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The National Community Development Projects in the United Kingdom, 1969-1978

In 1969, Harold Wilson's Labour government announced the launch of the National Community Development Projects (CDPs), a pilot programme of research and social action implemented across twelve local councils in Britain. The CDP programme was the "largest ever government-funded social action experiment"¹ inspired by American President Johnson's social welfare legislation in the 1960s, known as the "War on Poverty". Incentives for the British programme also derived from the "rediscovery of poverty", an expression used from the second half of the 1960s to refer to the convergence of sociological investigations which pointed to the persistence of deep inequalities and high levels of poverty in Britain at the time.² In contrast to the notion of a widely shared prosperity heralded by Harold Macmillan's Conservative government (1957-1963), such research came as a sobering reminder that the supposed post-war affluence had not reached all sectors of the population nor was it homogeneously spread across the country³. In parallel, the figure of the "affluent worker", assumed to be partaking in the country's economic growth in the late 1950s, was debunked and proved to be largely mythical.⁴

As part of efforts from different government departments to reduce social inequalities,⁵ plans to set up the National Community Development Projects were conceived by the Home Office, then headed by James Callaghan, in the same move which gave rise to the Urban Programme. Urban Aid, its main component, consisted in allocating grants to local authorities in order to support organisations involved in education, housing, social care, legal advice or immigrants' rights.⁶ "Inner cities" in particular, with their associations with urban deprivation, derelict housing, unemployment, educational and social inequalities, were considered as areas afflicted by several forms of social deprivation, requiring specific forms of public intervention.

¹ Martin Loney, *Community Against Government. The British Community Development Project, 1968-78 – a Study of Government Incompetence*. London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1983, p. 1. It cost an estimated £5 million.

² See Loney, *ibid*, p.6-12, and Keith Banting, *Poverty, Politics and Policy. Britain in the 1960s*. London: Macmillan, 1979, p. 1. Brian Abel-Smith, Peter Townsend and Richard Titmuss were among the social scientists who challenged assumptions about a generalization of prosperity across classes. They all belonged to the Fabian Society.

³ "Poverty and inequality were reinstated as central features of British society." Banting, *ibid*. p.1.

⁴ John Goldthorpe, David Lockwood, Frank Bechhofer, Jennifer Platt, "The Affluent Worker: Political Attitudes and Behaviour", *Sociology*, Vol. 1, No. 1, January 1967, p. 11-31.

⁵ Another example would be the Educational Priorities Areas (1968-1971), inspired by the Plowden Report (1966) and implemented by the Department of Education and Science.

⁶ CDP, *Gilding the Ghetto. The State and the Poverty Experiments*. London: CDP Inter-Project Editorial Team, February 1977, p. 12.

However, it can be argued that Urban Aid could at best only alleviate the social symptoms of poverty. In contrast, the original intention for the CDPs was twofold: to devise ways of making the management and coordination of social services more efficient locally, therefore improving accessibility; and to encourage the participation of individuals within communities by calling on to their personal responsibility in order to break what were considered as “cycles” of poverty, allegedly rooted in social, cultural and personal factors. An early document stated that aims were:

to discover and develop methods of helping the severely deprived to *make personally constructive use* of the social services; and to assess the implications for the future development of these services in their normal forms of organisation, including the establishment of *more valid and reliable criteria* for allocating resources to the greatest social benefit.⁷

Within the methodological framework of the local Community Development Projects, investigations were to be conducted by “research-action” teams in specific areas of twelve local councils across England, Scotland and Wales, envisaged as small-scale experimental case-studies.⁸ The first four CDP started work in 1970, and the last three in 1972, each with a five-year lifespan.⁹ The researchers (involving sociologists and social administrators) were commissioned to diagnose local living and working conditions and report on the coordination of social services, while the action teams composed of social workers intervened in the targeted areas more directly, encouraging local community action initiatives. This dichotomous approach did not prevent research and action teams from working closely together on the ground. The alternation of Labour and Conservative governments between 1969 and 1978 did not interrupt the programme¹⁰.

The way the whole project was devised at Home Office level and implemented locally soon generated a conflictual relationship between central government and teams on the ground. The radical critique developed by the last wave of CDPs, the formation of the CDP Information and

⁷ Community Development Areas, 13 Working Party on Community Development, Second Draft of Report to Ministers, 1968, quoted by M. Loney, *Community Against Government*, *op. cit.*, p. 126, emphasis added.

⁸ The first four CDPs started in 1970 in Hillfields (Coventry), Vauxhall (Liverpool), Newington (Southwark), and Glyncoirwg (Glamorgan). The others started between March 1971 and 1972 in Saltley (Birmingham), Benwell (Newcastle), Canning Town (Newham), North Shields (North Tyneside), Batley (West Riding), Ferguslie Park (Paisley), Clarksfield (Oldham) and Cleator Moor (Cumberland).

⁹ Some, like the Benwell CDP, continued to publish material even after they had reached their term, taking the name West End Resource Centre. Interview with Judith Green, September 2016.

¹⁰ Even though there were evolutions, and more emphasis was placed on the issue of cuts in public services in the later reports produced by the CDPs, in the context of Britain’s bailout by the International Monetary Fund in 1976.

Intelligence Unit (in 1973), the creation of the CDP Workers' Organisation and the Political Economy Collective (1974) signalled the emergence of a confrontational stance within the CDPs which questioned top-down methods but also, crucially, challenged the government's assumptions about the causes of poverty and its policy-making mechanisms. The politics of the CDP programme and the tensions between local teams and central government can be seen as emblematic of a moment of deep politicisation of social and community work. During their short lifespan, the radical CDPs presented damning conclusions about the encroachments of private interests in all spheres of the public sector. They were instrumental in articulating a political position which included the aims of empowerment and community control over resources, while denouncing broader processes of deindustrialisation and privatisation as the root causes of the massive rise in unemployment during the 1970s.¹¹ Workers in the CDPs used the commissions given to them to generate and support grassroots mobilisations, to produce detailed knowledge on social issues and make this knowledge easily accessible in creative ways. It is this creativity of the local CDPs, in connection with local campaigning groups, which this article seeks to explore. The politics of the CDP experiment will be addressed first, then the campaigning work undertaken by the local teams. Finally, the photographic archive of the CDP will be presented and examined as one aspect of the CDP's attempt to disseminate knowledge and problematize the representation of Britain's inner cities.

The politics of the Community Development Projects

The Home Office definition of objectives for the CDP initiative (improving the coordination and accessibility of social services locally and encouraging participation from members of the community) was cast in very managerial and paternalistic terms. This was something which the social scientists and community workers employed in the different teams soon realised and challenged. In the words of Derek Morrell, an administrator in the Children's Department of the Home Office who became the main CDP architect, people in deprived areas needed to be "rais[ed] from a fatalistic dependence on 'the Council' to self-sufficiency and independence".¹² A dominant assumption within government departments considered poverty as the result of individual, familial or cultural inadequacies, as a symptom of "social pathologies" which

¹¹ See for example Birmingham CDP, *Workers on the Scrapheap. Final Report N°2*. Birmingham CDP Research Team, Oxford University, 1977; North Tyneside CDP, *North Shields: Living with Industrial Change*. North Tyneside CDP Research Team, Newcastle-upon-Tyne Polytechnic, 1978; CDP Inter-Project Editorial Team, *The Costs of Industrial Change*, CDP Information and Intelligence Unit: London, 1977.

¹² CDP, *Gilding the Ghetto*, *op. cit.* p. 12.

trapped people in recurrent patterns of poverty. The notion of a “cycle of poverty” was also given some credit in 1972, notably by Conservative Secretary of State for Social Services, Sir Keith Joseph.¹³ The CDP rationale was premised on the conception that piecemeal interventions and enticements to increase self-help and public participation in community life would help break such cycles of poverty, while making individuals more responsible, and in turn, less reliant on social services. Therefore, the notion of self-help at the core of such assumptions contained clear moralistic undertones and barely concealed agendas for cuts in public spending.¹⁴

However, from their work on the ground, and because of their training as social scientists and community workers, the research-action teams soon began to confront such assumptions. They opposed to the social pathology model the notion that poverty was rooted in structural economic factors. Its symptoms could not be studied in isolation but rather should be seen at a macro level as systemic. From 1973, as the first four CDP were already reaching their finishing stages and the last ones were just starting, a radical, Marxist critique of the social pathology model emerged, linking poverty and inequality to deeply entrenched class politics. Moreover, in contrast to the moralistic implications latent in the concept of self-help, the more political notion of empowerment, with its associations with emancipation, control over resources and decision-making by organised individuals, held sway in the work of the CDP teams. 1973 marked a moment of change in the direction of the programme’s governance, and the move towards a decentralised structure. In the absence of clear direction from a rather boneless Central Steering Group in London, representatives from the local CDPs established an Inter-Project working group, which acted as a forum for debate about the direction of the programme and became a central resource for the dissemination of the radical perspective during its short lease of life.¹⁵ Based in the London offices of the Centre for Environmental Studies, the Information and Intelligence Unit became the organ responsible for the production and

¹³ Under Keith Joseph the Department of Health and Social Security financed sociological research, published as *Transmitted Deprivation, Report 1 and 2*, in 1974 and 1975.

¹⁴ Loney suggests that “the ‘measure of control over their own lives’ was not expected to result in any major struggle with those who currently exercised control; rather, the CDP was premised on the idea that, notwithstanding the possibility of relatively minor conflict, there was a general societal and governmental consensus on the desirability of increasing the autonomy and self-determination of the poor. This in turn stemmed from a larger consensual view which saw poverty not as an aspect of structured inequality, in the context of a market economy, but rather as a marginal legacy of pre-welfare state capitalism.” Loney, *Community Against Government*, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

¹⁵ Loney, *Community Against Government*, *op. cit.*, p. 116-128. The CDP Information and Intelligence Unit was created in October 1973 but first threatened with closure by the Home Office in January 1976, precisely because its work was regarded as too political. Protest from the local CDPs managed to delay closure to October 1976. In the meantime, it tried to publish as many reports as it could.

coordination of a series of influential Inter-Project reports¹⁶. The decision to produce reports collectively, pooling insights and conclusions drawn from different case-studies in a coherent political framework, was also a way of presenting a common position to the Home Office.¹⁷ The starting point of the first Inter-Project report was that poverty was the consequence of structural social, economic and political factors:

Problems of multi-deprivation have to be redefined and reinterpreted in terms of structural constraints rather than psychological motivations, external rather than internal factors.¹⁸

The move to try and organise CDP work from below and publish collective reports was symptomatic of a rejection of a centralised structure and signalled the development of a common front: instead of individually reporting their conclusions back to the Home Office, the CDPs made the decision to make their joint reports accessible to the widest audience. The titles of the different inter-project reports leave no doubt as to the radical angle adopted by their authors: *Local Government Becomes Big Business* (1975), *Whatever Happened to Council Housing?* (1976), *Profits Against Houses* (1976), or *The Cost of Industrial Change* (1977).

Within the network of CDP workers thus taking shape, a radical theoretical framework emerged and the Political Economy Collective was formed by members of different local CDPs, the same year as the creation of the CDP Workers' organisation.¹⁹ It distributed its *PEC Bulletin* to CDP workers in an attempt to "inform and guide the work of the local projects" with a Marxist analytical perspective.²⁰ The PEC was responsible for the publication of *The State and the Local Economy* in 1979, and *Housing Action? The Myth of Area Improvement* in 1982, after the programme had ceased. These reports gathered insights collected by the different CDPs and prolonged their analysis. The former pointed to the responsibility of successive governments' industrial policies in the country's economic decline and the rise of unemployment through the 1970s, while the latter challenged government claims that housing problem had receded.²¹ It

¹⁶ The largest distribution was reached by the CDP/CIS joint report, *Cutting the Welfare State (Who Profits)*, published in 1976, which sold 20,000 copies.

¹⁷ These were Saltley (Birmingham), Benwell (Newcastle), Canning Town (Newham), North Shields (North Tyneside, Batley and Coventry). The latter was reaching the end of its term, while Batley was forced to close early precisely because of the conflicts which arose with the local council on political issues.

¹⁸ CDP Information and Intelligence Unit. *The National Community Development Project: Inter-Project Report 1973*. London: CDP IIU, 1974, p. 8.

¹⁹ The Workers' Organisation was formed as an attempt to cohere CDP workers under a common position for negotiation in the face of rising Home Office hostility towards the radical orientation that it (rightly) sensed.

²⁰ Loney, *Community Against Government*, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

²¹ The authors made the argument that the economic decline of some regions needed to be understood as part of a national pattern, not taken in isolation. "Industrial decline so evident in older parts of our towns and cities is not

shed light on the central role of tenants' associations in campaigns for better housing at community level.

A partnership between the CDP Inter-Project party and the CIS (Counter Intelligence Service) led to the publication of *Cutting the Welfare State (Who Profits)* in 1975. CIS was an anonymous collective composed of anti-capitalist investigation journalists (1970-1984), whose "Anti-Reports" investigated into the operations of large corporations. CDP and CIS recognised the convergence of aims and methods in their work. Both shared a belief that in-depth information about pressing social issues could be a lever for action, though they never detailed clearly how theory might translate into practical action. Using examples drawn from CDP work on the ground, the report examined the rhetoric and implications of announced cuts in public services, which placed the Welfare State under attack. "[CDP and CIS] recognised the urgent need to describe the consequences of the government's current policies. By uniting their efforts they hope to produce a more powerful report to greater effect."²²

The lack of a unified central government orientation of the CDP programme, combined with clear divergences about fundamental concepts, allowed the different local CDPs to experiment with decentralised and collective ways of working from 1973. The perspective became openly confrontational of the government's views in the reports, but also in the campaigning work which the teams developed locally. The radical agenda of the CDPs was a sign of the politicisation of many workers in a context of grassroots mobilisation.

"Organising for change" – the campaigning work of the CDP²³

While the reports represent the more tangible legacy of the CDP programme, the campaigning work done in each of the twelve local areas deserves close attention. On the ground, the action teams opened resource centres in the areas in which they were established, encouraged local mobilisation around key issues and provided essential fieldwork information to the research teams. There were variations in emphasis depending on local contexts, but recurrent issues centred around housing improvement, contested redevelopment schemes,

an exception to Britain's industrial structure but an integral part of it. Inner city problems are merely the general problems of a capitalist economy exposed in exaggerated form." CDP PEC, *The State and the Local Economy*. London: CDP PEC and Publications Distributive Co-operative, 1979, p. 4.

²² CDP/ CIS, *Cutting the Welfare State (Who Profits)*, London: Counter Information Services and CDP, 1976, back cover.

²³ North Tyneside CDP, *North Shields: Organising for Change in a Working-class Area*, Final Report, Vol. 3. Newcastle-upon-Tyne Polytechnic, 1978.

tenants' rights, demands for play facilities for children, legal advice, access to benefits, women's aid, to name only a few.

The contention is that workers in the more radical CDPs seized the government's objective of raising "participation" and "self-help" within the local communities and politicised it, repurposing these terms to mean "empowerment".²⁴ One possible explanation is that CDP workers were "frequently recruited from the radical milieu of the social science faculties of the 1960s, or from existing grassroots organisations". They had "a commitment to organizing and a willingness to use conflict strategies to achieve their objectives".²⁵ They adhered to a conception of the aims of community work as facilitating bottom-up processes of individual and collective empowerment and control-taking:²⁶

The projects' experience has led them largely to discount the value of attempting to influence policy and promote technical strategies for change *in isolation from the development of working class action*. By this we do not mean vague schemes for "participation" and involvement" in policy formation but rather the deliberate attempt to provide information and resources so that groups can *formulate their own demands and press directly for change*.²⁷

The North Shields CDP action team articulated its position very clearly:

A significant part of our work is to operate in such a way that we assist people in the project area to develop and use their own organisations and powers, to create their own allies and to challenge those decisions which are contrary to their interests.²⁸

The CDP action teams' main method was to work closely with residents on issues which they themselves identified as priorities in the course of regular meetings. Tenants' associations were created in practically each local CDP, reflecting the prevalence of concerns over housing nationally (slum clearance and rehousing, rent rises, problems of disrepair, absence of consultation of residents, cuts in benefits, etc.). CDP workers were instrumental in politicising

²⁴ The "radical CDPs" were Hillfields (Coventry), Batley, Canning Town (Newham), Saltley (Birmingham), Benwell (Newcastle) and North Shields (North Tyneside). The last four started work in 1972.

²⁵ Loney, *Community Against Government*, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

²⁶ In rejection of the "community therapy" model. North Tyneside CDP, *North Shields, Organising for Social Change*, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

²⁷ CDP Information and Intelligence Unit, *Forward Plan 1975-76*, London: CDP Information and Intelligence Unit, 1975, p. 1, emphasis added.

²⁸ North Tyneside CDP, *North Shields, Organising for Social Change*, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

the issue: by providing detailed information, pointing to failings of the local council, and encouraging tenants to take action, they were often driven to confrontation with the local authorities in which they worked. In the case of the North Shields' Housing Action group, the campaign against cuts created connections with trade unions locally, leading to the creation of an anti-cuts committee in the region.²⁹

Housing problems were a very pressing issue, but so were education and access to leisure, particularly for children and young people, in areas where no or hardly any provision was made in that respect. This was a need identified in several CDPs, notably in North Shields and Cleator Moor. There, the action teams employed "play workers" to set up recreational activities during the holidays and supervise "adventure playgrounds". In Cleator Moor, a youth club was set up in the basement of the CDP offices, taking the name Cellar Youth Project and attracting local youths who enjoyed the autonomy they were entrusted with there. Free access to leisure was defended as a political objective, particularly in poor communities where this issue was not considered a priority by local services juggling with meagre resources. Organising for the provision of play facilities was therefore construed as inherent to a political critique of capitalist leisure, to which collective and uncompetitive forms of leisure could be opposed.³⁰ Recreational activities were beneficial to children and young people, but also to parents, especially mothers, who could either enjoy a break from caring duties or choose to get involved in organising activities. Supported by the action teams, residents successfully pressured their local councils for the use of specific buildings and the allocation of money, for leisure, but also childcare facilities. Campaigns such as these were just as important in terms of "increasing the capacity of the deprived to insist on an equitable distribution" of resources as campaigns on housing issues.³¹

In more ways than one, the action teams served as catalysts for action, responding to the needs of the population in the areas concerned. They provided the structure for group meetings, information and advice, publication of newsletters, and creation of campaigning material by making equipment available. In Saltley, for example, the CDP workers made their offices available to many different groups. Asian women in particular used the resource for information meetings or language classes. Leaflets and newsletters were produced in Urdu in recognition of

²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 16.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 41.

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 12.

the specific needs of immigrant groups.³² In Benwell, the CDP offices continued to serve as a legal advice centre staffed by former workers, once the CDP experiment was over.³³

Even though the campaigns which arose with the encouragement of the CDPs teams were extremely local in scale, their political gains and the experience of organising which they allowed were nevertheless meaningful and had a lasting impact for the people who were in contact with the mobilisations:

In assessing the history of CDP it is important not to forget the tangible, if mundane, contributions that projects of this kind make to low-income communities. For local residents, CDP is more likely to be remembered for the advice that it offered and the playgroups which were provided, than for the controversies and ideological debates which characterised the programme's history.³⁴

The activism of the radical CDPs was driven by a desire to inform both decision-makers and people living in socially deprived areas on the structural processes of social inequality. A fundamental consideration was how best to represent the realities encountered on the ground in their complexity, while also keeping a record of the actions implemented by the CDP teams. The Information and Intelligence Unit's decision to commission photographers was a response to that effort.

The photographic archive of the national CDP

In 1976, thirteen photographers were commissioned to document the activities of the CDP teams in the twelve areas, with the intention of building up a photographic archive.³⁵ This archive would belong to the National CDP, with photographers retaining joint copyright. The contention is that the initiative reflected a consciousness that the CDP experiment was unique and should be recorded: these images were intended to keep a visual memory both of the contexts in which the CDPs intervened and of their modes of operation, at a particular

³² Interview with photographer Nick Hedges, Shrewsbury, 28 May 2016.

³³ It was renamed West End Resource Centre. Interview with Judith Green, former Benwell CDP worker, 26 September 2016.

³⁴ Loney, *Community Against Government*, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

³⁵ The photographers were Nick Birch, Victor Burgin, Simon Danby, Byron Gage, Ken Grint, Nick Hedges, John Hughes, Derek Massey, Roger Perry, Pryce Creighton and Derek Smith. See the online collection at the University of Indiana, <http://www.ulib.iupui.edu/collections/CDP>

conjuncture in British history which saw the deep and irreversible transformation of working-class communities.

The terms of the commission were “to provide illustrative material” for the reports, and “to document the situation of these declining industrial areas before the CDP experiment was brought to an end.”³⁶ There was a definite sense of emergency, as photographers intervened towards the end of projects³⁷, at a time when some CDPs faced the hostility of local councils and early closure. The Information and Intelligence Unit itself was due to close by October 1976 as a result of the polemical stance it adopted against the Home Office.

Kathy Henderson, editor of the Inter-project reports at the Information and Intelligence Unit, was in charge of setting up the photographic archive.³⁸ She looked for photographers whose work and approach would be in tune with the positions developed by the radical CDPs:

Wherever possible we tried to link up with photographers who already had some connection with, or commitment to, the areas in question and who were *sympathetic to the kind of ideas CDP was developing*.³⁹

A specific commitment was expected from photographers:

Rather than going into the areas to record their personal impressions or do a 'colour supplement' job they were asked to document in photographs *the local project teams understandings (sic)* of the important features and processes at work in these areas, and to translate the analytical ideas that CDP had been developing over the previous years into images.⁴⁰

The insistence on finding the best way to visually “translate” the CDP approach testifies to the concern over faithfully presenting what was felt to be a unique and worthwhile adventure, at a moment when the whole CDP experiment faced growing government hostility. Such a commission represented a challenge to the photographers, who were nevertheless given free rein to work as they saw best. Derek Smith remembers:

³⁶ National Community Development Project Archive: photograph collection. Project: Newcastle (Benwell) CDP, unclassified paper. <http://indiamond6.ulib.iupui.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CDP/id/3691/rec/8>

³⁷ In the case of the Coventry CDP, photographer Victor Burgin was even called in after the project had ended.

³⁸ Henderson had previous experience as picture editor at Penguin Education, a collection of schoolbooks whose editorial choices reflected a strong left-wing orientation and an openness to radical debates on schooling (publishing books such as Paolo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*). Email exchange with the author, 27 September 2016.

³⁹ National Community Development Project Archive: photograph collection, *op.cit.* Emphasis added.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, original emphasis.

being taken through the main projects Benwell were working on. The area's industrial decline was evident [...]. Deprivation and poor local planning was also an issue, as was the strength of [Newcastle's] West End communities that were being threatened by change.⁴¹

The changing fabric of the area is captured in his photographs of derelict 1950s council houses, clearance areas, closing local businesses and corner shops.

In Saltley, photographer Nick Hedges found a different social make-up. "I photographed the High Street, Alum Rock Road, to try and get a portrait of the economics of the place. It had small businesses, independent shops, quite a variety."⁴² Certainly, Saltley was struggling with major shifts in its industrial base, as the gas plant had closed down and car-making factories became empty warehouses. But according to Hedges, "Saltley's problems were more to do with a recognition that the two communities (the older white community and the new Asian community) were separated. [The CDP workers] were trying to find ways to bring them together." Some of his images were used on leaflets to advertise the CDP resource centre's activities, particularly those in support of women and ethnic minorities.

The value of these images lies in their depiction of working and living conditions in communities otherwise left without a representation, in an attempt to contradict the stigmatisation attached to inner-city areas. The photographs taken inevitably had a very local focus, but also had relevance beyond their local context: they testified to the processes of transformation at work in different parts of Britain, and their impact on working-class communities.

The images produced by the commissioned photographers found use as illustrations in the reports, in line with the desire to make CPD findings widely accessible. The selection of images for publication reveals concerns for clear presentation of both contexts and issues, in combination with text. Layout, graphic design and iconography were part and parcel of efforts to produce documents which could be used as resources within the community and beyond.

These photographs bear witness to a determination to present conditions with authenticity, responsibility and respect for the communities that the local CDPs serviced. Even though the level of the photographers' implication was lesser than in their respective personal projects as

⁴¹ Email exchange, 29 September 2016.

⁴² Interview with Nick Hedges, Shrewsbury, 28 May 2016.

documentary photographers, there was a sense of trust that the images would be used for purposes that they approved of, in a context of left-wing critique of central government policies. Photographers involved in the experiment strove to do justice to the recommendations included in the reports, and be at the service of the communities in that manner. Their images intervened in a larger endeavour to empower communities and encourage local campaigns, supporting the case for more state intervention not less.

Conclusion

The 1970s were a decade of major challenges to Britain's postwar social and economic model. A faltering economy, a weakened currency, an ageing, uncompetitive and underfunded industrial base were heralded on the right as signs of the failure of the mixed economic system. The welfare system itself was under attack from private sector interests, as cracks in the post-war consensus over public spending began to widen. Such analyses bolstered the neoliberal agenda of Margaret Thatcher as leader of the Conservative Party from 1975, then as Prime Minister from 1979.

Yet the decade was also marked by intense ideological debates and political activism on the left. The National Community Development Project was at the heart of debates over the desired role of the State in economic and social policy. Between its official launch in 1969 and the closure of the last projects in 1977, the trajectory of the programme was certainly not what central government had expected initially. The confrontational stance which developed over definitions, principles and methods in a radically reformist perspective fed by Marxist insights, exemplified a specific moment of deep politicization among social workers. Helping local communities organize campaigns and find access to information, CDP workers embraced key objectives in community action (empowerment of individuals and communities, control over resources and effective participation in decision-making), at odds with the paternalistic and much milder objectives of the Home Office of improving the management and cost efficiency of social services. Ultimately, this stance limited the CDPs' effective impact in influencing policy, as ideological disagreements with the Home Office made it easier for central government to dismiss the reports' conclusions.

Nevertheless, for many years following the end of the national CDP, the programme's legacy continued through the circulation of its influential reports. Some of them were included in readers of higher education syllabuses and copies continued to sell regularly. These reports

now represent excellent historical sources on the transformations undergone by working class communities in the 1970s, marked by repeated attacks on post-war gains and the weakening of the public sector. The rediscovery of the photographic archive has brought fresh attention to the National CDP project and the scope of its action. The images provide a sobering record of living and working conditions in twelve areas facing the combined assault of industrial decline, unemployment, rising inequalities and encroachments of the private sector on the welfare system.

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