

Daisy Payling* *University of Birmingham*

.....

‘Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire’: Grassroots Activism and Left-Wing Solidarity in 1980s Sheffield

Abstract

This article contributes to the historiography on crisis and renewal in the British left in the 1980s. By looking at the relationship between local government and new social movements in Sheffield through the dual lenses of Stuart Hall’s notion of left-wing renewal and 1980s political scientists’ ‘local socialism’, it demonstrates how the left attempted to build new constituencies to rival Thatcherism. Hall’s vision of renewal stemmed from a merging of class and identity politics, and historians have located successful examples of this in the policies of the Greater London Council. Less work has been completed on what was happening outside of London, and this article seeks to address that gap. Through close analysis of Sheffield City Council’s policies on peace, race, and gender, this article shows how class politics and old left concerns were prioritized over new left identity politics in Sheffield. It makes the case that this still represented a dynamic form of renewal and one that suited Sheffield’s residents, and it brings new dimensions to the study of local movements and their engagement with established political forms.

South Yorkshire County Council and Sheffield City Council became known informally as the ‘Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire’ in the late 1970s. This name was used mockingly by Conservative councillors, but was then adopted willingly and with a sense of pride by those in the Labour Party and trade unions who sold badges bearing the moniker.¹ But the ‘Socialist Republic’ was more than a joke or

*dxp720@bham.ac.uk. The author is grateful to Matthew Hilton for his encouragement, criticism, and patience. Thanks also to the friendly, helpful staff at Sheffield Archives, the participants in my oral history interviews, and to the anonymous reviewers for their constructive suggestions.

¹ Alan Clarke, *The Rise and Fall of the Socialist Republic* (Sheffield, 1987), 53.

a campaign tool; it was a deliberate and dynamic attempt at a new left-wing politics. In an interview in 1984 the leader of Sheffield City Council, David Blunkett, described Sheffield's initiatives as socialist 'beacons' that he hoped would 'spread the vision across the country'.² Blunkett spoke of winning 'people's hearts and minds' back from Thatcherism, and not just in 'isolated islands' of socialism.³ He had an 'alternative vision of the world' and the future which he knew could only succeed if it was shared.⁴ This vision represented a deliberate attempt to formulate a left-wing politics to counter Thatcherism, a challenge which preoccupied many on the left in the 1980s. For Stuart Hall in *The Hard Road to Renewal*, left-wing revival lay in the ability to mobilize around something beyond class politics, such as identity politics, in a new cultural project, in many ways a revival of the new left with which he had long been associated.⁵ Hall's ideas were part of a trajectory of thinking on the left in the 1980s that was laid out in *Marxism Today* and has influenced how historians record this period. While we know that this cultural project was not fully successful at a national level, the assessment of its success at a local level can be used to explore the relationship between identity and class politics.⁶ It can show the blurring of the new and the old left, and bring new dimensions to the study of local movements and their engagement with established political forms. Sheffield, a 'steel city' with an established old left labour movement and a local government which was determined to fund newer, more radical organizations makes for a particularly fruitful case study with which to explore the negotiation between new and old left and subsequent notions of renewal.

The historian Geoff Eley makes the claim that if there was a new left in the 1980s then it was present in local government. He describes how local government became a key site of left-wing power in the 1980s through councils' engagement with new social movements. Eley argues that class and identity politics operated together in the 1980s as Labour-led metropolitan councils attempted to unite them in a new urban left coalition against Thatcherism's project.⁷ Political scientists working in the 1980s described these coalitions as 'local socialism', writing that the

² 'Interview with David Blunkett', in Martin Boddy and Colin Fudge, eds, *Local Socialism? Labour Councils and New Left Alternatives* (London, Basingstoke, 1984), 246.

³ 'Interview with David Blunkett', in Martin Boddy and Colin Fudge, eds, *Local Socialism? Labour Councils and New Left Alternatives* (London, Basingstoke, 1984).

⁴ Boddy and Fudge, *Blunkett Interview*, 245.

⁵ Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (London, New York, 1988).

⁶ James Curran et al., *Culture Wars: The Media and the British Left* (Edinburgh, 2005). Curran argues that the social side of this project did win, e.g. LGBT rights have improved, but that neoliberalism won the economic argument.

⁷ Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850-2000* (Oxford, New York, 2002), 461.

ideas and practices of local governments were often based around bottom-up rather than top-down initiatives.⁸ Common themes included the restructuring of local capital, decentralization of local services and increased participation in provision by users, and positive action towards women, the poor, and ethnic and sexual minorities.⁹ Eley shows the Greater London Council to be an example of this kind of politics; however, outside of London, this analysis is still to be tested.

Indeed, different cities embraced 'local socialism' in diverse ways. 'Local socialism' represented a balancing of tensions between the old left politics of class and the new left politics of identity built around ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. Julia Unwin, who worked for Liverpool and Southwark Councils as well as the GLC in the 1980s, describes how Labour authorities were motivated to engage with community groups and new social movements to 'generate a new constituency'.¹⁰ This political agenda was developed around attracting voters who were interested in more than class politics. In cities like London which had large ethnic minority populations and middle class residents, building left-wing coalitions around race and gender made sense. However, elsewhere these coalitions were not as attractive. In the words of Unwin 'we have to bear in mind how very different things looked in different parts of the country'.¹¹

This article focuses on Sheffield's socialism to test Eley's analysis in a very different city. In comparison to other major provincial cities, Sheffield in the 1980s was predominately white and working class, and its extra-parliamentary politics was dominated by steel unions and the miners' strike. This is not to deny the existence of middle class and black and minority ethnic residents in Sheffield. The 1981 Census revealed that the constituency of Hallam had a disproportionately large percentage of middle class residents, at over 70 per cent. In comparison, around 30 per cent of people in the Brightside and Central constituencies were middle class.¹² In Sheffield Central constituency 8.8 per cent of households were headed by 'a person born in the New Commonwealth or Pakistan', whereas in the constituencies of Attercliffe, Brightside, Hallam, and Heeley the percentage ranged between 1.4 and 3 per cent. These statistics, although in part

⁸ See John Gyford, *The Politics of Local Socialism* (London, Boston, Sydney, 1985); Boddy and Fudge, *Local Socialism*; Stewart Lansley, Sue Goss and Christian Wolmar, *Councils in Conflict* (London and Basingstoke, 1989).

⁹ Patrick Syed, *The Rise and Fall of the Labour Left* (Basingstoke, London, 1987), 141; Gyford, *Politics*, 18.

¹⁰ Nick Crowson, Matthew Hilton *et al.*, 'Witness Seminar: The Voluntary Sector in 1980s Britain', *Contemporary British History*, 25 (2011), 504.

¹¹ Crowson and Hilton, *Witness Seminar*, 503.

¹² Robert Waller, *The Almanac of British Politics* (London, New York, Sydney, 1987), 195–200.

problematic, illustrate Sheffield's significant middle class and black and minority ethnic populations.¹³ However, it is also clear that the majority of residents, especially in the Labour strongholds of Attercliffe, Brightside and Central were white and working class.

In this sense, Sheffield does not seem like an obvious candidate for revitalizing left-wing politics around new left issues. But if this was the case what was Blunkett attempting with his 'alternative vision'? This article will explore Sheffield's socialism through archive material detailing the actions Sheffield City Council took on peace, gender, and race from 1974 to 1989. The Council minutes depict only a skeleton view of the decision-making processes, and looking at the Council archives of one city has its limitations. However, as a record of policy decisions, minutes can be used to determine how, when, and whether Sheffield's socialism incorporated new urban left interests in the 1980s. Ultimately comparative studies will be required to test the central hypothesis of this article, but what follows is a first step in enabling such fuller accounts of 'local socialism' to take place, producing a more nuanced understanding of left-wing 'renewal' evidenced in the conscious creation of alternatives to Thatcherism.

A first look into Sheffield's politics does indeed paint a more complex picture. When tracked, the Council's actions on issues such as the anti-nuclear campaign, anti-apartheid, race, and gender and sexuality show elements of traditionalism as well as radicalism. Sheffield City Council spent time and money on established new left causes such as unilateral nuclear disarmament and anti-apartheid which by the 1980s were relatively popular campaigns. However, race was mainly seen in terms of employment and the Council did not act on women's issues and the priorities of sexual minorities until the mid to late 1980s. It never fully embraced this strand of identity politics, unlike its contemporary the GLC. It subordinated such concerns to economic and employment issues. In this sense, once we look past the red flag flying from the Town Hall on May Day, we can see that Sheffield's socialist claims hid a more traditional reality as they prioritized material concerns, such as the economy, over newer identity politics. The 'Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire' was just that; socialist policies tuned to the needs of South Yorkshire and Sheffield residents. It integrated radical policies aimed at building new constituencies of voters, but did so in such a way as to avoid alienating its core working class voters and, indeed, to win some of them back. As a form of renewal, it was more of an 'isolated island' of socialism with

¹³ The 'head of household' question in the 1981 Census failed to take into account the rest of the household, British-born minority ethnic residents, and members of other diasporas, however in the absence of any direct question this was the 'best alternative', Robert Waller, *The Almanac of British Politics* (London, New York, Sydney, 1983), 7.

an old left character, rather than the new urban left 'beacon' that Blunkett had hoped for.¹⁴ That said, as a conscious attempt to develop an alternative to Thatcherism, the 'Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire' offers new perspectives on the Labour Party's ultimate road to recovery and electoral success.

The Labour Party and 'Local Socialism' in Sheffield

The notion that local authorities could engage with extra-parliamentary groups and spread socialism through the country began to develop in the 1970s as the left wing of the Labour Party grew stronger.¹⁵ The 1970s saw the post-war social-democratic consensus weaken. This paved the way for Thatcherism's ideological challenge, but also allowed a counter-challenge from the left in the form of socialism.¹⁶ The perceived failures of the Wilson and Callaghan governments had alienated trade union support and contributed to a frustrated swelling of the ranks on the left of the Party and a 'split' within the Labour tradition.¹⁷ This was bolstered by an influx of a new generation of radical Party activists, including working-class militants, university graduates and public-sector professionals, as well as socialist women and second-wave feminists—a 'middle class 'polyocracy''.¹⁸ The Labour left developed policies such as the Alternative Economic Strategy, they were critical of American foreign policy regarding Chile and Vietnam, and supported a reduction in defence spending and unilateral nuclear disarmament.¹⁹ These policies represented a revival of left-wing ideology within the Labour Party. The 1974 manifesto went as far to say that 'The aims set out in this manifesto are Socialist aims, and we are proud of the word'.²⁰

Despite the growing strength of these left-wing elements in the 1970s, the 1980s are still seen as a decade of crisis for the Labour Party nationally and the left in general. The Labour Party suffered successive General Election defeats and trade unions were vilified by politicians and the press. The crisis of the left was recognized by Stuart Hall and his contemporaries, many of whom were represented in the journals

¹⁴ Boddy and Fudge, *Blunkett Interview*, 246.

¹⁵ Seyd, *Labour Left*, 17.

¹⁶ Seyd, *Labour Left*, 23–4.

¹⁷ Dave Child and Mike Paddon, 'Sheffield: Steelyard Blues', *Marxism Today*, July 1984, 18; Hilary Wainright, *Labour: A Tale of Two Parties* (London, 1987), 13.

¹⁸ Dominic Sandbrook, *State of Emergency: Britain 1970–74* (London, New York, 2011), 621.

¹⁹ Seyd, *Labour Left*, 29–33.

²⁰ 'February 1974', *Archive of Labour Party Manifestos*, <<http://www.labour-party.org.uk/manifestos/1974/feb/1974-feb-labour-manifesto.shtml>> accessed 27 August 2012.

Marxism Today and *New Socialist*, where there was widespread concern regarding the need for political 'renewal'.²¹ Eric Hobsbawm, in his 1978 Marx Memorial Lecture 'The Forward March of Labour Halted?', argued that Labour's decline had its roots in the structural changes of 1950s post-war capitalism, and that working class identity and solidarity had become fragmented and weakened.²² The same year Rowbotham, Wainright, and Segal published *Beyond the Fragments* which confronted the divisions within the left from a socialist-feminist perspective, arguing that the many strands needed to be brought together to reshape the labour movement.²³ These ideas culminated in Hall's Gramscian notion that the left needed to form a 'counter-hegemonic strategy' that would come from acknowledging the 'diversity of different points of antagonism in society; [and] unifying them ... within a common project'.²⁴ As Hall saw it, there was no longer an 'inevitable or guaranteed link between class origin and political ideas', and so left-wing revival lay in the ability to mobilize around identity politics as well as class to create a viable 'image of modernity'.²⁵

Dworkin suggests that Hall's writings 'exemplify the British cultural Marxist tradition at its best'. Both Hall and Hobsbawm's politics were rooted in a tradition of struggle that stemmed from the Popular Front. These ideas had been developed in the 1950s new left and 'in the new lefts that followed' and as such formed part of a wider longer term project of renewal and revival of socialist ideas.²⁶ Hall and *Marxism Today's* 'New Times' may not have been wholly 'new', but the articles represented a culmination of this thinking and were widely read by the Labour Party. Indeed, although Blunkett's writings did not reference *Marxism Today* directly, he used phrases such as 'hearts and minds' and argued for the return to political ideas: words and sentiments that echoed Hall.²⁷ Blunkett advocated combining theory and practice in what he termed a 'realistic view of socialism' that supported community action and political education.²⁸ He even invited Hall to speak at the first of Sheffield Council's own Marx Memorial Lecture series. Described in the local press as 'a heavyweight contest with everyone in the red corner', it was packed with 'the cream of the

²¹ Curran *et al.*, *Culture Wars*, 4; Hall, *Road to Renewal*, 11.

²² Eric Hobsbawm, *The Forward March of Labour Halted?* (London, 1981).

²³ Sheila Rowbotham *et al.*, *Beyond the Fragments: Feminism and the Making of Socialism* (London, 1979). A shorter version was originally published in pamphlet form in 1978.

²⁴ Hall, *Road to Renewal*, 11, 171, Denis Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left and the Origins of Cultural Studies* (Durham, London, 1997), 255

²⁵ Hall, *Road to Renewal*, 209, 178.

²⁶ Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism*, 260–1.

²⁷ David Blunkett and Geoff Green, *Building from the Bottom: The Sheffield Experience*, Fabian Society No. 491 (London, 1983), 1, 28. Hall, *Road to Renewal*, 177.

²⁸ Blunkett and Green, *Building from the Bottom*, 2, 26.

socialist cream;...little old ladies in woolly hats; every Labour councillor with an eye on public image' as well as a 'Greenham Commonish woman' annoyed by the collection of pint-pots.²⁹ Hall's influence had spread to Sheffield. As Michael Rustin groused, *Marxism Today* was 'more or less the theoretical organ of Labour revisionism',³⁰ and, as such, these ideas influenced policy.

Historians have subsequently picked up on these debates to suggest that the 1970s and 1980s, to varying degrees, embodied the types of manifesto and calls for renewal set out by Hobsbawm, Hall, and other *Marxism Today* writers who have been cast by some as the eventual forebears of New Labour.³¹ Rosanvallon for instance describes how identity politics and new social movements increasingly dealt with 'post-material' issues and became a more suitable and attractive form of left-wing politics than class-based, hierarchical, old social movements, like the labour movement and trade unions.³² Geoff Eley, as mentioned above, takes this further, explaining how local government became a space in which class and identity politics could work together constructively on community projects that went beyond the purely 'negative coalitions' usually associated with new social movement alliances.³³

However, Eley questions the degree of success this attempt had as the councils pursued an 'additive' approach to these interests, rather than combining them fully into a new image of the future.³⁴ Local government's engagement with identity politics did not lead to any great post-material renewal of the left, and, at the time, Rustin criticized 'theorists of the Left' for abandoning class; 'It seems an odd time to be debating the obsolescence of class'.³⁵ Yet this approach assumes that a post-material renewal was the goal when in practice many local authorities, including Sheffield City Council, still prioritized class issues such as unemployment and housing. Local authorities were able to combine elements of identity politics with their class policies to develop distinctive and varied 'local socialisms' that had the aim of making local

²⁹ Sheffield Archives(SA), CA-POL15/29 Policy Review Sub-Committee 4th November 1982, Sheffield Local Studies Library (SLSL), M1958, *The Sheffield Star*, 15 March 1983, 8.

³⁰ Michael Rustin, 'The Trouble with New Times', in Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques, eds, *New Times: The Changing Face of Politics in the 1990s* (London, 1989), 303.

³¹ Hobsbawm was celebrated with the Companion of Honour Award in Blair's first New Year's Honours List, *The Guardian*, 31 December 1997; and Geoff Mulgan was part of the Downing Street Policy Unit, *The Times*, 21 October 1998.

³² Pierre Rosanvallon, *Counter-Democracy: Politics in an Age of Distrust* (Cambridge, New York, 2008), 61–2, 47. Post-material is used here to denote a politics based on personal belief and identity rather than on material needs such as housing, food, and work. See Ronald Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution* (Princeton, 1977).

³³ Rosanvallon, *Counter-Democracy*, 15.

³⁴ Eley, *Forging Democracy*, 468.

³⁵ Rustin, *The Trouble with New Times*, 310.

politics more democratic, and of 'developing new ideas about the future of socialism'.³⁶ How they did this, however, and how they balanced the tension between radical and traditional interests varied in different cities.

In this sense, 'local socialism' had two key characteristics. First, it was about finding a balance between class and identity politics, and welding them together in an attempt to find a new left-wing ideology that worked and could gain mass support through new alliances while protecting old ones. And second, it was *local*, and therefore differed depending on the political priorities of each area. It was practiced by councils dominated by the new urban left, which included new younger councillors, party activists, community workers and activists, and even local government officers, who were expected to be sympathetic and committed to the politics of the councils.³⁷ Labour's local election defeats in the late 1960s and local government reorganization in the 1970s facilitated a sea change in Labour councillors across Britain.³⁸ A change of personnel brought a change in attitudes. The new urban left, trained in the activism of the 1960s counter-culture—rather than Marxism and Methodism—saw beyond class-based politics and appreciated the concerns of new social movements.³⁹ Furthermore they were willing to use local government to pursue those concerns.⁴⁰ Yet, despite this radical reputation, the GLC's spending commitments suggest that new urban left councils could be rather traditional in practice. It was estimated that in 1984 just 1.8 per cent of GLC grants went to 'controversial organizations'.⁴¹ This is not surprising as new urban left councils were mostly aiming to extend rather than replace Labour's core support base.⁴² Each area worked as a test-base for new ideas that could set an example of what a socialist government could do at a national level, and Sheffield, with Blunkett at the helm, was one of those areas.⁴³

Sheffield's new urban left developed from the mid-1970s onwards. Sheffield Labour Party's embarrassing defeat in the 1967/8 local elections, only the second since they took control in 1926, ultimately led to the election of an entirely new council in 1973, and a new cohort of councillors. Between 1970 and 1979 seventy-eight new Labour councillors were elected.⁴⁴ Power had previously rested to the right of

³⁶ Gyford, *Politics*, 1.

³⁷ Boddy and Fudge, *Local Socialism*, 5. Gyford, *Politics*, 17.

³⁸ In 1968 Labour took a net loss of 1,602 seats and the Conservative a net gain of 630 seats across England and Wales (Syed, *Labour Left*, 139.)

³⁹ Curran *et al.*, *Culture Wars*, 31, 42.

⁴⁰ Gyford, *Politics*, 16.

⁴¹ Curran *et al.*, *Culture Wars*, 18, 49.

⁴² Curran *et al.*, *Culture Wars*, 19.

⁴³ Syed, *Labour Left*, 158.

⁴⁴ Syed, *Labour Left*, 144.

the Labour Group in the hands of a small group of senior councillors with trade-union or working-class backgrounds, but the new cohort rose through the ranks to chair important council committees. In 1980, Blunkett, one of this cohort, became leader of the council which reinforced the dominance of the new urban left. However, Sheffield's new generation of councillors was not the sharp shock it was in other areas; this was 'an uncharacteristically smooth transition... a bloodless palace coup'.⁴⁵ As socialist-feminist Hilary Wainright explained; 'In Sheffield, there was no lost generation of the sixties and seventies', instead the 'younger generation was assimilated relatively peacefully into the leadership with a leg up from the left minority in the generation before'.⁴⁶

Blunkett was one of the key personalities in Sheffield, but the gentle rise of Sheffield's new urban left can be explained by elaborating on the other councillors, Bill Michie, Roger Barton, Peter Price, Joan Barton, Clive Betts, Helen Jackson, Mike Bower, and Rev. Alan Billings,⁴⁷ and some of the key officers, Dan Sequerra and Jim Coleman. The councillors were all, bar Bower, Billings, and Jackson—who was from near Leeds—'homegrown... activists' born and bred in Sheffield's East End.⁴⁸ Some were university educated, but most came from families of manual workers. Bill Michie had left school at 15 years of age, worked as a skilled engineer for 20 years, and was a shop steward in the Amalgamated Engineering Union.⁴⁹ Roger Barton was also a skilled engineer and had come to politics through the Sheffield Trades and Labour Council, of which he was at one time Secretary.⁵⁰ Both Barton and Peter Price were sons of steelworkers, though Price himself went to grammar school and then university to become a technician.⁵¹ Joan Barton was a clerk with the Yorkshire Electricity Board, and Betts was from a family of manual workers though he went to Cambridge before returning to the city. Many councillors came through the Labour Executive of the Trades Council, but Councillors Barton and Mike Bower, as well as officers Sequerra and Coleman also served on the Industrial Executive.⁵² Wainright wrote 'the most significant historical

⁴⁵ Child and Paddon, *Steelyard Blues*, 18.

⁴⁶ Wainright, *Tale of Two Parties*, 108. As well as co-authoring *Beyond the Fragments* Wainright had a trade union background and worked for the GLC in the 1980s.

⁴⁷ David Price, *Sheffield Troublemakers: Rebels and Radicals in Sheffield History* (Hampshire, 2011), 152.

⁴⁸ Patrick Seyd, 'The Political Management of Decline 1973–3', in Clyde Binfield *et al.*, eds, *The History of the City of Sheffield 1843–1993* (Sheffield, 1993), 157. *Interview with Helen Jackson*, 29 April 2013.

⁴⁹ Seyd, *Political Management*, 157.

⁵⁰ SA, AC.2002-130: Sheffield Trades and Labour Council Year Book 1984–5.

⁵¹ Seyd, *Political Management*, 157.

⁵² SA, AC.2002-130: Sheffield Trades and Labour Council Year Book 1981–82. SA, AC.2002-130: Sheffield Trades and Labour Council Year Book 1977–8.

feature about Sheffield Labour Party is its intimate relations with the trade unions'.⁵³ This intimacy had developed in the joint Trades and Labour Council, which only separated in 1974 after much protest, and in the generations of political families who passed through both the trades council and local government.⁵⁴ Their familiarity with trade unionism meant these councillors understood local working class culture and were seen as being part of it; they were neither middle class 'infiltrators' nor 'geographically outsiders'.⁵⁵

The working class and trade union background of Sheffield's councillors was a significant factor in determining the character of Sheffield's socialism, which was developed to suit the needs of the constituency, as well as attract new voters. Compared with London Sheffield was much more working class and white, but new urban left policies were designed to appeal to 'new social constituencies including progressive sections of the middle class'.⁵⁶ Although Labour dominated the council and held five of Sheffield's six parliamentary seats there were still political battles to be won, especially in predominantly middle class Hallam.⁵⁷ Furthermore, Sheffield's constituency was changing; by 1983 the Council was Sheffield's largest single employer, employing 17 per cent of the workforce.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, in 1981 only 4.6 per cent of Sheffield's population were classed as 'professionals', and at the 1991 census only around 5 per cent of Sheffield's residents were black or minority ethnic which was less than the national average.⁵⁹ Because of this, Sheffield was less amenable to the culture of extra-parliamentary identity politics and its councillors understood that.

Arguably the main political and social concern in Sheffield in the early 1980s was unemployment caused by the decline in the steel industry and mine closures. Unemployment in Sheffield had risen to 16.3 per cent by 1987, with 19.4 per cent of men looking for work.⁶⁰ Male unemployment was a problem that affected a lot of working class families in Sheffield, and which many of Sheffield's councillors, coming from similar industrial backgrounds, could sympathize with. Between 1979 and 1983 there were more than 57,000 notified redundancies and

⁵³ Wainright, *Tale of Two Parties*, 106.

⁵⁴ Warwick Modern Records Centre, MSS292 D 79/151, Vernon Thornes, Evidence Against Labour Party NEC Proposals, 29 June 1972, Wainright, *Tale of Two Parties*, 106.

⁵⁵ Seyd, *Political Management*, 157.

⁵⁶ Curran et al., *Culture Wars*, 5.

⁵⁷ Child and Paddon, *Steelyard Blues*, 18.

⁵⁸ William Hampton, *Local Government and Urban Politics* (Harlow, 1991), 23. Child and Paddon, *Steelyard Blues*, 19.

⁵⁹ Karen Evans et al., *A Tale of Two Cities: Global Change, Local Feeling and Everyday Life in the North of England: a Study in Manchester and Sheffield* 88 (1996), 201.

⁶⁰ Sidney Pollard, 'Labour', in Binfield, C. et al., eds, *The History of the City of Sheffield 1843-1993* (Sheffield, 1993), 278.

over 80 per cent of them were in manufacturing.⁶¹ This collapse had a large effect on engineering trade unions, traditionally some of the city's strongest. The employed membership of the Sheffield Engineering Employers Association halved in this period.⁶² Given the close relationship between the Labour Party and the trade union movement in Sheffield, this had a negative effect on Labour's share of the vote. In the 1983 General Election, Labour held all of its seats in Sheffield but in each case less than 40 per cent of the total electorate voted for them.⁶³ In Sheffield's four Labour strongholds, Labour's percentage of the total vote had declined by 23.9 per cent since 1950.⁶⁴ Two of these strongholds, Central and Brightside, ranked 24 and 74 highest, respectively, out of 633 constituencies for its male unemployment rate in the 1981 Census.⁶⁵ The decline in the steel industry and the subsequent levels of unemployment meant that Labour's working class support could 'no longer be guaranteed'.⁶⁶ From this it can be reasoned that keeping its working class electorate was a more pressing priority for the Labour Party in Sheffield than winning over middle class voters in areas such as Hallam. This priority led to an emphasis on employment and class issues in the Council's policies.

Beyond Sheffield City Council, the city had a vibrant extra-parliamentary politics, not least its labour and trade union movement. As well as organizations focused on peace, anti-nuclear, minority ethnic, and women's issues, there were groups campaigning on environmental issues, against racism, supporting gay rights, disability rights, youth and student organizations, tenants' associations, the miners' strike, and humanitarian and international causes such as the Chilean Solidarity Movement, the Anti-Apartheid Movement, and War on Want. The Council offered support to these causes in various ways; however, they prioritized established new left organizations such as the Anti-Apartheid Movement and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament [CND], and causes that had an economic or employment element such as disabled access to the workplace. Causes that did not fit into either of these categories were somewhat neglected by Sheffield City Council. Until 1988 homosexuality was addressed solely as a women's issue with lesbian groups such as Lesbian Mothers' Group, Christian Lesbian Women, and Lesbian Line mentioned only as part of the 'Women's Handbook' put together by the Council in 1987.⁶⁷ Even

⁶¹ Child and Paddon, *Steelyard Blues*, 19.

⁶² Child and Paddon, *Steelyard Blues*, 19.

⁶³ Child and Paddon, *Steelyard Blues*, 21.

⁶⁴ Child and Paddon, *Steelyard Blues*, 22.

⁶⁵ SA, CAPOL17 62 Appendix H: Sheffield 1981 Census Report 13: Unemployment in Yorkshire and Humberside.

⁶⁶ Child and Paddon, *Steelyard Blues*, 21.

⁶⁷ SA, CA-POL 27/Appendix C, *Women's Panel*, 18 September 1987.

when Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act drew gay rights into the centre of local government policy, the Council's response was limited to stating their opposition.⁶⁸ As Clive Betts put it, it was possible to take an anti-discrimination stance but 'people were quite prejudiced in those days and just didn't get it'.⁶⁹

Sheffield City Council's policies were geared towards the economic needs of the city, and in turn the material needs of its mainly working class residents. The Council only embraced the identity politics of the new left when they were brought into traditional class issues. The Council reached out to new constituencies, but it prioritized the needs of its core constituency, working class voters. Rather than embracing what Rustin called a 'socialism of the intelligentsia', it attempted to build socialism 'from the bottom' which aimed to incorporate the needs of its residents.⁷⁰ These included radical housing and transport policies, such as area-based management and subsidized bus fares, but also included more radical issues which it addressed from an economic position. In Sheffield there was a conscious attempt to find alternatives to Thatcherism. As Blunkett wrote in his autobiography, 'We endeavoured to create socialist policies which would be credible, viable alternatives to those of the Right of the Conservative Party'.⁷¹ This was a local initiative with national aims and significance. Unlike Liverpool, Militant Tendency had little impact on Sheffield City Council, and Blunkett forcefully refuted claims otherwise.⁷² On his election to the constituency section of the Labour Party National Executive Committee in 1983 Blunkett became a significant 'voice of local government'.⁷³ Sheffield's initiatives had the support of the wider party, and of Neil Kinnock specifically, who declared Sheffield 'a model of much that has to be built, not just in other localities, but in the country as a whole'.⁷⁴ This was a viable attempt at an alternative politics, one that for awhile was considered a success by Blunkett and others.⁷⁵ The following case studies of peace, women, and race illustrate how Blunkett and councillors attempted to achieve this alternative.

⁶⁸ SA, CA-POL38/Appendix Z, *Policy Committee*, 27 September 1988.

⁶⁹ *Interview with Clive Betts*, 19 July 2013.

⁷⁰ Rustin, *The Trouble with New Times*, 312. Blunkett and Green, *Building from the Bottom*, 6.

⁷¹ David Blunkett, *On a Clear Day* (Great Britain, 2002), 147.

⁷² SLSL, *The Sheffield Star*, 8 April 1983, 13.

⁷³ SLSL, *The Sheffield Star*, 4 October 1983, 1.

⁷⁴ SLSL, *The Sheffield Star*, 20 June 1984, 7.

⁷⁵ Blunkett, *Clear Day*, 149.

Peace

For the most part Sheffield City Council located its peace policies within a framework of employment and the local economy, emphasizing the extent to which established left-wing interests were integral to Sheffield's socialism even when engaging with more radical issues. In the 1950s and 1960s, peace and the CND were seen as radical causes supported by middle class members of the new left and extra-parliamentary activists, as well as pacifists and Christian groups.⁷⁶ By the 1980s, the anti-nuclear movement had become a priority of local government with around 150 councils declaring themselves nuclear-free zones. These declarations associated the policy with the new urban left, with 'local socialism', and to a certain extent with the radical 'expressive' politics of the 'loony left'.⁷⁷ In 1986, *The Sunday Times* ridiculed nuclear-free zone authorities describing first how Manchester ran 'non-competitive' sports days for peace, before explaining that Sheffield 'produces peace plays, films and songs, and runs a peace shop' with a "peace budget'...[of] more than £250,000 a year'.⁷⁸ Although it exaggerated their budget, the newspaper was not wrong about Sheffield City Council's activities. The Council funded peace films and theatre groups, supported torchlight vigils, and invited Members of Parliament to nominate the Greenham Common women for a Nobel Peace Prize.⁷⁹ It engaged with radical interests and tactics. However, the Council also formulated peace and anti-nuclear policies that served the interests of Sheffield's working class constituents. By 1984, 23 per cent of people surveyed in Britain supported unilateral nuclear disarmament, while 23 percent of CND supporters were church goers.⁸⁰ This was by no means a majority but it shows that anti-nuclear ideas were more widely accepted in the 1980s. Furthermore, the support base had shifted from the middle class to the working class; of the 23 per cent who supported unilateral disarmament, 37 per cent were unskilled workers, and 30 per cent were middle class.⁸¹ By focussing on anti-nuclear policies attractive to working class voters, Sheffield City Council incorporated peace and the nuclear question into its own form of socialism.

⁷⁶ Parkin, *Middle Class Radicalism: The Social Bases of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament* (Manchester, 1968). Kate Hudson, *CND Now More Than Ever: The Story of a Peace Movement* (London, 2005), 31, 41.

⁷⁷ Gyford, *Politics*, 16.

⁷⁸ *The Sunday Times*, 9 November 1986.

⁷⁹ SA, CA-POL16/255-7, *Sheffield Nuclear Free Zone Working Party*, 11 November 1983, CA-POL17/127, *Policy Review Sub-Committee*, 3 April 1984 and CA-POL17/321, *Policy Review Sub-Committee*, 4 September 1984.

⁸⁰ Anthony Messina, 'Post-war Protest Movements in Britain: A Challenge to Parties', *The Review of Politics*, 49 (1987), 412. Hudson, *CND Now More Than Ever*, 141.

⁸¹ Messina, *Post-war Protest Movements*, 412.

The Council did this by directing anti-nuclear policy towards economic issues, addressing nuclear power, rather than weapons, first. In July 1981, Sheffield City Council motioned to support the South Yorkshire County Council's stance against the Sizewell nuclear reactor.⁸² The leader of the SYCC, Ron Ironmonger had argued 'We are sitting on one of the most successful coalfields in the country, and at a time when the Coal Board is talking about closing pits, we should not be committing ourselves to this unsafe and expensive alternative'.⁸³ Ironmonger constructed nuclear power as a threat to Sheffield and South Yorkshire's mining industry—a threat that would affect many workers in the county. In supporting Ironmonger's position throughout the 1980s, the Council framed this radical campaign as an employment issue.

Sheffield City Council's focus on nuclear power was somewhat unusual, emphasizing that the economic reframing was part of Sheffield's 'local socialism'. Local authority opposition to nuclear weapons was more common, with joint campaigns almost exclusively focussing on weapons.⁸⁴ Many local authorities were more concerned by nuclear weapons because opposition to nuclear power was mostly localized and never reached the top of the national political agenda.⁸⁵ Opposition usually manifested itself through environmental groups protesting at proposed power plants or waste disposal sites, while support for nuclear power often existed in areas where power stations employed residents.⁸⁶ The run up to the 1987 general election saw press speculation over the safety of Jack Cunningham's seat in Copeland, Cumbria, which contained a Sellafield. Cunningham had a low majority and—whatever his personal stance on the issue—his party had pledged to phase out nuclear power, which employed many of his constituents.⁸⁷ Sheffield's opposition to nuclear power mirrors this. Pro-nuclear was seen as anti-coal, and Sheffielders worked in coal pits not power stations. Geographically, Sizewell and Sellafield were far away from Sheffield, but the threats they posed to coal and employment felt close. The Conservative government's proposals on nuclear power were also read as an attack on the National Union of Mineworkers [NUM], motivated by fear of future miners' strikes and a repeat of the 1974 energy situation.⁸⁸ Sheffield City Council supported the NUM and had

⁸² SA, CA-POL14/46, *Policy Committee*, 28 July 1981.

⁸³ Clarke, *Socialist Republic*, 73.

⁸⁴ SA, CA-POL14/180/Appendix A, *Policy Committee*, 24 November 1981.

⁸⁵ Wolfgang Rüdig, 'Maintaining a Low Profile: The Anti-nuclear Movement and the British State', in Helena Flam, (ed.), *States and Anti-Nuclear Movements*, (Edinburgh, 1994), 70.

⁸⁶ Rüdig, *Maintaining a Low Profile*, 82.

⁸⁷ *The Times*, 12 May 1987.

⁸⁸ Rüdig, *Maintaining a Low Profile*, 82.

contributed £200,000 towards relocating their headquarters to Sheffield.⁸⁹ The perceived attack arguably added fuel to the Council's opposition to nuclear power.

Sheffield City Council framed nuclear weapons in a similar way. The Council's call for central government to close British nuclear bases because it 'deplore[d] the Government's policy of increasing military spending at the expense of...other...services' made the economic element clear.⁹⁰ Six years later, they reaffirmed this position while planning celebrations for the International Nuclear Free Zones Day in June 1987. The Council described nuclear weapons tests as a 'colossal international diversion of public resources away from the provision of...services'.⁹¹ The Sheffield District Labour Party's 1983 manifesto developed this position, describing spending on nuclear weapons as an affront to local autonomy and the democratic use of resources. This objection to the undemocratic use of resources as well as the perceived dangers and threat to coal from nuclear power tied Sheffield's economic concerns to some of the more general tenets of 'local socialism'.⁹²

The above examples show how the Council made the nuclear question more palatable to working class voters. However, councillors' support of members of the Turkish Peace Association, imprisoned by the Turkish authorities in 1984 on charges relating to trade union and peace activism, suggests that highlighting economic concerns was not just a vote winner but part of a principled sense of class solidarity. Throughout 1985 the Council supported various efforts to lobby the Turkish Embassy 'calling for an end to the persecution of members of the Turkish Peace Association'.⁹³ Their motives for supporting the TPA were couched in terms of identifying with democracy, peace, and international relations but it is plausible that the charges for trade union activities may have played a part in Sheffield City Council's actions.⁹⁴ The personal response of the councillors who wrote regular letters to the imprisoned Turkish activists certainly points towards a sense of class solidarity.⁹⁵

For the most part Sheffield City Council constructed its anti-nuclear policies around established left-wing concerns such as the economy, employment, and class solidarity. The nuclear question is often seen as a popular new urban left concern; however, Sheffield City Council's actions show that cities dealt with it on their own terms as part of their unique 'local socialism'. Sheffield City Council's framing of the nuclear

⁸⁹ SA, CA-POL19/290, *Policy Committee*, 4 April 1986.

⁹⁰ SA, CA-POL13/243, *Policy Committee*, 24 February 1981.

⁹¹ SA, CA-POL24/Appendix E, *Nuclear Free Zone Working Party*, 20 February 1987.

⁹² SA, CA-POL16/37/Appendix A, *Sheffield District Labour Party Manifesto*, 1983.

⁹³ SA, CA-POL18/267, *Sheffield Nuclear Free Zone Working Party*, 15 March 1985.

⁹⁴ SA, CA-POL18/267, *Sheffield Nuclear Free Zone Working Party*.

⁹⁵ SA, CA-POL/18/342, *Policy Review Sub-Committee*, 17 June 1985.

issue in this way emphasizes that because of its working class residents, Sheffield's new form of politics still prioritized the traditional concerns of class and employment. By connecting the nuclear question to coal, the Council highlighted how important the politics of the miners' strike was to the area. Sheffield City Council offered support to new social movements like CND and the Greenham Common women, but its analysis of the nuclear question kept returning to coal and the familiar priorities of class and employment shared by its working class constituents.

Women

Sheffield City Council's policies towards women and gender equality also placed more emphasis on the economic needs of constituents than on new urban left identity politics. In the early 1980s local authorities, first in London then in cities such as Birmingham, Edinburgh, Leeds, Newcastle, and Nottingham, set up women's committees to address issues of equality, representation, and women's interests.⁹⁶ The scale of these women's committees varied; the GLC's had a budget of £6.91 million in 1983/4, whereas in other places the committees operated on annual budgets of a few thousand.⁹⁷ These committees reflected the change in attitudes towards women in the Labour Party and in society in the 1970s. However, this was not a simple process, and some local authorities found the act of balancing identity politics with more traditional Labour priorities problematic, despite the practice being an important part of 'local socialism'. The GLC fully embraced this balancing act, whereas Liverpool City Council did not. It had committees promoting neither women's nor race issues, and one Liverpool councillor declared that 'Merseyside politics is not lifestyle politics'.⁹⁸ In Liverpool, women's and race issues remained subordinate to class-based politics, and it was argued that positive discrimination in a time of high unemployment would only divide the community.⁹⁹

Sheffield City Council's position on women's issues lay nearer to the class-based policies of Liverpool than London. In 1984, when asked about his policies on gender, Blunkett explained that 'in a working class city like ours' he wanted to 'give opportunities to all women not just a few'. He maintained that he was not 'sneering at middle class feminists' and nor was he 'antagonistic' to the policies of the GLC, but with the economic problems that Sheffield was facing he did not deem it

⁹⁶ Sue Goss, 'Women's Initiatives in Local Government', in Boddy and Fudge, *Local Socialism*, 109. Gyford, *Politics*, 16.

⁹⁷ Syed, *Labour Left*, 151. Goss, 'Women's Initiatives', 109.

⁹⁸ Gyford, *Politics*, 51.

⁹⁹ Gyford, *Politics*, 16, 52.

appropriate to separate women from the general class struggle.¹⁰⁰ Sheffield City Council tended to keep their policies regarding equal opportunities for women to the sphere of employment and industrial relations; however, within this area they did advocate positive action. Their policies shifted over the course of the decade to gradually incorporate more feminist ideas, especially once the Women's Panel was set up in 1986. However, before then, policies were predominantly influenced by jobs and the economy.

There were very few mentions of women in the Council's minutes in the 1970s, but in 1976 an invitation to attend a conference on sex discrimination in the workplace was declined.¹⁰¹ Sex discrimination was not mentioned again until 1981, when the Council declared itself an 'equal opportunities employer' and job advertisements were changed to include the words 'regardless of handicap, sex or race'.¹⁰² This policy grouped many forms of workplace discrimination together. Only in 1983 did Sheffield City Council begin to construct policies specifically tailored to the problems women faced. Despite many other local authorities having set up women's committees by this point, Sheffield City Council did not follow suit. Instead they created a section within the Employment Department to promote opportunities for women.¹⁰³ This kept women's issues firmly in the sphere of employment and traditional left-wing politics.

The women's section of the Employment Department was created to research women's employment and positive action as part of a wider examination of the Council's equal opportunities employment practice.¹⁰⁴ The Council developed this section rather than a separate women's committee because it prioritized unemployment over discrimination. In 1984 Blunkett made it clear that Sheffield City Council conceived local politics as 'a struggle of working people for control over their lives and resources, not a separate struggle for women'.¹⁰⁵ The focus was on the local economy and employment situation generally rather than on improving women's opportunities specifically. However, Blunkett recognized that women's employment was a concern of the whole city as Sheffield's working class constituents frequently needed two incomes per household. Women's part-time work was 'often crucial to [the] family budget'.¹⁰⁶ Sheffield City Labour Party's 1983 manifesto quantified these concerns, stating that women's unemployment in Sheffield had risen by 150 per cent in the previous 3 years and that

¹⁰⁰ Boddy and Fudge, *Blunkett Interview*, 254–5.

¹⁰¹ SA, CA-POL9/47, *Personnel Services Sub-Committee*, 10 March 1976.

¹⁰² SA, CA-POL13/292, *Personnel Services Sub-Committee*, 10 March 1981.

¹⁰³ Goss, *Women's Initiatives*, 109.

¹⁰⁴ SA, CA-POL15/181, *Personnel Services Sub-Committee*, 8 March 1983.

¹⁰⁵ Boddy and Fudge, *Blunkett Interview*, 254.

¹⁰⁶ Boddy and Fudge, *Blunkett Interview*, 254.

'without women's earnings, four times as many families would live in poverty'.¹⁰⁷ The manifesto's policy 'Labour supports the right of women to paid work outside the home' reiterated that their support came from economic arguments rather than out of respect for gender equality.¹⁰⁸ Sheffield differed in attitude from the GLC and other new urban left councils, but as Blunkett explained in the spirit of 'local socialism' 'we've got our own job to do',¹⁰⁹ and Sheffield's socialism was of the well-worn, established left.

The policies outlined in the manifesto did, however, challenge notions of what constituted women's work, and though the Council continued to focus primarily on women's employment, they began to touch on more feminist causes. The local manifesto noted that women usually occupied low-paid positions and made up 90 per cent of part-time workers in Sheffield.¹¹⁰ It connected this to women's inequality outside of the workplace and attributed women's preference for part-time work to their often being the primary caregivers responsible for unpaid domestic work.¹¹¹ Sheffield District Labour Party recognized that equal opportunities in employment could only happen by 'ending the segregation of job by sex...and providing good quality child care facilities', which it pledged to do.¹¹² This rhetoric was brought to life by the Council's training programmes. In 1975 female school leavers were offered courses in shorthand and typing.¹¹³ Just under a decade later the Council was funding a Women's Training Workshop at an estimated cost of £109,500 between 1983 and 1986,¹¹⁴ and had developed training initiatives like the Young Women's Plastering Workshop to encourage women to enter non-traditional areas of employment.¹¹⁵ The 1984 manifesto added that it would take measures against workplace sexual harassment, calling it 'offensive...a form of sex discrimination'.¹¹⁶ Through tackling issues related to work, the Council was able to fight gender stereotypes and engage with the more radical politics of gender equality.

¹⁰⁷ SA, CA-POL16/37/Appendix A, *Sheffield District Labour Party Manifesto*, 1983.

¹⁰⁸ SA, CA-POL16/37/Appendix A, *Sheffield District Labour Party Manifesto*, 1983.

¹⁰⁹ Boddy and Fudge, *Blunkett Interview*, 255.

¹¹⁰ SA, CA-POL16/37/Appendix A, *Sheffield District Labour Party Manifesto*, 1983.

¹¹¹ SA, CA-POL16/37/Appendix A, *Sheffield District Labour Party Manifesto*, 1983.

¹¹² SA, CA-POL16/37/Appendix A, *Sheffield District Labour Party Manifesto*, 1983.

¹¹³ SA, CA-POL8/182, *Policy Committee Meeting*, 21 October 1975.

¹¹⁴ SA, CA-POL16/122, *Budget Sub-Committee*, 19 July 1983.

¹¹⁵ SA, CA-POL17/157/Appendix A, *Policy Committee, Sheffield District Labour Party Manifesto*, 22 May 1984.

¹¹⁶ SA, CA-POL17/157/Appendix A, *Policy Committee, Sheffield District Labour Party Manifesto*, 22 May 1984.

By 1986, Sheffield District Labour Party had begun to look beyond employment policies to how other areas of planning effected women. The 1986 manifesto talked of making planning processes 'more accessible to women' and deemed it 'crucial' that women were not seen as a homogenous group with a single set of needs.¹¹⁷ To help with this, Sheffield City Council established a Women's Panel in September 1986.¹¹⁸ The Panel made recommendations focussed on eliminating sexism in all Council departments, advised the Women's Unit in the Personnel Department, and attempted to build links between the Council and women in the community regardless of age, class, race, marital status, sexuality, or physical and mental disability, with a view to responding to their varied needs and concerns.¹¹⁹ For 6 months, 50 per cent of officer time was spent on outreach work with the community and on encouraging more women to come to Panel meetings.¹²⁰ From March 1987 meetings were publicized in the local press and approval was given for the provision of child care allowances for women attending.¹²¹ By 1988 the Panel was making a special effort to co-opt representatives from 'under-represented' groups of women, such as 'black and ethnic minority women, working class women, lesbians, women with disabilities, young women, and older women'.¹²² The Panel noted that there was 'no perfect system—we just have to find the one that suits women in Sheffield best'.¹²³ This echoes Blunkett's sentiment that 'we've got our own job to do', only by the end of the 1980s, this job included engagement with more radical interests.¹²⁴

The Women's Panel continued to support the economic and employment focussed measures of other departments but also listened to co-optees and supported campaigns with origins outside the Council. These included campaigns against the closure of the Nether Edge Maternity Unit and against the licensing of sex shops in Sheffield, co-ordinated by Women Against Violence Against Women.¹²⁵ They also opposed the Alton Bill, which sought to make abortion after the eighteenth week illegal, on the grounds that it represented 'an attack on women's rights to control their own fertility and futures'.¹²⁶ These feminist campaigns were unrelated to employment issues. After 1986 Sheffield City Council became more open to the identity politics of the

¹¹⁷ SA, CA-POL20/Appendix A, *Sheffield District Labour Party Manifesto*, 1986.

¹¹⁸ SA, CA-POL21/5, *Policy Committee*, 23 September 1986. SA, CA-POL21/Appendix S, *Report: Establishing a Women's Panel*, 23 September 1986.

¹¹⁹ SA, CA-POL22/148, *Women's Panel*, 14 November 1986.

¹²⁰ SA, CA-POL22/196, *Women's Panel*, 12 December 1986.

¹²¹ SA, CA-POL22/196, *Women's Panel*, 12 December 1986.

¹²² SA, CA-POL38/Appendix C, *Women's Panel*, 16 September 1988.

¹²³ SA, CA-POL38/Appendix C, *Women's Panel*, 16 September 1988.

¹²⁴ Boddy and Fudge, *Blunkett Interview*, 255.

¹²⁵ SA, CA-POL25/33, *Women's Panel*, 10 April 1987.

¹²⁶ SA, CA-POL29/187, *Women's Panel*, 13 November 1987.

women's movement; however, its interest in gender equality had stemmed from well-worn anxieties over employment and the local economy. As such, for most of the 1980s, education and training initiatives were where its focus on women was strongest.

Race

Following riots in cities across Britain in 1981 and the publication of the Scarman Report on community relations and racial disadvantage, local authorities increasingly began to adopt more radical race equality policies.¹²⁷ The London Borough of Lambeth had pioneered such policies from 1978 but following the 1982 local elections the boroughs of Brent, Newham, Southwark, Islington, and Greenwich joined them, as did councils in cities across the country.¹²⁸ Sheffield, however, did not. Sheffield had not experienced the 1981 riots to the same degree as other cities. There were instances of vandalism but, as one commentator put it, 'few called it a riot'.¹²⁹ Furthermore, the percentage of Sheffield's residents who were from ethnic minority communities was less than the national average, and much less than areas such as Lambeth and Brent in which 30 and 60 per cent of residents were black, respectively.¹³⁰ Despite this relatively small percentage, Sheffield had a vibrant anti-racist extra-parliamentary politics made up of organizations like the Sheffield Asian Youth Movement, the Anti-Nazi League, and the Sharrow Action Committee Against Racism to name just a few.¹³¹ Even with this large activist presence, Sheffield City Council did not pursue the new thrust in race equality policy with as much fervour as it did established working class concerns.

Sheffield City Council dealt with issues of black and minority ethnic equality in a similar way to women's equality. The Council had neither a women's committee nor a committee to deal with race equality and relations, unlike other cities such as London. Instead it had an Ethnic Minorities Working Party, a smaller body which tended to focus on equality within employment, contract compliance, and on funding 'worthy' black community groups.¹³² This was a throwback to the 1970s, and was encouraged by on-going central government initiatives like the Urban Programme, which by the early 1980s had become the

¹²⁷ Paul Gordon, 'A Dirty War: The New Right and Local Authority Anti-Racism' in Wendy Ball and John Solomos, *Race and Local Politics* (London, Basingstoke, 1990), 175.

¹²⁸ Lansley *et al.*, *Councils in Conflict*, 122–4.

¹²⁹ Clarke, *Socialist Republic*, 71.

¹³⁰ Evans *et al.*, *Two Cities*, 201. Lansley, Goss, and Wolmar, *Councils in Conflict*, 123, 133.

¹³¹ In the course of my research I have come across over seventy organisations in Sheffield that can be categorized as anti-racist or minority ethnic community groups.

¹³² Lansley *et al.*, *Councils in Conflict*, 119–22.

'new orthodoxy' of central and local government policies addressing racial disadvantage.¹³³

The Urban Programme was created to solve inner-city problems, like poverty, housing, and unemployment, but has long been identified as being about race as the '(presumed) neutral term... 'inner-city' was used by central government to avoid talking explicitly about race.¹³⁴ In Sheffield's 1981–4 Urban Programme bid, Blunkett reaffirmed this metonymy by explicitly connecting 'racial conflict' to youth unemployment.¹³⁵ However, as the Home Office was wary of being seen to favour minorities, the Urban Programme, rather than addressing inner-city problems and improving the lives of urban residents systematically, simply became a 'fund-dispensing mechanism'.¹³⁶ In Sheffield, money was given to 'worthy' black community groups, such as the Asian Welfare Association and the South Sheffield Project's Ethnic Minorities Fostering Scheme.¹³⁷ Notably the Sheffield Asian Youth Movement, who penned protest lyrics such as 'When the pigs frame us up... we will smash their laws and fight!', did not receive any direct support from the Council.¹³⁸ Sheffield City Council's early-1980s policy was to give pots of funding to non-controversial minority ethnic groups.

From 1981, Sheffield City Council also focussed on being an 'equal opportunities employer'.¹³⁹ Its Ethnic Minorities Working Party discussed methods of implementation which included reviewing the language used in Council job advertising, monitoring the number of ethnic minority applicants, and advertising certain positions solely in ethnic minorities' publications and on 'appropriate' welfare organizations' notice boards.¹⁴⁰ Another significant policy was contract compliance, dealt with by the Council's Contracts Panel. Members attended a symposium called 'Equal Opportunities through Contract Compliance—The United States and British Experience', which was organized by the GLC, Royal Institute of Public Administration, and the Commission for Racial Equality.¹⁴¹ From these policies we can see that the Ethnic Minorities Working Party shared a preoccupation with

¹³³ Ken Young, 'Approaches to Policy Development in the Field of Equal Opportunities' in Ball and Solomos, *Race and Local Politics*, 28–9.

¹³⁴ Joan Higgins *et al.*, *Government and Urban Poverty: Inside the Policy Making Process* (Oxford, 1983), 190. There is an established precedent in British culture of the avoidance of race and preferred use of euphemisms which has been explored in the work of sociologists and historians such as Robert Miles, Kathleen Paul and John Solomos.

¹³⁵ SA, CA-POL13/97, *Urban Programme Sub-Committee*, 15 September 1980.

¹³⁶ Higgins *et al.*, *Government and Urban Poverty*, 91–2, 74.

¹³⁷ SA, CA-POL13/323, *Urban Strategy Sub Committee*, 8 April 1981. SA, CA-POL14/331, *Budget Sub-Committee*, 17 March 1982.

¹³⁸ Tandana Archive (TA), Online, MH137, Sheffield AYM Poem Poster, 1984/85 <<http://www.tandana.org/data/pg/search.php?Ref=MH137>> accessed 31 October 2012.

¹³⁹ SA, CA-POL13/292, *Personnel Services Sub-Committee*, 10 March 1981.

¹⁴⁰ SA, CA-POL14/384, *Urban Strategy Sub Committee*, 30 April 1982.

¹⁴¹ SA, CA-POL19/195, *Contracts Panel*, 22 January 1986.

employment issues, rather than implementing systematic radical changes to Council policy.

The Council also contributed to organizations which were directly fighting racism such as the Hillsborough branch of the Anti-Nazi League and the Sheffield Campaign Against Racism.¹⁴² By inviting representatives from the Sheffield Campaign Against Racism to attend Anti-Apartheid Working Party meetings they linked their anti-apartheid policies to local struggles against racism, and the 1983 Sheffield District Labour Party manifesto encouraged others to do the same.¹⁴³ In June 1981 the Council had affirmed their 'abhorrence' of apartheid and agreed a boycott of South African products.¹⁴⁴ Throughout the decade they maintained this policy, and developed others in support of the anti-apartheid cause, including naming a pedestrian walkway after Nelson Mandela, and flying the African National Congress flag from the Town Hall.¹⁴⁵ The Anti-Apartheid Movement was associated with the new left of the 1950s and 1960s but it was at its most popular in the 1980s.¹⁴⁶ The Sheffield branch of the Anti-Apartheid Movement was one of the largest in the country with around 800 members.¹⁴⁷ The popularity of the campaign perhaps suggests that it had lost some of its radicalism. Likewise, despite the Trades Union Congress' worries in the 1960s that economic sanctions would damage British workers, by the 1980s Sheffield District Labour Party was claiming that the anti-apartheid campaign was about protecting British jobs from multinational companies 'exporting jobs and increasing the dependence of the British economy on South Africa'.¹⁴⁸ The District Labour Party was selling anti-apartheid as benefitting Sheffield workers in its manifesto. For the purpose of winning elections it emphasized the local economic benefits of anti-apartheid, rather than the campaign's radical legacy.

By the mid-1980s, however, Sheffield City Council had begun to develop an outlook on race that focussed on identity politics and was more in tune with other new urban left councils. The Sheffield District Labour Party's 1984 manifesto advocated anti-racist education strategies

¹⁴² SA, CA-POL11/138, *Policy Committee Meeting*, 26 September 1978 and CA-POL12/71, *Policy Committee*, 27 July 1979.

¹⁴³ SA, CA-POL18/108, *Anti-Apartheid Advisory Panel*, 17 December 1984. SA, CA-POL16/37/Appendix A, *Sheffield District Labour Party Manifesto*, 1983.

¹⁴⁴ SA, CA-POL14/61, *Policy Review Sub-Committee*, 30 June 1981.

¹⁴⁵ SA, CA-POL20/21, *Anti-Apartheid Working Party*, 2 May 1986, CA-POL18/170-1, *Anti-Apartheid Advisory Panel*, 1 February 1985, and CA-POL35/195, *Anti-Apartheid Panel*, 22 April 1988.

¹⁴⁶ Rob Skinner, *The Foundations of Anti-Apartheid: Liberal Humanitarians and Transnational Activists in Britain and the United States, c.1919–64* (Basingstoke, New York, 2010), 201.

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Paul Blomfield, 9 September 2013.

¹⁴⁸ Skinner, *Foundations of Anti-Apartheid*, 165. SA, CA-POL16/37/Appendix A, *Sheffield District Labour Party Manifesto*, 1983.

to achieve 'a multi-racial society based on principles of equality and justice', and by 1985 the Ethnic Minorities Working Party had evolved into the Race Equality Panel.¹⁴⁹ There was a brief engagement with the language of identity politics including an explanation of the use of the term 'Black' in a Race Equality Panel meeting. The appendix noted that 'Black' was 'essentially a political term'.¹⁵⁰ It described how, whereas other terms in use had negative connotations, "Black' is a political colour, that seeks to free language from this burden of racist stereotyping that it has come to inherit...and in doing so challenges the assumption on which racist belief and practice is based'.¹⁵¹ For these reasons it was the 'preferred term' for a 'progressive local authority'.¹⁵² Despite this shift in language, Sheffield City Council continued to orientate policy around employment and the economy, supporting the Sheffield Ethnic Minorities Business Initiative, and estimating the size of the black workforce in Sheffield.¹⁵³ It embraced identity politics to an extent that would not alienate white working-class voters.

Conclusion

South Yorkshire County Council, along with the GLC and other metropolitan councils, was abolished in 1986. After enduring many attacks both to funds and reputation including rate-capping and being branded with the label 'loony left', abolition brought the 'local socialism' project to an end across Britain, disrupting the negotiation between traditional and radical forms of politics and the building of new constituencies. Stuart Hall, speaking at the Islington Voluntary Action Council in 1988, talked of a 'crisis of funding' and, implicitly, of how 'local socialism' had been halted by financial restraints.¹⁵⁴ However, he acknowledged that this was not the first such crisis the voluntary sector had faced. Indeed, though the financial situation brought this specific moment to an end, Hall understood that the negotiation between traditional and radical interests was inherently and analytically problematic for the left. The end of this moment was ideological as well as financial. In a Q&A following the talk, he explained that 'the lesson we have to draw from the past 6 or 7 years is

¹⁴⁹ SA, CA-POL17/157/Appendix A, *Policy Committee, Sheffield District Labour Party Manifesto*, 22 May 1984. SA, CA-POL19/74, *Ethnic Minorities Panel*, 12 November 1985.

¹⁵⁰ SA, CA-POL20/Appendix D, *Race Equality Panel*, 10 June 1986.

¹⁵¹ SA, CA-POL20/Appendix D, *Race Equality Panel*, 10 June 1986.

¹⁵² SA, CA-POL20/Appendix D, *Race Equality Panel*, 10 June 1986.

¹⁵³ SA, CA-POL26/35, *Race Equality Panel*, 7 July 1987. CA-POL27/Appendix H, *Race Equality Panel*, 15 September 1987.

¹⁵⁴ Stuart Hall, *The Voluntary Sector Under Attack...?* (London, 1989), 2.

that it is not easy to convert those different minorities into a political majority'.¹⁵⁵

Tracing Hall's thoughts from articles published in *Marxism Today* throughout the 1980s we can see his mounting frustration with the left's failure to build new constituencies. He started the decade criticizing socialism for being too traditional and for not confronting its own racism and sexism. By 1985 he recognized that 'in some places—most notably in the GLC, but also in South Yorkshire—the left has made the most imaginative and innovative political response' by embracing culture and radical interests. But at the same time Hall was frustrated with the left's continuing inability to address identity politics fully; 'the culture of patriarchy is nowhere so deeply embedded as within the left itself'.¹⁵⁶ After Labour's 1987 election defeat he was forced to take a different tone. It was not defeatist—he was still claiming that this was a battle to be contested—but he had begun to think about a new strategy, one that focused more on the subjectivity of politics. Hall concluded that 'the stubborn truth is that social interests are contradictory'¹⁵⁷ and was left questioning not only the left's ability to create a popular politics that celebrated diversity, but the affect that continued failure would have; 'the paradox is that, banished by the front door, the politics of identity and desire return by the back door to exact a terrible, regressive revenge'.¹⁵⁸

Sheffield's 'local socialism' illustrates these difficulties well. This article maps Sheffield's socialism on the page and finds it to be different from London's. Indeed, in terms of Hall's *Hard Road to Renewal*, Sheffield's socialism did not lead to where Hall and political scientists Gyford, Fudge, and Boddy thought it would. Arguably Sheffield's 'overwhelmingly' working class constituency made it ill-suited to this kind of renewal, and perhaps the emphasis on the miners' strike and the politics of coal stalled the kind of cosmopolitan activism that Hall pinned his notion of renewal on. Hall's new left was about revitalizing class politics with new social movements. However, in practice, in local contexts such as Sheffield, this engagement was far more partial than the new left and perhaps even Blunkett had envisaged. It was not so much that class-based politics was revitalized, but more that the energy of new social movements was held in check by class politics.

Blunkett lamented that the Council had not managed to fully ingrain their political project, writing that 'perhaps if we had moved faster and pushed harder to implement these innovations, there might have been

¹⁵⁵ Hall, *Voluntary Sector*, 19.

¹⁵⁶ Hall, *Hard Road to Renewal*, 249.

¹⁵⁷ Hall, *Hard Road to Renewal*, 281.

¹⁵⁸ Hall, *Hard Road to Renewal*, 282.

more lasting fundamental changes'.¹⁵⁹ In Sheffield, rate-capping meant more than just financial restrictions. Combined with the abolition of the South Yorkshire County Council and joint policies such as subsidized bus fares, it represented the end of an ideological moment. Democratically elected 'local socialism' had been undermined. From 1986, the Council commenced with new public-private partnerships, approving Meadowhall shopping centre and, by 1988, working with the newly created Government-funded Sheffield Development Corporation.¹⁶⁰ At the same time, councillors who had been instrumental in implementing 'local socialism' shifted their interests towards national politics leaving a 'less cohesive and confident left' in Sheffield.¹⁶¹ Bill Michie had become an MP in 1983, and Blunkett followed him to Westminster in 1987, with Clive Betts and Helen Jackson close behind in 1992. This change in emphasis and councillors initiated an era of what Seyd calls 'new realism'. In reference to Sheffield City Council's decision to work with the Urban Development Corporation, Seyd writes 'The Labour leadership was aware that many of its working class voters would not understand or approve a policy of rejecting government money which might help to create jobs'.¹⁶² While this is undoubtedly the case, Seyd's emphasis on pragmatism and realism is misplaced. The Council's acceptance of the Urban Development Corporation was a new turn to the pragmatic, but not in the sense that it appeased working class constituents. As outlined above, the Council had appeased working class constituents throughout the 1980s. This shift towards a new pragmatism was aimed at appeasing a central Government which it could no longer resist by raising rates.

In the first half of the 1980s, Sheffield City Council's negotiation of traditional and radical interests was a pragmatic attempt at a new politics that—in that moment—fostered surprising activist networks between campaigns supporting the miners, anti-racism, peace, and women. Recent literature on Thatcherism has explored how Thatcherites built a new 'imagined constituency' by removing class from political language.¹⁶³ By replacing 'working class' with 'ordinary working people' and by encouraging tenants to buy their council houses and workers to buy shares in British Gas, Thatcherites built a 'property-owning democracy', a new constituency of popular

¹⁵⁹ Blunkett, *Clear Day*, 148.

¹⁶⁰ Seyd, *Political Management*, 170–2.

¹⁶¹ Seyd, *Labour Left*, 157.

¹⁶² Seyd, *Political Management*, 173.

¹⁶³ Jon Lawrence and Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, 'Margaret Thatcher and the decline of class politics', in Ben Jackson and Robert Saunders, eds, *Making Thatcher's Britain* (Cambridge, 2012), 135.

individualism.¹⁶⁴ Sheffield City Council was also building a new constituency, but one that used class as a uniting force. By framing identity and movement politics as traditional concerns, the Council made them more attractive to working class voters, while keeping their radicalism in check. When peace was connected to coal mining it became an issue experienced in the everyday; when sexism and racism fed unemployment and disadvantaged family incomes they became concerns to be rallied against by the majority. Blunkett wanted to win 'hearts and minds' back from Thatcherism, and invest them in 'collective response[s]' to the city's problems.¹⁶⁵ Whereas Thatcherism made individualism 'ordinary', Sheffield's socialism attempted to do the same with collectivism.

Sheffield might not have taken Hall's exact road to renewal, but the Council negotiated its own pragmatic path by blurring traditional and radical interests into a viable alternative politics. With the support of Kinnock and the local electorate it was, to a certain extent, successful. By tracking similar processes in other cities such as Manchester, Liverpool, Glasgow, Birmingham, Bristol, and Southampton, we might find other paths taken, and those paths might lead us closer to a comprehensive narrative of the British left in the 1980s. We have the narrative that Hall's notion of renewal did not and could not work on a national level, but that it was most fully developed in London and cropped up partially in other cities. How each place grappled with renewal and developed its own form of 'local socialism' reminds us that there were different routes travelled that failed to feed into either Thatcherism or New Labour, for better or ill. Understanding how these developed will give us a more complete picture of the left in Britain, one that shows successes as well as failures and emphasizes that left was not always 'loony'. Thatcherism may have been about 'remaking Britain, on her terms',¹⁶⁶ but we should not forget that the left in the 1980s was also under construction, though what was being built was not always certain and was certainly never the same from one provincial city to the next.

¹⁶⁴ Lawrence and Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, *Thatcher and the Decline of Class Politics*, 142; and Matthew Francis, 'A Crusade to Enfranchise the Many': Thatcherism and the 'Property-Owning Democracy', *Twentieth Century British History*, 23 (2012), 297.

¹⁶⁵ Boddy and Fudge, *Blunkett Interview*, 246. David Blunkett and Keith Jackson, *Democracy in Crisis* (London, 1987).

¹⁶⁶ Lawrence and Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, *Thatcher and the Decline of Class Politics*, 134.