

John Boughton (2018), *Municipal Dreams: The Rise and Fall of Council Housing*, London: Verso Books, £18.99, pp. 336, hbk.
doi:[10.1017/S0047279419000448](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279419000448)

'Municipal Dreams' is an apt title. Based on author's first-rate blog, supplying detailed accounts of local authority housing schemes, this book focuses on the 'visionaries': Unwin, Le Corbusier, Luberkin, Banham etc. The 'grand designs' are set out, tenant experience is recorded, and the relationship of fortunes of selected districts to government policies such as 'estate regeneration' is traced.

Boughton's message is that the dominant negative storyline on municipal housing is misleading: reality is 'far more mixed, and, generally, far more positive' (p3). Quite right, and, in recording this diversity, 'Municipal Dreams' ranks well above other 'eclipse of council housing' accounts. However, in his attempt to balance the prevailing narrative, Boughton tends to err towards the positive.

Local authority housing has many benefits. Storing value for community purposes tops the list. Despite Treasury asset-stripping under the right to buy – £42 billion up to 2015 – local authority housing has more than paid its way in terms of historic costs and maintenance expenses. Between 1995/6 and 2015/6 the Treasury gained an average of £250 million per year from local authority housing. Building by Direct Labour Organisations (DLOs) – absent from Boughton's account – has also been a strong plus. By the late 1960s, 178,000 workers were employed by DLOs. Unsurprisingly, they were unpopular with private builders and the Thatcher/Major governments severely curtailed DLOs, thereby ending some very good apprenticeship schemes. At a time when the volume builders dominate new house supply, local authority DLOs would be a valuable addition to the production process.

The downside to municipal building was that, in its heyday, tenants were expected to be grateful for what they received from above. 'High Modernism' – 'the rational design of social order commensurate with the scientific understanding of natural laws' (Scott, 1999, p. 4) – prevailed. In the housing process people were uprooted and put into the visionary projects, too often large, uniform, periphery estates built without 'useless ornamentation' and flats, despite tenant preferences for individuality in their homes and survey after survey showing that people did not want to live in flats. Yes, in the early years, tenants liked their homes – the internal amenities were far higher than in the dwellings they left – but dissatisfaction set in as design problems became apparent.

The treatment of tenants was linked to municipal housing politics, a theme underplayed in Boughton's narrative. In the middle 1930s central government subsidies were switched from general needs to slum clearance. Hilton Young, Minister for Health in the 1930s, denounced inner-city areas as 'radiating centres of depravity and disease'. In the interests of public health, the slums would be eradicated and residents decanted into inner-city 'flatted' estates. The standard of new council housing plummeted. The 'Containment of Urban England' had started and was accompanied by the tighter planning controls in the 1935 Restriction of Ribbon Development Act, justified as protecting 'natural beauty' (Hore-Belisha, 1935). Containing urban England was repeated from the middle 1950s as an adjunct to Duncan Sandy's green belt policy. Protecting rural England and enclosing urban England are conjoined.

Moreover, stigma was used as a weapon against council house tenants. Hanley (2007) claimed that the word 'estate' had become 'a bruise in the form of a word' and, post 2008, the Conservatives intensified the stigmatisation process. Duncan Smith (2008) declared that 'the level of dependency among social housing renters is quite staggering...' and Cameron linked council house estates to 'blocked opportunity, poor parenting, addiction and mental health problems'.

Can there be a renaissance in council housing? The Green Paper, *A New Deal for Social Housing*, (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2018), although reversing some of the most extreme policies of the Cameron era, such as forcing local authorities to sell their higher value homes, offered little hope. The tenant consultations that informed the Green Paper identified stigma and the dearth of social housing as important. However, the paper's specific proposals for overcoming stigma such as a 'best neighbourhood competition' had a paternalistic aura and the notion that social housing should be 'a springboard to home-ownership' seemed to reinforce the notion that social housing was a second class tenure. Although allowing local government a greater share of right to buy receipts in 'high affordability pressure' areas (shades of the 1930s and 1950s?) and a little more flexibility on borrowing, the Green Paper gave no commitment to extra Treasury resources for new social housing. Labour's 2018 Green Paper *Housing for the Many* set out a programme to build 100,000 'genuinely affordable' homes per year over ten years, but such is the precarious state of local authority housing finance – half of local authorities do not have a housing stock asset – local government only features as a scale provider towards the end of the ten year programme.

By balancing the cruder narratives on the history of local authority housing, Broughton's book helps to advance council housing but restoring local government's role in supplying low-cost housing for the many will be a Herculean task.erc

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Ann Oakley (2018), *Women, Peace and Welfare: A suppressed History of Social Reform 1880-1920*, Bristol: Policy Press, £19.99, pp. 442, hbk.
 doi:[10.1017/S004727941900045X](https://doi.org/10.1017/S004727941900045X)

This book teems with accounts of women's philosophical ideas, intellectual cross-currents, radical and reformist causes, and 'experiments in living', that were pioneered in Britain, Europe, north America, western Europe and elsewhere during the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – themes that have long been familiar to historians of that period interested in movements for social, economic and political reform. What distinguishes this new account, however, is that, whereas in many earlier studies the ideas and achievements of women have been portrayed as playing an important, but nonetheless largely subaltern, role in the wider evolution of the period, Ann Oakley's gripping narrative centres upon reform movements, scientific innovations and philosophical systems in which many of the major protagonists of change were themselves members of the female sex. She suggests, moreover, that the sheer

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