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Social Activism in Glasgow in the 1940s and the 1950s: housing protests
and the limitations of new social movement theory

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Introduction

Over the course of the twentieth century, Britain has witnessed protests by its citizens over many different issues. However, the issue of housing has remained a central issue of contention, particularly in Glasgow and the West of Scotland resulting on several occasions in social protests involving various actors from diverse sections of society. The rent strikes of 1915, which are often regarded as ‘a classic example of working-class struggle outside the sphere of production’, have been well documented.¹ According to sociologist Charlie Johnstone, who wrote extensively on post-World War II housing protests in Scotland, little progress has been made in any further study of housing struggles, particularly post-World War II housing struggles involving tenants’ campaigns.² The last one hundred years have been witness to enormous changes in the quality and quantity of housing provision in Glasgow however, these changes did not evolve by themselves rather, they were influenced by campaigns and protests involving the homeless and tenants’ with the support of workers, trade unions and political groups. In an attempt to enrich our understanding of social protests in the post-World War II years, this dissertation will focus on the squatting movement in Glasgow and the West of Scotland that followed the Second World War; and the protests over the attempted sale of newly built council houses at the Merrylee Estate in Glasgow in the early 1950s by using primary sources such as Glasgow Corporation records, Parliamentary Papers, media

¹ Charlie Johnstone, ‘Early Post-War Housing Struggles in Glasgow’, *Scottish Labour History Society*, Journal No. 28, (1993), p.8

² *Ibid*, p.8

reports and first-hand accounts. In addition, this dissertation will identify within these post World War II movements elements normally associated with New Social Movements (NSM) of the post 1960s era. The anti-Poll Tax campaign of the late 1980s and early 1990s was waged using similar tactics to the 1915 Rent Strikes therefore, this dissertation will attempt to show the importance of these post-World War II housing protests as markers for continuity between the protests of 1915 and the anti-Poll Tax campaign, a campaign that was situated in the post 1960s era. NSM theory has been used to explain forms of action that occurred, in post-industrial countries from the late 1960s and 1970s, outside of the workplace. Taking place at a time when Glasgow was still an industrial city, and prior to the 1960s, the housing protests this dissertation will engage with were, despite support from the labour movement, outside the point of production. By focussing on these protests and engaging with NSM theory, this dissertation will show evidence of the community-based character of social protest in Glasgow in the years following World War II. It also aims to challenge NSM theory by showing the existence of elements considered 'new' in the theory such as self-determination and autonomy, the existence of a diverse range of actors and actions, and direct-action involving protest out with 'traditional politics' within these post-World War II protests.³

Chapter one of this dissertation will begin with an overview of NSM theory based on the work of social scientists such as Steven Buechler, whose journal article gave an overview of the theory and critically discussed the emerging debates; and Nelson Pichardo, who

³ Craig Calhoun, "'New Social Movements' of the Early Nineteenth Century", *Social Science History*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (Autumn, 1993), p. 385

critically analysed the NSM thesis, ultimately finding it flawed as a theory. The assertion by NSM theorists that post 1960 movements represented a fundamentally new kind of social action was challenged in the work of Paul D'Anieri, Claire Ernst and Elizabeth Kier, where they gave examples of similarities in historical movements to those being claimed as 'new' by NSM theorists. Further discussion on NSM theory was assisted by Malcolm Todd and Gary Taylor's work on popular protests and social movements and the work of Gunnar Olofsson and Craig Calhoun who looked at the diversity of movements, both historically and in the years following the late 1960s, which again challenged the 'newness' of NSMs.

Chapter two begins with a historical look at the housing situation in Glasgow and the work of sociologist Sean Damer and historian Irene Maver provided excellent information on both Glasgow's history and the politics of Glasgow Corporation, as did Ewan Gibbs work on historical traditions and memories of the 1915 Rent Strikes within the anti-Poll Tax campaign of the late 1980s. It will go on to focus on the squatting movement following the end of World War II and, in addition to the primary sources used, relies heavily on the work of Don Watson and Charlie Johnstone. Watson's book, *Squatting in Britain 1945-1955*, was an invaluable source of information which was complemented by Johnstone's work which was primarily focussed on Glasgow and the West of Scotland. The main challenge was, as Johnstone states, the lack of available historiography surrounding the housing issues this dissertation engages with therefore, the information available within Glasgow Corporation Housing Committee minutes added to a better understanding of the feelings and actions taken by many of those

involved in both the protests and the state. The first-hand accounts of those involved in the squatting movement and those who had been involved in previous movements such as the 1915 Rent Strikes provided a fascinating insight into the politics of the time and the impact those earlier movements had on later protests.

In chapter three, the discussion on the proposed sale of homes being built for rental at Merrylee in Glasgow relied once again on the work of Charlie Johnstone as there was very little additional historiography available. As before this proved challenging and the minutes of Glasgow Corporation Housing Committee, which were more detailed than those during the squatting movement, and first-hand accounts of activists such as Les Forster and Ned Donaldson, enabled a better understanding of the reaction to the proposal and the actions taken by those involved. The involvement of activists such as Forster, at the time a member of the Communist Party and who had also been involved in the squatting movement illustrates the continuity surrounding housing protests over the years in Glasgow.

As stated previously, the lack of historiography was a challenge as, although the work of Watson was crucial to this dissertation and had considerable information on the situation in Glasgow and the West of Scotland, it was primarily concerned with squatting in Britain as a whole. Johnstone had also written on the squatting movement focussing on Glasgow however, it was difficult to find additional material to compliment his work specific to Glasgow. The minutes for Glasgow Corporation were therefore a valuable

source of information giving more depth to the available historiography as they illustrated the breadth of support for the squatters and the Merrylee protestors, both within the labour movement and across Glasgow society as a whole. Once again, the lack of available historiography surrounding the protests against the sale of the Merrylee houses was complemented by the use of Glasgow Corporation minutes and the first-hand accounts of activists such as Les Forster and Ned Donaldson. Although it is clear there was broad based support for both movements, it was difficult to find photographic material illustrating this. The use of newspaper accounts of the protests helped in backing up this lack of evidence as did the Corporation minutes which showed the diversity of groups supporting both the squatters and the Merrylee protests.

Chapter 1 New Social Movement Theory

According to Steven Buechler, NSM theory emerged from continental European traditions that were rooted in political and social theory with NSM theory being the response to what some saw as the inadequacies of classical Marxism when analysing collective action.¹ Marxists' emphasis on economic and class reductionism saw proletarian revolution as being rooted in the sphere of production thereby marginalising all other forms of social protest.² In contrast to this, NSM theorists addressed other forms of action around politics, ideology and culture as the basis of many forms of collective action looking at different sources to define collective identity such as gender, sexuality and ethnicity.³ Buechler states that NSM theory is 'a critical reaction to classical Marxism', with pre 1960 social movements presumably being replaced by NSMs containing a diversity of collective actions, which has led some NSM theorists to attempt to 'update and revise' their conventional assumptions, while other have sought to 'displace and transcend them'.⁴

NSM theorists explained the rise in collective action that rapidly developed across many advanced industrial nations in the 1960s and early 1970s as products 'of the structural conditions of post-industrial society' with the movements representing fundamentally

¹ Steven M Buechler, 'New Social Movement Theories', *The Sociological Quarterly*, Vol.36, No. 3 (Summer, 1995), p 441

² Ibid, p. 441,442

³ Ibid, p. 442

⁴ Ibid, p.442

new methods of collective action which had, at their core, entirely new values, goals and constituents.⁵ The argument made by NSM theorists is that more recent social movements are representative of completely new forms of social protest, reflecting specific elements of advanced industrial societies which enjoy the 'redistributive properties' of the welfare state as a result of the rapid expansion of the 1950s and 1960s.⁶ According to Gunnar Olofsson, when dealing with relationships between 'new' and 'old' movements, the NSM thesis implies that there is a fading away of the role the labour movement historically played due to them being 'imbricated' in the structures, dilemmas and institutions of the past and with their commitment to the Keynesian style welfare state, economic growth and the norms and ideals of industrialism, they make it difficult for 'new projects' to develop.⁷ They see NSMs as being the natural and obvious descendants of the labour movement as their ideas, goals, and their method of organisation are more in alignment with the 'modern age' while the labour movement is perceived as 'old', with its links to trade unions, political parties and social democracy.⁸

The concept of NSMs emerged with the view that they were movements that worked externally from 'institutional channels' and were emphasising concerns around lifestyle, identity or ethical concerns rather than the traditional economic goals of older movements.⁹ They were regarded as movements, in contrast to the labour movement,

⁵ P D'Anieri, C Ernst, E Keir, 'New Social Movements in Historical Perspective', *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (July, 1990) p.445

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 446

⁷ Gunnar Olofsson, 'After the Working-Class Movement? An Essay on What's 'New' and What's 'Social' in the New Social Movements', *Acta Sociologica*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (1988), pp. 16

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 16

⁹ Calhoun, 'New Social Movements', p. 385

with supposedly new tactics and issues that contrasted with socialism and Marxism which, historically, had class as the primary issue in politics and the belief that ‘a single political economic transfer’ would be the answer to the ills of capitalist society.¹⁰ Calhoun saw NSMs challenging the ‘conventional’ left and right division within politics by broadening political definitions to include concerns out with traditional politics, emphasising claims of ‘epochal change’, with NSMs being seen as signs of postmodern or post-industrial society.¹¹

Todd and Taylor see ‘old’ social movements differing from NSMs in their focus, with ‘old’ movements focussed primarily on economic redistribution and NSMs basing their focus around post-material values and issues of social identity.¹² With their focus on the ‘politics of identity’ NSMs, according to Todd and Taylor, may be undermining ideas around representative democracy possibly contributing to fears of declining political participation however, they also acknowledge that NSMs may in fact allow more opportunities for individuals to engage with ideas about democracy allowing them to participate with others in many different causes.¹³

Buechler, rather than seeing NSM theory as one theory, sees it as having a general approach with variations which tend to follow six themes, the first of which sees most

¹⁰ Calhoun, *New Social Movements*, p. 385

¹¹ Ibid, p. 386

¹² M Todd, and G Taylor, *Democracy and Participation: Popular Protest and New Social Movements*, (London: Merlin, 2004). P. 19

¹³ Ibid, p. 19

theorists underscoring ‘symbolic action in civil society or the cultural sphere’ as being the main stage for ‘collective action alongside instrumental action in the state or political sphere’.¹⁴ Secondly, instead of seeing attempts to maximise power and influence as being most important, theorists acknowledge the importance of processes that promote self-determination and autonomy.¹⁵ Thirdly, less emphasis is put on the role of conflicts over material resources emphasising rather the role post materialist values have on contemporary collective action.¹⁶ Fourthly, the often difficult process of identifying group interests and ‘constructing collective identities’ is problematic to many theorists, instead of them assuming that the interests of conflict groups may be determined structurally such as class position.¹⁷ Fifthly, instead of presuming ideology and grievances can be perceived from the structural location of groups, theorists acknowledge that they can be socially constructed, and finally, rather than assuming that for mobilisation to be successful there has to be central organisation they recognise there may be a diverse range of latent, submerged and temporary networks that are often the base for forms of collective action.¹⁸

Debate however, surrounds whether NSM theorists have considered if or how NSMs differ from ‘old’ movements. Nelson Pichardo heavily criticised the NSM paradigm, seeing many of its theorists’ observations as flawed. Marxist theories, according to Pichardo, ‘tended to marginalise protest that did not stem from the working class’, and he

¹⁴ Buechler, ‘New Social Movement Theories’ p. 442

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 442

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 442

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 442

¹⁸ Ibid, p 442

criticised NSM theory for marginalising social movements that did not emanate from the left, seeing the paradigm being based entirely on ‘observations of left-wing movements’.¹⁹ The flaw in this, for Pichardo, is the failure of NSM theorists to offer any possible rationale as to why those groups affected by fundamental changes in the economic structure of society do not include Christian rights movements, right to life supporters or those supporting the militia.²⁰

Pichardo is not alone in his criticism of the notion of ‘newness’ in relation to whether or not contemporary movements represent a break from past movements. D’Anieri et al go as far as to say that NSM theory has been informed by inaccurate assumptions surrounding the characteristics of ‘old’ social movements finding that supposedly ‘new’ characteristics have ‘historical predecessors’ as shown in their study of ‘old’ movements which, through actions not directed at the state, had sought ‘universal goals’, giving the example of the nineteenth-century temperance movement in the United States.²¹ In addition, they emphasise that not only were all ‘old’ social movements not ‘primarily class based’, their concerns were not always based around economic and materialistic issues.²² Furthermore, they found that values that motivated ‘old’ movements ‘foreshadow’ the concerns of NSMs ‘emphasis on life chances’ with the example of historians of antebellum America stressing similarities between movements of this period and more contemporary movements theorists have based their analysis on with both

¹⁹ Nelson A Pichardo, ‘New Social Movements: A Critical Review’, *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 23 (1997), p. 413

²⁰ Ibid, p. 413

²¹ D’Anieri et al, ‘New Social Movements in Historical Perspective’, p. 454

²² Ibid, p. 454

having a vision of a society fundamentally changed, freer and one that is more just in its treatment of all in society.²³

Todd and Taylor's assertion that 'new' movements were detached from 'identifiable political ideology' with their use of what they term 'unconventional methods of political action' such as marches, civil disobedience and public demonstrations, were evident in the post-World War II housing protest which will be discussed in this dissertation.²⁴

While there was support from trade unions and political organisations, the prime site of the protests remained out with the point of production and the rent strikes of 1915 may have foreshadowed the post-World War II protests with their self-determination, autonomy and diversity of actors that are evident in the later protests.

²³ D'Anieri et al, 'New Social Movements in Historical Perspective', p. 454

²⁴ M Todd, G Taylor, 'Democracy and Participation', p. 19

Chapter 2 The Squatting Movement

This chapter will begin with an historical overview of the housing conditions in Glasgow prior to the emergence of the squatting movement that was to take place in Glasgow and other cities in 1940s Britain. In addition to the historiography, it will use Glasgow Corporation minutes, press reports and first-hand accounts to illustrate the actions taken by those involved in the movement and the reaction to them by the state. By focussing on the action of the squatting movement this dissertation will show the existence of autonomy, self-determination and the willingness to take direct action thereby challenging NSM theory by showing some of the elements considered new within the theory are in fact to be found in movements prior to the 1960s.

Sean Damer states that ‘Glasgow was always a small city for the population it had to house’.¹ Rapid industrialisation saw the population in Glasgow grow at an extraordinary rate throughout the nineteenth century and the need to house large numbers of migrant workers who came to make up much of the working class was to prove a challenge for the constantly expanding city. Subdivision of tenement flats added to overcrowding, which was higher in Glasgow than elsewhere, resulting in many living in some of the most appalling conditions in Britain.² It was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that housing became a political and social issue when the link was made between

¹ Damer, S, *Glasgow: Going for a Song*, (London, Lawrence & Wishart Limited, 1990), p. 72

² Young, R, *Annie's Loo, The Govan Origins of Scotland's Community Based Housing Associations*, (Argyll, Argyll Publishing, 2013), p.23

poor health and overcrowded, unhygienic, poor quality housing.³ The provision of housing for the working class of Glasgow was, by 1890, largely provided by speculative builders and private landlords and this laissez-faire approach saw old or obsolete homes being filtered down, mainly for use by the poorest in society.⁴ It was not until 1885 with the introduction of the Housing of the Working Classes Act that local authorities were able to borrow money from the Exchequer to build houses.⁵

The Report of the Royal Commission on Housing in Scotland of 1917 painted a grim picture of the housing conditions in Scotland acknowledging that:

of the many social problems which, after the War, will demand treatment and solution, none is more pressing or more vital, in the interests of the welfare not only of the individual but also for the nation, than the housing problem.⁶

Within the report there were descriptions of the dire conditions many in Glasgow were forced to live in. Witness reports of a close in a street of high tenements in the Anderston area of Glasgow described conditions including ‘stairs down to these houses’ being ‘almost invariably dark and dirty, the passages pitch dark on the brightest day, so that only by feeling along the walls can one discover the doors’, or, stairs with ‘sickly cats

³ Young, ‘Annie’s Loo’, p. 23

⁴ Miles Horsey, ‘Tenements & Towers, Glasgow Working Class Housing 1890-1990’, *Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland*, (Edinburgh, 1990), p. 2

⁵ Raymond Young, ‘Annie’s Loo, The Govan Origins of Scotland’s Community Based Housing Associations’, (Argyll, Argyll Publishing, 2013), p. 26

⁶ Sir Henry Ballantyne, Simon Joseph Fraser Lovat 14th Baron, ‘Report of the Royal Commission on the Housing of the Industrial Population of Scotland’, *Royal Commission on Housing in Scotland*, (Edinburgh Stationary Office, 1917),

https://archive.org/stream/reportofroyalcom00scotrich/reportofroyalcom00scotrich_djvu.txt, p. 28

everywhere spreading disease...One street is known as “The Coffin Close”, so bad is its repute...with no light and absolutely no air’.⁷

Hugh Savage, an activist and Communist Party member, described similar appalling conditions in his memoir *Born up a Close*. Savage was raised in Bridgton, or Brigton, in Glasgow’s East End and he commented that, ‘in a tenement close like the one our family stayed in...probably twenty-two people including children used that one bog’.⁸ He went on to graphically describe the conditions for many women living in the tenements:

outside the ground floor windows and at the mouth of most of the closes groups of women would congregate. None of them wore coats, they all wore shawls of various colours and sizes. In most cases they were carrying weans. You could look along the whole of Bernard Street and never see a pram. The women carried their children everywhere in a shawl. They just had to get out of the houses. No wireless, no washing-up facilities, except the kitchen sink, no furniture other than several beds, a coal bunker and a large kitchen table where the whole family dined. There was hardly a place to sit and being lit by gas the atmosphere was always very stuffy.⁹

Savage also spoke of the ‘horrific’ death rate involved in childbirth with most babies being born at home however, he thought the death rate would have been much higher if not for the work of the local midwife who ‘has never received a mention in all the records

⁷ Sir Henry Ballantyne, Simon Joseph Fraser Lovat 14th Baron, ‘Report of the Royal Commission on the Housing of the Industrial Population of Scotland’, p. 28

⁸ Hugh Savage, *Born up a Close, Memoirs of a Brigton Boy*, (Scotland, Argyll Publishing, 2006), p. 92

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 92

of Brighton' as far as he knew, crediting Nurse Mulholland as having delivered thousands of babies.¹⁰ Despite the squalor, hardship and poverty it is clear there was a real sense of community and the living conditions experienced saw the emergence of activists, such as Savage and those who will be discussed further in this dissertation. Formative experiences, shared among their peers, created a sense of identity and a 'strengthening of bonds', particularly experiences from their youth, and the living conditions and poverty of the early years of the twentieth century helped influence the protest movements of the 1940s and 1950s providing evidence of elements of NSM theory in the pre-1960 movements such as the mobilisation of the community out with the sphere of production and a diversity of actors from different sections of society.¹¹

Although local authorities had the power to borrow money to build homes from 1885, at the beginning of the twentieth century, almost 70 percent of Glasgow's homes still housed over sixty percent of its population in properties of no more than two rooms, all of them privately let.¹² A quarter of the population were living in homes with one room, commonly known as single-ends, while lodgers were boarding in one in seven households by 1900.¹³ The overcrowding issue was addressed in the afore mentioned report with examples such as:

¹⁰ Savage, *'Born up a Close'*, p. 93

¹¹ J Phillips, 'Economic Direction and Generational Change in Twentieth-Century Britain: The Case of the Scottish Coalfields', *English Historical Review* Vol. 132 No. 557, (Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 892

¹² Sean Damer, *'From Moorepark to "Wine Alley"'*, (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1989). P. 69

¹³ Housetalk Group, *'Miles Better, Miles to Go, Looking Backward in The Story of Glasgow's Housing Associations'*, (Glasgow, Dave Barr Print, 1985). P.4

a two-apartment house with eleven persons in it, five of whom were males over ten years old and three females over ten...In other two-apartment houses there were eight and a half persons (two males and four females over ten); eleven persons (six males and four females over ten); nine persons (four males and three females over ten),

which contributed to the state's recognition that they would need to 'assume some direct measure of financial responsibility for the housing of the working classes' with the implementation of the 1919 Housing and Town Planning Act.¹⁴ According to the Report by the Scottish Housing Advisory Committee on the Design, Planning and Furnishing of New Homes of 1948, this 'resulted in a substantial improvement in the general level of housing conditions'.¹⁵ This assertion however, must surely be called in to question with housing conditions in Glasgow towards the end of the Second World War being so dire many were forced to illegally occupy property in a desperate need to find some form of accommodation that would be an improvement on where they were living.

In the period before and during the First World War landlord practices, such as frequently demanding annual rents, warrant sales if tenants defaulted on their rent and, as was seen in the case of miners in Lanarkshire who went on strike, eviction from tied cottages, all culminated in the working class of Glasgow taking to the streets over housing issues.¹⁶

¹⁴ Sir Henry Ballantyne, Simon Joseph Fraser Lovat 14th Baron, *Report of the Royal Commission on the Housing of the Industrial Population of Scotland*, report 5, p. 28

¹⁵ His Majesty's Stationary Office, *Planning our New Homes: Report by the Scottish Housing Advisory Committee on the Design, Planning and Furnishing of New Homes*, (Edinburgh: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1948), p. 10

¹⁶ Damer, *From Moorpark to Wine Alley*, p. 70-73

According to McIvor and Kenefick, increased awareness of class divisions due to industrial unrest and the associated growth of the trade union movement and socialist media saw a shift by political organisations to the left.¹⁷ Harry McShane, a socialist and at one point editor of the *Daily Worker*, the newspaper of the Communist Party, was involved in anti-war protests during the First World War and tells in his life story, *No Mean Fighter*, of how, before the First World War there were empty houses in Glasgow which began to fill as workers were 'drafted into the workshops and shipyards for war production'.¹⁸ Landlords began to increase rentals as all the unoccupied houses started to fill up evicting older tenants who could not pay the increased rents with the hardest hit being the elderly, unemployed and wives of soldiers often engaged in the ongoing war.¹⁹ This class struggle between tenants and landlords, at a time when many of the men in Glasgow were involved in the war effort, resulted in rent strikes which, according to Damer, had as their most prominent feature a 'mass organised character'.²⁰ The Rent Strikes did not only precipitate the 1915 Rent and Mortgage Interest Restrictions Act, they also highlighted the urgency that something had to be done by the state to accommodate soldiers returning from war.²¹ The struggles around housing in the early years of the twentieth century, for activists like McShane, would not only go on to influence their actions in the later protests such as the squatting movement and the attempted sale by Glasgow Corporation of houses being built for rental at Merrylee in Glasgow, which will be discussed in the following chapter, they also influenced the

¹⁷ William Kenefick, Arthur McIvor, *'Roots of Red Clydeside 1910-1914? Labour Unrest and Industrial Relations in West Scotland'*, (Edinburgh, John Donald Publishers Ltd, 1996). P. 13-14

¹⁸ Harry McShane, Joan Smith, *'No Mean Fighter'*, (London, Pluto Press, 1978), p. 74

¹⁹ McShane, p. 74

²⁰ Damer, S, *From Moorpark to Wine Alley*, p. 73

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 73

actions of activists who were involved in the anti-poll tax campaign of non-payment in the late 1980s.

The community charge, or poll tax as it became to be known, was implemented in Scotland in 1989 by Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government a year before its implementation in England, proving to be unpopular from its inception.²² Ewan Gibbs has stated that the mass non-payment campaign, in relation to the numbers of people involved, was the most significant 'act of civil disobedience' recently witnessed in Scotland's history and, as in the Rent Strikes of 1915 and the post-World War II housing protests discussed in this dissertation, central to the campaign was the presence of women and, 'a moral economy view of housing' which he saw originating from the failure of the Clydeside housing market in the early years of the Twentieth Century.²³ According to sociologist Paul Bagguley, opposition to the poll tax amongst British households was around seventy two percent in April 1990 with demonstrations and non-payment being the most 'overt' method used by activists opposed to the tax.²⁴ Bagguley also saw the anti-poll tax campaign drawing from the 'moral economy' with its combination of 'materialist issues with non-materialist moral questions'.²⁵ Although, according to academic Jon Tonge, the main organised element of the campaign was in the form of the All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation (ABAPTF), the majority of those who refused to

²² Ewan Gibbs, 'Historical Tradition and Community Mobilisation: Narratives of Red Clydeside in Memories of the Anti-Poll Tax Movement in Scotland, 1988-1990', *Labour History*, p. 441

²³ Gibbs, E, p. 441

²⁴ Paul Bagulley, 'Protest, Poverty and Power: A Case Study of the Anti-Poll Tax Movement' *The Sociological Review*, Vol. 43, Issue 4, (11/1995), p. 694

²⁵ Bagguley, p. 716

pay the charge had very little contact with the ABAPTF with half being unaware of their existence yet, in Scotland, the average non-payment rate in the first two years of the charge averaged at around eighteen percent.²⁶ Gibbs saw the activists involved in the 1915 Rent Strikes as having an understanding of their right to housing, out with the concerns of the market, with their actions illustrative of their 'moral standpoint'.²⁷ The anti-Poll Tax campaign of the late 1980s with its 'strong historical continuity' with the Rent Strikes of 1915 and its tactics of non-payment and mobilisation of activists from different sectors of society, such as women and the unemployed, appealed to the traditions of the 'older' campaigns.²⁸ Coming as it did in a de-industrialised Scotland, the anti-Poll Tax campaign fits with elements considered 'new' in NSM theory with its diversity of activists based mainly in local communities rather than the workplace and the favouring of direct action. NSM theorists believe that the rise in different forms of collective action stemmed from changes to the structure of society in advanced industrial nations sees them describing social movements, from the late 1960s onwards, as exhibiting entirely new forms of protest. The anti-poll tax campaign would seem to fit NSM theory with its tactics of marches, demonstrations, civil disobedience, and autonomy however, with its appeal to the traditions of older movements and its 'strong historical continuity' what NSM theorists consider 'new' is clearly evident in Glasgow's housing protests in the years prior to the 1960s.

²⁶ Jon Tonge, 'The Anti-Poll Tax Movement: A Pressure Movement', *Politics*, Vol. 14, No. 2, p. 94

²⁷ Gibbs, 'Historical Traditions and Community Mobilisation', p. 442

²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 441

Glasgow did not suffer bomb damage during the Second World War to the same extent that its close neighbour Clydebank or indeed other cities in Britain did however, this did not mean Glasgow was in a better position than other cities and with overcrowding still evident, it was estimated 100,000 homes would need to be built to alleviate the problem.²⁹ The housing conditions many were living under remained poor despite attempts at improving the housing stock during the inter-war years.³⁰ As early as 1933 the Ministry of Health had acknowledged that a programme was needed to clear slums in cities across the country stating ‘the programme should, so far as practicable, be drawn on the basis of clearing all areas that require clearance not later than 1938’.³¹ It was also becoming clear to the Ministry of Health in 1933 that the theory of ‘filtering’ in housing, whereby the building of property for those on higher incomes would see those with lower incomes moving in to the houses they vacated was not working when they reported that ‘experience has shown that the reliance for a solution cannot be placed upon indirect influences such as ‘filtering up’ into new accommodation’.³² The authorities, according to Eric Midwinter, had not only overestimated how many casualties the war would inflict, they had underestimated the number of properties to be demolished which, together with the increase in marriages and the rise in population associated with the post-war baby boom, all added to the pressure surrounding the post-war housing problem.³³

²⁹ Charlie Johnstone, ‘Housing and Class Struggles in Post-War Glasgow’, in *Class Struggle and Social Welfare*, ed. by Michael Lavalette and Gerry Mooney, (London, Routledge, 2000), p. 140

³⁰ Young, *Annie’s Loo*, p. 36

³¹ Ministry of Health, Cabinet: *Housing Act, 1930, Part 1, Circular 1331*, April 1933, <http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/small/cab-24-239-CP-87-5.pdf>, 09/01/2019

³² Ministry of Health, 09/01/2019

³³ Eric Midwinter, *The Development of Social Welfare in Britain*, (Buckingham, Open University Press, 1994), p. 101

Irene Maver states that post-World War Two reconstruction policies stressed more profoundly the necessity ‘for the fundamental re-planning of Scotland’ if improved housing was to be provided.³⁴ However, as a result of the war many of the country’s skilled building workers had joined the armed forces, with much of the remainder involved in government work, meaning measures to deal with overcrowding and clearance of slums had been drastically reduced.³⁵ This meant that for the working class in Glasgow, hopes of a raised standard of living after the war years were dashed and as their frustration turned to anger they began to organise themselves and engage in direct action to ‘alleviate their housing situation’.³⁶ As discussed previously, housing problems in Glasgow have been evident since the nineteenth century and although much literature exists surrounding the Rent Strikes of 1915, post-World War II housing struggles have tended to attract less attention from historians. According to Johnstone:

a long line of historians, alongside the parvenu of “housing experts”, who regard the development of housing policy as part of a legislative and administrative process somehow separate from the broader social and economic struggles which inevitably take place within class divided societies,

³⁴ Irene Maver, *Glasgow*, (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p. 261

³⁵ Don Watson, *Squatting in Britain, 1945-1955, Housing, Politics and Direct Action*, (London, The Merlin Press, 2016), p. 31

³⁶ Johnstone, *Housing and Class Struggle*, p. 142

often ignoring the influence working class people had on government social policy implementation through their campaigns, protests and demands; actions that were community based, multi-generational and well organised in character.³⁷

The new Labour government in 1945 received its first major challenge when direct action by ex-servicemen and working-class men and women, often with the support of the Communist Party, saw many of them taking over empty properties and disused former army camps up and down the country.³⁸ Defence Regulations that had been introduced at the start of the war allowed for temporary requisitioning of property for use by the armed forces and this was extended to allow local authorities the power to house essential war workers, evacuees and those who had lost their homes as a result of bombing raids.³⁹ In Scotland, local authorities had the power from 1943 to select tenants for requisitioned properties and charge rents that would normally have been expected to be paid, an initiative that, according to Watson, led to many people requesting houses at their local corporation office.⁴⁰ Despite this, the situation in 1945 remained dire for many and the lack of decent affordable housing remained one of the major issues for the working classes of Glasgow and many other cities in Britain. By organising into Defence Committees and through extra parliamentary activity and planning, many people who were living in overcrowded homes or indeed homeless, began occupying empty properties such as mansions, hotels and former warder's quarters and by late 1946

³⁷ Johnstone, *'Housing and Class Struggles'*, p 140

³⁸ Watson, D, *'Squatting in Britain 1945-1955'*, p. 1

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 37

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 37,38

squatting in Glasgow had become an integral part of the struggle among the working class for housing that was affordable and of decent quality.⁴¹

The Glasgow Herald reported on 28th August 1946 of numerous incidences of homeless people taking over empty homes and unoccupied buildings reporting that:

Officials of Parkhead Communist Party last night led 15 families into a large unoccupied building known as Parkhead House...all the families are homeless and are from the Parkhead district. They are accommodated on all three floors of the building. Running water is available but lighting has been cut off.⁴²

(Glasgow Herald, 28 August 1946)

It was reported that people were 'clamouring' to gain access to the building which still had two large halls unoccupied however, Communist Party officials refused any further entry while two policemen were reported to have been standing guard inside the doors as squatters entered the building with their belongings for moving in to their new accommodation.⁴³ There was also a report of forty-nine families, made up of 200 people, living in a former anti-aircraft camp at Bishopbriggs on the outskirts of Glasgow who had formed a committee to:

⁴¹ Johnstone, *'Housing and Class Struggles'* p. 142,143

⁴² *The Glasgow Herald*, Squatters Seize Glasgow Buildings, 28th August 1946, p. 5, 08/01/2019

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 5, 08/01/2019

collect 6s per week from each tenant to meet rent, fuel and electricity charges.

One shilling is to go to the executive committee account for payment of overhead charges and expenses already incurred.⁴⁴

(Glasgow Herald, 28 August 1946)

The grim conditions many had to live in is evidenced in the quality of the accommodation they were willing to squat in yet, rather than wanting something for nothing, the report in the Glasgow Herald shows the willingness of the protestors to pay their own way, they merely wanted a decent home for themselves and their families. The same report told of families requisitioning for their own use three boarded up tenements in Maryhill in Glasgow. Disused for around ten years, they chalked their names on doors before 'getting down to the task of ridding the houses of dust and decay', none of these houses had any 'lighting or sanitary conveniences' with one being the 'nesting place for years of hundreds of pigeons which were breeding in its nooks and crannies when the squatters took over'.⁴⁵ By taking matters into their own hands the squatters illustrated their self-determination and autonomy, elements NSM theorist see as 'new' however, the direct action of the squatters highlights the existence of what they term 'new' in the squatting movement of the mid-1940s.

On the same day, at a meeting held by Glasgow Corporation Housing Department, three separate requests to have deputations heard were refused. The Communist Party wanted a

⁴⁴ *The Glasgow Herald*, Squatters Seize Glasgow Buildings, 28th August 1946, p. 5, 08/01/2019

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 5, 08/01/2019

deputation to ‘discuss proposals regarding the position of squatters in the city’, a letter submitted by ‘Mr Robert Saunders, on behalf of twenty-four families squatting in the disused warder’s accommodation attached to Barlinnie Prison, asking for a deputation’, and a similar request from the squatters occupying camps at Blackhall and Parkhouse were all denied.⁴⁶ However, at the same meeting an invitation from the Queen’s Theatre in Glasgow was received for the opening night of their play, *The Gorbals Story*, which dealt with Glasgow’s housing problems, was accepted.⁴⁷ A story, according to Damer, that ‘said more about middle-class guilt than the reality of life in the Gorbals’.⁴⁸ Peter McIntyre, a former member of the Communist Party and an ally of the revolutionary socialist John McLean during the Red Clydeside years, was heavily involved in the squatting movement having arranged for seventeen families from Maryhill, who were living in properties that had been condemned, to be moved to a mansion with thirty rooms in the prosperous Kelvindale Road in Glasgow.⁴⁹ McIntyre was invited to speak at the play by one of the actresses on the opening night and delivered, what Don Watson describes as ‘an impassioned prologue’, on the housing conditions in Glasgow to the audience which included the Lord Provost and ‘many other squirming dignitaries’.⁵⁰ McIntyre, who would, in 1946, be elected as an independent councillor on Glasgow Corporation, was known locally as ‘the cloth capped king of Govan’ and had been one of the original founding members of The Scottish Workers Republican Party with John MacLean, a fore runner to the Scottish National Party.⁵¹ Watson is of the opinion

⁴⁶ Glasgow Corporation Minutes, 28/8/1946

⁴⁷ Glasgow Corporation Minutes, 28/8/1946

⁴⁸ Damer, S, *Glasgow: Going for a Song*, (London, Lawrence & Wishart Limited, 1990), p. 192

⁴⁹ Watson, *Squatting in Britain*, p. 68

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 93

⁵¹ Rootschat.com, <https://www.rootschat.com/forum/index.php?topic=469130.0>, 08/01/2019

McIntyre's distance from the Communist Party and the fact he had 'no political axe to grind', just the need 'to get people homes', may have contributed to his election as an independent, reflecting the support he had from within his community.⁵² Although there is very little information available on McIntyre, an entry in the Corporation minutes on 30th September 1948 shows his continuing support for the movement. Deputation requests that had been received by the Corporation were again refused and an amendment by McIntyre that they be heard was defeated and, although the records do not describe the action he took, whatever it was resulted in him being suspended due to his 'having disregarded the authority of the chairman' and he was 'retired from the meeting'.⁵³

In defence of the squatters, at a Glasgow Corporation meeting held on 20th September 1946, the Anniesland Branch of the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers submitted a resolution 'expressing full sympathy with the plight of the homeless people now squatting in empty property in Glasgow' and requested that the Corporation 'take steps to protect all families in non-corporation property and to requisition all empty houses and shops in the city for the purpose of providing accommodation for families presently inadequately housed'.⁵⁴ The housing committee declined to take any action with regards, 'the portion of the resolution relative to squatting', a reaction that was reflected in wider government attitudes to the squatting movement that was taking place in many other parts of the country.⁵⁵

⁵² Watson, *'Squatting in Britain'*, p. 96

⁵³ Glasgow Corporation Minutes, 30/09/1948

⁵⁴ Glasgow Corporation Minutes, 20/09/1946

⁵⁵ Glasgow Corporation Minutes, 20/09/1946

Just under three weeks later, the Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers of Great Britain and Ireland submitted a resolution which was read at the Corporation meeting of 9th October 1946 ‘urging the corporation to supply the necessary amenities to the squatters who were occupying premises in the city, and to make full use of their powers for the taking over of all unoccupied premises to relieve the housing shortage’.⁵⁶ Other than stating that the corporation were using their requisitioning powers to the full, it was agreed no other action would be taken with regards the squatters.⁵⁷ Further, at the same meeting a letter was read from the Homeless Defence Committee asking for a deputation to be received, this was refused on the grounds that, to be considered for a deputation they would need to apply stating ‘the nature of the business which the deputation wished to discuss’.⁵⁸ With the ongoing squatting in Glasgow and the crisis in housing provision, it would not be difficult to work out what they may have been wanting to discuss however, despite the support from a broad section of the labour movement, Glasgow Corporation was, by this time, beginning to take legal action to attempt to solve the issue.

Unlike England, Scotland has laws against trespassing dating back to 1856 when The Trespass Scotland Act was enforced to stop rural crofters occupying land during the Highland Clearances.⁵⁹ Early morning raids were carried out in the middle of September

⁵⁶ Glasgow Corporation Minutes, 09/10/1946

⁵⁷ Glasgow Corporation Minutes, 09/10/1946

⁵⁸ Glasgow Corporation Minutes, 09/10/1946

⁵⁹ Watson, ‘*Squatting in Britain*’, p. 33

1946 resulting in the first arrests for squatting in Glasgow with the squatters being charged under the 1856 law, while electricity and gas supplies were disconnected in an attempt to force the squatters to leave the occupied properties.⁶⁰ Around 7,000 people in Scotland were occupying disused army camps by the October however, the occupation of ‘public’ property seemed to be less of a threat to existing laws as the occupation of ‘private’ property was.⁶¹ According to Johnstone, when the squatters began to move into ‘privately-owned property the state, and its agents, used all of the power at their disposal to support those landlords whose interests were threatened’.⁶² Glasgow Corporation began taking action to evict squatters who were occupying their properties, and legal action was threatened against squatters living in private properties such as hotels, empty mansions, and the previously mentioned Kelvindale property being occupied under the leadership of Peter McIntyre.⁶³ Around the same time Duchess of Bedford House in the Kensington area of London, an apartment block that had been requisitioned during the war and had been offered to and turned down by Kensington Borough Council for temporary housing, was occupied by squatters.⁶⁴ There were so many people trying to occupy the building they began to spill over into nearby empty properties with some 1,500 people involved in what Watson described as ‘the largest single episode of direct action that year’.⁶⁵ As in Glasgow, the Communist Party were often seen as the driving force during the occupations, an impression reflected in an article in *The Spectator* on 20th September 1946 in which they commented:

⁶⁰ Johnstone, ‘*Housing and Class Struggles*’, p. 144

⁶¹ Ibid, p. 144

⁶² Ibid, p. 145

⁶³ Watson, ‘*Squatting in Britain*’, p. 102

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 103

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 104

it was when the mass occupation of London flats, carefully organised by the Communists, began a fortnight ago that it became clear that squatting had ceased to be an understandable demonstration of impatience with official shortcomings and become a menace.

(The Spectator, 20th September 1946)

Despite a small note in the article acknowledging that the majority of the squatting was ‘not Communist organised’, *The Spectator* saw squatting as not ‘merely a product of the silly season’ but, with its organisation of ‘mass violation of property’, they considered the Communists Party to be where ‘the greatest threat resides’.⁶⁶ In doing so they were overlooking the agency of the many thousands of people up and down Britain, from many different backgrounds, generations and communities, who took their own decision to engage in direct action in an effort to remedy the situation they found themselves. Action, that for advocates of NSM theory was not in evidence prior to the 1960s with its mass organised character out with the sphere of production.

In 1946 the country was being governed by its first ‘majority Labour government’ and the actions it was taking against the squatting movement made it clear to those involved that rather than fighting for the interests of the working class they were in fact defending the interests of landlords and private property owners.⁶⁷ In addition to the governments concerns surrounding the squatting movement, they also shared concerns over the

⁶⁶ *The Spectator*, Implications of Squatting, Vol, 177, Issue, 6169, No. 279, 20 September 1946, <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.gla.ac.uk/docview/1295632113?accountid=> , 02/01/2019

⁶⁷ Johnstone, ‘*Housing and Class Struggles*’, p. 145

involvement of members of the Communist Party in the movement with them often being involved when private property was taken over by squatters.⁶⁸ Watson saw ‘militant, or more accurately desperate action’ as being more prevalent in Scotland, most likely due to the exceptionally poor housing conditions and the higher levels of overcrowding found in cities such as Glasgow.⁶⁹ Harry McShane described the Gorbals area of Glasgow as ‘dark and miserable, and poverty is evident at every turn. It is questionable if there is another district in the whole of Britain with so much squalor and misery as exists in Gorbals’.⁷⁰ High rates of tuberculosis and appalling sanitary conditions together with a lack of grass, trees or facilities for recreation made for living conditions far different from those enjoyed by the ‘aristocracy’ stated McShane.⁷¹

Writing in 1946, McShane accused Glasgow Corporation of being slow to react to the decaying housing conditions in the Gorbals area, an area with houses over one hundred years old, often with seven families sharing an outside lavatory.⁷² His disgust for the actions of Glasgow Corporation is evident in his talk of their ‘indifference’ to the plight of the ‘many victims of the housing shortage’ who, due to their desperate situation, had ‘taken over old shops and endeavoured to convert them into housing accommodation’, while Corporation owned property of ‘exceptionally good quality at the top of Hope Street’, and houses in the Trongate and Gallowgate areas of Glasgow had been leased,

⁶⁸ Johnstone, *‘Housing and Class Struggles’*, p. 145

⁶⁹ Watson, *‘Squatting in Britain’*, p.33

⁷⁰ Robert Duncan, Arthur McIvor, *‘Militant Workers Labour and Class Conflict on the Clyde’, 1900-1950*, (Edinburgh, John Donald Publishers Ltd, 1992), p. 39

⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 40

⁷² *Ibid*, p. 44-45

long term, to furniture firms to use for storage.⁷³ He was also highly critical of the Corporation Housing Committee's record of house building in the period before the Second World War and argued that they could have built thirty thousand more houses than they did in the inter-war period, continuing to resist 'every proposal to speed up house building'.⁷⁴ The indifference McShane referred to was perfectly illustrated at a Corporation meeting held on 4th October 1946 when an application was submitted on behalf of 'Knightswood Ex-Warders Association' asking for permission 'to use for club purposes an A.R.P. shelter built on ground belonging to the Corporation'.⁷⁵ This request was granted and permission given to use it 'on a month to month basis' whilst at the same meeting the sub-committee agreed to 'expediting the vacation and removal' of squatters occupying army huts near Crookston Castle, a clear signal the Corporation were not willing to listen to those who took the decision to engage in direct action out with formal political channels.⁷⁶

Prior to 1933 Glasgow Corporation had been run by the 'Moderates', a group, according to Maver, made up of 'a loose and often uneasy blend of Unionists, Liberals and non-aligned' who were vocal in their deprecation of the 'intrusion of party politics' in municipal affairs, preferring instead to rely on pressure groups to put their message across.⁷⁷ In contrast to the Labour Party's parliamentary success, a combination of more restrictive criteria for local elections and the requirements for owner occupancy in

⁷³ Duncan, McIvor, *'Militant Workers'*, p. 45

⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 45

⁷⁵ Glasgow Corporation Minutes, 04/10/1946

⁷⁶ Glasgow Corporation Minutes, 04/10/1946

⁷⁷ Maver, *'Glasgow'*, p. 235

obtaining voting rights, which excluded those defined as ‘lodgers’, resulted in slower progress for Labour at the local level.⁷⁸ Success was finally achieved by Labour at the 1933 municipal elections however, accusations of corruption surrounding the building of houses and their allocation, which had been around long before 1933, persisted and intensified under the Labour controlled Corporation which may have gone some way to explain the indifference felt by activists such as McShane.⁷⁹

McShane was distrustful of members of the Labour Corporation such as Patrick Dollan whom he described in his book as ‘unscrupulous and ambitious’.⁸⁰ Dollan, who had also been an activist during the Rent Strikes of 1915 and imprisoned in 1916 by the coalition government in their attempts to quell the growing anti-war movement, would later go on to become Lord Provost in Glasgow.⁸¹ There were, according to Daniel Carrigan in his thesis on Dollan, feelings that he had had a negative effect on the events surrounding Red Clydeside with the revolution failing to materialise however, this view is disputed in Carrigan’s thesis.⁸² Dollan, Carrigan asserts, was of the opinion that the best interests of the working class in Glasgow did not lie with finding a commonality with the Communists but rather with the gradual reforming of capitalism, which may help explain the foundations of the animosity and distrust felt between McShane and Dollan.⁸³ In his farewell letter as Lord Provost, Dollan stated that under John Wheatley, a former Red

⁷⁸ Maver, ‘*Glasgow*’, p. 235

⁷⁹ Damer, ‘*Glasgow: Going for a Song*’, p. 171

⁸⁰ McShane, ‘*No Mean Fighter*’, p. 110

⁸¹ James Kelman, J, in Hugh Savage, ‘*Born up a Close, Memoirs of a Brighton Boy*’, p. 26

⁸² Daniel Carrigan OBE, ‘*Patrick Dollan (1885-1963) and the Labour Movement in Glasgow*’, p.27, <http://theses.gla.ac.uk/5640/1/2014CarriganMPhil.pdf>

⁸³ *Ibid*, p. 167

Clydesider and predecessor of Dollan for the seat at Shettleston, that he was ‘happy to have helped under his leadership in the building of 60,000 houses and thereby provided decent accommodation for 240,000 members of the working class’ and hoped that:

members of the Corporation, when the war is over, and if possible during its progress, will get on with housing and take advantage of all who can help in the building of new homes for the people. It will not be easy to accommodate service men when they return with theories. They will come back conscious they have been fighting for their country and properly demand their inheritance.⁸⁴

The Communist party were at the forefront of action in support of the squatters throughout the country helping them in their occupation of empty properties yet, there was clearly a grass roots movement amongst the people themselves in their willingness to take desperate action by taking over private or government owned property for their own use. Many of the squatters were the ex-servicemen Dollan spoke of and, ironically, were in fact used to living in the now disused army huts many of them were squatting in.⁸⁵ They were also, according to Watson, ‘used to taking risks’ after their service in the armed forces during the war and this experience may have led them to an appreciation of ‘the value of decisive action in the right circumstances’.⁸⁶ Life in the camps was not the unfamiliar experience one might have thought and wartime experiences of living in this type of environment may have helped in the running of the camps and establishing

⁸⁴ Parkhead History, *The History of Parkhead, Glasgow, and the Surrounding Area*, <http://parkheadhistory.com/eastern-standard/eastern-standard-1940s/sir-patrick-dollan/>, 13/12/2018

⁸⁵ Watson, ‘*Squatting in Britain*’, p. 58

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p. 58

routines which would have been essential if there was to be any chance of a successful outcome for the squatters.⁸⁷

One view of the government was that squatters should not be charged rent as, not only would this result in legal responsibility on them as landlords for the poor conditions prevailing in many of the camps, they also feared it might incentivise the squatting movement and prove an attraction for ‘the more undesirable section of the community’.⁸⁸ Coming as it did in the early years of the welfare state people had high hopes of a better future which, for many, included a decent home and as this was not materialising, it was not simply the case that those resorting to squatting were ‘undesirable’ rather, squatting was the only option left to them, resulting in around 1,500 families squatting in Glasgow by August 1946.⁸⁹ There were also accusations that the action of the squatters was endangering post-war reconstruction plans as they were living in accommodation needed for those involved in house building and by taking direct action and occupying the camps, local authorities were being forced to abandon their policy of allocating homes on the basis of need.⁹⁰ The failure of the Labour government to adequately supply housing for the needs of the country saw the media and opposition speakers accuse ‘the Socialists’ of ‘broken promises’ while some in the Labour Party took a more defensive tone such as Jean Mann, the MP for Clydeside, who referred to the squatters as ‘queue jumpers’,

⁸⁷ Watson, *‘Squatting in Britain’*, p. 58

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, p. 79

⁸⁹ Johnstone, *‘Housing and Class Struggles’*, p. 143

⁹⁰ Watson, *‘Squatting in Britain’*, p. 80

making their own decisions on who is in greatest need which, rather than aiding the situation, in fact did 'nothing to help the housing problem'.⁹¹

Although the Communist Party were heavily involved in the movement, women were also seen to take the initiative when it came to finding accommodation for themselves and their families. Watson describes a squatter from Maryhill in Glasgow who had been living with her children for four years in a single room without any heating or running water and had made the decision to squat just outside Glasgow at the Patterton Camp.⁹² Like many of those who took the decision to squat, this mother's self-determination saw her take direct action to alleviate her and her families living conditions. The Patterton Camp was discussed on 19th September 1946 by Glasgow Corporation when a letter was read from the Department of Health for Scotland in which they intimated:

that the department was prepared to provide housing accommodation in the huttled camp at Patterton for twelve families of squatters in condemned property at 66 Shamrock Street provided the Corporation were willing to undertake the management of the camp,

after discussion however, it was 'agreed that the suggestion that the corporation undertake the management of the camp be not entertained'.⁹³ Sixty families who had been living in sub-let tenements had also taken over a camp in Darnley near Glasgow with one woman commenting that her hut was 'better than a miserable single room in

⁹¹ Watson, *'Squatting in Britain'*, p. 81

⁹² Ibid, p. 59

⁹³ Glasgow Corporation Minutes, 19/09/1946

Warwick Street with an oil lamp, for which we were paying 12s a week'.⁹⁴ Although the occupations may appear to have been spontaneous Watson saw them as a 'product of observation, planning and discussion by local people', giving the example of women in Maryhill who organised street meetings which resulted in their husbands looking for 'likely prospects' around their district, which in the case of Maryhill meant 'boarded-up tenements'.⁹⁵ Watson also talks of young men from Maryhill and Govan, vaulting over 'barbed wire entanglements' in an effort to gain access to the Patterton Camp, and at a camp near Balloch, squatters 'simply' walking in, ignoring the guard on duty.⁹⁶ These actions clearly show the diversity of those involved in the movement with different political groups, generations and genders all coming together to take direct action to improve their living conditions showing clearly the community-based character the movement possessed.

Despite the actions of those involved in the squatting movement, the refusal of Glasgow Corporation to work with the squatters in their bid to secure reasonable accommodation for themselves and their families reveals, according to Watson, the issue of 'Labourism'.⁹⁷ With the belief within the Labour movement that the only way to achieve social change was through the existing political framework, the mass organisational character and autonomous nature of many of the squatters shows not only their willingness to engage in direct action, it also highlights the lack of faith in the existing

⁹⁴ Watson, *'Squatting in Britain'*, p. 59-60

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 61

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 62

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 179

political framework. This situation was to continue with the protests against the sale of council houses being built at Merrylee in Glasgow, which will be discussed in the following chapter, and the belief of the Labour Party during the anti-poll tax campaign of the late 1980s that any action should be within the law.⁹⁸ The undermining of ideas around representative democracy, discussed by Todd and Taylor in relation to NSM theory, and the broadening of politics to include issues out with what NSM theorists refer to as traditional politics, regarded by NMS theorists as signs of a post-industrial society, are evident in the actions taken by the squatting movement and the actions taken by the protesters which will be discussed in the next chapter.

⁹⁸ Gibbs, *Historical Traditions and Community Mobilisation*, p. 455

Chapter 3 Merrylee Housing Estate

This chapter will discuss the proposal put forward by the Progressive controlled Glasgow Corporation to sell houses that were being built at the Merrylee Estate on the Southside of Glasgow. By focussing on Glasgow Corporation minutes and press reports it will show the impact this decision had on both the opposition Labour group on the Corporation and those in the wider community. The anger felt by many at the decision resulted in direct action being taken to stop the sale of houses intended for rental by a diverse range of actors with strikes, protests and marches on the Corporation headquarters in Glasgow. Despite a split between those favouring direct action and many in the Labour group who preferred to protest within the political sphere, the protests were ultimately successful in overturning, not only the decision to sell most of the houses, they also influenced the results in the municipal elections which saw the end of the Progressives control of the Corporation.

Around ten per-cent of Britain's housing stock was council housing by 1939 and after 1945 both Labour and Conservative governments supported the building of further homes resulting in an expansion of the sector almost every year until the 1980s.¹ The right to buy policy adopted by the Conservative government under Margaret Thatcher contributed

¹ John English, '*Building for the Masses*', in *Built to Last? Reflections of British Housing Policy*, ed. by John Goodwin & Carol Grant, (London, Roof, 1997) p. 91

to the decline in council house building, from its peak in the 1970s when it was around 30 per-cent of the country's housing stock, to just over 20 per-cent by the mid-1990s.²

When Labour won the General Election in 1945 they began to implement their housing programme which, according to John English, in addition to their 'pro-public sector ideology', had elements of 'social mixing and rejection of "one class" council estates' culminating in 1949 in the repeal of the 'statutory restriction of council housing to the working class'.³ With Glasgow at the time having larger numbers of manual workers and more people looking to rent their homes, the issue of social mixing was more relevant and attempts to put the houses at Merrylee up for sale may have been seen as a threat to the rejection of one class council estates.⁴ The minister for health, Aneurin Bevan, insisted homes were to be built to a high standard, available to anyone who required one, with the main provider of housing to be the public sector.⁵ Homes, like the ones being built at Merrylee, were intended for those on the housing waiting list rather than those who could afford to buy one. The Conservative party on the other hand, campaigned with their alternative policy of a 'property owning democracy' during the 1945 election which, according to Johnstone, emphasised the 'superiority' of 'owner occupation over other forms of housing tenure'.⁶ With the defeat of Labour to the Conservatives in the 1951

² English, *Built to Last*, p. 91

³ *Ibid*, p, 92

⁴ Stephen Kendrick, David McCrone, 'Politics in a Cold Climate: The Conservative Decline in Scotland', *Political Studies*, Vol, 37, No. 4, (December, 1989), p. 592, <file:///C:/Users/janem/Downloads/Politics%20in%20a%20Cold%20Climate,%20Political%20Studies%2037.4%201989.pdf>, 15/12/2108

⁵ David Whitham, *The First Sixty Years of Council Housing*, in *The Future of Council Housing*, Ed by John English, (London, Biddles Ltd, 1982), p. 22

⁶ Johnstone, *Housing and Class Struggles*, p. 147

election, it became clear that the aim of the new government was to have as wide a distribution of property as possible, shown here in the words of Harold MacMillan in parliament in November 1951:

There will always be a very large number of people in this country who are compelled to, or want to, live in rented houses; but there will also be, I hope, a growing number of people who both want to own their own houses and may be enabled by various means to do so. Since it is part of our philosophy that a wide distribution of property rather its concentration makes for a sound community, we shall pursue this aim wherever it is appropriate and can be done with due regard to the interests of those who need to live in rented houses.⁷

With more than fifty per-cent of Glasgow's homes in 1951 having no fixed bath and thirty seven per-cent sharing water closets, the due regard for the interests of those in need of local authority housing MacMillan talked of would be put to the test by the protests Glasgow Corporation would face when they attempted to sell homes being built at Merrylee Estate in Glasgow, originally intended for rental, while over 100,000 people remained on the corporations waiting list.⁸

Since its inception in 1919 Glasgow Corporation had differentiated between tenants in their allocation of housing. The method of management adopted by Glasgow Corporation

⁷ Government Policy, 13 November 1951, Volume 493, Column 846, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1951-11-13/debates/0207f3b8-c5ef-4d2b-bdd4-855cb79d3061/GovernmentPolicy?highlight=harold%20macmillan%20housing#contribution-ae32adcb-3a17-4977-84a6-f2359408f00f>, 21/11/2018

⁸ Maver, 'Glasgow', p. 262

Housing Department had been taken directly from the private sector using the model of the Glasgow Property Owners' and Factors' Association and the allocation of housing for rent, which should have been on the basis of general needs, was done using categories which 'were to refract the class structure of the city more clearly than anywhere else in Scotland'.⁹ Despite the 1919 Housing Act specifying homes built were for 'general needs', many of the homes built by the Corporation were in 'elite' schemes such as Mosspark and Knightswood, having at least three bedrooms, spacious living areas and indoor bathrooms however, they had very few working class families as tenants.¹⁰ Although impressive properties, Maver saw as 'less impressive' the fact that most of the tenants were in a better position to afford the higher rents for these properties as they tended to come from 'skilled, white-collar and professional backgrounds'.¹¹ The pressure to rehouse those living in slums at lower rents mean that quality was compromised and many of the 'Slum Clearance' or 'Rehousing' schemes were in areas where land was cheaper and they were 'tucked away out of sight' with their tenants environmentally disadvantaged.¹²

Glasgow Corporation had been under Labour control since 1933 however, this changed at the May elections in 1951 with control transferring to the Progressives who, according to Johnstone 'were merely acting out the stated aims of the Conservative Party'.¹³ Maver

⁹ Damer, *'Glasgow: Going for a Song'*, p. 160,167

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 161

¹¹ Maver, *'Glasgow'*, p. 259

¹² Damer, *'Glasgow: Going for a Song'*, p. 167

¹³ Johnstone. C, 'Early Post War Housing Struggles in Glasgow', *The Journal of the Scottish Labour History Society*, Vol, 28, p. 15

described the Progressive Party as forward-sounding and Unionist-dominated' with the menace of socialism still looming large in their 'demonology' and, while they were committed to improvements in health and housing, this came with the need to ensure monitoring of public expenditure.¹⁴ The Progressives in Scotland, forming to begin with as a 'loose anti-Labour alliance', had grown in opposition to 'the growing socialism that accompanied the rise of the Labour Party in major towns and cities', emerging in its own right as a strong group.¹⁵ Although only commanding a slim majority on the Corporation in 1951, it is clear the Progressives had confidence in themselves when they took the decision to move that the houses at Merrylee Estate be sold, confidence which may have come from their standing in Scotland as a whole at this time. Despite Scotland, and Glasgow in particular, having a social structure in which its population would customarily be expected to vote Labour due to its high volume of manual workers and local authority tenants, during these years the Conservatives actually performed as well as Labour did in General Elections in the years after the Second World War.¹⁶ It would not be until the mid-1960s that decline in support for the Conservative Party would begin to be felt as the influence of the Scottish National Party became more apparent in Scottish politics rather than an increase in support for Labour.¹⁷

The Conservative 'philosophy' of a wider 'distribution of property' began to be realised at a Glasgow Corporation meeting on the 5th September 1951 when Alexander

¹⁴ Maver, 'Glasgow', p. 235

¹⁵ Scottish Progressives, <http://www.scottishprogressives.org/content/our-history>, 15/12/2108

¹⁶ Kendrick, S, McCrone, D, *Politics in a Cold Climate: The Conservative Decline in Scotland*, p. 592

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 590

MacPherson-Rait, Progressive leader of the Corporation and its housing convenor, moved that the Town Clerk 'be instructed to submit a report on the question of offering for sale the houses being erected at Merrylee Road housing scheme'.¹⁸ This motion was challenged by Labour councillors with an amendment that 'no further action be taken on the matter' and an additional amendment that 'the matter be continued until the next meeting' however, both amendments were defeated and the motion was carried with twelve voting for the motion and nine for the amendment.¹⁹ On the 28th of November 1951 MacPherson-Rait proposed that the 622 homes still under construction for rental at Merrylee should be sold.²⁰ According to a report in the Daily Express on 29th November 1951, this move came 'only a day after Housing Minister Harold MacMillan urged councils to sell houses'.²¹ The proposal was passed with eighteen councillors voting for the motion, and fifteen for the amendment 'that no further action be taken with regards the sale' of the houses at Merrylee.²²

Ned Donaldson, who was involved in the building industry for almost fifty years and active within the Bricklayers Trade Union during the protests; and Les Forster, who was a builders labourer and shop steward for the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) at the time, were both heavily involved in the protests.²³ In their account of what they called 'the Glasgow Merrylee housing scandal of 1951', they stated that at this

¹⁸ Glasgow Corporation Minutes, 05/09/1951

¹⁹ Ibid, 05/09/1951

²⁰ Ned Donaldson, Les Forster, '*Sell and Be Damned*', (Glasgow, Clydeside Press, 1992), p. 6

²¹ Daily Express Staff Reporter, City Selling 622 Homes, *Daily Express*, 29 November 1951 p. 1, https://www.ukpressonline.co.uk/ukpressonline/view/pagview/DExp_1951_11_29_001, 08/01/2018

²² Glasgow Corporation Minutes, 28/11/51

²³ Donaldson and Forster, '*Sell and be Damned*', p.2

time 'to even mention selling council houses in front of Labour councillors was like holding a red rag to a bull' and once news of the 'scandal' broke they spoke of outrage and anger amongst workers.²⁴ Following the council meeting the Glasgow Herald reported on 29th November 1951 that some Labour councillors had indicated 'that their group would make the question a major issue, and that the proceeding at the meeting of the corporation next Thursday might be expected to be stormy and prolonged'.²⁵ Les Forster, in his memoir, *Rocking the Boat*, spoke of anger amongst 'building workers in particular' who 'were up in arms' and the tense atmosphere among the workforce which included 'many demobbed ex-servicemen who had a genuine vested interest'.²⁶ Forster went on to state that 'some had lived in the slums, went to war, returned to live again in the same slums. Others had got married, but were living with in-laws', conditions that could only have added to the frustration of knowing they were now 622 places further back on the waiting list than they had been before the decision was made to put the Merrylee houses up for sale.²⁷

The previous Labour government's social mixing approach to housing was threatened with the actions of the new Progressive controlled Glasgow Corporation as, not only did they want to sell the houses rather than let them, one of the conditions of purchase was the ability to put down a £250 initial payment with future payments of £3 each week.²⁸

²⁴ Donaldson and Forster, *'Sell and be Damned'*, p. 6

²⁵ *The Glasgow Herald*, 29/11/1951, p. 5

²⁶ Les Forster, *'Rocking the Boat, Memoirs of a Glasgow Socialist and Whistleblower'*, (Glasgow, Clydeside Press, 1997), p. 43

²⁷ Forster, *'Rocking the Boat'*, pp. 43/44

²⁸ Johnstone, *'Housing and Class Struggles'*, p. 148

Although there were over 100,000 people waiting for a home, it was the ability to pay rather than on the basis of need, that was the criterion for the allocation of the new houses. Johnstone saw in this policy, ideological motivation, as the estate at Merrylee was being built in an area considered high value in a City Assessor's report which, according to Johnstone, had 'potential for future accumulation purposes for Tory supporters'.²⁹ With the Progressives belief that they should not be subsidising good quality housing it appeared they may have been attempting to create a radical change to the way local authorities provided housing.³⁰

By this time however, Weir's Engineering shop stewards had already convened a conference inviting delegations from all sectors of the labour movement set to take place on 3rd December 1951.³¹ Shop stewards and workers at Weir's had a long history of activism dating back to at least 1914 when Harry McShane worked there, which he attributed to the fact that, not only did the organisation of the factory allow for easier trade union organisation, most engineering works paid-off the socialists first while at Weir's it was rare to have pay-offs, meaning the more static work-force gave the workers more confidence.³² The Daily Worker reported on their front page on 3rd December 1951 of 'a great wave of opposition and anger' sweeping across Glasgow's labour movement and that 'Glasgow workers are not standing for this scandal' with Weir's shop stewards

²⁹ Johnstone, *'Housing and Class Struggles'*, p. 149

³⁰ Ibid, p. 149

³¹ Donaldson and Forster, *'Sell and be Damned'*, p. 7

³² McShane, *'No Mean Fighter'*, p. 590,

acting to ‘give it organised and effective expression’.³³ Donaldson and Forster state that the conference had ‘the usual traditionalists who could see no further than routine deputation to the town council’ while ‘there were others who thought that all would come right when labour captured the polls at the next municipal elections’, elections that were not due till the following May.³⁴ Opposing strategies of achieving change through either debate or direct grass-roots action were to continue throughout the campaign in a way Johnstone saw as being similar to ‘alternative approaches to agitation evident within working class organisations on similar campaigns, then and now’ providing evidence of the existence of what NSM theorists considered ‘new’ in these earlier movements.³⁵

Les Forster spoke in his capacity as Shop Steward at a meeting of building workers and called for a ‘one day strike’ for the same day as the Glasgow Corporation meeting on 6th December 1951.³⁶ Workers on several building sites took the decision to strike and, according to Forster, by the end of the week ‘engineers at Mavor and Coulsons Factory in Bridgeton’ had agreed to join them. By the 6th December they had the support of workers in the shipyards, railways and transport, in addition, women’s groups and tenants associations also came out to support the strike resulting in around 5,000 protesters gathering outside Glasgow City Chambers where the corporation meeting was being held.³⁷ Forster, describing the scene he witnessed when he arrived at George Square, was

³³ Glasgow’s Lead, ‘*Daily Worker*’, 03/12/1951, p.1, https://www.ukpressonline.co.uk/ukpressonline/view/pagview/DWMS_1st_1951_12_03_001, 08/01/2019

³⁴ Donaldson and Forster, ‘*Sell and be Damned*’, p. 7

³⁵ Johnstone, ‘*Housing and Class Struggles*’, p. 150

³⁶ Forster, ‘*Rocking the Boat*’, p. 44

³⁷ Johnstone, ‘*Housing and Class Struggles*’, p. 150-151

‘astounded’ by the numbers who had turned up to support the strike with traffic being brought to a halt amid the marchers ‘joyful revelry’ and ‘contagious’ atmosphere as thousands marched around the Square singing and chanting in protest.³⁸

As predicted the meeting was a long and stormy affair. Twenty-six letters and telegrams had been received opposing the sale of the houses at Merrylee from a diverse mix of organisations such as Glasgow Labour Women’s Advisory, trade union branches and housing associations with many seeking deputations.³⁹ While the protests continued outside the council building, tension was growing inside, according to the Glasgow Herald report of the events the following day, as members of some of the deputations tried to make their way to the meeting room before being diverted to the City Chambers library.⁴⁰ There were attempts by some protesters to storm the City Chambers however, the police presence was sufficient to stop this although a small number did gain access to the meeting delaying its start.⁴¹ With so many groups requesting deputations a move by the council treasurer that only a deputation from Glasgow Trades Council, as representative of the views of everyone, including the protesters outside be allowed, was challenged with an amendment from Labour Councillor Andrew Hood that all those who had requested a deputation be heard however, the motion was passed.⁴² Therefore, the only deputation heard was from the Trades Council, in a meeting lasting over five hours,

³⁸ Forster, *‘Rocking the Boat’*, p. 44

³⁹ Glasgow Corporation Minutes, 6/12/1951

⁴⁰ *The Glasgow Herald*, 7/12/1951, p. 5,

<https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=GGgVawPscysC&dat=19511207&printsec=frontpage&hl=en> , 07/01/2018

⁴¹ Johnstone, *‘Housing and Class Struggles’*, p. 151

⁴² Glasgow Corporation Minutes, 6/12/1951

and the decision to sell the houses was upheld with no Labour votes being counted as their members were still engaged in protest when the vote was taken.⁴³

Andrew Hood, who had been a councillor for the Independent Labour Party in Partick in Glasgow before moving to the Labour Party after the split between the two in 1932, was the leader of the Labour Group on the Corporation at this time.⁴⁴ Hood, who was to go on to become Lord Provost had, according to Harry McShane, played a significant role in the 1915 Rent Strikes by publicising them in his capacity as editor of the *Partick Gazette*.⁴⁵ Donaldson and Forster also mention Hood and his understanding of what was happening during the Merrylee protests when they quoted him as having said, ‘the demonstrations outside are spontaneous demonstrations of the people. Do not believe it was inspired by the Communist Party. It spells destruction for the Progressive Party’.⁴⁶ Memory and experience allowed Hood to see beyond the protests acknowledging the agency and diversity of those involved and, as in the 1915 Rent Strikes, the unity and strength of the protestors was a powerful force that could not and should not be ignored. Together with the involvement of activists who had been engaged in previous protests and the undoubted support of the labour movement, it is clear there was a mobilisation of a broad-base of the working class in Glasgow willing to engage in action beyond their own economic welfare, out with their workplace and within their communities to secure the protection of what they felt was rightfully theirs. Clear illustration of the existence of

⁴³ Johnstone, C, ‘Post War Housing Struggles in Glasgow’, *The Journal of the Scottish Labour History Society*, Vol. 28, (1993), p. 19

⁴⁴ <https://www.theglasgowstory.com/image/?inum=TGSE01394>, 15/12/2018

⁴⁵ McShane, ‘*No Mean Fighter*’, p. 75

⁴⁶ Donaldson and Forster, ‘*Sell and be Damned*’, p. 17

autonomy, self-determination and a diversity of actors, characteristics NSM theorists see as being unique to social movements from the 1960s onwards.

Councillor MacPherson-Rait was quoted in the Glasgow Herald accusing the Labour group of allowing their class hatred to be influenced and ‘encouraged by a movement foreign to this country’ and that ‘one would have thought that those protesting mobs outside would have been better employed increasing the nation’s production or building houses’.⁴⁷ Perhaps, unlike Hood, he was unaware of Glasgow’s history of well organised protests when it came to housing issues. When issues surrounding housing arose, Valerie Wright states that, once those affected were able to gain the support of the local community and the labour movement and media coverage was generated due to large campaigns and protests, there was no denying ‘local activists had agency’ when they took the decision to challenge councils, in this case, Glasgow Corporation.⁴⁸

The same Glasgow Herald report stated that amongst the protesters in the City Chambers were ‘a number of women with children in their arms’.⁴⁹ Five processions of ‘housewives’ from different areas of Glasgow had taken part in the demonstration, many of them active members of local tenant’s associations and possibly with a better understanding of the difficulties faced by the poor housing conditions than many of those

⁴⁷ *The Glasgow Herald*, 7/12/1951, p.5

⁴⁸ Wright, V, ‘Housing problems ... are political dynamite’: housing disputes in Glasgow c. 1971 to the present day’, *Sociological Research Online*, p. 11, <file:///C:/Users/janem/Downloads/V%20Wright%20Housing%20Problems%252c%20Sociological%20Research%202018.pdf>, 05/01/2019

⁴⁹ *The Glasgow Herald*, 7/12/1951, p.5

involved in the protests had to live in.⁵⁰ Donaldson and Forster spoke of a woman from the Gorbals slums who had brought a bag of plaster from her house with another holding up a dead rat.⁵¹ As in the rent strikes of 1915 and the post-World War II squatting movement, it was women who were able to give vivid accounts of the conditions they were forced to live in and their involvement in the Merrylee campaign and previous protests was an essential part of the continuing struggle for decent and affordable housing.

There was a further meeting of the Housing Committee on 12th December 1951 at which seven protest were submitted against the sale of the houses from groups such as Pollok Tenants Association, Shettleston Constituency Labour Party and the Glasgow Federation Labour League of Youth.⁵² It was moved by the Progressive Councillor Hart and seconded by his colleague Bailie Lawson that the terms be noted however, an amendment was made by Councillor Forrester and seconded by Councillor Vallance, both Labour councillors, 'that the protest be acknowledged and that the associations, bodies etc be informed that the proposal to sell the said houses had been submitted for approval by the Secretary of State for Scotland' with the amendment passing with fourteen votes to eight.⁵³

⁵⁰ Johnstone, *'Early Post War Housing Struggles in Glasgow'*, p. 17

⁵¹ Donaldson and Forster, *'Sell and be Damned'*, p. 13

⁵² Glasgow Corporation Minutes, p.1330

⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 1330

Although unsuccessful in swaying the decision of the corporation to sell the houses, the protestors were not ready to give up and according to Johnstone, it was around this time divisions began to become more apparent between those hoping to keep the campaign within the realm of representative democracy and those favouring more direct forms of action.⁵⁴ These divisions came to a head at a rally on 13th December 1951 organised by the Labour Party where they were challenged to show support for the strikes and demonstrations against the selling of the houses at Merrylee.⁵⁵ According to Donaldson and Forster, more than two thousand people were at the meeting, many of them workers who had come from all parts of Glasgow to add their support to the Labour Party rally.⁵⁶ In addition to MPs, town councillors, the former under-Secretary of State for Scotland and a Scottish Trade Union Congress representative, Les Forster was a surprise speaker on the platform, there as a spokesperson for the newly formed joint action committee.⁵⁷ The Labour Party MPs at the meeting and the Corporation Labour group refused to give their support for the proposal for more strikes and demonstrations on the grounds that they did not give support to unconstitutional and unofficial action when it came to 'the industrial side'.⁵⁸ It was clear however that for many of the protestors, relying on representative democracy alone was not the way forward if the decision to sell the houses was to be reversed. Forster stated that many in the crowd felt they were being let down and began shouting and stamping their feet at which point he had to appeal to the increasingly angry crowd suggesting they leave the meeting and gather outside, at which

⁵⁴ Johnstone, *'Early Post War Housing Struggles in Glasgow'*, p. 19

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 19

⁵⁶ Donaldson and Forster, *'Sell and be Damned'*, P. 18

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 18

⁵⁸ Johnstone, *'Housing and Class Struggles'*, p. 151

point further action by the protestors was organised.⁵⁹ Despite some opposition to direct action, plans were made for another strike in the January and more demonstrations, including one for 30th January 1952, which was when the next meeting of the Housing Committee was due to take place.⁶⁰ The campaign was now moving from the industrial arena to many of Glasgow's districts with meetings organised by both Communist and Labour parties, and tenants associations, with speeches by some of those involved in the Merrylee campaign.⁶¹

Around this time the Merrylee protests became a nationwide issue as working-class organisations around the country feared that if the sale were to go ahead other local authorities would take similar action, thereby threatening the concept of state responsibility for housing.⁶² When the issue of Merrylee was discussed in parliament on 29th January 1952 John McGovern, the Member of Parliament for Glasgow Shettleston asked:

Is the Secretary of State aware that with every house which now becomes vacant in Glasgow being offered for sale, and with these 622 houses being taken completely out of the pool, there will be comparatively few houses to let to people with limited means? Is he also aware that a very small percentage indeed of the applicants for Corporation houses can afford to pay £3 or £4 a week for those houses? Will he not reconsider this scandalous decision about these houses?

⁵⁹ Forster, *'Rocking the Boat'*, p. 45

⁶⁰ Johnstone, *'Early Post War Housing Struggles in Glasgow'*, p. 20

⁶¹ Donaldson and Forster, *'Sell and be Damned'*, p. 21

⁶² Johnstone, *'Housing and Class Struggles'*, p.152

to which James Stuart, the Secretary of State for Scotland replied ‘No, Sir. I cannot accept that this is a scandalous decision’.⁶³ McGovern had been a member of the Independent Labour Party during the 1920’s and had been involved in the 1934 Hunger March alongside Harry McShane however, he was seen as a ‘Judas’ in the eyes of McShane, his favourite term for him, as early as 1930 as he had, according to McShane in *No Mean Fighter*, referred to Labour MPs as ‘Judases’ in a leaflet he wrote for selling themselves out for their £400 per year salary.⁶⁴

A further concern was raised by the Labour MP for Bridgton in Glasgow, James Carmichael. Carmichael had been a member of Glasgow Corporation between 1929 and 1947 before being elected as the last Independent Labour Party MP in 1946 after which he joined the Labour Party.⁶⁵ With the criteria allowing someone to purchase one of the houses including ‘persons needing accommodation for reasons of ill health, e.g., tuberculosis patients’, Carmichael asked the Secretary of State if he had ‘any evidence from the records of the Glasgow Corporation of the incomes of people on the T.B. list’, a question which was to go unanswered.⁶⁶

⁶³ Corporation Houses Glasgow (Sale), House of Commons Debate, 29 January 1952, Volume 495, [https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1952-01-29/debates/d3ab6c66-a85c-4e31-bb41-35274ee0c74c/CorporationHousesGlasgow\(Sale\)?highlight=merrylee#contribution-0b6384de-8962-4a61-bdc7-b0a0410c2d07](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1952-01-29/debates/d3ab6c66-a85c-4e31-bb41-35274ee0c74c/CorporationHousesGlasgow(Sale)?highlight=merrylee#contribution-0b6384de-8962-4a61-bdc7-b0a0410c2d07), 08/01/2019

⁶⁴ McShane, ‘*No Mean Fighter*’, p. 171

⁶⁵ Papers of James Carmichael, 1894-1966, labour MP, Bridgeton Division, Glasgow, Scotland, 1947-1961 <https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/search/archives/81acb3b0-217c-33e3-b3c7-7819e4d6ae10>, 15/12/2018

⁶⁶ Corporation Houses Glasgow (Sale), House of Commons Debate, 29 January 1952, Volume 495, 08/01/2019

Despite these concerns being raised in parliament, at the next meeting held by the Housing Committee on 30th January 1952 it was confirmed a letter had been received from the Department of Health for Scotland which intimated that the Secretary of State for Scotland 'was prepared to give his consent to the proposal'.⁶⁷ Once again the corporation refused to receive deputations requested from various groups including the Joint Committee to Prevent the Sale of Merrylee Houses, despite an amendment by the Labour section of the committee 'that deputations be received'.⁶⁸ In addition to the Corporation refusing to allow a deputation magistrates in Glasgow, using the 1936 Public Order Act, attempted to ban the planned demonstration however, around two thousand protestors marched on the City Chambers.⁶⁹ By this time management on Corporation sites began sacking activists involved in the campaign with 'victimisation and intimidation' being 'the order of the day' and Donaldson and Forster were both fired with their trade unions doing very little to defend them.⁷⁰ This however, did not stop attempts being made for deputations to be heard by the Housing Committee with eleven requests for deputations received on 21st February 1952 however, as in the past it was moved that they 'be not received' despite an amendment from the Labour section which was defeated with fifty-three voting for the motion and forty-three for the amendment.⁷¹

Agitation continued right up to the municipal elections on 7th May 1952 with campaigners painting slogans on the streets and, on the day of the election, campaigning

⁶⁷ Glasgow Corporation Minutes, p. 1577

⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 1577

⁶⁹ Johnstone, *'Housing and Class Struggles'*, p. 152

⁷⁰ Donaldson and Forster, *'Sell and be Damned'*, p. 23

⁷¹ Glasgow Corporation Minutes, p. 1671

at polling stations which ultimately saw Labour regain control of the Corporation with majority of fifteen, taking ten Progressive seats.⁷² A special meeting of the Housing Committee was convened on 13th May 1952 at which Labour Councillor James R Duncan moved that ‘the said decision be rescinded, and that the houses in the scheme which had not so far been sold be let’, seconded by Bailie McGinniss, it was met with unanimous agreement that consideration would ‘be continued’.⁷³ Finally, after six months of campaigning, on 29th May 1952 the new Labour controlled Corporation, despite an amendment from MacPherson-Rait, rescinded the previous decision to sell the houses at Merrylee with sixty members voting for the motion and no votes for the amendment put forward by MacPherson-Rait.⁷⁴ Reported in *The Glasgow Herald* the following day as ‘accepting the verdict of the polls’, MacPherson-Rait was still convinced the decision to sell the houses was the right one and ‘as the author, rightly or wrongly, of the Merrylee idea, he was unrepentant’.⁷⁵

When Les Forster died in 2016 an obituary was written which illustrates the impact the experiences many of the activists had on continuing housing struggles in Glasgow throughout the twentieth century. Written by Ann Field a week after the death of Forster in early 2016, she said:

That generation — which included Harry McShane and the lesser known (outside of Glasgow) Hugh Savage and Ned Donaldson — was a “bridge” between

⁷² Johnstone, *Housing and Class Struggles*, p. 153

⁷³ Glasgow Corporation Minutes, 29 May 1952

⁷⁴ Ibid, 29 May 1952

⁷⁵ *The Glasgow Herald*, 30/05/1952, p. 5

Glasgow's "Red Clydeside" political traditions of the 1920s and 1930s and the New Left of the 1950s and 1960s.⁷⁶

The direct action taken by those involved in the housing struggles in this dissertation benefitted from the experiences of those early activists, allowing them to use that experience and the knowledge they gained through, not only their involvement within the Labour movement, but with the solidarity and comradeship that had developed through their joint experiences growing up in Glasgow.

⁷⁶ Workers Liberty: Reason in Revolt, <https://www.workersliberty.org/indexx.php/story/2017-07-26/les-forster-1919-2016> 15/12/2018

Chapter 4 Conclusion

NSM theory emphasises the novelty of social activism outside the sphere of production from the 1960s onwards. Although the theory has much to offer, this dissertation has shown the existence of this type of activism in the years before the late 1960s. Protests surrounding housing in Glasgow and the West of Scotland were recurrent throughout the twentieth century and, despite being outside the sphere of production, the men and women of Glasgow were willing to engage in direct action to attempt to remedy their situation. Glasgow in the 1940s and 1950s was still an industrial city yet the housing protests discussed in this dissertation highlight the willingness of many to look beyond the confines of the workplace and attempt, through community-based action, to improve and protect working class security regarding the issue of housing as a moral right rather than an issue to be left to market forces. The squatting movement of 1946 and the opposition to the sale of council houses at Merrylee Estate showed not only the involvement of a diverse array of participants, they have demonstrated the willingness of activists to engage in action out with representative democracy, an element considered 'new' amongst NSM theorists. The realisation that reliance on representative democracy alone would not see their demands met saw many become involved in direct action, demonstrating self-determination and autonomy, elements considered 'new' by NSM theorists.

Protests around housing in Glasgow in the early years of the Twentieth Century have been well documented however, the housing protests following World War II have not received as much attention. One of the aims of this dissertation was to gain more of an understanding of community-based activism in Glasgow in the post-World War II years and by focussing on the squatting movement and the Merrylee protests this dissertation has allowed for a greater awareness of the character of the protests and the actions taken by those involved. By focussing on the squatting movement and the Merrylee protests this dissertation has also been able to illustrate continuity running through housing protests in Glasgow with the Rent Strikes of 1915 proving to be an historical precedent to the post-World War II movements. The influence and knowledge of activists, gained through shared experiences of poverty and poor living conditions in the early years of the Twentieth Century, proved to be invaluable to the continuing protests around housing in Glasgow with this continuity prevailing through to the late 1980s in the campaign against the poll tax.

By engaging with NSM theory this dissertation has demonstrated that the actions of those involved in the protests contained elements NSM theorist consider to be unique to ‘new’ social movements from the late 1960s onwards. Buechler saw NSM theory as ‘a critical reaction of classical Marxism’ with NSMs replacing movements prior to the 1960s with their diversity of collective actions.⁷⁷ They also acknowledge the importance of processes that promote both self-determination and autonomy in NSMs and, as in the 1915 Rent

⁷⁷ Buechler, *‘New Social Movement Theories’*, p. 442

Strikes, both the squatting movement and the protests against the sale of the houses being built at Merrylee had, at their core, a diversity of actors. These came, not only from within the labour movement and political parties, this dissertation has provided evidence for broad-based support from local communities. The post-World War II protests also benefitted from the legacy of a multi-generational community with the knowledge and experience of past protests. This knowledge and experience proved to be invaluable to the protesters giving them a well organised character which allowed for efficient planning and the motivation to engage in extra parliamentary activity to achieve their goals.

Britain, in 1945, had a new majority Labour government which was well aware of the desperate need for decent housing and was committed to expanding the numbers of houses under local authority control. In Glasgow the Corporation was also controlled by Labour during the 1940s and with the recent introduction of the welfare state expectations were high of improvements to living condition which included a decent home for those who required one. When this was not forthcoming, and knowing they were unable to rely on representative democracy alone, the squatters took direct action to alleviate their dire living conditions. It quickly became clear the Labour controlled Corporation were not willing to engage with those taking direct action and, despite numerous attempts for deputations to be heard at Housing Committee meetings, any hopes of having the opportunity to have their voices heard were dashed, regardless of the support they were receiving from many sections of society resulting in many resorting to direct action.

With NSMs being seen as challengers of the traditional left and right divisions within politics, the actions of the squatters and the protestors against the sale of the Merrylee houses are prime examples of what NSM theorists consider elements of post-industrial societies. The anti-poll tax campaign of the late 1980s fits within NSM theory as it took place at a time when both Britain and Glasgow were suffering the consequences of de-industrialisation, while the actions of the protestors in both the squatting movement and the Merrylee protests took place at a time when Glasgow still had an industrial base. This dissertation has shown evidence of continuities between the older movements and the more recent anti-poll tax campaign with their substantial involvement of a diverse range of activists, from those in the labour movement to women, their families and the support of a broad section of society. The housing protests in Glasgow and the West of Scotland discussed in this dissertation have been shown to be out with the sphere of production, whether they were prior to the late 1960s or after therefore, not only do they show continuity within them, the methods of protest they chose to use challenges the uniqueness NSM theorists claim to be evident in action taken by social movements in the years after the late 1960s.

Reliance on representative democracy was also evident in the Labour opposition within Glasgow Corporation during the Merrylee protests. Although initially supportive of the protests, the Labour group were unwilling to sanction and engage in extra parliamentary action preferring to wait till the local elections when they hoped, through the ballot box, they would regain control of the Corporation. Although they did regain control at the elections the protestors were unwilling to rely on this hope alone and continued their

protests and requests for deputations despite victimisation and the sacking of prominent members of the campaign. Todd and Taylor see ‘new’ movements as being detached from ‘identifiable political ideology’ with the use of methods such as marches and public demonstrations considering them ‘unconventional’, methods which were an integral part of the Merrylee protests.⁷⁸ These protests not only contained a diverse range of actors, they also contained the temporary networks Buechler saw as forming the basis for forms of collective action seen as ‘new’, with groups coming together at specific times in a show of solidarity.⁷⁹

By analysing the squatting movement and the Merrylee protests, this dissertation has added to our understanding of community-based activism in Glasgow in the years following World War II. By engaging with the minutes of Glasgow Corporation it has been possible to not only add depth to our understanding of this period in the history of housing protest in Glasgow and the West of Scotland, it has also allowed for an understanding of the legacy of those involved in earlier protests such as the Rent Strikes of 1915 and the impact their experience and knowledge had on later movements. In addition, by focussing on these post-World War II protests this dissertation has been able to show the existence within them of elements NSM theorists consider as ‘new’ such as self-determination and autonomy, the willingness to engage in direct action rather than relying on representative democracy alone and the inclusion of a diverse range of actors.

⁷⁸ Todd and Taylor, *Democracy and Participation*, p. 19

⁷⁹ Buechler, *New Social Movement Theories*, p. 442

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