

'Looking both ways': place, space, and left-wing activism in Croydon after 1956

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Abstract

This thesis places the history of left-wing activism and activists within a specific suburban context. Focusing on Croydon, which predominantly elected Conservative MPs and a Conservative-controlled council until the 1990s, this study contributes to understanding left-wing politics in places where it was not necessarily electorally successful but where many activists grew up, lived, and have returned to. In the process, it explores the ways left-wing activists made sense of, and contributed to, the complex and contradictory experiences of Croydon and the suburban in a 'suburban nation' and 'suburban century'. 'Writing from within' and drawing upon a combination of oral history interviews, archival research, and Croydon's appearances in popular culture, this thesis adds to recent scholarship in contemporary political history and (sub)urban studies and enters conversation with the work of scholars including, but not limited to, Raymond Williams, Henri Lefebvre, and Stuart Hall. Through an innovative fourfold structure, this study presents an activist history of a place which was always in flux, internally fragmented, and understood through reference to elsewhere – whether the leafy suburbs of Surrey, 'blitzed cities' like Coventry, the shining skyscrapers of Manhattan, or the ageing 'inner city' of its Brixton neighbour. By exploring the processes of hope, frustration, and compromise through which Croydon and the suburbs were formed, this thesis argues that its late twentieth-century left-wing activists were 'looking both ways' between 'town' and 'country', between entering older spaces and opening new ones, and between disappointing pasts and optimistic futures – processes of suburbanisation which have rendered Croydon alternately a site of nostalgia, shame, pride, and mourning. In taking Croydon as its vantage point, it suggests an alternative perspective on the politics and culture of England in the late twentieth-century, highlighting the importance of struggles in and over, but not bounded by, space and place to contemporary left-wing activists.

Declaration

Declaration: I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

DANIEL FROST.

Ethical review

The approval of the University of Reading Ethics Committee (UREC) was sought before commencing the oral history component of this thesis and granted on 13th July 2018. The explicit consent of interviewees was received prior to their participation, and they were informed of the purpose of interviews and given an opportunity to review, alter, or retract transcripts prior to the inclusion of material in the thesis.

COVID-19 impact statement

As a result of the disruptions to archives and libraries during the COVID-19 pandemic, and restricted access to the British Library and Museum of Croydon especially, there are a small number of references which are not as detailed as they would otherwise have been. In particular, the difficulty in accessing the *Croydon Advertiser* has meant that there are two references to unpaginated newspaper clippings, whilst my survey of local newspaper coverage was restricted to the late 1960s and early 1970s.

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Abbreviations

AAM	Anti-Apartheid Movement
AEU	Amalgamated Engineering Union
ANL	Anti-Nazi League
APEX	Association of Professional, Executive, Clerical and Computer Staff
ARA	Anti-Racist Alliance
AYM	Asian Youth Movements
BPM	Black Parents Movement
BSFS	British-Soviet Friendship Society
BSG	Black Socialist Group
BUFP	Black Unity and Freedom Party
CAASE	Croydon Association for the Advancement of State Education
CAGS	Croydon Area Gay Society
CARD	Campaign Against Racial Discrimination
CARU	Croydon Action for Racial Unity
CAWU	Clerical and Administrative Workers' Union
CBC	Croydon and Brixton Collective Black Peoples Organisation
CBPAC	Croydon Black Peoples Action Committee
CCCR	Croydon Council for Community Relations
CCCS	Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies
CHE	Campaign for Homosexual Equality
CLCAR	Croydon Labour Campaign Against Racism
CLP	Constituency Labour Party
CND	Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
CPB	Communist Party of Britain
CPB-ML	Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist)
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
CPMU	Croydon Police Monitoring Unit
CRAM	Croydon Radical Action Movement
CRCU	Croydon Race and Community Unit
CREC	Croydon Race Equality Council
CTA	Croydon Tenants' Association
EMCF	Ethnic Minority Communities Forum
GLC	Greater London Council
HCC	Housing Campaign Committee
ICT	International Computers and Tabulators
ILEA	Inner London Education Authority
ILP	Independent Labour Party
IMG	International Marxist Group
IS	International Socialists
<i>IT</i>	<i>International Times</i>
LCC	London County Council
LCF	Local Campaign Forum
LEL	League of Empire Loyalists
LGC	Local Government Committee
LRC	Labour Representation Committee
MCF	Movement for Colonial Freedom
NALGO	National and Local Government Officers' Association
NCCL	National Council for Civil Liberties
NCP	New Communist Party
NEC	National Executive Committee
NF	National Front
NJACWER	National Joint Action Campaign for Women's Equal Rights

NUPE	National Union of Public Employees
NUR	National Union of Railwaymen
NUT	National Unions of Teachers
PACE	Parents Against Cuts in Education
PROP	Preservation of the Rights of Prisoners
RAC	Rents Action Committee
RAR	Rock Against Racism
SDF	Social Democratic Federation
SDP	Social Democratic Party
SLL	Socialist Labour League
SSCS	South Suburban Cooperative Society
SWP	Socialist Workers Party
TUC	Trades Union Congress
UCW	Union of Communication Workers
Usdaw	Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers
VfS	Victory for Socialism
WCG	Women's Cooperative Guild
WI	Women's Institute
WRP	Workers Revolutionary Party
YCL	Young Communist League
YCND	Youth Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
YS	Young Socialists

Introduction

'In Croydon!'

'Family of Noise', Adam and the Ants (1979)

On April 19th 2017 – the day after Theresa May announced a general election – Jeremy Corbyn stood and delivered a speech in Croydon town centre: 'We're here in Croydon,' he told a crowd of supporters, 'because we want to win Croydon.'¹

It was a statement of intent. Labour was pushing to unseat a Conservative housing minister in Croydon Central, Gavin Barwell. By coming to Croydon so early in the campaign, Corbyn promised to 'prove the establishment experts wrong' and win seats in the election.² Labour's candidate was Sarah Jones, a former civil servant and charity campaigns manager who was born in Shirley – she joined the Labour Party in 1992, aged 19 and pregnant with her first child, outraged by the notorious 'little list' speech by the Conservatives' Peter Lilley.³ She had lost out narrowly to Barwell in 2015, just 165 votes shy of victory.

For much of the twentieth century, Croydon had been, if not quite a bellwether, then at least an area Labour won whenever it won big.⁴ The party gained its first MP in Croydon, David Rees-Williams, in 1945, and then lost him again in 1950. Its second Croydon MP, David Winnick, was not to be elected until Harold Wilson's 1966 landslide, and he held it for just four years. Whilst Labour has held at least one seat in the north of Croydon since Malcolm Wicks' 1992 election, the

¹ The Labour Party, 'Jeremy Corbyn kickstarts the campaign in Croydon' [video] (19th April 2017), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u8h8fxel-XQ>, accessed 27th October 2021.

² H. Stewart, 'Jeremy Corbyn makes election pledge to bust "cosy cartel" of politics,' *The Guardian* (20th April 2017), <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/apr/20/election-result-not-a-foregone-conclusion-insists-jeremy-corbyn>, accessed 8th March 2021.

³ O. Tobin, 'Who is Sarah Jones? What do we know about Croydon's first female MP,' *Croydon Advertiser* (9th June 2017, updated 13th September 2017), <https://www.croydonadvertiser.co.uk/news/croydon-news/who-sarah-jones-what-know-471143>, accessed 13th June 2022. For an indication of the location of places like Shirley, and other areas within Croydon mentioned in this thesis, note the boundary maps provided in Appendix 3.

⁴ For a summary of local and general election results in Croydon, see Appendix 4.

other seats conformed to the norm – Croydon Central was held by Labour’s Geraint Davies from 1997 until 2005, when it reverted to the Conservatives, whilst Croydon South has remained stubbornly blue for its entire history. In this respect, Sarah Jones’ win in Croydon Central in 2017 was an example of the renewed success of appeals to the ‘Middle England’ which Labour has long worried about, epitomised in 1992’s *Southern Discomfort* pamphlet from the Fabian Society.⁵

Events since 2017, however, indicate another way Sarah Jones’ election victory could be seen: Croydon not as a bellwether with a Tory bias, but as representative of the types of places that had become rare sites of optimism for Labour, remaining red in the 2019 general election and with an increased majority.⁶ This growing comfort can be connected to its changing fortunes in local government – having waited until 1994 to run the council, Labour has spent 20 of the last 28 years in charge of the town hall. As Owen Hatherley described in his *Red Metropolis*, Croydon (and especially Croydon Central) could be regarded as ‘the new Red Base’.⁷

If the troubles which Labour has been thrown into in the wake of the council’s 2020 bankruptcy indicate its electoral hegemony in the borough is less than certain, the label ‘Red Base’ could be understood in a different way with a longer history.⁸ In 2017, Corbyn was accompanied by two policy advisers from the town: Andrew Fisher and Patsy Cummings. Prior to his appointment as Shadow Chancellor, and his appearance at a rally in Croydon which concluded the 2017 campaign, John McDonnell regularly addressed meetings of the trades council-initiated Croydon Assembly at Ruskin House, which is also the national headquarters of the Communist Party of

⁵ J. Moran, ‘The Strange Birth of Middle England,’ *Political Quarterly*, vol.76, no.2 (2005), pp.232-240, p.235; G. Radice, *Southern Discomfort* (London: Fabian Society, 1992).

⁶ T. O’Connor, ‘General Election results reaction in Croydon Central: “A stunning result on a devastating night for Labour”,’ *MyLondon* (13th December 2019), <https://www.mylondon.news/news/south-london-news/general-election-results-reaction-croydon-17414296>, accessed 8th March 2021.

⁷ O. Hatherley, *Red Metropolis* (London: Repeater Books, 2020), p.195.

⁸ W. Wallis, ‘Croydon bankruptcy offers cautionary tale for cash-strapped councils,’ *Financial Times* (13th January 2021), <https://www.ft.com/content/2730bc14-57ba-426a-b237-23dfbcae230c>, accessed 8th March 2021. In the local elections of May 2022, Labour’s hegemony received a decisive blow – the party lost the directly-elected mayoral contest to the Conservatives’ Jason Perry, whilst their strength on the council dipped just beneath a majority. For my discussion of these results, see: D. Frost, ‘Many Croydons: Labour’s Challenge in South London,’ *Mile End Institute Blog* (25th May 2022), <https://www.qmul.ac.uk/mei/news-and-opinion/items/many-croydons-labours-challenge-in-south-london.html>, accessed 13th June 2022.

Britain (CPB) and, from 2021, the *Morning Star*, and one of the last labour halls in London.⁹ David Evans – the general secretary whose appointment in 2020 marked one of Keir Starmer’s first acts as Corbyn’s successor – cut his teeth as the borough’s first paid Labour organiser and as a councillor from 1986 to 1990, and political consultancy firm The Campaign Company has been based in the town since he founded it in 2001; two of the other challengers for the post, Fisher and second-placed Byron Taylor, had connections to Croydon, the latter also as a former borough organiser.¹⁰

As both a birthplace for left-wing activists and a site of left-wing activism, Croydon has typically escaped attention – seen principally as a suburban Conservative stronghold during the twentieth-century, Croydon’s electoral history has been taken to represent its politics *tout court*. Croydon was ‘a kind of joke place’, where the notion of left-wing politics was amusing or inappropriate.¹¹ Yet Croydon’s history is littered with examples where its activism has outstripped that of other areas – like its branch of the Youth Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (YCND) in the 1960s, the largest in London.¹² This discrepancy between Croydon’s electoral history and its activism, and the difficulty of understanding their difference, is wrapped up with an enduring sense that it is ‘inconceivable that Croydon should have a history’ – that history is something which happened elsewhere.¹³ One local councillor and antiquarian remarked in 1891 that Croydon was ‘singularly barren of historical reminiscences’ and ‘events relating to it have never been of national importance’.¹⁴ As will be seen, this could hardly be further from the truth – Croydon has gained a

⁹ G. Pogrud & P. Maguire, *Left Out: The Inside Story of Labour Under Corbyn* (London: Bodley Head, 2020), p.90; H.N. Topman, *A Study of the Rise and Decline of Selected Labour Halls in the Greater London Area 1918-1979* (PhD Thesis, Kingston University, 2006), p.249; C. Tucker, ‘Goodbye Fish Island, hello Ruskin House,’ *Morning Star* (25th July 2021), <https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/f/goodbye-fish-island-hello-ruskin-house>, accessed 13th August 2021.

¹⁰ K. Proctor, ‘David Evans appointed Labour’s new general secretary after winning vote,’ *The Guardian* (26th May 2020), <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/may/26/david-evans-appointed-labours-new-general-secretary-after-winning-vote>, accessed 25th March 2021.

¹¹ Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman.

¹² W. Wolfgang, interviewed by L. Galpin and R. Dewa, *After Hiroshima* (16th April 2015), <https://www.londonbubble.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Walter20Wolfgang20Transcript.pdf>, p.13.

¹³ London, Black Cultural Archives, BCA/6/11/10.

¹⁴ J.O. Pelton, *Relics of Old Croydon* (Croydon: Roffley and Clark, 1891), p.3. Cited in F. Coetzee, ‘Villa Toryism Reconsidered: Conservatism and Suburban Sensibilities in Late-Victorian Croydon,’ *Parliamentary History*, vol.16, no.1 (1997), pp.29-47, p.33.

persistent but contradictory place in the popular imagination which has given the struggles within it a special salience.

This study is interested in the experiences of left-wing activists, inside and outside the Labour Party, in Croydon. It is concerned with understanding the ways that left-wing activists and activism are shaped by spaces in which they emerge and take place and, reciprocally, the ways that places have been shaped by the left-wing activists and activism within them. As a result, it is motivated by the following research questions: How did Croydon and perceptions of Croydon change in the twentieth century? How did the shifting senses of Croydon influence the politics of the activists that found themselves there, and felt them? And how have these activists made and remade Croydon through the politics of space? Why has Croydon so often been 'a place of nostalgia' for activists, associated with hopes as well as disappointments?¹⁵ And what does it mean to take Croydon as an alternative vantage point for the study of politics in twentieth-century England, Britain, and the world – suggesting a history as complex and contradictory and 'suburban' as Croydon itself?

Why Croydon?

David Bowie, who grew up in neighbouring Bromley, infamously declared that 'the most derogatory thing' he could say of something was 'God, it's so fucking Croydon.'¹⁶ Like Lauren Pikó's encounters with 'cultural cringe' in responses to her work on Milton Keynes, Croydon has been 'the brunt of numerous jokes regarding its banality in the popular media.'¹⁷ A 'consciously self-effacing definition of Croydon's identity' has been apparent since at least the nineteenth century.¹⁸ It was perhaps to this that I referred – '[telling] the joke against yourself before they do', as Raymond Williams described in Welsh culture, or '[making] possible a discourse that can

¹⁵ Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman.

¹⁶ P. Watts, 'The magic of Croydon: is London's punchline having the last laugh?', *The Guardian* (27th May 2015), <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2015/may/27/the-magic-of-croydon-is-londons-punchline-having-the-last-laugh>, accessed 8th March 2021.

¹⁷ L. Pikó, *Milton Keynes in British Culture: Imagining England* (London: Routledge, 2019), p.6; N.A. Phelps et al, *Post-Suburban Europe: Planning and Politics at the Margins of Europe's Capital Cities* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p.x.

¹⁸ Coetzee, 'Villa Toryism Reconsidered,' p.33.

consent without capitulating’, as Henri Lefebvre had it – when, responding to the ubiquitous question which heads this section, I have told people inquiring about my research that Croydon is where the twentieth century happened.¹⁹ The joke veils a truth: if ‘it is still in places that people’s lives are lived’, then there is a longstanding tradition of local history which, for a variety of reasons, generalises from the experiences of particular places to understand national ones.²⁰ In the so-called ‘suburban nation’ and a ‘suburban century’, there is a pressing need to address the suburban lacunae in contemporary political history, and to reckon with suburbanisation as a process to which activists have responded and by which they have been shaped – a process for which Croydon has served as a metonym.²¹

In the past decade, urban historians have increasingly sought to use the history of the built environment to provide new narratives of twentieth-century Britain. Of these, the broadest and best is Sam Wetherell’s *Foundations*, which provides an account of the broader trend of which it is part and sets out ‘a history of twentieth-century Britain told through the transformation of its built environment.’²² Wetherell uses six ‘urban forms’ to narrate an overarching shift from a mid-century ‘developmental social politics’ to the ‘postdevelopmental state’ of contemporary neoliberalism, continually returning to the ways that ‘these urban forms developed their own autonomy and logic, often escaping the ability of any single actor to contain or shape them.’²³ In the process, he adds to and complicates a body of work which emphasises the significance of place

¹⁹ R. Williams, *Who Speaks for Wales?: Nation, Culture, Identity* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), p.10; H. Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life* (London: Verso, 2014), p.738. Also note Angela Carter’s commentary of the ‘self-defensive joke’ told by her Scots father: A. Carter, *Shaking a Leg: Collected Journalism and Writings* (London: Vintage Books, 1998), p.20.

²⁰ J.A. Agnew, ‘Place and political behaviour: the geography of Scottish nationalism,’ *Political Geography Quarterly*, vol.3, no.3 (1984), pp.191-206, p.192. Compare, also, to the significance of the statement ‘everything is in everything’ described in J. Ranci ere, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), pp.26-27.

²¹ For ‘suburban nation’ applied to England, see: M. Clapson, ‘The suburban aspiration in England since 1919,’ *Contemporary British History*, vol.14, no.1 (2000), pp.151-174, p.151; T. Jeffrey, ‘The suburban nation: Politics and class in Lewisham,’ pp.189-216 in D. Feldman & G. Stedman Jones (eds.), *Metropolis-London: Histories and representations since 1880* (London: Routledge, 1989). The term is not restricted to England; see: M. Dines & T. Vermuelen, *New Suburban Stories* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p.2. For ‘suburban century’, see: M. Clapson, *Suburban Century: Social Change and Urban Growth in England and the USA* (Oxford: Berg, 2003), p.1.

²² S. Wetherell, *Foundations: How the Built Environment Made Twentieth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2020), pp.3-7.

²³ Wetherell, *Foundations*, pp.6-7 & p.191.

and space for the formation of subjectivities – including Mike Savage’s criticism of historians that see ‘the local social structure as nothing more than a fragment of a “national” class structure’.²⁴ ‘Material class inequalities and subjective experiences of class’, Ben Rogaly argued, ‘are reproduced through the built environment and the reputations of particular places’.²⁵ If urban historians have not quite succeeded in restoring the ‘spatial imagination’ – as Edward W. Soja hoped – to equivalence with the historical and social in its explanatory power, they have moved on from presenting space and place as simply ‘the raw canvas upon which our experiences take place’ or even ‘an external and largely inert physical “environment”’.²⁶ Instead, historians like Wetherell have shown that ‘space was the outcome of history rather than merely the terrain on which it unfolded.’²⁷

One particularly fruitful area of investigation for contemporary urban historians has been the so-called ‘inner city’. Whilst the ‘inner city’ is not a wholly novel urban form – note, for example, Daniel Renshaw’s interesting comparisons between ‘inner-city’ Edwardian Spitalfields and 1980s Brixton – recent research has tended to place the ‘inner city’ within wider narratives of both decline and emergent multiculturalism in the late twentieth century.²⁸ From the 1960s onwards,

²⁴ M. Savage, ‘Understanding political alignments in contemporary Britain: do localities matter?’ *Political Geography Quarterly*, vol.6, no.1 (1987), pp.53-76, p.73. For examples of local histories which primarily treat places as containers of class fragments, see: A. Thorpe, “‘One of the most backward areas of the country’: The Labour Party’s Grass Roots in South West England, 1918-45,’ pp.217-240, in M. Worley (ed.), *Labour’s Grass Roots: Essays on the Activities of Local Labour Parties and Members, 1918-45* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); S. Fielding & D. Tanner, ‘The “Rise of the Left” Revisited: Labour Party Culture in Post-War Manchester and Salford,’ *Labour History Review*, vol.71, no.3 (2006), pp.211-233; Jeffrey, ‘The suburban nation’; D. Weinbren, *Hendon Labour Party 1924-1992: A Brief Introduction to the Microfilm Edition* (Wakefield: Microfilm Academic Publishers, 1998); D. Weinbren, ‘Building Communities, Constructing Identities: The Rise of the Labour Party in London,’ *The London Journal*, vol.23, no.1 (1998), pp.41-60.

²⁵ B. Rogaly, ‘Class, Spatial Justice and the Production of Not-Quite Citizens,’ pp.157-176, in B. Anderson & V. Hughes (eds.), *Citizenship and its Others* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p.159. See also: D. Featherstone & P. Griffin, ‘Spatial relations, histories from below and the makings of agency: Reflections on *The Making of the English Working Class* at 50,’ *Progress in Human Geography*, vol.40, no.3 (2016), pp.375-393, p.378.

²⁶ E. Blake, ‘Spatiality past and present: An interview with Edward Soja, Los Angeles, 12 April 2001,’ *Journal of Social Archaeology*, vol.2, no.2 (2002), pp.139-158, pp.141-142; D. Trigg, ‘Place and Non-Place: A Phenomenological Perspective,’ pp.127-139, in B.B. Janz (ed.), *Place, Space and Hermeneutics* (Basel: Springer International Publishing, 2017), p.139.

²⁷ Wetherell, *Foundations*, p.5. As Wetherell himself notes, one of the best accounts of the ‘spatial turn’ in the humanities is provided in: E.W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989).

²⁸ D. Renshaw, ‘The violent frontline: space, ethnicity and confronting the state in Edwardian Spitalfields and 1980s Britain,’ *Contemporary British History*, vol.32, no.2 (2018), pp.231-252, p.14.

the 'inner city' was targeted by a series of policies aimed at 'multiple deprivation', identified not only with the bodies of its residents but with the apparent dilapidation of an ageing inner-suburban built environment.²⁹ As Wetherell points out, we increasingly 'carve lives for [our]selves out of a disintegrating, repurposed, or hastily repaired developmental infrastructure', the 'guiding logic' of which has fallen out of favour – but this has not kept them from being repurposed and remade.³⁰ Significantly, this repurposing has been associated with the processes of 'multicultural drift' apparent in contemporary Britain, 'the increasing visibility and "natural" participation of ethnic minorities in the streets as an inevitable part of British life, particularly in cities'.³¹ Although many studies have focused on experiences in London, and especially areas like Brixton and Peckham, research is also being conducted elsewhere – including Kieran Connell's thought-provoking *Black Handsworth*, which describes the 'establishing [of] a black, transnational sensibility as a powerful feature of the fabric of urban Britain' through a microhistory of an inner Birmingham suburb.³² Whether emplotted as a romance or a tragedy, these narratives interweave the deterioration (and reclamation) of the urban built environment and the emergence of multiculturalism in contemporary Britain.³³

It has become increasingly common for arguments previously associated with the 'inner city' to be extended further beyond the old inner suburbs, to 'multicultural suburbs' on the more distant edges of cities like London – particularly in the light of the uprisings which broke out in the

²⁹ A. Andrews, 'Multiple Deprivation, the Inner City, and the Fracturing of the Welfare State: Glasgow, c. 1968–78,' *Twentieth Century British History*, vol.29, no.4 (2018), pp.605–624, p.606; R. McManus & P.J. Ethington, 'Suburbs in transition: new approaches to suburban history,' *Urban History*, vol.34, no.2 (2007), pp.317–337, p.333; O. Saumarez Smith, 'Action for Cities: the Thatcher government and inner-city policy,' *Urban History*, vol.47, no.2 (2020), pp.274–291, p.276; M. Romyn, "'London Badlands": The Inner City Represented, Regenerated,' *The London Journal*, vol.44, no.2 (2019), pp.133–150, p.134.

³⁰ Wetherell, *Foundations*, p.191.

³¹ S. Watson & A. Saha, 'Suburban drifts: mundane multiculturalism in outer London,' *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol.36, no.2 (2013), pp.2016–2034, p.2019.

³² K. Connell, *Black Handsworth: Race in 1980s Britain* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019), p.11.

³³ An influential account of this process can be found in: K.H. Perry, *London is the Place for Me: Black Britons, Citizenship, and the Politics of Race* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). For a discussion of 'tragic' and 'romantic' emplotments in historical narratives, see, for example: H. White, 'Interpretation in History,' *New Literary History*, vol.4, no.2 (1973), pp.281–314.

summer of 2011.³⁴ Whereas, as Chapter Four will discuss, Croydon had traditionally been contrasted with the inner suburbs to its north, it was already possible by the 1990s to speak of northern wards like Thornton Heath and South Norwood as ‘almost inner-city in character’.³⁵ Whilst, as Mark Clapson points out, there remains a widely-held belief that Black people in Britain primarily live in areas like Brixton, the 1970s onwards saw ‘continuing *internal* and suburban migration’ as ‘longer-established and increasingly affluent working-class and middle-class black households’ – what Clapson elsewhere calls the ‘Black petit bourgeois’ – became able to afford homes.³⁶ There was a sense for some commentators that these processes of ‘secondary settlement’ changed the suburbs ‘into something else’: ‘a slice of Inner London on the lam’, as Owen Hatherley described Croydon, ‘as much a part of London proper as Peckham or Tottenham, albeit much more distant from the centre’.³⁷ By the mid-2000s, Croydon was fast becoming an important centre for the most exciting developments in contemporary British music, including the emergence of grime, dubstep and UK drill – all genres commonly invoked when discussing the complexity of diasporic identities, ‘multiculturalism’ and ‘hauntology’ in recent British history, and their political consequences.³⁸ Indeed, it has become common to see claims that ‘a reversal has taken place’ to make the suburbs into ‘the new inner city’, with Croydon

³⁴ Watson & Saha, ‘Suburban drifts’; R. Huq, ‘Suburbia Runs Riot: The UK August 2011 Riots, Neo-Moral Panic and the End of the English Suburban Dream?’, *Journal for Cultural Research*, vol.17, no.2 (2013), pp.105-123, p.106.

³⁵ N.A. Phelps, ‘On the Edge of Something Big: Edge-City Economic Development in Croydon, South London,’ *The Town Planning Review*, vol.69, no.4 (1998), pp.441-465, pp.461-462.

³⁶ Clapson, ‘The suburban aspiration in England since 1919,’ pp.163-164; Clapson, *Suburban Century*, p.97. For contemporary studies of these processes which focus upon Croydon, see: K. McPherson & J. Gaitskell, *Immigrants and Employment: two case studies in East London and Croydon* (London: Institute of Race Relations, 1969); I.W. Mildon, ‘West Indian home owners in Croydon,’ *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol.6, no.1-2 (1977), pp.94-98.

³⁷ M. Dines, ‘Metaburbia: writing and the evolving suburb in contemporary fiction,’ pp.81-90, in J. Archer, P.J.P. Sandul & K. Solomonson (eds.), *Making Suburbia: New Histories of Everyday America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), p.82; O. Hatherley, *A New Kind of Bleak: Journeys Through Urban Britain* (London: Verso, 2013), p.166.

³⁸ D. Hancox, *Inner City Pressure: The Story of Grime* (London: William Collins, 2018), p.105 & pp.285-286; M. Fisher, ‘What is Hauntology?’, *Film Quarterly*, vol.66, no.1 (2012), pp.16-24.

a prominent example.³⁹ To the extent that local historians opt for case studies which are representative, analogous or typical, therefore, Croydon is an apt choice for research.⁴⁰

Other urban historians have focused upon processes of urban redevelopment or 'renewal' in Britain from the 1960s onwards.⁴¹ Historians such as Otto Saumarez Smith have seen this period as 'both a high point in the history of urban renewal and the beginning of the end of a very long consensus [...] that the renewal of cities should be on a large, comprehensive scale'.⁴² For Saumarez Smith, this is an explicitly tragic narrative: a narrative of 'buoyant confidence' giving way to 'intense disillusionment'.⁴³ Wetherell suggests that these redevelopments produced latent urban forms which anticipated neoliberalism – 'lying in wait for the emergence of the political conditions under which they would thrive', provided nationally by the election of Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister in 1979.⁴⁴ Amongst the best examples of urban histories of this kind is Guy Ortolano's account of Thatcher's visit to Milton Keynes in the same year, a concise narrative of the triumph of the spatial politics of 'market liberalism' in what had been regarded as a prototypically social-democratic 'new town'.⁴⁵ If these histories have highlighted the extent to which 'Britain's neoliberal urban forms inherited the unequal social order of their predecessors', they have also stressed 'the decisive nature of Thatcher's 1979 victory'.⁴⁶ In this sense, the urban

³⁹ L. Oldfield Ford, "'The suburb is the new inner city'" Laura Oldfield Ford's new exhibition at the Stanley Picker Gallery,' *Verso Blog* (6th October 2014), <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/1721-the-suburb-is-the-new-inner-city-laura-oldfield-ford-s-new-exhibition-at-the-stanley-picker-gallery>, accessed 15th June 2022.

⁴⁰ C. Ginzburg, J. Tedeschi & A.C. Tedeschi, 'Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know about It,' *Critical Inquiry*, vol.20, no.1 (1993), pp.10–35, p.12 & p.33.

⁴¹ J. Greenhalgh, 'The new urban social history? Recent theses on urban development and governance in post-war Britain,' *Urban History*, vol.47, no.3 (2020), pp.535–545, p.535.

⁴² O. Saumarez Smith, *Boom Cities: Architect-Planners and the Politics of Radical Urban Renewal in 1960s Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p.8 & p.12.

⁴³ Saumarez Smith, *Boom Cities*, p.8.

⁴⁴ Wetherell, *Foundations*, p.11.

⁴⁵ G. Ortolano, *Thatcher's Progress: From Social Democracy to Market Liberalism through an English New Town* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p.3 & p.17. For my review of this book, see: D. Frost, Review of G. Ortolano, *Thatcher's Progress: from social democracy to market liberalism through an English new town*, *Social History*, vol.45, no.1 (2020), pp.138–140. Ortolano's use of 'market liberalism', rather than 'neoliberalism', is a sign of the disagreement over the latter term, which he regards as less 'precise, descriptive, and analytical'. Without enough space to discuss the term in detail here, I have tended to alternate between the two; in general, I am inclined to agree with Wetherell that neoliberalism 'still has some utility' in 'connect[ing] and nam[ing] a set of processes that are common across the world' and encouraging the consideration of 'political alternatives that can begin to transcend the parochialism of national electoral politics.' See: Wetherell, *Foundations*, p.11.

⁴⁶ Wetherell, *Foundations*, p.14; Ortolano, *Thatcher's Progress*, p.260.

history of (post)modern Britain has been used to understand the continuities and changes which the so-called 'boom cities' appeared to represent and their complex relationship to 'the political culture and ambitions of the period.'⁴⁷

One of the first scholars to connect the urban politics of the 1960s and 1970s to changes in the built environment – Peter Saunders – used Croydon as a case study, noting its mixture of large businesses, middle-class owner-occupiers, and working-class tenants.⁴⁸ Local political scientists have sought for their case studies to 'be not only microscopic but also microcosmic', and Croydon has been seen as 'the exemplar of post-industrial suburban development in the UK'.⁴⁹ For Iain Sinclair, Croydon was 'a subtopian city-state; constantly reaching out to devour the lesser hilltop developments of South London.'⁵⁰ By 1964, Croydon had already seen 2million gross square feet of construction in the town centre, with 750,000 square feet underway and 3.3million with planning permission, and 1.5million in surrounding areas – about the same as was found in major cities like Manchester, Birmingham or Liverpool.⁵¹ At the end of the 1960s, it was 'the Southeast's largest office centre outside Central London.'⁵² It has applied for city status unsuccessfully on at least ten occasions since 1951, most recently in 2012, as the largest town – the borough has over a third of a million residents – in Europe without it.⁵³ If, as Carlo Ginzburg suggests, 'any social structure is the result of interaction and of numerous individual strategies, a

⁴⁷ Saumarez Smith, *Boom Cities*, p.12.

⁴⁸ P. Saunders, *Urban Politics: A Sociological Interpretation* (London: Hutchinson, 1979), pp.205-206. There is not the space to develop this point further here, but it is notable that Saunders was a significant opponent of Marxist geography, advocating a 'non-spatial urban sociology', treating space as 'merely a contingent factor to be addressed in empirical investigations rather than an essential part of social theorization'; see: Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*, pp.68-72.

⁴⁹ F. Bealey, J. Blondel & W.P. McCann, *Constituency Politics: A Study of Newcastle-under-Lyme* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), p.20; A. Warde, 'Comparable localities: some problems of methods,' pp.54-76, in Lancaster Regionalism Group, *Localities, class and gender* (London: Pion Limited, 1985); Phelps, 'On the Edge of Something Big,' p.441.

⁵⁰ I. Sinclair, *London Orbital: A Walk around the M25* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), pp.389-390.

⁵¹ O. Marriott, *The Property Boom* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1967), pp.187-188.

⁵² J. Davis, *Waterloo Sunrise: London from the Sixties to Thatcher* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2022), p.276.

⁵³ S. Truelove, 'Why isn't Croydon a city? Here's the reasons,' *Croydon Advertiser* (8th August 2018), <https://www.croydonadvertiser.co.uk/news/local-news/isnt-croydon-city-heres-reasons-1845614>, accessed 8th March 2021; J. Beckett, *City status in the British Isles, 1830-2002* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p.100, p.103, p.110, pp.122-124, p.129, p.131, p.143, p.146, p.150, p.166, p.168 & pp.175-176.

fabric that can only be reconstituted from close observation', Croydon is a particularly appropriate place to observe to understand the urban fabric of neoliberalism.⁵⁴

Historians of urban change from the 1960s onwards have tended to couple their studies with a revisiting of the earlier phase of (re)construction which followed the Second World War, focusing upon two different (but interlinked) types of places. Much earlier work concentrated upon the so-called 'blitzed cities', rebuilt in the 1950s and 1960s in the wake of the destruction of the war – Plymouth, Kingston-Upon-Hull, and, above all, Coventry, 'a city which has occasionally seemed to embody the dominant economic and social trends of the wider society'.⁵⁵ More recent work has tended to pay greater attention to the ambitious 'new towns' – the creation of a series of new settlements across Britain, primarily for people moved out of cities like London, designated in three waves from the New Towns Act of 1946 until 1970 – and the earlier 'garden cities'.⁵⁶ Whether focused on 'blitzed cities' or 'new towns', these accounts have tended to emphasise the history of social housing.⁵⁷ Whilst exact motivations vary, these historians usually hope to rescue the potential for the state to intervene positively in social life, reassessing the oft-criticised built environments of the mid-twentieth century to reimagine 'social democracy' for the twenty-first century.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Ginzburg, Tedeschi & Tedeschi, 'Microhistory,' p.33. For a fuller summary of population, occupation, and housing tenure statistics for Croydon, see Appendix 2.

⁵⁵ N. Tiratsoo, *Reconstruction, Affluence and Labour Politics* (London: Routledge, 1990), p.103; B. Lancaster & T. Mason, *Life and Labour in a Twentieth Century City: The Experience of Coventry* (Coventry: Cryfield Press, 1986). From this point on, I will refer to 'Kingston-Upon-Hull' as 'Hull', the name by which it is more commonly known.

⁵⁶ M. Clapson, *Invincible green suburbs, brave new towns: Social change and urban dispersal in postwar England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); Ortolano, *Thatcher's Progress*; Pikó, *Milton Keynes in British Culture*.

⁵⁷ Significant histories of social housing include: A. Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture: The History of a Social Experiment* (Oxford: Routledge, 2001); P. Shapely, *The politics of housing: Power, consumers and urban culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007); M. Clapson, *Working-class suburb: Social change on an English council estate, 1930-2010* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012); L. Hanley, *Estates: An Intimate History* (London: Granta Books, 2007); J. Boughton, *Municipal Dreams: The Rise and Fall of Council Housing* (London: Verso, 2018).

⁵⁸ See, for example: Boughton, *Municipal Dreams*, p.6; Ortolano, *Thatcher's Progress*, pp.262-263; A. Campsie, 'On urbanism and optimism,' *Renewal*, vol.28, no.3 (2020), pp.75-82. As with 'neoliberalism', the term 'social democracy' is not without its critics – favoured, in this instance, by Ortolano, whilst Wetherell seeks 'to avoid telling a story about the Labour Party of welfarism, and to escape, as much as it is possible to do so, the specificity of domestic British high politics and its periodizations'; 'there is nothing necessarily democratic about this built environment', he reminds us: Wetherell, *Foundations*, pp.7-8. Again, I have opted to use terms like 'developmental state' and 'social democracy' largely interchangeably, but generally I have departed from Wetherell because my goal is not necessarily to decentre the Labour Party or the classed and political basis for the post-war consensus, and nor does 'social democracy' as a term

One history which put forward these arguments particularly strongly, for a popular audience, was John Grindrod's *Concretopia*, published in 2013.⁵⁹ Grindrod grew up in New Addington, on Croydon's edge, and it is in New Addington that he begins his book. If Croydon was not, strictly speaking, a 'New Town', New Addington – a combination of interwar semis and maisonettes built by Charles Boot, and prefabricated council houses and flats built in the 1960s and 1970s – was 'a garden city on a squeezed budget'.⁶⁰ It, along with other districts in Croydon, were the subject of sociological scrutiny in the 1950s and 1960s amidst rising anxieties about the post-war estates.⁶¹ As a borough 'bloodied' by the Blitz, this was a Croydon which invited comparisons to Coventry and Hull.⁶² However, as Grindrod pointed out, reconstruction in Croydon differed substantially from the 'social-democratic' examples elsewhere (not least because it was overseen by a Conservative-controlled council) even though a number of features were shared.⁶³ If we follow Ginzburg and other local historians in seeing 'the more improbable sort of documentation as being potentially richer', we may find that it is highlighting the anomalous, atypical and particular in Croydon's post-war built environments that allows us 'to isolate the factors that distinguished them from the more familiar'.⁶⁴

automatically imply, for myself, either nostalgia or a 'sheen of prelapsarian unity'. My own understanding of the term corresponds more to the radical critique of social democracy outlined in, for example: A. Hancox, 'Social democracy and its discontents: Race and class in the fallout of the UK general election,' *Ebb Magazine* (19th December 2019), <https://www.ebb-magazine.com/essays/social-democracy-and-its-discontents-race-and-class-in-the-fallout-of-the-uk-general-election>, accessed 15th June 2022; A. Hancox, 'Starmer and Siege Social Democracy,' *Ebb Magazine* (5th May 2022), <https://www.ebb-magazine.com/essays/starmer-and-siege-social-democracy>, accessed 15th June 2022.

⁵⁹ J. Grindrod, *Concretopia: A Journey around the Rebuilding of Postwar Britain* (Brecon: Old Street, 2013).

⁶⁰ Grindrod, *Concretopia*, p.8 & p.42.

⁶¹ T. Morris, *The Criminal Area: A Study in Social Ecology* (London: Routledge & Paul, 1958); E.H. Hare & G.K. Shaw, *Mental health on a new housing estate: a comparative study of health in two districts of Croydon* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965).

⁶² Grindrod, *Concretopia*, p.11.

⁶³ Grindrod, *Concretopia*, pp.432-433.

⁶⁴ Ginzburg, Tedeschi & Tedeschi, 'Microhistory,' p.33; E. Amenta, 'Making the Most of an Historical Case Study: Configuration, Sequence, Casing, and the US Old-age Pension Movement,' pp.351-366, in D. Byrne & C.C. Ragin (eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Case-Based Methods* (SAGE Publications, 2009), p.356; S. Macintyre, *Little Moscows: Communism and Working-class Militancy in Inter-war Britain* (London: Croomhelm, 1980), p.18. For other examples of local histories which emphasise particularity, see: C. Williams, *Democratic Rhondda: Politics and Society, 1885-1951* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996); S. Davies, *Liverpool Labour: Social and Political Influences on the Development of the Labour Party in Liverpool, 1900-1939* (Keele: Keele University Press, 1996); J. Marriott, *The Culture of Labourism: The East End Between the Wars* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991); A. Thorpe, 'J.H. Thomas and the Rise of Labour in Derby, 1880-1945,' *Midland History*, vol.15 (1990), pp.111-128; P. Wyncoll, *The Nottingham Labour Movement 1880-1939* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1985).

Grindrod followed *Concretopia* with another book which begins and ends in New Addington: 2017's *Outskirts*, an intimate study of the development of the 'green belt' which surrounds the estates and defines the strange kind of countryside found on London's edge.⁶⁵ Britain's rural modernism has attracted less interest from historians than environments which were more obviously built, and the focus is often still upon the interwar period.⁶⁶ As Clare Griffiths emphasised, however, the countryside is 'a cultural construct as much as an actual place'.⁶⁷ For Grindrod, growing up in New Addington made him 'feel that the town didn't want me, and the country wasn't too bothered either'.⁶⁸ This notion of being in-between town and country has been one of the major characteristics associated with the suburbs and the suburban.⁶⁹ Whilst initially focused upon suburbs in the United States, the 'New Suburban History' has challenged homogenising, formulaic narratives of suburban history which present them as internally undifferentiated, bourgeois, and unchanging, arguing that the suburbs were sites of history in their own right.⁷⁰ The overarching argument in much of this literature is effectively encapsulated in the title of an article by the sociologist (and subsequently Labour MP for Ealing Central and Acton) Rupa Huq: 'Don't sneer at suburbia'.⁷¹

⁶⁵ J. Grindrod, *Outskirts: Living life on the edge of the green belt* (London: Sceptre, 2017).

⁶⁶ K. Bluemel & M. McCluskey, 'Introduction,' pp.1-16, in K. Bluemel & M. McCluskey (eds.), *Rural Modernity in Britain: A Critical Intervention* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), p.7; V. Ware, *Return of a Native: Learning from the Land* (London: Repeater Books, 2022).

⁶⁷ C.V.J. Griffiths, *Labour and the Countryside: The Politics of Rural Britain 1918-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp.4-5 & p.11.

⁶⁸ Grindrod, *Outskirts*, p.341.

⁶⁹ Grindrod, *Outskirts*, p.14; McManus & Ethington, 'Suburbs in transition,' p.321 & p.325; P. Barker, 'Edge City,' pp.206-216, in A. Barnett & R. Scruton (eds.), *Town and Country* (London: Vintage Random House, 1999), p.208; A. Walks, 'Suburbanism as a Way of Life, Slight Return,' *Urban Studies*, vol.50, no.8 (2013), pp.1471-1488, p.1477.

⁷⁰ K.M. Kruse & T. Sugrue, *The New Suburban History* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p.3; M. Spence, *The Making of a London Suburb: Capital comes to Penge* (Monmouth: Merlin Press, 2007), p.27; D. Gilbert, C. Dwyer & N. Ahmed, 'Ethnic and Religious Diversity in the Politics of Suburban London,' *Political Quarterly*, vol.90, no.1 (2019), pp.72-80; M. Nickerson, 'Beyond Smog, Sprawl and Asphalt: Developments in the Not-So-New Suburban History,' *Journal of Urban History*, vol.41, no.1 (2015), pp.171-180; L. Vaughan et al, 'Do the Suburbs Exist? Discovering Complexity and Specificity in Suburban Built Form,' *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, vol.34, no.4 (2009), pp.475-488; H.J. Dyos, 'The Study of Urban History: A Conference Report,' *Victorian Studies*, vol.10, no.3 (1967), pp.289-292; R. Harris, 'The Suburban Worker in the History of Labour,' *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no.64 (2003), pp.8-24; M. McKenna, 'The Suburbanization of the Working-Class Population of Liverpool between the Wars,' *Social History*, vol.16, no.2 (1991), pp.173-189; M. Hollow, 'Suburban Ideals on England's Interwar Council Estates,' *Garden History*, vol.39, no.2 (2011), pp.203-217;

⁷¹ R. Huq, 'Don't sneer at suburbia,' *Public Policy Research* (2008), pp.149-150.

Croydon has often been the subject of sneers – jokes about requiring a passport to travel there are a reliable option for London comedians.⁷² It is tempting to treat Croydon as ‘a doom suburb’ or ‘a predominantly middle class suburban constituency’.⁷³ Yet that Croydon is ‘internally fragmented’ is relatively uncontroversial – Nicholas Phelps distinguished between white and middle-class south Croydon, white and working-class New Addington, the central business district, and the diverse communities in the north and west – and this makes it a particularly appropriate place to understand the ‘epistemological fragility’ of the term ‘suburban’ and the complexity of the experiences which it communicates.⁷⁴ Croydon allows us, as McManus and Ethington suggest, to turn our ‘eyes downward, to the points on the ground that have accumulated so much history since a given suburb was first planted’ and ‘sort through the concrete layers sedimented, as it were, in each particular once-upon-a-suburb’: the opportunity to take a longer-term perspective which has often been appealing to historians of the local.⁷⁵

However, whilst suburban historians have challenged visions of suburbia as ‘essentially unchanging and pickled in aspic’ – criticising the view that ‘suburbs cannot change; they can only change into something else’ – there is a danger too that distinctive meanings of the ‘suburban’ be lost.⁷⁶

Raymond Williams claimed that the term ‘suburban’ is found in English as a physical descriptor

⁷² R. Beech, ‘II things people from Croydon are fed up of hearing from Londoners,’ *MyLondon* (14th May 2019), <https://www.mylondon.news/news/news-opinion/ii-things-people-croydon-fed-16275960>, accessed 16th June 2022.

⁷³ Saunders, *Urban Politics*, p.7; L. Back, ‘So... fucking Croydon,’ *Tabula Rasa: Urban Skyline Projections* (undated), <http://web.archive.org/web/20060417083446/http%E2%80%8B://www.skylineprojections.co.uk/lesText.htm>, accessed 9th November 2021; M. Tichelar, ‘Labour Politics in Croydon, 1880 to 1914,’ *Croydon Radical History Monograph*, no.1 (2015 [1975]), p.3 & pp.10-11. For other research into Croydon which emphasises its provinciality or suburbanity, see, for example: R. Dyson, ‘The wealthier inhabitants of Croydon in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries,’ *Family & Community History*, vol.21, no.1 (2018), pp.3-14; Coetzee, ‘Villa Toryism Reconsidered,’ pp.29-47.

⁷⁴ Phelps et al, *Post-Suburban Europe*, p.173; Phelps, ‘On the Edge of Something Big,’ pp.461-462; Clapson, *Working-class suburb*, p.9; Clapson, *Suburban Century*, p.4; Vaughan et al, ‘Do the Suburbs Exist?’, p.475.

⁷⁵ McManus & Ethington, ‘Suburbs in transition,’ p.328. On the appeal of longer-term perspectives to historians of the local, discussed further below, see: Ginzburg, Tedeschi & Tedeschi, ‘Microhistory,’ p.21 & p.33; S. Goss, *Local Labour and Local Government: A study of changing interests, politics and policy in Southwark from 1919 to 1982* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988), p.4; L. Black, *The Political Culture of the Left in Affluent Britain, 1951-64* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p.7.

⁷⁶ Huq, ‘Don’t sneer at suburbia,’ p.148; M. Dines, ‘Metaburbia,’ p.82.

from the early seventeenth century and with a social sense from the early nineteenth.⁷⁷ The 'suburban', like 'racialisation', is a 'border concept' whose 'core lies not at its center but at its edges and whose logic is constantly being reworked as the borders shift'.⁷⁸ It is also an interdisciplinary 'boundary concept' – 'a loose concept, which has a strong cohesive power', broadly intelligible but with varying meanings and put to varying purposes.⁷⁹ Despite taxonomic difficulties, 'it is probably true to say that there are few people in the developed world who would not claim to know a suburb when they saw one.'⁸⁰ As historians have acknowledged, council estates (despite features which could easily be described as suburban) generally are not seen as sufficiently 'desirable' for the term to be popularly applied.⁸¹ The 'suburban' is classed, raced and gendered in important ways which render it more than the hinterland beyond the city centre.⁸² As David Jeevendrampillai stresses, 'suburbs are imagined as a cultural desert, void of history', but 'that *is* their history'.⁸³ Croydon (and its own suburbs like Shirley, 'synonymous with a peculiar feeling of nostalgia, wasted potential and suffocating regularity and routine') is therefore an appropriate place to understand the implications of this suburban 'state of mind' in twentieth-century Britain.⁸⁴

This recognises that, as well as being 'information-rich, critical, revelatory, unique, or extreme', there is an intrinsic interest in the study of places as opposed to particular types of place.⁸⁵ People

⁷⁷ R. Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Vintage, 2016 [1973]), p.442.

⁷⁸ R. Bernasconi, 'Crossed Lines in the Racialization Process: Race as a Border Concept,' *Research in Phenomenology*, vol.42, no.2 (2012), pp.206-228, p.227.

⁷⁹ D. Allen, 'From boundary concept to boundary object: The practice and politics of care pathway development,' *Social Science & Medicine*, no.69 (2009), pp.354-361, p.355; B. Arts et al, 'Landscape Approaches: A State-of-the-Art Review,' *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, no.42 (2017), pp.439-463, p.455.

⁸⁰ Vaughan et al, 'Do the Suburbs Exist?', p.475. A similar point was recently made by the writer Morgan Jones, with a slightly surprising comparison to 'pornography': M. Jones, 'Labour, suburbs and "suburbia",' *OnLondon* (3rd June 2022), <https://www.onlondon.co.uk/morgan-jones-labour-suburbs-and-suburbia/>, accessed 17th June 2022.

⁸¹ McManus & Ethington, 'Suburbs in transition,' p.324.

⁸² J. Giles, *The Parlour and the Suburb: Domestic Identities, Class, Femininity and Modernity* (Oxford: Berg, 2004), p.30; Dines & Vermuelen, *New Suburban Stories*, p.7.

⁸³ D. Jeevendrampillai, 'Being Suburban,' pp.287-306, in L. Vaughan (ed.), *Suburban Urbanities: Suburbs and the Life of the High Street* (London: UCL Press, 2015), p.292.

⁸⁴ V. Maguire, *Shamanarchy: The Life and Work of Jamie MacGregor Reid* (PhD Thesis, Liverpool John Moores University, 2010), pp.60-65.

⁸⁵ R. Johansson, 'Case Study Methodology,' paper presented to the *Methodologies in Housing Research* conference organised by the Royal Institute of Technology in cooperation with the International Association of People-Environment Studies, Stockholm (22nd-24th September 2003),

have not only understood themselves and others through terms like 'suburban' (or 'blitzed', or 'metropolitan', or 'inner-city') but through their particular understandings of Croydon.⁸⁶ Like Pikó's Milton Keynes, it is an example of 'the spatialising of wider structures of feeling' with 'a cultural life outside of the borders of the town itself', possessing 'an active and varied symbolic life in postwar British culture, acting as a spatial metaphor for wider and more nebulous political narratives, and anchoring these ideas to the national fabric and to concrete experience.'⁸⁷ I will argue that Croydon is a spatialisation – a 'grounded metaphor' – of a process which I will call 'suburbanisation'.⁸⁸ Drawing on Lefebvre, Alan Walks described suburbanism as the 'less than, or only partially, urban' –the tendency towards segregation and dispersion that accompanies and checks urbanism's tendency towards differentiation and centralisation.⁸⁹ By analogy with the arguments of Williams on 'counterculture' and 'subculture', I will use 'suburbanisation' to refer to the process by which the 'counter-projects' (and note that the word 'countryside' derives from the Latin '*contra*') posed to capitalist space are made into capitalist suburbs.⁹⁰ Croydon, then, casts light on a dynamic that might be regarded, alongside (and overarching or embodying)

http://www.psyking.net/htmlobj-3839/case_study_methodology-rolf_johansson_ver_2.pdf, accessed 23rd November 2021, p.8.

⁸⁶ Compare to Andrew Davies, Steven Fielding and Terry Wyke's suggestion that Salford 'has played an important role in shaping our understanding of working-class life', the city 'taken to typify the national working-class experience': A. Davies, S. Fielding & T. Wyke, 'Introduction,' pp.1-22, in A. Davies & S. Fielding (eds.), *Workers' worlds: Cultures and communities in Manchester and Salford, 1880-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), p.9.

⁸⁷ Pikó, *Milton Keynes in British Culture*, p.15. For 'structure of feeling', see: R. Williams, *The Long Revolution* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2011 [1961]), pp.69-91.

⁸⁸ For 'grounded metaphor', see: Bluemel & McCluskey, *Rural Modernity in Britain*, p.5.

⁸⁹ Walks, 'Suburbanism as a Way of Life, Slight Return,' p.1472 & p.1476.

⁹⁰ R. Williams, *Culture and Materialism* (London: Verso, 2005), pp.40-42; H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1991), p.55, pp.164-165 & p.383. For a discussion of the word 'countryside', see: Williams, *The Country and the City*, pp.425-426 & p.441. I have drawn attention to the influence of Mao Zedong and the Chinese revolution on Williams' approach to space, see: D. Frost, 'Long marches, long revolutions,' *red pepper* (8th April 2022), <https://www.redpepper.org.uk/long-marches-long-revolutions/>, accessed 21st June 2022. This is a further point of overlap with Lefebvre, whose understanding of the 'global city' has been elaborated upon by Stuart Schrader and stands in contrast to the 'global village' concept criticised by Williams and promoted by Marshall McLuhan. For Lefebvre and the 'global city', see: S. Schrader, 'Henri Lefebvre, Mao Zedong, and the Global Urban Concept,' *Global Urban History* (1st May 2018), <https://globalurbanhistory.com/2018/05/01/henri-lefebvre-mao-zedong-and-the-global-urban-concept/>, accessed 12th March 2021. For the 'global village', see: M. McLuhan & B.R. Powers, *The Global Village: Transformations in World Life and Media in the 21st Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). For further discussion of the overlap between the work of Lefebvre and Williams, see: A. Shmueli, 'Totality, hegemony, difference: Henri Lefebvre and Raymond Williams,' pp.212-230, in K. Goonewardena et al (eds.), *Space, Difference, Everyday Life: Reading Henri Lefebvre* (London: Routledge, 2008), p.220; C. Fuchs, 'Henri Lefebvre's Theory of the Production of Space and the Critical Theory of Communication,' *Communication Theory*, no.29 (2019), pp.129-150.

'declinism', 'decolonization' and 'deindustrialisation', as characterising Britain in a 'suburban century'.⁹¹

Croydon, Grindrod argues, often serves as a 'shorthand for a rather dated English idea of ugliness, boredom and embarrassment'.⁹² Contemporary urban historians working on twentieth-century Britain have recently paid increasing attention to the histories of the 'inner city', post-war 'reconstruction' and 'renewal', and the 'suburb' – using the histories of these built environments to shed light upon wider processes of social change. As Croydon is 'not a single self-contained place with a single identity', it can provide interesting case studies for the exploration of each of these, but also possesses an intrinsic appeal of its own: its power as a metonym for a wider structure of feeling and a process of opposition, disappointment, and incorporation (which we might label 'suburbanisation' or the suburban 'state of mind', but could also call 'Croydonisation') that makes it an especially relevant place to study.⁹³ Whether focusing upon Shirley's tree-lined roads or 'the capitalist's dream town' which was built after the war, Croydon helps us to understand the 'question of a single suburban place changing character over time.'⁹⁴ And, of course, it is where the twentieth century happened.

Contemporary political history

The previous section has discussed recent trends in urban British history. Few of these texts, of course, overlook the importance of politics and the political in the formation of Britain's twentieth-century built environments – but nor would they usually be described as works of political history.⁹⁵ The disputed definition of 'political history' hinges largely upon one's

⁹¹ J. Tomlinson, 'Thrice Denied: "Declinism" as a Recurrent Theme in British History in the Long Twentieth Century,' *Twentieth Century British History*, vol.20, no.2 (2009), pp.227-251; J. Tomlinson, 'De-industrialization Not Decline: A New Meta-narrative for Post-war British History,' *Twentieth Century British History*, vol.27, no.1 (2016), pp.76-99; E. Linstrum, et al, 'Decolonizing Britain: An Exchange,' *Twentieth Century British History*, vol.33, no.2 (2022), pp.274-303.

⁹² Grindrod, *Concretopia*, p.10.

⁹³ Phelps et al, *Post-Suburban Europe*, p.185. 'Croydonisation' is discussed further in Chapter Three.

⁹⁴ Grindrod, *Concretopia*, p.249; McManus & Ethington, 'Suburbs in transition,' p.325.

⁹⁵ Saumarez Smith notes an interest in 'the political motivations behind planning decisions' but describes his book as 'a work of *social* planning history': Saumarez Smith, *Boom Cities*, p.3 & p.11 (emphasis in original). Whilst discussing politics, Wetherell is clear that his focus is on the impact of spaces on their inhabitants, not vice versa: Wetherell, *Foundations*, p.7. Ortolano does describe his book as 'a political

definition of 'politics' and the 'political'; as one influential textbook chapter on the topic argues, 'historians of politics disagree not just about the usual issues of theory and method, but also, more fundamentally, about what their basic subject matter should be.'⁹⁶ Local political histories, once relatively common, have become scarcer in recent decades – a decline that roughly corresponds to the emergence of the so-called 'New Political History', with which the aforementioned urban historians are often in dialogue, a movement to expand understandings of the 'political' beyond the traditional.⁹⁷ Within the last few years, the dominant trend to emerge from the 'New Political History' has developed a distinctive narrative of twentieth-century British political history; a story which remains a closed narrative of the state, where (almost) 'everything is political' and the historian is the '*professional* seeker of truth' that Hayden White criticised for emulating the scientist.⁹⁸ By contrast, I have tended to look to art and artists for inspiration and metaphors.⁹⁹ In defining this thesis as a political history, then, I have chosen to adopt what Asad Haider has described as a 'vantage point of emancipation' – a standpoint from which the narratives of political history are not merely expanded (or inflated) but escaped, and which recognises the significance of the 'political commitment' of those who, as Stuart Hall reminds us, were actively engaged in moments of political interruption, 'carried at great personal cost, sometimes lost amidst great personal distress'.¹⁰⁰

history not about Parliament', but this is as part of a list of a variety of other ways in which it should be understood: Ortolano, *Thatcher's Progress*, p.24.

⁹⁶ J. Lawrence, 'Political history,' pp.183-202, in S. Berger, H. Feldner & K. Passmore (eds.), *Writing History: Theory & Practice* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2003), p.183.

⁹⁷ Lawrence, 'Political history,' p.193.

⁹⁸ S. Alderson, A. McWhinney & Cam W., 'Politics as Exceptional Interruption: An Interview with Asad Haider,' *Negation Mag* (December 2021), <https://www.negationmag.com/articles/exceptional-interruption-interview>, accessed 20th June 2022; H. White, 'The Politics of Historical Interpretation: Discipline and De-Sublimation,' *Critical Inquiry*, vol.9, no.1 (1982), pp.113-137, p.113 (emphasis in original).

⁹⁹ Note, however, the important challenge to the distinction between artist and scientist suggested in the thought of the philosopher Paul Feyerabend; see: C. Ambrosio, 'Feyerabend on Art and Science,' pp.11-39, in K. Bschrir & J. Shaw (eds.), *Interpreting Feyerabend: Critical Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). I am grateful to the philosopher Rory Kent for introducing me to Feyerabend's work. My understanding of the 'artist' echoes that found in James Baldwin's 1963 lecture 'The Artist's Struggle for Integrity', reprinted in: J. Baldwin, *The Cross of Redemption: Uncollected Writings* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2011), pp.50-58. I am grateful to my friend Abu Khan for encouraging me to listen to this lecture on the 468 bus back from Croydon, and for describing me as an 'artist' before I knew that I could do so myself. Amongst the historians to have been previously described as an 'artist' is Lewis Mumford, whose own influence on *Suburban Press* will be mentioned in Chapter Three: A. Trachtenberg, 'Mumford in the Twenties: The Historian as Artist,' *Salmagundi*, no.49 (1980), pp.29-42.

¹⁰⁰ A. Haider, 'Emancipation & Exhaustion,' *South Asian Avant-Garde: A Dissident Literary Anthology* (10th March 2021), <https://saaganthology.com/Emancipation-and-Exhaustion>, accessed 19th March 2021; H. White, 'Getting out of History,' *Diacritics*, vol.13, no.3 (1982), pp.2-13, p.7; S. Hall, 'Political

Whilst some have lamented the restriction to 'the single party, or the single geographic area, or even the single party *in* the single geographic area', the opportunity to conduct relatively broad research over relatively long periods has traditionally favoured the local political study.¹⁰¹ These studies have paid attention to the 'political tradition' or 'political culture' of an area – taking an intrinsic interest in the formation of political subjectivities in particular places.¹⁰² Both of these terms faced criticism for lacking explanatory power; in an influential account of the politics of Preston in Lancashire, Mike Savage noted that 'people's day-to-day practices are only weakly affected by any wider cultural values'.¹⁰³ Critically, however, Savage went on to argue – alongside other historians and political scientists – that local political distinctiveness as such was in decline in Britain in the twentieth century, particularly after the widening of access to television in the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁰⁴ Instead, he suggested that 'whereas in the past constituencies of a similar type often had different political alignments because of the salience of their local political cultures, this is becoming less apparent, and constituencies of a similar type are behaving in similar ways, whatever part of the country they are in'.¹⁰⁵ This, he felt, justified a shift in attention to 'clusters' – like the focus on 'blitzed cities' or 'suburbs' discussed in the historiography of the built

commitment (1966),' pp.85-106, in S. Davison et al (eds.), *Stuart Hall: Selected Political Writings* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2017), p.90.

¹⁰¹ S. Ball, A. Thorpe & M. Worley, 'Elections, Leaflets and Whist Drives: Constituency Party Members in Britain between the Wars,' pp.7-32, in Worley (ed.), *Labour's Grass Roots*, p.8. For local political histories which cover particularly long periods, see for example: J.J. Smyth, *Labour in Glasgow, 1896-1936: Socialism, Suffrage, Sectarianism* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000); T. Griffiths, *The Lancashire Working Classes c. 1880-1930* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001); G.W. Jones, *Borough Politics: A Study of the Wolverhampton Town Council, 1888-1964* (London: Macmillan, 1969).

¹⁰² For uses of 'political tradition', see for example: P. Salvesson, *Socialism with a Northern Accent: Radical traditions for modern times* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2012); J. Smith, 'Labour Tradition in Glasgow and Liverpool,' *History Workshop Journal*, vol.17, no.1 (1984), pp.32-56; C.M.M. Macdonald, *The Radical Thread: Political Change in Scotland, Paisley Politics, 1885-1924* (East Lothian: Tuckwell Press, 2000); P. Taaffe & T. Mulhearn, *Liverpool: A City That Dared To Fight* (London: Fortress, 1988), p.24. For uses of 'political culture', see for example: B. Lancaster, *Radicalism, Cooperation and Socialism: Leicester working-class politics 1890-1906* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1987); Marriott, *The Culture of Labourism*; Williams, *Democratic Rhondda*.

¹⁰³ M. Savage, *Dynamics of Working-Class Politics: The Labour Movement in Preston, 1880-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp.4-5. For Sam Davies, it was impossible to say whether culturalist, textualist or structuralist explanations of local politics in one locality should 'be accepted as a guide to work in other localities': Davies, *Liverpool Labour*, pp.40-42.

¹⁰⁴ Savage, 'Understanding political alignments in contemporary Britain,' p.62 & p.68; Griffiths, *The Lancashire Working Classes*, p.269; Smith, 'Labour Tradition in Glasgow and Liverpool,' p.44; Jones, *Borough Politics*, p.103; Bealey, Blondel & McCann, *Constituency Politics*, p.406; K. Newton, *Second City Politics: Democratic Processes and Decision-Making in Birmingham* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p.13 & p.16.

¹⁰⁵ Savage, 'Understanding political alignments in contemporary Britain,' p.66.

environment, above – as a way of explaining increased geographic electoral variation, rather than studying individual localities on their own and for their own intrinsic interest.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, whilst early political histories might have focused upon the ‘labour movement’ (especially in the latter nineteenth century) or the political party (between and immediately after the wars), their place has been problematised by the growing significance of ‘the left’ beyond party lines, particularly after 1956, and often untethered from the labour movement and the working class – the latter usually now a subject for social, rather than political, historians.¹⁰⁷ Whilst the local political study could never have disappeared entirely, they lost much of their earlier popularity, particularly for historians of a contemporary Britain where political cultures appear to be national or international, and political tradition is seen as under challenge.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Savage, ‘Understanding political alignments in contemporary Britain,’ p.55.

¹⁰⁷ For examples of local political histories focused upon the labour movement, see: Davies & Fielding, *Workers’ worlds*; Williams, *Democratic Rhondda*; Lancaster, *Radicalism, Cooperation and Socialism*; Marriott, *The Culture of Labourism*; Griffiths, *The Lancashire Working Classes*; M. Savage, *The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics*; Smyth, *Labour in Glasgow*; Wyncoll, *The Nottingham Labour Movement*; T. Woodhouse, *Nourishing the Liberty Tree: Labour Politics in Leeds, 1880-1914* (Keele: Keele University Press, 1996). For examples of political histories focused on the Labour Party, see: Worley, *Labour’s Grass Roots*; S. Fielding, ‘Activists against “Affluence”: Labour Party Culture during the “Golden Age,” circa 1950-1970,’ *Journal of British Studies*, vol.40, no.2 (2001), pp.241-267; Jeffrey, ‘The suburban nation’; Davies, *Liverpool Labour*; J. Reynolds & K. Laybourn, *Labour Heartland: A History of the Labour Party in West Yorkshire during the inter-war years, 1918-1939* (Leeds: Bradford University Press, 1987); D. McHugh, *Labour in the city: The development of the Labour party in Manchester, 1918-31* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006); Weinbren, ‘Building Communities, Constructing Identities’; Fielding & Tanner, ‘The “Rise of the Left” Revisited’. For later works of social history of the local working class, see: B. Jones, *The working class in mid-twentieth-century England: Community, identity and social memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p.5; B. Rogaly & B. Taylor, *Moving Histories of Class and Community: Identity, Place and Belonging in Contemporary England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). For accounts of the emergence (and meaning) of ‘the left’, see: R. Williams, *Keywords: A vocabulary of culture and society* (London: Fontana Press, 1983), p.291; L. Black, *The Political Culture of the Left in Affluent Britain*, p.7; J. Burkett, *Constructing Post-Imperial Britain: Britishness, “Race” and the Radical Left in the 1960s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p.3.

¹⁰⁸ For some exceptional examples of recent local histories of late-twentieth-century left-wing activism, see: S. Browne, ‘“A Veritable Hotbed of Feminism”: Women’s Liberation in St Andrews, Scotland, c.1968-c.1979,’ *Twentieth Century British History*, vol.23, no.1 (2012), pp.100-123; S. Brooke, ‘Space, Emotions and the Everyday: The Affective Ecology of 1980s London,’ *Twentieth Century British History*, vol.28, no.1 (2017), pp.110-142; D. Payling, ‘“Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire”: Grassroots Activism and Left-Wing Solidarity in 1980s Sheffield,’ *Twentieth Century British History*, vol.25, no.4 (2014), pp.602-627; J. Saunders, ‘“The merits of Brother Worth”: the International Socialists and life in a Coventry car factory, 1968-75,’ pp.88-106, D. Kelliher, ‘Networks of solidarity: the London left and the 1984-85 miners’ strike,’ pp.125-143, D. Payling, ‘“You have to start where you’re at”: politics and reputation in 1980s Sheffield,’ pp.144-162, in E. Smith & M. Worley (eds.), *Waiting for the revolution: The British far left from 1956* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017). For my review of this book, see: D. Frost, Review of E. Smith & M. Worley (eds.), *Waiting for the revolution: The British far left from 1956*, *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol.55, no.1 (2020), pp.233-235. Saunders and Kelliher have both subsequently published monographs on their work: J. Saunders, *Assembling Cultures: Workplace activism, labour militancy and cultural change in Britain’s car factories, 1945-82* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019); D. Kelliher, *Making Cultures of Solidarity: London and the 1984-5 Miners’ Strike* (London: Routledge, 2021).

These changes were to occur in parallel with the emergence of the 'New Political History' from the 1980s onwards. It is important, however, for the unity of the so-called 'New Political History' not to be overstated.¹⁰⁹ For some political historians, this shift primarily brought their attention to the cultures and identities of political actors that were otherwise broadly unchanged from the subjects of earlier 'grassroots' political histories: the cultures and identities of Labour Party, Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), or new social movement organisations, as well as the ways that these engaged with the emergent politics of (popular) culture and identity.¹¹⁰ If the scholars within this trend looked to historically ground the work of Stuart Hall and the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), however, the dominant trend within the 'New Political History' owed more to Gareth Stedman Jones, the 'linguistic turn', and contemporaneous shifts within the social sciences.¹¹¹ Stopping short of a full embrace of the epistemological uncertainty

¹⁰⁹ S. Fielding, "Looking for the 'New Political History'," *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol.42, no.3 (2007), pp.515-524, p.515.

¹¹⁰ For a partial list of examples, see: L. Robinson, *Gay men and the Left in post-war Britain: How the personal got political* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007); L. Robinson, "Three Revolutionary Years: The Impact of the Counter Culture on the Development of the Gay Liberation Movement in Britain," *Cultural and Social History*, vol.3 (2006), pp.445-471; G. Willett, 'Something new under the sun: The revolutionary left and gay politics,' pp.173-189, & S. Virdee, "Anti-racism and the socialist left, 1968-79," pp.209-228, in E. Smith & M. Worley (eds.), *Against the grain: The British far left from 1956* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014); S. Brooke, *Sexual Politics: Sexuality, Family Planning, and the British Left from the 1880s to the Present Day* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); E. Smith & D. Leeworthy, "Before *Pride*: The Struggle for the Recognition of Gay Rights in the British Communist Movement, 1973-85," *Twentieth Century British History*, vol.27, no.4 (2016), pp.621-642; N. Thomlinson, *Race, Ethnicity and the Women's Movement in England, 1968-1993* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Burkett, *Constructing Post-Imperial Britain*; E. Smith, "'Class before Race": British Communism and the Place of Empire in Postwar Race Relations," *Science & Society*, vol.72, no.4 (2008), pp.455-481; E. Smith, "1968 – Too Little and Too Late? The Communist Party and Race Relations in the Late 1960s," *Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory*, vol.36, no.3 (2008), pp.363-384; E. Smith, "National Liberation for Whom? The Postcolonial Question, the Communist Party of Great Britain, and the Party's African and Caribbean Membership," *International Review of Social History*, vol.61 (2016), pp.283-315; E. Smith, "When the party comes down: the CPGB and youth culture, 1976-1991," *Twentieth Century Communism*, no.4 (2012), pp.38-75; M. Worley, 'Marx-Lenin-Rotten-Strummer: British Marxism and youth culture in the 1970s,' *Contemporary British History*, vol.30, no.4 (2016), pp.505-521; E. Smith, "Are the Kids United? The Communist Party of Great Britain, Rock Against Racism and the Politics of Youth Culture," *Journal for the Study of Radicalism*, vol.5, no.2 (2011), pp.85-118; M. Worley, 'Shot By Both Sides: Punk, Politics and the End of "Consensus",' *Contemporary British History*, vol.26, no.3 (2012), pp.333-354.

¹¹¹ For the influence of the CCCS, see, for example: J. Harsin & M. Hayward, "Stuart Hall's "Deconstructing the Popular": Reconsiderations 30 Years Later," *Communication, Culture & Critique*, vol.6 (2013), pp.201-207; N. Shah, Review of R. Huq, *Beyond Subculture: Pop, Youth and Identity in a Postcolonial World*, *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, vol.20, no.3 (2008), pp.343-346. The literature on the 'linguistic turn' within British historiography is too vast to cover comprehensively, but a helpful introduction can be found in: J.K. Walton, 'New Directions in British Historiography: the Emergence of Cultural History?', *French Journal of British Studies*, vol.14, no.4 (2008), <http://journals.openedition.org/rfcb/5972>. For a useful discussion of the politics of Stedman Jones' work, see: J. Foster, 'The Declassing of Language,' *New Left Review*, no.150 (1985), pp.29-45. Stedman Jones

implied by developments within postmodern continental philosophy, they disdained a 'gladiatorial combat over theory' and urged a return to the 'empirical'.¹¹² In producing work on the languages of politics, this trend usefully emphasised the contingency of politics, treating it 'as something more than a refraction of underlying social forces'.¹¹³ Largely aligned with concurrent changes in approaches to political strategy within Britain's Labour Party, representative histories from this trend in the 1990s challenged Marxist emphases on discontinuity in the nineteenth century, re-evaluated the prospects of 'progressivism', and returned with fresh eyes to the perennial problem of (sub)urban working-class Conservatism.¹¹⁴ The 'New Political History', then, successfully responded to the invitation provided by the New Left to extend the meaning of the 'political' – in the case of the former trend by questioning and extending what political actors *do*, and in the case of the latter by questioning and extending who political actors *are*.¹¹⁵

Scholars involved with the first trend have increasingly turned away from their earlier, explicitly political concerns, often towards work which would probably be better characterised as (sub)cultural history.¹¹⁶ The second trend, however, closely linked to the Labour Party-supporting

has provided his own account: G. Stedman Jones, 'The Return of Language: Radicalism and the British Historians 1960-1990,' pp.331-349, in W. Steinmetz (ed.), *Political Languages in the Age of Extremes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). It is worth noting that this division between a tendency influenced by cultural studies and a tendency influenced by the traditional concerns of the social sciences has a counterpart within contemporary sociology, with Mike Savage representative of the latter trend in each of his two disciplines; see: B. Skeggs, 'Introduction: stratification or exploitation, domination, dispossession and devaluation?', *The Sociological Review*, vol.63 (2015), pp.205-222.

¹¹² J. Lawrence & M. Taylor, 'The Poverty of Protest: Gareth Stedman Jones and the Politics of Language: A Reply,' *Social History*, vol.18, no.1 (1993), pp.1-15. Similar scepticism about the value of the 'shift to culture' and 'linguistic turn' can be found in: Lawrence, 'Political history,' p.193. For criticisms of this reluctance to embrace these fully, and of this empiricism, see: P. Joyce, 'The Imaginary Discontents of Social History: A Note of Response to Mayfield and Thorne, and Lawrence and Taylor,' *Social History*, vol.18, no.1 (1993), pp.81-85; J. Vernon, 'Who's afraid of the "linguistic turn"? The politics of social history and its discontents,' *Social History*, vol.19, no.1 (1994), pp.81-97.

¹¹³ L. Black, 'Review: Popular Politics in Modern British History,' *Journal of British Studies*, vol.40, no.3 (2001), pp.431-445, p.432. Black also notes that Lawrence's work tends to privilege the historian's judgement; see p.434.

¹¹⁴ J. Lawrence, 'Popular Radicalism and the Socialist Revival in Britain,' *Journal of British Studies*, vol.31, no.2 (1992), pp.163-186; J. Lawrence, 'The Complexities of English Progressivism: Wolverhampton Politics in the Early Twentieth Century,' *Midland History*, vol.24, no.1 (1999), pp.147-166; J. Lawrence, 'Class and Gender in the Making of Urban Toryism, 1880-1914,' *English Historical Review*, vol.108, no.428 (1993), pp.629-652.

¹¹⁵ S. Davison, D. Featherstone & B. Schwartz, 'Introduction,' pp.1-15, & M. Rustin, 'Afterword: Stuart Hall as a political intellectual,' pp.336-353, in S. Davison et al (eds.), *Stuart Hall*, p.2 & p.336.

¹¹⁶ See, for example: M. Worley, 'Oi! Oi! Oi! Class, Locality, and British Punk,' *Twentieth Century British History*, vol.24, no.4 (2013), pp.606-636; M. Worley, *No Future: Punk, Politics and British Youth Culture, 1976-1984* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); M. Worley et al, 'British Youth Cultures and the Wider World,' *Britain and the World*, vol.11, no.1 (2018), pp.1-3. The latter special issue

journal *Renewal* and influencing much of the recent British urban historiography discussed above, remains dominant within the ‘closely networked community’ of modern British history.¹¹⁷ Whilst a common thread connects the contemporary work of this trend to the studies previously mentioned, emphases have also changed and new arguments emerged. To some extent, the recently described ‘social–scientific turn’ is representative of this trend.¹¹⁸ The major thrust of this work is directed at interrogating assumptions about the decline of ‘community’ and ‘class’ in post-war Britain and the connections routinely made between Thatcherism and ‘individualism’, providing new stories of twentieth-century Britain; if Wetherell focuses on the way that Britain’s built environments moulded its subjects, these modern political historians have been keen to restore a sense of agency to the prevalent narratives of doom surrounding 1970s and 1980s

was the product of the Interdisciplinary Network for the Study of Subcultures, Popular Music and Social Change (the Subcultures Network), which also includes Lucy Robinson. For a list of their publications, see: ‘Subcultures,’ *University of Reading Department of History* (undated),

<https://www.reading.ac.uk/history/research/subcultures>, accessed 21st June 2022. A broadly similar point about the trajectory of New Political Historians is made in: L. Black, ‘Blue Labour or the Political History Blues,’ *Left History*, vol.20, no.2 (2016), pp.11–33.

¹¹⁷ L. Butler, ‘The Social Scientific Turn in Modern British History,’ *Twentieth Century British History*, preprint (30th May 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1093/tcbh/hwac015>, p.2. For a useful discussion of the history of *Renewal* and its relationship to modern British historians, see: G. Morris, E. Robinson & F. Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, ‘*Renewal* beyond New Labour: From the LCC to Corbynomics,’ pp.267–285, in N. Yeowell (ed.), *Rethinking Labour’s Past* (London: I.B. Tauris & Progressive Britain, 2022). That so many modern British historians have contributed to that edited collection, co-published by Labour Party faction ‘Progressive Britain’ (formerly ‘Progress’), is indicative. Note, also, the creation of a network of Labour-supporting academics: T. Brooks, ‘Why Labour needs an academic network,’ *Renewal*, vol.29, no.4 (2021), pp.44–52. I provided a fuller discussion of this trend, and my criticisms, in the following: D. Frost, ‘*Renewal* or Revolution? Two trends in British political history, modern and contemporary,’ paper presented to the conference *Does British Political History have a future?* organised by the Mile End Institute and *Political Quarterly*, London (11th–12th July 2022). Morgan Jones, writing for the *Renewal* website and ‘boldly claim[ing] to speak on behalf of the voice of social democratic conformity’, has replied, ‘There is probably something in this’: M. Jones, ‘Review: “This Is Only The Beginning” by Michael Chessum,’ *Renewal* (8th September 2022), <https://renewal.org.uk/review-this-is-only-the-beginning-by-michael-chessum/>, accessed 9th September 2022.

¹¹⁸ Butler, ‘The Social Scientific Turn in Modern British History,’ p.1. This article forms part of an exchange initiated by criticism from one of their subjects, the sociologist John Goldthorpe; see: C. Hilliard, ‘Editorial introduction,’ *Twentieth Century British History*, preprint (30th May 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1093/tcbh/hwac011>; J. Goldthorpe, ‘Historians’ Uses of Archived Material from Sociological Research: Some Observations with Reference to the *Affluent Worker* Study,’ *Twentieth Century British History*, preprint (30th May 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1093/tcbh/hwac010>; R. Dubler, ‘The Sociologist and the Subject: Two Historiographies of Post-war Social Science,’ *Twentieth Century British History*, preprint (30th May 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1093/tcbh/hwac014>; J. Lawrence, ‘On Historians’ Re-Use of Social-Science Archives,’ *Twentieth Century British History*, preprint (30th May 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1093/tcbh/hwac013>; M. Savage, ‘History and Sociology: A Twenty-First Century Rapprochement?’, *Twentieth Century British History*, preprint (30th May 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1093/tcbh/hwac012>; J. Goldthorpe, ‘Historians’ Uses of Archived Material from Sociological Research: A Response to the Commentaries on My Paper,’ *Twentieth Century British History*, preprint (30th May 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1093/tcbh/hwac016>. From my perspective, the differences between Goldthorpe and the historians that this exchange reveals are less significant than what is shared, confirming the point made in Skeggs, ‘Introduction,’ p.206.

Britain.¹¹⁹ For Jon Lawrence and similar historians, the hope is to identify a 'vernacular social democracy' and, in communicating with it and the 'values' of the electorate, to bring Labour electoral success – an argument which closely parallels that of contemporary Labour strategists, with Lawrence and Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite cited in 2018's *The New Working Class*.¹²⁰ Implicit (and sometimes explicit) in these histories is a response to the earlier criticisms of post-war social democracy posed by the New Left, including Stuart Hall.¹²¹

This response has not necessarily been a direct rejection. In fact, one of the imperatives for this trend has been to recover a version of the New Left's arguments as evidence for the continued dynamism and vibrancy of social democracy in the 1960s and 1970s.¹²² There is nothing necessarily incorrect in arguing that social democracy produced its own gravediggers. Yet to suggest, as these historians sometimes do, that social democracy retains 'deep roots in British popular culture' which are 'potent resources for the left to draw upon', 'traditional patriotic narratives' to which Labour might appeal, and 'alternatives' if not an outright 'blueprint', is to

¹¹⁹ Wetherell, *Foundations*, p.7. The most important monographs on the problem of 'class', 'community' and the 'individual' in this period are: Jones, *The working class in mid-twentieth-century England*; J. Lawrence, *Me, Me, Me? The search for community in post-war England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); F. Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, *Class, Politics, and the Decline of Deference in England, 1968-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). Representative of the new attempts to describe the 1970s and 1980s, though perhaps differing in approach and apparently not entirely in dialogue, are: L. Black, H. Pemberton & P. Thane, *Reassessing 1970s Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013); E. Robinson et al, 'Telling Stories about Post-war Britain: Popular Individualism and the "Crisis" of the 1970s,' *Twentieth Century British History*, vol.28, no.2 (2017), pp.268-304; S. Brooke, 'Living in "New Times": Historicizing 1980s Britain,' *History Compass*, vol.12, no.1 (2014), pp.20-32.

¹²⁰ J. Lawrence, 'Vernacular social democracy and the politics of Labour,' *Renewal*, vol.28, no.3 (2020), pp.38-42; F. Sutcliffe-Braithwaite & E. Robinson, 'Defending, restoring, transforming,' *Renewal*, vol.28, no.3 (2020), pp.5-12; C. Ainsley, *The New Working Class: How to win hearts, minds and votes* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2018), p.39. Note the explicit connection between the emphasis on 'values' and the work of Daniel Stedman Jones, son of Gareth and fellow historian Sally Alexander: J. Stafford & F. Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, 'Reorienting the left,' *Renewal*, vol.24, no.1 (2016), pp.5-13, p.9. For thoughtful criticisms of the work of Labour strategists like Claire Ainsley and Deborah Mattinson, some from within the *Renewal* camp, see: A. Finlayson, 'Understanding the problem,' *Renewal*, vol.29, no.4 (2021), pp.5-12; J. Laite et al, 'Labour's Identity and Labour's Strategy: Roundtable: The politics of class, past and present,' *Renewal*, vol.30, no.1 (2022), pp.10-28, p.14; G. Peacock, 'Starmer-Ainsleyism: The Methodology behind Starmer's Week,' *New Socialist* (24th September 2020), <https://newsocialist.org.uk/transmissions/starmer-ainsleyism-methodology-behind-starmers-week/>, accessed 21st June 2022.

¹²¹ Lawrence, *Me, Me, Me?*, p.86. Goldthorpe's recent intervention provides a helpful political background to the social-scientific research of the twentieth century which is now being returned to, including the role of the CIA and the attempted marginalisation of Marxist academics: Goldthorpe, 'Historians' Uses of Archived Material from Sociological Research,' pp.4-6. It is striking that Goldthorpe has been the main subject of these historians' work to have produced a response; Michael Rustin has outlined the overlap between Hall's ideas and those of Goldthorpe and David Lockwood, see: Rustin, 'Afterword,' pp.340-341.

¹²² N. Garland, 'Social democracy, the decline of community and community politics in postwar Britain,' pp.137-157, in Yeowell, *Rethinking Labour's Past*, p.156.

engage in the tactic that the feminist scholar Clare Hemmings described as 'citational containment'.¹²³ They are citing the work of scholars critical of the post-war social democratic order but (as Onur Ulas Ince might argue) severing them from their revolutionary commitment 'to break with it', 'quelled and submersed (deemed "past") or co-opted and translated into the grammar of power (fated to the present)'.¹²⁴ Here, the reluctance to engage deeply with contemporary philosophy and an explicit discomfort with open political disputation has led to what might be described as the 'inflation', rather than the 'expansion', of the 'political'.¹²⁵ Whereas Hall criticised 'the process by which politics is degouted and neutered by always being presented as a form of social inquiry', it is striking that politically-committed actors (beyond the 'high politics' of politicians and planners) are so absent, or incidental, within much recent work in political history.¹²⁶ If the 'war' between political and social history 'in retrospect looks as if it has been a phoney one', this has partly been because of political historians' acceptance of moves 'to sociologise out of existence the political sensibility'.¹²⁷ Where Tony Judt once accused social

¹²³ Lawrence, 'Vernacular social democracy and the politics of Labour'; E. Goes, 'Wrapped up in the Union Jack,' *Renewal*, vol.29, no.1 (2021), pp.49-59; Campsie, 'On urbanism and optimism'; C. Hemmings, 'Telling feminist stories,' *Feminist Theory*, vol.6, no.2 (2005), pp.115-139, pp.123-124.

¹²⁴ O. Ulas Ince, 'Politics of History: Narrativity, Ideology, and Walter Benjamin's Critique of Progress,' *SSRN* (5th September 2008), https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1687872, accessed 22nd June 2022. I would argue that Owen Hatherley's work is one of the more prominent popular attempts to reconcile an essentially social-democratic politics with the arguments of the critics of social democracy, see: D. Frost, 'Burning Bridges: A Review of *Red Metropolis*,' *New Socialist* (16th October 2021), <https://newsocialist.org.uk/burning-bridges-review-red-metropolis/>, accessed 29th November 2021.

¹²⁵ Note, for example, *Renewal's* argument that 'inter-factional identity politics is damaging to Labour at every level, and prevents it from engaging with the threats to its future', with the 'soft left' favouring 'consensus and progress and debating the difficult choices that must be made.' Stafford & Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, 'Reorienting the left,' p.7. For the blistering, classic response to this approach within historiography, see: T. Judt, 'A Clown in Regal Purple: Social History and the Historians,' *History Workshop Journal*, vol.7, no.1 (1979), pp.66-94. For a thorough criticism of 'the reduction of the political to the state', and of 'consensus' as 'the reduction of politics to the police', see: J. Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), pp.35-36 & pp.50-52. The distinction between 'inflation' and 'expansion' is from Davison, Featherstone & Schwartz, 'Introduction,' p.6.

¹²⁶ Hall, 'Political commitment,' p.87. Lawrence, for example, mentions briefly that the Holdens – subjects of Raymond Firth's Bermondsey study – were 'strong Labour activists', the husband a local councillor, but their party membership is little addressed except to confirm that they 'were decidedly untypical of the people they lived amongst.' There is even less to be said about the Labour Party membership of John Collins, a subject of Raphael Samuel's Stevenage study. Lawrence, *Me, Me, Me?*, p.67 & p.98. Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, too, alights little on the party affiliations of the individuals that she discusses; Jane Daroch, the subject of an oral history study by Paul Thompson, is mentioned as an example of someone joining Labour as a rejection of class discrimination. More attention is characteristically paid to the autobiography of a Labour MP, Jack Ashley. Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, *Class, Politics, and the Decline of Deference*, p.44 & p.73. For a discussion of Hall's essay and its significance, see: A. Finlayson, 'Consciousness and Commitment in the Political Conjunction,' *New Formations*, nos.96-97 (2019), pp.229-232.

¹²⁷ J. Brown, 'The State of British Political History,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol.40, no.1 (2005), pp.189-198, p.189; Hall, 'Political commitment,' p.87.

historians of embarking on ‘a sort of retrospective cultural anthropology’, many political historians increasingly seem to be occupied with a sort of retrospective political sociology.¹²⁸ Moreover, whilst clearly positioning their work as interventions into the politics of the contemporary Labour Party, there is a contained reflexivity here; though some aspects of the historians’ personal lives are fit for inclusion, their own subjectivity as political actors (or party members) rarely is.¹²⁹ In the absence of any ‘political commitment’ in-between the public and the politician, a naïve determinism re-emerges in these histories – the observation and description of longer-term trends proving more important than their explanation or their alteration.¹³⁰ As Hall asserted, ‘what seems to reign as a dominant mood in the whole intellectual climate just at present is a spurious search for “objectivity”, a bogus pseudo-scientism’, ‘covertly hostile to politics.’¹³¹ Combined with frequent but undertheorized references to narrative, modern British political history has been prone to what Hayden White appropriately described as the ‘Fabian tactic’ employed by historians against their critics in the arts and sciences.¹³²

It is beyond the remit of this thesis to engage in a deeper critique of this tendency in modern British history – it should suffice to argue that this thesis is intended as a step ‘outside’ it.¹³³ Whilst sharing the New Left’s ambition to extend the political, I follow Asad Haider in regarding politics

¹²⁸ Judt, ‘A Clown in Regal Purple,’ p.87. Compare to contemporaneous criticisms of social history as the fine-tuning of the ‘already known’, discussed in: M. Suter, ‘A Thorn in the Side of Social History: Jacques Rancière and *Les Révoltes logiques*,’ *International Review of Social History*, vol.57, no.1 (2012), pp.61–85, p.69.

¹²⁹ Lawrence is explicitly responding to arguments posed by Blue Labour and makes extended reference to the lives of his parents, but his own political involvement is limited to the role of commentator. Lawrence, *Me, Me, Me?*, p.16 & pp.19–40. Note, also, Charlotte Lydia Riley’s suggestion that ‘if modern British history is important partly because of the value it can bring to contemporary political debates, then those debates can—perhaps should—be reflected within the scholarship itself.’ C.L. Riley, ‘*Rethinking Modern British Studies*. July 2015: A Reflection,’ *Twentieth Century British History*, vol.27, no.2 (2016), pp.305–309.

¹³⁰ Judt, ‘A Clown in Regal Purple,’ pp.70–71.

¹³¹ Hall, ‘Political commitment,’ p.88.

¹³² H. White, ‘The Burden of History,’ *History and Theory*, vol.5, no.2 (1966), pp.III–134, p.III.

¹³³ The notion of an ‘outsider history’ or ‘naïve history’, analogous to similar movements within contemporary art, has hitherto been little explored; for partial exceptions, see: B. Filene, ‘Passionate Histories: “Outsider” History-Makers and What They Teach Us,’ *The Public Historian*, vol.34, no.1 (2012), pp.11–33; A.A. Bobrikhin, ‘The Voice of the Culture of Silent Majority: Naïve Art and Literature,’ *KnE Engineering*, vol.3, no.8 (2018), pp.119–123, p.119. It should go without saying that this thesis does not constitute ‘outsider history’; ‘Like all historians,’ to quote Kieran Connell, ‘I am an outsider to my subject’, but I have strived to be informed by some of the lessons which Filene and Bobrikhin suggest that professional historians might learn from those outside the discipline. Connell, *Black Handsworth*, p.16.

as an 'active prescriptive relationship with reality', rather than a 'spontaneous consciousness', and 'not something that's happening all the time.'¹³⁴ Similarly, I hope to avoid presenting either a romantic teleology or a tragic eschatology, for there is no 'history with guarantees'.¹³⁵ I am not averse to narrative – a tool of the exploited before 'master narratives' became the 'master's tools' – but I have also hoped to acknowledge non-narrative approaches to history, as Ulas Ince suggests, 'effect[ing] a *destruction* of the closed, congealed, mythic "History" so as to open the way for the *construction* of a history in which the past makes a claim on the present'.¹³⁶ With Lauren Berlant, Peter Wagner and Stuart Hall, I have tried to speak from within the New Left and both 1956 and 1968 – not seeking to recover alternatives from the past so much as to hold space for emancipatory politics, utopianism and for a 'break' with 'the ongoing system'.¹³⁷ Whereas modern British historians, despite criticisms of 'modernisation' narratives, retain an affiliation to the 'modern', I favour the description – applied to both Marx and Hall – 'historian of the near-present' or, echoing White's interest in comparisons with the arts, 'contemporary political history'.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Haider, 'Emancipation & Exhaustion'; Alderson, McWhinney & Cam W., 'Politics as Exceptional Interruption'.

¹³⁵ A. Haider, 'Organizing Histories,' *Viewpoint Magazine* (19th June 2018), <https://viewpointmag.com/2018/06/19/organizing-histories/>, accessed 22nd June 2022.

¹³⁶ H.V. Carby, *Cultures in Babylon: Black Britain and African America* (London: Verso, 1999), p.99; Ulas Ince, 'Politics of History,' pp.14-15. White suggests that narrativity becomes a problem only when 'real events' are given 'the form of a story'; see: H. White, 'The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality,' *Critical Inquiry*, vol.7, no.1 (1980), pp.5-27, p.8.

¹³⁷ L. Berlant, '68, or Something,' *Critical Inquiry*, vol.21, no.1 (1994), pp.124-155, p.126; P. Wagner, 'The Project of Emancipation and the Possibility of Politics, or, what's wrong with post-1968 individualism?', *Thesis Eleven*, no.68 (2002), pp.31-45, p.43; Hall, 'Political commitment,' p.103. For a useful elaboration of this approach to utopianism, see: H. White, 'The Future of Utopia in History,' *Historien*, vol.7 (2007), pp.12-19. For further discussion of the interpretation of White which I am drawing upon, see, for example: E. Domanska, 'Hayden White and liberation historiography,' *Rethinking History*, vol.19, no.4 (2015), pp.640-650; A.J. Elias, 'The Voices of Hayden White,' *Los Angeles Review of Books* (22nd April 2018), <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-voices-of-hayden-white/>, accessed 22nd June 2022; W. Kansteiner, 'Hayden White's Critique of the Writing of History,' *History and Theory*, vol.32, no.3 (1993), pp.273-295; G.M. Spiegel, 'Above, about and beyond the writing of history: a retrospective view of Hayden White's *Metahistory* on the 40th anniversary of its publication,' *Rethinking History*, vol.17, no.4 (2013), pp.492-508.

¹³⁸ Rustin, 'Afterword,' p.346; Elias, 'The Voices of Hayden White'. Like Hemmings, 'I am concerned with the contested politics of the present over the "truth of the past": Hemmings, 'Telling feminist stories,' p.118. This implies a critique of both Tony Judt and Peter Catterall's approaches to the present: Judt, 'A Clown in Regal Purple,' pp.86-87; P. Catterall, 'What (if anything) Is Distinctive about Contemporary History?', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol.32, no.4 (1997), pp.441-452, p.448. Lawrence notes a declining interesting in 'the linearity' of arguments about modernisation in: Lawrence, 'Political history,' p.189. Judt denounces the 'epistemological vacuity' of the term 'modernisation' in: Judt, 'A Clown in Regal Purple,' pp.68-69.

Consequently, this thesis is influenced by the work of the contemporary historians, mentioned above as emerging from the 'New Political History', whose recent work on (sub)cultural history has been shaped by insider-outsider approaches to research, in which their own positions as (sub)cultural actors is acknowledged and incorporated into the histories which they produce.¹³⁹ If 'subcultural experiences can be explored as a way to get to grips with wider historical processes', I would suggest, then this applies not only to subcultures like 'punk' or 'rave' but also to the subculture to which I belong: that is, a left-wing, politically-committed, activist subculture.¹⁴⁰ Whilst the terms 'activism' and 'activist' have occasionally been criticised, I have found that they were well-understood by my narrators – including those that identified 'activism' as something performed by somebody else.¹⁴¹ In this thesis, I largely follow the usage of the terms made by Celia Hughes in her brilliant *Young Lives on the Left*, a work which recognises 'the value that dissenting lives offer the post-war historian'.¹⁴² As historians have observed, politics has a 'discrete presence' whose 'apartness and difference from, rather than pivotal place in, everyday life is salient'.¹⁴³ In fact, this is a point which runs through one of the landmark texts of the 'New Political History' – Raphael Samuel's monumental series on the 'lost world of British Communism' which presented

¹³⁹ I am thinking, here, especially, of the work of the aforementioned Subcultures Network and the self-designated 'punkademics', on which there is a growing literature; see, for example: L. Robinson, 'Exhibition Review Punk's 40th Anniversary – An Itchy Sort of Heritage,' *Twentieth Century British History*, vol.29, no.2 (2018), pp.309-317, p.315; L. Robinson & C. Warne, "'Can You Really Get Away with That at Work?": Recent Experiences of Teaching and Learning Hebdige,' pp.231-252, in: K. Gildart et al, *Hebdige and Subculture in the Twenty-First Century Through the Subcultural Lens* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), pp.232-233. For 'insider research' (and its connection to 'insider teaching'), see: P. Hodkinson, "'Insider Research" in the Study of Youth Cultures,' *Journal of Youth Studies*, vol.8, no.2 (2005), pp.131-149; B. Green & C. Feldman-Barrett, "'Become what you are": subcultural identity and "insider teaching" in youth studies,' *Teaching in Higher Education*, vol.27, no.1 (2022), pp.39-53. For 'insider-outsider', see: J.L. Buckle & S.C. Dwyer, 'The Space Between: On Being an Insider-Outsider in Qualitative Research,' *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, vol.8, no.1 (2009), pp.54-63.

¹⁴⁰ Robinson & Warne, "'Can You Really Get Away with That at Work?'," p.234. In describing left-wing, socialist activism unapologetically as a 'subculture', I have been substantially influenced by the arguments of Kade Doyle Griffiths; see: K. Doyle Griffiths, 'Normie Socialism or Communist Transgression,' *Red Wedge* (27th September 2018), <http://www.redwedgemagazine.com/online-issue/normie-socialism-or-communist-transgression-red-wedge-interviews-kate-doyle-griffiths>, accessed 23rd June 2022.

¹⁴¹ For critical discussions of 'activism', see: A. Taylor, 'Against Activism,' *The Baffler*, no.30 (2016), <https://thebaffler.com/salvos/against-activism>; G. Yang, 'Activism,' pp.1-17, in B. Peters (ed.), *Digital Keywords: A Vocabulary of Information Society & Culture* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016). The use of 'activist' as a self-descriptor was particularly apparent in my interview with Marian Carty; in my interview with Brian Nevill, on the other hand, he was keen to stress that he was not a 'life-long' or 'true' activist. We do not have to agree with their (self-)assessments to recognise the sense of difference which they articulate.

¹⁴² C. Hughes, *Young Lives on the Left: Sixties Activism and the Liberation of the Self* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), p.2.

¹⁴³ Black, *The Political Culture of the Left in Affluent Britain*, p.5.

himself and other CPGB members as occupying 'a little private world of our own'.¹⁴⁴ Whereas Samuel meant this somewhat pejoratively, it is worth remembering that, as well as being apart, the other 'worlds' of speculative fiction can be parallel, intersecting, or intrusive. As David Craig has noted, the 'half-closed world is also a half-open one', an observation which applies as much to the 'grassroots politics' of local left-wing activism as to the 'high politics' which he was considering.¹⁴⁵ I would suggest that the sense of an activist 'world' is a reminder of what Ben Jones called the 'social-experiential' and a useful rejoinder to the typical focus on the 'textual-linguistic', and recalls political arguments in favour of 'flight, desertion, the founding of new communities' and 'engaged withdrawal'.¹⁴⁶ It is also a recognition that the 'worlds' of left-wing politics are not insulated within Britain, challenging 'methodological nationalism' and bringing our attention to their global as well as local connections.¹⁴⁷ Williams argued that new movements emerge from 'new

¹⁴⁴ R. Samuel, 'The Lost World of British Communism: I. The Waning of Collectivity,' *New Left Review*, no.154 (1985), pp.3-53; R. Samuel, 'Staying Power: The Lost World of British Communism, Part Two,' *New Left Review*, no.156 (1986), pp.63-113; R. Samuel, 'Class Politics: The Lost World of British Communism, Part Three,' *New Left Review*, no.165 (1987), pp.52-91. Samuel faced some criticism for overemphasising the importance of 'Communist community culture', see: E. Hobsbawm, 'Cadres,' *London Review of Books*, vol.29, no.8 (2007), <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v29/n08/eric-hobsbawm/cadres>, accessed 11th March 2021. The term 'lost world' has gained little traction with academics, with one notable exception: L. Black, 'The Lost World of Young Conservatism,' *The Historical Journal*, vol.51, no.4 (2008), pp.991-1024. A piece which refers to the term is J. Watts, 'The lost world of the British Labour Party? Community, infiltration and disunity,' *British Politics*, no.13 (2018), pp.505-523, but the article draws exclusively on Benedict Anderson's concept of 'imagined community'. A reference in local studies may be the title of Davies & Fielding, *Workers' worlds*, but it is undertheorized and applied in a context which may owe more to G.D.H. Cole.

¹⁴⁵ D.M. Craig, "'High Politics" and the "New Political History",' *The Historical Journal*, vol.53, no.2 (2010), pp.453-475. p.475.

¹⁴⁶ Jones, *The working class in mid-twentieth-century England*, p.5. P. Virno, 'Virtuosity and Revolution: The Political Theory of Exodus,' pp.189-212, in P. Virno & M. Hardt (eds.), *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p.197; D. Graeber, *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2004), pp.60-61. For a convincing recent application of 'engaged withdrawal' in modern British history, see: E.W. Rogers, *"Engaged Withdrawal" Communal Living and Queer Spatial Politics in London's Gay Liberation Front 1971-1974* (MPhil Thesis, University of Cambridge, 2018).

¹⁴⁷ A. Wimmer & N. Glick Schiller, 'Methodological Nationalism, the Social Sciences, and the Study of Migration: An Essay in Historical Epistemology,' *The International Migration Review*, vol.37, no.3 (2003), pp.576-610. For a criticism of the insularity of much British political history, see: M. Bentley, 'The British State and its Historiography,' *Publications de l'École Française de Rome*, no.171 (1993), pp.153-168, p.153. A relevant example of the emphasis upon global and local connectivity within subcultural historiography is provided by a special issue of *Britain and the World* edited by the Subcultures Network: Worley et al, 'British Youth Cultures and the Wider World.' It is notable that much of the most exciting recent histories of activism in Britain, including its spatial relations, has been undertaken by geographers; see, for a select sample: D. Featherstone, *Solidarity: Hidden Histories and Geographies of Internationalism* (London: Zed Books, 2012); Kelliher, *Making Cultures of Solidarity*; G. Brown & H. Yaffe, *Youth Activism and Solidarity: The non-stop picket against Apartheid* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017). For a useful discussion of multi-scalar activism and recent work by urban geographers and historians, see: K. Navickas, 'theories of space and place', *Protest and the Politics of Space* (2016), <http://protesthistory.org.uk/about-me/theories-of-space-and-place>, accessed 9th November 2021.

ideas being specified in particular places'.¹⁴⁸ As the next sections will explore in more detail, this is a thesis which was initiated in a particular political moment – the 'collective joy' (as Lynne Segal put it) of the 2017 election with which this introduction began – and is embedded within the specific left-wing subcultures to which I belonged and belong.¹⁴⁹

In this section, I have outlined two of the prevailing trends to have emerged from the 'New Political History', highlighting the recent disciplinary contributions of modern British historians to the study of 'class', 'community' and 'individualism' in twentieth-century Britain. Whilst acknowledging the value of this work in contesting conventional narratives of this period, however, I have situated this thesis 'outside' it – within my understanding of 'contemporary political history' and animated by a socialist (rather than social-democratic) 'political commitment'. By studying a left-wing, activist 'world' which I have in a sense inhabited, I have tried to problematise both the role of the historian and the history itself, resistant to the possibility of 'containment' and politically committed to emancipation.¹⁵⁰ As Lefebvre had it, 'if politics alienates, and contains alienation, it can also be disalienated, and this through political activity – in and through struggle on the political level and in and through the conflict between life and politics.'¹⁵¹ Recognising that our understandings of 'political history' hinge decisively upon our understandings of 'politics' and 'history', I have pointed towards a distinctive way of interpreting the political history of contemporary Britain. The point, as ever, is to change it.¹⁵²

Writing from within

I have spoken, so far, of two different vantage points: the vantage point of emancipation, and of Croydon. It should be clear that these are not coterminous. Nevertheless, by 'writing from within'

¹⁴⁸ Cooke, 'Decentralism and the politics of place,' p.374.

¹⁴⁹ L. Segal, *Radical Happiness* (London: Verso, 2017), p.vii.

¹⁵⁰ Compare to the discussion of Williams' sense of political (and consequently epistemological-methodical) commitment in: B. Harker, 'Introduction: Williams's Commitment,' *Key Words*, no.16 (2018), pp.5-17, p.6.

¹⁵¹ Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, p.113.

¹⁵² For a lucid discussion of Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, and the varying responses to it, see: J. Moufawad-Paul, *Demarcation and Demystification: Philosophy and its Limits* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2019), pp.21-28.

– a term used within the artistic process to describe the practice of reflection alongside the main work – the problematic space of Croydon, and specifically from within its left-wing activism, I hope to produce a text which bursts its containers.¹⁵³ I would suggest that, following Williams and Hall, this sort of reflexive immanence can serve to ‘keep oneself permanently open to external influences as they make their presence felt.’¹⁵⁴ It is not always quite possible, as it was for John Ruskin, to write ‘frankly, garrulously, and at ease; speaking of what it gives me joy to [write about] at any length I like’, but value remains for the historian in writing unapologetically from within – and in the hopes of transforming – our subject and ‘[feeling] some freakish pleasure in exposing [our writing] to the chance of misinterpretation.’¹⁵⁵ In so doing, we might hold space for the emancipation of ourselves.¹⁵⁶

I lived in Croydon, where many of my family still live, until I was eight, when we moved to London’s Kentish commuter belt, perched between Tonbridge and Maidstone, whose similarities and differences to Croydon formed a nascent sense of the complexities of the ‘suburban’. I returned to Croydon in 2014 whilst studying for my MA in the history of Africa, living in several different parts of the borough before I moved to Lambeth in 2020. During that time, I served in multiple roles as a member of the local Labour Party and Momentum group, as well as the Ruskin House club committee, the Croydon Assembly and mutual aid group. Preparation for this thesis began towards the end of 2016, in time borrowed from cover teaching in a Tooting secondary school, and it commenced in earnest in September 2017. My enrolment at the University of Reading, in fact, took place on the day after my return from that year’s Labour conference in Brighton, at which I had been a delegate for Croydon Central Constituency Labour Party (CLP) – a conference at effectively the high point of Corbynism, still buoyed from the election successes

¹⁵³ E. Göransson & R. Ljungberg, ‘Writing from within the creative process,’ *ArtMonitor*, no.8 (2010), pp.167-173.

¹⁵⁴ Ang, ‘Stuart Hall and the tension between academic and intellectual work,’ p.33. For a discussion of Raymond Williams and immanence, see: D. Hartley, ‘On Raymond Williams: Complexity, Immanence, and the Long Revolution,’ *Mediations*, vol.30, no.1 (2016), pp.39-60, p.40.

¹⁵⁵ J. Ruskin, *Praeterita* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012 [1885-89]), p.5.

¹⁵⁶ This argument was influenced by: J. Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2009), pp.1-23.

which opened this introduction.¹⁵⁷ Research continued through 2018 and 2019, balanced with responsibilities on Labour's Local Campaign Forum (LCF). My interviews were concluded amidst the 2019 general election and its fallout, and much of the writing was to be undertaken in the long aftermath of Corbynism's defeat. The rhythms and resonances of these experiences have become only clearer in hindsight. This is not 'merely dryly [recording] what the past was like', but, as for Ruskin, '[offering] a self, a *life*, made through memory.'¹⁵⁸

This has given me a broad knowledge of activists in Croydon (albeit with a slight emphasis on those areas in Croydon Central) as well as a developed appreciation of what Dylan Trigg called the 'hermeneutics of place' in Croydon.¹⁵⁹ I conducted sixteen interviews with eighteen narrators of between one and two hours, between May 2019 and January 2020: two, Leni and Peter Gillman (b.1943 and 1942) and Lynda and Martin Graham (b.1944 and 1945), were with couples.¹⁶⁰ Four of these took place at Ruskin House, nine at the activists' homes – eight of them in Croydon or the immediate vicinity, and one with Roy Lockett (b.1939) in north London – and one, with the sitting councillor Clive Fraser (b.1960), in an office in Croydon's town hall. Two were conducted virtually: one, with Hamish MacColl (b.1950) in France, via video call, and the other, with Norman Brown (b.1950) in Florida, via phone call. These contexts influenced the interviews, with Ruskin House unsurprisingly inspiring reflections on its importance as a place, and activists' homes permitting the retrieval of photographs and newspaper clippings.¹⁶¹ The narrators had varying levels of involvement in activism, both in the past and the present, but were mostly born between 1938 and 1955, with two outliers at either end: Grace Fadden (b.1926) and Fraser. This gave a generational focus which anchored my research, Croydon's changing meanings were experienced alongside the unfolding of my narrators' lives – the main group could be divided

¹⁵⁷ Poggrund & Maguire, *Left Out*, pp.39-41.

¹⁵⁸ F. O'Gorman, 'Introduction,' pp.ix-xxiii, in Ruskin, *Praeterita*, p.xii.

¹⁵⁹ Trigg, 'Place and Non-Place,' p.135.

¹⁶⁰ I have provided brief biographical notes for my narrators in Appendix I. For a discussion of some consequences of interviewing couples, see: Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, *Class, Politics, and the Decline of Deference in England*, pp.25-26.

¹⁶¹ For discussion of the link between space and memory, see: S. Cohen, 'Music as Cartography: English Audiences and Their Autobiographical Memories of the Musical Past,' pp.107-123, in J. Brusila, B. Johnson & J. Richardson (eds.), *Memory, Space, Sound* (Bristol: intellect, 2016), p.107.

further into equal halves born between 1938 and 1945, and another between 1946 and 1958, with some of their experiences consequently differing.¹⁶² Most of my narrators grew up in Croydon, and most are still living in or around Croydon, although I did interview some who grew up elsewhere, some who have subsequently moved away, and one (Norman Brown, born in Jamaica) who did both. With Brown as my only Black narrator, and only six women narrators – in addition to those mentioned, Marian Carty (b.1954), Joan Matlock (b.1949) and Jean Tagg (b.1938) – there is a marked and, in some ways, regrettable imbalance to this grouping, although this does not seem to have been a radical departure from the demographics of left-wing activism in Croydon during the period. It is hoped that the implications of this bias for the argument is mitigated by the varying frequency that differing narrators are drawn upon. This was also partly a consequence of the method adopted for locating narrators – a mixture of tracking down people mentioned in the archival record online, like Brian Nevill (b.1948) and Peter Walker (b.1945), and interviewing people that were already known to me and snowballing to find other narrators.

David Percival (b.1945), who I knew from the local Labour Party, provided me with a phone number for Brown; David White (b.1948), for many years the secretary of Croydon Central CLP and a comrade in innumerable meetings, gave me an address to contact Fadden. Simon Berlin (b.1954), another Momentum comrade, owned a house to which I would briefly move during 2020, whilst Jerry Fitzpatrick (b.1952) had been my local councillor for several years when I was living in Addiscombe. In several cases, the narrators that I interviewed are people with whom I have had political disagreements. As Valerie Yow argues, though, I 'cannot – and do not wish to – pretend to complete objectivity.'¹⁶³ Alessandro Portelli showed that the subjectivity of oral history was a strength and a source of 'a *different credibility*'.¹⁶⁴ For historians interested in the subjective experience of activists, 'the most appropriate methodology is oral history'.¹⁶⁵ As Karl Figlio points

¹⁶² C. Hughes, *The Socio-Cultural Milieux of the Left in Post-War Britain* (PhD Thesis, University of Warwick, 2011), p.19 & p.24.

¹⁶³ V.R. Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences* (Oxford: AltaMira Press, 2005), p.2.

¹⁶⁴ A. Portelli, 'The Peculiarities of Oral History,' *History Workshop Journal*, vol.12, no.1 (1981), pp.96-107, p.100.

¹⁶⁵ S. Bruley, 'Jam tomorrow? Socialist women and Women's Liberation, 1968-82: an oral history approach,' pp.155-172, in Smith & Worley (eds.), *Against the grain*, p.155.

out, all relationships involve 'phantasized components'; all interview relationships will be 'invested with content and emotion from past relationships'.¹⁶⁶ The relationships that I have with my narrators could have produced a danger but, as Hall observed, 'dangers are not places you run away from but places you go towards'.¹⁶⁷ Oral history is always undertaken 'in a particular political context' and draws upon both real and phantasmic relationships, and research is better for having that acknowledged and incorporated into the study, rather than pursuing an ephemeral objectivity.¹⁶⁸ My activist experiences have attuned me to what Yow described as 'popular' or 'vernacular memory' – and the 'countermemory' which is formed in direct opposition to 'official memory', particularly (as Hughes found) in the context of activists using interviews 'as a means of remembering not only past activist selves, but also for reshaping political subjectivity in a left landscape transformed beyond Margaret Thatcher and New Labour'.¹⁶⁹ I hoped to retain a sense of oral history as 'an exceptionally powerful means of democratizing the content, process, and audience for history'.¹⁷⁰ As a way of exercising caution in running towards danger, and 'writing from within', I kept a diary of reflections after each interview to relate my own 'feeling-states' and capture some of the observations about body language and surroundings which would be lost in the transcribed recordings.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁶ K. Figlio, 'Oral History and the Unconscious,' *History Workshop Journal*, vol.26, no.1 (1988), pp.120–132, pp.121–122.

¹⁶⁷ I. Ang, 'Stuart Hall and the tension between academic and intellectual work,' *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol.19, no.1 (2016), pp.29–41, p.32. A similar point was made by Natalie Thomlinson, on studying Black experiences as a white woman – 'if you're not uncomfortable, then you're probably doing it wrong'. N. Thomlinson, *Race, Ethnicity and the Women's Movement in England, 1968–1993* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p.25.

¹⁶⁸ R. Jones, 'Blended Voices: Crafting a Narrative from Oral History Interviews,' *The Oral History Review*, vol.31, no.1 (2004), pp.23–42, p.29.

¹⁶⁹ Yow, *Recording Oral History*, p.54; Hughes, *The Socio-Cultural Milieux of the Left in Post-War Britain*, p.132; C. Hughes, 'Negotiating ungovernable spaces between the personal and the political: Oral history and the left in post-war Britain,' *Memory Studies*, vol.6, no.1 (2013), pp.70–90, p.72.

¹⁷⁰ L. Shopes, "'Insights and Oversights": Reflections on the Documentary Tradition and the Theoretical Turn in Oral History,' *Oral History Review*, vol.41, no.2 (2014), pp.257–268, p.258. Nor should the potentially therapeutic value of participating in oral history research, particularly for left-wing activists prone to neglecting 'feelings', be overlooked, although nor should it be exaggerated: J. Stanley, 'Including the Feelings: Personal Political Testimony and Self-Disclosure,' *Oral History*, vol.24, no.1 (1996), pp.60–67; W. Baum, 'Therapeutic Value of Oral History,' *International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, vol.12, no.1 (1981), pp.49–53.

¹⁷¹ Figlio, 'Oral History and the Unconscious,' p.126; Göransson & Ljungberg, 'Writing from within the creative process'.

Through the rapport of the oral history process, other sources, like diaries, letters, and photographs, also become accessible.¹⁷² These objects proved a tool for ‘jogging’ memory and were valuable in their own right.¹⁷³ Responding to gaps in the archives is often regarded as one of the main benefits of oral history.¹⁷⁴ In contrast to the scholars who were drawn to studying the Labour Party in Lewisham by a surfeit of sources, at the time that this thesis began, only a single Labour Party minute book (South Norwood’s) was available at the Museum of Croydon – although several more have now been added with my assistance, almost by chance following the closure of the Labour Party office at Ruskin House after the 2017 election.¹⁷⁵ Given the difficulties that even locating records for the local Labour Party can involve, it is a stark reminder that ‘for the most part the archive of Britain’s left activist milieu remains incomplete, scattered across the country in individuals’ attics and cupboards.’¹⁷⁶ For Ginzburg, absences such as this should be accepted and acknowledged in the historical narrative; ‘obstacles interfering with the research were constituent elements of the documentation’ (and should be acknowledged, as Charlotte Lydia Riley has noted, as a way of making explicit the conditions of our labour as historians).¹⁷⁷ In Croydon’s case, the paucity and dispersion of records is tied to its reputation: there are other, apparently more appropriate, places for its local activist material to be sent.

There are archives relating to left-wing and community activists in Croydon scattered across the Surrey History Centre in Woking, the archives at the London School of Economics, the British Library, the London Metropolitan Archives, the Bishopsgate Institute, the Institute of Race

¹⁷² C. Hughes, ‘The Struggle of the Male Self: A New Left Activist and His 1961 Diary,’ *Journal of British Studies*, no.54 (2015), pp.898-925; C. Hughes, ‘Left Activism, Succour and Selfhood: the epistolary friendship of two revolutionary mothers in 1970s Britain,’ *Women’s History Review*, vol.23, no.6 (2014), pp.874-902. Some activist diaries are available to scholars through archives, for example those collected by Mass Observation; see J. Hinton, ‘Middle-class Socialism: Selfhood, Democracy and Distinction in Wartime County Durham,’ *History Workshop Journal*, vol.62, no.1 (2006), pp.116-141.

¹⁷³ Yow, *Recording Oral History*, p.110.

¹⁷⁴ C. Borderias & M. Vilanova, ‘Memories of Hope and Defeat: Catalan Miners and Fishermen under the Second Spanish Republic, 1931-9,’ pp.38-53, in P. Thompson & N. Burchardt (eds.), *Our Common History: The Transformation of Europe* (London: Pluto Press, 1982), p.38 & p.40.

¹⁷⁵ G. Cohen, A. Flinn & L. Mates, ‘Political Culture and the Post-war Labour Party: Values, Practices and Activism in South Lewisham, 1948-71,’ *Socialist History*, vol.32 (2008), pp.59-83, p.61; G. Cohen, L. Mates & A. Flinn, ‘Capture-Recapture Methods and Party Activism in Britain,’ *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, vol.42, no.2 (2012), pp.247-274, p.262.

¹⁷⁶ Hughes, *The Socio-Cultural Milieux of the Left in Post-War Britain*, p.11.

¹⁷⁷ Ginzburg, Tedeschi & Tedeschi, ‘Microhistory,’ p.23; C.L. Riley, ‘Rethinking Modern British Studies. July 2015: A Reflection,’ *Twentieth Century British History*, vol.27, no.2 (2016), pp.305-309, p.306.

Relations, the Black Cultural Archives, and the George Padmore Institute (all in London), the Working Class Movement Library and People's History Museum (both in Manchester) and the University of Warwick's Modern Records Centre, as well as isolated records elsewhere and online, principally via the Marxists Internet Archive. There are obvious absences in this material, and it is difficult to assess how representative this is; Black radical organisations, discussed at some length in Chapter Four, are well-archived in Croydon's case relative to the women's liberation movement, who consequently feature little in this thesis. My broad intention to speak to the experience of a cohort (or cohorts) of New Left activists that later became involved within Corbynism – and whose own accounts tended to mention women's liberation only to note its absence – partially justifies this imbalance; if Black radical organisations hardly featured much more in these accounts, their extant archives do at least serve as a useful foil.¹⁷⁸ This thesis, as Ginzburg advises, 'accepts the limitations [of archival research] while exploring their gnoseological implications and transforming them into a narrative element'.¹⁷⁹ If my oral histories have helped to uncover material which would otherwise have proven unavailable, 'writing from within' them has also provided a helpful creative constraint – covering such a broadly dispersed range of archives is easier when the study is restricted to the local.¹⁸⁰

This is particularly important because I have also drawn upon a wide range of other sources.

Lefebvre observed that, though everyday life 'includes political life', 'political life detaches itself from everyday life by concentrating itself in privileged moments [...] and by fostering specialized

¹⁷⁸ Of my narrators, Leni and Peter Gillman remembered an egalitarianism in approaches to gender in the first New Left but avoided claiming that they had been feminists; Marian Carty identified with socialist feminism (and against 'feminism on its own') but linked this especially to her time away from Croydon, at university; David White, who encouraged me to ask him about gender and sexuality in our interview, did not recall any local women's liberation groups. I discuss the small but active Croydon branch of the National Joint Action Campaign for Women's Equal Rights (NJACWER) in Chapter Three; the Croydon Women's Centre is discussed in Chapter Four. Whilst this is not a point which I have had the space to explore in this thesis, it is likely that the lack of a university within Croydon, its perception as a suburb, and the comparative breadth (and potential for radicalism) of organisations like NJACWER on a local level, tended to mitigate against the formation of autonomous women's liberation groups. The experience of the Croydon branch of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE), also discussed in Chapter Three and Chapter Four, is comparable – activists interested in gay liberation might still have attended its meetings even if they were involved with more radical groups on the London-wide or national level.

¹⁷⁹ Ginzburg, Tedeschi & Tedeschi, 'Microhistory,' p.28.

¹⁸⁰ Yow, *Recording Oral History*, p.11.

activities'.¹⁸¹ This thesis closes this distance by using the one to make sense of the other, showing the ways that the products, and producers, of these 'specialized activities' are also products, and producers, of everyday life. Parliamentary and local authority boundary reviews, for example, found in the National Archives, represent an underutilised resource on political relationships to place in the twentieth century, with existing scholarship primarily focused upon their utility and consequences from a psephological perspective.¹⁸² The papers of politicians – like Reginald Prentice, at the British Library of Political and Economic Science, and Bernard Weatherill, at the University of Kent – also provide some insights, both in their collections of activist material and their communications with activists and other politicians. Further, I have made extensive use of Croydon's appearances in popular culture; as Matthew Waites has argued, the blurring of culture, identity and politics in contemporary society necessitates histories that bring together all three.¹⁸³ Art, in its various forms, is particularly helpful in tracing structures of feeling, with 'the capability to express a common experience of a time and place.'¹⁸⁴ Some historians have examined the relationship between politics and television and have begun to adopt methodologies for using television programmes as a historical source.¹⁸⁵ These, along with national and local newspapers

¹⁸¹ Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, p.114.

¹⁸² D. Rossiter, R. Johnston & C. Pattie, 'Representing People and Representing Places: Community, Continuity and the Current Redistribution of Parliamentary Constituencies in the UK,' *Parliamentary Affairs*, vol.66, no.4 (2013), pp.856-886; C. Rallings & M. Thrasher, 'The Parliamentary Boundary Commissions: Rules, Interpretations and Politics,' *Parliamentary Affairs*, vol.47, no.3 (1994), pp.387-404; R. Johnston, C. Pattie & D. Rossiter, 'Local Inquiries or Public Hearings: Changes in Public Consultation over the Redistribution of UK Parliamentary Constituency Boundaries,' *Public Administration*, vol.91, no.3 (2013), pp.663-679; D. Rossiter, R. Johnston & C. Pattie, *The Boundary Commissions: Redrawing the UK's map of parliamentary constituencies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999); R. Johnston, 'Manipulating maps and winning elections: measuring the impact of malapportionment and gerrymandering,' *Political Geography*, vol.21, no.1 (2002), pp.1-31; C. Rallings, R. Johnston & M. Thrasher, 'Equalising Votes but Enabling Bias: The Electoral Impact of the 1977 and 1999 Ward Boundary Reviews in London,' *Urban Studies*, vol.41, no.7 (2004), pp.1367-1393; R. Johnston, C. Pattie & D. Rossiter, *Representative democracy? Geography and the British electoral system* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021). For my review of the latter book, including a discussion of its relevance for contemporary political historians, see: D. Frost, 'The conundrums of the UK electoral system,' *Political Quarterly* (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923X.13065>.

¹⁸³ M. Waites, Review of L. Robinson, 'Gay men and the Left in post-war Britain: How the personal got political,' *Contemporary British History*, vol.22, no.4 (2008), pp.608-610, p.608.

¹⁸⁴ R. van den Akker & T. Vermeulen, 'Periodising the 2000s, or, the Emergence of Metamodernism,' pp.1-19, in R. van den Akker, A. Gibbons & T. Vermeulen (eds.), *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect and Depth After Postmodernism* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), p.7.

¹⁸⁵ G. Schaffer, "'Till Death Us Do Part" and the BBC: Racial Politics and the British Working Classes 1965-75,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol.45, no.2 (2010), pp.454-477; E. Smith, "'I Hope You're Satisfied, Thatcher!": Capturing the Zeitgeist of 1980s Britain in The Young Ones,' *Agora*, vol.4, no.49 (2014), pp.14-22; L. Robinson, "'Sometimes I like to stay in and watch TV..." Kinnock's Labour Party and Media Culture,' *Twentieth Century British History*, vol.22, no.3 (2011), pp.354-390.

and published books, are important resources for understanding the diverse meanings attached to Croydon and to the suburbs, and there is no shortage of appearances by Croydon in popular culture to choose from. These depictions cast light on the wider meanings which have become attached to Croydon, and how, and references to them are scattered throughout the thesis – drawn upon to supplement and situate, but not replace, the arguments anchored by the life stories of my narrators.

In some cases, the artists (authors, musicians, poets, and so on) behind the cultural artefacts which I cite provide something more – theoretical or methodological examples which have helped to shape this thesis ‘written from within’. Chapter Four, for example, was heavily influenced by the work of the poet Jay Bernard, who has produced ‘not just counter-histories but explorations and re-imaginings of what truth and history might usefully mean in twenty-first century Britain, and how such knowledge can be passed on and kept alive.’¹⁸⁶ Their work should be given more weight, and warrants comparison to the hauntological music of the better-recognised Croydon dubstep producer Burial.¹⁸⁷ Similarly, the writing of Angela Carter (a South Londoner noted for her ‘demonic inaccuracy’ whilst working at the *Croydon Advertiser*) has been a useful point of reference, including for her recognition that ‘art, of any kind, is part of politics – it either expresses or criticizes an ideology.’¹⁸⁸ Another notable thinker of the Gothic, John Ruskin, permeates Chapter One as his presence permeates Croydon, but his *Praeterita* and *Modern*

¹⁸⁶ K. Potts, ‘“I am haunted by this history but I also haunt it back”: two poetry collections,’ *Soundings*, no.74 (2020), pp.112-117, p.116.

¹⁸⁷ E. Campbell-Rowntree, ‘Like a Ghost Touched Your Heart: Burial’s Sonic Hauntology,’ *New Critique* (16th April 2021), <https://newcritique.co.uk/2021/04/16/essay-like-a-ghost-touched-your-heart-burials-sonic-hauntology-edward-campbell-rowntree/>, accessed 30th June 2022. It might also be profitable to compare Bernard to the work of Toni Morrison, whose refusal of ‘the consolation of narrativist history’ was reportedly favoured by Hayden White: Elias, ‘The Voices of Hayden White.’

¹⁸⁸ R. Hill, ‘Hairy Fairies,’ *London Review of Books*, vol.34, no.9 (2012), <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v34/n09/rosemary-hill/hairy-fairies>, accessed 30th June 2022; A. Carter, ‘Notes on the Gothic Mode,’ *The Iowa Review*, vol.6, nos.3/4 (1975), pp.132-134, p.133. I was particularly struck by a reading of Carter’s *The Passion of the New Eve*, which contains an appreciation of utopia which might be compared to some of my arguments above: M. Tonkin, ‘Travelling Hopefully: The Utopian Impulse in the Fiction of Angela Carter,’ *Contemporary Women’s Writing*, vol.9, no.2 (2015), pp.219-237. Despite her links to South London, more often mentioned in her fiction, Carter’s political experience is typically more associated with CND activism in Bristol; see: S.E. Hunt, *Angela Carter’s ‘Provincial Bohemia’: The counterculture in 1960s and 1970s Bristol and Bath* (Bristol: Bristol Radical History Group, 2020), p.1.

Painters were also a methodological influence on the thesis as a whole.¹⁸⁹ My other major theoretical influences, too, are writers that the subjects of this study could reasonably have been aware of and informed by – Raymond Williams for his role within the first New Left, Henri Lefebvre (via the Situationists) and Marshall McLuhan through *Suburban Press*, discussed in Chapter Three. Stuart Hall even invited Leni and Peter Gillman to his 1964 wedding.¹⁹⁰ One of his collaborators at the CCCS, the Black feminist cultural critic, Hazel Carby, whose work (including her recognition of the ‘shards of conflict and contradiction’ revealed in juxtaposing family memory and historical accounts) has been helpful in elaborating my arguments, attended school in Croydon.¹⁹¹ Whilst other points of reference are made, there is a conscious attempt at ‘writing from within’ by drawing upon the frameworks which would have been used by, or were at least available to, however indirectly, the movements and people being studied – as well as those theoretical insights which were, to a greater or lesser extent, sparked by contact with Croydon.

As Hayden White reminds us, for contemporary historians ‘the problem is precisely what to exclude from consideration.’¹⁹² This study takes up Croydon as a vantage point, prioritising the local over the national and seeing in its politically-committed left-wing activists the possibility of ‘a community of narrators and translators.’¹⁹³ ‘Writing from within’ has been an essential part of my process, giving an understanding of Croydon as a place – and of its activists – which could not be read from a page or even obtained in an interview. Similarly, and following Lauren Berlant, there is an attempt at ‘writing from within’ years which sit almost centrally within this work – 1956 and 1968 – and ‘of refusing to relinquish utopian practice, of refusing the apparently inevitable movement from tragedy to farce’, accepting ‘something like the risk of political embarrassment,

¹⁸⁹ T. Chandler, ‘Feeling Gothic: Affect and Aesthetics in Ruskin’s Architectural Theory,’ pp.101-115, in K. Freeman & T. Hughes (eds.), *Ruskin’s Ecologies: Figures of Relation from Modern Painters to the Storm-Cloud* (London: Courtauld Books Online, 2021), p.110. Several scholars have highlighted Ruskin’s appreciation for subjectivity and ‘the specific capacity of art to know’, and his confrontation with ‘the terrifying impossibility of closure.’ P. Garratt, ‘Ruskin’s *Modern Painters* and the Visual Language of Reality,’ *Journal of Victorian Culture*, vol.14, no.1 (2009), pp.53-71, p.53; M. Jarzombek, ‘Recognizing Ruskin: *Modern Painters* and the Refractions of Self,’ *Assemblage*, no.32 (1997), pp.70-87, p.73.

¹⁹⁰ Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman.

¹⁹¹ Back, ‘So... fucking Croydon’; H.V. Carby, *Imperial Intimacies: A Tale of Two Islands* (London: Verso, 2019), p.2.

¹⁹² H. White, ‘Introduction: Historical Fiction, Fictional History, and Historical Reality,’ *Rethinking History*, vol.9, nos.2-3 (2005), pp.147-157, p.151.

¹⁹³ Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p.22.

of embracing undercooked transitional thought about the possibilities and politics of futurity itself.¹⁹⁴ That acceptance of naivety, that alertness to possibility, which are so often associated with both the period and with the writing of Williams and Lefebvre and Ruskin, are taken not only as phenomena to be written about, but attitudes to be emulated.¹⁹⁵ This research has not merely surveyed developments in ‘countermemory’ but forms an active part of it – accepting, as Trigg remarked, that we are ‘*always already placed*’ even if our ‘felt experience of place can vary radically’, and that consequently Croydon is the place from which I can ‘write from within’.¹⁹⁶

Between being and doing

In his memoir, *Praeterita*, Ruskin ‘[asked] the reader to distinguish between being and doing, between what a man has made and what has made him’, paying attention to ‘the deepest foundations of a life’s work, on which all else was built.’¹⁹⁷ In some ways, it is this uneasy division which distinguishes the parallel approaches of the urban historians and ‘New Political Historians’, described above: Wetherell asserted that his interest was in ‘the ways that urban space molded its subjects rather than the other way around’.¹⁹⁸ Understanding this relationship is notoriously difficult, and part of the issue is temporal.¹⁹⁹ There is a temptation in urban biography, as Jaroslav Ira noted, to provide ‘a comprehensive image’ of the past of a city through a linear narrative in which the city is the overarching hero: sealing the place up in a depoliticized ‘envelope of space-time’, in Doreen Massey’s phrase.²⁰⁰ In each chapter of his ‘long rhapsody on what places [...] can do to and for a sensitive mind’, by contrast, Ruskin ‘moves the story just about forward through time’, but ‘keeps returning to earlier points’ to retell events ‘from different perspectives, several

¹⁹⁴ Berlant, ‘68, or Something,’ p.126. For a discussion focused on the significance of 1956, see: S. Hall, ‘Life and Times of the First New Left,’ *New Left Review*, no.61 (2010), pp.177-196.

¹⁹⁵ O’Gorman, ‘Introduction,’ p.x. Note the art historian James Elkins’ complaints about historians writing about visionary scholars without emulating them: J. Elkins, ‘Thoughts on Writing about Art after Postmodernism,’ pp.203-210, in van den Akker, Gibbons & Vermeulen (eds.), *Metamodernism*, p.208.

¹⁹⁶ Trigg, ‘Place and Non-Place,’ p.133.

¹⁹⁷ O’Gorman, ‘Introduction,’ p.xxi.

¹⁹⁸ Wetherell, *Foundations*, p.7.

¹⁹⁹ Williams, *Culture and Materialism*, pp.31-49. For another influential discussion of this problem, see: S. Hall, ‘A Sense of Classlessness,’ *Universities & Left Review*, no.5 (1958), pp.26-32, p.32.

²⁰⁰ J. Ira, ‘Rethinking the genre: urban biographies as means of creating critical public spheres,’ *Urban History*, vol.48, no.1 (2021), pp.162-178, p.169 & p.175; D. Massey, ‘Places and Their Pasts,’ *History Workshop Journal*, no.39 (1995), pp.182-192, p.188.

times, to catch more of what they meant or of what they might now imply.²⁰¹ In the process, he established a 'pattern of association of place and a particular theme/event', and hence with time.²⁰²

My approach, attempting to avoid both 'simple temporal continuity or only spatial simultaneity with no sense of historical depth', is similar.²⁰³ Massey highlighted place's 'throwntogetherness' and noted that 'places are always already hybrid'.²⁰⁴ This raises difficulties for the appropriate representation of place – as John Davis has discussed, there are good reasons to eschew 'conventional narrative history' in writing the history of 'a city as complex, diverse and multifaceted as London', and not only there.²⁰⁵ Whilst Davis opted to collect together essays on a number of discrete themes, the relationship which this thesis maps between changing and multiple Croydon(s) and the life-stages of my narrators is broadly comparable to that found in the fiction of Angela Carter, for whom 'the body and the city are identical in that they undergo the same fictionalizing process.'²⁰⁶ And, as Carter explained, such an approach is consistent with a 'committed materialism', for 'all myths are products of the human mind and reflect only aspects of material human practice.'²⁰⁷

Another example from fiction is provided by Williams' experience writing *Border Country*, as he found that he 'had to divide and contrast' the 'conflicting impulses and modes' of his father into multiple characters in order to 'express and work through what I believed I had seen as an internal conflict'.²⁰⁸ Following Ira's call for a 'multiperspective history', taking 'the present and

²⁰¹ O'Gorman, 'Introduction,' p.xii.

²⁰² F. O'Gorman, 'Note on the text,' pp.xxiv-xxv, in Ruskin, *Praeterita*, p.xxiv.

²⁰³ Massey, 'Places and Their Pasts,' p.191.

²⁰⁴ B. Rogaly, 'Contesting Neoliberal Common Sense: Bottom-up History and the Struggle over Urban Space,' pp.51-54, in J. Brennan (ed.), *Re:development: Voices, Cyanotypes and Writings from the Green Backyard* (London, 2016), p.1; Massey, 'Places and Their Pasts,' p.188.

²⁰⁵ Davis, *Waterloo Sunrise*, p.vii.

²⁰⁶ N. Vallorani, 'The Body of the City: Angela Carter's *The Passion of the New Eve*,' *Science Fiction Studies*, vol.21, no.3 (1994), pp.365-379, p.367. A comparison between White's just-mentioned comment and Carter's reluctance to map a destination might be fruitful: Tonkin, 'Travelling Hopefully,' p.229. For a further discussion of Carterian spatiality relevant to this thesis, see: A. Kérchy, 'Psychogeography in the curiosity cabinet: Angela Carter's poetics of space,' pp.39-57, in M. Mulvey-Roberts (ed.), *The Arts of Angela Carter: A Cabinet of Curiosities* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019).

²⁰⁷ Carter, *Shaking a Leg*, p.47.

²⁰⁸ Williams, *The Country and the City*, p.429.

experienced city, the here and now of that city’ as ‘the vantage point from which the narrative unfolds’, this thesis is broken down spatially into chapters on four different types of place within Croydon, and four different types of place to which Croydon has been compared, accounting for Rogaly’s observation that ‘places are always already connected to elsewhere’.²⁰⁹ Like in *Praeterita*, these are a series of places associated with times: with phases of urban development and with periods in the lives of my narrators.²¹⁰ The sections of this study inevitably overlap, of course, ‘to highlight periods of time where there was no single dominant theme or framework at play’.²¹¹ Returning and anticipating, through attention to the residual and the emergent, this reveals a Croydon which is a palimpsest, ‘a set of layers, partly still perceptible in the contemporary urban space and functional in urban memory’, a ‘simultaneity of stories-so-far’.²¹²

Chapter One describes the Croydon experienced by the parents of some of my narrators, and hence the imagined Croydon of their early childhoods, and historicises it within the long durée of Croydon’s relationship to rural Surrey and its nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century suburbanisation. As children, the activists had often encountered both a Croydon which they felt a part of, and a Croydon which they felt apart from – a firm, but never quite finished, sense of Croydon as a hopeless ‘Tory town’ in a suburban nation (and a suburban empire). This is an association which to some extent persists, particularly in areas like Purley and Coulsdon which were added to the borough after 1965. It was also, however, continually challenged by a residual sense of the ‘town-consciousness’ which seemed to be embodied by the Victorian town centre, the product of a Liberal middle class and Croydon’s nascent labour movement.

²⁰⁹ Ira, ‘Rethinking the genre,’ p.169 & p.174; B. Rogaly, ‘Diversity, urban space and the right to the provincial city,’ *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, vol.20, no.4 (2013), pp.423-437, p.424.

²¹⁰ On periodising urban development, see: J. Abu-Lughod, ‘The City is Dead – Long Live the City: Some Thoughts on Urbanity,’ *American Behavioural Scientist*, vol.10, no.1 (1966), pp.3-5; E.W. Soja, ‘Beyond Postmetropolis,’ *Urban Geography*, vol.32, no.4 (2011), pp.451-469, p.460.

²¹¹ Pikó, *Milton Keynes in British Culture*, p.14.

²¹² Ira, ‘Rethinking the genre,’ p.170; D. Massey, ‘Landscape/space/politics: an essay,’ *The Future of Landscape and the Moving Image* (2011), <https://thefutureoflandscape.wordpress.com/landscapespacepolitics-an-essay/>, accessed 28th May 2020.

Through the interwar period, the Labour Party drew upon this residual sense of Croydon as an industrialising town to appeal to a growing working class, helping to establish distinct working-class communities within Croydon – in Waddon, in New Addington – from which they could draw support. Chapter Two explores the ways activists responded to the changed circumstances of the Second World War and its aftermath, as the ‘blitzed suburb’ of Croydon had the potential to be reconstructed in a manner which invited comparisons to places like Coventry: a rebuilt social-democratic Jerusalem in the Surrey hills. This was the Croydon of most of my elder narrators’ own childhoods and teenage years – the Croydon where they started to establish themselves as political actors within the first New Left after 1956. It was a Croydon which, until the changes of the mid-1960s, could convincingly be presented as a product of Labour and its left-wing activists. At the same time, however, these processes were overseen by a Conservative council in which Labour councillors accepted a subordinate role, and within a social-democratic settlement which, as in Coventry, was as much about a shift in the technocratic state as the triumph of socialist intentions. In time, the young activists forged in the years after Suez and Hungary would have to reckon with surroundings which were being reformed in the wake of the 1956 Croydon Corporation Act.

It took a while for the consequences of these compromises and contradictions to be felt, but by the mid-1960s – with Harold Wilson in government nationally, with Croydon joining the Greater London Council (GLC) and being joined by Purley and Coulsdon, and with Croydon’s reconstruction starting to take effect in the town centre and inviting comparisons to Manhattan – the left found itself riven at the moment of a great success: the 1966 election of Croydon’s second Labour MP, David Winnick. After the crisis year of 1968, a critique emerged from the younger underground scene which was at once excited about the possibility of encounters in 1960s and 1970s Croydon and frustrated and bored with a suburbia and a town centre seen as disturbingly American. However, it was not only the left which advanced criticisms of mid-century Croydon. A reactionary and even fascist backlash targeted Croydon’s American-ness as an indication of moral decline, particularly in the context of growing immigration – cementing ‘Selsdon Man’ as

suburban Croydon's appropriate representative and forcing the left once more into subordinated and segregated positions, as Croydon was incorporated into the London metropolis. This contradictory, and contradictorily 'American', Croydon is the subject of Chapter Three – the Croydon within which my narrators entered adulthood, and which some of them would eventually leave behind.

In the 1970s and early 1980s, this decline was seen as located spatially in the 'inner city' on Croydon's northern border, which continually threatened to intrude – carried by processes of 'secondary settlement' – into the tranquillity of white suburbia. As Chapter Four discusses, a residual idea of Croydon saw Black activism as exceptional, and more appropriate to areas like Brixton to which Croydon's Black organisations retained strong links, and the distance between Black activists and (increasingly older) 'white' left-wing organisations grew. In the early 1980s, however, a left-wing GLC and an upsurge in Black youth militancy from within Croydon meant the creation of Black spaces, including in the town centre, and a rapprochement between radical Black activists, the 'white' left, and Labour. This contributed towards an emergent sense of Croydon (or parts of Croydon) not as a white suburb infiltrated by the 'inner city', but as part of the 'inner city' itself – a multicultural Croydon whose diversity could be celebrated and not feared. By the early 1990s, following the defeat of the GLC and the reincorporation of Black activists, the Labour Party was poised to take power in a Croydon which was dramatically changed, both demographically and through a recession which linked its town centre, too, with decline. However, with the arrival of the political (and literal) 'maturity' of my narrators and other activists from the old New Left, this victory was accompanied by a further incorporation as Croydon became a 'multicultural suburb' in a post-metropolis, reproducing some of the problems against which earlier Black activists had railed.

I have attempted, following Massey, to write 'a really "radical" history of a place' – a really radical history of a suburb, and a really radical history of Croydon – in which both the ingenuity and agency of activists, and the lurking potential of incorporation or 'suburbanisation', are

emphasised.²¹³ It is not the only history which could've been written, either of Croydon or its left-wing activists. As Pikó wrote of her work on Milton Keynes, this thesis does not offer 'a complete or exhaustive narrative of the multiple ways [it] can and has been understood'.²¹⁴ There is an attempt, instead, to understand the fragmentary production of a place whose meaning has had, and continues to have, importance for the understanding of twentieth- and even twenty-first-century Britain, and the role of left-wing activists in those processes. Each chapter is divided fourfold into sections, roughly corresponding to a division between the 'dominant', 'residual' and 'emergent' described by Williams and Lefebvre, with the fourth accounting for the suburbanisation of these counter-projects.²¹⁵ The overall structure of the thesis follows a similar pattern – Chapter One emphasising dominant views of suburbia, Chapter Two discussing the residual possibility of Croydon as a town, Chapter Three shifting to the emergent prospects of a metropolitan Croydon, and Chapter Four depicting the suburban settlement formed in the 1990s. At the same time, the structure follows the life-narratives of a cohort (or cohorts) of activists shaped in some fashion by the experience of the New Left: a group of activists whose influence upon myself and others of my generation, often as elder comrades, has been profound. As Lynne Segal argued almost two decades ago, such a 'transmission of generational histories appears more important than ever.'²¹⁶

My approach, as for Williams in *The Country and the City*, 'is a personal decision but then a social action', for this history is a continuous one, as the ongoing shifts in Croydon's meaning sketched at the beginning of this introduction are but a small demonstration.²¹⁷ Both Ruskin and Williams began their books with a 'declaration of situation' – Ruskin starting *Praeterita* in his old nursery in his father's old house, Williams in a Cambridgeshire village 'in the flat country, on a headland of boulder clay, towards the edge of the dikes and sluices, the black earth of the Fens,

²¹³ Massey, 'Places and Their Pasts,' p.191.

²¹⁴ Pikó, *Milton Keynes in British Culture*, p.14.

²¹⁵ Williams, *Culture and Materialism*, pp.40-42; Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, pp.164-165.

²¹⁶ L. Segal, 'Formations of feminism - Political memoirs of the Left (II),' *Radical Philosophy*, no.123 (2004), pp.8-27, p.26.

²¹⁷ Williams, *The Country and the City*, p.439.

under the high East Anglian skies.’²¹⁸ As I write, more news items about Croydon appear on my Twitter feed and the 468 passes by my West Norwood flat on its long South London journey from Elephant and Castle to south Croydon – a route rarely travelled in the midst of the pandemic, but still there, still felt.²¹⁹ ‘When there are questions to put,’ Williams said, ‘I have to push back my chair, look down at my papers, and feel the change.’²²⁰

²¹⁸ Ruskin, *Praeterita*, p.5; Williams, *The Country and the City*, pp.4-5. For a discussion of the ‘declaration of situation’, see: R. Williams, *Politics and Letters* (London: Verso, 2015 [1979]), p.342; L. Seaton, ‘The Ends of Criticism: A Reply to Joseph North,’ *New Left Review*, no.119 (2019), <https://newleftreview.org/issues/ii119/articles/lola-seaton-the-ends-of-criticism>, accessed 25th March 2021.

²¹⁹ The process of correcting this thesis calls for a new declaration of situation. I am sat in that same seat in that same room, though another is now available in my office in central London. The 468 still passes my window, though the trains have been cancelled during a red extreme weather warning: a heatwave suggestive of hotter times to come. With rents continuing to rise, a return to living in Croydon looks likely.

²²⁰ Williams, *The Country and the City*, p.11.

Chapter One: Croydon, Surrey

'In a house like that
Your Uncle Dick was born;
Satchel on back he walked to Whitgift
Each weekday morn.

REDACTION: Second and third verse redacted from digitised version of thesis for copyright reasons. Copyright holder is Aitken Alexander Associates Ltd., on behalf of the John Betjeman estate.

Pear and apple in Croydon gardens
Bud and blossom and fall,
But your Uncle Dick has left his Croydon
Once for all.'

'Croydon', John Betjeman (1932)¹

¹ J.R. Watson, "'Croydon" by John Betjeman,' *Critical Survey*, vol.3, no.3 (1967), pp.175-177, p.175. Betjeman's secretary, Jill Menzies, wrote in a letter to the poet that 'You understand things like Croydon as no one else would'. Cited in C.L. Green, *John Betjeman: Letters – Volume Two: 1951 to 1984* (London: Methuen, 2006), p.56. Interestingly, Croydon does not have a 'Marchmont Avenue' – the closest likely match would be Marchmont Road in Wallington, in the neighbouring London Borough of Sutton.

Childhood has been an eternal site of 'Old England', a pastoral Golden Age located somewhere between the distant past and one's own infancy.² This was the case for John Ruskin, whose childhood visits to Croydon were presented as part of the spring of youth, to be followed by a long autumn – the same season which rounds out Betjeman's poem, quoted above.³ It was not his own childhood which Betjeman was apparently remembering, but Uncle Dick's schoolboy walks to private school: a taught, second-hand childhood, related in stories by older relatives or read about in books as much as (or more than) directly experienced. By the time of the poem, and the time of my narrators' childhoods, this pastoral Croydon had apparently vanished, Henri Lefebvre observing that whilst 'natural space is disappearing', it 'obsesses us, as do childhood and spontaneity, via the filter of memory.'⁴ Indeed, as early as the 1880s, Ruskin was lamenting the loss of the 'rustic loveliness of Surrey and Kent' in the hills of the Norwood Ridge – transformed into 'three long lumps of clay, on lease for building.'⁵

Although Williams warned against projecting 'the real childhood memory [...] unqualified, as history', he argued that positive childhood memories were 'the perception and affirmation of a world in which one is not necessarily a stranger and an agent, but can be a member, a discoverer, in a shared source of life'.⁶ As the first section of this chapter demonstrates, however, this was not necessarily my activists' own relationship to the countryside or to their suburban childhoods. Leni Gillman recounted how, as a very young child in 1940s Croydon, she started doing 'these things called wandering' – she would leave the house on her own out of loneliness, and once got a bus into central Croydon before she was found by a policeman and taken back to South Norwood by her mother.⁷ If, like Angela Carter, we believe that 'our lives are all about our childhoods', these activists' childhood experiences of exclusion and separation played an important role in

² Williams, *The Country and the City*, p.16.

³ Ruskin, *Praeterita*, p.32. John Ruskin's relationship to South London, including Croydon, is explored in: J. Newman & L. Marsh, *Sunset over Herne Hill: John Ruskin and South London* (London: Backwater Books, 2021).

⁴ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p.30.

⁵ Ruskin, *Praeterita*, pp.29-30.

⁶ Williams, *The Country and the City*, p.428.

⁷ Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman. Compare to Hazel Carby's account of her own childhood mental escapes to the 'organic', 'pliable', 'living' roundabout glimpsed from her window in Pollards Hill, and her daytime adventures on the common beyond it: Carby, *Imperial Intimacies*, pp.8-9.

producing their political subjectivities as adults.⁸ Their individual experiences would be easily matched by the collective memory of a labour movement with a persistent association with the urban.⁹ The extent to which my narrators differed from a figure like Betjeman – or Ruskin – in their relationships to Croydon’s (imagined) pastoral past is worth noting and interrogating, slowing down and examining the ‘escalator’ via which both the countryside and childhood seem to disappear from view, and looking ‘at the real social processes of alienation, separation, externality, abstraction’ which underlay childhood memory.¹⁰ If the first section of this chapter examines pastoral Croydon and the earliest processes of suburbanisation, the second section discusses the Croydon which this suburbanisation allegedly displaced, residually embodied in the Victorian town centre of my narrators’ childhoods.

Chronologically, then, this is the most complex chapter in the thesis, accepting an ethical-intellectual responsibility to throw the historical gaze to the deeper past, to resist the urge to (as Ruskin put it) ‘build for the little revolution’ of our lives only, and to follow Rancière in critiquing progress ‘at the level of the progression, the speed or pacing, the practice of historical writing itself.’¹¹ Whilst anchored in the early childhoods of my narrators in the 1940s and 1950s, it covers a period which reaches back to the earliest phases of Croydon’s capitalist development in the sixteenth century, capturing a sense of non-simultaneity (Ernst Bloch’s ‘*Ungleichzeitigkeit*’): ‘the assumption of phenomena originating from very different periods occurring *at the same time* and often in the same place or context.’¹² The narrators of this thesis have ‘a shared lived relation to cycles of hope, then to cycles of discouragement, and on to the displacement of hope’ which neither began nor will end with them, and those cycles have left residues in the spaces within which left-wing activism occurs.¹³ By following these traces into the deeper past, and recognising

⁸ Quoted in Hill, ‘Hairy Fairies’.

⁹ Thorpe, ‘“One of the most backward areas of the country”,’ p.217; Griffiths, *Labour and the Countryside*, p.3.

¹⁰ Williams, *The Country and the City*, pp.12-17 & p.428.

¹¹ J. Ruskin, *Selected Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p.19; K. Ross, ‘Translator’s Introduction,’ pp.vii-xxiii, in Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, p.xxi.

¹² J. Heiser, ‘Super-Hybridity: Non-Simultaneity, Myth-Making and Multipolar Conflict,’ pp.55-68, in van den Akker, Gibbons & Vermeulen (eds.), *Metamodernism*, pp.56-57. Emphases in the original.

¹³ Ross, ‘Translator’s Introduction,’ p.xxii.

the ways that activists have tended to 'reproduce what we are breaking from, even when heading towards and beyond profound ruptures', I hope to pay attention to 'the permanent nature of struggle' and to the possibility that these cycles might yet be broken.¹⁴

With this in mind, the third section reveals a still more complicated activist relationship to suburban Croydon, uncovering some of the possible reasons that so many of my narrators have followed the 'normative trajectory' which Michaela Benson described, venturing (back) to the suburbs as they got older despite childhood antipathies towards the 'suburban ideal'.¹⁵ The fourth section describes the triumph, after challenge, of the dominant view of Croydon as a 'Tory town' which my narrators would confront explicitly as they became involved in the activism of the New Left after 1956, but which, in some cases, they had already reacted against in infancy. At times, this chapter (and the thesis as a whole) will appear to be weighed down by a 'dogged preoccupation with detail', formally capturing something of the lived, layered experience of the burdensome past in twentieth-century Croydon, activists' sense of place irreducible to a simple calculation of the electoral viability of left-wing politics.¹⁶ As a result, it reflects and embodies an ambiguous relationship to a mythic Croydon which many of my narrators felt from a young age and which will consequently be carried through the rest of this thesis – offering 'scenes of genuine ambivalence' about a place associated with defeat and with ageing as much as with the 'delighted absorption in our own world' experienced in childhood.¹⁷

¹⁴ L. Segal, 'Lost worlds: Political memoirs of the Left in Britain,' *Radical Philosophy*, no.121 (2003), pp.6-23, p.23.

¹⁵ M. Benson, 'Trajectories of middle-class belonging: The dynamics of place attachment and classed identities,' *Urban Studies*, vol.51, no.14 (2014), pp.3097-3112, p.3103; P. Watt, 'Living in an oasis: middle-class disaffiliation and selective belonging in an English suburb,' *Environment and Planning A*, vol.41 (2009), pp.2874-2892, p.2882.

¹⁶ R. van den Akker, 'Historicity,' pp.21-23, & Heiser, 'Super-Hybridity,' in van den Akker, Gibbons & Vermeulen, *Metamodernism*, p.23 & p.56. Note the discussion of Ruskin's collapsing of 'the binary between objective reality and subjective emotions and desires', his work 'at once governed and threatened by its animated and eccentric marginal details', in: P. Pradhan, 'Reading The Detail In John Ruskin's Gothic Aesthetics,' *ELH*, vol.89, no.3 (2022), pp.719-756, pp.722-723. For the burdensomeness of history, see: White, 'The Burden of History,' p.124.

¹⁷ L. Berlant, 'The commons: Infrastructures for troubling times,' *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol.34, no.3 (2016), pp.393-419, p.395; Williams, *The Country and the City*, p.427. Both Ruskin and Carter were also attentive to the value of ambivalence, which they identified with the grotesque and the Gothic: Chandler, 'Feeling Gothic,' p.110; Carter, 'Notes on the Gothic Mode,' p.133. For a discussion of the feminist interest in the concept of 'ambivalence', see: C. Hemmings, 'A Feminist Politics of Ambivalence: Reading with Emma Goldman,' *Revista Estudos Feministas*, vol.26, no.3 (2018), pp.1-11.

‘By the rivers of Paradise’

Croydon’s separation from London proper has been a persistent source of appeal for would-be residents. A survey conducted by a local newspaper in 2012 found 62 percent of respondents in the southern wards of South Croydon, Purley, Kenley, Coulsdon and Sanderstead preferred to describe themselves as living in Surrey – even though Croydon has not been part of the county since it joined the GLC in 1965.¹⁸ Hazel Carby remembered that her mother, living in nearby Mitcham, ‘loved having an address in a “posh” county, as if the mere reputation of Surrey could burnish their lives.’¹⁹ As Alan Mace found in neighbouring Beckenham, the use of non-London postcodes like ‘BR’ or ‘CR’ – the latter classified by the Royal Mail as part of Surrey until 1996, when it ceased including county names in its database – reinforced the ‘sense of separation from London’ and helped to reproduce the still-common misrecognition of suburbs as essentially villages.²⁰ For many left-wing activists, however, association with the Home Counties is less welcome, Martin Graham insisting that he would ‘never use the Surrey, it’s an insult’.²¹ The areas where identification with Surrey is strongest have been regarded as the epitome of ‘white middle-class south Croydon’, a synecdoche for a Croydon seen as ‘the apotheosis of anonymous suburbia’ and ‘middle-class complacency’.²² This was a Croydon from which left-wing activists (and often politics itself) seemed excluded, above and before their consciousness of their electoral marginality – a site of parental authority, often comfortable but typically limiting for the children that inhabited it.

Vron Ware, paraphrasing Gaston Bachelard, has suggested that ‘the house in which we spend our earliest childhood provides us with the mental pictures that we need in order to make sense of all

¹⁸ ‘Croydon, London or Croydon, Surrey?’, *Croydon Advertiser* (14th February 2012, updated 5th September 2017), <https://www.croydonadvertiser.co.uk/news/croydon-news/croydon-london-or-croydon-surrey-425372>, accessed 5th September 2018.

¹⁹ Carby, *Imperial Intimacies*, p.7.

²⁰ A. Mace, ‘Whiteness, class and place in two London suburbs,’ *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol.42, no.7 (2019), pp.1032–1049, p.1038.

²¹ Interview with Lynda and Martin Graham.

²² Phelps, ‘On the Edge of Something Big,’ p.461; Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman.

other places we will inhabit.’²³ By the 1940s and 1950s, my narrators would have been unlikely to regard their childhood homes in Croydon as rural, but several factors complicate the pictures constructed in childhood memory. Angela Carter, born in 1940 and soon living in the safe surroundings of her grandmother’s childhood village in south Yorkshire, was treated like ‘the child she had been, in a sense, for the first five years of my life.’²⁴ Similarly, not all my narrators were born in Croydon, and their early childhood perceptions of place were in some cases shaped by rural homes elsewhere – Norman Brown, for example, was born in Jamaica and his father was ‘from the country’.²⁵ Others were born whilst their parents were away from Croydon during the Second World War: Leni Gillman in Leicestershire, David Percival in his mother’s hometown of Torquay in Devon.²⁶ Even for those born in Croydon during or prior to the war, however, early childhoods were frequently marked by evacuation or exit; in the case of Jean Tagg (born into a family of thirteen children in nearby Richmond, Surrey), the intervention of Barnardo’s as an infant meant that she was raised by a devout aunt in Northamptonshire.²⁷ Nor were those of my narrators born after the war, or those that avoided evacuation, raised entirely without the rural childhood imaginary – Marian Carty remembered rural holidays in her parents’ native Ireland, even if trips to Surrey were rarer.²⁸ Hamish MacColl, the son of the folk musician Ewan MacColl, spent his earliest years on the road with his parents, and can hardly have escaped the images of rural Britain and Ireland evoked in the traditional songs collected by his father.²⁹ Given the messiness of childhood memory, narrators born in the 1940s and 1950s, were often, literally or metaphorically, spatially or temporally, raised elsewhere.

Moreover, whilst the Croydon of their childhood had long been overtaken by the ‘abstract space’ – ‘the space of the bourgeoisie and of capitalism’, as Lefebvre described it – of the suburbs, it is worth being attentive to what the Finnish anthropologist Vincent Ialenti, cited by Ware, has called

²³ Ware, *Return of a Native*, p.395.

²⁴ Carter, *Shaking a Leg*, p.4.

²⁵ Interview with Norman Brown.

²⁶ Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman; Interview with David Percival.

²⁷ Interview with Jean Tagg.

²⁸ Interview with Marian Carty.

²⁹ Interview with Hamish MacColl.

'time-literacy'.³⁰ Some signs of the world which preceded Croydon's (sub)urbanisation do remain, whether in the borough's geology and topography or in its place names – 'often all we have left of the stories that once made them distinctive.'³¹ Located in north-eastern Surrey in the valley of the River Wandle, which rose from springs in and to the south of the town before flowing northwards towards Wandsworth and Putney, Croydon is perched between the North Downs and the hills of the Norwood Ridge. In the sixteenth century, the parish of Croydon had covered 9,000 acres 'and comprised a number of rural hamlets in addition to the town itself': Addiscombe, Bensham, Selsdon, Shirley, Waddon, and Woodside.³² Whilst a few place names do owe something to agriculture (the Anglo-Saxon words for woad and crocuses supposedly give their name to 'Waddon' and 'Croydon' respectively) most owe more to the hills and to the Great North Wood which once spanned much of the borough: witness the large number of places featuring 'hurst', 'combe' or 'coombe', as well as obvious references like Woodside and the Norwoods. Many of these places were little more than isolated farmsteads as late as the 1840s. Thornton Heath, then still a rural hamlet, has a name which suggests desolation, 'an absence of cultivation', as Ware noted of similarly-named Pill Heath, in Hampshire.³³ Even today, the borough has over 500 hectares of woodland and, collecting acorns or conkers as a child, it is hard not to be reminded of the 'immense time scales' of these trees' life-cycles and the 'multiple temporalities that co-exist within any given urban space'.³⁴

The Chartist printer and publisher of the *Communist Chronicle*, Thomas Frost, a child in 1820s Croydon, described a town 'still surrounded on the south and east by thick woods, in which rabbits and hedgehogs burrowed, and the cooing of the ring-dove formed an accompaniment to the melody of innumerable finches and warblers.'³⁵ Ruskin's *Praeterita* recalls his childhood visits to family in 1820s Croydon, 'by the rivers of Paradise', when his father was ill, 'to be petted by my

³⁰ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p.57; Ware, *Return of a Native*, p.33.

³¹ Ware, *Return of a Native*, p.14.

³² Dyson, 'The wealthier inhabitants of Croydon,' p.4.

³³ J. Morris, *Religion and Urban Change: Croydon, 1840-1914* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1992), p.16; Ware, *Return of a Native*, p.12.

³⁴ Grindrod, *Outskirts*, pp.78-81; Ira, 'Rethinking the genre,' p.16.

³⁵ T. Frost, *Reminiscences of a country journalist* (London: Ward, 1886), p.5.

homely aunt; and walk on Duppas Hill, and on the heather of Addington.³⁶ In some respects, this was a conventional view of rural England, of 'the quiet, the innocence, the simple plenty of the countryside: the metaphorical but also the actual retreat', and is typical of the role which Croydon served for those wishing to find respite from the major urban centres.³⁷ At the same time, however, this view of Croydon, Surrey, was marked by ambiguities. Ruskin, like his father 'a violent Tory of the old school', observed a 'shade of shyness' from his London-based parents towards their Croydonian relatives, who he described as 'totally uneducated, but entirely good and right-minded'.³⁸ If, for Ruskin, this was no insult, for left-wing activists, who tended to, in Williams' phrase, 'pick up that settling archival sentence about the "idiocy of rural life"', this would be a problem.³⁹ Whilst Frost had painted a pretty picture of the Croydon of his childhood, his tone was sardonic. The high street, in the 1820s, was 'dull rather than quiet', Tory candidates addressing a crowd by:

'the old butter market (now converted into a printing office) to which farmers' wives brought butter, eggs, and poultry, in that golden age of Tory-Radical politicians of [William] Cobbett's school, when farmers wore linen gaberdines, as their forefathers had done since the days of Egbert, and their wives did not disdain to milk the cows, make the butter, feed the poultry, and collect the eggs.'⁴⁰

The reference to Cobbett and an Anglo-Saxon king is revealing, Frost sending up the tendency to romanticise the lost rural past, and he described 'the Croydonians of that period' as 'eminently Conservative and unprogressive', noting that 'the single Whig candidate was in those days nearly always defeated in Surrey.'⁴¹ If not quite pastoral, this was still a Croydon where Croydon might have brought his flock to market, and where he, or rather his master, would likely have voted for the Tories. It was not a Croydon where later generations of left-wing activists would have hoped to

³⁶ Ruskin, *Praeterita*, pp.10-11.

³⁷ Williams, *The Country and the City*, p.33.

³⁸ Ruskin, *Praeterita*, p.1, p.11 & p.59.

³⁹ Williams, *The Country and the City*, p.51 & p.187.

⁴⁰ T. Frost, *Forty years' recollections: literary and political* (London: S. Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington, 1880), p.3.

⁴¹ Frost, *Forty years' recollections*, p.4 & p.9.

find success – and it is still identifiable, with both positive and negative associations, in the ‘mythic images of a lost golden age that,’ Celia Hughes has argued, ‘frequently accompany popular representations of fifties childhood.’⁴² If there were reasons to look fondly upon the countryside, a widespread view of the rural as modernism’s Other, its people ‘imagined for better or worse as stolid, static or stagnant’, has not made it a promising terrain for those with a preference for the progressive and the modern.⁴³

It is worth dwelling upon the specific connotations of Surrey because, as Ware notes, ‘until fairly recently counties were thought to produce different kinds of people who were physically distinguishable from each other.’⁴⁴ For Brian Nevill, growing up in New Addington on the Surrey–Kent border in the 1950s, the difference between the counties was clear, and familiar to me as somebody that moved between the two in my own childhood: Kent was ‘rough-hewn and raggedly rural, where Surrey is stockbroker and tidy’.⁴⁵ Whilst Surrey might be appropriate for a day-out for many London families, Kent brings up memories of the working-holidays made to its hop farms right through to the interwar period.⁴⁶ Similarly, Ware’s contrast between Surrey and Hampshire seems typical – Surrey ‘a metonym for another sort of inbetween place: boring commuter territory and excessive, showy wealth.’⁴⁷ It is important to remember that the rural Croydon of the earlier accounts was as much a site of retreat and leisure as it was a site for agriculture – particularly for the Archbishops of Canterbury, who summered in Croydon Palace and then, from 1807 to 1897, in Addington Palace, purchased to replace it. John Whitgift, the sixteenth-century archbishop most associated with the town, praised ‘the sweetness of the place, especially in the summer’, and was buried along with five other archbishops in Croydon Minster, whilst five nineteenth-century archbishops were buried in St Mary’s, Addington.⁴⁸ A *New Society* article in 1975 described Croydon as an ‘illogical promontory of Canterbury’s influence’: the

⁴² Hughes, *Young Lives on the Left*, p.35.

⁴³ Bluemel & McCluskey, ‘Introduction,’ p.3.

⁴⁴ Ware, *Return of a Native*, p.19.

⁴⁵ B. Nevill, *Boom Baby: the escape from 60s suburban culture* (London: McZine Publishing, 2013), p.15.

⁴⁶ See, for example: G. O’Neill, *Lost Voices: Memories of a Vanished Way of Life* (London: Arrow, 2006).

⁴⁷ Ware, *Return of a Native*, p.36.

⁴⁸ Church Extension Association, *The History of the Old Palace, Croydon* (Croydon: J. Bartlett, 1892), p.16.

Whitgift Foundation, established by the archbishop in 1596, is one of the town's largest landowners, with governors including both the Bishop and Vicar of Croydon and a representative of the Archbishop of Canterbury.⁴⁹ The Whitgift Foundation and Croydon's Ecclesiastical Commissioners would play an important role in Croydon's suburbanisation as people pursued what Graeme Davison has called the 'suburban idea', 'an ideology defined by the logic of avoidance – the determination to escape the vice, disease, ugliness, and violence of the city – as much as by the forces of attraction: the desire to embrace the virtue, health, beauty and seclusion of the countryside.'⁵⁰

In fact, at the start of the nineteenth century the strength of Anglican commitment in Croydon was limited – owing to the low population, there was not a single place of worship between the parish churches of Croydon and Lambeth.⁵¹ This would soon change, with nineteenth-century Evangelicals finding the slopes of both the Norwood Ridge and the Addington Hills a welcome escape.⁵² St. John the Evangelist in Shirley, established in 1856, was one of many Gothic churches to be built during the period; Ruskin's vintner father, John James, and his devoutly Evangelical mother, Margaret, were buried in its churchyard in 1864, and their graves remain prominent.⁵³ Ruskin, Timothy Chandler has commented, saw the experience of ecclesiastical architecture as 'marked neither by an expansion nor a refinement of perception, which we would associate with the sublime or the beautiful respectively, but by its restriction and obfuscation.'⁵⁴ Deeply influenced by a moralising Christianity, his experience is 'alienated from us by history'.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the continued symbolic power of the Gothic church is apparent in a childhood recollection of my narrator Hamish MacColl:

⁴⁹ D. White, 'The pleasure of Croydon,' *New Society* (29th May 1975), pp.525–526, p.525.

⁵⁰ Morris, *Religion and Urban Change*, p.21; G. Davison, 'The Suburban Idea and Its Enemies,' *Journal of Urban History*, vol.39, no.5 (2013), pp.829–847, p.830.

⁵¹ Frost, *Reminiscences of a country journalist*, p.6.

⁵² Davison, 'The Suburban Idea and Its Enemies,' p.831 & p.833.

⁵³ R.C.W. Cox, *Urban Development and Redevelopment in Croydon 1835–1940* (PhD Thesis, University of Leicester, 1970), p.329. Anecdotally, it is not uncommon for the grave of 'John James Ruskin', the father, to be confused with the grave of John Ruskin himself – buried in Coniston in the Lake District (which, incidentally, gave its name to Coniston Road in Addiscombe, where my parents owned their first house).

⁵⁴ Chandler, 'Feeling Gothic,' p.108.

⁵⁵ Chandler, 'Feeling Gothic,' p.112.

‘I went to a school in Shirley – St. John’s – and it was a really good school, but it was typically Church of England, and I remember going to church with the school and being really quite horrified because there were people buried in the floor and in the walls, and it was very dark and here they were, going up to the front of the church and eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Christ. It all seemed to me like black magic, it just seemed bizarre.’⁵⁶

The memory is vivid, summoning the image of suburban skeletons pushing up through the floor whilst worshippers engage in a medieval ritual – a deeper sense of the past embodied within the walls of a nineteenth-century church. The ethereal symbolism of the Gothic and of Anglicanism itself had only grown since Ruskin’s time; in fact, it was on a visit to (architecturally Palladian) Addington Palace that Henry James was told the tale by his friend, the archbishop Edward White Benson, which would become arguably the most famous English Gothic ghost story, ‘The Turn of the Screw’.⁵⁷ For Hamish, the son of a dedicated atheist, Ewan MacColl, the church served as a metonym for a sinister, old-fashioned Anglican establishment against which both rebelled: an establishment which originated in feudal England but was revived and reimagined during the reign of Victoria.⁵⁸ Anglicans like the Ruskins, or Peter Walker’s Edwardian grandparents in the interwar period, tended to be drawn towards Toryism; in nineteenth-century Croydon, their recuperative ‘quietism’ had been arrayed against ‘Liberal interventionism, especially the “coercive moral reform” of militant Nonconformity.’⁵⁹ The persistent strength of the Anglican establishment posed a problem not just for Nonconformists, however; both Catholic and Jewish people felt it to be exclusionary, with Simon Berlin’s father withdrawing him from the local Church of England school in the 1960s after witnessing an incident of antisemitism.⁶⁰ Note, on the other hand, that Leni Gillman’s mother – raised as an Irish Protestant but by this point a firm atheist – explained her daughter’s aforementioned ‘wanderings’ in the religious language of

⁵⁶ Interview with Hamish MacColl.

⁵⁷ H. James, *The Turn of the Screw and Other Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p.244. Incidentally, the primary school which my own father attended in Shirley was, in fact, called ‘Benson’.

⁵⁸ For Ewan MacColl’s own secular upbringing, see: B. Harker, *Class Act: The Cultural and Political Life of Ewan MacColl* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), p.11.

⁵⁹ Coetzee, ‘Villa Toryism Reconsidered,’ p.37.

⁶⁰ Interview with Simon Berlin.

'devilment', as if the Anglican suburb overrode her socialist scepticism.⁶¹ Croydon's Anglicanism, despite its relatively young churches, was experienced by MacColl as emblematic of backwardness, akin to that articulated by Frost a century earlier, and a source of exclusion – of non-Anglicans, of the budding left-wing activists, and, thanks to their 'quietism', of politics as such.

If James set his tale in an old country house, the suburbs have not been free from ghosts, either; a recent novel-history of the 1930s has investigated the circumstances surrounding 'the Thornton Heath poltergeist'.⁶² Croydon, 'the ghost capital of the East London Line', is a part of a suburban South London that inspired, in the work of Angela Carter, what Rosemary Hill has described as 'South Circular Gothic'.⁶³ A common theme within these stories is the relationship between hauntings, gender, and the ambiguous safety of the country/suburban home – an ambiguity to which Ruskin drew attention in his expressions of frustration with his mother, for despite being unafraid of 'either ghosts, thunder, or beasts', he felt that 'the bride and blinkers were never taken off me.'⁶⁴ The childhood visits to the countryside, described above, were associated in particular with female relatives like aunts and grandmothers.⁶⁵ The 'suburban idea', meanwhile, had thrived on the 'Evangelical cult of Home', and domestic life increasingly became central to understandings of national life in which the house was 'a special, still sacred, quasi-religious and in fact almost absolute space' – persisting into the post-war period of my narrators' childhoods.⁶⁶ The Primrose League had earlier had one of its largest branches in Croydon and its powerful

⁶¹ Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman.

⁶² K. Summerscale, *The Haunting of Alma Fielding* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020).

⁶³ C. Alderwick, 'Croydon: Most Haunted Borough,' *East London Lines* (15th April 2011), <https://www.eastlondonlines.co.uk/2011/04/croydon-most-haunted-borough/>, accessed 7th July 2022; Hill, 'Hairy Fairies'. There is a much wider literature, usually focused upon examples from American popular culture, on 'suburban Gothic'; see, for example: M. Dines, *The Literature of Suburban Change* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), pp.82-124.

⁶⁴ Ruskin, *Praeterita*, pp.28-29. On gender, ghost stories, and the suburbs, see: B. Newman, 'Getting Fixed: Feminine Identity and Scopic Crisis in "The Turn of the Screw",' *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, vol.26, no.1 (1992), pp.43-63; Summerscale, *The Haunting of Alma Fielding*, p.26. Another example, a weird-gunshoe novella in which a young boy in contemporary Thornton Heath hires a Lovecraftian detective to kill his abusive stepfather, and which I read prior to commencing this thesis, is: C. Khaw, *Hammers on Bone* (Manhattan: St. Martin's Press, 2016).

⁶⁵ Note, also, the significance of the interwar figure of the 'rural spinster' as discussed in: S. Deen, 'The Spinster in Eden: Reclaiming Civilisation in Interwar British Rural Fiction,' pp.135-148, in Bluemel & McCluskey, *Rural Modernity in Britain*.

⁶⁶ Davison, 'The Suburban Idea and Its Enemies,' p.832; Hughes, *Young Lives on the Left*, p.23; Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, pp.120-121, p.155 & pp.208-209.

appeals to 'God, Queen and Country' promoted a pastoral, suburban Conservatism.⁶⁷ These were the suburbs of D.H. Lawrence, whose 1912 suburban adultery novel, *The Trespasser*, was based on the experience of Helen Corke, a colleague from the Davidson Road School in Addiscombe, and who described Croydon as 'semi-rural', 'a beautiful modernized version of pastoral.'⁶⁸ Dines and Vermeulen suggest 'many of [Simone] de Beauvoir's assertions about women's apparent lack applies also to popular perceptions of the suburbs and suburbanites' – 'the feminine counterpart to cities' – but these are equally assertions which could have been applied to and were inherited from the countryside, the realm of 'Mother Nature', frequently gendered as feminine and subjected to (again recalling de Beauvoir's commentary) urban 'penetration'.⁶⁹

Nor were the suburbs of my narrators' childhoods, and the mythic Croydon, only gendered. Rather than the 'interlocking exploitation' of town and country which Williams felt characteristic of an earlier phase of development, suburbanisation formed part of 'a factual exploitation of the country as a whole by the city as a whole', as 'the processes of the city become in some respects self-generating', albeit sustained by an overseas empire: a London metropolis at the centre of an imperial metropole.⁷⁰ At the start of the nineteenth century, Croydon's population was beneath 6,000 but, as R.C.W. Cox noted, it 'was a place destined to expand rapidly in the nineteenth century by virtue of its geographical position' – the Surrey Iron Railway, opened in 1802, and the

⁶⁷ T. Judge, *Tory Socialism in English Culture, Politics and Society, 1870-1940* (London: Mentor Books, 2019), p.269.

⁶⁸ G. Pope, *All the Tiny Moments Blazing: A Literary Guide to Suburban London* (London: Reaktion Books, 2020), pp.135-139. For Carter's view of Lawrence and his influence on hers and preceding generations of 'grammar-school kids', see: Carter, *Shaking a Leg*, pp.649-655.

⁶⁹ Dines & Vermuelen, *New Suburban Stories*, p.7. For the association between the rural and the 'female principle', see, for example: Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p.141 & pp.409-410; Ware, *Return of a Native*, pp.221-258. The phrase 'urban penetration' has been widely used to describe urbanisation transnationally and across periods – see, for example: B.E. Marks, 'Rural response to urban penetration: Baltimore and St Mary's County, Maryland, 1790-1840,' *Journal of Historical Geography*, vol.8, no.2 (1982), pp.113-127. Note that de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* depicted penetration as the first act of violation of women by men: C.T. Léon, 'Simone de Beauvoir's Woman: Eunuch or Male?', *Ultimate Reality and Meaning*, vol.11, no.3 (1988), pp.196-211, p.201. This was an argument which she would later partially withdraw, but, as will be seen, if there is a simplification here it is paralleled in the common simplification of the relationship of countryside to town; for de Beauvoir's changing views, and a feminist criticism, see: J.P. Fuchs, 'Female Eroticism in "The Second Sex",' *Feminist Studies*, vol.6, no.2 (1980), pp.304-313.

⁷⁰ Williams, *The Country and the City*, p.71. For a useful overview of some of the arguments about the domestic economic consequences of British imperialism, including through the expanded market for British manufacturing and 'a massive redistribution of the world's resources from native peoples to Britain', see: M. Daunton, 'Britain's Imperial Economy,' *The Journal of Economic History*, vol.62, no.2 (2001), pp.476-485, pp.478-479.

1809 Croydon Canal, replaced in the 1830s by the London and Croydon Railway, brought it into closer connection with both its larger northern neighbour and further flung urban centres.⁷¹ The relocation of the Crystal Palace to Sydenham Hill (on the corner of the five boroughs of Croydon, Bromley, Southwark, Lambeth and Lewisham) after the Great Exhibition in 1851, and the construction of a housing estate (now the so-called 'East India Estate Conservation Area') on the grounds of the former Addiscombe Military Seminary, closed in 1861, gave Croydon's nineteenth-century suburban development further connections to empire.⁷² The earlier phase of suburbanisation, like the earlier phase of British imperialism to which it was connected, had its primary beneficiaries amongst the increasingly-interrelated aristocracy and bourgeoisie.⁷³ Already in 1845, 'commuting was a normal feature of life among the better-off sections of the community', including Lady Ashburton, the wife of a scion of the Baring banking family, or the sherry merchant John James Ruskin in nearby Herne Hill, where his son '[accepted] with resignation the aesthetic external surroundings of a London suburb'.⁷⁴ They are an indication of the extent to which the expansion of finance, foreign trade and the British empire, as well as the related construction of the railways, facilitated the growth of the commuting middle class which built 'villa-lined roads of Addiscombe and the Common' to replace the 'green pastures and cottage gardens' of Frost's, and perhaps Uncle Dick's, youth.⁷⁵ In Croydon, as in the South London suburbs to its north, 'geographic elevation was a good guide to social elevation as well' – the 'Snobs', 'those people who live in villas and are called gentlemen in common parlance', mostly resided in the hillier areas of Upper Norwood, physically as well as economically distant from the

⁷¹ N.A. Phelps et al, *Post-Suburban Europe*, p.172; Cox, *Urban Development and Redevelopment in Croydon*, p.3.

⁷² Its roads are named Outram, Havelock, Elgin, Clyde and Canning, after officers involved with the suppression of the 1857 Indian rebellion. For further discussion of the links between suburban road names and the empire of this period, see: R. Porter, *London: A Social History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp.326-327, quoted in T. Kuchta, *Semi-Detached Empire: The Literature and Culture of Suburbia in Britain and the Colonies* (PhD Thesis, Indiana University, 2003), p.41.

⁷³ This symbiosis is one of the central observations in the much-disputed 'Nairn-Anderson theses'; for an ongoing discussion of these, see: P. Anderson, 'Ukania Perpetua?', *New Left Review*, no.125 (2020), pp.35-107; D. Edgerton, 'Why the left must abandon the myth of British decline,' *New Statesman* (5th October 2021), <https://www.newstatesman.com/ideas/2021/10/why-the-left-must-abandon-the-myth-of-british-decline>, accessed 7th July 2022; P. Anderson, 'Edgerton's Britain,' *New Left Review*, no.132 (2021), pp.41-53.

⁷⁴ Cox, *Urban Development and Redevelopment in Croydon*, p.320; 'The Letters of Harriet, Lady Ashburton, to Thomas Carlyle,' *Carlyle Studies Annual*, no.26 (2010), pp.25-108, & no.27 (2011), pp.5-88; Ruskin, *Praeterita*, p.87.

⁷⁵ Frost, *Reminiscences of a country journalist*, pp.1-2.

working class in Broad Green and Whitehorse Manor.⁷⁶ Just as Surrey's hills had been playgrounds for earlier aristocrats and archbishops, Croydon's elevated areas proved popular amongst the beneficiaries of empire – securing a long-lasting sense that the hilltop suburbs were irredeemably 'bourgeois'.⁷⁷

Croydon was seen as 'a prime example of London's suburban development', Sidney Low predicting in 1891 that 'not one but a dozen Croydons will form a circle of detached forts around the central stronghold'.⁷⁸ 'When the well-to-do fled to the suburbs,' Davison explained, 'they sought to place a protective cordon between themselves and a class on whose labor they relied but increasingly sought to avoid.'⁷⁹ The new, upper-middle-class suburbanites had played the role of 'a reactionary vanguard' in a phenomenon which has been labelled 'Villa Toryism'.⁸⁰ For J.P.D. Dunbabin, the 'suburban shift, combined with an apparently growing Conservatism elsewhere in the south, brought South-East England (the most populous part of the country) firmly into the Conservative camp'.⁸¹ They had determined that:

'Preserving the dominance of the commuting sector was the surest way to avoid diluting the "quality" of its inhabitants, even if propagating this view entailed fictionalizing Croydon's development – denying its status as a town and insisting that its economic functions solely followed from, rather than partially preceded, the influx of commuting residents.'⁸²

In the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries, the suburbs continued to be regarded as bourgeois and suburbanites as 'increasingly more likely to vote for parties of the right and to hold attitudes on the right of the spectrum'.⁸³ As late as 1980, a Labour Party member told a parliamentary

⁷⁶ Coetzee, 'Villa Toryism Reconsidered,' p.38.

⁷⁷ Kruse & Sugrue, *The New Suburban History*, p.3.

⁷⁸ Coetzee, 'Villa Toryism Reconsidered,' p.33.

⁷⁹ Davison, 'The Suburban Idea and Its Enemies,' p.836.

⁸⁰ Coetzee, 'Villa Toryism Reconsidered,' p.32.

⁸¹ J.P.D. Dunbabin, 'British Elections in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, a Regional Approach,' *The English Historical Review*, vol.95, no.375 (1980), pp.241-267, p.261.

⁸² Coetzee, 'Villa Toryism Reconsidered,' p.37.

⁸³ R.A. Walks, 'City-suburban electoral polarization in Great Britain, 1950-2001,' *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, vol.30, no.4 (2005), pp.500-517, pp.500-502.

boundary review that people from Norbury had 'always given that kind of feeling that they are a cut above'; 'they call themselves Norbury and I think there is a certain amount of snob feeling in this, that they are citizens of Norbury.'⁸⁴ Jean Tagg remembered that the north of Croydon had always been 'very blue'.⁸⁵ As Coetzee pointed out, the idea that Croydon's Conservatism was 'sustained by a homogenous middle-class suburban presence was dubious enough in the 1880s and even more fanciful thereafter.'⁸⁶ Nevertheless, the suburban 'villas' built for the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie were a persistent symbol both of social segregation and of the strength of Conservatism in the borough.

As will be discussed more in Chapter Three, the twentieth century also saw the expansion of Croydon and the addition of places from a constituency then known as East Surrey (classified as 'rural' right into the 1930s), including the 'Coulsdon woodlands' mentioned in Betjeman's 'Love in a Valley'.⁸⁷ As waves of suburbanisation continued (already in 1886, Frost declared that 'Lord Ashburton had fled before the irruption of the builders') it was places like Shirley, Coulsdon and Purley which came to be seen as particularly middle-class, depicted in sitcoms like *Terry and June* (1979–1987): the world of the 'stockbroker belt', a land of 'affluence if not opulence, a comfortable prosperity if not an indiscrete privilege'.⁸⁸ This was 'where all the bankers and stockbrokers and the suchlike live', as Jean Tagg recalled.⁸⁹ At Lynda Graham's school in Selhurst, the 'kids that came from south Croydon were going to be the posh kids'; David Percival, too, remembered 'posh kids from Shirley' who he imagined came from Conservative-supporting households.⁹⁰ As the introduction to this section noted, these were some of the places most likely

⁸⁴ London, National Archives, AF 1/1910. For a further discussion of 'snobbery' and 'snobbishness', see: Jones, *The working class in mid-twentieth-century England*, p.58; Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, *Class, Politics, and the Decline of Deference in England*, pp.22-23 & p.119.

⁸⁵ Interview with Jean Tagg.

⁸⁶ Coetzee, 'Villa Toryism Reconsidered,' p.46.

⁸⁷ Griffiths, *Labour and the Countryside*, p.345; J. Bayley, 'The Best of Betjeman,' *London Review of Books*, vol.2, no.24 (1980), <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v02/n24/john-bayley/the-best-of-betjeman>, accessed 28th September 2020. For a further discussion of Betjeman and a comparison of 'Croydon' and 'Love in a Valley', see: Pope, *All the Tiny Moments Blazing*, p.139.

⁸⁸ Frost, *Reminiscences of a country journalist*, p.244; Phelps, 'On the Edge of Something Big,' p.461; Saunders, *Urban Politics*, p.237.

⁸⁹ Interview with Jean Tagg.

⁹⁰ Interview with Lynda and Martin Graham; Interview with David Percival.

to identify themselves with 'Surrey', and so it is hardly surprising that some of my narrators should have viewed 'Surrey' as an insult.

This section has traced the rural 'Golden Ages' imagined in the post-war childhoods of my narrators and others that would form part of the New Left(s) after 1956. Regardless of whether this 'mythic Croydon' was consciously located in the body of the borough itself, images of a 'Surreyified' countryside shaped some of their earliest memories.⁹¹ At the same time, through the process of nineteenth-century suburbanisation, Croydon retained and inherited many of the earlier associations of rurality and the pastoral. This is a time and place often regarded as lost. Unlike Betjeman, however, the 'mythic Croydon' of my narrators' childhoods was seen as a site of exclusion – a reminder of the backwards Anglicanism, bourgeois Conservatism, and dependence on empire of both Croydon and England. In spite of this pervasive and early sense of exclusion, and the confirmation of that sense electorally through much of the twentieth century, most of my narrators have continued (or returned) to make Croydon their home. For Vron Ware, an 'ambivalent mixture of attachment to and alienation from a small place feels like an opportunity to learn something, not about myself but about big things like life, death and the world.'⁹² Against the suburbanisation of the 'reactionary vanguard', later left-wing activists were able to recall a residual, urban Croydon in which they felt varying degrees of inclusion. Suburbanisation was not Croydon's only reality: its suburban expansion followed on from, rather than generating, its earlier nineteenth-century urban development. It is partly because of these residues that activists like Martin Graham do not replace the 'Surrey' on their envelopes with 'London' – insisting, instead, on 'Croydon, full stop.'⁹³

The delights of gas lamps

If the initial processes of suburbanisation were partially held responsible, by my narrators, for their childhood exclusions, it is worth returning attention to the Croydon which they are

⁹¹ For 'Surreyified', see: Ware, *Return of a Native*, p.350.

⁹² Ware, *Return of a Native*, p.6.

⁹³ Interview with Lynda and Martin Graham.

supposed to have displaced – and within whose remnants my narrators would feel more welcome. The Croydon which Ruskin visited as a child was a county town, a major commercial centre at the outset of the Industrial Revolution.⁹⁴ Williams pointed out that the association of childhood and spontaneity is not confined to images of the pastoral, and experiences of urban childhoods ('the delights of corner-shops, gas lamps, horsecabs, trams, piestalls: all gone, it seems, in successive generations') can possess 'the same real emotional substance as the brooks, commons, hedges, cottages, festivals of the rural scene.'⁹⁵ As Leni Gillman observed of her aforementioned, illicit journey to the town centre as a small child, 'Croydon was very important even as a three-year-old'.⁹⁶ The residual memory of an urban Croydon, so prominent in their childhood experiences, influenced the ways that the young activists of the New Left(s) would make sense of their surroundings as they turned the Victorian town centre into the site of their own political explorations in the post-war period.

Thomas Frost was born and 'first saw the light in the old, and then rather dull, town of Croydon' in 1821, describing it as 'a fair example of the towns of its class, urban centres of agricultural districts, before railways had connected them with the metropolis, or gas lighted their streets.'⁹⁷ Surrey Street market gained its charter in 1276, and featured prominently in the childhood memories of my narrators. Note, for instance, Hamish MacColl's recollection of the 1950s and 'Croydon when the underpass wasn't there, when that whole area was just open space. There were chestnut trees, there were wooden sidewalks, can you imagine that?'⁹⁸ He continued:

'You'd go down the hill to the market, where you'd turn right and on the corner was a coffee shop where they'd roast coffee, and the smell that would come out on a Saturday – and there'd be crowds of people, and there were tables on the street outside the shop, and the smell, and the street was *packed* with people, absolutely jampacked with people,

⁹⁴ Ruskin, *Praeterita*, pp.10–11; Dyson, 'The wealthier inhabitants of Croydon,' p.5; S. Creighton, 'Radical Croydon 1860s–1939: An introduction to the history of Croydon's labour, radical and socialist movements,' *Croydon Radical History Monograph*, no.2 (2016), p.3.

⁹⁵ Williams, *The Country and the City*, p.427.

⁹⁶ Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman.

⁹⁷ Frost, *Forty years' recollections*, p.2.

⁹⁸ Interview with Hamish MacColl.

moving about, just going shopping, looking in the windows, going for a coffee and a cake or whatever.’⁹⁹

Roy Lockett claimed that his maternal side were descended from a wealthy Jewish family that had once owned a chain of tailors’ shops; he recalled his grandmother telling him as a child, even though the shops had long closed by the 1950s, ‘if you’re ever in trouble in Croydon, son, just go to Stanley’s and say you knew Annie Stanley and they’ll look after you.’¹⁰⁰ The importance of female relatives in these childhood memories complicates and adds to the memories of mothers and grandmothers described in the previous section – the town, too, is presented as a space of feminine navigability, albeit ‘reduced’ and ‘subordinated’.¹⁰¹

To further unpick my narrators’ feelings about Croydon’s town centre, learned in childhood, it is necessary to pull back slightly to consider its formation amidst Croydon’s nineteenth-century urban development. The relationship between town and country in the initial period of the Industrial Revolution (and earlier) was reciprocal, as ‘most towns seem to have developed as an aspect of the agricultural order itself’ – as Lefebvre described, early growth in the productive forces ‘could only occur via the town-country relationship’.¹⁰² This reciprocity included a privileged role for the county town as a site of escape – not from the city, but from the countryside. In addition to a longstanding association of the town with the excitement of the market and the festival – a fair in central Croydon’s ‘Fair Field’ lasted until 1860 – and the specific opportunities posed by urban trades, the nineteenth century saw the town providing a relatively new and specific type of escape from the consequences of the ‘Golden Age of Farming’.¹⁰³ ‘Poor people and vagrants,’ Williams explained, ‘the casualties of a changing rural economy, or the hard-pressed or ambitious seeing in London some escape from their

⁹⁹ Interview with Hamish MacColl.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Roy Lockett.

¹⁰¹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, pp.376–377. Women’s contradictory feelings of urban safety, opportunity, excitement, and threat is explored in: L. Kern, *Feminist City* (London: Verso, 2021), pp.11–12. I would suggest that these arguments can be extended to children of any gender as similarly subordinated figures within patriarchal society.

¹⁰² Williams, *The Country and the City*, p.33; Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p.78.

¹⁰³ Cox, *Urban Development and Redevelopment in Croydon*, p.306.

subordinate destiny, were the explicit objects of exclusion from the developing city', but 'the general changes were of an order which made exclusion impossible.'¹⁰⁴ For those rural migrants that lived closer to Croydon, it was the obvious first choice, even if they moved on later.¹⁰⁵ For working-class newcomers to Croydon, then, the town represented a place of escape from the acute exploitation of the nineteenth-century countryside – just as it later served as a site of Leni Gillman's escape from the suburban home.

The Industrial Revolution, however, also changed the function of Croydon's town centre as its importance as an agricultural market declined relative to its shops and workplaces. The prominent French economist Jean-Baptiste Say visited Croydon in 1785 and drew its first street plan, and though he was not necessarily fond of the town, he returned in 1825 at the request of fellow economist James Mill.¹⁰⁶ By the 1840s, Frost adjudged, following the growth of the railways, Croydon showed 'evidence of social progress and intellectual vitality which had not been visible twenty years before', as 'mental progress had advanced in the same ratio as commercial activity.'¹⁰⁷ Printers like Frost were an important part of Croydon's small town working class, and printing was to remain a growth industry by the 1890s – indeed, Lockett would become an apprentice compositor in the 1950s.¹⁰⁸ Frost recalled that the members of the National Charter Association in the town 'were not very numerous, but they were thoroughly imbued with democratic ideas, and active and earnest in their dissemination.'¹⁰⁹ The growth of Croydon brought a small labour movement: the Workingmen's Club, formed in 1864, met at the Old Lecture Hall on Crown Hill, and later in the Gun Inn on Church Street, a meeting place still used by activists in the mid-twentieth century.¹¹⁰ It was an example of what Williams called 'the liberating and enlightening character of the modern city – where the first institutions and

¹⁰⁴ Williams, *The Country and the City*, p.211.

¹⁰⁵ Cox, *Urban Development and Redevelopment in Croydon*, p.294.

¹⁰⁶ B. Lancaster, 'Jean-Baptiste Say's First Visit to England (1785/6),' *History of European Ideas*, vol.41, no.7 (2015), pp.922-930, p.928.

¹⁰⁷ Frost, *Forty years' recollections*, p.28.

¹⁰⁸ Tichelar, 'Labour Politics in Croydon,' p.10; Interview with Roy Lockett.

¹⁰⁹ Frost, *Forty years' recollections*, p.28.

¹¹⁰ Creighton, 'Radical Croydon,' p.4.

directions of socialism were found', as the expansion of the working class and its access to newsprint provided the opportunity for its political organisation.¹¹¹

The emphasis on the crowd and on organicity and smell (a sense which Lefebvre saw as 'being eliminated' in the modern world) in the above quotation from MacColl comes through equally clearly in the Gillmans' descriptions of coffee shops like Kennard's and Wilson's, where 'the smell of roasting coffee would draw you like a magnet to the shop and they had these rotating cylinders with all different kinds of coffee'.¹¹² An archetypal colonial commodity, coffee was a powerful symbol of Croydon's place within a commercial empire, and still an exclusive product within it; as Leni Gillman observed, she was 'watching mesmerised, and smelling this wonderful smell called coffee, which my parents could never afford'.¹¹³ At the same time, however, coffee had a long association with progressive thought and milieus; Frost recounted a story of 'the coachman of a Conservative gentleman' who had attended a Chartist meeting as a spy, and sat quietly before leaving because 'coffee and lemonade were not the beverages to which he was accustomed.'¹¹⁴ 'Beer and Bible Toryism' was an important source of lower-middle-class and upper-working-class support for the Conservatives in the late nineteenth century, whilst the labour movement in Croydon received some teetotaler support; H.T. Muggerridge, in 1893, chose the Railway Temperance Hotel in West Croydon for the meeting which established the Croydon Socialist Society.¹¹⁵ My narrators' childhood memories of coffee, therefore, are memories which – whilst marked by exclusion – speak to the possibilities of an enlightened and convivial (and sober) Croydon, in which left-wing politics might have an active place.

Similarly, Lockett's association of small, local employers – in the form of the Stanley family – with a sense of safety harks back to the nineteenth-century alliance between a local, Liberal middle class and a small labour movement in which, like in London, 'working class Liberalism was strongly

¹¹¹ Williams, *Politics and Letters*, p.315.

¹¹² Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p.197; Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman.

¹¹³ Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman.

¹¹⁴ Frost, *Forty years' recollections*, p.149.

¹¹⁵ Coetzee, 'Villa Toryism Reconsidered,' p.37; West, *The beginnings of Labour in Croydon*, p.3; Creighton, 'Radical Croydon,' p.10.

entrenched'.¹¹⁶ Peter Saunders argued that 'at least since 1849, the town's governing bodies have invariably been controlled by varying types of businessmen', but the differences between these types could be important.¹¹⁷ Relations between the nascent labour movement and the Liberals were close.¹¹⁸ Partly as a result of these alliances, the political balance within Croydon began to tilt away from the Conservatives, as 'a party articulating the interests of the countryside might be thought [...] to be backing the wrong horse' in an increasingly urban and industrial England.¹¹⁹ East Surrey, Croydon's parliamentary constituency, elected a Whig or Liberal to at least one of its seats from 1832-1837 and 1847-1871 – a sharp contrast with the Croydon of Frost's 1820s childhood.

Liberal politicians, led by the first mayor (and later convicted fraudster) Jabez Spencer Balfour, pushed for the borough's 1883 incorporation in the face of the Conservatives' and Church of England's opposition.¹²⁰ Moreover, Liberal-supporting middle-class women provided a 'strong cohort of women Poor Law Guardians', and the nineteenth-century Liberals were decisive in the redevelopment of the market 'from an insanitary, lawless slum into an area of commercial prosperity and civic pride.'¹²¹ The changes which the Liberals oversaw could be dramatic – Frost noted in 1886 that 'old inhabitants who have been absent for thirty or forty years find themselves lost in the new streets between the Old Town and the southern portion of High Street' – but later left-wing activists generally had fond memories of the town centre which they produced.¹²² Cox's study of this redevelopment quotes a councillor, Hinton, in 1884, to give a sense of the ambition motivating, for example, the widening of the high street:

'instead of the fair Croydonians going across the water to see the Boulevards of Paris, the fair Parisians would come across the English Channel to see the Boulevards of Croydon.'¹²³

¹¹⁶ Tichelar, 'Labour Politics in Croydon,' p.3.

¹¹⁷ Saunders, *Urban Politics*, p.211.

¹¹⁸ F.G. West, *The beginnings of Labour in Croydon: The Pioneers – 1890-1918* (unpublished manuscript, 1979), p.2 & p.4; Creighton, 'Radical Croydon,' p.11; Tichelar, 'Labour Politics in Croydon,' p.3.

¹¹⁹ Goetzee, 'Villa Toryism Reconsidered,' p.30.

¹²⁰ White, 'The pleasure of Croydon,' p.525.

¹²¹ R. Davidson, 'A local perspective: the women's movement and citizenship, Croydon 1890s-1939,' *Women's History Review*, vol.29, no.6 (2020), pp.1016-1033, pp.1019-1020; Cox, *Urban Development and Redevelopment in Croydon*, p.5.

¹²² Frost, *Reminiscences of a country journalist*, pp.1-2.

¹²³ Cox, *Urban Development and Redevelopment in Croydon*, p.204.

There was clearly a familiar element of bathos in this, but the comment – ‘greeted with both laughter and applause’ – was indicative of Croydon’s developing ‘sense of collective responsibility’, based on the alliance between the Liberals and the labour movement.¹²⁴ In the 1880s, Jabez Spencer Balfour had advocated for a daily workman’s train and for Croydon’s trams, and public transport proved a persistent site and symbol of social mixing, encouraging working-class people to move between different parts of Croydon.¹²⁵ Trams (which stopped in 1951, when he was nine) were a major image in Peter Gillman’s memory of the town which he visited with his mother; the significance of buses for his future wife, as she attempted to escape the suburban home, has already been explained.¹²⁶ There has been an enduring sense of public transport (and specifically buses and trams as opposed to the more complex, class-inflected associations of trains) as a leveller – note Williams’ opening to ‘Culture is Ordinary’ and the bus stop ‘outside the cathedral’.¹²⁷ Again, the Liberals with the support of a subordinate working class had succeeded in rendering the town centre navigable – not just for the nineteenth-century working class, but for my narrators.

However, public transport had been a major point of contention in the 1885 general election campaign: the trams sat poorly with a growing commuter electorate that had specifically sought out distance from the working class.¹²⁸ These divisions were reflected in the local press’ attitudes towards redevelopment: ‘the *Croydon Advertiser* and the *Croydon Chronicle*, both avowedly Liberal, supported the various schemes; whereas the *Croydon Guardian*, staunchly Conservative, invariably opposed them.’¹²⁹ William Grantham, the Conservative candidate, ‘amplified “vestryism” during the 1885 campaign to designate the inability of Balfour (and, by extension, most local Liberals) to grasp what representing Croydon’s interests really meant.’¹³⁰ Whilst the

¹²⁴ Cox, *Urban Development and Redevelopment in Croydon*, p.204 & pp.248-249.

¹²⁵ Coetzee, ‘Villa Toryism Reconsidered,’ p.37.

¹²⁶ Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman.

¹²⁷ R. Williams, *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism* (London: Verso, 1989), p.3.

¹²⁸ Coetzee, ‘Villa Toryism Reconsidered,’ p.36.

¹²⁹ Cox, *Urban Development and Redevelopment in Croydon*, p.242.

¹³⁰ Coetzee, ‘Villa Toryism Reconsidered,’ p.37.

Liberals, supported by the small labour movement, succeeded in driving forward Croydon's redevelopment, in 1885 they were overwhelmed by the growing commuter vote, with Grantham beating Balfour by more than a thousand votes; a Conservative-supported candidate won every subsequent election, often uncontested, until the constituency was divided in 1918. Croydon's 'Haussmanization', to echo Ulas Ince and the above comparison to Paris, was not to be matched by its 'barricades' – although the town which the Liberals had built was not torn down either, their 'urban monuments' remaining for the benefit of successive generations.¹³¹

This section has shown the ways that the town centre could be understood as the product of both capital and labour, and of a growing sense of Croydon as an independent civic space. It has situated the childhood memories of the post-war activists, fond of this Croydon, within the residues of the town's nineteenth-century urbanisation. After 1885, however, this was a Croydon where the town itself – 'once the forcing-house of accumulation, fountainhead of wealth and centre of historical space' – was perennially at risk, as Lefebvre warned, of disintegrating; its centre, so important to the left-wing activists' childhood memories, mentioned in neither of Betjeman's Croydon poems, bypassed on the way to London.¹³² As Williams argued, though, the importance of the strength of these memories of inclusion and exclusion is 'not only that these are childhood views, which contemporary adult experience contradicts or qualifies; but that a process of human growth has in itself been deformed, by these deep internal directions of what an adult consciousness must be, in this kind of using, consuming, abstracting world.'¹³³ The memory of the organic, spontaneous, exciting and novel in the town centre is an indication of the extent to which these, rather than the pastoral Croydon highlighted by Betjeman, were seen as eliminated or distorted in the Croydon which the left-wing activists experienced as teenagers and even more as adults. Yet if it was the town centre which left-wing activists have remembered most fondly, that does not mean that its greener, suburban streets have not held a conflicted appeal of their own – it is these suburban streets, and not the town centre or even the more built-up

¹³¹ Ulas Ince, 'Politics of History,' p.10 & pp.20-21.

¹³² Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p.30.

¹³³ Williams, *The Country and the City*, p.428.

northern areas of the borough, to which many of the left-wing activists that I interviewed have returned as they have got older.

‘The Superman has been found’

Whilst it was the town centre which dominated activists’ childhood memories, indicating an affinity for the urban, their feelings about suburbia remained complex – not least because of their parents or grandparents, who had often made the decision to move to Croydon in the first place. For Michael Tichelar, Croydon’s suburbanisation was the principal reason that ‘Labour Croydon has never managed to achieve local or national representation for any sustained period of time’ – but it also contributed to the growth of a progressive middle class and a markedly left-wing labour movement.¹³⁴ As Frost’s reference to Cobbett had implied, there was a longer anti-capitalist tradition of romanticisation of the countryside, and hence in compromised fashion of suburbia, to which left-wing activists were drawn, and which partly shaped the suburban streets in which they have lived. As well as, and as part of, the ‘avoidance’-seeking middle class described by Davison, suburbanisation drew to Croydon progressives who acted as patrons to its growing labour movement, itself recomposed as the working class changed to meet the needs of the suburban residents and as working-class people opted to move to the suburbs themselves.¹³⁵ This was an emergent sense of Croydon as a best-of-both-worlds, a meeting point of town and country, and of the progressive middle class and the working class in whom they invested their hopes. It was an accommodating suburban vision with which some narrators would make peace as they got older – motivated to follow the ‘normative trajectory’ of their parents and grandparents by memories of suburban and rural childhoods which were, if not remembered particularly fondly, at least familiar and reassuring.¹³⁶

Despite their reservations about suburban childhoods, and their awareness of the political proclivities of their neighbours, most of my narrators chose to return to suburban Croydon as

¹³⁴ Tichelar, ‘Labour Politics in Croydon,’ p.17.

¹³⁵ Davison, ‘The Suburban Idea and Its Enemies,’ p.830.

¹³⁶ Benson, ‘Trajectories of middle-class belonging,’ p.3103; Watt, ‘Living in an oasis,’ p.2882.

they got older. The Gillmans eventually moved away from the 'very busy main roads' in Clapham to raise their children, back to 'a house near South Norwood lake, and the big park there which was just a lovely environment' and 'a huge garden' – 'a very suburban environment compared to the urban concentration of Clapham.'¹³⁷ Lynda Graham, for whom a trip to the Shirley Hills had been 'a treat' as a child, had lived in Woodmansterne near Banstead, in Surrey, with her first husband, and then with Martin in Croham.¹³⁸ Narratives of these returns could be self-deprecating: Martin Graham described Croydon's 'lovely bit of greenery in the middle' as 'tremendous', but laughed about the fact that it had 'a lot of posh houses at the south', where they lived.¹³⁹ Even Marian Carty, one of the more urban-oriented of my narrators (she reported that she wouldn't have gone to Surrey as a young person because she was from 'Croydon, innit') said that she had become more likely to go to country pubs near Oxted, where her brother lives, as she got older.¹⁴⁰ Given their childhood feelings of exclusion from the countryside and the suburb, this might seem surprising – perhaps indicative of another common 'trajectory', with people often regarded as becoming more right-wing (and possibly re-evaluating childhood memories) as they get older.¹⁴¹ However, if, as Yow points out, 'people tend with the passage of time to be more, rather than less, candid', it is worth investigating whether there was a basis in activists' early memory for a positive but distinctively left-wing assessment of the suburbs.¹⁴²

Dylan Trigg noted that that 'we might be tempted to think that a person living in suburbia would have a deficient and inauthentic way of being in place quite apart from how they actually experience their home'.¹⁴³ Yet if 'home is decidedly palatial inasmuch as it serves as a point of attachment for the dweller', then many people (including left-wing activists like the Gillmans and the Grahams) did feel attached to Croydon as their home, albeit an attachment which was

¹³⁷ Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman.

¹³⁸ Interview with Lynda and Martin Graham.

¹³⁹ Interview with Lynda and Martin Graham.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Marian Carty.

¹⁴¹ Some evidence for a connection between ageing and an increased likelihood of support for Conservatism – not something that any of my narrators could be accused of! – is provided in: J. Tilley & G. Evans, 'Ageing and generational effects on vote choice: Combining cross-sectional and panel data to estimate APC effects,' *Electoral Studies*, vol.33 (2014), pp.19-27.

¹⁴² Yow, *Recording Oral History*, pp.19-20.

¹⁴³ Trigg, 'Place and Non-Place,' p.134.

frequently understood through a sense of detachment.¹⁴⁴ Whilst left-wing activists have tended not to see themselves as shaped by suburban spaces, given those spaces' association with right-wing politics if they are associated with any politics at all, these contradictory experiences of attachment and detachment were important for the making of activists who, despite their awareness of exclusion, have continued to make places like Croydon their homes. Again, it is necessary to peel back some of the layers of Croydon's suburban history to understand these ambivalent feelings. 'By the early 1900s,' Phelps et al. claimed, 'Croydon had evolved from a physically non-contiguous market town to a residential suburb and part of the continuous urban fabric of greater London.'¹⁴⁵ The steady stream of people moving from Croydon towards London in an earlier phase of urbanisation had become, by that point, 'an ebb tide', and the middle class was preponderant.¹⁴⁶ From 1891 to 1901, Croydon was one of the four fastest growing communities in England and Wales, going from a population of 20,000 in 1851 to 134,000 in 1901, and then continuing to grow until it started to level out at over 230,000 in the 1930s.¹⁴⁷ By 1911, according to Morris, 26 percent of Croydon's inhabitants had been born in London.¹⁴⁸ If suburban Croydon was shaped by the 'logic of avoidance', however, it was a logic which has held an appeal for progressives as well as for 'the well-worn image of the suburban middle class as isolated and reactionary' – a logic of avoiding the consequences of capitalist urbanisation which encouraged my narrators' parents and grandparents, and later my narrators themselves, to consider the semi-detached (or semi-attached) solutions which the suburb provided for the problems of the city.¹⁴⁹

Romanticism, central to the 'suburban idea', was not the exclusive property of the right.¹⁵⁰

Ruskin, for example, was a Romantic critic of capitalism, and an ally to working-class education and organisation as well as conservation – he declared himself 'a Communist of the old school',

¹⁴⁴ Trigg, 'Place and Non-Place,' p.129.

¹⁴⁵ Phelps et al, *Post-Suburban Europe*, p.196.

¹⁴⁶ Cox, *Urban Development and Redevelopment in Croydon*, p.363; S. Davies & B. Morley, *County Borough Elections in England and Wales, 1918-1938: A Comparative Analysis, Volume 3: Chester-East Ham* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p.147.

¹⁴⁷ Tichelar, 'Labour Politics in Croydon,' pp.5-6; Davies & Morley, *County Borough Elections in England and Wales, 1918-1938: A Comparative Analysis, Volume 3*, p.139.

¹⁴⁸ Morris, *Religion and Urban Change*, p.23.

¹⁴⁹ Jeffrey, 'The suburban nation,' p.191.

¹⁵⁰ Davison, 'The Suburban Idea and Its Enemies,' p.830.

'reddest also of the red'.¹⁵¹ William Morris built his Red House in the South London suburb of Bexleyheath, and his work influenced the Arts and Crafts design of the Whitgift estate, built in the 1930s, as well as the interior decoration of innumerable Croydon homes; my narrator Peter Walker continues to be involved with William Morris House, a former Victorian family home, in Wimbledon.¹⁵² Nor was Anglican suburbanization simply the expansion of 'the Conservative Party at prayer', as growing numbers of clergymen converted to socialism in the late nineteenth century and interwar period.¹⁵³ Peter Walker's father, James, whose role in the Croydon labour movement was to be considerable, had met his mother, Grace (the daughter of those 'Edwardian Tories' mentioned earlier), as part of the Anglican Pacifist Fellowship in the 1930s, with Cuthbert Bardley (later Bishop of Croydon and then Coventry) their minister at Christchurch Streatham – which had windows designed by the socialist Walter Crane.¹⁵⁴ Given the contribution which socialist aesthetes (following Ruskin in attempting to address both the division of labour and the impact of capitalist urbanisation on the countryside) had made to the material forms of the suburbs, left-wing activists could feel a certain attachment to Croydon's suburban streets as well as to its town centre.

Nor was the contribution of suburban progressives like Ruskin or Morris limited to aesthetic design. As Williams explained, 'the gentleman amateur, the dilettante patron [...] were at a pivotal moment in English culture: launched and supported by bourgeois trade but not yet flattened into professional and business routines and conformities.'¹⁵⁵ Croydon drew visiting Romantics like Ruskin and Thomas Carlyle, and both Camille Pissarro and Émile Zola spent time in Upper Norwood; Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, born in 1875 to an English woman and a Sierra Leonean Krio doctor, grew up in Croydon and was named for the Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Whilst the political commitments of these figures could be uneven, many of them

¹⁵¹ O'Gorman, 'Introduction,' p.xvi.

¹⁵² Interview with Peter Walker. My sister and niece live a ten-minute walk from the Red House, at the time of writing.

¹⁵³ Judge, *Tory Socialism*, p.91.

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Peter Walker.

¹⁵⁵ R. Williams, 'Ruskin among others,' *London Review of Books*, vol.7, no.11 (1985), <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v07/n11/raymond-williams/ruskin-among-others>, accessed 1st April 2021.

shared with Ruskin a belief in overcoming (or reimagining) class divides. Georgina King Lewis (a Temperance activist whose considerable importance for Croydon's labour movement will be discussed below) was the daughter of a minister and sister of the co-founder of the Congregationalist publishing house Hodder & Stoughton, and there was in Croydon a 'broader ethical socialist movement' featuring 'a whole range of religious and social organizations which can be defined as "Progressive"'.¹⁵⁶ A short story of 1909 by the literary critic and philosopher G.K. Chesterton begins with the following: 'Readers of Mr. Bernard Shaw and other modern writers may be interested to know that the Superman has been found. I found him; he lives in South Croydon.'¹⁵⁷ In this text, Croydon has become emblematic of a kind of suburban middle-class progressivism, typified in the story by Lady Hypatia Smythe-Browne (interested in Zoroaster), and her partner (a geologist and pioneer of 'Neo-Individualist Eugenics'), Dr. Hagg: the parents, in 1894, of the supposed 'Superman'.¹⁵⁸ Chesterton was taking aim at people like George Bernard Shaw, H.G. Wells and his Fabian sister-in-law, Ada – who later established the Cecil Houses, named for his deceased brother, and died in a nursing home in Croydon in 1962. The Fabians had a significant connection to Croydon's ethical socialist movement. Croydon Brotherhood Church was formed in 1894 with the support of members of the Fellowship of the New Life (whose printing press was based in Thornton Heath), which had one of Muggeridge's sons and the locally-resident sexologist (and Fabian eugenicist) Havelock Ellis as members; the Ruskin Labour Church (1897-1905) is a further reminder of Ruskin's continuing influence.¹⁵⁹ As Jenny Fryman explained, the Brotherhood Church made use of the (Evangelical, though Wesleyan) Salvation Army building, and 'the community at Croydon seems to have played an important role in many radical and back-to-the-land initiatives during the later part of the 1890s.'¹⁶⁰ She continued:

¹⁵⁶ Creighton, 'Radical Croydon,' p.18; Tichelar, 'Labour Politics in Croydon,' p.4; G. Plym, 'The Late Mrs. King Lewis,' *Western Morning News and Mercury* (15th December 1924), p.3.

¹⁵⁷ G.K. Chesterton, 'How I Found the Superman,' *Daily News* (1909), <http://www.gkc.org.uk/gkc/books/HIFTS.html>, accessed 30th September 2020.

¹⁵⁸ Chesterton, 'How I Found the Superman.'

¹⁵⁹ Creighton, 'Radical Croydon,' pp.5-6.

¹⁶⁰ J. Fryman, *William Morris and Edward Carpenter: Back to the Land and the Simple Life, 1880-1910* (PhD Thesis, University of Gloucester, 2002), p.113.

'In parallel to Croydon's rise as a new, prosperous and conventional suburb of London, it also became the location of co-operative ventures and shops, progressive educational experiments and the home of radical printing presses'.¹⁶¹

Morris suggests that the rise of 'unorthodox Croydon' may have been connected not just to arrivals from London, 'where an extremely wide range of small denominations and religious groups could be found', but also the 'small eccentric religious communities' which could survive in rural parts of Surrey and Kent.¹⁶² By the turn of the century, Croydon had become associated with middle-class social reformers that, rather than seeking separation from the working class, regarded it as the agent of social change – as their 'Superman', which they had birthed – capable of overcoming the contradiction between town and country and restoring through labour a sense of dignity and authenticity.

The identification of the 'Superman' rested partly upon the late-nineteenth-century growth of the working class in areas like Croydon, as the class-segregationist middle class started to require a working class which was close enough to service their needs. Servants 'increasingly made up a large section of the population' – as late as 1931, Davies and Morley found that there were 12,000 female domestic servants in the town, comprising 35 percent of all paid female work.¹⁶³ Similarly, suburbanisation was a boon to Croydon's building trade, its 'staple industry', with over half of all tradespeople between 1860 and 1900 involved in the upkeep or furnishing of houses.¹⁶⁴ By 1931, there were 10,000 men working in building trades, predominantly for small employers.¹⁶⁵ Joan Matlock's great-grandfather, a physic gardener in Mitcham, was therefore in a fairly typical

¹⁶¹ Fryman, *William Morris and Edward Carpenter*, p.113.

¹⁶² Morris, *Religion and Urban Change*, pp.98-99.

¹⁶³ Creighton, 'Radical Croydon,' p.4; Davies & Morley, *County Borough Elections in England and Wales, 1918-1938: A Comparative Analysis, Volume 3*, p.141.

¹⁶⁴ R. Ferguson, *The emergence of a labour movement – Croydon 1880-1900* (MA Thesis, Birkbeck College, 1980), p.3; Davies & Morley, *County Borough Elections in England and Wales, 1918-1938: A Comparative Analysis, Volume 3*, p.140.

¹⁶⁵ Davies & Morley, *County Borough Elections in England and Wales, 1918-1938: A Comparative Analysis, Volume 3*, p.141.

suburban working-class occupation.¹⁶⁶ Matlock grew up with an awareness of a historic expulsion from the land:

‘it had been done to people, the removal of common land [...] poor people had grazed a pig or a few other animals on the common, had been able to collect firewood, and then suddenly you could have the most heinous penalties, deportation and stuff for doing what you and your forebears had done for centuries.’¹⁶⁷

If this is a reminder of the sense of exclusion associated with the rural, it is also suggestive of the hope of return – memories of those ‘heinous penalties’ kept alive by events like the Tolpuddle Martyrs Festival, held annually since 1934, as well as the more enjoyable aspects of childhood visits to the countryside described above and in Carolyn Steedman’s *Landscape for a Good Woman*.¹⁶⁸ As Clare Griffiths has argued in her study of the Labour Party’s attitudes towards the countryside, it was ‘an idealized world, a favoured setting for leisure, the pointed contrast to crowded, unpleasant, and ill-planned urban development, and a metaphor for a better quality of life.’¹⁶⁹ Many socialists, including Frederick Engels, saw the abolition of ‘the antithesis between town and country’ as necessary for the completion of ‘the emancipation of humanity from the chains which its historic past has forged’.¹⁷⁰ From this perspective, the growth in the suburban working class would have satisfied, in a compromised way, this working-class desire to escape the city and to gain access to a version, however suburbanised, of the countryside.¹⁷¹

This suburban working class, in concert with both the nineteenth-century Liberals and the new suburban progressives, did contribute to the growth of a modest labour movement dominated by construction workers. Their marches, in the 1890s, typically culminated in Croydon’s parks,

¹⁶⁶ Interview with Joan Matlock.

¹⁶⁷ Interview with Joan Matlock.

¹⁶⁸ C. Griffiths, ‘Remembering Tolpuddle: Rural History and Commemoration in the Inter-War Labour Movement,’ *History Workshop Journal*, no.44 (1997), pp.144–169; C. Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman* (London: Virago, 1986), pp.31–34.

¹⁶⁹ Griffiths, *Labour and the Countryside*, p.79.

¹⁷⁰ F. Engels, *The Housing Question* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975 [1872]), p.92.

¹⁷¹ Compare with evidence from the 1960s for persistent working-class fantasies of escape to ‘village shops, country pubs, smallholdings, and even chicken farms’: Lawrence, *Me, Me, Me?*, pp.109–110.

especially Duppas Hill – another reason for the significance of green spaces.¹⁷² In 1902, the Croydon Labour Electoral Council was established to contest elections, and a year later, five of the town's 36 councillors were members, along with three members of the Board of Guardians.¹⁷³ In 1904, a newspaper, the *Croydon Citizen*, was established.¹⁷⁴ The new labour movement's electoral success reached a high point in 1906 with Sidney Stranks – a stonemason supported by the newly-formed Labour Representation Committee (LRC) – winning 4,007 votes in the general election, won by the Conservative-endorsed Liberal Unionist candidate, H.O. Arnold-Forster.¹⁷⁵ Far from causing Labour's electoral weakness, suburbanisation seemed to be playing a major role in the labour movement's electoral growth.

Chesterton's short story, however, was mocking and pessimistic. 'The whole universe,' Chesterston reported his Dr. Hagg saying of the fifteen-year-old 'Superman', was 'weeping over the frustration of its most magnificent birth' – the narrator, opening a door and letting in a draught, kills a creature which 'was not of any human shape', the death emblematic of the weakness and incoherence of its parents' pet projects.¹⁷⁶ 1909, the year of the story's publication, was a disastrous election for the labour movement in Croydon. The 'Graysonite' friend of Keir Hardie, Frank Smith, imposed as candidate by the Independent Labour Party (ILP), won a mere 886 votes, because of what Tichelar called 'a complex breakdown in the alliance between socialists, Progressives and trade unionists'; the *Croydon Citizen* folded in the same year.¹⁷⁷ In the years preceding 1909, the socialist movement in Croydon had started to splinter along both class and political lines as the older allegiance to the Liberals conflicted with the explicitly socialist and often anti-Liberal politics of both the ILP (formed in 1905) and the Social Democratic Federation (SDF, which the Croydon Socialist Society had been reformed into in 1896).¹⁷⁸ The 1906 election marked the beginning of problems in the relationship between the Liberals and the

¹⁷² Creighton, 'Radical Croydon,' pp.8-9; Tichelar, 'Labour Politics in Croydon,' p.3.

¹⁷³ Creighton, 'Radical Croydon,' p.13; Tichelar, 'Labour Politics in Croydon,' p.3.

¹⁷⁴ Tichelar, 'Labour Politics in Croydon,' p.3.

¹⁷⁵ Creighton, 'Radical Croydon,' p.16; Tichelar, 'Labour Politics in Croydon,' p.3.

¹⁷⁶ Chesterton, 'How I Found the Superman.'

¹⁷⁷ Tichelar, 'Labour Politics in Croydon,' p.3.

¹⁷⁸ Ferguson, *The emergence of a labour movement*, p.17; Tichelar, 'Labour Politics in Croydon,' p.3; Creighton, 'Radical Croydon,' p.16.

labour movement, as 'Croydon's propertied classes, of whatever political hue, vilified the first Labour councillors'.¹⁷⁹ Croydon's working class, though it was growing, was not to prove the 'Superman' that middle-class socialists might have hoped – whilst, as Jon Lawrence observed of nineteenth-century Wolverhampton, Edwardian Liberals and the emergent electoral labour movement were riven by disputed claims to be the representative of 'progressivism'.¹⁸⁰ Michael Tichelar described the SDF's decision to run its own candidates in that year as 'a wild chase after the impossible'.¹⁸¹ As early as Chesterton's short story of 1909, then, there was a perceived connection between the suburban weakness of left-wing politics and the extent of its local radicalism – the futile progressivism in whose death Chesterton's narrator detected 'a hoot of laughter in the high wail of the wind'.¹⁸²

However, the alliance between suburban progressives and the nascent labour movement was to have one other long-lasting consequence: the establishment of Ruskin House, perhaps the site in Croydon to which activists have felt the most consistent sense of attachment. The first building – the former Railway Temperance Hotel, on the corner of St. Michaels and Station Road in West Croydon, mentioned above – was purchased in 1912 by the Croydon Trades and Labour Council with a £1200 donation from Georgina King Lewis.¹⁸³ As Peter Walker recalled, though mistaking the 1919 'old Victorian building' for the 1912 one, 'a woman heard that trade union branches were meeting above pubs and she was teetotal and so she gave this house for Labour and trade union movement'.¹⁸⁴ With Muggeridge as the first president, and the requirement not to serve alcohol administered by the Croydon United Temperance Council, the building – named Ruskin House – served as a base for over 50 trade unions before it moved location in 1919 to a former residence, 'Netherton', on the corner of Poplar Walk and Wellesley Road.¹⁸⁵ Ruskin House, since

¹⁷⁹ Tichelar, 'Labour Politics in Croydon,' p.3 & p.14; Coetzee, 'Villa Toryism Reconsidered,' p.42.

¹⁸⁰ Lawrence, 'The Complexities of English Progressivism,' p.148.

¹⁸¹ Tichelar, 'Labour Politics in Croydon,' p.3.

¹⁸² Chesterton, 'How I Found the Superman.'

¹⁸³ Topman, *A Study of the Rise and Decline of Selected Labour Halls*, p.29; Creighton, 'Radical Croydon,' p.18.

¹⁸⁴ Interview with Peter Walker.

¹⁸⁵ Topman, *A Study of the Rise and Decline of Selected Labour Halls*, p.30; E. Daisley & M. Tiedemann, *Ruskin House: A History 1919-1999* (Croydon: Jupiter Associates, 1999), p.8.

1967 situated in the former Coombe Hill House on the corner of Coombe Road and Wellesley Road, not far from central Croydon, is currently on its third incarnation. Although the specific building has changed, Ruskin House essentially remains (like 'Netherton') an example of a sought-after suburban property, an 'elegant well-proportioned red brick house' which had previously served as home, from 1851 to 1880, to Baron Robert Amadeus Heath, the Italian consul general and a contemporary of Ruskin.¹⁸⁶

Given the original purposes for which it was designed, it might be assumed that some friction would be felt between activists and Ruskin House as a space, but feelings were typically warm. Not every view of Ruskin House was wholly positive – Lynda Graham preferred those that happened in people's actual homes.¹⁸⁷ Norman Brown, though, remembered it as one of his favourite places to socialise in Croydon, and Marian Carty called it 'such a beautiful place [...] with the gardens and everything.'¹⁸⁸ Heidi Topman notes that 'Wimbledon Labour Hall, Barnes and Richmond Labour Club and Institute and Ruskin House, Croydon, three of the longest surviving halls, are all situated in traditionally Conservative constituencies' – something which she has explained as the result of their greater affluence and the importance of preserving a physical space for the labour movement in hostile surroundings.¹⁸⁹ Daniel Weinbren suggested that Hendon's labour hall benefited 'because the party had members on secure incomes [...] able to purchase the building and eventually repay the loan'.¹⁹⁰ The same seems to have been true in Croydon where, in 1919, £3,000 was raised by the Ruskin House Memorial Fund to purchase a larger premises commemorating trade unionists who died in the First World War, and in 1927 donations and loans made possible a further expansion with the construction of the 500-capacity Ruskin Hall.¹⁹¹ Ruskin House has served as a powerful symbol, not of an alternative to suburbanism per se, but as

¹⁸⁶ Daisley & Tiedemann, *Ruskin House*, p.2.

¹⁸⁷ Interview with Lynda and Martin Graham.

¹⁸⁸ Interview with Norman Brown; Interview with Marian Carty.

¹⁸⁹ Topman, *A Study of the Rise and Decline of Selected Labour Halls*, pp.264-265.

¹⁹⁰ Weinbren, *Hendon Labour Party*, p.3.

¹⁹¹ Topman, *A Study of the Rise and Decline of Selected Labour Halls*, p.29.

a reminder that suburban buildings, formerly the preserve of the Georgian or Victorian wealthy, could become the property of the labour movement.¹⁹²

Some of the fond memories of Ruskin House, of course, derive from the activists' later experiences – their own political histories. As Michel de Certeau argued, however, memory is 'made up of nothing but [...] details, of broken pieces, particular fragments' which the individual struggles to compose into a coherent narrative.¹⁹³ Hence his enquiry into how to 'think the implantation of memory into a space which is already an organized whole' – in the case of Ruskin House, how to think through the complex layering of memory that occurs around a historic labour movement building.¹⁹⁴ In the 1926 general strike, the second Ruskin House was attended by 300–500 people, and the building served as the starting point for a 20,000 'monster' demonstration to Duppas Hill; a newspaper, the *Croydon Worker*, was also published, and the building was defended by a 'workers defence corps'.¹⁹⁵ In a further sign of the connections between the labour movement and rural image-making, Rutland Boughton, the socialist composer interested in Arthurian and Ruskinian themes, came from nearby Tatsfield in Surrey 'to offer his help and advice'.¹⁹⁶ Though he likely would have been no fan of the architecture of the current Ruskin House, Ruskin himself offered something in the way of an anticipatory response to de Certeau's enquiry in 'The Lamp of Memory' (1849):

'the greatest glory of a building is not in its stones, nor in its gold. Its glory is in its Age, and in that deep sense of voicefulness, of stern watching, of mysterious sympathy, nay, even of approval or condemnation, which we feel in walls that have long been washed by the passing waves of humanity.'¹⁹⁷

¹⁹² For further discussion of activists' ambivalent relationships to the labour movement's historic buildings, see: N. Mansfield & M. Trustram, 'Remembering the buildings of the British labour movement: an act of mourning,' *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, vol.19, no.5 (2013), pp.439–456, p.448 & p.453.

¹⁹³ M. de Certeau, F. Jameson & C. Levitt, 'On the Oppositional Practices of Everyday Life,' *Social Text*, no.3 (1980), pp.3–43, p.41.

¹⁹⁴ de Certeau, Jameson & Levitt, 'On the Oppositional Practices of Everyday Life,' p.40.

¹⁹⁵ Topman, *A Study of the Rise and Decline of Selected Labour Halls*, p.96.

¹⁹⁶ 'Music and Acrobatics: Mr. Rutland Boughton's Help At Croydon,' *The British Worker*, no.2 (6th May 1926), p.7.

¹⁹⁷ Ruskin, *Selected Writings*, p.24.

Martin Graham called Ruskin House 'a lovely old building', saying that it was a 'pity it doesn't have more money spent on it', and though the aged bricks of the current Ruskin House were not exactly washed by the humanity of the general strike, they have inherited from the building's nominal predecessors some of their accumulated sense of awe.¹⁹⁸ As treasurer of the CPB, Martin Graham was instrumental in the twenty-first-century move of their headquarters from Camden to its current location on the top floor of Ruskin House, where our interview took place, in the offices formerly rented by the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (Usdaw).¹⁹⁹ The walls around us were covered in commemorative symbols awarded by Communist parties from across the world, whilst the lower floors of Ruskin House are adorned with the images of fallen activists – including Marian Carty's brother, long-term Usdaw activist Jim, as well as those, like Ted Knight and Stephen Aselford, who have passed away since our interview took place. In these symbols, as well as the 'stones' (or wood panelling) of a suburban building which is always somehow also the other buildings which bore its name, there is a 'stern watching' and a 'mysterious sympathy' which act as a reassurance and a reminder of responsibility.

If Croydon as a suburb could be associated with exclusion, it could also represent an emergent attempt at reconciling town and country, bringing together a progressive middle class with a labour movement representing a working class that it had partly generated, overcoming class divides. Its patronage meant that Croydon's labour movement developed institutions like Ruskin House that have persisted longer than many of those in more conventionally 'left-wing' or 'working-class' areas, and these institutions, as well as the extent to which suburbanisation drew upon Romantic aesthetics, have given left-wing activists a sense of attachment not just to Croydon's town centre, remembered from childhood, but also its suburban streets and homes. In the pre-First World War and interwar period Croydon remained a difficult area for the Labour Party, consistently performing worse there than in Liverpool, itself already seen as poor

¹⁹⁸ Interview with Lynda and Martin Graham.

¹⁹⁹ Interview with Lynda and Martin Graham. He described the move as a 'break from tradition really because, like everything based in London, [the Communist Party] tended to be a bit *north-centric*'. Whilst the majority of the interview took place in the offices, this specific comment was recorded by the pool table on the ground floor.

terrain.²⁰⁰ For most of the twentieth century, Croydon was to remain a ‘Tory town’ – and yet, as this section has argued, it was also a suburb to which my narrators, like their parents and grandparents before them, would find reasons to move or to return.²⁰¹ If this complex mix of appeal and exclusion could give rise to the dismissal of radical activists as out-of-place or out-of-their-minds, the butt of their own jokes as much as those of others, it was a potentially subversive side to the suburban formation with which the opponents of these activists have, as the next section will discuss, had to reckon.

‘The lost cause’

The previous two sections have suggested that, in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, despite the strength of images of pastoral or early suburban Croydon, there were alternative Croydons in which left-wing politics might have been expected to have more success. As late as the general strike, for example, the labour movement in Croydon was clearly seen, at least by some, as a part of the community: one shopwindow display of the *British Worker*, published by the Trades Union Congress (TUC), and *The Times* was accompanied by a sign saying ‘Read both sides’, and one optimistic speaker at Ruskin House demanded that ‘When this little job is all over – and we’ve won! – Croydon must show the same solidarity politically as it is now showing industrially.’²⁰² Yet whilst 1926 saw Labour do well in Brighton, Chester and Eastbourne, Croydon bucked the national trend, suggesting that ‘Labour’s links to the trade union movement raised apprehension in the hearts of Croydon’s middle classes.’²⁰³ This class-based explanation of Croydon’s Conservatism, indebted to the ‘Villa Toryism’ thesis described above, has been a common one, but it does not tell the whole story. This section, then, charts the creation of both ‘Tory Croydon’ and the ‘working-class Tories’ that post-war left-wing activists would see, with despair, as its buttress, subsumed by their suburban surroundings – the extension of Davison’s ‘suburban idea’

²⁰⁰ Davies, *Liverpool Labour*, pp.84–85.

²⁰¹ D. White, ‘Political Croydon: The Sixties,’ *Croydon Citizen* (11th February 2014), <https://web.archive.org/web/20150802022721/https://thecroydoncitizen.com/history/political-croydon-sixties/>, accessed 5th September 2018.

²⁰² ‘Croydon Notes,’ *British Broadcasting Company’s News*, no.4 (1926), p.3; G.J.W, ‘When It’s All Over,’ *The Croydon Worker – The Official Bulletin of the Croydon Strike Committee*, no.1 (1926), p.1.

²⁰³ Davies & Morley, *County Borough Elections in England and Wales, 1918–1938: A Comparative Analysis, Volume 3*, p.147.

to the entirety of the 'suburban nation' in a popular empire. It will conclude by suggesting some of the implications of this doomed sense of place (or non-place) for the left-wing activists that had spent their childhoods there.

Histories of the Conservative Party's electoral performance in interwar Croydon have often suggested that the modest growth of the labour movement in Croydon 'transformed and reinvigorated a broad-based conservatism in the borough'.²⁰⁴ Anti-socialist groupings brought together Liberals and Conservatives as 'the prevalence of the "unprogressive alliance", the various ratepayers' organizations, predisposed some Liberals to regard working men as their opponents and Conservative voters as their allies in local affairs'.²⁰⁵ It was typical for Conservative candidates to describe their opponents as 'Socialists' rather than 'Labour' – even as late as 1992 in Guy Harding's literature targeting Pat Ryan in an Upper Norwood by-election.²⁰⁶ The dominance of the ratepayers' organisations meant that 'the political ethos established in inter-war Croydon was unique amongst the county boroughs'.²⁰⁷ In the 1970s, Peter Saunders found, every ward in the south still had a residents' association and one covered 95 percent of eligible households.²⁰⁸ His book, *Urban Politics*, was specifically alluded to by Clive Fraser, who noted the long history of 'a far more entrenched middle-class Conservative power structure' based in 'the power of the residents associations'.²⁰⁹ As with the growth of 'Villa Toryism' in late-nineteenth-century Croydon, this is an explanation of Croydon's Conservatism which stresses the power of a suburban middle class, capable on its own of keeping the labour movement from electoral success.

Dunbabin, however, argued that 'the more one stresses class explanations and the class basis of the new electorate, the harder it is to account for the Conservative dominance between the wars'.²¹⁰ If

²⁰⁴ Davies & Morley, *County Borough Elections in England and Wales, 1918-1938: A Comparative Analysis, Volume 3*, p.143.

²⁰⁵ Coetzee, 'Villa Toryism Reconsidered,' p.45; Reynolds & Laybourn, *Labour Heartland*, p.2; Dunbabin, 'British Elections in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,' p.242.

²⁰⁶ London, British Library of Political and Economic Science, COLL MISC 0781.

²⁰⁷ Davies & Morley, *County Borough Elections in England and Wales, 1918-1938: A Comparative Analysis, Volume 3*, p.147.

²⁰⁸ Saunders, *Urban Politics*, p.239.

²⁰⁹ Interview with Clive Fraser.

²¹⁰ Dunbabin, 'British Elections in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,' p.242.

the ratepayers' associations were most powerfully associated with the very south of the post-1965 London Borough, that hardly explains the strength of Conservatism in an interwar Croydon which Coulsdon and Purley had not yet joined. There was, of course, some nineteenth-century basis for working-class support for the Conservatives; 'Beer and Bible Toryism' has already been mentioned, and the preponderance of small employers and domestic servants and lack of distinct working-class communities in Croydon were also predictors of working-class Conservatism.²¹¹ In nineteenth-century Croydon, even lower-lying areas like Whitehorse Manor or Broad Green, 'the cradle of Labour', had boomed from the 1870s onwards with lower-middle-class clerks in addition to builders.²¹² Williams pointed out that 'where centres of proletarian consciousness developed, their strength really drew from the fact that all the bonds were holding in the same direction' – that experiences in workplaces were accompanied and paralleled by experiences at home or elsewhere – and in Croydon these bonds held in different ones.²¹³ Some of the features of Croydon which might have been thought of positively (social mixing in places like Broad Green, and the presence of small rather than big employers) were actually the cause of low levels of trade unionism and a 'high level of political naivete', reflected in the Croydon labour movement's dependence on the middle-class Liberals and social reformers skewered by Chesterton, and ethical or religious socialism more broadly.²¹⁴

By the interwar period, however, the efficacy of some of the older drivers of working-class Conservatism had been undermined: working-class Anglicanism, for example, had started to decline.²¹⁵ Percival derided the 'Queen and Country types' that he saw as typifying working-class Conservatism in his own 1950s childhood, but the absent reference to 'God' indicates that the Church of England had lost some of its significance as an indicator of Conservatism.²¹⁶ Similarly, the relative importance of larger employers like the railway increased in the interwar period, and

²¹¹ F. Parkin, 'Working-Class Conservatives: A Theory of Political Deviance,' *The British Journal of Sociology*, vol.18 (1967), pp.278-290, pp.285-288.

²¹² West, *The beginnings of Labour in Croydon*, p.2; Coetzee, 'Villa Toryism Reconsidered,' p.39.

²¹³ Interviewed in Cooke, 'Decentralism and the politics of place,' p.372.

²¹⁴ Ferguson, *The emergence of a labour movement*, p.30.

²¹⁵ Coetzee, 'Villa Toryism Reconsidered,' p.39.

²¹⁶ Interview with David Percival.

this new working class was disposed towards relatively high levels of radicalism – South Norwood Communist Group had sent a delegate, E.T. Eames, to the Communist Unity Convention which established the CPGB in 1921, and in the 1930s the party published a local newspaper, *The Flash*, aimed at railway workers.²¹⁷ Given the growth of Croydon’s labour movement under middle-class patronage, and the impossibility of sustaining Conservative and ratepayer control of the council on the basis of middle-class votes alone, a means had to be found for the Conservatives ‘to secure large numbers of “working class” votes on some other basis than class.’²¹⁸ Awareness of (and resentment towards) a ‘Tory working class’ persisted into the post-war childhoods of my narrators. David White saw his father as ‘a sort of working-class Tory’ that ‘used to sit watching the news and shout out his views very loudly to anybody who was sitting in the room watching at the same time’.²¹⁹ The new basis for working-class Conservatism was provided in Croydon through the extension of the ‘suburban idea’ beyond the commuting middle class to the increasingly suburbanised working class – that is, a working class which, after 1900, was now more likely to be commuting as well, rather than serving the needs of the commuting middle class, and consequently experienced ‘weakening working class community solidarity’ as its geographic mobility increased.²²⁰

The suburban expansion secured Conservative votes in several overlapping ways. As Lynsey Hanley observed, between the wars ‘about a quarter of working class people moved from the inner cities out into new outer-urban [...] housing estates’.²²¹ If, in the 1920s, house purchases were still dominated by the middle class, there is evidence to suggest growing homeownership amongst the manual and lower-paid non-manual working class following dramatic falls in house prices after 1932.²²² By 1939, 4 million properties had been built across the country, ‘making what had been

²¹⁷ Parkin, ‘Working-Class Conservatives,’ pp.285-288; B. Reid, ‘Communist Unity Convention Delegates,’ *Marxist Internet Archive* (undated), https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/sections/britain/subject/unity_convention/delegates.htm, accessed 2nd October 2020; Salford, Working Class Movement Library, AB/31000758.

²¹⁸ Dunbabin, ‘British Elections in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,’ p.242.

²¹⁹ Interview with David White.

²²⁰ Tichelar, ‘Labour Politics in Croydon,’ p.10.

²²¹ Hanley, *Estates*, pp.11-12.

²²² G. Speight, ‘Who Bought the Inter-war Semi? The Socio-economic Characteristics of New-house Buyers in the 1930s,’ *University of Oxford Discussion Papers in Economic and Social History*, no.38 (2000), <http://www.nuff.ox.ac.uk/Economics/History/paper38/speight.pdf>. This paper was a response to

the most urbanized country in the world at the end of the First World War the most suburbanized by the beginning of the Second World War.²²³ Stanley Baldwin, as Prime Minister, courted these lower-middle-class and upper-working-class 'neo-suburbanites' through supporting property ownership, showing the willingness to deploy state power which saw the *Daily Telegraph* label him a 'Tory socialist'.²²⁴ Marian Carty described Chatsworth Road as 'a very Tory road' in which her parents' home, known as 'the red house', stood out from 'even the next door neighbours, who built the house together': 'they were Tories, they were kind of like working-class Tories'.²²⁵ Chatsworth Road – part of a conservation area which reportedly 'has the highest density of locally listed buildings in Croydon' – is a long, roughly central Croydon street with a mixture of architectural styles including Arts and Crafts, and for people like Carty's neighbours, it was the opportunity to own, and even build, their home which made it compelling.²²⁶ For left-wing activists with 'a widely held suspicion that anybody who owned a house was likely to vote Tory', such an expansion in home ownership was an understandable concern, even when – as in Chatsworth Road – the homes which were owned were shaped by socialist aesthetics.²²⁷

Not all the 'neo-suburbanites', however, were homeowners. Although 'in a relatively affluent borough like Croydon private speculative builders satisfied much of the demand for housing', 3,500 council homes, including London County Council (LCC) 'out country' estates, were built in the borough in the interwar period, mainly in Norbury, Waddon (where the county borough had most of its council houses) and Broad Green.²²⁸ Even in these estates, however, 'it seems almost certain that some segregation took place', with those deemed to be 'houseproud' and with 'middle class aspirations to respectability' granted homes on frontage roads, and 'those who were

an earlier piece which had emphasised the middle-class character of interwar house purchase, and the discontinuous history of owner-occupation: M. Swenarton & S. Taylor, 'The Scale and Nature of the Growth of Owner-Occupation in Britain between the Wars,' *The Economic History Review*, vol.38, no.3 (1985), pp.373-392.

²²³ Hollow, 'Suburban Ideals on England's Interwar Council Estates,' p.203.

²²⁴ Moran, 'The Strange Birth of Middle England,' p.232; Judge, *Tory Socialism*, p.1.

²²⁵ Interview with Marian Carty.

²²⁶ 'About,' *Chatsworth Residents' Association* (undated),

<https://chatsworthresidentsassociation.weebly.com/about.html>, accessed 8th April 2021.

²²⁷ N. Tiratsoo, 'Labour and the electorate,' pp.281-308, in D. Tanner, P. Thane & N. Tiratsoo (eds.), *Labour's First Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.300.

²²⁸ Davies & Morley, *County Borough Elections in England and Wales, 1918-1938: A Comparative Analysis, Volume 3*, p.153.

former slum dwellers or who were undoubtedly “rough” by comparison were placed in the back roads and crescents.²²⁹ Moreover, as Hanley noted, those moving to the new estates were more likely to be in the former group anyway, predominantly ‘those who would have been considered snobby or different – quiet, preoccupied, distant – by their fellow tenement dwellers.’²³⁰ Interwar housing constructed by local authorities was overwhelmingly in ‘sprawling suburban developments’, not the high-density estates typical later, developing ‘a new type of domestic suburban modernity’.²³¹ Similarly, the interwar rental properties constructed as part of New Addington’s early ‘garden village’, constructed by the developer Charles Boot, tended towards the ‘cottagey English vernacular feel’, the ‘little idyll of picturesque domesticity’ which John Boughton described of interwar LCC housing: notably, the road names of the Boot estate (including King Henry’s Drive, Queen Elizabeth’s Drive, and crescents named for Thomas Wolsey, Nicholas Shaxton and Robert Aldrich) evoke ‘Tudor’ figures.²³² Brian Nevill captured the connection between the ruralist respectability of suburban working-class Conservatism in his description of the ‘kind of *Darling Buds of May*’ ‘Thatcher dream’ pursued by ‘the ultimate working-class Conservatives’: ‘the lost cause’.²³³ This promotion of respectability, embodied in the suburban council home, was a component of the creation – as Lefebvre put it – ‘of a disempowering, homogenising and isolating social world begat by segregation and injustice’, as the suburban working class were made into Conservatives.²³⁴

The cultivation of respectability, irrespective of tenancy status, was an important part of this popular Conservatism, and it was promoted through a particularly gendered imagining of the suburban – especially, after the 1918 and 1928 widening of suffrage, in ‘the transformed conditions of the post-war, “feminized” franchise.’²³⁵ Croydon was ‘coded feminine’ as a suburb,

²²⁹ Morris, *The Criminal Area*, pp.186–188.

²³⁰ Hanley, *Estates*, p.13.

²³¹ Wetherell, *Foundations*, pp.83–84.

²³² Boughton, *Municipal Dreams*, p.32; Grindrod, *Concretopia*, p.8 & p.42.

²³³ Interview with Brian Nevill. The theme music to *Darling Buds of May* (1991–1993) was composed by Whitgift-educated Pip Burley, a member of Croydon’s 1960s music scene: C. Groom, *Rockin’ and around Croydon: Rock, Folk, Blues & Jazz in & around the Croydon Area 1960–1980* (Purley: WOMBeAT publishing, 1998), p.69.

²³⁴ Walks, ‘Suburbanism as a Way of Life, Slight Return,’ p.1484.

²³⁵ Lawrence, ‘Class and Gender in the Making of Urban Toryism,’ p.652; M. Tichelar, *Why London is Labour: A History of Metropolitan Politics, 1900–2020* (London: Routledge, 2021), p.37.

which may have contributed towards the 'relative prominence of women' in Croydon's civic life, but this was a prominence which came with constraints.²³⁶ The rise of the ratepayers' associations was accompanied, after the First World War, as Ruth Davidson has shown, by the replacement of earlier, Liberal Quaker women active in the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (whose pacifism posed them real challenges in the war years) with the Croydon Women Citizens Association, firmly anti-Labour.²³⁷ Later, Brian Nevill's mother joined the Women's League of Health and Beauty ('a very fifties suburban bettering movement of some sort, a kind of early version of Keep Fit'), founded in 1930 with one of its first branches in Croydon aimed at 'mistresses and maids', and an effective successor to the Primrose League.²³⁸ In the 1960s and 1970s, the resentments which these suburban upbringings inspired would encourage some of the women that grew up in the suburbs to pursue socialist and feminist politics, but typically elsewhere. As Giles acknowledged, the housewives' suburban compromise could come at the expense of 'psyches in which the need for security battled with yearnings for adventure, or in which self-denial and deference hid deeply-felt losses, or envy and resentment produced truculence and hostility', and 'was not able ultimately to challenge the gendered and classed nature of the everyday life that it created'.²³⁹

Whilst Clapson has argued against the stereotype that suburban women 'were uniquely prone to neuroses', this perception features strongly in childhood memories of mothers, particularly for girls.²⁴⁰ In Carter's work, the home is 'a place of an intimate encounter with an idealized maternal past, and also a point of origin from where daughters rebelliously break away to find paths of their own making.'²⁴¹ It was when her younger brother was born, in the late 1940s, that Leni Gillman remembers having become suddenly aware of the exclusions of the suburban homes which Giles

²³⁶ Davison, 'The Suburban Idea and Its Enemies,' p.832; Davies & Morley, *County Borough Elections in England and Wales, 1918-1938: A Comparative Analysis, Volume 3*, pp.153-154.

²³⁷ Davidson, 'A local perspective,' p.1026.

²³⁸ Interview with Brian Nevill; J.J. Matthews, 'They Had Such a Lot of Fun: The Women's League of Health and Beauty between the Wars,' *History Workshop*, no.30 (1990), pp.22-54, p.35.

²³⁹ Giles, *The Parlour and the Suburb*, p.64. For a discussion of some of the feminist critiques of the suburbs, see: Kern, *Feminist City*, p.30.

²⁴⁰ Clapson, *Suburban Century*, p.137.

²⁴¹ Hill, 'Hairy Fairies'. For a similar point on 'subterranean resentments' which young activist women identified with their mothers, see: Hughes, *Young Lives on the Left*, p.39.

has described as 'the visual expression of the spatial organisation of gender', and this apparently led to her 'wandering'.²⁴² Her mother, Margaret (Pat) O'Connell, hardly epitomised the stereotype of the suburban housewife in the 1940s and 1950s, sharing responsibility for cooking, cleaning and childcare with her husband, but Leni was frustrated by her mother's clear belief, based on her own upbringing, 'that the girls should be brought up to know how to cook and look after the home, so that the men could be looked after.'²⁴³ The subterranean, gendered resentments which people like Leni Gillman experienced would be embodied in the suburban home and were overlapped by the concerns about suburban Conservatism with which those spaces were associated.

The cultivation of respectability was facilitated by the widening access, through scholarship and local-authority funding schemes, to Croydon's public and selective schools. As late as 1965, an article by a Labour councillor, Keith Unwin, pointed out that Croydon had a very high proportion (16 percent) of children in school beyond the minimum age – above that of the neighbouring LCC – and 84 percent of parents opted to apply for grammar school places.²⁴⁴ Sometimes the division between types of school could be quite fine; Jamie Reid later said that John Ruskin Grammar School 'was a glorified secondary modern with pretensions to being a public school.'²⁴⁵ Established in 1920 as a boys' selective school, alongside the Lady Edridge School for girls (named after the wife of the town's Conservative mayor), it was a reminder that Ruskin's name did not only appeal to the left. In addition, in and around Croydon there were nine independent or direct grant schools which took 5 percent of Croydon children, including some for whom the local authority contracted free places.²⁴⁶ These included the co-educational Royal Russell School plus, for girls, Croydon High School and the Old Palace of John Whitgift, and, for boys, Trinity School of John Whitgift, the Whitgift School (mentioned in Betjeman's

²⁴² Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman; Giles, *The Parlour and the Suburb*, p.18.

²⁴³ Leni, remembering how she felt about her parents' division of labour as a child, 'thought that was how it was in all families'. Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman.

²⁴⁴ K. Unwin, 'Slow motion in Croydon,' *New Society* (1st July 1965), pp.16-17, p.16.

²⁴⁵ J. Reid & J. Savage, *Up They Rise: the incomplete works of Jamie Reid* (London: Faber & Faber, 1987), p.II.

²⁴⁶ Unwin, 'Slow motion in Croydon,' p.16.

poem) and the John Fisher School. There was also, close to the borough's northern border in Southwark, the prestigious Dulwich College. The locally-funded places to these private schools, as well as selective schools like those named for John Ruskin and Lady Edridge, offered families like the Prentices (who sent their son, Reginald, to Whitgift) the possibility of 'upward mobility' through 'educational improvement', and contributed to their becoming Conservative voters.²⁴⁷

Schools could also be an important site for the growing connections drawn between rurality, the suburbs, Englishness, and the empire. Whilst, as Angela Carter suggested, children are always brought up, to a degree, in the childhood of their parents and grandparents, this was exacerbated by the ruralist nationalisms which post-war children encountered in primary school.²⁴⁸ She recalled Empire Day celebrations in the 1950s, where:

'south Londoners, several generations removed from the soil, skipped round in circles whilst plaiting and unplaiting the ribbons – could they have been red, white and blue ribbons? – on a purpose-built maypole which was far removed from the phallic splendour of the ethnic originals.'²⁴⁹

This nationalism was bound up with whiteness, which Mace saw as connected to 'bucolic Englishness', with suburbs even today misrecognised as villages from which ethnic minorities were perceived to be absent; as Graeme Davison acknowledges, the 'suburban idea' was realised more fully in the colonies than in Britain, and movement between the white settler colonies and suburban Croydon was to prove relatively common in the inter- and post-war periods.²⁵⁰ The town's apparent whiteness often stuck out in activists' childhood memories of mid-twentieth century Croydon. Leni Gillman believed that it was 'completely white [...] we didn't have any immigrants in Croydon at the time'; David White called it 'a fairly sort of quiet, quite well-to-do

²⁴⁷ G. Horn, *Crossing the floor: Reg Prentice and the crisis of British social democracy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), p.12.

²⁴⁸ Compare to Hazel Carby's discussion of the work of Susan Willis, for whom 'the relation of generations is a means of access to the past and to the geography of migration.' Carby, *Cultures in Babylon*, p.130.

²⁴⁹ Carter, *Shaking a Leg*, p.18 & p.229.

²⁵⁰ Mace, 'Whiteness, class and place in two London suburbs,' p.1033; M. Benson & E. Jackson, 'Place-making and Place Maintenance: Performativity, Place and Belonging among the Middle Classes,' *Sociology*, vol.47, no.4 (2012), pp.793-809, pp.801-803; Davison, 'The Suburban Idea and Its Enemies,' p.830.

town', 'almost entirely white'.²⁵¹ Whilst the previous section has suggested that alternative imaginings of the rural and the suburban were possible, the interwar period saw attempts to couple representations of the rural with 'paean to a national past.'²⁵² Griffiths described Stanley Baldwin's interwar attempts to promote a ruralist narrative of British identity which, given the constraints on how many people could live in the countryside, necessarily meant the promotion of the compromise of suburbia.²⁵³ As Tom Jeffrey observed, 'the politics of the suburbs [...] were part and parcel of the politics of the nation'.²⁵⁴ Popular suburbanism was 'a close bedfellow of Middle England', and this extension in the suburban idea went hand-in-hand with 'the historical development of the idea of "middleness" in British political culture': the sense that the suburbs, in-between town and country, could be equated both with political moderation and with the in-betweenness of the lower middle class and upper working class, and 'the belief that the middle ranks of society were beleaguered and put-upon'.²⁵⁵ This connection between 'Middle England', suburbia and Conservatism has had a powerful pull in British politics, with Huq highlighting John Major's summoning of a 'quasi suburban pastoral rural-idyll' in the 1990s as an attempt to reinforce the Conservative Party's waning popular support.²⁵⁶

In the interwar period, this suburban nationalism was sustained by Croydon's developing links to the British empire, which reached its greatest territorial extent in 1921 – links that, as the first section of this chapter emphasised, dated right back to its original suburbanisation. Crystal Palace Football Club, founded first in 1861 and again in 1905 to provide entertainment for visitors to the quintessential imperial building, joined the Football League in 1920 and relocated to Selhurst Park in 1924, turning what had been effectively an imperial novelty into a professional club with a popular base in South Norwood. The development of light engineering ensembles (including the short-lived National Aircraft Factory, in 1917) and consumer goods manufacture along the Purley Way was tied to the presence of Croydon Airport, opened in 1920 and from

²⁵¹ Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman; Interview with David White.

²⁵² Bluemel & McCluskey, 'Introduction,' p.3.

²⁵³ Griffiths, *Labour and the Countryside*, p.4.

²⁵⁴ Jeffrey, 'The suburban nation,' p.191.

²⁵⁵ Huq, 'Don't sneer at suburbia,' p.148; Moran, 'The Strange Birth of Middle England,' p.232.

²⁵⁶ Huq, 'Don't sneer at suburbia,' p.148.

1924 the home of Imperial Airways (one of the precursor airlines to British Airways) and the site for the early 1920s invention of the 'Mayday' signal.²⁵⁷ Whilst in the nineteenth century the prevalence of smaller employers could be associated with 'civic responsibility' in Croydon, the increased proximity between employers and their workers could weaken the radicalism of the labour movement, especially in industries like electronics.²⁵⁸ Roy Lockett's mother, born on 'Cairo Place' off 'Cairo Road' in Croydon's Old Town, and working at the Newmark Watch Factory on Purley Way in the 1950s, was close enough to her manager to invite him home for dinner, where Lockett recalled him expressing 'some very nasty, racist views' (with which Lockett's father had agreed), having 'been in Africa'.²⁵⁹ In this encounter, poignant for Lockett as he came to terms with his own opposition to colonialism, Croydon's material and symbolic links to empire brought his parents, over the dinner table and in their views, into close proximity with the factory's manager, who was himself in a similar position to Lockett's father: 'a reactionary man politically', a Conservative voter and *Daily Express* reader, and a manager at a plastics works.²⁶⁰ As Tony Judge explained, 'patriotism and national pride in an imperial age were emotions that could be used to forge alliances across the social class divide.'²⁶¹ And, moreover, as Emily Robinson has pointed out in language which recalls the different ways that a Ruskinian Romanticism could be sublimated, the interiors of the suburban home, the empire, and Conservatism were tightly sutured:

'The (sublime) terror of imperialism was refracted through the homeliness of everyday colonialism, while the (beautiful) domestic was made less parochial by the awesome backdrop of empire.'²⁶²

²⁵⁷ Phelps, 'On the Edge of Something Big,' p. 446; Davies & Morley, *County Borough Elections in England and Wales, 1918-1938: A Comparative Analysis, Volume 3*, p.140. 'Mayday' was a phonetic equivalent to the French 'm'aidez' ('help me'); it is interesting to note, however, that Croydon's main hospital was already at that stage located on Mayday Road and was renamed Mayday Hospital in 1923.

²⁵⁸ H. Bakvis, *The Determinants of Working-Class Conservatism: A Cross-National Comparison* (MA Thesis, Queen's University at Kingston, 1971), pp.56-58.

²⁵⁹ Interview with Roy Lockett.

²⁶⁰ Interview with Roy Lockett.

²⁶¹ Judge, *Tory Socialism*, p.223.

²⁶² E. Robinson, 'The Authority of Feeling in Mid-Twentieth Century English Conservatism,' *The Historical Journal*, vol.63, no.5 (2020), pp.1303-1324, p.1317.

Lockett's anecdote also points to the growing complexity of describing the class backgrounds of my narrators' parents and of people in suburban Croydon generally. Whilst both the adult men were factory managers, Lockett's mother was a committed member of her factory's trade union.²⁶³ Similarly, the interwar Norhyrst estate in South Norwood, not far from the lake that the Gillmans praised above, was described by Percival as containing 'a big concentration of Tory votes' – but he went back-and-forth between describing the area as 'kind of middle class' and populated by 'I wouldn't say poor Tories, but they were like working-class Tories, a lot of them.'²⁶⁴ Whereas Martin Graham's father was a bank manager on New Bond Street and commuted from Beckenham (and he could hardly be more 'solidly middle class', the son of a customs officer and, the Grahams suspected, a freemason, with Lynda joking about 'pictures of them in all these fancy dress'), his mother was 'very upwardly mobile' (perhaps a reaction to the Nonconformism of her father, who had known Keir Hardie in the working-class East End) and that meant she 'bought into the establishment system'.²⁶⁵ On the other hand, whilst Nevill saw New Addington as a working-class place, his father, an accountant, 'actually called himself middle class', and 'was a dyed-in-the-wool Conservative'.²⁶⁶ As Williams pointed out in 1961, however, there is no real reason to regard 'middle class' and 'working class' as 'true alternatives' and the question is 'not only what purposes are served by the classification, but also what purposes are served by so persistent a confusion.'²⁶⁷ 'The Conservative Party is still basically the party of the propertied and the controllers,' he continued,

'with an old and natural genuflection to the mellow dusk in which these processes are blurred. But it is felt to be the party of most of those who still anxiously call themselves "middle class". Preoccupied as always with the upward identification and downward keeping-in-place, the latter now fortunately expressible in precise wage percentages.'²⁶⁸

²⁶³ Interview with Roy Lockett.

²⁶⁴ Interview with David Percival.

²⁶⁵ Interview with Lynda and Martin Graham. Compare with Steedman's discussion of her own mother: 'Surrounded as a child by the articulated politics of class-consciousness, she became a working-class Conservative, the only political form that allowed her to reveal the politics of envy.' Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman*, pp.6-7.

²⁶⁶ Interview with Brian Nevill.

²⁶⁷ Williams, *The Long Revolution*, pp.363-364.

²⁶⁸ Williams, *The Long Revolution*, p.372.

This link between confused class positions and Conservatism was accompanied by a powerful sense of Croydon as an apolitical 'non-place': 'defined by a lack of historical relation to their surrounding environment' and an 'absence of a specific identity'.²⁶⁹ The new parochial middle-class Conservatism, organised through the ratepayers' organisations, had been not just anti-socialist but anti-municipalist; 'Gas and Water Socialism' opposed as much because it implied state intervention at all, as because of any specific ideological commitment. This was an apolitical, apathetic, and parochial attitude (Coetzee saw it as 'a reformulated vestryism') which was a problem for left-wing activists, who struggled to relate to its limited imagination and the suburban middle class (and specifically suburban middle-class women) that were seen as its proponents.²⁷⁰ Croydon had become a dormitory town, associated (as George Orwell had it in the 1930s) with 'somnolence and tranquillity'.²⁷¹ Meanwhile, according to Davies and Morley, turnout in local elections in Croydon exceeded 40 percent only four times prior to 1926, and it was less than 30 percent on three occasions thereafter – at an average of 34.8 percent between 1919 and 1938, it was the lowest of the 29 county boroughs which they had considered at that stage.²⁷² If some of this was due to the perceived hopelessness of a Labour vote in a Conservative and ratepayer-dominated borough, it was also a sign that the parochialism of the ratepayers' associations had been internalised by the ambiguously-classed 'neo-suburbanites': the pointlessness of thinking about politics beyond the end of your front garden. Conservatism could be regarded as an unthinking, inherited trait; Nevill had 'a feeling his dad voted Conservative, he was never going to do anything else other than that, he wasn't going to think any deeper about it than that.'²⁷³ This was a sensibility which left-wing activists would struggle to understand. As Martin Graham complained:

'I always took a fairly dim view of the sort of parochial approach to politics that you get from the Lib Dems et cetera. You don't want to campaign on the fact that my party's

²⁶⁹ Trigg, 'Place and Non-Place,' pp.128-129.

²⁷⁰ Coetzee, 'Villa Toryism Reconsidered,' p.46.

²⁷¹ Back, 'So... fucking Croydon.'

²⁷² Davies & Morley, *County Borough Elections in England and Wales, 1918-1938: A Comparative Analysis, Volume 3*, p.148.

²⁷³ Interview with Brian Nevill.

gonna make sure your dustbins are cleaned regularly or something. I mean I always took a big lofty strategic political view on these things. I was after saving the world, not getting your dustbins done.’²⁷⁴

Similarly, Lynda Graham’s response after I answered her question about my hypotheses is typical of the way that left-wing activists could regard the ‘non-place’ of Croydon:

‘I don’t feel as if Croydon shaped me politically. The actual place of it. [Martin: Mm, bit harsh] Yeah, I don’t think that’s harsh. I’m seeing where Dan is coming from in talking about “does the place shape you?”, and if I were in a mining town, probably that place would’ve shaped me. But I don’t think the place shaped me, I think it’s more the job that I was in that shaped me.’²⁷⁵

This contrast between Croydon and a place seen as appropriately political – and working class – like a mining town, and between the impact of suburban homes and the more appropriate politicisation of the workplace, speaks to the kinds of distinction which post-war left-wing activists made between suburban Croydon and the areas where left-wing politics found more success. This point about the ‘classiness’ of jobs like mining, or working in a textile factory, is emphasised by Steedman.²⁷⁶ When I asked about trade unionism in her area, Lynda Graham apologised for not having much to say, reminding me that ‘we’re talking about *Croham*, Sanderstead’; her husband, Martin, quipped that her assessment was ‘very Marxist, your relationship to the forces of production et cetera’.²⁷⁷ Gillian Rose has argued such a focus on production inhibits our understanding of politics of areas in which homes were as important as – if not more than – workplaces in people’s lives, but the Grahams indicate that this is a perception not limited to historians, shaping how left-wing activists perceived their opportunities for political activism in their immediate vicinity.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁴ Interview with Lynda and Martin Graham.

²⁷⁵ Interview with Lynda and Martin Graham.

²⁷⁶ Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman*, p.23.

²⁷⁷ Interview with Lynda and Martin Graham.

²⁷⁸ G. Rose, ‘Locality-Studies and Waged Labour: An Historical Critique,’ *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, vol.14, no.2 (1989), pp.317-328, p.317.

For activists like Martin Graham, this understanding of Croydon as a largely apolitical, parochial place was a source of frustration and could mean, as with his trade union experience as a civil servant, a focus on activism in London proper.²⁷⁹ Similar assessments had ran through the trades council's disputes with the TUC in the interwar period, the national organisation insistent that the branch should be included within the Surrey Federation, where it claimed Croydon 'could render far more assistance and take a more important part in the work of the movement'.²⁸⁰ Croydon saw this as a 'mistake', 'feel[ing] that the whole of our interests lay within the London area' and with which 'within a few years it is felt we shall be directly connected' – anticipating the inclusion of Croydon within the GLC which was not to come for another forty years.²⁸¹ Croydon, they explained, was 'only the "Lodging House" for our six thousand affiliated membership & our whole livelihood is governed by London conditions.'²⁸² Despite its own radicalism, therefore, the trades council in Croydon broadly accepted a suburban view of the area as a dormitory for its members, and saw the appropriate site for political action as London – 'Surrey' was, again, associated with political backwardness and poorer working conditions, and hence rejected as a federation but not as a residence.

If it has been common to see Croydon's middle class as responsible for its Conservatism, it is not sufficient to explain the Conservatives' and ratepayers' dominance of Croydon's politics after the extensions of suffrage in the interwar period. As the previous section had argued, the emergent 'suburban idea' had a basis in, and appeal to, left-wing sections of both the middle and working class, interested in an alternative to capitalist urbanisation. In the interwar period, the extension of this 'suburban idea', with Baldwin's support, to the lower middle class and upper working class, was facilitated through an expansion in homeownership, careful residential segregation, and the

²⁷⁹ Interview with Lynda and Martin Graham. This maintenance of connections to the urban core by middle-class suburban residents may not be as atypical as sometimes suggested; see: L. Balderstone, 'Semi-detached Britain? Reviewing suburban engagement in twentieth-century society,' *Urban History*, vol.41, no.1 (2014), pp.141–160, p.156.

²⁸⁰ Coventry, Modern Records Centre, MSS.292/79C/53.

²⁸¹ MRC, MSS.292/79C/53.

²⁸² MRC, MSS.292/79C/53.

cultivation of respectability, including through access to Croydon's public and selective schools. The interwar growth in the importance of Britain's empire, and its connections to an imperial Croydon, encouraged the development of light industry around the Croydon Airport site and brought smaller employers and managers closer to their employees – who could realistically hope to be their neighbours, their colleagues, and their dinner hosts. In this sense, a view could develop of a Croydon as a 'Tory town': not only, that is, as a town which the Conservatives had made, but a suburban place which made Conservatives. For some activists, this implied a looking to London as the proper site of radical politics.

Looking both ways

As I warned, the chronology of this chapter has been complex and long. From one point of view, it began in the 'deep-time' of the Great North Wood, throwing back our understandings of Croydon to its pre-histories to understand the earliest perceptions of rural Surrey as a site of retreat.²⁸³ From there, it has watched as suburban villas appeared atop its hills, as the town centre was remade in the nineteenth century, as Ruskin House was repurposed, and as the suburban sprawl continued into the interwar period. At the same time, however, this chapter has followed my narrators through their own pre-childhoods and infancies, attempting second-hand Steedman's effort to write a text with 'a childhood at its centre – my childhood, a personal past – and [...] about the disruption of that fifties childhood by the one my mother had lived out before me, and the stories she told about it.'²⁸⁴ Ahead of the next chapters, which follow my narrators as they found their political selves in the New Left(s), Chapter One has therefore made a problem of periodisation, attempting to undermine the tendency to treat either 1945 or 1956 as the decisive moment upon which the twentieth century hinges.²⁸⁵

²⁸³ Ware, *Return of a Native*, p.33.

²⁸⁴ Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman*, p.5.

²⁸⁵ Catterall, 'What (if anything) Is Distinctive about Contemporary History?', p.441; Brown, 'The State of British Political History,' p.191.

As John Grindrod said, the experience of living in Croydon is one of 'looking both ways', and the same was true of left-wing activists.²⁸⁶ Mark Clapson has shown that by the 1990s, 'more houses, both owner occupied and local authority rental, had been built in "suburban" locations than in "urban" and "rural" areas combined.'²⁸⁷ This chapter has sought out the earliest histories of these places in order to understand the earliest self-understandings of suburban left-wing activists in a 'suburban nation' and a 'suburban century'. They were forever 'looking both ways' through time, to the past and to the future. They were also 'looking both ways' between the town and the country: whilst the urban was often looked to as a space of safety or enlightenment, the suburban (marked by Romantic ideas of return to the countryside and escape from the capitalist city) had an appeal to socialists who had shaped, in complex ways, many of its features. Together with their appreciation for the remnants of the Victorian town centre, these sources of attachment explain why, despite its Conservatism, left-wing activists have chosen to return to and make their homes in 'Croydon, Surrey' – whatever they ask to be written upon their envelopes – as they have grown older and particularly as they became parents.

Because of this 'looking both ways', responses to the exclusions associated with the 'Tory town' could take different forms. If the trades council had emphasised the necessity of connections to London, their clashes with the TUC could also speak to the specific possibility for radicalism in the suburbs. In 1936, the trades council was deregistered by the TUC, 'one of the very small groups of Trades Councils that refuses to conform to Congress decisions' over its Communist connections.²⁸⁸ When F.G. West, the Labour Party secretary, complained to the Organisational Department about 'these Communist blighters', the TUC responded that Croydon, despite its proximity to London, was 'really an "outpost" so far as we are concerned, and (...) at least a generation behind many other parts of the country.'²⁸⁹ The local labour movement's distance from power meant that:

²⁸⁶ Grindrod, *Outskirts*, p.14.

²⁸⁷ Clapson, 'The suburban aspiration in England since 1919,' p.151.

²⁸⁸ MRC, MSS.292/79C/53.

²⁸⁹ MRC, MSS.292/79C/53.

‘there is a limited opportunity for the exercise of responsibility so far as the rank and file of the Movement is concerned, and this in turn makes for extreme left-wing opinion. We always say at this office that when the revolution starts, it will be in Bournemouth or Torquay, judging by the resolutions we get from places of this description.’²⁹⁰

To the TUC, Croydon was a provincial town with a small working class, given to out-of-touch flirtations with Communism. This was a Croydon whose Conservatism could be pinned not only on its middle-class preponderance, but on its ‘Tory working class’: the ‘lost cause’ that left-wing activists saw, with mounting frustration, as the guarantors of a parochial, apolitical Croydon which ensured the continued importance of the town centre, and rare places like Ruskin House, as an escape.

However, the lack of left-wing electoral success could also trigger extraordinary outbursts, particularly for the young people who (as this chapter has suggested) tended to feel their exclusion from suburban Croydon most keenly. A striking example is the response by a crowd of ‘extremists’ gathered to hear the results of a 1920 election in Croydon’s East ward. Upon hearing of Labour’s defeat, a group of young people reportedly cried, ‘three cheers for a red revolution!’, ‘we want red revolution!’: ‘One was no blinking good! Let’s have two revolutions!’²⁹¹ The radicalism of youth – the sense of revolutionary possibility which their apparent immaturity seemed to make possible in the face of electoral defeat – would recur as young post-war activists struggled against the constraints which the judgements of their elders implied, the judgements which dictated that only a careful and dutiful reformism was properly at home in the suburbs.

Every incorporation carries a cost. Interwar Croydon may have been suburban, and Conservative voting, but the transition from the nineteenth century was a real one. Working-class and lower-middle-class people, many of them with broadly left-wing politics, really did find themselves as homeowners and parents, and in attempting to meet their needs, the interwar Conservatives had

²⁹⁰ MRC, MSS.292/79C/53.

²⁹¹ *Croydon Times* (6th November 1920), p.7.

conceded ground. If, at first, the response to Croydon's Conservatism was for left-wing activists to look to London, many of the children of those that first moved to the suburbs were looking the other way – not to Surrey, but to 'Croydon, full stop', and the possibilities that would be presented in the world which they entered as schoolchildren, in the aftermath of the Second World War.

Chapter Two: Sent to Coventry?

'In 1952 in Croydon

There was bomb sites still around from the war

November that year food was scarcely off the ration

Two boys went out to rob a store'

Ralph McTell, 'Bentley and Craig' (1981)

'He was just a half-grown frightened lad who couldn't read or write

But standing there with gun in hand he terrorised the night

It was guns and comics, films of war that made his education'

Karl Dallas, 'Ballad of Derek Bentley' (1953)

In March 1948, European members of the Socialist International met at the Selsdon Park Hotel, in the south of Croydon, to discuss their response to the Marshall Plan, the American proposals to provide aid for post-war European reconstruction.¹ Croydon was an appropriate choice, having suffered particularly badly during the war. It had also recently elected its first Labour MP, David Rees-Williams, and Labour's presence on the council had never been stronger. If activists were still 'looking both ways' – as one article by Reginald Prentice, the defeated Croydon North candidate, was titled in 1950, when Rees-Williams also lost his seat – it was between a past in which the obstacles they faced seemed increasingly inconsequential, and a future in which they would 'win Croydon for Socialism.'²

It was an auspicious time for Selsdon, the post-war period. In 1949, Peter Mitchell-Thomson, second Baron Selsdon, with the Italian-American driver Luigi Chinetti, won Ferrari's first competitive race: the 24 Hours of Le Mans, the first to occur after the end of the war. Some of

¹ R.T. Griffiths, 'European Utopia or Capitalist Trap? The Socialist International and the Question of Europe,' pp.9-24, in R.T. Griffiths (ed.), *Socialist Parties and the Question of Europe in the 1950s* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1993), p.13.

² R. Prentice, 'Looking Both Ways,' *Croydon Labour Journal*, vol.3, no.8 (1950), p.3.

Croydon's developing connections were closer to home – above all, with the 'blitzed cities', and especially with Coventry, where a Labour council was rebuilding the city after the destruction of much of the town and its historic cathedral in the Coventry Blitz of November 1940.³ Coventry, as well as other 'blitzed cities' like Hull, were points of reference for those emphasising a different side to Croydon, which shares 'roughly [their] extent and population' and, as Owen Hatherley has pointed out, is 'somewhere that is entirely confident about its own modernity, that willingly inhabited the late twentieth century without looking over its shoulder.'⁴ Whilst there are smatterings of this Croydon, like the Fairfield Halls, in the town centre – and Hatherley particularly associated this Croydon with the trams, not to be reintroduced until the 1990s – it is the large outlying council estates of New Addington which are the most enduring monument to social-democratic Croydon. The 'bomb sites' referenced in Ralph McTell's song are a reminder of the possibilities of building something different in their place: the reassertion of the urbane, socially mixed Croydon with which left-wing activists had long associated, described in the previous chapter, and a Croydon of peace and internationalism in contrast to the suburban nationalism of the 1930s.

For left-wing activists growing up in these years, as Celia Hughes suggested, this meant 'the psychological security deriving from the stable social and economic conditions of the post-war boom', 'packaged in the bottles of free school milk and the grammar school education that instilled expectations of academic achievement and hopes of social advancement.'⁵ Whilst, as has been seen, these activists grew up aware of the exclusions and hypocrisies of post-war Croydon, they started to find others who felt likewise, developing '*ways of coping*' with the uncertainty of adolescence and the social and political dislocations this entailed, whether at home, at school or in the wider world.'⁶ At the same time, places like Croydon and Coventry became a focus for post-war anxieties around the consequences of affluence and social mixing, particularly in its young people. The 'two boys' mourned in McTell's song, Derek Bentley and Christopher Craig, were

³ Grindrod, *Concretopia*, p.99.

⁴ Hatherley, *A New Kind of Bleak*, p.164.

⁵ Hughes, *Young Lives on the Left*, p.21.

⁶ Hughes, *Young Lives on the Left*, p.56.

supposedly influenced by the 'guns and comics, films of war' described by Karl Dallas in an earlier ballad recorded by Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger. These anxieties, however, were accompanied by real excitement and real encounters between people from different backgrounds, which meant the formation of an active and young New Left in a Croydon comparable to the 'new towns' – with the support, for the time being, of local figures like MacColl and Seeger.

This chapter follows the baby boomer activists through their school years and their adolescence, and left-wing activism in Croydon from the end of the Second World War until the consensus began to break apart in the early-to-mid-1960s. It shows the extent to which this post-war optimism, linked to Labour's electoral success, was sustained by older activists organised in working-class communities and Ruskin House (although without – in most cases – these communities themselves being transformed by this activism), in a Croydon which broadly remained dominated by suburban Conservatism. It then discusses the emergence of the young activists as political actors themselves in the 'first New Left', in a Croydon which was characterised as both youthful and socially mixed.⁷ In the end, this chapter speaks of a Croydon which fell short of the hopes placed in post-war Coventry, a vision of a social-democratic future which slipped through activists' fingers – not only in Croydon, but in Britain as a whole – and yet to which activists have still felt strongly attached.

'Gradually growing in good sense'

When spaces become vacant, they are 'susceptible of being diverted, reappropriated and put to a use different from its initial one.'⁸ As the introduction to a recent special issue on the material consequences of the Blitz pointed out, the wartime bombing 'was a catalyst for the reconstruction of London, not just in response to the physical damage but because of its capacity to discursively gather a broader set of concerns about the capital.'⁹ In the context of a growing working class and

⁷ The New Left to emerge in the years immediately after 1956 has usually been described by participants and historians as the 'first New Left', which Hall saw as succeeded by 'a second, even perhaps a third' generation in the 1960s: Hall, 'Life and Times of the First New Left,' p.177.

⁸ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p.167.

⁹ S. Johnson-Schlee, 'Introduction to the Special Issue on Material Cultures of Reconstruction in post-war London,' *The London Journal*, vol.46, no.1 (2021), pp.1-5, p.1.

shifting middle-class identities, and the example of Labour in government nationally and municipally in the 'blitzed cities', the young left-wing activists encountered a social-democratic world – and each other – in their schools which contrasted with the suburban privatism described in the previous chapter.

The consequences of the Second World War for Croydon were considerable. 54,000 houses had been destroyed: Croydon Airport and its location to the south of London meant the town was hit heavily in the Blitz, with more doodlebugs landing there than anywhere else in the country.¹⁰ The Crystal Palace had burned down already in 1936, just as tensions mounted in Europe following the coup in Spain, but it was fully dismantled during the war after a period in which the remaining north water tower was used to test dummy bombs; the School of Art burned down in a further incident in 1950.¹¹ Some of my narrators' recollections correspond to Angela Carter's description of a post-war return to a suburban South London street 'that had had the residue of respectability bombed out of it'.¹² In addition to the physical destruction, the area was vacated through evacuation and the requirements of wartime service. Joan Matlock's father had been a firefighter in the Blitz, David Percival's was a staff sergeant in the Royal Engineers (although he mainly served in Bournemouth and Nottingham) whilst his mother was evacuated to Torquay, and David White's father was an army hairdresser who served at the Battle of El-Alamein.¹³ It was not guaranteed that the people who had left Croydon would be the same as those who returned, whether in a literal sense or because they had been changed by their experiences in the war. Yet this notion of Croydon as a vacated space was not restricted to the war years. Hamish MacColl remembered his childhood in Park Hill Rise, where he moved aged four in 1954:

'Up the road, there were these rows of houses that were empty. They were like that ship that was found with all the meals half-eaten and all the rest of it? As kids we would go and

¹⁰ Grindrod, *Concretopia*, p.12; S. George, 'A fascinating map points out where every bomb was dropped on Croydon during The Blitz,' *Croydon Advertiser* (15th September 2018), <https://www.croydonadvertiser.co.uk/news/croydon-news/london-blitz-bomb-map-croydon-1234120>, accessed 15th November 2021.

¹¹ M. Harrison, 'Disaster strikes, 1936,' *The Crystal Palace Foundation* (2022), <http://www.crystalpalacefoundation.org.uk/history/disaster-strikes-1936-2>, accessed 7th October 2022.

¹² Carter, *Shaking a Leg*, pp.14-15.

¹³ Interview with Joan Matlock; Interview with David Percival; Interview with David White.

break in, mind you it wasn't difficult. You'd just walk through an open door or an open window because some people had already been here. And the curtains were still there, and there were overturned tables and things like that, and they were *gigantic*, you'd go into a room that's forty-foot square, and there was a coach house next door – which was not for cars, it was a coach house, with a glass roof, thirty-foot high, and it's obviously built for giant carriages and God knows what else. And this was the row, this was the profits of the empire, gone. One imagines, all these people had gone broke, I suppose, because they couldn't run their houses anymore.'¹⁴

As this quote indicates, Croydon's relationship to the empire was changing. To some extent, this manifested in a rise in migration to the white settler colonies – one of the early builders on the Ham Farm estate in Monks Orchard moved to New Zealand in 1951.¹⁵ As Ronald Hyam assessed, however, 'the empire would not stand or fall on the establishment of a base in Kenya, or poultry farms in Gambia, or the supply of bicycles to Blantyre, or even of peanuts and bananas to Battersea.'¹⁶ Croydon Airport suffered in the post-war world as Heathrow took its place as London's main airport, and in 1952 – with Blackbushe and Northolt handling the majority of European flights – it was decided that it should be closed, with the last planes departing in 1959. The Croydon Empire, one of the town's main theatres from 1906 and from 1930 a major cinema, was renamed the Eros Theatre in 1953 and then closed after purchase by a development company in 1959.¹⁷ Similarly, whilst Angela Carter's memories of primary school (discussed in the previous chapter) were still evocative of the imaginative power of Empire Day, it was a tradition effectively discontinued after her teacher's retirement in 1951.¹⁸ If Croydon's shifting relationship with the empire would eventually provoke a reactionary backlash, it was also a Croydon losing

¹⁴ Interview with Hamish MacColl. On the family's move to 'suburban East Croydon', see: Harker, *Class Act*, pp.108-109.

¹⁵ Cox, *Urban Development and Redevelopment in Croydon*, p.374.

¹⁶ R. Hyam, *Understanding the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p.256.

¹⁷ K. Roe, 'Eros Cinema,' *Cinema Treasures* (undated), <http://cinematreasures.org/theaters/29117>, accessed 15th November 2021.

¹⁸ Carter, *Shaking a Leg*, p.229.

some of the connections to empire so important in cementing suburban Conservatism prior to the war.

Some of the hopes for this vacated post-war Croydon were laid down in the 'Town and Country Plan for Surrey', devised by the Surrey Federation of Labour Parties in 1943.¹⁹ Beginning with quotes from Morris and Cobbett, the plan reiterated their antipathy to capitalist urbanisation:

'Since we are children of the earth, and since all our life depends on labour applied to the earth, it appears to be obvious that in order to realise life to its fullest extent we must keep in close and constant touch with the world and all the natural forms and manifestations it exhibits for our joy and instruction.'²⁰

Recognising that socialism's 'town and country planning side can only become a reality with the achievement of the classless society', the plan attempted to address the relationship between Surrey and London: 'the greatest problem in any scheme of post-war policy for housing', the Labour plan warning 'that no solution which aims at improving the position in that county at the expense of Surrey will be tolerated.'²¹ 'There must,' they insisted, 'be no suburbia', anticipating Nye Bevan's *In Place of Fear* (1952) and its rejection of the specifically suburban compromise between the country and the city.²² Instead, they thought 'the town should promote a sense of town-consciousness in its population', drawing on a residual sense of the socially-mixed county towns of the nineteenth century and earlier.²³ In this, they could look to cities like Coventry – an embodiment, in the aftermath of war, of a new consensus.²⁴ As late as 1962, the Croydon Adult Students Association organised a trip to Coventry 'to view the new Cathedral, and to see the new shopping precincts, etc' – a cathedral watched over by the Bishop of Coventry, Cuthbert Bardsley, who had moved there from Croydon in 1956.²⁵ This was a vision of a town-conscious and socially-

¹⁹ Woking, Surrey History Centre, 6586/2/1.

²⁰ SHC, 6586/2/1.

²¹ SHC, 6586/2/1.

²² SHC, 6586/2/1; Black, *The Political Culture of the Left in Affluent Britain*, p.121.

²³ SHC, 6586/2/1.

²⁴ Lancaster & Mason, *Life and Labour in a Twentieth Century City*, p.8.

²⁵ Croydon, Museum of Croydon, AR164/3/1.

planned Croydon breaking from both suburban privatism and privately-developed suburbia, and in which Labour, rather than the Conservatives, might be predominant.

Perhaps the most powerful symbol of optimism in Croydon's post-war reconstruction was the Fairfield Halls, one 1975 commentator reporting that 'all feel a faint flutter of pride when the Fairfield Halls is mentioned'.²⁶ Opened in 1962, the building replaced a gravel pit and railway sidings which had been located on what was until 1868 the site of an annual fair – an earlier instance of the domination of what had been public space, which the new building could be seen as reappropriating to generate a new 'town-consciousness'.²⁷ A 'scaled-down version' of the 1951 Royal Festival Hall, the Fairfield Halls shared something of its spirit.²⁸ Built for the Festival of Britain, 'the cultural showcase the laissez-faire city never had', the Royal Festival Hall had marked the centenary of the Great Exhibition whose lasting legacy was in Crystal Palace, 'to reward the British people for their fortitude during the war, and point the way to a brighter, happier, more modern way of life'.²⁹ By contrast with the Great Exhibition, however, foreign and Commonwealth exhibits were absent, 'imperial majesty and economic prowess' replaced by 'culture and ideas', as the Festival of Britain cultivated 'pride in what the nation had accomplished on its own as well as a glimpse of its potential for the future'.³⁰ Lynda Graham, who was otherwise more likely to spend time close to home in Upper Norwood, remembered attending free Saturday morning concerts for children at the Fairfield Halls, and performing with her school.³¹ Croydon's reconstruction, however much it would differ from the proposals of the 1943 Surrey plan, therefore seemed to be encouraging the 'town-consciousness' which they had hoped for.

This vision assumed that Croydon's vacancies would be populated by left-wing voters, including the returning soldiers changed by their experiences of the conflict. Leni Gillman's father, raised a

²⁶ White, 'The pleasure of Croydon,' pp.525-526.

²⁷ K. Navickas, 'Public Spaces, Private Land,' pp.129-135, in O. Hatherley (ed.), *The Alternative Guide to the London Boroughs* (London: Open House, 2020), p.132.

²⁸ M. Fulcher, 'Fairfield Halls', in Hatherley (ed.), *The Alternative Guide to the London Boroughs*, p.136.

²⁹ Hatherley, *Red Metropolis*, p.21; Grindrod, *Concretopia*, p.73.

³⁰ F.M. Leventhal, "'A Tonic to the Nation": The Festival of Britain, 1951,' *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, vol.27, no.3 (1995), pp.445-453. p.449 & p.453.

³¹ Interview with Lynda and Martin Graham.

Catholic, suffered an extremely traumatic incident within the Fleet Air Arm in the Mediterranean which led to his left hand being amputated, and the resultant crisis of faith contributed to his post-war pacifism.³² Brian Nevill was born in Wuppertal in Germany in 1948 to a German interpreter and a British serviceman who moved back to Croydon when he was demobbed.³³ Whilst not all of the returning servicemen were, like Roy Lockett's father and his friends, 'blood-in-the-eye communists', there was nevertheless an assumption that things would be different when they got back.³⁴ In 1946, business and cultural ties were formed with the Dutch town of Arnhem, including a bridge club, on the basis of shared experiences of war-time destruction and the 1944 Battle of Arnhem in which soldiers from Croydon had participated; the Fairfield Halls opened with a room, the Arnhem Gallery, named for the town.³⁵ Arnhem was also formally twinned with Croydon in 1985, joining the Dutch town's other sibling city of Coventry, with which it had been twinned in 1958.³⁶ Given its wartime experience, and those of its soldiers, therefore, post-war Croydon, like Coventry, was arguably predisposed towards pacifism and internationalism.

Croydon's reconstruction would also require the growth of its working-class population, and Joan Matlock's father worked in delivering building materials to New Addington in the 1950s.³⁷ The estate's growth was dramatic: 730 council homes in 1951 rising to 3,146 by the end of the decade, its population ballooning from 8,000 to around 20,000 by 1960.³⁸ The changes were not limited to New Addington, as construction workers found homes across the borough: Matlock's father in Henderson Road in Thornton Heath, Marian Carty's in central Croydon. Carty said that Croydon was 'working-class – it's, like the French would say, *populaire* – there's a sense of

³² Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman.

³³ Interview with Brian Nevill.

³⁴ Interview with Roy Lockett.

³⁵ 'Historic ties with Arnhem celebrated at the restored Fairfield Halls,' *Your Croydon* (15th October 2019), <https://news.croydon.gov.uk/historic-ties-with-arnhem-celebrated-at-the-restored-fairfield-halls/>, accessed 16th November 2020; 'Arnhem links are as strong as ever,' *News Shopper* (3rd October 2001), <https://www.newshopper.co.uk/news/6395079.arnhem-links-are-as-strong-as-ever/>, accessed 16th November 2020.

³⁶ M. Griffin, 'What is the point of Coventry's twin towns?' *Coventry Telegraph* (2nd August 2011), <https://web.archive.org/web/20130806032050/http://www.coventrytelegraph.net/news/local-news/what-point-coventrys-twin-towns-3038605>, accessed 16th November 2020.

³⁷ Interview with Joan Matlock.

³⁸ Hare & Shaw, *Mental health on a new housing estate*, p.3.

people being down to earth, I think.’³⁹ Compared to the interwar years, after the war there was an expectation that, given the increased size of the town and its working class, prospects would improve. A TUC official in the 1950s described the Croydon Trades Council as a “‘Village” Trades Council in a very big town’, chastising them for ‘[carrying] on as though you were a village. You are not Camberley – you are Croydon.’⁴⁰ ‘You are bigger than Nottingham,’ he continued, ‘and Nottingham Trades Council could eat you.’⁴¹ These were increasingly the sorts of places to which Croydon was compared. The destruction of the Second World War, therefore, and the requirements of Croydon’s reconstruction, created the opportunity to reimagine Croydon as working-class and qualitatively different from its pre-war, middle-class Conservatism.

The decolonising world also meant new arrivals; Carty remembered an established Mauritian community in South Norwood when she was growing up in the 1950s and 1960s.⁴² Her own father was involved in building the Fairfield Halls, having arrived in Croydon from Ireland to perform war work, and joined a growing Irish Catholic community in the town.⁴³ The Rapoport brothers (Michael, Arron, and Wolf), Lithuanian Jews who had first moved to Glasgow to escape antisemitic pogroms, came to Croydon to work as doctors and acted as the nucleus of the town’s Communist Party.⁴⁴ They were a reminder that the ‘desire for a suburban home, after years of poorer housing, was not simply an aspiration confined to “mainstream” white groups in English society.’⁴⁵ Jewish suburbanisation in Croydon also included Jerry Fitzpatrick’s father, who had been in the Labour League of Youth before the war, and was a ‘fellow traveller’ after it; the family ‘took the *Daily Worker* and *Morning Star*’ and his parents later went on holiday to Bulgaria where they met ‘a communist couple who owned a fur shop in South End in Croydon, the Silvers.’⁴⁶ Simon Berlin’s father, who like his brothers ‘had links with the Communist Party, which a lot of

³⁹ Interview with Marian Carty.

⁴⁰ Coventry, Modern Records Centre, MSS.292/79C/54.

⁴¹ MRC, MSS.292/79C/54.

⁴² Interview with Marian Carty.

⁴³ Interview with Marian Carty.

⁴⁴ ‘Obituary,’ *British Medical Journal*, vol.302 (1991), p.903; Manchester, Labour History Archive and Study Centre, CP/CENT/PERS/06/04.

⁴⁵ Clapson, ‘The suburban aspiration in England since 1919,’ p.160.

⁴⁶ Interview with Jerry Fitzpatrick.

the Jewish East Enders did in those days', also moved to Croydon after the war.⁴⁷ Given the connections between suburban Conservatism and both Anglicanism and whiteness, the post-war period indicated that the appropriation of Croydon's vacated spaces might permit the resurgence of both the 'town-conscious' Croydon associated with the nineteenth century and the suburban progressivism pilloried by Chesterton forty years earlier.

More broadly, the vacancies created by an expanding welfare state provided opportunities for the generation of 'powerful new kinds of middle-class identities' in the post-war period, 'which broke from old notions of "status" and "gentility" and which emphasised instead the technocratic and scientific capacities of the middle class, and hence saw them as key parts of an efficient and modernising nation.'⁴⁸ Lynda Graham's mother had worked in the civil service, including for Harold Wilson, and then trained as a teacher, eventually becoming a headteacher.⁴⁹ Leni Gillman's parents underwent the emergency teacher training scheme during the Second World War, and both taught in secondary schools; Fitzpatrick's father became a maths teacher and taught at Croydon College.⁵⁰ After the Second World War, teachers in Croydon were increasingly drawn to the Labour Party and the left; in the 1950s, the Croydon Teachers Association noted that the Labour councillor James Keeling was a teacher, and decided it 'should approach him to act as our teachers representative after the council elections'.⁵¹ They also maintained correspondence with the Teachers for Peace Committee and sent delegates to both the United Nations Association and the Croydon Council of Peace Groups.⁵² Similarly, the Rapoport's roles as doctors gave them a level of technocratic credibility which allowed them to influence the Labour Party; a Labour Party ward meeting on the NHS was addressed by 'Dr Rapoport' in 1947.⁵³ The growth of a professional middle class – especially teachers and doctors – whose interests were connected to the expanding

⁴⁷ Interview with Simon Berlin.

⁴⁸ M. Savage, 'Affluence and Social Change in the Making of Technocratic Middle-Class Identities: Britain, 1939-55,' *Contemporary British History*, vol.22, no.4 (2008), pp.457-476, p.458.

⁴⁹ Interview with Lynda and Martin Graham. Lynda Graham was born in 1944, so this was probably during Wilson's period as Director of Economics and Statistics at the Ministry of Fuel and Power from 1943.

⁵⁰ Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman; Interview with Jerry Fitzpatrick.

⁵¹ Croydon, Museum of Croydon, AR763/1/3/4.

⁵² MC, AR763/1/3/4.

⁵³ *Croydon Labour Journal*, vol.1, no.3 (1947), p.5.

welfare state and to work in Croydon, rather than London, was fortuitous for a Labour Party which had been seeking to appeal to them since before the war.⁵⁴

This appeal rested upon a sense of the Conservatives as a 'class party', as Prentice put it, unlike Labour, 'the party of the nation' which was 'drawn from all sections of the community'.⁵⁵ This approach had been successful in the 1930s, as 'some of the most active and sizeable divisional organisations emerged in and around the Home Counties and beyond Labour's industrial heartlands'.⁵⁶ Prentice himself was an example of Labour's growing appeal, won over by a classmate at Whitgift whose father was a Labour councillor.⁵⁷ The 1930s ended with Croydon's largest Labour Group to that point (fourteen members) 'against the trend elsewhere', and 1937 saw the election of Labour's first alderman, coinciding with a particularly good year for Labour in the neighbouring London County Council elections.⁵⁸ These attempts to convert the professional middle class went hand-in-hand with the ongoing eclipse (and appropriation) of Liberalism.⁵⁹ One backbencher wrote to the *Croydon Labour Journal* celebrating the fact that many Liberals had defected to Labour, 'the Party that gets things done' – also the slogan of a 1949 election leaflet.⁶⁰ This cross-class, technocratic emphasis had succeeded in winning over a significant section of the professional middle class which was moving to Croydon after the war.

It was the war itself which consolidated this appeal and produced Labour's first major electoral successes in Croydon. In 1944-45, party membership nationally rose by 366,000; in the general election, Labour was endorsed (tacitly or otherwise) by three national newspapers with a combined readership of about six million.⁶¹ Its first mayor in Croydon, Samuel Roden, was

⁵⁴ Jeffrey, 'The suburban nation,' p.201.

⁵⁵ *Croydon Labour Journal*, vol.3, no.9 (1950), p.3; *Croydon Labour Journal*, vol.1, no.5 (1947); McHugh, *Labour in the city*, pp.113-121.

⁵⁶ Worley, *Labour's Grass Roots*, p.3; Weinbren, *Hendon Labour Party*, p.1; Jeffrey, 'The suburban nation,' p.190.

⁵⁷ Horn, *Crossing the floor*, p.12.

⁵⁸ Davies & Morley, *County Borough Elections in England and Wales, 1918-1938: A Comparative Analysis, Volume 3*, p.148; L. Beers, 'Labour's Britain, Fight for it now!', *The Historical Journal*, vol.52, no.3 (2009), pp.667-695, p.673.

⁵⁹ Macdonald, *The Radical Thread*, p.279.

⁶⁰ 'Council Commentary,' *Croydon Labour Journal*, vol.1, no.2 (1947), p.10; London, British Library of Politics and Economic Science, JENKINS/1/15.

⁶¹ Beers, 'Labour's Britain, Fight for it now!', p.685 & p.690.

elected in 1942, and eight wins in the 1945 local elections took its total number of councillors to an all-time high of 22. In the same year, Croydon South elected a Labour MP (David Rees-Williams, a lieutenant-colonel during the war) for the first time; in 1947, the local Labour Party secretary, G.G. Stubbart, noted proudly that, one of the largest constituencies in the country, it had been 'one of the Divisions that made it possible to have a Labour Government – with power.'⁶² In Croydon North, Marian Billson missed out by a mere 607 votes, with rumours that sacks of Labour-voting servicemen's ballots went uncounted in the basement of the town hall.⁶³ Labour benefited from a resurgence of interest in politics after the decidedly apolitical 1930s, as appetite for their pamphlets – and the Beveridge report – surged.⁶⁴ The experience seemed to confirm the view, criticised by David Edgerton, that 'it is labour, and the Labour party, which are in the ascendant during the war, and it is this which leads to wartime production miracles and innovation in social policy.'⁶⁵ As late as 1964, on his appointment by the council as delegate to the Surrey Territorial and Auxiliary Forces Association, James Keeling declared that 'Socialists fought and died in the last war as well as anyone else.'⁶⁶ By asserting their own contribution to the war effort, Labour portrayed itself as the representative of the nation, and of Croydon, in contrast to the narrower of appeal of a Conservative Party blamed for the difficulties of the 1930s. As Steedman noted:

'People said at the time that the War had been fought for the children, for a better future; and the decade represents a watershed in the historical process by which children have come to be thought of as repositories of hope, and objects of desire.'⁶⁷

If David Cowan's work has indicated that this kind of language resonated little with the young voters of the 1940s and early 1950s – and, as will be seen, it would cause similar problems for my

⁶² G.G. Stubbart, 'The Secretary says...', *Croydon Labour Journal*, vol.1, no.1 (1947), p.3.

⁶³ 'Marion Graeme Billson,' *The Inner Temple* (undated), <https://www.innertemple.org.uk/women-in-law/our-women/marion-billson/>, accessed 15th November 2021.

⁶⁴ Beers, 'Labour's Britain, Fight for it now!', p.693.

⁶⁵ D. Edgerton, 'Science and the nation: towards new histories of twentieth-century Britain,' *Historical Research*, vol.78, no.199 (2005), pp.96-112, p.101.

⁶⁶ 'T.A. stalwart fumes over choice of Labour delegate,' *Croydon Advertiser* (9th October 1964), p.1.

⁶⁷ Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman*, p.108.

narrators as they got older – the children born during and immediately after the war were the symbolic receptacles of a changing, improved future.⁶⁸

The victory in the 1945 general election was partial and short-lived, with George Bernard Shaw suggesting to Billson that she stand somewhere other than Croydon's 'quite hopeless constituency', which she did not heed.⁶⁹ In 1948, Labour (represented by Harold Nicolson, a controversial former supporter of the New Party and a National Labour MP) suffered a declining vote in a second-place finish in the Croydon North by-election.⁷⁰ In 1950, Prentice failed to take Croydon North, and Rees-Williams lost in newly-created Croydon West – though was later elevated to the Lords as a Liberal, Baron Ogmore. These defeats did not necessarily shake their confidence that Croydon was changing, or that Labour was the party which deserved to represent it. The Conservatives were criticised for the tone of their 1948 by-election celebrations, parading Churchill around in 'a sort of suburban Roman triumph', because 'Mr. Churchill belongs now not to Upper Norwood but to the world.'⁷¹ As Billson was told, standing in Croydon East, 'Croydon is not a town of the idle rich, it is a town of workers by hand or brain, who ought to have more sense.'⁷² It was, she thought, 'gradually growing in good sense' – its voters simply outnumbered by those who didn't normally vote, 'roused from their lethargic condition to vote Tory' out of fear of Labour's 'Big Bad Wolf'.⁷³ For Rees-Williams there was the hope that 'within a much shorter period than people think [...] Croydon will return not three Conservative but three Labour members to Westminster', if only they could 'kindle the growing embers sympathetic to Labour in the hearts of so many people in Croydon.'⁷⁴ It was just a matter of time before Labour convinced these voters that it should represent them, as its councillors prioritised 'efficient conduct' to 'build up the reputation of the Labour Party in the minds of interested ratepayers.'⁷⁵

⁶⁸ D. Cowan, 'The "Progress of a Slogan": Youth, Culture, and the Shaping of Everyday Political Languages in Late 1940s Britain,' *Twentieth Century British History*, vol.29, no.3 (2018), pp.435–458, p.456.

⁶⁹ 'Marion Graeme Billson.'

⁷⁰ The third-placed Liberal, Air Vice-Marshal Don Bennett, later joined the fascist National Party.

⁷¹ *Croydon Labour Journal*, vol.1, no.10 (1948), p.9.

⁷² *Croydon Labour Journal*, vol.3, no.8 (1950), p.6.

⁷³ *Croydon Labour Journal*, vol.3, no.8 (1950), p.6.

⁷⁴ *Croydon Labour Journal*, vol.3, no.8 (1950), p.8.

⁷⁵ *Croydon Labour Journal*, vol.1, no.1 (1947), p.7.

Croydon could be won for socialism – it was just a matter of cultivating a little more ‘town-consciousness’.

This was the Croydon which some left-wing activists encountered upon entering their schools, contrasted with the suburban Conservatism of the streets where they lived, and often of their homes. Lockett remembered his bottom form class – ‘this terrible kind of anarchic soviet’ – taught by Tom Gibson, ‘an anarchist, really, as much as he was a communist’.⁷⁶ Percival thought that, of his classmates, ‘nearly all of them were Labour supporting families’ and, in 1959, Labour ‘swept the board’ in the mock elections.⁷⁷ Carty remembered winning, with her primary school classmate Maureen O’Casey, ‘hands down, obviously’, in the 1964 election:

‘Maureen and I made our own manifesto – we tried to imagine the world being a fairer place, you know, with everybody having a nice house to live in and a garden, and people not having to work too hard – because our parents worked really hard, I mean my dad used to do loads of overtime – and so we thought about what we’d want and what we’d want in school, as well.’⁷⁸

Whilst there was a suburbanity to Carty and O’Casey’s manifesto, it was an early example of political expression, as they started to understand themselves as working-class and Labour-supporting. Given Carty’s comment about her Tory neighbours on Chatsworth Road, school represented a site of encounter with other left-wing children, as well as with the politics of the left-wing teachers referred to above. This experience remained persistent even whilst the broader political context changed. Fitzpatrick recalled that after standing in a mock election in 1970, one teacher ‘pretty well instructed me to turn up at the HQ of what was then the Norwood division of Lambeth Labour Party, and to do my bit, and so I was far too scared to disobey.’⁷⁹ As a civic space, the schools represented sites of escape from the suburban home, reproducing some of the attributes of Croydon’s town centre, and provided the young activists with a space in which they

⁷⁶ Interview with Roy Lockett.

⁷⁷ Interview with David Percival.

⁷⁸ Interview with Marian Carty.

⁷⁹ Interview with Jerry Fitzpatrick.

could explore and experiment with their own political identities. They were also a symbol of a period 'when state intervention in children's lives was highly visible, and experienced [...] as entirely beneficent.'⁸⁰

The experience of the Blitz, as well as the changing place of the empire in post-war life, offered an opportunity to rethink and rebuild Croydon. Against the suburban Conservatism of the interwar period and earlier, Labour put forward a vision of 'town-consciousness' – seeing the post-war growth of Croydon's working class, and the changing professional identities of its middle class, as signs that Croydon was changing. In some ways, they were right, as Labour secured its first MP and came very close to taking a second parliamentary seat and the council, but despite the optimism of figures like Prentice and Billson, Labour would make few advances in Croydon until the 1960s, falling short of the hoped-for comparisons to Coventry or Hull. However, the young left-wing activists did enter a world, particularly in their schools, where they often felt themselves in a majority and where arguing for left-wing politics was not only possible but appropriate. As the previous chapter argued, though, these sites of inclusion were oases in what was still a generally exclusionary experience of suburban Croydon, and the support of both the suburbanised working class and the professional middle class could not be assumed.

'Winning in China'... and Little Siberia

With their hopes of representing the entirety of Croydon dashed, or at least halted, left-wing activists retreated into the more familiar appeal of working-class politics in the town's relatively discrete working-class communities. For these activists, 'Labour Croydon' referred not to the borough, but to a grouping of its constituent parts: Labour Thornton Heath, Labour Waddon, or Labour New Addington. Focusing on working-class housing and social life, these activists (members of the CPGB, as well as Labour) contributed to a differentiated sense of several Croydons, hoping to represent working-class communities against both the dominant suburban Conservatism and, often, the subordinate, social-democratic politics of Labour's leaderships,

⁸⁰ Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman*, p.120.

locally and nationally, whose constituencies they ensured and who, like in Coventry, took working-class passivity 'as a fact'.⁸¹ These communities, as well as Ruskin House, secured a basis for an internationalist, socialist politics which transcended local concerns, and which made Croydon's left-wing politics nationally important. Whilst for many Labour activists the local and the international were largely distinct, for the CPGB in Croydon there was an attempt at something like the 'Coventry Communism' which James Hinton described of the war years: an unwillingness to accept the easy division between local and international issues, or between the industrial and electoral and other spheres, or between Labour and Communist.⁸² This two-sided aspect of the 'Old Left' in Croydon – its marginality and relative caution in claiming to speak on behalf of Croydon, and its receptiveness to radical politics – would prove significant as a younger generation of activists entered the scene in the years after 1956.

Despite their advances, the predominant experiences of the left in post-war Croydon remained exclusion and, at best, incorporation. In 1950, the Leader of the Council had to deny that there was a 'local dictatorship', and the *Croydon Labour Journal* quoted an *Advertiser* editorial which said it was 'easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a Labour member of Croydon Council to have a suggestion accepted by the R.A. majority.'⁸³ 'When the vote is taken,' Albert Dammarell, Labour Group leader, lamented, 'the Anti-Labour combination is generally strong enough to win'.⁸⁴ As he complained:

'A Labour Councillor's job in Croydon Council is not easy. Many have thought that if only they could get elected they would give the Council a good dose of Labour philosophy. But they find it easier to subside into dignified silence in the Chamber. Soon you hear them saying that after all the Council's real work is done in Committee.'⁸⁵

⁸¹ F. Carr, 'Municipal Socialism: Labour's Rise to Power,' pp.172-203, in Lancaster & Mason (eds.), *Life and Labour in a Twentieth Century City*, p.198.

⁸² J. Hinton, 'Coventry Communism: A Study of Factory Politics in the Second World War,' *History Workshop Journal*, vol.10, no.1 (1980), pp.90-118, p.112.

⁸³ *Croydon Labour Journal*, vol.3, no.9 (1950), p.8.

⁸⁴ A.V. Dammarell, 'A Councillor's Job,' *Croydon Labour Journal*, vol.1, no.1 (1947), p.7

⁸⁵ A.V. Dammarell, 'A Councillor's Job,' *Croydon Labour Journal*, vol.1, no.1 (1947), p.7.

They were frustrated that the ratepayers objected to their proposals 'lest the Labour Party get the kudos', then came forward later to present them as their own, and the Conservatives were criticised for having 'purloined' a seat in an aldermanic election.⁸⁶ Labour were vociferous in asserting that it was the representative of the town's working class and post-war social democracy: in 1949, Stubbart accused the Conservatives of 'following Goebbels' footsteps' for claiming responsibility for the NHS and family allowances, and said that they had 'distinctly fascist tendencies', describing its leader as 'Croydon's Tory "fuehrer"'.⁸⁷ To some extent, the growth of the working class in post-war Croydon 'obviat[ed] the need for a cross-class coalition', and (alongside and in contrast to appeals to the nation, described above) left-wing activists made clear their claim to represent specifically working-class interests.⁸⁸ One councillor, Frank Cole, 'a manual worker myself', claimed to be 'able to see the problem in a different light from some other members of the [Establishment] Committee who are black-coated workers'.⁸⁹ Labour opposed the council's reconstruction proposals because those 'who lived in the less desirable parts of Croydon should have the same opportunities of healthy environment as those who lived in the better parts'.⁹⁰ The stress was often on the narrow base which the Majority Group was thought to represent, 'concerned mainly with the interests of local big business' and disinterested in public services.⁹¹ A combative Woodside branch declared that it wanted 'Councillors who will represent the working class – not capitalists'.⁹² Despite the partially successful attempts to grow its support amongst the professional middle class, then, the Labour Party's perceived basis in post-war Croydon remained the working class and manual workers in particular.

Yet whilst someone like Carty saw Croydon as a working-class place, the geographic limits to this Croydon were clear in the places which she saw as 'not so *Croydon*' (South Croydon, Purley, Shirley, East Croydon) in contrast to her examples of working-class Croydon: 'Waddon, central

⁸⁶ 'Council Commentary,' *Croydon Labour Journal*, vol.1, no.3 (1947), p.10.

⁸⁷ *Croydon Labour Journal*, vol.2, no.12 (1949), p.1.

⁸⁸ Jeffrey, 'The suburban nation,' p.195.

⁸⁹ *Croydon Labour Journal*, vol.1, no.3 (1947), p.7.

⁹⁰ *Croydon Labour Journal*, vol.1, no.4 (1947), p.11.

⁹¹ *Croydon Labour Journal*, vol.3, no.9 (1950), p.2.

⁹² *Croydon Labour Journal*, vol.4, no.3 (1950), p.4.

Croydon, even Addiscombe, Thornton Heath, South Norwood.⁹³ Working-class identity in post-war Croydon was predominantly local, oriented to the immediate area and not to Croydon as a whole.⁹⁴ In the 'Town and Country Plan for Surrey', Labour had called for the growth of the entire county to be limited to 250,000 additional people, through a scheme which would split up its 'over-populated north-eastern area' into 'smaller communities' of 50,000 at most, which for Croydon meant four distinct towns: Thornton Heath, Woodside, Croydon, and Chelsham (now in Tandridge).⁹⁵ An extreme example is the testimony to a parliamentary boundary review of Lucy Brown, a 69-year-old who argued that 'Whitehorse Manor has always been termed as Croydon and I am not a Croydonian. I am a Thornton Heath [sic] and I am very adamant about that.'⁹⁶ Albert Dammarell, presenting a different but still local and working-class narrative of Whitehorse Manor, was at pains to emphasise that Whitehorse Manor was 'of one social sort, by and large' – 'I am comfortable there,' he said, 'and I would not be comfortable in some other parts of Croydon.'⁹⁷ Often this perspective was influenced by different experiences of transport, with working-class people more likely to depend upon buses; one witness pointed out that whereas there were four frequent bus services between Whitehorse Manor and South Norwood, there was only one frequent and one infrequent service between Whitehorse Manor and the north-west.⁹⁸ The 'town-consciousness' Labour cultivated not necessarily that of Croydon as a whole, but smaller communities like Thornton Heath or Woodside – examples of the older, working-class places described by Stuart Hall as the centres of 'a "class" life, a pattern of – in some cases – hastily erected personal and collective barricades.'⁹⁹

⁹³ Interview with Marian Carty.

⁹⁴ This was not a phenomenon restricted to Croydon: 'The working-class experience of the city is more segmented – it is carried in specific and concrete *localities* and connections. [...] Even more, however, this connection with the city is carried in the patterns and organisations of specific localities within the city – the social and economic patterns of the particular working-class neighbourhood, with its specific traditions, membership and definite limits. It is where people live, talk, play, shop and sometimes work – it is their "bit" of the city, to which people are concretely and directly attached. Working-class experience is crucially *parochial* in this sense.' S. Hall et al, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (London: Macmillan Press, 1978), pp.145–146.

⁹⁵ SHC, 6586/2/1.

⁹⁶ NA, AF 1/517.

⁹⁷ NA, AF 1/517.

⁹⁸ NA, AF 1/515.

⁹⁹ Hall, 'A Sense of Classlessness,' p.27.

Perceptions of these working-class communities overlapped with changing religious demographics and especially the arrival of large numbers of Irish Catholics, who tended to congregate in proximity to each other and to the Catholic churches and schools. A 2018 study by Alan Mace found that Penge, across the Croydon-Bromley boundary from South Norwood, is still seen as a 'spoiled place' by residents in Beckenham for its association with Irish navvies.¹⁰⁰ The Carty family very deeply embedded within this community: she didn't realise that the Irish accent used by visitors to the house, and herself as a child, wasn't the norm in Croydon until she went to school, where she started to pick up the South London vernacular.¹⁰¹ All nine of her family went to mass every Sunday (to St. Mary's in West Croydon, with mostly Irish worshippers but also 'a few Italians, a few Polish, few Indian, Burmese') and her parents helped to build a swimming pool for the primary school.¹⁰² 'The Catholic club set up there,' she remembered, 'was really good – I'd imagine he was a socialist, the canon – he got people like Bruce Kent to come and talk about peace, and, you know, all the Irish people were very socialist and republican, so they were a politically aware bunch of people.'¹⁰³ Berlin thought that his school 'probably veered towards Labour' because Irish Catholic families were predominant.¹⁰⁴ The clustering of these working-class Irish Catholics in areas like South Norwood or West Croydon contributed to the perception of these spaces as working-class and Labour-supporting communities where 'all the bonds were holding in the same direction', in contrast to the socially-mixed blue- and white-collar suburbs of the interwar period and earlier.¹⁰⁵

However, this perspective understates the role of older left-wing activists in constructing the perception of these places as working-class, especially where those areas lacked an unbroken

¹⁰⁰ Mace, 'Whiteness, class and place in two London suburbs,' p.1039. Note, also, the discussion of middle-class attitudes towards 'navvies' in: Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, *Class, Politics, and the Decline of Deference in England*, p.41.

¹⁰¹ Interview with Marian Carty. Acquisition of 'a real South London accent' was also associated with attending school in Croydon for Kirsty MacColl: see J. MacColl, *My Kirsty: End of the Fairytale* (London: John Blake, 2014), p.67.

¹⁰² Interview with Marian Carty.

¹⁰³ Interview with Marian Carty.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Simon Berlin.

¹⁰⁵ Cooke, 'Decentralism and the politics of place,' p.372. Note, also, the discussion of the working-class Catholic community, anchored by attendance at Catholic schools, in post-war Bermondsey, in: Lawrence, *Me, Me, Me?*, pp.65-66.

connection to the older working-class communities at the foot of the Norwood Ridge: the 'new housing estates and new towns' which Hall described as 'part of a new style of urban life.'¹⁰⁶ Whilst Nevill thought that New Addington 'felt more like part of Kent than Surrey' (with the implications discussed in the previous chapter), never-complete perceptions of New Addington as working-class and Labour-supporting had to be achieved.¹⁰⁷ New Addington did end up as a Labour stronghold in Croydon, with what locally-born Les Back described as 'a strong trace of a connection with the Labour and co-operative movement amongst early pioneers'.¹⁰⁸ Its nickname, 'Little Siberia' (a combination of its distance from the centre of Croydon and its peculiar weather patterns), contrasts with the CPGB-voting 'Little Moscows' of the interwar years, as a space of exile rather than strength, but still somewhere that Labour won a majority consistently, the only ward to have at least one Labour councillor throughout the post-war period.¹⁰⁹ Like the other areas of Labour strength – from the war until the mid-1970s, with the exception of the 1968 council, Labour was always represented in Addiscombe, Broad Green, Thornton Heath, Waddon, Whitehorse Manor and Woodside – New Addington's status as a Labour stronghold was fought for, and primarily through the politics of working-class housing.

The paradigmatic example of this, for many of the young post-war activists, was Viterbo Burgos, elected as councillor for Waddon in 1952 and then serving (except for 1955-56 and 1968-71) until his death in 1977. He was described by my narrators as 'a very fiery person', 'eccentric' and 'very hyper', a 'firebrand', known for his 'crusading' on local issues and especially housing: the Faddens, two of Burgos' most important local allies, had been homeless in the early 1960s and Burgos had helped them to find somewhere to live.¹¹⁰ Grace Fadden remembered that her husband, Frank, would come home, eat dinner, and immediately leave to join Burgos in going

¹⁰⁶ Hall, 'A Sense of Classlessness,' p.26.

¹⁰⁷ Nevill, *Boom Baby*, p.15.

¹⁰⁸ L. Back, 'Why Everyday Life Matters: Class, Community and Making Life Liveable,' *Sociology*, vol.49, no.5 (2015), pp.820-836, p.825.

¹⁰⁹ For references to 'Little Siberia', see for example: Nevill, *Boom Baby*, p.16; Grindrod, *Concretopia*, p.7; Back, 'Why Everyday Life Matters,' p.825. For 'Little Moscows', see: Macintyre, *Little Moscows*, pp.14-15. Compare to the playful labelling of council houses as 'SIBERIA' in North Moulescomb, an estate outside Brighton, in the 1920s: Jones, *The working class in mid-twentieth-century England*, p.171.

¹¹⁰ Interview with Jean Tagg; Interview with Peter Walker; Interview with Jerry Fitzpatrick; Interview with David White.

from door to door, asking people if they had room for a homeless person or family.¹¹¹ Burgos built up 'a personal kind of fiefdom amongst working-class voters on the council estate in Waddon' with Frank Fadden's help, and both men were known as 'Mr. Waddon'.¹¹² Whilst their campaigning built their own and the party's reputation on the estate, it also brought them into conflicts with the council and the Labour Group, and Burgos was repeatedly censured.¹¹³ The accusation that Burgos was threatening was a recurring theme, and hints at the othering which he may have experienced as a migrant from Spain.¹¹⁴ Narrators pointed towards the condescension which Burgos faced, treated as an 'embarrassment' by the Group.¹¹⁵ Yet Burgos was enormously popular, and it is difficult to imagine that Labour could have had such success in Waddon without him – after 1968 his presence was missed, with the *Advertiser* declaring that 'every council needs its V. Burgos.'¹¹⁶ Figures like Burgos and Fadden established Labour's reputation as defenders of working-class housing even in areas where lack of council control inhibited 'clientage', and were consequently respected by the fledgling members of the first New Left for their bravery and commitment.¹¹⁷

Burgos' work in Waddon was connected to the Housing Campaign Committee (HCC), a CPGB-linked tenants' organisation in Croydon which Burgos volunteered to speak on behalf of.¹¹⁸ For the post-war CPGB, the emphasis had shifted – as it did in Coventry – from industrial to residential organisation.¹¹⁹ Whereas in Coventry, Hinton argued, this was 'little short of disastrous', in Croydon (where industry was less prominent) it provided a level of organisation appropriate to the place, as George Barnsby argued the policy shift was intended: 'New towns and

¹¹¹ Interview with Grace Fadden.

¹¹² Interview with Roy Lockett; Interview with David White; Interview with Grace Fadden.

¹¹³ Croydon, Museum of Croydon, uncatalogued minute book of Croydon Labour Party Executive Committee (1961-1972).

¹¹⁴ On social-democratic attitudes to people from southern Europe, see: J. de Graaf, Review of E. Costa, 'The Labour Party, Denis Healey and the International Socialist Movement: Rebuilding the Socialist International during the Cold War, 1945-1951,' *Contemporary British History* (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1080/13619462.2019.1664294>, p.2.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Peter Walker; Interview with David White.

¹¹⁶ 'Croydon prospects in 1971,' *Croydon Advertiser* (1st January 1971), p.11.

¹¹⁷ On 'clientage', see: A. Thorpe, *A History of the British Labour Party* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p.113.

¹¹⁸ MRC, MSS.292/79C/54; MC, uncatalogued minute book of Croydon Labour Party Executive Committee (1961-1972).

¹¹⁹ Hinton, 'Coventry Communism,' p.107.

new industrial areas would have to be organised in areas where the Party had never before existed'.¹²⁰ In 1954, the Belgrave Road tenants' committee held a funeral parade for the Rent Act, whilst the party claimed credit for rehousing three families in South Norwood.¹²¹ This reflected the strength of the 'fairly active and militant' tenant movement in 1950s Croydon.¹²² The CPGB's attempts to build tenant associations could be a point of tension with Labour, whose members on the trades council (though they expressed support for the groups in the abstract) worried about 'a loss of workers from essential Labour Party work.'¹²³ This may have overlapped with concerns about the threat posed to the Labour vote; in 1955, a Labour-supporting Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU) member attacked the CPGB for having stood a candidate in Woodside, where Labour lost a seat, whilst another member of the same union argued 'the C.P. did not lose the election for Labour; it was Labour's policy'.¹²⁴ Housing activism had given the CPGB, as well as Labour, a basis for organising within Croydon's working-class communities, and a means of exerting influence on the Labour left.

The approaches of the CPGB and the Labour left to housing activism were not, however, identical – as their differing attitudes to the role of housewives attest. Harriet Keeling gave a tour of Waddon to Burgos when he was first elected as a councillor, forging a firm friendship with his wife, Irene, who helped Keeling, paralysed in her legs, to meetings of the Women's Cooperative Guild (WCG).¹²⁵ This is an example of the relational 'walking-with' described by Tiina Männistö-Funk, highlighting 'the practical role of much of women's walking in a city: taking care of the logistics of food and weaker as well as other bodily needs of a city's other inhabitants.'¹²⁶ For

¹²⁰ Hinton, 'Coventry Communism,' p.107; G. Barnsby, 'Coventry Communism,' *History Workshop*, no.13 (1982), pp.184–186, p.184. As Lawrence Black argued, this was also a shift which met with success in Crawley, where the CPGB was able to build solidarity between workers and tenants: Black, *The Political Culture of the Left in Affluent Britain*, p.120.

¹²¹ Manchester, Labour History Archive and Study Centre, CP/LOC/MISC/01/07.

¹²² Saunders, *Urban Politics*, p.282.

¹²³ MRC, MSS.292/79C/54.

¹²⁴ MRC, MSS.292/79C/54.

¹²⁵ Waddon Labour Party newsletter, in David White's personal papers. On the WCG and its attitude to housewives in the post-war period, see: P. Gurney, 'Redefining "the woman with the basket": The Women's Co-operative Guild and the Politics of Consumption in Britain during the Second World War,' *Gender & History*, vol.31, no.2 (2019), pp.189–207, p.191.

¹²⁶ T. Männistö-Funk, 'The gender of walking: female pedestrians in street photographs 1890–1989,' *Urban History*, vol.48, no.2 (2021), pp.227–247, p.242.

Labour, housewives provided access to a specialised knowledge which figures like Burgos would otherwise have lacked, tapping into the 'growing recognition that housewives had an important role in post-war society', with two thirds of women aged between 20 and 64 'full-time housewives' in 1951.¹²⁷ Reference to women's roles as mothers was a persistent theme in Labour's local election literature, as local government was portrayed as 'the nation's "domestic" work'; in 1964, Violet Rooke, the first woman candidate in New Addington, was praised for being able 'to hear the women's grumbles – things that would normally be overlooked.'¹²⁸ Working-class housewives remained important interlocutors for working-class communities, with Matlock recalling her 'granny and Mrs Hill [who] lived in the two houses at the short end, and half the people in the street were related one way or another to those two [...] matriarchal women.'¹²⁹ Yet these women were typically seen as dispensing knowledge without involving themselves directly in activism – it was Frank, and not Grace, who accompanied Viterbo, and not Irene, in door knocking in Waddon.¹³⁰ Labour's literature treated housewives scornfully, with 'well dressed, well fed ladies complaining about rationing' and their 'moaning squads' representing suburban Conservatism; a visit from Sir Hartley Shawcross, apparently persuasive to 'a stout, middle-aged lady in a salmon-pink jumper', was celebrated as the 'Rout of the Housewives' League'.¹³¹ In 1955, the trades council acknowledged an 'absence of women representatives on the [Executive Committee] can only point to a weakness of work amongst women by Trade Unions in Croydon', despite Croydon's trades council having the only women's advisory committee of any in Surrey.¹³² If Labour treated housewives as a useful resource, and if Labour housewives contributed to the depth of knowledge which figures like Burgos brought to their housing activism, they remained essentially passive themselves – mistrusted as the archetypal representatives of suburban privatism.

¹²⁷ C. Beaumont, 'What *Do* Women Want? Housewives' Associations, Activism and Changing Representations of Women in the 1950s,' *Women's History Review*, vol.26, no.1 (2017), pp.147-162, pp.147-148; K. Hunt, 'Making Politics in Local Communities: Labour Women in Interwar Manchester,' pp.79-101, in Worley (ed.), *Labour's Grass Roots*, p.79.

¹²⁸ London, British Library of Political and Economic Science, JENKINS/2/1; *Croydon Labour Journal*, vol.2, no.11 (1949), p.1 & p.4; 'Mother of two as council candidate,' *Croydon Advertiser* (13th March 1964), p.5.

¹²⁹ Interview with Joan Matlock.

¹³⁰ Fielding, 'Activists against "Affluence",' p.255; Interview with Grace Fadden.

¹³¹ *Croydon Labour Journal*, vol.1, no.3 (1947), pp.1-3. For an examination of Labour's difficulty securing the votes of women in the early post-war period, see: A. Black & S. Brooke, 'The Labour Party, Women, and the Problem of Gender, 1951-1966,' *Journal of British Studies*, vol.36, no.4 (1997), pp.419-452.

¹³² MRC, MSS.292/79C/54.

The contrast with the role of women in the post-war CPGB could not be more apparent. The CPGB tried to avoid reducing women to a singular role, the Surrey bulletin calling for members to 'build women's groups' aimed at 'not housewives only!'¹³³ As one CPGB activist, Queenie Knight, commented:

'The two gross old women who stand at their doors in the hot summer evenings and talk scandal about the rest of the street – how many of us would dismiss them as "impossible" and "no good". And yet when the bailiffs come to the little old lady across the road, these two are in the forefront of the women blocking the way. There was nothing wrong with their class instincts. And to me they made work amongst women seem so much more real, so much more vital.'¹³⁴

Similarly, she praised members who were housewives with young children on their recruiting work around the bus garages.¹³⁵ The roles which she saw these women as capable of performing – blocking the way themselves or selling newspapers – spoke to her own role as one of Croydon's most prominent CPGB organisers and a perennial council candidate in Woodside. Whilst her husband, Roy Knight, who had joined the party in 1939, was a member of the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the Sign and Display Trades Union, and active within the cooperative movement as well as with the British-Soviet Friendship Society (BSFS), Queenie was more prominent locally.¹³⁶ She quickly rose to the Surrey district committee, possessing 'all the making of an outstanding public party figure' with a recommendation that 'she be used much more in party propaganda and to take classes for women.'¹³⁷ She made a big impression on the young activists that they encountered – I was once jokingly told by a local activist, though not in an

¹³³ LHASC, CP/LOC/MISC/01/07. For a discussion of working-class women in the Labour Party in the interwar period, and a contrast with the assumed lack of autonomy of 'Communist wives', see: S. Ward, 'Labour Activism and the Political Self in Inter-War Working-Class Women's Politics,' *Twentieth Century British History*, vol.30, no.1 (2019), pp.29-52; A. Baldwin, *Progress and patterns in the election of women as councillors, 1918-1938* (PhD Thesis, University of Huddersfield, 2012).

¹³⁴ LHASC, CP/LOC/MISC/01/07. For a discussion of the role of 'gossip' and women in fostering a sense of community in working-class neighbourhoods, see: Jones, *The working class in mid-twentieth-century England*, pp.134-135.

¹³⁵ LHASC, CP/LOC/MISC/01/07.

¹³⁶ LHASC, CP/CENT/PERS/04/04; London, Bishopsgate Institute, LCS/D/50/1.

¹³⁷ LHASC, CP/CENT/PERS/04/04.

interview, that the mere mention of her was enough to shake the knees of those comrades who had known her in their youth.¹³⁸ Meanwhile, the active role of women in CPGB organising, in contrast to the relative passivity available within Labour, contributed to its strength in areas like Woodside, where, although Knight struggled to obtain much electoral success, it was able to secure a base for its activists to influence those who did.

For both the Labour left and the CPGB, these bases were bolstered by the development of social spaces. The left-wing activists in Waddon organised daytrips for people on the estate to go to the coast, as well as jumble sales and parties.¹³⁹ The construction of a vibrant social life was also an important part of the CPGB's work. In 1952, a new member, George Hardy, had addressed a meeting of four in South Norwood ('not an industrial area', though it had a rail depot), with 'nearly all activity taking place in West Croydon'.¹⁴⁰ A few years later, they celebrated 'the building of a social life – where the word "comrade" meant something, where everyone lingered for a chat after the meeting.'¹⁴¹ In 1954, the Croydon branch organised a 'family outing' for the Surrey district, taking 150 people 'from babes in prams to old aged pensioners' to Earlswood Common to go sunbathing, swimming and boating; the women's team won the tug of war.¹⁴² In the context of a Croydon largely hostile to left-wing politics, these organisations established sites of retreat, appealing to the residual fascination with access to nature and social encounters to sustain their activism despite the strength of Croydon's suburban Conservatism.

As the previous chapter suggested, this relative isolation contributed to the strength and radicalism of left-wing politics in places like Croydon. Burgos, Fitzpatrick remembered, 'could be relied upon to take a kind of traditional left-of-centre, sort of Tribunitary decision on national

¹³⁸ Queenie Knight was brought up by two of my narrators: Interview with Peter Walker; Interview with David White. Simon Berlin recalled another impressive older American woman who had been a member of the anti-revisionist New Communist Party (which Queenie Knight would eventually join) in the 1970s: Interview with Simon Berlin.

¹³⁹ Interview with Grace Fadden.

¹⁴⁰ LHASC, CP/LOC/MISC/01/07.

¹⁴¹ LHASC, CP/LOC/MISC/01/07.

¹⁴² LHASC, CP/LOC/MISC/01/07.

issues [and] to stand up and advocate a case, even if it wasn't a very popular case.'¹⁴³ Percival recalled that many in his local Labour Party, including his father, 'were or had been Bevanites' – and the party invited speakers like Tony Benn and representatives from the Cuban embassy after the revolution.¹⁴⁴ In the 1950s, Bevanism found national organisational expression in Victory for Socialism (VfS), whose president from 1958, the former Tottenham South MP Frederick Messer, 'a kind of pleasant old leftie' as Lockett recalled him, lived in Croydon, where his son Eric stood in Croydon South in 1959 – alongside Walter Wolfgang (the VfS secretary from 1955 to 1958) in Croydon North East.¹⁴⁵ Another old left-winger, William Adams, arrested during the general strike, was president of the local party in the mid-1950s when it took the lead in challenging the national leadership.¹⁴⁶ Disgruntled about the party's policy on both German rearmament and colonial policy, Adams circulated a letter to all CLPs calling for an annual conference of constituency parties analogous to the annual TUC.¹⁴⁷ They received 105 replies, of which 85 were in support – 'many very enthusiastically' – and only 13 opposed.¹⁴⁸ In 1958, too, Grace Walker wrote on the local party's behalf to unsuccessfully suggest the creation of an explicitly socialist propaganda organisation.¹⁴⁹ As in the interwar period, Croydon remained associated with left-wing politics to the chagrin of the party leadership: a left-wing politics which was possible because of the base which figures like Burgos had built in areas like Waddon, and which would provide the first organised political encounters of many of the young post-war activists.

It was particularly significant that the older left-wing Labour activists emphasised both pacifism and anti-colonialism. There were a growing number of ethnic minority activists within Croydon's Labour Party, including Said Shah (the Labour Party's agent in Croydon general elections from 1959 to 1970, who came from the Fiji Islands and moved to Croydon in 1952) and Errol Neckles (noted as working to improve 'the coloured vote' in 1968's local elections, in which he stood),

¹⁴³ Interview with Jerry Fitzpatrick.

¹⁴⁴ Interview with David Percival; Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Roy Lockett.

¹⁴⁶ London, National Archives, HO 328/158; Manchester, Labour History Archive and Study Centre, LP/GS/VS/2.

¹⁴⁷ LHASC, LP/GS/VS/2.

¹⁴⁸ LHASC, LP/GS/VS/4.

¹⁴⁹ LHASC, LP/GS/VS/147-148.

who acted as delegates to the Vfs-supported Movement for Colonial Freedom (MCF).¹⁵⁰ Whilst in 1955 a resolution by the Croydon branch of the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR) demanded 'that coloured workers be declared ineligible for supervisory grades', by 1958 Croydon NUR were arguing that 'any restriction of coloured immigrants is tantamount to support of the colour bar.'¹⁵¹ The MCF was founded in 1954 as the result of the merger of three lobbies including the Council for the Defence of Seretse Khama and the Protectorates and the British Guiana Association, both particularly relevant in Croydon.¹⁵² Similarly, and as indicated by their opposition to German rearmament, peace campaigning was an important part of Croydon Labour activism, with even Peter Walker's parents described as 'right-wing CND'.¹⁵³ Councillors attempted to undermine the civil defence programme, although in 1955 their refusal to approve the proposals was withdrawn following a discussion.¹⁵⁴ In 1957, two councillors sought to pass a resolution, taken from Kingston-upon-Hull City Council, to recommend an end to nuclear testing; in 1960, Burgos moved a motion that the Civil Defence Committee be renamed the 'Emergency Rescue Committee'.¹⁵⁵ Grace Walker wrote to the Coventry Labour Party in 1961 about a meeting which the Lord Mayor of Coventry was trying to convene:

'Some of the members were under the impression, although of course realising that your Lord Mayor, is a Labour Mayor, that this appeal to Mayors from other countries and the churches was a non-political approach to all people, and that to draw in other boroughs such as ours, which are not socialist controlled this would have to be the approach.'¹⁵⁶

The reply clarified that the Lord Mayor had 'decided to call together the Lord Mayors and Mayors from many overseas countries, and also from this country, on a non-political basis, in order that

¹⁵⁰ 'The Agent Behind Labour Victory,' *Croydon Advertiser* (8th April 1966), p.15; Croydon, Museum of Croydon, A845.

¹⁵¹ D. Breen, 'Jamaicans in Britain,' *Socialist Review*, vol.4, no.5 (1955), pp.6-7; MRC, MSS.292/79C/54.

¹⁵² S. Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics: The Left and the End of Empire 1918-1964* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.231. Seretse Khama – the first president of independent Botswana – lived on Maplewood Avenue in Addiscombe with his wife, Ruth Williams Khama, during their 1951-1956 exile.

¹⁵³ Interview with Peter Walker.

¹⁵⁴ Croydon, Museum of Croydon, uncatalogued minutes of County Borough of Croydon Civil Defence Committee.

¹⁵⁵ MC, uncatalogued minutes of County Borough of Croydon Civil Defence Committee.

¹⁵⁶ Coventry, Modern Records Centre, MSS 11/3/25/278.

they may draw attention to the desire of the common man to live in peace', and – noting that the Mayor of Croydon had declined the invitation – suggested that the Croydon Labour Party protest the refusal and send a speaker in his place, at the Coventry Labour Party's expense.¹⁵⁷ In a blitzed and decolonising Croydon, pacifism and anti-colonialism offered the older left-wing Labour activists the opportunity to reach out and establish connections to other activists in Labour-held areas like Coventry and Hull.

They also acted as a bridge between the left-wing Labour activists and the CPGB, particularly on the trades council – by 1953 the largest in Surrey – where relations between the Labour left and the CPGB were amicable.¹⁵⁸ Working together, CPGB and left-wing Labour activists pushed issues of international importance. After Suez, the CPGB supported 'a rather wild resolution', passed unanimously, calling for a general strike against military intervention, 'the Labour delegates making the point that while the formulation of the thing did not appeal to them they wholeheartedly approved of the spirit moving it and would give all support.'¹⁵⁹ The trades council's internationalism was a continuing source of tension with the TUC, critical in 1954 of Croydon Trades Council for its links to the proscribed British-China Friendship Society, blaming the council's low attendance on its failure to address local issues.¹⁶⁰ In fact, these criticisms (similar to the 'remote-control radicalism' described by David Caute) overlapped with some of the self-criticisms expressed by Edward and Dorothy Thompson, recalling the CPGB of the 1940s.¹⁶¹ Remembering one ill-fated by-election, they quoted a familiar refrain from the time: 'We may be losing in South Croydon, but we're winning in China'.¹⁶² Like the interwar

¹⁵⁷ MRC, MSS 11/3/25/278.

¹⁵⁸ MRC, MSS.292/79C/54.

¹⁵⁹ LHASC, CP/LOC/MISC/01/07.

¹⁶⁰ MRC, MSS.292/79C/54.

¹⁶¹ D. Caute, *The Fellow-Travelers: Intellectual Friends of Communism* (London: Yale University Press, 1988), p.4.

¹⁶² A. Whitehead, 'Political Voices: E.P. Thompson,' *Andrew Whitehead* (undated)

<https://www.andrewwhitehead.net/political-voices-ep-thompson.html>, accessed 16th November 2020. It's unclear to which by-election this anecdote refers. The CPGB did not stand a candidate in the Croydon North by-election in 1948, and it's unlikely that the party would have sent the Thompsons to campaign for Harold Nicolson. It's possible that they were referring to Bob Jarvie's 1950 general election campaign in Croydon West, including South Croydon, in which he secured 336 votes, or one of his several local election campaigns in Waddon. G. Stevenson, 'Bob Jarvie,' *Graham Stevenson* (undated), <https://web.archive.org/web/20170418192039/http://www.grahamstevenson.me.uk/index.php/biographies/j-l/j/1461-jarvie-bob>, accessed 16th November 2020. The Thompsons were not alone in making a

criticisms which compared Croydon to Torquay or Bournemouth, these arguments saw the internationalism of Croydon's left-wing activists as a distraction from the local.

As in the interwar period, it was the close relationship between left-wing Labour activists and the CPGB which could be blamed. During the war, some 10 percent of the CPGB's membership was operating inside the Labour Party as entrists, possibly including Queenie Knight.¹⁶³ The CPGB's high turnover of membership 'helped the party to sustain or even increase its wider influence', including in Croydon.¹⁶⁴ A CPGB meeting in Addington in 1953 addressed by the Surrey district organiser, Sid French, was attended by 24 people of whom half were non-party members, including four or five from Labour who notably referred to the Communists by their forenames.¹⁶⁵ The overlap between CPGB and Labour Party membership posed a problem in 1961, when Betty Fisher – the mother of the future Procul Harum organist Matthew Fisher, and a former CPGB member with a reputation almost as weighty as Queenie Knight's – was appointed as delegate to the Labour Party's general management committee by her union, the Clerical and Administrative Workers' Union (CAWU); when Fisher refused to publicly distance herself from the CPGB, only Burgos voted to accept her as a delegate.¹⁶⁶ Later in the year, when the president of Croydon Labour Party refused to meet with a Waddon AEU delegation that included a former CPGB member, Eric Messer successfully moved that he should have consulted with the other officers.¹⁶⁷ The overlap was perhaps best represented by the one minute silence which the trades council held in 1960 for recently-deceased Harry Pollitt and Nye Bevan, each 'a champion in his own particular field of Socialist endeavour.'¹⁶⁸ This closeness would have consequences as a younger generation of activists figured out their own politics after 1956. Moreover, just as before

comment like this, nor was Croydon the only point of reference – Pollitt apparently made a similar remark about the 1949 St Pancras North by-election. I. Birchall, "'Vicarious pleasure'?: The British far left and the third world, 1956-79,' pp.190-208, in Smith & Worley (eds.), *Against the grain*, p.190.

¹⁶³ A. Campbell & J. McIlroy, "'The Trojan Horse': Communist Entrism in the British Labour Party, 1933-43,' *Labor History*, vol.59, no.5 (2018), pp.513-554, p.543.

¹⁶⁴ A. Thorpe, 'The Membership of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1920-1945,' *The Historical Journal*, vol.43, no.3 (2000), pp.777-800, p.800.

¹⁶⁵ LHASC, CP/LOC/MISC/01/07.

¹⁶⁶ MC, uncatalogued minute book of Croydon Labour Party Executive Committee (1961-1972); Interview with Peter Walker.

¹⁶⁷ MC, uncatalogued minute book of Croydon Labour Party Executive Committee (1961-1972).

¹⁶⁸ MRC, MSS.292/79C/54.

the war, the relative electoral weakness of the left in post-war Croydon, and the possibilities offered by Ruskin House as a site of encounter for the trades council, enabled the close relationship between the CPGB and the Vfs activists which both the TUC and figures like the Thompsons blamed for internationalist distractions from the local.

However, if some of these criticisms rang true of Labour's councillors, for whom peace campaigning (whether they were from the left or the right of the party) was mainly a matter of mimicking and building alliances with places like Coventry and Hull, it was less true of the trades council and the CPGB. Whilst the trades council faced criticism from the TUC, it was (in the 1950s and early 1960s, at least) credibly 'the most community conscious Council in the Federation', and its focus on political issues could realistically have made meeting attendance more, rather than less, attractive.¹⁶⁹ The CPGB was active within the local peace committee, sending Bob Jarvie as a delegate to the World Congress of Advocates of Peace in Paris in 1949, but it also made a more concerted effort than Labour activists to connect issues at a local level with its internationalism.¹⁷⁰ On the same day as the Belgrave Road funeral procession, an exhibition in South Norwood drew attention to 'the Nazi atrocities', whilst a poster parade in central Croydon against nuclear weapons brought together Labour and WCG members and a Methodist minister.¹⁷¹ In 1955, 1200 copies of *In Defence of Peace* were sold in South Norwood, which had only 12,500 electors.¹⁷² The CPGB's social life was not sharply distinct from its political campaigning: 65 old-age pensioners on the party's annual outing in 1956 drafted and signed a letter to Eden protesting the Suez conflict.¹⁷³ Nor was there a rigid divide between its trade unionism and its internationalism, as two of the CPGB-influenced AEU branches in Croydon passed motions to similar effect.¹⁷⁴ Far from representing a distraction from the problems of the local, in a decolonising and blitzed Croydon, the internationalism of the CPGB was a major potential source of support. Unlike left-wing Labour activists, too, they saw the local as an

¹⁶⁹ Coventry, Modern Records Centre, MSS.292B/79C/43.

¹⁷⁰ Stevenson, 'Bob Jarvie.'

¹⁷¹ LHASC, CP/LOC/MISC/01/07.

¹⁷² LHASC, CP/LOC/MISC/01/07.

¹⁷³ LHASC, CP/LOC/MISC/01/07.

¹⁷⁴ LHASC, CP/LOC/MISC/01/07.

appropriate site for internationalist campaigning – and not only as providing an electoral basis for an internationalism located elsewhere.

Although left-wing Labour activists succeeded in organising working-class communities like New Addington as working-class and, often, Labour-voting, therefore, they failed to transform them in ways which would have avoided the suburban privatism described in the previous chapter. Rees-Williams decided against supporting the opening of a left-wing bookshop in Croydon in 1946, and efforts at this kind of political education were to prove relatively limited.¹⁷⁵ This was exacerbated by the Conservatives' continued dominance of the council, as Roy Lockett remembered that 'Croydon was one of the first authorities to introduce the sale of council houses in the fifties', his father buying theirs for 'five bob' in about 1955.¹⁷⁶ He was, he said, 'kind of seduced by the fifties, by this new vision, you know, telephones and televisions and cars', despite the radical politics which he had when he left the army.¹⁷⁷ Simon Berlin's once-Communist father and uncles 'ended up as just *Daily Express* reading Tories', having 'all become sort of self-employed – all of them became showbusiness agents, and I guess they felt at the end of the fifties and the end of the sixties, they had to become Tories.'¹⁷⁸ 'One cannot', Stuart Hall remarked acerbically, 'organise militantly to keep up with the Joneses'; 'the "new Conservatism" offered itself as a going concern with a gilt-edged future, a safe investment for the politically uncommitted.'¹⁷⁹ Despite the efforts of Labour activists to turn areas like Waddon and New Addington into Labour strongholds, then, there was a failure to make their internationalist and socialist politics felt in the working-class communities which they represented, as the CPGB had attempted.

¹⁷⁵ Manchester, Labour History Archive and Study Centre, LP/GS/CITBO/4-7.

¹⁷⁶ Interview with Roy Lockett. For discussions of council house sales as contributor to residualisation prior to the 1980s, see: Jones, *The working class in mid-twentieth-century England*, pp.77-78 & pp.96-99; Boughton, *Municipal Dreams*, p.170.

¹⁷⁷ Interview with Roy Lockett.

¹⁷⁸ Interview with Simon Berlin.

¹⁷⁹ Hall, 'A Sense of Classlessness,' p.31; S. Hall, 'The new Conservatism and the old (1957),' pp.18-27, in Davison et al (eds.), *Stuart Hall*, p.18.

Whilst Labour did make advances in the immediate post-war years, Croydon remained a Conservative town and borough from which left-wing politics was partially excluded. However, for left-wing activists, organising within and creating working-class communities in areas like Waddon and New Addington provided them (as well as the right of the party, appealing to the 'whole community' but dependent on working-class votes) with remarkably consistent bases of support.¹⁸⁰ Organising in spaces like Ruskin House, these left-wing activists had national importance through their involvement in VfS and close relationships with the CPGB, with whom they shared priorities with particular resonance in post-war Croydon: working-class housing, anti-colonialism, and peace campaigning. However, the left-wing Labour activists, unlike the CPGB, perceived a disconnect between the internationalist and pacifist activism which they pushed at the council and national level, and the work which they did in their communities – with important consequences for the development of the New Left.

'Part of the mix'

Croydon has not only been regarded as built anew in the post-war period, but – especially in New Addington, and later in the town centre – built at all, as recognised by a museumgoer in the 1990s, incredulous that Croydon could have a history when 'it's only been up fifty years.'¹⁸¹ For Henri Lefebvre, the 'new towns' were 'a metaphor for and an embodiment of all that he found disturbing and intriguing about capitalist modernity'; 'pregnant with desires, frustrated frenzies, unrealized possibilities.'¹⁸² Lefebvre's commentary, made in response to the 1958 construction of a largely new settlement, Mourenx, on the edge of his hometown of Navarrenx, is a reminder that imaginaries of the 'new town' went beyond official designation – Mourenx was not one of (and predated) the ten '*villes nouvelles*' called for as part of Parisian urban planning after 1965.¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ M. Worley, *Labour Inside the Gate: A History of the British Labour Party between the Wars* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008), pp.199–200.

¹⁸¹ BCA, BCA/6/11/10.

¹⁸² J. Wilson, 'Notes on the Rural City: Henri Lefebvre and the transformation of everyday life in Chiapas, Mexico,' *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol.29 (2011), pp.993–1009, p.994; H. Lefebvre, *Introduction to Modernity* (London: Verso, 1995 [1962]), p.124.

¹⁸³ For a discussion of the development of the officially designated '*villes nouvelles*', see: J.N. Tuppen, 'The Development of French New Towns: an Assessment of Progress,' *Urban Studies*, vol.20, no.1 (1983), pp.11–30; E. Welch, 'Build the imaginary: Urban futures and New Towns in post-war French spatial planning,' *Journal of Urban Cultural Studies*, vol.8, no.2 (2021), pp.167–186.

Similarly, Croydon was not one of the officially-designated 'New Towns' established in the series of New Town Acts in Britain following the Second World War.¹⁸⁴ However, places like Croydon (and New Addington) were not just 'blitzed cities' but a form of 'new town': in both the Lefebvrian sense and as an embodiment 'of the social idealism of this post-war era, particularly its hopes for greater mixing between classes.'¹⁸⁵ For many observers, 'new town' Croydon – the site of social mixing and uncontrollable youth – was disturbing and dangerous. At the same time, however, this youthful mixture provided the basis for the New Left which emerged in the years after 1956, and which both broke with and was nurtured by the older generation of activists who they met in left-wing spaces.

At the time, according to Jamie Reid and Jon Savage, 'the youth of Croydon were notorious. The place was full of gangs: Pretty Boys, Cosh Boys and early Teddy Boys.'¹⁸⁶ In 1952, two young people, Derek Bentley (aged 19) and Christopher Craig (aged 16) had attempted to break into a sweet shop and, pursued by police, climbed up to the roof, where the police constable was shot and killed by Craig.¹⁸⁷ The killing, and the trial which followed, became a familiar touchstone for descriptions of Croydon in the post-war period; in 1975, *New Society* contrasted the Croydon which was being built with its earlier 'downtown tattiness' and the 'sad, pointless gun battle' in Tamworth Road.¹⁸⁸ To some extent, the attention paid to Croydon was unwarranted, as Terence Morris – who wrote a book titled *The Criminal Area* which put the case in the Croydon context – noted that crime levels were much lower than in Coventry and other comparably sized towns, but

¹⁸⁴ The literature on the New Towns Acts and the official New Towns is extensive, but see, for example: Boughton, *Municipal Dreams*, p.77; Ortolano, *Thatcher's Progress*, pp.6-8, pp.10-17; Grindrod, *Concretopia*, pp.35-69.

¹⁸⁵ Boughton, *Municipal Dreams*, p.77. This recognition of a potential haziness between the terms 'blitzed cities' and 'new towns' is hinted at, to some extent, in: Wetherell, *Foundations*, pp.60-62. It is also apparent in contemporary analyses, which do not always indicate whether their use of 'new town' was restricted to those for which it was formally appropriate; see, for instance: Hall, 'A Sense of Classlessness,' p.26 & p.29. Note that another article from the same issue, focused upon the (formally designated) 'New Towns' of Crawley and Harlow, uses capital letters to refer to its subjects, which Hall consistently avoided: J. Hase, 'Impressions of Two New Towns,' *Universities & Left Review*, no.5 (1958), pp.20-23. To indicate the distinction between official and symbolic applications, I have followed this convention and capitalised 'New Town' when referring to a formally designated settlement, and not when referring to areas which are only 'new towns' by analogy.

¹⁸⁶ Reid & Savage, *Up They Rise*, p.5.

¹⁸⁷ Morris, *The Criminal Area*, p.108.

¹⁸⁸ White, 'The pleasure of Croydon,' pp.525-526.

the case ensured a popular connection between Croydon and youth delinquency.¹⁸⁹ Whilst Morris argued that it was the maintenance, rather than deterioration, of working-class values which were the cause of criminality, the trauma of the Blitz compounded the potential for social mixture to result in 'a certain amount of anti-social behaviour [occurring] among children from otherwise highly respectable and law abiding families.'¹⁹⁰ Particular concern was expressed over the fact that Craig 'was not the son of an unskilled labourer but of a bank clerk; his home was not in a slum or a council housing estate but in a highly respectable district from which white collar workers went up to the City every day.'¹⁹¹ Croydon, then, was increasingly the subject of anxieties about the state of post-war British youth and in particular those in the 'blitzed cities' and 'new towns', associated with the dragging down of respectable middle-class young people by their working-class neighbours.

For left-wing activists, attitudes towards the 'new towns' and post-war youth were mixed. Figures like Ewan MacColl had deep reservations about the influence of American popular culture and post-war affluence – 'to him,' his second wife, Jean, commented, 'there were only three types of music: folk, classical, and jazz.'¹⁹² On the other hand, Lefebvre thought Mourenx had 'a lot going for it', as the new town generated possibilities for the emergence of oppositional cultures.¹⁹³ As Herman Bakvis pointed out, there was the opportunity for 'middle-class radicalism', strengthened by the security of post-war affluence, to encounter 'the offspring of our working-class conservatives [who] might well be even more inclined to defect to left-parties, or more importantly, create sources of cleavage for a more radical politics.'¹⁹⁴ Hall – like Morris – saw in the unevenness of post-war developments the preservation of solid if defensive working-class communities as 'old and new physical environments coexist within a single borough': in 1958's 'A Sense of Classlessness', one of the most influential of the early New Left texts on the question, the

¹⁸⁹ Morris, *The Criminal Area*, p.121.

¹⁹⁰ Morris, *The Criminal Area*, p.159 & p.189.

¹⁹¹ Morris, *The Criminal Area*, p.108.

¹⁹² Black, *The Political Culture of the Left in Affluent Britain*, p.77; Interview with Roy Lockett; MacColl, *My Kirsty*, p.45. On Ewan MacColl's 'cultural nationalism' and anti-Americanism, see: Harker, *Class Act*, pp.159-163.

¹⁹³ Lefebvre, *Introduction to Modernity*, p.119; Shmueli, 'Totality, hegemony, difference,' p.219.

¹⁹⁴ Bakvis, *The Determinants of Working-Class Conservatism*, p.95.

confused and unfinished built environment of suburban London is foregrounded.¹⁹⁵ Whilst some of the popular post-war anxieties about British youth in the new town were shared by older left-wing activists, then, there was also a basis for seeing the 'new town' context of post-war Croydon as producing possibilities for a resurgent left-wing politics.

One important site of social mixing was, counterintuitively, the prestigious Dulwich College, just beyond the borough's northern border. In 1947, the *Croydon Labour Journal* had celebrated Dulwich College for agreeing to take 12 boys funded by Croydon council.¹⁹⁶ Peter Gillman won a county scholarship and claimed that the school had an 80 percent local authority intake, part of the so-called 'Dulwich Experiment' which had responded to falling student numbers and the costs of the school's post-war reconstruction by rapidly expanding access to local authority scholars from the LCC, Kent, Surrey, Croydon and even Southend and East Sussex.¹⁹⁷ Although a private school, Jerry Fitzpatrick, who attended later, thought that Dulwich College was 'much more socially liberal than grammar schools, which were wanting to ape more old fashioned independent schools'.¹⁹⁸ This did not mean that these young activists were in the majority – in a mock election in 1955, there was one Liberal and one Labour student, himself, in Gillman's entire class, but he nevertheless 'fell in with a kind of group of like-minded radicals and rebels'.¹⁹⁹ The most prominent of these was Bruce Reid (with whom Gillman shared both a birthday and a bus) who recruited him to the Young Socialists (YS) and CND in quick succession, and the two formed a 'rather rebellious knot'.²⁰⁰ Reid was remembered by Roy Lockett as 'extraordinary, kind of Byronic, really good looking, very attractive, very funny, very clever, and with real charisma', and in the late 1950s he was the lynchpin for virtually every organisation in Croydon's first New

¹⁹⁵ Hall, 'A Sense of Classlessness,' p.27. Hall, living in Brixton, reflects upon children studying in a 'Dickensian brick building' next to a 'glass-and-steel compound of the local comprehensive, not yet completed'.

¹⁹⁶ 'Council Commentary,' *Croydon Labour Journal*, vol.1, no.5 (1947), p.10.

¹⁹⁷ Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman; S. Hodges, *God's Gift: A Living History of Dulwich College* (London: Heinemann, 1981), pp.139-149 & pp.164-172. Annual sixth-form lectures at Dulwich College in this period were delivered by figures including the Labour MPs Michael Stewart, Richard Crossman and James Callaghan, the TUC general secretary George Woodcock, and Lord Attlee.

¹⁹⁸ Interview with Jerry Fitzpatrick.

¹⁹⁹ Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman.

²⁰⁰ Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman.

Left.²⁰¹ As with the working-class children whose school experiences were described above, the left-wing Dulwich College cohort benefited from expanding secondary education, which increased the likelihood of encounters with other left-wing students and provided opportunities 'for thinking about subjectivity'.²⁰²

Outside of the classroom, these young people entered a vibrant cultural scene focused upon Croydon's town centre, which 'had a nice radical presence to it' that Peter Gillman compared to the Andrzej Wajda film *A Generation* (1955), set in 1940s Warsaw.²⁰³ Films played an important part in their political development; 'we all used to go to the Croydon Classic', Leni Gillman remembered, to see films by Jean-Luc Godard, and their first date was to see *Jazz on a Summer's Day* (1959), about the Newport jazz festival.²⁰⁴ It was jazz – there were appearances at the Davis Theatre through 1958 and 1959 from Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong and Ella Fitzgerald – and folk which most appealed to the young left-wing activists of the late 1950s.²⁰⁵ Percival remembered the Croydon Jazz Club (at the Star Hotel in Broad Green) and the Woodman in south Croydon ('kind of the hangout for the more CND types') as especially important centres.²⁰⁶ Lockett worked at the Star Hotel on Friday nights, and went to the Woodman on Sundays, where he remembered spotting a police spy; 'it was as much about parties and jazz and sex,' he said, 'as it was about politics.'²⁰⁷ The latter venue was Vicky Stewart's 'first introduction to politics and lots of talk about socialism'.²⁰⁸ The Woodman provided opportunities for more cross-class interactions, with 'a number of working class blokes who went there who aligned themselves with the group, and so it was a very nice social mix'.²⁰⁹ This youth cultural scene in 'new town' Croydon, then, brought together young people from different backgrounds, connecting their explorations of political

²⁰¹ Interview with Roy Lockett.

²⁰² Hughes, *Young Lives on the Left*, p.63.

²⁰³ Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman.

²⁰⁴ Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman. Note Angela Carter's discussion of Godard, 'the perennial adolescent of film', and his significance to young viewers in the early 1960s: Carter, *Shaking a Leg*, pp.464-466.

²⁰⁵ Groom, *Rockin' and around Croydon*, p.13.

²⁰⁶ Interview with David Percival.

²⁰⁷ Interview with Roy Lockett.

²⁰⁸ V. Stewart, 'The Whitgift Arms, Croydon,' *The Whitgift Arms* (January 2011), <http://thewhitgiftarms.blogspot.com/2011/01/the-whitgift-arms-croydon.html>, accessed 2nd November 2021.

²⁰⁹ Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman.

subjectivity to experimentation with music, sex and alcohol in Croydon's still-nineteenth-century town centre, layering fond memories from childhood with fonder memories from their adolescence.

In the 1950s, however, this cultural scene was still partly sustained by older left-wing activists, including their parents, who had moved to Croydon in the interwar period and afterwards – like the 'experienced people from elsewhere' that Sean Creighton alluded to in the 1920s, and whose cultural tastes overlapped with those of their children.²¹⁰ The Reids, descended from the Scottish Druidic leader and SDF member George Watson McGregor Reid whose 'spiritual socialism [had] flourished due to the new freedoms afforded by the end of the Victorian era', moved to Shirley, 'an embodiment of the utopian ideal of London's greenest and most desirable borough', in 1930, 'to escape the grime and smog of inner-city London'.²¹¹ Similarly, Ewan MacColl moved with his second wife, Jean, and son, Hamish, to Croydon following the breakup of the theatre company directed by his first wife, Joan Littlewood.²¹² The MacColls had met the Rapoport – including Arron, at one point their family doctor – at parties before they moved to Croydon, and various Rapoport children served as their babysitters.²¹³ Despite his reservations about youth culture, MacColl's presence had significant consequences for the local activist scene, with visits to the home which he moved to in Beckenham in 1959, with his third wife Peggy Seeger, from Indian musicians like Ravi Shankar and Kali Dasgupta, as well as Americans like Alan Lomax and Big Bill Broonzy.²¹⁴ MacColl and Seeger supplied the music to the Philip Donnellan documentary *Coventry Kids: People of a Restless City* (1960), which suggests that the breach with youth culture was not yet complete, and between 1968 and 1985 they compiled and published the appropriately-named *New City Songster* to document the end of the folk revival.²¹⁵ Leni Gillman attended the

²¹⁰ Creighton, 'Radical Croydon,' p.21.

²¹¹ Maguire, *Shamanarchy*, p.29 & pp.60–62.

²¹² Interview with Hamish MacColl. On the problems faced by Theatre Workshop, and Ewan MacColl's drifting away, see: Harker, *Class Act*, pp.98–104.

²¹³ MacColl, *My Kirsty*, p.2.

²¹⁴ Interview with Hamish MacColl; W. Jones, 'The Croydon Connection,' *Wizzjones.com* (undated), <https://wizzjones.com/croydonconnection.html>, accessed 2nd November 2021; Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman. On their 'quiet, suburban life' in 'salubrious' Beckenham, see: Harker, *Class Act*, pp.152–153.

²¹⁵ 'Coventry Kids (1960),' *BFI* (undated), <https://www2.bfi.org.uk/films-tv-people/4ce2b81f3b732>, accessed 15th November 2021; 'New City Songster – About,' *Peggy Seeger* (undated),

dance group run by Jean MacColl, a Laban instructor, and went with them (the London Dancers) to the World Youth Congress in Moscow in 1957 and to Aldermaston in 1958.²¹⁶ She remembered the MacColl household's 'wonderful social evenings' – mostly attended by CPGB members and 'a large circle of very left wing people, all interested in the peace movement, all interested in working class history', and her mother sang Irish folk songs as 'part of the mix'.²¹⁷ In the 1950s, the young left-wing activists shared with their parents a love for jazz and folk which could serve as important vehicles for communicating commitments to peace, internationalism, and socialism.

The houses of the suburban progressives were themselves important, both as sites of social mixing and as representations of comfort and affluence. In this way, the young New Left activists were provided with an opportunity to 'rework' or 'reinterpret' childhood memories of exclusive suburban landscapes, layering their earlier ambivalence with new memories of the potential for political debate and teenage excitement.²¹⁸ As an informal social centre for left-wing activists in Croydon, the MacColl house was only matched by Leni's own home on Warminster Road, a 'big house' with a 'big kitchen', where she lived with her parents, Margaret (Pat) and Philip, and siblings Wendy, Philip, Sean and Edmund (Sonny), and where activists gathered to socialise and make banners.²¹⁹ These homes were especially important for those whose opportunities for political expression, and sometimes relaxation or security generally, were more limited elsewhere. Peter Gillman apparently loved visits to the 'radical melting pot or meeting point' in the O'Connell household (Leni claimed that her mother always told her to cook eggs on toast for him) and this may have been related to his being an only-child with older, although progressive, parents.²²⁰ Lockett had also, as the last chapter mentioned, clashed with his own father over African decolonisation, and it is likely that dating Wendy fulfilled a similar need for friendly political dialogues with her, her sister, and their parents, as well as other young visitors.²²¹ Lynda

<http://www.peggyseeger.com/discography/new-city-songster>, accessed 15th November 2021; Harker, *Class Act*, p.201 & p.228.

²¹⁶ Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman.

²¹⁷ Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman.

²¹⁸ Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman*, p.98.

²¹⁹ Interview with Roy Lockett; Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman.

²²⁰ Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman.

²²¹ Interview with Roy Lockett.

Graham, too, had remembered being told not to discuss the Hungarian uprising or the Suez crisis at her family's dinner table, and her visit to the 'very socialist household' of her schoolfriend Judy, the daughter of Wolf Rapoport, was memorable:

'She lived in the poshest house I'd ever been in. And they had a huge sort of breakfast room – I'd never been in a *breakfast* room before – and on the table there was a glass dish and it was full of cherries and you could just help yourself and I'd never been in a house where they had *fruit* where you could just help yourself.'²²²

Experiences such as these suggested to the young visitors a link between the comfort of progressive suburban households and the opportunity for radical political discussions. Not part of the first New Left in 1950s Croydon, and too young to attend Aldermaston, Lynda Graham would later vote for Michael Rapoport when he stood for the GLC in 1964 – and, as the previous chapter mentioned, would later favour meetings held in activists' suburban homes over those at Ruskin House.²²³ For those whose involvement was greater, CND 'became the first radical space in which socially aware youngsters could invest an uncertain teenage identity, at odds with the conservative customs of home, school and state institutions'.²²⁴ Their early political explorations were encouraged by left-wing parents (or the left-wing parents of their friends and partners), and especially by the O'Connells. Philip O'Connell had been 'very outraged' by the miscarriage of justice in the Bentley trial, and he passed on an interest in criminal psychology to his daughters and to Peter Gillman, who went on to study similar cases as a journalist.²²⁵ Pat O'Connell had been a Labour councillor in Lambeth before moving to Croydon, presented in local newspapers as 'this outrageous socialist woman breaking *all* the rules by wearing *trousers* to the council meeting'.²²⁶ Lockett remembered that Pat 'dragged a kayak all the way from South Norwood to Holy Loch' to protest against Polaris, and that her husband used to go to Holloway Prison whilst

²²² Interview with Lynda and Martin Graham.

²²³ Interview with Lynda and Martin Graham.

²²⁴ Hughes, *Young Lives on the Left*, pp.74-75. Hughes interviewed Max Farrar, involved with Hemel Hempstead CND – the area to which Hall compared Croydon.

²²⁵ Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman.

²²⁶ Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman. Compare to Angela Carter's discussion of the significance of trousers for young women in the late 1950s and early 1960s CND: Carter, *Shaking a Leg*, pp.140-143.

she was held there to throw packets of cigarettes over the gates.²²⁷ These suburban progressive households, 'young and old at the same time' (to borrow a phrase from Lynne Segal), therefore nurtured the young, 'beanstalker' New Left activists, providing them with models of political affiliation which were connected but not limited to the Labour Party, and an alternate way of imagining the uses of suburban dwellings.²²⁸

As a consequence, the YCND group in Croydon was the largest in London, with Leni Gillman unsure whether an adult group had even existed: 'Croydon CND was effectively its youth body, and we were huge, there must've been about seventy-odd people in it, I should think, easily.'²²⁹ Post-war British youth were especially receptive to the themes of peace and anti-colonialism which had emerged in 1950s Croydon, as 'a generation that had largely grown up in an era of decolonisation' and as the 'spectre of Auschwitz haunted the young activists' moral frame of reference', the latter especially clear in the local CND group's warnings of 'the menacing nearness of the holocaust we have foretold'.²³⁰ Joan Matlock recalled a debate about the nuclear bomb in her secondary school, in which her opposition was met by a headmistress who 'told us how she was the daughter of a Welsh miner et cetera, and I called her a class traitor in front of the school'.²³¹ The YCND group performed 'the lion's share of the work' in Croydon and, in 1960, a 'jazzy band ball' which they organised covered not only their own subscription but the national levy of the adult CND group, who had 'financial difficulties of their own'.²³² Croydon CND even had its own magazine, *The Banner*, which Lockett, trained in printing, helped to produce.²³³ They were

²²⁷ Interview with Roy Lockett.

²²⁸ Segal, 'Formations of feminism,' p.26. In stressing the potential for intergenerational cooperation during this period, and positive relations between the activists and their parents, this largely parallels the observations of (working-class) parents' encouragement for the development of the post-war teenager in Coventry and Liverpool, in: S. Todd & H. Young, 'Baby-Boomers to "Beanstalkers": Making the Modern Teenager in Post-War Britain,' *Cultural and Social History*, vol.9, no.3 (2012), pp.451-467.

²²⁹ Wolfgang, interviewed by Galpin and Dewa, *After Hiroshima*, p.13; Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman.

²³⁰ A. Bocking-Welch, 'Youth against hunger: service, activism and the mobilisation of young humanitarians in 1960s Britain,' *European Review of History*, vol.23, nos.1-2 (2016), pp.154-170, p.158; C. Hughes, *The Socio-Cultural Milieux of the Left in Post-War Britain*, p.57; London, British Library of Political and Economic Science, CND/2008/13/50.

²³¹ Interview with Joan Matlock.

²³² London, British Library of Political and Economic Science, CND/2008/12/2/1; London, British Library of Political and Economic Science, CND/6/1/2/204.

²³³ Interview with Roy Lockett.

at the forefront of developments across London, and the first place in the country to have a local recruiting march as part of the build-up to Aldermaston.²³⁴ Later, a youth centre at Federation House in Broad Green had 'records, darts, table tennis and a period in which they can explain these ideas, encouraging new people to become active workers for the Campaign.'²³⁵ By the mid-1960s, they were organising events at the Fairfield Halls.²³⁶ As is clear from a civil defence committee report in 1960, the council were concerned about the level of local opposition:

'Croydon has an active [Anti-Nuclear Campaign] element and there is no doubt that the vast majority of the public fear the nuclear threat and would be glad to be rid of it. In addition many people are convinced that there is no protection against nuclear attack. When it is pointed out that there would be many survivors, hence the reason for Civil Defence, the reply is usually "What would be the use of surviving under such conditions?"'²³⁷

However, whilst these YCND activists were supported by progressive parents like the O'Connells or Reids, the relative strength of the group is a reminder of the tensions which were emerging between younger and older activists. As Hall said, 1956 was 'a conjuncture – not just a year', and the suppression of the Hungarian uprising, as well as Suez, 'defined for people of my generation the boundaries and limits of the tolerable in politics'.²³⁸ This was a source of tension in Croydon, where the CPGB – based in working-class communities and the trades council – remained dominated by older members opposed to the emerging anti-Stalinist line; Croydon was described as one of the areas where 'there is a firmly held conviction that if we go to people and invite them to buy the *Daily Worker* they will probably eat us', and with a Young Communist League (YCL) membership only one twentieth of the Surrey district, it was proportionately one of the weakest youth sections in the country.²³⁹ The TUC's Organisation Department wrote to Croydon Trades Council to condemn them for having 'gone on record in favour of the repression of Hungarian

²³⁴ BLPES, CND/2008/12/2/2; BLPES, CND/6/1/1/26 & 29.

²³⁵ London, British Library of Political and Economic Science, CND/7/5/15.

²³⁶ BLPES, CND/2008/12/2/2.

²³⁷ MC, uncatalogued minutes of County Borough of Croydon Civil Defence Committee.

²³⁸ Hall, 'Life and Times of the First New Left,' p.177.

²³⁹ LHASC, CP/LOC/MISC/01/07.

workers by Russian troops.²⁴⁰ One CPGB-aligned trade unionist ascribed the Polish protests of October 1956 to the actions of 'teddy boys', making clear their distrust of post-war youth cultures.²⁴¹ In the dispute over the *Reasoner* which led to the breakaway by Edward Thompson and John Savile, the Croydon CPGB sided decisively with the party leadership.²⁴² Nor were these tensions restricted to the CPGB; in 1950, the local Labour Group had declared its opposition to the provision of contraceptives in dance halls.²⁴³ 'A dilapidated atmosphere permeated branch-level socialism', according to Black, and 'the left was distant from "the popular" and disposed to be critical of affluence in the 1950s'.²⁴⁴ The dilapidation could be quite literal, as an inspection of the local party offices in 1962 found that in one room the rot posed a 'grave danger', and 'the cellar was not in a fit condition for the Young Socialists to meet in'.²⁴⁵ To add insult to injury, an older Labour right-winger, Joan Ulyett, attempted to have a higher charge imposed on them for holding meetings.²⁴⁶ The convulsions caused by the Hungarian uprising, and the growing cultural divide between the young activists and older members of both the CPGB and Labour, led the former to seek different kinds of political identification.

This did not always mean open conflict. Just as the young activists were encouraged by progressive parents, they also found allies amongst the older VfS supporters described above. Although Lockett recalled a 'fraught evening' when Gaitskell visited the Greyhound in Croydon during the 1959 election, the fact that two left-wing, unilateralist candidates (Wolfgang and Messer) were standing meant that hopes in the parliamentary road remained.²⁴⁷ Wolfgang, in his late thirties or early forties, was an important figure in managing the divide between the young New Left and Labour's older members.²⁴⁸ He spoke to the trades council in 1962, convincing them to join the Aldermaston march.²⁴⁹ Ulyett's attempt to increase the charge – likely in part a reprisal for the

²⁴⁰ MRC, MSS.292/79C/54.

²⁴¹ MRC, MSS.292/79C/54.

²⁴² Manchester, Labour History Archive and Study Centre, CP/CENT/ORG/18/05, 9.

²⁴³ *Croydon Labour Journal*, vol.3, no.7 (1950), p.11.

²⁴⁴ Black, *The Political Culture of the Left in Affluent Britain*, pp.40-42.

²⁴⁵ MC, uncatalogued minute book of Croydon Labour Party Executive Committee (1961-1972).

²⁴⁶ MC, uncatalogued minute book of Croydon Labour Party Executive Committee (1961-1972).

²⁴⁷ Interview with Roy Lockett.

²⁴⁸ Interview with Roy Lockett. It's indicative of the way in which age differences were interpreted that Lockett recalled Wolfgang as 'old' even in the 1950s.

²⁴⁹ MRC, MSS.292B/79C/43.

move by Messer to prevent her and Harriet Keeling, both wheelchair users, from voting *in absentia* in a conference resolutions meeting which was not wheelchair accessible – was rejected with the support of the VFS activists.²⁵⁰ Similarly, although the executive claimed that the YS were not supposed to express views contrary to party policy, they accepted that they ‘must be a little lenient here.’²⁵¹ In 1962, Croydon Labour Party rented out its loudspeakers to London CND (whilst asking them ‘to be extra careful as the sets are getting old’), and the use of its banner on a CND march was approved – although a motorcade only went ahead on the condition that posters supporting unilateralism or CND, or opposing nuclear weapons tests, not be displayed.²⁵² Nor did the dilapidation of formal left-wing spaces mean that they were unenjoyable to enter, especially if it meant the opening of vacancies which the younger left-wing activists could then occupy. Percival remembered the excitement of the visit from the Cuban ambassadors who ‘came in wearing battle fatigues’, whilst Lockett noted the size of Labour Party meetings – then open to members of all three CLPs, with sometimes 150 people attending – and ‘the sheer exhilaration of being young, of being active in politics, of the Cuban revolution and events of that kind.’²⁵³ Whilst the signs of generational political differences were there, perhaps most of all with the older women active in the WCG, they had not yet developed into a generalised breach, and nor had disillusionment with older sites of organising, like Ruskin House, set in.

Nevertheless, the young activists were keen to establish political identities and organisations of their own. They benefited from Croydon’s proximity to London, able to visit the Partisan Coffee House in Soho and feel part of ‘a mood’, noting of the New Left thinkers they encountered that ‘there was a freshness about them, a cleanness and a kind of an intellectual quality to their work, which wasn’t like anything else around’; the Gillmans were even later invited to Hall’s wedding.²⁵⁴ The two Dulwich College boys, Reid and Gillman, were at the centre of the Croydon New Left Club, which had an active membership of about 50, and was formed through ‘the spontaneous

²⁵⁰ MC, uncatalogued minute book of Croydon Labour Party Executive Committee (1961-1972).

²⁵¹ MC, uncatalogued minute book of Croydon Labour Party Executive Committee (1961-1972).

²⁵² MC, uncatalogued minute book of Croydon Labour Party Executive Committee (1961-1972).

²⁵³ Interview with David Percival; Interview with Roy Lockett.

²⁵⁴ Interview with Roy Lockett; Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman.

demands' of members of the local YS and YCND 'for some independent socialist body, in which topics of a wider scope could be discussed and acted upon.'²⁵⁵ Whilst its establishment apparently did cause some tensions with the adult Labour Party, relations were soon normalised.²⁵⁶ The group was run 'by co-operation rather than administration', and met twice-monthly with speakers that included Hall, Clancy Segal, and Gordon Redfern.²⁵⁷ They organised three discussion groups, each with about twelve members, on housing, 'the teenager in Croydon', and literature and politics.²⁵⁸ According to Reid, the group 'revitalised the Left in Croydon' and drew the attention of the CND group to the wider aspects of unilateralism.²⁵⁹ Their first meeting attracted seventy people, and George Clark wrote to Redfern that they had 'got off to a flying start'.²⁶⁰ Whilst not as large as the London New Left Club, which drew weekly attendances of 300-400 people, the Croydon New Left Club did score one victory over them: winning a football game 5-4, which brought 'much unexpected enthusiasm from a hitherto ostentatiously sport-despising faction of political dissenters.'²⁶¹ Looking back at the first New Left in 2010, Hall would describe areas like Croydon and Hemel Hempstead as "'cross-class" or even "déclassé-new-town"' sites of social mixture between 'those social strata emerging within and across the rapidly shifting, recomposing-decomposing class landscapes of post-war Britain.'²⁶²

One of the main focuses of this New Left's political activity in Croydon was outside the gates to the Whitgift, 'the poshest school in Croydon', on North End, which served as 'a meeting point and leafleting area' – although Lockett claimed that he did not know any activists who were actually pupils there.²⁶³ Walker recalled getting up on a soapbox, 'a real training ground' in public speaking, whilst Lockett had fond memories of their stall by the Whitgift, 'surrounded by fields – it was beautiful [...] a very nice place to be.'²⁶⁴ Not everybody was so positive – Matlock

²⁵⁵ B. Reid, 'The Croydon Club,' *New Left Review*, no.4 (1960), pp.68-69.

²⁵⁶ Reid, 'The Croydon Club,' pp.68-69.

²⁵⁷ Reid, 'The Croydon Club,' pp.68-69; Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman.

²⁵⁸ Reid, 'The Croydon Club,' pp.68-69.

²⁵⁹ Reid, 'The Croydon Club,' pp.68-69.

²⁶⁰ BLPES, CND/6/1/1/103.

²⁶¹ Hall, 'Life and Times of the First New Left,' p.189; P. Gillman, 'Recreative Arts,' *New Left Review*, no.4 (1960), p.68.

²⁶² Hall, 'Life and Times of the First New Left,' p.190.

²⁶³ Interview with Roy Lockett; Interview with David White

²⁶⁴ Interview with Peter Walker; Interview with Roy Lockett.

remembered having meetings inside the school where she spotted woodworm.²⁶⁵ Leni Gillman noted some of the tensions implicit with this choice of site:

'there had been this big public school in the middle of the green there, and no one had any access to it, so there was something slightly anomalous about Whitgift owning the middle of Croydon, but nobody having any access to it, and I remember feeling quite kind of alienated when we used to stand outside those gates [Peter: That's right] and Bruce'd be waving his fist and try to bring down the scurrilous bastards who were trying to control our lives, and there would be this great green – it was *enormous*, if you can imagine, the size of that field, it was acres and acres and acres and acres, and I did feel a profound sense of alienation.'²⁶⁶

Gillman, who had been similarly attentive to the exclusions of the coffee shops where activists congregated, recognised that the youthful New Left was unrepresentative of those young people, especially from working-class backgrounds, who had lacked educational opportunities.²⁶⁷ She, too, sometimes demonstrated a seriousness which may have belied her years and set activists like her apart from other young people – in 1960, despite being a jazz fan, she had complained to CND organisers that a 'jazz jamboree' would be inappropriate for an event in Brighton referencing Hiroshima.²⁶⁸ In our interview, she noted the group had 'fairly intellectual discussions, so you needed to have some sort of an academic background or bent, to participate in them', and the football game described in the *New Left Review* indicated that everybody was from either a grammar or a private school.²⁶⁹ Lockett 'was a bit of an exception, as a kind of working-class lad and an apprentice'.²⁷⁰ The reality was falling short of the hoped-for 'cross-class' Croydon described by Hall; indeed, both Hall and Redfern were criticised for 'a very abstract allegiance' to

²⁶⁵ Interview with Joan Matlock.

²⁶⁶ Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman.

²⁶⁷ Interview with Joan Matlock; Interview with Brian Nevill; Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman.

²⁶⁸ M. Vähäsalo, *'They've got the bomb, we've got the records!': Roles of Music in the Making of Social Movements: The Case of the British Nuclear Disarmament Movement, 1958-1963* (MA Thesis, University of Tampere, 2016), pp.44-45.

²⁶⁹ Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman; Gillman, 'Recreative Arts,' p.68.

²⁷⁰ Interview with Roy Lockett.

working people who, Thompson said, filled them 'with nausea'.²⁷¹ Nor was Thompson entirely representative of the working class either, and the New Left's break with the CPGB was not unanimously supported: the Surrey CPGB district committee described March 1956, immediately following Khrushchev's secret speech, as their best month since Pollitt had held a rally in 1953, the district reaching its highest membership (1,391) in six years.²⁷² If the first New Left in Croydon emerged in the context of both intergenerational and cross-class social mixing, therefore, it was the former which predominated, whilst the latter was primarily achieved through widened access to education – with organising in working-class communities abandoned to older Vfs supporters like Burgos in a retreat from the 'Coventry Communism' discussed above.

Similarly, if folk and jazz 'had been the bridge between the populist Old Left and the New,' it was also a potential divide in a youth cultural scene undergoing change, and no longer confined to those genres.²⁷³ This was a Croydon impacted by the rise of rock and roll, with local riots which coincided with the performances of Johnnie Ray in 1956 and Bill Haley in 1957, both at the Davis Theatre – Haley's film, *Don't Knock the Rock* (1956), also showed at the Eros Cinema – and Jamie Reid, Bruce's younger brother, linked the ripped-up seats of the Haley riot with the Craig and Bentley case and his own 'little flirtation with being a bit of a teddy boy.'²⁷⁴ The Young Conservatives opened a coffee house of their own in Croydon in 1956, and, although the young left-wing activists often won out, there was competition with them over stalls, with the Young Conservatives typically more socially vibrant than either the YS or the YCL.²⁷⁵ Given the appeal which South African-born A.K. Chesterton's League of Empire Loyalists (LEL), founded in 1954 at his home in south Croydon, had for Young Conservatives in particular, it seems plausible that there was an overlap.²⁷⁶ The New Left Club's discussion group on 'the teenager in Croydon'

²⁷¹ E.P. Thompson, 'Commitment in Politics,' *Universities and Left Review*, no.6 (1959), pp.50-55.

²⁷² LHASC, CP/LOC/MISC/01/07. For a discussion of the first New Left's attitude towards the working class, see: M. Davis, "'Among the Ordinary People": New Left Involvement in Working-Class Political Mobilization 1956-68,' *History Workshop Journal*, no.86 (2018), pp.133-159.

²⁷³ D. Caute, *Sixty-Eight: The Year of the Barricades* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1988), p.35.

²⁷⁴ Groom, *Rockin' and around Croydon*, p.10; Maguire, *Shamanarchy*, p.87.

²⁷⁵ Black, 'The Lost World of Young Conservatism,' p.1018; R. Walker, 'Croydon,' *Young Guard*, no.22 (1963), p.3; L. Black, *The Political Culture of the Left in Affluent Britain*, pp.68-69.

²⁷⁶ J. Mulhall, 'From apathy to obsession: the reactions of A.K. Chesterton and the British far right to imperial decline,' *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol.50, nos.4-5 (2016), pp.458-477, pp.473-474; G. Macklin,

did not guarantee that it could speak to them, particularly given its members were predominantly 'beats' and not 'teds' – some of the latter, plausibly involved in the LEL, may have been responsible for a brick thrown through the window of the Labour headquarters in Tamworth Road on the same day in 1960 that the local party began boycotting South African goods, describing Labour as 'the negro's party'.²⁷⁷ Whilst Percival was from a relatively working-class and Labour-supporting area, his former classmates later told him that 'we all thought you were going to be a Labour MP' – which, given that he barely remembered discussing politics with them, did not necessarily say much for their own political consciousness.²⁷⁸ Even for Nevill, closely involved in the Croydon music scene, there was a pervasive sense of alienation from the direction which the youth subcultures could take: 'in the long run you could almost see them being proto-pre-Thatcher working-class Conservatives, because the way they looked and what they did and what they bought was very important to them.'²⁷⁹ There seemed to be something like the 'strategy of inward-facing imperialism that emerged as a supplemental alternative on the eve of decolonisation' implied in Lefebvre's observations of everyday life in the post-war period, as social life was apparently 'colonised' by capital – even where it did not lead to Conservative-voting.²⁸⁰

The educational backgrounds of the New Left also meant a considerable degree of instability and hence quite rapid political change. Bruce Reid noted the difficulties which the New Left Club, with an average age of 19, faced in its 'continuity of development' as a result of exoduses to university and absences for revision.²⁸¹ The young CND members were increasingly drawn into the activities of the Committee of 100, the civil disobedience group established in 1960 by Bertrand Russell and others, and both Peter Walker and Roy Lockett were arrested in their

'Transatlantic Connections and Conspiracies: A.K. Chesterton and *The New Unhappy Lords*,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol.47, no.2 (2012), pp.270-290, pp.272-273.

²⁷⁷ 'Boycott: Brick thrown through window,' *Croydon Advertiser* (4th March 1960), clipping provided by Katrina Navickas.

²⁷⁸ Interview with David Percival.

²⁷⁹ Interview with Brian Nevill.

²⁸⁰ Shmueli, 'Totality, hegemony, difference,' p.220.

²⁸¹ Reid, 'The Croydon Club,' pp.68-69.

demonstrations.²⁸² Bruce Reid served as the group's press officer and was one of the Spies for Peace who broke into a government bunker near Reading in 1963.²⁸³ Locally, they organised well-publicised sit-down protests against civil defence preparations.²⁸⁴ Nor did the Committee of 100 restrict itself to targeting British or American nuclear weapons, holding protests outside the Russian embassy as the anti-Soviet positions of the first New Left became more consequential.²⁸⁵ Reid was one of twelve CND/Committee of 100 members to travel to Moscow in 1962 for the World Council of Peace Congress, where they distributed Trotskyist-influenced leaflets in Russian and held a small demonstration in Red Square.²⁸⁶ Again, however, the Committee of 100's local activities were marked by their distance from the town's working-class communities, and the council shrugged off its protests, thanking the Committee for 100 whose 'unexpected publicity did Civil Defence a good turn for which we were very grateful' because it was an exceptional year for recruitment.²⁸⁷ As previously, though, the young activists received the support of progressive parents; Pat O'Connell was one of the original signatories to the Committee of 100, and whilst Croydon CND was neutral on the question of civil disobedience – supporting its members who took part but not making such support a condition of membership – Nora Reid, Bruce's mother, collected money to pay the fines which younger activists incurred.²⁸⁸ In blitzed and decolonising Croydon, again, it was the CND and the Committee of 100 which provided 'a subterranean litany to which young people subscribed in order to be marked out as dissidents', not just against nuclear weapons but against the more conventional types of action associated with the 'Old Left', although not always their parents – even whilst this isolated them from the working-class communities that the 'Old Left' represented but did not transform.²⁸⁹

In the 1950s and 1960s, Croydon came to represent both the anxieties and hopes invested in the 'new town' and post-war youth. Whilst there was a pervasive sense of blitzed Croydon as a site of

²⁸² Interview with Peter Walker; Interview with Roy Lockett.

²⁸³ Maguire, *Shamanarchy*, pp.74-75.

²⁸⁴ MC, uncatalogued minutes of County Borough of Croydon Civil Defence Committee.

²⁸⁵ Hughes, *Young Lives on the Left*, p.80.

²⁸⁶ Maguire, *Shamanarchy*, pp.78-79.

²⁸⁷ MC, uncatalogued minutes of County Borough of Croydon Civil Defence Committee.

²⁸⁸ BLPES, CND/2008/13/50.

²⁸⁹ Hughes, *Young Lives on the Left*, pp.74-75.

danger and social mixing, exemplified in the Craig and Bentley case, this context was to prove fortuitous for the development of young New Left activists finding each other at school and in the folk and jazz clubs and straining against what appeared an old-fashioned and dilapidated 'Old Left'. This latter point, however, can be exaggerated. As much as (and possibly more than) a mixing across class lines, post-war Croydon was the site of intergenerational encounters, as radical young people were encouraged by both progressive middle-class parents and the older VFS activists. In post-war Croydon, the residual functions of meeting places like Ruskin House and the town centre's coffee shops, as well as the suburban progressivism found in their parents' houses, combined with the emergent appeals of affluence and social mixture which were associated with social democracy, generated a New Left which 'defined and tried to prise open' what Hall referred to as a 'third space' – an alternative to the crises provoked by 'Hungary' and 'Suez', to 'the Gaitskell leadership, on the one hand, and the "nothing-has-changed, reaffirm-Clause-4" perspective of the traditional left on the other'.²⁹⁰ At the same time, these New Left activists ran into difficulty in the 'new town', where 'the new capitalism [which] recognizes and tries to cater for, at least in *form*, the human problems of industrial society, which in *substance* socialism first named' – a 'new town' Croydon which was not wholly of their making.²⁹¹ For the young New Left activists, the psychically-fraught process of adolescence coincided with a series of dramatic political challenges (signalled by 1956, represented by their parents and teachers, and embodied by changing perceptions of suburban Croydon and its town centre) to produce their specific, ambivalent, left-wing subjectivities as a component of the broader shift which Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite has labelled 'the decline of deference': a declining 'tendency to defer to authority, convention, and tradition in an array of areas – political, social, cultural, and personal.'²⁹²

'Mutually satisfying back-scratching'

Croydon was not, despite the hopes of its Labour activists, won for socialism in the early post-war period; it remained under the control of the same Conservatives and ratepayers that had led it

²⁹⁰ Hall, 'Life and Times of the First New Left,' pp.191-193.

²⁹¹ Hall, 'A Sense of Classlessness,' p.30.

²⁹² Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, *Class, Politics, and the Decline of Deference in England*, pp.8-9.

between the wars. For the young activists, this was a Croydon where they felt at home, but also a Croydon which was dominated by their parents and teachers, who had entered compromises with which they were increasingly frustrated. If the 1950s and 1960s were regarded as a period of relative security, they were later to be 'frequently located as the place where the labour movement failed to place socialism on the agenda of class politics, and at the same time, failed to identify and respond to new constituencies'; if the interwar childhoods of their parents and teachers had seen 'the iron entered into the children's soul', the 1950s and 1960s would be when the successive generation started to realise the consequences, including a powerful sense communicated by adults that they should be content with the gains of the post-war settlement.²⁹³ As they departed from Croydon to attend university, the generation of the first New Left began to realise the extent to which the Croydon of their childhoods fell short of their parents' social-democratic aspirations.

Croydon's reconstruction was directed by its Conservative leader, Sir James Marshall, who had entered the council in 1928 and was made an alderman in 1936 – the last election which he faced until he stepped down in the 1960s.²⁹⁴ As Leader of the Council, Chairman of the Finance Committee, Chairman of the Planning Committee and Chairman of the Governors of the Whitgift Foundation (which he joined in 1944), he reportedly believed that 'the best committee is a committee of one'.²⁹⁵ He established the 1943 reconstruction committee, setting out a fifty-year plan for the town's redevelopment achieving its apotheosis in the 1956 Croydon Corporation Act – granting the local authority the power 'to compulsorily purchase land for redevelopment without the slow and interfering approval of central government.'²⁹⁶ As Otto Saumarez Smith has pointed out, 'large-scale, state-led, infrastructural projects' benefited the construction industry and land speculators to whom many Conservatives had connections.²⁹⁷ Meanwhile, ratepayers

²⁹³ Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman*, pp.107-108.

²⁹⁴ Saunders, *Urban Politics*, p.307.

²⁹⁵ Grindrod, *Concretopia*, p.249; White, 'Political Croydon: The Sixties'; Marriott, *The Property Boom*, p.186.

²⁹⁶ Grindrod, *Concretopia*, p.249; Harwood, 'White Light/White Heat,' pp.60-61; Marriott, *The Property Boom*, p.185.

²⁹⁷ Saumarez Smith, *Boom Cities*, p.44.

chairing the council's committees ensured that day nurseries were closed and drastic cuts made to library services, which the trades council noted were worse than 'any other town of like size'.²⁹⁸ Similarly, when the Fairfield Halls opened, its catering company (for whom Fitzpatrick's mother worked as a payroll clerk) was outsourced.²⁹⁹

Perhaps the greatest disappointments were associated with New Addington, its creation described by John Grindrod as 'a tale of expediency'.³⁰⁰ An example of 'intense residential segregation', it didn't have a swimming pool until the mid-1960s, and still doesn't have a cinema, 'just a funfair,' Nevill remembered, 'twice a year.'³⁰¹ In the 1950s and early 1960s, under a Conservative government and local authority, meanwhile, council housing increasingly took the form of system-built higher-density blocks constructed (alongside lower-density suburban housing) to house former 'slum' dwellers, shifting perceptions of these estates as 'othered' spaces.³⁰² In nearby Mitcham, Hazel Carby has described a childhood in 'the last gasp of the working-class estates of South London, the boundary *before* gracious living began': 'ugly and soulless and, as with similar South London estates, a nursery for white supremacist hatred.'³⁰³ Whilst a lack of amenities could provide a basis for the left-wing organising described above, the experience of privation and residualisation fostered the "'exquisite" distinctions of status' which Hall identified with the 'new towns', 'expanding suburbs and dormitory towns' and 'the large housing estates in welfare Britain.'³⁰⁴ If it was only later that the residents of New Addington 'gobbled up the idea of Right to Buy, in a big way' (which Moran saw as decisively forging 'Middle England'), it is clear that Nevill saw working-class Conservatism as reaching further back: they are 'very New Addington

²⁹⁸ Morris, *The Criminal Area*, p.118; MRC, MSS.292/79C/54.

²⁹⁹ Interview with Jerry Fitzpatrick.

³⁰⁰ Grindrod, *Concretopia*, p.42 & p.432.

³⁰¹ Back, 'So... fucking Croydon'; Nevill, *Boom Baby*, p.16.

³⁰² A useful account of New Addington's development from the 'Boot estate' to the post-war and post-Blitz resettlements and slum clearances is provided in: Back, 'Why Everyday Life Matters,' pp.824-828. For a discussion of these developments nationally, see: Wetherell, *Foundations*, pp.84-93; Jones, *The working class in mid-twentieth-century England*, p.67; Boughton, *Municipal Dreams*, pp.108-128; J. Yelling, 'The incident of slum clearance in England and Wales, 1955-85,' *Urban History*, vol.27, no.2 (2000), pp.234-254.

³⁰³ Carby, *Imperial Intimacies*, p.7.

³⁰⁴ Hall, 'A Sense of Classlessness,' p.30. The tendency for a lack of amenities to bring residents together, and the countervailing tendency of the 'politics of association' to separate them, is discussed in: Jones, *The working class in mid-twentieth-century England*, pp.142-146.

people *still*, he said.³⁰⁵ These frustrations were a reminder that it was the Conservatives, and not Labour, who ultimately dictated the terms of Croydon's reconstruction, even if it was Labour voters like the Carty family who were doing the rebuilding.

However, if Labour was not in the driving seat, that did not mean that it was outside the car. As Elaine Harwood argued, this reconstruction was the result of 'stable local politics' in which the party in charge, Labour or Conservative, 'mattered little'.³⁰⁶ Labour had difficulty navigating its opposition to the council's proposals, torn between the appeal of planning, including the proposals of the 'Town and Country Plan', and the need for working-class housing. Their plans had already shifted by 1947, urging that the population of Croydon should be limited to 250,000.³⁰⁷ On the other hand, Labour criticised the slow rate of housebuilding.³⁰⁸ Torn between wishing to limit and encourage construction, Labour struggled to pose a substantive opposition to the Conservatives' proposals, typically settling into an appeal to planning 'as a purely technocratic operation' which for Lefebvre 'conceal[ed] its deeply *political* nature'.³⁰⁹ The building which did occur, especially after 1951, was facilitated by 'new planning powers of the local state [...] used, not for collectivist projects of state-led social provision but as levers for the encouragement and support of private redevelopment activity.'³¹⁰ In Croydon, where the nineteenth-century redevelopments described in the previous chapter were pushed through by an alliance of small-town capital and the emergent working class (albeit on a different scale to what occurred after the Second World War) the civic tradition already included a significant collaboration between the public and private sectors.³¹¹ Labour councillors could easily succumb to the weight of local non-partisan traditions, expressing 'an unwillingness to make specific the local manifestations of the national conflicts between, say, labour and capital, lest this harms local

³⁰⁵ Interview with Brian Nevill; Moran, 'The Strange Birth of Middle England,' p.237.

³⁰⁶ Harwood, 'White Light/White Heat,' pp.56-70, p.61.

³⁰⁷ *Croydon Labour Journal*, vol.1, no.4 (1947), p.11.

³⁰⁸ *Croydon Labour Journal*, vol.3, no.9 (1950), p.1.

³⁰⁹ Harwood, 'White Light/White Heat,' p.61; J. Wilson, "'The Devastating Conquest of the Lived by the Conceived": The Concept of Abstract Space in the Work of Henri Lefebvre,' *Space and Culture*, vol.16, no.3 (2013), pp.364-380, p.370.

³¹⁰ A. Kefford, 'Actually existing managerialism: Planning, politics and property development in post-1945 Britain,' *Urban Studies*, vol.58, no.12 (2020), pp. 2441-2455, pp.2444-2445.

³¹¹ Cox, *Urban Development and Redevelopment in Croydon*, p.423.

images of a friendly community at one with itself'.³¹² 'Half a loaf is better than none', Labour's council leadership argued; if Croydon's redevelopment was frustrating and compromising, therefore, the Labour Group was complicit, 'content to follow a policy of moderation and conciliation designed to create and maintain close and informal relations with the political elite'.³¹³

Nor were the Labour Group's hopes in this policy entirely baseless: Croydon's Conservative middle class had, in the post-war period, developed a kind of 'town-consciousness' which reinforced Labour's broader support for local institutions.³¹⁴ When a new college was proposed in 1954, 'it was members of the Labour group who argued in council for more selective places'.³¹⁵ Even in 1971, Saunders found, an eighth of Labour councillors had attended fee-paying schools – a considerable distance behind the half of Conservative councillors, but enough to make a difference and permit the maintenance of old boys' networks across party lines.³¹⁶ From the election of Roden during the war onwards, Labour were repeatedly offered the town's mayoralty, and James Keeling was proud of his appointment to the Surrey Territorial and Auxiliary Forces Association, claiming that it showed the council leadership 'must have thought I was a worthwhile person to represent them'.³¹⁷ By 1964, looking forward to the formation of the GLC, Frank Cole held Croydon up as an example to emulate. 'All of you know that a good, strong opposition in the council is what local government needs', he told party members, 'and many of the things which have happened in Croydon have been the ideas of members of the minority groups. Croydon is blessed with a council which is evenly balanced and nothing goes through without a full debate.'³¹⁸ Labour's older and more experienced council members 'enjoy[ed] both the respect and the confidence of their Conservative counterparts' with the Labour Group leader sometimes

³¹² J. Gyford and R. Baker, 'Labour and local politics,' *Fabian Tract*, no.446 (1977), pp.16-17.

³¹³ Saunders, *Urban Politics*, p.226.

³¹⁴ Fielding, 'Activists against "Affluence"', p.257.

³¹⁵ Unwin, 'Slow motion in Croydon,' p.16.

³¹⁶ Saunders, *Urban Politics*, p.214.

³¹⁷ 'T.A. stalwart fumes over choice of Labour delegate,' *Croydon Advertiser* (9th October 1964), p.1.

³¹⁸ 'London elections a dress rehearsal for Labour,' *Croydon Advertiser* (10th January 1964), p.8.

consulted on decisions before Conservative members – a process described by Saunders as ‘mutually satisfying back-scratching’.³¹⁹

It was often Labour’s women members, or the wives of Labour’s councillors, who managed this incorporation. Frank Cole’s wife (referred to in the *Advertiser* only as ‘Mrs. Frank Cole’), in their year (1963–64) as a ‘courteous and efficient Mayor and a charming Mayoress’, was responsible for making all but one of her own dresses and attending 43 lunches and thereby rendered her working-class husband presentable to Croydon’s middle-class civic culture.³²⁰ Central to this civic culture – at least through the 1950s – was the Standing Conference of Women’s Organisations of Croydon, which brought together groups as diverse as the Association of Headmistresses, the British Red Cross Society (Youth Section), the Croydon Association for Moral Welfare, the Grantham Dames Habitation (Primrose League), the WCG, the Women’s International League and the Women’s Section of South Croydon Labour Party.³²¹ Although there were differences between working-class organisations like the WCG and the Conservative-aligned Primrose League, ‘women’s organisations were often able to work together as an effective women’s movement in an effort to enhance the status of wives and mothers in post-war society.’³²² One woman who addressed the Standing Conference on ‘loneliness’ in 1958 had served in 1955 as the chair of the Croydon Teachers’ Association and in 1957 had been their delegate to the Croydon Council of Peace Groups – an indication of the connections which had developed between organisations at this time.³²³ The Standing Conference’s priorities were the ‘cleanliness of our streets’, ‘the future development of Croydon’ and ‘the happiness of its citizens’ – a broad commitment to the welfare of the borough typical of Croydon’s civic culture.³²⁴ Whilst ‘the development of a shared sense of civility and duty – delineated in gendered terms – united the disparate groups of “the middle classes” in opposition to a decadent aristocracy and a corrupt

³¹⁹ Saunders, *Urban Politics*, p.226.

³²⁰ ‘First citizens get council’s thanks,’ *Croydon Advertiser* (1st May 1964), p.8; ‘One year as Mayor – by Ald. Cole,’ *Croydon Advertiser* (26th June 1964), p.16.

³²¹ London, The Women’s Library, 5/WFM/K22.

³²² Beaumont, ‘What *Do* Women Want?’, p.153.

³²³ WL, 5/WFM/K22; MC, AR763/1/3/4.

³²⁴ WL, 5/WFM/K22.

poor', this post-war civic culture offered something to the working-class women who were incorporated into it, providing them with opportunities for contributing to Croydon's redevelopment.³²⁵ The tensions between the younger New Left activists and older women in the WCG, alluded to above, should be understood in this light.

It is equally striking that the wives of Viterbo Burgos and James Keeling were firm friends. Despite his repeated clashes with the Labour Group, Burgos, who Roy Lockett remembered as saying that 'the teapot should be the symbol of the Labour Party', was ultimately committed to conciliation with the rest of the Group and with the council – even whilst he went further to push at the boundaries of respectability.³²⁶ He defended his 'unorthodox' methods as a councillor because they 'paid off', but also on the basis of his membership of groups like Addiscombe Boys Club, the Foreign Language Club, Croydon Cancer Campaign and (more controversially) the HCC. Against the charges levelled at him by the local Labour executive committee, Burgos insisted that he kept the 'best of relations with the Majority Group'; he mentioned that 'the Tories used to jeer in Council when he spoke but they now listened because they respected him'. In the end, it was not enough – the executive committee voted to endorse the Group's decision to suspend the whip with only one vote against and one abstention – but it indicated his willingness to submit to the same standards as the Labour Group's leaders.³²⁷ Similarly, although Croydon CPGB complained of the party's exclusion from television coverage, the reality of their experience was somewhat different from 'the immense wave of anti-Communism' lamented by Barnsby – indeed, even the Addiscombe Young Conservatives were willing to host a speaker from the Hungarian embassy in 1964.³²⁸ The CPGB was included in the 1961 *Croydon Directory* alongside the Croydon Council of Peace Groups, the Purley Left Discussion Group, the Croydon New Left Labour Club – then

³²⁵ K. Cowman & L.A. Jackson, 'Middle-Class Women and Professional Identity,' *Women's History Review*, vol.14, no.2 (2005), pp.165-180, p.170.

³²⁶ Interview with Roy Lockett.

³²⁷ MC, uncatalogued minute book of Croydon Labour Party Executive Committee (1961-1972).

³²⁸ Letter from Ian Southard, *Croydon Advertiser* (15th May 1964), p.14; 'How modern Hungary lives,' *Croydon Advertiser* (17th July 1964), p.7; Barnsby, 'Coventry Communism,' p.186. The relatively benign attitude towards the CPGB was influenced by the party's own moderation in the immediate post-war period, as noted in, for example: D. Watson, "'Theirs was the crisis, Ours was the remedy': The Squatting Movements of 1946 in Britain, Canada, and Australia,' *Labour History Review*, vol.84, no.3 (2019), pp.241-265.

meeting at the Friends Meeting House – and the BSFS, as well as pages upon pages of trade unions.³²⁹ If the left was less willing to go along with the post-war consensus negotiated between the council and the Labour Group, therefore, it remained incorporated into a Croydon which went out of its way to ensure that it was included.

In these respects, Croydon's reconstruction did not differ entirely from that overseen in Labour-controlled local authorities. In Coventry, Nick Tiratsoo found that the reconstruction was less a 'New Jerusalem' – the high ambitions for which had never been total, anyway – and more a programme, implemented as well in cities like Hull, Plymouth, Portsmouth and Southampton, to correct welfare defects and the urban form, responsive to the obstacles it faced and the compromises hence forced.³³⁰ As Alistair Kefford has shown, 'the pre-war intellectual inheritance of liberalism, with its celebration of markets, private enterprise and individualism, continued to exercise a powerful hold over the political and administrative elites who designed and oversaw the new social state'.³³¹ Similarly, whilst the Fairfield Halls – which Leni Gillman saw as the result of Labour councillor James Walker's intervention, but which Percival thought Labour had opposed – was modelled on the Royal Festival Hall, the Festival of Britain itself was 'less the symbol of social democracy in action than an unleashing of talented professionals egged on by the Great and the Good', with representations of town planning, scientific progress and culture prioritised over social services, education, and working-class housing.³³² Hamish MacColl recalled that the Fairfield Halls was 'kind of institutional, everything was perfect, a bit too sterile': a microcosm of some of the frustrations felt with the post-war settlement, and a built remnant, in 1962, of what Matlock had described as 'the greyness of the fifties', when 'everything was so dour'.³³³

³²⁹ *Croydon Directory and Buying Guide* (Thornton Heath: Heath Publications, 1961), p.91, p.93 & pp.107-108.

³³⁰ Tiratsoo, *Reconstruction, Affluence and Labour Politics*, pp.103-110.

³³¹ Kefford, 'Actually existing managerialism,' p.2444.

³³² Interview with Leni Gillman; Interview with David Percival; Leventhal, "'A Tonic to the Nation",' p.449 & p.453.

³³³ Interview with Hamish MacColl; Interview with Joan Matlock.

Similarly, those from working-class backgrounds could feel especially frustrated with the ways that they had been treated by their teachers. By the early 1960s, the limits of the post-war settlement were quite apparent to the young activists, including a middle class whose changing professional identities could represent merely 'a less offensive way of defending [their] privileges'.³³⁴ Carty found that her favourite French teacher, a Labour Party member, discriminated between those from more working-class backgrounds and those who had attended the preparatory school, seen as 'more responsible'.³³⁵ She also reacted against the prejudice she witnessed towards her father in the more middle-class secondary school, 'because he was a working-class Irish navy, I suppose, in their eyes'.³³⁶ The maintenance of selection was another problem, as some activists had been unable to get into a grammar school and strained against what was, for Leni Gillman (whose sister passed the eleven plus, whilst she didn't), 'a first class education for the ones that passed, and then very much second class education for the ones that failed'.³³⁷ Although David Percival, at Ashburton secondary modern, was still able to get on 'a GCE stream', other boys were expected to do metalwork and woodwork and girls to learn 'to be a housewife, really, to cook and stuff like that'.³³⁸ Joan Matlock went to Lanfranc Girls' Secondary School, 'which was fairly rough' and she remembered having received no coaching for the eleven plus.³³⁹ Nevill, who went to Fairchildes secondary modern, noted New Addington 'had no grammars, they were all on the way in to Croydon, the nearest town proper, and a half-hour bus ride away'.³⁴⁰ The division between the schools was clearest for Lockett, whose school was called, until just before he joined, Croydon School of Building – the pupils were known as 'the brick-bashers'.³⁴¹ Going to secondary school may have meant encountering other left-wing pupils and left-wing ideas – but it also meant exposure to a sharply stratified, 'meritocratic' education system which was one of the consequences of the post-war compromise, which demonstrated to Williams 'the essential

³³⁴ Savage, 'Affluence and Social Change in the Making of Technocratic Middle-Class Identities,' p.459.

³³⁵ Interview with Marian Carty. Compare to Ben Jones' discussion of the class divides which could emerge within Catholic schools: Jones, *The working class in mid-twentieth-century England*, pp.63-64.

³³⁶ Interview with Marian Carty.

³³⁷ Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman. The psychological and relational consequences of selective education are highlighted in: E. Worth, *The Welfare State Generation: Women, Agency and Class in Britain Since 1945* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), pp.30-39.

³³⁸ Interview with David Percival.

³³⁹ Interview with Joan Matlock.

³⁴⁰ Nevill, *Boom Baby*, p.15.

³⁴¹ Interview with Roy Lockett.

continuity, despite changes in the economy, of a pattern of thinking drawn from a rigid class society.’³⁴²

Heading to university marked the moment that many activists came to terms with the limitations of their Croydon childhoods.³⁴³ Leni and Peter Gillman went to university in 1961 – the former, like her sister Wendy, to the University of Reading, whilst Peter ‘was one of a kind of elitist cohort that went to Oxford’, which he found ‘very liberating’ in contrast to the ‘conformist’ Dulwich College, and where he became editor of *Isis* with Hall’s encouragement.³⁴⁴ Martin Graham recalled that he went to Liverpool to study physics because it ‘was a time in the early sixties when science was the future’: ‘Harold Wilson’s white-hot heat of technology’, discussed in the next chapter.³⁴⁵ Lynda Graham left for a teacher training college in Nottingham, where she campaigned alongside ‘Harold Wilson in his mac with his pipe’ on the Clifton estate.³⁴⁶ Time at university revealed the shortcomings of Croydon’s Labour connections. Martin Graham found it an ‘eye-opener to me because the north and the south of England were very different at that time.’³⁴⁷ Berlin – who went to Nottingham in the early-1970s – made a similar point:

‘It was actually a very interesting place to be because Nottingham was not northern, technically it’s Midlands but it feels northern. Felt northern to any Londoner, it even felt more northern to me, and I knew Lancashire very well, because my mother’s family came from Lancashire. So, it did have that northern city feel to it – it’s always been quite a depressed city.’³⁴⁸

Taught by the Marxist sociologist Bill Silburn, who had co-authored with Ken Coates – also at Nottingham – a study of the local St. Ann’s estate, Berlin could hardly have missed the differences

³⁴² Williams, *The Long Revolution*, p.180.

³⁴³ Compare with the discussion of post-war activists’ arrivals at university in: Hughes, *Young Lives on the Left*, pp.107-111.

³⁴⁴ Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman.

³⁴⁵ Interview with Lynda and Martin Graham.

³⁴⁶ Interview with Lynda and Martin Graham.

³⁴⁷ Interview with Lynda and Martin Graham.

³⁴⁸ Interview with Simon Berlin. The growing significance of the North-South divide, from the 1920s onwards, is highlighted in: Lawrence, *Me, Me, Me?*, p.103.

between the area and his hometown of Croydon.³⁴⁹ Whilst Carty's year in the small French town of Charolles in the Bourgogne confirmed her as a 'townie', the experience of university generally made Croydon seem suburban and middle-class – as it was – by comparison, and gave the young activists a taste of places which were much more definitively Labour-voting than the Croydon of their childhoods.³⁵⁰

As this section has argued, the multiple 'vacancies' which opened in Croydon during and after the Second World War were filled in, not by Labour, but by the same Majority Group which had governed the town in the interwar period. Like in Coventry and other 'blitzed cities', and post-war Britain generally, social democracy in Croydon was to prove as much the product of technocratic modernisation as of working-class initiative. Whilst this was a Croydon which provided numerous opportunities to both the 'Old Left' and the young activists of the first New Left, it was not a Croydon which they had much say in rebuilding, although they had enough of a say to provide them with a memory of being 'a member, a discoverer, in a shared source of life', in the Croydon of the post-war consensus.³⁵¹ Often, it was only in moving away from Croydon – in departure to university, in particular – that activists came to terms with the limitations of the Croydon which they had left: limitations which were imposed by the spaces to which left-wing politics had been granted entry.

The other Marshall plan

The meeting of the European sections of the Socialist International in 1948 set out the differences between Labour's approach to the post-war period and that of its sister parties. For all of the bluster of the Labour representatives, Hugh Dalton and Morgan Phillips, about the 'reactionary Churchill committee' in their opposition to the European federalism supported by French socialists, other motivations loomed larger.³⁵² Whilst Independent Labour Party figures

³⁴⁹ Interview with Simon Berlin. The book was K. Coates & R. Silburn, *Poverty: The Forgotten Englishmen* (Nottingham: Penguin Books, 1970).

³⁵⁰ Interview with Marian Carty. She was taking a year abroad from her studies at the University of Leicester.

³⁵¹ Williams, *The Country and the City*, p.428.

³⁵² W. Loth, 'The French Socialist Party, 1947-1954,' pp.25-42, in Griffiths (ed.), *Socialist Parties and the Question of Europe in the 1950s*, p.30.

like Fenner Brockway and Bob Edwards did engage with the European federalist project, the 'Third Force' proposal and the loss of national powers conflicted with the Labour Party's post-war position.³⁵³ Labour had banked on a distinct position: reconstruction within the borders, and with the limitations, of the British state; involvement in, but separation from, the European project; and alliance with the United States alongside maintenance of the empire. They had settled on taking over, and turning to their advantage, the British state – not overthrowing it – and on working with the leading capitalist power, the United States, to do so.³⁵⁴

Similar approaches characterised Labour's approach to Croydon's post-war redevelopment. Into the vacated spaces created by the Blitz, and with the technocratic modernism which was increasingly a part of middle-class professionals' identities in the interwar period and afterwards, there was an attempt to build a new Jerusalem along the lines of that under construction in Labour-held Coventry or Hull, and to cultivate the 'town-consciousness' associated with the nineteenth-century Victorian town centre. Given the continued dynamism of suburban Conservatism, Labour's representation on the council depended upon the support of working-class communities cultivated by left-wing councillors like Burgos as well as the CPGB. These left-wing activists, in a blitzed and decolonising Croydon, provided the foundations for an active left which had national importance in the form of groups like VfS. At the same time, the ongoing growth of a progressive middle class, and the social mixing offered in Croydon's schools, coffee houses and suburban homes, connected these activists to a young New Left making sense of themselves and their surroundings in the aftermath of 1956.

However, if 1956 is better-known for its significance in global politics, thanks to the twin crises of Suez and Hungary, in Croydon it was just as importantly the date of the Croydon Corporation Act: Sir James Marshall's masterpiece which laid the foundations for the 'Croydonisation' to

³⁵³ D.W.H., 'The Socialist Parties and European Unity: A British Labour Party View,' *The World Today*, vol.6, no.10 (1950), pp.421-422.

³⁵⁴ On Labour's attitude towards the United States in the pre-war, wartime, and immediate post-war periods, see: R. Carr, "'A party not unlike the Democrats": Labour, the left and encounters with America from the New Deal to the New Frontier,' pp.39-55, in Yeowell (ed.), *Rethinking Labour's Past*, pp.42-53.

follow. Whilst its full implications were not apparent in the late 1950s, and the Croydon of this immediate post-war period was generally remembered fondly by my narrators, the Act was a product of a Conservative-led post-war settlement that increasingly frustrated the young New Left activists, and a contributor to some of the conflicted, ambivalent, contradictory feelings later evoked by the 1945 Labour government which was, in a sense, responsible.³⁵⁵ The trams, so important in Peter Gillman's childhood recollections of the town centre, discussed in the previous chapter, were cancelled in 1959 – the same year as national cuts to public transport by the Conservative government, which the New Left opposed.³⁵⁶ Matlock had a fond memory of the 'long white building' where she was taken by her mother for her 'National Health orange juice', but it was replaced by Norfolk House in 1959.³⁵⁷ Similarly, the Davis Theatre was pulled down in 1959 to make way for the Fairfield Halls – a replacement which contributed to some of the ambiguous feelings which activists identified with it, and with Croydon's post-war redevelopment more generally.³⁵⁸ The 'orange juice, milk and dinners at school', described so beautifully by Steedman, were not necessarily experienced in the new buildings of post-war reconstruction, but in the blitzed Victoria town centre which they replaced.³⁵⁹ The end of this chapter, to a certain extent, describes the conclusion of my narrators' childhoods: 'the continually reworked and re-used personal history that lies at the heart of each present.'³⁶⁰

By the time that the young people of the first New Left generation returned from university, the differences (between the imagined social-democratic promise and the reality of the post-war settlement, between the young left-wing activists and the order constructed by their parents, and

³⁵⁵ S. Fielding, 'The shifting significance of the "Spirit of '45"', pp.57-73, in Yeowell (ed.), *Rethinking Labour's Past*, pp.59-62 & pp.65-69.

³⁵⁶ Interview with Peter Gillman; S. Hall, 'The supply of demand (1960)', pp.47-69, in Davison et al (eds.), *Stuart Hall*, p.51.

³⁵⁷ Interview with Joan Matlock.

³⁵⁸ Groom, *Rockin' and around Croydon*, p.82.

³⁵⁹ Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman*, p.122. It is worth noting that Steedman was making a specific point about the felt difference between the post-war Labour government and 'late Victorian liberal philanthropy' – the overlapping of each's spaces, though, makes these feelings particularly complicated. Compare, also, to Alistair Cartwright's recent contrasts between perceptions of bomb sites as 'the seed of a better future' and the 'self-inflicted injuries' associated with the failures of reconstruction: 'a future that brings new ruins hurtling towards the present.' A. Cartwright, 'The Un-Ideal Home: Fire Safety, Visual Culture and the LCC (1958-63)', *The London Journal*, vol.46, no.1 (2020), pp.66-91, p.80.

³⁶⁰ Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman*, p.128.

between Croydon and a long list of Labour-supporting elsewhere) had become starker, as the consequences of both Marshall plans for post-war Croydon, and Britain as a whole, were revealed. This was a Croydon where comparisons to the United States were frequent, and the left felt excluded: a Croydon to be associated with another important meeting at Selsdon Park, discussed in the next chapter. That was a time in which the young activists of the New Left would, like Hall, reconfigure their commitments 'to the making of socialist consciousness, rather than the accession to political power.'³⁶¹ In the early-1960s, however, Croydon remained a site of optimism for left-wing activists: a vacated space which they could fill, and the site of social mixing for a young New Left in a young 'new town', offering the chance of finally overcoming the frustrations and exclusions identified with the post-war consensus. Entrance into this world gave post-war children like Carolyn Steedman, and particularly those most alienated by the suburban landscapes described in the previous chapter, a sense, 'in a covert way, that I had a right to exist'.³⁶² This was a Croydon where they may have been patronised and subordinated, yes – but they were not 'sent to Coventry'.

³⁶¹ Hall, 'Political commitment,' p.101.

³⁶² Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman*, p.122.

Chapter Three: Croydonisation and its discontents

'In seventy-two we was born to lose

We slipped down snakes into yesterday's news

I was ready to quit

But then we went to Croydon'

Mott the Hoople, 'Saturday Gigs' (1974)

'My friend who moaned there was no beauty in his life

has moved to Croydon where he waters his allotment'

Mary Joannou, 'Where are the friends of 1968?' (1977)¹

There's something decidedly Space Age about the centre of Croydon – as John Grindrod put it, 'a vision of the future from the past' which 'makes sense as a town to be approached by jetpack, where paranoid androids hum early Human League songs in the underpasses and flying saucers land on top of shopping centres, transforming Terry and June into George and Jane Jetson at the zap of a ray gun.'² *Ad Astra Per Croydon*, a 2018 alternate history zine, documents the failed ambitions of the 'Croydonauts' to build 'Orbital Suburbs', attempting to beat Bromley to become 'the first London borough to land a man on the moon.'³ A hundred years earlier, Croydon had served as the point of departure for an astronomic adventure novel by Mark Wicks; it was the point of arrival for a group of alien visitors in Whitgift-educated Neil Gaiman's short story 'How to Talk to Girls at Parties', itself later a 2017 film.⁴ This chapter will consider the responses of

¹ *Peace News* (28th January 1977), p.13.

² Grindrod, *Concretopia*, pp.16-17.

³ T. Murphy, *Ad Astra Per Croydon* (Penge: Colossive Press, 2018), p.2, p.12 & p.14.

⁴ M. Wicks, *To Mars via the Moon: An Astronomical Story* (London: Seeley and Co. Ltd., 1911); N. Gaiman, 'How to Talk to Girls at Parties,' *Neil Gaiman* (2006),

<https://www.neilgaiman.com/Cool%20Stuff/Short%20Stories/How%20To%20Talk%20To%20Girls%20At%20Parties?key=Cool%20Stuff/Short%20Stories/How%20To%20Talk%20To%20Girls%20At%20Parties>, accessed 19th April 2021.

activists to, and their contribution towards, this changing, 'Space Age' Croydon, as the world which they had experienced ambiguously as children was renewed, remodelled, and replaced.

The Space Age which Croydon evokes is emphatically American: a 'miniature Manhattan skyline', 'so redolent of Sixties redevelopment', beginning with the widening of Wellesley Road that Elaine Harwood described as 'Croydon's sunset strip'.⁵ Foremost amongst the new office blocks was No.1 Croydon, formerly the Noble Lowndes Annuities headquarters and known variously as the NLA Tower, 'threepenny-bit' or '5Op' building, and 'the wedding-cake' for its unusual shape: the Richard Seifert-designed 'star building' of the new Croydon, 'a *Thunderbirds* rocket caught mid-launch'.⁶ As the focus of urban development shifted from what James Greenhalgh called 'reconstruction' to 'renewal', Croydon came to possess an urban city centre which, like Lauren Pikó's Milton Keynes, was both 'futuristic' and 'foreign', a 'reversal of a colonial logic' which saw the United States establishing an outpost in the Surrey hills.⁷ Grindrod saw this Croydon as 'an expression of pure capitalism'; a dynamic, urban Croydon – not the county town urbanity of the nineteenth century, or the provincial post-war urbanity of the previous chapter, but the 'city slickness' of the 'Chester-Perry vortex' which *New Society* described in 1975 as 'anything but suburban'.⁸ This was the phenomenon which Harwood described as 'Croydonisation': 'a symbol of civic pride commensurate with the redevelopment of the town's High Street and building of its grand town hall in the 1890s', although many left-wing activists felt differently.⁹ For all its faults, though, this was still a Croydon of excitement and youthfulness – the Croydon celebrated by Mott the Hoople, or in Brian Auger's 1967 'Oh Baby, Won't You Come Back Home to Croydon (Where Everybody Beedle and Bo)'.⁹

⁵ Phelps et al, *Post-Suburban Europe*, p.172; Harwood, 'White Light/White Heat,' p.60.

⁶ Grindrod, *Concretopia*, pp.252-253; J. Grindrod, 'NLA Tower, Croydon,' *Twentieth Century Society* (November 2014), <https://c20society.org.uk/building-of-the-month/nla-tower-croydon>, accessed 25th July 2022. On Richard Seifert, see: E. Harrison, "'Money Spinners": R. Seifert & Partners, Sir Frank Price and Public-Sector Speculative Development in the 1970s,' *Architectural History*, no.61 (2018), pp.259-280.

⁷ Greenhalgh, 'The new urban social history?,' p.535; Pikó, *Milton Keynes in British Culture*, p.52.

⁸ Grindrod, *Concretopia*, p.249; White, 'The pleasure of Croydon,' p.525.

⁹ Harwood, 'White Light/White Heat,' p.60.

However, Manhattan is not the only place in the United States to which Croydon has been compared – musically, the preference has been for California, often bathetically, as in *Russ Abbot's Madhouse's* 1983 cover of the Beach Boys 1965 classic retitled 'Upper Norwood Girls'.¹⁰ Whereas the idea of Croydon-as-Manhattan evoked the spontaneity of the urban encounter, the idea of Croydon-as-Los-Angeles is a retrieval of the segregated, suburban Croydon described in the first chapter, signalled by the addition of Purley and Coulsdon with the creation of the London Borough in 1965. This was a compromising, reactionary Croydon, as found in Joannou's mournful 1977 poem: embodying the disappointments of the 1960s and prefiguring the rise of Thatcherism, whether in suburban Selsdon or its 'suburban' town centre, and which activists would regard critically, pessimistically, but also as a site of struggle. In navigating these struggles, the influence of figures in France and the United States was paramount – in the politics of liberation represented by French Maoism and the Black Panthers, or the imaginative, media-savvy provocations of the Situationists and Marshall McLuhan, whose dynamic 'tetrad of media effects' (enhancement; obsolescence; retrieval; reversal) has influenced the structure of this chapter.¹¹

Given the apparent suddenness of these changes, and the steady growth in Labour's support which they seemingly interrupted, it is not surprising that Croydon's 1960s and 1970s redevelopments were experienced as an alien invasion: an obsolescence of the 'town-conscious', social-democratic Croydon described in the previous chapter, as well as the Victorian town centre described in the first. As this chapter argues, however, the early-1960s remained a period of optimism for left-wing activists in the 'second New Left', and advances continued to be made based on the contradictory appeals of social democracy. In the mid-1960s, these started to unravel with Labour in government and partly responsible for Croydon's redevelopment, culminating in multiple interlocking crises in (and represented in popular memory by) 1968, when the blame attributed to the United States was as common as, and in proportion to, the earlier admiration. At the same

¹⁰ The exception, musically, is Kirsty MacColl, who recorded several times in New York – the subject of the song with the Pogues for which she is best known, 'Fairytale of New York' (1987), as well as 'Manhattan Moon' (2000), although in neither case was a comparison to Croydon explicit.

¹¹ McLuhan & Powers, *The Global Village*, p.10.

time, however, from within this crisis and the spaces opened up by social democracy, emerged a young ('third New Left') underground scene which seized upon the differences generated by the twentieth-century metropolis to articulate a complex version of the 'suburban' – a creative, intersectional politics of liberation, willing to take on the 'risk of political embarrassment' which Lauren Berlant has described as characteristic of the movements of 1968, and whose subsumption and defeat closes this chapter.¹²

'For Croydon in the Sixties... Vote Labour in the Sixties'

The previous chapter has argued that the 1950s were a decade of disappointment and frustration for the young left-wing activists – regarded by Joan Matlock as 'leaden' and 'uptight', despite the concessions which had been won since the war.¹³ As Raymond Williams described in 1961, 'the objectives for which many generations worked have been quite generally achieved, yet [...] the society has never been more radically criticised', with a pervasive 'mood of both stagnation and restlessness.'¹⁴ However, by the start of the 1960s, Croydon was a site of optimism for Labour and the left, representative of the possibilities of a break from a decade of Conservative dominance. To borrow a term from McLuhan, its renewal 'enhanced' the 'new town' Croydon of the 1950s, a Croydon rebuilt along lines influenced by both the Soviet Union and especially the United States, and home to a young and progressive population which played a critical role in Labour's early-1960s local advances and the 1966 election of David Winnick – the urban redevelopment and expansion '[intensifying] the centralizing of all human activities' in a manner which could prove conducive to left-wing politics.¹⁵ This exciting, urbane Croydon, though overseen by a Conservative-controlled council, embodied the vision of the future to which Harold Wilson, as Labour leader and Prime Minister, was appealing: an increasingly American-influenced vision of

¹² Berlant, '68, or Something,' p.128.

¹³ Interview with Joan Matlock.

¹⁴ Williams, *The Long Revolution*, pp.12-13. For a fuller discussion of the sense of 'declinism' in late 1950s and early 1960s Britain, originally articulated by the left and centre-left, see: Tomlinson, 'Thrice Denied,' p.235.

¹⁵ McLuhan & Powers, *The Global Village*, p.10 & p.172.

the future apt for the Atlanticist party described in the previous chapter, fulfilling hopes in the post-war settlement which had long been frustrated.

'Optimism was a recurring theme running like electricity through the discourse of the early 1960s,' Otto Saumarez Smith has argued, 'giving energy to ambition.'¹⁶ Hugh Gaitskell had succeeded, as Labour leader, in speaking to the sense of futurity and progress which the coming decade seemed to be calling for, and the distance between the Liberals (under Jo Grimond) and the Labour Party was narrowing; in 1962 Reg Prentice was requested to address a Young Liberals meeting.¹⁷ The growth of 'middle-class radicalism' challenged 'Conservative hegemony in the outer suburbs', typified by the Liberal victory in the 1962 by-election in neighbouring Orpington, inspiring Labour activists in Croydon as they headed towards the 1964 elections.¹⁸ Labour achieved record local election results in the last few years ahead of the formation of the GLC – Patrick Byrne and Lil Scott elected in hitherto impregnable South Norwood and West Thornton, and the leader of the ratepayers openly wondered whether 'there may be better ways of fighting the Socialists than in the past'.¹⁹ Labour's South Regional Council had chosen to hold its 'Labour in the Sixties' meeting in Croydon in April 1961 and then, in 1962, the banner headline for their election address read boldly, 'For Croydon in the Sixties... Vote Labour in the Sixties.'²⁰ The 1960s looked like the decade when the Croydon electorate might finally be, to steal a phrase from the previous chapter, 'growing in good sense'.²¹

It was not Gaitskell that reaped the benefits – in 1963, the Croydon North East Liberal Association sent a letter to the local Labour Party expressing sympathy over their leader's premature death.²² His successor, Harold Wilson ('an anti-metropolitan, provincial figure' well-

¹⁶ Saumarez Smith, *Boom Cities*, p.14.

¹⁷ P. Barberis, 'The 1964 General Election and the Liberals' False Dawn,' *Contemporary British History*, vol.21, no.3 (2007), pp.373-387, p.379; MC, uncatalogued minute book of Croydon Labour Party Executive Committee (1961-1972).

¹⁸ Samuel, 'The Lost World of British Communism: 1,' p.13; 'London elections a dress rehearsal for Labour,' *Croydon Advertiser* (10th January 1964), p.8.

¹⁹ MC, uncatalogued minute book of Croydon Labour Party Executive Committee (1961-1972); 'Tory take-over is spreading: Joint candidates to contest many wards,' *Croydon Advertiser* (31st January 1964), p.1.

²⁰ MC, uncatalogued minute book of Croydon Labour Party Executive Committee (1961-1972).

²¹ *Croydon Labour Journal*, vol.3, no.8 (1950), p.6.

²² MC, uncatalogued minute book of Croydon Labour Party Executive Committee (1961-1972).

suiting to the Croydon described in the previous chapter), would nevertheless articulate similar themes.²³ He would turn Labour into the 'party of technocratic modernization', most famously in his 1963 conference speech, describing 'the Britain that is going to be forged in the white heat of this revolution', which International Socialists (IS) and Labour member David Percival witnessed in Blackpool.²⁴ His speech could have been describing the buildings then springing up across Croydon, whose names reflected the 'New Britain' (or England) which Labour's candidates contrasted with the 'backward looking' and 'slothful' Conservatives: early blocks included Surrey House, then Suffolk House, Essex House and the Norwich Union's 11-storey Norfolk House, and in 1964 the 24-storey St. George's Tower, with its distinctive Nestlé sign.²⁵ Although it would be two more years before Croydon gained a Labour MP, Wilson's 1964 general election victory had major consequences for the town, with the 'Brown ban' halting city centre high-rise construction and driving offices to relocate to Croydon in what John Grindrod has called 'an unwitting side effect of one of the most socialistic creations in British politics': Croydon's expansion as a financial centre linked directly to the Wilson government's attempts to impose controls on private development in central London.²⁶ Both St. George's Walk and the Fairfield Halls have appeared in films like 2010's *Made in Dagenham* – soundtracked by a mixture of British, American and Jamaican musicians – to represent a familiar image of 1960s Britain, a mixture of concrete and glass, a faltering establishment and the possibilities of liberation. Although, as will be seen, Croydon was 'hardly a paragon of social democratic urbanism', it remains a possible site of attachment for left-wing activists today because, as Owen Hatherley points out, 'in aesthetic it's a 1960s living museum, left remarkably intact', and evocative of a time when bold and socialist futures could be envisioned.²⁷

²³ B. Jackson, 'The disenchantment of the Labour Party: Socialism, liberalism and progressive history,' pp.25-36, in Yeowell (ed.), *Rethinking Labour's Past*, p.29.

²⁴ Edgerton, 'Science and the nation,' p.106; Interview with David Percival.

²⁵ Marriott, *The Property Boom*, p.185; Grindrod, *Concretopia*, pp.250-251.

²⁶ Grindrod, *Concretopia*, p.249.

²⁷ Hatherley, *A New Kind of Bleak*, p.165.

In the early-1960s, those envisioning these futures often looked to the Soviet Union.²⁸ For CPGB activists in the British-Soviet Friendship Society (BSFS), the new office buildings actually resembled those of the Soviet Union; as a Russian newspaper correspondent reported during a 1964 visit, 'Since the days of Stalin, we in Russia have been building similar skyscrapers to yours, but, I think, yours are more beautiful.'²⁹ This was a period of renewed interest in the eastern European example; in 1964, the BSFS attempted to establish a link with a Soviet town, and the English-Czechoslovakian Friendship League organised a 'Shakespeare in Czechoslovakia' exhibition at the Fairfield Halls, opened by the Czech ambassador.³⁰ As late as 1968, the BSFS promoted an exhibition at the Fairfield Halls showcasing the artwork of Soviet children, and a few months ahead of the 1970 general election, then-MP Winnick asserted that, despite political differences, he believed 'the form of economic ownership and planning carried out in Russia will inevitably be the general pattern for most countries.'³¹ Both Labour and the CPGB benefited from an atmosphere, typified by the 1957 launch of Sputnik and the 1961 orbit of Yuri Gagarin, whereby success in science was identified with the Soviet Union and with socialism.³²

Those blocks built in the latter part of the decade – notably the civil service offices in Lunar and Apollo House, completed in 1970 in the aftermath of the 1969 moon landing by Apollo 11 – were inspired by American, rather than Soviet, achievements in the Space Race.³³ As the last chapter pointed out, Croydon's renewal was overseen by Sir James Marshall, 'in a sense comparable to an American-style town boss', and 'to Croydon what Robert Moses is to New York, albeit on a smaller scale and less brutal', responsible for the creation of what has been described as a 'mini-Manhattan'.³⁴ However, this American-influenced Croydon was not solely the preserve of the

²⁸ Williams, *The Long Revolution*, p.396.

²⁹ "'I like Croydon,'" says Izvestia's Mr. Ossipov,' *Croydon Advertiser* (8th May 1964), p.2.

³⁰ 'British-Soviet Friendship Society,' *Croydon Advertiser* (28th February 1964), p.4; 'Czechs and the Bard,' *Croydon Advertiser* (19th June 1964), p.8.

³¹ 'Greater stress on Soviet links,' *Croydon Advertiser* (1st March 1968), p.22; London, Bishopsgate Institute, PPA/1/629.

³² B. Harker, *The Chronology of Revolution: Communism, Culture, and Civil Society in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021), pp.128-129.

³³ Back, 'So... fucking Croydon.'

³⁴ Marriott, *The Property Boom*, pp.185-186; 'The Towers of Croydon,' *Urban Notes*, no.1 (31st October 2020), <https://www.urbannotes.info/post/the-towers-of-croydon>, accessed 29th April 2021. For other uses of 'mini-Manhattan', see, for example: White, 'The pleasure of Croydon,' p.525; Reid & Savage, *Up They Rise*, p.5.

Conservatives, in a period where Labour's Atlanticism equalled or exceeded that of their rivals – with John F. Kennedy and then Lyndon B. Johnson in the White House, and the progress of the Civil Rights movement, the United States was seen by some progressives as providing a model which contrasted with the staid, Conservative-voting Britain of the 1950s.³⁵ Martin Luther King Jr. provided a particular touchstone for white anti-racist and community relations activists, and his earlier visit to the United Kingdom in December 1964 had been followed by the formation of the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination (CARD).³⁶ Locally, interest in these American examples was encouraged, partly, by the growth of Croydon's Black population across the course of the 1960s. In 1951, only 139 residents of the county borough had been born in the Caribbean; by 1966 this had grown to approximately 4,290, and 6,000 by 1971.³⁷ Organisations like Parchmore Methodist Church attempted to cater to the growing number of Black young people in Croydon as part of what has been described as the 'Parchmore approach' of embedding the church within the local community, their youth centre a significant example of Christian forays into 'race relations' in the 1960s and early 1970s.³⁸ In June 1968, Dorothy Steffens – described as a 'close colleague of Mrs. Corinna Luther King' – spoke at Croydon Unitarian Church to a meeting organised by the International Association and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.³⁹ As late as the 1970 general election, Dr. Gerald Elliott, candidate in Croydon North East for the second time and described as 'Labour's Man for the 1970s', made much of having 'spent eighteen months as Professor in the Carnegie-Mellon University in Pittsburgh, where he took an interest in race and big-city problems in the USA.'⁴⁰

³⁵ Carr, "'A party not unlike the Democrats'", pp.48-53.

³⁶ Green, *Digging at Roots and Tugging at Branches*, p.107; R. Waters, *Thinking Black: Britain, 1964-1985* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019), p.16; Perry, *London is the Place for Me*, pp.190-191.

³⁷ Mildon, 'West Indian home owners in Croydon,' p.94.

³⁸ 'Celebrating 50 years at the heart of our community,' *Thornton Heath Chronicle* (5th June 2018), <https://www.thorntonheathchronicle.co.uk/celebrating-50-years-at-the-heart-of-the-our-community/>, accessed 20th July 2020. A useful comparison might be made between the 'Parchmore approach' and the experience of Christian activists involved in the 'Team Ministry' in Notting Hill, discussed in: T. Green, *Digging at Roots and Tugging at Branches: Christians and 'Race Relations' in the Sixties* (PhD Thesis, University of Exeter, 2016).

³⁹ 'Racialism: You are following in our steps, warns an American,' *Croydon Advertiser* (21st June 1968), p.5.

⁴⁰ Canterbury, University of Kent Special Collections & Archives, WEA/PC/E3.

Moreover, as Pikó has explained, Wilson's first government favoured a shift 'in favour of flexibility, inclusion, and actively learning from early new town planning.'⁴¹ On the radical edge of this was a 'quartet of mavericks' that co-authored an article in *New Society*, 'Non-plan: An experiment in freedom,' which was to become 'a key text in the intellectual counter-attack against Webbian Fabianism', presenting places like Las Vegas as to be emulated.⁴² Its four authors were Cedric Price, Paul Barker, Reyner Banham (known for his work on Los Angeles) and Peter Hall (who had an 'extensive knowledge of the United States'); together, as Sam Wetherell has described in an important text on the lasting significance of 'Non-plan', they 'called for large, county-sized regions of the UK to be freed from all planning restrictions.'⁴³ They were almost as enamoured with Croydon as they were with the United States. Cedric Price had worked on proposals for a 'fun palace' in East London with Ewan MacColl's first wife, Joan Littlewood; later, when MacColl's second wife, Jean MacColl, was trying to find an architect to build her home following their separation, Littlewood recommended Price.⁴⁴ More seriously, in *London 2000* (published in 1963 and revised in 1969), Hall celebrated Croydon as 'perhaps the most spectacular example so far of suburban office decentralization', despite problems with congestion, and promoted construction of houses at sites including Croydon Airport – an area whose original 1920s construction 'Non-plan' had cited as the last example of 'the area around an airport develop[ing] naturally'.⁴⁵ Left-wing writers such as Owen Hatherley continue to celebrate developments like St. Bernard's, 'a secluded 1971 estate of three short terraces' in Park Hill, designed by Swiss architects for whom 'a utopian Southern California was more the model than Düsseldorf or Acton', 'incarnat[ing] traditional suburban values of privacy, seclusion and hierarchy in a very different

⁴¹ Pikó, *Milton Keynes in British Culture*, p.18.

⁴² Barker, 'Thinking the Unthinkable,' p.6.

⁴³ Barker, 'Thinking the Unthinkable,' p.4; S. Wetherell, 'Freedom Planned: Enterprise Zones and Urban Non-Planning in Post-War Britain,' *Twentieth Century British History*, vol.27, no.2 (2016), pp.266-289, p.268. For a further account of 'Non-plan' and its implications for the development of Milton Keynes, see: Ortolano, *Thatcher's Progress*, pp.70-72 & p.92. For a discussion of Reyner Banham's celebration of Los Angeles, see: J.P. Bell, 'Reyner Banham, Mike Davis, and the Discourse on Los Angeles Ecology,' *UrbDeZine* (2015), <https://works.bepress.com/jonathanpbell/12/>, accessed 9th November 2021.

⁴⁴ Price came up with an expensive five-storey design which would have blocked out the sun for her neighbours; unsurprisingly, and appropriately given Price's involvement in 'Non-Plan', they complained to the planning office, and she hired a different architect. MacColl, *My Kirsty*, p.33.

⁴⁵ P. Hall, *London 2000* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), p.69, p.81 & p.110; Barker, 'Thinking the Unthinkable,' p.18. For a discussion of *London 2000*, see: Saumarez Smith, *Boom Cities*, pp.1-2, pp.22-23 & pp.102-104.

way from most of the sprawl where London meets Surrey.⁴⁶ Croydon's Americanisms could be identified as a positive by left-wing thinkers for whom the United States still represented progress.

Beyond the symbolism of the new office blocks, their occupants, too, were a source of optimism. Whilst Labour's politicians expressed reservations about aspects of the redevelopment, they vocally supported 'the development of Croydon' and its becoming 'a commercial centre' as the party courted sections of capital.⁴⁷ Tyrrell Burgess, the candidate in Croydon South in 1964 and *New Society's* assistant editor, was endorsed by business leader Lord Shackleton, whilst a letter to the *Advertiser* highlighted the City of London's apparent support for a Labour government.⁴⁸ John Palmer, a member of IS and later European editor of *The Guardian*, stood in Croydon North West and insisted that Labour were 'the party of working people, blue collar and white collar'.⁴⁹ Between 1963 and 1973, 20 percent of offices and 30 percent of jobs which relocated from central London ended up in Croydon, as the town expanded into one of the most important financial and administrative areas in the country.⁵⁰ The expansion of offices meant the introduction of new technologies which commentators again saw positively – especially computing, designed 'to do the repetitive reading, writing, adding, multiplying, and dividing that we all get bored with'.⁵¹ Eileen Bagley, a local trade unionist and clerical worker, enthused about the possibilities of automation and suggested that 'more of us should read the *New Scientist* instead of the *New Statesman*'.⁵² Many computing workers in Croydon were drawn into left-wing politics, including Paul Pawlowski (a Polish anarchist who made headlines for his activism in the

⁴⁶ Hatherley, *A New Kind of Bleak*, p.168; Hatherley, *The Alternative Guide to the London Boroughs*, p.136.

⁴⁷ "'Town centre is a wilderness",' *Croydon Advertiser* (8th May 1964), p.5; 'Labour "fed up to teeth" with house demolition,' *Croydon Advertiser* (1st May 1964), p.2.

⁴⁸ "'Bogyman attempt by Tories",' *Croydon Advertiser* (9th October 1964), p.17; S.W. Davies, 'Looking to Labour for help?' *Croydon Advertiser* (19th June 1964).

⁴⁹ Interview with David Percival; Interview with Peter Walker; 'Hundreds of evictions each month,' *Croydon Advertiser* (31st January 1964), p.16. Palmer wrote an essay for *International Socialism* on the Common Market, which anticipated his later work with *The Guardian*: J. Palmer, 'The Common Market,' *International Socialism*, no.12 (1963), pp.26–28, <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/isj/1963/no012/palmer.htm>.

⁵⁰ Harwood, 'White Light/White Heat,' p.61.

⁵¹ McLuhan & Powers, *The Global Village*, pp.103–104.

⁵² E.B., 'Scientific revolution,' *Vanguard* (March 1965), p.12, <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/periodicals/vanguard/2-2.pdf>; E. Bagley, 'Towards 2,000,' *Vanguard* (March 1965), p.7, <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/periodicals/vanguard/2-2.pdf>.

mid-1960s) and Norman Davies, a Labour-supporting computer analyst involved in unionisation attempts.⁵³ International Computers and Tabulators (ICT) had a factory in West Croydon – when they announced 900 redundancies in 1964, its workers denounced Cold War embargoes and Labour’s candidates directly contrasted the deterioration of the British computing industry after 1951 with the support which had been provided in the United States.⁵⁴ By 1966, Elliott was able to point to the Labour government’s successes, and contrast them with the Conservative council’s failure to retain the teleprinter company Creed’s in the town.⁵⁵ The economic significance of the office blocks and of new technologies in the 1960s was particularly important for Croydon, and Labour under Wilson was well-positioned to present itself as a forward-thinking party capable of learning from both Soviet and American examples.

Whilst many of the new office workers were men, the 1960s also saw a growth in feminised work: a combination exemplified in Grindrod’s recent description of the blocks as ‘like scaled-up *Mad Men*-era G-Plan wardrobes and filing cabinets’, with ‘girlishly turned ankles’.⁵⁶ In 1975’s *New Society* article on the new Croydon, the town’s former ‘market town pace’ was replaced by a quickness set by ‘the girls from the government offices above who are down for an hour for shopping and lunch.’⁵⁷ For young women like Jean Tagg – who attended secretarial college and worked for the National Association of Probation Officers, based in the 1960s-built Ambassador House in Thornton Heath – this was a Croydon of increasing opportunity.⁵⁸ Matlock recalled that her ‘battle axe’ headmistress encouraged girls to take commercial courses, in ‘a bit of a boom town in the sixties as regards office work’, and whilst struggling with secretarial skills she had little trouble finding work in photographic processing, pleased with the ‘disposable income’ which ‘for

⁵³ ‘Plan to protest by tree squatting ends in court,’ *Croydon Advertiser* (4th September 1964), p.68; ‘In memory of Hiroshima,’ *Croydon Advertiser* (7th August 1964), p.1; MC, uncatalogued minute book of Croydon Labour Party Executive Committee (1961-1972).

⁵⁴ ‘Alarm over I.C.T. redundancies: M.P.s asked to “secure industry’s future”,’ *Croydon Advertiser* (4th September 1964), p.1; ‘Labour man hits out at I.C.T. sackings,’ *Croydon Advertiser* (21st August 1964), p.11; ‘Attack on management of I.C.T.,’ *Croydon Advertiser* (2nd October 1964), p.15; Letter from Tyrrell Burgess, *Croydon Advertiser* (9th October 1964), p.13.

⁵⁵ ‘Labour’s taunt at “divided Tories”,’ *Croydon Advertiser* (11th March 1966), p.20.

⁵⁶ Grindrod, *Concretopia*, p.11.

⁵⁷ White, ‘The pleasure of Croydon,’ pp.525-526.

⁵⁸ Interview with Jean Tagg. Compare to John Davis’ discussion of the young women that were ‘beneficiaries of the office boom that was transforming the capital.’ Davis, *Waterloo Sunrise*, pp.12-18.

most people was not really a thing' in the 1950s.⁵⁹ Meanwhile, although the TUC's Ethel Chipchase (addressing an audience on the trades council consisting of 20 men and just one woman) complained of 'apathy on the part of women', across the country women's trade union membership was growing faster than men's as a corollary of the growth in women's employment in general.⁶⁰ Whilst Matlock could not recall whether her photographic processing jobs had been formally unionised, she joined one workplace a week after her new colleagues had concluded a strike over working temperatures – their ability to bargain bolstered by a swollen job market, with Matlock once receiving three offers of employment on the short walk between East Croydon and North End.⁶¹ This shifting Croydon was a site of optimism both for office and retail workers, and especially women, and for the Labour politicians who hoped to speak to them.

Croydon 'personified this new consumer culture architecturally', with the Whitgift Centre opened between 1968 and 1970 – which most activists remembered enjoying.⁶² Where Wetherell has linked the urban form of the earlier 'shopping precincts' of post-war reconstruction to places like Coventry, the Whitgift Centre was an example of a new American import with its origins in New York City and southern California: the 'shopping mall'.⁶³ Matlock was excited to show her aunt the new St. George's Walk, 'full of buzzy shops and things' in a 'new vibrant Croydon', enjoying 'something that's bright and [has] an edge of frivolity'.⁶⁴ In the 1964 election, Burgess was supported by the local solicitor Anthony Dumont, a co-founder of the Consumer Association's *Which?* magazine, who contrasted 'Britain of the advertisers against Britain of the rational and scientific'.⁶⁵ Donald Storer, in Croydon North East, similarly, had been the political

⁵⁹ Interview with Joan Matlock.

⁶⁰ 'Women's apathy is trade union obstacle,' *Croydon Advertiser* (21st February 1964), p.2.

⁶¹ Interview with Joan Matlock.

⁶² Harwood, 'White Light/White Heat,' p.60; Interview with Jerry Fitzpatrick; Interview with Jean Tagg; Interview with David Percival; Interview with Simon Berlin; Interview with Grace Fadden; Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman.

⁶³ Wetherell, *Foundations*, pp.47-49, pp.56-62, pp.68-75 & pp.137-143. It should be noted that the Whitgift Centre was originally open-roofed, and only 'enclosed' (a typical feature of later shopping centres) after its first two decades; there is therefore a case to be made that the Whitgift Centre was built at a point of transition between two urban forms.

⁶⁴ Interview with Joan Matlock

⁶⁵ 'Women told: Elections affect your lives,' *Croydon Advertiser* (7th February 1964), p.2; 'Depends on women,' *Croydon Advertiser* (13th March 1964), p.7; "'Bogyman attempt by Tories",' *Croydon Advertiser* (9th October 1964), p.17; S.W. Davies, 'Looking to Labour for help?' *Croydon Advertiser* (19th June 1964),

secretary of the South Suburban Cooperative Society (SSCS) since 1957, at a time when the cooperative movement was at the vanguard of the introduction of self-service and supermarkets – although the first Sainsbury’s self-service supermarket had opened in Croydon in 1950.⁶⁶ As Hall remarked in 1958, ‘consumption has been so built into capitalism that it has become the most significant relationship between the working class and the employing class’ – and Labour was positioning itself, not unsuccessfully, as the consumer’s representative.⁶⁷

This affluent, consumerist Croydon was also an important centre for popular youth culture increasingly focused upon genres associated with the United States. Hamish MacColl remembered older people, including his maternal grandmother and people on the bus, claiming ‘we were doing the things they’d always wished they could do’ – a reminder of the persistence of parents and grandparents’ encouragement of post-war teenagers.⁶⁸ Whilst the closure of the Davis Theatre had marked an interruption, the decision of Croydon’s ‘good councillors [...] in their “infinite Christian wisdom”, that the town would become a modern, go-ahead, model ‘sixties development and that nothing should stand in the way of their dream’ (as one historian of Croydon’s music scene has put it) was eventually vindicated, with the Fairfield Halls hosting three appearances from the Beatles in 1963.⁶⁹ Venues like the Star Hotel, the Gun Tavern and the Olive Tree coffee bar in south Croydon acted as hubs for musicians from the wider Croydon and Bromley area like Wizz Jones, Jacqui McShee, Ralph McTell, Jeff Beck, Eric Clapton, and Bill Wyman. Croydon, McTell remembered, was ‘close enough to London to catch the latest fashions but far enough away to have an identity of its own’.⁷⁰ This was a period of Anglomania that had reached across the Atlantic, which John Davis has argued was ‘driven by a comprehensive enthusiasm for London’s

p.10; “‘Fantastic profits”,’ *Croydon Advertiser* (2nd October 1964), p.14; L. Black, *The Political Culture of the Left in Affluent Britain*, pp.113–114.

⁶⁶ ‘Mr. Donald Storer,’ *Croydon Advertiser* (9th October 1964), p.24; P. Gurney, “‘Co-operation and Communism cannot work side by side”: Organized Consumers and the Early Cold War in Britain,’ *Twentieth Century British History*, vol.30, no.3 (2018), pp.347–374, p.372.

⁶⁷ Hall, ‘A Sense of Classlessness,’ p.28. For a discussion of post-war consumerism as ‘at least as much communal as individualist’, a sense of collective entitlement which emerged from the imaginary of ‘wartime populism’, see: Lawrence, *Me, Me, Me?*, p.100.

⁶⁸ Interview with Hamish MacColl; Todd & Young, ‘Baby-Boomers to “Beanstalkers”,’ p.452.

⁶⁹ Groom, *Rockin’ and around Croydon*, p.82.

⁷⁰ R. McTell, ‘From ‘40s Croydon to London ‘80s,’ *Wizzjones.com* (August 1988), <https://wizzjones.com/croydon.html>, accessed 2nd November 2021.

innovative culture, embracing fashion, design, food and lifestyle generally, as well as music.⁷¹ If the conclusion to the previous chapter hinted at some of the traumas that could be produced by, for example, the demolition of the Davis Theatre, especially for those young activists whose adolescence was spent in late 1950s Croydon, a music scene 'generated, in large part, by the political and socio-economic changes evident from 1945' would produce conflicting memories of the new Croydon, especially for those younger activists with dimmer recollections of what preceded it.⁷² Celia Hughes described the 'teenage mod culture originating from communities such as Croyden [sic], Tottenham and Hackney' as an important recruiting ground for the 'YS/IS milieu', and by the early 1960s Croydon's young New Left had largely been incorporated into a thriving IS branch founded by Percival and Peter Walker following a meeting with Tony Cliff in Norbury in around 1961.⁷³ By the mid-1960s, the young Croydon left, and the older Labour candidates that they canvassed for, were responsive to the emergent youth cultures in a way which the previous chapter described as having once alluded them.

Consequently, whilst there were tensions between the Young Socialists (YS) and the older party, the early 1960s saw the New Left, many of them now within the IS branch, reintegrating itself into Labour spaces. This was facilitated by the turnover of activists described in the previous chapter, as some of those that had been critical in the years after 1956 moved onto university and were supplemented or replaced in the early 1960s by a 'second New Left'.⁷⁴ Percival and Walker had met through the friendship of their fathers, both prominent Labour activists, and they recruited young activists like the Gillmans, Bruce Reid, Walker's sister Rosemary and her first husband Pat Fortune, Tony Marks, Terry Mandrell, and Ian Craib (a working-class boy who went to Trinity School and later became a noted sociologist and psychotherapist); a railwayman, Stan Mills, was

⁷¹ Davis, *Waterloo Sunrise*, pp.1-4.

⁷² M. Worley et al, 'British Youth Cultures and the Wider World,' *Britain and the World*, vol.II, no.1 (2018), pp.1-3, p.1.

⁷³ Hughes, *Young Lives on the Left*, pp.85-86; Interview with David Percival.

⁷⁴ Again, this periodisation follows that of Hall as well as the contemporary observations of Peter Sedgwick: Hall, 'Life and Times of the First New Left,' p.177; P. Sedgwick, 'The Two New Lefts,' *International Socialism*, no.17 (1964), p.15. The 'second New Left' is sometimes dated to Perry Anderson's appointment as *New Left Review* editor in 1962: S. Hall, 'The "First" New Left: Life and Times,' pp.11-38, in R. Archer et al (eds.), *Out of Apathy: Voices of the New Left Thirty Years On* (London: Verso, 1989), p.31.

one of the few older members.⁷⁵ Considering they had only about 250 members nationally at the end of 1964, the strength of the Croydon IS branch was noteworthy.⁷⁶ Meanwhile, if the first New Left had never broken fully with the politics of their parents, with the abandonment of the autonomous New Left club, as Paul Blackledge has argued, 'the New Left's aim of creating a socialist voice independent of both social democracy and Stalinism [...] collapsed into the train of Harold Wilson's general election bandwagon'.⁷⁷ Within CND, Walter Wolfgang cited the specific Croydon context:

'Independent nuclear disarmament candidates would not get the votes of Labour loyalists. They would not get the vote of the section of the public – much larger in Southern England – who may or may not have a vague or strong loyalty to political party but who either vote for a major political party or stay at home, who believe that there is always a choice to be made however wide or narrow the gulf dividing the candidates may be.'⁷⁸

Walker was on the editorial board of *Young Guard*, aimed at the Young Socialists and run principally by IS with the support of other Trotskyists (although Percival recalled that the IS, in the early 1960s, were 'not so Bolshevik-minded', and their 'patron saint' was Rosa Luxemburg).⁷⁹ The one major Trotskyist group which they excluded – the Socialist Labour League (SLL) – were more critical of the Labour leadership, and IS activists like Peter Walker saw this as the same 'ongoing fight' against their influence which his father had begun decades earlier against Gerry Healey in Streatham.⁸⁰ Nor was the IS activists' willingness to support Labour's candidates unreciprocated, for their concerns were being articulated by the party. One of the key issues for the young activists, given the frustrations described in the previous chapter, was

⁷⁵ Interview with Peter Walker; Interview with David Percival; T. Benton, 'Ian Craib,' *The Guardian* (18th February 2003), <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2003/feb/18/guardianobituaries.highereducation>, accessed 14th April 2021. Note the references to Craib's later sociological work in: P. Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The cultural politics of race and nation* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp.2-3.

⁷⁶ Interview with David Percival; J. Kelly, *Contemporary Trotskyism: Parties, Sects and Social Movements in Britain* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), p.44.

⁷⁷ P. Blackledge, 'The New Left: Beyond Stalinism and social democracy?', pp.45-61, in Smith & Worley (eds.), *Against the grain*, p.53.

⁷⁸ BLPES, CND/7/5/32.

⁷⁹ Interview with Peter Walker; Interview with David Percival.

⁸⁰ Interview with Peter Walker; 'Row over Labour Party H.Q. ban on group,' *Croydon Advertiser* (26th April 1968), p.1.

comprehensivisation, which Labour won support for on the council prior to its 1965 dissolution and was able to promote whilst in government.⁸¹ Comprehensivisation was a key policy which united disparate members of the Labour Party – a comprehensive study group was formed in Croydon in 1962, and by 1966 there was a sizeable Croydon Association for the Advancement of State Education (CAASE), chaired by David Simpson.⁸² Given prevailing hopes about the future, and the continuing influence of their parents and the appeal of Labour spaces, the young New Left activists in IS in the mid-1960s were willing to throw themselves into Labour's election campaigns and party activism much more directly than in the late 1950s, when support for Gaitskell's campaigns had been more ambiguous.⁸³ Even after Palmer, one of the young activists' own, was rejected by Labour's NEC in 1966, Elliott – a scientific adviser on the controversial BBC film *The War Game* (1966) – was apparently comfortable enough in his own politics to tell the Croydon Young Socialists' *Iskra* that meetings should be more political.⁸⁴

Although their vote share increased in all three constituencies, Labour was unable to break through in Croydon in the 1964 general election: in Croydon South, despite increasing his share to over 47 percent, Burgess suffered from the withdrawal of the Liberal, L.G. Pine, whose votes largely went to the sitting MP, Richard Thompson.⁸⁵ Two years later, however, the country returned to the polls as Wilson sought to increase his majority. Replacing Palmer was Michael Stewart, the son of novelist J.I.M. Stewart (better known as Michael Innes) and the chief assistant to Wilson's economic adviser, who had previously conducted research at Cornell.⁸⁶ Meanwhile, the advertising manager for *Tribune* replaced Burgess, his leaflets declaring that 'a vote for

⁸¹ Unwin, 'Slow motion in Croydon,' p.17.

⁸² "'Fight like mad" call to Labour,' *Croydon Advertiser* (21st January 1966), p.2; 'Victory for campaigners – Croydon plan rejected,' *Croydon Advertiser* (21st January 1966), p.2.

⁸³ This point, and the paragraph that follows, is a reminder of Harold Wilson's success in fusing left-wing and social-democratic revisionist factions into an electorally successful combination: G. O'Hara, 'The fall and rise of Harold Wilson,' pp.75-93, in Yeowell (ed.), *Rethinking Labour's Past*, p.80.

⁸⁴ 'Labour's North West problem,' *Croydon Advertiser* (4th March 1966), p.1; 'Dr. Gerald Elliott (Labour),' *Croydon Advertiser* (25th March 1966), p.23; 'Not enough politics at meetings,' *Croydon Advertiser* (21st January 1966), p.4.

⁸⁵ 'Straight fight in Croydon South: Liberals leave field to Tories and Labour,' *Croydon Advertiser* (25th September 1964), p.1.

⁸⁶ 'Mr. Michael Stewart (Labour),' *Croydon Advertiser* (25th March 1966), p.23.

[David] Winnick is a vote for Wilson'.⁸⁷ With votes increasing in the two northern seats, and a Liberal splitting the vote in Croydon South, Winnick was successfully elected, although only after his agent, Said Shah, spotted that not all the ballots had been counted.⁸⁸ The *Advertiser* suggested that the win was 'no more than a just reflection of their strength in the town' and anticipated that Winnick 'will probably remain a Croydon M.P. for a great many years if he chooses'.⁸⁹ Describing the result as 'a great feather in the cap of the Labour Party', Shah hoped boundary changes would 'mean Croydon Central being a safe Labour seat.'⁹⁰ In 1965, the new Croydon boundaries (which didn't take effect until 1970) provoked suggestions that 'Croydon Central is the sort of seat the Government must win if they are to stay in power', and the CLP's president noted that they gave 'Labour a very good chance in the future.'⁹¹ By 1967, Winnick was being 'widely regarded as Croydon's Labour M.P.'⁹² After close to two decades in which Labour in Croydon had continuously fallen short of expectations, and as Wilson achieved the party's first landslide since Clement Attlee had been leader, it finally seemed as if the wider climate of optimism about the future was paying dividends electorally in the town.

This section has argued that Labour and the left benefited from the optimism and enthusiasm for futurity, linked to the Soviet Union and the United States, which Wilson harnessed to his election campaigns, and which was embodied by the changing Croydon skyline. This was an enhanced, expanded version of the 'new town' described in the previous chapter (youthful, exciting, and affluent) finally bearing fruit for a left that had often been disappointed. For those young activists whose experience of the early stages of Croydon's reconstruction had been marred by frustration, the coincidence of Labour's electoral success and the completion of reconstruction projects like the Fairfield Halls meant a further complication of memory: another jolting reminder of

⁸⁷ 'Mr. David Winnick (Labour),' *Croydon Advertiser* (25th March 1966), p.25; 'New M.P. will move to town,' *Croydon Advertiser* (8th March 1966), p.15; London, British Library of Political and Economic Science, PRENTICE/2/1; BI, PPA/1/629.

⁸⁸ Interview with Roy Lockett; D. White, 'Political Croydon: The Sixties'; 'The agent behind Labour victory,' *Croydon Advertiser* (8th April 1966), p.15.

⁸⁹ Argus Letters, *Croydon Advertiser* (8th April 1966), p.15.

⁹⁰ 'The agent behind Labour victory,' *Croydon Advertiser* (8th April 1966), p.15.

⁹¹ NA, AF 1/514.

⁹² MC, uncatalogued minute book of Croydon Labour Party Executive Committee (1961-1972).

Croydon's contradictory multivalences, echoing Carolyn Steedman's description of 'the places where we rework what has already happened to give current events meaning.'⁹³ However, whilst Labour and the left appealed to futurity and even the American model, their successes in the 1960s (including Winnick's 1966 victory) were equally representative of a growing backlash against the changes which the Conservatives had overseen in government and on the council which continued with Wilson in Downing Street. As will be seen, this was a reaction which figures like Winnick could adapt to, but which ultimately led to Labour's undoing, making the 1960s a decade of defeats, as well as victories, for the left in Croydon.

'A Tory stronghold in a Labour London'

In his autobiography, Tariq Ali describes addressing a meeting in Croydon in the mid-1960s alongside the president of the Students for a Democratic Society, Carl Oglesby. 'From what Oglesby reported to that tiny assembly in a suburban English town,' Ali argued, 'it was obvious that the times were beginning to change and the new generation was not prepared to let the needs of the cold war determine the future of humanity.'⁹⁴ It is interesting, however, that it was Oglesby that he remembered visiting Croydon, for Oglesby was notable as an advocate not only of a break with the 'Old Left' (tainted by its support for the USSR) but of an alliance with the libertarian, isolationist conservatives that had been labelled the 'Old Right', with whom he thought the New Left were 'morally and politically coordinate.'⁹⁵ Whilst the New Left was not without a progressivist streak, described in the previous section, it was also articulating criticisms of the post-war settlement that paralleled (without being reducible to) a growing right-wing reaction to Croydon's American-ness and anxiety about the place which was being (to borrow another term from McLuhan) 'obsolesced'.⁹⁶ Whereas the early-to-mid-1960s saw Labour benefiting from the strength of this reaction, without surrendering its claims to the future described above, experience of Labour in government would unsettle this uneasy balance and contribute to

⁹³ Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman*, p.5.

⁹⁴ T. Ali, *Street Fighting Years* (London: Verso, 2018), pp.125-126.

⁹⁵ C. Oglesby, 'Vietnamese Crucible,' pp.3-178, in C. Oglesby and R. Small (eds.), *Containment and Change* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), p.167.

⁹⁶ McLuhan & Powers, *The Global Village*, p.10 & p.172.

growing internal divisions and a backlash which culminated in the electoral disasters of 1968, reduced to a single elected councillor in the entirety of Croydon.

Glen O'Hara has argued that 'the intoxicating atmosphere of a rapidly changing Britain, in its fashionable mid-1960s mood, made the subsequent dawn of reality feel much harsher than it might have.'⁹⁷ In few places was this truer than in Croydon, where the electoral advances of the early-to-mid-1960s were accompanied by tremendous setbacks. In early 1964, the party came close to securing a numerical majority on the council following the death of an alderman, but the Majority Group prevented it from electing a non-councillor as replacement – a reminder of the limits to the gentlemen's agreements of the post-war consensus.⁹⁸ Even had they obtained a majority, it would have been Pyrrhic: 'their first glimpse of political power came at a time when it was of no value to them, and could very easily have become an embarrassment.'⁹⁹ 1964 saw the first elections to the newly-created GLC and to a London Borough of Croydon which now included the solidly Conservative-voting areas of Purley and Coulsdon, discussed in Chapter One as the epitome of Surrey suburban where 'servant keepers [were] more likely to put down roots': part of an intentional move by the outgoing Conservative government to weaken Labour's stranglehold over the old LCC.¹⁰⁰ Despite only modest losses within the boundaries of the county borough, including for Byrne and Scott as well as two councillors in the Central ward, their 21 councillors were a smaller percentage of the now-60-strong council than their 25 had been within the earlier 48. Croydon was, as the *Advertiser* described, 'a Tory stronghold in a Labour London'; the leading Conservative candidate to the GLC, John Ashton, received 57,625 votes, the most of any candidate anywhere in the capital.¹⁰¹ The reassertion of sleepy, suburban Croydon in the form of Coulsdon and Purley apparently overwhelmed the gradual build-up of support which Labour had achieved at the beginning of the decade.

⁹⁷ O'Hara, 'The fall and rise of Harold Wilson,' p.91.

⁹⁸ 'Aldermanic vacancy will not be filled,' *Croydon Advertiser* (31st January 1964), p.4. For a contemporaneous dispute over an aldermanic election in Sheffield, in which Labour was the beneficiary, and the subsequent proposals of the Redcliffe-Maud report, see: W. Hampton, *Democracy and Community: A Study of Politics in Sheffield* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp.51-53.

⁹⁹ 'Welcome defeat?' *Croydon Advertiser* (31st January 1964), p.17.

¹⁰⁰ White, 'The pleasure of Croydon,' pp.525-526; Goss, *Local Labour and Local Government*, p.64.

¹⁰¹ 'Four Tories romp home in G.L.C. election,' *Croydon Advertiser* (17th April 1964), p.1.

Yet it would be a mistake to reduce the political history of 1960s Croydon to a face-off between reactionary Conservatives and ratepayers in their southern strongholds, and progressive, left-wing activists within the boundaries of the old county borough. After all, the early 1960s had seen the Conservatives struggling with the growth of 'middle-class radicalism' in London's outer suburbs; whilst Roy Lockett poked fun at the attempts of Croydon CND 'to rouse the revolutionary masses of Purley for the need for instant nuclear disarmament', the area had its own branch which, in 1963, managed to get 700 signatures 'largely owing to the efforts of Ursula Richardson and the Women's Peace Groups'.¹⁰² L.G. Pine, the Liberal candidate whose withdrawal in 1964 (in favour of Labour) had benefited the sitting Conservative MP, was a reminder that the Liberal resurgence owed much to reactionary as well as progressive criticisms of the post-war consensus: a former Conservative himself, he denounced his old party for 'Socialism' and launched an attack on 'progressives' in education, as well as 'Drug-taking, strip-teasing, prostitution, homosexuality, pimpery, drunkenness, dishonesty, betting' and 'the insistence on money as the greatest good in human life'.¹⁰³ Winnick's success in 1966 (when the Liberal candidate did not withdraw) might therefore owe something to the growing concerns of the middle class in what John Davis labelled 'a metropolis as mundane as "Swinging London" was exotic'.¹⁰⁴ The creation of the GLC proved unpopular with traditional Conservative voters uncomfortable with integration into this London, and the local Labour Party – vocal in its disapproval of the change and keen for the incoming Wilson government to reverse it – stood a chance of benefiting from this backlash.¹⁰⁵ Norman Davies (the computing worker mentioned above) was an active member of the Coulsdon West Residents' Association, known for his opposition to the sale of Coulsdon Gold Course, and this

¹⁰² Interview with Roy Lockett; BLPES, CND/7/5/18.

¹⁰³ Barberis, 'The 1964 General Election and the Liberals' False Dawn,' pp.379-380; "'Wasted Liberal vote" claim is due to fear – says Mr. Pine,' *Croydon Advertiser* (7th February 1964), p.2; Letter from L.G. Pine, *Croydon Advertiser* (20th March 1964), p.11; 'Straight fight in Croydon South: Liberals leave field to Tories and Labour,' *Croydon Advertiser* (25th September 1964), p.1; 'Tories win new Croydon Council,' *Croydon Advertiser* (8th May 1964), p.1; 'Eight candidates to battle for three seats,' *Croydon Advertiser* (18th September 1964), p.1.

¹⁰⁴ Davis, *Waterloo Sunrise*, pp.4-5.

¹⁰⁵ MC, uncatalogued minute book of Croydon Labour Party Executive Committee (1961-1972); 'Unrealistic,' *Croydon Advertiser* (10th April 1964), p.11; Letter from Trevor Williams, *Croydon Advertiser* (17th April 1964), p.11. For examples of the objections to the creation of the London Borough of Croydon from Coulsdon and Purley residents, see: NA, HO 328/158.

likely contributed to his association's support for Labour's 'cogent and positive' submissions to a 1966 boundary inquiry.¹⁰⁶ Given the responsibility of a Conservative council (and, initially, a Conservative government) for the changes in Croydon which were provoking this backlash, it was still possible – as the 1966 election attested – that Croydon could become something other than a 'Tory stronghold'.

As John Davis' recent history of London in the period has emphasised, Croydon 'displayed the kind of modern development that modernist architects decried', and the town was frequently invoked as a worst-case scenario by suburbanites facing comparable developments elsewhere.¹⁰⁷ The office blocks, described as 'tombstones' by the *Advertiser*, represented a Croydon increasingly dominated in the Lefebvrian sense: a process through which 'technology introduces a new form into a pre-existing space – generally, a rectilinear or rectangular form', conquering and displacing the softer, irregular 'natural space' (including the natural space of the Victorian town centre) which had been there before it.¹⁰⁸ These were criticisms which could be advanced as much from the left as from the right, and they loomed large in my narrators' opinions of the redevelopment; as Lockett explained, 'we've got the worst kind of office architecture in the fifties, the worst from the sixties, the worst from the fucking seventies'.¹⁰⁹ As candidate, Palmer criticised the office blocks' construction, noting that developers were motivated by profit and not by 'some paranoiac lust for their architectural beauty'; the early New Left had been influenced by the short-lived 'Anti-Uglies' movement against post-war architecture, led by the Carshalton-born artist Pauline Boty and treated sympathetically by conservative figures like John Betjeman.¹¹⁰ More than just aesthetics, however, my narrators were frustrated by the destruction of the Croydon where they had grown up: the organic, 'town-conscious' Croydon which Lynda Graham saw as

¹⁰⁶ MC, uncatalogued minute book of Croydon Labour Party Executive Committee (1961-1972); London, National Archives, OS 77/78.

¹⁰⁷ Davis, *Waterloo Sunrise*, pp.275-280.

¹⁰⁸ *Croydon Advertiser* (10th January 1964), p.13; Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p.165.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Roy Lockett.

¹¹⁰ 'Visit that shocked Mr. Palmer,' *Croydon Advertiser* (2nd October 1964), p.15; R. Baker, 'Pauline Boty, the Anti-Uglies and Bowater House in Knightsbridge,' *Another Nickel in the Machine* (20th February 2013), <http://www.nickelinthemachine.com/2013/02/pauline-boty-the-anti-uglies-and-bowater-house-in-knightsbridge-2/>, accessed 26th July 2022. On the connections of 'Anti-Ugly Action' to the New Left, see: Hall, 'The "First" New Left,' p.33; G. Stamp, 'Anti-Ugly Action: An Episode in the History of British Modernism,' *AA Files*, no.70 (2015), pp.76-88, pp.79-80.

having been ‘*dug up*’ (‘there’s no soul in the middle of it now’, she complained).¹¹¹ Percival said ‘they knocked down some lovely buildings to create [the area around Park Street] and, even at the time, I thought that was very bad.’¹¹² Peter Gillman criticized ‘the destruction of the town centre and the hideous architecture that was put up and just seemed to wipe away a beautiful Victorian town centre.’¹¹³ If Croydon’s redevelopment could represent the regeneration of a town in which many activists had felt disillusioned, it also meant the displacement of a town to which many had been attached.

This displacement was particularly acute for working-class housing and the manufacturing industry, which had long provided the foundation for Labour politics in Croydon. Purley Way had been particularly important to my narrators, with Norman Brown working at Ford Motor Company when he moved to Croydon, Matlock taking up her first job on the site (and later writing her dissertation about the airport), and Percival selling newspapers outside its factories – but from 1951 to 1995, manufacturing employment declined from 33 percent to 7.5 percent in a reorientation of the borough’s economy towards the town centre, and from manufacturing to offices and retail.¹¹⁴ Ken Woodhams, chair of Croydon North West Young Socialists, called for an end to the growth of office blocks and for the vacated Croydon Airport site to be used for an ‘L.C.C.-type council estate, properly planned and landscaped’.¹¹⁵ When the council granted planning permission for a factory in a residential area to be converted to offices, rather than housing, Viterbo Burgos warned ‘these offices are going to be a white elephant round someone’s neck some day.’¹¹⁶ The demolition of homes was a particular issue for Labour’s town centre branch; the chair complained ‘the erection of office blocks was far outpacing the building of houses and flats.’¹¹⁷ The branch’s membership, however, increased – a sign that Labour could

¹¹¹ Interview with Lynda and Martin Graham.

¹¹² Interview with David Percival.

¹¹³ Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman.

¹¹⁴ Interview with Norman Brown; Interview with Joan Matlock; Interview with David Percival; Phelps, ‘On the Edge of Something Big,’ pp.457–458. To situate this process in the national and international context, see: Tomlinson, ‘De-industrialization Not Decline,’ pp.89–95.

¹¹⁵ ‘New offices or more homes?’ *Croydon Advertiser* 10th April 1964), p.10; Letter from Ken Woodhams, *Croydon Advertiser* (17th April 1964), p.11.

¹¹⁶ ‘Council want offices instead of factory,’ *Croydon Advertiser* (28th February 1964), p.6.

¹¹⁷ ‘Increase in Labour’s membership,’ *Croydon Advertiser* (21st February 1964), p.4.

benefit from opposition to the office blocks, from both workers and potentially (given the arguments in the previous chapters about their proximity) employers in the manufacturing sector.¹¹⁸

Croydon's post-war redevelopment has been described as 'the subjugation of planning to commerce', and an 'orgy of commercialism', a forerunner of the 'landscape of "total work"' which had become 'familiar throughout the country' by the early 1970s.¹¹⁹ The *New Society* article quoted an 80-year-old woman who worried about going to shop in the Whitgift Centre, completed between 1968 and 1970, because 'the young people rushing, they'd have me over.'¹²⁰ It is striking, given the arguments of the previous chapters, that the criticisms were so prominently made by older women; one, writing for the *Woodside Clarion*, stressed the importance of amenities and improved housing and (whilst celebrating the consequences of 'the social revolution') expressed a determination 'that the "big, airy, office-workers' Croydon" will not overshadow the needs and rights of people in the backstreets.'¹²¹ Nor was this resistance from older women restricted to Labour supporters: in a dispute which became part of Croydon's folklore, the construction of the iconic NLA Tower was substantially altered because the owner of a building on the site, Kathleen Harding, the daughter of a former mayor, refused to sell.¹²² There was a powerful sense that the older, 'town-conscious' Croydon, which Chapter One described my narrators visiting with older female relatives when they were children, was being threatened. Joan Ulyett gave a tour of the town centre in 1971 to demonstrate the difficulties navigating the area as a wheelchair-user.¹²³ Similarly, Joan Matlock's aunt Daisy, born in 1900 and using a wheelchair, declared St. George's Walk would 'be a white elephant soon'; in hindsight, Matlock thought she

¹¹⁸ 'Increase in Labour's membership,' *Croydon Advertiser* (21st February 1964), p.4.

¹¹⁹ Hatherley, *A New Kind of Bleak*, p.164; Reid & Savage, *Up They Rise*, p.5; Grindrod, *Concretopia*, p.12. Although not cited by Grindrod, 'total work' is a phrase associated with the Thomist Catholic philosopher Josef Pieper. For a discussion of this concept, see: A. Cunningham, 'Shall Work Set Us Free?' *New Blackfriars*, vol.62, no.728 (1981), pp.63-77.

¹²⁰ White, 'The pleasure of Croydon,' pp.525-526.

¹²¹ 'As they see themselves,' *Croydon Advertiser* (20th March 1964), p.6.

¹²² 'Owner who won't sell "blocks" new skyscraper?' *Croydon Advertiser* (22nd January 1971), clipping provided by Katrina Navickas.

¹²³ Paul Williams, 'Our dream town can be a nightmare for disabled people,' *Croydon Advertiser* (19th March 1971), p.3.

had been proven right, an indication of the ways that my narrators' re-evaluated the opinions of their older relatives through the late 1960s and afterwards.¹²⁴

Given the Labour Party's broad support for Croydon's redevelopment, described in the previous section, these criticisms were a powerful source of tension. Some of the least popular features of Croydon's redevelopment (large blocks of flats rather than houses, or the destruction of historic buildings) were promoted by Labour councillors against the Conservative-controlled council; Arthur Edwards, for example, delayed building plans by opposing a move to reduce the density of one development in New Addington, intended to avoid the construction of tower blocks in addition to houses.¹²⁵ Notably, 1968 would see the completion of the Fieldway estate (for which the council had contracted John Laing) in the north of New Addington, with significantly worse amenities and quality of housing on the 'new estate' – 'built fast and on the cheap', Les Back said, and with a greater proportion of tower blocks – than the older developments to its south.¹²⁶ Labour's opposition to low density housing saw them accused by the Conservatives of supporting 'new slums' and 'rabbit hutches', and one Labour councillor even suggested some of New Addington's green spaces and verges be used to provide additional parking.¹²⁷ It is likely that the new estates, including the tower blocks, were initially popular with the residents themselves.¹²⁸ Regardless, it is notable that Labour councillors had done so much to associate themselves with an urban form which would quickly be stigmatised both by middle-class onlookers in adjacent areas and by working-class residents as the corner-cutting Laing's system-built homes deteriorated.¹²⁹ In 1964, another Labour councillor, David Spillett, even called for the sixteenth-century Whitgift Almshouses to be pulled down to improve the safety of 'pedestrians and traffic' – indeed, according to Peter Walker it was the failure to do so which ranked as one of the main regrets of his

¹²⁴ Interview with Joan Matlock.

¹²⁵ 'Late protest will delay homes plan,' *Croydon Advertiser* (1st May 1964), p.5; "'Cussed Labour alderman held up housing" – Tory candidates,' *Croydon Advertiser* (1st May 1964), p.6.

¹²⁶ Back, 'Why Everyday Life Matters,' p.828.

¹²⁷ *Croydon Advertiser* (2nd October 1964), p.16; 'Labour views on parking problem,' *Croydon Advertiser* (4th December 1964), p.5.

¹²⁸ An emerging consensus in the historiography of council housing suggests that they would have been: Jones, *The working class in mid-twentieth-century England*, p.104; Davis, *Waterloo Sunrise*, p.143; Boughton, *Municipal Dreams*, pp.129-130.

¹²⁹ On Laing's, see: Boughton, *Municipal Dreams*, pp.129-133.

father, James Walker.¹³⁰ Similarly, although the Croydon Flyover scheme to construct an overpass for the A232 through the town centre received wide opposition, including from Burgos and Winnick, the Labour Group reportedly colluded in ensuring that there was not sufficient notice to organise against it.¹³¹ The ‘mutually satisfying back-scratching’ between the council and the Labour Group, described in the previous chapter, was unsurprisingly to come under increased pressure: the sense of consensus replaced by a sense of collusion.

With Labour in government, some of the tensions which had been contained by support for Wilson’s campaigns began to explode. Whereas earlier Percival noted that the IS group had ‘a free run’ in the YS, the now-growing SLL ‘were more or less always attacking us right the way through’; with their nucleus around Dorothy (‘Dot’) and Peter Gibson, readmitted after joint expulsions from Norwood CLP in 1959, and the Kearney brothers within the YS, the SLL became increasingly active as enthusiasm for Wilson faded.¹³² In 1964, they made an ambitious attempt to recruit in New Addington, claiming to be members of the East Surrey Federation of Young Socialist Branches (formerly chaired by Walker) and trying to establish a new branch without the adult party’s approval, provoking a row in which the SLL activists were accused of being ‘troublemakers’ and ‘irresponsible “Mods”’ and two of them, Joe Kearney and Rex Henry, were expelled from Labour for being ‘Trotskyists’ who saw Wilson as ‘on the side of the capitalists’.¹³³ The next year, the SLL-controlled trades council denounced ‘12 months of betrayals’ by Labour: including a decision by local councillors (but not Burgos, who addressed a march called by the still-extant East Surrey Federation) to attend a football game and therefore miss an important

¹³⁰ “‘Pull them down,” says councillor,’ *Croydon Advertiser* (24th July 1964), p.1; Interview with Peter Walker.

¹³¹ “‘Secrecy over the redevelopment,” says critic,’ *Croydon Advertiser* (14th January 1966), p.3; ‘Flyover goes ahead despite protests – “Two years too late”,’ *Croydon Advertiser* (29th April 1966), p.19.

¹³² Interview with David Percival; Interview with Peter Walker; Interview with David White; Interview with Jerry Fitzpatrick; MC, uncatalogued minute book of Croydon Labour Party Executive Committee (1961–1972). When she was criticised by Gerry Healey, who had physically assaulted her, in the final days of his leadership of the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP), Dot Gibson was described as ‘that Croydon housewife’; see: N. Harding, *Staying Red: Why I Remain A Socialist* (Brixton: Index Books, 2005), p.243.

¹³³ ‘Young Socialists clash with party over new branch,’ *Croydon Advertiser* (6th November 1964), p.1; “‘A smear,” say Young Socialists,’ *Croydon Advertiser* (13th November 1964), p.11; ‘Young Socialists bar Press from meeting,’ *Croydon Advertiser* (20th November 1964), p.4; ‘Young Socialist who “insisted on arguing”,’ *Croydon Advertiser* (27th November 1964), p.2; ‘Two Young Socialists expelled and branch suspended,’ *Croydon Advertiser* (4th December 1964), p.1.

council meeting on cuts affecting old-age pensioners.¹³⁴ The growing SLL won plaudits for standing alongside Labour's voters when Labour councillors were unwilling to do so, increasing the tensions between Labour members and its representatives, and the party and the trades council, and challenging the previously convivial spaces of the left in Croydon.

Tensions became particularly acute in the controversy over increases to council rents. By 1966, activists associated with the SLL and IS, as well as the CPGB and figures from Waddon Labour Party, had formed the Rents Action Committee (RAC), holding a meeting for old-age pensioners in Broad Green with Frank Fadden and the SLL's Pat Leonard.¹³⁵ Although the first meeting was supported by James Twitchett, president of the Croydon Tenants' Association (CTA), relations with the Labour Group soon turned sour, with claims the RAC was being manipulated for 'political ends' and the CTA withdrawing from the group after a disorderly protest in which 30 people were removed from the council's public gallery.¹³⁶ The Labour Group's leadership told the *Advertiser* that 'some increase in rents was just and inevitable'.¹³⁷ As tensions escalated, the end of the year saw left-wing Frank Fadden adopted as a Labour candidate in Waddon.¹³⁸ The RAC and CTA battled for influence on the estates; the New Addington Tenants Association was re-founded by Labour councillor Violet Rooke, explicitly non-political and opposed to the RAC, whilst the Shrublands estate (close to Burgos' home in Shirley) had a new RAC-supporting tenants' group which got 500 signatures within two days.¹³⁹ The left faced criticisms because the RAC was dominated by non-council tenants like Palmer, Fortune and Dot Gibson; Percival noted he had been involved in organising council tenants whilst himself a private tenant in Norbury.¹⁴⁰ Though a left-wing politician like Winnick was successful in retaining the support of activists associated

¹³⁴ 'Croydon YS to lobby council,' *The Newsletter* (10th April 1965), p.4; 'Young Socialists lobby Croydon Council on pensions issue,' *The Newsletter* (8th May 1965), p.4; MRC, MSS.292B/79C/43.

¹³⁵ 'O.A.P.s at rents protest meeting,' *Croydon Advertiser* (28th January 1966), p.18.

¹³⁶ 'The rents battle is now on,' *Croydon Advertiser* (21st January 1966), p.1; 'You are being used for politics,' *Croydon Advertiser* (28th January 1966), p.1; Letter from John Palmer, *Croydon Advertiser* (4th February 1966), p.10; 'Tenants quit action group,' *Croydon Advertiser* (4th February 1966), p.1.

¹³⁷ 'Labour's stand on rents issue,' *Croydon Advertiser* (25th February 1966), p.10.

¹³⁸ 'Croydon tenants elect own candidate,' *The Newsletter* (12th November 1966), p.4.

¹³⁹ "'Democratic" rents fight,' *Croydon Advertiser* (18th February 1966), p.1; 'Tenants fighting rise in the rent,' *Croydon Advertiser* (4th March 1966), p.5; 'Membership boost for tenants' association,' *Croydon Advertiser* (18th March 1966), p.5; 'Tenants' rent protest,' *Croydon Advertiser* (25th February 1966), p.1.

¹⁴⁰ 'Politics behind the rents increase?', *Croydon Advertiser* (18th February 1966), p.10; Letter from J.R. Graces, *Croydon Advertiser* (11th February 1966), p.10; Interview with David Percival.

with the RAC (who he addressed) the growing divides on the estates meant the unravelling of the relationship between an electorate cultivated by left-wing councillors and the Labour Group which took them for granted.¹⁴¹

To understand the fuller emotional significance of Croydon's 1960s redevelopment and its association with Labour's period in government, however, it needs to be placed within the specific context of 1968 – a year, like 1956, marked by two interlocking geopolitical crises which discredited the world's two superpowers. January 1968 saw the launching of the Tet Offensive and the intensification of fighting in Vietnam. Letters to the *Advertiser* about the war had become frequent; the Croydon Council for Peace in Vietnam requested an empty shop for three weeks to help raise money for medical aid.¹⁴² Both Fred Messer and the local CND secretary emphasised the broad support which opposition to the war had found, including the Liberal and Labour Party conferences and the TUC, whilst the SSCS also expressed opposition.¹⁴³ An artist even exhibited anti-war paintings at the Fairfield Halls in 1967.¹⁴⁴ Winnick signed an amendment to the Queen's speech which criticised the government for insufficient opposition, although it focused on American involvement because the government had refused to supply British troops.¹⁴⁵ Meanwhile, however, letter writers were complaining that anti-Americanism was overshadowing opposition to the actions of the USSR.¹⁴⁶ In August 1968, the USSR and its eastern European allies invaded Czechoslovakia, putting an end to the short-lived 'Prague Spring'. Though the national CPGB criticised the invasion, its most prominent representatives in Croydon (grouped around the anti-revisionist figurehead Sid French) had been reluctant to do so, with Surrey's district opposing the CPGB's resolution.¹⁴⁷ In 1966, the CPGB's French and Eric Trevett had reportedly asked the police to arrest the SLL's Dot Gibson, Rex Henry, Pat Leonard and James

¹⁴¹ 'Labour's stand on rents issue,' *Croydon Advertiser* (25th February 1966), p.10.

¹⁴² 'Medical aid for Vietnam,' *Croydon Advertiser* (19th January 1968), p.10.

¹⁴³ 'Why the war in Vietnam is opposed,' *Croydon Advertiser* (26th January 1968), p.10; London, Bishopsgate Institute, LHM/62.

¹⁴⁴ 'Raising money for sufferers in Vietnam,' *Croydon Advertiser* (23rd February 1968), p.19; 'Pictures may be censored,' *Croydon Advertiser* (23rd February 1968), p.1.

¹⁴⁵ 'Vietnam policy opposed,' *Croydon Advertiser* (29th April 1966), p.6.

¹⁴⁶ 'One-sided protest marches,' *Croydon Advertiser* (19th January 1968), p.10.

¹⁴⁷ L. Parker, 'Opposition in slow motion: the CPGB's "anti-revisionists" in the 1960s and 1970s,' pp.98-114, in Smith & Worley (eds.), *Against the grain*, pp.102-103.

McMullen for being 'insulting to another part of the community', the CPGB and 'Labour Traitors'.¹⁴⁸ Leonard had shouted to the stewards that 'Stalin would have been proud of you' – to which a steward replied 'Stalin was the greatest man of the century.'¹⁴⁹ As Celia Hughes has shown, 1968 would only further confirm the reservations which some activists had about official Communism and the Soviet model – just at the moment when the opposition to American involvement in Vietnam was reaching its height, undermining residual associations between progressivism and the United States.¹⁵⁰

This complicated the comparisons between Croydon and the Soviet and American models, discussed in the first section of this chapter. As early as 1961, Williams noted that friends in the United States told him that 'they in America are in touch with the future, and it does not work – the extension of industry, democracy and communications leads only to what is called the massification of society.'¹⁵¹ By the late 1960s, as later writers have argued, Croydon had become a 'capitalists' dream town' which was 'a good 20 years ahead of most localities in the UK in its transition to a post-industrial economy', an enduring example of 'capitalist modernism' with affinities to the version of Milton Keynes described by Pikó, whose 'dystopian sterility' was increasingly attributed 'to the town's embrace of consumer capitalism.'¹⁵² Growing concerns about Croydon's transformation were overlaid with concerns about Americanisation, including from Storer who (in an attack on 'speculators') noted that a third of the companies which the Conservatives claimed Labour would nationalise in 1959 had subsequently either 'disappeared through mergers and take-overs, or [been] sold outright to the Americans.'¹⁵³ Widespread dismay at American conduct in Vietnam had begun to undermine the prestige of the United States at precisely the time when Croydon was apparently becoming more American. Meanwhile, the

¹⁴⁸ 'Court case after Vietnam march,' *The Newsletter* (16th July 1966), p.1; 'Court case after march,' *The Newsletter* (16th July 1966), p.4; 'The CP and the police,' *The Newsletter* (20th August 1966), p.1; 'Socialists fined £40,' *The Newsletter* (20th August 1966), p.3.

¹⁴⁹ 'Socialists fined £40,' *The Newsletter* (20th August 1966), p.3.

¹⁵⁰ Hughes, *Young Lives on the Left*, p.68.

¹⁵¹ Williams, *The Long Revolution*, p.396.

¹⁵² Grindrod, *Concretopia*, p.249; Phelps, 'On the Edge of Something Big,' p.441; Back, 'So... fucking Croydon'; Pikó, *Milton Keynes in British Culture*, p.138.

¹⁵³ 'True colours warning by Labour man,' *Croydon Advertiser* (11th September 1964), p.2; "'Speculators hoping for Tory win",' *Croydon Advertiser* (9th October 1964), p.17.

positive comparisons between Soviet architecture and Croydon's redevelopment would lose their strength as Soviet prestige faced a similar decline, and New Left writers became increasingly aware of the overlaps between Soviet and American approaches to development in the post-war period, including their fascination with planning and productivism. As Lefebvre had already described, 'the two modes of production present some similarities and some curious homologies' – a phenomenon which he would label as a transition to the 'State Mode of Production'.¹⁵⁴ As the 1960s dragged on, therefore, the similarity between Soviet and American 'productivism' turned from a potential source of pride in Croydon's futurity to an indication of the foreignness and ugliness of the new (imagined, as in Milton Keynes, 'as an absolute and irrevocably negative force') and the 'Manhattan built in Poland' jibe which Grindrod remembered being told by someone typically critical of the town.¹⁵⁵

Equally, though the Wilson government avoided direct involvement in Vietnam, they could not escape criticism for duplicity – early on, Hall had described Wilson as 'Mr Facing-Both-Ways'.¹⁵⁶ Critically, whereas some opponents of the war (including the CPGB) were calling for peace, both Trotskyists and the emerging New Left were more likely to call for 'Victory to the Vietcong'.¹⁵⁷ Whilst the CND insisted Britain had a duty of involvement in pressing for peace due to the Geneva Agreement, a writer from Croydon to the left-wing *Black Dwarf* argued that steps should be taken to avoid following the CND 'into oblivion for want of decisive action'.¹⁵⁸ For these activists, Wilson's refusal to commit troops was not enough. Similarly, despite legislation such as the 1965 Race Relations Act, the Wilson government was responsible for the 'racist Kenya immigration bill' – the Gillmans (then living in Clapham) left the party, as did a number of activists in South Norwood, whilst even Winnick, who had voted against, was criticised for

¹⁵⁴ Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, p.524.

¹⁵⁵ Wilson, "'The Devastating Conquest of the Lived by the Conceived",' pp.369-370; Pikó, *Milton Keynes in British Culture*, p.140; Grindrod, *Concretopia*, p.10.

¹⁵⁶ Hall, 'The "First" New Left,' p.30.

¹⁵⁷ 'Socialists fined £40,' *The Newsletter* (20th August 1966), p.3.

¹⁵⁸ 'The Vietnam war is "Britain's business",' *Croydon Advertiser* (23rd February 1968), p.12; P.J. Cullis, 'October 27 – I,' *Black Dwarf*, vol.13, no.8 (1968), p.3.

otherwise voting with the government 'like a good sheep.'¹⁵⁹ If previously IS activists had not been openly antagonistic towards the Labour leadership, by 1966 Stan Mills declared that he would abstain in defiance of what he saw as 'policies of conservatism'.¹⁶⁰ Labour clamped down on internal opposition, with Palmer prevented from standing by the NEC despite the overwhelming support of his CLP.¹⁶¹

These growing tensions came to a head, for the IS group, over the opening of the new Ruskin House in 1967, with the old building demolished as part of the widening of Wellesley Road.¹⁶² As replacement, James Walker, chairman of the Ruskin House management committee, purchased Coombe Hill House for £30,000 at auction in 1966; it opened a year later with the addition of Cedar Hall to its garden and a bar selling alcohol, and a visit from Wilson and Prentice.¹⁶³ Croydon's IS group, including Percival, assembled outside to protest against the Vietnam War – Peter Walker, on the other hand, ostensibly still a member of IS, was inside meeting the Prime Minister with Winnick and his parents. Percival and Walker had gone on a hitchhiking holiday together and fallen out politically whilst away, but this protest signalled their break.¹⁶⁴ Walker was expelled at the next IS meeting, which he didn't attend, although he recalled a disagreement over anti-racist organising as the decisive factor.¹⁶⁵ After such a long time where Ruskin House had acted as a meeting point of figures from the Labour Group and their critics on the left, with virtually the SLL alone excluded, the opening of the new building signalled a break with the left's connections to the past and the growing disagreements within the left over how to relate to Labour. By the 1970s, David White remembered that Ruskin House's management could be 'standoffish', perhaps because 'didn't really want young people there'.¹⁶⁶

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman; MC, A845; *Croydon Advertiser* (1st March 1968), p.1; Letter from B.G.F. Nash, *Croydon Advertiser* (26th January 1968), p.10.

¹⁶⁰ S. Mills, 'Dilemma for a Socialist,' *Croydon Advertiser* (1st April 1966), p.11.

¹⁶¹ 'Labour's North West problem,' *Croydon Advertiser* (4th March 1966), p.1.

¹⁶² MRC, MSS.292B/79C/43.

¹⁶³ Daisley & Tiedemann, *Ruskin House*, p.3 & p.8; Interview with Peter Walker.

¹⁶⁴ Interview with David Percival.

¹⁶⁵ Interview with David Percival; Interview with Peter Walker.

¹⁶⁶ Interview with David White.

This division and demoralisation culminated in a disastrous set of results for Labour in the 1968 local elections.¹⁶⁷ In the run-up, local Labour councillor J.T. Bell had resigned over the government's cuts.¹⁶⁸ The IS and CND member Tony Marks complained that he was 'not prepared to work to return a Conservative Party which calls itself "Labour."' ¹⁶⁹ The response from Labour's Barry Bulled was revealing – he retorted that Wilson's government was 'simply facing up to the harsh facts of the international situation, particularly our dependence on America', which he abhorred but did not think could be changed overnight.¹⁷⁰ Marks, conceding he was a 'revolutionary Socialist', declared that it was 'deluded' to think that Labour would 'produce significant changes in our society towards Socialism' – a real sign of the falling expectations in the post-war consensus, with even its supporters deflecting blame onto the United States.¹⁷¹ David Dayus suggested that Labour focus on its local record, asking whether critics 'really want to destroy the Labour Group on Croydon Council, who have done many good services to the locality?'¹⁷² However, despite the Majority Group facing problems of its own – the Coulsdon East Independents received a 'slap in the face' that allowed a Liberal to sneak in – it was 'a black day for Croydon Labour Party.'¹⁷³ With a swing of nearly 20 percent the Majority Group grew to 58 members, having 'virtually eliminated all effective opposition' and achieved 'a near-monopoly': Labour held onto a single councillor in New Addington, and even there only after a recount. Its remaining supporters, including Bulled and an anonymous author poignantly signing as 'One Who Knows', blamed falling turnouts and an electorate that did not sufficiently understand local elections or appreciate the contribution of the Labour Group.¹⁷⁴ One letter to the *Advertiser* before the election was especially dismissive about Labour members of the council, describing

¹⁶⁷ For a fuller discussion of the 1968 local elections in Croydon, see: D. Frost, 'Looking back: Croydon's local elections, 1968,' *Croydon Citizen* (7th June 2018), <http://web.archive.org/web/20180928194845/https://thecroydoncitizen.com/politics-society/looking-back-croydons-local-elections-1968/>, accessed 22nd April 2021.

¹⁶⁸ 'Councillor quits Labour Party,' *Croydon Advertiser* (19th January 1968), p.1.

¹⁶⁹ A.H. Marks, 'Do the Labour Party deserve support?' *Croydon Advertiser* (9th February 1968), p.11.

¹⁷⁰ B.V. Bulled, 'Only Labour's methods will win reforms,' *Croydon Advertiser* (16th February 1968), p.12.

¹⁷¹ A.H. Marks, 'More poverty – and more millionaires,' *Croydon Advertiser* (23rd February 1968), p.12.

¹⁷² Letter from D. Dayus, *Croydon Advertiser* (2nd February 1968), p.10

¹⁷³ 'Election triumph for Tories,' *Croydon Advertiser* (17th May 1968), p.17.

¹⁷⁴ Letter from John Byford, *Croydon Advertiser* (17th May 1968), p.13; Letter from 'One Who Knows', *The Croydon Advertiser* (17th May 1968), p.13; Letter from Barry V. Bulled, *Croydon Advertiser* (17th May 1968), p.13. Given the choice of pseudonym, it is worth highlighting the discussion of criticisms of 'the predictable temporality of *the one who knows*', aimed at Althusserianism but applicable to anyone for whom 'May '68 was not the *proper* moment', in: Ross, 'Translator's Introduction,' p.xviii.

them as 'our hectoring Ulsterman', 'our Brum trade unionist', 'our Labour schoolmasters' and 'that ponderous pipe-smoker', all archetypal representatives of frustrations with the post-war settlement.¹⁷⁵ In the election's aftermath, the trades council and the Labour MP Peter Shore traded blows over the former's call 'to break with Wilson and Co', Shore retorting that 'both national and international bankers have at least as much interest as anyone else in maintaining the stability of national currencies.'¹⁷⁶ Relations had deteriorated so much by June that a 'trade unionist' from New Addington wrote to express support for 'the militant line' of the Conservative MP Richard Thompson in opposing 'anti-trade union legislation, the end of collective bargaining, a low wage economy, bigger dole queues and the pay-roll tax to make sure there are more on the dole.'¹⁷⁷ Whereas previously Labour had relied upon its national association with social-democratic politics in addition to its local record, by 1968 both were detrimental.

If Labour was suffering from declining turnouts and fractious supporters, however, its performance in 1968 needs to be placed in the context of a reactionary backlash reinvigorated by the Conservatives' period in opposition. This was reflected in the anxieties of some sitting Conservatives and ratepayers about their own prospects in the event of Labour suffering an electoral 'massacre' – there was a suggestion that, given the potential absence of Labour councillors, the Majority Group 'were planning to stage-manage their own opposition in the new council'.¹⁷⁸ Through the 1960s, the growing opposition to comprehensivisation (in the 'Save Our Schools' campaign led by local housewife Kathleen Frost) lambasted both the Conservative-controlled council and the Labour government for attempting to deprive parents of their 'choice'.¹⁷⁹ With Labour candidates like Winnick criticising the 'recalcitrant and reactionary' council, however, and appealing to a Labour-controlled parliament to overrule local decisions, it was Labour activists that found themselves at odds with a forceful local middle class attached to the

¹⁷⁵ Letter from 'Formerly Labour', *Croydon Advertiser* (26th January 1968), p.10.

¹⁷⁶ "'Defeatists" rebuke by Minister,' *Croydon Advertiser* (24th May 1968), p.2; 'This is why the Trades Council protested,' *Croydon Advertiser* (24th May 1968), p.19.

¹⁷⁷ Letter from Trade Unionist, *Croydon Advertiser* (14th June 1968), p.13.

¹⁷⁸ 'Massacre fear at low poll elections – "Democracy threatened",' *Croydon Advertiser* (3rd May 1968), p.1.

¹⁷⁹ 'Victory for campaigners – Croydon plan rejected,' *Croydon Advertiser* (21st January 1966), p.2; Unwin, 'Slow motion in Croydon,' p.16; 'Schools debate,' *Croydon Advertiser* (7th January 1966), p.4; Saunders, *Urban Politics*, p.265; 'Pressure by "militants",' *Croydon Advertiser* (28th January 1966), p.12.

educational institutions of the old Croydon.¹⁸⁰ Meanwhile, as John Davis has explained, changing national fortunes in the latter 1960s, whilst Labour was in office, saw suburban residents making 'easy connections between London's self-indulgence and Britain's economic plight.'¹⁸¹

At a greater extreme, the National Front (NF) was based in A.K. Chesterton's home in South Croydon after the LEL's 1967 merger with Colin Jordan's Notting Hill-based British National Party (itself having already incorporated an early LEL splinter, the National Labour Party – led by John Tyndall and John Bean, an NF candidate in Waddon in 1968 and Woodside in 1971, and headquartered in Thornton Heath).¹⁸² Chesterton, as leader of the LEL and then the NF, developed a sophisticated fascist narrative that located his international Jewish conspiracy in New York, not Moscow, and 'America' frequently served as his code for 'Jewish bankers'.¹⁸³ In 1966, Winnick had to speak out against the 'race hatred' in rumours that 500 houses in Lodge Lane in New Addington were reserved for Black people moving from Brixton.¹⁸⁴ Whilst the NF remained marginal in the 1960s, it is worth noting that suburban middle-class opposition to Croydon's redevelopment (as well as comprehensivisation) were to be increasingly shaped by 'the inflections of subsuming, invasion, and violent imposition which are used in coverage which focuses on foreignness' that Pikó identified in reactions to the development of Milton Keynes.¹⁸⁵ The United States had become 'the symbol of a modern industrial capitalist "in crisis"; 'larger-than-life', 'more extravagant, more quirky, more bizarre, more sensational than anything comparable in Britain', but which Britain would likely mimic after a 'time lag'.¹⁸⁶ Following the uprisings in the United States in response to the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., for example, the MP for Croydon North East, Bernard Weatherill, played on 'the fear felt by ordinary decent people in

¹⁸⁰ Saunders, *Urban Politics*, p.265; 'Government should act if "councils are reactionary",' *Croydon Advertiser* (18th March 1966), p.20.

¹⁸¹ Davis, *Waterloo Sunrise*, pp.4-5.

¹⁸² Mulhall, 'From apathy to obsession,' p. 460.

¹⁸³ Macklin, 'Transatlantic Connections and Conspiracies,' p.273; Mulhall, 'From apathy to obsession,' p. 467; L. LeCras, *A.K. Chesterton and the Problem of British Fascism, 1915-1973* (PhD Thesis, Murdoch University, 2017), pp.169-170.

¹⁸⁴ "'500 houses for coloured" tale,' *Croydon Advertiser* (18th March 1966), p. 5.

¹⁸⁵ Pikó, *Milton Keynes in British Culture*, p.52. On suburban middle-class opposition to Croydon's redevelopment, eventually joined even by Sir James Marshall, see the extensive discussion in: Saunders, *Urban Politics*, pp.251-255.

¹⁸⁶ Hall et al, *Policing the Crisis*, p.21 and p.25.

the U.S.A. living in suburbs very like Croydon in the race riots that broke out' in 1968.¹⁸⁷ With the 1968 local elections mere weeks after Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' speech, a Labour member, Alan Brett, was described as a 'nigger lover' by an NF canvasser.¹⁸⁸ Whilst the significance of Powellism and the NF would grow in the 1970s, by the time of the 1968 local elections a right-wing backlash against the post-war consensus had already been nurtured on the basis of a complex combination of racism, anti-Americanism, and opposition to urban redevelopment.¹⁸⁹

This section has argued that the mid-to-late 1960s saw the partial 'obsolescence' of the Croydon described in the previous chapters: Labour's prospects dampened by Coulsdon and Purley's admittance accompanying entrance into the GLC, and homes and workplaces (and the old Ruskin House) replaced by offices and shopping centres described as 'white elephants'. With Labour in government nationally, and supportive of redevelopment locally, the relatively amicable relations on the left which had persisted in the late 1950s and early 1960s were fractured: working-class communities like New Addington and Waddon, and institutions like Ruskin House, were increasingly contested in ways which threatened to undermine support for the party as a whole. In the face of criticism, figures in the Labour leadership tended to deflect onto the United States, at a time when lesions were forming on the images of America and the USSR once optimistically associated with the new Croydon. The 1968 local elections revealed the fragility of Labour's 1960s successes, and the strength of a reactionary backlash which might be equated with the 'Old Right' described by Oglesby, advancing criticisms of the post-war consensus and American hegemony which were parallel to (but distinct from) those being made by the New Left. As the next section will explore, however, the contradictions and challenges of this new Croydon provided

¹⁸⁷ Letter from Asquith Gibbes, *Croydon Advertiser* (17th May 1968), p.6.

¹⁸⁸ 'Racial issue: "Canvasser called me nigger lover",' *Croydon Advertiser* (3rd May 1968), p.1.

¹⁸⁹ This echoes the argument made in Camilla Schofield's landmark work on Enoch Powell, and particularly her discussion of the 'Rivers of Blood' speech as occurring 'at a moment when the moral coherence of the postwar consensus appeared to be in jeopardy.' C. Schofield, *Enoch Powell and the Making of Postcolonial Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp.208-210.

opportunities in the vacancies created by the defeats of 1968, as a renewed New Left 'open[ed] up a psychic space for young activists to envisage new forms of being in the world.'¹⁹⁰

'Suburban is a state of mind'

If the new Croydon 'enhanced' the promise of the new town whilst 'obsolescing' the 'town-conscious' post-war consensus, it also (borrowing again from McLuhan) 'retrieved' a sense of 'homeostasis' and 'bustle', of both enduring routines and social mixture.¹⁹¹ The crisis year of 1968 saw the fruition of a 'third New Left' which operated largely outside the spaces of its predecessors, rooted in the underground scene and appropriating for their own purposes the sites made available by post-war social democracy.¹⁹² These activists, too, looked to the United States – not for inspiration from its government or its space programme, but from its social movements and especially the Black Panthers. Developing a sense of equivalence between the American 'ghetto' or the Parisian '*banlieue*' and the British suburb, and specifically outer council estates like New Addington, elements of this counterculture expressed a spatial politics that took the suburbs seriously as a site of political engagement – and the suburban condition as increasingly universal – with disillusioned suburban youth like themselves as revolutionary actors.

As the previous section suggested, 1968 saw a widening division between the younger activists and their older counterparts. The significance of the year's multiple crises was often greatest for those that were younger, particularly those without the memories of the similar crises of 1956 to compare, or with a relatively weaker connection to existing forms of left-wing politics. Divisions over the Vietnam War widened in response to police repression, particularly at Grosvenor Square in central London, with chiefly (though not exclusively) younger activists identifying with the demonstrators.¹⁹³ Prevented by his parents from attending, Simon Berlin saw Grosvenor Square as the moment when he 'worked out whose side I was on in *that*.'¹⁹⁴ Even Brian Nevill, at that

¹⁹⁰ Hughes, 'The Struggle of the Male Self,' p.905.

¹⁹¹ McLuhan & Powers, *The Global Village*, p.10 & p.172.

¹⁹² This follows Hall's speculative remarks in: Hall, 'Life and Times of the First New Left,' p.177.

¹⁹³ 'It's not only the young who protest,' *Croydon Advertiser* (5th April 1968), p.22.

¹⁹⁴ Interview with Simon Berlin.

point less involved politically, attended several of the American embassy protests.¹⁹⁵ The Gillmans, by contrast, had attended protests in Grosvenor Square with their young children, and so had to leave 'when it got nasty' – indicating some of the circumstances dividing the first New Left from its successors.¹⁹⁶ For the IS's Craib, the violence at these demonstrations was the result of the 'blocking of constitutional outlets'.¹⁹⁷ Meanwhile, a group of sixth-formers established a socialist society at Dulwich College, which the master quelled, and someone was suspended for daubing left-wing slogans – a definite shift to the left by comparison to the school which Reid and Gillman had attended.¹⁹⁸ These shifts alarmed and amused older commentators; in March 1968, the *Advertiser* ran a joke column by a representative of 'Croydon Young Anarchists' calling for the voting age to be lowered to five, claiming it was as nonsensical as reducing it to 18 (or 'enfranchising talking parrots').¹⁹⁹ With the voting age not reduced from 21 until 1970, many of the youngest activists felt alienated from electoral politics entirely; Nevill didn't end up voting until his thirties, partly because he wanted to stay off the electoral register.²⁰⁰ There was a growing disconnect (cultural and political) between older activists and younger people whose relationship to activism was markedly different, as perhaps indicated by Nevill's disinclination to describe himself as a 'lifelong activist'.²⁰¹

Similarly, and especially for those students benefiting from the post-war expansion of further and higher education, events in Paris in May 1968 were a touchstone. Peter Walker, having just completed a degree at City University, travelled to the Sorbonne and told the occupying students, 'I'm over here to support your revolution' – he was asked to go and 'liberate' the British Institute with the aid of two Algerians, and then helped translate revolutionary literature for the benefit of Anglophone journalists.²⁰² Coverage of the ways Croydon was impacted by the disturbances was

¹⁹⁵ Interview with Brian Nevill.

¹⁹⁶ Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman.

¹⁹⁷ Letter from Ian Craib, *Croydon Advertiser* (5th April 1968), p.22.

¹⁹⁸ Interview with Jerry Fitzpatrick. For a discussion of Dulwich College in this period, see: Hodges, *God's Gift*, pp.184-185.

¹⁹⁹ J. Hitchens, 'Poll-axe the age to vote – down to five,' *Croydon Advertiser* (8th March 1968), p.22.

²⁰⁰ Interview with Brian Nevill.

²⁰¹ Interview with Brian Nevill.

²⁰² Interview with Peter Walker.

extensive.²⁰³ Another City student, Mary Hynes, a Coloma Convent Girls' School alumna, reported her experiences in Paris to the *Advertiser*, declaring it 'fantastic to see the students running the whole show, and the professors taking orders from them'.²⁰⁴ Back in Croydon, Berlin remembered 'all the stuff on the telly' about the Sorbonne, which he connected to coverage of the Cultural Revolution and 'a lot of stuff about the Red Guards': 'all of those things were kind of coming together.'²⁰⁵ Meanwhile, a history teacher at his school, who he remembered as not 'much older than us' and who had reportedly seen Bob Dylan at the Isle of Wight Festival, was helping them to make comparisons between 1848 and 1968.²⁰⁶ David Percival, who joined the post office in 1968, was nicknamed 'Danny the Red' after Daniel Cohn-Bendit.²⁰⁷ The international examples supplied by the events in Paris, but also by those unfolding in Vietnam, China and the United States, inspired the young activists to go beyond the precedents available in their immediate context. As Celia Hughes put it, 'iconic revolutionary figures from international conflicts were not mere cultural icons, but models of social justice and humanitarianism.'²⁰⁸

The exploration of these revolutionary examples could occur in surprising spaces – including, notably, the Young Liberals, who David White joined at Trinity School because they were more active and 'more radical than the Labour Party Young Socialists at that time.'²⁰⁹ For young middle-class activists disillusioned with the experience of Labour in government, and put off by the rhetoric of Marxist groups, the Young Liberals had a growing appeal which was particularly connected to the growth of the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM), avoiding some of the

²⁰³ 'Pilgrimage to Lourdes despite the strikes,' *Croydon Advertiser* (31st May 1968), p.22; 'Children's visit ends with rush to find boat,' *Croydon Advertiser* (31st May 1968), p.1.

²⁰⁴ 'Girl got into student H.Q. – and her share of tear-gas,' *Croydon Advertiser* (31st May 1968), p.1.

²⁰⁵ Interview with Simon Berlin.

²⁰⁶ Interview with Simon Berlin. On Bob Dylan's influence on the younger New Left activists, see: Hughes, *Young Lives on the Left*, p.68.

²⁰⁷ Interview with David Percival.

²⁰⁸ Hughes, *Young Lives on the Left*, p.134.

²⁰⁹ Interview with David White. For discussions of the politics of the Young Liberals in the late 1960s, see: P. Hellyer, 'The Young Liberals and the Left 1965-70,' *Journal of Liberal History*, no.67 (2010), pp.60-67; C. Ellis & M. Redding, 'Not Playing Games: The Young Liberals and Anti-Apartheid Campaigns, 1968-70,' *Journal of Liberal History*, no.74 (2012), pp.6-12; P. Hellyer, 'Young Liberals: The "Red Guard" Era,' *Journal of Liberal Democrat History*, no.17 (1997), pp.14-15; R. Fox, 'Young Liberal Influence and its Effects, 1970-74,' *Liberal Democrat History Group Newsletter*, no.14 (1997), pp.16-18.

controversies over official Communism linked to CND and the anti-Vietnam War campaigns.²¹⁰ Whilst at the beginning of 1968, the Young Liberals in Croydon were still a fairly cautious group, as events unfolded they were pulled to the left.²¹¹ The leader of Sanderstead Young Liberals, Stuart Paterson, wrote that whilst he did 'deplore student violence', he could 'see why the strait-jacket of our outmoded society and system of government [...] can bring student frustrations to the boiling point.'²¹² Figures like Iain McNay increasingly identified as libertarian socialists, provoking the ire of the party's more reactionary older members; one, a member since 1908, complained 'the militants' were opposed to the monarchy, 'a bulwark against the forces of anarchy and a focus point around which all shades of political opinion and of none can muster'.²¹³ In May, the Young Liberals held a meeting with the YCL and YS to oppose Enoch Powell and call for 'a united white and coloured working-class movement [...] to force their demands on to the Government.'²¹⁴ Another meeting discussed the appropriate targets for 'rebel students' – 'an impotent Parliament, the party system and bureaucracy.'²¹⁵ An Irish speaker at a local Young Liberal meeting even had to defend themselves from claims that they had promoted the IRA; the speaker, Christy Hudson, also denounced the SLL for working with the police at a demonstration outside the French embassy, to which Dot Gibson retorted that Hudson and their friends were 'anarchists'.²¹⁶ McNay wrote a letter to the *Advertiser* in 1968 in praise of Alexander Dubček and calling for Britain to 'immediately stop supplying arms to the Nigerian Federal Forces and recognise Biafra as a separate State; dissociate from American policy in Vietnam; and urge the

²¹⁰ Hellyer, 'The Young Liberals and the Left,' p.60; Ellis & Redding, 'Not Playing Games,' p.9; Hellyer, 'Young Liberals: The "Red Guard" Era,' p.14; Fox, 'Young Liberal Influence and its Effects,' pp.16–18.

²¹¹ For example, Iain McNay had co-authored a letter which blamed disorder at Grosvenor Square on both police provocation and 'trouble-makers (mainly Communists) who deliberately went to ruin and break up the demonstration.' Letter from N. Muir & I. McNay, *Croydon Advertiser* (5th April 1968), p.22.

²¹² S. Paterson, 'Why are students rebellious?' *Croydon Advertiser* (31st May 1968), p.15.

²¹³ 'New Young Liberal group,' *Croydon Advertiser* (12th April 1968), p.14; 'Groups merge,' *Croydon Advertiser* (21st June 1968), p.19; A.E. Legg, 'Shock for a Liberal,' *Croydon Advertiser* (19th April 1968), p.12.

²¹⁴ 'Masking the real cause,' *Croydon Advertiser* (3rd May 1968), p.15.

²¹⁵ 'Targets for the rebel students,' *Croydon Advertiser* (31st May 1968), p.18.

²¹⁶ C. Hudson, 'A talk about the I.R.A.,' *Croydon Advertiser* (9th August 1968), p.10; C. Hudson, 'Solidarity on the Left,' *Croydon Advertiser* (7th June 1968), p.11; D. Gibson, 'The story of a demonstration,' *Croydon Advertiser* (21st June 1968), p.13. Hudson appears to have been in communication with the Dutch Provo movement following a trip to Amsterdam in 1966, when they were still based in Ireland; see N. Pas, 'Mediatization of Provos: From a Local Movement to a European Phenomenon,' pp.157–176, in M. Klimke, J. Pekelder & J. Scharloth (eds.), *Between Prague Spring and French May: Opposition and Revolt in Europe, 1960–1980* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), p.169.

expulsion of Portugal from NATO and the cessation of arms trading with Portugal.²¹⁷ The young activists, politicised in their schools and universities and inspired by the Parisian example, were increasingly beyond the labour movement altogether – retrieving the kind of middle-class suburban progressivism, within the Liberals, that was described in the first chapter.

The main struggle to grab the headlines in Croydon in 1968, however, was the occupation of the School of Art – itself a beneficiary of Croydon’s post-war reconstruction.²¹⁸ Following the similar occupation at Hornsey College of Arts, which sent a representative to speak to the occupiers on their first day, a group of about 350 mostly full-time students took over one of its three annexes on Selhurst Road.²¹⁹ The figures most often associated with the occupation are Jamie Reid, younger brother of Bruce, and the ‘professional student’ Malcolm McLaren, who joined the School of Art in 1967.²²⁰ The young arts students had benefited from the expansion of post-war education, and Reid described them as ‘sheltered and privileged’ – he ‘really didn’t give a fuck’.²²¹ They were frustrated by the limitations in both the post-war settlement and the opposition offered by the mainstream left. Robin Scott, the occupation’s press officer, complained ‘that Croydon was tired of being regarded as “a poor relation” of other colleges’, and their manifesto emphasised demands about access to buildings and against the requirement to take academic courses which the Labour government was imposing.²²² Reid was acutely aware of his elder brother’s negative experiences with more conventional political spaces and media attention, described as ‘the snake-pit’.²²³ The events in Paris seemed to indicate a different way forwards: McLaren had unsuccessfully attempted to visit a friend at the Sorbonne, Fred Vermorel, later a prominent pop-cultural biographer, and the young artists were heavily influenced by the

²¹⁷ Interview with David White; I. McNay, ‘A victory, but fight goes on,’ *Croydon Advertiser* (9th August 1968), p.11.

²¹⁸ Davis, *Waterloo Sunrise*, p.276. For a fuller discussion of the occupation, and Croydon’s 1968, see: D. Frost, ‘Progressive, not rebellious: the student occupation of Croydon College of Art,’ *Croydon Citizen* (14th June 2018), <http://web.archive.org/web/20180928211156/https://thecroydoncitizen.com/history/progressive-rebellious-student-occupation-croydon-college-art/>, accessed 22nd April 2021.

²¹⁹ ‘Sit-in at college annexe,’ *Croydon Advertiser* (7th June 1968), p.1.

²²⁰ Maguire, *Shamanarchy*, pp.124-125.

²²¹ Reid & Savage, *Up They Rise*, p.15.

²²² ‘Sit-in at college annexe,’ *Croydon Advertiser* (7th June 1968), p.1.

²²³ Reid & Savage, *Up They Rise*, p.7.

Situationists in France.²²⁴ Reid saw the Croydon occupation as more radical than Hornsey (associated with 'endless meetings, discussions about students power-sharing (horrible term) with governors and staff') and declared their 'solution to all the talk about network structures and changing years and departments was just to tear the dividing walls down.'²²⁵ Like the Situationists (and their mentor, Lefebvre) the occupiers attempted to appropriate and reimagine a space which had been created within the compromising post-war consensus.²²⁶ Inspired by the French example, and aware of the limitations of the previous generation of the New Left, the art students seized control of their immediate surroundings and began directly changing them, engaging in a prefigurative spatial politics which diverged from more conventional activism earlier in the decade.

'The scale of the reprisals against staff as well as students in the British art colleges', David Caute assessed, 'appears to have had no counterpart in any Western country during the campus insurrections of 1968.'²²⁷ Reid's account of the challenges facing the occupation emphasised police harassment and the loss of grants – an issue raised by Winnick in parliament – and the principal's attempt to have McLaren committed to an asylum.²²⁸ The experience of state repression aligned with the young artists' visions of the emerging Croydon; an earlier work by Reid depicts a White Goddess, a druidic nature symbol, mournfully playing a violin amidst the redevelopments, which he later dubbed 'Governmental Croydon'.²²⁹ Similarly, McLaren had embarked upon 'an investigation into the post-war development of Croydon, manifested in black and white drawings of tower blocks and a series of disturbing, angular sculptures hung in concrete environments'.²³⁰ Ultimately, however, Reid claimed the occupation ended because 'almost all of the students went home when the summer term finished'.²³¹ This tells only part of the story.

²²⁴ Maguire, *Shamanarchy*, pp.132-133 & p.140. One of Vermorel's most successful biographies is about the Addiscombe-born and Sanderstead-raised model Kate Moss, who he diagnosed as having a 'state of semi-detachment'; see F. Vermorel, *Kate Moss: Addicted to Love* (Omnibus, 2006), p.11.

²²⁵ Reid & Savage, *Up They Rise*, p.15.

²²⁶ Reid & Savage, *Up They Rise*, p.13; K. Ross & H. Lefebvre, 'Lefebvre on the Situationists: An Interview,' *October*, no.79 (1997), pp.69-83, p.81.

²²⁷ Caute, *Sixty-Eight*, p.309.

²²⁸ Reid & Savage, *Up They Rise*, p.15.

²²⁹ Maguire, *Shamanarchy*, p.20; Reid & Savage, *Up They Rise*, p.5.

²³⁰ Maguire, *Shamanarchy*, p.126.

²³¹ Reid & Savage, *Up They Rise*, p.15.

Whilst the Croydon students did face harassment, including the cutting of their telephone line, they also faced a council prepared to negotiate. Local coverage was surprisingly sympathetic, praising them for limiting demands 'to some reform of their situation', with 'none of the violence that has marked similar demonstrations in other places' – although the letter pages were not always so kind.²³² After their telephone line was cut, the occupiers (predominantly full-time in a college mainly attended by part-time students) agreed to return to work whilst talks occurred, losing control of the annexe.²³³ Driving a wedge between the occupiers, the chairman of the Education Committee praised the students for having 'scrupulously maintained' the buildings and 'meticulously correct' conduct.²³⁴ After the end of the occupation, which lasted from 5th to 11th June, seminars were organised between staff and students to discuss 'art education issues'.²³⁵ A mass meeting of students organised by the principal voted 130-29 to agree the joint proposals of the student-staff committee, 'a virtual defeat for the militant students'.²³⁶ The more radical group were isolated by a council willing to accept some of their demands and a student body which did not quite meet their hopes – one declared that she was 'progressive, not rebellious'.²³⁷ Another occupier, Malcolm St. Julian-Brown, already organising a music workshop at the Gun, tried to get help acquiring premises for a student art centre, delivering an exhibition aimed at ratepayers to transform the 'cold, dead place' of newly-built Croydon.²³⁸ As well as the experience of state repression, the occupation gave figures like Reid and McLaren an awareness of the possibility of radicals' incorporation back into the institutions which they challenged, and the unreliability of those they sought to organise.

Nevertheless, the youth music scene in Croydon remained vibrant and increasingly independent in the years after 1968. Neither Nevill nor Hamish MacColl, the two interviewed activists closest

²³² 'A matter of discipline,' *Croydon Advertiser* (14th June 1968), p.12; A. West, 'Students and the community,' *Croydon Advertiser* (14th June 1968), p.12.

²³³ 'Student revolt ends with talking,' *Croydon Advertiser* (14th June 1968), p.1.

²³⁴ 'Students learn you can cancel out a sit-in with a lock-out,' *Croydon Advertiser* (14th June 1968), p.24.

²³⁵ 'Student row: A mass meeting,' *Croydon Advertiser* (21st June 1968), p.1.

²³⁶ 'Art students' vote ends the rebellion,' *Croydon Advertiser* (5th July 1968), p.1.

²³⁷ J. Ward, 'Progressive, not rebellious,' *Croydon Advertiser* (12th July 1968), p.12.

²³⁸ S. Grant, 'Music workshop,' *Croydon Advertiser* (28th June 1968), p.8; 'Students' arts centre plan,' *Croydon Advertiser* (28th June 1968), p.1.

to this scene, had heard of Ruskin House.²³⁹ In 1969, *Bromley Broadsheet* reported on a performance by David Bowie at the Gun's EGG club, whilst an Arts Lab was established at the Orchard Tavern on Cherry Orchard Road, in Addiscombe.²⁴⁰ In fact, from 1967 onwards the 'provincial' scenes were growing in importance relative to that of London.²⁴¹ MacColl remembered an 'extraordinary' party scene which included his friend David Rapoport, with large parties in big houses in Beckenham, taking advantage of absent parents (like one teenager whose parents were in prison for embezzlement).²⁴² MacColl joined the 'flying squad' – 'zooming off' around South London in a Mini Estate to help with eviction resistance – and his folk club operated without the involvement of his father, whose invitation to join his Critics Group's visit to China-aligned Albania, though honoured, was unpersuasive.²⁴³ Littlewood provided the surety on a house which her godson, Hamish, occupied with Dave Smith, a former Dulwich College pupil whose father was a lay preacher, and with whom he formed the miniscule Croydon Socialist Society in 1968 or 1969.²⁴⁴ Other members included an American who had served as a sergeant in Vietnam, who Ewan MacColl believed was a police plant, and a mixed-race man named Rob Latter who was murdered, along with his fiancée, whilst hitchhiking near Toulouse in 1972.²⁴⁵ In different ways, both the American – whose name Hamish MacColl could not remember – and Latter are indicative of a youth scene which was increasingly influenced by American popular culture and by what Hazel Carby described as the extension of 'the frontline of the colour bar', and through the Croydon Socialist Society participated in an emergent type of activism which took South London, rather than the city centre or Croydon, as its terrain.²⁴⁶

As Felix Fuhg argued, 'a fascination for music and style paved the way for teenagers to become cross-border commuters, travelling towards a new British multiracial identity born of consuming

²³⁹ Interview with Brian Nevill; Interview with Hamish MacColl.

²⁴⁰ London, British Library, MIC.F.19(2), 8–15.

²⁴¹ J. Griffiths, "'Rivalling the Metropolis": Cultural conflict between London and the regions c.1967–1973,' *Contemporary British History*, vol.33, no.4 (2019), pp.524–547, p.537.

²⁴² Interview with Hamish MacColl.

²⁴³ Interview with Hamish MacColl.

²⁴⁴ Interview with Hamish MacColl.

²⁴⁵ Interview with Hamish MacColl.

²⁴⁶ Quoted in Back, 'So... fucking Croydon.'

and sometimes “living” black culture.²⁴⁷ Jimi Hendrix played at the Star Hotel in the mid-1960s, and Prince Buster performed at one of the Wednesday ska nights.²⁴⁸ There was also, MacColl noted:

‘a club round the back of the East Croydon station, there was a Black club, but if you didn’t make too many waves, you could get into and it was full of Black people dancing, and we used to go there, but we always felt a bit out of place, you know, we weren’t entirely welcome. But then we were white. White middle-class kids, I mean, you could understand it.’²⁴⁹

Examples such as this conform to Fuhg’s work on London nightclubs in the 1960s, which provided ‘a London separate from the racism that could infuse everyday life on the streets’ – albeit one ‘where black musicians were accepted, black customers were often not’.²⁵⁰ In 1969, a group of Jamaicans went to the High Commission to complain of police harassment outside a nightclub run from the Gun Tavern, with over 750 members (‘the majority being West Indians’, and ‘decent lads’ according to the High Commission’s legal attaché).²⁵¹ Percival remembered that, as a child, he and another boy had followed ‘a Black guy in South Norwood – it must’ve been the first Black guy I’d ever seen [...] to see what he would do’; later, however, his sister would babysit for their Black neighbours, and he thought that they ‘got on with them pretty well’.²⁵² In 1971, following a petition by local residents to have the above-mentioned Parchmore Methodist Church’s youth club closed down because of the behaviour of newer members, the club’s volunteers and young people – Black and white – hit back, saying that the members who had joined at Christmas were West Indian and that ‘the sight of coloured boys with white girls outside

²⁴⁷ F. Fuhg, ‘Ambivalent Relationships: London’s Youth Culture and the Making of the Multi-Racial Society in the 1960s,’ *Britain and the World*, vol.II, no.1 (2018), pp.4-26, p.10.

²⁴⁸ Interview with Hamish MacColl; Interview with Brian Nevill.

²⁴⁹ Interview with Hamish MacColl.

²⁵⁰ Fuhg, ‘Ambivalent Relationships,’ p.21.

²⁵¹ London, National Archives, MEPO/31/2.

²⁵² Interview with David Percival. This anecdote is worth considering in light of Rob Waters’ discussion of the way that ‘Black lives in this period were lived under the intensive scrutiny of neighbours.’ R. Waters, ‘Respectability and race between the suburb and the city: an argument about the making of “inner-city” London,’ *Urban History*, preprint (29th November 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0963926821000730>, p.16.

the club is causing the complaints.’²⁵³ A group of white club members marched from the youth centre to the council offices at Taberner House with a counter-petition which they had organised alongside Black friends, getting 380 signatures, and were met by the council leader.²⁵⁴ These examples are demonstrative of the extent to which Black and white young people in early 1970s Croydon shared spaces and expressed solidarity with one another – a solidarity partly linked to excitement and hopefulness about the changing demographics of a Croydon seen as white and staid.

As hinted above, the forms of anti-racism which responded to these changing demographics were heavily influenced by examples from the United States – but by the late 1960s, the lessons to be learned from the Civil Rights movement had decisively shifted. Wilfred Wood, then chaplain to the Bishop of Kensington and later himself the Bishop of Croydon (and the first Black bishop in the Church of England), preached at a special memorial service at the parish church following Martin Luther King’s assassination in April 1968.²⁵⁵ King, however, was not the only possible source of inspiration from the United States, with some figures pointing in revolutionary directions beyond ‘the existing structure of the American Democratic Project’.²⁵⁶ Malcolm X’s visit to Smethwick in February 1965, shortly before his own assassination, had ‘threatened to bring the race debate bang up to date’; by 1968, Cliff Lynch was leading a breakaway from CARD, named Croydon Action for Racial Unity (CARU), in opposition to ‘Black Power and Maoist extremists’ regarded as infiltrating his former group.²⁵⁷ According to Rob Waters, highlighting the significance of Stokely Carmichael’s July 1967 visit, CARD was torn apart by ‘an ascendant confrontational anti-imperialist politics, couched in a language of blackness that regarded black internationalism, black leadership, and a commitment to grassroots involvement as founding principles.’²⁵⁸ By 1972, a British Black Panther branch was formed at 202 Selhurst Road, South

²⁵³ “‘Colour prejudice” attack,’ *Croydon Advertiser* (26th March 1971), p.1.

²⁵⁴ “‘Colour prejudice” attack,’ *Croydon Advertiser* (26th March 1971), p.1.

²⁵⁵ ‘Luther King service,’ *Croydon Advertiser* (12th April 1968), p.3.

²⁵⁶ M.E. Sawyer, *Black Minded: The Political Philosophy of Malcolm X* (London: Pluto Press, 2020), p.19.

²⁵⁷ J. Street, ‘Malcolm X, Smethwick, and the Influence of the African American Freedom Struggle on British Race Relations in the 1960s,’ *Journal of Black Studies*, vol.38, no.6 (2008), pp.932–950, p.942; ‘Anti-racialists split with Black Power,’ *Croydon Advertiser* (19th July 1968), p.1.

²⁵⁸ Waters, *Thinking Black*, p.29. See also: Perry, *London is the Place for Me*, pp.238–243.

Norwood.²⁵⁹ For the young white participants in Croydon's vibrant underground scene, American figures like Malcolm X and the Black Panthers provided an example – and a style – of confrontational, liberatory politics which was distinct from that of the older white left.

Nor was Black politics the only source of inspiration. According to some narrators, 'gay rights hadn't quite come over the horizon for most people' in the 1960s, despite the government's reforms at the end of the decade, 'but certainly did, suddenly.'²⁶⁰ It was only later activists realised some of the cohabiting men who were their fellow Labour members were likely gay.²⁶¹

Nevertheless, activists like the Gillmans felt they had been 'very much in favour of liberalising everything', partly on the basis of the film *Victim* (1961), starring Dirk Bogarde, whom they later interviewed.²⁶² White remembered the shock of the attendees at a Young Liberals conference in the late 1960s when a speaker declared, 'I am a homosexual', and highlighted the role of local historian John Gent in the Croydon branch of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE).²⁶³

Whilst distinguishing itself from more radical groups like the Gay Liberation Front, formed in New York in the wake of the Stonewall riots in 1969 with a British group following the next year, who 'want[ed] to turn society upside down', the Croydon branch grew quickly.²⁶⁴ CHE members from 'Surrey, north Sussex, Sutton, Croydon and Bromley' were directed to the Croydon branch's founder, Wallace Garrett, who lived in Reigate.²⁶⁵ Noted for the quality of their publication, and benefiting from the locally-based internationally-renowned pianist Peter Katin as a fundraising host, Croydon CHE, though describing the town as an 'outback' which people might avoid, managed to draw support from 'the Greater Croydon area'.²⁶⁶ As will be discussed in the next chapter, the politics of such local groups, in a place like Croydon, could be substantially more radical than those of the national organisation to which they belonged.

²⁵⁹ *Street Sheet*, no.2 (1972), p.3.

²⁶⁰ Interview with Joan Matlock. For a discussion of the continuing prosecution of 'immoral' and 'unlawful' conduct after the Sexual Offences Act 1967, and public attitudes towards homosexuality, see: H. Cocks, 'Conspiracy to corrupt public morals and the "unlawful" status of homosexuality in Britain after 1967,' *Social History*, vol.41, no.3 (2016), pp.267-284.

²⁶¹ Interview with Peter Walker.

²⁶² Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman.

²⁶³ Interview with David White.

²⁶⁴ London, British Library of Politics and Economic Science, HCA/CHE/7/84.

²⁶⁵ BLPES, HCA/CHE/7/84.

²⁶⁶ BLPES, HCA/CHE/7/84.

Similarly, Barbara Wilson – a woman living in Shirley – was the organiser of a Croydon branch of the National Joint Action Committee for Women’s Equal Rights (NJACWER), variously described as part of South London or Surrey.²⁶⁷ With activists linked to the International Marxist Group (IMG), Croydon NJACWER was particularly focused on nursery provision for ‘working mothers’.²⁶⁸ The group sparked coverage in the *Advertiser* throughout 1971, with the group’s members including Barbara Wilson’s husband Richard, Pat Knight (and husband Jack), and Jennifer Blockley, credited with stitching their banner for a national march which included slogans against ‘suburban slavery’.²⁶⁹ Croydon NJACWER was very critical of ‘stay at home wives’ engaged in ‘muddle-headed charity work’, arguing it was ‘the wage slave who needs liberating’ – criticisms which provoked uproar from women in the letters section.²⁷⁰ At a meeting, Knight was even forced to apologise for her husband, who had argued for improvements to education by suggesting that ‘the majority of women are stupid’ – she said that he meant ‘because we are oppressed’.²⁷¹ Nevertheless, despite tensions between the younger feminists and older housewives, Knight did address Forestdale Women’s Institute (WI) – comparing their struggle to that ‘against racial prejudice’ – and this may have contributed to the Croydon WI’s decision to allow discussions of politics, ‘the only way to keep up with the youngsters’.²⁷² As with CHE, the formation of an NJACWER branch in Croydon was indicative of the growing importance of prefigurative, identity-based politics in a Croydon which, in its new town centre and in its incorporation into London, could increasingly be described as ‘metropolitan’, a ‘difference machine’ associated with the creation of what Lefebvre described as ‘produced differences’.²⁷³

²⁶⁷ L. Lloyd, *Booklist for Women’s Liberation* (London: Prinkipo Press, 1970), p.13; C. Day, ‘Croydon,’ *Marxist Studies*, no.1 (1970), p.4.

²⁶⁸ C. Day, ‘Croydon,’ *Marxist Studies*, no.1 (1970), p.5; ‘May Day Women’s Lib Rally,’ *Croydon Advertiser* (23rd April 1971), p.23.

²⁶⁹ ‘Housewives ready for equality march – and baby Colin too!’ *Croydon Advertiser* (5th March 1971), p.22; ‘Women could not find poles to carry the banner!’ *Croydon Advertiser* (12th March 1971), p.7.

²⁷⁰ ‘It’s Men’s Lib. Now! – for the breadwinners who are as bored as the childbearers,’ *Croydon Advertiser* (9th April 1971), p.5; ‘Backing and Brickbats for Women’s Lib.,’ *Croydon Advertiser* (16th April 1971), p.13.

²⁷¹ ‘Madam, you are stupid – he says,’ *Croydon Advertiser* (2nd April 1971), p.9.

²⁷² ‘Women’s Lib. struggle like race issue,’ *Croydon Advertiser* (7th May 1971), p.33; ‘W.I. welcomes politics,’ *Croydon Advertiser* (18th June 1971), p.9.

²⁷³ Toscano, ‘Factory, territory, metropolis, Empire,’ pp.210–211; Isin, ‘City.State,’ p.223; Shmueli, ‘Totality, hegemony, difference,’ p.223; Wilson, ‘“The Devastating Conquest of the Lived by the Conceived”,’ p.372.

These politics were brought together within an emergent counterculture linked to the growth of the underground press, from which Croydon activists once again benefited through proximity to London. Papers like *Oz* and *International Times (IT)* had flourished in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and *IT* sent an editor to address an early meeting of Croydon CHE; Berlin recalled that, because his father worked in central London, he was able to get into Soho to buy copies to share with his classmates.²⁷⁴ Whilst the national papers remained important, however, some activists were committed to developing an underground press in Croydon; Nevill 'figured, well they seem to have got it together in Ladbroke Grove, they seem to have got it together in Camden Town or whatever, but Croydon is ripe for that sort of thing as well.'²⁷⁵ Jamie Reid (following a series of part-time jobs across South London) set up Croydon's most famous underground newspaper, *Suburban Press*, in 1970, with the hope that 'we can expect to see a gradual diminishing role for the London-based alternative press as new local and community-based papers begin to emerge.'²⁷⁶ He did so with friends Jeremy Brook and Nigel Edwards, and was later joined by Nigel Kershaw and Reid's then-girlfriend Sophie Richmond.²⁷⁷ Meanwhile, Nevill founded *Red Fist and Bust* – the latter part his contribution – with his schoolmate Chris Lansdowne, who set up the 'Red Fist Movement' after getting hold of some badges emblazoned with red fists.²⁷⁸ The pair lived together in Lansdowne's New Addington council flat with his partner and young child, one room converted into a rudimentary print office in another appropriation of a space provided by post-war social democracy.²⁷⁹ As with others emerging from 1968 with a more combative politics (and in contrast to the potential for sentimentality about the post-war settlement) the writers of

²⁷⁴ BLPES, HCA/CHE/7/84; Interview with Simon Berlin.

²⁷⁵ Interview with Brian Nevill. Note, also, Kieran Connell's observation that 'the ethos that characterized late 1960s counterculturalism continued to resonate beyond London well into the 1970s': Connell, *Black Handsworth*, p.58.

²⁷⁶ *Suburban Press*, no.3 (undated), p.1; Reid & Savage, *Up They Rise*, p.17. For a fuller account of *Suburban Press* and its origins, see: D. Frost, "'The city is dying... The suburbs are growing... The country shrinks": spatial Maoism and *Suburban Press*,' *Twentieth Century Communism*, no.22 (2022), pp.166-190.

²⁷⁷ Reid & Savage, *Up They Rise*, p.35; Maguire, *Shamanarchy*, p.149.

²⁷⁸ Interview with Brian Nevill.

²⁷⁹ Interview with Brian Nevill.

Suburban Press repudiated their ‘fathers’ who ‘tell us of the horrors of the thirties and of the benefits of the present welfare state’ and ‘wallow in history’s pessimism.’²⁸⁰

Nevill distributed copies of his papers in Croydon’s venues, including to a local biker gang, offering advice on drug-taking and police harassment.²⁸¹ Though Nevill recalled that Reid, ‘more of an intellectual’, was not particularly prominent in the local music scene, the underground papers were connected to each other and the wider counterculture described above: according to Reid, *Suburban Press* were ‘the only press that the Black Panthers would use’, and they forged relationships nationally with the Maoist-influenced Big Flame and Preservation of the Rights of Prisoners (PROP).²⁸² *Red Fist and Bust* expressed support for the Gay Liberation Front, whilst Nevill wrote an article about the Angela Davis/Soledad Brothers Defence Group for *Suburban Press* and extended solidarity to the Black Panthers in South Norwood, and organised a claimants union with *Suburban Press*, the IS and NJACWER.²⁸³ Nevill and Lansdowne had started out with a branch of the Defence Group; Lansdowne, who had some experience with the YCL, ‘was very into the whole American Black Power, Black Liberation, Black Panthers, all of that.’²⁸⁴ Whilst Nevill noted that there was a ‘romantic edge to that, really, because you’re a white guy with a family on a council estate in South London, you do not have anything to do with this stuff’, it was demonstrative of the ways that the counterculture (to quote Lucy Robinson) provided ‘a theory of oppression that accepted the contradictions of its constituents’ experiences – that they could be heterosexual, white, male, and middle class, and yet still “feel” oppressed.’²⁸⁵

²⁸⁰ *Suburban Press*, no.1 (undated), p.2.

²⁸¹ Interview with Brian Nevill.

²⁸² Nevill, *Boom Baby*, p.237; Maguire, *Shamanarchy*, p.150; G. McFarlane, ‘Black Power comes to Britain,’ *International Socialism*, no.143 (26th June 2014), <http://isj.org.uk/black-power-comes-to-britain/>; ‘Episodes in Big Flame History: No 7. China,’ *Big Flame 1970-1984* (2 June 2009), <https://bigflameuk.wordpress.com/2009/06/02/episodes-in-big-flame-history-no-7/>; Reid & Savage, *Up They Rise*, p.37.

²⁸³ *Red Fist and Bust*, no.1 (undated), p.2; *Red Fist and Bust*, no.2 (undated), p.2; *The Street Sheet*, no.1 (1972), p.1; ‘Special Branch report concerning a branch meeting held by the Croydon International Socialists (13th December 1971),’ *Undercover Policing Inquiry*, MPS-0731828 (19th November 2020), <https://www.ucpi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/MPS-0731828.pdf>.

²⁸⁴ Interview with Brian Nevill.

²⁸⁵ Interview with Brian Nevill; L. Robinson, ‘Three Revolutionary Years: The Impact of the Counter Culture on the Development of the Gay Liberation Movement in Britain,’ *Cultural and Social History*, vol.3 (2006), pp.445-471, p.445.

Nevill would eventually found the Croydon and Bromley White Panther Party (he resented that the leadership in Abbey Wood had formed the 'South London' branch, self-deprecatingly comparing his own arguably-indulgent desire for a larger group to 'wanting an American car instead of a Ford Anglia'), with *Bust* renamed to *Street Sheet*.²⁸⁶ The new paper reported on a walkout at Heath Clark School after a girl was disciplined for wearing an 'afro wig', whilst the Red Fist Movement committed to 'fight for the right of the Black Sisters to identify with their own race, and for the right of boys to wear their hair in the manner they wish.'²⁸⁷ The White Panthers had been inspired by the example of their Detroit-based counterparts, formed around the band MC5 and the poet John Sinclair, and attempted to forge a basis for the solidarity of the 'life culture' with 'other minority groups like Blacks, gays and all working-class people' through shared experiences of police harassment.²⁸⁸ According to Nevill, 'the Croydon CID had a rep back then that would make the fuzz over in NW5 seem like the proverbial vicar's tea party.'²⁸⁹ The vibrancy of Croydon's music and arts scene, particularly as venues in central London were increasingly policed, had provided a fertile environment for the development of a distinctive local underground press tailored to its needs. The counterculture offered a new form of identification for suburban young people (and especially young men) frustrated with the post-war consensus, and a way of doing politics which was attuned to the new suburban context: as *Street Sheet* announced, 'those sunny suburban suburbs are tuning in to da vibes, man!'²⁹⁰

Nor was the underground press' understanding of the suburban limited to the middle-class, picket-fenced stereotype. The various papers associated with Nevill and Lansdowne were small and short-lived, with Lansdowne eventually setting up his own paper, *Community Press*, as an organ for the Red Fist Movement to conduct 'a study of environmental relations and living conditions

²⁸⁶ Interview with Brian Nevill; *The Street Sheet*, no.1 (1972), p.3.

²⁸⁷ *The Street Sheet*, no.1 (1972), p.3.

²⁸⁸ M. Bartkowiak, 'Motor City Burning: Rock and Rebellion in the WPP and the MC5,' *Journal for the Study of Radicalism*, vol.1, no.2 (2007), pp.55-76; "'He Not Busy Being Born is Busy Dying...': Revolution, the life culture and the White Panther Party UK report March 1972,' *International Times*, no.127 (1972), pp.16-17; *Bust*, no.3 (undated), p.1 and pp.6-10; *Street Sheet*, no.3 (undated), p.2.

²⁸⁹ Nevill, *Boom Baby*, p.247.

²⁹⁰ L. Robinson, 'Three Revolutionary Years: The Impact of the Counter Culture on the Development of the Gay Liberation Movement in Britain,' *Cultural and Social History*, vol.3 (2006), pp.445-471, p.445; *Street Sheet*, no.3 (undated), p.2.

in Addington, which is an ideal place to do this.²⁹¹ The material they gathered proved critical to the fourth issue of *Suburban Press*, which was achieving a circulation of about 5000 including 'working-class areas like West Croydon and the "new town" of New Addington', and was reported on in *Time Out*.²⁹² Whilst notably influenced by the Situationists – Mustapha Khayati had singled out Bruce Reid's Spies for Peace as one of the few activist groups to deserve praise – the paper was punctuated by quotations from, and references to, Mao Zedong; the paper's attempt to organise within the suburbs owed more to the French Maoists of 1968 than to the Situationists, who had wanted 'to go make noise in the bourgeois quarters'.²⁹³ New Addington was an 'ideal place' because it could be analogous to the Parisian *banlieue*, a working-class space segregated from a Croydon which grew rich at its expense.²⁹⁴ For *Suburban Press*, New Addington was a 'dumping ground for the working class', the estates 'not just eyesores but a living hell for thousands of people.'²⁹⁵ 'Little Siberia' was apparently 'a prison' or a 'living tomb', moving to the area 'a fate worse than death' – a testament to deteriorating perceptions of the new housing estates in the early 1970s.²⁹⁶ This was an image of the suburban which spoke more to Nevill and Lansdowne's childhood experiences (and not those of Reid, who grew up in Shirley) and which, like the punk movement that *Suburban Press* and Reid would heavily influence, 'tapped into the frustrations of a displaced working class reimagining an urbanity lost through family relocation'.²⁹⁷ Whilst other London suburbs, including in Croydon, did conform more closely to the middle-class stereotypes established in the first chapter, New Addington, the product of frustrating compromises associated with towns like Coventry, could be depicted as a working-class area to be liberated in a quasi-Maoist surrounding of the dying cities.

²⁹¹ *The Street Sheet*, no.1 (1972), p.1.

²⁹² *Suburban Press*, no.4 (undated); 'Dumping ground for working class,' *Time Out*, no.112 (1972), p.9; Reid & Savage, *Up They Rise*, p.45.

²⁹³ UNEF Strasbourg, *On the Poverty of Student Life* (1966), <http://library.nothingness.org/articles/SI/en/display/140>, accessed 2nd November 2021; Ross & Lefebvre, 'Lefebvre on the Situationists,' p.81.

²⁹⁴ *Suburban Press*, no.4 (undated), p.3.

²⁹⁵ *Suburban Press*, no.4 (undated), p.2; 'Dumping ground for working class,' *Time Out*, no.112 (1972), p.9.

²⁹⁶ *Suburban Press*, no.4 (undated), pp.6-8. For a discussion of these changing perceptions and their causes, see: Boughton, *Municipal Dreams*, pp.139-168; Jones, *The working class in mid-twentieth-century England*, pp.104-108.

²⁹⁷ M. Worley, *No Future: Punk, Politics and British Youth Culture, 1976-1984* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p.122.

Yet it is neither its depictions of leafy suburban streets nor the New Addington *banlieue* for which *Suburban Press* is most well-known. Like his work in art school, Reid's *Suburban Press* was littered with images of the new Croydon where 'commerce and finance overshadowed all else', its office blocks 'the perfect canvass for situationist slogans, radical gestures and the stylistic refusals of punk.'²⁹⁸ They launched 'a full-blown assault on the destruction of communities and the rise of business enterprise and real estate in their place.'²⁹⁹ One repeated image was a lizard-like monster marching past the new skyscrapers, accompanied by the Captain Beefheart lyrics, 'and I'll keep rumbling through your petrified forest' – the 'natural space' of the town centre frozen in time and then destroyed.³⁰⁰ *Suburban Press* emphasised Croydon's suburbanity whilst its town centre was becoming increasingly metropolitan, revealing a specific understanding of the claim that 'the city is dying': not only replaced by the suburbs, but suburbanised in its centre.³⁰¹ They argued, citing Guy Debord but echoing his mentor Lefebvre as well as Lewis Mumford and Marshall McLuhan, that the suburban was not 'a geographical location (the area surrounding the urban city), it is a state of mind' – 'rampant in groovy, revolutionary Nottinghill [sic] flats as well as semi-detached Purley.'³⁰² Reid drew upon his experience of the ways that radical politics could be incorporated and suburbanised – *Suburban Press* even lambasted the squatting movements as 'a sterile branch of the council'.³⁰³ If Reid was interested in 'explor[ing] the darker side of suburban living', then it was not simply because the suburban offered more than the urban as a site of struggle, but because the city centre, whether in London or Croydon, could now be seen as more suburban than the suburbs.³⁰⁴ This was a vision of Croydon as part of a sprawling

²⁹⁸ Back, 'So... fucking Croydon.'

²⁹⁹ Maguire, *Shamanarchy*, p.154; 'Croydon's Suburban Press and the "grave-yard of commerce",' *Recovering the Regional Radical Press in Britain 1968-88* (30th June 2019), <https://radpresshistory.wordpress.com/2019/06/30/croydons-suburban-press-and-the-graveyard-of-commerce/>, accessed 2nd November 2021.

³⁰⁰ *Suburban Press*, no.3 (undated), p.1.

³⁰¹ *Suburban Press*, no.3 (undated), pp.5-8.

³⁰² *Suburban Press*, no.2 (undated), p.1. Lefebvre had argued 'the city endures, but only as museum and as spectacle' – the urban 'deteriorating and perhaps disappearing' as the world urbanised: H. Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2003), p.113 & p.170; H. Lefebvre, 'Dissolving city, planetary metamorphosis,' *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol.32 (2014), pp.203-205, p.204.

³⁰³ *Suburban Press*, no.1 (undated), p.4.

³⁰⁴ Maguire, *Shamanarchy*, p.153.

metropolis, a segregated and sterile part of a new Los Angeles, a symbol for the stagnant suburban mindset and the suburban Britain with which *Suburban Press* sought to break.

If the previous section culminated in the crisis year of 1968, then this section has traced the types of politics which were to emerge from it, as young left-wing activists made sense of themselves in a changing world and a changing Croydon. As Hughes explained, 'the period 1969-71 heralded a transition when the "new politics" began to transform cultural, social and emotional life inside the extra-parliamentary Left.'³⁰⁵ The emergent politics, in some ways a retrieval of an older suburban progressivism, found a home in the Young Liberals and to an even greater extent within an underground, countercultural scene which was exploring new ways of being and new intersections. Comparing their own situations to those of people in Paris, China, and above all the United States, these activists found a different way of understanding Croydon as American: not only as a symbol of capitalist dystopia, but as a source of examples of movements for liberation. Though fleeting, the young activists, and *Suburban Press* in particular, formulated a novel and imaginative politics which forged bonds of solidarity between disparate groups with differing experiences of oppression – bonds that they understood through their resentment at an increasingly universal suburban 'state of mind'. To understand the development of the suburban mentality which the underground press surveyed with such disdain, however, and their situation in Croydon in the 1970s, it is necessary to reflect on later developments within the suburban reaction described in this chapter's second section – and the (ultimately unsuccessful) subsumption of the politics of the 'third New Left' into a Labour Party partially renewed after the defeats of 1968.

Return to Selsdon Park

This initially contributed to a brief early 1970s resurgence for the Labour Party, and success in campaigns against developments in London catapulted Croydon activists to the centre of capital-wide campaigns. As the *Suburban Press* analysis implied, however, the hopefulness represented by

³⁰⁵ Hughes, *Young Lives on the Left*, p.144.

Croydon's modernisation and metropolitanisation, and the comparisons to the United States, pushed to an extreme, were to be 'reversed' (to take another of McLuhan's terms) into something more 'Los Angeles' than 'Manhattan': 'the breakdown of centralism'.³⁰⁶ As activists found, for all the opportunities which the new politics offered, it was not only left-wing politicians who could respond to them – and the new intersections were as likely to lead to collision as exchange. By the mid-1970s, many of the critiques of the post-war consensus that groups like *Suburban Press* had provided were being taken up by figures closer to the Conservative Party, as the critique of Croydon's American-ness provided material for those anxious about the demographic change and social upheaval which the United States represented. With the addition of conscious efforts by right-wing politicians in Croydon to cultivate suburban racism, as well as another negative experience of Labour in government nationally, the successes which left-wing activists had made in the 1960s and earlier 1970s were rolled back, as the ground was prepared for the construction of a new consensus and Margaret Thatcher's 1979 victory.

This chapter has predominantly focused upon the multiple interlocking crises confronting the left in the 1960s, and the consequences of disillusionment and division for 1968 and after. At the same time, however, this left was confronted by a mounting reactionary backlash which went beyond the mere addition of Purley and Coulsdon to the borough in 1965. Amidst this reactionary ferment, Selsdon, over twenty years after the meeting of socialist parties discussed in the previous chapter, 'entered the national political lexicon.'³⁰⁷ In January 1970, the Leader of the Opposition, Edward Heath, convened a meeting at the Selsdon Park Hotel to discuss his manifesto for the upcoming general election – a meeting so emblematic of the Conservatives' rightwards shift that they returned to the hotel in 2001 to signal a move in the opposite direction.³⁰⁸ Influenced by the success of the Nixon-Agnew campaign in the United States, the meeting's proposals combined an emphasis on 'law-and-order' with 'abrasive measures, tied to the strict discipline of the market mechanism, [...] for the shake-up and shake-out of British

³⁰⁶ McLuhan & Powers, *The Global Village*, p.10 & p.172.

³⁰⁷ White, 'Political Croydon: The Seventies.'

³⁰⁸ P. Obone, 'Back to the middle way,' *The Guardian* (17th June 2001), <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2001/jun/17/conservatives.uk2>, accessed 26th July 2021.

industry – coupled, of course, with a promise of tough action to curb the power of the unions and to bring the unofficial strike to a dead halt.³⁰⁹ Heath (who visited Croydon immediately prior to the election, speaking at Waddon’s Heath Clark School) was lambasted by Wilson for appealing to ‘Selsdon Man’ and ‘an atavistic desire to reverse the course of twenty-five years of social revolution’.³¹⁰ Although the result in 1970 was partly down to disillusionment amongst Labour supporters, not least amongst the newly-enfranchised young, Heath succeeded in winning the support of a suburban middle class which had been wavering in the mid-1960s; Winnick lost in Croydon Central, and Heath formed a majority government. Patrick Diamond has argued that it was an election result which left ‘many members shellshocked’ after six years in office: ‘The great hopes of a “New Britain” were dashed.’³¹¹

However, the election defeats of 1968 (locally) and 1970 (nationally) did allow for a period of reflection and renewal after the crises and conflicts of the 1960s – and both the New Left and the changing Croydon were beginning to have consequences for electoral politics. By 1971, Iain McNay, then an accountant for an American film company, had broken with the Young Liberals and was running as an independent ‘Libertarian Socialist’ candidate in the local elections, on a platform which included banning cars from central Croydon.³¹² Many of the socialists from the Young Liberals’ ‘Red Guard’ phase, however, were to enter the Labour Party – including White after studying at Oxford, returning to a Croydon where the left-wing Winnick was still an MP.³¹³ Indeed, the loss of all-but-one of its councillors had led to Labour forming a ‘shadow group’ of ordinary members to discuss local policy.³¹⁴ In 1971, Labour came ‘within a hair’s breadth of seizing power’, having ‘cleaned the slate of their 1968 defeats – and more’, with their highest ever

³⁰⁹ Hall et al, *Policing the Crisis*, p.274.

³¹⁰ White, ‘Political Croydon: The Seventies’; P. Clarke, ‘Tale from a Silver Age,’ *London Review of Books*, vol.15, no.14 (22nd July 1993), <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v15/n14/peter-clarke/tale-from-a-silver-age>, accessed 15th November 2021.

³¹¹ P. Diamond, ‘Crosland in the seventies: Revisionist social democracy in a cold climate,’ pp.95-115, in Yeowell (ed.), *Rethinking Labour’s Past*, pp.98-99.

³¹² V. Hurst, C. Deans, I. McNay & V. Anderson, ‘The result of a kidnapping,’ *Croydon Advertiser* (5th February 1971), p.12; ‘Census protests,’ *Croydon Advertiser* (23rd April 1971), p.1; ‘Census burner seeks council seat,’ *Croydon Advertiser* (30th April 1971), p.7; ‘Thornton Heath,’ *Croydon Advertiser* (7th May 1971), p.32; ‘Independents and Others,’ *Croydon Advertiser* (7th May 1971), p.29.

³¹³ Hellyer, ‘The Young Liberals and the Left,’ p.61; Fox, ‘Young Liberal Influence and its Effects,’ pp.16-18, p.16; Interview with David White.

³¹⁴ MC, A845.

return: 27 councillors.³¹⁵ Only seven had prior experience of local government, and one of those was Burgos; newly elected were Peter Walker, Anna Usher (a 27-year-old air stewardess 'in a see-through crochet dress with a very body-pink lining underneath'), Mary Curson (a teacher who caused controversy by wearing hot pants to the count), Susan Lord (the secretary of Croydon Humanist Group and a playgroup manager), Bryn Davies (later a councillor in Lambeth, left-wing member of the GLC, and a Corbyn appointment to the House of Lords) and Amrit Devesar – Croydon's first Asian councillor.³¹⁶ It was a Labour Group markedly different to that which dominated the earlier post-war period, and the council leadership found it much more difficult to bring them to heel.³¹⁷ Protesting the council's machinations to prevent the election of Stanley Boden as alderman, White (then secretary of Croydon Central YS) organised a boycott of a mayoral dinner.³¹⁸ Although the Labour Group remained out of power, the party locally had been recomposed through the entrance of some of the new types of politics which had been generated in the aftermath of 1968, producing a party more willing to confront Croydon's establishment and the redevelopment underway in the centre of the town.

One of the redevelopment's most controversial aspects was the construction of motorways, requiring the destruction of parts of the town centre as well as representing suburban sprawl and the dominance of the car.³¹⁹ Labour had lost control of the GLC in 1967, and failed to retake it in 1970 in an election notable for the 'Homes before Roads' campaign against the London Ringways scheme, which Labour had originally commissioned and then supported, along with the

³¹⁵ 'Labour pipped in council voting shock,' *Croydon Advertiser* (14th May 1971), p.1.

³¹⁶ Saunders, *Urban Politics*, p.227; Interview with Peter Walker; Interview with David White; 'The election line-up starts to take shape,' *Croydon Advertiser* (8th January 1971), p.3; 'Council's first Indian – and an air hostess is elected,' *Croydon Advertiser* (21st May 1971), p.21; H. Williamson, 'Family of Croydon's first Asian councillor Amrit Devesar pay tribute to "inspirational man",' *Croydon Guardian* (10th January 2013),

https://www.yourlocalguardian.co.uk/news/croydonnews/10153831.Family_of_Croydon_s_first_Asian_councillor_pay_tribute_to_inspirational_man/, accessed 19th November 2018. Compare the remarks on the newly-elected women councillors' clothing to Angela Carter's discussion of 'Sixties Style': 'Clothes are our weapons, our challenges, our visible insults.' Carter, *Shaking a Leg*, pp.131-135.

³¹⁷ Saunders, *Urban Politics*, p.227.

³¹⁸ 'Reflections on council elections,' *Croydon Advertiser* (28th May 1971), p.12; 'In defence of anti-banquet demo,' *Croydon Advertiser* (4th June 1971), p.11.

³¹⁹ 'Dumping ground for working class,' *Time Out*, no.112 (1972), p.9.

Conservatives, on the GLC.³²⁰ There were grumblings within the party, and the 1970 defeat meant a reassessment; in 1971, Robert Irwin, standing unsuccessfully in Norbury, one of the main places impacted by the proposals, had argued that he wanted the area 'to be a pleasant place to live in not a name on a motorway route'.³²¹ By 1973, Peter Walker had been appointed to write the London Labour Party's GLC manifesto, which committed to scrapping the motorway scheme and introducing free fares for the elderly; after Labour swept the elections, he became the first open political appointment in British local government, running Reg Goodwin's office as Leader of the GLC until 1977.³²² With parliamentary constituencies used for the first time in GLC elections, Labour won three seats (before David Simpson's win in Croydon North East was controversially overturned in favour of the Conservative candidate, Gladys Morgan) including White in Croydon Central.³²³ The party seemed to have benefited from rising opposition to London's potential resemblance to Los Angeles, 'a city believed to be cribbed by expressways and smothered by smog.'³²⁴

Although he had joined the party only relatively recently, and was aged just 23, White quickly made his reputation as a campaigner against road construction and for better housing.³²⁵ There was controversy in Waddon, where he lived, around the construction of Roman Way by 'road-mad Croydon council', with three lanes in each direction; whilst their campaign for a footbridge was unsuccessful, White and other campaigners did succeed in getting a surface-level crossing and then, when Labour returned to power nationally in 1974, had the road narrowed, something virtually unprecedented for one so recently constructed.³²⁶ They also managed to stop the extension of the town's ring road – linking Roman Way and the Flyover to Wellesley Road – after control of the decision passed from Croydon to the GLC.³²⁷ At one point, Tagg recalled, the

³²⁰ Interview with Peter Walker. For a discussion of the origins of the London Ringways scheme, see: Davis, *Waterloo Sunrise*, pp.161-166.

³²¹ 'Norbury,' *Croydon Advertiser* (7th May 1971), p.30. John Davis that Labour began to distance itself from the scheme in 1969: Davis, *Waterloo Sunrise*, p.168.

³²² Interview with Peter Walker.

³²³ Interview with Jean Tagg; Interview with David White.

³²⁴ Davis, *Waterloo Sunrise*, p.172.

³²⁵ Interview with Jean Tagg; Interview with Jerry Fitzpatrick.

³²⁶ Interview with David White.

³²⁷ Interview with David White.

Mayor of Croydon had to intervene at a protest in the town hall when the police looked like they were about to arrest White, who told *Time Out* that local people's 'politicisation' was the major gain.³²⁸ As a councillor on the GLC, and advancing an eminently suburban progressivism, White ensured that 'people have some defensible space, a garden for kids to play in as well as a house', as well as stopping the GLC from purchasing South African produce and, as vice-chair of the public services committee, pushing for a lax approach to entertainments licensing.³²⁹ He became increasingly involved with Militant, with Peter Taaffe and Ted Grant paying visits to YS meetings in Croydon in the early 1970s, as well as the group around Ken Livingstone on the GLC.³³⁰ Both Walker and White, in their respective involvements with the GLC, signalled the influence of the New Left within the Labour Party of the 1970s, and successfully linked this new politics to an expansive opposition to road construction across London – although John Davis notes that the GLC result in 1973 had more to do with 'a Conservative government at Westminster [...] beset by growing economic problems.'³³¹

It was the Heath government's difficulties with the trade unions which ultimately spelled its downfall, and for which he has primarily been remembered. The struggles with the miners, which led to a three-day week in 1974, are prominent in popular memory, and *Suburban Press* produced a sticker ('switch on something for the miners') that the National Union of Mineworkers rejected but paid for; *Street Sheet* delighted in declaring that 'You don't need to see in the dark to know who you're screwing!'³³² In 1969, the Fairfield Halls had hosted a Special Congress of the TUC in opposition to Barbara Castle's White Paper, *In Place of Strife* – a meeting which one speaker described as 'the opening day of the second century of the Trade

³²⁸ Interview with Jean Tagg; 'Labour Left: "The lesser evil"', *Time Out* (undated), p.9, in David White's personal papers.

³²⁹ Interview with David White; D. White, 'Political Croydon: The Seventies,' *Croydon Citizen* (4th June 2014), <https://web.archive.org/web/20180928212507/https://thecroydoncitizen.com/history/political-croydon-seventies/>, accessed 1st December 2020. Note the critical discussion of the concept of 'defensible space', originating with the American architect Oscar Newman in 1972 and subsequently taken up by the 'Thatcherite' Alice Coleman, in: Boughton, *Municipal Dreams*, pp.178-184.

³³⁰ Interview with David White; Waddon Labour Party newsletter, in David White's personal papers.

³³¹ Davis, *Waterloo Sunrise*, p.180.

³³² Reid & Savage, *Up They Rise*, p.44; *Street Sheet*, no.3 (undated), p.10.

Union Congress.³³³ Two years later, Heath brought forward new proposals, with an Industrial Relations Act intended to discipline an increasingly combative rank-and-file.³³⁴ As that was going on, there was a major nationwide Post Office strike – David Percival, alongside Don Failes (the son of an elected leader of the union in Glasgow) as secretary, was a ‘leading light’ locally and soon elected as chair of a ‘big branch’ covering multiple boroughs, with over 2,500 members in Croydon alone and further members in Sutton.³³⁵ Croydon was still seen as an unusual place to hold a TUC meeting – the *Advertiser* reflected on the absurdity with a cartoon depicting a ‘delegate’ in the hall for ‘East Surrey Symphony Orchestra’.³³⁶ Yet there were also signs that the trade union militancy which was sweeping the country was being felt, too, in Croydon: the SLL-controlled trades council even established a ‘Council of Action’ with support from the YS and IS, calling for a general strike and a Labour government.³³⁷ This was the context in which *Suburban Press* declared that ‘the workers strike still has the maximum effect on the establishment, apart from blowing the bastards to pieces.’³³⁸ Many of my narrators – and New Left activists more generally – entered adulthood and the workforce at a time of escalating industrial militancy, and amidst a turn to the workplace by organisations such as IS and the IMG.³³⁹

Historians such as Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite have pointed to the industrial action of the early 1970s as a marker not (or not only) of class consciousness, but the growing individual aspirations connected to the decline of deference, with unions still seen as ‘often the best way of advancing a worker’s interests (personal and/or familial).’³⁴⁰ Croydon is a useful example of some of the challenges and contradictions which this industrial militancy could face. At the Special Congress at the Fairfield Halls in March 1971, TUC delegates ‘strongly advised’ unions not to register

³³³ R. Taylor, *The TUC: From the General Strike to New Unionism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), p.178; Trades Union Congress, *Report of the TUC General Council to a Special Trades Union Congress, Fairfield Hall, Croydon, June 5 1969* (1969), p.25. Some recent Labour commentators have lamented the failure of this attempt ‘to re-centralize and rationalize power in the industrial relations system’: O’Hara, ‘The fall and rise of Harold Wilson,’ pp.85–86.

³³⁴ S. Warner, ‘(Re)politicising ‘the governmental’: Resisting the Industrial Relations Act 1971,’ *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, vol.21, no.3 (2019), pp.541–558.

³³⁵ Interview with David Percival.

³³⁶ N. Watson, ‘T.U.C.,’ *Croydon Advertiser* (26th March 1971), p.15.

³³⁷ ‘Croydon trade unionists set up Council of Action,’ *Workers Press*, no.821 (19th July 1972), p.3.

³³⁸ *Suburban Press*, no.1 (undated), p.2.

³³⁹ Hughes, *Young Lives on the Left*, p.184 & pp.228–251.

³⁴⁰ Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, *Class, Politics, and the Decline of Deference*, pp.27–32.

under the provisions of the Act; however, a left-wing motion to 'instruct' unions to deregister was defeated by 5,055,000 to 4,284,000, and this set the tone for the limited opposition which many affiliated unions offered in the subsequent year.³⁴¹ Unions which might be regarded as typical of Croydon proved decisive in the defeat of the left-wing motion; the National Union of Teachers (NUT) and the National and Local Government Officers' Association (NALGO) – affiliated to the TUC in 1969 and 1964 respectively – had supported re-registration.³⁴² Indeed, whilst the TUC was meeting at the Fairfield Halls, the local hospitals' branch of NALGO announced its support for the bill and attacked their NEC for donating £5,000 to the ongoing Post Office strike.³⁴³ Similarly, the branch secretary of the National Union of Public Employees (NUPE) 'thought striking was made too easy' through supplementary benefits, contrasting the 1970s to the general strike, when they 'didn't cry on somebody's shoulder'.³⁴⁴ Whilst the strike was well-supported by the postal union, the *Advertiser's* coverage indicated the tensions, and misogyny, which it exposed: the secretary to the NLA's managing director was pictured on the frontpage, wearing hotpants and white knee-high boots, as a 'new-look postal worker', 'one of the many office workers who have been delivering letters as well as typing them.'³⁴⁵ If Croydon had hosted some of the early struggles around trade unionism which peppered the new decade, it was also a symbol of the challenges which trade unions were facing in organising workers, and especially women, in the new offices and the public sector.³⁴⁶

Similarly, one of the most significant consequences of the changing philosophies within the Conservative Party was the 1972 Housing Finance Act, which reduced council housing subsidies and increased rents.³⁴⁷ The council had already increased rents in 1970, and this chapter has described the tenor of campaigning on the estates through the 1960s; White's motion to Waddon

³⁴¹ Taylor, *The TUC*, pp.193-194.

³⁴² Trades Union Council, *Report of the Special Trades Union Congress 1971* (1971), p.44.

³⁴³ 'NALGO branch "disgust" over P.O. £5,000,' *Croydon Advertiser* (26th March 1971), p.12; Interview with David Percival.

³⁴⁴ 'Are the strikers featherbedded?' *Croydon Advertiser* (2nd April 1971), p.2.

³⁴⁵ *Croydon Advertiser* (12th February 1971), p.1

³⁴⁶ 'After Croydon,' *The Worker* (April 1971), p.1 & p.4.

³⁴⁷ For discussions of the 1972 Housing Finance Act, see: Boughton, *Municipal Dreams*, p.167; Davis, *Waterloo Sunrise*, pp.380-381.

branch opposing the Housing Finance Act was, unsurprisingly, carried unanimously.³⁴⁸ As a 1973 pamphlet by Croydon CPGB recorded, the Conservatives were 'frank and quite unable to contain their glee' over council house sales (132 in 1972, with only 144 constructed – the numbers low because council housing had never been widespread in Croydon) in a borough with 2,871 on the housing waiting list and the third least council houses being built in London.³⁴⁹ Council house sales – and the famous 'Right to Buy' – remain one of the biggest complaints amongst left-wing activists looking back on the period, and the Labour Group opposed them when they were announced in 1971, with *Suburban Press* highlighting that they undermined solidarity amongst tenants.³⁵⁰

However, the sales occurred at a time when, due to government and council policy, the experiences of council tenants were becoming worse. Despite reservations, Tagg and her husband eventually purchased their council house, having faced 'disrespect' from council employees who treated them like 'sub-humans', and after being told by their local Conservative councillor that they didn't have a say, as tenants, on the chopping down of local woodland.³⁵¹ Lansdowne's *Community Press* angrily asked why the council was delaying sales, complaining that the Conservative government's 'financial help to councils selling their homes' was not enough to persuade 'Taberner House to open its doors just a little.'³⁵² The very next page – in an issue which continued to highlight the struggle of Angela Davis – criticised the increase of rents, but above all *Community Press*' perspective was that 'it is everybody's right to have a decent home regardless of financial status.'³⁵³ Just as Nevill and Lansdowne had repurposed the latter's council flat, *Community Press* was quite happy to support the appropriation (through sale to tenants) of public housing in order to meet this right. Even Croydon CPGB, critical of mortgages, had complained owner-occupation was declining; in the 1960s, a left-wing member of the YS had

³⁴⁸ Waddon Labour Party newsletter, in David White's personal papers; Croydon, Museum of Croydon, uncatalogued minute book of Waddon Ward Labour Party (1971-79).

³⁴⁹ London, Marx Memorial Library, YAOI.06/HOU.

³⁵⁰ Interview with Peter Walker; Saunders, *Urban Politics*, p.281; *Suburban Press*, no.4 (undated), p.4. For a discussion of the origins of 'Right to Buy', see: Boughton, *Municipal Dreams*, pp.169-170.

³⁵¹ Interview with Jean Tagg.

³⁵² 'House for sale?', *Community Press*, no.1 (undated), p.3.

³⁵³ "'Fair" Rents or Not so fair?', *Community Press*, no.1 (undated), p.4.

written to the *Advertiser* calling for a Labour-controlled GLC 'pledged to increase the present L.C.C. 100 per cent mortgage scheme (without a means test)'.³⁵⁴ As a consequence, whilst left-wing activists offered opposition to the Housing Finance Act, and many opposed the sales, the Conservatives' efforts to increase home-ownership were experienced as a means of alleviating the disappointments of council housing in the 1970s, consistent with the policies of both major parties in the post-war period. Even one of *Suburban Press*' complaints – that the council had turned down a property developer offering to build amenities in New Addington in 1966 – is indicative of the flexible attitude of left-wing activists towards private development, in the context of suspicions about the local state.³⁵⁵ In what Guy Ortolano has christened a 'property-owning social democracy', and given the suburban political subjectivities whose formation was described in the previous two chapters, promotion of home-ownership through sales and private construction appealed to both frustrated council tenants and to the kind of disappointed post-1968 activist needled in Joannou's poem, for whom an allotment was an acceptable kind of beauty.³⁵⁶

The new housing policies exacerbated existing processes of racialised residualisation.³⁵⁷ From at least the 1950s, competition over housing had been an important driver of anti-immigrant feeling as, in Rachel Yemm's words, 'the white British public felt a strong sense of entitlement which fed into a privileged understanding [of] who was and was not entitled to receive council housing.'³⁵⁸ Jean Tagg, whose husband was Asian, received NF leaflets through her door when they moved to Waddon in the 1970s, as the far-right nurtured resentments about the estates' changing demographics.³⁵⁹ As Robyn Muncy has shown in the United States, the language of 'class' was increasingly used to ascribe racism to (in Jerry Fitzpatrick's words) the 'white working class, more

³⁵⁴ MML, YAOI.06/HOU; 'New offices or more homes?' *Croydon Advertiser* (10th April 1964), p.10.

³⁵⁵ *Suburban Press*, no.4 (undated), p.8.

³⁵⁶ Ortolano, *Thatcher's Progress*, p.217; *Peace News* (28th January 1977), p.13.

³⁵⁷ Wetherell, *Foundations*, pp.93-106; Boughton, *Municipal Dreams*, pp.211-212.

³⁵⁸ R. Yemm, 'Immigration, race and local media: Smethwick and the 1964 general election,' *Contemporary British History*, vol.33, no.1 (2019), pp.98-122, p.103; Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, p.96.

³⁵⁹ Interview with Jean Tagg. Compare to similar moves by the far right in Slough: J. Barlow & M. Savage, 'The politics of growth: cleavage and conflict in a Tory heartland,' *Capital & Class*, vol.10, no.3 (1986), pp.156-182, p.173.

lumpen white sections of society', and to council estates which have received the 'BNP heartland descriptor'.³⁶⁰ Whilst those labels are often unwarranted, Labour did face increasing problems in areas like Waddon, where one local member defected to 'the racist National Party' amidst declining membership on the estates; by 1989 an inquiry by the party highlighted the weakening support of white British people in the ward as a major concern.³⁶¹ Over the next decades, White Power bands such as the Croydon Criminals 'made a direct connection between working-classness, suburban rebellion and racism' as Croydon 'became a kind of urban frontier for the defenders of racially exclusive Englishness.'³⁶² Yet Conservative councils also played their part in ensuring a racist understanding of problems with housing. After its infamous by-election in 1964, Smethwick's right-wing Conservative council had even put forward a 'Marshall Plan' to fund 'White only' housing on the town's Marshall Street.³⁶³ When she became a governor at a school in Waddon, one Conservative councillor complained to Tagg that 'we've got these *immigrants* moved into Stafford Road', remarking 'all these Black kids in the classroom, it's a bit whiffy, I expect' – not realising that 'that was *me*, and my kids', with one of her sons chased and called 'paki'.³⁶⁴ The council was unreceptive to the attempts by Tagg and others to have the racist children's book *Little Black Sambo* removed from school libraries.³⁶⁵ As these examples indicate, both the NF and the Conservatives were instrumental in encouraging a racist response to immigrants moving into council estates in the 1970s, ensuring that problems with housing were interpreted as the outcome of racial competition rather than changes in the government's or council's housing policies. A 'produced difference' had been replaced in Lefebvrian terms by a suburban, segregating, 'induced difference', incorporated and 'brought under the control of a dominant power'.³⁶⁶

³⁶⁰ R. Muncy, 'The Strange Career of "the Working Class" in US Political Culture Since the 1950s,' *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas*, vol.15, no.4 (2018), pp.37-58; Interview with Jerry Fitzpatrick; Clapson, *Working-class suburb*, pp.230-231.

³⁶¹ MC, uncatalogued minute book of Waddon Ward Labour Party (1971-79); Croydon, Museum of Croydon, uncatalogued papers of Croydon Labour Party.

³⁶² Back, 'So... fucking Croydon.'

³⁶³ Perry, *London is the Place for Me*, p.194.

³⁶⁴ Interview with Jean Tagg.

³⁶⁵ Interview with Jean Tagg.

³⁶⁶ Shmueli, 'Totality, hegemony, difference,' p.223.

This interpenetration of far-right and Conservative narratives of the changing Croydon needs to be stressed. Although Chesterton (who resigned as chair of the NF in 1970) and Powell had not seen eye-to-eye, the NF and Powell had a symbiotic relationship, with 50 far-right activists turning out to defend him on his visit to the Croydon North West Conservative Association in 1971.³⁶⁷ Comparing government expenditure to 'the gradual build-up of poisons in the countryside', Powell connected public austerity (and opposition to inflation) and restrictive immigration policies, as well as the changing landscape of Britain.³⁶⁸ Meanwhile, the apparently American skyline of the new Croydon had become a cypher for a complex of concerns about demographic change, consumer culture, and the decline of Britain's empire. As the *Sunday Times* had declared in 1969, quoted in *Policing the Crisis* (arguably the most important and prescient discussion of this trend), New York City was now being imagined not only as 'the science fiction metropolis of the future' but 'the cancer capital, a laboratory where all the splendours and miseries of the new age are being tried out in experimental form'.³⁶⁹ Whilst Heath rowed back on the commitments made at Selsdon Park, with Powell eventually endorsing Labour and subsequently defecting to the Ulster Unionists, the Selsdon Group (formed at the same location in 1973) took up the cause, with a speech from Nicholas Ridley which berated the 'Defeatists' and declared its intention 'to secure that free market conditions prevail to the greatest possible extent in the economy, providing the maximum choice of goods and services for all citizens.'³⁷⁰ This heady combination of free-market and 'law-and-order' rhetoric, nurtured by Powell and the NF and then pressed for within the Conservatives by the Selsdon Group, would have significant consequences in Croydon and nationally.

The Conservatives and NF pushed these interpretations at a moment when Labour was especially prominent, with the party in government nationally from 1974 (despite another defeat for

³⁶⁷ 'Enoch misses demos,' *Croydon Advertiser* (23rd April 1971), p.1.

³⁶⁸ 'Politicians spend too much says Mr Powell,' *Croydon Advertiser* (30th April 1971), p.7.

³⁶⁹ Hall et al, *Policing the Crisis*, p.18.

³⁷⁰ N. Ridley, 'Conservatism: Nicholas Ridley speech at Selsdon Park (launch of Selsdon Group),' *Margaret Thatcher Foundation* (19th September 1973), <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/110861>, accessed 15th November 2021. For a discussion of Powell and Powellism in this period, including the pressure exerted on the Conservative Party, see: Schofield, *Enoch Powell and the Making of Postcolonial Britain*, pp.264-318.

Winnick in the October general election), a reasonably strong Labour Group on the council (although the number of councillors dropped to 17 in the same year), and half of Croydon's representation on the GLC. Just as in the 1960s, this success meant that Labour locally was blamed for the increasing problems which the Wilson and James Callaghan governments encountered, especially after the multiple crises of 1976, which again favoured an interpretation that held the United States and new youth cultures (in this case punk and reggae) responsible. Whilst more recent historiography has questioned them, 'hegemonic memories and popular representations of the seventies have become a by-word for all that was worst about postwar Britain.'³⁷¹ In the early-to-mid-1970s, most local Labour members had been united in opposition to the European Economic Community, but defeat in the 1975 referendum was a reminder of their isolation; White commented that he knew they had lost because 'when we arrived in Fieldway we met a group of Labour Party members who had just voted and they told us they'd voted "Yes".'³⁷² In 1977, both Labour representatives to the GLC lost their seats in a campaign marked by tensions between White and the London party.³⁷³ The same year was punctuated by two other major losses for the local party; in May, the old stalwart of socialism in Waddon, Burgos, passed away, and his branch established the Vit Burgos Waddon Memorial Fund to purchase a bench dedicated to his memory.³⁷⁴ Meanwhile, Prentice (an MP in Newham, where he was deselected in 1975) crossed the floor, joining the Conservatives; the secretary of his new party's London region welcomed him with a note stating that he, too, had studied at Whitgift.³⁷⁵ Political journalists descended on Croydon, trying to find him, but he 'was secretly based for the weekend at the Selsdon Park hotel, a matter of minutes from his Croydon home.'³⁷⁶ According to his biographer, Thatcher – now Prentice's party leader – 'clearly hoped that her most significant Labour convert would emerge from the same destination [as the 1970 manifesto meeting] to help

³⁷¹ L. Black & H. Pemberton, 'Introduction: The benighted decade? Reassessing the 1970s,' pp.1-24, in L. Black, H. Pemberton & P. Thane (eds.), *Reassessing 1970s Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), p.9.

³⁷² White, 'Political Croydon: The Seventies'; Waddon Labour Party newsletter, in David White's personal papers.

³⁷³ Waddon Labour Party newsletter, in David White's personal papers.

³⁷⁴ MC, uncatalogued minute book of Waddon Ward Labour Party (1971-79). The bench can now be found in the garden of Ruskin House.

³⁷⁵ London, British Library of Political and Economic Science, PRENTICE/4/1.

³⁷⁶ Horn, *Crossing the floor*, p.195.

play an important role in securing another general election victory for the Conservatives.³⁷⁷ White, standing unsuccessfully for the GLC, pointed out to *Time Out* 'the mock Tudor residences of Bishops Avenue, where he won't bother to canvass, and the semi-detached suburb where Reg Prentice lives.'³⁷⁸ In 1978, Labour's representation on an enlarged 70-strong council dropped to 11, with losses in Addiscombe, Waddon and Woodside; Labour had been criticised in its submissions to the local boundary review for garnering 'little external support' and not paying 'due regard to the community of interest'.³⁷⁹ With the loss or reversal of many of the limited advantages which they had acquired in the post-war period, Labour found itself – after two decades where they had come within touching distance of power on multiple occasions – unable to speak on behalf of even its old strongholds.

This was the context for the 1979 election in Croydon, which felt 'thrust on' local activists after a motion of no confidence in Callaghan.³⁸⁰ With Boden (a candidate since 1970) and David Simpson standing in the two northern seats, the campaign to get the most attention was that of White, in Croydon Central, the only seat that Labour had ever won and where the Conservatives had just a 164 majority. Facing John Moore, an MP since 1974 with an American wife and experience as a Democratic Party organiser in the 1960s, the ideological clash between the two could hardly be more obvious – although they had worked together on some roads campaigning earlier in the decade.³⁸¹ White had won the selection a few years earlier, in a process which involved a contentious meeting in Waddon because Burgos was also running.³⁸² Whilst still facing opposition from Peter Gibson for the WRP, White received the endorsement of Charlie Fraser from the New Communist Party (NCP), the Surrey-based breakaway from the CPGB which Sid French had formed in opposition to Eurocommunism in 1977.³⁸³ White was one of three candidates supported nationwide by Militant – alongside Cathy Wilson on the Isle of Wight and

³⁷⁷ Horn, *Crossing the floor*, p.195.

³⁷⁸ 'Labour Left: "The lesser evil"', *Time Out* (undated), p.9, in David White's personal papers.

³⁷⁹ Local Government Boundary Commission for England, *Report*, no.211 (1977), p.20.

³⁸⁰ Interview with David White.

³⁸¹ Interview with David White; White, 'Political Croydon: The Seventies.'

³⁸² Interview with Jean Tagg; MC, uncatalogued minute book of Waddon Ward Labour Party (1971-79); Interview with David White.

³⁸³ G. Pierce, 'Hitting the canvass,' *Punch* (2nd Mat 1979), pp.758-759, p.758.

Tony Mulhearn in Crosby.³⁸⁴ They ran an explicitly left-wing campaign, with appearances from Lawrence Daly and Neil Kinnock and a meeting of 200 people in New Addington which was addressed by Tony Benn.³⁸⁵ Militant emphasised the stakes of the election, with Croydon's council 'run by right-wing Thatcherites'; White argued they had 'seen on a smaller scale what a Tory government nationally would do.'³⁸⁶ Much of their campaign focused on New Addington, White a councillor for Fieldway since 1978 – remembering both the 'social problems' and the 'community spirit' of the area that he represented.³⁸⁷ Militant's portrayal of 'Little Siberia' drew upon arguments which had been made, earlier, by *Suburban Press* – it was 'the most isolated community in London' and there was 'not even a Wimpy bar!'³⁸⁸ As they argued, 'you don't have to live on New Addington long to find out what Tory rule means'.³⁸⁹ The 1979 election seemed the culmination of struggles which had been waged in Croydon across the decade – the former Young Liberal and roads campaigner White, standing as representative of 'Little Siberia', arraigned against the right-wing, American-connected Moore, on behalf of the occupants of Croydon's new privately-built houses.

White's campaign was not without its detractors. Militant's supporters in 1979 were mostly in the Young Socialists and from Wales or the north, and local activists were ill-prepared to deal with the numbers, with resentment about a 'takeover' by young people who seemed like an 'alien presence – or certainly an obvious non-Croydon presence.'³⁹⁰ White acknowledged that it had been a mistake, a week before the election, to have a meeting of Militant supporters from across the country – 'some of the soft left people who'd been very supportive came into Ruskin House that night and they didn't know about the meeting and they saw this going on and they felt rather excluded.'³⁹¹ The media launched a brutal 'red-scare and witch-hunt' campaign against White's

³⁸⁴ Interview with David White; J. Bulaitis, 'Fighting for Socialism,' *Militant*, no.451 (1979), p.2.

³⁸⁵ Interview with David White.

³⁸⁶ J. Bulaitis, 'Fighting for Socialism,' *Militant*, no.451 (1979), p.2.

³⁸⁷ Interview with David White.

³⁸⁸ 'What Tory Rule means in Croydon – Little Siberia,' *Militant*, no.453 (1979), p.6.

³⁸⁹ 'What Tory Rule means in Croydon – Little Siberia,' *Militant*, no.453 (1979), p.6.

³⁹⁰ Interview with David White; Interview with Jerry Fitzpatrick.

³⁹¹ Interview with David White.

candidacy, including one headline which described him as 'a worm in Labour's apple'.³⁹² *Punch's* coverage of the election described a 'harridan in her late twenties' with a copy of the *Sunday Express*, accusing White of being a 'Trotskyist'.³⁹³ Lockett, who had used his design training to improve White's leaflets, complained that 'people wouldn't climb out of the carapace of their political bigotries and vote for him'.³⁹⁴ Moreover, although White had cut his teeth in the AAM and pushed libertarian positions on the GLC, *Militant* was notable for its social conservatism and ignorance of social movements; with Labour running a male candidate in every constituency in Croydon, White found himself confronted by women on the doorstep who were excited about the prospects of electing a woman as Prime Minister.³⁹⁵ Whilst White insisted that he was using *Militant* as much as vice versa, the narrow focus on council estates like New Addington perhaps missed other potential sources of support – and, as Tagg remembered, there may have been some unfortunate misunderstandings when they marched on May Day with a big banner which said 'White'.³⁹⁶ With a 'mood of resignation' in the constituency and the country, and local canvassers unenthusiastic – 'two seduced by Kenny Everett and one under strict instruction to stay in because the wife might need the car' – it was no great surprise that the result was a disappointment, with Moore re-elected with a sizeable majority and Thatcher entering Downing Street on the back of victories 'in the outer-London suburbs and the South-East commuter belt'.³⁹⁷

Moore, a stockbroker from a working-class background, went on to be a critical part of Thatcher's cabinet, known as 'Mr Privatisation' and noted for his attacks on the 'loony left', and for a time considered a potential successor.³⁹⁸ White, after the stresses of the elections, 'really wanted to

³⁹² 'Croydon Central – Socialist Campaign Builds Labour Movement,' *Militant*, no.455 (1979), p.16; Interview with David White.

³⁹³ Interview with David White; G. Pierce, 'Hitting the canvass,' *Punch* (2nd Mat 1979), pp.758-759, p.758.

³⁹⁴ Interview with Roy Lockett.

³⁹⁵ Interview with David White; G. Willett, 'Something new under the sun: The revolutionary left and gay politics,' pp.173-189, in Smith & Worley (eds.), *Against the grain*; G. Pierce, 'Hitting the canvass,' *Punch* (2nd May 1979), pp.758-759, p.758.

³⁹⁶ Interview with David White; Interview with Jean Tagg.

³⁹⁷ 'Tory Government – Rich Win – Workers Lose,' *Militant*, no.454 (1979), p.1; G. Pierce, 'Hitting the canvass,' *Punch* (2nd Mat 1979), pp.758-759, p.758.

³⁹⁸ 'Lord Moore of Lower Marsh obituary,' *The Times* (22nd May 2019), <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/lord-moore-of-lower-marsh-obituary-xrp72xwdj>, accessed 29th July 2021.

move onto something else' – he departed from politics, working for fellow Labour member Arnold Simanowitz's law firm.³⁹⁹ In a sense, the hopes of the New Left after 1968 had been reversed: where, for groups like the Red Fist Movement, New Addington was the perfect site for a new intersectional suburban politics, by 1979 it was a last refuge where Labour was hemmed in and, with the growth of the NF and the politicisation of the 'white working class', under attack. A reactionary backlash against the Americanisation associated rhetorically with the young New Left activists and Croydon's physical redevelopment could, counterintuitively, be redirected into support for figures like Moore for whom the United States offered a different kind of neoliberal, suburban model. At the same time, the worst left-wing fears about Croydon's new metropolitan centre were coming to fruition, as the trade union movement found itself divided by the growth of white-collar and feminised work, and as Labour proved unable (or unwilling) to satisfy demands for women's increased representation. Thatcher would play more closely to the tune of 'Selsdon Man' as she became (in Jim Tomlinson's words) 'the most significant British declinist of them all': a figure embodied in *Terry and June*, which first aired in 1979, and in her chief press secretary, Sir Bernard Ingham, who moved to an 'Artex-dipped bungalow' in 'suburban and unhappening' Purley in 1970.⁴⁰⁰

Moving onto something else?

It was not just White thinking about moving on. Through the 1970s, many of the younger activists gave up on Croydon and went elsewhere. Nevill left in the early 1970s, getting married and moving to a commune in Mornington Crescent with others who 'had all arrived from their own private Croydons'; MacColl wound up in Brixton, where he got involved in Buddhism and Daoism.⁴⁰¹ By 1976, Reid had sold off *Suburban Press* and moved to Scotland – 'disillusioned at how jargonistic and non-committal left-wing politics had become', and resentful of being turned

³⁹⁹ Interview with David White.

⁴⁰⁰ Tomlinson, 'Thrice Denied,' p.235; 'Sir Bernard Ingham: The uncivil servant,' *The Independent* (24th March 2003), <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/profiles/sir-bernard-ingham-the-uncivil-servant-112142.html>, accessed 29th July 2021.

⁴⁰¹ Nevill, *Boom Baby*, p.246; Interview with Hamish MacColl. For a discussion of the appeal of urban communes in the German context, as a response to 'the alienation of modern urban life,' see: J.C. Häberlen, 'Feeling at home in lonely cities: an emotional history of the West German urban commune movement during the long 1970s,' *Urban History*, vol.48, no.1 (2021), pp.143-161.

into 'unpaid social workers'.⁴⁰² Several had successful careers in music: Reid as art director for the McLaren-managed Sex Pistols, Robin Scott as the lead singer of M, and McNay as the founder of Cherry Red Records.⁴⁰³

The days of Mott the Hoople's enthusiasm seemed to be passing. Paradoxically, people who were sick of Croydon's Americanisms were finding relief in the United States itself, just as the mounting reactionary backlash found inspiration in the exponents of the Chicago School. Sincerely or not, in the mid-to-late 1970s, two of the most famous figures from Croydon's 1960s music scene – David Bowie and Eric Clapton (each of them by that point in the United States) – were to engage in dalliances, alongside the punk Bromley Contingent's Siouxsie Sioux, with the symbols and rhetoric of the far right.⁴⁰⁴ In Thomas Dolby's 1984 'Screen Kiss', meanwhile, a 'Croydon girl' finds 'a thousand miles of real estate to choose from' in 'old Hollywood'; in 'Croydon' (1982), The Damned's locally born Captain Sensible declares that he'll 'be in Los Angeles, where the famous people never quite get old', even if promising to 'be back another day, saying "Sod L.A.!"'

Many of my other narrators, too, chose various elsewhere. Norman Brown, when Thatcher was elected as leader of the Conservative Party, announced he was 'going to try and find me a piece of land somewhere in the sun belt' – 1979 was the only time that he has ever voted, and by the early 1980s he had followed his mother in moving to Florida.⁴⁰⁵ His friend Percival drifted out of the IS after it became more rigidly Trotskyist in the late 1970s and 1980s, as the Socialist Workers Party (SWP).⁴⁰⁶ Walker, on the other hand, left his job with the GLC in 1977 and spent three years at Amnesty International before joining a management consultancy and earning enough money to get divorced.⁴⁰⁷ Younger activists found inspiration in other places. Berlin took a long trip to India in the mid-1970s, meeting members of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), and

⁴⁰² Reid & Savage, *Up They Rise*, p.45 & p.55.

⁴⁰³ Interview with David White.

⁴⁰⁴ Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, p.156.

⁴⁰⁵ Interview with Norman Brown.

⁴⁰⁶ Interview with David Percival.

⁴⁰⁷ Interview with Peter Walker.

around the Middle East, and on his return joined the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist), whose 'two-class line' appealed because it did not (unlike the SWP) discourage members from becoming white-collar workers and even highly-paid professionals, supervisors, and small business owners; Marian Carty, too, joined the CPB-ML when she became a 'Maoist' at university, between 1972 and 1976.⁴⁰⁸ Whilst 'the late 1970s did not represent an end-point in their trajectories', with Thatcher in power from 1979, and Croydon again a 'Tory town', the activists' hopes of making a new intersectional politics in the suburbs seemed to have been dashed.⁴⁰⁹

This chapter has explored the different ways Croydon was compared to places in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s – the different aspects to its apparently 'American' character. This goes some way to explaining the complexity of the ways in which Croydon has been understood as a source of denigration and admiration for figures on the left and the right, as two competing anti-Americanisms confronted each other with models partly drawn from America. By the end of the 1970s, metropolitan Croydon was (and, for the Lefebvre- and McLuhan-influenced *Suburban Press*, always had been) suburban Croydon, as urbanisation at its extreme reversed into its opposite, in a country which elected the MP for suburban Finchley as Prime Minister.⁴¹⁰ For many left-wing activists, Thatcher's victory was a sign that it was time to 'move onto something else'.⁴¹¹ And yet, as the next chapter will show, in moving onto something – or somewhere – else, left-wing activists would find, through the comparisons and connections forged between Croydon and 'inner-city' London, a path back to the new kinds of politics which the 'friends of 1968' and after had believed were viable in Croydon.

⁴⁰⁸ Interview with Simon Berlin; Interview with Marian Carty.

⁴⁰⁹ Hughes, *Young Lives on the Left*, p.274.

⁴¹⁰ Clapson, *Suburban Century*, p.169; Davis, *Waterloo Sunrise*, pp.433-434. For this sense of urban 'reversal', see: McLuhan & Powers, *The Global Village*, p.10 & p.172; Walks, 'Suburbanism as a Way of Life, Slight Return,' p.1472 & p.1476.

⁴¹¹ Interview with David Winnick.

Chapter Four: On the 109 bus

'My eyes are English spectacles and everywhere
 I see decay; I see cheap shoes; I see fast food; I see women
 With fake hair and plastic gems on their toenails.
 I see pierced children. I see bags in the trees and animal entrails
 On the road. I see damp take-away boxes. I smell weed.
 I hear a girl call her son a dickhead when he cries.
 And who am I to judge?
 And if I don't, who will?'

Jay Bernard, '109' (2012)¹

The route of the 109 bus has, since it was introduced to replace some old tram lines in 1951, been a symbol of Croydon's connections to South London, and of Croydon itself. Commencing in Katharine Street by Croydon's town hall and travelling via West Croydon, it passes up the London Road until the A23 becomes Streatham High Road at St Leonard's, continues until it becomes Brixton Hill and then terminates by Windrush Square. The route varied a few times in the twentieth century – going as far as Purley in the south, Victoria Embankment in the north – but the basics have remained the same. In 2018, at a launch for his book *Rise Up*, Stormzy described the start and finish of the route as his 'whole world', growing up in Thornton Heath – 'an unremarkable looking part of Croydon', according to the BBC.²

This is a different view of Croydon, a 'cosmopolitan' and 'convivial' Croydon produced by what Stuart Hall described as 'multicultural drift': 'an increasing organic sense of familiarity with diversity in Britain'.³ In some ways, it was the Croydon feared by the Conservative MP for

¹ 'Jay Bernard: 2 Bold Poems,' *Zócalo Poets* (29th April 2012), <https://zocalopoets.com/2012/04/29/jay-bernard-2-bold-poems/>, accessed 16th November 2021.

² K. Virk, 'Stormzy's big year,' *BBC News* (28th December 2018), https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-sh/stormzys_big_year, accessed 26th April 2021. His first sentence published in the book is indicative: 'Where I grew up and how I grew up really affected how I saw the world.' Stormzy & J. Yawson, *Rise Up: The #Merky Story So Far* (London: #Merky Books, 2018), p.15.

³ Connell, *Black Handsworth*, p.6. For 'cosmopolitan' and 'conviviality', see: P. Gilroy, *After Empire: Melancholia or convivial culture?* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004), p.9.

Croydon North West, Robert Taylor, in 1976, who insisted that his constituency 'wish[ed] to maintain our individuality' and 'does not wish to be like Southall' – as well as by Jabez Spencer Balfour far back in 1885, worried that 'Croydon was becoming like Peckham' in its urbanity.⁴ Yet it was also a Croydon where, as in Jay Bernard's poem, even a sympathetic IOG-borne observer could observe examples of 'decay' through 'English spectacles', nervous about what would happen in the absence of their judgement. Tellingly, Bernard worried that the poem 'doesn't fully express the ambiguity of my feelings about Croydon'.⁵

This chapter focuses on connections and comparisons between Croydon and the 'inner-city' areas to its north. It begins where the previous chapter finished, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when it was the difference between Croydon and places like Brixton which was emphasised – 'Selsdon Man' voting Conservative in opposition to the threat of 'inner-city' decline. The suburban context shaped activists' responses to 'secondary settlement', which they enabled through an integrationist politics that left unchallenged Croydon's status as a predominantly white, middle-class suburb. By the early 1980s, Croydon represented the 'middle ground' which Labour was in the process of losing – whether to the Conservatives themselves, or to the Liberals and newly-formed Social Democratic Party (SDP).

At the same time, the decade would see the growth of 'social democracy zones' with the support of the left-wing GLC, as young activists imagined the possibilities of a Croydon remade in Brixton's image. Whilst these efforts, like the GLC itself, were eventually defeated and subsumed, they contributed to the recomposition of Labour's appeal in a newly 'inner-city' Croydon. By the 1990s, the notion that Croydon was a multicultural suburb had become hegemonic – a notion that served to downplay or disguise racism in Croydon in the past and present. If this is a

⁴ HC Deb 5th July 1976 vol.914 c.994; Coetzee, 'Villa Toryism Reconsidered,' p.36.

⁵ 'Jay Bernard: 2 Bold Poems,' *Zócalo Poets* (29th April 2012), <https://zocalopoets.com/2012/04/29/jay-bernard-2-bold-poems/>, accessed 16th November 2021.

Croydon which Labour has found easier to represent, it is also a Croydon which they have been more ready to speak for, and judge, and fix.⁶

Decay through English spectacles

The reactionary backlash which was apparently seizing large parts of Croydon in the late 1970s and early 1980s was framed by a particular understanding of older, inner (or 'inner-city') suburbs, most notably in Lambeth. As the work of Stuart Hall and others has highlighted, Thatcherism responded to interlocking concerns about the various crises of the 1970s by pushing 'law and order' solutions to a racialised sense of decline embodied in the ageing landscapes of suburbs like Brixton and Southall.⁷ Croydon, as previous chapters have emphasised, was popularly understood as a predominantly white, middle-class suburb, to be contrasted with the 'inner-city' 'fringe'. However, the demographics of Croydon in the late 1970s and 1980s were changing, particularly in northern parts of the borough – a process of 'secondary settlement' which some saw as driving an inevitable improvement in Labour's fortunes. The results of the early 1980s, though, demonstrated that Labour was caught between a backlash against these changes and the declining support which it received amongst both white suburban progressives and the new Black homeowners. Whether because of the economic and demographic changes affecting the north of the borough, or because of the apparent hopelessness of left-wing politics in the 'Tory wasteland', dominant views of 1980s Croydon emphasised disappointment and dread about a future in which Labour was browbeaten and marginalised.⁸

If the left was concerned about ageing suburbanites, the reactionary backlash itself traded on fears of decline linked to suburban change and the creation of the 'inner city'. Older inner London suburbs like Brixton or Peckham had been popular destinations in the post-war period for Black migrants, with dilapidated suburban housing often the most affordable, and both had become a

⁶ Compare to Hazel Carby's discussion of multicultural policy in education: 'The school is made a site for containing the effects of racism.' Carby, *Cultures in Babylon*, p.220.

⁷ Hall et al, *Policing the Crisis*, p.118; S. Hall, 'The Great Moving Right Show,' *Marxism Today* (January 1979), pp.14-20, p.19; Saumarez Smith, 'Action for Cities,' p.276; Romyn, "'London Badlands",' p.134.

⁸ Interview with Marian Carty.

'loaded signifier' or 'othered space' representative of anxieties about Black settlement and 'inner-city' decline.⁹ With his collaborators in *Policing the Crisis*, Hall outlined a 'signification spiral', a 'metonymic framework' through which various moral panics – some of them already covered in previous chapters – became mutually reinforcing, with a 'circle of associations' between problems with housing, race, youth violence, and crime tightening around the figure of the Black 'mugger' in the declining city, for which the United States again served as the model.¹⁰ Though sometimes rhetorically connected to outer estates like New Addington (described by *Time Out* as a 'municipal ghetto') the 'inner cities' were treated, from the American-influenced 1968 Urban Programme onwards, as the main examples of 'the concentration of multiple deprivation'.¹¹ Whilst this rhetoric could be used by activists – including South Norwood Labour Party in 1976 – to seek improvements to genuine problems, this focus on the needs of specific areas or sections of society contributed to the fracturing of the welfare state and treated 'inner cities' as a 'spatially manifested locus' for the 'multivalent crises' of the 1970s and 1980s which fuelled the fears of the so-called 'silent majority'.¹² Anxieties around race, crime, youth and deindustrialisation were therefore embodied in the ageing 'ghettoes' or 'no-go zones' which 'normal' white and middle-class society saw as other – areas like Brixton, Peckham or, in the case of Croydon North West's MP, Southall.¹³

Concerns about the 'inner cities' were connected to fears about 'Black youth' cast as 'the central threat to the coherence and stability of the nation and state'.¹⁴ The 1970s, Harry Goulbourne has

⁹ McManus & Etherington, 'Suburbs in transition,' p.334; Clapson, 'The suburban aspiration in England since 1919,' p.163; Clapson, *Suburban Century*, p.99; Benson & Jackson, 'Place-making and Place Maintenance,' p.798; Renshaw, 'The violent frontline,' p.14; E. Jackson & M. Benson, 'Neither "Deepest, Darkest Peckham" nor "Run-of-the-Mille" East Dulwich: The Middle Classes and their "Others" in an Inner-London Neighbourhood,' *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, vol.38, no.4 (2014), pp.1195-1210, pp.1196-1197.

¹⁰ Pikó, *Milton Keynes in British Culture*, p.91; Hall et al, *Policing the Crisis*, p.19.

¹¹ S. Cottle, *TV News, Urban Conflict and the Inner City* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1993), p.1; Interview with Jean Tagg; 'Labour Left: "The lesser evil",' *Time Out* (undated), p.9, in David White's personal papers; Andrews, 'Multiple Deprivation, the Inner City, and the Fracturing of the Welfare State,' p.606.

¹² Andrews, 'Multiple Deprivation, the Inner City, and the Fracturing of the Welfare State,' p.623; MC, A845; Saumarez Smith, 'Action for Cities,' p.276; Romyne, "'London Badlands",' p.134; Hall et al, *Policing the Crisis*, pp.19-20.

¹³ Romyne, "'London Badlands",' pp.137-141; Davis, *Waterloo Sunrise*, pp.410-416.

¹⁴ Waters, *Thinking Black*, p.167.

argued, was 'a time for the coming of age of a neglected group in the migration process – those who had accompanied immigrant parents to Britain and were not prepared to face the prospects of replacing their parents in lowly, marginal, jobs.'¹⁵ 1976 had seen widely-publicised confrontations between the police and young people at Notting Hill Carnival, and more followed in Bristol in 1980.¹⁶ After the April 1981 uprisings, blamed in the subsequent Scarman report on pathological problems in Black family life, the association of Brixton with clashes between the police and 'Black youth' became particularly acute.¹⁷ Brixton was a frontline (in fact, 'the Frontline' was a popular nickname for Railton Road, the site of numerous squats) and Ted Knight, leader of Lambeth council since 1978, described the police as 'an army of occupation'.¹⁸ Through Knight, fears about 'Black youth' were overlapped by a growing sense of Brixton as a 'radical place', a left-wing council that had emerged out of the entrance of 'a younger and more radical generation of activists' after 1968, known as the 'new urban left'.¹⁹ As Simon Berlin, who worked in Lambeth in the late 1970s and 1980s, remembered:

'In Croydon there was a good few left-wing organisations operating. Brixton? It was just ridiculous, every corner you turned down [...] The *Class War* people were big there – the anarcho-syndicalists had a couple of big squat areas where they seemed to be based. Socialist Party of Great Britain, the Workers' Institute of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought, it just went on and on and on, they all had their headquarters there, there were loads and loads and loads of these people, and there was the Communist Party of England (Marxist-Leninist), and a goodly number of them were just cults.'²⁰

¹⁵ H. Goulbourne, *Caribbean Transnational Experience* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), pp.128-129.

¹⁶ Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, pp.120-125; A. Elliott-Cooper, *Black Resistance to British Policing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021), p.41. For a detailed discussion of the Notting Hill Carnival riot, see: Davis, *Waterloo Sunrise*, pp.320-345.

¹⁷ Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, pp.133-134; Waters, *Thinking Black*, p.179.

¹⁸ Renshaw, 'The violent frontline,' p.2; S. Hannah, *Radical Lambeth 1978-1991* (London: Breviary Stuff, 2021), p.15, p.25 & p.63. For my review of the latter book, see: D. Frost, Review of S. Hannah, *Radical Lambeth, 1978-1991*, *London Journal* (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1080/03058034.2022.1992243>. Other places, including Handsworth in Birmingham, were described as 'Front Line Britain': Connell, *Black Handsworth*, pp.73-74.

¹⁹ Hannah, *Radical Lambeth*, p.7; Brooke, 'Space, Emotions and the Everyday,' p.116.

²⁰ Interview with Simon Berlin.

The uprisings linked 'Black youth' in the 'inner city' with the actions of other subversive forces within Lambeth and without, and provided the Thatcher government with a stick with which to beat recalcitrant local authorities – the uprisings' causes and consequences alike 'construed as a long-term, inexorable and remorseless issue, on which the opposition were relatively weak', buttressing Thatcherism's wider assault on the legacies of urban modernism for the built environment.²¹ The 'inner city', therefore, depicted as 'a distant and deviant place', was posited as a source not only of demographic and cultural dangers, but of revolutionary, left-wing political change – and stagnation.²²

The growth of radical left-wing politics was commonly understood, by detractors, as simultaneously juvenile and out-dated, a framing which paralleled that of the youthful but decrepit 'inner cities'. The 'new urban left', adopting an emotional politics of identity and appealing to new communities and interest groups, were castigated both for the apparently old-fashioned politics of long-term revolutionaries like Knight and for the naivety of their young supporters.²³ As Lynne Segal has pointed out, there is a tendency to disparage older people that identify with the militancy of youth as engaged in 'a "disavowal" of ageing.'²⁴ The MP for Croydon Central, John Moore, denounced them as the 'loony left' in a 1983 party political broadcast for the Conservatives – similar language recurs through this chapter, occasionally from unusual sources.²⁵ Areas like Lambeth, as well as the left-wing GLC under Ken Livingstone, largely dependent on inner-London representatives, formed part of the 'radical fringes' (alongside republicanism in the north of Ireland or the National Union of Mineworkers in Scotland, Wales, northern England and isolated parts of Kent) which Thatcher opposed to 'white, south-eastern-English, middle-class cultural conservatism'.²⁶ As one quotation from Clive Fraser indicates, in

²¹ Saumarez Smith, 'Action for Cities,' p.277.

²² Cottle, *TV News, Urban Conflict and the Inner City*, p.14. For a discussion of the connection between the 'inner city' and immobility, see: S. Gunn, 'Spatial mobility in later twentieth-century Britain,' *Contemporary British History* (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1080/13619462.2020.1858060>, pp.11-12.

²³ Brooke, 'Space, Emotions and the Everyday,' p.118.

²⁴ Segal, 'Formations of feminism,' p.26.

²⁵ 'Lord Moore of Lower Marsh obituary,' *The Times* (22nd May 2019) <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/lord-moore-of-lower-marsh-obituary-xrp72xwdj>, accessed 29th July 2021.

²⁶ Pikó, *Milton Keynes in British Culture*, pp.149-150.

the 1970s the othered spaces of inner-city South London were still contrasted with Conservative-voting Croydon:

'The first time I can remember driving down from Scotland, probably early teens, coming through London [...] Vauxhall'd be totally different: sort of like metallic fences all the place, Rastafarian and reggae posters on. Drive down through South London, you've got Streatham it started to change, you got to Croydon it would change [...] and it was very much a county town sort of feel, but with quite a large metropolis centre.'²⁷

This memory closely corresponds to Rob Waters' discussion of accounts of journeys 'passing through the expanding areas of Caribbean settlement that spilled out from just beyond the city's old medieval heart, [...] seen by many in the equally expanding suburbs as an index of London's postcolonial decline, and a measure of what they sought to escape from.'²⁸ As the previous chapter has argued, by the late 1970s Croydon was a centre for the reactionary movements which contributed to Thatcher's election victory. The 'Tory town' was noted for its 'right-wing leadership', particularly after one of Thatcher's 'prominent lieutenants' (Whitgift-educated Peter Bowness) became leader in 1976.²⁹ By 1978, Croydon, apparently the 'posher parts of South London', was seen as an especially unusual place to see strike action; the SWP's *Women's Voice* reported on 'a posher sort of strike' by cleaners at Royal Russell School.³⁰ Activists within CHE found it difficult to book venues or place advertisements in the local press.³¹ In 1975, a survey of homosexual teachers by the National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCL) found that Croydon was the 'most bigoted' local authority.³² As Croydon CHE reflected, there was 'a long, long way to go before the "man on the 109 bus" [would be] able to accept homosex for what it is'.³³ After surveying election candidates, Nigel Webb argued in the group's magazine, *Checkpoint*, that there

²⁷ Interview with Clive Fraser.

²⁸ Waters, 'Respectability and race between the suburb and the city,' p.2.

²⁹ D. White, 'Political Croydon: The Eighties,' *Croydon Citizen* (9th October 2014), <https://web.archive.org/web/20180928164040/https://thecroydoncitizen.com/politics-society/political-croydon-eighties/>, accessed 3rd November 2021.

³⁰ M. Williams, 'A Posher Sort of Strike,' *Women's Voice*, no.15 (1978), p.9.

³¹ London, British Library of Politics and Economic Science, HCA/CHE/5/55; BLPES, HCA/CHE/7/81.

³² London, British Library of Politics and Economic Science, HCA/Friend/4/1.

³³ BLPES, HCA/Friend/4/1.

was 'No hope whilst Tories rule Croydon'.³⁴ 1979 saw the gents' toilets on Katharine Street ('Kathy's Cottage') closed as part of a 'War on Vice', and the election was followed by an article from Webb which quoted Tom Robinson Band's 'The Summer [sic] of '79' and 'wonder[ed] whether a prophecy will be fulfilled.'³⁵ Whilst Croydon CHE's membership was significant, the suburbs were presented – in language reminiscent of that used by *Suburban Press* – as an increasingly apocalyptic prospect, and areas like Reigate and Surrey were regarded as a 'gay wilderness'.³⁶ Webb, mocked as 'Chairman Mao' in letters to Croydon CHE's *Checkpoint*, faced criticism from more right-wing members including Alan Mead, a Liberal candidate in Woodside in 1976, who defeated him as chairman in 1980 and declared he was 'standing at the edge of an immense chasm, with a barren desert behind me'.³⁷ For his part, Webb linked the apathy that he saw in Croydon CHE to its suburban membership, noting:

'From the security of the self contained flat or semidetached, the reasonably well paid job and the circle of friends, it is easy to forget those gays who live in pokey bed-sits, or have to become squatters, or live in isolation in rural villages...'³⁸

Complaining of a lack of members 'from a black or working class background', Webb reproduced a common feeling, discussed in previous chapters, that the white middle-class inhabitants of the suburbs were ill-suited to radical activism; in 1979, they were even asked by a town-centre shopper whether they were 'a newly resurrected CHE Guevara group [...] planning to place bombs at the Fairfield Halls'.³⁹ With the emergence of the punk scene which evidently influenced Webb, some individuals were presenting themselves as 'atypical' in their commitment to countercultural values like 'peace, respect, a hatred of discrimination and violence', and were willingly seen as such by the apparently 'vacuous' middle class – including some of CHE's own members.⁴⁰

³⁴ BLPES, HCA/CHE/7/81.

³⁵ BLPES, HCA/CHE/7/81.

³⁶ BLPES, HCA/CHE/7/81.

³⁷ BLPES, HCA/CHE/7/83; BLPES, HCA/CHE/7/81.

³⁸ BLPES, HCA/CHE/7/81.

³⁹ BLPES, HCA/CHE/7/81.

⁴⁰ Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, *Class, Politics, and the Decline of Deference*, pp.50-54.

Yet the Croydon of the late 1970s and early 1980s was not only a white, middle-class place, and its northern wards were changing. Like the Los Angeles to which it had been compared, Croydon in the late 1970s and early-to-mid-1980s was a site of deepening racial anxiety and antagonism.⁴¹ Peter Saunders claimed 'the dominant atmosphere of most of the northern wards [was] one of general decay and degeneration'.⁴² As in the boroughs to Croydon's north, the deteriorating condition of their suburban housing meant that areas like Bensham Manor, Whitehorse Manor and Woodside had become affordable places to buy homes.⁴³ Whilst historians like David Renton have correctly noted that it was 'not a decade of mass immigration', partly due to the 1971 Immigration Act, the 1970s saw internal migration from the older 'inner city' to places like Croydon; by 1979, the iconic Guyanese dub musician, Mad Professor, had set up a studio in Thornton Heath, later moving to Peckham and then back to South Norwood.⁴⁴ Large parts of the north of Croydon, and especially areas like Thornton Heath, had been more working-class and less affluent for some time.⁴⁵ As Rupa Huq has pointed out, suburbs 'are often the only places of affordable housing for ethnic minorities' (a phenomenon she terms 'brown flight') and a 1970s study found that one-third of 'West Indian' families in Croydon surveyed had moved from elsewhere in South London, 80 percent buying their own homes.⁴⁶ Gee Bernard, who moved to Britain in 1961 from Jamaica and studied for a social work qualification between 1973 and 1978, initially living in Brixton, reported:

'It took me 10 years in Britain to find decent accommodation for me and my family, another 10 years to get into further and higher education, another 10 years before I could buy my first house in Britain.'⁴⁷

⁴¹ For a discussion of the changing attitudes towards Los Angeles, exemplified by Mike Davis' critique, see: Bell, 'Reyner Banham, Mike Davis, and the Discourse on Los Angeles Ecology.' For a discussion of an alternative to this 'pessimistic Marxist analysis', see: S. Didier, 'Edward W. Soja, Los Angeles and Spatial Justice: Rereading *Postmetropolis: critical studies of cities and regions* twenty years later,' *Justice spatiale/Spatial Justice* (2018), http://www.jssj.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/JSSJ12_DIDIER_VA.pdf, accessed 9th November 2021.

⁴² Saunders, *Urban Politics*, p.238.

⁴³ Mildon, 'West Indian home owners in Croydon,' p.95.

⁴⁴ D. Renton, *Never Again: Rock Against Racism and the Anti-Nazi League 1976-1982* (London: Routledge, 2019), p.9; Clapson, 'The suburban aspiration in England since 1919,' p.165; Clapson, *Suburban Century*, p.97.

⁴⁵ Interview with Lynda and Martin Graham.

⁴⁶ Huq, 'Don't sneer at suburbia,' p.148; Mildon, 'West Indian home owners in Croydon,' p.94.

⁴⁷ London, Black Cultural Archives, ORAL/1/5.

Simon Cottle points out that 'the semantic site of the inner city has been mobilized within competing political discourses and does not therefore refer to a stable or uncontested referent'; through the presence of Black people, and especially young Black people, the suburbs themselves could be reimagined as 'inner city', regardless of their location.⁴⁸ Sometimes, 'secondary settlement' was interpreted as the cause, rather than the consequence, of the decline in the built environment of the northern wards; for Saumarez Smith, imagining the expansion of the 'inner city' had the effect of 'anathematizing sections of the population, especially black and Asian ethnic minorities'.⁴⁹ This could be inadvertent, as in 1964 when a Labour councillor criticised landlords who used the 'colour bar' in order 'to pack in as many coloured people as possible, regardless of hygiene, safety or any feeling of humanity' – implying a connection between an area's changing demographics and its deteriorating built environment.⁵⁰ For others, however, there were neutral or positive associations with these changes. In the early 1980s parliamentary boundary review, Addiscombe Labour Party's submission stressed that 'north Croydon is an almost continuous built up area dotted by occasional small parks', with a community 'belonging to loosely defined areas of South London or Croydon'.⁵¹ Describing her ward as 'an urban environment, peopled by an urban population', Nancy Irwin compared the area's density to Hong Kong and insisted there was 'no such thing in Addiscombe as a "West Indian Community" or a "Sri Lankan Community" or a "Jewish Community": there are simply members of the ward living in different streets'.⁵² Whilst Irwin was clearly uncomfortable with the idea of discrete 'ethnic communities' – classified by 'race relations' experts at the time as a problem – her response does suggest a hopefulness about a newly metropolitan Croydon.⁵³

⁴⁸ Cottle, *TV News, Urban Conflict and the Inner City*, p.70.

⁴⁹ Saumarez Smith, 'Action for Cities,' p.277.

⁵⁰ P. Byrne, 'Cashing in on colour bar,' *Croydon Advertiser* (17th April 1964), p.10.

⁵¹ NA, AF 1/1909.

⁵² NA, AF 1/1909.

⁵³ A. Ebke, 'From "Ethnic Community" to "Black Community": The Cultural Belonging of Migrants Between Race-Relations Research and the Politics of Blackness in 1970s and 1980s Britain,' *German Historical Institute Washington Bulletin, Supplement*, no.15 (2020), pp.93-110, p.99.

Left-wing activists have typically attributed Labour's changing fortunes to 'the makeup of the population,' as David Percival put it, '[becoming] much more multicultural'.⁵⁴ This argument was made succinctly by Jean Tagg, who couldn't 'see the Tories winning in north Croydon, because of the sort of mixed ethnic groups, who will always vote Labour'.⁵⁵ As she said:

'The influx of people from Lambeth to Croydon changed the political landscape and people started to vote Labour more. And of course, eventually north Croydon became Labour and [...] we now have a Labour council, as you know.'⁵⁶

The death of Robert Taylor in 1981 presented the party with an opportunity to test its hopes in a by-election in Croydon North West. Whilst acknowledging that 'Croydon is difficult territory for Labour' and the outdated electoral register didn't help, its candidate, Stan Boden, had 'consistently whittled down' the Tory majority since 1970 and it was 'a seat that Labour should have every expectation of winning'.⁵⁷ It was 'not typical outer-ring suburban Tory-land', and both Labour and the Liberals emphasised the high levels of youth unemployment against the area's 'traditional prosperity': unemployment in Croydon had risen from 4000 in 1979 to over 11,000 two years later.⁵⁸ Labour noted that 50 percent of school-leavers were unable to find a job, with the unemployment benefit office in Dingwall Road unable to cope with the demand.⁵⁹ As late as October 9th, mere weeks before the election, Labour still apparently expected Boden to win, and hoped to cement it through subsequent boundary changes.⁶⁰ Liberals believed Labour had 'the Whitehorse Manor Ward firmly in its grip'.⁶¹ With Labour-voting Broad Green expected to be added to the constituency, and Conservative-voting Upper Norwood removed, one commentator suggested that 'if we win Croydon North West on October 22, we will never lose it.'⁶²

⁵⁴ Interview with David Percival; Interview with Lynda and Martin Graham.

⁵⁵ Interview with Jean Tagg.

⁵⁶ Interview with Jean Tagg.

⁵⁷ London, British Library of Political and Economic Science, SHORE/13/69.

⁵⁸ L. Marks, 'Now the Liberals fear the Social Democrats,' *The Observer* (26th July 1981), p.4; London, British Library of Political and Economic Science, COLL MISC 0882/2.

⁵⁹ BLPES, COLL MISC 0882/2.

⁶⁰ NA, AF 1/1909.

⁶¹ London, London Metropolitan Archives, LMA/4445/03/018.

⁶² NA, AF 1/1909. Refer to Appendix 3 for an overview of Croydon's parliamentary boundary changes.

It was not only the by-election, however, which drew media attention to Croydon, that year. On 1st June 1981, after a large open-air meeting in Thornton Heath's Melfort Park, a group of young Black people had launched an attack on the Wilton Arms, later known as the Thomas Farley – a pub widely regarded as an NF meeting place.⁶³ After injuring an apparent NF member, Robert Kennett, within the pub, the group attacked a pair of uninvolved white teenagers on a nearby motorbike, with one, Terence May, dying as a result of his stab wounds – the media made much of reports that he 'had a crippled foot and could not run'.⁶⁴ Initial responses described the violence as 'tit for tat' between 'young gangs of blacks and whites', including 'teds and punks', with Kennett portrayed in *The Times* as merely a 'white youth' and 'skinhead'; the attackers were supposedly users of the aforementioned Parchmore Youth Centre which coverage now implied was aimed primarily at Black young people, not the white teenagers (like May) that lived in nearby Green Lane.⁶⁵ Whilst drawing upon the moral panics about youth delinquency discussed in previous chapters, these responses framed the attack as an aberration in 'an unremarkable and apparently untroubled suburb.'⁶⁶ *The Guardian* suggested the 'black people who started to settle in the Melfort Road area of Thornton Heath in the 1960s did so for the same reason that white people moved there earlier in the century – it was a step up in the world'.⁶⁷ *The Times* noted that 'streets around Melfort Road, where many blacks live, are pleasant and the terraces well kept', that Thornton Heath was 'not recognized as an area of black political militancy,' and nor did it 'have many of the problems associated with inner-city areas such as Brixton, also in south-London.'⁶⁸ *The Guardian* quoted local Black people critical of the attack, including one regular at the pub who asserted Thornton Heath was 'no ghetto', and a teenager who asked, 'do we want this place to

⁶³ For a discussion of the incident, and issues relating to it, see: D. Frost, 'Activist Streets,' *History Workshop Online* (15th March 2021), <https://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/activist-streets/>, accessed 23rd August 2021.

⁶⁴ 'Pub used as base for attacking blacks, court told,' *The Times* (25th February 1982), p.5; Kennett died in 2008 whilst awaiting trial for violence targeting Charlton Athletic fans, see: 'Jail for football train rampage.' *BBC News* (5th December 2008), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/london/7767405.stm>, accessed 8th November 2021.

⁶⁵ D. Nicholson-Lord, 'Anti-black bias is denied by CID chief,' *The Times* (4th March 1982), p.2; R. Ford, 'Racial trouble feared after killing.,' *The Times* (3rd June 1981), p.3; R. Ford, 'Reprisals fear shuts black youth club,' *The Times* (4th June 1981), p.4.

⁶⁶ D. Nicholson-Lord, "'Tragic accident" led to death in quiet suburb,' *The Times* (16th April 1982), p.2.

⁶⁷ 'Murder and pub rampage bring fears of another Brixton,' *The Guardian* (3rd June 1981), p.3.

⁶⁸ R. Ford, 'Reprisals fear shuts black youth club,' *The Times* (4th June 1981), p.4.

end up like Brixton?’⁶⁹ These responses are typical of the way that ‘inner-city’ places like Brixton were contrasted with Croydon, and presented as threatening it through proximity.

The blame for the violence was placed on Black young people who had grown up in ‘an otherwise unremarkable south London suburb’, and now tested its ‘moral climate’ as a result of both their youth and their connections to the ‘inner city’: the bread-and-butter of the reactionary backlash which had identified Croydon North West as a major battleground.⁷⁰ The NF had been headquartered on Pawsons Road in Thornton Heath since 1972 – Fraser noted that one Black friend later told him he had avoided Croydon in the 1970s as a result of the NF’s presence.⁷¹ The by-election was the first to be contested by a young Nick Griffin for the NF, whilst Suzan McKenzie, a Nationalist Party member, promised a referendum on immigration as ‘the voice of the silent majority’.⁷² The *Daily Mail*, invoking Enoch Powell in the wake of the May killing, had warned against putting ‘political handcuffs on the police in our inner cities’.⁷³ In the by-election, the Conservatives’ John Butterfill, a ‘Surrey man’ according to his literature, slammed the ‘Marxist Ken Livingstone’ and warned that ‘the Police must remain free from the political control advocated by London’s Marxist rulers.’⁷⁴ Labour were also hurt by the GLC’s rates increases, which they struggled to defend as a necessary consequence of the withdrawal of government grants, and by Livingstone’s comments after the Chelsea Barracks bombing.⁷⁵ Despite their hopes in the changes taking place in the constituency, Labour was suffering from negative perceptions of ‘secondary settlement’ and the intrusion of the (Knight- and Livingstone-voting) ‘inner city’ with which it was associated.

Yet it was not the Conservatives that frustrated Labour’s hopes in Croydon North West. By March 1981, opposition to the growth of the left within Labour had led the ‘Gang of Four’ (including

⁶⁹ ‘Murder and pub rampage bring fears of another Brixton,’ *The Guardian* (3rd June 1981), p.3.

⁷⁰ ‘Racial tension haunts trial of suburbia “mob”,’ *The Sunday Times* (February 28th 1982), p.4.

⁷¹ Interview with Clive Fraser.

⁷² BLPES, COLL MISC 0882/2.

⁷³ ‘Comment,’ *Daily Mail* (3rd June 1981), p.6.

⁷⁴ BLPES, COLL MISC 0882/2.

⁷⁵ BLPES, SHORE/13/69; L. Marks, ‘Fight for the mid-ground in Croydon,’ *The Observer* (18th October 1981), p.7.

Shirley Williams, who White had notably not invited to speak in Croydon in the 1979 election) to breakaway and form the SDP.⁷⁶ Although there was initial speculation that the SDP would select Williams for the seat, they eventually deferred to their new Alliance partners, the Liberals, to choose 'bearded local government officer' Bill Pitt – who had chaired Lambeth NALGO until the growing left-wing membership 'passed a symbolic motion that the chair shouldn't sit on a raised platform overlooking the members and shouldn't wear their customary gold chain.'⁷⁷ He contrasted himself with 'the old class politics' of 'Monetarism and Marxism', and Liberal leader David Steel told Conservative voters that it was 'Bill Pitt against the London Labour Party.'⁷⁸ Ahead of the election, one commentator remarked that 'Croydon on a cold wet Monday doesn't look the kind of place where history will be made', but noted that it was 'not a neighbourly place like Warrington' (where Labour had held out against the SDP's Roy Jenkins) and 'old allegiances may well crumble more easily here': it was 'a chunk of amorphous South London, where community spirit is fragmented.'⁷⁹ As Nick Garland has noted, it was this sense of community fragmentation which the SDP (and, by extension, the Alliance) hoped to address – without suggesting the resurrection of the 'working-class community' so important for Labour in wards like Whitehorse Manor.⁸⁰

Another commentator highlighted the Alliance's threat to a heavily-criticised Conservative government, suggesting a Liberal victory would 'banish the ghost of Selsdon Man forever.'⁸¹ By the end of the campaign, polls were turning in Pitt's favour, and with the endorsement of the *Advertiser* he romped to a surprise victory with an almost 30 percent swing; coverage presented the constituency as the archetypal 'middle ground' which Labour and the Conservatives had apparently lost.⁸² Labour pinned the blame for their third-placed finish on internal factionalism

⁷⁶ Hannah, *Radical Lambeth*, p.16; Interview with Jerry Fitzpatrick; Interview with David White.

⁷⁷ White, 'Political Croydon: The Eighties'; Hannah, *Radical Lambeth*, p.20.

⁷⁸ BLPES, COLL MISC 0882/2; D. Johnson, 'Steel's byelection plea to Tory voters,' *The Guardian* (10th October 1981), p.2.

⁷⁹ P. Jenkins, 'A seat to be won if the mould is to be broken,' *The Guardian* (21st October 1981), p.17; D. Johnson, 'Voters appear ready to break the mould,' *The Guardian* (19th October 1981), p.3.

⁸⁰ Garland, 'Social democracy, the decline of community and community politics in postwar Britain,' pp.149-151.

⁸¹ D. Johnson, 'Selsdon man keeps a bold front at Croydon,' *The Guardian* (5th October 1981), p.2.

⁸² BLPES, COLL MISC 0882/2; L. Marks, 'Fight for the mid-ground in Croydon,' *The Observer* (18th October 1981), p.7.

and the strength of the Alliance's ground campaign.⁸³ Importantly, Pitt had not only criticised the 'new urban left', but sought to cultivate some of its likely supporters. He argued from experience that 'Lambeth as a borough is second to none in London'; his election material highlighted his vice-chairmanship of the Joint Committee Against Racism, he had left the Young Conservatives in opposition to apartheid, and he described himself as a 'pacifist' although not necessarily a unilateralist.⁸⁴ Croydon CHE's Mead was his local party chairman, and Pitt was the only candidate to reply on time to the group's letters; *The Guardian* reported that whilst 'Croydon may be a rather conventional and suburban-sounding part of the world [...] it could be poised for an historic role in the annals of gay liberation.'⁸⁵ South Norwood Labour Party defended Boden, complaining their 'traditional areas of support were no longer confident in the Labour Party nationally.'⁸⁶ It was not just that Labour was struggling with a 'white working class' frightened by 'secondary settlement' – it had also lost credibility with the 'suburban progressives' who now occupied the 'middle ground'.⁸⁷

The left criticised Boden and argued 'Croydon was not a good test of how Labour could fare if it challenged the SDP-Liberal alliance with bold socialist policies.'⁸⁸ The Alliance, however, posed problems for Labour in Croydon throughout the decade.⁸⁹ Tyrrell Burgess (who a 1964 *Advertiser* column had predicted would be unlikely to ever defect, being 'staunchly and valiantly Labour') stood for the SDP in Croydon Central in 1983 and 1987; long-term Labour members Audrey and David Simpson endorsed a Liberal candidate in South Norwood in 1982.⁹⁰ Jerry Fitzpatrick noted the Alliance 'were pretty strong across Croydon and particularly areas like Addiscombe', popular with 'people who would go on perhaps in the Blair years to happily vote

⁸³ BLPES, SHORE/13/69; L. Marks, 'Fight for the mid-ground in Croydon,' *The Observer* (18th October 1981), p.7.

⁸⁴ H. Hebert, 'A Pitt in the Croydon road,' *The Guardian* (21st July 1981), p.17; BLPES, COLL MISC 0882/2; BLPES, SHORE/13/69.

⁸⁵ BLPES, HCA/CHE/7/81; 'CHE looks to Croydon,' *The Guardian* (26th June 1981), p.15. Boden did belatedly express support for CHE.

⁸⁶ MC, A845.

⁸⁷ Yeowell, *Rethinking Labour's Past*, p.13.

⁸⁸ 'Alliance's Croydon victory,' *Socialist Challenge*, no.219 (1981), p.2,

<https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/socialist-challenge/sc-no219.pdf>.

⁸⁹ Tichelar, *Why London is Labour*, p.32, p.56 & p.61.

⁹⁰ 'Something in the air,' *Croydon Advertiser* (9th October 1964), p.13; MC, A845.

Labour'.⁹¹ Nor was there any guarantee that Black and Asian suburban homeowners would vote Labour – as previous chapters have indicated, Labour-voting was a habit often lost upon gaining a 'foothold' in the suburbs.⁹² This was the Black middle class which some saw as 'overly concerned with the politics of respectability and offending the sensibilities of White people'; as one delegation from Croydon told the Select Committee of Race Relations and Immigration in 1976, giving as an example a Black teacher who had to 'become a carbon copy "white"', a section of the Caribbean community 'eager for social acceptance is seeking to adopt the various characteristics of the English society in which they live.'⁹³ Once again, there was a sense that Croydon and the suburbs were transforming the people who moved there, with consequent problems for the left.⁹⁴ Webb, now an ordinary member of the renamed Croydon Area Gay Society (CAGS), continued to express amusement and frustration with activism in 'bungaloid suburbia', complaining in 1986 that hosts demanding payment for coffee and biscuits at gatherings 'are at the same time able to enjoy lifestyles that include running a car, going on expensive holidays, and regular visits to pubs, clubs, discos and restaurants.'⁹⁵ Whilst left-wing activists were frustrated with the limits of suburban activism, there was equally a sense that they had lost touch with the 'middle ground' which Croydon again represented.

In the early 1980s, therefore, Labour and the left in Croydon were caught in a vice between two different types of appeal to the 'middle ground': the Alliance, on the one hand, appealing to 'classlessness', suburban progressivism and the 'anti-Tory vote', and the Conservatives and NF, on the other, to the 'quiet majority' behind the reactionary backlash.⁹⁶ In the 1982 'Falklands election', Labour dropped from 11 councillors to just five – all of them in New Addington.⁹⁷ In

⁹¹ Interview with Jerry Fitzpatrick.

⁹² Mildon, 'West Indian home owners in Croydon,' p.95; Watson & Saha, 'Suburban drifts,' p.2023.

⁹³ J.K. Wright, 'Black Outlaws and the Struggle for Empowerment in Blaxploitation Cinema,' *Spectrum: A Journal on Black Men*, vol.2, no.2 (2014), pp.63-86, p.71; Select Committee of Race Relations and Immigration, *The West Indian Community: Minutes of Evidence*, 11th November 1976, HC Paper 47-xxiii 1975-76, p.901.

⁹⁴ For a discussion of Conservative attempts to appeal to suburbanising ethnic minority voters, see: M. Francis, 'Mrs Thatcher's peacock blue sari: ethnic minorities, electoral politics and the Conservative Party, c. 1974-86,' *Contemporary British History*, vol.31, no.2 (2017), pp.274-293.

⁹⁵ BLPES, HCA/CHE/7/85; London, British Library of Politics and Economic Science, HCA/CHE2/7/3.

⁹⁶ I. Aitken & D. Johnson, 'Alliance takes Croydon as Pitt sweeps in,' *The Guardian* (23rd October 1981), p.1; Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, *Class, Politics, and the Decline of Deference*, p.100 & p.171.

⁹⁷ Interview with Jerry Fitzpatrick; Interview with Clive Fraser.

the 1983 general election, which Joan Matlock remembered as her worst experience canvassing, Labour came a poor second in Croydon Central with half their previous votes and was beaten into third place in the other three Croydon constituencies, Pitt losing out to a Conservative, Humphrey Malins.⁹⁸ With Thatcher riding high on victory in the Falklands, and Labour struggling to persuade 'working class New Addingtonian men' apparently worried that Russia would 'invade New Addington and takeover all its assets', Fitzpatrick remembered that they lost in every ward, including their two strongholds.⁹⁹ The 1983 election was a disaster for Labour across the country and especially the south-east, with John Fraser in Norwood the southernmost Labour MP.¹⁰⁰ With Croydon appearing increasingly hopeless – 'pretty much of a Black Hole' as the Socialist Party of Great Britain remarked, in 1982 – Fitzpatrick allowed himself just a small measure of pride 'that we kept the flag flying.'¹⁰¹ Labour was also suffering from an ageing membership, with the problems that brought; two of its remaining councillors were James Walker and Trevor Laffin, first elected in 1958 and 1960 respectively.¹⁰² The others, meanwhile, included Mary Walker, who had started to develop problems with alcohol; 'a common theme for Croydon Labour parties', and a difficulty also for Reg Page, partly because he had responsibility for Ruskin House bar.¹⁰³ With its councillors ageing, unwell and few in number, and caught between the offers of the Alliance and Thatcher's Conservatives, Labour in early 1980s Croydon found itself out-of-touch, out-of-place, and outdated.

This section has described the development of the concept of the 'inner city' (ageing inner suburbs characterised by a deteriorating built environment and growing Black and Asian populations) as well as its extension to the north of Croydon and its role in the formation of the reactionary backlash which was rendering the borough a 'Tory wasteland'. For some commentators, the north of Croydon's economic decline and demographic change meant that it was likely to become Labour-voting. As the 1981 by-election demonstrated, however, this was not

⁹⁸ Interview with Joan Matlock.

⁹⁹ Interview with Jerry Fitzpatrick.

¹⁰⁰ Hannah, *Radical Lambeth*, p.78.

¹⁰¹ London, Socialist Party of Great Britain Archive, 5/16/1; Interview with Jerry Fitzpatrick.

¹⁰² Interview with Peter Walker.

¹⁰³ Interview with Clive Fraser; Interview with Peter Walker.

inevitable – not just because of resentment towards left-wing Labour councils like Lambeth, but due to the ways the suburban context transformed the people who moved there. With the Alliance contesting Labour’s claims to one ‘middle ground’ and the Conservatives and NF challenging for another, the left would increasingly identify Croydon as a site of hopelessness, defeat, and grim endurance. By the mid-1990s, though, the situation had been reversed; after 1997, Labour had two MPs in the borough as well as control of the council, with the economic and demographic changes which had proved insufficient in the 1980s apparently bearing fruit. To understand the ways in which their situation was altered, as well as the extent of their difficulties, it is necessary to re-examine the politics of race and anti-racism in 1960s and 1970s Croydon, making sense of their residual influence on the struggles of the 1980s.

‘It wasn’t naturally welcoming’

Early responses to racism in 1960s and 1970s Croydon tended to look to a sense of suburban tolerance ensconced within the town’s middle-class philanthropic civic culture, or else to labour movement internationalism and anti-colonialism, discussed in the first and second chapter. Emphasising forms of integration, this approach to anti-racism has been criticised for treating racism ‘as a consequence of the black presence, and not something innate to white society’.¹⁰⁴ By the 1970s, an alternative, countercultural understanding of anti-racism had started to emerge – the approach adopted by groups like the White Panthers, briefly discussed in Chapter Three and reinigorated by the growing popularity of punk and reggae.¹⁰⁵ To some extent, the limitations of anti-racism in Croydon, and particularly its focus on anti-fascism directed at the NF, vindicates criticisms of the ‘white left’ which were advanced by radical Black activists across the 1970s and 1980s (including Darcus Howe and *Race Today*, which relocated to Brixton in 1974), for whom ‘inner-city’ sites typically remained the ‘front lines’.¹⁰⁶ As this section argues, however, the

¹⁰⁴ Green, *Digging at Roots and Tugging at Branches*, p.13; C. Schofield & B. Jones, ‘“Whatever Community Is, This Is Not It”: Notting Hill and the Reconstruction of “Race” in Britain after 1958,’ *Journal of British Studies*, vol.58 (2019), pp.142-173.

¹⁰⁵ Compare to Paul Gilroy’s distinction between ‘two sides of anti-racism’ (from which he distinguished ‘black struggles’, ‘both more extensive and more modest than the anti-racist label suggests’): Gilroy, *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*, pp.146-151.

¹⁰⁶ Gilroy, *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*, pp.151-155; R. Bunce & P. Field, *Darcus Howe: A Political Biography* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), pp.147-151.

Croydon context gave a special relevance to the struggle against the NF which went beyond (and sometimes conflicted with) ideological stances. Despite the emergence of an autonomous Black politics in 1970s Croydon, both the so-called 'white left' and these Black radicals shared several features reflecting their suburban situation, rendering Croydon a difficult place in which to organize and making the Grunwick strike, rather than Brixton, an especially attractive example for the new anti-racist politics. For the activists influenced by these approaches, it was still Croydon's difference from the 'inner city' which was foregrounded.

Early left-wing responses to racism in Croydon were dominated by an integrationist approach shaped by the philanthropic Christian civic culture and the internationalist labour movement in which the activists had learned their politics. In 1962, for example, the local Labour Party called upon the Bishop of Croydon to intervene to discourage fascists, in a typical deferral of responsibility to non-political groups.¹⁰⁷ Croydon's philanthropic civic culture, discussed in Chapter Two, included the East and West Friendship Council (from 1970, the Croydon Committee for Overseas Students), which met at the YMCA, Ruskin House and the Conservative Party Hall, and the International Association, which counted both Burgos and the Conservative mayor, B.C. Sparrowe, as members.¹⁰⁸ Left-wing activists also saw opposition to racism as part of the labour movement's internationalism, connected to the work of groups like the MCF and AAM – which in 1964 had provided speakers to form a 'group to fight racial prejudice' in Croydon, and in 1972 released a leaflet on the arrival of Ugandan Asians.¹⁰⁹ The significance of measures taken by these 'suburban progressives' should not be underestimated. In 1967, for example, a Labour councillor in Woodside, K.F. Unwin, had offered a house for sale to a Jamaican family in South Norwood Hill, and local white residents clubbed together to purchase it instead.¹¹⁰ As a result of the ensuing publicity, the family was offered two alternative houses on the street, and the

¹⁰⁷ MC, uncatalogued minute book of Croydon Labour Party Executive Committee (1961-1972).

¹⁰⁸ Croydon, Museum of Croydon, ARI43; 'New association will give more help to immigrants,' *Croydon Advertiser* (26th June 1964), p.1; D. Savage, 'International Association: Council blessing, but very little else,' *Croydon Advertiser* (4th March 1966), p.2; 'Official to aid immigrants?', *Croydon Advertiser* (8th March 1968), p.1.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with David Percival; 'Group to oppose race prejudice,' *Croydon Advertiser* (17th April 1964), p.2; MC, uncatalogued minute book of Waddon Ward Labour Party (1971-79).

¹¹⁰ Mildon, 'West Indian home owners in Croydon,' p.96.

International Association advertised a three-bedroom house in Thornton Heath 'in order that anyone, regardless of nationality or colour, might have a chance to purchase.'¹¹¹ In this way, the 'suburban progressives' involved in supporting 'race relations' extended 'the range within which West Indians were able to buy houses', appealing to a welcoming and tolerant notion of the suburban idea as a means of integrating migrants as homeowners.¹¹²

By the mid-to-late 1970s, these groups had largely given way to the Croydon Council for Community Relations (CCCR), chaired by the Jewish South African lawyer and Labour member Arnold Simanowitz.¹¹³ The CCCR would refer to the May killing in their (late) submission to the Scarman inquiry into the April 1981 disturbances, arguing that 'as a contiguous London borough, we have certain positive things to say which may prove to have wider value', and warning of 'an "overspill" of the social problems of the Inner City into the north of the borough'; they highlighted their own contribution to integration, including intervening when 30 girls were accused of attacking the police.¹¹⁴ Their response was heavily criticised by *Race Today*, who accused the older Black community of having 'sang like canaries'; Martin Kettle noted the 'undermining of community solidarity' in response to the May killing.¹¹⁵ A local (albeit 'unpopular') Labour member, Chris Wright, even testified for the prosecution in the subsequent 'Croydon 15' trial.¹¹⁶ The CCCR sought to discourage further disturbances by applying for funding for a community theatre project, described by one group of local Black activists as 'not a serious attempt to tackle youth unemployment in the borough but perhaps a commendable attempt to add variety to it'.¹¹⁷

This is typical of the criticisms which have been made of integrationist approaches to anti-racism. As Evan Smith has shown, the CPGB (exerting a significant influence on the left within

¹¹¹ Mildon, 'West Indian home owners in Croydon,' p.96.

¹¹² Mildon, 'West Indian home owners in Croydon,' p.96.

¹¹³ Interview with David White; Interview with Jean Tagg.

¹¹⁴ London, National Archives, HO 266/132.

¹¹⁵ C. Straker, P. Dick & D. Howe, 'Thornton Heath – the debacle,' *Race Today*, vol.14, no.3 (1982), pp.86–87, p.87; M. Kettle, 'Not a black and white case,' *New Society* (22nd April 1982), pp.128–130; LMA, LRB/FN/C4/01/01; 'C.C.R.C. in gutless sellout,' *The Sniper*, no.1 (1982), p.5; MC, A845.

¹¹⁶ MC, A845; Interview with Jean Tagg.

¹¹⁷ 'Community Theatre Project,' *The Sniper*, no.1 (1982), p.2.

Croydon's Labour Party) regarded racism as an aspect of anti-colonialism, which 'served to reinforce the "foreignness" of immigrant workers and subordinated immediate matters of fighting racism in Britain to a much longer term program of colonial freedom and socialist revolution'.¹¹⁸ It typically fell to Black and Asian activists like Shah to act as delegates to groups like the MCF, which did not emphasise anti-racism but anti-colonialism.¹¹⁹ Black activists like Errol Neckles – a member of Labour in South Norwood in the late 1960s, and husband to an activist within the International Association – were treated as responsible for their communities, seen as 'culturally homogenous and essentially culturally different', and expected to win 'the coloured vote' over to Labour.¹²⁰ This was often coupled with an economism about the discrimination which workers from ethnic minority communities experienced. Indeed, as late as 1977, South Norwood activists described some speakers arguing for the CCCR to 'be seen merely as a means of bringing people into the Labour Movt.; it should concentrate on coloured unemployment or providing hostels for coloured unemployed.'¹²¹ Meanwhile, the previous chapter has shown that Labour faced opposition and even defections for adopting anti-racist stances. In 1975, the Croydon Committee for Overseas Students was refused a booking at Ruskin House, despite stressing their ties to Labour and the TUC, which may indicate a reluctance from the management to host a dance there.¹²² Even in the 1980s, Clive Fraser remembered, a regular at Ruskin House had objected to the renaming of a ground-floor room as the 'Mandela Lounge', asking why they were 'naming a part of Ruskin House after a terrorist?'¹²³ As Fraser explained, 'Croydon had a view of itself being kind of outer London, a more traditional view, and therefore the Labour Party mirrored that too'; 'it wasn't naturally welcoming to people of a different culture, a different race.'¹²⁴

¹¹⁸ E. Smith, "'Class before Race": British Communism and the Place of Empire in Postwar Race Relations,' *Science & Society*, vol.72, no.4 (2008), pp.455-481, pp.457-458.

¹¹⁹ MC, uncatalogued minute book of Croydon Labour Party Executive Committee (1961-1972); Burkett, *Constructing Post-Imperial Britain*, p.194.

¹²⁰ 'Council blessing, but very little else,' *Croydon Advertiser* (4th March 1966), p.2; Ebke, 'From "Ethnic Community" to "Black Community",' p.99; MC, A845.

¹²¹ MC, A845.

¹²² MC, AR143; Interview with Clive Fraser.

¹²³ MC, AR143; Interview with Clive Fraser.

¹²⁴ Interview with Clive Fraser.

The philanthropic civic culture and labour movement internationalism were not the only residual anti-racisms in Croydon, however. One of the earliest groups to confront the NF in the borough, the Croydon Radical Action Movement (CRAM) in the late 1960s and early 1970s, drew together 'Stalinists, Trotskyists, social democrats, anarchists' as well as Young Liberals like its chair Iain McNay, who had experience in the AAM, CND and the opposition to the Vietnam War.¹²⁵ In 1970, CRAM and the Surrey Anti-Apartheid Committee, supported by the CPGB, had led the demonstrations against Enoch Powell which clashed with the NF.¹²⁶ Meanwhile, countercultural groups like the White Panthers offered a different way of understanding politics, thriving in a youth scene in which (partially) crossing the 'colour bar' was becoming (comparatively) common.¹²⁷ One of my narrators, Simon Berlin, explicitly connected the countercultural scene of the late 1960s and early 1970s to the 'progressive music movement', 'quite intertwined with left wing politics', of the late 1970s: Rock Against Racism (RAR), founded in opposition to the aforementioned reactionary turn of some members of the earlier Croydon underground.¹²⁸ Indeed, Paul Gilroy, author of one of the most significant (and sympathetic) analyses of RAR, had himself encountered the White Panthers as a 13-year-old attendee at the 1969 Isle of Wight Festival.¹²⁹ My narrators were generally too old (or too elsewhere) to have participated in the punk movement in Croydon, and both Roy Lockett and Brian Nevill discussed Jamie Reid's latter involvement in the Sex Pistols from the perspective of outsiders.¹³⁰ Nevertheless, the borough, home to Johnny Moped and The Damned as well as reggae musicians like Delroy Wilson and Desmond Dekker, and with a catchment area which overlapped with the Bromley Contingent, was well-placed for involvement.¹³¹ As Gilroy argued, RAR made 'racism central to radical or revolutionary sentiment not because it was the most important dimension to life in the declining

¹²⁵ 'Croydon Left Unites Against Fascism,' *International: A Survey of British and World Affairs*, vol.2, no.7 (1969), p.2.

¹²⁶ LHASC, CP/LOC/MISC/01/07.

¹²⁷ Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, pp.220-223.

¹²⁸ Interview with Simon Berlin.

¹²⁹ K.P. Sian, *Conversations in Postcolonial Thought* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p.176. For Gilroy's discussion of RAR, see: Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, pp.148-170.

¹³⁰ Interview with Brian Nevill; Interview with Roy Lockett.

¹³¹ F. Molloy, 'Sound of a Suburb,' *Wandering Tour Guide* (24th December 2021), <https://soulcitywanderer.com/2021/12/24/sound-of-a-suburb/>, accessed 29th July 2022. Billy Idol, of Generation X, was actually taught by my grandad at Ravensbourne School for Boys. My father, unsurprisingly, has more memories of the punk scene and wearing anti-racist badges in late 1970s Croydon, as well as the presence of clothing shops with enigmatic names like 'Che Guevara'.

UK but because it was a moment in the process of social and political struggle where the system as a whole was vulnerable, where its irrationality, bias and brutality could be demonstrated to exist.¹³²

However, as the late 1970s continued, RAR was to play second fiddle to the SWP-initiated Anti-Nazi League (ANL), better-remembered by my narrators and more reminiscent of CRAM than of the White Panthers. David Percival was arrested at a protest during the 1978 Lambeth Central by-election, when John Tilley was successfully elected as Labour MP with the NF coming third, and the Croydon ANL secretary, Mike Marriott, had his arm broken at the 'Battle of Lewisham' in 1977, when the NF was prevented from marching by an anti-fascist demonstration.¹³³ Gilroy has argued that the ANL pivoted to convincing older voters (arguably including my narrators' now-adult demographic) to oppose the NF, whilst its campaigning often focused on defences of 'inner-city' areas like Lewisham, Brixton, and Southall.¹³⁴ This should be understood in the context of the above-described perceptions of Croydon as fundamentally different to the inner city. The 1976 delegation from the CCCR to the Select Committee of Race Relations and Immigration, for example, led by the Guyanese community relations officer James Cummings, had made a convincing argument that 'the colonies were not only overseas', but the list of internal colonies which he identified ('Brixton, Notting Hill, the Midlands') did not include Croydon.¹³⁵ Berlin, acquainted with the varieties of 'Black politics' which were growing in Lambeth, thought that the phenomenon 'hadn't really hit Croydon', and struggled to explain the 'identity politics' encountered in his union branch to his comrades in Croydon, where it had 'yet to arrive' – 'of course the population of Croydon was probably at least ninety percent white even in the late seventies', White remembered.¹³⁶ Given this persistent view of Croydon as a white, middle-class space, it is perhaps unsurprising that many activists continued to focus their anti-racist efforts elsewhere.

¹³² Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, p.169.

¹³³ Interview with David Percival. For a discussion of the 'Battle of Lewisham', see: Renton, *Never Again*, pp.69-86.

¹³⁴ Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, pp.170-177.

¹³⁵ Select Committee of Race Relations and Immigration, *The West Indian Community*, p.903.

¹³⁶ Interview with Simon Berlin; Interview with David White.

On the other hand, the Croydon Labour Campaign Against Racism (CLCAR), formed after the 'Lewisham holocaust' in 1976 to call for the council to refuse to let rooms to the NF and for a proposed march from Streatham to Croydon to be banned, did bring anti-fascism into the town centre itself.¹³⁷ A mass demonstration (supported by Labour PPCs, the AAM, the ANL, and the SSCS's political committee) prevented the NF from selling literature in the Whitgift Centre.¹³⁸ Three campaigners – Marriott, Charles Fraser (from the NUT and NCP) and Ken Brinson (the CLCAR chair and a CPGGB member) – were arrested in September 1978, charged with obstruction at what was 'traditionally Croydon's speakers' corner'.¹³⁹ 'No bench could be found whose members were not acquainted with them because of their prominence in the town's political scene', and the connections forged with activists in the 'inner city' were mobilised when Tilley, newly-elected, presented a petition for their release to the Home Secretary, Merlyn Rees.¹⁴⁰ White, himself involved prominently in the arrestees' defence as a prospective parliamentary candidate, described the campaign as having 'really brought together all the left wing groups to oppose racism'.¹⁴¹ As the list of arrestees indicates, however, these 'left wing groups' were still predominantly white, and largely focused on anti-fascism rather than anti-racism. This focus, from the ANL and CLCAR, 'on the most extreme expressions of racism, in order to demonstrate that racism of all sorts was wrong', has faced criticism, including from Black activists who argued 'the NF was not importing an alien ideology, but drawing on the history and practice of the British state'.¹⁴² Whilst Satnam Virdee has argued that groups like the ANL or CLCAR managed to 'mobilise a community of anti-racists, of committed white anti-racists in particular, that undermined the NF, and forced many of the racist middle classes and deferential working-class Tories to retreat back into the Conservative Party', the victory of Thatcher in 1979 (and her consolidation of power by 1983) meant that racist politics was advancing without a mass

¹³⁷ MC, A845.

¹³⁸ London, Bishopsgate Institute, MS/6/9/1/33.

¹³⁹ BI, MS/6/9/1/16.

¹⁴⁰ BI, MS/6/9/1/16.

¹⁴¹ Interview with David White.

¹⁴² Renton, *Never Again*, p.94; M. Higgs, 'From the street to the state: making anti-fascism anti-racist in 1970s Britain,' *Race & Class*, vol.58, no.1 (2016), pp.66-84, p.81.

movement to oppose them, the ‘permanent cadres of the far left’ (as David Renton put it) concentrating on a dwindling NF.¹⁴³ As Gilroy argued, the ANL’s ‘single issue orientation became harder to sustain and looked out of place when the Prime Minister elect made remarks about British people “feeling rather swamped”.’¹⁴⁴

In Croydon, criticisms of the ANL’s approach took different forms. Some, including several Black activists, defended a more familiar ‘class politics’ approach which treated members of the NF as ‘misguided because of propaganda’ – as Norman Brown, an SWP member, said, ‘the folks in our society that really use things like racism to divide us, you’re never ever going to see those folks out on the street.’¹⁴⁵ Moreover, as the previous chapter noted, South Norwood possessed in the early 1970s a branch of the British Black Panthers, headquartered at 202 Selhurst Road; another group was based nearby at the college in Redhill, Surrey.¹⁴⁶ Linton Kwesi Johnson recalled selling the newspaper of the British Black Panther Movement in Croydon as well as Brixton and Balham.¹⁴⁷ A former member of the Redhill group, Ghanaian market trader and later Lambeth council employee Wilf Domfe, joined the Croydon branch of the CPB-ML, which saw involvement in anti-fascist street organising, such as the march against the NF in Lewisham, as counterproductive.¹⁴⁸ Meanwhile, by the mid-1970s, 202 Selhurst Road had been repurposed as the base for the Croydon and Brixton Collective Black Peoples Organisation (CBC, sometimes known as the ‘Black Marxist Collective’), with ‘a different kind of politics, based on the immigrant cultures’.¹⁴⁹ They defined themselves as ‘a BLACK PEOPLES organisation formed to fight for the just demands of black people in this society, and to support these demands of black people

¹⁴³ S. Virdee, ‘Anti-racism and the socialist left, 1968–79,’ pp.209–228, in Smith & Worley (eds.), *Against the grain*, p.225; Renton, *Never Again*, p.163.

¹⁴⁴ Gilroy, *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*, p.177.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Norman Brown.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Simon Berlin.

¹⁴⁷ A. Angelo, ‘“Black Oppressed People All over the World Are One”: The British Black Panthers’ Grassroots Internationalism, 1969–73,’ *Journal of Civil and Human Rights*, vol.4, no.1 (2018), pp.64–97, p.71.

¹⁴⁸ Interview with Simon Berlin.

¹⁴⁹ *Front Lines*, vol.1, no.6 (1977), p.2; T. Bogue, K. Gordon & C.L.R. James, *Black Nationalism and Socialism* (London: SWP, 1979), quoted in Renton, *Never Again*, p. 72. Ambalavaner Sivanandan referred to the group as ‘BCC: Brixton and Croydon Collective’, but CBC is the phrasing which appears in the group’s own materials: A. Sivanandan, ‘From resistance to rebellion: Asian and Afro-Caribbean struggles in Britain,’ *Race & Class*, vol.23 (1981), pp.III–152, p.135.

nationally & internationally'.¹⁵⁰ Calling for 'clear thinking organisations that are independent of the State and of the white left', they complained:

'White socialist organisations, realising that in times like these people will be looking for alternatives, are pouring into black communities trying to "organize" us. Their main concern seems to be to get more black members into the "party". We say that we can, and must organise ourselves.'¹⁵¹

They described the NF as 'simply the pawns of big business' and, alongside Big Flame (whose position on Black autonomy they influenced), called for an autonomous anti-fascist organisation distinct from the trades council, with minimal IS/SWP involvement.¹⁵² The CBC repeatedly clashed with the CCCR, arguing that both 'black leaders' and community relations councils 'merely hold back our struggle'.¹⁵³ After some community leaders criticised Black young people following the 1977 Notting Hill Carnival, the CBC said that 'Black puppets, masquerading as community leaders tripper themselves to cuss of black youth, and protect their state paid salaries'.¹⁵⁴ As James Cummings reported to the Select Committee, he faced resentment because a large section of the Caribbean community in Croydon had 'gradually withdrawn all but the most absolutely necessary communication with the remainder of English society'.¹⁵⁵ Even Cummings, within the CCCR, had clashed with some of the 'white left'; whilst White argued that Cummings did 'quite a lot to enhance equality issues in Croydon', Tagg thought that he 'was having his strings pulled by other people' and he argued frequently with Simanowitz.¹⁵⁶ South Norwood Labour Party, of which Simanowitz was a member, described the 1978 annual general meeting as a 'shambles', and a meeting was convened to discuss the 'serious situation in the CCCR'; Labour

¹⁵⁰ *Front Lines*, vol.1, no.1 (undated), p.2.

¹⁵¹ 'Carnage at the Carnival,' *Front Lines*, vol.1, no.3 (undated), p.2.

¹⁵² 'No Apologies,' *Front Lines*, vol.1, no.3 (undated), p.3; 'Special Branch report on a meeting between representatives of Big Flame and the Croydon Collective discussing tactics at the formation of the Croydon anti-Fascist Committee (14th August 1976),' *Undercover Policing Inquiry*, UCPI0000010825 (5th May 2021), <https://www.ucpi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/UCPI0000010825.pdf>; 'Black Autonomy in Class Struggle,' *Revolutionary Socialism*, no.2 (1978), pp.20-23; Bunce & Field, *Darcus Howe*, p.168.

¹⁵³ 'Message from Bradford: We Will Fight,' *Front Lines*, vol.1, no.2 (undated), p.1.

¹⁵⁴ 'Carnival – After the lights went out,' *Front Lines*, vol.1, no.6 (1977), pp.1-3.

¹⁵⁵ Select Committee of Race Relations and Immigration, *The West Indian Community*, p.900.

¹⁵⁶ Interview with David White; Interview with Jean Tagg.

councillors were reportedly no longer attending the group's meetings.¹⁵⁷ Breaches were bound to open, given the ambiguous approaches of Labour and the 'white left' to racism beyond the fascist organisations, and Labour governments' positions on immigration: in South Norwood, Labour members rebuked protestors who had disrupted a national rally in order to draw attention to an impending deportation.¹⁵⁸ Given these differences, it is perhaps unsurprising that the activists that I interviewed had such little awareness of groups like the CBC – as with the earlier counterculture, radical Black activists were almost entirely outside the left-wing world of, say, Ruskin House.

The CBC were associated with the Black Unity and Freedom Party (BUFP, formed in 1970 as an explicitly Marxist-Leninist organization and prominently including *Race Today's* Leila Hassan Howe) and joined the BUFP-founded Africa Liberation Committee, set up in 1973 to coordinate Africa Liberation Day celebrations.¹⁵⁹ Their journal, *Front Lines*, a reference to Brixton's Railton Road, is indicative of the territorial politics which they had inherited from the Panthers.¹⁶⁰ The CBC took part in a 1972 summer school initiative with the BUFP which attempted to teach Black history beyond the American example, something they found particularly difficult 'because Caribbean groups in Britain had not yet developed the institutions they required for survival in a society based on (white) ethnicity which automatically excluded the black "other"'.¹⁶¹ They were signatories, alongside the BUFP and *Race Today*, of a statement in solidarity with the three participants in the 1975 'Spaghetti House siege', and were co-signatories with the BUFP of a later, longer statement which *Race Today* declined to support.¹⁶² They had also

¹⁵⁷ MC, A845.

¹⁵⁸ MC, A845; Renton, *Never Again*, p.xxi.

¹⁵⁹ *Front Lines*, vol.1, no.1 (undated), p.2; London, George Padmore Institute, BPM/7/1/4/2/1-2; 'Independent radical black politics: Looking at the BUFP & BLF,' *Encyclopedia of Anti-Revisionism On-Line* (October 2017), <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/uk.secondwave/bufp-blf.pdf>, accessed 17th November 2021; Bunce & Field, *Darcus Howe*, p.142.

¹⁶⁰ J.A. Tyner, "'Defend the Ghetto': Space and the Urban Politics of the Black Panther Party,' *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol.96, no.1 (2006), pp.105-118, p.107.

¹⁶¹ Goulbourne, *Caribbean Transnational Experience*, p.147.

¹⁶² J. Bourne, 'Spaghetti House siege: making the rhetoric real,' *Race & Class*, vol.53, no.2 (2011), pp.1-13, pp.4-5. The 'Spaghetti house siege' was a significant moment in the police's political strategy, which promoted an 'emphasis on brute and basic images of black criminality and on crime rather than politics as the motivation and the primary characteristic of black law-breakers': Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, pp.119-120.

been heavily involved in establishing the Joshua Francis Defence Committee in February 1972, set up to defend a 38 year old Jamaican worker at the London Transport bus garage in Thornton Heath, found guilty of assault on police officers, and later renamed the Black People's Defence Committee.¹⁶³ As well as the BUFP and the CBC, represented by Lloyd Blake, the defence committee was chaired by the West Indian Standing Conference's Cliff Lynch (who had earlier broken away from Croydon CARD in opposition to Black Power) and had Rudy Narayan as a member.¹⁶⁴ However, whilst the defence committee was started because of the plight of a worker in Thornton Heath, the majority of their campaigning was focused on Brixton, not Croydon. The headquarters of the CBC may have been in Croydon, but its attention was largely elsewhere – as for many participants in the broader counterculture, fixated by the metropolis.

This reflects an understanding of the suburban context which paralleled, rather than fundamentally differed from, that of the ANL and CLCAR – and this explains the potential for overlap between the three's approaches, particularly in a Croydon where the threat of violence from the NF was palpable. This was especially true of Thornton Heath, which 'wasn't the place to be', Lockett describing stewarding an anti-racist meeting by the clocktower as 'like something from Gotham City', 'furtive people in the street', 'a rough old area' that 'looked like it needed a shot of penicillin'.¹⁶⁵ In February 1978, South Norwood Labour Party appealed for members to attend the CLCAR meeting with Joan Lestor 'because poorly attended meetings have in the past been broken up by racials'.¹⁶⁶ The specific threat of organised fascism in Croydon was apparent in the instances where the left-wing critics of the ANL abandoned their ideological reservations in order to physically confront the NF. Percival remembered that it was Brown and another Black member, Mark Kelly, who 'led the charge' when an SWP meeting in the Oval in Addiscombe was besieged by the NF – 'they stormed out and they ran shouting and screaming at them, and they basically legged it, the whole lot of them run away'.¹⁶⁷ Similarly, despite the CPB-ML's opposition

¹⁶³ Goulbourne, *Caribbean Transnational Experience*, pp.159-163.

¹⁶⁴ Goulbourne, *Caribbean Transnational Experience*, p.162.

¹⁶⁵ Interview with Roy Lockett.

¹⁶⁶ MC, A845.

¹⁶⁷ Interview with David Percival.

to more dangerous or illegal types of activism, their members in Croydon – including Domfe – were applauded by other left-wing groups for having chased away an NF stall; ‘we’re not having this’, Berlin remembered thinking, ‘we’re not having them selling newspapers in Thornton Heath.’¹⁶⁸ As these examples indicate, the ‘spatial strategy’ which left-wing activists developed, focused on establishing and maintaining spaces as unwelcoming to the organised far right, emerged out of the demands of a suburban context in which the NF posed a real danger, and not simply their having made a fetish of anti-fascism.¹⁶⁹

Consequently, the CLCAR had both greater Black and Asian involvement, and more support from the CBC, than some treatments of the approaches of the ‘white left’ to anti-fascism might imply. Fitzpatrick attributed the impetus for the CLCAR to the Sri Lankan activist Mani Supiramamiam, described as ‘quite a strong antifascist activist in the 1970s, [...] quite a character, at the heart of many, if you like, left-wing activities within the various Labour parties and the Labour units in Croydon.’¹⁷⁰ Similarly, the CBC offered support to the trades council’s anti-racist campaign, including praise for leafleting against Powell at the Fairfield Halls, whilst noting that ‘if left within the sphere of the unions, and in the hands of a small committee, [it] would have been doomed to failure.’¹⁷¹ They praised the Labour Party’s anti-racism ahead of the 1977 GLC elections, which they saw as challenging a fascist ‘spring offensive’, ‘since black people are just the first barrier that the fascists intend to eliminate; and it has become most clear that the labour movement is their main objective.’¹⁷² They were also willing to support activities against the Young NF (formed in 1978) which was organising in local schools.¹⁷³ As Mike Higgs points out, if ‘there were, for a while, essentially two separate struggles in the UK – the (white) class fight against fascism, and the (black) immigrant fight against racism’, ‘they began to fuse or at least

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Simon Berlin.

¹⁶⁹ A. Ince, ‘Anti-Fascist Action and the Transversal Territorialities of Militant Anti-Fascism in 1990s Britain,’ *Antipode* (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12768>, pp.2-4. For a discussion of the spatial and the strategic, see: de Certeau, Jameson & Levitt, ‘On the Oppositional Practices of Everyday Life,’ pp.3-43; D. Frost, ‘Strategy and Tactics,’ *New Socialist* (19th April 2020), <https://newsocialist.org.uk/strategy-and-tactics/>, accessed 9th November 2021.

¹⁷⁰ Interview with Jerry Fitzpatrick.

¹⁷¹ *Front Lines*, vol.1, no.4 (undated), p.5.

¹⁷² ‘Croydon Campaign,’ *Front Lines*, vol.1, no.5 (1977), p.6.

¹⁷³ ‘NF Youth,’ *Front Lines*, vol.2, no.1 (1978), pp.1-3.

contaminate one another during the 1970s.¹⁷⁴ The increased willingness of ANL supporters like Nigel Webb to describe Thatcher and other Conservative politicians as fascists, as 1979 approached, was in part the consequence of interactions with Black radical activists which involvement in anti-racist activism, as well as the residues of the counterculture accessed via punk or reggae, provided.

This comes through more generally in the CBC's ambiguous relationship to the mainstream of the labour movement. On the one hand, they were critical of 'Foot and Benn' and lamented that, through the Social Contract, the TUC had 'committed its members to maximum servitude for the next 12 months'.¹⁷⁵ They especially disputed the slogan 'Black and White Unite and Fight', noting that 'we are oppressed both because of our class position and because of our colour.'¹⁷⁶ As has been seen, however, the CBC was not entirely averse to supporting the CLCAR, and the group celebrated the results of a nine-day strike at Ariston Alloys on Beddington Lane as 'a perfect example of workers solidarity, where black workers and white workers united and fought against management, where the struggle came first before colour and no one had any doubt who the real enemy was.'¹⁷⁷ In part, this willingness to work within the predominantly-white labour movement reflected the CBC's proximity to Darcus Howe, of *Race Today*, who was then engaged in a political disagreement with the Institute of Race Relations' Ambalavaner Sivanandan; whereas, Almuth Ebke notes, the latter emphasised the analysis of white racism, Howe (and the CBC, at least in early-to-mid-1977) 'believed that black people had to take the lead not only against white racism, but also in engaging in the struggles of the British working class'.¹⁷⁸ For the CBC, the willingness to adopt positions closer to 'Black and White Unite' in the Croydon context suggests a division between politics in 'inner-city' Brixton and what was possible in more suburban spaces. Just as the CBC contrasted mass violence in South Africa with their own situation – 'Britain is

¹⁷⁴ Higgs, 'From the street to the state,' p.67.

¹⁷⁵ 'Whose Budget?' *Front Lines*, vol.1, no.2 (undated), p.4.

¹⁷⁶ *Front Lines*, vol.1, no.4 (undated), p.3. For Paul Gilroy's criticism of this phrase, see: Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, pp.13-14.

¹⁷⁷ 'Croydon Strike,' *Front Lines*, vol.1, no.4 (undated), pp.1-2.

¹⁷⁸ Ebke, 'From "Ethnic Community" to "Black Community",' p.107; Bunce & Field, *Darcus Howe*, pp.144-147.

much too smart for that', they claimed – the activists could not miss the differences between Brixton and Croydon; whilst the language of 'apartheid' provided one way of identifying the struggle against racism in Britain with a heroic cause in South Africa, it was also used by other figures (as with comparisons to the United States) to emphasise Britain's relative tolerance, or at least that of its working class.¹⁷⁹ If the CBC still looked to the 'Black youth' of Soweto or Brixton as a symbol of hope and resistance, their willingness to emphasise the labour movement in Croydon indicates that they thought the suburban context required a different approach.

The strike at Grunwick Film Processing Laboratories, in Willesden, north London – an industry shared by Croydon, and a comparable suburban setting – seemed to show that the residual internationalism of the labour movement could be used to develop class unity across racial lines, with 'black people as protagonists'.¹⁸⁰ The 1976-1978 dispute was begun by Asian workers (predominantly women) in opposition to unequal pay and racist harassment, but eventually received the support of the union which they joined, the Association of Professional, Executive, Clerical and Computer Staff (APEX, led by Roy Grantham, later a Croydon councillor), Brent trades council, and the wider labour movement and especially the postal union.¹⁸¹ Simanowitz, White remembered, 'was very keen to support the Grunwick workers, and all the people who were working for his firm [...] on one day went over and supported the Grunwick picket'.¹⁸² In 1977, a police report stated that amongst the 'most notable' banners displayed at a Grunwick rally were those of Croydon and Addiscombe Labour; John Barnard and an 'unidentified male, R.C.4.' (the police classification for 'Asian', probably referring to Supiramamiam), spoke at rallies on the party's behalf.¹⁸³ Within CHE, Webb stressed the strike's importance, attempting to make a

¹⁷⁹ 'Should we join the police force? A look at the arguments put forward by the "West Indian World",' *Front Lines*, vol.1, no.1 (undated), p.4; Perry, *London is the Place for Me*, p.104 & p.155.

¹⁸⁰ In this, the strike echoed the 1974 Imperial Typewriters' strike in Leicester, about which *Race Today* had been enthusiastic: Bunce & Field, *Darcus Howe*, p.147 & pp.154-155. A major text on the Grunwick disputes, which highlights this connection, is: S. Anitha & R. Pearson, *Striking Women: Struggles and Strategies of South Asian Women Workers from Grunwick to Gate Gourmet* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2018), pp.28-31 & pp.101-140.

¹⁸¹ Virdee, 'Anti-racism and the socialist left,' pp.219-220; Anitha & Pearson, *Striking Women*, pp.119-127.

¹⁸² Interview with David White.

¹⁸³ Special Branch Files Project, 1977-07-25-MPS-Report-Grunwick, <https://embed.documentcloud.org/documents/2693977-1977-07-25-MPS-Report-Grunwick>.

connection between gay politics and a struggle by working-class Asian women.¹⁸⁴ The CBC, too, in an article which appeared on the same page of *Front Lines* as their endorsement for Labour in the 1977 elections, used the strike to show the importance of trade union membership.¹⁸⁵ Satnam Virdee argued that what the strike 'crystallised above all was how, in the space of less than a decade, parts of the working class had undergone a dramatic, organic transformation in their political consciousness.'¹⁸⁶ The support of groups like the BUFP (and by extension the CBC) for cross-racial class solidarity 'on the grounds of radically altering the tenets of class struggle in Britain' was being vindicated – but on the basis of a 'suburban', rather than stereotypically 'inner-city', example.¹⁸⁷

Arguably, the Grunwick example tended to benefit groups like CLCAR – whose labour movement focus it rewarded, even if it had been transformed by the contribution of radical Black activists – rather than the CBC, whose emphasis was on the centres of Black activism in Brixton and the 'inner city', and especially the activism of 'Black youth'. This deepened some of the contradictions which the CBC faced as the 1970s drew on. By the fifth issue, *Front Lines* was complaining that it was 'a constant struggle' to keep it afloat, and they would require regular donations and 'a permanent readership bank' for it to survive.¹⁸⁸ This was followed by a six-month hiatus and a 'protracted exodus' as the editorial line of the paper changed.¹⁸⁹ Relaunched, they acknowledged that 'the organisation had moved out of the community; and were developing tactics similar to white left organisations, which were channelling us into political irrelevance', and that they 'carried more international news, than the state in our own backyards' – not dissimilar to the 'winning in China' self-criticisms of the CPGB, discussed in Chapter Two.¹⁹⁰ Instead, they promised 'the way we operate must to a greater degree be based on the particularities of the black

¹⁸⁴ BLPES, HCA/CHE/7/81.

¹⁸⁵ 'Grunwick Strike for recognition,' *Front Lines*, vol.1, no.5 (1977), p.6.

¹⁸⁶ Virdee, 'Anti-racism and the socialist left,' p.220.

¹⁸⁷ J. Narayan, 'British Black Power: The anti-imperialism of political blackness and the problem of nativist socialism,' *The Sociological Review*, vol.67, no.5 (2019), pp.945-967, p.957.

¹⁸⁸ *Front Lines*, vol.1, no.5 (1977), p.1.

¹⁸⁹ 'The Collective Steps Out Again,' *Front Lines*, vol.1, no.6 (1977), pp.1-2.

¹⁹⁰ 'The Collective Steps Out Again,' *Front Lines*, vol.1, no.6 (1977), pp.1-2.

community; its history; culture, identity, relationships to the state, and class allies.¹⁹¹ Whereas early issues had described Rastafarianism as a 'cult' and (commenting on Marcus Garvey) suggested that it was 'easy for black people today to mistake all white people as our enemy', by the seventh issue, their approach to Rastafarianism had changed, emphasising 'the significance of a move to unify a movement which has been splintered immersed in myths etc', the CBC expressing 'a determination to come to terms with the political scene as it exists today'.¹⁹² However, still influenced by Howe and *Race Today*, they criticised those who 'emphasis[ed] the fact that the jury that delivered this verdict [in a trial of a National Party leader] was all-white', and their perspective on 'Black youth' – though broadly supportive – was marked by its distance, with strong criticism of those stealing from others at Notting Hill Carnival and thereby providing 'a reason for the state to bring out its counter insurgency weapons for testing'.¹⁹³ Whilst the exact end of the CBC is unclear, *Front Lines* does not seem to have survived beyond 1978, as it struggled to find its place, torn between the Brixton where resistance was celebrated and the Croydon where ageing activists increasingly lived.

This section has highlighted some of the residual influences upon anti-racist activism in 1970s and early 1980s Croydon, including the philanthropic civic culture, the internationalist labour movement, and the countercultural underground. Groups like the International Association, CCCR and CLCAR actively made Croydon into a more welcoming place, making places like Thornton Heath available as sites of 'secondary settlement'. At the same time, these groups tended to treat Croydon as a white suburb where new residents should be made to feel at home, and attributed racism to the failure of this process. However, whilst this section has described the emergence of Black radical groups, including the CBC, which were critical of these limitations, it has also argued that these group's own imaginings of Croydon (as contrasted with South Africa, or Brixton) tended to limit their attempts to have effects in the borough, rendering them dependent

¹⁹¹ 'The Collective Steps Out Again,' *Front Lines*, vol.1, no.6 (1977), pp.1-2.

¹⁹² 'Rastafarian Unity,' *Front Lines*, vol.2, no.1 (1978), p.8; *Front Lines*, vol.1, no.3 (undated), p.5. On the changing significance of Rastafari, see: Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, pp.150-158.

¹⁹³ 'Judge A National Affront,' *Front Lines*, vol.2, no.1 (1978), p.7; 'Carnival – After the lights went out,' *Front Lines*, vol.1, no.6 (1977), pp.1-3.

upon activism in the 'inner city'. In Croydon, where the NF was headquartered and left-wing activists were especially threatened, a focus on combating organised fascism was not an ideological mistake, but a practical necessity, whilst the inspiring example of Grunwick had more immediate relevance to activism in Croydon than the heroic actions of Black young people in Lewisham or Soweto. Nevertheless, the tensions developing within the CBC are an indication that suburban solutions remained an unsatisfactory response to racism deeply-ingrained in British society – leading some activists, in the 1980s, back to the politics of liberation embodied in 'inner-city' Brixton.

'We had a bit of socialism in London'

1981 was a tumultuous year in South London and in Croydon. The March 1981 Black People's Day of Action in response to the 'New Cross massacre', memorialised in Jay Bernard's *Surge* (2019), 'was the largest political gathering of black people in British history at the time.'¹⁹⁴ In April 1981, following similar uprisings in Bristol and Nottingham in the previous year, 'institutionalized racism, supported and perpetuated by the police' (and epitomised by operation SWAMP 81) provoked what has come to be known as the 'Brixton riots'.¹⁹⁵ June 1981 saw the May killing, described above and frequently connected to the preceding disturbances. For radical Black activists, both inside and outside Croydon, the resulting 'Croydon 15' trial allowed the area to be reimagined as a site of Black militancy, with Black young people influenced by their connections to Brixton and New Cross breaking with the suburbanity of their parents. This would be reinforced by the award of funding from the left-wing GLC, a council which was busy establishing 'social democracy zones', including in Croydon: attempts, Stephen Brooke has argued, 'to redefine the relationship between the state and citizen and [...] animate local groups', acting as 'emotional refuges, material and discursive spaces against neo-liberalism'.¹⁹⁶ Though

¹⁹⁴ J. Bernard, *Surge* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2019), p.x.

¹⁹⁵ Carby, *Cultures in Babylon*, p.229. An overview of the uprisings in Bristol and Brixton, and responses to them, is provided in: S. Peplow, *Race and Riots in Thatcher's Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019). For my review of this book, see: D. Frost, Review of S. Peplow, *Race and Riots in Thatcher's Britain*, *Social History*, vol.46, no.2 (2021), pp.232-233.

¹⁹⁶ Brooke, 'Space, Emotions and the Everyday,' pp.123-124 & p.142; D. Kelliher, 'Contested Spaces: London and the 1984-5 Miners' Strike,' *Twentieth Century British History*, vol.28, no.4 (2017), pp.595-617, p.598.

marked by tensions, this led, alongside other spatial strategies in 1980s Croydon, to a shifting understanding of the borough as part of London and even the 'inner city', an appropriate space for some of the politics which the 'new urban left' were encouraging in Lambeth and elsewhere.

The arrest of 15 Black teenagers in the attack's aftermath, and the subsequent 'Croydon 15' trial, led to a response by radical Black activists from both inside and outside the borough. Amongst the accused was the cousin of Paul Robinson, a toolmaker who had previously been involved with the CBC.¹⁹⁷ Winford Jamieson, a 36-year-old relative of another defendant, also soon became involved, and was joined by Femi Adelaja (a postgraduate physicist in his late twenties, born in Nigeria) and Tony Graham (a social worker).¹⁹⁸ They received the support of *Race Today* and the Black Parents Movement (BPM, founded by John La Rose and others in 1975, and involved in campaigning around the New Cross fire), issuing a series of statements about racist and fascist violence locally, including the smashing of the Labour Party headquarters and assaults on non-white bus drivers as well as 'months of persistent racial attacks on black people in the area, in the face of police inaction.'¹⁹⁹ With the defence led by the radical barrister Rudy Narayan, Kennett was accused of attacking four Black men on the nights preceding the attack; witnesses would claim that young whites outside the pub 'chanted "Sieg Heil" and gave Nazi salutes' or 'saluted like Germans'.²⁰⁰ The journalist Martin Kettle described the trial as 'the courtroom equivalent of the Scarman inquiry', arguing 'a series of racial incidents in Thornton Heath were translated into the courtroom in a highly nuanced and equivocal manner'.²⁰¹ As in the 1970 Mangrove Nine trial, the defence successfully argued that jurors' race was relevant to their capacity to deliver a fair verdict, and the jury therefore consisted of five white jurors, five Black jurors, and two Asian, with NF sympathisers removed.²⁰² Records were broken when the jury deliberated for a total of 56 hours

¹⁹⁷ London, London Metropolitan Archives, LMA/4463/B/02/01/005.

¹⁹⁸ Straker, Dick & Howe, 'Thornton Heath,' p.87; LMA, LMA/4463/B/02/01/005; London, London Metropolitan Archives, LRB/FN/C4/01/01.

¹⁹⁹ LMA, LMA/4463/B/02/02/047/1.

²⁰⁰ R. Ford, 'Racial trouble feared after killing.,' *The Times* (3rd June 1981), p.3; 'Rage Murder in Suburbia,' *Daily Mail* (June 3rd 1981), p.2; L. Hodges, 'Blacks "were attacked",' *The Times* (24th February 1982), p.2; 'Pub used as base for attacking blacks, court told,' *The Times* (25th February 1982), p.5

²⁰¹ M. Kettle, 'Not a black and white case,' *New Society* (22nd April 1982), pp.128-130; F. Gibb, 'Narayan guilty of misconduct,' *The Times* (25th June 1983), p.2.

²⁰² Waters, *Thinking Black*, pp.94-101; 'Riot verdict in pub attack case,' *The Times* (8th April 1982), p.2.

and 37 minutes and delivered its verdict over Easter – the first time that had happened since the establishment of the Central Criminal Court in 1834.²⁰³ The results were mixed. None of the seven people charged with murder were found guilty, but ten were found guilty of riot, five of affray and one (Ronald Pilgrim) of manslaughter.²⁰⁴ However, the judge did accept that the defendants ‘suffered provocation and insults from whites in the days before the attack, and they also had to face prejudice because of their colour.’²⁰⁵ If the prosecution had hoped to depoliticise the case and ensure that it was not about race, Nicholson-Lord noted ‘that was how many people chose to see it’ – a partial victory for a campaign led by radical Black activists.²⁰⁶

For *Race Today*, the attack on the Wilton Arms was a further demonstration of the potential of Black young people to stand up against racist violence. They argued that ‘until the drastic action of June 1st, the West Indian community in Thornton Heath avoided the developing black movement as if it were the plague’, having ‘endured their terror with a respectable suburban silence’ and looked ‘down on their lesser brethren in the ghettos’; the parents ‘warned their children to stay away from Brixton and such areas lest they be contaminated by lawless elements.’²⁰⁷ Whilst the ‘Friends and Family of the Croydon 15’ argued the borough had ‘for years been seen by black people as a place to aspire to as a way of escaping from rundown Inner City areas’, *Race Today* noted that the young people ‘did not drink from the same trough as did their parents’, having made journeys in the opposite direction – following South London sound systems, socialising with friends in inner London, and participating in the Brixton uprising.²⁰⁸ The spatial difference between Brixton and Croydon therefore overlapped with a generational divide between the young people (responsible for a heroic ‘retaliatory mission against known fascists and racists’) and their parents.²⁰⁹ As Waters argued, Black intellectuals ‘looked to black youth’s cultural and political

²⁰³ D. Nicholson-Lord, ‘Riot jury retires for eighth night,’ *The Times* (14th April 1982), p.2. The previous record was held by the Notting Hill riot case in 1977.

²⁰⁴ M. Kettle, ‘Not a black and white case,’ *New Society* (22nd April 1982), pp.128-130.

²⁰⁵ D. Nicholson-Lord, ‘Riot leader in May case gets 8 years,’ *The Times* (16th April 1982), p.1.

²⁰⁶ D. Nicholson-Lord, ‘“Tragic accident” led to death in quiet suburb,’ *The Times* (16th April 1982), p.2.

²⁰⁷ Straker, Dick & Howe, ‘Thornton Heath,’ p.86.

²⁰⁸ GPI, BPM/7/1/4/2/8; Straker, Dick & Howe, ‘Thornton Heath,’ p.87. On the significance of sound systems, see: Connell, *Black Handsworth*, p.109; Gilroy, *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*, pp.251-255.

²⁰⁹ Straker, Dick & Howe, ‘Thornton Heath,’ p.86.

practices for the promise of an alternative solution to the deepening crisis of the long 1970s', seeking 'to seize hold of the energy of youth urban resistance of the 1970s and 1980s, and to see in them, not the end of society, but its new beginnings.'²¹⁰ If the suburbanity of Croydon, then, was seen as having a corrupting influence on older Black residents, this was liable to change as their children came into contact with radical Black politics centred on Brixton, and 'Black youth' forged a politics appropriate to their circumstances.

However, divisions quickly emerged between local figures and 'those people we had called in'.²¹¹ Describing the result as a 'serious defeat', *Race Today* accused Adelaja, Jamieson and Graham of having 'hectoring and abused the parents', and complained of 'a tinge of Croydon nationalism' because the New Cross committee were treated as 'outsiders' – complaints which might confirm Connell's description of the potentially disorganising effects of 'local issues' for 'an inclusivist politics of black.'²¹² From the outset, separate meetings had to be arranged by the BPM with Robinson, on the one hand, and Adelaja and Jamieson, on the other; the latter figures were presented as difficult, producing leaflets 'too dangerous to approve', and the external activists fretted that it was 'resembling New [Cross] all over again'.²¹³ This likely relates to the Pan African Congress Movement's efforts to have whites and Asians excluded from the Black People's Assembly in New Cross, which Howe and *Race Today* had opposed.²¹⁴ At one meeting, Adelaja brought thirty people that the external activists described as having 'swamped' the committee, and he was also alleged to have impersonated Tom Carran, a Guyanese solicitor defending one of the accused.²¹⁵ *Race Today* argued that Adelaja, whose brother Adegboy was a lawyer, had a 'manic insistence on employing black barristers'; whilst Adelaja and Jamieson denied responsibility, they were alleged to have persuaded Pilgrim, found guilty of manslaughter, to replace his white lawyer, James Rant, with Beriston Bryan.²¹⁶ From *Race Today's* perspective, Adelaja and Jamieson were

²¹⁰ Waters, *Thinking Black*, p.206.

²¹¹ 'Race to Oblivion,' *The Sniper* (28th January 1983), p.17.

²¹² Straker, Dick & Howe, 'Thornton Heath,' p.87; Connell, *Black Handsworth*, pp.50-51.

²¹³ LMA, LMA/4463/B/02/01/005.

²¹⁴ Bunce & Field, *Darcus Howe*, pp.188-191.

²¹⁵ LMA, LMA/4463/B/02/01/005.

²¹⁶ Straker, Dick & Howe, 'Thornton Heath,' p.87; 'Race to Oblivion,' *The Sniper* (28th January 1983), p.17; M. Kettle, 'Not a black and white case,' *New Society* (22nd April 1982), pp.128-130.

responsible for a naïve and unduly provocative approach which saw the young Black defendants repeatedly criticised in the press.²¹⁷

Whereas *Race Today* had presented them as uncontrollable, Adelaja and Jamieson accused *Race Today* of taking advantage of Robinson's 'extraordinary neurosis', claiming that he did not appear 'to be a person of sound mind' and alleging that 'the neurotic Darcus Howe and his collective of stooges' wished 'to suffocate at birth any growing black organisation that will not tow [sic] his line by smothering it with false and malicious vilifications.'²¹⁸ Specifically, the BPM and *Race Today* were accused of seeking to obtain 'through moral blackmail carte blanche from parents to have things done their way'; lawyers and parents were criticised for 'actively encouraging their client to stick the knife in fellow defendants backs', whilst the young people 'cooperated and fought racists together in a comradely fashion'.²¹⁹ These tensions should be seen in the context of the clashes which Howe and *Race Today* had with young Black people in Brixton in the late 1970s, including a 1978 burglary which Leila Hassan Howe had reported to the police and which was followed by an armed defence of the property: 'This was class war', Darcus Howe's biographers have suggested, 'Cambridge graduates and former private school students defending a house against a growing posse of Brixton's lumpen proletarians.'²²⁰ Whilst Darcus Howe was cleared of any wrongdoing in 1980, and Bunce and Field suggest that the confrontation with 'one of Brixton's hard men' won respect in the community, Adelaja and Jamieson accused the 'lunatic' and 'penniless' Howe of having attacked Asian girls in Brixton.²²¹ Ultimately, the pair presented Howe and the BPM as unjustly claiming to represent Black young people whilst actually speaking on behalf of their parents, and linked *Race Today* to an older, Brixton-bound approach to radical politics which they saw as outdated and insufficient in 1980s Croydon.

²¹⁷ D. Nicholson-Lord, "'Tragic accident" led to death in quiet suburb,' *The Times* (16th April 1982), p.2; D. Nicholson-Lord, 'Judge praises unity of May trial jury,' *The Times* (April 15th 1982), p.1.

²¹⁸ 'Race to Oblivion,' *The Sniper* (28th January 1983), p.17.

²¹⁹ 'Race to Oblivion,' *The Sniper* (28th January 1983), p.17.

²²⁰ Bunce & Field, *Darcus Howe*, pp.180-183.

²²¹ Bunce & Field, *Darcus Howe*, pp.182-183; 'Race to Oblivion,' *The Sniper* (28th January 1983), p.9 & p.13.

Evoking the meeting which had decided upon the attack on the Wilton Arms, Adelaja and Jamieson convened a gathering of 150 young Black people at Melfort Park to discuss the formation of the Croydon Black Peoples Action Committee (CBPAC).²²² As Anandi Ramamurthy wrote of the Asian Youth Movements (AYM), 'racism galvanised and forced the youth to organise, often without conscious political understanding, but the importance of organising themselves was made clear to them in their daily lives.'²²³ Adelaja, posing as a property developer named 'John Smith', secured a list of empty properties owned by the council. They identified 43 Wellesley Road, adjacent to the community relations office (long sought unsuccessfully by the Association of Jamaicans) on the corner of George Street in central Croydon; on 21st August 1981, Jamieson pretended to be a businessman interested in purchasing the £12,000 lease for the four-storey building. As the council official opened the back gate for the viewing, Adelaja and fifty other young people climbed in through a window. Twenty young people then went to the town hall, a short walk away, and demanded of the town clerk that the police presence be kept low; another ten arrived shortly after, and the town clerk agreed to meet both the initial demands and a request that the eviction notice be stayed.²²⁴ The new building was nicknamed 'Base Uhuru' – after the Swahili word for 'freedom', in a clear sign of the group's 'localized performance of diaspora' – and became the CBPAC headquarters.²²⁵ The fun of the occupation was encapsulated in the pseudonyms given by occupiers to the newspapers, taken from the reggae musicians Barrington Levy and Gregory Isaacs; they hosted performances by Mighty Observer and Sweet Sencemania (from Battersea) and Sir Lloyd and Steppers (from Croydon).²²⁶ If, as Ramamurthy observed, 'the spaces such as youth centres that the AYM did use to mobilise young people were spaces that were essentially there to organise young people, not spaces where they organised themselves', Base Uhuru represents more ambivalence – an attempt to establish a youth centre organised by young

²²² LMA, LRB/FN/C4/01/01.

²²³ A. Ramamurthy, 'South Asian Mobilisation in Two Northern Cities: A Comparison of Manchester and Bradford Asian Youth Movements,' *Ethnicity and Race in a Changing World*, vol.2, no.2 (2011), pp.26-42, p.30.

²²⁴ LMA, LRB/FN/C4/01/01.

²²⁵ 'Vigilantes Spy on Police,' *Daily Star* (3rd November 1982), p.15; Connell, *Black Handsworth*, p.93.

²²⁶ LMA, LRB/FN/C4/01/01; *The Sniper*, no.1 (1982), p.12. Note the significance of names in reggae and soul cultures: Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, p.292.

people themselves, albeit with the involvement of older members like Jamieson and Graham (and paint and brooms donated by local white shopkeepers).²²⁷

Adelaja and Jamieson presented themselves as the representatives of young Black people in Croydon, persuading the GLC that Base Uhuru was a worthy project requiring funding, 'now that the "fun" of taking part in an occupation has been somewhat diminished by the legitimisation of the occupation.'²²⁸ The GLC described them as 'very enthusiastic' and 'hard-working', 'a self-help project generated and managed by young people themselves'.²²⁹ CBPAC received an original award of £13,375 from the GLC, and later a £3000 advance to purchase equipment.²³⁰ Even the Conservative-controlled council was eventually persuaded to part with £18,000 to help refurbish the building.²³¹ The Croydon Race and Community Unit (CRCU), led by James Cummings and Malachi Ramsay (a Pentecostal Bishop), conceded the 'heat [...] that overflowed' from the Brixton uprising and the May killing was diverted into the seizure of a space for 'Black youth'.²³² By the end of 1982, their application – supported by Sivanandan and the North Lambeth Law Centre – to establish Croydon Police Monitoring Unit (CPMU) was also successful, with £28,000 to cover running costs, paying for two secretaries and office expenses (£14,000), a rights law centre (£4000) and a newspaper provocatively titled *The Sniper* (£6000), with £1400 covering rates and rent.²³³ The CPMU constitution guaranteed that three members of the management committee would be under 21.²³⁴ Despite the CRCU's reservations about the occupation of Base Uhuru, they acknowledged that it was 'the first time the Councillors' ears and eyes were opened and became conscious of the need for a Centre for the Black youths of the Borough'.²³⁵

²²⁷ Ramamurthy, 'South Asian Mobilisation in Two Northern Cities,' p.38; LMA, LRB/FN/C4/01/01.

²²⁸ London, London Metropolitan Archives, LRB/FN/C4/02/017.

²²⁹ LMA, LRB/FN/C4/02/017.

²³⁰ LMA, LRB/FN/C4/02/017.

²³¹ 'Vigilantes Spy on Police,' *Daily Star* (3rd November 1982), p.15; LMA, LRB/FN/C4/01/01.

²³² LMA, LRB/FN/C4/01/01.

²³³ LMA, LRB/FN/C4/01/01; 'Vigilantes Spy on Police,' *Daily Star* (3rd November 1982), p.15.

²³⁴ LMA, LRB/FN/C4/01/01.

²³⁵ LMA, LRB/FN/C4/01/01.

The Sniper suggested that 'being white and living in the more pampered southern part of Croydon as most councillors do, that they are blind to what goes on in the North of Croydon.'²³⁶ Whereas the earlier CBC activists had tended to accept their dependence upon Brixton as an organising centre, however, the younger group around the CBPAC boldly attempted to remake Croydon in Brixton's image. Adelaja, contrasting the experience of racism in the two places, emphasised that the comparatively visible type of racism found in Brixton was the consequence of successful Black struggles, whilst the quieter but more insidious racism of the suburbs was the result of their absence:

'Racial discrimination in Croydon isn't obvious, as it is in Brixton. A black can go for a job and be rejected because he's black and not suspect it – it's only when he's been unemployed for a year that he begins to realise that on the basis of probability he should have got a job. Croydon has the most amazing ability to camouflage discrimination in a cynical, subtle way.'²³⁷

CBPAC complained that 'in Croydon every S*****se! [sic] manager of most institutions from the D.H.S.S. to the G.P.O can arrogantly take Liberties with the community because there is no serious challenge to what must seem to them to be their omnipotent position'.²³⁸ Jamieson was very critical of the local media for its suburban preoccupations, covering potholes and TV licence convictions.²³⁹ Brixton, by contrast, provided a model to be emulated. As *The Sniper* argued, the 'hypocritical declarations of Croydon being a cosmopolitan borough are now being abandoned with the developing organisations of blacks in Croydon as a response to years of police and institutional persecution.'²⁴⁰ *The Sniper* asked:

'Would the Leader of the Council have the guts to tell Winford Jamieson to his face that Black people are irrelevant, if there existed in Croydon an organisation like the Lambeth Community Law Centre?'²⁴¹

²³⁶ 'Policing the Police,' *The Sniper*, no.1 (1982), p.8.

²³⁷ LMA, LRB/FN/C4/01/01.

²³⁸ 'Croydon needs a law centre,' *The Sniper*, no.1 (1982), p.3 & p.11.

²³⁹ W. Jamieson, 'Editorial,' *The Sniper*, no.1 (1982), p.2.

²⁴⁰ 'Seeboard in shocking! Conspiracy,' *The Sniper*, no.1 (1982), p.5.

²⁴¹ 'Croydon needs a law centre,' *The Sniper*, no.1 (1982), p.3 & p.11.

The CBPAC's experience with the left-wing GLC contrasted with the lukewarm reputation of Labour locally; the South Norwood branch showed little interest in CPMU despite calling to support the GLC's police monitoring initiatives.²⁴² The CBPAC, by contrast, offered to distribute the GLC's leaflets about racial harassment when Conservative-controlled Croydon council refused to do so, and again offered help when it failed to support the GLC's World Disarmament campaign.²⁴³ *Race Today*, however, accused the Croydon-based activists of 'busily negotiating a state grant for some youth project they have floated while the 11 defendants languish in prison' – though *Race Today* had itself received a £250,000 grant from the GLC.²⁴⁴ It is difficult to say whether the receipt of grants, or the adoption of a service model typified by the formation of the youth centre, had a decisive influence on the CBPAC's politics – as late as 1985, a newspaper in Torquay reported on Adelaja warning police that, in the event of plastic bullets being fired at rioters, they would retaliate with 'shotguns, rifles and grenades'.²⁴⁵ Despite criticisms of the tendency for GLC initiatives 'to lack the active participation of large numbers of black people', the CBPAC did successfully attract the interest of 'black youth'.²⁴⁶ On the other hand, and in contrast with the way they were described by the press, the CBPAC activists had a clear sense of what they wished to achieve and their actions repeatedly showed restraint; they sought police permission when they protested outside the house of the council leader, and they informed the *Daily Mail* that they wanted to 'stop all trouble'.²⁴⁷ The GLC had called for 'the provision of community improvement funds and [...] a sharper focus on high-crime areas', and the CBPAC described an increase in police patrols as a positive consequence of the CPMU – a reminder that the group was as much concerned with police inaction as police action.²⁴⁸ As Connell found in Handsworth, the 1980s had seen distinctions between 'campaigning' and

²⁴² MC, A845.

²⁴³ 'Policing the Police,' *The Sniper*, no.1 (1982), p.8.

²⁴⁴ Straker, Dick & Howe, 'Thornton Heath,' p.87; Bunce & Field, *Darcus Howe*, p.164.

²⁴⁵ 'Blacks grenade threat,' *Herald Express* (17th October 1985), p.5.

²⁴⁶ Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, p.197.

²⁴⁷ LMA, LRB/FN/C4/01/01.

²⁴⁸ C. Moores, 'Thatcher's troops? Neighbourhood Watch schemes and the search for "ordinary" Thatcherism in 1980s Britain,' *Contemporary British History*, vol.31, no.2 (2017), pp.230-255, p.237; LMA, LRB/FN/C4/01/01.

'service provision' becoming harder to maintain, and the demand that the state had a 'duty of care toward black communities' could itself be radical.²⁴⁹

Adelaja's 1985 bravado is typical of the CBPAC, adept at handling the media and shifting perceptions of Croydon through provoking suburban reactions and asserting Black strength. While the group did hire Black women as secretaries (visible in some press photography) and newspaper coverage noted the support of a young Black mother of seven, they cultivated a distinctly masculine public image to maximise their symbolic power.²⁵⁰ In a photograph published by the *Daily Star*, for example, Adelaja crouches with a walkie-talkie to his ear, wearing an open-necked white shirt and aviator sunglasses, in what is unmistakably reminiscent of a Hollywood film or television poster: like something from *Starsky and Hutch*, it invokes a sense of legitimacy whilst, at the same time, emphasising the two men's Black masculinity in a way that recalls blaxploitation films like *Shaft*.²⁵¹ There is nothing here of the 'constant visual discomfort with the camera' which Rachel Yemm described in Black and Asian people interviewed on television in the 1960s.²⁵² When Adelaja supplied a sensational quote to the *Daily Star*, therefore, it was a tactical move to ensure that they were covered: 'We can have 1,000 of our people on the streets within minutes', the front page declared, although internally the number was revised down to 200.²⁵³ Coverage of CPMU, compared to that of the May killing, indicated that the public image of Croydon was changing; the *Daily Star* expressed alarm at their calls to "'police" the leafy and relatively law-abiding mixed race suburb' but, a page earlier, referred to Croydon as 'one of the capital's most racially-volatile suburbs'.²⁵⁴ The *Daily Mail*, too, presented Thornton Heath as 'racially-sensitive'.²⁵⁵ Whilst Howe and the CBPAC had clashed, they shared a willingness, knowing the way that they would be portrayed in the media irrespective of their actions and

²⁴⁹ Connell, *Black Handsworth*, p.39 & p.43.

²⁵⁰ ANL/Shutterstock, 5778169a (26th October 1982), <https://www.rexfeatures.com/set/5778169>; LMA, LRB/FN/C4/01/01. Contrast with Kieran Connell's discussion of Vanley Burke's reluctance or inability 'to photograph the internal activities of political groups.' Connell, *Black Handsworth*, p.89.

²⁵¹ 'Vigilantes Spy on Police,' *Daily Star* (3rd November 1982), p.15; Wright, 'Black Outlaws and the Struggle for Empowerment in Blaxploitation Cinema,' pp.63-86.

²⁵² Yemm, 'Immigration, race and local media,' p.101.

²⁵³ 'Vigilantes Spy on Police,' *Daily Star* (3rd November 1982), p.15.

²⁵⁴ 'Vigilantes Spy on Police,' *Daily Star* (3rd November 1982), pp.14-15.

²⁵⁵ 'Vigilantes on patrol say: We're not thugs,' *Daily Mail* (9th August 1982), p.2.

drawing upon a 'sinister guerrilla chic' earlier identified with Stokely Carmichael, to prod and poke at suburban anxieties about race, transforming perceptions of places like Croydon and the possibilities of radical Black politics.²⁵⁶

Base Uhuru, funded and supported and increasingly impressed by the left-wing GLC, is an important example of the ways that 'social democracy zones' could be opened, in the first instance, by people for whom 'social democrat' is an inappropriate label – and the significance of the left-wing councils in sustaining those openings. By the late 1970s, a priority for Croydon CHE was the establishment of a gay centre in the borough.²⁵⁷ Launched in April 1978 and aimed at raising £500 by August, by October their fund had reached £3945; one suggestion was to set it up in Crystal Palace, where property was cheaper and because neighbouring 'Lambeth and Southwark should be more amenable to providing suitable property for our disposal'.²⁵⁸ Whilst CHE seems to have been unsuccessful, perhaps too early to benefit from the Livingstone era, other groups later received GLC support; Croydon Women's Centre was established on Woodside Green, offering 'friendship and support to women in need' and encouraging them 'to form their own groups and develop their own projects'.²⁵⁹ There was also an unemployed resources centre established with trades council and GLC support in West Croydon.²⁶⁰ Fraser was a volunteer on the project, alongside the secretary of the Local Government Committee (LGC), Kevin Jowett, and David Evans, Alison Butler, and Steve Radford, an SWP member who 'sort of coordinated and managed the thing really, when everybody else went off and did their things'.²⁶¹ The GLC even sought to help the Croydon Irish Association locate a premises 'for use as a cultural, social and educational centre in the Croydon area'.²⁶² Funding for the different centres connected them to one another, with Croydon Women's Centre promoting the unemployment centre in its

²⁵⁶ Connell, *Black Handsworth*, p.105; Waters, *Thinking black*, p.31. Howe would, in the mid-1980s, explore television's potential 'as a progressive force', building upon Black radicals' understanding of the media as 'a propaganda weapon': Bunce & Field, *Darcus Howe*, p.226.

²⁵⁷ BLPES, HCA/CHE/7/81.

²⁵⁸ BLPES, HCA/CHE/7/81.

²⁵⁹ *Croydon Women's Centre Newsletter* (December 1987), unpaginated.

²⁶⁰ Interview with Lynda and Martin Graham.

²⁶¹ Interview with Clive Fraser.

²⁶² London, London Metropolitan Archives, LSPU/REPG/03/004.

material.²⁶³ They also developed an interest in the connections between sexism and racism, publishing a poem called 'Paper Equality' which was searing towards claims about 'dem anti-racist nation', and celebrated Winnie Mandela's role in the struggle against apartheid.²⁶⁴ The creation of spaces like these tended to bring together types of activism which had been separated in the 1970s, linked these struggles to the political circumstances of London's Labour Party, and altered perceptions of Croydon as a place.

Connections to inner London undoubtedly remained important. The women's centre organised a fundraiser at the Ritzy in Brixton, and visits to the public entertainments provided at the Southbank were memorable to activists, Carty remembering that 'we had a bit of socialism in London', though 'it didn't reach out to Croydon, we had to go in to get things'.²⁶⁵ However, in 1984, Croydon CND advised the Women's Peace Bus Cooperative, based on Brixton's Acre Lane, that New Addington was in 'an ideal position' for a visit from the group, who could offer 'good publicity in an area that is otherwise not easy to reach'.²⁶⁶ It was a GLC-funded project which was framed as a non-political 'friendly place' for women to discuss peace issues.²⁶⁷ Whilst CND were repeatedly banned from Croydon's carnival in the mid-1980s for being 'political', they responded in 1986 by organising 'Croydon Peace Fayre' at Croydon Parish Church, with the hopes of 'reaching not only CND supporters but also the general public'.²⁶⁸ The previous year, they had organised a stall at the 'Croydon's People's Fair' in Whitehorse Road recreation ground.²⁶⁹ Anti-apartheid activists organised within supermarkets and schools, bringing an internationalist cause into unexpected spaces.²⁷⁰ Carty, working at Monk's Hill High School, was involved in organising visits by miners from Kent and Nottinghamshire ('the striking ones')

²⁶³ *Croydon Women's Centre Newsletter* (December 1987), unpaginated.

²⁶⁴ *Croydon Women's Centre Newsletter* (December 1987), unpaginated.

²⁶⁵ London, Bishopsgate Institute, FL/POS/120; Interview with Marian Carty.

²⁶⁶ London, British Library of Political and Economic Science, CND/ADD/8/3/97.

²⁶⁷ 'Update,' *Marxism Today* (March 1984), p.48,

http://banmarchive.org.uk/collections/mt/pdf/84_03_48.pdf.

²⁶⁸ London, British Library of Political and Economic Science, CND/1993/10/1.

²⁶⁹ BLPES, CND/ADD/8/3/162.

²⁷⁰ R. Evans, 'British police spied on anti-apartheid campaigners for decades,' *The Guardian* (10th December 2013), <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/undercover-with-paul-lewis-and-rob-evans/2013/dec/10/undercover-police-and-policing-nelsonmandela>, accessed 16th November 2021.

during the 1983-84 strike; as Diarmaid Kelliher argued, sometimes 'spaces usually considered relatively neutral were politicised in support of a highly contentious strike.'²⁷¹ Carty remembered:

'We had great collections, and it really politicised people. They recognised that the teachers' fight and the miners' fight was *one*. Not all of them, but I think lots of people got politicised.'²⁷²

Norman Strike, a miner from Durham, stayed with SWP members in Croydon and visited a factory meeting with shop stewards.²⁷³ As well as the opening of temporary left-wing spaces in public sites like schools, the 1980s also saw activists transforming older left-wing spaces, including Ruskin House. A group of miners from Kent used Ruskin House as a base for campaigning in the local area and in London, and it holds several miners' lamps as thanks for its support during the strikes.²⁷⁴ Teachers organised a fundraiser in the building, one of them playing guitar alongside Ainsley Harriott.²⁷⁵ Carty described the trades council members as 'all of an age' – linking their activism to 'the optimism of youth', perhaps more indicative of the mood of things than participants' stage of life.²⁷⁶ The trades council's activities around the miners' strike brought together members of different left-wing parties (Labour, the CPB-ML, the SWP) and unions, including through joint fundraisers with Croydon NALGO.²⁷⁷ Spaces like Ruskin House proved 'important in allowing personal interactions between people from the capital and the coalfields', the young trades council forging ties between themselves and with left-wing activists beyond Croydon.²⁷⁸

The naming of the Mandela Lounge – despite objections – and the 1986 decision to twin the trades council with its counterpart in Nablus, Palestine (with the support of Mary Walker, David

²⁷¹ Kelliher, 'Contested Spaces,' p.613.

²⁷² Interview with Marian Carty.

²⁷³ Kelliher, 'Networks of solidarity,' p.126.

²⁷⁴ White, 'Political Croydon: The Eighties'; Daisley & Tiedemann, *Ruskin House*, p.10.

²⁷⁵ Interview with Marian Carty.

²⁷⁶ Interview with Marian Carty.

²⁷⁷ Interview with Joan Matlock.

²⁷⁸ Kelliher, 'Contested Spaces,' p.605.

Evans and Peter Gibson) further transformed existing left-wing spaces in Croydon.²⁷⁹ The CND resolved to hold its regular meetings in the building, whilst special meetings took place in the nearby Friends Meeting House.²⁸⁰ The contribution of radical action should not be overlooked: Matlock remembered that the council was more responsive to issues around racism after the Brixton uprising, but took less action on sexism; 'if it had been women rioting in Sutton,' she asked them, 'would you be thinking about it?'²⁸¹ However, NALGO in Croydon was also changing; whereas earlier the white-collar public sector unions had been on the right, the influx of women, and Black and Asian people, into social services roles was changing its makeup.²⁸² Whereas, at first, campaigning against racism was 'purely on principle and because we were all awaiting the Scarman report,' it rose up the agenda as the number of 'Black faces' within the department grew.²⁸³ By 1985, Croydon NALGO was clearly on the union's left, supporting a sacked Militant member, donating to Medical Aid for Palestinians, and attending a conference fringe meeting with Ted Knight and Anna Tapsell from Lambeth.²⁸⁴ If spaces like Ruskin House or the public sector unions were not transformed entirely, they were clearly changing, with the influence of the 'new urban left' unmistakable; Fraser noted that although 'there was a bit of resentment in terms of the GLC trying to do things in a different way, a radical way, [...] a lot of people bought into that'.²⁸⁵

These changing spaces contributed to the sense that Croydon, too, was changing, and provided opportunities for activists to speak on its behalf. Whilst banned from the carnival, CND's repeated interventions positioned them as representatives of Croydon. The CND used the ban to get a 'splash' in the local press, including seven articles in one month, and promised to 'be back next year to try again'.²⁸⁶ In 1985, CAGS contributed to the *Advertiser's* campaign to purchase a

²⁷⁹ Interview with Clive Fraser; 'Croydon-Nablus Link,' *Workers Press*, no.32 (12th July 1986), p.13.

²⁸⁰ BLPES, CND/ADD/8/3/133.

²⁸¹ Interview with Joan Matlock.

²⁸² Note the critical discussion of this phenomena in: Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, pp.72-78.

²⁸³ Interview with Joan Matlock.

²⁸⁴ *Inservice – Croydon NALGO Branch News* (June 1985), p.1; 'Conference 85,' *Inservice – Croydon NALGO Branch News* (July 1985), pp.1-3.

²⁸⁵ Interview with Clive Fraser.

²⁸⁶ BLPES, CND/ADD/8/3/162.

brain scanner for Mayday hospital, and CND linked the lack of a body scanner to funding for Trident.²⁸⁷ CND emphasised the impact of a nuclear attack on Croydon, with a 1986 newsletter citing a GLC study which found that 66 percent of Croydon's population would die in a nuclear war.²⁸⁸ A 1984 leaflet emphasised the threat to Croydon due to a United States Air Force communications station, part of the Cruise missile system, at Botley Hill Farm in nearby Warlingham.²⁸⁹ As Laucht and Johnes explained, 'anti-nuclear campaigning worked best when it pointed out the direct threat to people's own lives and homes'.²⁹⁰ One peace canvass found '55% Against Cruise & Trident in Tory Croydon', whilst a survey supervised by the vicar of St Mary's Church in 1985 found 81 percent of those asked were opposed to Trident.²⁹¹ In 1985, Croydon CND also provided an alternative to the council's formal twinning with the Dutch city of Arnhem, noting that Arnhem had supplied 20,000 signatures to a four million-strong petition against Cruise handed to the Dutch government.²⁹² Then, in 1986, a member of the peace group Samenwerkende Arnhemse Vredesgroepen (SAV) wrote regarding a visit of one of their members to Croydon, and suggested that if Croydon CND sent members to Arnhem then 'the Mayor should be happy to meet you'.²⁹³ Recalling some of the connections sought with Coventry and Hull in the 1950s and 1960s, the Arnhem link provided another opportunity for the CND to present an alternative image of 'Tory Croydon'. At the same time, growing movements against Thatcherism spoke on behalf of the borough without organising along partisan lines – such as the NUPE-organised 'Croydon Rally Against the Cuts' in 1980, 'formed by local people on a non-party basis to oppose the savage attacks being launched on our public services', and the Croydon Public Transport Defence Campaign, which stressed the involvement of 'disabled groups, pensioners groups and tenants associations' as well as the trade unions.²⁹⁴ Whilst far from

²⁸⁷ BLPES, HCA/CHE/7/85; BLPES, CND/ADD/8/3/173.

²⁸⁸ BLPES, CND/1993/10/1.

²⁸⁹ BLPES, CND/ADD/8/3/107.

²⁹⁰ C. Laucht & M. Johnes, 'Resist and survive: Welsh protests and the British nuclear state in the 1980s,' *Contemporary British History*, vol.33, no.2 (2019), pp.226-245, p.228. For a discussion of the GLC's approach, which made a similar emphasis, see: H.A. Atashroo, 'Weaponising peace: the Greater London Council, cultural policy and "GLC peace year 1983",' *Contemporary British History*, vol.33, no.2 (2019), pp.170-186.

²⁹¹ BLPES, CND/ADD/8/3/131 & 162.

²⁹² BLPES, CND/ADD/8/3/174.

²⁹³ BLPES, CND/ADD/8/4/3.

²⁹⁴ Coventry, Modern Records Centre, 562/5/187; London, London Metropolitan Archives, LMA/4560/G/01/009.

hegemonic, these examples presented an image of a Croydon suffering from, and resistant to, Thatcherism, which would grow in importance as the situation in the borough changed in the 1990s.

By the close of the 1980s, many of the initiatives discussed in this section had come to an end. The CBPAC had faced violent retaliations from the beginning, with a member's car windows smashed on the same day as an NF meeting in Thornton Heath.²⁹⁵ Base Uhuru suffered a firebomb attack in 1983 which destroyed much of CBPAC's equipment and documents and left the building unsafe – further straining relations between the group and the CRCU which shared the space.²⁹⁶ Jamieson left the project in March 1983 and the next year was consumed with recriminations between him and Adelaja, increasingly involved in a group called Blackwatch Publishing.²⁹⁷ In 1988, Adelaja died whilst awaiting trial at the Old Bailey in a landmark fraud case – extraordinarily, Rant, the lawyer replaced by Bryan in the 'Croydon 15' trial, was the presiding judge in a case which had already seen five deaths.²⁹⁸ By that point, the GLC had been abolished, and the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) followed in 1990 in an act of 'wanton vandalism', as ILEA teacher Leni Gillman put it, from the Thatcher government.²⁹⁹ Anti-racist activists in Croydon continued to treat the 'inner city' as a threatening image of Croydon's future: a 1986 housing conference organised by the CCCR where one speaker declared that 'Croydon must wake up before the real problem emerges: ... Brixton, Toxteth, Broadwater Farm, etc'.³⁰⁰ Encouraged by the GLC, however, early 1980s activists (and perhaps most visibly CBPAC) had successfully nurtured the emergent sense of a borough where people 'think they're

²⁹⁵ S. Cook, 'The darker side of suburbia,' *The Guardian* (7th September 1982), p.19.

²⁹⁶ LMA, LRB/FN/C4/02/017; LMA, LRB/FN/C4/01/01; London, London Metropolitan Archives, LRB/FN/C4/02/08.

²⁹⁷ LMA, LRB/FN/C4/02/017.

²⁹⁸ 'Sixth person in fraud trial dies,' *The Guardian* (February 24th 1988), p.4.

²⁹⁹ Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman. Whilst the funding provided by the GLC ceased, figures involved with the projects remembered an instruction to take 'whatever resources you can out of the building and into the community'; see: A. Beckett, *Promised You A Miracle: Why 1980-82 Made Modern Britain* (London: Penguin Books, 2016), p.370. For a discussion of the impact of dependency on GLC funding, and the consequences of its withdrawal, see: Connell, *Black Handsworth*, p.51; Thomlinson, *Race, Ethnicity and the Women's Movement in England*, p.196. Between 1981 and 1983, the leader of ILEA had been Bryn Davies, formerly a councillor in Waddon (1971-1974) and now Baron Davies of Brixton: Interview with David White.

³⁰⁰ London, Black Cultural Archives, 7.2p CRO.

part of London'.³⁰¹ If Hall saw social democracy as 'an active and formative relationship' between the working class and its principal means of representation, broken down by the time of the 1981 by-election, then, as Brooke suggested, the 'new urban left' councils 'made local social democracy material'.³⁰² Despite this, none of my narrators seemed to remember the CBPAC or its occupation of a town-centre property. As the next section will explore, the opportunities for young Black activists opened in the early 1980s, which had contributed to the changing image of Croydon, were to close in the late 1980s and early 1990s, with movement leadership passing once more to parents and sympathisers in the Labour Party.

'A town with much pain and poverty'

Labour's growing successes in the borough in the 1990s (with the party electing two MPs and taking control of the council for the first time) have been associated with the 'maturity' of New Labour and its 'authoritarian versions of emancipatory modernization', with a particular appeal to the types of south-eastern English suburb for which Croydon had long served as an example.³⁰³ However, Croydon by the 1990s was no longer seen in quite the same way as previously – its demographics altered through the process of 'secondary settlement', and its economy struggling in the wake of the early 1990s recession. Articulating a paternalistic, suburban multiculturalism, Labour succeeded in positioning itself as the representative of both Croydon's ethnic minority communities and others directly suffering from the consequences of Thatcherism, and those whose main concern was ensuring that these changes were policed. If this positioning drew upon the legacy of the 'social democracy zones' described above, therefore, the language of the multicultural suburb smoothed over the cracks which earlier activism had exposed: replacing the bold, youthful 'inner-city' activism of the 1980s with the 'mature' activism of parents in an ageing suburb.

³⁰¹ Interview with Clive Fraser.

³⁰² Hall, 'The Great Moving Right Show,' *Marxism Today*, p.16; Brooke, 'Space, Emotions and the Everyday,' p.122.

³⁰³ Gilroy, *After Empire*, p.106.

As in 1971, 1986 saw an influx of new Labour councillors following the severe defeat of the previous local elections. These included Leni Gillman (then in her late thirties), whose activism increased as their children ‘were getting older, and became more independent’, and Gee Bernard, the ILEA’s first elected Black representative and a founder of West Indian Parents Against Sus in Brixton.³⁰⁴ Her fellow councillors in West Thornton were David Evans and Margaret Mansell, both of whom had been involved in anti-apartheid activism; with Labour restored to 26 seats, they were supplemented by, amongst others, Jerry Fitzpatrick, Geraint Davies and Martin Walker, the latter joining his father and sister-in-law, James and Mary, the only holdouts from the previous Labour Group.³⁰⁵ By contrast to the sense in the early 1980s that the party in Croydon was ageing, the new councillors and members brought an energy particularly associated with the group around the ‘dynamic’ Peter Spalding, including Fraser, who wanted ‘to go out and do things and make a difference, not sit in [general committees] and pass resolutions.’³⁰⁶ Lynda Graham, who joined the party in the early 1990s, described ‘terrible meetings’ with rows of seats – ‘all men with their back to you, and all pontificating’ – which, as women’s officer for Croydon South, she succeeded in replacing with a circle.³⁰⁷ Her husband, Martin, who she had met around the same time and ‘wove’ into attending meetings (after a long period as an ‘armchair pontificator’), was impressed by the efficiency at ‘electioneering’ of Evans’ replacement as organiser, Geoff Dixon, who had campaigned for Bill Clinton in the 1992 presidential election.³⁰⁸ With the election of activists connected to the ‘social democracy zones’ detailed in the prior section, and an energy and professionalism contrasted with the old-fashioned politics of their predecessors, Labour in Croydon seemed to be renewed; after 1986,

³⁰⁴ Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman; Elliott-Cooper, *Black Resistance to British Policing*, p.39. It is worth noting Hazel Carby’s criticisms of ILEA’s ‘normative pluralism’, which ‘[made] it impossible even to raise the question of the *construction* of inequality.’ Carby, *Cultures in Babylon*, p.221.

³⁰⁵ Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman; Interview with Jerry Fitzpatrick; T.F. Matthews, ‘Tributes to “kind and caring” Croydon councillor Maggie Mansell who has died,’ *MyLondon* (6th January 2019), <https://www.mylondon.news/news/south-london-news/tributes-kind-caring-croydon-councillor-15637140>, accessed 30th August 2021.

³⁰⁶ Interview with Clive Fraser.

³⁰⁷ Interview with Lynda and Martin Graham.

³⁰⁸ Interview with Lynda and Martin Graham; Croydon South Constituency Labour Party minutes, personal collection.

Fitzpatrick thought, 'it would be a failure in analytical ability not to have realised that we had a chance – we thought we had a real chance in 1990'.³⁰⁹

In 1987, their vote recovered in every constituency and especially Croydon North West, where Malcolm Wicks overtook the Liberals. Wicks, however, is a reminder that, for all their novelty, Croydon Labour's politicians and activists in the late 1980s and early 1990s were overwhelmingly middle-aged and usually parents. He had worked for the Urban Deprivation Unit until 1978 (leaking Cabinet papers to the Child Poverty Action Group in 1976 to prevent child benefit from being means tested) and from 1983 the Family Policy Studies Centre.³¹⁰ Carty had become more involved in campaigning for Labour as the CPB-ML changed tack in the late 1980s; she met Wicks as part of Parents Against Cuts in Education (PACE), because his children attended the same school as some CPB-ML members.³¹¹ Like Leni Gillman, Lynda Graham's involvement in Labour was linked to reduced childcare commitments, with her three children from an earlier marriage then teenagers – she decided that she had 'got to find myself again', noting 'less a feeling of helplessness when you're involved.'³¹² Other activists, like David White, were returning to politics as their workloads eased.³¹³ For some, though not all, of the activists and newly-elected councillors, the contrast was not just with their elders but with their younger selves or peers: Fraser, whose brother was an SWP member, had joined Labour because it was a 'more worthwhile thing to do than being a member of the Socialist Workers Party and going around selling newspapers which nobody read or wanted to read in the first place.'³¹⁴ Whilst the national result in 1992 was disappointing, Wicks was elected to parliament, the first MP elected for the party in the borough since 1966 and its third overall. The national election defeat ('a kick in the solar plexus', according to Fitzpatrick) entrenched the view that Labour had been naïve, 'too honest' in its tax

³⁰⁹ Interview with Jerry Fitzpatrick.

³¹⁰ M. Wicks, *My Life* (Kibworth Beauchamp: Matador, 2013), pp.35–50; BI, PPA/1/613; R. Davidson, 'Family Politics: Campaigning for Child Benefits in the 1980s,' *Twentieth Century British History*, vol.31, no.1 (2020), pp.101–124, p.106.

³¹¹ Interview with Marian Carty.

³¹² Interview with Lynda and Martin Graham.

³¹³ Interview with David White.

³¹⁴ Interview with Clive Fraser.

policy in 1992.³¹⁵ Activists and councillors getting older, and their becoming parents (or becoming parents to teenagers), therefore, coincided with a sense that the Labour Party needed to be more 'grownup', as well as renewed – a sense that reinforced the already paternalistic aspects of social democracy, and built upon the foundations laid by Neil Kinnick in dismissals of the 'new urban left'.³¹⁶

In 1990, Labour gained only four more councillors, but Fitzpatrick remembered appearing on television and celebrating the growth in their vote – 'we've come within a whisker, a few hundred votes of winning a borough that has never been Labour, of winning wards that we lost by a street in previous elections.'³¹⁷ In 1992, Conservatives campaigned in a by-election in a former council stronghold by making a familiar comparison:

'Just across the road from Upper Norwood – Lambeth Council continues to be a by-word for incompetence, mismanagement and extremism [...] Their success is fed by apathy. *Don't let Labour in by not voting – we don't want Lambeth in Upper Norwood.*'³¹⁸

By 1992, however, these attacks were losing their impact. Though still a source of controversy, the days of 'radical Lambeth' were over, with left-wing council leader Joan Twelves ousted after suspension by Labour's NEC.³¹⁹ Pat Ryan won the Upper Norwood by-election and 'that proved to us that we could win any seat in Croydon North', confirming what Wicks' April victory had already suggested.³²⁰ Croydon South reported soon afterwards that it was 'possible that Labour could take control of the council in the 1994 Elections.'³²¹ A week before polling day, John Smith and Tony Blair visited the Stanley Halls: 'if anything there's a signal that obviously the party machine is expecting something good to happen in Croydon', Fitzpatrick noted, confirming the symbolic importance of southern English suburban areas like Croydon to the modernising

³¹⁵ Interview with Jerry Fitzpatrick.

³¹⁶ Ross McKibbin has argued that Neil Kinnick helped to 'disembarrass Labour of the infantile disorders of the early 1980s'; quoted in: Yeowell, *Rethinking Labour's Past*, p.20.

³¹⁷ Interview with Jerry Fitzpatrick.

³¹⁸ BLPES, COLL MISC 0781. Emphasis in the original.

³¹⁹ Hannah, *Radical Lambeth*, p.198.

³²⁰ Interview with Clive Fraser.

³²¹ Croydon South Constituency Labour Party minutes, personal collection.

project within the party.³²² The minutes to Croydon South's last meeting ahead of the 1994 council election end auspiciously: 'There being no other business, the meeting ended at 9.00pm. The rest is History.'³²³

Victory in the 'kind of totem Conservative authority' of Croydon, including a third seat in Addiscombe as well as sweeps in Upper Norwood, South Norwood (where Fraser was elected), Norbury, and Beulah, vindicated the strategy pressed by modernisers like Blair, who became leader when Smith died shortly after their visit (as a result, in Croydon political folklore, of a bacon butty 'in a caff down Portland Road').³²⁴ According to Fitzpatrick, the New Labour project 'gained momentum once Blair himself became leader' and the importance of suburbs, including in Croydon, was emphasised following the 1997 victory – Labour winning in Croydon Central and coming second (with Charles Birling, former Liberal, as candidate) even in Croydon South, the Grahams convinced that 'Tony Blair went down quite well in that sort of area.'³²⁵ 1994, however, was the more memorable moment for Labour activists in Croydon: 'the first time in a hundred and eleven years Croydon had elected Labour', albeit with a minority of the popular vote.³²⁶ White remembered 'the enormous sense of elation amongst Labour supporters, and despondency in the Conservative ranks, when the results were declared at the Fairfield Halls.'³²⁷ The celebration also stuck out to Lynda Graham, who vividly remembered Margaret Mansell, elected in Norbury, at the top of the staircase, dressed in red. She was pleased the results weren't 'at a private school, it's much better at Fairfield' – perhaps in part because the Fairfield Halls had long been understood as a space belonging to the whole of Croydon, including the left.³²⁸ The party did not lose control of the borough again until 2006.

³²² Interview with Clive Fraser; Interview with Jerry Fitzpatrick.

³²³ Croydon South Constituency Labour Party minutes, personal collection.

³²⁴ Interview with Jerry Fitzpatrick; Interview with Clive Fraser.

³²⁵ Interview with Jerry Fitzpatrick; Interview with Lynda and Martin Graham. For a discussion of New Labour's attempts to appeal to the suburbs through an 'ideological updating', see: J. Nuttall, 'The Labour Party and aspiration,' pp.289-306, in Yeowell (ed.), *Rethinking Labour's Past*, p.297. For the significance of London's suburbs in 1997, see: Tichelar, *Why London is Labour*, pp.70-71.

³²⁶ Interview with Clive Fraser.

³²⁷ D. White, 'Political Croydon: The Nineties,' *Croydon Citizen* (5th May 2015), <https://web.archive.org/web/20180928164040/https://thecroydoncitizen.com/politics-society/political-croydon-nineties/>, accessed 8th September 2020.

³²⁸ Interview with Martin and Lynda Graham.

Yet the tone of celebrations after 1994 is also revealing; the win was not understood merely as the outcome of a successful shift to the right by a 'grownup' political party, but as the victory of the new Croydon nurtured in the 1980s. Fraser, who had remembered drinking cheap champagne outside South Africa House when Nelson Mandela was released in 1990, connected the 5th May election to the international context and the first South African democratic elections (which took place from 26th to 29th April):

'Ninety-four, when we won, I think demographics were changing, though we were a predominantly still white party. It was a week or two or even days after South Africa saw the first election, and I can remember being stopped by a Black guy in a car that says, "Where do I vote? Where do I vote?"'.³²⁹

Comparing the opportunity to elect a Labour council in Croydon to the advent of multiracial democracy in South Africa, Fraser's memory of 1994 is a reminder of the ways that the borough had changed. If some voters in Upper Norwood in 1992 may have decided that the borough to the north had sufficiently changed from the heights of its 'radical Lambeth' era, others would still have responded to the Conservatives' threat as a sign of promise. Indeed, Labour's vote in Lambeth had been strengthening in the late 1980s whilst its left-wing leadership remained, with more councillors in 1990 than elected under Knight; in 1992, Streatham, Croydon's traditionally Conservative-voting neighbouring constituency on the route of the IO9, elected a Labour MP for the first time in its history.³³⁰ Simon Hannah has suggested that it was as much 'Labour's failure to get with the times' – by engaging with increasingly popular, and confrontational, movements supported by the 'loony left' – which had cost Kinnock the election in 1992, as it was the lingering immaturity perceived by some activists quoted above.³³¹ Blair, in succeeding Smith, was intent on appealing to 'Middle England' – but this was a 'Middle England' living in places undergoing substantial changes, no longer quite the 'invincible green suburbs'

³²⁹ Interview with Clive Fraser.

³³⁰ Hannah, *Radical Lambeth*, p.196.

³³¹ Hannah, *Radical Lambeth*, p.204.

which Major was trying to evoke.³³² The ambiguously 'inner-city' suburban 'fringe' was now being centred.

However, whereas South Africa had, in the 1970s and 1980s, served as a point of reference for radical activists enthused by the militancy of young people in Soweto, the end of apartheid in the 1990s was to become emblematic of the possibility of peaceful integration (with committed anti-racism kept at a safe distance). As Gilroy would acerbically remark, 'the only image of a black man to be found in the glossy pages of that famous first New Labour Manifesto was a smiley picture of Nelson Mandela.'³³³ Activists like Gee Bernard had entered the Labour Party as part of the Black Sections movement in the 1980s, which saw 'themselves as fighting primarily an anti-racist battle, and one defined by a politics of blackness inherited from those same traditions that Sivanandan and Howe spoke' but 'only succeeded in bringing political blackness into the institutions of state power at the expense of its radical promise.'³³⁴ Marc Wadsworth, a Black Sections activist (and, from 2014, a Croydon resident), had urged Labour to represent the grievances of the participants in the 1980-81 uprisings as a way of avoiding further 'extra-parliamentary action', and the Black Sections movement was later accused of having 'given the impression that the state could be effective in anti-racism'.³³⁵ In Croydon, 1988 saw the Conservative council establish the Ethnic Minority Communities Forum (EMCF), bringing together a broad cross section of community organisations in Croydon, as well as the Croydon Race Equality Council (CREC) and the council's community relations policy adviser.³³⁶ Groups were divided between 'African-Caribbean' and 'Asian' organisations, each with six representatives; whilst there were some Conservative-supporting Asian representatives ('probably the people that the Conservatives had

³³² Clapson, *Invincible green suburbs, brave new towns*, p.201; Tichelar, *Why London is Labour*, p.70. This is a type of phenomena which historians have sometimes failed to include in their accounts of New Labour's appeal – see, for example: Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, *Class, Politics, and the Decline of Deference*, pp.201-202.

³³³ Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, p.xxxi.

³³⁴ Waters, *Thinking Black*, p.216.

³³⁵ Peplow, *Race and Riots in Thatcher's Britain*, p.214. Compare Wadsworth's comment to Gilroy's discussion of the GLC's attempts to alleviate hostility towards state institutions, with 'only limited success in countering the idea that being political now requires complete disassociation from the corporate structures of formal politics which are in need of drastic re-politicization.' Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, pp.310-311.

³³⁶ London, Black Cultural Archives, 2.3 CRO.

got on for that reason'), Fitzpatrick noted that 'it's very difficult to find six Conservative people who are going to represent the West Indian communities, so they were a much more feisty lot.'³³⁷ Whilst of some benefit to the Labour Party, the incorporation of these forms of representation by the local state was another iteration of the Lefebvrian 'induced difference' described in the previous chapter, as (to take Hazel Carby's words, describing the situation in the academy in the 1990s United States) the politics of race and anti-racisms were 'absorbed within, or subsumed under, frameworks of critical thinking that organize themselves around concepts of difference and otherness', not liberation.³³⁸

By 1994, Croydon had a Black Socialist Group (BSG), led by Bernard and Raj Chandarana, an ARA activist and youth representative to the EMCF who was soon to be elected as a Labour councillor – as was his fellow EMCF member, Shafiqul Khan.³³⁹ At the BSG's inaugural meeting at Ruskin House, Bernard emphasised that their priorities were housing, education, and crime.³⁴⁰ She was speaking alongside one of the MPs from the trio famously elected in 1987, Bernie Grant, who had already clashed with Darcus Howe on television in 1993 over Grant's apparent calls for state-funded 'voluntary repatriation' – with Grant receiving the support of a BNP candidate in the studio audience, and treated sympathetically by former Lambeth leader Linda Bellos.³⁴¹ Whilst elements of the Black Sections' radicalism remained, the priorities which Bernard set out (and which clearly drew upon the precedent set by the GLC in the 1980s) were easily reconcilable with efforts, criticised by Gilroy, 'to use anxiety about black crime as a means to renovate Labour's political relationship with disenchanted white voters in inner-city areas.'³⁴² In 1987, Christine Patrick campaigned for Labour in Croydon North East by stressing 'the shabby state of parts of North Croydon', describing herself as 'particularly concerned about crime', and citing her involvement in the Croydon Police Consultative Committee where she worked 'for more police

³³⁷ Interview with Jerry Fitzpatrick.

³³⁸ Carby, *Cultures in Babylon*, p.93.

³³⁹ BCA, 2.3 CRO; Croydon South Constituency Labour Party minutes, personal collection; London, Bishopsgate Institute, BG/P/14/3/76.

³⁴⁰ BI, BG/P/14/3/76.

³⁴¹ Bunce & Field, *Darcus Howe*, pp.233-237.

³⁴² Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, p.142.

on the beat and a safer borough'.³⁴³ Local candidates emphasised their roles in police consultative committees through the 1990s, and in 1994 Blair's infamous slogan as Shadow Home Secretary – 'tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime too' – appeared on Labour's council leaflets.³⁴⁴ Wicks was known as 'Frank Field without God', and Field wrote the introduction to the posthumous autobiography in which Wicks, echoing the Scarman report of thirty years earlier, worried that the recent 2011 riots might be linked to 'families which are uncaring and chaotic, where there is no father figure.'³⁴⁵ The party presented itself as both the representative of the changing Croydon and of those anxious about it – ascribing problems in the 'inner city' not only to poverty but to 'the pathology of Black families', which required policing by a police force presented as the guarantors of Black and Asian people's safety.³⁴⁶

This is partly illustrated in the responses to the 31st July 1992 attack on Afghan refugee Ruhullah Aramesh, in Thornton Heath, after he attempted to protect his female relatives from harassment by a group of white youths – he died two days later, with three men eventually found guilty, one of them having attacked a 65-year-old Asian man earlier the same day.³⁴⁷ The attack received international media attention; as Les Back argued, it was part of an 'upsurge in racism and racial violence', which included the murders of Rohit Duggal in 1992 and Stephen Lawrence in 1993, both in Eltham in south-east London.³⁴⁸ In September 1992, Wicks wrote a letter to organisations in Croydon calling for an anti-racist conference.³⁴⁹ On the 12th, the ANL held a march from Norbury which included the banners of its Croydon branch, Crofton School NUT, the Croydon

³⁴³ UKSCA, WEA/PC/E3.

³⁴⁴ BLPES, COLL MISC 0781; London, British Library of Political and Economic Science, COLL MISC 880.

³⁴⁵ BI, PPA/1/613; Wicks, *My Life*, p.164.

³⁴⁶ Elliott-Cooper, *Black Resistance to British Policing*, p.68.

³⁴⁷ H. Mills, 'Refugee battered to death: Old Bailey told of racist taunts,' *The Independent* (4th October 1993), <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/refugee-battered-to-death-old-bailey-told-of-racist-taunts-1508697.html>, accessed 6th September 2021.

³⁴⁸ L. Back, 'Race, identity and nation within an adolescent community in South London,' *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol.19, no.2 (1993), pp.217-233, p.217; W.E. Schmidt, 'British Racial Attacks Grow, Alarming Minorities,' *New York Times* (20th August 1992), <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/08/20/world/british-racial-attacks-grow-alarming-minorities.html>, accessed 6th September 2021; S. Sekar and P. Peachey, 'Spate of racist stabbings in Eltham had gone unpunished,' *The Independent* (4th January 2012), <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/spate-racist-stabbings-eltham-had-gone-unpunished-6284643.html>, accessed 6th September 2021.

³⁴⁹ Croydon South Constituency Labour Party minutes, personal collection.

Union of Communication Workers (UCW), and the Rohit Duggal campaign.³⁵⁰ Partly organised by the Black NUT activist (and, from 1998, Labour councillor) Louisa Woodley, Fraser felt that the ANL had ‘probably died off a bit in Croydon by then’ – although it continued to spark controversy with the Labour Group, with Gee Bernard addressing the rally against the wishes of both the Conservative-controlled council and her own party’s leadership.³⁵¹ Like other Black women activists in the early 1990s, she articulated Black motherhood in an impassioned speech which noted that her own son had almost been killed in the same location as Aramesh a decade earlier – possibly the attack which inspired her grandchild’s poem ‘At last we are alone’ (2012) – and drew a parallel between the murder and the ongoing violence in South Africa.³⁵² She accused the council of having ‘pushed [them] into the back corner of Croydon [...] when Croydon Council said it is the natural choice’: ‘If you are the natural choice then why aren’t we out over in *that* part of Croydon? Why are we over this side?’³⁵³ For Bernard, drawing on a Black radical critique of racism as ‘endemic in this society from top to bottom’, the point to be emphasised was that:

‘Racism is not an isolated incident. The colleges, the schools, the council and all the bureaucracy of Britain is racist, and I am not ashamed to say that because it is what it is.’³⁵⁴

Bernard, in making a connection between the attack on Aramesh and earlier violence, as well as structural and everyday racism, used the rally to challenge the council’s attempts to present itself, and Croydon, as anti-racist. Other speakers, however, in line with both the traditional positions of the ANL and the new image of Croydon as a multicultural suburb, adopted a different approach. Hari Mongul, a member of CREC and the EMCF, described the protest as an

³⁵⁰ Spectacle Media, ‘Ruhullah Aramesh Demo 1992: Full Video’ [video] (26th May 2021), <https://vimeo.com/555256901>, accessed 8th November 2021.

³⁵¹ Interview with Clive Fraser; Spectacle Media, ‘Ruhullah Aramesh Demo 1992.’

³⁵² Elliott-Cooper, *Black Resistance to British Policing*, p.75; Spectacle Media, ‘Ruhullah Aramesh Demo 1992’; Jay Bernard: 2 Bold Poems,’ *Zócalo Poets* (29th April 2012), <https://zocalopoets.com/2012/04/29/jay-bernard-2-bold-poems/>, accessed 16th November 2021. For a discussion of evocations of Black motherhood during this period, see: J. White, ‘Child-centred Matriarch or Mother Among Other Things? Race and the Construction of Working-class Motherhood in Late Twentieth-century Britain,’ *Twentieth Century British History*, preprint (22nd February 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1093/tcbh/hwac005>.

³⁵³ Spectacle Media, ‘Ruhullah Aramesh Demo 1992.’

³⁵⁴ Spectacle Media, ‘Ruhullah Aramesh Demo 1992.’

opportunity 'to show our solidarity against the insidious racism that has been creeping into the hitherto harmonious relationships between all the peoples of Croydon', referring to 'all the good work done by individuals and organisations promoting good relations – the police, the clergy and the various associations of Croydon citizens who have worked and continue to work to make it the peaceful borough that it is.'³⁵⁵ Aramesh's uncle, also speaking, did connect the murder to other instances of racism in Thornton Heath, including swastikas and racist graffiti and the defacement of the synagogue, but stressed that 'the Nazis represent only a tiny minority', the ANL demonstration being 'the clearest expression by the people of London Borough of Croydon that they will have nothing to do with the racist idea and activities of the Nazi.'³⁵⁶ In this way, both speakers described a suburban multiculturalism which conflicted with Bernard's more expansive and critical understanding of racism, and the sense of alienation from 'that part of Croydon' which she communicated. In all three cases, however, the speakers were approaching the issue from the position of parents or older relatives; the mobilisation did not provide the opportunity for young people to respond to racist violence themselves, as they had in the early 1980s.³⁵⁷

The following year, the Anti-Racist Alliance (ARA) organised another march; ARA had emerged from the Black Sections movement and was close to Livingstone's faction within the Labour Party, with activists like Lee Jasper and Marc Wadsworth arguing for Black leadership of the anti-racist movement against the (still predominantly white) ANL.³⁵⁸ Fraser, however, suggested that the ARA march in Croydon was partly organised by white activists – including Fraser, Dixon and Rod Matlock – after Jasper, 'a chancer', dropped out.³⁵⁹ As the trades council's nominated chief steward, Fraser brought in Brendan O'Kane and around six FBU activists to act as security after rumours that members of the neo-Nazi terror group Combat 18 lived along the route.³⁶⁰ He also worked with the police, at the ARA's request, to ensure that the ANL were not at the front of the

³⁵⁵ Spectacle Media, 'Ruhullah Aramesh Demo 1992.'

³⁵⁶ Spectacle Media, 'Ruhullah Aramesh Demo 1992.'

³⁵⁷ Adam Elliott-Cooper notes the relative (but not complete) safety for Black women activists in speaking on behalf of young Black men: Elliott-Cooper, *Black Resistance to British Policing*, p.77.

³⁵⁸ C. Lloyd, 'Anti-racism, Social Movements and Civil Society,' pp.60-78, in F. Anthias and C. Lloyd (eds.), *Rethinking Anti-racism: From Theory to Practice* (London: Routledge, 2002), p.67.

³⁵⁹ Interview with Clive Fraser.

³⁶⁰ Interview with Clive Fraser.

protest.³⁶¹ Whilst Fraser felt that Wadsworth and himself were 'testing each other out', with Wadsworth suspicious of Fraser's intentions (and Labour's chief whip Wallace Garratt worried that 'this thing would all go off pear shaped'), the protest was an indication of Labour's new centrality to anti-racist organising in Croydon, accompanied by a less militant approach signalled by the presence of both Wicks and Archbishop Desmond Tutu.³⁶² For Fraser, the march marked 'a sort of a cohesive approach to us being clearly an anti-racist party': 'it was peaceful, it made the point, I think I felt a new sort of dawn for left anti-racist politics in Croydon.'³⁶³ The ARA would go on to play a major role, alongside community organisations and church groups, in supporting Labour's successful representations to the Fourth Periodic Review of Westminster Constituencies, in the early 1990s – arguing, in the context of a reduction from four to three seats in the borough, for the distinctive needs of ethnic minority voters in the north, meriting representation by a single MP for 'Croydon North', and providing evidence of 'local ties' which Labour had been unable to demonstrate in the previous review.³⁶⁴ The ARA argued:

'North Croydon has always had a separate identity, which is reflected by the high proportion of ethnic minority residents. Many of the problems this section of the community face are related to racism [...] Many people who approach the Croydon & District ARA from North Croydon with cases of racial abuse/harassment/violence are under the impression that they live in a single constituency – Croydon North West – when in fact they live in Croydon North East.'³⁶⁵

The Conservatives resorted to defending Croydon's original entitlement to four MPs – never likely to be successful – and claiming that the concentration of ethnic minority voters in the north of the borough produced too much work for a single MP.³⁶⁶ Through their involvement in ARA, and the growing prominence of Black and Asian members and councillors, Labour had

³⁶¹ Interview with Clive Fraser.

³⁶² Interview with Clive Fraser.

³⁶³ Interview with Clive Fraser.

³⁶⁴ NA, AF 1/2277.

³⁶⁵ NA, AF 1/2277.

³⁶⁶ NA, AF 1/2280.

positioned itself as the representative of the ethnic minority communities in the north of Croydon, reaping success both electorally and – relatedly – in the Fourth Periodic Review.

However, Labour's changing fortunes in Croydon in the 1990 cannot be reduced to demographic shifts. Even in 1992, only 15 percent of the working age population of the borough were ethnic minorities, peaking at 30–35 percent in wards like West Thornton and Bensham Manor.³⁶⁷ Nor were Labour's arguments in the Fourth Periodic Review expressed solely in terms of the needs of ethnic minority communities – instead, representations by groups like the ARA served to reinforce longer-standing arguments about the distinctiveness of working-class, '*populaire*', parts of the north of Croydon, by overlapping classed claims about space with racialised ones. A 'Campaign for North Croydon' was formed, which Wicks supported 'essentially because it feels right', and Labour representations argued for pedestrian crossings to be considered in opposition to the Conservatives' focus on the difficulty of crossing the Brighton mainline railway by car.³⁶⁸ Earlier identifications with Thornton Heath, whose 'unification' was achieved through Labour's proposals, remained – but Labour also successfully defended the integrity of the borough against suggestions that South and Upper Norwood should be merged with parts of Lambeth.³⁶⁹ In part this relied upon a changing view of Croydon, described in Wicks' maiden speech as 'a town with much pain and poverty', in which it was the south, rather than the north, of the borough which was exceptional.³⁷⁰ Conceding Waddon's move into Croydon South, Labour pushed back against proposals that New Addington – because of its isolation, with the 'Little Siberia' label now invoked by the Conservatives – should move into the southern constituency, insisting that:

'High unemployment, social deprivation, poor housing, inadequate education and high crime levels are the key problems for New Addington. In contrast, the expressed priorities for Croydon South are speed humps and British Rail punctuality!'³⁷¹

³⁶⁷ BCA, 2.3 CRO.

³⁶⁸ NA, AF 1/2281; NA, AF 1/2277; NA, AF 1/2280.

³⁶⁹ NA, AF 1/2280; NA, AF 1/2277.

³⁷⁰ HC Deb 13th May 1992 vol.207 c.695.

³⁷¹ NA, AF 1/2280; NA, AF 1/2277.

The disabled Labour councillor for New Addington, Brenda Kirby, made a convincing argument about the area's links to central Croydon – where she would visit the housing office as a council tenant – by pointing to the journeys made by the taxi service Addington Cars: 85 percent of journeys to central Croydon, 10 percent local, and 5 percent to south Croydon, Bromley and out of the area combined.³⁷² The connection between the centre of Croydon and areas like New Addington also made sense, however, because the view of the centre was itself changing. Whilst much of Croydon had escaped the worst consequences of recession in the 1980s, the impact of the 1990s recession on financial services and the middle class was much greater and Croydon 'had started to decline economically'.³⁷³ It faced competition from developments in the Docklands, whilst the 1950s and 1960s office blocks were ill-equipped to respond to the rise of new technologies; similarly, Croydon's shopping centres appeared increasingly dated after the opening of Bluewater and Lakeside on the M25, and its manufacturing was further declining.³⁷⁴ As a 1990s study found, the town which had 'only been up fifty years' was starting to show its age:

'Croydon is a commercial centre with commercial values. These are hard, like the "Dallas" skyline, leaving people with the impression that Croydon can look after itself and does not need "my" sympathy. It personifies the spirit of the Thatcherite 80's, "Yuppified". But Yuppies are no longer folk heroes, Yuppie values have become pretentious.'³⁷⁵

In this context, a party whose activists had successfully presented themselves as an alternative to Thatcherism, through the struggles of the 1980s and afterwards, could position itself as the appropriate representative of a Croydon in decline. Whilst Fraser tended to emphasise the growing maturity of the party in the 1990s, he also acknowledged the participation of key activists in 1980s initiatives like the unemployed resources centre, and Fitzpatrick remembered that several Labour councillors refused to pay the poll tax until they 'got our arms seriously twisted

³⁷² NA, AF 1/2280.

³⁷³ White, 'Political Croydon: The Nineties.' For a brief discussion of, for example, the 1989–1992 mortgage crisis and its consequences, see: Lawrence, *Me, Me, Me?*, pp.201–202.

³⁷⁴ Phelps, 'On the Edge of Something Big,' p.448. Compare to the discussion of the fate of 1960s retail developments in the 1980s and 1990s in: Saumarez Smith, *Boom Cities*, pp.164–165; Wetherell, *Foundations*, pp.156–161.

³⁷⁵ BCA, BCA/6/11/10.

about it'.³⁷⁶ Ryan's 1992 leaflets described the Upper Norwood by-election as a 'referendum on the new Tax', and noted that activists had managed to get 1000 signatures for a petition to 'back the miners' and 'protect the British Coal Industry' outside Safeway in Crystal Palace.³⁷⁷ Fraser remembered an enthusiastic response in Croydon, where people made connections between their own experiences and family histories and those of the miners, as both the town centre and the coalfields fell victim to processes which the left had predicted.³⁷⁸ Such was the opposition to the Conservatives that Labour received the active support of the CPB-ML and NCP.³⁷⁹

As with the party's anti-racism, however, Labour in the early 1990s subsumed these feelings into a paternalistic sense of a Croydon which they could mend: 'a Croydon that *works* and a Croydon that *cares*'.³⁸⁰ As Nick Garland points out, the language of 'community', for New Labour, became 'a vehicle for articulating a belief in the essentially social nature of human beings, but also for a more conservative aspect of socialist politics'.³⁸¹ After the 1994 election, CAGS celebrated the new Labour council's appointment of 'a Councillor with direct responsibility for monitoring equal opportunities in the Borough', but noted that the library still lacked a gay section; Spalding and Mary Walker planted a Japanese weeping cherry in Park Hill Park to commemorate Hiroshima, but the numbers participating in the vigil were not high.³⁸² In the early 1990s, Lynda Graham even had to argue against some Labour members who wished to close down a nightclub which her son attended.³⁸³ If in important ways the left's critiques of Thatcherism had been vindicated in Croydon's decline, the New Labour project which benefited from this prestige would effectively endorse a paternalistic, if more progressive, Thatcherism as the cure.³⁸⁴ Whereas Gilroy has bemoaned the British government's failure to adopt 'a mature response to diversity, plurality, and differentiation' (echoing similar, earlier demands put forward by James Baldwin), New Labour's

³⁷⁶ Interview with Clive Fraser; Interview with Jerry Fitzpatrick.

³⁷⁷ BLPES, COLL MISC 0781.

³⁷⁸ Interview with Clive Fraser.

³⁷⁹ Interview with Simon Berlin; Interview with Clive Fraser.

³⁸⁰ BLPES, COLL MISC 0781. Emphasis in the original.

³⁸¹ Garland, 'Social democracy, the decline of community and community politics in postwar Britain,' p.153.

³⁸² BLPES, HCA/CHE2/7/3; BLPES, CND/2008/12/136.

³⁸³ Interview with Lynda and Martin Graham; Croydon South Constituency Labour Party minutes, personal collection.

³⁸⁴ Tomlinson, 'Thrice Denied,' p.236.

willingness to pathologize Black families and young people is a reminder of the dangers of a 'maturity' which holds youth in contempt.³⁸⁵

James Baldwin never lost sight of the importance and revolutionary potential of youth – celebrating Stokely Carmichael and lamenting the fact that his own 'youthful comrades', once 'trying to do something to alter the state of the world', had become neoconservatives.³⁸⁶ If, as Lynne Segal argues, it has become 'almost subversive to celebrate the particular experience and self-reflective knowledge' which comes with age, it is no less important to nurture the intergenerational affinities bringing such experience and knowledge into conversation with the 'the confidence, anger and cynicism of young critics'.³⁸⁷ As Gilroy suggests, 'the convivial metropolitan cultures of the country's young people are still a bulwark against the machinations of racial politics.'³⁸⁸ Highlighting the two-sidedness of experiences of 'maturity', this section has shown that Labour's paternalistic efforts to articulate 'social-democratic politics in an inhospitable climate' served to displace younger activists, and especially younger Black activists.³⁸⁹ By the time she was interviewed by the Black Cultural Archives in 2009, Gee Bernard was increasingly focused on concerns about violence between Black young people, the failure to discipline children due to women working full-time, and mixed marriages.³⁹⁰ Her grandchild's poem, 'IO9', captures the difficulty, in representing a place perceived as in decline – on a bus full of 'pierced children' and an overwhelmed young mother – of reconciling a reluctance 'to judge' with a worry that 'if I don't, who will?'

³⁸⁵ Gilroy, *After Empire*, pp.108-109 & pp.146-147; Baldwin, *The Cross of Redemption*, p.87, p.97 & p.206.

³⁸⁶ Baldwin, *The Cross of Redemption*, p.104 & p.173.

³⁸⁷ Segal, 'Formations of feminism,' p.26.

³⁸⁸ Gilroy, *After Empire*, pp.131-132.

³⁸⁹ Garland, 'Social democracy, the decline of community and community politics in postwar Britain,' p.154.

³⁹⁰ BCA, ORAL/1/5; Elliott-Cooper, *Black Resistance to British Policing*, pp.86-90 & 99-104.

‘Better than living somewhere that no-one’s ever heard of’

This chapter has traced the changing relationship between one end of the IO9’s route and another – the relationship between Brixton and Croydon – as well as the perceptions of its riders. In the 1970s and early 1980s, the difference between the two places was emphasised: Croydon regarded as a predominantly white, middle-class, and Conservative-voting borough, with Brixton its left-wing, ‘inner-city’ neighbour, constantly threatening to intrude into suburban Croydon, the anxieties of Los Angeles in the era of the 1984 Olympics and the Night Stalker transplanted to the Surrey hills. The ‘man on the IO9 bus’ was a reactionary figure, retreating from an othered Brixton, whilst left-wing activists treated the differences between the places as (regrettably) inviolable.

However, this chapter has also shown that, in the 1980s, activists encouraged by the left-wing GLC strove to remake Croydon, opening new spaces – temporary and permanent – in which the borough, or at least its north, could be reimagined as a part of London and the ‘inner-city’, comparable (and not merely connected) to Brixton. These became the spaces that Brooke has described as ‘social democracy zones’, and whilst they were eventually closed, the version of Croydon which they inaugurated was one that Labour could claim to speak for.³⁹¹ In the 1990s, with Croydon undergoing economic decline – a dystopian, declinist image of Croydon which has appeared in Terry Gilliam’s *Brazil* (1985), as Gotham in *Batman: The Dark Night Rises* (2012), and in *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* (2018) – and increasingly ‘multicultural’, Labour won the support of both those brought to Croydon by these changes and, through its paternalism, some of those who feared them. In tandem with the deterioration of its built environment, Croydon had been made into a ‘multicultural suburb’, embodying a sensibility which ‘had become an irreversible feature of the fabric of modern Britain.’³⁹²

³⁹¹ Brooke, ‘Living in “New Times”,’ p.28.

³⁹² Connell, *Black Handsworth*, p.161.

This has contributed to the ambiguity of activists' feelings about Croydon – the relative success of the Labour Party was linked to the town's apparent decline, and the relative weakness of its left. Croydon had become representable because of changes which were, for some activists, resented. As CAGS put it, Croydon was 'not a particularly lovely place'; in a 1990s survey, the most one teenage respondent could manage was that Croydon was 'better than living somewhere that no-one's ever heard of'.³⁹³ Meanwhile, darker aspects of the earlier Croydon – the reactionary Croydon contrasted with Brixton – survived. 'Suburban racism,' Back argued, had 'remained while Croydon has become a more culturally diverse place.'³⁹⁴ The language of the 'multicultural suburb' has served to separate incidents of racist violence from conversations about structural and everyday racism in Croydon. As Watson and Saha have pointed out, suburban 'multicultural drift' can be misused to justify 'a celebratory multiculturalism that obfuscates the inevitable ambivalences, contestations, conflicts, inequalities and accommodations associated with the changing ethnic composition of urban populations in a post-colonial world.'³⁹⁵

Shortly after Stormzy, born in Croydon in 1993, used his appearance at Glastonbury to proudly emblazon local place names across the back of the stage, he reiterated a point that has run throughout this chapter – when asked whether Britain is racist, he replied 'definitely, 100%', even if it is 'hidden' and 'trying to explain that Britain is a racist country [to a British person] is the most difficult thing ever.'³⁹⁶ If this chapter has emphasised the extent to which suburban multiculturalism incorporated radical activism whilst failing to fully address racism in Croydon, however, it is important not to dismiss the significance of the changes which finally brought down one of the 'detached forts' of suburban Conservatism. The 'East India Estate Conservation Area' is a grim reminder of Croydon's imperial history, but the Addiscombe Military Seminary is as

³⁹³ BLPES, HCA/CHE2/7/3; BCA, BCA/6/11/10.

³⁹⁴ Back, 'So... fucking Croydon.'

³⁹⁵ Watson & Saha, 'Suburban drifts,' pp.2033-2034.

³⁹⁶ H. Kane. 'Stormzy pays tribute to Thornton Heath, Croydon and South Norwood in Glastonbury set.' *MyLondon* (30th June 2019), <https://www.mylondon.news/news/south-london-news/stormzy-pays-tribute-thornton-heath-16508750>, accessed 3rd March 2020; L. Bakare, 'Stormzy: UK is "definitely racist" and Johnson has made it worse,' *The Guardian* (20th December 2019), <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2019/dec/21/stormzy-uk-is-racist-and-boris-johnson-has-made-it-worse>, accessed 8th September 2021.

ruined as the empire that its pupils governed – the generals who suppressed the 1857 rebellion could not have imagined that the descendants of their subjects would be living and resisting in the streets to which Outram and others gave their names, because power is not absolute.³⁹⁷ Similarly, whilst dystopic, segregating depictions of Los Angeles are common, Hazel Carby has highlighted depictions of the city and its suburbs in the work of Black writers like Octavia Butler as ‘significant acts of dissent: dissent from the perpetuation of injustice in contemporary politics; dissent from the increasing extremes of wealth and poverty; and dissent from the parasitic relation of the US to the earth and its environment.’³⁹⁸

Jay Bernard addressed the difficulties of ‘navigat[ing] what felt like the repetition of history’ in the introduction to their 2019 poetic response to the fires at New Cross and Grenfell Tower – the unclosed, unresolved cases of racist violence which dot the map of London (and Croydon).³⁹⁹ If suburban multiculturalism has hidden racism and incorporated opposition to it, this chapter has provided examples of the breadth and depth of the struggles which were possible and were necessary, and remain so, in the ‘multicultural suburb’. In an insider ethnography of Forest Gate, Newham, Joy White points out that ‘young people are yearning for a better world’, ‘carving out space to talk, engage and be free (even if that freedom is often framed in neoliberal, competitive terms).’⁴⁰⁰ As Bernard concluded:

‘I am from here, I am specific to this place, I am haunted by this history but I also haunt it back.’⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁷ I am grateful to my friend Abu Khan for the conversations which formed this observation.

³⁹⁸ H.V. Carby, ‘Figuring the Future in Los(t) Angeles,’ *Comparative American Studies: An International Journal*, vol.1, no.1 (2003), pp.19–34, p.32.

³⁹⁹ Bernard, *Surge*, p.xi; Potts, “‘I am haunted by this history but I also haunt it back”,’ pp.112–117.

⁴⁰⁰ J. White, *Terraformed: Young Black Lives in the Inner City* (London: Repeater Books, 2020), pp.124–125.

⁴⁰¹ Bernard, *Surge*, p.xi.

Conclusion

'My name is The Problem.'

'Know Me From', Stormzy (2015)

This thesis has demonstrated that, contrary to its reputation, Croydon has a history – a history of radical politics, of left-wing activism. Like the suburban provocateurs of the 'South Norwood Tourist Board', this thesis has highlighted Croydon's distinctiveness, going 'beyond the socio-spatial imaginary of suburbs, which typically views them as a place on the edge, in between and everywhere the same'; it has provided a counternarrative of Croydon as 'an interesting and curious place' in its own right.¹ It has traced the changes which Croydon, and perceptions of Croydon, underwent in the years after the Croydon Corporation Act – emphasising the specific role and experiences of left-wing activists in the difficult decades following 1956. In the process, I have offered a novel way of understanding the problems which contemporary Croydon faces, and the challenges confronting its left-wing activists today.

More than this, I have intervened in ongoing conversations about the history of twentieth-century Britain. A local political study, this thesis has brought into conversation contemporary work in the historiography of (sub)urban Britain and the two trends to have emerged as part of the so-called 'New Political History', drawing attention back to the significance of left-wing activism in its own right. Its argument, borne by its structure, has pointed to the potential of 'suburbanisation' as a label for the complex process by which the spaces opened or appropriated by activists were themselves subsumed. In so doing, it has experimented with a way of writing history and of wrestling with the problems of structure and agency, 'being' and 'doing'. This neatly parallels the explorations of metamodern artists in neighbouring disciplines, whilst the thesis strains against the bounds of disciplinarity in its interweaving of the personal, political,

¹Jeevendrampillai, 'Being Suburban,' p.288; Phelps et al, *Post-Suburban Europe*, p.x.

spatial, and cultural.² I have tried to achieve this by thinking from within, between, and beyond the multiple Croydons whose twentieth-century history this thesis has traced – and with a summary of which this conclusion will begin.

Croydon as palimpsest

The electronic musician Burial has been described as ‘the John Betjeman of South London’s post-clubbing comedowners, a chronicler of greyness, ghosts, and grief.’³ His tracks, ‘each song serv[ing] as its own palimpsest’, capture brief images of South London – especially Croydon, especially Thornton Heath – as an amalgam of innumerable layers, comforting and dissociative.⁴ For Mark Fisher, his work provided a useful example for discussions of ‘hauntology’, the mounting detritus of lost futures with a ghostly presence in late-twentieth- and twenty-first-century culture.⁵ If this thesis has followed the changing meanings of Croydon over time, it has also indicated the ways that older meanings persist – both in the ‘sedimented’ time of the Croydon palimpsest and in the coexistence of multiple, divergent Croydons alongside one another.⁶ These layers, these Croydons, captured briefly, provided this thesis with its structure.

The thesis began by discussing some of the earliest claims about Croydon: the notion of ‘Croydon, Surrey’ that remains both an important attraction and a source of derision, an imagined Croydon which was inculcated early in my narrators’ childhoods. Formed in the nineteenth century, if not before, this was a Croydon reproduced in stories from parents and grandparents (remembering, with Steedman, that a story, once told, ‘ceases to be a story: it becomes a piece of history, an interpretative device’) as well as in their infant experiences.⁷ At the same time, the suburban ideal – an emergent sense of class-mixing and the reconciliation of town

² van den Akker & Vermeulen, ‘Periodising the 2000s,’ pp.8-10.

³ K. MacNeill, ‘A Love Letter to Burial, the Producer Who Changed – and Saved – My Life,’ *Vice* (8th August 2016), <https://www.vice.com/en/article/bmayna/burial-essay>, accessed 26th August 2022.

⁴ D. Chau, ‘The Augmented Reality of Burial’s “Untrue,” 10 Years Later,’ *The Ringer* (3rd November 2017), <https://www.theringer.com/music/2017/11/3/16601150/burial-untrue-10-year-anniversary>, accessed 26th August 2022.

⁵ Fisher, ‘What is Hauntology?’, p.16.

⁶ K.D. Derickson, ‘The annihilation of time by space,’ *Urban Geography*, vol.41, no.4 (2020), pp.487-491, p.488; Ira, ‘Rethinking the genre,’ p.170.

⁷ Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman*, p.143.

and country – had an appeal of its own to both middle-class suburban progressives and to a newly suburban working class with memories of its expulsion from the land. For over a hundred years, therefore, Croydon (as a place, as a built environment) has been viewed ambiguously by the forces that would become ‘the left’; a site of exclusion, certainly, but also somewhere with the potential to be appropriated for their own purposes. Nevertheless, the first chapter concluded in a familiar fashion: with the incorporation of these (sub)urban counter-projects into the consolidation of the Conservatives’ suburban electorate, the creation of the ‘Tory town’ within which most of my narrators were to be born.

In moving between Chapter One and Chapter Two, however, there was an inversion which likewise became part of this thesis’ narrative pattern. The processes which had produced the ‘Tory town’ were to have contradictory consequences after 1945: the period during which my narrators entered school and encountered other children for the first time, finding comrades amongst their classmates and becoming politically active as teenagers. For the activists that I interviewed, this Croydon was often symbolic of a lost social-democratic consensus – but, as Chapter Two concluded, that was a settlement whose disappointments were embodied by a Croydon shaped by both Marshall plans, visible in the injustices of post-war secondary education and the exclusions of the first New Left and increasingly apparent when its young activists departed for university.

By the early-to-mid-1960s, frustrations with Conservative-dominated post-war Britain seemed as if they might generate the possibility of renewal. Whilst Chapter Three highlighted the ambiguity of the frequent comparisons which have been made between Croydon and places in the United States, it also showed how American examples were taken on by the countercultural ‘third New Left’ in formulating a distinctly suburban politics against the suburban. Once again, however, by the mid-to-late 1970s, with Croydon’s politics changing under the influence of Purley and Coulsdon (added in 1965) and a growing reactionary backlash, the intersecting ‘produced differences’ of the 1960s and earlier 1970s had given way to the ‘induced differences’ and disarray which contributed to Thatcher’s victory.

Chapter Four discussed the ways this reactionary backlash, and the left-wing sense of defeat, was animated by contrasts drawn between Conservative-voting Croydon and the 'inner-city' boroughs to its north, most notably Lambeth. For many activists, the late 1970s and early 1980s was a period in which they longed to 'move onto something else'.⁸ In the 1980s, however, some activists began to suggest that Croydon could be remade in Brixton's image – a version of Croydon reminiscent of the hopes of the 1970s counterculture. Whilst their struggles were eventually defeated, they were incorporated in the 1990s into a recomposed social democracy, benefiting a 'grownup' New Labour in the 'multicultural suburb', dominated by activists who were now often parents themselves and confident in speaking on Croydon's behalf – with all the suburban exclusions and compromises which that implied.

This thesis has argued that the left-wing activists who grew up, lived, and worked in Croydon were perpetually 'looking both ways' – between 'town' and 'country', between entering older spaces and opening new ones, and between disappointing pasts and optimistic futures. If left-wing activists have sometimes presented Croydon as a 'non-place', I have highlighted their role in forcing, and eventually accepting, these suburban compromises. For some of my narrators, it was precisely their involvement in activism which allowed them to feel close to the area as a whole: 'being in the Labour Party, I feel more connected with Croydon,' Marian Carty said, 'you really see the richness of the demographic.'⁹ As David White said, 'it's got a very diverse and exciting dynamic to it'; 'I think it's a sort of really good place to live.'¹⁰ Nevertheless, whilst my narrators were generally proud to come from Croydon, often passionately so, they also agreed that it was 'pretty battered about', 'down at heel', and 'rundown' – Peter Walker felt that its reputation and that of Wimbledon had been reversed.¹¹ Understanding the Croydon palimpsest helps to explain the complexity of these activists' feelings about a haunted place – a melancholy about the loss of what one recent critic of Fisher and Burial has called 'dad futures', 'museum futures', 'putrefying' and

⁸ Interview with David White.

⁹ Interview with Marian Carty.

¹⁰ Interview with David White.

¹¹ Interview with Lynda and Martin Graham; Interview with Marian Carty; Interview with Peter Walker.

'calcifying futures'.¹² For Paul Gilroy, it is the zombie and not the ghost which might best represent the 'stubbornly undead' histories which threaten Croydon with an alternative future, 'terrifying to the power and destabilising of the order that pronounced their death.'¹³ This is worth keeping in mind as the Croydon palimpsest is read for the divisions and contradictions which have continued to shape the borough and its left-wing activists from the 1990s to the present.

Problems in Croydon

The germs of this thesis were seeded in 2014, when I returned to Croydon to begin my MA. Some of the MA's modules fed into a discussion which I led at a CPB-organised 'Communist University in South London' reading group, in Ruskin House, and by the completion of the degree I'd become more familiar with Croydon's activist scene. I'd also penned my first, provisional outline of Croydon's history: a comparison of *Terry and June* and the recently completed *Peep Show*.¹⁴ By the time of my thesis proposals in late 2016, I had been tempered in the early stages of the 'short-lived supernova' of Corbynism; my enrolment coincided with the euphoria of the 2017 Labour Party conference.¹⁵ In hindsight, the 2017 conference might be better understood as Corbynism's apex, and a point from which we might have spied its nadir; the optimism of the conference speeches made Corbyn 'a hostage to fortune' in subsequent years.¹⁶ Corbynism did not overcome the contradictions which this thesis – researched and written in the period of its long defeat – has spent so much time spelling out, especially acute in Croydon.

¹² Kit Mackintosh describes dubstep (and UK dance music in the 2010s) as unable to 'retain any new information', stuck 'in this haze of a half-remembered past.' K. Mackintosh, *Neon Screams: How Drill, Trap and Bashment Made Music New Again* (London: Repeater Books, 2021), p.8 & p.124.

¹³ P. Gilroy, "'My Britain is fuck all" zombie multiculturalism and the race politics of citizenship,' *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, vol.19, no.4 (2012), pp.380-397, p.384. Note, also, Asad Haider's use of this same quotation in his response to criticisms of his work: A. Haider, 'Zombie Manifesto,' *Verso Blog* (1st September 2018), <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/4002-zombie-manifesto>, accessed 8th September 2022.

¹⁴ D. Frost, 'From Terry and June to Mark and Jez: What is Croydon and where is it going?', *Croydon, Croydon*. (21st August 2015), <https://croydoncroydon.wordpress.com/2015/08/21/from-terry-and-june-to-mark-and-jez-what-is-croydon-and-where-is-it-going/>, accessed 29th August 2022.

¹⁵ J. Virasami, 'The rise of Black Lives Matter and Extinction Rebellion,' *IPPR Progressive Review*, vol.28, no.1 (2021), pp.17-23, p.19.

¹⁶ Pogrud & Maguire, *Left Out*, p.88.

Labour's control of Croydon council in the 1990s saw continuity and change. Several officials were replaced by those that the incoming leadership 'could work with'; Mary Walker was replaced as Leader of the Labour Group by Geraint Davies, replaced again by fellow New Addington councillor Valerie Shawcross after his own election to parliament in 1997.¹⁷ Much remained from before 1994 – including the Tramlink project (which began operation, with cross-party support, in 2000) and, more controversially, the dominance of public-private partnerships that saw the borough labelled 'Croydon Plc', 'a U.S. style of urban regime'.¹⁸ The trams were one reason that *Peep Show* (first broadcast in 2003 and completed in 2015) was set in Croydon; the director wanted a place befitting the programme's innovative filmography, 'a bit avant garde and European'.¹⁹ In a sort of Europeanised version of 'Croydon as Manhattan', recalling the tongue-in-cheek Paris comparisons of the nineteenth century, Croydon's Labour council oversaw the creation of an EU-funded Edge Cities Network along with places like Getafe (outside Madrid), Noisy-le-Grand (outside Paris), and Espoo (outside Helsinki).²⁰ The Croydon of the late 1990s and early-to-mid 2000s seemed the culmination of a century of promise for a 'town-conscious' Croydon, with New Labour to thank.

The trams did not actually feature in *Peep Show*: trams 'aren't funny', apparently.²¹ For Channel Four, it was Croydon's status as 'a kind of joke place' which was preponderant.²² Mark and Jez, *Peep Show*'s lead characters, are emblematic of an anxious, mediocre town filling up with middle-class commuters priced out of inner London. Their flat is in a block named 'Apollo House' (a

¹⁷ Interview with Clive Fraser.

¹⁸ N.A. Phelps, D. McNeill & N. Parsons, 'In Search of a European Edge Urban Identity: Trans-European Networking Among Edge Urban Municipalities,' *European Urban and Regional Studies*, vol.9, no.3 (2002), pp.211-224, pp.219-220. For a contemporary criticism of the 'local politics of growth' in south-eastern England, and its consequences for class politics, see: J. Charlesworth & A. Cochrane, 'Tales of the Suburbs: The Local Politics of Growth in the South-east of England,' *Urban Studies*, vol.31, no.10 (1994), pp.1723-1738.

¹⁹ A. Anthony, 'Mitchell and Webb on Peep Show: "We just wanted to milk it",' *The Observer* (1st November 2015), <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2015/nov/01/david-mitchell-robert-webb-on-peep-show-we-just-wanted-to-milk-it-interview>, accessed 30th September 2021.

²⁰ N.A. Phelps & N. Parsons, 'Edge Urban Geographies: Notes from the Margins of Europe's Capital Cities,' *Urban Studies*, vol.40, no.9 (2003), pp.1740-1745.

²¹ A. Anthony, 'Mitchell and Webb on Peep Show: "We just wanted to milk it",' *The Observer* (1st November 2015), <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2015/nov/01/david-mitchell-robert-webb-on-peep-show-we-just-wanted-to-milk-it-interview>, accessed 30th September 2021.

²² Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman.

strange reference to Croydon's Home Office building) but the filmed exterior is Zodiac Court on London Road, an office-to-flats conversion which makes an appropriate home for Mark (a loan manager) and Jez (a struggling musician) – inhabitants of a 'surveillance society' hinted at in their neurotic, self-policing internal monologues.²³ By the mid-to-late 2000s, the Labour Party that Mark and Jez may once have voted for – Mark argues in a 2004 episode that he doesn't 'necessarily think money or Tony Blair are a bad thing' – was beginning to bleed support, including in Croydon.²⁴ In 2005, Croydon Central was lost to Andrew Pelling, a prominent Conservative councillor.²⁵ 2010 saw the seat pass to Gavin Barwell and the Conservatives holding the council, having taken it back from Labour in 2006. Later, the popular Malcolm Wicks – who passed away in 2012 – was replaced by Labour's Steve Reed, leader of Lambeth council. These were difficult years, abrupt reminders that the 1990s triumphs would not last forever.

Labour regained the council in 2014, with Ed Miliband at the helm, but 2015 saw Sarah Jones defeated in Croydon Central by just 165 votes. Sarah Jones' victory in 2017 (and again in 2019) was frequently compared by my narrators to the failure of 1979, when David White saw a Conservative majority of 164 turn into a much stronger one.²⁶ Whereas White was supported by Militant, Jones was supported by Momentum activists from Surrey and South London. As Housing Minister, Barwell had failed to deliver on affordable housing – a major concern in Croydon, where Labour won a lot of votes from 'priced-out Londoners' living, like Mark and Jez, in converted office blocks, as well as the constituency's now-considerable ethnic minority communities.²⁷ Indeed, by the 2010s, some of Croydon's once-scorned urban landscape was

²³ B. Mills, "'Paranoia, paranoia, everybody's coming to get me": *Peep Show*, sitcom, and the surveillance society,' *Screen*, vol.49, no.1 (2008), pp.51–64.

²⁴ Compare to Paul Gilroy's discussion of *The Office*, another New Labour era sitcom which conveys a sense of surveillance, 'a distorted microcosm of Tony Blair's Britain', set in another town on which John Betjeman had passed comment: Gilroy, *After Empire*, pp.149–153.

²⁵ Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman; Interview with Jean Tagg.

²⁶ Interview with Jerry Fitzpatrick; Interview with David White.

²⁷ B. Kentish, 'Croydon Central election result: Tory Housing Minister Gavin Barwell loses Greater London seat to Labour,' *The Independent* (9th June 2017),

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/croydon-central-election-result-gavin-barwell-tory-housing-minister-lose-seat-labour-greater-london-conservatives-a7780591.html>, accessed 30th

September 2021; Hatherley, *Red Metropolis*, p.194; K. Andrews, 'The votes of ethnic minorities made a big difference to the general election – Labour should take note,' *The Independent* (15th June 2017),

<https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/ethnic-minority-vote-general-election-labour-jeremy-corbyn-racial-faultlines-anti-immigration-a7791101.html>, accessed 30th September 2019.

regarded 'with nostalgia for a lost idealism', emblazoned on t-shirts and wall posters as 1960s skylines became fashionable.²⁸ Meanwhile, as Jessica Perera – who spoke to Croydon Central CLP on my invitation in 2019 – has argued, 'Generation Grime' was a major contributor to Labour's unexpected 2017 electoral performance.²⁹ Posters with Stormzy's face and the message 'Stormzy says vote Labour' appeared across Croydon in the week before the general election – the rapper had endorsed Jeremy Corbyn in the campaign (and did again in 2019), although the posters were not approved by either himself or the party.³⁰ Sarah Jones quoted Stormzy's 'Shut Up' in her maiden speech, reminding MPs that 'you're never too big for the boot'.³¹ This looked like the victory of the young, multicultural Croydon, in alliance with an anxious middle class, described in the fourth chapter of this thesis.

In *Peep Show's* first episode, one of Mark's neuroses is sparked by a group of white, hooded-wearing children who accost him ('fuck off, clean shirt!') outside his flat; 'I know it must be difficult, being a kid,' he protests, 'not a lot of schemes... But I'm not the borough, I wish I was!'³² The reputation of 'Little Siberia' was deteriorating further in the era of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders, as New Addington became known as 'the centre of the chav universe'; in 2008, Croydon, whose 'chav' associations were already immortalised in the 'Croydon facelift' (a ponytail sported by *Little Britain's* Vicky Pollard and 'updated' by Kate Moss), was voted 'the chavviest town in the country'.³³ This stigmatisation was accompanied by Labour's growing

²⁸ Saumarez Smith, *Boom Cities*, p.173.

²⁹ J. Perera, 'The politics of Generation Grime,' *Race & Class*, vol.60, no.2 (2018), pp.82-93. I was then the CLP's Policy Officer, and asked Perera to talk about her into the interrelation between the policing of 'knife crime' and the housing crisis: J. Perera, *The London Clearances: Race, Housing and Policing* (London: Institute of Race Relations, 2019).

³⁰ F. Gillett & H. Collier, "'Stormzy says vote Labour!' Hundreds of posters featuring grime star appear in Croydon,' *Evening Standard* (2nd June 2017), <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/stormzy-says-vote-labour-hundreds-of-posters-featuring-grime-star-appear-in-croydon-a3555586.html>, accessed 26th April 2021.

³¹ HC Deb 12th July 2017 vol.627 c.358. For a discussion of support for Corbyn from grime artists, see: Hancox, *Inner City Pressure*, pp.281-285.

³² Channel Four Comedy, "'F*** Off Clean Shirt!' Mark Gets Bullied by Kids | Peep Show' [video] (24th January 2019), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sZtLDufsjLU>, accessed 5th September 2022.

³³ S. Truelove, "'It's the centre of the chav universe' – The "worst" places in Croydon according to locals,' *MyLondon* (26th November 2019), <https://www.mylondon.news/news/south-london-news/its-centre-chav-universe-worst-17319558>, accessed 30th September 2021; 'Croydon makes its comeback,' *Evening Standard* (25th July 2011), <https://www.standard.co.uk/insider/fashion/croydon-makes-its-comeback-6425630.html>, accessed 30th September 2021; P. Truman, 'Survey labels Croydon UK chav capital,'

difficulties on Croydon's estates. In 2010, one seat in New Addington fell to the Conservatives; regained four years later, the estates voted for Leave in 2016 by a large margin.³⁴ In May 2022, Labour lost three of New Addington's four seats – the first time that the Fieldway estate has had a Conservative councillor since 1968.³⁵ In 2021, the *Huffington Post* described Keir Starmer's advisers (several with links to the borough, including Evans and Tom Hughes) worrying about 'white working class areas like Croydon'.³⁶ It was apparently a recognition of a Croydon which had been 'sent to Coventry'.

If it is jarring to see Croydon described as 'white working class', it indicates how grievances identified with New Addington have been racialised – including by the Labour Party, whose flagging appeal has been ascribed to a 'flirtation with the far right' on the estates, reminiscent of the explanations for difficulties in Waddon described in Chapter Three.³⁷ In 2011, the BNP attempted to capitalise after the 'Racist Tram Woman' from New Addington, viral on Twitter and YouTube, was arrested.³⁸ As Gilroy points out, politicians and commentators presented her rant as 'the spontaneous outpouring of an injured white working class'.³⁹ It was one of several recent incidents of public racism in Croydon, alongside a 2017 assault on a Kurdish-Iranian asylum seeker called Reker Ahmed, the 2018 burning of an effigy of Grenfell Tower in South Norwood,

Croydon Guardian (31st July 2008), <https://www.yourlocalguardian.co.uk/news/3561347.survey-labels-croydon-uk-chav-capital/>, accessed 30th September 2021.

³⁴ T. Goodenough, 'Croydon could be key to deciding Boris's election fortunes,' *The Spectator* (19th November 2019), <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/croydon-could-be-key-to-deciding-boris-s-election-fortunes>, accessed 30th September 2021.

³⁵ For a further discussion of these results, see: D. Frost, 'Many Croydons: Labour's Challenge in South London,' *Mile End Institute Blog* (25th May 2022), <https://www.qmul.ac.uk/mei/news-and-opinion/items/many-croydons-labours-challenge-in-south-london.html>, accessed 13th June 2022.

³⁶ P. Waugh, 'Fighting them on the beaches: Keir Starmer draws his battle lines for the next election,' *Huffington Post* (6th August 2021), https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/keir-starmer-summer-campaign-starts-the-long-battle-for-the-next-election_uk_610c8d39e4b0e28b31ded9db, accessed 30th September 2021; S. Rodgers, 'Another close aide to Keir Starmer goes as Chris Ward set to leave leader's office,' *LabourList* (28th July 2021), <https://labourlist.org/2021/07/another-close-aide-to-keir-starmer-goes-as-chris-ward-set-to-leave-leaders-office/>, accessed 30th September 2021.

³⁷ Grindrod, *Concretopia*, pp.6–7.

³⁸ M. Collins, "'Tram Woman' sobs, BNP gets busy,' *Hope Not Hate* (6th December 2011), <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2011/12/06/tram-woman-sobs-bnp-gets-busy/>, accessed 30th September 2021; L. Back, 'Fairytale of New Addington,' *openDemocracy* (18th December 2014), <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/opendemocracyuk/fairytale-of-new-addington/>, accessed 30th September 2021.

³⁹ Gilroy, "'My Britain is fuck all",' p.394. See, also: Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, pp.xxxiii–xxxv.

and a 2020 acid attack on a pair of Eritrean asylum speakers.⁴⁰ These events have rarely been connected to one another, or to the earlier racist violence described in Chapter Four, smoothed over by the narrative of the ‘multicultural suburb’.⁴¹ This could have complex results: canvassing on the edge of the Shrublands estate in 2017, close to where Reker Ahmed had been attacked, I was told by one resident that he wouldn’t vote Conservative because (he claimed) Gavin Barwell had described people from his area as ‘scum’.⁴²

The outburst of the ‘Racist Tram Woman’ should not be reduced to ‘the subcultural habits of white south London which half-baked anti-racism might imagine Emma to represent, if not to embody.’⁴³ Shakuntala Banaji found that white (anti-racist) viewers responded to the video by distancing themselves from her views with ‘aggressive disgust’.⁴⁴ This was the anxiety about public perception captured within the internal monologues of *Peep Show*’s main characters, as well as their uncertain commentaries on race and racism; a scene which lampshaded this ambiguity, depicting Jez in blackface, has since been removed by Netflix.⁴⁵ These responses mirror New Labour’s attempts to police racism, guided by the ‘symbiotic relationship to governmental power’

⁴⁰ ‘Croydon tram woman admits racist rant, knife attack on partner and assault on Pc,’ *Evening Standard* (5th June 2013), <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/croydon-tram-woman-admits-racist-rant-knife-attack-on-partner-and-assault-on-pc-8644974.html>, accessed 8th September 2021; A. Fo, ‘Girl cried “Stop, you’re killing him!” as gang of six beat and kicked student in racist attack, court hears,’ *The Independent* (12th October 2017), <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/reker-ahmed-attack-girl-cried-stop-racist-assault-goat-pub-croydon-crown-court-a7996871.html>, accessed 8th September 2021; ‘Beckenham and Croydon men arrested over Grenfell Tower effigy video,’ *News Shopper* (6th November 2018), <https://www.newshopper.co.uk/news/17203591.beckenham-croydon-men-arrested-grenfell-tower-effigy-video/>, accessed 8th September 2021; D. Taylor, ‘Refugee, 18, blinded in acid attack says Met delay may have cost him sight,’ *The Guardian* (18th February 2021), <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/feb/18/refugee-18-blinded-in-acid-attack-says-met-delay-may-have-cost-him-sight>, accessed 8th September 2021.

⁴¹ D. Frost, “‘Racism is not an isolated incident’: Croydon’s 1981, Croydon’s 2011, and troubling memories in the “multicultural suburb”,’ paper presented to the *Troubling Anniversaries* conference organised by the Institute of Historical Research and the Centre for Public History, Queen’s University Belfast (22nd October 2021).

⁴² Gilroy, “‘My Britain is fuck all”,’ p.393. Barwell was referring to the attackers: ‘Croydon asylum boy assault: Up to 20 people watched attack,’ *BBC News* (2nd April 2017), <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-39470487>, accessed 29th August 2022.

⁴³ Gilroy, “‘My Britain is fuck all”,’ p.394.

⁴⁴ S. Banaji, ‘Everyday racism and “my tram experience”: emotion, civic performance and learning on YouTube,’ *Comunicar*, vol.20, no.40 (2013), pp.69-77, p.73.

⁴⁵ Mills, “‘Paranoia, paranoia, everybody’s coming to get me”,’ pp.58-59; ‘Peep Show blackface scene removed from Netflix but remains on C4,’ *BBC News* (30th June 2020), <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-53233134>, accessed 29th August 2022. Again, compare to the discussion of racial anxieties in *The Office*: Gilroy, *After Empire*, pp.150-152.

which Gilroy criticised in anti-racist activists in the 1980s.⁴⁶ Structural racism remains largely untouched – even representationally, the borough has never had a Black or Asian MP, and only elected its first ethnic minority council leader in 2020, with Hamida Ali taking over at a time of unprecedented challenges.⁴⁷ Whilst musicians like Stormzy are spoken of with pride, venues for Black music in Croydon are few and the council and police gained notoriety for the ‘bashment ban’.⁴⁸ Furthermore, as Gilroy makes clear, Emma West’s racist rant echoed the criticisms of ‘state multiculturalism’ levelled by politicians like David Cameron – criticisms underpinned by a rhetoric of ‘values’ which Keir Starmer’s advisers are apparently happy to mimic.⁴⁹

Similarly, coverage of the 2011 uprisings focused on the fact ‘looting and rioting made it to locations not usually associated with such disorder’, ‘ethnically mixed twenty-first-century suburbs’ like Croydon and Ealing, now ‘gang-affected’.⁵⁰ Reed, a shadow minister under Corbyn, condemned in his maiden speech ‘the mindless hooliganism, looting, burning and destruction that so appalled the nation in the summer of last year’, of which his new constituency ‘bore the brunt’.⁵¹ The uprisings provided an opportunity, after the anniversaries of the New Cross fire and the 1981 riots passed ‘almost without acknowledgement’, for commentators like Darcus Howe (then living locally) to link ‘Croydonians to a network of anti-imperial activists, past and present’.⁵² Interviewing Howe a fortnight beforehand, however, Anne-Marie Angelo found him

⁴⁶ Gilroy, “‘My Britain is fuck all’,” pp.385–386; Gilroy, *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*, p.xiv, p.xvii & p.195.

⁴⁷ O. Murphy, “‘It’s been challenging’”: Hamida Ali reflects on turning Croydon around,’ *SW Londoner* (1st July 2021), <https://www.swlondoner.co.uk/news/O1O72O2I-its-been-challenging-hamida-ali-reflects-on-turning-croydon-around/>, accessed 30th September 2021.

⁴⁸ C. Simpson, ‘Croydon Council slammed by politician for giving “thumbs up” to policy which led to a “Bashment ban” in the borough,’ *Croydon Advertiser* (22nd January 2018), <https://www.croydonadvertiser.co.uk/news/croydon-news/croydon-council-slammed-politician-giving-1090516>, accessed 26th April 2021.

⁴⁹ Gilroy, “‘My Britain is fuck all’,” p.387.

⁵⁰ E. Smith, ‘Once as History, Twice as Farce? The Spectre of the Summer of ’81 in Discourses on the August 2011 Riots,’ *Journal for Cultural Research*, vol.17, no.2 (2013), pp.124–143, p.127; Huq, ‘Suburbia Runs Riot,’ p.106 & p.119; S. Harding, ‘Street Government: The Role of the Urban Street Gang in the London Riots,’ pp.193–213, in D. Briggs (ed.), *The English Riots of 2011: A Summer of Discontent* (Sheffield on Loddon: Waterside Press, 2012), p.200.

⁵¹ HC Deb 11th December 2012 vol.555 c.225. The phrase ‘mindless hooliganism’ echoed a remark made by the Conservative council’s then-leader, Mike Fisher: A. Angelo, “*Any Name That Has Power*”: *The Black Panthers of Israel, the United Kingdom, and the United States, 1948–1977* (PhD Thesis, Duke University, 2013), p.378.

⁵² Gilroy, “‘My Britain is fuck all’,” p.382; Angelo, “*Any Name That Has Power*”, p.381. See, also: Perry, *London is the Place for Me*, p.246.

struggling to know what he could say to young people, and commentators like Sivanandan responded to the uprisings with ambivalence because they were 'neither community-based nor politically-orientated'; an even more uncertain relationship to Croydon's young Black population characterised Corbynism and Labour more generally.⁵³ Whilst the sympathy of grime artists like Stormzy for Corbyn has been noted, this relationship was marked by tensions.⁵⁴ When drill artists Skengdo and AM received suspended sentences for performing a song with violent lyrics, our response was muted – even though they were sentenced at Croydon County Court.⁵⁵ One consequence of these ambiguities is the growth of the Taking The Initiative Party, emerging from the Black Lives Matter movement and standing candidates in local elections in the north of the borough, focusing on improving representation and addressing youth violence.⁵⁶ Another possibility is the continued withdrawal of young Black and Asian people (and younger people in general) from formal politics entirely – which might lead to further uprisings in the future.⁵⁷

As Joshua Virasami observes, '[t]he deep-seated suspicion of the state' associated with Black Lives Matter and the radical climate movement 'was never truly reflected back to the young people joining the [Corbyn-supporting] insurgency.'⁵⁸ During the 2017 election, I skipped one Momentum-organised bout of canvassing training to attend an anti-fascist demonstration outside Lunar House. Playing 'Skwod', by Stormzy's cousin Nadia Rose, activists 'took up space dancing' against the far-right, adding to familiar chants of 'refugees are welcome here!' and 'Croydon is

⁵³ Angelo, "Any Name That Has Power", pp.375-376. On Sivanandan's response to the 2011 uprisings, see: Peplow, *Race and Riots in Thatcher's Britain*, p.212; Elliott-Cooper, *Black Resistance to British Policing*, p.118.

⁵⁴ For some tensions between grime artists and Labour, real or imagined, see: Stormzy & Yawson, *Rise Up*, p.196; Hancox, *Inner City Pressure*, pp.286-287. For reservations about 'Grime4Corbyn', the 'student-friendly' incarnation of 2010s grime, and Stormzy's 'positive write-ups in high-end broadsheet newspapers for insulting politicians and prime ministers', see: Mackintosh, *Neon Screams*, p.51 & p.145.

⁵⁵ L. Fatsis, 'Policing the beats: The criminalisation of UK drill and grime music by the London Metropolitan Police,' *The Sociological Review*, vol.67, no.6 (2019), pp.1300-1316, p.1303; Elliott-Cooper, *Black Resistance to British Policing*, p.157.

⁵⁶ M. Ayodele, 'Ones to Watch: Taking The Initiative Party makes its electoral debut,' *Operation Black Vote* (7th May 2021), <https://www.obv.org.uk/news-blogs/ones-watch-taking-initiative-party-makes-its-electoral-debut>, accessed 1st October 2021.

⁵⁷ A. Ince, T. Bóren & I. Lindell, 'After riots: Toward a research agenda on the long-term effects of urban unrest,' *Journal of Urban Affairs*, preprint (15th April 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1080/07352166.2021.1898284>, p.4 & p.8; S. Akram, 'Recognizing the 2011 United Kingdom riots as political protest,' *British Journal of Criminology*, vol.54 (2014), pp.375-392, pp.387-388.

⁵⁸ Virasami, 'The rise of Black Lives Matter and Extinction Rebellion,' p.21.

anti-fascist!’⁵⁹ If it was a missed opportunity for Corbynism to connect to a group of committed young people, it is also a reminder of a deeper irony in Croydon’s activist scene: anti-fascist and left-wing activists in Croydon physically defending the headquarters of Britain’s violent border system. The state racism underpinning anti-migrant violence emerges relatively unscathed.⁶⁰ Moreover, as Aditya Sarkar points out, the Corbyn leadership’s equivocation over freedom of movement and migration ‘cast a shadow Corbynism was never able to outrun’.⁶¹ This thesis, and Chapter Four in particular, has traced a partial history of these exclusions and the ways that they came to be accepted by a part of the left in Croydon, as well as the contradictions implicit in seeking to take over the racist, capitalist state.

Although many of the worst features of Croydon’s recent redevelopments (including the notorious ‘permitted development’ office-to-homes schemes) are the product of national policy, as in the 1960s and 1970s, Labour has received a portion of the blame.⁶² The borough’s 2020 bankruptcy – the result of austerity, the challenges of ‘an Outer London borough with Inner London needs’, and financial mismanagement including of the council-owned housing company Brick By Brick and the regeneration of the (symbolically important) Fairfield Halls – has heightened criticism.⁶³ A 20,000-strong petition handed in by the campaign for a democratically-elected mayor (DEMOC) led to a referendum that defeated the Labour Group’s campaign for the status quo by a significant margin (albeit on a 21 percent turnout), often

⁵⁹ C. Brinkhurst-Cuff, ‘Nadia Rose’s “Skwod” used to ward off fascists in London,’ *Dazed* (7th May 2017), <https://www.dazeddigital.com/music/article/35827/1/nadia-roses-skwod-used-to-ward-off-fascists-in-croydon>, accessed 30th September 2021.

⁶⁰ J. Bourne, ‘The life and times of institutional racism,’ *Race & Class*, vol.43, no.2 (2001), pp.7-22, pp.14-15 & p.19; N. Yuval-Davis, ‘Institutional Racism, Cultural Diversity and Citizenship: Some Reflections on Reading The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report,’ *Sociological Research Online*, vol.4, no.1 (1999), §3.11.

⁶¹ Laite et al, ‘Labour’s Identity and Labour’s Strategy,’ pp.21-22.

⁶² T. Wall, ‘“It feels almost like prison”: the developers building homes with no natural light,’ *The Guardian* (19th December 2019), <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2019/dec/19/it-feels-almost-like-prison-the-developers-building-homes-with-no-natural-light>, accessed 1st October 2021; J. Evans, ‘“Slums of the future”? UK office-to-homes policy sparks fears,’ *Financial Times* (26th December 2018), <https://www.ft.com/content/48f8e55c-ffb2-11e8-ac00-57a2a826423e>, accessed 1st October 2021.

⁶³ D. Hill, ‘Croydon: The budget gap, the town and the Town Hall,’ *OnLondon* (12th October 2020), <https://www.onlondon.co.uk/croydon-the-budget-gap-the-town-and-the-town-hall/>, accessed 1st October 2021.

explained as an attempt by voters in the south to address planning complaints.⁶⁴ However, whilst led by the chair of the Whitgift Estate Residents' Association and a former campaign manager of Vote Leave, and supported by the Conservative Party, DEMOC received the support of Croydon South CLP and several prominent Labour activists – including Andrew Pelling, the former Conservative MP, from 2014 a Labour councillor for Waddon and a frequent attendee at Momentum meetings.⁶⁵ Many of my narrators emphasised concern about the changes underway in Croydon, with Peter Walker negatively contrasting Croydon's recent experience with that of Preston – the quintessential 'community wealth-building' council.⁶⁶ Jean Tagg had been 'sending a little message to Croydon council saying "Little Boxes"', comparing the developments to the Malvina Reynolds song recorded by Pete Seeger – a very clear echo of the earlier reservations of the New Left.⁶⁷ Grace Fadden complained about the tower blocks and difficulty accessing services: 'it's a Labour council here, now [...] and well we all have problems with them'.⁶⁸ Tagg felt the council 'seem hell bent on building in every little bit of north Croydon that they can, and leaving the south to their green and pleasant land'.⁶⁹ If her point was vindicated by the comments of Labour's unsuccessful mayoral candidate, Valerie Shawcross, in 2022 – she lambasted a three-storey block of flats in Coulsdon for 'really stick[ing] out like a sore thumb in this attractive suburban area' – it also recalls the disputes over left-wing responses to Croydon's redevelopment which were detailed in Chapter Three.⁷⁰ On a personal level, these divisions were painfully clear

⁶⁴ T. O'Connor, '20,000 people in Croydon want to see their council leader replaced – here's why,' *MyLondon* (4th September 2020), <https://www.mylondon.news/news/south-london-news/croydon-council-votes-labour-politics-18881615>, accessed 1st October 2021; D. Hill, 'Croydon: Borough's voters choose directly-elected Mayor system in referendum,' *OnLondon* (8th October 2021), <https://www.onlondon.co.uk/croydon-boroughs-voters-choose-directly-elected-mayor-system-in-referendum/>, accessed 8th October 2021. As MP, Barwell had prospered from his opposition to development on the Green Belt, representing those locals hostile towards further construction: Grindrod, *Outskirts*, p.313.

⁶⁵ O'Connor, '20,000 people in Croydon want to see their council leader replaced'; Hill, 'Croydon: The budget gap, the town and the Town Hall.'

⁶⁶ Interview with Peter Walker. On the 'Preston model', see: M. Brown & R.E. Jones, *Paint Your Town Red: How Preston Took Back Control and Your Town Can Too* (London: Repeater Books, 2021).

⁶⁷ Interview with Jean Tagg.

⁶⁸ Interview with Grace Fadden.

⁶⁹ Interview with Jean Tagg.

⁷⁰ D. Hill, 'Croydon: Why does Labour's mayoral candidate sound so Conservative on housing?', *OnLondon* (5th April 2022), <https://www.onlondon.co.uk/croydon-why-does-labours-mayoral-candidate-sound-so-conservative-on-housing/>, accessed 29th August 2022.

as soon as Momentum succeeded in getting some of its supporters elected locally in 2018.⁷¹ It was less clear what could be done about them.

One of the foremost public critics of Corbyn's leadership after 2015 was *Peep Show's* Robert Webb – an example of the emerging chasm between the so-called 'centrist dads' and a younger, left-wing generation with a style of humour distinct from traditional broadcast comedy.⁷²

Corbynism's collapse since the highpoint of the 2017 conference, nationally but especially in Croydon, can be connected to the contradictions among left-wing activists which this thesis has lingered over, particularly in their relationships to the state and to Croydon as a place. In May 2022, Croydon – or, rather, 34.5 percent of its first-round voters on a 35 percent turnout – opted to make Jason Perry, a Conservative, the first directly-elected Mayor of Croydon. Labour dropped to 34 seats against the Conservatives' 33 (enough, with the mayoralty, for Conservative control), losing seats to the Conservatives in both New Addington wards and Waddon, to the Liberal Democrats in Upper Norwood and Crystal Palace, and to the Greens in the town centre. The losses suggest that the multifaceted difficulties which Labour wrestled with through much of Croydon's history have persisted into the twenty-first century. Nevertheless, periods of defeat and withdrawal – think 1968, think the early 1980s – have often provided opportunities for recalibrating left-wing activism. 'Croydon had, and has, ideas above its station, and for that it's quite hard not to warm to it', Owen Hatherley has argued: 'Croydon is a *place*. It could be much more of one.'⁷³ If by 'explicitly questioning the construction of that place', left-wing activists, young and old, have helped to make the diverse, dynamic place(s) of Croydon in the past, it is

⁷¹ This is a point explored further in: D. Frost, 'Burning Bridges: A Review of *Red Metropolis*,' *New Socialist* (16th October 2021), <https://newsocialist.org.uk/burning-bridges-review-red-metropolis/>, accessed 29th November 2021.

⁷² N. Khomami, 'Corbyn critic Robert Webb announces he has left Labour,' *The Guardian* (20th November 2015), <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2015/nov/20/robert-webb-announces-he-has-left-labour-and-cites-election-of-corbyn-peep-show>, accessed 30th August 2022. For a discussion of 'centrist dad' memes and Corbynist humour, see: D. Ashby, *OK Boomer: Geography, Comedy and the Emerging Political Expression of Generation Left in the UK* (PhD Thesis, University of Leicester, 2020), pp.223-237.

⁷³ Hatherley, *A New Kind of Bleak*, p.164 & p.170.

hoped that this thesis will act as a reminder of their potential role in (re)making Croydon in the future.⁷⁴

Croydon as problem

The epigraph to this conclusion names one of Stormzy's monikers. In the introduction to his self-released mixtape *168* (2013), he elaborated on what this meant to him: 'People don't think [...] that I'm one to be looked out for, one to be watched. And that's when it becomes a problem, that's when I have to rise up and become a problem, do you understand?'⁷⁵ The social scientist Edwin Amenta suggested 'that scholars go deeper into their cases, but not so far native as to neglect more general theorizing'.⁷⁶ If this study has formed part of a broader move away from concerns about typicality, its gaze has not been fixated solely on Croydon.⁷⁷ Instead, echoing Stormzy, it has made Croydon into a problem: thinking from within Croydon in order to think beyond Croydon, taking advantage of the liminal, metonymic qualities of a suburban place to re-examine the history of twentieth-century Britain and approaches to left-wing activism in general.

I have been influenced by the work of Lauren Pikó on Milton Keynes and 'the spatialising of wider structures of feeling' which have located both the promises and problems of social democracy, neoliberalism, and modernity in general in specific places and spaces, towns and suburbs.⁷⁸ Through a four-part internal chapter structure (dominant conceptions, residual and emergent responses, and subsumption), this thesis has developed an understanding of the processes whereby challenges to the capitalist city are recuperated by (the) capital, without ever being incorporated entirely. This process of contestation and frustrating compromise, which I have labelled 'suburbanisation', provides an alternative metanarrative (alongside 'decline', 'deindustrialisation', and 'decolonisation') for the history of the twentieth century – a 'structure

⁷⁴ D. Massey, S. Bond & D. Featherstone, 'The Possibilities of a Politics of Place Beyond Place? A Conversation with Doreen Massey,' *Scottish Geographical Journal*, vol.125, nos.3-4 (2009), pp.401-420, p.411.

⁷⁵ Stormzy & Yawson, *Rise Up*, p.10.

⁷⁶ Amenta, 'Making the Most of an Historical Case Study,' p.352.

⁷⁷ Hughes, *The Socio-Cultural Milieux of the Left in Post-War Britain*, p.3.

⁷⁸ Pikó, *Milton Keynes in British Culture*, p.7.

of feeling' which has shaped contemporary political subjectivity. If I have contributed to the closing of suburban lacunae in contemporary political history, then, I have also brought together and troubled the gap between recent work in (sub)urban historiography and the trends to have emerged from the New Political History, thereby getting at the complex relationship between the built environment and politics in twentieth-century Britain.⁷⁹

It may well be that this metanarrative is already undergoing a process of erosion – arguably, some of the trends in the history of Croydon since the 1990s, outlined above, point in that direction.⁸⁰ Regardless, Williams reminded us to avoid the fatalism which states that there is 'no main current of thought in the world which had not been incorporated within the fundamental forms of the capitalist and imperialist system'.⁸¹ It is tempting to apply an ironic or melancholic gloss to the history of left-wing activism in general and of Croydon in particular; arguably, in writing about a 'joke place', it is unavoidable, and laughter can do many things.⁸² If I have tried to mitigate against fatalism through adopting a structure which resists the finality of incorporation, I have also recognised the value of subcultural history as a way of understanding wider processes.⁸³ Specifically, I have foregrounded the left-wing activist subculture to which I belong and to which I am politically committed – a commitment which, 'for Williams, if it meant anything, meant consciousness of and engagement with the deeper historical processes at work'.⁸⁴ If he 'pushed out

⁷⁹ For recent work in suburban political history, in addition to those texts already cited, see: B. Humphries, *The Origins and Development of the Labour Movement in West London 1918-1970* (PhD Thesis, University of Reading, 2018); S. Wilks-Heeg, 'Safe Labour Suburbia? The Changing Politics of the Merseyside Suburbs,' *The Political Quarterly*, vol.90, no.1 (2019), pp.53-63.

⁸⁰ For a similar argument applied to suburban metanarratives in the United States, see: M. de Oliver, 'Defending Gentrification as a Valid Collective Conception: Utilizing the Metanarrative of "Suburbia" as a Common Axis for the Diversity of Middle-Class Reurbanization Projects,' *Urban Affairs Review*, vol.55, no.5 (2019), pp.1487-1511, pp.1503-1504.

⁸¹ Williams, *The Country and the City*, p.438.

⁸² Spiegel, 'Above, about and beyond the writing of history,' p.500. For one of many criticisms of 'left-wing irony or melancholy', which 'feeds on its own impotence', see: Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, pp.33-37. On laughter, see: Gilroy, *After Empire*, pp.148-149. Compare to the discussion of 'postirony' in: L. Konstantinou, 'Four Faces of Postirony,' pp.87-102, in van den Akker, Gibbons & Vermeulen (eds.), *Metamodernism*, p.88.

⁸³ On the growing popularity of subcultural studies, see: L. Robinson, Review of G. Dylan Smith, M. Dines & T. Parkinson (eds.), *Punk Pedagogies: Music, Culture and Learning*, *Punk & Post-Punk*, vol.7, no.3 (2018), pp.447-450, p.447. As Lucy Robinson argues of punk, in a sentence that might easily be repurposed to refer to left-wing activism: 'Even in the most traditional punk narratives, there is always an itchy, creative, and slightly awkward punk possibility.' Robinson, 'Exhibition Review Punk's 40th Anniversary – An Itchy Sort of Heritage,' p.313.

⁸⁴ Harker, 'Introduction,' p.6.

from personal memory to history, situating his early life within the *longue durée* of struggle on the Welsh borders', I have followed a metamodern impulse and written together personal memory, oral history and the products of archival research in an attempt to 'pick out from the scrapheap of history those elements that allow them to resignify the present and reimagine a future.'⁸⁵ Whilst, as Hazel Carby notes, it is not possible for 'social justice to be mined', I believe that a sincere effort to write from within a movement to which I was politically committed (without surrendering an element of hopefulness about Corbynism's passing) provides for an account of Britain's twentieth-century history which refuses to condemn the radicalism of participants (whether in the contemporary movement itself or in their younger lives) as "'past", and thus dead, obsolete, and beyond the reach of the present.'⁸⁶ After all, as Lynne Segal reminded us, 'nonaligned activists and thinkers, especially prevalent from the 1960s, have only our snatched and fleeting reconstructions.'⁸⁷

Whereas Pikó wrote that her Australian 'lack of attunement to a finely-grained cultural hierarchy of place' marked her as out-of-place in Milton Keynes and in England, and whilst her work primarily uses material either produced or consumed outside Milton Keynes, this thesis has been explicitly written from within Croydon.⁸⁸ Whilst writing from both positions is valuable, and no academic – least of all Pikó – could be described as entirely inside or outside the subject of their research, I have emphasised the worth of writing from within a place: of immersing oneself as a historian in the built environment and amongst the people that are studied, of gaining a feel for particular spaces as a participant, of writing with our narrators as an audience.⁸⁹ Many of my narrators, including those who had spent most of the time examined by this thesis outside the Labour Party, were involved in Corbynism; former activists from the CPB-ML or SWP were

⁸⁵ Harker, 'Introduction,' p.7; van den Akker & Vermeulen, 'Periodising the 2000s,' p.10.

⁸⁶ H.V. Carby, 'Imperial Intimacies – Further Thoughts,' *small axe*, vol.25, no.1 (2021), pp.198–203, p.202; Ulas Ince, 'Politics of History,' p.11. On 'sincerity' and its connection to irony, and its relevance to Corbynism, see: Ashby, *OK Boomer*, pp.187–189.

⁸⁷ Segal, 'Formations of feminism,' p.26.

⁸⁸ Pikó, *Milton Keynes in British Culture*, pp.3–4 and p.11.

⁸⁹ For a recent work adopting a similar approach, see: E. Ormerod, 'The place of politics and the politics of place: Housing, the Labour Party and the local state in England,' *Political Geography*, vol.85 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2020.102308>.

(re)united with those who had dropped out of Labour over Blair and Iraq and those who had never left, and their contemporary activism cannot really be understood without an awareness of these rekindled friendships and enmities, increasingly important as people reconnect over Facebook as well as in person.⁹⁰ They frequently related their experiences of activism in the past to their experiences, often critical, of Corbynism (bemoaning the deficiencies of meeting practices, the modern payment of councillors, or the controversies over antisemitism); whilst understanding their histories on the left, inside and outside Labour, helps with interpreting Corbynism, understanding Corbynism has equally helped to understand the memories which they related.⁹¹ By structuring my thesis around the lives of my narrators, I have used a 'bricolage of authentic anecdotes [...] to construct a sense of depthiness' and as a means of 'presenting and empathising with the "real" experiences of others.'⁹²

Similarly, I decided to draw theoretically upon those scholars and artists that had (like John Ruskin, Angela Carter, Hazel Carby, Stuart Hall and Jay Bernard) some clear connection to Croydon or its activists – or else those (like Raymond Williams, Henri Lefebvre, Marshall McLuhan, Doreen Massey and Paul Gilroy) whose work was otherwise present, in whatever mediated form, to the subjects of this thesis.⁹³ One of the responses to Corbynism's defeat has been a turn to the local, and I would hope that attention to these theorists (and to the history which I have written with them) might encourage us to make sure that our activism is 'place-based', but not 'place-bound'.⁹⁴ As Les Back argued, 'Croydon's anti-charisma may just be its

⁹⁰ Interview with Marian Carty; Interview with Simon Berlin; Interview with David Percival; Interview with Lynda and Martin Graham; Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman; Interview with David White; Interview with Brian Nevill. Jerry Fitzpatrick, who had stood down from the council in 2002, was re-elected in Addiscombe West in 2018 before stepping down in 2022; Clive Fraser was re-elected in 2022, but in Fitzpatrick's ward after deselection in South Norwood.

⁹¹ Interview with Leni and Peter Gillman; Interview with Peter Walker; Interview with Simon Berlin; Interview with Marian Carty; Smith & Worley, *Waiting for the revolution*, pp.1-3.

⁹² S. Browse, 'Between Truth, Sincerity and Satire: Post-Truth Politics and the Rhetoric of Authenticity,' pp.167-181, in van den Akker, Gibbons & Vermeulen (eds.), *Metamodernism*, p.179. Sam Browse, an academic-turned-political adviser currently working for a Labour MP, was commenting on Jeremy Corbyn's famous rhetorical strategy (which he labels 'curated authenticity') at Prime Minister's Questions.

⁹³ Compare to Kieran Connell's recognition in his own work that scholars like Paul Gilroy and Stuart Hall 'often appear as historical characters who were in different ways shaped by the social and political climates they were each attempting to understand.' Connell, *Black Handsworth*, p.13.

⁹⁴ Massey, 'Places and Their Pasts,' p.184; D. Featherstone, 'Towards the Relational Construction of Militant Particularisms: or Why the Geographies of Past Struggles Matter for Resistance to Neoliberal Globalisation,' *Antipode*, vol.37, no.2 (2005), pp.250-271, p.252. For examples of contemporary

biggest asset'; 'it has got some identity of its own,' Jerry Fitzpatrick noted, 'but a kind of limited identity'.⁹⁵ Perhaps through exploring with this in mind, activists can again find themselves, as Phelps described Croydon, 'on the edge of something big'.⁹⁶

Endings and openings

'Come Down with Us' (2013), a Burial track from an EP noted for its being 'explicitly readable as *about* something', concludes with a sample from Lana Wachowski's HRC Visibility Award acceptance speech: 'this world that we imagine in this room might be used to gain access to other rooms, to other worlds previously unimaginable'.⁹⁷ The heading of this last section is a partial nod to Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*, whose final chapter is titled 'Openings and Conclusions': asking, in relation to revolutionary strategy, if 'what is misunderstood today [might] not be perfectly well understood tomorrow?'⁹⁸

Stuart Hall and his fellow authors finished *Policing the Crisis* by cautioning against 'any strategy which is based simply on favouring current modes of resistance', and there is a danger implicit in this thesis of having captured a history in a moment which has already passed.⁹⁹ I hope that were I to have commenced this project in 2020 or 2021 or 2022 (amidst the international Black Lives Matter protests in response to the murder of George Floyd, during the Kill the Bill demonstrations organised by a coalition around Sisters Uncut, or whilst protestors resisted the

activists interest in the local, see: Hatherley, *Red Metropolis*; Brown & Jones, *Paint Your Town Red*; O. Durose, *Suburban Socialism* (London: Repeater Books, 2022). For contemporary discussions of left-wing politics in the suburbs in North America, see: S. Chamberlain, 'Can Socialism Win In The Suburbs?' *Forbes* (29th February 2020), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/sarahchamberlain/2020/02/29/can-socialism-win-in-the-suburbs/?sh=3eefe2a76d99>, accessed 5th October 2021; M. Speers, 'The socialist struggle in the suburbs,' *spring: a magazine of socialist ideas in action* (10th February 2020), <https://springmag.ca/the-socialist-struggle-in-the-suburbs>, accessed 5th October 2021.

⁹⁵ Back, 'So... fucking Croydon'; Interview with Jerry Fitzpatrick. Compare to the discussion of local and regional identities in: Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, p.58.

⁹⁶ Phelps, 'On the Edge of Something Big,' pp.441-465.

⁹⁷ J. Baines, 'Burial: Rival Dealer (Hyperdub),' *Crack Magazine* (14th December 2013), <https://crackmagazine.net/article/news/burial/>, accessed 6th September 2022; 'Lana Wachowski's HRC Visibility Award Acceptance Speech (Transcript),' *The Hollywood Reporter* (24th October 2012), <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/general-news/lana-wachowskis-hrc-visibility-award-382177/>, accessed 6th September 2022.

⁹⁸ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p.420.

⁹⁹ Hall et al, *Policing the Crisis*, p.397.

deportations to Rwanda) then it would have appeared quite differently.¹⁰⁰ My theoretical influences, my choice of narrators, even my timeframe and my sense of place, would likely have been altered. Whilst I have tried to explore the limitations of Corbynism consciously, I have not been able to escape them – they have limited the gaze of this thesis, even if a limitation of some kind was a practical necessity. Indeed, whilst the title of this thesis nods towards a metamodern preference for ‘oscillation’, that should not be mistaken for a desire to combine the ‘best of both worlds’ – it is no substitute for a ‘sincere commitment’ to liberation to present oneself as ‘between camps’, intellectual or political.¹⁰¹

Nevertheless, the important thing, as Hall said of Williams, is to be able ‘*to go on thinking*, to go on developing and changing in response to new intellectual challenges.’¹⁰² Williams and Ruskin closed the introduction to this thesis, and the work of each often ended with a sense that it remained ongoing. Williams described *The Country and the City* as ‘a limited inquiry’ which allowed him to ‘offer its meanings, its implications and its connections to others: for discussion and amendment; for many kinds of possible cooperative work; but above all for an emphasis – the sense of an experience and of ways of changing it – in the many countries and cities where we live.’¹⁰³ The last chapter of the fifth and final volume of Ruskin’s *Modern Painters* declared that he had ‘only now the power of ending this work; it being time that it should end, but not of “concluding” it; for it has led me into fields of infinite inquiry, where it is only possible to break off with such imperfect result as may, at any given moment, have been attained.’¹⁰⁴ I feel much the same.

¹⁰⁰ Elliott-Cooper, *Black Resistance to British Policing*, pp.2-6.

¹⁰¹ van den Akker & Vermeulen, ‘Periodising the 2000s,’ p.6 & pp.10-11; Konstantinou, ‘Four Faces of Postirony,’ p.102; L. Chrisman, ‘The Vanishing Body of Frantz Fanon in Paul Gilroy’s *Against Race and After Empire*,’ *The Black Scholar*, vol.41, no.4 (2011), pp.18-30, pp.22-24.

¹⁰² S. Hall, ‘The Williams interviews,’ pp.304-318, in M. Alvarado, E. Buscombe & R. Collins (eds.), *The Screen Education Reader: Cinema, Television, Culture* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993), p.306.

¹⁰³ Williams, *The Country and the City*, p.440.

¹⁰⁴ J. Ruskin, *Modern Painters, Volume V* (London: Smith Elder & Co., 1860; Project Gutenberg, 1st December 2013, last updated 14th March 2015), ch.XII, §1, [https://www.gutenberg.org/files/44329/44329-h.htm](https://www.gutenberg.org/files/44329/44329-h/44329-h.htm). For a discussion of Ruskin’s conclusion, ‘coinciding with a waning of the compulsion to write rather than with the finalisation of meaning’, see: Garratt, ‘Ruskin’s *Modern Painters* and the Visual Language of Reality,’ p.62.

Appendix I: Biographical notes

In all cases, the names listed are those that the narrators were known to me by at the time of interview.

Berlin, Simon (b.1954)

Born in Mayday Hospital and raised in Shirley, Croydon; his mother was a Catholic housewife from Preston and his father was a variety showbusiness agent with roots in London's Jewish East End. First involved in politics through the AAM, as a teenager, before studying social administration at the University of Nottingham in the early 1970s. He took the 'magic bus' to Afghanistan and travelled around India and the Middle East, visiting Lebanon shortly after the 1976 Karantina massacre and later staying in a kibbutz. Having encountered members of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) whilst travelling, on his return to London, he began working in the London Borough of Lambeth's housing department and later joined the Croydon branch of the CPB-ML. An active member of NALGO, Berlin left the CPB-ML in the late 1980s and eventually became a chief officer for Lambeth council – a politically-restricted role. At the time of interview, he was a member of the Labour Party in Croydon.

Brown, Norman (b.1950)

Born in Jamaica, Brown and his brother joined their parents in Paddington in 1961. After their separation, they moved to Southend-on-Sea, where Brown attended Fairfax High School. At about 16, he moved to stay with an aunt in Brixton, and after several weeks relocated to Croydon, initially working at the Gaskell and Chambers optic measures factory in Bensham Manor. He worked at Ford Motor Company in Purley Way, and then joined the postal service in 1972. He was active in the UCW and joined the Croydon branch of the SWP. In 1983, he moved with his wife and four children to the United States, joining his mother in Florida, where he was living at the time of interview.

Carty, Marian (b.1954)

Born in St. Mary's maternity hospital, in Croydon, to Irish parents – the family lived on Chatsworth Road in a house built by her father, a construction worker and member of the Labour Party. Her mother worked as a cleaner, and Carty was the fourth of seven children. She attended St. Mary's Catholic Primary School, and then Coloma Convent Grammar School. She studied French and German at the University of Leicester (1972-1976), with a year abroad in Charolles, France. She was involved in student politics at university, founding a Marxist society, and joined the Croydon branch of the CPB-ML along with three of her brothers. She worked at Monks' Hill High School and was an active member of the NUT, including as a delegate to Croydon Trades Council. She had a son, Patrick, in 1982 and a daughter, Maddie, in 1988 – with David Trendell, later Labour councillor for Woodside (1990-1994). Carty left the CPB-ML in the late 1980s and was active in PACE. At the time of interview, she was a member of the Labour Party in Croydon and the president of UCU at Goldsmiths, University of London.

Fadden, Grace (b.1926)

Born in South Africa to an Italian mother and a South African father – her mother was a housewife, and her father was a decorator. She was raised as a Catholic, attending a convent school which taught in English. She moved on her own to Britain after the Second World War, and met her husband, Frank Fadden, at a Territorial Army dance party. They both worked for Philips, although at different sites, and had two sons and one daughter. Whilst her husband was known as 'Mr. Waddon', Grace Fadden was also involved in Labour Party activism and the residents' association, including the organising of trips and jumble sales. Frank Fadden passed away, aged 77, in 2006. At the time of interview, Grace was still living in Waddon.

Fitzpatrick, Jerry (b.1952)

Born in Thornton Heath; Fitzpatrick's father was a statistician for Mullard (a subsidiary of Philips) and later a maths teacher at Croydon College, whilst his mother was a payroll clerk. The pair had met at South London Liberal Synagogue, in Streatham. His father, a member of the

Labour League of Youth prior to the Second World War, became a 'dedicated and avowed atheist' when Jerry was in his early teens. His parents were not active in politics, although they read the *Daily Worker* and *Morning Star*, and his father was a member of ASSET and later NATFHE. Jerry attended Winterbourne Primary School and then Dulwich College, taking a local authority place, and joined the Labour Party in 1971. After studying at Wadham College, Oxford, he completed his teacher training at the Institute of Education and returned to Croydon in 1976. He worked within ILEA, eventually becoming a deputy headteacher, before retraining in family law. A repeated election agent for the local Labour Party, Fitzpatrick was councillor for Addiscombe (1986-2002), eventually becoming deputy leader, and later Addiscombe West (2018-2022).

Fraser, Clive (b.1960)

Born in Mayday Hospital in Croydon, where his father had grown up and met his mother, who moved from Ireland in the 1950s. His father was a telephone technician and the pair met whilst working at a mental health hospital in Caterham. The family moved to Stirling, in Scotland, in 1966, but they returned to Croydon to visit his grandparents. Initially a Scottish nationalist, one of Fraser's schoolteachers was Dennis Canavan, later a Labour MP. Unemployed after leaving school, Fraser moved back to Croydon to look for work and was eventually joined by the rest of his family, before moving to study town planning at the City of Liverpool Polytechnic, chairing the student union's representative council. He joined the Labour Party just prior to his move to Liverpool. Finishing his studies in 1985, Fraser worked (and briefly lived) in Lewisham before moving to Croydon permanently in the late 1980s. Secretary of Labour's LGC in the early 1990s, Fraser represented South Norwood from 1994 until 2002 and again from 2018-2022. In 2022, he was elected as councillor for Addiscombe West.

Gillman, Leni (b.1943)

Born in Leicestershire as her parents were moving around during the war, before arriving in South Norwood in Croydon in 1946, one of eventually five children. Her parents were both teachers, having both gone through the emergency training scheme – her father after having been

in the RAF, during which time his left-hand was amputated and he lost his Catholic faith. Her mother had been born in County Kilkenny, Ireland, but her family were Protestant, and she too was an atheist. Leni's mother, Margaret (Pat) O'Connell, was one of the first female councillors in the London Borough of Lambeth, and later prominent as a peace campaigner. Leni was a member of Jean MacColl's London Dancers, attending the World Youth Festival in Moscow in 1957 and the first Aldermaston march in 1958, and soon became involved in CND and met her future husband, Peter Gillman – they married in 1962. She studied psychology at the University of Reading, graduating after the birth of their first son. They moved together to Clapham and later South Norwood and Leni, influenced by research into child development encountered during her degree, opted to stay at home for the first five years. In 1969, when their second child went to school, she went to Goldsmiths to gain her postgraduate teaching qualification, working in a primary school from 1970. She left teaching following the abolition of ILEA in 1987, becoming more active as a journalist. She was a Labour councillor in Thornton Heath from 1986 to 1990 but left the Labour Party over the Iraq War. At the time of interview, she was a member of the Labour Party and living in Penge, Bromley.

Gillman, Peter (b.1942)

Born in Bromley to a civil servant (eventually a chief executive of the Board of Trade) who had served in the First World War, and a French and Spanish teacher – his father was 51, his mother 42. His mother had been raised as a Catholic but broke with the church after spending time in children's homes, and Peter described her as a 'socialist' and 'feminist'. After primary school in West Wickham, he attended Dulwich College through the local authority scheme, meeting several of the founders of Croydon's YCND. His father died in 1953, and his mother in 1962. At around the same time, Peter married Leni O'Connell to ensure that they could live together whilst he studied psychology and philosophy at the University of Oxford, where he edited *Isis*. After graduating alone – Leni was nursing their new-born baby – he became a journalist, working briefly for *Town*, the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Sunday Times Magazine* and the *Radio Times* with much of his career at the *Sunday Times*. He left shortly after Rupert Murdoch purchased the paper, becoming a freelancer and later authoring several books alongside Leni. An active member

of the NUJ throughout his career, and a member of Labour prior to the Iraq War, at the time of interview Peter was again a member of the Labour Party and living in Penge, Bromley.

Graham, Lynda (b.1944)

Born in Bromley, the eldest of two, moving with her family to Upper Norwood when she was seven. Her father worked in the Molins cigarette factory in Deptford, ending his career as a foreman. Her mother worked in the civil service – including under Harold Wilson – and then was a housewife after having children, before retraining as a teacher when Lynda was eleven, eventually becoming a headteacher. The family attended All Saints' Church in Upper Norwood, and her father was in the choir; they were staunch supporters of the Labour Party. She went from school into teacher training college in Nottingham (1962-1964), joining the NUT and working at Duppas Junior School in Waddon. She lived in Woodmansterne, near Banstead in Surrey, during her first marriage. By the early 1990s, with her three children all teenagers, Lynda joined the Labour Party in Croham, in Croydon, and met her future husband, Martin Graham, at around the same time. She left in 2003, over the Iraq War, re-joining after the election of Jeremy Corbyn. At the time of interview, she was a member of the Labour Party in Croydon South.

Graham, Martin (b.1945)

Born in Croydon, growing up in Beckenham, Martin's father was a bank manager on New Bond Street. His mother was the daughter of a Baptist minister in the East End. He attended Whitgift School and then studied physics at the University of Liverpool (1963-1966) before training as a chartered accountant. He was a member of the First Division Association whilst working at the Office of Fair Trading. Other than university, and a 'brief sojourn north of the Thames' during his second marriage (1987-1991), he has lived in South London for his entire life. After meeting Lynda in the early 1990s, Martin became involved with the Labour Party, eventually joining the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy and working on *Voice of the Unions*. He left the Labour Party over the war with Yugoslavia in 1999. At the time of interview, he was the national treasurer for the Communist Party of Britain.

Lockett, Roy (b.1939)

Lockett's father was a plumber born in Oval Road, near East Croydon, whilst his mother was a factory worker – and eventually senior administrator – born in Waddon's Cairo Place, near Pitlake Bridge. He attended Waddon Primary, Waddon Junior and Waddon Secondary Modern, and then Croydon Secondary Technical. Leaving school at 15, Lockett attended Croydon School of Printing as an apprentice, and joined the London Society of Compositors. Becoming active in the Labour Party in Croydon in the late 1950s, Lockett was heavily involved with the YCND group and the YS, dating Wendy O'Connell (sister to Leni Gillman, above) as a teenager. He was supported by an Addy Hopkinson scholarship to attend Ruskin College, Oxford, and then studied for a postgraduate degree in PPE at Wadham College. Newly married and with a young child, Lockett then returned to working in printing before getting a job as a research officer and journal editor at the Association of Cinematograph, Television and Allied Technicians, returning to Croydon and eventually becoming deputy general secretary of the ACTT (later BECTU), retiring in 1999. At the time of interview, Lockett was living in Tufnell Park, North London – his daughter, Hannah Lockett, was a comrade of mine in the Labour Party in Croydon.

MacColl, Hamish (b.1950)

Born to folk musician Ewan MacColl and his second wife, the Laban-trained dancer Jean Newlove, Hamish MacColl moved from Brixton to Park Hill Rise with his parents when he was four. His parents separated when he was 10, and he lived with his mother and younger sister (and future singer-songwriter), Kirsty, whilst Ewan MacColl moved with his third wife, Peggy Seeger, to Beckenham. Involved in the folk music scene from a young age, Hamish attended St. John's primary school in Shirley and then received a scholarship to Trinity School of John Whitgift. He joined his father's Critics Group as a sixteen-year-old and went with them on a trip to Albania. With financial support from his godmother (and his father's first wife), the director Joan Littlewood, Hamish moved into a rented property on Avondale Road and formed a small 'Croydon Socialist Group' alongside his folk club at Spurgeon's Bridge. In 1970, he left

Croydon, living in West London, Blackheath, Brixton, and Acton. At the time of interview, Hamish was living in France.

Matlock, Joan (b.1949)

Born in Mayday Hospital in Croydon, living on nearby Henderson Road until she was seven. Her father had been in the fire brigade during the Second World War and subsequently became a lorry driver, delivering materials to construction sites in Croydon in the 1950s. Her mother was a shop worker at Woolworths and then British Home Stores, at one point serving as a representative for Usdaw. Her maternal grandfather had been a member of the NUR. After Sydenham Road Infants' and Kingsley Road Junior School, she attended Lanfranc Girls' Secondary School. She got involved with Oxfam and the CND as a teenager, raising money for the former from local pubs. After a period working in photographic processing, she discovered that she was pregnant and left work to have the baby, marrying in 1966 and soon having a second child. She studied at Furzedown Teachers Training College in Tooting and began working in the Link special school in Sutton. She later moved into work in local government, becoming active within NALGO and later UNISON. Her first husband, Rodney Matlock, was later Labour councillor for Broad Green between 1990 and 2002 – they had separated in 1984. At the time of writing, she was living in Addiscombe.

Nevill, Brian (b.1948)

Born in Wuppertal in Germany to an interpreter from Dortmund and a soldier from Thornton Heath. When he was six months old, they moved to Britain, living with his grandparents and later in West Wickham. They moved to a newbuild maisonette in New Addington in around 1950. His mother worked as a private secretary from when he was five, whilst his father was an accountant, both in London. They later separated, his mother living for the last twenty years of her life in Spain. Nevill got involved with the CND in the mid-1960s, largely through his schoolfriend Chris Lansdowne, but he was initially more active in the rockers scene and knew Hamish MacColl through the folk clubs, attending meetings of the YCL. He attended the Grosvenor Square

protest against the war in Vietnam in 1968, but his major priority was music until around 1970 when he moved in with Lansdowne and helped found *Red Fist and Bust*. After developing a relationship with the underground magazine *Frendz*, based in Ladbroke Grove, he helped found the Croydon and Bromley branch of the White Panther Party. After the implosion of the national group, and getting married, Nevill moved to West London and joined *Frendz*. At the time of writing, he was still living in West London.

Percival, David (b.1945)

Born in Torquay, his mother's hometown, his father was a post office worker serving as a staff sergeant in the Royal Engineers' post office section. When he was about nine months old, at the beginning of 1946, the family moved back from Devon to Huntley Road, South Norwood, living with his father's aunt. His father, Jack Percival, was an active Labour member and for a long time the treasurer of South Norwood Labour Party. After attending South Norwood primary school, David went to Ashburton secondary, being put in for the GCE stream. He started attending Labour meetings with his father when he was about 13, and set up a YS group with Peter Walker, eventually joining the IS. He stayed with them following their break with the Labour Party in 1968 and later transformation into the SWP. After several years working as a railway clerk, initially a member of the TSSA and then the NUR, in 1968 Percival became a postman, participating in the 1971 strike. He left the SWP in around 1986, sometime after the closure of the rank-and-file paper *Post Office Worker*. He re-joined the Labour Party in the run-up to Jeremy Corbyn's election as leader in 2015 and was still a member at the time of interview.

Tagg, Jean (b.1938)

Born in Richmond, Surrey, Jean Tagg's father passed away when she was just ten days old; she had nine brothers and three sisters, describing her mother's occupation as 'being a mother'. At a year and nine months, after the involvement of Barnardo's, she was sent to live with an aunt, a devout Christian, in Northamptonshire, where she remained until she was fifteen. She went to a commercial college, studying secretarial and book-keeping, and then worked as a finance officer

for the National Association of Probation Officers, in Thornton Heath. She joined the Labour Party when she was 27, whilst working part-time at the Queen's Hotel in South Norwood. She briefly considered standing as a local councillor in South Norwood in 1973 but decided against after becoming pregnant with her daughter. Initially living in Upper Norwood, she moved with her husband and children into a housing association ground floor flat in Waddon. She served as a governor at several schools, including Rockmount primary, Heath Clark high school, and Sylvan high school – the latter alongside Leni Gillman. In Waddon, she recalled racist remarks regarding her children, whose father was Asian, from a Conservative councillor. At the time of interview, she was living in South Norwood – a member of the Labour Party, and regular attendee (with Hannah Lockett) at Crystal Palace home games.

Walker, Peter (b.1945)

Born in Norbury. His father, Jim Walker, was a surveyor and later the property manager of the SSCS as well as a prominent Labour councillor, representing Thornton Heath (1958-1968) and Fieldway (1979-2006). His mother, Grace, was employed as the secretary of Croydon Labour Party and from 1962 as agent for Brentford and Chiswick Labour Party, but she passed away in 1969. His parents had met in Streatham in the Anglican Pacifist Fellowship. His elder sister, Rosemary, was a member of the IS, and her first husband was Pat Fortune; his younger brother, Martin, was Labour councillor for Addiscombe (1986-1990). Peter Walker was a founder of the YS in Croydon, on the editorial board of *Young Guard*, and a member of IS until they broke with Labour in 1968. After studying for an LSE external degree at City of London College, Peter met Mary Squire – who had been working for the Labour Party and been secretary of the International Council of Social Democratic Women – and they married in 1971. Mary Walker was councillor for Addiscombe (1973-78) and Fieldway (1978-2005), and the first Labour leader of the council, but they had separated in 1983. They had two children – Liam, now a lawyer at Doughty Street, and Rowena.

Peter Walker was elected as Labour councillor for New Addington (1971-1982) and ran the office of the Labour leader of the GLC, Reg Goodwin, from 1973 to 1977 – apparently the first open

political appointment in British local government. He then worked for Amnesty International for three years before entering management consultancy. In the 1980s, he met his second wife, Brenda, a deputy general secretary of the Fabian Society, with whom he had a son, Niall. At the time of interview, Peter was living in Wimbledon – he sat as Labour councillor for Figges Marsh on Merton council from 2010 to 2016, when he resigned in opposition to budget cuts. A member of Momentum, he was suspended from the Labour Party in 2017.

White, David (b.1948)

Born in Purley hospital, David's parents lived in Thornton Heath. His father, born in Stepney in 1911, worked laying telephone cables as part of the post office, and had been a hairdresser in the army during the Second World War. His mother, born in Thornton Heath in 1912, had done an apprenticeship in dressmaking at a London fashion house, and later worked at Grant's in Croydon. David has one sister, now living in Waddon. After attending Howard primary school on Dering Place, David attended Trinity School – initially on the old town centre campus, with the last two terms at Shirley Park. At about fourteen, he joined the Young Liberals, remaining a member from 1964 to 1970, when he joined the Labour Party. He was actively involved, alongside Peter Hain, in the AAM and the Stop the Seventy Tour campaign. After a term working at a preparatory school, he went to the University of Cambridge to study law, returning afterwards to Croydon and becoming active in the YS and Waddon Labour Party. He was elected as a representative for Croydon Central to the GLC in 1973, serving until 1977. He was Labour councillor for Fieldway (1978–1979) and then stood unsuccessfully as the Croydon Central candidate in the 1979 general election. After working part-time for fellow Labour member Arnold Simanowitz's legal aid firm through the 1970s, he focused more upon his legal career in the 1980s and eventually founded his own firm in 1996. At the time of interview, he was mostly retired and more active in the Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn, including as Croydon Central CLP's secretary and a period alongside myself on the LCF. A supporter of Momentum, he was suspended from the party in 2016, readmitted, before being suspended again in 2021 and expelled in 2022.

Appendix 2: Statistical information

Except where otherwise noted, this work is based on data provided through

www.VisionofBritain.org.uk and uses historical material which is copyright of the Great Britain

Historical GIS Project and the University of Portsmouth. All estimates refer to the area covered

by the current London Borough of Croydon.

Population (1801-2001)¹

Census year	Population
1801	8,376
1811	10,445
1821	12,239
1831	14,903
1841	18,723
1851	21,549
1861	31,063
1871	60,000 ²
1881	84,777
1891	110,748
1901	143,000 ²
1911	189,679
1921	214,768
1931	266,852
1939	297,000 ²
1951	301,586
1961	311,042
1971	346,775
1981	311,202
1991	313,523
2001	330,424

Social Grade (1971-2001)³

Census year	A/B	C	D/E
1971	34,171 (33%)	50,408 (49%)	18,303 (18%)
1981	33,466 (36%)	43,911 (48%)	14,686 (16%)
1991	35,250 (42%)	36,650 (43%)	12,600 (15%)
2001	30,485 (30%)	52,360 (51%)	19,982 (19%)

¹ 'Total Population,' *A Vision of Britain through Time*,

http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10168338/cube/TOT_POP, accessed 15th July 2022.

² Estimates provided within: 'Historical Census Population,' *London Datastore*,

<https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/historic-census-population>, accessed 15th July 2022.

³ 'Social Grade,' *A Vision of Britain through Time*,

https://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10168338/cube/SOCIAL_GRADE, accessed 15th July 2022. All percentages are approximate, rounded to the nearest whole number.

Simplified Industrial Structure (1911-1991)⁴

Census year	Agriculture	Mining	Manufacturing	Utilities, transport, construction	Consumer services	Business services	Public services
1911	2,300 (3%)	88 (<1%)	13,680 (18%)	15,385 (20%)	30,827 (40%)	9,433 (12%)	6,106 (8%)
1931	1,044 (<1%)	64 (<1%)	24,180 (21%)	23,148 (20%)	44,749 (39%)	11,087 (9%)	12,892 (11%)
1951	526 (<1%)	20 (<1%)	30,713 (32%)	19,539 (20%)	29,905 (31%)	3,504 (4%)	12,833 (13%)
1971	230 (<1%)	290 (<1%)	37,380 (26%)	30,150 (21%)	35,400 (25%)	18,630 (13%)	22,370 (15%)
1991	230 (<1%)	0 (0%)	15,502 (12%)	24,024 (19%)	29,028 (23%)	32,334 (25%)	25,802 (20%)

Housing Tenure (1961-2001)⁵

Census year	Owner-Occupied	Local Authority	Other Rented
1961	52,115 (53%)	13,701 (14%)	33,225 (34%)
1971	67,183 (58%)	21,070 (18%)	28,365 (24%)
1981	73,992 (65%)	21,526 (19%)	19,007 (17%)
1991	90,884 (73%)	16,752 (13%)	17,199 (14%)
2001	95,488 (69%)	14,231 (10%)	29,220 (21%)

⁴ 'Simplified Industrial Structure,' *A Vision of Britain through Time*, https://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10168338/cube/IND_SECTOR_GEN, accessed 15th July 2022. All percentages are approximate, rounded to the nearest whole number.

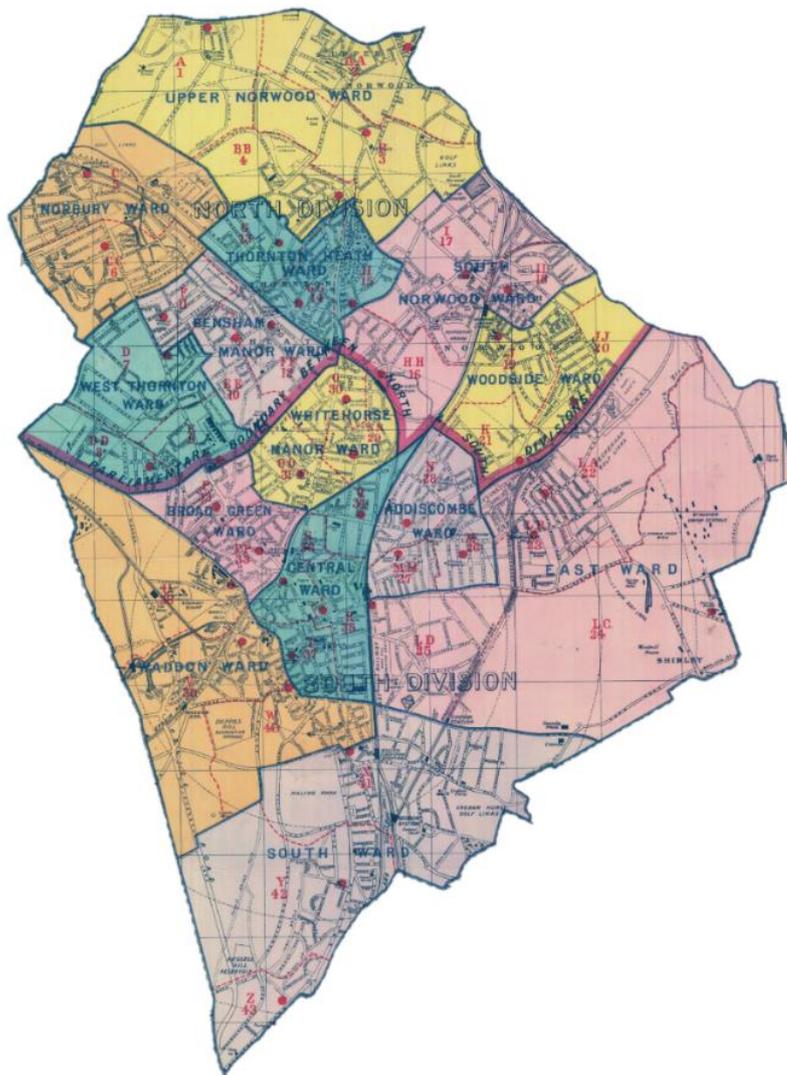
⁵ 'Housing Tenure,' *A Vision of Britain through Time*, https://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10168338/cube/HOUS_TENURE_GEN, accessed 15th July 2022. All percentages are approximate, rounded to the nearest whole number. 'Other Rented' includes Housing Association properties.

Appendix 3: Boundary changes and maps

With thanks to Croydon Archives for their assistance in producing these maps. The dates given for parliamentary constituencies in the titles refer to the general elections in which these boundaries were utilised. The external boundaries depicted below correspond to the boundaries of the Municipal Borough of Croydon, the County Borough of Croydon and, later, the London Borough of Croydon. Prior to 1997, it was exceptional for constituency boundaries to diverge from local authority boundaries; the sole exceptions were the constituencies which contained the City of London and Isles of Scilly. The Fourth Periodic Review opted to pair some London boroughs and thereby cross local authority boundaries; the Fifth Periodic Review extended this to the crossing of county borough boundaries. In the ongoing review, it is probable that the London Borough of Croydon will be 'dismembered'.¹

¹ For a further discussion, see: Johnston, Pattie & Rossiter, *Representative democracy?*, pp.55-60, pp.69-71, pp.77-80 & pp.89-92.

Parliamentary constituencies (1918-1945) and local authority external boundaries (1889-1925)

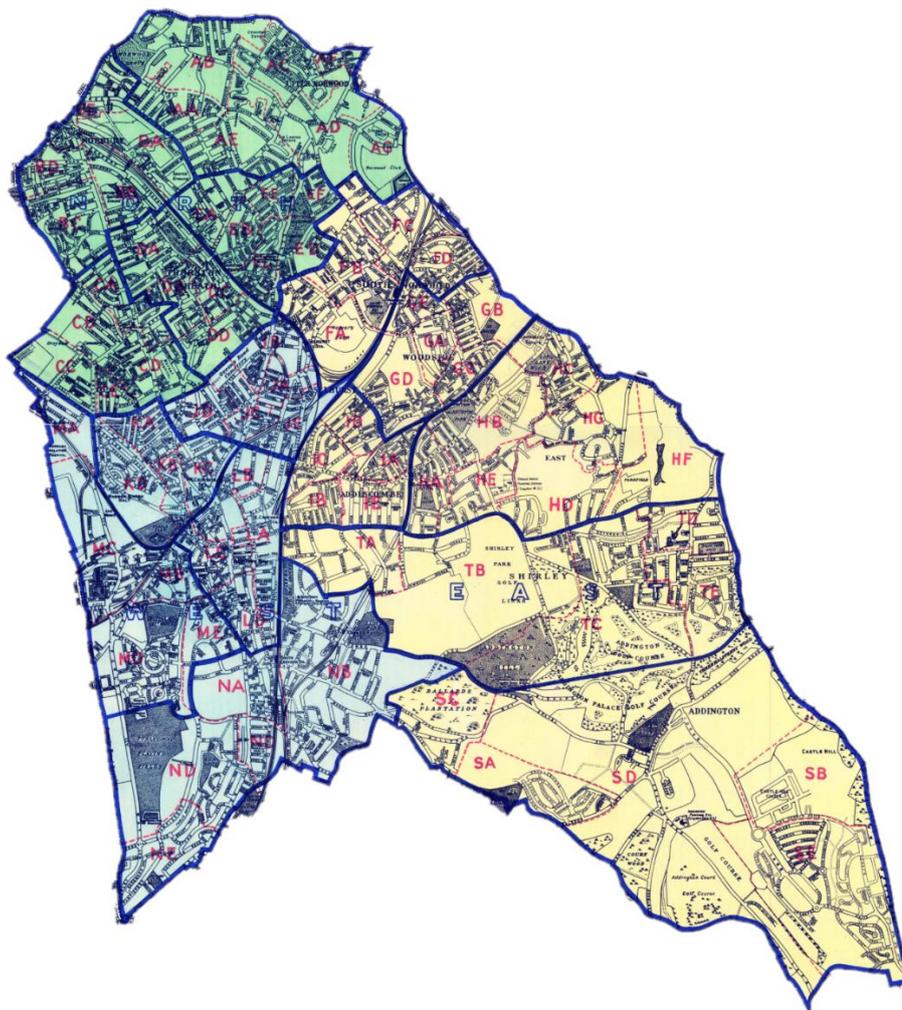


Map from 1922.²

Constituency	Wards
Croydon North	Besham Manor, Norbury, South Norwood, Thornton Heath, Upper Norwood, West Thornton, and Woodside
Croydon South	Addiscombe, Broad Green, Central, East, South, Waddon, and Whitehorse Manor

² External boundaries largely correspond to those of the Municipal Borough of Croydon (from 1883) and subsequently the County Borough of Croydon (from 1889). Prior to 1918, the County Borough of Croydon was represented by a single MP. Internal boundaries varied considerably, originally consisting of six wards (Central, East, South, South Norwood, Upper Norwood, and West), with 'North' added in 1905 and further subdivisions in 1918.

Parliamentary constituencies (1950-1951) and local authority external boundaries (1925-1965)

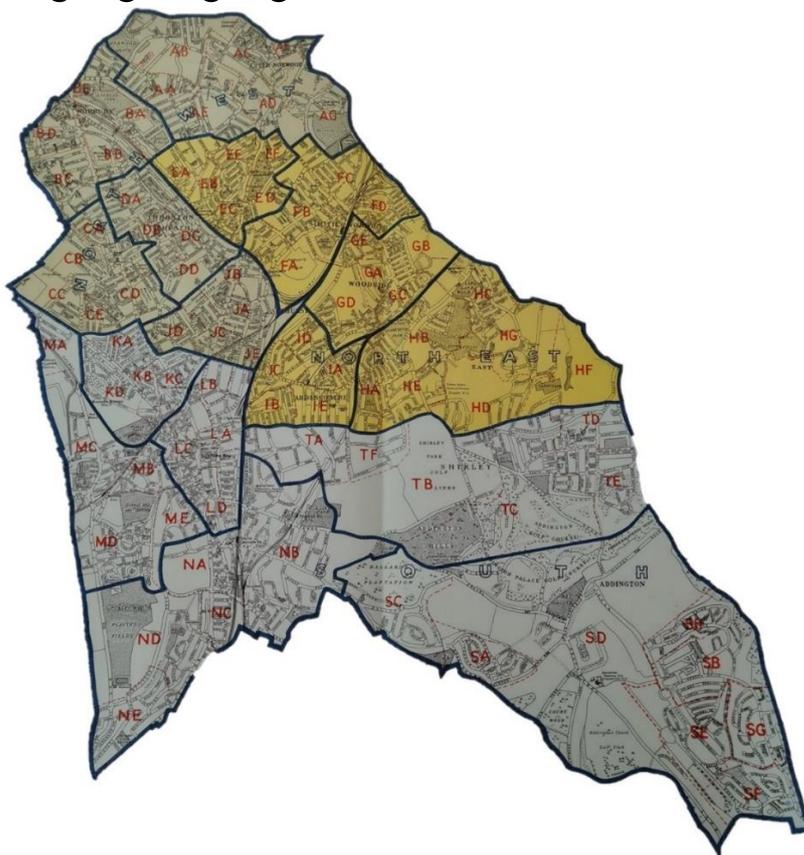


Map from 1951.³

Constituency	Wards (and polling districts)
Croydon North	Bensham Manor (DA-DD), Norbury (BA-BB), Thornton Heath (EA-EF), Upper Norwood (AA-AG), and West Thornton (CA-CE)
Croydon East	Addington (SA-SE), Addiscombe (IA-IE), East (HA-HG), South Norwood (FA-FD), Shirley (TA-TE), and Woodside (GA-GE)
Croydon West	Broad Green (KA-KD), Central (LA-LD), South (NA-NE), Waddon (MA-ME), and Whitehorse Manor (JA-JE)

³ External boundaries correspond to the post-1925 extent of the County Borough of Croydon, following the addition of Addington from Godstone Rural District, to which it had been added upon the abolition of the Croydon Rural District in 1915.

Parliamentary constituencies (1955-1970) and local authority external boundaries (1925-1965)



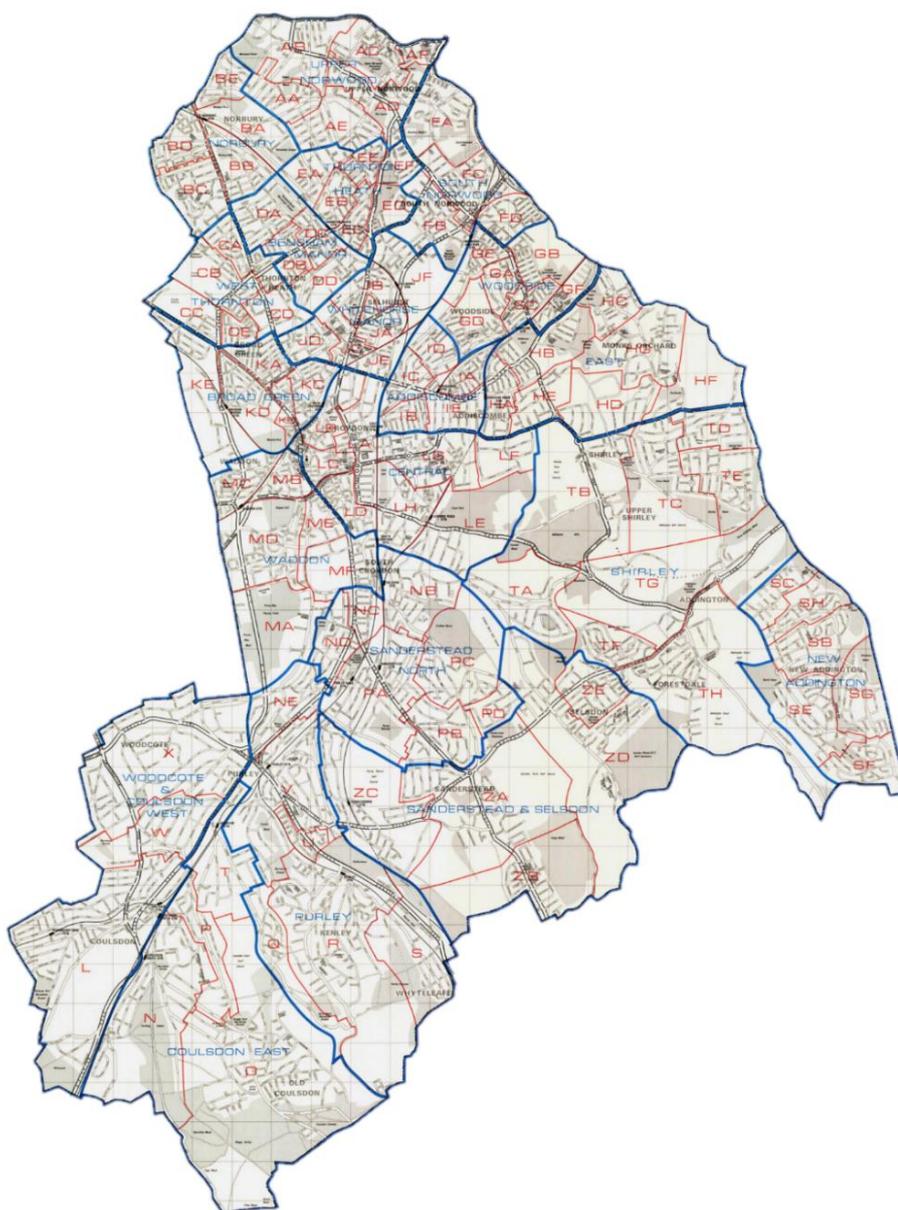
Map from 1959.⁴

Constituency	Wards (and polling districts)	Changes
Croydon North East	Addiscombe (IA-IE), East (HA-HG), South Norwood (FA-FD), Thornton Heath (EA-EF), and Woodside (GA-GE)	'Croydon East' renamed 'Croydon North East', losing Addington to Croydon South and gaining Thornton Heath from Croydon North.
Croydon North West	Bensham Manor (DA-DD), Norbury (BA-BE), Upper Norwood (AA-AG), West Thornton (CA-CE), and Whitehorse Manor (JA-JE)	'Croydon West' renamed 'Croydon North West', gaining Addington from Croydon South and new ward Shirley, losing Whitehorse Manor to Croydon North East.
Croydon South	Addington (SA-SH), Broad Green (KA-KD), Central (LA-LD), Shirley (TA-TF), South (NA-NE), and Waddon (MA-ME)	

⁴ Despite the creation of the London Borough of Croydon in 1965, these constituency boundaries remained in use until the 1974 general elections, with the newly-added wards of the former Coulsdon and Purley Urban District remaining part of the parliamentary constituency of East Surrey. Between 1965 and 1969, the London Borough of Croydon included the areas of Farleigh and Hooley, which were transferred to Godstone Rural District and Banstead Rural District respectively following successful petitions by local residents.

		<p>'Croydon North' renamed 'Croydon North West', gaining Whitehorse Manor from Croydon West and losing Thornton Heath to Croydon North East.</p>
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Parliamentary constituencies (1974-1979) and local authority external boundaries (1965+)



Map from 1974.⁵

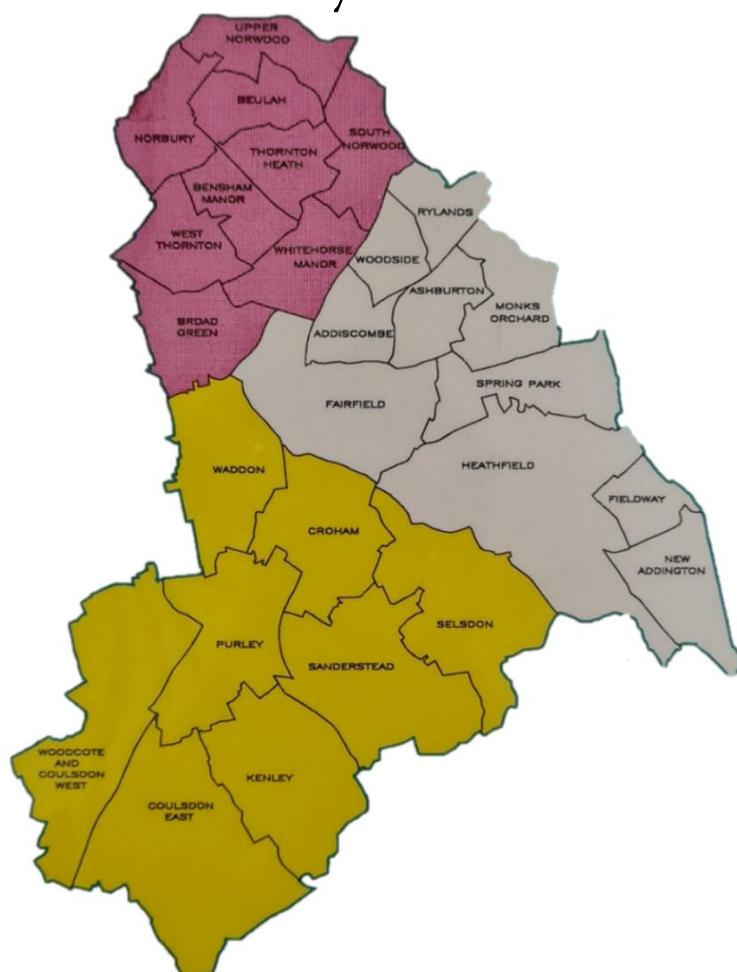
⁵ External boundaries correspond to the boundaries of the London Borough of Croydon, created in 1965. Minor ward boundary changes took place in 1971, but ward names were unchanged.

Constituency	Wards	Changes
Croydon North East	Addiscombe, East, South Norwood, Thornton Heath, and Woodside	Croydon North East and Croydon North West unchanged.
Croydon North West	Bensham Manor, Norbury, Upper Norwood, West Thornton, and Whitehorse Manor	
Croydon Central	Broad Green, Central, New Addington, Shirley, and Waddon	Croydon Central replaces Croydon South, unchanged except
Croydon South	Coulsdon East, Purley, Sanderstead and Selsdon, Sanderstead North, Woodcote and Coulsdon West	Addington renamed New Addington and South deleted. Croydon South formed from Purley and Coulsdon, formerly East Surrey.

Parliamentary constituencies (1983-1992)

Constituency	Wards	Changes
Croydon North East	Addiscombe, Ashburton, Monks Orchard, Rylands, South Norwood, Thornton Heath, Upper Norwood, and Woodside	Council wards extensively changed and renamed (for reference, see 1996 map, below). Croydon North East gains Upper Norwood, but Beulah remains within Croydon North West. Croydon North West gains Broad Green from Croydon Central.
Croydon North West	Bensham Manor, Beulah, Broad Green, Norbury, West Thornton, and Whitehorse Manor	
Croydon Central	Fairfield, Fieldway, Heathfield, New Addington, Spring Park, and Waddon	
Croydon South	Coulsdon East, Croham, Kenley, Purley, Sanderstead, Selsdon, Woodcote and Coulsdon West	

Parliamentary constituencies (1997-2005)



Map from 1996.⁶

Constituency	Ward	Changes
Croydon North	Besham Manor, Beulah, Broad Green, Norbury, South Norwood, Thornton Heath, Upper Norwood, West Thornton, and Whitehorse Manor	Croydon North West renamed 'Croydon North' and gained South Norwood, Thornton Heath and Upper Norwood from deleted Croydon North East.
Croydon Central	Addiscombe, Ashburton, Fairfield, Fieldway, Heathfield, Monks Orchard, New Addington, Rylands, Spring Park, and Woodside	Croydon Central gained Addiscombe, Ashburton, Monks Orchard, Rylands and Woodside from deleted Croydon North East.
Croydon South	Coulsdon East, Croham, Kenley, Purley, Sanderstead, Selsdon, Waddon, Woodcote and Coulsdon West	Croydon South gained Waddon from Croydon Central.

⁶ Wards correspond to those established for the 1978 local elections, with minor alterations to ward boundaries in 1994, 1998 and 2002.

Appendix 4: Electoral performance

For an indication of the changing areas within each constituency or ward, see Appendix 3. Data below focuses upon the Labour Party, the main electoral expression of left-wing politics in my period, but elections contested by other left-wing parties are noted. The Green Party and its precursor, the Ecology Party, have not been included; pensions-related groups have been included based on the involvement of figures associated with the WRP.

General elections

Data compiled from results collated by the House of Commons Library.¹ Only elections in which Labour candidates competed have been included. Elections in which Labour candidates won have been italicised.

Croydon South (1918-1945)

Election	Labour Vote	Labour Percentage	Labour Candidate	Winning Candidate
<i>1918</i>	7,006	28.2%	H.T. Muggeridge	Ian Malcolm (Unionist)
<i>1922</i>	8,942	27.5%	H.T. Muggeridge	Allan Smith (Unionist)
<i>1923</i>	9,926	31.6%	H.T. Muggeridge	William Mitchell-Thomson (Unionist)
<i>1924</i>	12,979	35.4%	H.T. Muggeridge	William Mitchell-Thomson (Unionist)
<i>1929</i>	13,793	29.2%	E.W. Wilton	William Mitchell-Thomson (Unionist)
<i>1931</i>	9,950	19.66%	T. Crawford	William Mitchell-Thomson (Conservative)
<i>1935</i>	14,900	29%	T. Crawford	Herbert Williams (Conservative)
<i>1945</i>	27,650	53.4%	<i>David Rees-Williams</i>	<i>David Rees-Williams (Labour)</i>

Croydon North (1918-1951)

Election	Labour Vote	Labour Percentage	Labour Candidate	Winning Candidate
<i>1923</i>	10,054	37%	Gilbert Foan	Glyn Mason (Unionist)
<i>1924</i>	10,954	29.7%	Gilbert Foan	Glyn Mason (Unionist)
<i>1929</i>	13,852	26.5%	Gilbert Foan	Glyn Mason (Unionist)
<i>1931</i>	10,795	19.1%	H.W. Ray	Glyn Mason (Conservative)
<i>1935</i>	17,872	32.9%	Frank Mitchell	Glyn Mason (Conservative)
<i>1945</i>	22,810	40.1%	Marion Billson	Henry Willink (Conservative)
<i>1948</i>	24,536	36.6%	Harold Nicolson	Fred Harris (Conservative)

¹ 'General election results from 1918 to 2019,' *House of Commons Library* (17th April 2020), <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8647/>, accessed 19th July 2022.

1950	20,116	36.5%	Reg Prentice	Fred Harris (Conservative)
1951	19,738	36.6%	Reg Prentice	Fred Harris (Conservative)

Croydon West (1950-1954)

Election	Labour Vote	Labour Percentage	Labour Candidate	Winning Candidate
1950 ²	20,424	45.1%	David-Rees Williams	Richard Thompson (Conservative)
1951	21,534	47.8%	Gerald Gardiner	Richard Thompson (Conservative)

Croydon East (1950-1954)

Election	Labour Vote	Labour Percentage	Labour Candidate	Winning Candidate
1950	20,903	37.8%	Marion Billson	Herbert Williams (Conservative)
1951	22,615	41.2%	Alexander Bain	Herbert Williams (Conservative)

Croydon South (1955-1970)

Election	Labour Vote	Labour Percentage	Labour Candidate	Winning Candidate
1955	20,659	43.02%	Arthur Carr	Richard Thompson (Conservative)
1959	22,069	41.84%	Frederick Messer	Richard Thompson (Conservative)
1964	22,265	47.25%	Tyrell Burgess	Richard Thompson (Conservative)
1966	21,496	44.73%	David Winnick	David Winnick (Labour)
1970	22,283	42.65%	David Winnick	Richard Thompson (Conservative)

Croydon North West (1955-1992)

Election	Labour Vote	Labour Percentage	Labour Candidate	Winning Candidate
1955	15,760	34.1%	Ronald Huzzard	Fred Harris (Conservative)
1959	14,658	31.98%	David W. Chalkley	Fred Harris (Conservative)
1964	13,967	33.46%	J.A.P. Palmer	Fred Harris (Conservative)
1966	15,882	38.81%	Michael J. Stewart	Fred Harris (Conservative)
1970	14,687	38.04%	Stanley J. Boden	Robert Taylor (Conservative)
Feb 1974	14,816	34.94%	Stanley J. Boden	Robert Taylor (Conservative)
Oct 1974	14,556	38.1%	Stanley J. Boden	Robert Taylor (Conservative)
1979	16,159	40.07%	Stanley J. Boden	Robert Taylor (Conservative)
1983	9,561	24.2%	Ian Smedley	Humfrey Malins (Conservative)
1987	14,677	37%	Malcolm Wicks	Humfrey Malins (Conservative)
1992	19,152	47.3%	Malcolm Wicks	Malcolm Wicks (Labour)

² Bob Jarvie stood as a candidate for the CPGB, receiving 336 votes (0.7%).

Croydon North East (1955-1992)

Election	Labour Vote	Labour Percentage	Labour Candidate	Winning Candidate
1955	16,616	36.4%	Gordon Borrie	John Hughes-Hallett (Conservative)
1959	15,440	33.6%	Walter Wolfgang	John Hughes-Hallett (Conservative)
1964	16,099	37.8%	Donald Storer	Bernard Weatherill (Conservative)
1966	17,714	42.2%	Gerald F. Elliot	Bernard Weatherill (Conservative)
1970	16,373	40%	Gerald F. Elliot	Bernard Weatherill (Conservative)
Feb 1974	15,575	34.1%	C.R. Coyne	Bernard Weatherill (Conservative)
Oct 1974	15,787	38.1%	David H. Simpson	Bernard Weatherill (Conservative)
1979	14,784	35%	David H. Simpson	Bernard Weatherill (Conservative)
1983	9,503	22.4%	K.A. Riley	Bernard Weatherill (Conservative)
1987	11,669	26.5%	Christine Patrick	Bernard Weatherill (Speaker)
1992	16,362	35.3%	Mary Walker	David Congdon (Conservative)

Croydon South (1974-2019)

Election	Labour Vote	Labour Percentage	Labour Candidate	Winning Candidate
Feb 1974	6,965	14.2%	Henry Hodge	William Clark (Conservative)
Oct 1974	7,203	16.2%	D.W. Keene	William Clark (Conservative)
1979	6,249	13.1%	J.M. Bloom	William Clark (Conservative)
1983	3,568	7.8%	R.C.E. Brooks	William Clark (Conservative)
1987	4,679	9.8%	Geraint Davies	William Clark (Conservative)
1992	6,444	12.8%	Helen Salmon	Richard Ottaway (Conservative)
1997	13,719	25.3%	Charlie Burling	Richard Ottaway (Conservative)
2001	13,472	29.9%	Gerry Ryan	Richard Ottaway (Conservative)
2005	11,792	24.1%	Paul Smith	Richard Ottaway (Conservative)
2010	11,287	20%	Jane Avis	Richard Ottaway (Conservative)
2015 ³	14,308	24.8%	Emily Benn	Chris Philp (Conservative)
2017	21,928	35.8%	Jennifer Braithwaite	Chris Philp (Conservative)
2019	18,646	31.4%	Olga FitzRoy	Chris Philp (Conservative)

³ Jon Bigger stood as a candidate for Class War, receiving 65 votes (0.1%).

Croydon Central (1974-2019)

Election	Labour Vote	Labour Percentage	Labour Candidate	Winning Candidate
Feb 1974	20,039	38%	Richard Rosser	John Moore (Conservative)
Oct 1974	20,226	41.75%	David Winnick	John Moore (Conservative)
1979 ⁴	18,499	36.69%	David F. White	John Moore (Conservative)
1983	9,045	23.33%	Andrew MacKinlay	John Moore (Conservative)
1987	9,516	24.35%	Bridget Prentice	John Moore (Conservative)
1992	12,518	31.3%	Geraint Davies	Paul Beresford (Conservative)
1997	25,432	45.6%	Geraint Davies	Geraint Davies (Labour)
2001	21,643	47.2%	Geraint Davies	Geraint Davies (Labour)
2005	19,899	40.6%	Geraint Davies	Andrew Pelling (Conservative)
2010	16,688	33.6%	Gerry Ryan	Gavin Barwell (Conservative)
2015 ⁵	22,588	42.7%	Sarah Jones	Gavin Barwell (Conservative)
2017	29,873	52.3%	Sarah Jones	Sarah Jones (Labour)
2019	27,124	50.2%	Sarah Jones	Sarah Jones (Labour)

Croydon North (1997-2019)

Election	Labour Vote	Labour Percentage	Labour Candidate	Winning Candidate
1997	32,672	62.2%	Malcolm Wicks	Malcolm Wicks (Labour)
2001 ⁶	26,610	63.5%	Malcolm Wicks	Malcolm Wicks (Labour)
2005 ⁷	23,555	53.7%	Malcolm Wicks	Malcolm Wicks (Labour)
2010 ⁸	28,947	56%	Malcolm Wicks	Malcolm Wicks (Labour)
2015 ⁹	33,513	62.6%	Steve Reed	Steve Reed (Labour)
2017	44,213	74.2%	Steve Reed	Steve Reed (Labour)
2019	36,495	65.6%	Steve Reed	Steve Reed (Labour)

Local elections

Data compiled from results collated by Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher.¹⁰ Elections in which the Labour Party won control of the council have been italicised. Percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.

⁴ Peter Gibson stood as a candidate for the WRP, receiving 116 votes (0.23%).

⁵ April Ashley stood as a candidate for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, receiving 127 votes (0.2%).

⁶ Don Madgwick stood as a candidate for the Socialist Alliance, receiving 539 votes (1.3%).

⁷ Peter Gibson stood as a candidate for the Croydon Pensions Alliance, receiving 394 votes (0.9%).

⁸ Mohammad Shaikh stood as a candidate for Respect, receiving 272 votes (0.5%). Ben Stevenson stood as a candidate for the Communist Party of Britain, receiving 160 votes (0.3%).

⁹ Glen Hart stood as a candidate for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, receiving 261 votes (0.5%). Ben Stevenson stood as a candidate for the Communist Party of Britain, receiving 125 votes (0.2%).

¹⁰ C. Rallings & M. Thrasher, 'London Borough of Croydon Election Results 1964-2010,' *The Elections Centre* (undated), <http://www.electionscentre.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Croydon-1964-2010.pdf>, accessed 19th July 2022.

60-seat council, 1964-1974

Election	Labour seats	Labour percentage of seats	Leader of the Majority Group	Conservative seats	Liberal/ LibDem seats	Ratepayer/ Independent seats
1964 ¹¹	21	35%	Albert Dunn (Conservative)	21		18
1968 ¹²	1	2%	Digby Weightman (Conservative)	47	1	11
1971 ¹³	27	45%	Albert Dunn (Conservative)	30		3
1974 ¹⁴	17	28%	Albert Dunn (Conservative)	40		3

70-seat council, 1978-2010

Election	Labour seats	Labour percentage of seats	Leader of the Majority Group	Conservative seats	Liberal/ LibDem seats	Ratepayer/ Independent seats
1978 ¹⁵	11	16%	Peter Bowness (Conservative)	56		3
1982 ¹⁶	5	7%	Peter Bowness (Conservative)	62		3
1986	26	37%	Peter Bowness (Conservative)	44		
1990	29	41%	Peter Bowness (Conservative)	41		
1994	40	57%	Mary Walker (Labour)	30		
1998	38	54%	Val Shawcross (Labour)	31	1	
2002	37	53%	Hugh Malyan (Labour)	32	1	
2006 ¹⁷	27	39%	Mike Fisher (Conservative)	43		
2010 ¹⁸	33	47%	Mike Fisher (Conservative)	37		

¹¹ The CPGB stood 4 candidates in total, in Bensham Manor, Broad Green, Whitehorse Manor and Woodside.

¹² The CPGB stood 2 candidates in total, in Broad Green and Woodside.

¹³ Queenie Knight was the CPGB's candidate in Woodside. Iain McNay stood as a 'Libertarian Socialist' candidate in Thornton Heath.

¹⁴ The CPGB stood 2 candidates in total, in Thornton Heath and Woodside.

¹⁵ Peter Gibson was the WRP candidate in Waddon.

¹⁶ Peter Latham was the CPGB's candidate in Broad Green.

¹⁷ Peter Latham was the CPGB's candidate in Broad Green. The Pensions Action Alliance stood 6 candidates across Waddon and Woodside.

¹⁸ The CPGB stood 3 candidates in total, in Broad Green, Selhurst and West Thornton.

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Daily Mail

Daily Star

Front Lines

The Guardian

Herald Express

Inservice – Croydon NALGO Branch News

International: A Survey of British and World

Affairs

International Socialism

International Times

Marxism Today

Marxist Studies

Militant

The Newsletter

New Society

The Observer

Peace News

Punch

Red Fist and Bust

Revolutionary Socialism

The Sniper

Socialist Challenge

Street Sheet

Suburban Press

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