

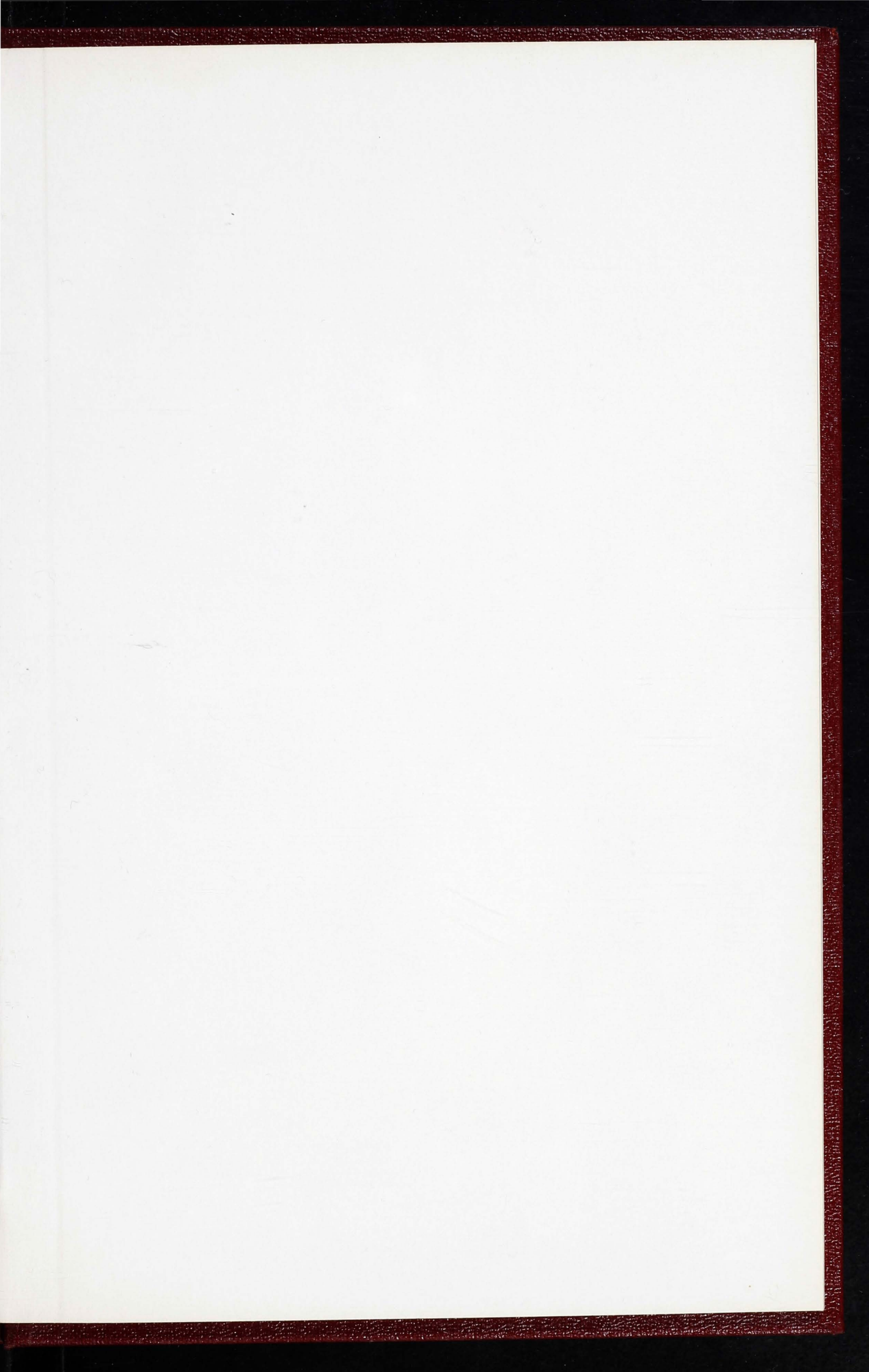


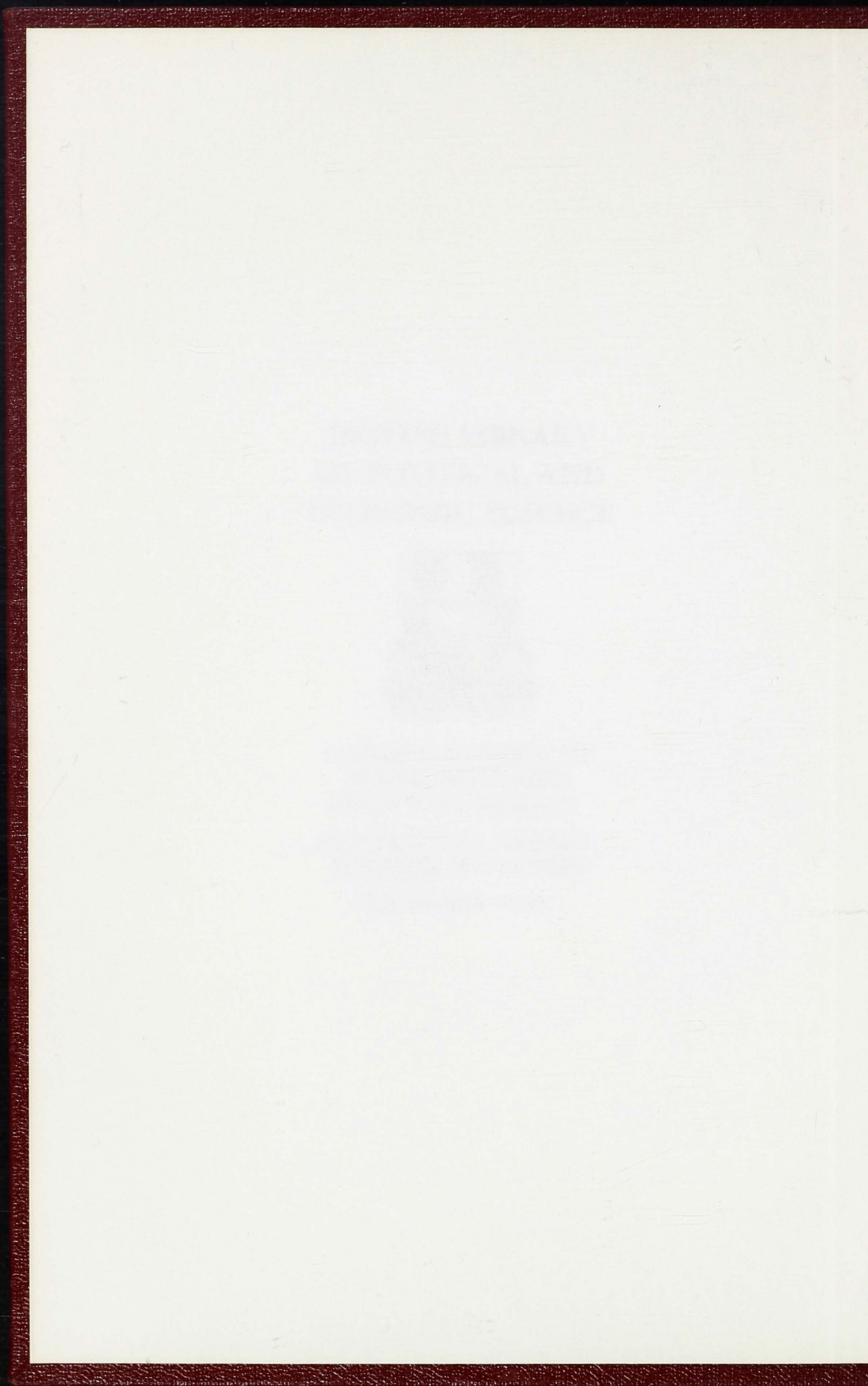
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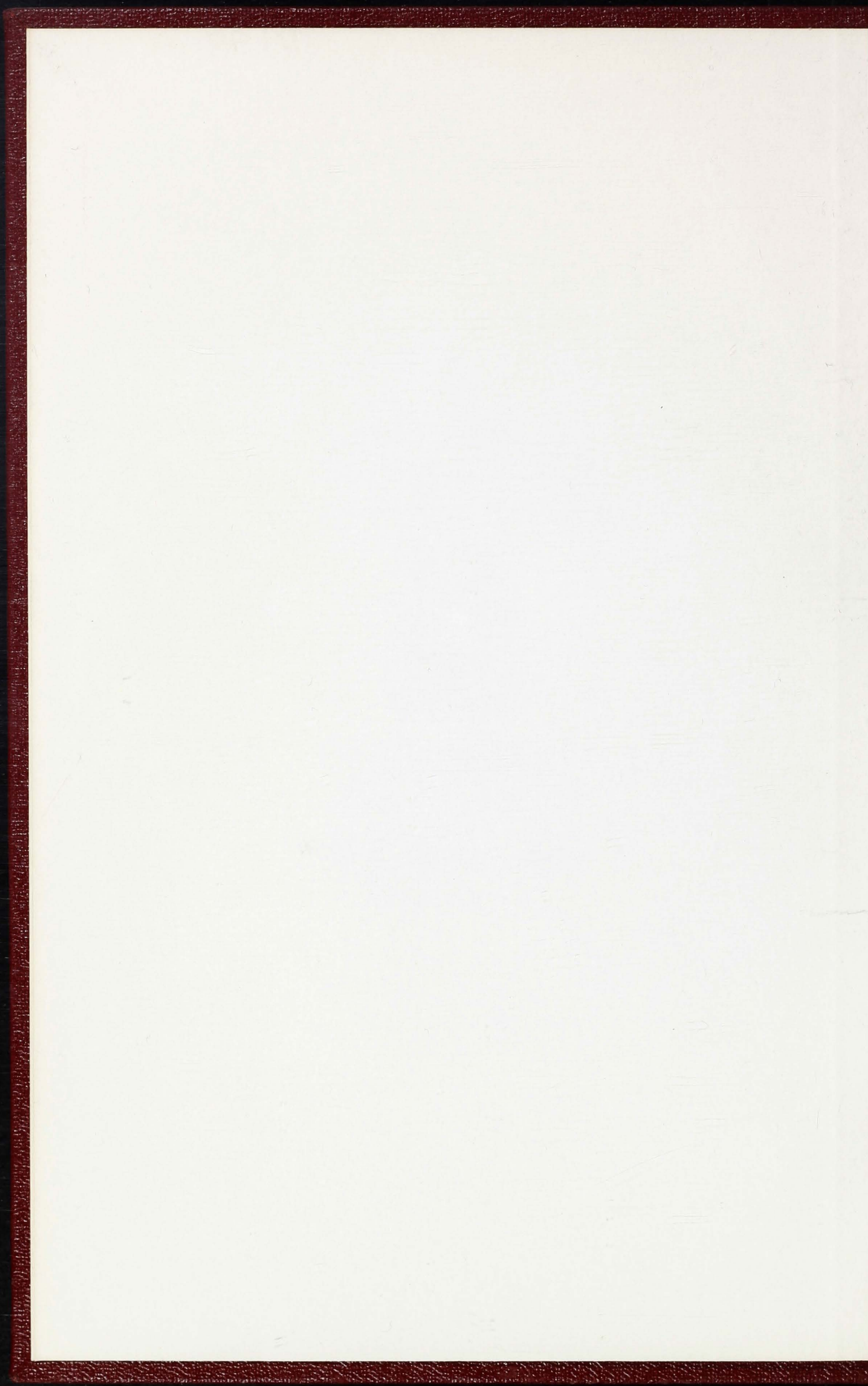
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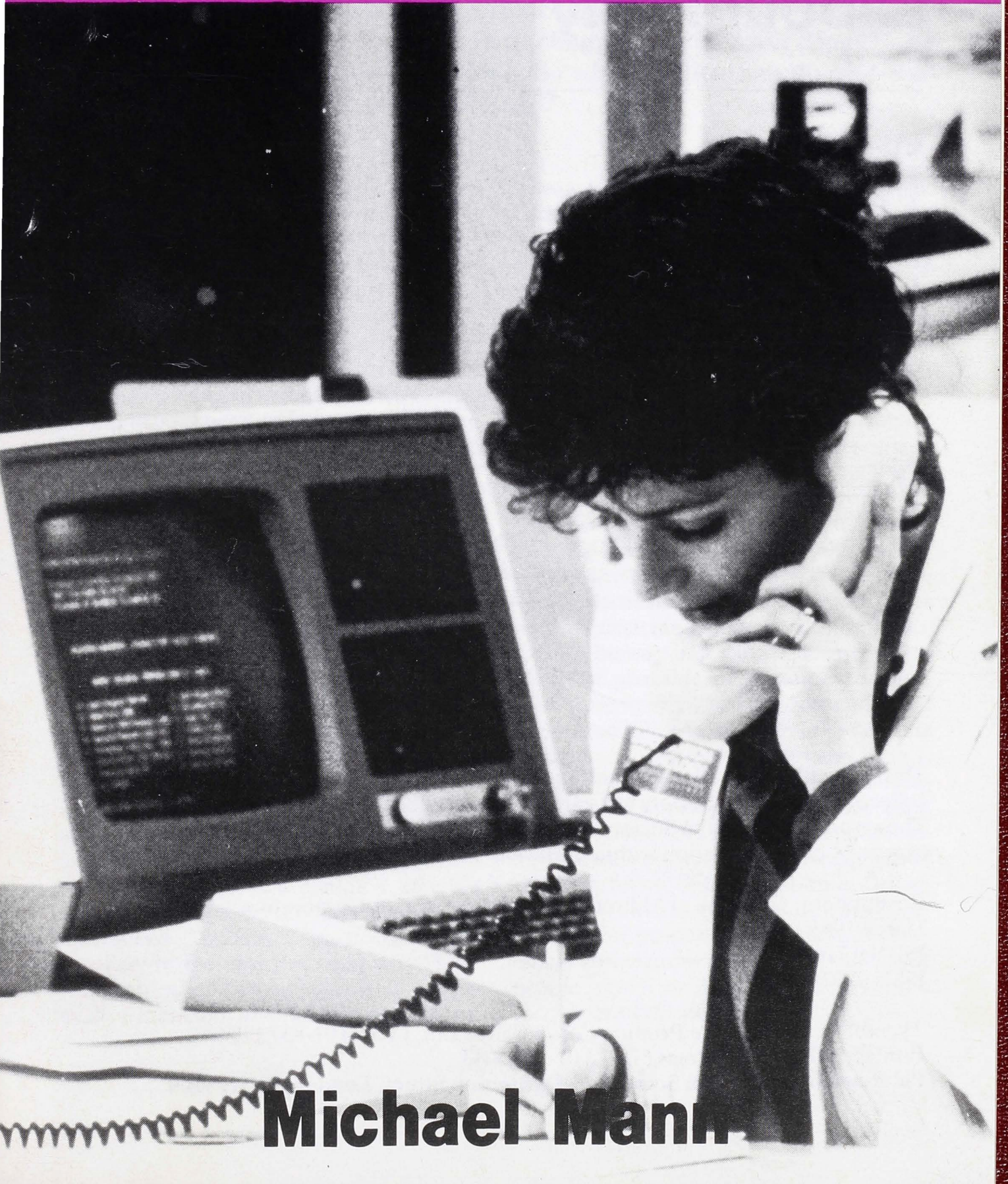


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Fabian Society
No. 502

Socialism Can Survive

Social Change and the Labour Party



Michael Mann

Fabian Tract 502

Socialism Can Survive:

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Labour Party

CHAPTER

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1. Introduction

Political parties are always on the look-out for social trends which might affect their political support. This seems more urgent after electoral defeat. They ask: is society's experience going against us? should our policies and ideology be modified to fit changing social aspirations? – as many Labour activists are now asking. So what implications do post-war social changes have for Labour strategy?

In this essay I will argue that there are two main ones. First, the trends do not amount to a massive change in social structure – such as a 'decline in the working class' – which would necessarily damage Labour. In fact the trend has been toward greater *variability* of social experience. I will distinguish between the life experiences of three main types of ordinary British families. (I see no need to become embroiled here in disputes about whether they are to be called 'working class', 'middle class' or whatever. 'Ordinary British families' denotes adequately my subject-matter: the life experiences of (roughly) the lower two-thirds of the population, organized (as we shall see) into families.) I shall call them the 'moderately prospering floaters', the 'moderately prospering Labour core', and the 'welfare dependants'. None of the three need be lost to Labour. Yet the Party has not sufficiently appreciated the distinct aspirations of the first and third.

Second, variability is nothing new: it merely has new forms. Political parties are always coalitions of varied social groups, loosely integrated by an ideology which shows that there is a common element among their diverse life experiences and aspirations. Labour's most successful ideology in the past has been what T.H. Marshall called '*social citizenship*' (Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class*, 1950):

a basic level of economic and social participation in society, organized collectively, guaranteed as a right of universal citizenship. Labour now needs to revive and revise an ideology of social citizenship so as to make common sense of the life experiences of my three groups.

As I am a sociologist, I am better qualified to make the first of these two arguments. This essay concentrates on analysing post-war social trends. I only sketch briefly the ideological strategy required, and I leave policy details to others.

But social trends do not have inevitable political consequences. Between social experience and political action there are two further distinct realms, those of social and political organization. The latter refers to the way political parties present a coherent plausible programme and perform creditably in government and opposition. Obviously this is of the utmost significance. But political organisation is not my problem in this essay. I concentrate on the impact of social trends upon *social* organisation. I discuss the potentiality for either socialism or conservatism of changing forms of organisation in British society. What are the forms of work organisation, of property ownership, of communal and regional experience, that make people more or less receptive to the ideologies of the parties?

2. Trends in Employment

Social trends are often described as indicating the decline of the working class. If the working class is in decline, and the middle class is multiplying, then this is serious news for socialism. There are two trends lying at the root of such claims: a decline in the number of manual as opposed to non-manual employees, and a decline in manufacturing as opposed to service employment. Of course, there is no necessary reason to equate 'the working class' with manual workers in manufacturing industry. Obviously, exploitation, anger and collective action are not merely found among them. But there is ground for socialist unease, because one of the main thrusts of collective mobilisation by the Labour movement has been provided by manual workers in manufacturing industry. So it is worth looking at the trends in some detail.

The simple numerical statements are largely correct, though to differing degrees. The proportion of manual workers has been in steady decline throughout the post-war period, though they are still (just) in a majority. (The evidence for this and many other empirical assertions in this essay can be found in recent issues of two government publications, *The Employment Gazette* and *Social Trends*). All non-manual levels have gained considerable numbers. There is one important difference by sex. The expansion of the clerical stratum has been entirely female, men having moved into foremen, managerial and professional positions but not into lower clerical and sales. So, from the viewpoint of party traditions there appear two worries for Labour: declining manual workers, and female (traditionally more Conservative) domination of what is usually seen as the most exploited stratum of non-manual work.

Sectoral changes have followed a similar pattern. The traditions of the Labour movement lie in mining (massive decline in numbers throughout the century, still continuing), manufacturing (decline from about 40% in 1951 to 30% in 1983), and

some 'service' industries (transport, communication, utilities, construction – all fairly static at around 15% for most of the century). This overall decline in Labour heartlands has been matched by the secular increase in the remaining services, now amounting to just about half total employment. Again this seems bad news for Labour.

But these aggregate trends are unlikely to continue. This is for the worst of reasons: continuing, deepening economic recession. Both trends depended initially on the massive growth of the inter-war and post-war economy. They were maintained into the first phase of recession which hit manufacturing industry first. Since about 1979, however, services and non-manual employment have been nearly equally affected, and it is difficult to see an end in sight to equality of suffering. Thus the two aggregate trends seem frozen for the foreseeable future.

But this is crude, aggregate analysis. We must look much more closely within these categories. The real news is much more complex, sometimes bad for Labour, sometimes good, most often giving rise to new problems and opportuni-

ties requiring change in political response.

There are obvious objections to viewing the 'upward' shift in occupations as indicating class change. Class has something, though not all, to do with inequality. Overall inequalities in income and wealth between, say, different deciles of the population have not diminished in the post-war period. Indeed, since the 1960s they have increased at an accelerating rate. Also, the earnings overlap between manual and lower and mid non-manual workers has widened steadily in line with the occupational shifts. Today, for example, the earnings of male clerks are similar to male unskilled workers, whereas in the early part of the century they were similar to skilled workers. Similar trends, not quite so advanced, are observable among women workers. Thus inequalities within the non-manual group have widened considerably. Millions of workers in non-manual jobs and in the service sector have similar wages and conditions of employ-

ment as manual workers in manufacturing. 'Objectively', relatively exploited workers have not become fewer. From this point of view all non-manual workers are certainly not part of a single 'middle' class. The politics of redistribution should have just as much 'objective' appeal to as many of the population as traditionally. But this now includes a large and growing proportion of non-manual workers.

However, it is not only objective inequalities that produce social or political action. It has rarely been the most oppressed, the poorest, who have organised, or even most supported, the Labour movement in this or any other country. The causes of organisational capacity differ from those of exploitation. This is pertinent when we examine the propensity of lower non-manual workers to join trade unions. Later I discuss the kinds of union they join, broadening my perspective to include other workers as well.

3. Trade Unionism

Overall white-collar union membership is lower than manual (44% to 60% in 1980), which is a greater disparity than that in the wage levels of the two groups. There are two main reasons. The first is that they are heterogeneous, composed of three different groups: younger men, most of whom will be promoted to higher levels; older men permanently in those positions (or 'promoted sideways' from manual work); and women, very few of whom will be promoted. Organising such variety is difficult, but additionally two of these groups are 'birds of passage', though in different ways. The younger men expect to move out and up. They are not good union fodder, nor are they exploited if they achieve career success. Most women (if they marry) interrupt their work-lives for

7-10 years and then return usually as part-time workers. The post-war growth in female employment is almost entirely of married women working part-time. Both the male career and the more partial commitment of women workers further weaken trade unionism (see Stewart et al, *Social Stratification and Occupations*, 1982, and Prandy et al, *White-Collar Unionism*, 1983, for the best – though a rather difficult – analysis of such heterogeneity).

Public and private sectors

The second problem arises from the workplaces. People doing similar work in different types of organisation have different propensities for collective action. Among all workers, manual and non-manual, there are two main workplaces that encourage union membership and activity: public employment and large employing establishments.

Public sector unionisation runs at double private sector (in 1982 85% compared to 42%). But for white-collar workers there is a third encourager: a large number of (unionised) manual workers in the establishment. Thus most white-collar union members are in the public sector and most of the remainder appear to have spun-off from manual worker organisation. This is also true of indices of union activism like strikes, other collective actions, and branch activism (Daniel and Millward, *Workplace Industrial Relations in Britain*, 1983). These large variations indicate that for white-collar workers to organise requires them to be in establishments which interfere considerably with markets. Public authorities, normally monopolies, have their prices and 'profits' set by fiat, and so wages and other negotiations inherently possess a more planned and political element than do those of private sector workers. Similarly, well-established manual unions in large establishments also provide an example to their white-collar comrades of non-market possibilities of determining wages and conditions. Conversely, those in smaller establishments with fewer manual workers in

the private sector find it difficult to invent from scratch collective organisations which challenge employer-led market rationality, including so-called 'freedom of choice' in markets.

The public-private distinction leads us toward other inter-sector differences. Workers in the service sector are relatively under-unionised. In the deeper phase of recession, from 1979, this has actually reduced the overall level of unionisation for the first time since the war – a product not of greater union unpopularity, it must be said, but of contraction in industries with traditionally high levels of unionisation. The relatively non-unionised nature of services is not the result of better wages and conditions there. Probably the most privileged area of services in private ownership is insurance, banking and finance. Yet here unionisation is relatively high (45%) and still slightly increasing. Not all service expansion, even in the private sector, obviously disadvantages Labour. Yet in the most exploited service areas unionisation is low (hotels and catering 8%, distribution 15%). Why? The answer is size of enterprise. Small employers have fewer workers whom they can control directly; and the workers have to coordinate action with a large number of other small workforces if they wish to interfere with the coercion of the labour market. Private sector services now employ as many people as private manufacturing. Only 16% of their 7 million workers are unionised. Here is the largest concentration of exploitation at work in our society – low wages, poor security and fringe benefits, and a large penumbra of

casual, sweated labour. Yet they predominantly lack experience of collective economic action, the traditional link between social and political mobilisation. 'Objectively', they might seem like natural Labour supporters; but they have few organisational linkages to Labour.

Thus once we begin to examine more closely occupational and sector trend data we find an increasing disjunction between 'objective' and 'organisational' aspects of class in Britain today. We have to go quite a long way up the occupational hierarchy – perhaps to middle managers and established professions – before we come to groups who are clearly privileged and almost entirely non-unionised. Before we get there we find little overall relationship between level of exploitation and participation in the Labour movement. Public/private, inter-sector, plant size, gender, and proximity to unionised manual workers – these are the principal confusing variables. Union members are more varied than they may have been in the past. But as an aggregate group they are not particularly badly off.

Plant and national unionism

Indeed, variety continues within the Labour movement itself. In the mid-1960s two systems of industrial relations in Britain appeared – the Donovan Commission called them the 'formal system' of national negotiations between union leaders and employers' associations (or the government) and the 'informal system' of plant bargaining between shop stewards and individual employers or even their departmental managers. Since then plant bargaining has become dominant in private manufacturing industry (see Brown, *The Changing Contours of British Industrial Relations*, 1981). Many large multi-divisional corporations have been decentralising bargaining to the individual divi-

sion or department. 1983 and 1984 examples have been Pilkingtons, Reed International and Royal Insurance. As recession began to bite, it became employer- rather than steward-dominated. As the bargaining position of workers weakened, it became almost a company unionism, without great links to the national trade union movement. Conversely, in the public sector the trend has been the other way. The massive decline of major nationalised industries and an incomes policy applied only to the public sector have politicised their industrial relations and given a greater national role to their union leaders.

Plant and national unionism also occur among non-manual workers. Blackburn, Prandy and Stewart in their studies distinguish two types of union, oriented to the enterprise and to the society. The former bargains with one's own employer about wages, conditions and grievances. It fosters the emergence of actual trade unions only in the situations mentioned earlier. Elsewhere it may lead to the emergence of staff associations, bargaining but not militant. By contrast, 'society unionism' goes beyond the workplace to identify with the union movement as a whole. It is generally found among lower non-manuals, the worse-paid, and those with least promotion chances – but, again, usually only where there is considerable contact with large groups of manual workers.

So the trade union movement is increasingly dual, both wings active, but only one feeding its activity regularly into the national Labour movement's main activities – the T.U.C., the Labour Party, and the tripartite committee structure of the corporatist state (which has admittedly declined under the Thatcher government). The nationalised industries, a few highly concentrated traditional and declining manufacturing industries, and white-collar workers in central and local government increasingly dominate the national Labour movement, while the bulk of private manufacturing (especially

newer and more profitable industries) and private sector services exclude themselves from it. The 'middle class' take-over of many local Labour parties is probably entirely by public sector employees. The danger is that the Labour movement and Party adopts a political economy which appeals exclusively to the first group and alienates the second. There are signs – in the emergence of national-chauvinist job protectionist policies, and in 'protect pub-

lic sector jobs at any cost' lobbying – that this is beginning to happen.

A further political consequence of all these trends discussed so far is that trade union membership becomes less and less a predictor of voting behaviour, as does occupational level itself. These familiar findings of recent electoral studies seem deeply-rooted in the complex shifts I have been analysing.

4. Region and Locality

The next question is, whether these trends are simplified by region into separate socio-political blocs. The North-South divide and inner-city decay, together with regional differences in unemployment levels and growth, make this plausible and worrying for Labour, potentially trapped into peripheral declining regions and decaying inner cities. But again we shall find that the detailed picture is more variable and ambiguous in its political implications: regional variations are cross-cut by urban/rural, by locality, and by family variations. Northern Ireland apart, regional differences in the growth of new manufacturing and service jobs are largely a product of city/small town differences (Fothergill and Gudgin, *Unequal Growth*, 1982). The areas that did worst in the 1960s and 1970s were dominated by conurbations and larger 'freestanding cities' (like Coventry or Sheffield). Scotland declined greatly because of its domination by Clydeside, the North-West because of Liverpool and Manchester. Sub-areas of these regions away from the conurbations and cities actually performed close to the national average. Conversely, regions like East Anglia, the East Midlands, and the South West prospered because they were rural or small-town in character. The South-East is around the national average because it contains the largest conurbation but also many small towns.

Employment profiles

Thus areas that are quite close to one another may have very different employment profiles. Murgatroyd and Urry (in Murgatroyd et al, *Localities, Class and Gender*, 1984) have assembled figures for the North-West Region. In June 1980 the overall unemployment rate varied between 5% in Crewe and 13.7% in Liverpool. The percentage change in male unemployment between 1960 and 1977 varied from -27.7% in Liverpool to +15.6% in Crewe; and in female unemployment from -33.5% in Rossendale to +58.7% in Northwich. The 1980 ratio of female to male employees varied from 0.534 in Warrington to 1.165 in Southport. Such variations within regions are now the national norm.

This is only to modify the 'two Britains' thesis. The two are not in origin South versus North plus Celts, but cities versus the rest, a division which then creates regional cultural characteristics. Moreover, it uncomfortably reinforces some of the divisions mentioned above. Newer, smaller, more profitable enterprises, probably only with plant bargaining among manual unions, with a predominantly non-union white-collar stratum, have moved into small towns and rural areas, leaving major cities for large heavily-unionised, nationally organised enterprises. Nationally, small employers are now increasing slightly in numbers at the expense of large ones. These are in declining and nationalised industries, and in central and local government (more local deprivation requires more council employees).

In small towns large numbers of people, some highly exploited, others more average in their social experience, relatively exposed to their employer and to market rationality and power, find no support for an alternative model of social organisation in their local communities. The smaller towns and their sub-regions, which have been the expanding parts of British society in the last three decades, are dominated

by conservative social organisations. Then regional, quasi-national and even racial cultural elements are added. People's sense of 'Englishness' in, for example, the East Midlands, East Anglia, the South West etc., may be affected. The cities, and those with heavy northern, Welsh or Scots accents or black faces, may appear as slightly alien to them. The cities contain most of the black population whose unemployment rates are double white ones. Cities may also seem less civilised, more backward, because they represent the heavy industrial, often poverty-stricken, *past*, whereas we in small towns stand for progress and the future.

Such self-identity has been encouraged – though not started – by the rhetoric and policies of the Thatcher government. "Let us abandon the old industries" the argument goes, "and rely on the activities of the future, high-tech and services like finance, banking, insurance, and other professional expertise with which Britain is well-endowed". Effective ideology makes plausible sense of life experience – as this one seems to do in these social locations.

Since the mid 1970s, as the depth of the national recession began to overwhelm all other trends, regional differentials have been diminishing. If we look at regional unemployment rates we see that (again Northern Ireland apart) they grew further apart through the 1960s and most of the 1970s. But then differentials narrowed. In August 1984, no region's rate was double that of another – the range is only from 9.6% to 17.8%. A deep national recession brings a bit more equality of suffering between regions and may mean that the trends trapping Labour into its heartlands have ended. Labour may only be up against what exists now. Also for those in employment, conditions are quite similar across regions. Average wage levels, as well as the proportion of those in poverty, tend to vary only by about 20% across all regions. This is still a fairly cohesive and homogeneous nation-state – with the ob-

vious exception of parts of Northern Ireland, and probably also of the experience of many blacks in our cities. The overall conclusion must be that city/small town differences, rather than regions, provide the main organizing frame for the variations noted so far.

So far I have concentrated on employment and on its attendant social and political organisation. Occupational, sectoral and regional trends give Labour a major organisational problem. Some of its 'natural constituency' in terms of inequalities has got more difficult to reach by the traditional mediating links provided by trade unions, big factories, big cities. The

Labour movement has become less of a class-based movement and more of an interest-group drawn from the public sector and some delimited, declining areas of the private. Through this socio-political organizational route – not through any change in the general beliefs of the British population as a whole – class has become less important in British elections. Of course, this is only a difference of degree from the past: the Labour Party has always been a coalition of interest-groups with a rough approximation to class. All I indicate is the changing nature of the coalition.

5. Gender and Families

One of the major trends in post-war employment has been the increase in women workers. In 1951 36% of women aged between 20 and 64 were economically active; by 1981 it had risen to 58%. It is now stabilised at around this level. Over a rather longer period, earnings differentials between men and women also narrowed. Average hourly earnings of full-time manual women had risen from about 50% of their male counterparts' in 1940 to 60% by 1946 and 70% by 1981 (it had actually risen to 75% in the mid 1970s, but then fell back). Over the last six or seven years women have been doing slightly worse in the labour market than men, but it seems unlikely that the long-term gains will be significantly reversed.

Nevertheless, the image of equality must be qualified. Few women are really entering the same labour market as men. The growth in female employment has been almost entirely of part-time work, which

very few men seek. It has been largely either in traditional female work, or in sectors from which men have been pushed out. 80% of women are in four types of service job (cleaning or serving food and

drink; saleswork; clerical work; and the 'caring professions' like nursing, teaching and social work). They are largely segregated from men, with few career prospects, worse fringe benefits, and lower wages. Outside of formal full-time and part-time employment there is also a large grey area of casual work, whose exact dimensions are unknown, but where disproportionately women workers are treated far worse.

Gender inequalities

There are two ways of looking at such trends in gender inequality. The first is to concentrate on the differences between men and women, and so to fight politically against segregation, discrimination and inequality. Feminists have made such an impact on the Labour Party's grass-roots that Labour no longer has major problems in formulating policies to deal with these issues. Buried in the Manifesto of 1983 were a number of proposals which could significantly improve the rights of women: equality of pay for work of equal value, nursery education to be made universal for those who want it, more financial help for single-parent families, widows, those who care for the disabled or elderly in the household etc. But these proposals received little prominence in the Party's national campaign. It is fairly obvious that the leadership doubted their general appeal. Let me try briefly to give them some re-assurance.

Right now we are in the curious position where the most visible ideologies in both major parties probably strike little resonance in the life-experience of most women or men. Neither the blue-rinse Tory 'women's place is in the home' nor the militant feminism, and advocacy of gay rights, of the Labour left feminists say a great deal that seems plausible to many people. But the former actually controls the Conservative Party, and this must be good news for Labour. Conservative

ideology about gender actually does resonate within one group, the upper-middle class. This is the only sector of society in which a large number of women choose to stay in the home rather than return to work in middle age – probably because only here is the man's income (and family wealth) sufficient to manage comfortably without a wife's wage. And this is also the only sector in which existing legislation may give some women a reasonable shot at equal opportunity (i.e. in the professions, which women are still continuing to enter in ever-larger numbers). Tory ideology is blinded by a restricted class experience.

Labour policy, on the other hand, recognises the importance of major recent trends: that most women work out of necessity; that men as well as women have an interest in attacking the growth of casual, sweated labour; that rising divorce rates result in a mass of one-parent families with special needs; that the cultural reinforcement of traditional sexism (in the content of television, newspapers and women's magazines, and of popular music and fashion) has been in decline for over a decade. Society is moving slowly toward less segregated – and even more slowly toward more egalitarian – relations between men and women. Conservative ideology merely ignores this; Labour policy, but unfortunately not yet its leadership, accepts it. Men and women together *are* approaching 'social citizenship'. The opportunities for Labour are enormous.

Household inequalities

But there is also a second way of looking at gender trends. This recognises that most men and women live together in households, sharing, albeit unequally, incomes and expenditures. Even where they do not – as in single-parent households – their living standards are dictated by the national dominance of the shared household.

Thus inequalities are not only between men and women, but also between households in which women (and other 'dependants') may or may not work. We can make the following points about inequalities between households.

■ One in eight households with dependent children are now headed by a lone parent. 90% of these loners are women. Along with pensioner households they are now the poorest family type, because they are least able to find good full-time work. About half are below the poverty line, defined at 120% of supplementary benefit level.

■ Female employment only rarely compensates for male unemployment. 50-60% of wives work if their husband also works, but only 30-35% do if he is unemployed. One reason is that supplementary benefits could be cut if the wife did work. Presumably many (most?) of the exceptions are found scattered across the country in the Southport-type labour market, with disproportionate employment chances for women.

■ Female wages rarely compensate for male wages. Very few women earn more than their husbands or fathers. The working wives of unskilled and semi-skilled men tend to do lower-paid unskilled jobs. The wives of skilled and white-collar husbands are usually in low-paid, routine white-collar jobs (or nursing).

■ Children worsen a family's finances. This is even partly true when children enter the labour market. They very rarely compensate for the unemployment or low wages of their parent(s). Youth unemployment is very high (around 25% among boys under 20 and 20% among girls), and is reinforced by an equal number in the quasi-employment of government training schemes. It also shows the same regional, city, ethnic and skill biases as adult unemployment. Thus where parents are unemployed, so often are children.

■ Long-term unemployment has been increasing rapidly over the last five years, and it amplifies the trends in the above points. For example, among men unemployed for a year or more the proportion of wives working falls to 10-15%. Again, supplementary benefits entitlements play a large role because most of the long-term unemployed need them. Poverty is severe here for the whole family. And again, it is concentrated among the unskilled, among youths as well as the relatively elderly, and in the same regions and localities.

■ Part of the explanation for all these family differences is that the household (and the more extended family of which it is a part) is an important agency in finding good employment. Most workers find jobs informally. They hear of vacancies, and of chances of acquiring qualifications, through networks of families and friends; they are often taken on because of the known reliability of other family members; mothers are more easily able to find family support for child-care while they work. Informal networks are especially important during recessions, and some families are better-connected than others. They cream off the better, more stable jobs – and in high unemployment areas they may cream off almost all jobs. (On the importance of networks, see Harris and Morris, "Households, labour markets and the position of women", in Crompton and Mann, *Gender and Stratification*, 1985.)

Our conclusion must be: *to those families that have shall be given*. Among most ordinary people today inequalities tend to polarise families. Those in reasonable employment tend to be in multiple, reasonable employment. If their individual family members lose their job, they have a better chance of finding another one. Thus skilled and qualified families tend to move away in living standards from the unskilled and unqualified, white families from black families, Protestants from Catholics

(in Northern Ireland), well-connected families from more isolated ones, single parents from the rest. Some trends reinforce differences between localities but some do not. Putting together these trends with those I showed earlier tends to throw up two separate, relatively privileged groups of families: those controlling the best jobs in the city/public employment/large enterprise sector; and those controlling the small town/newer industry and service sector. Both are relatively segregated from poorer families in their localities. My three family types are beginning to emerge. They can imply differences between families living next to each other. Remember the different time-scales of some of the trends: growing female employment possibilities over thirty years,

rising youth unemployment over ten years, rocketing long-term unemployment over five years – their differing rhythms can divide families in the same neighbourhood, even the same street.

Why should local variation matter? In the case of ethnicity and religion (in Northern Ireland) because they produce divisions between ordinary families which then fundamentally divide the Labour movement. They are extremely difficult to overcome politically. But in other respects it might seem that if most ordinary families suffer greatly themselves or see suffering around them, then this would increase their collective solidarity. But it is not happening like that. Other trends connected with housing and welfare benefits weaken their solidarity.

6. Housing and Property Ownership

There is a sphere of social and economic experience where post-war Britain has seen a dramatic shift. Between 1951 and 1982, owner-occupation rose from 30% to virtually 60% of British households. Among young adults at the peak of their family commitments (i.e. aged 30-34) it is even higher (67%) so the overall figure will probably continue rising whatever government is in power. In aspirations owner-occupation rates even higher. In recent surveys of young people, around 80% want and expect to own their homes in the future.

Owner-occupation now dominates Britain. This is not general among the most advanced countries – it is peculiar to Britain and a few others. Though it is related

to income level, it is now widespread. It is only a minority tenure among semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers. 58% of households headed by a skilled worker,

and 68% of lower non-manual households were in owner-occupation in 1981. By income only the two lowest deciles are not majority owner-occupiers. In regions only Scotland differs, with council homes most frequent. Across the country the major decline is less in council housing than in private renting (now only 12% of households and no longer associated with wealth or class – principally with youth).

Serious housing problems and social deprivation are increasingly confined to the council housing sector, a trend antedating but strengthened by the recent sale of generally better council houses to their tenants. Increasingly the polarisation between families has implications for tenure. Building societies and banks set cut-off points for eligibility for a mortgage. They take security of earnings into account, as well as their level. They have been increasingly willing to count a proportion of wives' and other household members' incomes. Again, to those families that have. . . . Supplementary benefit claimants are now mostly in council housing, as are single-parent families and households headed by divorced or separated women (67% of them in 1982). Segregation is not total and housing quality varies within and between tenure types. Nevertheless housing apartheid is beginning to develop (Forest and Murie, *The Journal of Social Policy*, 1983).

But the housing divide has additional political significance because families on either side of it become implicated in different types of social organization. Owner-occupiers become embroiled in the world of property and capital. The average price for a new house is now just under £30,000. This dwarfs into insignificance any other expenditure made by the average British family. They borrow about three-quarters of it, from building societies and increasingly from banks (plus some local authority borrowing). But endowment and other mortgage schemes bring in insurance companies. The capital flows are, along with pension-

funds (of which more in a moment), the major investors in British capitalism, the major business for the City, the major contributor to the disproportionate channelling of investment funds abroad rather than to Britain. The average family income as assessed by building societies involved in new mortgages is about £10,000, just about the national average. The household lays out substantial monthly sums on housing every month, usually to begin with in excess of those of renters (even after tax relief), as an investment in the future. They watch interest rates, worry about property values, about assisting their married children to get into owner-occupation, about inflation in housing versus inflation in other living costs. Individual households are minor property owners, connected directly to the institutions of big finance capitalism, to some of the most exploiting professions in our society (solicitors and estate agents).

A property-owning democracy?

All this integrates them into the network of banks, building societies, finance houses and rich private investors who dominate the Conservative Party's economic policy. They are able to immediately relate some of the main elements of traditional capitalist and Tory ideology to their own personal experience and interests. The life of the majority British family today is implicated in a world of property-owning, atomised individual families investing in property the fruits of their labour, making choices in markets and submitting to the rationality of those markets. Is it not a 'property-owning democracy'?

This is the appearance of things. It is appearance only but the Labour Party has done little to expose it. This probably derives from ideological hostility – though of a rather embarrassed kind, because the

bulk of activists in the Labour movement are owner-occupiers. Owner-occupation costs the Labour Party votes, and this is just deserts while the Party believes that housing inequality and exploitation exist between tenure types and not also within them. Within owner-occupation there is inequality and exploitation galore. Taxation is deeply regressive. Mortgage relief is given at the marginal not the standard rate: the richer you are, the bigger the subsidy. But Labour worries only about whether there should be relief at all (because the subsidies cancel out council house subsidies). In turn this understandably worries the average British household. The poorest owner-occupiers often pay higher interest rates. This is because banks and building societies are financially conservative in their lending, and they sometimes 'redline' poorer areas as bad investments. Nor do they have to make public statements about these or other practices to their applicants or anyone else. Transaction costs of buying and selling are absurdly high through professional monopolies. These redistribute wealth from the average household to solicitors and estate agents. In this the lending institutions are co-conspirators, so that bringing them into the monopoly (as current legislation proposes) will change little.

So the reality of owner-occupation is that small property-owners subsidise big ones. They consent to regressive finance and to an almost total lack of democracy concerning the ways in which this is done. They do so because over the century, more and more households have been gradually absorbed into a system whose institutions were originally those of the relatively rich alone. Owner-occupation brings forth no collective, countervailing forms of organisation to those of big property. It is up to national political parties representing ordinary families' interests to propose policies which at the minimum are not regressive and not totally secretive. So far it is largely a record of Labour

failure, one that is proving extremely costly politically.

Occupational pensions

Another area of economic experience has suffered a similar fate: occupational pensions. Just about half the employees in Britain in 1979 were members of private occupational pension schemes. They are dominant in the public sector (90% of employees), common in the private sector (40%). Again they link ordinary people's contributions to the highest reaches of finance capitalism. Again they are internally regressive. Benefits are commonly related to final salary levels, which privileges those with successful managerial careers and disadvantages manual workers who peak earlier and then often decline in late work-life. Very few are inflation-proofed. This is especially marked in the private sector where less than 10% of pensioners are protected even at the level of 70% of inflation (all public schemes at least do this). This means that, unlike housing mortgages, pension schemes often do not provide value for money. They redistribute towards the managers of the funds and the owners of those stocks in which they invest, i.e. the very rich. And, again, there is no democracy. Only a small minority of schemes, public or private, have elected members of their management committees. Many do not have management committees at all, giving all power to the Trustees – which the National Union of Mineworkers recently discovered to its consternation in the law courts. (See James, *Occupational Pensions: The Failure of Private Welfare*, Fabian Tract no 497, 1984).

Small dependent property is a missed opportunity for Labour. It is now proving doubly costly because the Conservative government is embarked on legislative improvements, infringing professional

monopolies and easing the transfer of pension rights between private employers. These are useful improvements which appear to show that the government will protect the interest of small, dependent property. But Conservatism cannot touch the fundamental issue. There is no identity of interest between the average house-owning or pension-contributing family and rich capitalists and professionals. Exploitation and inequality take the same general forms as they do in other areas of

economic life. But there is no significant Labour opposition to the Tory claim that there is such an identity. We do not have a property-owning democracy, but perhaps we should. Control over our immediate life-span is surely part of a socialist society. Immediate control is possessed by owner-occupiers, but participation in wider housing power is denied them. But both are denied to council tenants, as we will now see.

7. Welfare State Dependence

On the other side of the housing divide, surely Labour has done much for (and derives political benefit from) council housing? It is, after all, the defender of the public sector – jobs, houses and the whole range of Welfare State benefits. And this is indeed appreciated by much of the electorate. The Welfare State is still, on balance, favourably viewed in opinion surveys: “Two cheers for the welfare state”, as Taylor-Gooby entitles his report of one such poll (in *The Journal of Public Policy*, 1982). Labour is aware of this, as it is of the semi-sacred aura of the education system and the National Health Service (two of its principal vote-winners) in the mind of the electorate.

But electoral benefit is increasingly undercut by developments in the Welfare State which erode some of the principles on which the Labour movement was founded. Here I introduce my second theme. The extension of the Welfare State in the 20th century was meant to bring ‘*social citizenship*’. After first legal, then electoral citizenship had been won, radicals and socialists supposedly secured a third stage of citizenship: basic economic and social rights for all. A level of subsistence,

education and health, sufficient to participate fully as citizens in economic, political and cultural life, was supposedly guaranteed for all by the Labour government of 1945-1951.

But was it? There are many grounds for doubt – for example, worsening inequality and poverty, and Thatcherite encroachments. But there were also inadequacies in the original philosophy of the Welfare State, increasingly exposed in recent years. Only some benefits were given free-

ly, unconditionally as citizen *rights*. This is generally so with education and health services – accounting for their popularity. But in housing and in most of the cash grants of the Welfare State different philosophies prevail. These detract from citizenship and weaken the support that the citizens' party might otherwise expect.

Tenant control

First, housing. Labour traditionally committed itself to provide a good standard of housing for all. Its main plank of policy has been council housing. We may argue about how successful or redistributive this has been, but few doubt the enormous contribution the programme has made over the years to the relief of material deprivation. Nevertheless, its administrative form leaves doubts as to whether adequate housing really is a citizen's *right*. It is a peculiar kind of right to be given life-space which you cannot then control yourself. Families' size, expenses and income fluctuate through their life-cycles; families acquire from time to time in-laws or friends who have access to a cement mixer or to someone who can lay bricks. Owner-occupiers respond flexibly to such pressures and opportunities, building small extensions, knocking down walls, building car-ports, patios, redecorating the outside of the house. All these are material improvements in themselves as well as outward symbols that our families matter to us and that we are in control of our immediate environment. But council tenants have been denied all this. Their life-space has been controlled by local state bureaucracies. This supposed citizenship conveys loss of personal liberty in return for material subsistence. It is not the kind of contract that makes council tenants feel affectionate towards the state or makes them feel it is *their* state.

This became perfectly evident when the Conservatives introduced council house sales. In a national explosion of brass door

knockers and glazed porches, moderately prospering families ostentatiously distanced themselves from the council house state and from their neighbours. Who could blame them? Indeed the result was that now more families control their immediate life-space. And soon even more will, for Labour activists in many areas have reacted healthily. The local bureaucratic state is under attack, and even council tenants are beginning to get more rights.

It is not my task here to contribute detailed housing policy. Instead I concentrate on the effect that passive, state-controlled citizenship has on morale and commitment to the Welfare State and Labour. The general direction of policy required to remedy this is obvious: giving council tenants more control of their housing. Whether this is done within the present structure of tenancy, or by converting wholesale to forms of owner-occupation seems to me secondary – provided new housing stock continues to be built.

The benefit system

The essence of the argument applies also to welfare benefits as a whole – unemployment insurance, supplementary benefits, rent rebates, disability and old-age pensions, and the many other cash and kind grants. Are these citizens' *rights*? Again, only in a restricted sense. They resemble charity handed out by Victorian ladies. You get them if you behave well. Most are means-tested. Most presuppose a distinction between the deserving and the undeserving poor. Some presuppose a model of normal family life in which men and women have state-defined responsibilities toward each other. The tests of income, effort and morality may be well-meant. The civil servants who administer them may be merely neutral enforcers of Parliamentary laws and statutory instruments. But the system results in con-

tinuous vetting of the private circumstances of families receiving welfare benefits. The extreme is the D.H.S.S.'s Special Claims Control, known as 'The Rabbit Squad' because claimants bolt for their holes when confronted by it! This agency, and others, check that people have declared exactly their earnings, assets and disabilities, that continued unemployment is 'no fault of their own', that Ms. A, heading a single-parent family but seeing Mr. B suspiciously often, is still entitled to claim benefits rather than be supported by him. Only welfare recipients receive this kind of public scrutiny and humiliation. By contrast tax surveillance is private, discreet and less extensive. Material subsistence through the state is not a right: it depends on moral rectitude.

The system is now so institutionalised that it is generally regarded as normal, even right. The scrounger has become a 'folk devil' in contemporary Britain. Claimants are often shopped by their neighbours and associates. Indeed surveys reveal least support for claimants among those only just above them in the social scale. This slight social distance is to be preserved at all costs, for being a claimant is a stigma (evidence can be found in Golding and Middleton, *Images of Welfare*, 1982, especially p.172). The stigma is assiduously encouraged by the media and the Conservatives. It is necessary to the Conservative road to economic recovery: growth through reducing real wages, and increasing incentives to work at any wage.

It is worth emphasising how far the debasement of claimants' sense of citizenship has gone. Recent in-depth sociological studies have brought this out. Bell and McKie have interviewed long-term unemployed and their families in Kidderminster. They find, almost without exception, fear of the state and all its agencies, fear of their neighbours, and a consequent retreat into privacy and isolation. What scrounging is managed is pathetically little and restricted by the fear of detection. The stigma of being a long-term

claimant and 'idler' also damaged marital relations. Much male resentment is taken out on the wife; and her ability to make money 'stretch' involves her in much harder work and emotional stress ("His unemployment: her problem" in Allen et al, *The Experience of Unemployment*, 1985).

Similarly, Pahl and his colleagues argue that in the Isle of Sheppey, Kent, the unemployed are frightened of being shopped. The 'black economy' is largely confined to those in employment, 'moonlighting' in their spare time. Most of the informal economy is undertaken by the most prosperous families (*Divisions of Labour*, 1984). Aggregate figures also give low estimates of the black economy. Inland Revenue assessments and estimates of the discrepancies between reported income and expenditure in the Family Expenditure Survey put its total at around 5% of total income (e.g. O'Higgins, *British Tax Review*, 1981).

It is just possible – despite all this evidence, and despite the low level of fraud yet uncovered by the D.H.S.S. and the Department of Employment fraud squads – that fiddling may be more widespread than any outsider could possibly know. After all, with unemployment soaring far beyond the policing resources of government departments, the objective chances of getting away with it must be increasing. In this case we would see not defeated, privatised families, but manipulative, privatised ones, keeping their heads down, fiddling quietly what they could, equally unlikely to be committed emotionally to the Welfare State and its furtherance. From various studies it seems that an old sociological distinction used in former times of recession is back again: 'roughs' and 'respectables'. But with a difference: now the 'roughs' are not so public in their moral offences to the 'respectables'. Though better able to subsist materially through the Welfare State, they are ashamed or resentful, not grateful, to a state that supports them amid humiliation.

8. The Three Types of Family

Let me bring together the various strands of the argument. National aggregate figures conceal large variations in the circumstances of ordinary families. Some of these are expressed in differences between regions, more are between cities and small towns. Others distinguish neighbourhoods, streets and even neighbouring households. While these effects often cross-cut one another to produce a confused picture, there is enough mutual reinforcement to produce socio-political segregation between three types of household. They are, I guess, of roughly equal proportion in the population.

Two family types are doing moderately well even in times of recession. First, those in the private sector concentrated in small towns and rural areas, in small factories and offices in newer manufacturing and service industries. They are moderately unionised, but in unions or staff associations dominated by local bargaining, relatively unconnected to national unions, the T.U.C. or the Labour Party. They tend to be owner-occupiers and to contribute to private pension and life insurance schemes. They have as close or closer organized relations to the world of capitalist property as they have to the world of union and socialist collectivism. Because of their predominantly manual origins many still vote Labour. They may be committed to the education and health services, but as for the rest of the Welfare State they are uneasy. They suspect the poor of scrounging off their, the Taxpayers', money and they are conscious of the need to protect their hard-earned security and 'quasi-bourgeois' respectability. These are still ordinary households whose interests do not lie with the rich. But unless Labour recaptures an ideology which resonates in their life experience, their defection to the Conservatives or the Alliance will continue. I call them the *moderately prospering floaters*.

The second type, also moderately prospering, are predominantly in public employment or in such large-scale, traditional manufacturing as is still relatively secure. They are concentrated in cities, are heavily-unionised, and their unions dominate the national labour movement. Even more than the first type, they are well-connected in local networks to obtain steady employment for other family members. Like the first type, they may be manual or non-manual. They may be owner-occupiers or council tenants: they are likely to be in employer pension funds. But their property commitments are usually outweighed by their centrality to the labour movement. Their 'respectability' is culturally working-class rather than bourgeois. They are the *moderately prospering Labour core*, in activism and in voting.

The third type consists of households of the poor, predominantly outside the reach of the organisations of the Labour movement, either because they are non-working, single-parent households (usually women), because they are unemployed, or because they work in exploited but unorganised service and casual industries. Labour reaches them through council housing, the provision of welfare benefits, and in less direct fashion through the

national mechanisms of low-wage industries like Wages Councils (now being dismantled). The problem here, though traditional, is worsening in two ways. First, the number of people involved has been greatly increasing. Second, their defence of the Welfare State may be weakening in the ways I described. As humiliated dependants of the Welfare State they have been stripped of some of the rights of social citizenship. While their interests obviously lie with an extension of the Welfare State, their relative isolation makes them a-political. These *welfare dependants* are unreliable supporters.

These are 'ideal types' to which real families only approximate roughly. Probably the majority of the population will experience cross-pressures. But they are real enough forces in society, the first two

as leaders, the third as a negative 'folk devil'. The character of a locality may be shaped quite strongly by whichever of the first two predominates locally with 'welfare dependants' following their lead.

Labour can continue to attract the support of the second type, especially the public sector and the inner cities, almost indefinitely. It can probably continue to get as much support from the third as any other party. Some of the first type will stay through sentiment and conscience. Labour may still be capable of winning elections, because elections are won and lost on many grounds, some fairly fortuitous. But if Labour aspires again to be a radical party of government, it cannot continue to ignore post-war trends. None need work to its disadvantage; but to ignore them does.

9. An Ideological Strategy: Social Citizenship

If we constructed a shopping-list of policies to appeal to members of all three social groups, we would end up with a rag-bag. Many policies to help Liverpool would not resonate in the experience of the families of Maidstone, nor vice-versa. Just to chase the votes of 'moderately prospering floaters' would move the Party to the right while reducing the commitment of the 'Labour core' (and of the activists). Just to chase 'Labour core' votes traps the Party into diehard job protectionism. 'Welfare dependants' are never chased hard for their votes, since they are not an effective lobby. But to do this alone would alienate the other groups.

Something more is needed, an ideological offensive finding a common socialist thread in the aspirations and deprivations

of the three types of family. I suggest that we require an ideology of social citizenship, rooted in Labour traditions

yet capable of being up-dated to deal with the post-war trends I enumerated.

Social movements rest on ideologies – broad visions of how society is and how it ought to be, capable of uniting the practical drive and moral outrage of activists and of resonating in the life-experience and moral sense of the people. The present Conservative Party believes, falsely, that it possesses such an ideology. Its leaders spout continuously their rhetorical equations of freedom/ private property/ enterprise/ markets/ profits/ dynamism/ military strength/ patriotism. But in truth this ideology is not all that popular. It attracts a minority of the electorate and actively repels at least as many. Of the three family types identified earlier, it strikes effective chords only among the ‘moderately prospering floaters’.

Democratic socialist theory

Against this, Labour can mobilise a more formidable ideology. But, curiously, it holds back. During the last election campaign Michael Foot sought to counter Tory ideology with a series of alternatives: ‘fairness’, not ‘profits’; a ‘caring society’, not one dominated by the pursuit of wealth; and other contrasts between the supposed ideologies of Labour and Conservative Parties. Such contrasts are still the stock-in-trade of Labour leaders. But this is to make the Labour Party into a kind of church or charitable organization. Labour is not for caring *rather than* wealth. In fact democratic socialism has a superior theory of how wealth is created in modern society: *through* a fair society based on the co-operation of free citizens. Social citizenship is not a charitable urge – it is the way toward a more productive, more generally creative society.

So Tory ideology is not only immoral because it is selfish; it is also wrong on two counts about how modern societies actually work. First, wealth cannot be created by giving preferential incentives to those who

own private property. Wealth results from the common co-operation of almost all of us. In our particular form of society this requires a highly literate, skilled and healthy population, sharing the same overall culture and conceiving of ourselves as full and equal participants in the same society. One Tory claim looks particularly foolish when applied to such a society: that we can somehow distinguish between the ‘wealth creators’ in the private sector – as if, for example, the teaching of literacy or skills, or the maintenance of a transport infrastructure, were not directly necessary to the creation of wealth.

Second, to privilege private property and markets at the expense of all else creates a divided, discontented society which then produces less effectively. Policies which run counter to peoples’ sense of fairness and citizenship need naked force to implement – as we are seeing increasingly under the Thatcher government. At present importing coal, burning oil, and giving the police unlimited overtime and riot gear amounts to a bizarrely inefficient (and socially horrendous) energy policy.

Exposing the two errors of current Tory ideology is not difficult. The ideology is actually rather foreign to most of the experience of the British people. Tory history, for example, is Victorian. It tells of the saga of the Industrial Revolution created by dynamic capitalists, extracting the maximum effort from their workers, with the aid of an undemocratic state. Fine – let us concede them the early 19th century. But the achievement of genuinely wealthy societies, of a tremendous increase in mass living standards, of the ability to plan deliberately for full employment through Keynesian economics, of a guarantee of health and minimal well-being through the Welfare State, of universal suffrage and literacy, of the liberation of colonial peoples – these all belong to the 20th century, and to societies for whom such progress was only possible through social citizenship. Granted, such achievements

were not due to Labour alone, either in this or any other country. But if Tory history abandons them, let our history move in.

There is also a direct link between this history and our present predicament. Labour's greatest contribution was through the Attlee governments. Aided considerably by war-time common sacrifice, Labour's demands for a fairer, more productive society struck deep ideological chords and laid down deep institutional roots which still flourish today. Common sacrifice in pursuit of future common benefit was the explicit trade-off accepted by the majority of the electorate. It could be so again today in the increasingly-desperate circumstances of the British economy.

The right to citizenship

I suggest, therefore, that Labour has a potent, popular weapon available through its ideological traditions. Social citizenship guarantees adequate participation in economic, social and cultural life as of *right*. The right to citizenship means an absolute right, no questions asked, no tests of worth or of morality required. True, it has never been fully implemented. It may even be quite utopian in its fullest ideals. But it has more resonance than its Tory opposite – selectivity of citizenship and benefits only to those in need, as defined by the state's surveillance machinery – simply because in the modern society we are all closely inter-dependent, all susceptible to the same vagaries of fortune.

Naturally, social citizenship requires up-dating. Indeed, its strength as an ideology is precisely that it can overcome the varieties of experience which have grown up in the post-war period. The particular policies which would be both just and popular among the three main types of

family I identified would be many, detailed and varied. But their common aspects involve basic rights of citizenship, some in their details old, others new. In the sphere of employment the right to work should follow from citizenship. In macro-economics this involves a commitment to Keynesian principles. In social policy it might involve measures such as a guarantee of employment (though not in present job), a minimum wage and participation in decision-making, and adequate care facilities for children, the elderly, and the disabled (so that women and single parents can work if they wish to). In housing, citizenship should guarantee basic standards of housing and control over it, one's immediate life-space. Detailed policies might include a guarantee of a minimum space and set of facilities; a right to decide whether to buy or rent; help and advice with all basic aspects of ownership and tenancy; help with repairs; plus rights to control one's immediate housing space and to participation in broader decision-making in either public or private housing institutions. In the sphere of welfare, citizenship should guarantee an adequate standard of health and economic security, regardless of ability to work and with a minimum of state surveillance over eligibility. In detail this might involve the provision of a national minimum for all, regardless of circumstance. We might indeed aim for a higher level of unifying citizenship across all these three spheres, through some kind of national 'social dividend' or 'social wage' paid to everyone, in work or out.

Policy details are outside of my scope here. In any case the Labour Party is at present fertile in specific policy (as even the last Manifesto showed). But policy should stem from a broad ideological vision, to fire activists and attract mass support. Policy should be built on top of a simpler, more universal, more radical understanding of citizen rights, to enhance the power of the ordinary person and family against the power of big capital

and state bureaucracy alike. Like all socialist ideals, that of social citizenship can be formulated in relatively mild or revolutionary terms and can inspire countless 'left versus right' disputes. It is only a general ideology, but we are in need of some such ideology. It is unquestionable that some of the old visions are fading. We can no longer plausibly glorify the industrial proletariat or seriously believe that state ownership solves much. Indeed we need to distance ourselves in principle from self-styled 'socialist' regimes which do just that. The tradition of social citizenship has welded together apparently-disparate groups in the past. It can do so again.

I make one further claim: such an ideology can help unify Right and Left. Disunity has been disastrous in recent years, both in creating a new Centre Party and in reducing the coherence and credibility of Labour itself. Unless this changes, the Tories may stay in power with a minority

of votes. But it is my contention that many (though not all) of the disputes concern obsolete issues. The failure to face the present has been common to the Left and Right. The Left is generally correct to observe that Labour has done relatively little for ordinary families over the last 20 years or so, and to argue for a more radical approach. But it has been wrong to see more nationalization, larger state bureaucracies, and more job protectionism and national chauvinism as either objective or popular solutions. The Right has been generally correct to insist on an appeal to the newer, middling strata in the population. But it errs in asserting that this requires 'moderate' policies and a move to the 'right' or the 'centre' of traditional British politics. My view is rather that appealing to these new strata will actually involve the Party in developing new, radical, socialist policies and strategies to which Left and Right alike can make important contributions.

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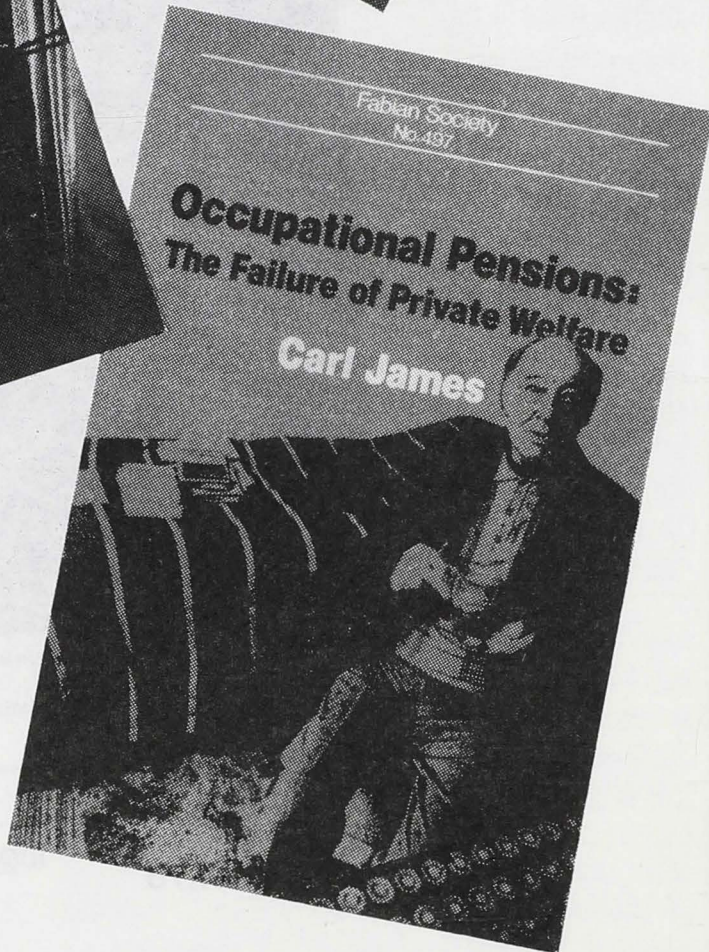
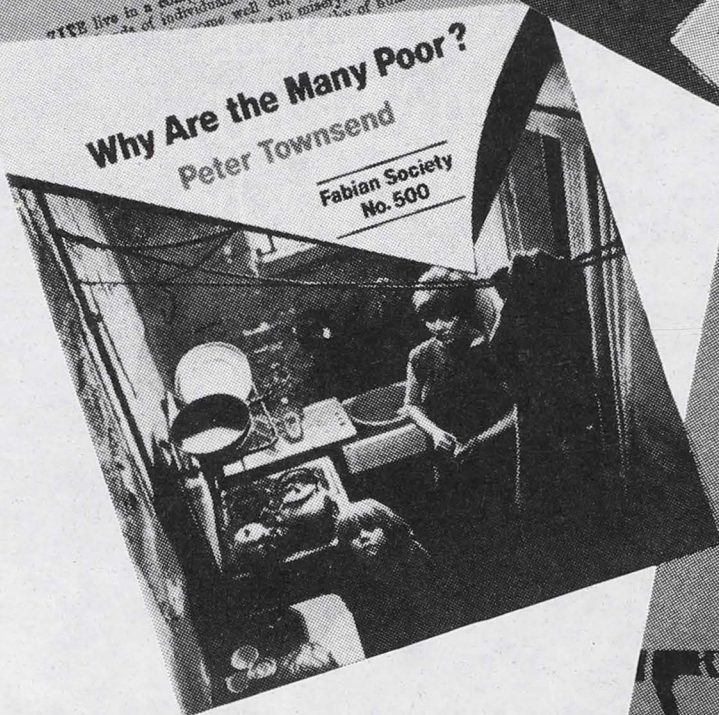
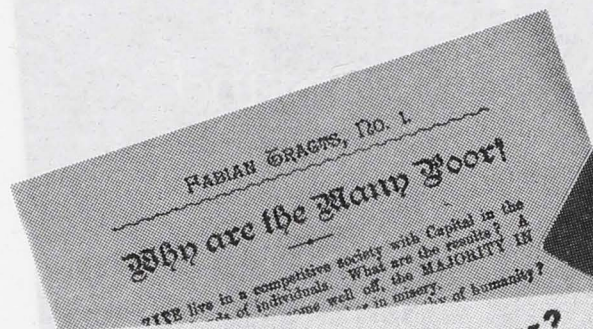
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