

GLC R.I.P.

CULTURAL POLICIES IN LONDON

1981-1986

In 1986, the Greater London Council (GLC), the local authority responsible for London, was abolished by the Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher. Under the leadership of Ken Livingstone, the GLC had been a thorn in the national government's flesh since the Labour Party won control in the election of 1981. It experimented with innovative socialist policies in a number of spheres and, equally important, it also introduced a significantly new populist *style* into British politics. This may help to explain why between 1981 and 1986 it was able to mount a sustained and in many ways successful challenge from the left to the traditional depoliticization of cultural policy in Britain.

The 'non-political' status of cultural policy has been embodied in such institutions as the Arts Council of Great Britain. This is supposed to be insulated from political pressures by the 'arm's length principle', which means that government provides the money but has no say in how it should be distributed. The phrase was coined by Lord Redcliffe-Maud, who described how it is intended to work.

By self-denying ordinance politicians leave the Arts Council free to spend as it thinks fit. No Minister needs to reply to questions about the beneficiaries in Parliament, or about unsuccessful applicants for an Arts Council grant. A convention has been established over the years that in arts patronage neither the politician nor the bureaucrat knows best.¹

The principle thus leaves any questions about what constitutes cultural value to supposedly non-political specialists. When the Arts Council was set up in 1946, it took over from its wartime predecessor, the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts, not only its chairman, Lord Keynes, but also the slogan, 'The Best for the Most' - both of which seemed to assume that what constitutes 'the best' is a non-controversial question.

Both the arm's length principle and the consensus about culture as a means of civilizing the majority were generally accepted by the Labour Party when in power, either nationally or locally. At the national level, they had survived the challenges of arts ministers coming from Labour's left, like Jennie Lee (1964-70) and Hugh Jenkins (1974-6), and had been comfortably reasserted under Lord Donaldson (1976-9)- At the local level, it is possible to find Labour and Conservative members of the GLC's Recreation and Community Services

Policy Committee agreeing on the fundamentally bipartisan nature of arts policy in London as recently as 1977; they summarized the aims of their work over the previous twelve years thus:

- 1) To maintain and enhance the cultural traditions of the capital, primarily by maintaining and managing the South Bank Concert Halls as a centre of international standard and by grants to major companies.
- 2) To provide a wide-ranging programme of cultural activities in . . . parks and other open spaces throughout the Greater London area and to increase the numbers attending them.
- 3) To extend, by means of grants to cultural bodies, the availability and accessibility of the arts across the Greater London region to reach the largest number of Londoners at moderate prices and to help, in particular, those areas away from the centre where there are few cultural opportunities.²

It was this tradition of Labour welfarism that the GLC broke away from in its arts and cultural policies between 1981 and 1986.

The change was already becoming apparent when, in March 1982, a House of Commons Select Committee investigated the Public and Private Funding of the Arts. During the examination of one witness, Tony Banks, who chaired the GLC's Arts and Recreation Committee, the Conservative MP Patrick Cormack commented:

It seems to some of us . . . from what you have said . . . and your council has done over the last year that politics have been entering into the arts in London. Here, in the House of Commons, we tend to pride ourselves on the fact that this is one of those areas - perhaps the only major area - of national life where we have succeeded in keeping party politics out. . . . Is it not possible to keep politics out of the arts in London? And if not, why not?³

So the question is, how did the GLC - through its functions as a direct organizer of cultural events and activities and also as a funding agency - get politics into London's arts and cultural policy?

POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

As a direct organizer of culture, the council operated a *political communication* strategy. This worked at both a catch-all level and through more targeted initiatives.

The catch-all programme injected a new urban dimension into an existing municipal tradition of entertainments in parks and other open spaces. Its focus was transferred to the South Bank, the arts complex on the south side of the Thames between Waterloo and Westminster Bridge. This was first developed for the 1951 Festival of Britain by the then Labour government and the Labour-controlled London County Council (the predecessor of the GLC). It also incorporates County Hall, the home of London's government until the GLC's abolition, and therefore has certain left and 'dual power' connotations, somehow symbolizing a Labour local government bridgehead in an economically poorer part of London.

Between 1981 and 1986, the GLC livened up the South Bank with open-air entertainments, built a new Festival Pier on the Thames and decided to keep the foyer of the Royal Festival Hall open outside performance hours, providing live music, exhibitions and a new restaurant. During its first year (April 1983-4), this 'open foyer' policy attracted about a million visitors and helped to reverse the decline in concert attendances at the Festival Hall. (The number of first-time concert-goers trebled during the year to make up a quarter of all attendances; among them, the number of people under 25 doubled.) Festivals like Thamesday, repeated every year from 1980 with an average attendance of 200,000 people, and the South Bank Weekend combined the use of the river's recreational potential with shore-based events: free music and dance, arts and crafts exhibitions, theatre and puppet shows, children's entertainments and fireworks. These developments on the South Bank were paralleled in other parts of the city by initiatives like the Londoners' May Festivals, the popular music programme,⁴ the London Marathon and an attempt to brighten up Covent Garden.

Although this catch-all programme had a low overt political content, Tony Banks has pointed out that it provided one useful way 'to project the GLC's image as a progressive, caring, socialist council'.⁵

More targeted were the cultural initiatives associated with the GLC's various political campaigns. These were first evident in the Fare's Fair campaign in 1982 - the GLC's response to the House of Lords' ruling that its reductions in public transport fares were illegal because they placed an unnecessary burden on the ratepayers of the (mostly Tory) outer London boroughs - and then in Peace Year (1983), London Against Racism (1984) and Jobs Year (1985). 'In all GLC policies there was an ingredient which involved the arts,' explains Tony Banks. 'We could use the arts, in a way, to explain and have a better understanding of the other policies. We could, in other words, use the arts *as a medium for a political message*' (my emphasis).

One of the best examples of this campaigning use of the arts was the Jobs for a Change festival in Battersea Park on 7 July 1985. The park was organized along the lines of the *Festa de l'Unita* of the Italian Communist Party.⁶ There were four outdoor stages for an all-day programme of concerts by Billy Bragg, Ravi Shankar and many other musicians. Cabaret, poetry and visual arts tents presented examples of the cultural explosion in mining communities during the 1984/5 strike. Also featured were children's theatre, sports and games, a soul disco, and food and beer provided by Battersea and Wandsworth Trades Council. A Jobs Maze, a number of exhibitions and an open forum on industrial strategy explained the GLC's economic policies and challenged the government's acceptance of high levels of unemployment.

Twenty-three years earlier, in 1962, Battersea Park had also been used by the Labour Party as the central venue for a one-off Festival of Labour, a morale-boosting initiative whose watchword - in tune with the Gaitskell leadership's attempts to revamp the image of the party - had been 'modernity'. The festival, organized by Merlyn Rees - later Home Secretary in the Callaghan government but then a little-known officer at party headquarters - was a success in terms of popular participation. It hardly sounds 'modern' in its cultural content, though,

featuring items like an exhibition of Labour women's handicrafts along with the finals of the Young Socialists' Public Speaking Contest and the Ipswich Co-operative Girls' Choir.

In contrast to this image of traditional labourism, the politicians directing the GLC's cultural policies from 1981 on generally belonged to the generation born during the first decade after the war. They were more influenced by things like the Socialist Workers Party's Rock Against Racism and Anti-Nazi League campaigns in the 1970s, which had successfully exploited popular, twentieth-century cultural forms to political ends. Another important influence seems to have been the 'urbanist populism' of Communist local government in Italy. In Rome, for example, young politicians like Renato Nicolini took the model developed by the *Festa de l'Unita* for enclosed sites, usually outside town centres, and adapted it to the heart of the city, blending ancient ruins with contemporary mass entertainment.

Earlier distinctions are reshuffled to produce a collage of local, national and international cultures. So the Clash play a free concert in Bologna's historic main square, Lindsay Kemp performs beneath the sky in a Neapolitan castle, giant screens in public gardens and in the Coliseum project Hollywood films through the night.⁷

Nicolini's *Estate Romana* had a tremendous impact on the left in Italy because it represented an attempt to create through cultural policy an alternative to the declining traditional forms of political mobilization.

Both the catch-all and targeted dimensions of the GLC's 'direct' cultural policy - along with its increasing, and increasingly sophisticated, use of advertising⁸ - were vital in increasing public awareness of the council. They therefore helped to maintain its political presence even after most of its powers had been taken away from it in the fields of planning, housing and (after 1983) transport. This may help to explain why its budget for open-air entertainment quintupled from £480,000 in 1980 to £2,500,000 in 1985.

Catch-all events like the *Exploring Living Memory* exhibition at the Royal Festival Hall, a popular reconstruction of London's history in the twentieth century organized in co-operation with senior citizens' groups, were designed, according to Tony Banks's policy adviser Alan Tomkins, to 'help people retain some sense of self-identity'. They could also reinforce notions of 'London' and 'being a Londoner' by showing how 'a wide range of cultural forms, including nursery rhymes, literature, architecture, painting, football, greyhound racing, music and film have all given London its modern identity'.⁹ And, finally, they were supposed to establish a connection between these ideas and the work of the GLC. In cases like this, the GLC was attempting to act as a true 'local state' by creating a spirit of civic unity and belonging which had been undermined in London by urban, social and historical changes.

Targeted initiatives like the Jobs for a Change festival were aspects of the GLC's challenge to the Thatcher government. These were aimed at channelling towards the local state politically disaffected constituencies, like young people and the unemployed, and anti-government public opinion on local as well as

national issues - from racism and sexism to nuclear disarmament, economic policy and Northern Ireland.

SOCIAL ENGINEERING

In its enabling function as a funding agency, die GLC operated a *social engineering* strategy aimed at endowing certain constituencies with an independent cultural voice. This strategy was pursued in two very different - perhaps even contradictory - ways by two separate bodies, the Arts and Recreation Committee and the Industry and Employment Committee.

Arts and Recreation Committee

In Labour's 50,000-word manifesto for the 1981 GLC elections, *A Socialist Policy for the GLC*, cultural policy was dealt with in no more than a quarter of a page. This emphasized the need to involve 'all sections of the community' in cultural activities and to give 'community-based projects a more equitable share of resources'. In June 1981, in a document on *The GLC's Future Arts Policy*, Tony Banks, as the newly appointed chair of the Arts and Recreation Committee, sketched the broad outlines of the council's role as a direct organizer of culture but left to forces outside County Hall the definition of its function as a funding agency.

Public consultation conferences on 'community arts' (in November 1981) and 'ethnic arts' (in May 1982) led to the establishment of GLC subcommittees under those titles in September 1982. After a third conference in December 1982, a sports subcommittee was created in March 1983. The subcommittees consisted of three Arts and Recreation Committee members and up to seventeen advisory members, mainly drawn from participants at the conferences. They had independent budgets, and majority party members usually voted according to the recommendations of the majority of the advisers.

The titles of the Community Arts Subcommittee and the Ethnic Arts Subcommittee are misleading and controversial; both phrases are associated with a philosophy of social integration which the GLC rejected. The term 'ethnic arts' - along with such alternatives as 'ethnic minority arts', 'non-British arts', 'multi-ethnic arts' and 'multi-cultural arts' - was introduced by Naseem Khan in her book *The Arts Britain Ignores* (1976). According to Parminder Vir, one of the main officers in charge of Black arts policy at the GLC, the emphasis in the notion of ethnic arts is on 'racial harmony and multiculturalism . . . on people's attitudes rather than on relations of power; but racism is about *power*, political power, not about people's minds'. And according to Kwesi Owusu, Naseem Khan's plethora of synonyms all 'defined and described Black and other immigrant arts not in their own terms but in terms of their subordination to the dominant British culture'. Hence the favoured term at the GLC became Black arts, capitalized to stress that it is a specific political and cultural identity that is at issue, rather than a mere colour.¹⁰ The concept of 'community arts' is similarly problematic. It originated in die arts lab movement of the late 1960s,

GLC R.I.P.

but lost most of its radical connotations during the 1970s after the formation of the Association of Community Artists. This never developed a clear political and artistic programme, and effectively left it to the Arts Council to define what 'community arts' are about. In a 1977 document, the Labour Party placed an equally depoliticized emphasis on their usefulness in 'building up a unified and harmonious neighbourhood' - an approach explicitly rejected by Alan Tomkins, who argued that social and cultural changes had rendered it irrelevant and even hypocritical.¹¹

The membership of the Ethnic Arts Subcommittee consisted entirely of black cultural practitioners and activists, while the Community Arts Subcommittee - on which 60 per cent of the appointees were women - represented the cultural voice of constituencies like the Irish; gay, lesbian and feminist activists; the disabled; the elderly and youth groups. Tomkins's criterion in recommending the selection of advisers was 'to pick people with a knowledge of popular cultural forms and an involvement in grass-roots organization'.¹² The Greater London Association of Community Artists (GLACA) lobbied for a recognition of 'community arts' as a body of professional knowledge, but the GLC refused to fund a training course for community artists and appointed to the subcommittee only three GLACA members, whose characteristics met Tomkins's requirements.

This conflict highlights the GLC's priority of funding the cultural expression of organized political movements rather than community arts professionals. This priority reflects a broader political strategy. Like others on the left, Ken Livingstone had perceived the declining strength of the organized industrial working class in London:

For twenty years or more there was a policy of driving industry out of London so that two-thirds of redundancies have been in manufacturing industry. If you look at the London Labour Party Conference . . . the industrial trade unions are small, and absolutely splintered.¹³

It was the absence of a solid craft unions' bloc controlled by the right that enabled the left to win control of the London Labour Party in the early 1980s. Once in power, they tried to construct a new political majority out of fragmented and heterogeneous groupings. In terms of cultural policy, this meant going beyond Labour's traditional concentration on centralized planning and even beyond existing forms of decentralization. New alliances could be built only by *devolving* power and resources to the constituencies represented on the Ethnic and Community Arts Subcommittees.

The concept of *representation* was central to this policy. According to Alan Tomkins, 'representation is not just a matter of parliamentary democracy: it is one of the principal means through which the cultural and political configurations of a social formation are historically produced'.¹⁴ In order to promote 'the production, the celebration of working class, women's, black and youth histories', one of Tomkins's principal objectives, the GLC began to fund contemporary cultural forms like photography, video, pop music and community radio which had traditionally been neglected by the state. As a GLC report on Black arts pointed out, this was a precondition for creating 'a new aesthetics

NEW FORMATIONS

which is not "traditional", "ethnic", "folk", "exotica", but which is appropriate for what needs to be expressed here and now'.¹⁵

It was probably in the area of Black arts that the Arts and Recreation Committee's social engineering strategy worked most successfully. After the first Brixton riots in April 1981, the incoming Labour GLC set up a new Ethnic Minorities Committee (chaired by Livingstone himself) and an Ethnic Minorities Unit. These meant that Black arts policy was given unprecedented backing at members' and officers' level respectively. 'Before the GLC,' Stuart Hall remarks, 'black people in London were just totally outside the whole political mechanism, except tiny groupings in local Labour parties. . . . Their willingness to come in was therefore a very suspicious one. They expected to be ripped off daily.'¹⁶ This scepticism was clearly expressed in May 1982 in a speech to the GLC consultative conference on ethnic arts by Errol Lloyd, a black artist working for the Minority Arts Advisory Service. He set his remarks in the context of the uprisings in the black districts of London, Bristol and Liverpool during 1981.

I think the first thing we have to do is to acknowledge why we are here today. It is the struggles and the sacrifices of people in areas like Brixton, St Pauls, Southall and Toxteth that have made it possible for us to be here . . . and for funding to be available. . . . We need to be aware that the present GLC funding is so aligned to the political situation, so that if there is a change in the structure of the GLC . . . then there is a serious possibility that there won't be any funds available for minority artists. We need to be aware of this and to seize the time now.¹⁷

One thing that made the alliance between black activists and the GLC possible was the establishment of independent policy-making and grant-allocating structures. A Race Equality Unit, corresponding at officers' level to the Ethnic Arts Subcommittee, was created within the Arts Department to develop the Black arts sector through grant-aid and to campaign for anti-racist and equal opportunities policies in the rest of the cultural sector.

The Race Equality Unit was more successful in the first of these tasks than in the second. Grants from the Ethnic Arts Subcommittee, whose budget grew from £400,000 in 1982-3 to over £2,000,000 in 1985-6, and from other council committees consolidated existing Black arts groups and encouraged the emergence of new ones, especially in the independent film sector. The Roundhouse in Chalk Farm was designated a 'centre of excellence' for Black arts in Europe. Among the many other high-profile initiatives launched were *Third Eye*, a festival of Third World cinema, a Black Theatre season, and *The Black Experience*, a London-wide programme of seminars, exhibitions and performances in February and March, 1986.

In the field of training, the GLC sponsored short courses in film and video, radio and print journalism, in co-operation with the Black Media Workers Association and the Polytechnic of Central London, and a one-year course in arts administration at City University. Even so, its pressure on mainstream arts institutions to employ and train more black people, to increase blacks'

representation on their decision-making bodies and to make Black arts an integral part of their artistic programmes yielded more modest results.

There was no equivalent of the Race Equality Unit in the area of 'women's arts', and the Women's Issues Group formed within the Arts Department met only from March to October 1985 and was never allocated a staff or budget of its own. In general, women's issues never had the level of political support enjoyed by anti-racist policies. As Ken Livingstone admitted, 'because you are forcing men to examine so much of their own past of which they are extremely uncertain and ashamed . . . it really is quite an effort to get policies on feminism through the [Labour] group.'¹⁸ And, in an assessment of its cultural policies for women, the GLC bitterly acknowledged 'a feeling that a golden opportunity to create and build upon a women's culture was missed'.¹⁹ One of the main problems was a lack of co-ordination between three different sources of funding and policy: the Community Arts Subcommittee, the Ethnic Arts Subcommittee and the Women's Committee. The latter had been created as a kind of institutionalized pressure group within the council and had the power to make recommendations on other committees' work. The Arts Committee, however, never replied to specific proposals made by the Women's Arts and Media Working Group formed within the Women's Committee.

Although the GLC funded some sixty-seven women's arts groups and supported festivals on International Women's Day, its cultural policies for women failed to gain within the feminist movement a recognition comparable to that achieved by its Black arts policy within the Black movement. To some extent, this may reflect the different forms of political organization between the two movements, and also a proper uncertainty about how to define the category 'women' and the concept of 'women's culture'. But it also stemmed from the way policy-making was organized within the council. The advisers to the Community Arts and Ethnic Arts Subcommittees were chosen as art-form specialists, and there was therefore no one with specific responsibility for representing women's groups as potential clients. The GLC also emphasized change through group struggle rather than personal development, and this gave priority to collective or media-based arts like film, video and photography rather than the more individualized art forms in which women have traditionally taken a major role, like dance and the crafts. Nor was this imbalance compensated for by sponsorship of adequate technical training courses for women.

Similar problems arose around cultural policies for other targeted groups like the Irish community, gay men and lesbians, 14-18 year-olds, the elderly and the disabled. GLC funding consolidated existing groups, but there were no specialist advisers (with the exception of the Irish in the council's final year) and there was no development work comparable to that being carried out by the Race Equality Unit. Whether these failings could have been overcome remains an open question. Abolition came only three years after the new subcommittee structure was set up, and this prevented the GLC from building on important achievements like the consolidation of gay and feminist publishing, the opening of the London Lesbian and Gay Centre in Clerkenwell, improved access to arts events for the disabled, and the inclusion of Irish sports within the canon of culture worthy of state subsidy.

Industry and Employment Committee

Like the Arts Council, the Arts and Recreation Committee gave grants on the basis of year-by-year deficit financing. This approach was rejected by the Industry and Employment Committee, which was established in 1981 to implement the job creation strategy which (unlike cultural policy) had been spelt out in great detail in Labour's GLC election manifesto that year.

The main impetus for the Industry and Employment Committee's involvement in cultural policy came from Robin Murray's Economic Policy Group, a small unit of economists responsible for advising the committee and for drawing up a new London Industrial Strategy. But the key figure was Nicholas Garnham, who was seconded from his post as Professor of Communications at the Polytechnic of Central London and who had already been involved in Labour's cultural policy-making at a national level; he was a member both of the working party which produced the discussion paper *The People and the Media* in 1974 and also of the Current Arts Policy Advisory Group, an unofficial body created by Labour Arts Minister Hugh Jenkins in 1975. Under Garnham's guidance, the Economic Policy Group produced reports on London's cultural industries which showed how important the cultural sector is to London's economy: it employs about 250,000 people, 112,000 in printing and publishing (London's biggest manufacturing industry), a further 50,000 in broadcasting, film and video, and about 20,000 in advertising. The reports concluded that public policy should treat the cultural sector as a co-ordinated whole. The need for strategic intervention was justified, they argued, by the multi-sectoral organization of both capital and labour in all these industries, by the inelasticity of consumers' cultural expenditure and by the non-expandability of the pool of both advertising revenue and consumers' cultural consumption time.

Garnham tried to link this work with that of the Arts and Recreation Committee, which, especially through its Community Arts Subcommittee, was also beginning to develop policies on the independent film sector, cable and community radio. A liaison group was set up at officer level and a major policy-making conference, *Cultural Industries and Cultural Policy in London*, was held at London's Riverside Studios in December 1983. In one contribution, Garnham placed his approach in opposition to a tradition of 'idealist' cultural analysis which defines culture 'as a realm separate from, and often actively opposed to, the realm of material production and economic activity'. In this tradition, culture is assumed to possess 'inherent values, of life enhancement or whatever, which are fundamentally opposed to and in danger of damage by commercial forces'. It also attributes a special and central status to 'the "creative artist" whose aspirations and values, seen as stemming from some unfathomable and unquestionable source of genius, inspiration or talent, are the source of cultural value'. The result of this emphasis has been 'to define the policy problem as one of finding audiences for their work rather than vice versa. When audiences cannot be found . . . the market is blamed and the gap is filled by subsidy.'

This critique was directed not only at traditional Labour cultural policy, but also implicitly at the Arts and Recreation Committee.

It is important to note that most of those who have challenged from the left this dominant view of culture as elitist, have themselves tacitly if not explicitly accepted the remaining assumptions of the tradition they were rejecting. . . . One result of this cultural policy-making tradition has been to marginalise public intervention in the cultural sphere and to make it purely reactive to processes which it cannot grasp nor attempt to control.²⁰

In other words, Garnham saw the Arts and Recreation Committee's deficit-funding approach as inadequate within a socialist strategy that attempts to be *hegemonic* rather than merely *responsive*.

Garnham left the GLC after the Riverside conference. Although his arguments never gained the prominence or the level of support within the Arts and Recreation Committee that they had enjoyed on the Industry and Employment Committee, they did nevertheless have some longer-term impact. In 1984, for example, the Principal Officer on the Economic Policy Group and the GLC's Chief Economic Adviser wrote:

Public sector involvement in cultural activities . . . has tended to be directed towards those activities which can rarely be commercially viable . . . while most people's cultural needs have continued to be met through the market. One result of this is that public policies have tended to have a relatively marginal impact on what cultural commodities and services are actually consumed. . . . For the public sector to have an influence both on economic and employment patterns and on 'culture' in its broadest sense, intervention must be directed *through* and not *against* the market.²¹

More specifically, in its document on *London Industrial Strategy*, the Economic Policy Group proposed 'different forms of finance - investment through loans and equity rather than grant-aid and deficit-financing - to break the relationship of dependence which subsidy and grant always imply . . . which tends to make funding bodies appear to serve performers and producers rather than the general public'.²² In this new model, 'common services' typical of the commercial sector - management consultancy, marketing, advice on the introduction of new technology - would be provided. At the same time, a cultural industries unit was set up at the Greater London Enterprise Board (GLEB), the municipal agency for intervention into London's industry established as an independent body by the Industry and Employment Committee in 1981; its task was 'to screen out unviable projects, to make recommendations on investment decisions and to develop projects in such a way that they can be supported as viable enterprises'.²³

GLEB's initiatives ranged from setting up community recording studios (Firehouse Ltd), black publishing houses (Bladestock Publications) and radical book distribution co-ops (Turnaround) to the encouragement of non-commercial video distribution in public libraries and feasibility studies into the launch of a proposed new radical weekly, *The News on Sunday*. Nevertheless, the cultural industries model probably remained more important as a new idea than as an actual policy. Like the Arts and Recreation Committee, GLEB in practice gave it a fairly low priority. This was probably because GLEB's main priority was to

create as many jobs as possible in the short term and, as Nicholas Garnham explains, 'investment in the cultural industries has to be directed through small units, and although these units create a network of surrounding employment, it is difficult to prove that you are creating a lot of jobs with each immediate investment'.²⁴ This scale of priorities is clearly reflected in the £600,000 or so allocated to the cultural industries policy by the GLC and GLEB - modest by comparison with the Arts and Recreation Committee's revenue expenditure on its cultural policies, which was well in excess of £20,000,000 in the single financial year 1983-4.

LEGACIES

This judgement is not to diminish the long-term importance of the cultural industries model in British public policy, nor of the detailed studies it produced of their role 'in the systematic production of meaning through manipulating symbols, images, narratives and sounds'.²⁵ Like many other GLC policies, the implementation of Garnham's approach was delayed by internal legal wrangles. Clearance was given only late in 1984, and by that time the struggle against abolition had become the council's overriding priority. Year-by-year deficit-financing - and the relationship of financial dependency it creates amongst its clientele - was considered essential within a short-term strategy for mobilizing immediate political support.

The Arts and Recreation Committee's social engineering strategy made a considerable impact in terms of rendering London's oppressed minorities culturally more visible and also in creating a new climate of co-operation between local Labour politicians and people already engaged in radical and oppositional cultural practices, but often bitterly disillusioned with Labour Party politics. Despite these successes, however, it left a number of major problems fundamentally unresolved. Three in particular stand out. First, there is the problem of how to transform a 'coalition of the dispossessed' into a political bloc: how, in Perry Anderson's terms, to create 'a synthesis of the aspirations and identities of different groups in a global project which exceeds them all'.²⁶ Secondly, and very much related to this, is the question identified by Stuart Hall as the 'mobilisation and hegemonisation of a wider left formation, involving people who do not have an activist connection with community groups, or black groups, or feminist groups'.²⁷ And, last but not least, there remains a question mark over the Labour leadership's attitude towards the GLC experiment.

The more market-oriented approach proposed by Nicholas Garnham and Robin Murray could have been beneficial in thinking through all three problems. The project of constructing an alternative market might have encouraged the various fragments of the GLC's political constituency to elaborate common political and artistic programmes, to appeal to - and reach - wider audiences, to define and develop their professional skills, and to make a sustained and radical input into the trade unions. (It was notable that, with the partial exception of ACTT - the Association of Cinematograph, Television and Allied Technicians - the unions made no contribution to the formulation of the

GLC's cultural policies.) Within the GLC, it could well be that greater collaboration in this project between the more determinist, more traditionally Marxist approach that characterized the Industry and Employment Committee, on the one hand, and the 'new politics' focusing on questions of race, gender, age and sexuality that prevailed in the Arts and Recreation Committee, on the other, might have enriched the cultural and political heritage of both strands of Livingstone's Labour Left alliance. Had it not been for the Damoclean sword of abolition hanging over the GLC's head, the market-oriented approach may also have helped to generate stronger policies on the cultural industries and on sports that would engage more successfully with the culture of the white, 'respectable' working class. For this crucial group, as Tony Banks and Alan Tomkins themselves admit in an article in *New Socialist* (February 1986), 'little was done'.

Now the GLC has gone, the division between the old and new forms of left politics is perhaps being bridged by the various groups on the libertarian left interested in non-capitalist market forms - what Stuart Hall has called 'artisan capitalism'.²⁸ One example of such groups is Comedia, a publishing house and management consultancy service, which began in 1978 as a development from the Minority Press Group. At the same time as maintaining a commitment to the objectives of the 'new politics', the Comedia group is willing to take a hard look at its organizational philosophy and at its attitude towards the market both in its publishing policy and in its members' own writing. They conclude that:

It is time to recognise that market mechanisms have progressive possibilities as an index of social needs. . . . For us, the market is not some mystical religion to which each area of social life should respond, but simply the most practical way of gaining information about the thousands of complex choices users make about goods and services.²⁹

What impact have the GLC's cultural policies had on the Labour Party nationally? The political support mobilized during the anti-abolition campaign, it has justly been pointed out, was 'not pro-Labour, but pro-GLC, pro-London'.³⁰ This perhaps explains why, after a phase of open hostility between 1981 and 1983, the Labour leadership began to associate itself with the GLC, even if it was, as Ken Livingstone observes, 'in terms of image rather than detail'.³¹ Labour leader Neil Kinnock still does not seem prepared to acknowledge the substance of the GLC's legacy - which is nothing less than the emergence of a new form of politics in London.

In cultural terms, it is the populist campaigning style of festivals, advertising and popular music that Kinnock's leadership seems more willing to take from the GLC. It has, for example, granted an unusual degree of autonomy to organizations like Red Wedge, originally created by musicians like Paul Weller and Billy Bragg to organize concerts campaigning for the return of a Labour government at the next general election but now expanding into other areas of cultural work. (One of Red Wedge's major purposes is to reverse the decline in Labour's youth vote. In the 1983 election, according to a BBC-Gallup poll, it was supported by only 29 per cent of voters aged between 18 and 22 - its lowest proportion ever.) The design and presentation of the party's recent campaigns,

NEW FORMATIONS

like Jobs and Industry in 1985 and Freedom and Fairness in 1986, the increasing slickness of its party political broadcasts on television, and the revamping of its theoretical journal, *New Socialist*: all these are signs of a new interest in questions of image and style.

Although the GLC's 'urban populism' may have had some impact on certain areas of the party's campaigning, however, it still has not become part of mainstream Labour thinking. Labour could, for example, attempt to develop a strategy for Britain's cities that would incorporate a GLC-style cultural urbanism along with cheap transport policies and adequate planning measures to make public spaces more attractive - good lighting, the closing of parts of the city to motor traffic, the redecoration of buildings and streets, the provision of public transport late at night, and so forth. This could be important *both* in counteracting some of the Conservative right's arguments about 'making the streets safe', privatization and even home entertainment *and* in projecting an image of the new society Labour wants to build.

This radical thinking in policy terms - going *beyond* the GLC experience - is also missing from Labour's approach to other issues like Black arts and the cultural industries. Even non-sectarian groups on the Labour left which are genuinely interested in building a mass party, like the Labour Co-ordinating Committee, show little sign of grasping the need for a cultural strategy if that aim is to be achieved.³² They seem to forget that it would have to involve 'a tremendous tension and effort in every cultural field, a constant enrichment of ideas and language to capture the moving current of history'. That prescription for transforming Labour into a hegemonic force, written by Perry Anderson in 1965,³³ retains all its validity for the Labour Party of today, which by concentrating almost exclusively on electioneering and the parliamentary sphere appears to have chosen a strategy of *descending integration* of the aspirations of different social groups.

Perhaps the fundamental problem remains the Labour leadership's - and the Labour Party's - deeply ingrained reluctance to accept the principle of *giving power away*. This is what makes the GLC's attempt to construct a new social base through an *ascending integration* of interests so important. As Ken Livingstone put it, 'the leadership of the Labour movement hangs on to all its power and prerogatives so jealously that the concept of actually deferring to some groups outside it is totally alien'; and on this point Sheila Rowbotham adds, 'the Labour Party seems to think that instead of doing what makes sense to the broadest range of people in their own area of interest and expertise, you water things down to their lowest common denominator'.³⁴ The GLC saw that devolving power was a precondition for achieving a fundamental aim of Anderson's 'hegemonic socialist' party: to be 'present at every contradiction and conflict in society, and at every effort at invention and creation'.³⁵ In other words, the GLC had realized the need for a cultural strategy if people's consciousness, rather than just the opinions of voters, is to be changed.

NOTES

- 1 Lord Redcliffe-Maud, *Support for the Arts in England and Wales* (London: Gulbenkian Foundation, 1976), 24-5.
- 2 Report of GLC Recreation and Community Services Policy Committee, 21 June 1977.
- 3 House of Commons Select Committee on Education, Science and the Arts, report on *Public and Private Funding of the Arts* (meeting of 8 March 1982) (London: HMSO, 1982).
- 4 In 1980, this programme consisted of 163 free concerts, mainly by jazz and brass bands. By 1985, it included 269 concerts, featuring steel and calypso bands and annual 'music villages' of ethnic music in Holland Park, organized in co-operation with the Commonwealth Institute. From 1982 on, various symphony orchestras gave lunch-hour concerts at Ford's factories in Dagenham, in London's East End. According to a GLC *Arts Opinion Poll* in 1984, 81 per cent of the people interviewed supported the continuation of the old municipal tradition of concerts in parks, but 71 per cent thought that factory concerts were a bad idea: 'Work is work. You like to get away from work to enjoy yourself.'
- 5 T. Banks, interview with the author, 29 May 1985.
- 6 See F. Ferrara, 'The Feste de l'Unita', in *Formations of Nation and People* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984).
- 7 I. Chambers and L. Curti, 'A volatile alliance: culture, popular culture and the Italian left', in *Formations of Nation and People*, op. cit., 118.
- 8 The account for the GLC's 'awareness campaign', launched in 1984, was handled by an award-winning agency, Boase Massimi Pollitt. According to opinion polls in November 1984, the percentage of people supporting abolition remained about the same (17 per cent) throughout the campaign, while the percentage opposing it rose from 40 per cent to 74 per cent. The campaign avoided overt party political confrontation. Under the slogan 'Say No to No Say', it focused on the right of Londoners to be consulted about the GLC's abolition, which was proposed in the Conservatives' 1983 election manifesto, introduced in the Local Government Bill of 1984, and finally implemented in 1986. The campaign was so successful that a new Local Government Bill in 1985 took up proposals in Lord Widdicombe's report on local authority spending to limit severely local councils' scope for advertising. See K. Myers, *Understains* (London: Comedia, 1986), 109-18.
- 9 A. Tomkins, 'The state and public cultural policies', paper given to the *Cultural Industries and Cultural Policy in London* conference (London: Riverside Studios, 12-13 December 1983), 6.
- 10 See N. Khan, *The Arts Britain Ignores* (London: Commission for Racial Equality, 1976); K. Owusu, *The Struggle for Black Arts in Britain* (London: Comedia, 1986), 50; P. Vir, interview with the author, 21 June 1985.
- 11 See O. Kelly, *Community, Art and the State* (London: Comedia, 1984), esp. 9-38; Labour Party, *The Arts and the People* (London, 1977), 57; A. Tomkins, *Community Arts Revisited*, GLC, 18 October 1982, C/AR4.
- 12 A. Tomkins, interview with the author, 24 March 1986.
- 13 Interviewed by M. Boddy and C. Fudge, *Local Socialism?* (London: Macmillan, 1984), 264.
- 14 Tomkins, *Community Arts Revisited*, 5. Tomkins repeated almost verbatim the words of the editorial in an issue of *Screen Education*, 36 (Autumn 1980), devoted to 'the politics of representation', which he acknowledges as one of the theoretical bases of GLC policy (interview with the author, 24 March 1986).
- 15 Tomkins, *Community Arts Revisited*, 5; GLC, 16 March 1984, C/AR258.

- 16 S. Hall, interview with the author, 8 November 1985.
- 17 *Conference on Ethnic Arts* (London: GLC, 1982), 6.
- 18 In Boddy and Fudge, op. cit., 274.
- 19 In *Campaign for a Popular Culture* (London: GLC, 1986), 57.
- 20 N. Garnham, *Concepts of Culture, Public Policy and the Cultural Industries* (London: GLC, 1983), 1.
- 21 *Cultural Industries Strategy*, GLC, 18 June 1984, IEC1603; emphasis added.
- 22 *The London Industrial Strategy* (London: GLC, 1985), 171.
- 23 *Cultural Industries Strategy*, 3.
- 24 N. Garnham, interview with the author, 10 December 1985.
- 25 G. Mulgan, in *The State of the Art or the Art of the State?* (London: GLC, 1985), 69.
This contains some of the papers presented to the 1983 Riverside conference. Other important studies on single London cultural industries are those published as EPG strategy documents in 1983.
- 26 P. Anderson, 'Problems of socialist strategy', in P. Anderson *et al.*, *Towards Socialism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965), 242.
- 27 S. Hall, interview with the author, 8 November 1985.
- 28 S. Hall, in *Marxism Today* (November 1984), 28.
- 29 C. Landry, D. Morley, R. Southwood and P. Wright, *What a Way to Run a Railroad* (London: Comedia, 1985), 92.
- 30 M. Jacques and B. Campbell, in *Marxism Today* (April 1986), 8.
- 31 In *New Socialist* (April 1986), 31.
- 32 The attitude of the Labour left is particularly important, since it seems likely to obtain for the first time a majority in the Parliamentary Labour Party if the party wins the next general election (see *Guardian*, 8 July 1986). More specifically, Tribune, the Labour 'soft' left parliamentary group, would benefit from an influx of new MPs. The debate on cultural strategy is still marginal within Tribune, but there are encouraging signs of a change of attitudes. John Edmonds, the head of GMBATU (Britain's third largest trade union), wrote in *New Socialist* (June 1986) that 'trade unionism ought to be central to popular culture', while Red Wedge opened a trade union agency and the Labour Co-ordinating Committee recognized, in *Labour and Mass Politics* (1986), that 'music, theatre and play can be as much part of mass politics as speechifying'.
- 33 Anderson, op. cit., 243.
- 34 In *New Socialist* (April 1986), 31 and 32.
- 35 Anderson, op. cit., 245. The party conceptualized by Anderson would, however, probably be more theoretically totalizing and more politically directive than the one I am arguing for here. Rather than elaborating a 'socialist culture' and a 'total theory of man' (Anderson, *ibid.*, 243 and 287), the new prince-party ought, in Nicolini's words, 'to become a vassal' and to recognize that 'there no longer exists the possibility of organic interpretations of society and values. On the contrary, there is a confused, contradictory, uneven plurality of wills, cultural expressions, values... and we must consider it a positive phenomenon' (quoted in Chambers and Curti, op. cit., 119 and 118).