



Change in the Postwar World

One-day interdisciplinary PGR and Early
Career conference (online)
1st October 2021

Preface

As the world slowly emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic, social and political discourse has illustrated a key tension - whether to seek a return to 'normality', or to respond to this moment with global, national and local change. This poses several important questions for historians. If an event on the scale of the COVID-19 pandemic only produces a 'return to normality', what does it take to cause significant historical change? Why might continuity and stability be desired by some? How should we even define change?

In order to shed some light on these questions and more, *Change in the Postwar World*, a one-day interdisciplinary PGR and Early Career conference organised by PGRs at the Universities of Birmingham, Coventry and Nottingham, will be held on Friday October 1st 2021. This conference will reappraise the postwar decades, during which populations wrestled with questions of change in response to global upheaval, including in the aftermath of the Second World War, decolonisation, the turbulence of the 1960s and the economic crises of the 1970s. In doing so, it will highlight the ways in which the world underwent dramatic changes in the Twentieth Century, but also the areas which retained important continuities.

Summary

This PDF booklet outlines the full program of the one-day interdisciplinary PGR and Early Career conference: '**Change in the Postwar World**', to include the speakers' abstracts and biographies.

Organising Team

Alex Riggs, University of Nottingham
Benjamin Thomas, University of Nottingham
William Noble, University of Nottingham
Rob Fitt, University of Birmingham
Eleanor Cook, Coventry University

Acknowledgements

The organisers would like to thank all those that have made this conference possible. In particular, we express our gratitude to Midlands4Cities for their financial support for the conference, and to Kirsty Fox of the University of Nottingham School of Humanities' Events and Marketing team for her help in promoting and organising the conference. We would also like to show our appreciation for PGR colleagues that have supported us throughout, especially to Joe Himsworth who gave us our title and early encouragement, and to Lauren Sission and Fred Lloyd Williams, whose sage advice on organising a conference helped us to get the project off the ground. Finally, they wish to thank each other, for their hard work and dedication through the long process to get here!

Seminar Series

This conference emerged from the Contemporary Political History Seminars (CPHS), a series founded and organised by Will Noble, Alex Riggs and Ben Thomas since October 2020. The seminars have brought together students and staff from History, Politics, English and cultural studies to discuss the politics, society and culture of the Twentieth Century, and it is upon that interdisciplinary basis that this conference was organised. We hope that his conference will serve to expand that network, and provide a space for those researching the contemporary world from a variety of perspectives to share work and discuss ideas in a friendly environment. The series will continue with a mixture of in-person (at the University of Nottingham) and online seminars this autumn term, with a schedule to be announced shortly. You can continue to follow our Twitter @postwarchange to get all the latest updates from the series, and any announcements for call for papers for future seminars. We hope to see you at a seminar soon!

Supported By



Conference Shedule

9:30 - 9:45	Welcome
9:45 - 10:45	<p><u>Historicising American Literature</u></p> <p>Danielle Cameron (University of East Anglia) - Historicising Precarious Adulthoods in Twenty-First Century New York City Literature</p> <p>Dorka Tamás (University of Exeter) - The Vilification of Women's Sexuality in Postwar America through Sylvia Plath's The Bell Jar</p> <p>AND</p> <p><u>The Historical Roots of Contemporary Issues on the Right</u></p> <p>Ian Jenkins (University of Birmingham) - El Salvador: Contemporary Lessons from a Cold War Conflict</p> <p>Adam Waddingham (University of Manchester) - Enoch Powell and the Making of Eurosceptic Constitutionalism</p>
11:00 - 12:40	<p><u>Out of the Ashes: The Aftermath of the Second World War</u></p> <p>Ellie Cook (Coventry University) - Public Consultation and The Provisioning of Home in Post-war Britain</p> <p>Olga Byrska (European University Institute) - Revolution or Reconstruction? The Immediate Post-WW2 Dilemmas of Polish Intellectuals</p> <p>Emily Steinhauer (German Historical Institute London) - Accelerating the Kafkaesque: The Administered State after the Second World War</p> <p>Jennifer Grant (Queen Mary University London) - Unvisited Tombs: 1946 and the Rapid Rewriting of the Polish Wartime Contribution in British Cultural Memory</p>
12:40 - 13:40	<p>Lunchtime mixer on wonder.me</p> <p><i>An opportunity for organisers, presenters and attendees to get to know each other on an easy-to-use online platform (link to be provided closer to the conference).</i></p>

13:50 - 15:30

Social Democracy and the Postwar World

Will Noble (University of Nottingham) - 1970s Leicester and the Collapse of the Postwar Consensus

Neil Warner (London School of Economics and Political Science) - Roads to No Alternative: The Rejection of Proposals for the Socialisation of Investment in France, Britain and Sweden, 1970-1991

Christopher Dodd (Nottingham Trent University) - "The Worst Kind of Dickensian, Victorian Loony Bin": The Labour Party and the Politics of Asylum Closure, 1954-1975

Michael Lambert (Lancaster University) - Realising the Problem Family, Crafting the Social Democratic State: Consensus, Welfare and Policy in Post-war England

15:45 - 16:45

Keynote by **Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite** (University College London)

16:45 - 17:00

Thanks and goodbye!

About the Organisers, Keynote and Speakers

Adam Waddingham is a PhD candidate in the Department of History at The University of Manchester. Broadly speaking, his thesis asks where Euroscepticism comes from. His work focuses on the historical reception of Euroscepticism within British political thought and particularly debates of constitutionalism. In this, Adam aims to explore how the concept of hostility towards the various forms of European organisation was developed, maintained, received, and ultimately consumed. Outside of his PhD, Adam is a Convenor for the Political Studies Association's Politics and History Specialist Group.

Alex Riggs is a second-year University of Nottingham PhD History student, funded by Midlands4Cities. He researches the 1970s and 1980s American left, using the Democratic Socialist Organising Committee, Harold Washington mayoralty in Chicago and Jesse Jackson presidential campaigns as case studies. In doing so, it traces their intellectual history and organisational efforts, challenging ideas of this period as an 'age of Reagan', but also showing the limits and contradictions of the American left in these decades. He also co-organises the Contemporary Political History Seminars at Nottingham and is an assistant editor of the Midlands Historical Review.

Benjamin Thomas is a doctoral researcher in the School of Politics and International Relations at the University of Nottingham and affiliated with the Centre for the Study of Political Ideologies. His thesis, entitled 'Conceptualising Ideological Transition: Centre-right Neoliberalisation in the UK and West Germany', examines the rise of neoliberalism in political party ideologies and discourse by looking at the CDU in West Germany (1945-1949) and the Conservative Party in the United Kingdom (1970-1979).

Christopher Dodd completed his Ph.D. in 2019 having been funded on a part-time basis by Nottingham Trent University History. His thesis re-examined Britain's hospital building programmes of the 1960s with specific attention paid to the Labour Governments stewardship of the large increases in capital investment. In June of this year he began a project that investigates the development of Labour's policy for the improvement of provision for the mentally ill within the NHS during the 1960s.

Danielle Cameron is an American Studies PhD student at the University of East Anglia. Her thesis examines representations of age, space and power in New York literature published between 1970 and 2020. Her wider research interests include horror writing, and depictions of family, work and community in contemporary literature. Danielle's writing appears on U.S. Studies Online, in Dear Movies and the European Journal of American Culture.

Dorka Tamás is a PhD researcher and teaching assistant at the University of Exeter. Her thesis explores the politics of the supernatural in Sylvia Plath's poetry. Dorka is interested in modernist culture and poetry and its narratives on magic and the occult. She aims to expand her research interested to environmental humanities investigating the relationship between the nature and supernatural subthemes across literature, folklore, and twentieth-century culture. Dorka is the co-founder of the now-forming Sylvia Plath Society and a member of the Magic Research Group at Exeter. She has published her research in the USSO and Feminist Modernist Studies.

Dr Emily A. Steinhauer - After completing my PhD at QMUL in late 2020, I joined the German Historical Institute London with a postdoc project on the gendered dimensions of intellectual culture in the twentieth century. My previous research focused on the remigration of the Frankfurt School from American exile to post-war West Germany. I am particularly interested in the (intellectual) history of modern Germany in a global world, histories of gender and culture and questions surrounding exile, 'home(lessness)' and the psychological conditions of modernity

Eleanor Cook is an AHRC Midlands 4 Cities funded PhD candidate in the Centre for Arts, Memory and Communities at Coventry University. Her thesis 'At Home in Coventry' – a project working in partnership with The Herbert Museum & Art Gallery – seeks to ascertain what 'home' meant to the diverse populations of post-war Coventry; querying the significance of public art, civic architecture, and material culture to the provisioning of home in the post-war period.

Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite is Associate Professor of Twentieth Century British History at UCL. Her first book, *Class, Politics and the Decline of Deference in England, 1968-2000*, was published in 2018, and an edited collection with Dr Aled Davies and Dr Ben Jackson on neoliberalism in Britain will be published in 2021. She is currently working on a study of working-class women's activism in the miners' strike of 1984-5 with Dr Natalie Thomlinson.

Ian Jenkins holds a M.Litt in Terrorism Studies from CSTPV, University of St Andrews and a MSt from Wolfson College, University of Oxford in Historical Studies. He was Course Convenor at University of Salford (Terrorism: Threat and Response) in 2021. Currently Ian is a PhD Researcher at University of Birmingham. His dissertation is 'Full Circle: The emergence of US counter-terrorism policy post-Watergate to 1988'. This research looks at the manner in which counter-terrorism became weaponized and how the Reagan Administration blurred the lines between counter-terrorism and state-sponsored terrorism and established the concept of pre-emptive strikes as part of that policy.

Jennifer Grant is a Postgraduate Researcher at Queen Mary University of London, focusing on the challenges to integration encountered by Polish servicemen and women in the UK between 1939 and 1945. She is passionate about promoting public engagement with the experience of the Polish community in Britain and has presented talks at the National Army Museum and Chelsea History Festival, as well as having her work published in the *History of War* magazine and by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

Dr Michael Lambert is a Postdoctoral Fellow in Social Inequalities at the Centre for Alternatives to Social and Economic Inequalities based in Lancaster University Sociology Department. He completed his doctoral thesis on 'problem families' in North West England in 2017. His research focuses on social histories of policy, inequality, and marginality in twentieth century Britain. His first book, based on work undertaken on the University of Liverpool's Governance of Health project, *Managing decline: governing the NHS in Liverpool, 1978-96* is due to be published on the 75th anniversary of the foundation of the National Health Service in 2023.

Neil Warner is a PhD student at the LSE Sociology Department, focussing on the economic policies of European socialist parties, on the eve of their turn to neoliberalism, in the 1970s and 1980s. He holds a BA in History and Political Science and an M.Litt in History from Trinity College Dublin, and previously also worked as a research assistant in the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies in Cologne. Areas of interest include comparative historical methods, the sociology of political parties and of economic policy, and the socialisation or democratisation of investment.

Rob Fitt is in the third year of his PhD in American History at the University of Birmingham. His project uses the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games to talk about the intersection of neoliberalism with questions of identity, race, and culture during a period in which developing ideas about multiculturalism and globalisation collided with a renewed sense of American patriotism.

Olga Byrska - 3rd year PhD researcher in history at the European University Institute in Florence, working on the intellectual history of the immediate post-WW2 in Poland, France, United Kingdom and Germany. Earlier worked as a researcher at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris. She graduated from Theatre at the National Academy of Dramatic Art in Warsaw and cultural studies in Paris and Warsaw. She also translated essays of Simone de Beauvoir, Achille Mbembe and Paul Preciado.

Will Noble is a second-year PhD student in modern British history at the University of Nottingham, funded by Midlands4Cities. In his research, Will uses several local case studies from around the Midlands—including Leicester, Smethwick and Wolverhampton—to examine local and national discourses of ‘decline’ in the period c. 1958-1981, and in particular the relationship between these ideas and discourses of ‘race’ and immigration. He is also a co-organiser of the Contemporary Political History Seminars at Nottingham, was on the organising committee of the 2021 Midlands4Cities Research Festival, and is an assistant editor for the Midlands Historical Review.

Panel 1

Historicising American Literature

Danielle Cameron, University of East Anglia

Historicising Precarious Adulthoods in Twenty-First Century New York City Literature

By engaging with age studies, spatial theory and historical analysis, this paper traces changing literary constructions of adulthood and analyses, in particular, representations of precarious adulthood in Ling Ma's *Severance* (2018) and Raven Leilani's *Luster* (2020). Both novels centre millennial protagonists who attempt to navigate the cultures of overwork and precarity in Manhattan's job market. I argue that Ma and Leilani's novels can be read as reactionary texts to the ongoing dilapidation of traditional markers of adulthood – including securing employment and real estate – in North America under late capitalism; a dilapidation whose origins can be traced back to American economic policy changes in the 1970s and 1980s. Thus, I determine that, while representations of age in *Severance* and *Luster* may appear vitally contemporary, they are also rooted in socio-economic shifts of the last fifty years. By assessing how this socio-economic precarity manifests in depictions of physical spaces throughout the novels, this paper builds upon Sari Edelstein's assertion that 'adulthood functions less as a biological status than a social achievement; it is best understood as an ideal rather than an inevitability' (*Adulthood and Other Fictions*, 3). Furthermore, this paper offers a close comparative analysis of Ma and Leilani's representations of tenancy as indicative of a 'foreclosure' of normative signifiers of adulthood. This paper demonstrates that – in portraying millennials grappling with the impossibility of traditional adulthood in New York City – these novels offer a reconsideration of age-based power and what it means to age 'successfully' in twenty-first century America.

Dorka Tamás, University of Exeter

The Vilification of Women's Sexuality in Postwar America through Sylvia Plath's The Bell Jar

Sylvia Plath's novel, *The Bell Jar* is situated within the peak of postwar McCarthyism during which Ethel and Julius Rosenberg were executed for alleged nuclear spying. Throughout the couple's trial, Ethel Rosenberg's gender was at the forefront in public discourses, particularly her portrayal as a "bad mother" was prominent. In *The Bell Jar*, Plath makes several allusions that link the breakdown of Esther Greenwood with the electrocution of the Rosenbergs. My presentation focuses on the novel's portrayal of female sexuality, the way promiscuous women are demonised, looked down on, or othered as a response to the postwar culture that held strict rules for women. In 1953, the same year *The Bell Jar* is set, Alfred Kinsey's report, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* was published. The report on the sexuality of young white women shook American society. In the US, sexual and political othering was brought into parallel: immoral sexuality (promiscuity, homosexuality) was considered common among those labelled as Communists. In *The Bell Jar*, Esther's sexual behaviour is often the source of her being an outsider or othered. My presentation looks at the overlaps between politics and sexuality, and the way postwar America vilified and regulated women's sexuality. I argue that in *The Bell Jar*, female sexuality is the 'enemy within', the phrase used by Senator McCarthy on American anti-Communism.

Panel 1

The Historical Roots of Contemporary Issues on the Right

Ian Jenkins, University of Birmingham

El Salvador- Contemporary Lessons from a Cold War conflict

Post- 9/11 there has been much scrutiny of foreign military interventions in a counter-terrorism sense as well as an enhanced interest from the Critical Terrorism Studies (CTS) school as to what constitutes state-sponsored terrorism. US military interventions in Latin America during President Reagan's two terms of office were conducted in the name of Cold-War counter-terrorism to eliminate the perceived regional threat to US national security. US intervention in Nicaragua and the Iran-Contra affair has been widely covered but the less well covered US intervention in El Salvador can be equally instructive and presents a case study that warrants scrutiny as it is relevant to the development of contemporary counter-terrorism policy. The US intervention in El Salvador not only blurred the lines between what might be considered counter-terrorism and what might be considered state-sponsored terrorism but the precedents set by the Reagan Administration in its use of low-intensity warfare doctrine and the support of right-wing 'death squads' remain relevant to the conduct of the 'global war on terror' today. Equally relevant to this appraisal are Reagan's National Security Directives which are the antecedent to the current US foreign policy as regards the 'drone war'. Ethical questions about the Reagan Administration's introduction of pre-emptive strikes as a legitimate form of self-defense remain equally relevant today as four decades ago. This study of US interventions in El Salvador can inform and enhance current counter-terrorism policy and contribute to the elimination of state-sponsored terrorism as a by-product of this policy.

Adam Waddingham, University of Manchester

Enoch Powell and the Making of Eurosceptic Constitutionalism

For historians of modern Britain, a central question has been the creation, reception, and adaption of a strand of political thought which has come to dominate British politics: Euroscepticism. This paper considers one distinct strand of the intellectual tradition of scepticism towards Europe through an analysis of constitutionalism. Through analysing the British Constitution, and the attendant intellectual culture surrounding its development, this paper examines how Euroscepticism was developed with one key individual acting as a proponent – Enoch Powell. By considering how Powell, and others, constructed early arguments of what would later be termed Euroscepticism, this paper offers a complement and a corrective. A complement to the existing understanding of Powell's legacy around nationhood and a corrective to the conception that Euroscepticism is rooted solely in the 1980s and early 1990s. The paper also proffers a working definition of the term 'Eurosceptic Constitutionalism' to develop understandings of how debates of constitutionalism intersect with broader understandings of Europe, Britain, and the relationship between the two. An analysis of constitutionalism thus contributes an important perspective when considering the ways in which distinctive political traditions are created and adapted.

Panel 2

Out of the Ashes: The Aftermath of the Second World War

Exhibiting Home: Public Consultation and The Provisioning of Home in Post-war Britain

Composed in relation to both state and commercial initiatives, the town planning and industrial design exhibitions of the post-war period can be seen to offer an insight into discourses of home, identity, and issues of placemaking in the aftermath of the Second World War.

This paper examines town planning and industrial design exhibitions as a major promotional strategy and cultural force in conveying and consolidating home imaginaries in the post-war period. Organised by city planning departments, design councils and local authority groups, such exhibitions affirm the extent to which home is manufactured in relation to technocratic approaches to town planning and design reform. In providing a template for the physical reconstruction of blitzed cities, exhibitions such as the Coventry of The Future exhibition (1945) and the Manchester and District Planning Exhibition (1945) evidence how ideas of home are conceptualised in accordance with the provisioning of the built environment. Conversely, industrial design exhibitions such as Britain Can Make it (1946) and The Daily Mail Ideal Homes Exhibition (1948) demonstrate the way in which ideas of home are articulated in relation to the production of aesthetic and political propaganda around design and its consumption. Intended to alert the public of the need for a co-ordinated approach to city planning and design reform, such exhibitions evidence the way in which ideas of home are propagandised in relation to the provisioning of both civic and domestic space.

Olga Byrska, European University Institute

Revolution or Reconstruction? The Immediate Post-WW2 Dilemmas of Polish Intellectuals

How to rebuild the world that was completely destroyed – and in what way? This general question guided many societies and nations in the immediate post-Second World War period, but was particularly pertinent in Poland between 1944 and 1947/8. In my presentation, I will show a fraction of the intellectual post-war debate in Poland on the notions of reconstruction of an intellectual life of the country. Through the figure of Jerzy Borejsza, journalist and publicist-turned dedicated communist who came from the USSR to rebuild the entire publishing system – and quickly became one of the most powerful figures of the pre-Iron Curtain political life of the country – I will present the ways in which the intellectual discourse concentrated on continuities and discontinuities with the pre-war systems and ideologies. More specifically, through the example of his essay 'The Gentle Revolution', published in early 1945, I will invite you to look with me at the ways and tendencies of thinking about the direction of changes in Polish culture and society, and to think together on how – if at all – it could look like, a gentle revolution of this time.

Emily Steinhauer, German Historical Institute London

Accelerating the Kafkaesque: The Administered World after the Second World War

Rationalisation as a paradigm of modernity experienced a fundamental crisis with the conclusion of WW2: if Max Weber's 'iron cage of modernity' or Kafka's novels had spoken to the complex stratification and administration of fin-de-siècle Europe, fate but not necessarily fateful, the Frankfurt School's Dialectic of Enlightenment brought home the catastrophic implications of reason unbound. Whilst the USSR was soon seen as the successor to the bureaucratic nightmare of Nazi Germany, a rebranding of the relationship of the individual to the welfare state and the new 'managers' of the workplace seemed to herald a breaking away from stuffy hierarchies and cumbersome structures. Yet some of the fundamental actors of pre-WW2 rationalisation stubbornly persisted: the bureaucrats and white-collar employees, who had already seemed outdated by the interwar period, re-emerged in the West. From American writers like C. Wright Mills to members of the Frankfurt School in West Germany, scholars in the West were assessing the re-emergence of white-collar workers and bureaucrats as a fundamental cog in the post-war machine. This paper will analyse the persistence and transformation of this group, highlighting how their continued role in the labour market betrayed also a persistence of ideology – specifically the rejection of class over an estate-based or levelled-out middle strata (Schelsky) – and a continued critique of this seemingly outdated or untimely 'spirit' (Bloch). Central to this is the persistent analysis of the bureaucratic psyche by Alfred Weber, Max Weber's younger brother, whose indictment of the administered mind continues fiercely from the 1910s to the 1950s.

Jennifer Grant, Queen Mary University London

Unvisited Tombs: The Rewriting of the Polish Wartime Contribution in British Cultural Memory, 1945-55

The regrouping of the Polish Armed Forces first in France and then the UK had a primarily diplomatic motivation: to remind the western Allies of Poland's continuing existence, in the belief that this would result in fair treatment in the final peace settlement. The Poles had a significant impact on British society, becoming part of the new cosmopolitan profile of British cities, while her fighter pilots achieved celebrity status during the Battle of Britain. However, Poland could not hope to compete with the significant hard power proffered by the Soviet Union to the western Allies from 1941. The UK's transfer of recognition from the London-based Polish government-in-exile to the Provisional Government in Poland in July 1945 represented a turning point in how the Polish contribution would be remembered.

In the first place, the decision of the Attlee government to stage the Victory Parade in 1946 without inviting the 'London Poles' was a source of fierce debate across Britain, from local newspapers through to the House of Commons, on what exactly Britain owed the Poles as former allies. I will also be examining the practical difficulties encountered by the Imperial War Graves Commission in the 1950s as it attempted to coordinate and finance the erection of permanent headstones to Polish servicemen buried on British soil when the Warsaw government had disowned such men, and examining how far the British decision to take full responsibility for the headstones was motivated by a sense of obligation.

Panel 3

Social Democracy and the Postwar World

1970s Leicester and the Collapse of the Postwar Consensus

While Leicester today is often seen as a 'model city' of multiculturalism, in the 1970s its reputation could not have been more different. The national press then referred to Leicester as the 'most racist city in Britain', based on both its negative responses to the arrival of Ugandan Asian evacuees in 1972, and for its high level of support for the far-right National Front, peaking in the 1976 local elections where they won almost 20 per cent of the vote. At the same time Leicester, which at the start of the decade was still often referred to as the 'second wealthiest city in Europe', underwent a rapid decline in manufacturing industry and increasing unemployment. In many people's minds these two phenomena seemed to be linked.

In this paper, based on my first draft chapter, I examine how local discourses around 'race' and immigration in 1970s Leicester related to ideas of local and national 'decline'. In this way, critiques of the city's (and nation's) changing demographics were linked with wider worries about the 'state of the nation', particularly the perceived economic crisis of the 1970s and the ostensible inability of the welfare state to provide health, housing, education, and other services, on a universalist basis. In this paper I therefore ask if we can see signs of the end of the post-war consensus in 1970s Leicester, and, more broadly, also argue for the importance of local factors and, in particular, narratives in explaining wider political and social change in this period.

Neil Warner, London School of Economics and Political Science

Roads to No Alternative: The Rejection of Proposals for the Socialisation of Investment in France, Britain and Sweden, 1970-1991

This study examines proposals to bring the investment process in economies under the control of the state or workers' movements, that gained significant attention socialist parties and labour movements in many Western countries during the 1970s and 1980s. Focussing on the cases of France, Britain and Sweden, it seeks to explain why socialist governments in these countries discussed but ultimately rejected this approach to economic strategy. By situating these failures in a wider debate about low or declining investment in the 1970s, it suggests that a choice was faced by governments in the 1970s to tackle tensions between redistributive politics and privately-controlled investment either by expanding the role of the state and labour in the investment process, or by reducing their role and pairing back redistributive politics in order to promote privately-controlled investment. By seeking to explain why social democratic governments chose the latter course rather than the former, it therefore contributes to our understanding of the early stages of the transition towards 'neoliberalism' in the policies of social democratic parties in the 1970s and 1980s. It argues that socialisation of investment proposals failed because investment questions lacked an experiential resonance with left constituencies whose attention and mobilisation was needed for such measures to succeed.

Christopher Dodd, Nottingham Trent University

“The Worst Kind of Dickensian, Victorian Loony Bin”: The Labour Party and the Politics of Asylum Closure, 1954-1975

In the early 1960s ambitious changes were planned for the British National Health Service [NHS]. The most eye-catching was a considerable increase in capital expenditure to fund a hospital building programme to 'modernise' the hospital service. A significant aspect of this was the wholesale closure of mental asylums which were to be replaced by facilities that could support a move towards more community-based care. This paper examines the pursuit of this policy between 1954-75 with specific attention paid to the Labour governments of 1964-70. The policy was in part a response to significant changes in methods of treatment for patients with a broad spectrum of mental health issues. It was also strongly influenced by a number of government reports including those set up to investigate mis-treatment of patients that criticised the out-dated facilities and over-crowding in asylums. Despite broad cross-party support and sustained investment not a single asylum had been closed by 1975 when a government white paper conceded that it was not achievable in the short-term. Perhaps unsurprisingly, historical coverage of the policy is dominated by analysis of why asylums were not closed more quickly. To offer a different perspective this paper will provide an explanation for how the policy of closure became so entrenched. Ultimately this will pose a broader question of whether the pursuit of closure was really the best policy for patients. This is fundamentally intertwined with concepts of continuity and change in post-war Britain especially the trope that explains the optimism of 1960s Britain and how this was tempered by reality.

Michael Lambert, Lancaster University

Realising the Problem Family, Crafting the Social Democratic State: Consensus, Welfare and Policy in Post-war England

Neoliberal retrenchment of the current welfare state presents an inescapable concern to research its past. Initiated by Conservative Governments in 1979 and perpetuated by their Labour successors from 1997, retrenchment reflects a neoliberal consensus. Privatisation, contracting, conditionality and performance management have been documented as pillars of the neoliberalising process, alongside austerity since 2008. The forces behind neoliberalisation represent what Bourdieu (1998) considers to be the right hand of the state: technocrats, financiers, ministers, cabinets, and high politics. This is complemented by the left hand: functionaries, social workers, welfare officials and a phalanx of what Lipsky (1980) lumps as 'street level bureaucrats'. The advancing power of the right at the expense of the professionalism of the left is central to the neoliberal 'rolling back' of the welfare state's frontiers in the literature. However, this analysis lacks a contingent and contextual historical grasp of the 'rolling forward' of the social democratic welfare state. Such a grasp exposes far more complexity than permitted in this synthesis. Building on Crossley's (2016) notion of neoliberal statecraft through the realisation of 'troubled family' policies since 2011, this paper develops a case study of 'problem family' policies from 1940 to 1970, offering a comparable process for the social democratic state. The embedded and politically opaque nature of policies throws light on how 'pertinent silences' (Toye, 2013) in postwar British social policy revisit the contested concept of consensus. Paradoxically, the professionalisation, expansion and consolidation of the left hand of the state was integral to empowering the right.

Keynote Speaker

Florence Sutcliffe- Braithwaite

Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, UCL

Neoliberalism, feminism and change in gender roles in Britain in the late twentieth century

At the end of the Second World War, state nurseries closed, women were pushed out of jobs to make room for returning servicemen, and the expanding welfare state assumed women would be primarily housewives and mothers. By the end of the century, though women remained unequal in many ways, there had been a transformation in women's roles and in gendered ideologies, with the rise of working motherhood, a growing emphasis on equal opportunities for girls and women, and challenges to traditional modes of masculinity. Though these changes were gradual, they accelerated in the final three decades of the century, a period which saw the rise and decline of the women's liberation movement and the rise of neoliberalism. This lecture will look at the interaction of neoliberal thinking and neoliberal economics with feminism and gender, to offer an explanation of why women's lives changed so much in this period. I will challenge accounts which centre either post-1968 feminist activism or neoliberal governments: while both of these were significant forces shaping women's lives, neither on its own can fully explain the transformations in gendered ideologies. Instead, I will look to long-term changes in Britain's economy, and to growing discourses of popular individualism as key factors transforming women's roles. Drawing on oral history interviews with working-class women from Britain's coalfields, conducted as part of my research with Natalie Thomlinson on women in the miners' strike, the lecture will suggest that accounts of change must bring together social, cultural, political and economic history, and that self-narrative sources (such as oral history) can be an invaluable tool to do so.