

'A Hand Up, not a Hand Out': The Labour Governments and Street Homelessness 1997-2010

Why did Labour concentrate so much attention and resources to the issue of street homelessness?

Why have the results of Labour's intervention been forgotten?



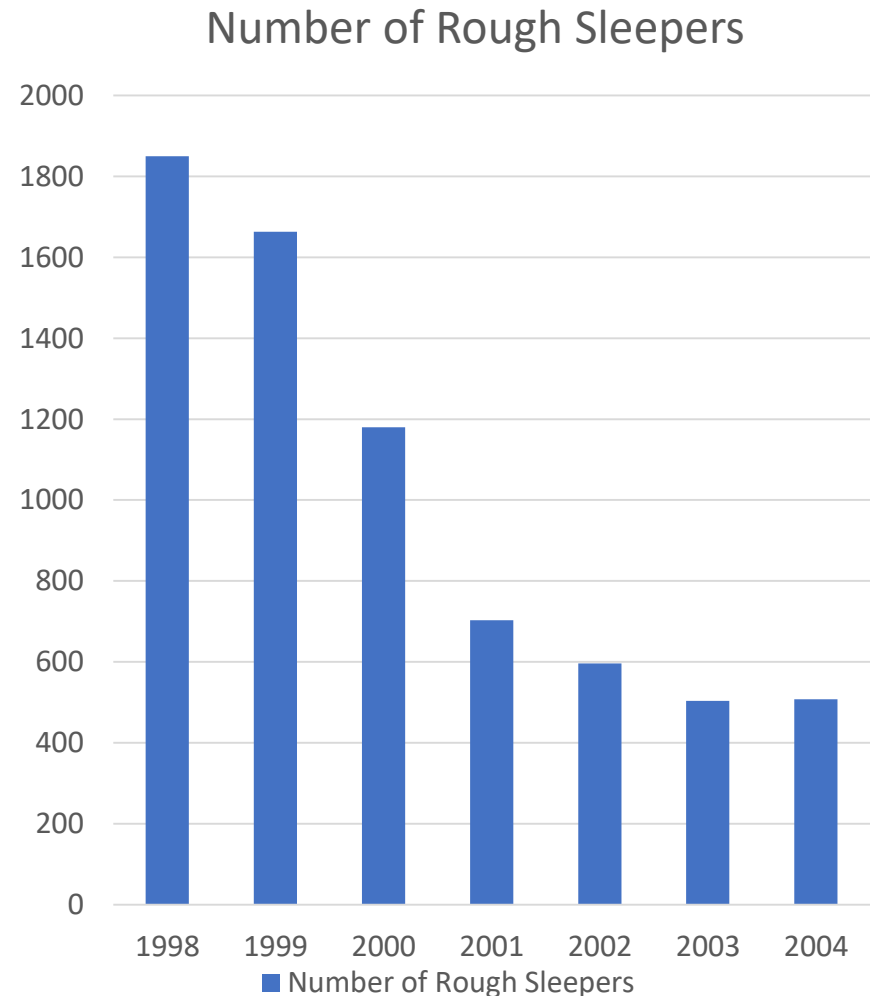
Homelessness in the 1990s

- Peaks in mid-90s with 2,000 sleeping rough each night in London
- Two shanty towns in capital – Bull Ring and Lincoln's Inn Fields
- In 1997 – 2,400 people spent at least one night sleeping rough on London's streets,
- An additional 10,000 slept rough across the rest of the UK.
- All rough-sleeping statistics are tentative.
(Controversy)



New Labour's Intervention

- 1999 Labour set up the Rough Sleepers Unit (RSU) with a target of reducing rough sleeping by two-thirds by April 2002.
- **Target achieved ahead of schedule by November 2001.**
- By 2010 street homelessness at lowest level on record.
- Homelessness ceases to be a visible problem.



Homelessness 2020...pre Coronavirus

- Since Labour left office in 2010, street homelessness has risen by 169% - returning to the levels of the late 1980s.



Amnesia

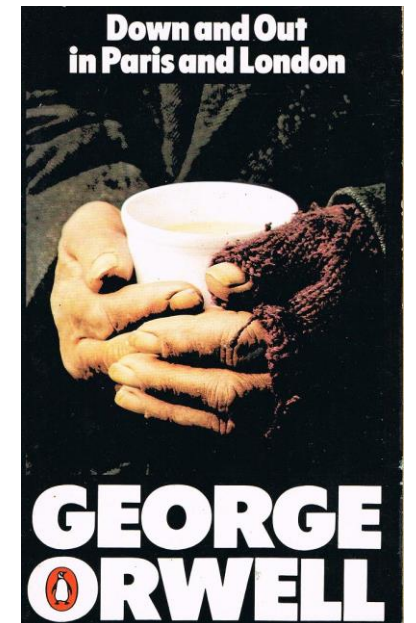
- However, Labour's record on street homelessness is largely absent from general histories of the period and scarcely mentioned in scholarly accounts of Labour's performance in office.
- Most surprisingly, it is unmentioned in the, (largely valedictory), accounts of prominent New Labour Figures.
- Labour's success in 'clearing the night-time streets of their Dickensian cargo' was 'a quick alleviation of [one of] the easier symptoms of Thatcher's legacy'. Toynbee & Walker, *The Verdict: Did Labour Change Britain?*, (2010).



'The Poor are always with Us'

- First response to Toynbee and Walker one of outrage....
- Persistence of Homelessness a social problem through time.
- Elizabethan 'vagabonds'
- Inter-war 'vagrancy'
- Rising numbers from 1960s
- Explosion in street homelessness from 1980s

- But, 26 March 2020 – Luke Hall (Minister for Housing and Homelessness) issues 'everyone in' directive. All homeless people to be housed by end of the week.

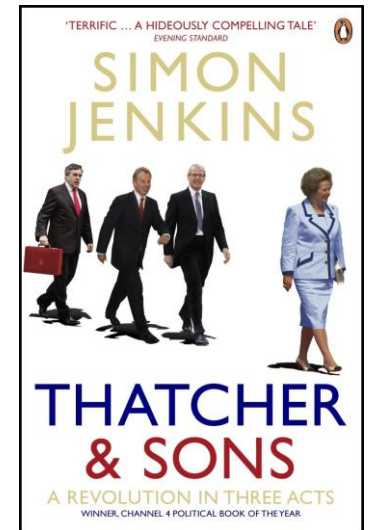


Why Did Labour Prioritize Street Homelessness?

Interpretation 1: Public Image/Revanchist

Interpretation of New Labour as Thatcherism-lite, unconcerned about inequality, wedded to markets and focused primarily on image not social justice. Authoritarian tendencies.

- No ideology
- Focused on winning elections not delivering social change
- Obsessed with representation with the media
- All spin and no substance



- Revanchist theory
- Cities refashioned to ‘willfully marginalize the visible poor’.
- American studies – Davies, M., *Cities of Quartz* (1990) on Los Angeles & Smith, N., *The New Urban Frontier* (1996) on New York



• New Labour and Revanchist theory

- ‘Warehousing’ homeless in hostels rather than addressing fundamental issue of affordable housing supply.
- Close down Soup Runs and Invest in Day Centres
- Remove homeless from streets by: ‘Designing Out’ ‘problematic street activities’; create Designated Public Place Orders; Make begging a recordable Offence; Issue ASBOs; Discourage public from giving money to homeless people – diverted giving schemes.

ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR, CRIME & POLICE ACT 2014
PART 3 - Section 35
DIRECTION TO LEAVE

The below named Police Inspector is satisfied on reasonable grounds that the use of these powers in the locality during a specified period may be necessary for the purpose of removing or reducing the likelihood of members of the public in the locality being harassed, alarmed or distressed or the occurrence in the locality of crime or disorder.

Specified Locality

I, Inspector Michael O'Donoghue, of the Metropolitan Police, hereby authorise uniformed Constables to direct individuals to leave a specified locality for the relevant period using S35 of the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime & Police Act 2014.

YOU ARE EXCLUDED FROM THE ABOVE AREA FOR THE BELOW PERIOD

From (time) _____ hrs (24 hour clock) on (date) _____ (year) 2015
To (time) _____ hrs (24 hour clock) on (date) _____ (year) 2015

Directions

During the authorised periods a Constable may give one or more of the following directions:

- Tell a person in the locality to leave a specified area (either immediately or at a stated time and in a stated way).
- Tell a person who doesn't live in the specified area not to return to the specified area or any part of it for such period (not exceeding 48 hours) from when the direction was given, as he / she may specify.

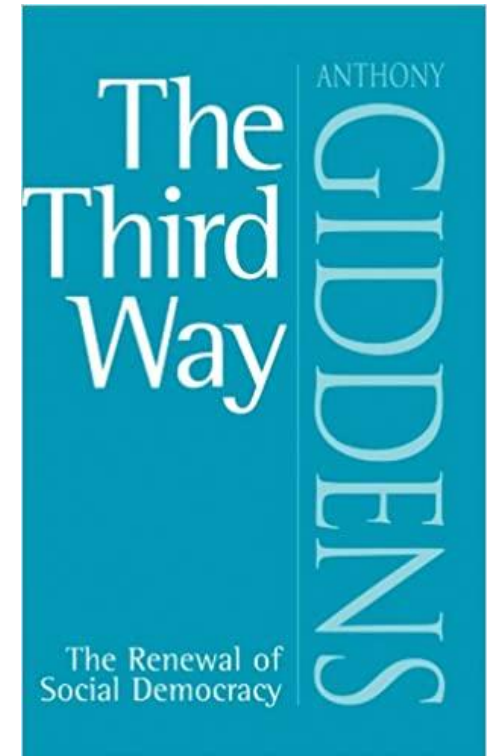
TAKE NOTE:
To contravene a direction is an offence under Section 39 of the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime & Police Act 2014, punishable by 3 months imprisonment and / or a fine not exceeding £250.

OFFICER GIVING DIRECTION TO LEAVE: _____

Why Did Labour Prioritise Street Homelessness?

Interpretation 2: Sincerity & the 'Third Way'

- New Labour genuinely concerned with Social Exclusion.
- Invested significant resources in addressing street homelessness.
- Homelessness interventions delivered through **'third-way' ideology**.
- Third Way - Government act as enabler, not necessarily provider, of services – 'Compacts' (partnerships) with Voluntary Sector
- Modernisation of public service delivery. Use of outside expertise. Evidence based policy-making. Modern management techniques - Measurable outcomes
- 'Rights and Responsibilities'



Third Way – delivery of Rough Sleepers Programme

- Deputy director of Shelter appointed to lead RSU.
- Quantification and targeting of problem.
- Outreach teams.
- Focus on ethos of rehabilitation and change –hostels obliged to focus on resettlement.
- Joint working across departments to provide support needs.
- Move-on accommodation and supported housing developed.
- Hostel accommodation improved.
- Specialist mental health teams for homeless.
- ‘Supporting people’ funding to maintain tenancies.
- Preventative measures – care leavers, probation – minimum wage-working families tax credit.
- Punitive measures consistent with ethos of ‘rights and responsibilities’
- ‘What works matters’

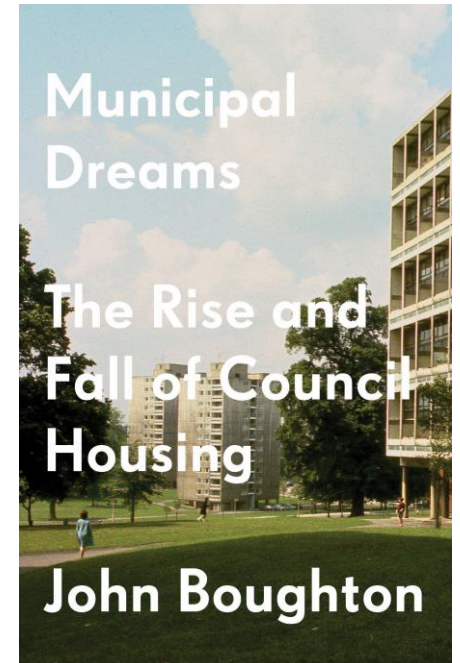


Why has this achievement been forgotten?

- First Term
- Neglect of Housing under New Labour
- Presentation of political history
- Post- Iraq reputation of New Labour in office
- Visibility

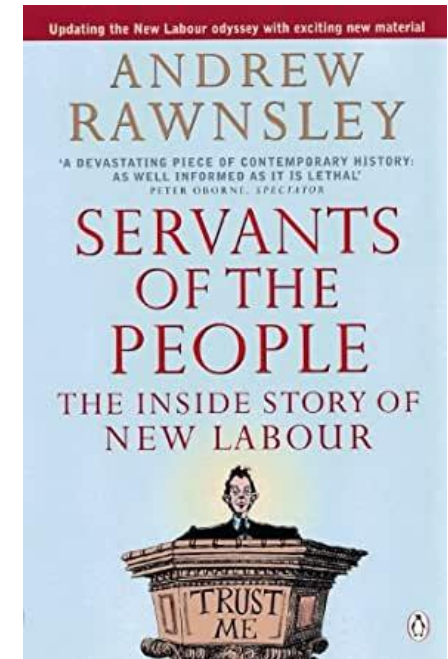
Neglect of Housing

- Labour figures perhaps ashamed of housing record.
- Structural interpretations of the causes of homelessness suggest it is primarily a consequence of poverty and the supply of affordable housing.
- Labour built only 7,870 council houses 1997-2010 – 350,000 Housing Association homes (2.61 million houses built)
- Did not address fundamental issue of housing shortage
- Perhaps Toynbee was right – ‘easy symptom’. ‘Everyone in’ directive under Covid – suggests problem was instantly solvable with sufficient political will.



Presentation of Political History

- Michael Barber, who headed Blair's 'Delivery Unit', critiques the style of political history typified by Andrew Rawnsley's best-selling accounts of New Labour, *Servants of the People* (2000) & *The End of the Party* (2010).
- He describes it as an 'entertaining account' but as each chapter focusses on 'an incident' it conveys a misleading account of what government is truly like, 'like judging a family by looking at photograph albums displaying wedding anniversaries and holidays', special, and determinedly *not* typical events. It therefore neglects the truly important work of government as this happens with 'no rows, no legislation, just steady, persistent implementation.' Michael Barber, *Instruction to Deliver*, (2007)



Loss of Political Capital by New Labour

- Our ability to fairly assess New Labour's performance in office, or acknowledge its achievements is hampered by:
- Iraq
- Gordon Brown's 'light touch regulation of the financial sector.'
- Collective disappointment/sense of betrayal after euphoria of 1997.



Visibility

- **Unique aspect of homelessness?**
- Failures in other policy areas are largely invisible to the majority of the population e.g. prison sector.
- Homelessness played out visibly on the streets of every major city
- Success renders problem invisible and therefore easily forgotten.

Only comparison I can think of
Litter. Local outrage when
present – forgotten when no
longer visible.

