DARLING HARBOUR
TO DACEYVILLE

The Housing Reform Movement in Sydney
1900 to 1915

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of the requirements for the degree of
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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has not already been accepted in substance for any degree. It is the result of my own independent research and all sources which have been consulted are acknowledged in the references.
For Professor Ted Wheelwright, who taught me that the study of economics also has a political and social dimension
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Abstract

This thesis is an historical inquiry into the emergence and significance of Sydney's housing reform movement in the period from 1900 to 1915. Its purpose is to redress the relatively neglected study of housing reform activity in Australian history. Housing reform scholarship in general has suffered from inadequate conceptual definition, narrow contextual analysis and the problem of historical hindsight. In early twentieth century Sydney, the housing reform movement played host to a variety of reform groups and ideologies, whose competing currents require the historian to reassess the view that the period simply sought to advance public housing goals, human progress and state welfare policy. The range of state housing interventions, it is argued, need to be related to wider historical processes occurring in the city economy and urban society. In pre-war Sydney, governments, housing reform groups, social philosophies, and cultural ideas interacted with one another to produce housing reform outcomes which were not predetermined, but subject to tension, conflict and renegotiation. This dialectical conception of state housing reform therefore seeks to show how institutional factors, social groups, and individuals all helped to shape responses to the housing problem. The major players in this period were liberal professional groups and worker housing interests. On the eve of the First World War liberal concern for working-class housing reform swung toward greater scientific understanding of the housing problem. Nevertheless, by 1915, the reform strategy of professional planning advocates was forced to confront the redistributive claims of socialist housing reformers. The liberal ideal of a self-supporting single-family housing programme effectively collided with the socialist concept of low-cost suburbs for Sydney's working-class.
Acknowledgements

The subject of this doctoral thesis grew out of my work as a research officer in the Office of the NSW Minister for Housing during the 1980s. It was stimulated by a political dispute between the State Government and its tenants in the Rocks area. Preliminary research revealed that tensions between governments and residents in the area had a recurring history which reached back to the beginning of the twentieth century. Early records and reports held in the Housing Department’s Library also helped to orientate research and encourage further inquiry into the state housing history of Sydney. How and why governments became involved in housing reform programmes was a key question which demanded wider research and study. Government provision of housing has always been a political problem as much as an economic one. The formation of housing policy varies across time, space and culture. The purpose of the thesis is therefore to recreate this early period of state intervention in Sydney's housing environment and to explain its significance in the context of broader urban, economic and social structures.

I wish to acknowledge the assistance of a number of people and institutions. Thanks are owed to the staffs of the State Library, Mitchell Library, Parliamentary Library, and Archives Office of New South Wales. Librarians and archivists at the Sydney City Library, Botany Municipal Library, Maritime Services Board and N.S.W. Housing Department all helped me to locate newspaper files and materials. The staff of Fisher Library, at the University of Sydney, provided valuable research assistance and technical services. In Melbourne, Professor Graeme Davison was a most helpful guide to other sources and researchers in the field.

Thanks are also due to the supervisor of my thesis, Mr Garry Wotherspoon of the Department of Economic History, at the University of Sydney. Garry read, impeccably punctuated, edited and encouraged my work during its various stages of completion. I also wish to thank the Head of Department, Associate Professor F. Ben Tipton, for wading through draft chapters and providing critical comments from the outset. Special thanks are due to Ms Julie Manley, Administrative Assistant, who patiently, skilfully, and cheerfully formatted the document, deciphered the text and prepared the final proofs for submission.

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<td>Archives Office of New South Wales</td>
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<td>APP</td>
<td>Australian Parliamentary Papers</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>City Building Surveyor</td>
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<td>CFSHT</td>
<td>Correspondence Files of Sydney Harbour Trust</td>
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<td>CHO</td>
<td>City Health Officer</td>
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<td>DT</td>
<td>Daily Telegraph</td>
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<tr>
<td>EN</td>
<td>Evening News</td>
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<tr>
<td>MHR</td>
<td>Member House Representatives</td>
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<td>ML</td>
<td>Mitchell Library</td>
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<td>MLA</td>
<td>Member Legislative Assembly</td>
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<td>MLC</td>
<td>Member Legislative Council</td>
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<td>NSWPD</td>
<td>New South Wales Parliamentary Debates</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSWPP</td>
<td>New South Wales Parliamentary Papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R&amp;PSGCC</td>
<td>Reports and Proceedings of Sydney City Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMH</td>
<td>Sydney Morning Herald</td>
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<tr>
<td>TCAR</td>
<td>Town Clerk's Annual Report</td>
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<tr>
<td>V&amp;PLANSW</td>
<td>Votes and Proceedings of Legislative Assembly of New South Wales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V&amp;PLAVIC</td>
<td>Votes and Proceedings of Legislative Assembly of Victoria</td>
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<td>VPP</td>
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Chapter One

Introduction

The housing problem, and government attempts to deal with it, have long been subjects of interest to urban, economic and social historians. For urban historians the housing problem is often studied in relation to nineteenth century urbanisation and the emergence of industrial towns. The quality of a city's housing stock, the prevalence of overcrowded slum districts, and the distribution of differing dwelling types, can all be used as indicators of urban living standards. Economic historians, however, might choose to focus their attention on the mechanics of the housing market. The relationship between wage and rent levels in an urban economy over time and space is one manifestation of the housing problem. Another may involve the effect of government intervention on the profitability of housing investment and the relative attractiveness of alternative uses of capital in an urban environment. Social historians, by contrast, are more interested in the wider forces behind housing interventions. These include the interaction of individuals and social groups and the political structures in which the reform process is played out. An historical explanation of why the state and various social groups entered the housing reform debate in early twentieth century Sydney should therefore take into account competing political cultures and ideologies.

The period from 1900 to 1915 is of particular significance to historians of housing reform in Australia. Before 1900 no government had passed specific housing legislation in any of the colonies. In the capital cities health and housing issues were as always, critical and Sydney was on the verge of a plague epidemic. By 1915, however, virtually every State Government had enacted legislation relating to worker dwellings and introduced varying forms of housing assistance for city-dwellers. In Sydney, this period of heightened state intervention was accompanied by the emergence of a housing reform movement. The movement drew together a body of individuals and groups who shared a general consensus about the necessity for city housing reform. Sanitary reformers and civic improvers had advocated regulatory measures since the mid-nineteenth century, but direct intervention in the housing market seemed to them to be an unacceptable policy response.
The forces behind greater state involvement in Sydney's housing question were better organised after 1900 yet no more united in their reform aims. They carried with them many of the assumptions and attitudes of the colonial past, but most notably, a heightened sense of urgency and determination to achieve real change. Understanding the interplay of the competing social groups, their differing perceptions of the housing problem and strategies for its resolution, should be seen in the context of the dominant political and cultural institutions which straddled the period. Housing reform was more than a product of progressive state intervention in early twentieth century Sydney and the policy outcomes were rarely simple and far from predictable.

It seems appropriate that a brash and self confident city like Sydney should have played host to an equally vigorous housing reform movement in the early 1900s. Outwardly, the City of Sydney was the most populous and prosperous of colonial capitals. Its harbour handled more trade, its transport system carried more commuters, and more immigrants sought its shores than any other Australian port. Inwardly, however, the City was subject to all the stresses and strains of an ageing and degenerate commercial capital. Its physical structures, the product of nineteenth century growth and technological change, appeared worn out and exhausted. Opportunities for further growth and renewal were constrained by the lack of exploitable land and the indiscriminate mixing of manufacturing, commercial and residential activities. Among these competing uses it was the deteriorating conditions of the last which most alarmed contemporaries. Housing conditions, they believed, could be used as a barometer to test the public health and stamina of the City. The more rudimentary and unsavoury a housing district seemed, then the more likely were its inhabitants to be under-nourished, enfeebled and impoverished. This debilitating relationship had to be dissolved for the sake of civic and social progress. A programme of physical and environmental improvement, it was argued, would raise slum-dwellers from their sordid and debased existence.

The City's preoccupation with health and housing conditions in the period from 1900-1915 did not signal a radical departure from the problems which earlier authorities had faced. Everywhere there were visible signs of continuity with the late nineteenth century. Unemployment, homelessness, crime, and sickness continued to ravage the streets and alleys of inner-city neighbourhoods. Hundreds of the outcasts had been reared under housing conditions which were obnoxious to middle-class reformers and health agencies. In 1900 many of the urban problems which colonial governments had failed to solve re-emerged in a
frightening epidemic of bubonic plague. Once again the political and social structures which shaped urban society were called into question. Governments were obliged to protect the public health and restore order. The forms of intervention were not always welcomed, but their emergence signalled the possibility of further reform measures.

In 1915 the housing problem remained as intractable as ever, although a range of new processes and institutions had emerged to deal with it. In the wake of slum clearance activity, housing legislation was passed, workmen's dwellings were built and the reform debate fell under the sway of a professional group of civic reformers and planners. The reform leadership was horrified by the sight of the 'old world' slum and formulated a theory of environmental determinism to explain its existence in a new nation. Armed with this body of belief, the reformers continued to assume that the causes of Sydney's housing problem had only to be isolated, and they could be remedied by appropriate methods of intervention. If bad environment was the cause of housing stress, as most observers suspected, then removing physical and cultural barriers seemed more important than replacing existing economic structures in the City.

When the reform leadership tried to rationalise Sydney's housing problem, it conjured up disturbing visions of town life in the 'old country'. City newspapers regularly featured harrowing accounts of the parlous condition of the lower-classes in mother England. London's low life, its teeming tenements and philanthropic societies were well known to informed readers in Federation Sydney. Few doubted the authenticity of the accounts, and the more inquiring must have wondered whether Sydney's rookeries were not rearing a similar crop of misfits and outcasts. One housing reformer who feared the worst was John Daniel Fitzgerald. In 1902 he told a parliamentary committee that:

No city in the world needs structural improvement more than Sydney; no city is riper for it. We have whole acres of slum areas, which have reached that stage of age and decay which render them dangerous to the residents and to the health of the city. We have miles of tiny, choking lanes, in which the stamina of the children is sapped... You will find slums and decaying houses and tenements in suburbs quite recently populated. Whole areas are now ripe for resumption and demolition in the interests of public health, because it has been found during the recent plague operations that thousands of houses were built at a period when sanitary plumbing was an unknown science, and when the present laws of construction were rudimentary.
Fitzgerald pictured a process of urban degeneration at work. Sydney, it seemed, was the 'Cinderella of Cities' rather than the Queen of the new Commonwealth.3

What forms should the state intervention take? Contemporaries were reluctant to nominate concrete housing reform measures for city-dwellers. Many talked in terms of suburban rather than city solutions. Reformers agreed that any intervention which undermined individual self-reliance would have harmful consequences for family life and future generations. In 1900 the *Sydney Morning Herald* warned that housing reform which sought social improvement by 'purely charitable effort' would be 'doomed to failure'. The most sound policy for governments and reformers was to introduce the 'business element' which wisely avoided charity.4 The apocalyptic vision of shoe-horning working people into impersonal and subsidised housing enclaves indeed repelled most middle-class housing reformers in early twentieth century Sydney. Public housing solutions, which involved redistribution or the replacement of private home ownership, were never seriously advocated by reformers.

Nevertheless, conservatives and liberals did not have the housing reform stage solely to themselves in this period. They were forced to share it with other social groups jostling for positions of influence and favour. For working-class interests housing reform promised political change. Their representatives were just as eager to participate in the housing reform process as was the middle-class leadership. Public protests, worker dwelling associations and ministerial deputations were popular forms of action used to pressure official opinion and influence housing policy outcomes. Least organised as a social group, but most often the target of state intervention, were Sydney's slum-dwellers. They formed an urban sub-culture which had attracted official scrutiny since the mid-nineteenth century. In Federation Sydney the poor were repeatedly subjected to the indignity of slum reform tours organised by Lord Mayors, churchmen and charity workers.

**Methodology and Terminology**

The aim of the thesis is to look beyond a narrow conceptual model of state housing intervention by examining housing reform strategies in the context of a developing urban nation. Housing historians have mostly pointed to the integrative purpose of state housing in relation to working-class protest in the early twentieth century. In Britain, some historians have interpreted state housing programmes as a form of social control, designed to contain industrial
unrest or correct market failure. The problem with this perspective is that it tends to assume that the housing reform process is governed by a simple causal relationship. Bad housing is the cause of conflict, and government intervention is seen as the effect. The stimulus-response approach to housing reform can also lead historians to conclude that the private housing market contains inherent weaknesses which will inevitably be addressed by state actions. Market deficiencies harm low-income earners who are in most housing need and therefore the target of interventionist strategies. State house building activity, however, does not necessarily point to a ruling consensus supporting a public housing solution for the working-classes. There is no a priori reason why state housing provision should be an inevitable entrant on the historical stage.

These problems and the assumptions they embody, can be modified by broadening the field of historical enquiry. State housing has been a significant feature of the historical experience of the urban working-classes in the early twentieth century. Governments and housing reform groups have existed in a complex relationship with each other. The relationship touches on more than the maintenance of the existing social order. Housing interventions in Australian history occurred in the context of a distinctive urban culture and nineteenth century settler tradition. They owe as much to colonial assumptions and cultural perspectives as to socio-economic factors. Housing problems generally call forth interventionist responses when they disturb existing political and social structures. This does not mean, however, that the housing question will be decisively resolved by state intervention. In the context of early twentieth century Sydney, the problem of housing the working classes was complicated by relations between social groups, and institutional attitudes to central and municipal governments, state assistance, slum housing and poverty. The state became enmeshed in a shifting set of negotiations and tensions between rival interests and ideologies. These conflicts were not always resolved to the satisfaction of housing reform groups, governments or wider society.

In any historical recreation there are also problems of definition and identity. More recently, historians of nineteenth century urban society have begun to urge caution in the way in which we choose to reinvent the past. Alan Mayne, for example, has attempted to place colonial newspaper reports on Sydney's slums in their socio-cultural context. He argues that documentary texts do not 'speak' directly from the past but are embedded in the social structures and cultural exchanges of their age. Historians who do not appreciate the distance separating their world view from the perspective of the period that
they examine risk obscuring or misinterpreting the significance of historical evidence. Mayne suggests that the colourful 'slummer journalism' of late nineteenth century Sydney should be viewed as a 'performance' rather than 'reflection' of contemporary urban society.

The imprecise meaning of historical language obviously affects this study. A number of terms and concepts recur frequently throughout the thesis. Slum dwellers, for example, was a subjective description used by contemporaries to emphasise cultural separateness and otherness within Sydney's population. Frost himself has observed that the term slum was 'coined in the nineteenth century to connote growing areas of deteriorating, overcrowded and insanitary housing...'. Slum dwellers were therefore thought to be the dominant social group inhabiting these blighted areas. When contemporaries and especially worker interests addressed the housing question, they also employed the term workingmen's dwellings. It is assumed that this term was not gender specific and that it referred to low-cost, purpose-built housing for city workers engaged in manual and casual labour. Whilst recognising the generic nature of the term working-class housing, it is also assumed that contemporaries made no appreciable distinction between the two categories.

Historiography

What then is the range and nature of explanatory literature related to housing reform movements in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? Researching urban housing history, and more specifically, the housing reform experience in Sydney, demands considerable contextual analysis. The area of urban studies has grown extensively and much of the available literature is of an inter-disciplinary nature. Housing, public health, environment, welfare and poverty have all been the focus of more recent research into urban and social history. Max Kelly, in a pioneering essay on slum housing in Sydney, showed that housing standards were woeful for thousands of city-dwellers during the 'Long Boom' of 1861-1891. Alan Mayne's study of sanitary and social policy in Victorian Sydney identified an alien and degenerate sub-culture among the lower orders. Furthering this theme of urban degeneracy, Graeme Davison explored the national anxieties associated with city-bred children in early twentieth century Melbourne. He argued that liberal reformers developed a theory of urban degeneration which questioned racial fitness and justified state intervention in the human life cycle.
Chapter 1  Introduction

origins of the urban progressives and their social idealism in early twentieth century Australian political culture.11

The above studies provide a broad analytical context in which to develop a theory of housing reform in early twentieth century Sydney. Housing reformers did not come equipped with a preconceived programme of intervention for the urban and social problems they observed. They did, however, share many of the attitudes, values and anxieties of their age. The habitations of the urban poor clearly scandalised notions of economic independence and upward mobility in a fledgling nation. In nineteenth century Australia there existed a widespread assumption that the worker could eventually become his own landlord. By the end of the colonial period, however, such assumptions came under increasing strain as Sydney's physical environment deteriorated.12 If most contemporaries saw nothing seriously wrong with the mechanisms of wealth creation and distribution, then it was reasonable to assume that something had gone amiss with the city-dweller and his environment. How then could the problem be explained?

Sanitarians, medical authorities, churchmen and charity workers suspected that there was a causal relationship between the life of the poor and the city space they inhabited. Everyday observations in Federation Sydney showed that the worst housing quarters bred the most dependent poor. It was therefore logical to conclude that certain types of housing environment had a harmful effect on their inhabitants. Bad housing could be blamed for a range of urban disorders such as crime, disease, immorality and degeneracy. Although it was a determinist theory, based on a mechanical view of urban society, contemporaries did not lose sight of its application for housing reform purposes. Indeed, if the housing problem was mostly manifested in the plight of the slum-dweller, the outlook for city-bred people in general was bleak. What was needed then were effective reform measures 'lest Australia should reproduce the conditions of misery and over-crowding prevalent in old-world cities'.13

Comparisons between old world cities and a newly emerging nation were important to housing reformers in Sydney. Parallel currents can also be drawn between the history of the housing reform movements in Australian and British towns. A preponderance of public debate on urban health and sanitation was common to both countries in the second half of the nineteenth century.14 So too were slum demolition and city improvement programmes.15 The period of heightened state intervention in the housing problem was roughly similar, occurring between 1900 and 1920. Furthermore, the British town planning and
garden city movement helped to influence reform opinion and housing legislation in the various States of Australia.

These thematic comparisons, however, should not obscure deeper political and cultural divergencies between the two countries. Unlike Britain, local government institutions in nineteenth century Australia were politically weak. There was not a strong tradition of municipal housing intervention in the colonies. Nor was there a corresponding model dwelling reform movement. By the late nineteenth century, colonial Australia had failed to develop national insurance policies and lagged behind Britain in terms of housing reforms. While private landlords built much of the working-class housing stock in both countries, owner-occupation was not a significant cultural factor in Victorian England. It should also be noted that the nature and timing of the state interventions had produced different housing outcomes in the two nations by the end of the First World War.

What did distinguish the housing reform movement in early twentieth century Sydney was the development of a liberal intellectual leadership. Housing reform advocates such as J.D. Fitzgerald, R.F. Irvine and J. Sulman were all critical of the existing housing order. As social idealists, however, none wished to recreate the political and social tensions of the 1890s by preaching radical housing reform. They questioned the physical arrangement and distribution of housing resources among city-dwellers more closely than the economic structures of Federation Sydney. The labouring poor were still taught to practice thrift and not to rely on governments as public charities. Self-help housing programmes rather than worker housing schemes would encourage the poor to win back their independence. The liberal leadership saw housing reform as a national goal and cure-all for urban squalor and decay.

The reform elite therefore believed that the housing question could be settled by environmental/cultural interventions rather than by political solutions. This proposition should not imply that it was opposed to state intervention. The housing reform leaders of the period were ambassadors of the 'New Liberalism', which taught that the individual's place in society was more important than membership of a social class or group. The 'New Liberals' could appeal to the state to modify social institutions and relations which blocked or deformed the ideal development of the individual. Housing reformers in Sydney, for example, saw the free-standing, single-family home as compatible with social harmony: it seemed to promise the fulfilment of the personal development of the individual. Tenement and terrace-dwellers,
contrast, appeared locked in a degenerate relationship with their inner-city housing environment. Housing reform measures which assisted the former process and discouraged the latter must therefore benefit all of society.

The state was viewed as an instrument of neutrality by the housing reform leadership. It believed that governments could be used to promote ethical or universal ideals in a new nation. The 'secular evangelism' of the period cut across class boundaries and helped to influence the thinking of Labor's housing legislators. J.R. Dacey, for instance, repudiated the notion of class-based legislation and argued that his 1912 Housing Act had an educative, moral purpose. This liberal ethic, however, was not necessarily shared by the victims of Sydney's housing crisis. Working-class groups had a more radical housing agenda to fulfil. Wage earners expected that their parliamentary representatives would press their claims for social justice and introduce working-class housing legislation. However, the reluctance or unwillingness of legislators to implement a redistributive housing programme for low-paid labour suggested that they had no desire to see the state beholden to any social group in early twentieth century Sydney.

New Liberalism versus State Socialism

The competing ideologies of New Liberalism and State Socialism provide a broad conceptual framework to help explain the differing housing reform programmes pursued in this period. Rowse has argued that intellectual elites in the Federated Commonwealth sought to steer a middle course between laissez-faire individualism and old-world socialism. As liberal critics of Australian society they believed that a political consensus was needed to contain the antagonisms inherent in both visions. The emerging nation could continue to cultivate its nineteenth century liberal tradition and introduce progressive social reforms without rupturing the political centre. Social experiments could be tried in the hope that they would solve the problems of the old world. The 'New Protectionism' of the period, whereby manufacturing and worker interests struck an accord over tariffs and wages, was a notable product of the strategy of containment.

The New Liberal reformers emphasised the primacy of environmental and cultural factors of causation in their analysis of Sydney's housing problem. It does not necessarily follow, however, that their approach blinded them to the importance of economic relationships. Rather, the terms of the housing reform debate were largely shaped by the premises chosen and the questions they gave
rise to in this period. Economic structures in early twentieth century Sydney remained unchallenged because the liberal reform leadership assumed that social class was no barrier to housing reform and that a new urban nation could 'side-step' the miseries of old-world cities. Accordingly, environmental remedies rather than economic solutions seemed the most appropriate way to deal with the housing problem. As a reform programme, New Liberalism appealed to those who believed that social questions could be resolved without invoking the political ideologies and practices of the past.

Given this context, housing reform was yet another attempt to reach a political consensus over an unresolved social question in the new Commonwealth. The roots of the problem, however, ran deep into the nineteenth century where they periodically gave rise to environmental anxieties and interventionist responses. The failure of colonial governments to effect real reform meant that the housing problem would recur in more frightening forms for future generations to deal with. However, when the housing problem re-emerged at the turn of the century, liberal reformers found that they now had to contend with an organised labour movement. The emergence of this new player on the political stage introduced an unpredictable factor into the housing reform process. The liberal leadership was forced into an uncomfortable relationship with a competing social class. Its housing reform theory, which assumed that urban society was an ensemble of competing individuals with a neutral state, now confronted the concept of an exploited group struggling to express its own political identity.

As an ideology and reform programme, State Socialism was an influential organising force within the labour movement of turn-of-the-century Sydney. Its visionaries were critical of the overcrowded and blighted nineteenth century city. They accepted the basic assumption of Social Darwinists and eugenists that urban-bred populations were prey to degenerate tendencies which weakened national character and corrupted social relationships. However, the reform practices of State Socialists were fundamentally different from those urged by eugenists. State Socialism stressed the importance of environmental rather than hereditary factors in accounting for social dependency and poverty. Environmental conditions and not hereditary differences could best explain individual and social inequalities. Furthermore, in this stream of thought, the state served as the cornerstone upon which State Socialists based their interventionist programmes. State support, they argued, was needed to help the poorest and weakest groups in urban society.²⁰
The state had the capacity to emancipate the poor and oppressed. State Socialists believed that it could deliver economic and social justice for the working-classes. Governments were thought to be capable of undertaking all manner of enterprise carried on by private individuals and groups. Much of this private economic activity seemed to be dominated by a plutocracy which had conspired to deprive working people of decent wages and living conditions. The state could therefore help humanity by establishing state enterprises, banking institutions and municipal markets. It could enter the housing market by building workmen's dwellings and thereby dislodge parasitical landlord groups. Governments had only to legislate to protect the living standards of the urban working-class. The organised labour movement was the vehicle which would help deliver State Socialism.

There were close ties between State Socialist ideology and wider labour organisations in the 1890s. Members of the Australian Socialist League (ASL) were active in keeping their ideals alive in trade unions and Labor electoral leagues. The Sydney Trades and Labor Council was a prominent proving ground. So too was the NSW Labor Party which maintained an alliance with the ASL until 1898. J.D. Fitzgerald, W.M. Hughes, W.A. Holman and Arthur Griffith had indeed all been members. State Socialist ideas continued to percolate throughout the 1900s. Many in the Labor movement hoped that this body of belief would guide society along 'the parliamentary road to socialism'.

Nevertheless, State Socialism failed to supplant the New Liberal leadership and its housing reform programme for Sydney. Worker groups and their representatives, despite the growing tensions generated by the housing reform interventions, were unable to displace the primacy of environmental determinist thinking in the movement. For much of the period they were in broad agreement with the propositions of the progressive leadership. Both the New Liberals and State Socialists wished to harness state power in support of housing reform. There was a general consensus that governments had to widen homeownership opportunities for the working-classes. The New Liberals favoured this form of state support because it seemed to help the individual towards greater self-reliance and personal freedom. Working-class groups believed it would break the monopoly power of the urban landlord class and help free the exploited rent-paying proletariat. However, the reform groups parted ways over fair rents legislation and worker housing provision. The leadership stressed that these policies would upset the housing market mechanism and undermine
individual self-reliance. State Socialists believed that their implementation would promote a more equal and just society.

Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is arranged in the following manner. Chapter Two looks at how the social ideal of the single-family home emerged in colonial society. Nineteenth century Australia eulogised the independence of the private and detached cottage. By the closing decades of the century, however, its availability was not universal but problematic for many city-dwellers in Sydney. While contemporaries saw working-class housing as a problem, the state focused on public health and sanitary regulation rather than direct dwelling provision. The plague epidemic of 1900 was a key factor in stimulating City Council reforms and a more systematic attack on sub-standard housing conditions. As an agent of housing reform the City Council also became a political rival of the State Legislature.

In the early 1900s the Council's administrative authority was usurped by the emergence of state landlordism in West Sydney. Chapter Three is a case study of the Sydney Harbour Trust housing experience - the first government housing venture in Sydney. The interventionist strategy was motivated by contradictions in the maritime industry. The attempt to rehouse wharf labourers in modern tenements was not a business proposition but a form of state philanthropy. Critics feared that the scheme would weaken self-reliance and foster worker dependency. The workers, in turn, resented the State's management policy and higher house rents. Overall, the Harbour Trust housing example was not regarded as an ideal scheme for the working-classes of Sydney.

Chapter Four examines the broader slum reform movement in Sydney before the First World War. It focuses on various social aspects of the housing problem such as the incidence of city overcrowding, the individuals and groups lobbying for reform and the forces motivating municipal resumption policy. A recurring theme is that the 'old-world slum' questioned both the confident assumption of national progress and social improvement on the one hand, and the physical fitness and infant health of the growing urban population on the other. Health and housing reformers in Sydney developed a theory of environmental determinism which justified state intervention in working-class neighbourhoods. They also agitated for the formation of a strong metropolitan government with wider powers over building and housing schemes.
Chapter Five explores the 'fair rents' debate in the context of Sydney's pre-war boom. It is also concerned with showing the centralisation of state housing policy and the desire of legislators to extend worker home ownership and curb private landlordism before 1914. In 1912 formal housing powers were conferred on the State and City governments. The 1912 Housing Act, which created a statutory authority known as the Housing Board, reflected Parliament's reluctance to devolve house-building responsibilities on the City Council. As a central authority the Housing Board could operate in suburban municipalities. Municipal dwelling powers, by contrast, were confined to the boundaries of the City.

By 1914 optimists boasted that the horrors of city slum life had been banished. Unhealthy and unsightly worker enclaves had been swept aside. Yet the aftermath revealed that slum clearance had not solved the housing problem in Sydney at all. Chapter Six argues that housing reformers did not abandon their belief in environmental determinism nor advocate a comprehensive public housing programme. Rather, they adopted a more professional and 'scientific' strategy in the context of the burgeoning town planning movement. Civic and scientific slum reformers redefined their mission in terms of preventative solutions. They hoped to regenerate the working-class housing environment and unleash the human potential of a more self-reliant urban population.

The purpose of Chapter Seven is to revisit and interpret the overall development of the housing reform debate in the context of the environmental determinism of the period. By 1915 the competing ideologies and reform policies of the New Liberals and State Socialists had crystallised in the controversy over two types of state housing environment; Daceyville and Calicotown. The former model represented the New Liberals' housing ideal for the urban working-class. Daceyville, indeed, was the realisation of their belief that the individual was the product of his social environment in early twentieth century Sydney. Calicotown, by contrast, challenged this conventional wisdom by housing the poor in a comparatively impoverished housing environment. The scheme appalled the reform leadership who saw it as an undignified working-class ghetto built 'on the cheap' by Public Works Minister Griffith. State Socialists, however, pictured Calicotown as a prototype worker suburb which struck an accord between the wage-earning capacity of the working-class and its ability to pay rent. Indeed in 1915 Kate Dwyer, a housing reformer and socialist, boldly declared that 'Mr Griffith has solved the problem of housing the casual workers'.

24
Chapter 1  
Introduction

Endnotes

1. The City of Sydney comprised the administrative wards of the City Council. In 1901 the City boundaries contained twelve wards of varying size and population. Sydney, or the greater metropolitan area, included the growing suburban municipalities. The term City specifically refers to the City Council's administrative area. The term Sydney, however, denotes the much larger metropolitan region.

2. See the Select Committee on System of Municipal Government for Greater Sydney, V&PLANSW, 1911-12, Vol .3, Minutes of Evidence, p. 91. (The evidence was first taken in 1902 but not printed until 1912).


4. SMH, 13 November 1900.


15. A.J.C. Mayne, *Fever, Squalor and Vice*.


24. See K. Dwyer, 'The Housing Problem', *Building*, Vol. 15, No. 95 (July 1915), p. 120.
Chapter Two

Health and Housing in Nineteenth Century Sydney

Introduction

Throughout the nineteenth century Sydney's housing environment became increasingly enmeshed with the political, social and economic structures of an urbanised society. Housing conditions could be aggravated or relieved by the changing nature of these structures. Then again, a dramatic housing or health crisis could promote political and social change. New groups could emerge to contest the housing problem and in turn bring with them differing ideologies to explain its existence. Economic factors of course also played an important role. They influenced the rate and type of house building, the level of wages in different employments and the choices people made between renting and purchasing. Most urban economies of the nineteenth century provided inadequate and overcrowded accommodation for working people. How this problem was experienced and what reform strategies were employed to deal with it differed according to the nation's historical and cultural pattern of development.

The colonisers of nineteenth century Australia brought with them a complex baggage of values and beliefs. Many believed that they had escaped the shackles of the past to embark upon a fresh enterprise - the creation of a new nation. The vast emptiness of the unknown land seemed to promise unbounded economic opportunities and the possibility of forging new social relations free of old-world concerns. The colonist could resist the temptation to reproduce the old social order by demonstrating self-reliant and independent qualities. The manner in which he housed himself and his family was a good indicator of the colonist's domination over his physical surroundings. The possession of a sturdy, single-family dwelling meant that he had conquered the adversities of a hostile environment by becoming his own landlord.

If the single-family dwelling in Australia conferred privacy, independence and material security on the individual, what were the origins of this persistent and persuasive ideology? How should its emergence and dominance in colonial
society be explained? Why, by 1900, were housing conditions in the City of Sydney far removed from the cultural expectation of better and healthier homes for all citizens? What factors induced the state to become increasingly involved in the regulation and management of Sydney’s housing environment at the turn of the century?

This chapter will attempt to explore these relationships by firstly looking at the colonial foundations and the pattern of housing growth of Sydney’s early economy. It will then focus on the poorest housing districts of Victorian Sydney known as ‘slumland’. Attention will be given to the moral disgust which the middle-classes felt for the slum housing environment in colonial Sydney. Public health authorities, for example, suspected that fevers and deadly epidemics were the result of poor living conditions. In the 1880s the City Council pursued a city improvement programme of slum demolition and street widening. This period, it will be shown, was also marked by political infighting between the colonial Legislature and Town Hall. In 1900 a plague epidemic exposed serious faults in Sydney’s public health administration and building provisions. Finally, it will be argued that the epidemic led to key political and structural reforms affecting the sanitary services and housing accommodation of early twentieth century Sydney.

Home-Owner Origins

The dominance of the separate, single-family home in the urban imagery of nineteenth century Australia strikes the historian as a powerful social ideal. Popular colonial literature eulogised the benefits which the possession of a private dwelling bestowed on its happy owner. Home ownership supposedly had appeal to both the colonist and newly arrived immigrant. The Australian settler, it seemed, freed himself from 'old world' encumbrances by becoming his own keeper. In 1883 Richard Twopeny pointed to the positive connection between the colonist’s home environment and material welfare:

I should...say that during the first year or two after his arrival there is little improvement in his habitation; but before long he acquires a small freehold, and with the aid of a building society becomes his own landlord. Directly he has reached this stage, an improvement is visible in his condition.1

Twopeny went on to note that ‘terraces and attached houses are universally disliked, and almost every class of suburban house is detached and stands in its
own garden*. Anticipating the criticisms of twentieth century town planners, he also observed that the 'four-roomed squares or six-roomed oblongs' contributed to architectural monotony and suburban conformity.²

The assumption that city-dwellers had ready access to separate family cottages and therefore better health and home life was widespread in early twentieth century Sydney. When contemporaries compared the Australian and European housing system, the latter was invariably regarded as socially inferior and alien. In 1915 Commissioner A.C. Carmichael, a Labor politician and housing reformer, reported that on the Continent 'none but the wealthy occupy a whole house. The others have developed the system of flat life; the houses are built accordingly, and the people accommodate themselves with comparative comfort to a habit of life that is obnoxious to the Australian's idea of the privacy of family requirements'. The European tenement, Carmichael considered, had been adapted to the defensive needs and limited living space of the walled town. Although house rents in Sydney seemed high compared to the Continent, a 'satisfactory comparison' was impossible 'since the detached or semi-detached cottage so popular in the suburbs of Sydney has no prototype in the great cities of England or the Continent'.³

Urban and economic historians, sociologists, architects and geographers have all remarked upon the significance of the separate suburban dwelling in nineteenth century Australia. Few would dispute that possession of a single-family home has been of pivotal importance to the growth of Australian cities and the emergence of a national culture. In the residential boom of the 1950s, Robin Boyd saw the humble suburban cottage as the quintessential feature of Australia's urbanised landscape:

Australia is the small house. Ownership of one in a fenced allotment is as inevitable and unquestionable a goal of the average Australian as marriage. Australia has more per head of population than other nations and has maintained a higher standard of living in a greater number of them.⁴

Boyd's observation echoed those expressed earlier by Carmichael and Twopeny. What the observers acknowledged was a seemingly inherent preference among city-dwellers for privatised suburban living. A mutually dependent relationship between home ownership and social improvement is also implied. The city-dweller intuitively knows that the acquisition of a modest house is a necessary step towards economic independence.
This relationship, however, needs to be located in its historical context. The suburban ideal, as represented by the single detached dwelling, should not be seen as an 'inevitable and unquestionable' outcome of Australia's urbanised existence. The historical and cultural interplay which gave birth to the ideal was complex and has evolved over time. In order to better understand the importance of the home-owner image in nineteenth century Australia and its significance for housing reformers in early twentieth century Sydney, the historian must explore its origins. If the image is viewed as a cultural creation, an explanation of how the concept was constructed, and what it meant to nineteenth century contemporaries, is also necessary. The following section attempts a survey of its development in the context of a transplanted settler society in colonial Sydney.

When Governor Phillip anchored at Sydney Cove in 1788 his transport contained not only approximately 1,000 immigrants as well as government stores, but also a complex set of architectural and cultural values belonging to late eighteenth century England. High society in the old country had turned away from individual domestic display and private spaces towards open residential squares and grand architectural design. The convicts, marines, officials and their families, however, cared little for impressive architectural unity and shared outdoor space in an open environment. Above all, Boyd argues, they brought with them that 'acquired English taste for privacy', which would remain 'a prime motive through the subsequent generations of home-building'.

Private shelter was a priority and physical planning an ideal at Sydney Cove. An immediate shortage of artisans, materials and tools necessitated hasty and improvised building techniques in the fledgling settlement. The convicts built rough huts using whatever skills and materials were available; bark sheets, wattle and daub, split logs. There was no incentive to construct two-storey houses when lime mortar was scarce, or create a compact garrison town where land was plentiful and natural boundaries gave protection. The huts, notes Hughes, 'might have been drawn by a child - boxes about 9 by 12 feet, with a hipped roof and two windows like eyes on either side of a doorway, the archetypal cottage-as-face'. Primitive shelter was not confined to the convicts. Before occupying his Georgian two-storied brick and tile residence, Governor Phillip was obliged to reside in a prefabricated canvas dwelling which was 'neither wind nor water proof'.7
Nevertheless, Phillip had plans for the orderly development of infant Sydney. His proposal to position new houses on separate allotments, Troy suggests, could be interpreted as the genesis of the 'Australian predilection for single dwellings on "quarter acre blocks"'. At the very least the executive office was anxious to fashion the town's appearance and, indirectly, its housing environment. Phillip proposed that

...the land will be granted with a clause that will ever prevent more than one house being built on the allotment, which will be sixty feet in front and 150 feet in depth. This will preserve uniformity in the buildings, prevent narrow streets, and the many inconveniences which the increase of inhabitants would otherwise occasion hereafter.

Sheer economic survival in the infant colony, however, left little enthusiasm or resources for orderly residential development. After the departure of Phillip the process of crown land alienation gathered pace and building regulations were rarely enforced. The land-grabbing activities of military officers and wealthy merchants soon made a mockery of Phillip's town planning proposals.

By 1803 Sydney was a shanty town with some 600 dwellings of indeterminate appearance and size. Governor King had instructions to resume public lands set aside by Phillip and remove the offending squatters. The complicated system of land holdings frustrated King's efforts to delineate allotments and the pattern of land tenure remained confused. Bligh's arrival in 1806 was followed by the announcement that Phillip's plan would be enforced. House-owners occupying crown leasehold reserves were given notice to quit. The order, however, was forestalled by Bligh's arrest and removal from office. Foveaux, his successor, abandoned the government leasehold system and issued the first freehold grants of town land. As one researcher notes, the struggle between Sydney's 'town plan' and private property interests helped precipitate the colony's first military coup.

Governor Macquarie's period was associated with attempts to restore some regularity and dignity to the streets and houses of Sydney. Growing population demanded new suburbs, roads, buildings and bridges. Beyond Sydney new townships were officially proclaimed. Despite Macquarie's building boom, however, the contours of Sydney's complicated tenure system remained largely unaltered. In the absence of a rectangular grid pattern, colonial buildings, barracks and dwellings straggled beyond the original settlement. A preference
The 'single-storey habit' of house building dominated Sydney's outskirts despite the urban consolidation occurring in the town centre. Boyd suggests that the simple but popular suburban bungalow rose to prominence in the 1820s. 'It appeared by the score around Sydney, in brick, its four rooms in a thirty-ft. square, a verandah in front, the kitchen and conveniences detached at the rear'.

If physical and cultural factors contributed to the emergence of the self reliant home-maker in colonial Sydney, economic forces also played a role. Cultivating self-sufficiency and discouraging social dependency were foremost in the minds of the early governors. As such, by allowing the convicts in government service to seek private wages and lodgings in the town, the colonial state soon shrugged off its housing obligations. Home ownership barriers, moreover, were not insurmountable in an open urban environment. Wages were high due to the general labour shortage, and beyond the boundaries of the town land prices were relatively low. In times of prosperity the opening of new subdivisions offered the colonist an opportunity to escape the noisy and congested town and become his own landlord. Better living conditions, it seemed, could be realised without waiting for government approval or assistance.

As a place of private retreat and renewal, the separate cottage must have exerted a strong attraction for the transplanted colonist. Its replication as the basic unit of the suburb, economic historians have argued, was made possible by a favourable combination of long-run economic and social factors. According to N.G. Butlin, for example, increasing population (native and immigrant) fostered the 'kinked age distribution' structure and high urban consumption levels. Further, high wage and employment rates reinforced growing dwelling demand in the towns. On the supply side, house-building was stimulated by favourable rents, cheap finance and stable building costs between 1860-1890. In this period the rent of a four-roomed cottage rarely fell below 20-25 per cent
of average annual earnings and the cost (excluding land) was unlikely to exceed twice the annual wage income. Much of the housing stock was built or bought with the financial support of intermediaries such as banks, building societies and estate agents. Overall, Butlin estimated that gross residential investment accounted for about one-third of all (public and private) capital formation in the Australian colonies during the Long Boom.

While the single-family dwelling in nineteenth century Sydney had undoubted appeal, there were income barriers to its realisation. Lionel Frost suggests that the colonial capitals experienced a severe housing shortage after the gold-rush period. In the early 1860s Sydney's population faced relatively high rents. A building tradesman, for example, needed to spend about a day's wages on the weekly rent of a four-roomed house. The same housing, however, would have cost an unskilled worker in Sydney about one-third of his wages. This wage-rent ratio was a source of irritation to many city labourers. Low wages and irregular work mean that few labourers could afford to purchase a private dwelling. Trapped in the inner-city rental market and dependent upon investor landlords, many inhabited an overcrowded and unhealthy housing environment. In 1886 the City contained 22,140 houses but only 7,946 rate-payers.

By the late nineteenth century home ownership in Sydney had increasingly become a spatial phenomenon. Jackson's research between 1871-1891 suggests that 'less than half of the houses built in Sydney during this period were built by or for owner-occupiers'. In the more densely populated inner-city suburbs such as Chippendale and Surry Hills, rent-payers heavily outnumbered owner-occupiers by 1891. By contrast, in the newly built outer-suburbs, the share of owner-occupied housing stock was more significant and the incidence of tenanted houses much less. Jackson argued that market considerations such as high land costs and prospective returns influenced landlord-investors to build terrace rows rather than detached cottages in the City. He concluded that 'the more thoroughly urban was an area's character- the smaller was the role of the owner-occupier likely to be'.

Although Sydney began as a government town, its political leadership was slow to secure the public safety and health of the inhabitants. Unregulated building development in the first half of the nineteenth century allowed the erection of mean dwellings with no water supply or proper drainage. In 1837 a Building Act was passed but opposed by private owners and builders who sought amendments. The provisions, moreover, applied only to the Town of Sydney
and were seldom enforced. In the second half of the nineteenth century administrative responsibility for the regulation and control of city buildings was transferred to local government. Even into the twentieth century the City Council would continue to agitate for more comprehensive building provisions. Nevertheless, as Troy points out, before 1850 governments were not overly concerned with housing quality, quantity, pricing or tenure.22

Local administrative responsibility was forced rather than devolved upon Sydney’s citizenry during this period. The imposition of self-government by the autocratic governors, Fry notes, was premature and prevented the emergence of an effective metropolitan government.23 Under-capitalised, narrowly based and inexperienced, the City Council could not compete against the centralised power of the colonial state. Municipal authority remained weak and urban services were subject to central government takeover as the metropolis grew. When housing reformers sought to strengthen Sydney’s municipal government in the early 1900s they had to contend with this powerful centralist tradition.

By the late nineteenth century, Sydney had become a dynamic commercial city where marketplace, household and government authorities competed for existence. The city housing stock, overwhelmingly built of brick and/or stone, was a mixture of ageing dilapidated buildings and badly built newer dwellings. The older dwellings were mostly free-standing and so too were many of the newer cottages filling up the expanding outer Wards. Inner-city neighbourhoods, however, were distinguished by more compact housing arranged in terraces and often hidden in courts.24 Compared to the separate cottage, shared housing space had no positive cultural identity. It was seen as a morally and socially inferior dwelling form:

The tenement evoked old world slums and it often became a slum. It was housing for the poor, hence frequently overcrowded; it was poor housing built in drab replica for an investor’s profit. The tenement dweller would rarely own his own home, and that too marked him off from many cottage dwellers.25

The earlier combination of factors which had permitted colonists to secure their own home were now more fluid and uncertain. A large casual labour market, periodic dwelling demolition, competing investment options, altering ownership and rent levels, and the end of the building boom were all reshaping the city housing environment.26 Home ownership was still possible in Sydney but it was increasingly marketed as a suburban solution to unhealthy city living. Beyond
the soulless city slums, urban reformers argued, the wage-worker might yet become his own landlord and begin to feel the pride and security of a self-reliant citizen.

**Slums and Fevers**

Urban historians have argued that the engine of town growth in colonial Australia was overwhelmingly powered by overseas sources of labour and capital rather than a productive hinterland. Nineteenth century Sydney was a major port for new migrants, a central market for the disposal of British capital and a staging post for pastoral production. To many contemporaries it seemed inconceivable that a young and prosperous colony could give birth to social miseries which plagued the 'old world'. Congested towns, poor housing districts and insanitary lanes were problems which many migrants expected to leave behind. Yet as Sydney's administrative and commercial heart grew, areas of low-cost housing which had hitherto remained undisturbed were exposed, and their denizens made subject of official reports. Victorian Sydney, much to the chagrin of middle-class society, appeared to be reproducing a slumland which seriously undermined the colonist's confident expectation of healthier housing conditions. Furthermore, many authorities feared that these inner-city neighbourhoods were incubators of fevers, poverty and crime.

Between 1830-40 the population of Sydney rose from 11,500 to 29,000. The continual demand for housing brought high rents and quick profits. Rental returns on housing investment were as high as 30 and 40 per cent per annum. Indeed, entire streets of small houses were built on leases of 10 years. In the central streets modest dwellings were 'known to have returned the capital laid out in their erection by the rent of the first year'. Not surprisingly, Sydney in the early 1840s was likened-to 'an Augean stable, the cleansing of which was a task far harder than that set Hercules'. A return of buildings valued in Gipps Ward (The Rocks/Millers Point) in 1845 suggests that the description was not inaccurate: assessors from the City Council found hundreds of makeshift shops and dwellings without 'yard or outhouses', in 'bad repair' and 'not safe to live in'.

In the 1850s Sydney's housing standards declined further. When Henry Parkes' Select Committee reported on the condition of working-class accommodation in 1860 it found scenes as shocking as those publicised by sanitary reformers in Britain. Evidence collected by the Committee revealed insanitary living conditions and gross overcrowding in localities of low-rating
house property. Alarmed by the miasma theory of disease, some witnesses despaired for the future of the colony's infant population. J.H. Palmer, Esq. argued:

I have no doubt the large rate of infantile mortality and disease which prevails in Sydney may be attributed to the want of ventilation in the houses and of pure air in the streets. In some localities the stench arising from cesspools and putrid matter collected in the water courses of the street is so offensive as almost to overpower those who come from the purer air of the suburbs. This poisonous atmosphere must inevitably be peculiarly injurious to young children...and where not attended with immediately fatal results deposit the seeds of much future physical debility and suffering.32

The Colony's Attorney-General, the Hon. E. Wise, MLC, shared Palmer's fears. Wise was disturbed by the quality of Sydney's housing environment when he arrived in 1855. An admirer of English sanitary reform, he quoted authorities such as Lord Shaftesbury and Dr. Southwood Smith who were urging stronger building and housing regulations in the old country. Wise also saw Sydney's suburbs as an escape exit from city overcrowding. The colonial government, he argued, had a responsibility to 'facilitate the means of getting to the suburbs by railway' in order to relieve the housing problem.33

Some of Parkes' committeemen were of course anxious to point up the prospect of private home ownership in the growing suburbs. The picture of the thrifty artisan buying his own home beyond 'slumland' was morally uplifting. The following exchange occurred between a committeeman and the City Council rate collector:

Q. Do you not think there is a desire, on the part of the humbler portion of the community, when they have any means to shew it, by the erection of houses for themselves?

A. Among the humbler classes the moment a man gets a hundred pounds together, the first thing he does is to buy a piece of land, and to erect a house for himself. In many parts of Wooloomooloo all the little houses are owned by the people who live in them.34

Sanitary provision, however, lagged far behind the rate of house building in Sydney. Even the recently built cottages at Wooloomooloo, the rate-collector
observed, lacked conveniences such as water closets, sinks and drains. In time, these jerry-built dwellings would become slums.

Responsibility for health and housing problems in colonial Sydney was shared by two municipal officers; the City Health Officer and the Inspector of Nuisances. The CHO, a part-time position created by the Council, was occupied in 1859 by Henry Graham. Graham's low-paid office had limited authority over Sydney's public health. Although he had 'always found the greatest difficulty in getting the landlords to do anything', when questioned about his capacity to compel improvements the CHO replied that he was powerless 'to enforce cleanliness or any sanitary regulations at all'. However Graham believed that the Inspector of Nuisances could prosecute offenders 'but the difficulty is in proving what is nuisance'. Issac Aaron, the previous CHO, tendered similar evidence to Parkes' Committee. During his term of office Aaron observed that the municipal authority had 'very deficient' powers to enforce sanitary standards and 'that even in matters over which it has ample control' there was 'great disinclination to act'. Both the CHOs urged the Council to update Sydney's building laws.

Some sanitary reformers hoped that London's model lodging-house movement would arrest the destructive influences of 'slumland'. City health authorities were quick to point out that recent epidemics in London had spared the inmates of the model tenements. Aaron argued that Sydney's housing shortage forced the working-classes to crowd into 'the most miserable accommodation possible' and that preventing such physical and moral degeneracy was contingent upon capitalists constructing dwellings which were both profitable and comfortable. However, while the artisan class would benefit from these model dwellings, he doubted whether they would assist the 'lowest class' in Sydney which lodged in 'all manner of holes and corners...paying little or no rent'. Clearly, if only the better paid workers could afford a decent dwelling, the problem of housing the labouring poor remained. It was a problem which would confront reformers in early twentieth century Sydney.

In his Report to Parliament Parkes argued that housing improvement was a 'matter that admits of no delay'. Sydney's housing environment, if left unregulated, would have a destructive influence on the health and future well-being of city-dwellers. The Report declared:

Not in a spirit of false philanthropy, but with an enlightened view of the ends of civilization, every danger should be anxiously eradicated.
which threatens the mental power and bodily vigour of the race. The members of the future nation can never be strong if the springs of life are suffered to be vitiated. Manly and contented citizens can hardly be expected to rise up from the arms of unhappy and unwomanly mothers.  

Specifically, the Legislature was advised to introduce 'remedial measures' to regulate the room size, ventilation and sanitation of dwellings. Other recommendations included the licensing of lodging houses and a government incentive scheme to encourage private enterprise to build model dwellings for the working-classes. Alarmed by the revelations of the municipal sanitary staff, the Committee also advised the appointment of a professionally qualified Government Health Officer. Parkes suggested that the position 'should be independent of municipal authority' and modelled on London's Board of Public Health.  

Parkes' recommendations suggested that local government could not be trusted to administer the public health. By proposing that the Health Officer be appointed by the colonial government the Committee was aware of the manipulation of municipal power by property interests. Possibly, an enlarged regulatory role for the colonial government on the eve of the Long Boom would have arrested the worst elements of rapid urban and residential growth. At the same time, a better resourced Council may also have been equal to the task. Any suggestion that the state should attempt to build and own working-class housing was both beyond the colonial imagination and the institutional constraints of the period. Parkes' Report was not adopted but it spawned several decades of public debate and anxiety about Sydney's slum environment.  

In the 1870s the suburban dwelling population began to overtake that in the City. The more mobile wealthy had avoided the destructive influences of town life by retreating to a separate house and garden. In the City, however, most workers' dwellings were crammed between warehouses and workshops, behind hidden lanes and increasingly in the outer Wards. Defective waste disposal, a high death rate and fear of epidemics saw the creation of the City and Suburban Sewage and Health Board in 1875. The Health Board subsequently issued twelve reports on Sydney's drainage and sewage system which also included a special investigation of crowded dwellings. The Committee's findings, that Sydney was fast reproducing the urban evils of mother England, may have upset middle-class dinner-tables but was old news to the lower orders. 'The poor did not need to read it in the newspapers',
Fitzgerald writes, 'as much of the board’s reporting merely detailed life as they knew it'.

The Health Board investigations of 1875-76 showed that higher-density dwellings had begun to challenge the single-storey cottage in inner-city suburbs. Rising site costs encouraged investors to make optimal use of the land 'by housing large numbers at minimal expense'. Health Board officers described the following method of construction:

A wall is run up on the extreme back boundary of the allotment... this is intersected by a number of partitions...a couple of cheap sashes for the upper and lower room, and one door on the ground floor of each house, and lo! the buildings when roofed are completed; and a property yielding good returns is created at a minimum outlay.

The more inquiring officers who entered some of the dwellings were greeted by sights depressingly familiar to members of the 1860 Parkes Committee. Slum landlordism was a feature of many alleys and back-lanes. As the earnest gentlemen made their way through 'slumland' they also found that some landlords were honourable members of Parliament. G.F. Dansey, the City Health Officer, recorded the following evidence:

In Bowman-street we came to four houses built of rubble, with corrugated iron roofs, belonging to the Hon. G. Wigram Allen, rented at 7s.6d a week each... The tenants informed us that it (the second house) was a stinking hole, and that vermin abounded in it. We saw no reason to doubt either statement but everything to confirm it. The closet at the back is in a broken down dilapidated condition and filthy state...we were obliged to leave hastily—we could not stand the smell... The tenants of these houses all complained of ill health, and no doubt their dwellings are very unwholesome. The floors rest on solid earth, there being no excavation under them.

This was not an exaggerated case. Hundreds of other dwellings were described as 'crowded', 'shocking', 'fetid', 'abominable' and 'unfit for human habitation'.

Beyond the built-up City dwelling conditions were little better for rent payers. Residential sites were invariably undrained and unsewered. Regulations governing cesspits and night-soil removal were non-existent. In the southern suburbs of Redfern, Alexandria and Waterloo, wells were sometimes polluted.
by the contents of nearby cesspits. Such conditions, the Health Board officers argued, demanded a comprehensive sewerage system and sanitary authority to protect the public health:

*What struck us most forcibly during our visit to these crowded localities was the total absence of any attempt on part of the owners or landlords to do anything in the shape of repairs, or to improve the sanitary condition of the dwellings... The want of some sanitary authority, whose special business it should be to interfere in these cases, and to compel, where necessary, landlords to provide such accommodation as will render health and cleanliness at least possible, seems to us very urgent.*

Apart from the Water Pollution and Nuisances Prevention Acts, however, no major public health legislation was passed by Parliament. In the late 1870s the City was gripped by a widespread fear that a deadly epidemic would break out and sweep across the metropolis. Sanitarians and social reformers began to suspect that Sydney's 'slumland' was ripe for remedies.

Their fears had been fed by a major public health crisis. In 1875-76 Sydney suffered from a scarlet fever outbreak which killed 575 persons. The outbreak raged among the City's outer Wards and the suburbs of Paddington, Redfern and Newtown. It penetrated residential areas on the North Shore and even reached as far as Hunters Hill. Sydney's infant population was most at risk. Whilst working-class children suffered heavily, those from wealthier homes were also in danger. More than a quarter of all deaths from the scarlet fever epidemic came from Sydney's middle and professional classes. They, of course, demanded public health reforms.

Curson argues that the scarlet fever epidemic was the 'first outbreak of infectious disease to excite official concern and generate public unrest'. An interventionist strategy resulted which focused attention on the living conditions of the city's poor. The Health Board's investigative committee, for example, redirected its attention to the scarlet fever outbreak and advanced a tentative hypothesis to explain spatial variations in the mortality rate. It observed a correlation between different types of housing environment and the incidence of mortality. Purer air, lower population and housing densities all seemed to influence the relationship. Meanwhile, the Health Society of New South Wales had also begun to examine the scarlet fever outbreak. It published a pamphlet which urged a programme of segregation and public hygiene. The
recommendations, together with an official government memorandum, indicated the early emergence of a public health policy for the citizens of Sydney.51

The reluctance of colonial governments to introduce public health and housing legislation in this period of rapid urban growth is something that requires explanation. One is that the prevailing political culture was dominated by a 'pastoral interest'. The financial-mercantile leadership in Macquarie Street saw Sydney as a great clearing-house for rural produce and overseas capital rather than as a growing manufacturing town with an industrial workforce. Consequently, the colonial elite neglected the urban population.52 However, it can also be argued that colonial society was so infatuated with the notion of a new land of opportunity and fearful of reproducing old-world housing poverty that its politicians conceived solutions in terms of simple environmental remedies. Their reaction was to alter the housing environment lest urban evils might take root. Selective civic surgery, rather than comprehensive state intervention, seemed to many middle-class reformers in late nineteenth century Sydney the most appropriate way to restore environmental order to the urban system. There was no need to question the economic organisation of colonial society or enact housing legislation when the avenues for wealth creation and social improvement were assumed to be open to all individuals.

City Improvement

While the Sewage and Health Board reports of 1875-76 called for restraining legislation to protect the public health they also saw the need for city improvement. Professor Smith, chairman of the Board's special Committee investigating overcrowding, urged the creation of an authority with powers 'to buy up unhealthy tenements and crowded areas so as to open up broad thoroughfares in closely packed quarters of the city'. Influenced by the English model housing reform movement, Smith's Committee likewise recommended the provision of more wholesome dwellings for workmen in Sydney.53 Building demolition, street widening and rehousing proposals appealed to urban reformers dismayed by the presence of slums in such a young city. City improvement, the Herald predicted, would lessen the destructive influence of epidemics and elevate Sydney's slum environment.54 But what authority should undertake such a programme? Both the City Council and colonial Legislature laid claim to the metropolis, yet neither had the authority to demolish slums nor the legislative tools to build and own workmen's dwellings. Governmental
rivalry and political jealousy could only hamper a comprehensive approach to the housing problem in late nineteenth century Sydney.

The City Council had recourse to two Acts to deal with 'ruinous or dangerous buildings' in the City of Sydney; the Sydney Corporation Amendment Act of 1879 and the City of Sydney Improvement Act, 1879. Under the latter legislation an Improvement Board was appointed by the government to operate as a court of appeal against decisions made by the Council. In Parliament the new building legislation had faced opposition from architects, builders and developers who claimed that the Improvement Act would 'tend to discourage building and to deter capitalists from investments in the erection of houses'. Nevertheless, the Improvement Act allowed the City Building Surveyor to by-pass the lengthy judicial process and act swiftly on the Board's decision. In effect, as Fitzgerald argues, the Act 'gave partial power to both the Council and the Government and in so doing pleased neither'.

Armed with the fresh authority of the Improvement Act, the City Council expected to quickly begin the business of repairing and cleaning up the City's most unsavoury localities. After an enthusiastic start under Section 29, however, the City Building Surveyor was halted by the Improvement Board. It sought a legal ruling on the precise meaning of Section 29 and was advised that this only applied to structurally unsound dwellings. As a result, the City Council was denied power to order the demolition of slum dwellings on insanitary grounds. This was a blow to the Council's sanitary administration. The colonial government, it seemed, had unjustly intervened to deny the City Council powers which English municipal authorities already possessed.

Frustrated by an unresponsive Improvement Board, the City Council now launched its own cleansing campaign. Using Section 31 of the Act, the Mayor and his sanitary staff could inspect and issue closing orders against buildings deemed 'unfit for human habitation'. As a result, mayoral tours of city properties became commonplace in the 1880s. Although the Council still lacked the legal power to order demolitions, the mayoral crusades, Mayne argues, 'sought to bluff landlords into pulling down their properties'. He estimates that the City Council condemned about 4,000 buildings between 1880-1901 and that over half were subsequently demolished. By the end of the nineteenth century then, the Town Hall had presided over an extensive slum clearance programme despite inadequate legislation and Board disapproval.

The mayoral slum tours tapped into widespread community support for sanitary reform. Sydney's citizenry had been conditioned to believe that filth,
diseases and seasonal epidemics emanated from insanitary housing districts. Foul air, hidden courts and congested dwellings were also seen as incubators of socially threatening and sexually deviant behaviour. Suburban relocation rather than city rehousing was thought to be the best alternative for city workers who inhabited unhealthy tenements. The *Daily Telegraph*, which followed the slum tours of the 1880s, argued that workplace convenience was less important than a wholesome homesite for the future population:

So long as such houses stand people will be found to tenant them. The convenience of their husbands being near their work, and thus able to get home for a hot meal in the middle of the day, make the wives, perhaps unknowingly, sacrifice not only their home comforts, but risk the health of themselves and children in living in such unhealthy dens; dens for which they pay a rental that in the suburbs would secure them a neat, clean and comfortable cottage, from which they could scent the fresh air of Heaven, instead of the poisonous atmosphere of the city lanes.

Not surprisingly, the mayoral inspection parties directed much of their attention to the City's older neighbourhoods where low-rating house property was under siege from commercial developers. Mayne notes that relatively few inspections occurred on the City's more populous outskirts where the cottages tended to be newer, owner-occupied and consequently, more healthy.

After 1885 enthusiasm for slum housing clearance began to wane. Protests were organised by property owners and residents alike. In 1886 a Ratepayers Association began to question the Mayor's condemnation policy and thereafter crusades against the city slums became less frequent. Council referrals to the Improvement Board increased but tensions remained. By holding up demolition orders the Board appeared to be frustrating the Council's actions and supporting slum landlords. The Board, in turn, complained that the Improvement Act was unworkable and repeatedly appealed to the government to amend it. After the Board threatened to dissolve itself the *Australasian Builder and Contractors' News* remarked:

The Board is the abortive production of clumsy legislation and says very little for the Parliament that brought it into existence or for the Ministries that have regularly received its report without taking steps to render its labours operative or save the country the expense of its maintenance.
By the 1890s the City Improvement Board was virtually inoperative. In 1894 the colonial government cut its funding and did not renew the grant. What resulted from this period of city improvement? By the end of the nineteenth century the City of Sydney had undergone both a physical and social transformation. More than two decades of economic growth and simple environmental remedies had visibly altered the city landscape. Hundreds of workmen's dwellings had been razed, 'old-world' courts and lanes had disappeared and higher-rating buildings now filled many gaps. Pockets of low-rating properties, of course, could still be found in the central City but the 1879 Improvement Act was practically defunct. There were more palatial public monuments to admire, such as the ostentatious Town Hall, but as yet no model tenements for the city workers to inhabit.

Cultural attitudes towards the slum housing environment had not really changed. The City's plague spots remained a fertile source of imagination for middle-class social reformers. If there was growing recognition of the need to rehouse the dislodged there was a more powerful conviction that the suburban frontier would dissipate Sydney's housing evils. Whilst the City Council retreated from its improvement programme in the face of the depression, no authority emerged to continue the work. A Public Health Act was passed in 1896 but its sanitary and building regulations proved cumbersome. At the end of the century there was still no systematic planning legislation to tackle the housing problem. The general relief which had earlier greeted the razing of slum housing now gave way to panic as a more frightening epidemic appeared in Sydney's midst.

Plague and Sanitary Reform

Between January and August 1900 Sydney was stricken by an epidemic of bubonic plague. Despite prior warnings the City health authorities were ill equipped to combat the outbreak. Sensational news reporting heightened 'old-world' superstitions and caused a wave of hysteria to sweep the City. Many people believed that the plague was 'catching'. The epidemic exacted a heavy toll from the rat-infested and insanitary housing districts adjoining Darling Harbour. The plague dislocated Sydney's maritime trade and commuter transport network. It bankrupted small business people while fostering new commercial opportunities. Above all, by again focusing attention on the housing conditions of the poor, the epidemic stimulated important public health and governmental reforms.
Medical knowledge of the nature and transmission of plague, despite its fearsome reputation, was uncertain in the late nineteenth century. Whilst the plague bacillus 'Pasteurella pestis' was first identified in 1894, scientific opinion differed over the question of human infection. By 1900 there existed two schools of thought; the rat-flea theory of transmission, recently formulated by Professor Simond, and a traditional filth-type explanation of personal contact. Medical opinion in Sydney favoured Simond's hypothesis 'that plague is conveyed to man by inoculation through the skin, and that the flea or some other suctoril insect is the intermediary.' Indeed, the chief officer of the N.S.W. Department of Public Health, Dr Ashburton Thompson, and his bacteriologist Dr Tidswell, helped to substantiate Simond's theory of flea transmission. During the plague panic in Sydney Ashburton Thompson consistently argued that a rat extermination programme must have highest priority. Personal hygiene and sanitary improvements, while desirable, were of secondary importance in checking the epidemic. Unfortunately, the City Council was not conversant with the latest theory of plague transmission. On 15 January 1900, the Council's part-time Health Officer, Dr. Gwynne-Hughes, revealed his ignorance in a memo to the Town Clerk. Gwynne-Hughes doubted that Sydney would be stricken by bubonic plague but argued that its 'chief predisposing causes' were overcrowding, accumulated filth and 'want of cleanliness'. Moreover, the Council would rely on past methods of managing epidemics by cleansing, quarantine and disinfection. These environmental remedies, however, could be no substitute for the bacteriological research which the Department of Public Health was conducting. Gwynne-Hughes wrote his memo on the same day that plague reached Adelaide. On 19 January, Arthur Paine, a carter from Millers Point, became the first official plague victim in Sydney.

The Public Health Department attempted to educate the public. After proving the presence of the plague bacillus on 25 February, the Department distributed posters throughout the City warning of the disease. These were then reprinted as pamphlets and addressed to all metropolitan households. They read:

Plague is present in Sydney. It has been introduced by diseased rats. It has attacked only three persons at present, but there is great danger of its spreading. If it does spread it will be mainly by diseased rats... Dead rats found about premises should not be touched until they have been scalded with boiling water where they
lie; they should not be taken up in the hands, but with tongs; they should be burnt.\(^{74}\)

By late March the ripple of fear had turned to panic. The plague now spread south, appearing in other City Wards as well as in the suburbs of Redfern, Annandale and Leichhardt.\(^{75}\) City dwellers were terrified. On 21 March the Health Department’s office was besieged by a crowd demanding inoculation against the plague. In the outer suburbs house agents were reported to be doing brisk business, while the *Bulletin* observed that many people had fled Sydney altogether: ‘...there is much panic, a mad rush to the Blue Mountains.’\(^{76}\)

Politicians and the press demanded more drastic measures. On 23 March, the Government intervened by issuing a Proclamation which removed City Council control over the Darling Harbour district and imposed a general quarantine over the waterfront neighbourhood. Some 800 residents had no warning of the Government’s action and before day-light next morning their neighbourhood was fenced off and guarded by police.\(^{77}\) A contractor, Mr McCredie, was appointed by the Lyne Government to superintend a thorough cleansing of the infectious area - a task which had been beyond the capacity of the City Council. McCredie, however, had difficulty in organising a staff to undertake the work. He reported:

I spent the whole of Saturday, 24th of March, in obtaining the necessary authorities, and in endeavouring to obtain capable assistance; and it was not until eleven o’clock on Sunday morning that I was able to enter the area and take charge. My reception was anything but reassuring, as I was immediately surrounded by a clamouring crowd of people, who complained that they were locked up without having any opportunity to obtain the necessaries of life... I applied to men whom I knew to be competent to take the responsible positions; but met with so many refusals, although I offered twenty shillings a day, that it seemed as though the difficulties would be insuperable. Very few would take the risk to which they considered they would be exposed by accepting employment in the very hot-bed of the plague.\(^{78}\)

B.R. Wise, Attorney-General at the time, claimed that persons from the quarantine area were ‘shunned like lepers’. Store keepers requested McCredie’s officers to make purchases from the doorstep and some firms even forbade this minimal contact. Wise recalled the condition of the neighbourhood:
The accumulations of filth were everywhere. Few houses were connected with a sewer; but their receptacles were emptied twice a week into Darling Harbour. Sanitary arrangements and even common cleanliness were universally disregarded; and the whole place was a forcing ground of disease. Houses rested upon heaps of decaying matter, and the filth was knee-deep when the floors were lifted.79

By 11 June, McCredie and his staff had removed thousands of tons of material from the area. Some 52,000 tons of sewage-laden silt were dredged from the wharves and nearly 4,000 premises were inspected and cleansed. In addition, 45,000 rats were destroyed while 1,400 dead animals were taken from the harbour and burnt.80

Meanwhile, the Government was under pressure to dismiss or seriously reform the City Council. The Citizens' Vigilance Committee, a reform-minded coalition of politicians and city businessmen, urged Premier Lyne to broaden the Council's franchise and place the body on a more professional footing. One Committeeman, W.M. Hughes MLA, argued that the Council was responsible for the plague. Hughes charged that plural voting had led to the dominance of a property-owning interest on Council and that Sydney's aldermen were 'largely elected by men who owned insanitary premises'. Both Hughes and the leader of the reform group, Dr. James Graham MLA, suggested that Sydney should have a greater metropolitan government clothed with proper powers. Their local government model was the Greater London Council.81

When Parliament met in June 1900 it passed two important acts affecting Sydney's health and government. The Sydney Corporation Amending Act of 1900 abolished the City's plural voting system and gave the vote to lodgers. The Act also provided for the State Government to pay for half of the salaries of the Council's sanitary inspectors. In effect, the inspectors were given greater security of tenure and could not be appointed or dismissed without the approval of the Government.82 Premier Lyne also introduced the Darling Harbour Wharves Resumption Bill, 1900. The Act effectively ended City Council control over the Sussex Street wharves and stores which had harboured the plague-infected rats. Lyne informed Parliament:

What are we going to do to prevent those properties from going back into the slum state they were discovered to be in? I say that we are going to resume those properties to prevent them from going back into their previous condition, and also to prevent this destructive dire
disease coming amongst us next year, not to the extent of, perhaps, three or four cases a day, but as in Hongkong where, at the present time, there are 100 cases a day.\(^8^3\)

During his speech the Premier announced that house property in the Rocks area would also be resumed and an expert board appointed to remodel the locality. The Government's action would give 'a more healthy city to the people of Sydney by insuring the destruction of typhoid and plague germs'. The rebuilt area, Lyne expected, would then revert to the City Council.\(^8^4\)

After the plague epidemic peaked the recriminations began. Who was to blame for the crisis? The City Council claimed that the projecting wharfside was beyond its jurisdiction and that the Water and Sewerage Board had asked for funds to pump the low level sewerage from Darling Harbour to the Bondi outfall.\(^8^5\) Dr. Graham MLA, (elected Lord Mayor of the new Council in December 1900), bemoaned the internecine warfare conducted by the City's rival health bodies. 'Who is responsible for the health of the city', he demanded. Sydney's health administration was divided between the Board of Health, the Water and Sewerage Board, a city health officer appointed under the \(18^9^6\) Public Health Act and another employed part-time by the Council. Nevertheless, Dr. Graham conceded that as a health authority the Council 'must plead guilty straight away'. It had shown itself 'distinctly primitive' and bereft of 'anything like scientific methods'. At the same time Graham accused the 'great Board of Health' of failing to communicate with the Council.\(^8^6\)

The President of the Board of Health, Dr. Ashburton Thompson, fought a running battle with the City Council. He argued that the City's impaired public health was due to municipal incompetence, rather than inadequate authority.\(^8^7\) A report from the Town Clerk for 1900 certainly supports Ashburton Thompson's opinion. Idle inspectors, unanswered correspondence and general inertia ruled the Council's Sanitary Department. The Town Clerk reported that during the plague panic the Department 'completely broke down', its executive officer was 'sent away to recuperate his health' and outside expertise was brought in to clear the administrative backlog. However, no major reform was forthcoming. As the Town Clerk noted:

It will hardly be credited that after some weeks of this high pressure effort I found that the old inspectors sauntered out to their work at about 11 o'clock in the day, and batches of informations by our special men, and from the Water and Sewerage Board, had been
allowed to accumulate to the number of some thousands, of which not one had been acted upon...\textsuperscript{88}

In May 1900 Dr. W.G. Armstrong, the centrally appointed District Medical Officer, was instructed to reorganise the archaic Sanitary Department. As the new CHO, he soon had the support of Lord Mayor Graham and his reformed Council. Armstrong's position of CHO was made a full-time post, the first time since 1859.\textsuperscript{89}

Dr Armstrong was made the official head of the Sanitary Department. Under his supervision the Department was modernised and the work of sanitary inspection became routine and systematised. Dr Armstrong wrote that his 'most important reform' in 1901 'was the formation of an efficient staff of Inspectors'. He argued that a staff of 15 competent inspectors was necessary for the City of Sydney where the 'amount of sanitary work...owing to neglect of sanitary considerations in the past, was in excess of that in most English cities'.\textsuperscript{90} Armstrong's inspecting staff were nominated by the City Council but appointed by the Governor. Furthermore, half of their salaries were paid by the Government and all inspectors were required to hold the Sanitary Institute Certificate.\textsuperscript{91}

Much of the sanitary supervision begun during the plague epidemic was extended and strengthened under Armstrong's regime. Particular attention was paid to the quality of the City's food supply, housing stock, and infant health. From May 1901 to October 1902 a thorough house-to-house inspection of the City was conducted by Armstrong's sanitary staff. The City was divided into ten administrative areas and an inspector allocated to each sector. The CHO hoped to inspect the entire dwelling stock twice annually but the investigative work proved slow. By the end of 1901, after a further outbreak of plague, some 8,346 dwellings had been inspected or nearly 40 per cent of the total stock.\textsuperscript{92}

Like the nineteenth century health and housing reformers, Dr Armstrong was disturbed by the findings. The City of Sydney, despite its agreeable climate, location and age, nurtured a housing stock which was positively harmful to its inhabitants. This, of course, should not have surprised the new CHO. After all, it seems reasonable to assume that he had access to official reports and registers prepared by the Council's sanitary staff in the late nineteenth century. Yet Armstrong remarked that 'no records of such work were kept' and that in 1900 the sanitary condition of the City 'was not such as
to warrant any firm belief in the efficiency of the sanitary methods of the City Council prior to that time’. In 1901 he reported that:

As the house-to-house inspection proceeded, it led to the exposure of a state of affairs as regards the structural conditions and drainage arrangements of dwellings which was even worse than previously available information had led me to believe. Nothing worse was disclosed in individual instances...but a more extended knowledge showed that defects of construction and neglect of repairs leading to grossly insanitary conditions of dwellings were far more common than had been believed to be the case. Whole terraces of small houses were found to be dangerously damp and unwholesome from want of proper damp proof courses in the walls, and the absence of ventilation beneath the floors. The drainage and connection of house drains with the public sewers were found to be defective in more than 50 per cent of the houses inspected. Often these defects were of a serious character, permitting the reflux of sewer gas into premises, and engendering nuisances of a more or less objectionable nature upon the premises.

In his paper 'Municipal Sanitation in the City', Armstrong claimed that Sydney's slum housing districts were worse than he had seen in London's Whitechapel area. Town Clerk Nesbitt shared Armstrong's opinion. Indeed, he was dumbfounded that a young city could contain such bad housing.

Appalled by the results of the house-to-house inspection, Armstrong demanded the passing of a comprehensive Building Act to replace the obsolete Improvement Act of 1879. Unlike the City Building Surveyor, he had no desire to restore the old Improvement Board and firmly resisted appeals by the CBS to reform the Board in 1901. The City's public health powers, Armstrong argued, should only be subject to legal restraint and the central health authority of the State. 'They should not be subservient to any more or less irresponsible Board'. Armstrong was indeed too aware of the adverse consequences contained in such a political arrangement.

Unveiled by the bubonic plague, the City of Sydney appeared even more unattractive as a homesite for working people at the beginning of the twentieth century. The City Council, despite its reformed image, presided over a declining residential core and an ageing housing environment which had fallen into an unhygienic and dangerous condition. The Lord Mayor, Thomas Hughes, saw his City as an unsuitable site for housing the poor. 'Of course it is better to get them into the fresh air, away from the slums and the dangers of
city life', he remarked in 1902. Indeed, the *Herald* argued that Sydney's housing problem could be solved. The suburban frontier would assist residential dispersal and defuse working-class demand for housing reform:

The matter of the housing of the working classes unavoidably crops up in every large city once the necessity of city improvement is admitted. This necessity is admitted in Sydney, though, fortunately, there has not been the same demand here as there has been in other centres of population for the erection of houses for the working classes. This is partly due to the general prosperity of our people and partly to the excellent provisions made by the Railway Commissioners. When a man on leaving his work can take a cheap train to a cheap suburb he is not oppressed by the hardships which overwhelm his brethren in British and American cities.

Nevertheless, city health hazards remained. 'Something must be done to remove those big dangers to the city...which exist in localities like Wexford-street and the Rocks', Hughes declared. Alderman J.D. Fitzgerald agreed. 'We have had smallpox and plague. We have not had cholera but it will come'. Both reformers advocated a Greater Sydney Council with resumption and rebuilding powers to prevent the plague's return.

**Conclusion**

The aim of this chapter was to introduce the main themes of the thesis in the context of a nineteenth century colonial city. The home owner image in an infant colony struggling for identity became a pervasive cultural force in nineteenth century Sydney. By securing a private housing domain the transplanted colonist hoped to break the bonds of landlordism and attain a level of economic independence. If the expectation of a separate cottage and garden had influential force its realisation was problematic for the working-classes. Nowhere did the social ideal appear more at odds with its physical environment than among the back-slums of late nineteenth century Sydney. The City nurtured housing conditions which, contemporary authorities argued, had a destructive rather than uplifting effect on the inhabitants.

Government involvement in Sydney's health and housing environment was weakened by the existence of a dual political structure. As rival authorities in the City of Sydney, the colonial government and City Council operated legislative mechanisms which frustrated cooperation and encouraged institutional conflict. Health and building regulations in this period were bitterly contested.
by the Council and government-appointed Improvement Board. The municipal improvement programme was a simple environmental response to an unhealthy and hostile housing environment. Dwelling demolition without rehousing could only aggravate overcrowding. Nevertheless, it was a lesson which housing reformers in early twentieth century Sydney would be slow to appreciate in their programme to expunge the City's plague spots.

If the City of Sydney cradled an unhealthy and unattractive workmen's homesite, there was a widespread assumption that the suburban frontier remained free of bad city influences. Possession of a neat suburban cottage within reach of a central workplace, slum reformers speculated, would be a haven from the stresses of the destructive city environment. When major epidemics ravaged the City, sanitarians and hygienists could point to the suburban attractions of pure air, open spaces and wholesome homesites for working people. A succession of infectious outbreaks, including a severe epidemic of scarlet fever in the 1870s, alerted government authorities to the disease-breeding districts of Sydney's working-classes. The childhood epidemic also stimulated the development of a public health programme which helped to influence official responses to the plague outbreak. In 1900 the bubonic plague outbreak, the City's most frightening epidemic, reinforced popular anxieties about the dangers of overcrowded housing areas as well as the advantages of suburban escape.

The plague, like earlier epidemics, was also a prime cause of public health and housing reform. It set in motion central government machinery and drastic measures to deal with Sydney's plague spots and insanitary housing stock. Repeated epidemics in colonial Sydney had challenged old methods of thinking and intervention. 'The plague did not create an interventionist approach to urban government', Fitzgerald writes, 'but it allowed the voices of the social engineers, the town planners and improvers to be heard more clearly'. Some focused their thoughts on modernising Sydney's municipal system of government. Others turned their attention to remodelling the Darling Harbour waterfront and Rocks area which had fallen under State Government control.
Table 2.1  Conditions Found in House-to-House Inspection of City (Completed 31 October, 1902)

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<td>No. of Dwellings with drains not properly disconnected from sewers</td>
<td>620</td>
<td>140</td>
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<td>740</td>
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<td>169</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>683</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>2,706</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Dwellings showing signs of damp in walls</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>2,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Dwellings showing insufficiently lighted rooms</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>559</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Dwellings showing infestation by rats</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>2,005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Dwellings with indoor closets</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>454</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>598</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1,692</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Dwellings with stables attached</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>1,131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Dwellings with badly graded or paved yards</td>
<td>1,020</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>438</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>952</td>
<td>855</td>
<td>439</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>727</td>
<td>472</td>
<td>6,475</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Report of the City Health Officer for 1902 in R&PSCC, 1902, p. 13.
Endnotes

5. Ibid, p. 3.
15. Fry, op. cit, pp. 35-36.
17. Ibid, pp. 275-77.
18. Ibid, p. 211.


25. Fry, *op. cit*, p. 35.


31. See the 'Return of Buildings in Gipps Ward 1845', *City Assessment Books* (Archives Office of Sydney City Council).


43. Fitzgerald, *op. cit*, p. 83.

44. Frost, *op. cit*, p. 108.


55. A. Mayne, *Representing the Slum*, pp. 50-51.


57. Mayne, *op. cit*, p. 51.


60. Mayne, *op. cit*, p. 52.


62. See *DT*, 14 January 1881.

63. A. Mayne, *Representing the Slum*, p. 29.

64. Fitzgerald, *op. cit*, pp. 114-16.


66. See *Australasian Builder and Contractors' News*, 27 August 1887.

72. See City Health Officer to the Town Clerk, re. 'Bubonic Plague' 15 January, 1900, *Reports and Proceedings of the Municipal Council of the City of Sydney*, 1900, pp. 304-10 (hereafter referred to as *R&PSCC*).
89. Fitzgerald, *op.cit*, p. 219. Also see Coward, *op. cit*, p. 212.
90. See Report of the Health of the City of Sydney, 1901 in *R&PSCC*, 1901, p. 3.


94. Report of the Health of the City of Sydney, 1901, *R&PSCC*, 1901, pp. 3-4. Also see Table 2.1.

95. *SMH*, 15 October 1901.


100. *SMH*, 30 August 1902.


Chapter Three

State Landlordism in West Sydney

Introduction

In 1900 Sydney's health and housing crises were brought to a dramatic climax by the bubonic plague outbreak. New political and social structures were put in place to deal with the urban blight and insanitary harbourside. The acrimony between the State Government and City Council, however, had not subsided. When the Government established statutory authorities to administer the Port and the Rocks area, old tensions were renewed. The Council believed that its municipal functions had been unjustly usurped by non-elected and unrepresentative bodies. The Government, in turn, now regarded the public and commercial health of the Port as paramount. It was determined to bring maritime and shipping activities in Sydney under tighter central control.

The creation of the Sydney Harbour Trust and City Improvement Advisory Board not only eroded municipal sovereignty in West Sydney. Private property owners in the area were also replaced by public officials and hundreds of commercial and residential buildings became state property. The State Government was now the new landlord in the area. Port and public works investment were the primary functions of its ad hoc authorities. The waterside labourers who mostly lived in the area, however, had differing demands. They expected that their government landlord would provide cheaper, better and more secure housing for the maritime workforce. In the aftermath of the plague, dwelling demolitions and arbitrary administration soon put the residents and government authorities at loggerheads. Nevertheless, by the end of the decade an uneasy social consensus had emerged between the surviving wharf labourers and their government landlord.

State landlordism before 1912 was destined to be a difficult infant. Working-class representatives repeatedly called upon the government authorities to enlarge their housing responsibilities in the resumed areas. The City Council, outraged by its loss of political power, wished to win back control of the Rocks. The Harbour Trust Commissioners, despite these differing demands, simply wanted to reconstruct wharfage facilities and improve the management of
Sydney's shipping trade. How could these competing claims be accommodated? What attitudes and policies emerged during this period to deal with them? How did the maritime community fare under state landlordism? These questions were central to the housing reform debate in early twentieth century Sydney. Many of the responses to them continued to be guided by the assumptions and ideas of the slum reformers of the late colonial period.

The argument which emerges from this early episode of state landlordism deserves emphasis because it provides the analytical context for later chapters. Housing reform responses in Federation Sydney were not simply the product of a gradual process of political enlightenment or past policy-making practices. The various forms of housing interventions were influenced by earlier government actions but not necessarily dominated or determined by them. The ways in which governments and state officials responded to the differing claims made upon them in West Sydney, for example, depended upon existing institutional structures and a changing set of factors. Some were directly inherited from the past while others were generated by competing social forces seeking to dominate the housing reform debate. The most vocal and organised protagonists in the resumed lands were represented by professional liberals and working-class interests. At times both reform groups adopted converging positions on the question of working-class housing reform. These reform strategies in pre-war Sydney, however, were not permanent arrangements. The reform process was always subject to fracture and dissolution, and when this occurred, housing policy outcomes were unpredictable and unlikely to conform to past traditions.

The Maritime Industry and Community

By the late nineteenth century the world shipping industry had greatly expanded its range and carrying capacity. New technologies and materials, such as iron and steel, allowed bigger ocean-going steamers to reach overseas ports more quickly and efficiently. In 1897 the first of many ships to exceed 10,000 tonnes arrived in Sydney harbour. The more frequent arrival of larger ocean-going steamers strained the capacity of the existing wharf infrastructure. Harbour berths had to be dredged more deeply. Sea walls subsided and rats found shelter under the wharves. The handling of coastal and foreign trade was often disrupted by inadequate berths and storage facilities. By 1900 the number of ships entering Sydney harbour had grown to nearly 2,000 with an aggregate
tonnage of 2.7 million.\(^1\) It was increasingly obvious to governments that Sydney Port could not adequately accommodate its maritime trade.

Much of Sydney's old wharfage was owned by private shipping companies. Evasion of port charges was widespread. For many years indeed, shipowners and merchants had avoided paying wharfage rates to the City Council. The Lyne Government's decision to resume the Darling Harbour wharves was welcomed by the owners who wished to avoid the reconstruction costs themselves. By continuing wharf renovations begun by the Public Works Department, the Government planned to extend its operations to the entire Port of Sydney. The public investment would gradually be recouped by tightening up port management and charges.\(^2\)

The shipping companies soon benefited from the port improvements. The Harbour Trust rationalised the maritime industry by restricting the operations of steamers and ferries in Sydney Cove, removing liners to Darling Harbour and collecting port revenue assiduously. Much of the new wharf investment included warehouse and office additions. As part of its agreement with Dalgety and Company, the Trust built a seven-storey wool store fronting the new 1,100 foot wharf. One of the largest projects completed by the Trust was the reconstruction of Darling Island. As a result of the addition of new concrete wharves, the wheat handling capacity of the site was greatly enlarged. In June 1906 the Harbour Trust Commissioners reported that they had provided over 7,000 feet of new wharfage space, 4,000 feet of rat-proof sea wall and 3,000 feet of new streets.\(^3\) Government intervention had clearly helped to restore the commercial health of the Port. The housing problem, however, continued to cause tensions.

In the 1900s, a ready supply of wharf labour was needed to work the waterfront. The maritime community, mostly lodged around Darling Harbour and the Rocks area, contained a heterogeneous group of waterside workers and their families. Wharf labourers, coal lumpers, wheat carriers, carters and seamen, depended upon the shipping trade. Lumping and loading cargoes of wool, wheat, meat, coal and raw materials provided a casual source of employment. 'We have to live in close proximity to the wharves', a labourer explained, 'or we should miss the work often enough'.\(^4\) Much of the work was seasonal, unskilled and dangerous. A job sometimes lasted an hour or two or demanded non-stop effort day and night.

Wage rates on the waterfront were low. Before 1914 the maximum rate for unskilled wharf labour in Sydney was 1s.3d per hour.\(^5\) If a man worked
overtime he could earn over the 'living wage'. A 'bull' labourer might earn an equivalent amount during a 24-hour shift. Few labourers, however, had the constitution of a 'bull' and much of the day could be unpaid as men waited for news of a job or rushed from wharf to wharf. In 1905 at a United Wharf Labourers' picnic W.M. Hughes claimed that many union members were not averaging 25s. a week. Some men had made only 6s. a week. Low wages and relatively high housing costs in the maritime community made for economic grievances.

In seeking to improve their position waterside workers focused on local housing conditions. Low wages restricted the amount of housing space that workers could rent and sub-letting of dwellings was common practice. The plague crisis of 1900 had only put more pressure on the rental housing stock of the neighbourhood. As the City Health Officer reported:

A considerable number of low-grade dwellings have lately been demolished...adjacent to Darling Harbour. In each case of demolition, the inhabitants have been dispossessed, the total aggregate accommodation has been correspondingly reduced, and the pressure on existing accommodation in the neighbourhood increased.

In 1901 the reformed City Council agitated for a rehousing programme and criticised the Government for neglecting the housing needs of the resumed areas. If worker expectations were raised, however, they were soon dampened by the creation of dual government authority in the Darling Harbour and Rocks areas. The establishment of the Sydney Harbour Trust and City Improvement Advisory Board, given past public performances, was not a recipe for smooth government policy making. On the one hand was a port authority whose primary purpose was to raise the efficiency of the maritime industry, and on the other there existed an advisory body anxious to rebuild the Rocks area. The arrangement simply spelt divided control and bureaucratic tension for the maritime community.

The Sydney Harbour Trust Act came into force in February, 1901. Initially, the legislation prescribed a semi-representative body of seven members - four government appointees and three elected trustees. During the committee stage, however, the structure was altered and the Lyne government appointed instead, three Commissioners with salaries and tenure equivalent to the NSW
Railway Commissioners. A Herald editorial applauded the newly unelected but expert triumvirate:

The property to be placed under trustees or commissioners is State Property, and it is to be administered as a large spending and revenue-producing department. If a like property in the railways is best administered by a small body of competent men solely devoted to their work and appointed by the government, the analogy is strong in the case of wharves and harbour accommodation.9

The Herald implied that urban and port reforms were too important to be trusted to an unreliable body of elected aldermen - namely the Sydney City Council.

The Harbour Trust Commissioners all shared a professional class interest. Given their backgrounds, it is unlikely that the three gentlemen were even remotely interested in Darling Harbour's housing problem. R.R.P. Hickson, President of the Harbour Trust, was a civil engineer. Hickson had been Chief Engineer in the Public Works Department and was Commissioner for Roads at the time of his appointment. The second commissioner, T.F. Waller, had been a pastoral stock agent in Albury and pursued numerous business interests in Sydney, including that of Government land valuer. L. Beaton, the third commissioner, was formerly the Sydney manager for the shipping company of Howard Smith and Sons.10

The Sydney Harbour Trust Act of 1901 gave the three Commissioners virtual 'carte blanche' in the Darling Harbour area. They had the power to grant, renew or revoke leases and were exempt from paying municipal rates. Section 42 of the Act allowed the Commissioners to resume any private property 'for the purpose of harbour improvements and for the development of trade...'. If premises were not vacated within three months of notice, the Commissioners could issue a Sheriff's warrant for possession. The latter could then 'expel and remove therefrom all persons then in possession without any legal process whatsoever'. The Commissioners, however, were required to 'keep in proper order and condition all other property vested in them'.11 There was no onus on them to rehouse displaced tenants.

The Commissioners' readiness to exercise these powers, quickly brought them into conflict with the maritime community. As members of a professional group, sharing similar middle-class backgrounds, the priorities of the Commissioners were not necessarily those of the working-class tenants who laboured on the waterfront. The actions of the Harbour Trust soon suggested
that its officers cared little for the plight of the low-paid wharf labourers. The hidden lanes and alleys of low-rating property they inhabited, appeared unhealthy and a barrier to more productive port and land use. The cultural chasm which divided middle-class improvers and professionals on the one hand, from the lower orders on the other, dominated the confrontation in West Sydney. Frustrated by their lack of political power and fearful of change, working people turned to their parliamentary representatives for support.

Dwelling Demolitions and Renovations

In the early 1900s West Sydney was represented in State Parliament by the Labor M.L.A.s, W. M. Daley and J. J. Power. Both members acted as housing reform ambassadors and frequently raised the issue in the Legislative Assembly. Daley’s parliamentary questions in late 1901 began a protracted and bitter conflict between the interests of the state and its tenants in the resumed areas. On November 19, 1901 he asked the Public Works Minister what government authority was responsible for raising house rents in the Rocks area. The Hon. E. W. O’Sullivan replied that rents had not been raised and that buildings unfit for habitation were being demolished. However, the following month Daley claimed that workers had received notices to quit their dwellings. Daley called upon the Minister to ‘rescind such notices’ until provision was made to rehouse the displaced tenants. O’Sullivan acknowledged that notices to quit had been served on ‘undesirable tenants’ in arrears, but promised that he would take steps to ‘avert anything approaching harsh treatment’ of the residents. Rents, security of tenure and rehousing would be pressing concerns in West Sydney for the next decade.

O’Sullivan’s answers in Parliament provided little comfort for the Rocks residents. Their dwellings had been made the targets of sanitary reports in the nineteenth century and, more recently, a quarantine and cleansing programme owing to the plague catastrophe. However, adjoining The Rocks Resumption Area and in varying states of decay, were several hundred residences now administered by the Sydney Harbour Trust. Crumbling stone cottages squatted beside respectable terraces and common lodging houses. Galvanised sheds and disused warehouses provided convenient harbourside shelter for wharf labourers who could be required to work at any hour of the day or night. Only 10 per cent of the Trusts’ housing stock was found in ‘good order’. Indeed, it was estimated that 35 per cent was ‘in such a dilapidated and insanitary state that it
was impossible to make them fit for habitation.\textsuperscript{15} In 1902 W. Bruce, Harbour Trust Works Inspector, described the sanitary conditions:

On an examination of properties subsequent to resumption a large number of premises were in the most defective sanitary condition, having obsolete and defective pan traps, gullies and insufficient water service and drainage which had received no attention from previous owners.\textsuperscript{16}

The insanitary housing conditions posed both moral and political dilemmas for the Commissioners. They could tackle the public health problem by simply demolishing the housing. However, such action would be unpopular given the absence of a rehousing programme and might lead to a shortage of wharf labour. Alternatively, the Sydney Harbour Trust could begin the urgent task of repairing and rebuilding some of Sydney's oldest housing stock. Yet this reform strategy could only conflict with the immediate priority of port improvement.

In the absence of a rehousing programme it must have appeared to many tenants that the state was simply engaged in shovelling out the poor. On July 15, 1902, J.J. Power, the member for Lang, continued the parliamentary attack begun by Daley. Power asked the colonial secretary was he aware that the Commissioners had knocked down entire streets of housing and left valuable government land vacant? Further, was the Harbour Trust, by raising the rents, intent on driving wharf labourers from their homes? The Commissioners replied that their policy was to demolish dwellings 'unfit for habitation and not worth repair, or when the site was required for other purposes.' Moreover, they had 'no wish to get rid of the workers and had not used any coercive measures for that purpose.'\textsuperscript{17}

Given the sweeping powers of the Harbour Trust Commissioners and shortage of cheap accommodation in West Sydney, Power's fears for the welfare of his working-class electorate were understandable. The actions of the Harbour Trust could only aggravate the situation. If the Commissioners had no intention of driving workers from the resumed area, their policy of slum clearance had the same effect. The extent of housing demolition on the Darling Harbour waterfront in the early 1900s was not insignificant. Between September, 1901 and April, 1902, 14 houses in Clyde Street and over 40 in Day Street were demolished. Later in the year a row of 23 terraces in Merriman Street, Millers Point were also torn down.\textsuperscript{18} Many of these houses were located
along the 'Hungry Mile' of wharfside and were inhabited exclusively by wharf
labourers and their families. Finding alternate and adequate accommodation in
the area was near impossible. Indeed, the housing shortage must have been
made even more acute.

In October, 1902 Mr. Martin, the Harbour Trust Secretary, responded to
criticisms levelled at the Commissioners. The letter, which was published in the
Telegraph, attempted to explain the actions of the Harbour Trust. Martin wrote:

The position which the Commissioners find themselves in is a very
difficult one. On the one hand, they have to conserve the interests
of the public, whose funds they are administering; on the other, they
have very properly to recognise the fact that any extremely harsh
action with Government tenants in poor circumstances would not be
justified.

This was a moot point. In many instances the Commissioners defended their
interventionist policy on public health grounds and were quick to label
troublesome residents as 'undesirable tenants.' In May 1903 for instance, they
made an inspection of a group of dwellings at 115-121 Kent Street. The stone
terrace, known as 'Paton's Building', consisted of 11 slate and iron roofed
dwellings. Seven were found vacant and in a 'very bad state.' The Harbour
Trust's Treasurer considered it was 'quite impossible to persuade respectable
people to occupy any of these.' The Chief Engineer also reported that the
terrace was insanitary and 'really not fit for people to live in.' The remaining
occupants were served with notices to quit 'in consequence of the demolition of
the buildings and not because the Commissioners have any fault to find with you
as a tenant.' The unfortunate tenants were no doubt consoled by the
knowledge that the Harbour Trust had not evicted them.

Anyone visiting The Rocks in the early 1900s would have witnessed the
derelict and half demolished streets of dwellings which had fallen foul of the
Rocks Resumption Board. Over at Millers Point and inside the Harbour Trust's
domain, however, building activities were proceeding apace. Old harbourside
housing was making way for the construction of a costly rat-proof seawall.
New investment in wharf facilities, warehouses and shipping offices was
underway. At the same time, surplus resumed land and barricaded dwellings
were evident. Indeed, it would have been almost impossible to detect any
process of housing rehabilitation occurring inside the vast construction zone. In
her study, Mitchell argued that the Trust's improvements '...catered exclusively
for the needs of the shipowners.' What then was the extent of housing improvement in the area? How important was dwelling maintenance to the maritime community? The following discussion attempts to evaluate these questions by examining the empirical evidence available.

The maintenance and management of several hundred dwellings scattered between the head of Darling Harbour and Dawes Point was no simple task. The Commissioners discovered it was one thing to demolish insanitary housing, but another to make it secure and habitable for wharf labourers and their families. Unsafe sewerage connections, bad drainage, structural damage and rising damp were some of the problems bequeathed by half a century of landlord and government neglect. Insanitary housing, it was argued, only invited a recurrence of bubonic plague. Furthermore, the reformed City Council was eager to see that the Harbour Trust complied with defect notices issued under the Public Health Act, 1902. For their part, the Commissioners could not afford to be seen as slum landlords.

It must have seemed to the revenue-conscious Commissioners more expedient and convenient to tear down insanitary housing than engage in costly renovations. This attitude was evident in their responses to the parliamentary questioning of Daley and Power. But under the Harbour Trust Act, the Commissioners were clearly required to provide for the upkeep of all property vested in them. They were evidently aware of this obligation. For example, the early reports of the Trust's Chief Engineer show that continual repairs were being made to the remaining housing stock. An indication of this early public housing investment in West Sydney is shown below in Table 3.1. It indicates that more than 300 dwellings from Day Street, Darling Harbour to Windmill Street, Millers Point were repaired by the Harbour Trust over a six-month period to December, 1901. Admittedly, some houses attracted only a few shillings repair work and were probably demolished over time. Others, however, such as Victoria Terrace, Millers Point, received more substantial investment. Sanitary repairs, not surprisingly, accounted for much of the expenditure in the early 1900s. The Chief Engineer of the Trust reported that some £1200 were spent on sanitary improvements alone in 1901-02.

The annual reports of the Harbour Trust Commissioners also indicate that housing improvement in the Darling Harbour area was a long-run affair. Although the Trust was not specifically concerned with housing provision, it was committed to a regular dwelling maintenance programme. By examining the quantitative evidence appended to the annual reports, it is possible to shed
some light on long term housing investment by the port authority. Accordingly, Table 3.2 below provides an annual breakdown of Harbour Trust housing income and expenditure for the period 1901-12. Annual reinvestment in the resumed housing stock was not insignificant. As a proportion of rental dwelling income it never fell below 14 per cent.

Table 3.1. Harbour Trust Housing Repairs, West Sydney, 1901

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Street</th>
<th>No. of Houses Repaired</th>
<th>£ s. d.</th>
<th>Street</th>
<th>No. of Houses Repaired</th>
<th>£ s. d.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agar</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19 12 8</td>
<td>Merriman</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>32 1 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argyle</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>30 3 9</td>
<td>Margaret</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27 14 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bateson’s Lane</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8 4 1</td>
<td>Millers Rd.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1 17 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bettington</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>34 15 5</td>
<td>Munn</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3 9 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clyde</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>46 8 0</td>
<td>Napoleon</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8 4 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>30 4 3</td>
<td>Paton’s Bld.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18 9 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erskine</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>34 13 3</td>
<td>Pottinger</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1 11 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferry Lane</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5 14 6</td>
<td>Sussex</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>87 2 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hart</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>15 19 11</td>
<td>Unwin</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2 0 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kent</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>68 6 9</td>
<td>Victoria Tce.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>86 5 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17 0 6</td>
<td>Wentworth</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2 15 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Fort</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>119 17 0</td>
<td>Windmill</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5 11 7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Appendix to the First Report of the Sydney Harbour Trust Commissioners, 1901, p. 43.

Table 3.2. Harbour Trust Housing Income and Expenditure, 1901-1912

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Rental Dwelling Income (£)</th>
<th>Maintenance/Repair Expenditure (£)</th>
<th>% of Income</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901-2</td>
<td>11,300</td>
<td>1,588</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902-3</td>
<td>11,574</td>
<td>2,626</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1903-4</td>
<td>11,185</td>
<td>1,699</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1904-5</td>
<td>11,128</td>
<td>3,533</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905-6</td>
<td>11,151</td>
<td>2,408</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1906-7</td>
<td>11,118</td>
<td>2,244</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1907-8</td>
<td>11,577</td>
<td>2,246</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908-9</td>
<td>11,523</td>
<td>2,858</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1909-10</td>
<td>10,600</td>
<td>3,300</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910-11</td>
<td>11,359</td>
<td>2,697</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911-12</td>
<td>12,152</td>
<td>3,943</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Appendix to the Annual Reports of the Sydney Harbour Trust Commissioners, 1901-12.
During the ten-year period 1901-11, annual rental income from the Harbour Trust housing stock averaged about £11,000. In the first half of the decade the Commissioners expended roughly 20 per cent of rental income on the maintenance and improvement of residential properties. During the second half of the decade the proportion rose to around 25 per cent of gross rental income. In most years, according to the Harbour Trust Secretary, approximately 100 dwellings were constantly in need of repair. Evidently then, a sizeable share of the residential stock required more or less intensive rehabilitatory work.

Dwelling maintenance, not surprisingly, proved to be a divisive issue in the resumed lands. In 1902 the Harbour Trust rent collectors caused an imbroglio by distributing attornment notices to the rent payers. The notices effectively made the residents responsible for the upkeep of their dwellings. The more militant tenants dug in their heels and refused to sign. In Parliament, Daley protested that his constituents had been '...requested to sign attornments containing the most obnoxious clauses' and that the Commissioners seemed 'determined upon driving the helpless workmen from their present necessary dwellings...'. On October 24, 1902 the irate government tenants held a public meeting to denounce the latest imposition. The resolution adopted read as follows:

That in the opinion of this meeting the action of the Harbour Trust and the representatives of the Rocks Resumption Board are harsh and absolutely unjust to the tenants who have for many years faithfully paid their rents to the previous landlords; that our representatives... be empowered to interview the State Premier and to point out that State ownership should be in no way more oppressive to tenants than private ownership...

For the Commissioners, the rental lease forms were an administrative nightmare. There was confusion and disagreement over the 'obnoxious clause' inserted by Commissioner Waller. The Secretary of the Trust reported that several tenants had received eviction notices for refusing to sign the agreement. He also noted that Waller's clause 'seems to me to be opposed to the practice obtaining generally in cases of weekly tenancies.' Eventually, an executive meeting of October 27, 1902 resolved that the attornment notices be withdrawn from circulation.

It may be asked, given the hostile atmosphere in the resumed lands, why the Commissioners chose to issue the attornments. Were they intent on
confrontation? This seems plausible but unlikely. More notable was a suggestion that the entire affair had been precipitated by a £1600 debt due to housing improvements in 1901. In March, 1904, J. R. Martin, former Harbour Trust Secretary, wrote a letter to the Herald which supported this explanation. Martin felt that it was his duty to the 'taxpayers of the State' to disclose the true financial position of the port authority. In order to 'pay its way', the Harbour Trust was expected to raise sufficient revenue to meet the annual interest cost on the public debt of £4.5 million. According to Martin, however, the 1903 Annual Report revealed a shortfall of £90,000 needed to cover the burgeoning interest bill. Martin calculated that the 'accumulated deficiency' came to £200,000. The Commissioners' vague financial statements and use of creative accounting to hide the growing public debt had embarrassed the former Secretary. Martin later remarked that apart from Commissioner Beaton, no other senior official had a 'financial or good business training.'

The Harbour Trust bureaucracy could be sluggish in dealing with individual requests for house repairs. When Mr. Finck of 49 Kent Street wrote a letter to the Commissioners in early December, 1903 he informed them that the roof and W.C. leaked, a door was down and the copper needed a chimney. He received no reply and urging attention, sent a second letter. Mr. Finck then refused to pay his weekly rent (20 shillings) and by December 14, was £2 in arrears. Meanwhile, Commissioner Waller had told his Secretary

Inform the tenant that immediately he pays the rent, the repairs will be carried out and that if he does not pay the amount due without delay, other steps will be taken in the matter.

Mr. Finck duly reciprocated and the repairs were effected a month later. In February 1904, however, the City Council served notice that the premises at 49 Kent Street were poorly ventilated and insanitary. Following further repair work the dwelling was finally re-roofed on May 31, 1904. Poor Mr. Finck had faced eviction and a six-month delay before his house was made habitable. This was not an extraordinary case. Another Harbour Trust tenant complained that it took 14 months to have seven panes put in his windows.

Nevertheless, by the end of the decade there had occurred a marked improvement in the sanitary standard of the Harbour Trust housing stock. A municipal health report on the condition of the Observatory Hill area found that concentrated pockets of bad housing had been broken up. After an inspection of more than 700 dwellings in 1909, the City Health Officer reported some 390 as
satisfactory, another 329 as fair and 14 in bad condition. T. H. Nesbitt, the Town Clerk, reported that 'serious defects' had been 'promptly remedied' by government officials although 'considerable delay' applied to City Council notices concerning minor nuisances. On the whole, these observations stand in sharp relief to official views expressed at the turn of the century.

**Rents and Evictions**

The foregoing discussion has argued that the rehabilitation programme of the Harbour Trust improved the housing stock in West Sydney. Despite the delay involved, many dwellings were upgraded to socially acceptable standards. The following section seeks to address other aspects of state landlordism - the rental question and eviction problem. The access which individual labourers and families had to Harbour Trust housing depended on their economic security and the amount of rent they could afford to pay. Some wharf labourers hoped for rent relief from their government landlord and understandably, many were worried about security of tenure. Expectations and passions ran high. Striking a balance between the housing demands of the waterside workers and the stated objectives of the Harbour Trust Commissioners would be a difficult task.

Rents in the resumed lands were relatively high compared with the rest of Sydney. One witness told the 1891 Royal Commission on Strikes that wharf labourers would pay up to twice as much for housing in The Rocks area compared with the suburbs. Indeed, property owners, in anticipation of bigger compensation payouts, had raised rental values. While some tenants occupied adequate and affordable dwellings others, like unfortunate Mr. Finck, paid decidedly extravagant rents for sub-standard housing. A sample of the housing rents which wharf labourers could expect to pay are shown in Table 3.3. The figures were taken from the weekly ledgers of the rent collectors employed by the Harbour Trust in March, 1902. Any amount between 5 shillings and £1 weekly for dwellings awaiting demolition or sanitary improvement was evidently not unusual. Although Table 3.3 does not indicate the size of these rental properties, it is not unreasonable to assume that many tenants engaged in sub-letting in order to reduce their housing costs. There were few other options available to them. Indeed, residential mobility and choice were restricted, due to the casual nature and irregular hours of employment.
A war of words regularly broke out over the issues of tenant evictions and 'fair' rents. The residents' cause was championed in a number of quarters, most notably the Sydney press. Allegations of incompetence and lawlessness were hurled at the Commissioners and their 'tribe of bailiffs' who had been let loose on the defenceless residents. On May 24, 1902 the Catholic Press took the Harbour Trust to task. In a rhetorical article it described how a government rent collector had refused the sum of £5.12.0 on account of £6.12.0 and then threatened the tenant with a bailiff, unless the full amount was paid. Other cases told how the Commissioners had signed distraint warrants and served them when tenants were paying rental arrears at the Trust's office. The behaviour of the Harbour Trust heads conjured up visions of Irish landlordism:

The scenes which are weekly witnessed within the Harbour Trust Resumption bring to mind the 'crowbar brigades' of Irish landlords of the Clanricarde type. Indeed, one is almost inclined to think that the Commissioners (Messrs. Hickson, Waller and Beaton) had spent their past days in the company of those rack-renting landlords, whose one endeavour in life has been to turn Ireland into a wilderness.40

The Commissioners were told that they could seek atonement by entrusting future rent collection to private contractors, who would 'treat tenants as human beings and not as beasts devoid of reason.' If private landlords had adopted such tactics, the article warned, 'half of Sydney would be under canvas on the

Table 3.3. Harbour Trust Housing Rents - March, 1902

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dwellings</th>
<th>Weekly Rent</th>
<th>Dwellings</th>
<th>Weekly Rent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day's Terrace</td>
<td>8s.</td>
<td>Munn St.</td>
<td>9s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>157 Sussex St.</td>
<td>13s.</td>
<td>Merriman St.</td>
<td>15s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>99 Sussex St.</td>
<td>20s.</td>
<td>Windmill St.</td>
<td>9s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>199 Kent St.</td>
<td>8s.</td>
<td>Argyle St.</td>
<td>20s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83 Kent St.</td>
<td>22s.</td>
<td>Millers Rd.</td>
<td>9s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wharf Lane</td>
<td>5s.</td>
<td>Hart St.</td>
<td>9s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day St.</td>
<td>8s.</td>
<td>Clyde St.</td>
<td>5s.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CFSHT, AONSW 19/10442-3
spare allotments and parks of the metropolis.  
Parliamentary weight was now added to the debate. Speaking in the Legislative Assembly on June 11, 1902 Daley stated that if his constituents failed to pay the rent on Monday, the Harbour Trust put a bailiff in on Tuesday:

I brought several cases before the notice of the Premier, but he said he had no power. I can tell the members that last week 20 bailiffs were sent in, and in all the cases the claims were under two pounds. The poorest people are the sufferers.

For these penniless tenants, the past indifference of property owners had been replaced by a harsh and exacting landlord. State landlordism had begun to wear out its welcome in West Sydney.

The first Annual Report of the Harbour Trust Commissioners acknowledged the public outcry and revealed the frustration involved in performing the role of government landlord. The burden of housing management had greatly increased. In June, 1901 the Commissioners annexed from the Rocks Resumption Area 'a densely populated area' adjoining their domain. The area contained 401 dwelling-houses, 82 shops and houses combined, 23 hotels, 70 bonded stores and 45 factories, workshops and offices. The City Improvement Advisory Board had planned to build model workmen's houses on the land which conflicted with the Commissioners' policy of reserving the area for future port and commercial investment. Until such time, however, the Harbour Trust was forced to shoulder administrative responsibility for the increased housing stock. A statement from their 1901 Annual Report suggests that the Commissioners resented the responsibility:

It can easily be imagined that the collection of rents from a body of 400 or 500 tenants, occupying houses at a rental of a few shillings per week, is an exceedingly difficult matter; and as the Commissioners are only Trustees for the public and have no right to allow the property of the State to be non-productive, they have had in numerous cases to take the necessary legal action for the recovery of rent or the ejectment of the tenant.

The Commissioners were prepared 'to stay proceedings temporarily' in 'genuine cases of distress' but, on the other hand, they believed that some tenants had no intention of paying rent to a state landlord. By dividing the government tenants into the deserving and undeserving poor, the Commissioners could continue to
justify their practice of evicting 'undesirable' residents, demolishing dwellings and leaving others uninhabitable.

Undoubtedly, the most feared visitor in the resumed lands was the bailiff. Newspaper accounts of Harbour Trust evictions made regular reference to these shady characters. According to reporters, if residents fell into arrears or failed to vacate their houses, they could expect a stranger on the doorstep, occasionally brandishing a revolver. As for the identity and source of employment of the bailiffs, there is little evidence available. The *Telegraph* reported a number of incidents where bailiffs had been sent to seize the furniture and gain possession of the homes of incapacitated wharf labourers unable to pay the weekly rent.46 Could the Commissioners have hired thugs to rough up the 'wharfies' on the government lands? One witness, Patsy Brannagan, thought so:

> I've been living there four years and have been pestered for rent. They (the Harbour Trust) have been humbugging me about and taking me to court and even sending a man with a revolver and a bailiff. Money or your life! Nice sort of merciful Government that is! ... I have never been a bank manager and had a permanent job at six quid a week, or anything like that. If I had the money I would pay them, but they should not threaten me.47

The term 'bailiff' may have referred to the Sheriff's officer who, under the Harbour Trust Act, had summary powers to deliver possession of property and remove any occupant. In any event, there was a general consensus that the bailiffs did the bidding of the Commissioners, and that their physical presence and verbal threats intimidated the poorest residents.

When in July 1902, J. J. Power MLA, asked to know the number of cases where bailiffs had ejected tenants, he also inquired whether the Commissioners had raised house rents in the resumed lands by 20 per cent. The Commissioners answered both parliamentary questions in the negative.48 In view of the official statement made in their 1901 Annual Report, the first denial was unbelievable. For instance, a return tabled in Parliament showed that no less than 81 tenants had become the victims of distraint orders by September, 1903.49 Secondly, it was undeniable that a general rent rise had occurred and that in matters of residential property management the Harbour Trust officials had acted in an amateurish and arbitrary manner.

Raising the house rents was the work of the Harbour Trust Treasurer. A rental ledger dated in November, 1902 highlighted adjustments made since
1901. In Argyle Street, for example, a house which had let at 10s. per week was relet for 20s. per week in November, 1902. Treasurer Bradley noted in the margin that 10s. was a 'ridiculously low rent' and found 'no difficulty in obtaining one pound per week.' At number 66 Bettington Street, the weekly rent had increased from 18s. to £1. 'I do not consider 18s. per week a fair rental', Bradley commented, and 'suggested an advance to one pound which is paid regularly.' Treasurer Bradley's rental ledger ran to pages of similar cases.

The Harbour Trust was not concerned with matching housing costs to the capacity of government tenants to pay. Instead, the shortage of low cost working-class housing in West Sydney allowed supply and demand forces to dictate dwelling rents in the resumed areas. This practice was applied to Day's Terrace - a row of 11 houses in Sussex Street. There the rent had jumped by 25 per cent. Bradley explained the increase:

There has always been a great demand for houses in this terrace; the situation making it so convenient for waterside workers. I consider 8s. per week a low rental and as several people had offered more I suggested that the premises should be put in proper repair and the rent increased to 10s. If there were 30 (houses) instead of 11, I could easily find tenants for them.

It was the same story further north at Millers Point. At number 1 Merriman Street, the weekly rent was raised from £1 to 27s.6d:

The house was let at a low rental and when the tenant left several people were anxious to get it. Anyone of them would have given 27s.6d. but the first who applied was accepted as tenant and has paid the rent regularly.

At number 28 Merriman Street, the Harbour Trust installed a bath in response to an offer of additional rent. Auctioning scarce accommodation to the highest bidder was administratively simple for the Harbour Trust officials. The better paid wharf labourers could afford to devote a larger share of their wages to rent. For the pool of insecure and low-paid workers dependent on nearby shelter, however, the practice seemed as unjust and demeaning as the wharf gate 'pick-up'. The increased rents must also have encouraged sub-letting and overcrowding among the workforce; a feature which Mitchell noted in her study.
The rent hikes of the early 1900s did not endear the low-paid wharf labourers to their state landlord. The Harbour Trust seemed more intent on exploiting its position as a monopoly supplier of houses to force up rents rather than responding to the reform demands of the working-class residents. Admittedly, the port authority was engaged in a dwelling maintenance programme but the problem of rehousing remained as contentious as ever. Tensions in the process of health and housing reform had not been lessened as a result of government intervention in the Darling Harbour area. They were again inflamed when the Harbour Trust's redevelopment programme dragged other interest groups into the conflict.

**Rehousing Policy**

Demolitions, evictions and increased rentals were everyday experiences for state housing tenants living in West Sydney in the early 1900s. The rehousing needs of the displaced maritime community had taken a back-seat to the public health question and overwhelming priority of Darling Harbour port redevelopment. Nevertheless, for wharf labourers and their families the provision of secure and affordable government housing remained a major reform demand. This section looks at the rehousing debate and attempts by the Harbour Trust to replace demolished dwellings in the resumed area. These efforts were notable but their scope remained limited. The Trust's rehousing scheme did not signal a major departure from its programme of port improvement. The new accommodation was simply viewed as an addition to the authority's capital stock. State paternalism perhaps best defines the Harbour Trust's attitude to worker housing in West Sydney.

Promises to provide low-cost accommodation for the maritime workers haunted successive State governments after Premier Lyne's resumption of The Rocks in 1900. In August 1902, the Hon. E. W. O'Sullivan, Public Works Minister, assured a meeting of wharf labourers that the Government was about to commence the Windmill Street model tenement scheme. He also told the workers that the Harbour Trust had plans to rehouse them on surplus resumed sites. The men had good cause to believe the Minister's speech. O'Sullivan was an advocate of national development through enlightened state capitalism and believed that the lot of the labouring man could be improved by the expansion of public works expenditure.

The Windmill Street model tenement scheme was the brainchild of the City Improvement Advisory Board. Its members, Varney Parkes (chairman),
John Barlow and George McCredie had laboured nine months on the scheme. A *Telegraph* journalist marvelled at its potential:

Imagine a building five storeys high, the facades of stone, and almost as architecturally imposing as the Victoria Markets or the Post Office ... with frontages extending along Windmill Street (705 ft.); Kent Street (249 ft.); Lower Fort Street (225 ft.) as well as to Argyle Street and some idea may be gained of the magnitude of the undertaking.\(^{59}\)

In the quadrangle basement, provision was made for a pool, gymnasium, library, lecture hall and school. Rents were set between 5s. per room for single men and 12s.6d. for a five-roomed flat. Overall, it was estimated that the Windmill housing estate, together with a tenement block adjoining Observatory Hill, would provide accommodation for about 700 families and 1,000 single persons.\(^{60}\) It was a grand vision but like so many other urban plans for twentieth century Sydney, the scheme was never realised. The work of the City Improvement Advisory Board was pigeon-holed in the Public Works Department. Such was the fate of Sydney’s first potential public housing project.

While the Windmill Street housing scheme remained on the drawing board, a more modest terrace was built by the Harbour Trust in Napoleon Street. Each of the five tenements contained four rooms, together with a kitchen, laundry and bathroom - an internal layout which was rarely available in contemporary working-class dwellings. Ornamental features included marble mantelpieces and stained-glass hall lamps. Indeed, the balcony and verandah additions were regarded as ‘exceptionally generous’ for workmen’s dwellings. Weekly rents were set at 14s. and a modest return of 5 per cent was expected on the investment. Eligibility, however, was confined to the Harbour Trust’s workforce.\(^{61}\)

On June 22, 1903 State Treasurer Waddell was invited by J. J. Power MLA, to personally inspect the new dwellings in Napoleon Street. The member for Lang was an enthusiastic supporter of government rehousing programmes and seldom missed an opportunity to agitate for state housing investment in West Sydney. After the inspection, Power told Waddell that if additional accommodation was built on Harbour Trust land, the Government would receive a satisfactory return and provide jobs and shelter for the wharf labourers. Treasurer Waddell was considering Power’s proposition when a group of
maritime union officials and residents suddenly ambushed the two men. The disgruntled tenants demanded immediate rent relief and a fairer assessment system based on housing quality rather than market values. One government tenant felt outraged by having to pay 22s.6d. for his dwelling which was a 'shanty' compared to these modern tenements.\(^{62}\) In reply, Waddell explained that the Government was entitled to the same rents as private house-owners. It would not allow tenants to occupy government dwellings at below-market rents. The Government wished to appear as a humane, but above all, business-like landlord. Waddell then agreed to meet a formal deputation at his office.\(^{63}\)

The deputation which petitioned Treasurer Waddell included government tenants, representatives of the Gipps Division Labour League and officials from the Coal Lumpers, Wharf Labourers and Seamen's Unions. W. Daley, MLA, argued that dual Government control of the resumed areas was overly bureaucratic and unworkable. A number of tenants were exasperated by their government landlord. Many complained that the government had uprooted the maritime neighbourhood. One man, who had lived a lifetime in The Rocks, stated that more than 800 inhabitants had been driven out. Waddell restated that his department would make inquiries into cases of excessive house rents and adjust them.\(^{64}\)

If W. Daley, MLA, was discouraged about the prospects of state housing investment in West Sydney, his parliamentary colleague, J. J. Power, remained optimistic. Power argued that tough economic times had prevented new dwelling investment in 1903. The Harbour Trust's works programme, moreover, was dependent on the size of the Treasury estimates passed by Parliament. After the funds were exhausted, investment activity in the resumed lands came to a standstill. 'Boiled down, it is all a matter of money,' Power remarked, 'and the Government is economising in every direction ...'\(^{65}\) Nevertheless, in February 1904, the member for Lang was relieved to hear that the Commissioners had called construction tenders for a row of 8 tenements in Day Street, Darling Harbour.\(^{66}\)

Undoubtedly, the problem of 'divided control' had also kept the rehousing question off the political agenda. When the Lyne Government resumed the Darling Harbour and Rocks areas, the Sydney City Council was deprived of both rateable property and political authority. In March 1903, following the abolition of the City Improvement Advisory Board, Lord Mayor Thomas Hughes launched a concerted but unsuccessful campaign to wrest back municipal control of The Rocks area. The ensuing fight highlighted the animosity existing
between the State Government and City Council, as well as their conflicting priorities for West Sydney. Mayor Hughes bitterly attacked the Harbour Trust Commissioners for retreating from Premier Lyne’s promise to re-model The Rocks area:

It is an outrage on the very principles of civic government that a large area of the city proper should be removed from municipal control and placed in the hands of a board like the Sydney Harbour Trust, which possesses no qualifications whatever for the special work entailed, as the members of it were, presumably, appointed in the first instance on account of their knowledge of shipping matters.\(^{67}\)

In reply, State Treasurer Waddell mounted a defence of the Harbour Trust’s record and the Government’s policy in The Rocks. The first priority had been to put the Darling Harbour foreshores in proper sanitary order, to make them rat-proof and to prevent a recurrence of the plague. Secondly, given the depressed condition of the commercial property market, it was wiser to grant short-term leases in The Rocks and await the economic upturn before rebuilding the area. The past inaction of the City Council, Waddell remarked, had created the insanitary conditions in the first place and it was in no position to lecture the State Government about its administrative responsibilities to the citizens of Sydney.\(^{68}\)

In the second half of the decade working-class demand for low-cost housing in West Sydney intensified. The Harbour Trust’s programme of wharfside expansion, warehouse construction and road re-alignment all combined to push back the remaining boundaries of residential settlement. In 1905 the Rocks Resumption Area contained about 900 dwellings. However, the City Building Surveyor had now earmarked 53 premises for immediate demolition and planned to raze another 73 properties by 1910.\(^{69}\) Wharf labourers feared for the future and residential protests were again renewed. On the evening of September 18, 1908 speakers addressed local tenants from a hotel balcony in Cumberland Street. The meeting constituted itself as the Gipps Ward Progress Association and immediately censured the Commissioners’ demolition programme and inaction over the rehousing question. W. Macey, president of the Coal Lumpers Union, argued that the area provided waterside labour with convenient shelter and must remain a working-class neighbourhood. Alderman O’Connor told the meeting that new dwelling rents should be set between 8-12s.
per week. Another Alderman, W. Fitzgerald, remarked that the Government had recently let new dwellings in Windmill Street at 'extravagent rentals quite impossible for workmen to pay.' In his opinion the neighbourhood was a municipal responsibility and belonged to the City Council. Harry Holland stirred up the gathering by claiming that government bureaucrats wanted to 'drive the working-classes of The Rocks to suburban areas and make it a second Potts Point.'

By now it was apparent that the rehousing question posed a number of problems for the protagonists. The Harbour Trust, if it continued to demolish low-rating house property to make way for port improvements, would face even greater pressure to rehouse displaced workers. A rehousing programme, however, would have to be undertaken on costly resumed land and the rents would need to reflect these costs if the government investment was to show a satisfactory return. Working-class groups had to resist further demolitions in order to preserve their political power. Furthermore, a rehousing scheme would be of little benefit unless the rents were within their wage range. The City Council, still smouldering over the lost lands, supported the workers' cause, even though it had no rehousing powers and was busy demolishing workmen's dwellings in other neighbourhoods. The forces promoting and resisting state housing provision were clearly too divisive and unstable to make it a simple reform solution in West Sydney.

In 1909 W.M. Hughes, MHR added his political weight to the rehousing debate. In a long letter to the Herald, the former organiser of the Waterside Workers Federation (W.W.F.), argued passionately and persuasively that Sir William Lyne had resumed The Rocks area in order 'to provide the residents with better accommodation, not to refuse them any accommodation at all.' Existing tenants were not to be 'sacrificed, or even unnecessarily disturbed,' Hughes recalled. The idea behind the intervention had been to build more comfortable and affordable houses for the slum-dwellers. Underlying Hughes' agitation, however, was a more fundamental concern. The Government, by pressing ahead with its policy of demolition and eviction, was clearly undermining the waterside relations of production which he had so painstakingly crafted. Hughes wrote:

To drive out those whose lot it is to work on the waterfront is unwise, short-sighted and unjust. These men exist as a convenience to the shipping industry; without them it could not be carried on. In essentials they are the industry.
As a result of Hughes' organising efforts since 1900, the Sydney branch of the W.W.F. had grown by several thousand and the great advocate of compulsory arbitration had no desire to see the process disturbed. Hughes informed Treasurer Waddell that about 2,000 residents, including no less than 800 men, had been displaced by The Rocks resumption. Wharf labourers who continued to work on the waterfront, he argued, increasingly rented a room at Pyrmont and housed their families in the suburbs. Similar misgivings about the housing shortage were expressed to Waddell by Mr. Healy, a Bellambi Coal Company employer.

If the reason for state intervention was the replacement of insanitary dwellings with modern working-class housing, documentation for Hughes' argument was thin. Parliamentary debates at the time of the Resumption Acts made little reference to rehousing workers in The Rocks. As the foregoing argument demonstrates, government housing provision was never a primary responsibility for state officials in the resumed lands. Furthermore, the acute housing shortage in West Sydney was not officially acknowledged by the Harbour Trust Commissioners until their eighth Annual Report in 1908. They reported:

The demand for workmen's dwellings in the vicinity of Millers Point became so great during the year that the Commissioners erected twenty two workmen's dwellings on the western side of Dalgety Road. Such premises - which were actually let before completion - are on the flat system ... Clearly, the housing shortage had reached breaking point for the wharf labourers and the Harbour Trust Commissioners.

Why then were the Commissioners more conciliatory? Arguably, their policies of slum clearance, sanitary reform and port improvement were less pressing compared to the turn of the century. Certainly the State's commercial outlook improved after the end of the severe drought of 1895-1903. The housing reform strategy of the wharf labourers, residents and local politicians must also have had some influence on their state landlord. At any rate the Harbour Trust was prepared to replace demolished dwellings on a larger scale than previously. Indeed, the implicit assumption in the Commissioners' ninth Annual Report was that the growing shipping accommodation in Darling
Harbour depended on its correlative - locally and better housed waterside labour:

It is the policy of the Commissioners to provide houses, where possible, for those of the waterside workers who must, of necessity, live near their work; but a great deal of the land vested in the Commissioners is too valuable to be used for this purpose, and is required in connection with the improvement of the facilities for shipping at the various wharves. In accordance with this policy, a number of suitable dwellings will be erected within the next few months on the limited area available for the purpose.76

Indeed, Commissioner Walsh later explained that the workers' dwellings 'were not built as a business proposition but as part of the equipment of the port in the same way as we construct sheds or wharfs'. Furthermore, the flats were solely reserved for waterside workers among whom the Trust 'selected the best of the tenants to occupy the new houses'.77

In total, between 1901-12, the Sydney Harbour Trust constructed about 120 houses in West Sydney. It demolished, however, several times that number. Table 3.4 below provides an estimate of the number of new dwellings built during the period.

Table 3.4. Harbour Trust Housing Completions, West Sydney, 1901-1912

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Locality</th>
<th>Dwellings*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1902-03</td>
<td>Napoleon St.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1904</td>
<td>Day St.</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>Dalgety Rd.</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>Munn St.</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910-12</td>
<td>High St.</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Estimate

Source: *Annual Reports of the Sydney Harbour Trust Commissioners, 1901-12*

In High Street, Millers Point, the Harbour Trust ran up a row of 72 flats for wharf labourers.78 A reporter from the *Telegraph* visited the half-built High Street flats in November, 1911. At the time he noted that there were already 200 applicants for the new accommodation. One flat that he inspected was tenanted by a woman and her sons. 'Mine work on the wharves,' she replied to
his observation that the verandah was an ideal playground for the children. She told the journalist:

They're mansions to the old places we used to live in. I was born and reared close to here, in Thornton Street. When the houses were pulled down I had to move out to Pyrmont, but I came back as soon as this terrace was built; my sons have to live near their work...  

Although the woman paid 4s. more in rent and could no longer 'keep a few fowls at the back', she welcomed the additional domestic conveniences:

There was no copper, nor tubs, nor bath in the old houses. And you could never keep them clean, ... if you didn't look out there would be bugs everywhere ... And then there was the rats.

The reporter next made an inspection of the Harbour Trust flats in Dalgety Road, Millers Point. 'I would rather live under the Government than under a private landlord,' a tenant commented. 'Private landlords are something fearful!' By the eve of the First World War, many wharf labourers and residents had left the Darling Harbour area permanently. Some of those who remained or returned were gradually rehoused in the Harbour Trust's new flats in High Street. According to Sand's Sydney Directory, a number of the tenants had formerly lived in old Hart Street, Millers Point. At the turn of the century, for instance, Alexander Patience had resided at No. 8 Hart Street, but now occupied No. 2 High Street. Emanuel Tobieson, who had been a nearby neighbour, had moved into No. 18a High Street. Mrs Jane Murphy, who had lived opposite at No. 11 Hart Street, had taken the upstairs flat at No. 4a High Street. She in turn probably knew Thomas Henson, formerly of No. 17 Hart Street, who had been rehoused next door.

Conclusion

The Darling Harbour and Rocks resumptions were the culmination of increasing state intervention in the urban environment of late nineteenth century Sydney. Although the state did not seek to become a leading housing reformer, its administrative arms were forced to juggle a complex set of economic, health and housing demands in the resumed areas. On the whole, the sanitary and commercial health of the state property monopolised the Harbour Trust
Commissioners' attention more than political pressure for housing reform. Nevertheless, by demolishing low-rating residential buildings and dislocating community networks, the Trust's actions continued the City Council's slum clearance tradition and paved the way for further inner-city resumptions. After 1900 impoverished working-class neighbourhoods were effectively put on notice by the Trust's cleansing activities in the Darling Harbour area. Sordid housing environments heightened middle-class anxieties and were popularly seen as public health hazards. They would increasingly come under the surveillance of local and central governments in pre-war Sydney.

Underneath the surface, hidden political tensions were revived by the resumptions. The City Council, which saw itself as the representative public authority, was deprived of rateable property and a voice in the area. In the absence of a partnership between competing bureaucracies, the problem of divided control remained and became more intractable in this period. The mutual distrust which permeated state and local government relations in Federation Sydney could only result in a fragmented approach to the housing question. These problems were again exposed when the state began to legislate for housing reform.

There were also breaks with the past. Unlike the slum clearance activity of the nineteenth century, the government's resumptions of the early 1900s raised the possibility of worker housing provision in West Sydney. Labor politicians, Council aldermen, maritime unions and local progress associations all petitioned governments over the rehousing issue. Their efforts met with mixed success. Alternative investment priorities, dual government control and high land costs were unfavourable to house-building activity. By 1912, however, the Harbour Trust had replaced some of the demolished stock and rehoused a select group of waterside workers. The housing scheme was officially acknowledged as a government concession to wharf labourers who needed lodgings near the waterfront. It in turn created new tensions by housing working people in unpopular tenements.

This early episode of state landlordism also left strains between the middle-class protagonists and working-class subjects of urban renewal. Wharf labourers, who expected sympathy and support from their new landlord, found that the state and its rent collectors could be as autocratic and uncaring as private landlords. Dwelling demolitions, rent increases and evictions all heightened tensions. The Harbour Trust's attempt to renovate some properties, replace others and rehouse a minority of waterside workers showed that state
intervention was not a neutral player in the urban environment. Housing reform could benefit some groups and disadvantage others. Civic reformers generally, however, would fail to see the social divisions generated by environmental intervention in early twentieth century Sydney. They increasingly assumed that their vision of social improvement was shared by all and that the housing problem was capable of solution.
Endnotes


16. Mr. Bruce to Chief Engineer on cleansing operations - Sydney Harbour Trust Properties, 20 February 1902, *Correspondence Files of the Sydney Harbour Trust* (hereafter cited as *CFSHT*), Archives Office of N.S.W. (hereafter cited as AONSW), 19/10442.


18. Letter from the Harbour Trust Secretary to the Water Supply & Sewerage Board re. rate exemption for demolished premises 7 April 1902 in *CFSHT*, AONSW 19/10443.

20. By June 1903, the Harbour Trust had demolished over 100 dwellings or about 25 per cent of the government housing stock in the resumed area. See the 'Return respecting residential properties in the area vested in the Sydney Harbour Trust', Votes and Proceedings of Legislative Assembly of New South Wales, (hereafter cited as V&PLANSW) 1903, Vol .4, p. 227.


22. The City Council *Assessment Books* for Gipps Ward show that some of these insanitary terraces were two-roomed dwellings. In 1901 they let between 7-8 shillings! See 'Demolition of Paton's Buildings, March 1904' in *CFSHT*, AONSW 19/10447.


24. Mr. Bruce to Chief Engineer on cleansing operations - Sydney Harbour Trust Properties, 20 February 1902, *CFSHT*, AONSW 19/10442.


28. See 'Attornment Forms' file and Minute from the Harbour Trust Secretary to the Board, 22 September 1902, *CFSHT*, AONSW 19/10447.

29. *Ibid*.


32. See the file '49 Kent St. - re. repairs', *CFSHT*, AONSW 19/10448.

33. *Ibid*.

34. *DT*, 23 June 1903.


38. *DT*, 10 August 1903.


40. See the *Catholic Press*, 24 May 1902 in the Maritime Services Board Library.

41. *Ibid*.

42. *DT*, 25 October 1902.

44. *DT*, 19 June 1901.
46. *DT*, 25 and 29 October 1902.
47. *DT*, 10 August 1903.
48. See the file, 'Questions in Parliament', 15 July 1902 in *CFSHT, AONSW* 19/10443.
50. See the 'Return showing increases in rentals', 17 November 1902 in *CFSHT, AONSW* 19/10443.
56. *SMH*, 21 August 1902.
58. The City Improvement Advisory Board was appointed in early 1901 to advise the State Government on reconstructing the Rocks Resumption Area. The Board existed until March 1903 when its affairs were transferred to the Sydney Harbour Trust. See the *SMH, 19 March 1903*.
59. *DT*, 7 January 1902.
64. *DT*, 10 August 1903.
65. See J. J. Power's letter in the *SMH, 24 July 1903*.
66. See the file, 'Erection of 8 Terrace Houses in Day Street 1904' in *CFSHT, AONSW* 19/10449.
67. *SMH*, 20 March 1903
68. *SMH*, 24 March 1903.
69. *SMH*, 17 April 1905.
70. *DT*, 19 September 1908.
72. Ibid.
74. Ibid.
79. *DT*, 16 November 1911.
80. Ibid.
81. Ibid.
82. See *Sand's Sydney and NSW Directory*, 1900-1914 (Botany Municipal Council Library, microfiche).
Chapter Four

Slums, Resumptions and Reformers

Introduction

Sydney at the turn of the century was an expanding metropolis with an urban population approaching half a million inhabitants. The disclosure of continuing nineteenth century overcrowding and sub-standard dwelling conditions showed that there was a sizeable section of the population which had never enjoyed adequate housing standards. The previous chapter revealed how the state housed several hundred wharf labourers in two-storey tenement flats. However, the physical transformation of Sydney during the early twentieth century was accompanied by a steady exodus of working people seeking cheaper housing beyond the City's core. The inner suburbs absorbed much of the population growth, and attention began to turn to hidden localities plagued by inadequate paving, drainage and open space. Why were the inhabitants branded as 'slum-dwellers' and how and by whom were they to be housed? Could the State or City Council make provision for these propertyless tenants within Sydney or did the solution lie beyond the urban fringe? Housing reformers had differing opinions. Most agreed however, that government sponsored resumption of 'congested' inner-city areas was a logical step in the right direction. Unfortunately, the human and rehousing cost appeared as an afterthought.

City slum demolition had been used as an interventionist strategy since the early 1880s. After 1900, however, the City Council increasingly targeted not just street rows but specific neighbourhoods of working-class housing. The pretext for more systematic state intervention varied according to the circumstances of each case. It was nevertheless underpinned by the hypothesis that areas of unwholesome and congested house property produced higher rates of death and immorality compared to the rest of the City. Contemporaries speculated that there was a direct correlation between physical decay and social degeneration. It therefore seemed reasonable for them to assume that the removal of unhealthy living quarters would help to correct disturbing social tendencies among the city poor.
Reformers freely borrowed demographic information to measure the degree of housing stress in the City. Population density, housing acreage and crude death rates all served to 'prove' their theory that adverse urban environment had a destructive influence on the individual. The first section of Chapter Four therefore begins by interpreting census material to see what light can be thrown on Sydney's housing problem after 1900. It then turns to consider several slum reformers and their ideologies of housing reform. Slum reform campaigns in pre-war Sydney found expression in the resumption of a number of poor residential districts and the subsequent dishousing of thousands of city-dwellers. The resumptions rewarded the hard work of City Mayoralty, health officers and clergymen. Beneath the surface of urban improvement, however, the City's political and social structures seemed incapable of dealing with the results. Worker dwelling interests emerged to contest the reform debate and advocate greater government involvement in the housing market. Middle-class reformers, in turn, questioned the soundness of the strategy and the absence of a rehousing policy.

City Congestion

Urban growth statistics help to throw some light on long-term demand for living space and housing in early twentieth century Sydney. Population changes occurred both within the City proper and outside the urban Wards. There were two pronounced developments. Firstly, the rate of population growth within the City Council boundaries slowed markedly during the last decade of the nineteenth century. The 1891 Census of N.S.W. found 107,652 people living in the City of Sydney. Ten years later the 1901 Census recorded a figure of 112,137 persons - a modest 4 per cent growth in population despite the addition of four new City Wards.\(^1\) Secondly, the expansion of Sydney's suburban population proceeded unabated. In 1901 the total suburban population defined by the census takers was 369,693.\(^2\) In other words, for every Sydney City inhabitant there were three suburban residents at the turn of the century.

Given the absence of annual statistics on house-building in nineteenth century Sydney, census material can provide part of the housing picture. After 1890 it seems that the virtual suspension of capital inflow and large-scale immigration ended the house-building boom in the City. The low level of residential investment and continual loss of dwellings due to demolition saw the total housing stock decline in the last decade of the century. The growth in
population and corresponding loss of accommodation during this period is shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1  
Population and Housing Stock, Sydney City 1891-1901

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census Year</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Total Habitations</th>
<th>Inhabited Dwellings</th>
<th>Persons per Inhabited Dwelling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>107,652</td>
<td>21,117</td>
<td>17,893</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>112,137</td>
<td>19,112</td>
<td>18,338</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NSW Censuses, 1891 and 1901

Although Sydney City lost about 2,000 houses between 1891 and 1901, the density of habitation (persons per inhabited dwelling) showed no appreciable increase over the period. The ratio remained around 6.0. What did change however, was the level of occupancy. In 1891 the share of total housing stock occupied in the City was 85 per cent but 96 per cent by 1901. The 'slum dwellers' referred to by contemporary sources were therefore both numerically and visibly larger by 1900. The tenements in which many lived were a world apart from the popular suburban cottage and backyard.

Contemporaries who observed Sydney's housing environment in the 1890s deplored the absence of wholesome, single-family accommodation for city workers. Bertha McNamara, a leading socialist agitator, recoiled from the 'tumble-down, dilapidated, fever-breeding dens, now called human dwellings and Workingmen's Houses'. McNamara's social-democratic imagination pictured the dawning of a new housing era under a benevolent government. Better worker housing has improved domestic relations between the sexes and ended epidemics and overcrowding. In her future housing environment, free-standing houses complete with pretty gardens have replaced the 'little one-story cottages and their dirty little backyards'. The process of housing renewal is also accompanied by an extension of individual home ownership. 'A good, wise Government has appropriated all the little fever-breeding dens, and the people are now their own landlords'. In McNamara's mind there was a positive correlation between better dwelling standards and greater personal freedom.
Figure 1. City of Sydney, Population and Housing 1902

It was not the failure of house building to keep pace with population but the physical and moral results of congested living which aroused popular opinion in Sydney. Economic and social forces were transforming the city landscape. Alternative land use, railway extensions, building demolition and street widening all combined to make inroads into the inner zone of working-class housing which had hitherto lay hidden from public view. Districts which had once housed respectable workingmen were, according to the Herald, being overtaken by undesirable inhabitants whose habits encouraged the creation of slums. If Sydney was fortunately free of the 'festering wynds of Edinburgh or the noisome alleys of the East End of London' it was merely a matter of time before such unsavoury rookeries took root:

Experts on the question of housing declare that the slack habits of a certain type of tenant combined with the carelessness of the authorities will transform a decent street in an incredibly short space of time into a slum of the worst kind. The process is said to take five years, and we see it at work to-day in Sydney.4

Despite improved public transport facilities, which were allowing better-paid workers to reside in the suburbs, overcrowding and visual chaos appeared as the most prevalent aspect of the housing problem. It was argued that only through the provision of cheaper land and greater space outside the metropolitan area would the 'incentive to overcrowding' be removed.5

The idea that working people should be encouraged to reside in the suburbs had been fashionable in late nineteenth century Sydney. The rapid urban growth of the 1880s saw the press speculate upon the advantages of a suburban bungalow safe from the congestion, disease and crime of the central City. The detached cottage surrounded by air, light and garden space promised both to improve the lot of the working-classes and to foster an attachment to enterprise, independence and home-ownership. The means to attaining this ideal housing situation, it was assumed, lay in the development of cheap and rapid commuter transport between the City and suburbs.6 This simple solution to the housing problem, however, overlooked two important realities of city life. Firstly, many working people could not afford to move house by virtue of their dependence on nearby employment and family support networks. Secondly, the unregulated building practices which had produced the City's unhealthy housing stock were now operating virtually unchecked in new suburban districts. In 1898, the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science was told that
Sydney badly needed a Suburban Building Act to regulate the structure of walls, foundations and the size of sleeping rooms.\(^7\)

How congested then was Federation Sydney? Residential overcrowding can be measured in a number of ways. Population density (persons per acre) serves as a very crude indicator. It was the definition most often used by slum reformers to describe densely inhabited areas in the city. At the next level, the density of habitation ratio (persons per inhabited dwelling), provides a more useful definition of overcrowding. However, as Burnett points out in his *Social History of Housing 1815-1985*, the definition is limited because it does not distinguish between house type, room size/numbers and the age of the occupants. Even these specific criteria can conceal the incidence of housing congestion. For instance, overcrowding in English towns in 1891 was technically defined as a dwelling room containing more than two adults with children under ten counting as half and those under one year not at all. As such, a three-roomed dwelling could house four adults, four children and any number of babies without infringing the definition.\(^8\)

One yardstick for measuring residential overcrowding in Sydney was a by-law enacted by the City Council in 1902. It set the minimum permissible space in sleeping rooms in private dwellings at 400 cubic feet for each person over ten years. During the 1901-02 systematic house-to-house inspections in the City, Dr Armstrong, the City Health Officer, found only 210 cases which infringed this minimum. 'Generally speaking' he wrote, 'serious overcrowding of dwellings does not occur in Sydney.'\(^9\) However, data from the 1901 N.S.W. Census suggests that the CHO understated the incidence of overcrowding in the City. The Census provided a breakdown of habitations which averaged *more than two* occupants per room. The statistics on serious overcrowding in Sydney City Wards are reproduced in Table 4.2. It should be noted, however, that the table is a very conservative indicator of overcrowding as it excludes the number of dwellings with two persons per room. A three-roomed dwelling containing 6 persons, for instance, would have been excluded by the 1901 Census. Similarly, a four-roomed dwelling containing 8 persons would also have fallen outside the definition.
Table 4.2 Overcrowding in Sydney City, 1901
(Dwellings with more than two persons per room)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sydney Wards</th>
<th>No. of Dwellings</th>
<th>Per Cent of Total Dwellings</th>
<th>No. of Persons</th>
<th>Per Cent of Total Population in Overcrowded Dwellings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belmore</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>856</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bligh</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bourke</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denison</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>775</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitzroy</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>334</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flinders</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gipps</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>618</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lang</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>709</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macquarie</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>537</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phillip</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>1543</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pyrmont</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>671</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Wards</td>
<td>595</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>7216</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NSW Census, 1901, p. 530.

In total, some 595 households, comprising 7,216 persons, lived in extremely overcrowded conditions in Sydney City in 1901. The highest incidence of residential overcrowding occurred in the following Wards: Phillip, Macquarie, Lang, Denison, Belmore and Pyrmont. The lowest incidence of overcrowding was found in Bourke, Cook and Fitzroy Wards. The City's most congested residential areas therefore tended to be located in the southern and western end, close to sites of industrial and maritime employment. These densely housed quarters provided the labour for the daily working of the waterfront, assorted factories and Darling Harbour goods yard. By contrast, the higher status residences of East Sydney frequently contained more than six rooms. Table 4.2 indicates that less than 1 per cent of the population of Bourke Ward occupied overcrowded dwellings at the turn of the century.

Although population density began to ease beyond the built-up City, residential life in the suburbs was far from idyllic. To the City's south, scattered working-class districts were surrounded by noxious industries whose odours polluted the atmosphere. In 1902 the district of Alexandria contained no
fewer than 23 noxious establishments.\textsuperscript{10} Despite a population density of only 9 persons per acre, the incidence of overcrowding in Alexandria and the adjoining municipalities of Botany and Waterloo approached inner-city levels as shown below.

### Table 4.3 Overcrowding in Sydney Suburbs, 1901
(Dwellings with \textit{more} than two persons per room)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selected Municipalities</th>
<th>No. of Dwellings</th>
<th>Per Cent of Total Dwellings</th>
<th>No. of Persons</th>
<th>Per Cent of Total Population in Overcrowded Dwellings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alexandria</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>851</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balmain</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>1840</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Botany</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darlington</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newtown</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>885</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redfern</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>1192</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waterloo</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>679</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Municipalities</td>
<td>1945</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>17228</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NSW Census, 1901, p. 531.

Dr Armstrong's Annual Report of 1902 included a detailed survey of health and housing conditions in these metropolitan districts. Sanitary inspection was infrequent, dwelling construction inferior and the community infrastructure less developed compared to the City. In suburban boroughs, Armstrong noted, it was common practice for local authorities to combine the office of council clerk with that of nuisance inspector. As a result, 'the outdoor duties of the inspector become whittled away... and the sanitation of the district is very apt to be neglected.' In 1902 there was one sanitary inspector for the 30,000 inhabitants of the borough of Balmain. During that year a house-to-house survey of 851 premises in Alexandria found 224 dwellings 'unfit for human habitation' and only 88 in a 'satisfactory condition'.\textsuperscript{11}

Despite the suburban 'slum problem', it was the more densely populated inner-city which focused the attention of housing reformers. By 1901 there was little unimproved land around Pyrmont, Surry Hills and Chippendale.
Darlington had the highest population density of any urban borough. During the second half of the nineteenth century these areas had grown haphazardly in the absence of strict building regulations and by-laws. The narrow lanes, dark alleys and irregular rows of terraces on tiny allotments provided fertile material for imaginative newspapermen and anti-slum crusaders. The apparent lack of privacy and open space suggested to middle-class reformers that these areas were haunts for vice and immorality. Seldom was the voice of the 'slum dweller' heard.

Some inhabitants of the 'slum' areas of Sydney gave their side of the story following the report of a Royal Commission on the falling birth rate. The report concluded that the primary cause of the decline was due to the practice of birth control, and inferred that women were avoiding their child-bearing role. In March 1904 a series of letters criticising the findings of the commissioners were published in the Herald. One correspondent, Edward Beeby, lived in West Sydney. He observed that the want of an 'effective building Act' had created the slum conditions and that the people of Ultimo and Pyrmont had not lowered their birth-rate but regularly contributed to the infant mortality statistics of the State. Beeby deplored the laissez-faire attitude of earlier colonial governments:

We have to look back to the past, when our legislators beheld a growing city and suburban areas, and blame them for the apathy, want of forethought, and selfishness displayed while these dwellings were being erected, which were to be the homes of, and eventually the death traps for the future units of a working population.\(^{12}\)

Other letters decried the high cost of living in Sydney. Working-class women commented that economic circumstances were not favourable to the formation of large families. Josephine Baker believed that low wages and poor home life acted as a brake on child bearing. She complained that many dwellings lacked proper facilities for cooking and washing:

It is only within the last year or two that landlords have thought fit to place coppers, stoves and baths in working men's homes... Let anyone take a walk through some of the slums in Sydney; they won't ask why so many babies die.\(^{13}\)

Baker indeed wondered why women continued to give birth to children under such precarious circumstances.
Slum Reformers

Church leaders, social reformers and Labor politicians were persistent critics of the slums of Federation Sydney. Their work brought them into close contact with the poor, the sick, the unemployed and aged. The social distress they observed in their inner-city parishes and electorates indicated that something had gone amiss with the process of colonial liberalism. All the old-world habits and vices which the liberal nineteenth century tradition claimed to have discarded had simply accumulated in these hidden localities. Churchmen believed that the neighbourhoods bred immorality and degeneracy. Politicians argued that they mocked the democratic ideals of the new Commonwealth. Health authorities declared that sordid housing areas harboured the germs of endemic disease. Most reformers suspected that there was an insidious process at work which sapped the inhabitants' self-worth and self-reliant potential.

One individual whose work took him through the 'slums' of South Sydney was the Anglican Archdeacon of Redfern, Francis Bertie Boyce (1844-1931). As a young clergyman Boyce had been stationed in small rural settlements in western New South Wales and for a period worked as a missioner on the Darling. In 1882 Boyce returned to Sydney and settled in the industrial parish of St Bartholomew, Pyrmont. Two years later he was appointed to St Paul's parish, Redfern. Boyce described the transformation:

What a contrast! The open spaces and the far distances of the West and the crowded tenements and mean streets of an industrial area...
I was shocked by the cramped conditions of existence suffered by so many people in my new parish.  

By 1901 over 24,000 people lived in the municipality of Redfern. The density of population was equivalent to 56 persons per acre. In the smaller adjoining borough of Darlington however, the density ratio was almost double. For the vigorous social reformer this amounted to an intolerable state of affairs. Boyce forecast that unless something was done about these 'slums', the consequences for health and crime in Sydney would be catastrophic.

Boyce claimed that his slum abolition campaign was motivated by two concerns. First, there was a religious duty to administer more adequately to the spiritual needs of the inhabitants, many of whom existed in a 'state of heathenism.' Second, slum abolition represented social improvement because it promised to end the squalor and disorder which was a 'disgrace to democracy and civilization'. The Archdeacon's memoirs suggest, however, that his
penchant for slum reform was also linked to Church politics and personal ambition. Boyce pointed out to his superiors that the overpopulated and under-funded inner-city parishes were in dire need of spiritual renewal in late nineteenth century Sydney. Furthering his aims, he became honorary secretary of a special committee which successfully agitated for greater Anglican activity in neglected urban parishes. 'As a result of this movement', Boyce recalled, 'there was a remarkable extension of the Church's influence throughout the congested and slum areas of the city'.

For slum reformers such as Boyce there was a direct correlation between population density and social disorder in the City. The more congested a working-class quarter appeared, the more likely were the denizens to be products of intemperance, crime and parental neglect. Every new year Boyce would deliver a sermon on this theme at St Paul's, Redfern. On January 6, 1902 he told his congregation that christian households could not be reared in cramped dwellings where families were forced to share a single room. While he praised the government resumption of the Rocks area, other unsavoury localities in the City required urgent attention. Boyce pointed to the maze of narrow streets and lanes in the Wexford Street district near Hyde Park and much of the area known as Chippendale. Such warrens, he insisted, 'should be laid out with broad streets, and have model artisans' dwellings built upon them'.

Boyce's anti-slum campaign found an ally in the Rev. S.D. Yarrington. In 1914 Yarrington's publication, *Darkest Sydney*, drew together the varied chorus of moral corruption developed by city churchmen over the previous decade. City-dwellers were reminded that dirty and crowded living conditions nurtured moral depravity and epidemic disease. *Darkest Sydney* fed these fears by implying that bad environment had a debilitating effect on its inhabitants. Yarrington claimed:

As long as we have such streets as are to be found in Wootpomooloo, Surry Hills, and, in fact, right throughout the city and near suburbs, we shall always be faced with a sickly immoral and degenerate section of citizens.

New born generations, he observed, had been raised in nurseries 'reeking with disease and contagion...' and consequently were 'marred by the wretched power of their environment'. The extirpation of these forgotten quarters by forceful government intervention would promote a new sanitary regime and end the
moral torpor. 'By slum resumption and reformation', Yarrington argued, 'you make for happier conditions, a healthier people and purity of life'.

The assumption that densely populated residential districts in a city were characterised by mean and cramped housing was self evident to slum reformers in Federation Sydney. Central to this determinist outlook was the belief that physical environment was the primary cause of the sordid existence of working-class slum dwellers. In short, closely built housing quarters provided breeding grounds for immorality, crime and disease. John Daniel Fitzgerald (1862-1922), a forceful advocate of municipal and housing reform in Sydney, described the deleterious results of city slum life:

Its moral consequences belong to the secrets of the prelate and the priest; its miasmatic ravages are capable of being registered in the statistics of the health officers' bureau, its criminal effects are the problems of the bureau of the Police Department.

Reformers had a mental picture of what constituted a 'slum' but little knowledge of its interior. Fitzgerald remarked that the inside of these dwellings was only known to 'certain philanthropic and charitable agencies' and local government health officers. Boyce consistently commented that Sydney City should be both beautiful outside and clean within, yet confined most of his observations to external appearances and immediate surroundings.

J.D. Fitzgerald's critique of city housing conditions was linked to his campaign for municipal reform in Sydney. Extensive travel and study in England and Europe had persuaded Fitzgerald of the benefits of a unified local government system for Sydney. Better public health, housing and transport in the metropolitan area, he argued, could best be achieved if control and management of municipal services was placed under a Greater Sydney Council. The prevailing system of 'divided control', whereby dozens of boards, authorities and boroughs performed conflicting functions, was both wasteful and inefficient for a city the size of Sydney. Fitzgerald shared Dr Armstrong's opinion that weak local authorities were plagued by insufficient finances and staff necessary to carry out elementary services such as street cleaning and sanitary inspection. Yet Parliament seemed uninterested in attempts by the City Council aldermen to deal with urban reform and improvement. 'Hardly a prominent politician', Fitzgerald wrote, 'would be seen identifying himself in any way with municipal affairs.'
In 1902 Alderman Fitzgerald attempted to promote a Housing of the Working Classes Bill based on nineteenth century English legislation. The preamble of his Bill stated that parts of Sydney were so densely built 'as to be highly injurious to the moral and physical welfare of the inhabitants.' The City Council was empowered by the Bill to declare such areas as 'unhealthy' and implement an 'improvement scheme' for their renewal. Aware of the greater planning and rehousing powers of local authorities in London, Fitzgerald drafted a clause which gave the City Council power to purchase lands outside the improvement area for rehousing purposes. Resumed land would be held in trust by the Council and used to widen streets and lanes, leave open spaces and build 'workmen's terraces and tenements.' Fitzgerald considered that the Council should lease rather than resell the land. On the important question of finance he assumed that expenditure would be defrayed from loan money and debenture issues. Provision was also made for the State to advance funds for the execution of the improvement schemes. The municipal Housing Bill was repeatedly brought before Parliament, but the See and Carruthers Governments failed to give it a first reading. Legislative indifference to the housing issue only served to reinforce Fitzgerald's belief that Parliament cared little for the importance or role of city government.

In 1908-09 interest in the slum reform issue was greatly stimulated by the Royal Commission on Sydney and Suburban Improvement. Boyce claimed that his appearance at the inquiry was prompted by the dearth of evidence on the inner city housing problem. It also happened to provide a suitable forum for the astute Archdeacon to champion the social needs of his parish. Accordingly, the Wexford Street neighbourhood and Chippendale area served as convenient case studies. 'I think there is no room to live in those areas', Boyce informed the Commissioners, 'and that in a modern city there ought to be no slums.' Chippendale, bounded by George Street West, Regent, Cleveland and Pine Streets was the 'most crowded area in the metropolis.' Boyce described the visual chaos which confronted a visitor to the area:

You come out of a very fine street, and at once get into these wretched little streets... Many of these streets, such as Outram, Gould, Balfour, Carlton, Dick, Middle and Dale streets, as well as Dangar-place are very narrow— in fact, the average seems to be about 20 feet.
It was impossible to rear 'healthy and robust' children in such localities where overcrowding was the rule and adequate yard-space the exception. Boyce presumed that in some rookeries, families of four, five and six persons shared a single room.  

How overcrowded was the Chippendale area in early twentieth century Sydney? Obtaining precise data on the area is difficult because it formed the southern end of Phillip Ward. However, the 1901 census indicates that Phillip Ward had the highest incidence of residential overcrowding in the City. Some 1,543 persons or 13 per cent of the Ward's population lived in badly congested dwellings. It seems reasonable to assume that many of these people were residents of Chippendale. The share of single and two-roomed habitations in the dwelling stock is another indicator of housing stress. Some 3.3 per cent of the dwellings in Phillip Ward contained two or less rooms in 1901. This percentage was above the metropolitan average. The comparative results for some selected suburban municipalities are shown below in Table 4.4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selected Municipalities</th>
<th>Total Habitations</th>
<th>Percentage of Habitations with Two or Less Rooms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alexandria</td>
<td>1,934</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balmain</td>
<td>6,028</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Botany</td>
<td>671</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darlington</td>
<td>755</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newtown</td>
<td>4,519</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redfern</td>
<td>4,600</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waterloo</td>
<td>2,002</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Municipalities</td>
<td>73,822</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Compiled from the NSW Census, 1901 pp. 492-93.
In 1910 a municipal health report on the Chippendale neighbourhood, located between Meagher, Myrtle, Regent and Cleveland Streets found that the dwelling stock was of the 'smallest and poorest class existing in the City.' The area contained 358 dwellings and an estimated population of 1,800 persons which was equivalent to an average of 5.0 persons per dwelling.\(^3^4\)

Other witnesses who appeared before the 1908-09 Royal Commission also gave evidence on the housing problem in Sydney. Most reformers agreed that slum resumption and clearance schemes should be incorporated into plans for inner-city redevelopment. The Rev. George Campbell, President of the Sydney City Mission, shared Boyce's belief that the Wexford Street and Chippendale areas were beyond redemption:

\[\text{I think that the best plan should be to resume the whole of the blocks and rebuild them. The districts in question are hot-beds of vice, insanitation, misery and disease.}\]\(^3^5\)

The Church, however, was not the only institution in favour of slum clearance on the grounds of sanitary health and city improvement. The Sydney Trades and Labor Council welcomed the idea that congested areas should be resumed and remodelled in order to provide sites for the erection of workmen's dwellings. Kate Dwyer, the Trades Hall Council delegate, told the Commissioners that the Council's attitude had been influenced by Boyce's anti-slum crusade. In the event that the Wexford Street and Chippendale areas were remodelled, the Labor Council preferred the introduction of the New Zealand housing system whereby 'detached model dwellings of three rooms and upwards' were erected.\(^3^6\) Dwyer argued that the alternative tenement or flat scheme was steadfastly opposed by the Labor Council because it undermined family life and morality.\(^3^7\)

Housing reformers in early twentieth century Sydney differed over the question of the ideal form of working-class dwelling. Leading opinion makers sang the praises of the traditional detached cottage as opposed to the multi-storeyed tenement. The former was held to be a natural feature of Australian cities while the latter was seen as peculiar to urban living on the Continent. In terms of comfort, privacy and amenity it was argued that tenements and flats were inferior to separate dwellings. More importantly, tenement life was associated with increased population density and hence overcrowding. In 1911, the *Telegraph* declared that:
Hundreds of authorities could be quoted to prove that tenements are not creditable to a high type of civilisation. The healthiest, brightest and freest people are those who make their homes their castle...

Indeed, it was widely accepted that the tenement system of housing eventually degenerated into 'slumdom'. Journalists, for instance, pointed to the teeming tenements which had been exposed and condemned by housing reformers in Europe and America. As such, the locational and economic advantages which tenemented housing might have over the separate house and garden were seldom discussed.

The tendency of contemporaries to emphasise the environmental dangers rather than the economic attractions of residential tenements invites explanation. Sydney had no tenement tradition in the colonial period and slum reformers had no desire to aggravate overcrowding in the City. In the context of the early 1900s there remained a powerful environmental belief that working-class tenements, such as existed in Berlin, New York and Glasgow, were overcrowded, insanitary and disease-breeding barracks. Despite the widespread acceptance of the germ theory of disease, much of the urban population continued to assume that closely-packed and badly ventilated accommodation bred harmful 'miasmas' ready to decimate infant lives. In addition to their public health danger, tenements were also known to corrupt family relationships by promoting the indiscriminate crowding of all ages and both sexes. As housing structures designed to accommodate more than one family unit, they clearly disturbed colonial notions of privacy and morality.

Nevertheless, opposition to tenement blocks was not unanimous in Federation Sydney. Reformers who had first-hand knowledge of contemporary schemes overseas argued that multi-storeyed housing conferred distinct benefits on the inhabitants. Archdeacon Boyce supported a policy of urban consolidation for resumed residential areas in the inner city. 'Hogarth mansions' or large tenement buildings for working people in Sydney, would prove to be as popular as those built in London, where the occupants 'seemed pleased with the better conditions and lesser rents.' The Rev. Campbell was no less impressed by the municipal housing schemes he had seen in Birmingham and Glasgow in 1906. He inspected model lodging houses built upon resumed land and found four-storeyed tenement buildings 'well lighted and ventilated.' Campbell argued that there was enormous working-class demand for similar accommodation in Sydney. J.D. Fitzgerald, too, favoured workmen's 'mansions'. He had lived in tenement flats in European cities and believed that the accommodation could be
as agreeable as separate dwellings, provided that it contained modern amenities. Fitzgerald could not point to a good example of a modern tenement block in Sydney but thought that the development of higher density living was inevitable for maritime labourers who had to live close to their work. Influenced by English Garden City theory, however, he argued that in an ideal urban environment 'the factories should be taken out as far as possible, and garden villages should be provided.'

Despite the body of opinion supporting tenement housing, the Royal Commission recommended against flat development as a solution to the housing problem in Sydney. The primary reason of the Commission was that multi-storeyed dwellings fostered an unhealthy slum environment which was highly undesirable:

Australian workmen, we are convinced, would not take kindly to these communal dwellings ... On social and hygienic grounds we think it better that workmen should be encouraged to live in separate houses in suburban areas. To this end we recommend that municipalities be empowered to acquire land for the provision of sites for sanitary homes at rentals within the means of the working classes.

The Report acknowledged that due to the absence of a re-housing policy, the City Council's practice of resuming 'insanitary' residential areas had been self-defeating. The removal of overcrowding in one locality had simply intensified congestion in adjoining districts. Another factor preventing city housing reform was the 'system of divided control' which had dislocated the delivery of metropolitan services. In other words, while city government was shackled by a host of parochial municipal bodies, and overlapping statutory boards and trusts, there could be no purposeful programme of urban improvement. Notwithstanding these obstacles, the Commission believed housing improvement was possible on two fronts. Once local authorities were given power to purchase land and erect cottages they could begin to re-house displaced tenants. Secondly, the introduction of a comprehensive Building Act was necessary to prevent further jerry-building in the suburbs. The Royal Commission reported that together these measures 'would not only check the growth of slums, but lead to their ultimate extinction.'

Few slum reformers would have disagreed with the need for a Suburban Building Act. However, the assumption that enlightened municipal authority
would legislate the slum problem out of existence was understandable but misplaced. It was understandable in the context of a housing reform ideology which regarded slum dwellings as the most visible symptom of urban decay and therefore amenable to physical intervention. But without a compulsory funding mechanism to finance dwelling investment at rents within reach of the working-class, slum resumption schemes could no more improve housing conditions any more than tenements could undermine them. For example, the voluntary English Housing Act of 1890, which empowered local government in London to acquire land and re-house displaced tenants, actually encouraged more demolition than re-building. Few local authorities chose to become landlords because building costs had to be borne from the city rates. Indeed, less than 5 per cent of all new housing built in England between 1890 and 1914 was undertaken by local authorities.45

City Resumptions

Predictably, the recommendations of the 1908-09 Royal Commission provided a fillip to the housing reform movement in Sydney. Arguments in favour of slum resumption and reconstruction now appeared to carry official weight. The City Council, which had already made inroads into Athlone Place (Ultimo) and the Wexford Street neighbourhood, drew the inference that resolution of the housing problem was a 'matter of primary importance to the prosperity of the City.146 It was certainly of vital importance to the growing army of displaced people who were seeking shelter as a result of such resumption schemes. In April 1908 a deputation from the N.S.W. Workmen's Dwelling Association waited on the Lord Mayor to request that the freehold of vacant resumed land in the Athlone Place and Wexford Street area be retained for worker's dwellings. The deputation urged that in view of the amount of attention given to the problem abroad, both the State Legislature and City Council had an obligation to provide better housing for working people in Sydney. In reply, the Mayor explained that the Council had no legislative power to erect houses on resumed property and hastened to add that its Housing Bill had failed to advance 'one single solitary inch' through Parliament. Furthermore, the Athlone Place and Wexford Street neighbourhood were business districts and accordingly, better adapted to accommodate commercial premises rather than workmen's cottages.47 No doubt some in the deputation went away thinking that slum resumptions were more concerned with increasing rateable values at the expense of ordinary rent-payers.
The City Council had no legislative authority to erect workmen's dwellings but it could remodel resumed lands under the Sydney Corporation Amendment Act, 1905. According to the Town Clerk the legislation gave the Council optional rather than mandatory rehousing powers in the affected areas. Proposals to resume and improve the locality known as Athlone Place had preoccupied the Council since the 1880s. The land in question had originally been reclaimed from Blackwattle Bay and, according to one source, was 'illegally subdivided'. The reclamation effectively restricted the discharge of upland drainage from surrounding suburbs, with the result that houses on the low-lying Blackfriars estate were periodically flooded with stormwater and sewage from Redfern, Newtown and The Glebe. In April 1905 the nuisance was aggravated when torrential storms deluged the City and inundated Athlone Place. Following a Mayoral inspection of the flood damaged neighbourhood, the Government was urged to pass an amendment bill to give the Council special powers to deal with the area.

Prior to resumption the Athlone Place area contained 435 dwellings and a population of 1,779 persons. Dr Armstrong, the CHO, inspected some 124 flooded dwellings in the area. In some houses he noted that the water 'stood 3 feet above the floors'. He reported to Council:

The great majority of the houses on the area are small, three and four-roomed cottages, built of brick and in terraces. A few weatherboard dwellings still persist. The structural condition of many of the dwellings is most unsatisfactory... In fact nearly every house in the area has been the subject of a notice under the Public Health Act since the year 1900, and the work asked for has... in many instances been performed grudgingly, and the improvements effected have been the minimum which could be made to comply with the legal demands of the Council... The low rents which the liability to flooding has brought about in portions of the area have, in some instances, attracted an undesirable class of tenants whose dirty habits and want of reasonable care result in their dwellings falling into disrepair, and in turn affect the health conditions of the neighbourhood.
City. Typhoid fever attacks in the Athlone Place area during the same period were six times greater than the City's infection rate. These public health statistics lead Armstrong to conclude that the area was 'very unsanitary' and an unsuitable site for workmen's dwellings.\(^{52}\)

If Athlone Place was an incubator of contagious disease, the Wexford Street environment appeared even more squalid and morally corrupt. 'Wexford Street has equal claims', Lord Mayor Taylor told the Council, 'though not so apparent to the casual observer'. Taylor recommended surgical intervention on several grounds. First, the area had an unacceptably high death rate compared to the rest of the City. Second, its 'narrow and tortuous' streets obstructed safe access to and from the new Central Railway Station, and furthermore, immediate resumption would be financially advantageous to the Council. The deviant lifestyle of the inhabitants also alarmed Lord Mayor Taylor. Taylor claimed that two-thirds of the dwellings in the Wexford Street area were 'opium dens' occupied by Chinese who had a habit of enclosing their back-yards with wooden sheds.\(^{53}\) Dr. Armstrong, too, was appalled by the visual chaos of this 'slum district' and remarked that 'its resumption and rearrangement by the Council would be beneficial to the public health...'.\(^{54}\)

The proposition that areas like Athlone Place and Wexford Street were nurseries of crime, disease and death was sufficient to condemn them as unfit for human habitation. Reformers accentuated the relationship between bad housing environment and personal character but did not automatically endorse state provision of worker housing as a policy solution. Those who did, such as J. Norton, MLA for Surry Hills, argued that poor housing quarters must first be purged of their moral infamy. In December 1905, during parliamentary debate on the Sydney Corporation Amendment Bill, Norton described Wexford Street as a 'black blot' on the 'premier city of the mother state, the capital of the Commonwealth...'. He also claimed that the biggest landlord in the Athlone Place area was that 'rich, greedy, godly corporation, the Christian Anglican Chapter of the Cathedral of St. Andrews'. In his muck-raking style, Norton raged:

> With regard to Wexford-street what do we find? Not only an insanitary area, but a seething sink of crime. Like Athlone-place, it is not only a menace to the health of the community, but a centre for bad characters, a sort of warren for criminals. By abolishing these slum areas we are not only improving and guaranteeing the health
and happiness of the people, ... we are sweetening the lives of that portion of our citizens whose lives require sweetening.\textsuperscript{55}

Many houses, he alleged, were let by wealthy landlords to Chinese 'who run them as opium dens and gambling shops and brothels, where the young and innocent daughters of the people are debauched by the score every year'.\textsuperscript{56}

The Wexford Street improvement scheme was criticised by J.D. Fitzgerald. He argued that inner city resumptions had to be practical, well-planned and commercially successful. He regretted the absence of any re-housing policy and questioned the Council's wisdom of selling off prime frontage land which would otherwise return a large 'unearned increment' to the citizens in future years.\textsuperscript{57} To illustrate his argument, Fitzgerald pointed to the slum clearance experience in Glasgow and Birmingham where the local authorities held the resumed property in trust for the citizenry. In the Corporation Street area of Birmingham for instance, the local authority had raised £1.5 million to purchase the land at slum values, re-housed the 16,000 inhabitants in municipal dwellings, and let the ground on building leases of 75 years. The upshot was that the Birmingham Corporation would eventually 'own the site and buildings on this great street, deriving enormous revenues therefrom.'\textsuperscript{58}

\textbf{ii) Camperdown}

Fitzgerald's misgivings did not halt the City Council's reform strategy of resumption and dispossession. In 1908 the municipality of Camperdown was absorbed by the City of Sydney and immediately subjected to a resumption order. The Camperdown municipality embodied the type of bankrupt and inefficient administration which Fitzgerald wished to replace with his Greater Sydney Council. A financial report by the City Council showed that the borough was heavily in debt and incapable of delivering effective municipal services. However, as far as \textit{Mayor Hughes} was concerned, the benefits which absorption and resumption held for the City of Sydney were mostly economic. Mayor Hughes told the Finance Committee of the City Council:

\begin{quote}
If after years of virtual bankruptcy, Camperdown can be set on a sound financial footing, the immediate result will be a marked recovery in the land value within its boundaries. Add to this the improvement arising from the remodelling of its area...and the certain outcome will be a substantial rise in its rateable value...\textsuperscript{59}
\end{quote}
By 1911 some 177 cottages had been pulled down and over 700 Camperdown residents displaced by new thoroughfares and wider streets. No attempt was made to replace the demolished cottages.  

On 5 June 1911, the Camperdown residents gathered in the local town hall to protest the decision of the City Council to auction surplus resumed land in the area. The land in dispute (Tooth's paddock) lay between Australia and Church Streets. The Labor member for Camperdown, Mr Stuart-Robertson, moved that the site should be withheld from sale and the Government approached 'with the view of building thereon workmen's dwellings to give homes to the people who have had their homes resumed.'

Unless a re-housing programme was started, he remarked, Camperdown tenants would soon be seeking permission to pitch tents in the parks. Alderman Burke supported the motion and told the meeting that the City Council was more beholden to commercial than community interests. He attacked landlords and called for the introduction of a bill to regulate house rents in Sydney. Another speaker, Alderman Davoren, shared Stuart-Robertson's joke that Sydney's Lord Mayor secretly desired a knighthood.

The following evening the City Council met to discuss the Camperdown resumption question. Alderman Mallet, a Camperdown representative, stated that the Council had offered the surplus land to the Government for £30,000. The Government, however, had refused the offer because it was uneconomic to build workmen's dwellings on land which cost £6 per foot.

Mayor Taylor told the Council that it was undignified for fellow aldermen to attack the civic head and held the 'greatest possible contempt' for Stuart-Robertson's remark. Alderman Burke then moved that the Camperdown land 'should be withdrawn from sale in order to give this Council an opportunity of considering the desirability of erecting workmen's dwellings on the area...' However, Lord Mayor rose to explain that the motion contravened an earlier Council resolution to dispose of the land and added that Tooth's paddock would allow 800 persons the opportunity of finding a home of their own. This brought the matter to an end. The next day the Herald concluded that the Camperdown housing brawl highlighted the need for a public authority to begin the business of house-building in Sydney.

The Camperdown dispute posed a number of dilemmas for housing reformers in Sydney. It showed that the historic animosity existing between City and State Governments could effectively thwart urban and housing reform. The City Council complained that it had been denied the power to build houses
on resumed property. Equally, there was an economic hurdle to be overcome. The episode suggested that governments were reluctant housing investors in inner-city areas with prohibitive land costs and the prospect of little economic return from working-class rents. Finally, the confrontation showed that competing political demands could generate tensions between the agents and subjects of housing reform in Federation Sydney. Housing reform groups, anxious to effect social change, chose to pursue remedial measures which satisfied their own interests. Environmental determinism helped to define the broader parameters of the reform debate but did not produce a political consensus over working-class housing policy. As yet there was no agreement that municipal dwelling provision was a satisfactory policy solution to Sydney's housing problem.

iii) Chippendale

Meanwhile, there had been a resurgence of interest in the Chippendale resumption question. Its most vocal advocate, the Rev. Canon Boyce, had stepped up his campaign following his evidence at the Royal Commission. Preaching the gospel of slum abolition in January 1909, he told his parish that purification of residential localities such as Chippendale was more urgent than city beautification schemes. In addition to this familiar theme Boyce also advocated better dwellings and lower rents for the working poor. The implicit assumption that dwelling costs were contributing to the problem of housing the working-classes in Sydney added a new dimension to the housing debate. It indicated that there were other factors at work in the creation of slums, besides the bad behaviour of the dwellers or the physical appearance of the neighbourhood.

In March 1909 an informative tour of the Chippendale district featured in the Evening News. The investigative team, comprising a reporter, Canon Boyce and two representatives from the N.S.W. Workmen's Dwelling Association, aimed to inspect as many houses as possible and ascertain average rents in the area. 'It is not exactly a slum quarter', the journalist reported, and although the inhabitants were poor, he noted that many kept their dwellings 'as neat and clean as circumstances permit.' Many occupants answered that their accommodation consisted of 'two rooms and a kitchen', while baths were a rarity. The average rent for these three-roomed dwellings was 7s 6d a week. In a narrow lane behind Myrtle Street an irregular-looking group of two-storeyed tenements let for 6s. Two of the structures were without yardspace and their
outhouses joined the front door. Overall, the neighbourhood was 'scarcely bad enough to be condemned', but also 'scarcely fit to be let for residence.' The tenants however, could not be blamed for the housing conditions. On the contrary, the reporter thought that the house-owners were more guilty:

Chippendale, as part of the city proper, certainly calls for the early attention of the energetic Lord Mayor; meanwhile much might be done by humane landlords in the direction of making more habitable and home-like the dwellings for which they receive decidedly high rents. 68

Lord Mayor Taylor was an energetic supporter of slum resumption schemes but, unfortunately, a reluctant housing improver. In July 1910, a combined deputation from the Anglican Social Reform Association and Sydney Labor Council urged him to implement the housing reforms of the 1908-09 Royal Commission. The deputation pointed out that cheap and hygienic houses were built by municipal authorities in France because they had access to the funds of State Saving Banks. Surely a similar financial arrangement could be worked out between the Government and City Council? Rents in Sydney were rising and scores of families were living in two-roomed dwellings. How could health and decency be preserved under these circumstances? 69

Taylor's response evaded the housing problem but turned up some interesting information on the economics of City Council resumptions. He spoke in glowing terms of the recent remodelling of Athlone Place, Wexford Street and Nickson Street, Surry Hills, all of which had been admirably covered by the City rate and land tax. Rehousing was a worthy cause but like other improvement works it had to recoup the costs of resumption. He was firmly opposed to any scheme which placed an unfair financial burden on City property-owners. In regard to Chippendale, Taylor welcomed the idea of resumption and personally felt that the entire area from George Street West to Regent Street should be razed in the interests of the public health. Experience, had shown that improvement schemes increased City property values, thereby generating greater revenue and avoiding rate increases. At current values it was wise to resume urban land and recoup the comparatively small cost by disposing of the surplus profitably. It was an unfortunate fact that the State Government had been unwilling to assist the City Council. Taylor promised to visit the localities described by the deputation and make an assessment of their redevelopment potential. 70
Chapter 4  Slums, Resumptions and Reformers

On the afternoon of August 18, 1910 a party of social reformers met at the corner of George and Abercrombie Streets. The assorted gathering included Lord Mayor Taylor, municipal officers, Labor Council delegates, clergymen and newspaper reporters. Led by the familiar figure of Archdeacon Boyce, the group set off in search of the 'slum-dwellers' of Chippendale. The Mayoral tour of the locality was significant not for the hidden evils it exposed but the tensions which arose. Mayor Taylor was convinced that the planned resumption had to proceed before it became financially unattractive. In his opinion some of the houses were 'not fit for dogs to live in.' The City Health Officer, however, was not as critical as Lord Mayor Taylor. In comparison with European cities Dr Armstrong thought that Sydney was mostly free of slums. He observed that the Chippendale dwelling stock comprised mostly one-storied tenements which allowed the entry of air and sunlight. Indeed, Armstrong was more dismayed by the sight of children playing in the lanes due to the absence of any nearby park or playground.

The presence of yet another slum reform committee in Chippendale was a source of irritation to some tenants. The rumour of resumption, not surprisingly, produced a number of emotional reactions. One old woman who was satisfied with her accommodation threatened to 'bust the picture-box' of the photographer and hoped that the clergyman would 'pray for the repose of his soul.' In a narrow back lane the committee, including Lord Mayor Taylor, was told that it 'ought all to be stuffed in a bag' and dumped in the harbour. 'Who's growling about the houses eh? Not me', complained another tenant. If the Chippendale area was a hotbed of vice, insanitation and disease, the investigative party did not succeed in unearthing much:

It could not be said that there was anything insanitary about the area. The lanes were narrow, and the dwellings were ridiculously small and indescribably ugly. But sunshine and air penetrated all of them save one, which has been condemned, and is to be razed.

The Telegraph reporter was indeed surprised to discover that many of the 'slum dwellers' were 'tolerably satisfied with their lot.' The existence of cheap rental quarters in the inner-city, it seemed, had more to do with the economic position and not the individual failings of the inhabitants. He concluded that low wages, and the necessity to live within walking distance of work, meant that 'the people who reside in slum areas are those who are virtually compelled to live in them.'
The City Council resumed the Chippendale area in 1911. Some 1800 inhabitants, many of whom had lived a lifetime in the locality, were turned out of their houses. According to the Town Clerk, Lord Mayor regretted the 'inconvenience' but remained adamant that the neighbourhood 'should be remodelled in the interests of the community as a whole.' Growing demand for commercial leases in the area had also forced Lord Mayor to act before the cost of resumption became prohibitive. Predictably, Archdeacon Boyce saw the resumption decision as the crowning achievement of his slum reform campaign in Sydney. He presumed that the displaced tenants had shifted to other suburbs 'to lead normal, healthy lives', but personally felt that the Council should have built model dwellings on the resumed site.

By 1912 the habitual haunts of Sydney's 'slum-dwellers' had been mostly erased from the inner-city, according to the Herald. The 'great movement towards city improvement', it claimed, had resulted in the opening-up of congested working-class quarters:

The dark and noisome corners, with their squalid tenements, insanitary and foul, where the poorer classes herded; have most of them been swept away. Crowded localities which saw but little sunlight have vanished before the pick and the crowbar of the destroyers and wide streets have taken the place of blind alleys.

As to the fate of the dispossessed inhabitants, the article was less certain. It speculated that thousands of 'slum-dwellers' had shifted from resumed inner-city areas and been absorbed by surrounding municipalities such as Paddington, Redfern and Newtown. It then went on to show that a number of factors were working to prevent the formation of fresh slums in the metropolitan area. Local government building by-laws had set minimum requirements for dwelling space, daylight and sanitation, and also proscribed terrace construction in some suburbs. The other important factor inhibiting future slum creation, the Herald observed, was a 'filtering-up' effect. Squalid surroundings which had once satisfied poor tenants were no longer acceptable to many as more domestic comforts became available. Higher wages and better working conditions could also be counted on to raise the outlook of the 'slum-dweller'. At the same time, intemperance and other vices connected with slum life appeared to be on the wane.

These social Darwinist assumptions provided no solution to the housing problem. It was painfully obvious that the City Council resumptions had
aggravated the housing shortage and widened slum boundaries. J.D. Fitzgerald was disturbed by the increasing destruction of working-class habitations and wrote that:

The average citizen would, when he learns the truth, feel scandalised and saddened at the thought that every progressive city in the world is solving its slum problem by re-housing the people; and not as we are in Sydney by destroying the hovels of the poor... thereby driving them into other areas, which are already congested to suffocation and increasing the intensity of the evil.  

The rate at which inner-city 'slum dwellers' were being dislodged is dramatically illustrated by the depopulation of the City between 1908-11. In 1908 the City's population stood at some 127,460 but only 112,921 in 1911. Research conducted by the Social Investigation Committee of the Sydney University Christian Union in 1911, revealed that many of the displaced tenants had been squeezed into badly housed suburbs like Alexandria and Waterloo. The survey's editor, C.H. Northcott, pointed out that slum clearance schemes had to be complemented by a proper rehousing policy. Like Fitzgerald, he believed that only a modern metropolitan government with adequate funding and planning powers could supply low-cost dwellings for workmen. Northcott also hoped that a Greater Sydney Council would regulate future residential suburban subdivisions in order to provide 'garden cities' for both the working poor and the better paid.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that, despite these more informed observations, the underlying causes of housing stress were not seriously debated by civic reformers in Federation Sydney. Overall, the housing reform leadership subscribed to a Victorian ideology which measured the problem in physical and moral terms. Reformers compared the denser and therefore more destructive city housing environment with the supposedly more spacious and safer suburban ideal. The impoverished inner-city tenant was branded a 'slum-dweller' and appeared to have an habitual dependency on overcrowded and unwholesome conditions, while the suburban dweller was free to enjoy fresh air, ample sunlight and garden space. Indeed, the reformers' preoccupation with city congestion and physical dwelling design saw tenement housing simply dismissed as an unwanted reform solution to the housing problem.
What slum reform agitation was eventually rewarded with was the resumption and 'remodelling' of old residential neighbourhoods in Federation Sydney. Tearing down the inner-city housing stock, shovelling-out the occupants, and driving roads through unsightly working-class areas was popularly known as city improvement. For clergymen such as Archdeacon Boyce and the Rev. Yarrington, the process was equivalent to moral purification. For sanitarians like Dr. Armstrong, slum clearance safeguarded the public health and lowered infant mortality rates. More importantly, for the business-minded City Mayors, the resumption of low-rating and morally polluted enclaves made sound economic sense. By sweeping them away, inner-city sites could be leased or sold for higher-rating commercial use. Most contemporaries simply assumed that the displaced persons would resettle in some unspecified but presumably more sanitary environment.

Middle-class improvers seldom saw any differences between their housing reform strategies and those held by other social groups in early twentieth century Sydney. Driven by their environmental determinism, housing reformers felt compelled to give overwhelming priority to physical appearances, spatial arrangements and lower-density outcomes. They believed that history was on their side. A physically superior and healthier housing environment, they argued, would pay handsome dividends to future generations. However, if this vision seemed internally coherent, its outcome could only produce serious social and political strains. Working people who had grown up in the City had no desire to see their dwellings and neighbourhood network sacrificed for the sake of better environment. They wanted better-equipped houses, lower rents and fairer treatment from governments and landlords. The inner-city poor did not easily fit the 'slum-dweller' image, nor did they move to more congenial surroundings. Many workers had to remain in locations close to a range of casual labour. The much idealised but anonymous garden suburb was an economic impossibility for the ordinary rent-payers of Athlone Place, Wexford Street and Chippendale. A detached house on its own block was more likely to mean, in working-class terms, a modest weatherboard shack in a noxious suburb such as Waterloo, Alexandria or Botany.

The housing problem in Sydney failed to stimulate any serious legislative response before 1912. At the municipal level the City Council's powers had been found wanting. Without a greater metropolitan government, local authorities lacked the political and financial will to engage in costly rehousing ventures. At the central level, Parliament displayed little interest in municipal
matters and seemed unwilling to relinquish any powers for the sake of better urban administration. The belief that private enterprise would continue to meet the normal housing needs of the working-classes remained unquestioned. Nevertheless, by the end of the period rising house rents in the inner-city suburbs were increasingly generating demands to control the profits of exploitative landlords. The election of a Labor Government in 1910 inflamed opinion on these issues and raised the possibility of housing reform legislation for the working-classes.
Endnotes

1. Census of NSW, 1901, p. 492
2. Ibid., p. 492.
3. B. McNamara, 'Workingmen's Homes' in Commercialism and Distribution of the Nineteenth Century (1894), Mitchell Library, pp. 11-14.
4. SMH, 17 November 1913.
5. Ibid.
9. Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health, for the Year 1902 in R&PSCC, 1902, p. 26. Also see Table 2.1.
10. Ibid., p. 24.
11. Ibid., pp. 27-8.
12. SMH, 8 March 1904.
13. SMH, 21 March 1904.
15. F.B. Boyce, Fourscore Years and Seven (Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1934), p. 86.
19. DT, 6 January 1902.
21. Ibid., pp. 9-10.


26. See 'The Housing of the Working Classes', *Town Clerk's Annual Report of the Sydney City Council, 1902*, p. 29. (Hereafter referred to as *TCAR*.)


32. See Table 4.2


51. Ibid., p. 11
52. Ibid., p. 11
53. Ibid., p. 15.
54. Ibid., p. 16.
56. Ibid., p. 4609. The City Council did not wish to be seen profiting from the resumed premises. In March 1907 its Controller of Assets reported that he was busy 'ridding the place of opium dens, gambling dens and houses of ill-fame...' See the SMH, 2 May 1907.
57. J.D. Fitzgerald, op. cit., p. 111.
58. Ibid., p. 117.
59. See Minute by the Lord Mayor re Absorption of Borough of Camperdown in R&PSCC, 1908, p. 5.
61. DT, 6 June 1911.
62. Ibid.
63. SMH, 7 June 1911.
64. Ibid.
65. Ibid.
66. Ibid.
67. DT, 5 January 1909.
68. EN, 10 March 1909.
69. DT, 28 July 1910.
70. See the DT, 28 July 1910 and the TCAR, 1910, pp. 22-4.
71. DT, 19 August 1910.
72. SMH, 19 August 1910.
73. Ibid.
74. DT, 19 August 1910.
75. TCAR, 1911, p. 135.
76. Boyce, *op. cit.*, p. 93. The City Council did build several blocks of residential flats on the eastern side of the Chippendale resumed area. Bounded by Meagher, Dale and Cleveland Streets, they were opened by Governor Strickland in April, 1914. See the *SMH*, 10 April 1914.

77. *SMH*, 17 November 1911.


79. *SMH*, 16 June 1911.


Chapter Five

Boom, High Rents and Housing Legislation

Introduction

This chapter aims to show how the housing question emerged as a major issue in Sydney during the period of the McGowen Labor Government. All the fears and concerns which urban improvers and liberal progressives held for the future of the slum dweller coalesced as a result of the dwelling shortage, congestion and high rents. In 1911-13 the policy debates in Parliament addressed both the immediate housing emergency and wider cultural concerns in the community. There was a belief among the Government benches that private enterprise could not supply sufficient working-class dwellings. The housing shortage and high rents were critical in Labor's heavily tenanted inner suburban electorates but so too were the broader implications for the future housing environment. A fledgling nation, it was feared, could not be adequately reared in noisome terraces and dark tenements. Narrow back lanes and crowded slums were no fit place to promote moral and social hygiene. Housing reformers favoured the healthy family home and garden as the institution for cultivating national character and individual responsibility. As A.C. Carmichael contended, a home lending department in the Government Savings Bank would inculcate habits of thrift, saving and self reliance among the urban population. The general consensus which underpinned these ideas was reflected in the evidence given to the 1911-12 Select Committee on House Rents and confirmed by the Report's recommendation to extend state home loans to the working-classes.

In this pre-war period widespread anxieties about housing wage workers in city terraces and tenements were heightened by misgivings over the Darling Harbour/Rocks resumption schemes. Conservative critics argued that state landlordism in West Sydney amounted to a decade of administrative and financial disaster. Opposition to the passage of the 1912 Housing Bill was dominated by financial fears for future government experiments. Parliamentary legislators stressed that the McGowen Government's housing scheme had to be protected from losses. Block dwellings on expensive city sites were obviously unacceptable. Dacey's proposal for a model garden suburb stressed that the
experiment would not be a form of state charity or workers' welfare. Excluding property owners, all individuals regardless of social background, would qualify for assistance. By charging the tenants a rent which reflected the costs of investment and administration, the McGowen Government hoped to lower house rents in Sydney and put slum landlords out of business.

Another tier of Labor's housing reform platform was rent control. The slum landlord was the *bête noire* of the fair rent reformers. Just as urban liberals had attempted to end the squatter monopoly of the mid-nineteenth century by passing Selection Acts, radical reformers inside the labour movement and Parliament campaigned to break the stranglehold of the rack-renting landlord in pre-war Sydney. The sharp practices of monopolistic house-owners appeared to rob the honest worker of his hard earned wages and independence. Implicit in the populist rhetoric was the belief that a Fair Rents Court would bring the dishonest landlord to justice. The 1913 Fair Rents Bill was not the end of private property ownership, as many conservatives suggested, but an attempt to use state power to ameliorate the worst excesses of urban landlordism. The most forceful critique was that landlords would vacate the private rental market. In short, by limiting the landlord's return there would be no incentive to increase the supply of working-class housing.

Vital to this period of state housing reform was the vexed question of central versus local government responsibility. While the 1912 Housing Act created a Housing Board, chaired by J.D. Fitzgerald, to administer state housing policy; the Board's relationship with the Ministry and municipal bodies was poorly defined. The Sydney City Council became a public housing authority in the same year, but a distrustful Parliament confined its housing powers to the administrative boundaries of the City. Professor Irvine and other liberal progressives despaired at the deficiencies of Sydney's urban government system and pointed to the lack of policy making at the municipal level. Civic reformers expected that the formation of a Greater Sydney Council would overcome many of these administrative difficulties and promote town planning.

The broad response of the state to the housing problem highlighted the complexity of the political culture of pre-war Sydney. Populist elements were evident in Labor's housing policies. The small home owner was idealised as the inheritor of a proud tradition of independence while the parasitic landlord was despised. State housing assistance, which promised to release the propertyless tenant from the grip of the slum landlord, had enormous appeal for workers burdened by high rents during periods of housing shortage. But why was the
state responding to the call for housing reform during this period? Obviously governments were not reacting to industrial or social unrest in the pre-war boom. The creation of a loyal home-owning yeomanry therefore seems an unlikely explanation. Nor can it be simply assumed that the state merely aimed to increase the dwelling supply in Sydney. After all, the Government's threat to regulate the profits of landlords was a populist form of intervention, and as legislators argued, more likely to aggravate rather than relieve the housing shortage.

A more adequate explanation of the range of interventions is that they reflected the varying ability of the interest groups to swing state support behind their housing reform agendas. The dominant ideology of the reform movement, which assumed that bad housing environments nurtured bad individuals, found expression in the unrelenting attack on the city slum. Slum clearance was the most consistent of all interventionist responses in pre-war Sydney, but also the source of suppressed tensions and anxieties in the reform movement. The destruction of low-rating house property not only struck a blow at slum landlords but added impetus to demands for worker dwelling programmes which in turn strained relations between the environmental determinists and other housing reform groups. Environmental determinism was the driving force behind housing reform theory in pre-war Sydney. Its competing elements, however, could only produce conflicting outcomes which the housing reform movement would find difficult to contain.

State housing intervention in pre-war Sydney should also be seen in the wider context of social and welfare reforms. Social policy reform at the turn of the century, O'Brien argues, was not founded on the notion of 'universal entitlement' but aimed to keep the poor provident and independent. The selective nature of the intervention was accompanied by an expansion of private charitable agencies and acted to reinforce rather than weaken individual responsibility. Arguably then, the promotion of state home loans, the creation of a model housing suburb, and the introduction of fair rents legislation were all forms of intervention designed to wean the working-class from its dependency on landlordism in favour of home ownership responsibilities. Again, the extent to which these policy 'solutions' satisfied some reform groups more than others pointed to the contradictory tensions beneath the surface of the housing reform debate. By 1914 housing reformers were warning that unless more preventative intervention was forthcoming, the slum environment would remain to sap the stamina and character of the city race.
The Fair Rents Debate

In October 1910 the McGowen Labor Government won office in Macquarie street. Many of its members represented inner-city seats and were eager to extend state power and reform the working-class housing environment. Sydney was gripped by a rental crisis and the housing question had been made an election issue. In inner-city suburbs avaricious landlords and house agents were seen as the class enemy. Those accused of exploiting the dwelling shortage by raising rents and demanding special bonuses were disparagingly known as 'rack-renters'. For example, J.D. Fitzgerald, who unsuccessfully contested the east Sydney seat of Darlinghurst, campaigned against the 'rack-renting of the poor'. Fitzgerald's election handbills told voters that a Labor Government would provide relief from high rents by creating a 'Fair Rents Court' and also pass the 'Housing of the Working Classes Act' to enable municipal authorities to house workers in better dwellings.2

The labour movement was receptive to the idea that the state apparatus could regulate rent profiteering and the slum housing environment. Sydney's trade unionists were mostly rent payers and in the context of the general economic boom, rent control promised to restore wage gains which had been nullified by the increasing cost of living. By 1911 rising house rents accounted for a growing share of wage income. 'Generally speaking', noted the Government Statistician, 'the deduction from a labourer's income for rent exceeds 25 percent; which, from whatever point it is viewed, must be regarded as excessive'.3 Table 5.1 highlights the relationship between annual rent and annual male earnings in Sydney during the period 1911-14.

Table 5.1 High Rents in Sydney, 1911-14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Annual Male Earnings $</th>
<th>Annual Rent $</th>
<th>Rent as % of Earnings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>28.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1912</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>28.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>30.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>31.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clearly, talk of social justice was premature when arbitrated wage rises were gobbled up by rent increases. The caricature of the bloated landlord, standing on the doorstep with his outstretched hand, was a recurring image in *The Worker* at the time.

Sydney's high house rents and the threat of rent control evoked considerable editorial comment in the local press. During the McGowen Government's first term of office lead editorials were devoted to the issue. The newspapers were at pains to point out that the high cost of housing accommodation was not simply the work of wicked landlords or house agents. The price of a dwelling, like any other commodity, was governed by its cost of production and availability. High labour costs, land taxation increases and the 'demolition of whole districts of homes', the *Herald* noted, had all acted to raise house rents. Its editorial of 1 September, 1911 moralised:

It is one thing, however, to declaim against bad landlordism and quite another to say how the condition of things complained of can be corrected by law. The difficulty of regulating rents by legal enactment is obvious and anyone embarking upon a crusade in this direction would soon discover the nature of the labyrinthine maze of conflicting interests that presently confront the investigator and reformer.⁴

The editorial recommended that building regulations should be 'rigidly enforced' and inadequate health and housing standards raised for the 'protection of the public'. Impressed by the 'excellent results' of municipal house building in Britain, the *Herald* assumed that a 'better class of dwelling' could be erected by suburban municipalities and 'let at a rental that would pay the authorities without exposing the tenant to the harsh conditions he has at present to face'.

However, Thomas Keegan, Labor MLA for The Glebe, was not deterred from his own course of action. In 1911 Keegan notified Parliament that he intended to debate the rental question. On 19 September, the member for The Glebe moved the adjournment of the House to discuss 'the necessity for passing a fair rents bill'. In his address Keegan rejected explanations that increased house rents were the result of higher building and wage costs. Furthermore, claims by landlords that the Government's graduated land tax had forced up Sydney rents were nothing more than excuses. Keegan explained his stand:

In my opinion, it is in no way true that that is the reason why rents are raised to-day. The truth lies in the fact that there are not
sufficient houses for the people, and the landlord is taking advantage of the occasion. This is a burning question in the minds of the people to-day, and I believe that the only solution is the establishment of a rent court that may adjust in a fair way the rents which people ought to pay.  

The member for The Glebe stated that he had received letters from tenants complaining of unjust treatment by landlords. Inner-city residents were paying up to 17s. a week for houses which 'the landlord would not stable his horse in'. The 'voracious greed' of the house-owner was intolerable. Keegan hoped that the State brickworks would soon cheapen the brick supply but believed that was no reason to delay the immediate introduction of a fair rents court. While industrial legislation passed by Parliament showed that employers had the capacity to pay better wages, any increase was simply transferred back to the worker in the form of higher house rent. Admittedly, many landlords treated their tenants fairly but other property owners, encouraged by present conditions, descended on the people 'like carrion crows'. Keegan ended his speech by reminding members that he had on the business paper a motion for the appointment of a committee of enquiry into the question of fair rents. He considered that he was fully justified in leading the adjournment debate to discuss 'one of the most important questions' ever brought before Parliament.  

Keegan's motion led to a four hour debate in which no fewer than eighteen members from both sides of the House rose to speak. The member for The Glebe was followed by J.B. Mercer, MLA for Rozelle. Mercer claimed that the subject affected every electorate in metropolitan Sydney and cited a case of rack-renting in his constituency. He pointed out that the Opposition had balked at the Government Savings Bank Bill which would have enabled people to secure their own homes and thereby 'steer clear' of the private rental trap. J. Fallick, MLA for Singleton, thought that the proposal to allow an owner 10 per cent on his investment was generous because few landlords enjoyed a higher rate of return. His own property did not bring 7.5 per cent and present building costs were 30 to 40 per cent higher than a decade ago. Nevertheless, he preferred to place his faith in market forces and opposed the motion. Next to speak was R.J. Stuart-Robertson, MLA for Camperdown. In a bitter attack on landlordism he described how rising rents in his electorate had forced families to crowd together to make ends meet. One landlord had told his tenant that the rent was raised because voters had elected the Labor Government. Moreover, the City Council was aggravating the situation by knocking down dwellings and
leaving the homeless at the mercy of landlords. Stuart-Robertson gave notice that he too, would move to have the housing problem heard by a parliamentary committee.7

T. Waddell, former colonial treasurer and MLA for Belubula, attempted to moderate the debate with some sober observations. In his country electorate thrifty and industrious workingmen invested their savings in cottages, while those who wasted their wages on amusements, paid rent. Waddell accused the Government benches of 'talking all sorts of silly nonsensical rot' about landlords. All house-owners, irrespective of their political sympathies, had to obey the laws of supply and demand. Higher wages and building prices had contributed to the rent increases and housing shortage but demand would subside and dwelling vacancies reappear when the prosperity ended. What would be the effect if Parliament created a rent fixing tribunal? Waddell suggested that it would discourage building activity and reduce the supply of new housing to the extent that 'the trouble would be accentuated ten times over.'8

The question of government house building also exercised the minds of the honourable members. A.J. Kelly, MLA for The Lachlan, called on the Government to pass a bill to allow the City Council to erect workmen's dwellings. More importantly, the Government needed to select areas of Crown land suitable for the provision of working-class housing and cheap tramway facilities. In this way working people could escape the overcrowded city and breathe the 'pure fresh air' of open spaces. Kelly believed that if the Government introduced a bill to reserve hundreds of Crown acres near Kensington for house building, it would have the support of both sides of the House. J.P. Osborne, MLA for Paddington, stated that tenants in his electorate had been intimidated by landlords who threatened rent increases if they re-elected their Labor candidate. It was time for the Government to put an end to rising rents by building houses as had been proposed by the Workmen's Dwellings Bill. If that Bill was passed during the present session, thousands of houses could be erected for working people in the nearby suburbs. Osborne endorsed the maxim of one family, one home:

It cannot be in the best interests of the state, or of the city, that two or three families should be herded together in one house. The system of living in tenement houses does not commend itself to the average Australian. Every family should have a home of their own. They should be able to live under their own roof, without interference by any section of the community.9
Although opinion in the House was clearly divided over the prospect of rent regulation, Osborne's statement would undoubtedly have struck a chord of consensus among members. If the government entered the house building business it would have to supply detached, single-family dwellings in the outer suburbs.

Labor members were keen to see the Government build a better type of workmen's cottage than the slum offered in the private rental market. The member for The Murray spoke of the need to supply 'a better, a more up-to-date, a more refined home...' for working people. H.C. Hoyle, MLA for Surry Hills, advised the adoption of the modern 'town planning system' for any future state housing scheme. T.S. Crawford, MLA for Marrickville, expected that the Government's housing legislation would maintain the 'high social status' of the people and encourage working-class independence and dignity. He declared:

Let us pass measures to help the people to help themselves. Let us establish state brickworks, so that the people may get cheap bricks with which to build their houses. Let us build houses for the people on the purchase system, and give them... an opportunity to procure homes for themselves.¹⁰

J. Storey, MLA for Balmain, argued that the Government was completely justified in its bid to provide working people with decent homes and healthy surroundings. Indeed, it was hypocritical for the Opposition and particularly, the member for Belubula, to criticise the Government's proposals when he had earlier supported a bill to establish workmen's cottages at Crickville.¹¹

It remained for James McGowen, Premier and Colonial Treasurer, to sum up the adjournment debate. The Opposition, he claimed, had offered no answers to the 'burning question', but was content to 'explain away' the housing difficulty by invoking the law of supply and demand. The Government, on the other hand, had an obligation to see that the working-classes were better housed and 'not unduly squeezed by combines.' Since assuming office his Government had taken positive steps to relieve the housing congestion of the inner-city and cheapen commuter access to the suburbs. The Railway Commissioners, for example, had introduced apprentices' tickets and reduced suburban fares for working people. The Premier also pointed out that it was Government policy to utilise the Savings Bank as a source of cheap lending for workers wishing to erect a dwelling. Furthermore, the Government intended to play the role of landlord by erecting workmen's cottages at Kensington and every other suburb.
In McGowen's view, Government regulation of the industrial environment created a moral precedent for interference in the housing market. He asked rhetorically:

If we are right in protecting a man's health and his work and labour, are we not also entitled to see that he is not unduly forced down by any man who is in a position to determine the conditions under which he shall live?12

If a select committee was appointed to investigate the housing question the Government would 'afford every assistance in furthering the inquiry...' The Premier thanked the member for The Glebe for raising the subject and announced his intention to introduce legislation.

Keegan's adjournment motion opened up the whole field of government housing policy to debate and discussion. The spectre of fair rents legislation had forced the conservative opposition into defining its attitude towards state housing reform. Conservative opinion accepted that Sydney faced a housing emergency and whilst affirming its faith in a market solution, seemed prepared to give tacit approval to measures which turned tenants into freehold home owners. Labor too believed that government support for working-class home ownership was laudable, although the reasons which motivated the belief differed from those held by its political opponents. For the non-Labor forces, home purchase policies promised the creation of future economic prosperity through the consolidation of freehold property relations. Labor, by contrast, looked upon home ownership as a means for the tenant to escape an exploitative and oppressive housing environment. Ultimately, a permanent and agreeable solution to the housing problem was believed by both parties to lie outside the City.

The 1911-12 Select Committee on House Rents

Outside Macquarie Street all signs pointed to a deteriorating rental situation in Sydney. City working people, much to the chagrin of slum reformers, had not staged an exodus to the outer suburbs but remained behind to search for scarce housing accommodation in their beleaguered neighbourhoods, close to work and community networks. To make matters worse, Sydney was again in the grip of an inflationary property boom. On 17 October, 1911 a month after the housing debate, the McGowen Government appointed a parliamentary Select Committee to inquire into increased house rents. The
Committee, which consisted of Messrs Minahan, Fallick, Waddell, Crawford and Stuart-Robertson MsLA, was chaired by Thomas Keegan. The mass of testimony given to the Committee between November 1911 and March 1912 was printed as a progress report. Tenants, landlords, estate agents, builders and local government officers were called as witnesses. After the examination of further evidence, the Committee’s final Report was tabled in November 1912. The Reports, together with the minutes of evidence, represent an important political and social expose of private landlordism in Sydney before the First World War. By examining the detailed evidence of the reports this section reveals the attitudes and arguments of ordinary rent payers, and the landlords who invested in houses to let for profit. There were important considerations for housing reformers, legislators and the state. These included the problems of building costs, the determination of an economic rent and the broader question of bringing a family-type home within reach of wage earning groups in Sydney.

The 1911-12 inquiry into high house rents showed that Sydney was undergoing both a property boom and rental crisis. For landlords, the prosperity represented the first urban boom of the new century. For tenants however, the period signified the return of rent profiteering and insecurity of tenure. Henry Pentecost, a foreman painter who lived in Leichhardt, described his experience as a tenant at 14 Alfred street, Annandale. The premises he had inhabited were rat-infested, dirty and chiefly built of packing cases. There was no bathroom, 'an apology for a kitchen' and an insanitary water closet. One room and stable were let at 15s. a week and Pentecost occupied the remainder of the property for 13s. A month after he moved in the rent was raised to 15s. 6d. After Pentecost did some repairs, at his own expense, the landlady demanded 17s. a week. The Water and Sewerage Board subsequently served the owner with notice to provide washing facilities and Pentecost was told to quit. He considered that the property was not worth more than £150. Minahan asked him:

Q. You occupied these unhealthy dilapidated premises for four months?

A. Yes.

Q. Did you make any effort to get a better place?

A. Yes; we tried in Newtown, Leichhardt, Glebe and Annandale. I visited all the local agents.
None of the house agents however, had a dwelling available at a rent which suited his income and Pentecost considered that 16s. was too much to pay. He suggested several reasons for the rise in rents. There had been a general increase in the cost of living, building demolitions had increased demand in the suburbs and immigration was adding to the urban population. Fallick inquired:

Q. You say it is the force of circumstances that compels people to pay these high rents?
A. Yes, it is the demand for houses. In many instances two people take one house at about one pound or 22s. 6d. a week and cut it up between them. That is on account of houses being so scarce.\(^\text{14}\)

In Pentecost's opinion the prohibitive cost of materials made it uneconomic 'to build small properties.' The Government 'should build workmens' dwellings', he added, 'and then the private landlords would not ask such exorbitant rents.'\(^\text{15}\)

To the south-west of Sydney building activity was buoyant. Early evidence was taken from Marrickville municipality where population and house rents had grown rapidly. Henry Brown, the town clerk, told the Committee that there was 'great demand for every class of property, both for buying and renting.' Brown stated that some 1200 houses had been built in the municipality during the past three years. Moreover, the rise in rental values had affected 'all classes of properties' and workmens' dwellings, which normally let between 10-12s. a week, showed the highest increases. The municipal assessment books indicated that the rents of these modest dwellings had increased by 2s. to 8s. a week. Whilst the town clerk believed that 10 per cent gross was a fair rate of return on a housing investment, he saw no justification for the extent of the rent increases. Overall, Brown estimated that Marrickville house rents had risen by an average of 25 per cent.\(^\text{16}\)

Large families could be especially impoverished by the perpetual payment of rent in Sydney. The Committee heard with dismay the housing experience of John Millard, secretary of the Builders' Labourers' Union, living at 11 Park Street, Erskineville. Millard, who had raised a family of nine and was constantly in debt, despite his temperate habits, declared that workmen could not escape the rental trap because 'they have not the opportunity of saving anything.' The rent of his dwelling had been raised twice during the past year and members of his Union were complaining of similar increases. Millard told the Committee:
I have paid close on 600 pounds in rent, and although I have helped to construct a large number of homes for other people I have not been able to construct one for myself.¹⁷

When asked to propose a remedy to the existing state of affairs, he suggested that the Government should help workmen 'to build and make homes for themselves.' A comprehensive housing act which would assist the tenant to purchase a block of land or acquire a State-built cottage through the instalment plan was 'the only permanent cure.' In hard times Millard had been forced to pawn his family's clothing for rent in order to keep the 'bum-bailiff out of his house. Economic uncertainty and fear of the landlord, he argued, would always haunt working people until the State began 'to house its family'.¹⁸

Millard's situation was not an isolated case and other inner-city tenants had similar stories to tell. The sense of frustration and helplessness experienced by rent-payers as a result of their inability to enjoy a settled and secure home life was a recurring worry. Robert Fuller, a waiter forced to take lodgings in Fitzroy Street, Surry Hills, had searched in vain for a vacant dwelling. His wife had recently been shown a house at Redfern for 12s. a week but was told by the agent that an additional bonus of 12s. was required to secure the lease. Fuller had two children to support from his weekly wage of 35s. and could not afford more than 10s. for a cottage. When he rented a house at 15s. a week he usually 'let a room or two'.¹⁹ Another witness, Patrick O'Connor, had lived for five years in a sub-divided house at 30 Alexandra Street, Paddington. The place contained three small rooms, each 7 feet by 7 feet, a kitchen but no bathroom. During his residence the property had changed hands numerous times and the latest owner had raised the rent to 10s. The landlady had given notice of a further increase to 11s. once the lease expired. O'Connor believed that working people would welcome the opportunity to buy Government cottages provided that they were given security of tenure. 'It is the putting out that is the whole of the trouble', he told Waddell. When asked by Fallick to explain the high house rents in Sydney, O'Connor replied:

Griping landlordism is the cause of it. It is a regular sticking up, just as much as the bushrangers stuck people up, only the bushrangers did not stick up poor people.²⁰
Fallick, himself a landlord, was more concerned with defending private housing enterprise than exposing evidence of high house rents in Sydney. Throughout the proceedings his questioning sought to persuade tenants that the upward movement of rents was the natural result of market forces and self interest. The following exchange occurred between Fallick and a witness whose rent had climbed from 15s. to 20s:

Q. Is it natural for people to get as much as they can for their houses?
A. Yes I suppose it is.
Q. And you would do the same thing yourself?
A. No, not on a tenant who had been in a number of years...
Q. Supposing you owned a dozen houses, and you had two good tenants, and you were prepared to let them stay for 14s. a week and at the same time you could get 20s. - you would get it?
A. Yes, I suppose I would.21

Waddell, in contrast, adopted a more investigative method of inquiry. As a staunch defender of the freehold-principle the former colonial treasurer wished to hear the attitude of working-class tenants to Government home-purchase schemes. He asked the same witness:

Q. Do you think there would be a preference for buying or for leasing?
A. I think there would be a better demand for sale on long easy terms. Working people and those who consider themselves to be a bit above the working people cannot rake together the £50 deposit on a house. I cannot do it... If the Government erected places and offered them on easy terms, I think thousands would jump at the chance of buying.22

Clearly, without state assistance there was little chance of turning many working-class tenants into secure and respectable home owners. Few workers had sufficient savings and housing loans were hard to obtain and expensive.

The Select Committee also examined a number of suburban agents and landlords. There was general agreement among them that rents had increased due to the enormous demand for housing and the inadequate supply. William Herbert, a Surry Hills agent, suggested that tenants had raised rents by offering
bonuses. He admitted nevertheless, that he had recently purchased a property for £500 and raised the rent to 16s.6d. The tenant had subsequently vacated and the house was re-let at 20s. a week. Chairman Keegan asked Herbert whether he could suggest a solution to the housing shortage:

No, the only remedy I could see is for the Government to build dwellings. The private builder does not seem inclined to build small tenements on account of the increased cost of building. Such places do not give them sufficient returns.23

This was a significant admission, and one which was increasingly repeated by property-owning interests in Sydney. Private housing enterprise was obviously supplying accommodation in the suburbs but due to higher building costs much of the housing stock could only be let at rents beyond the reach of ordinary wage workers. The Committee had uncovered two important aspects of the housing problem. In addition to the realisation that existing house owners had raised rents to get a higher return was disturbing evidence that private builders found it unprofitable to erect working-class dwellings.

One witness, Alderman William Robinson, was in a position to speak with some authority on the subject. Robinson and his wife owned nearly one hundred small tenements in working-class Erskineville. Unlike some landlords who had 'gone to the extreme', Robinson had not raised the rents of his properties since 1897. He argued that the shortage of cheap workmens' dwellings in Sydney had been aggravated by the introduction of local government building regulations. In Marrickville, for example, the municipal council insisted on a minimum land frontage and side entrance to the cottage. It was now impossible for a builder to supply such accommodation for workers at 8s. a week and Robinson could not afford to build anywhere in Sydney for that rate of return. 'If you get anything less than 9 per cent', he complained, 'you are going to be behind at the finish.' Moreover, given existing conditions, he thought that Government house-building could be 'tried as an experiment.' Robinson saw advantages which the Government possessed in comparison to private builders:

They have control of the Savings Bank money, and they have a brick making plant, where bricks are turned out 100 per cent cheaper than builders can get them at. Under these conditions, they ought to be able to erect dwellings and get a return on the money and do no harm to anyone. It would not do the builder any harm, and it would
be an asset, to a certain extent, for the Department which erected them.\textsuperscript{24}

When Alderman Robinson was questioned by Crawford he restated that private builders in Sydney were reluctant to undertake the construction of workmens' dwellings. Furthermore, the rents of new cottages now ranged from 15s. a week upwards which made them unsuitable for low-paid workers.\textsuperscript{25}

Joseph Stimson, an estate agent in Glebe, reinforced Robinson's observations about high house rents. Stimson managed several hundred properties situated in Glebe, Forest Lodge, Annandale, Newtown, Petersham, Waterloo, Redfern and the City. He informed Chairman Keegan that most agents belonged to an association of land and house agents which charged a flat commission for managing properties. In Glebe, where rents were high and houses scarce, new three-roomed cottages let from 14-16s, while four-roomed places readily brought 20s., and 21s, if they were detached. Crawford inquired:

Q. Have you many applications for untenanted houses?
A. Yes, we could let 100 places within a fortnight, and choose our tenants at that.

Q. Are there prospects of houses being built?
A. No. The temptation is not good enough to build.

Q. Would the cost of building be much greater to-day than three years ago?
A. Yes, fully 35 per cent.\textsuperscript{26}

When Mr Waddell raised the spectre of rent control Stimson replied that it would further discourage house building in Sydney. 'Unless you can buy land very cheap you cannot get a return if you do not charge a high rental', he added.

In March 1912 the Progress Report of the Select Committee on House Rents was presented to Parliament with Keegan's recommendation that the inquiry be resumed early next session. Armed with the evidence of the Progress Report, the member for The Glebe went on the attack. Contrary to Opposition claims, the inflated cost of housing and living in Sydney could not be laid at the Government's door, but was the result of property-owners taking advantage of the economic boom. During the address in reply debate Keegan applauded the Government's housing programme and hoped that a bill to limit rents would soon be introduced. He told the House:
Personally, I am of opinion that there are three contributory causes to the advance in rents. First, the avariciousness of the landlords; secondly, the association of house and land agents; and thirdly, supply and demand.$^{27}$

Landlordism was clearly to blame. When Keegan’s Committee was reappointed in September 1912 'to inquire into and report upon the enormous increase in house rents', the proceedings were, not surprisingly, preoccupied with the question of a fair rents court.

The Keegan Committee lacked detailed knowledge of fair rent experiments and was anxious to gather evidence on the subject. The English Statute books, however, provided no precedent. Irish land reform legislation in 1881 had created a fair rent Court to regulate landlord and tenant disputes in respect to land but not dwelling houses.$^{28}$ Keegan thought that the progressive movement in municipal property valuations provided the basis for a system of rent regulation in Sydney. John Garlick, executive officer of Local Government, gave the Committee extensive information on the matter. He was asked if the increased land values in Sydney accounted for the higher rents:

That is open to question. The cost of labour in repairing houses has increased; the cost of materials for repairs has increased; the rates have increased; the federal land tax has imposed additional expenditure on large holders...the population has increased, and people go to owners and offer them higher rents in order to secure houses... With such causes operating it is not to be wondered at if rents do rise.$^{29}$

Garlick's response, like that of earlier witnesses, suggested that a combination of factors had led to steep increases in house building costs. The root cause of the rental crisis, he agreed, was the inability of house building to keep pace with Sydney's increasing population. Nevertheless, Garlick doubted that a fair rent court could use the existing system of municipal land valuation as the basis for assessing rents. There was no reliable system of valuation in metropolitan Sydney because local councils employed clerks and estate agents as valuers. As such, if incorrect valuations were made, a fair rents court could fix unequal rents for similar properties.$^{30}$

In order to provide a reliable foundation for rent determination, Garlick recommended the establishment of a government valuation office free from
political interference. District valuers would be appointed to compile a comprehensive register of all lands, maintain sales records and make regular valuations. The fair rents court would then have access to this information from the central office. Garlick was also concerned with other aspects of the court's machinery. For instance, strict guidelines governing the operations of the court needed to be defined. The determination of a fair market value for property during times of real estate speculation would be difficult and there was also the risk of driving landlords away by making dwelling investment financially unattractive. Garlick reasoned:

It seems to me that if a Fair Rents Court is to be established, it should give a man a net return distinctly higher than he could get by investing his money on mortgage at the rates ruling from time to time; otherwise there would be no inducement whatever for men with means to supply the need for houses.  

He went on to explain that rent regulation had the potential to discourage the small investor who expected a high rate of return from a housing investment. Accordingly, during periods of economic prosperity and profitable investment opportunities, the Court's operations could 'cause the supply of houses to fall below the needs of the population.'

The creation of a fair rents Court was therefore a double-edged sword. Garlick was not opposed to the idea but argued that its implementation was fraught with technical difficulties. For working-class tenants there were the attractions of more stable house rents and greater security of tenure. For investor landlords, however, there was a danger that rent control would reinforce their reluctance to build workmens' dwellings in Sydney at a time when such housing was in short supply. But if high house rents reflected the dwelling shortage then economic wisdom taught that it was simply a matter of time before the imbalance in supply and demand was corrected. Fallick questioned Garlick on this point:

Q. But after the demand has been met, and houses can be erected faster than the demand for them, you anticipate that rents will be lowered?

A. Yes. But even that would be, to my mind, affected by the question of whether the price of materials and labour falls to any extent. If values of material and labour keep up, I doubt
very much whether any large surplus number of houses will be
built. 33

The prognosis was not encouraging. A permanent solution to the housing
problem, in terms of a market response, appeared unlikely while building costs
remained high. As Fallick pointed out, speculative builders who had supplied
much of the nineteenth century rental stock, now showed little interest in
erecting the smallest and least profitable class of dwelling in Sydney. 34 The
problem which now confronted the Committee was how best to boost the
uncertain supply of worker accommodation.

Garlick doubted that legislative action could achieve much unless the state
began to build dwellings in competition with private enterprise. He observed
that government authorities had adopted that form of intervention in England
and New Zealand. Nevertheless, serious economic hurdles lay in the way.
Local or state authorities would be forced to purchase building labour and
materials in a highly-priced market. The houses would then be burdened with
administrative costs such as allowances for interest payments, depreciation,
repairs, taxes, and rates. The Government, of course, would have to let the
houses at rents which reflected the additional charges. The upshot was that the
resultant economic rent would not be significantly less than existing market
rents. As Garlick put it:

All of these allowances would have to be calculated on the initial
cost, and that cost would be high for the reasons already stated. So
that even if we started building houses, it is very doubtful whether
we could let them for much less than the rents now prevailing. 35

As a reform strategy, state housing competition now looked more difficult to
achieve than the Select Committee may have cared to admit.

The increased cost of building in Sydney had undoubtedly led to higher
house rents for new properties. Estimates of the increased cost of construction
between 1907-12 ranged from 35 to 50 per cent. John Archibald, a Newtown
builder, stated that over the five year period there had been a 50 per cent cost
increase in the construction of a four-roomed workman's cottage. In Newtown,
two cottages were squeezed onto a 30 foot allotment in order to save costs.
Archibald believed that a builder was entitled to a gross return of 10 per cent
and was satisfied with 6 per cent net from his property. He also commented
that the price of native hardwood had been forced up as the result of a 'ring' formed by Sir Allen Taylor's timber company.\textsuperscript{36}

Higher rents for new housing in Sydney were the inevitable outcome of increased building costs. More disturbing, however, were signs that established house-owners had taken advantage of the situation. Sydney Fraser, a land valuer, supplied the Committee with information which showed that the rents of older properties were raised to give the owner a gross return of 10 per cent. He cited the case of 14 terrace houses which had been built in the early 1900s, before the property boom. The annual rent of the property, based on its original cost, showed a net return of about 7 per cent. When calculated on replacement costs at present values, however, the net return of the property came to about 5 per cent. As such, Fraser stated that the rents of the property would soon be raised 'to bring it up to 10 per cent gross.'\textsuperscript{37} These inflated returns, together with the opportunity for capital gain, had combined to drive up property values and fuel the real estate boom. Indeed, a Redfern builder showed the Committee a list of 32 houses situated in Dowling, Bourke, Rennie and Mount streets, where the rents had been raised as high as 80 per cent during a two year period.\textsuperscript{38}

The Select Committee on House Rents tabled its final Report on November 5, 1912. Sydney's high house rents were attributed to many causes. These included population growth, the high cost of building labour and materials, slum clearance schemes, and growing demand for cottages rather than terraces. The inference was that detached dwellings were more costly to build and therefore required higher rents. Local government building codes and 'in isolated cases', the Federal land tax were also listed as contributing factors. While the Report acknowledged that the rise in rents was necessary to induce landlords to supply future housing, it was especially critical of existing house-owners who enjoyed 'a much higher return than formerly on their investments...'\textsuperscript{39} In effect, they had reaped unfair rents without a corresponding increase in housing costs.

The recommendations of the Report, which were as diverse as the findings, endorsed a broad housing reform programme for Sydney. State support for individual home ownership was a central plank. Accordingly, greater access to mortgage finance was required for 'artisans and others wishing to build small houses and cottages on their land...'. Indeed, it was suggested that the Government Savings Bank Commissioners be empowered to lend up to 95 per cent of capital valuation and to allow repayment 'on long easy terms at
the lowest rate of interest the Bank can afford.' Mindful of the need to encourage low-density suburban living, the Report also urged the Government to release surplus Crown land for building purposes, and provide a more efficient train service to the outer suburbs. The Government was also called upon to enter the house building business in earnest:

We suggest that the Government should carry out a vigorous policy of constructing dwelling-houses that, allowing for a reasonable interest on outlay, will let at a rental within the reach of wage-earners, and that power be given to Shires and Municipalities to do likewise.  

The provision of canvas dwellings at Daceyville or Centennial Park was proposed as a temporary measure to relieve housing stress. Finally, the Report suggested that the Government should introduce a Bill to regulate house rents and agreed that 10 per cent gross represented a satisfactory return on a housing investment.

All of these proposals pointed to the complex nature of the housing problem in Sydney. High house building costs, rising rents and a generally low-paid labouring population placed formidable barriers in the way of working-class home ownership. For inner-city labouring families struggling to pay the weekly rent, the expectation of buying a detached cottage on a suburban block was understandable but unattainable without some form of state assistance. The Government Savings Bank, it was assumed, would be instrumental in providing home-buyers with a secure and cheap source of repayable mortgage finance. By widening the conditions of access to the mortgage market the desire was to bring home ownership opportunities within reach of the working population. During the finalisation of the Report there was unanimous agreement over the recommendation for more liberal housing loans but opposition to the proposal of state housing competition, despite the support shown by building industry groups. Although the recommendation amounted to direct market intervention it did not really challenge the principle of private housing enterprise. Landlords had little interest in the working-class housing market because building costs in the inner-city prevented them from obtaining satisfactory returns. In contrast, any attempt by the Government to control house rents during a property boom would obviously represent a threat to the income of property-owners. The introduction of fair rents legislation was sure to be interpreted as a direct attack on landlords and the sanctity of private property.
Early in 1912, the State Government and City Council acquired legislative authority to begin the business of house building in Sydney. The question of state housing legislation had been on the parliamentary notice paper throughout 1911. In May, the Acting Treasurer, A.C. Carmichael, MLA for Leichhardt, told a deputation of tramway workers that the Government would introduce housing legislation during the forthcoming parliamentary session. He stated that the Government could supply a 'reasonably good house' for 10s. a week and that it intended to sell the dwellings to anyone who wished to purchase. The Government was not attracted by the idea of building on narrow and expensive frontages in the congested inner-city. Carmichael envisaged instead, 66 feet wide blocks and four to six roomed cottages set in surroundings conducive to the rearing of healthy children. The simple aim was to supply workmen with dwellings and thereby deprive others of 'the opportunity to speculate in houses.'

In July, 1911 Carmichael introduced a Workers' Dwellings Bill to give the Crown power to acquire land for the construction and management of workers' dwellings. He explained to the House that the Bill would bring New South Wales into line with other Commonwealth States and New Zealand. The Minister would have power to purchase land for workers' dwellings recommended by a board created under the Act and any land purchase proposal would require the consent of Parliament. Carmichael's Bill also sought approval for the disposal of the dwellings 'on the credit foncier system, or by sale right out.' The proposal to give the purchaser the option to buy or lease delighted Opposition leader Wade, who argued that the Government had abandoned its leasehold policy in favour of the liberal principle of freehold tenure. Nevertheless, Carmichael's Bill lapsed with the prorogation of Parliament and was not revived.

Concurrent with his bid to turn rent-payers into home-owners, Carmichael sought to broaden the lending base of the Government Savings Bank. An important provision of the Savings Banks Amalgamation Bill, he informed Parliament, was the creation of a Homes Department which would give working people easier access to housing loans. The financial advantages granted to farmers and settlers by the existing Advances Branch would in effect be extended to city-dwellers through the Homes Department of the Government Savings Bank. Carmichael argued that compared to the problems of rural
settlers, the hardships of city workers and those housed in overcrowded conditions were seldom debated in Parliament. He claimed:

They have equal disabilities under which they labour, although in a different direction. They are very often called upon to dwell in the most congested areas, where they want space and fresh air... and it is more especially to that section of the community, whether in the city of Sydney or any other town of the State, that I wish the home department to be applicable.45

The existing lending arrangements of the Savings Bank severely limited advances for workers' dwellings. A borrower wishing to build had to deposit 40 per cent of valuation before the Bank would advance the remaining 60 per cent on mortgage for a limited five year term. The Homes Department, however, would allow people to borrow larger amounts and repay the loan in the form of weekly rent over a much longer period. Carmichael suggested that the Savings Bank Commissioners be permitted to lend up to 75 per cent on house property over a repayment period of 20 years or more. He illustrated his argument by showing the weekly instalments on a housing loan of £350, repayable over a twenty year period with interest at 4 per cent. The instalment payments, which are tabled below, compared favourably with working-class rents in Sydney.

Table 5.2 Mortgage Repayments on a £350 Loan at 4 Per Cent Interest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Loan Period</th>
<th>Weekly Repayments</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20 years</td>
<td>9s. 10d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 years</td>
<td>8s. 7d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 years</td>
<td>7s. 9d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 years</td>
<td>6s. 9d</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The weekly repayments, however, did not include the added costs of insurance, water rates, and repairs. Overall, Carmichael hoped that more liberal lending facilities would encourage wage earners to acquire better homes rather than pay exorbitant rents 'to live in dog-boxes'.46
By 1912 the question of state housing reform was dominating Labor's agenda. In January the Acting Premier, George Beeby, received an anxious deputation from the Trades and Labor Council. W.L. Duncan, the Labor Council President, pointed out that high house rents in Sydney had nullified wage increases during recent years and called for legislation to curb unscrupulous house agents. Another representative of the deputation argued that tenants were entitled to have their rents adjusted in the same way that property owners had their rates reviewed by an appeals court. When rents were high, wage earners had to be protected from both the employer and landlord. In reply, Beeby acknowledged the housing emergency and informed the deputation that the Government planned to address the entire question as soon as the House met. Government-funded housing, as Carmichael had earlier proposed, would be sold or let on a 5 per cent basis. Beeby had visited a number of suburbs within commuting distance of Sydney where thousands of homes could be erected on quarter-acre blocks at low cost. Further, he expected that the supply of State housing funds would be greatly boosted once the Savings Banks Amalgamation Bill was passed. However, Acting Premier Beeby was more circumspect about the possibility of fair rents legislation and declined to comment until he was given more information.47

Meanwhile, his colleague the State Treasurer, John R. Dacey, MLA for Alexandria, had divulged details of a state housing scheme near Kensington. Dacey had been elected to Parliament in 1895 as the member for Botany. A coachbuilder by trade and former mayor of Alexandria Council, the State Treasurer was not a radical representative of the labour movement. Dacey had entered the Labor Party as an employer who frowned upon charity and extolled the virtues of thrift, self-reliance and respectability.48 Class distinction was not a source of pride to Dacey but an unfortunate prejudice which had to be overcome for the common good. His proposal for a suburb of State-built wooden cottages revealed his political outlook:

I desire to avoid as far as possible creating class distinctions by calling them workmen's dwellings. They will be residences for anyone who is not the owner of house property, irrespective of his status in life. To create a settlement called workmen's dwellings' would, I'm afraid, militate against the success of the scheme and depreciate the value of the surrounding property... I am wholly opposed to creating slums or erecting buildings which will encourage the congregation of one particular class on any Government land.49
Dacey's concern to prevent the creation of a working-class ghetto indicated the influential impact of environmentalist ideology on housing reform. The unwholesome conditions which housing reformers held responsible for the formation of the city slum environment would not be tolerated under a government housing scheme. The state, by virtue of its refusal to create a charitable housing estate for the urban working-class, would demonstrate the benefits of the suburban house and garden for all social groups. On 4 January, 1912 Dacey informed the Herald:

I propose to build the first batch of houses on blocks some distance apart from each other in order to relieve the monotony of design by placing others of a different design on intervening blocks as soon as I get the necessary authority. Every place will be detached, and there will therefore be no huddling together of buildings to create danger in the way of fire... In connection with the Government dwellings...there will be nothing shoddy about the buildings, no matter of what material they may be constructed.50

Dacey stressed his intense desire to see the Government build sanitary and comfortable dwellings at reasonable rents before he died of old age.

The question of tenure, however, had not been resolved. When Dacey's scheme was mooted it was reported that the tenants would be able to purchase the cottages while the land would be leased to them.51 Before the legislation reached Parliament, however, the home-purchase proposal was scrapped in favour of a leasehold system.52 Dacey's strategy aimed not to create a socialised housing market but to prevent the government dwellings from being picked off by private landlords. He was questioned about the tenure:

Q. Don't you think it would be wise to build houses that people could buy cheaply, so that everybody would have a little stake in the country?
A. Well, that's not the policy of the Government.
Q. But personally you believe in the freehold, don't you?
A. I'm a freeholder to a certain extent. What I object to is one man, or two men, owning everything. Chop it up, and let us have small holdings - and then I don't care what sort of lease you give 'em. But Daceyville's a State proposition, and we won't part with the freehold or the leasehold. We'll just let the houses.53
The freehold principle behind Carmichael's earlier housing bill had been put on the 'back-burner'. As far as the Opposition was concerned, the absence of the home-purchase option provided a convenient alibi for an attack on the government housing scheme.

The legislation to enable Dacey to pursue his housing venture was introduced on 23 February, 1912. The preamble of the Housing Bill vested the Crown with the authority to purchase, resume and appropriate certain lands and buildings, and place them under the management of a government board. More specifically, the intention of the Bill was to supply working people with decent dwellings and abolish congested housing conditions. The government housing scheme would be self-supporting and free of political interference. Dacey emphasised in Parliament:

> There is no element of charity about this proposal. The tenants who take the houses which it is intended to build will not be beholden to any other section of the community, but will merely be parties to a business arrangement with the Government, who will enter into competition with private capitalists, who supply houses, just as they enter into competition in other matters.54

The State Treasurer chose his words carefully. Dacey's housing policy could not be regarded as harmful to the interests of builders and landlords in Sydney. If the Government could make housing investment profitable there was no excuse for private enterprise not to do the same. The presumption that the building industry would continue to house the working-classes, despite the high rents, was not seriously questioned. There was no measure in Dacey's Housing Act indeed to 'prevent contractors or speculators continuing to take full advantage of the building boom by erecting working-men's houses'.55

The non-Labor Opposition were sceptical of the Government's housing policy. They argued that Sydney's housing shortage had been caused by Labor's restrictive immigration programme. The inadequate labour supply had inflated domestic costs and resulted in a building bottleneck. More pointedly, the proposed scheme, which was derided as 'Audaciousville', would only be a 'drop in the ocean' if it was built on business lines. What additional benefit accrued to a government tenant compared to an individual who rented privately, Opposition leader Wade asked? A similar leasehold housing scheme had been tried at Crickville but had failed dismally because only a handful of blocks were
taken up. If the Government revived the discredited leasehold arrangement, Wade warned, then 'Daceyville' too, would court financial disaster.56

Other members were disturbed by the potential scale of the housing venture. Unlike public housing investment in the Rocks area, which was a product of paternalist intervention, Dacey's housing scheme led the State into unknown territory. A model suburb designed to accommodate some 5,000 people would require heavy capital borrowings, aggravate the skilled labour shortage and commit the State to a general housing policy. W.H. Wood, MLA for Bega, told Parliament:

> It is true that the state has in the past undertaken a somewhat similar project by building houses in the Rocks area, but these buildings were erected under a special set of circumstances, and the Government were moved by a special motive; and, after all, the operations have been simple and of such a character that everyone could see their limitation.57

The member for Bega seriously doubted that Dacey's housing scheme, which was much more ambitious than the Rocks' venture, could be administered to 'ensure sound, practical and financial results'.58 Former treasurer Waddell observed that speculative housing activity in Sydney had been hampered by low profit rates and predicted the scheme's financial failure if rentals were based upon 5 per cent of the capital outlay.59 Nevertheless, the state housing suburb was infinitely preferable to any form of rent control. Waddell declared:

> The Government are much better warranted in carrying out a project of this kind on a small scale than they would be in accepting the strange and outrageous proposal to fix the rentals for the people of this country. If that idea were carried out no one would really own his house. People are shy enough now about building, owing to the high prices; but if they were not allowed to fix their own rents, would anyone be such a raving lunatic as to build a house and allow some Government official to fix the rent?60

Another conservative speaker voiced his opposition to the proposal to place the housing suburb under the administrative control of the City Council. The proposition was intolerable because it threatened the political sovereignty of local municipalities and furthered the cause of the Greater Sydney movement.61

Dacey further developed his vision of state housing reform during the second reading of the Housing Bill. City-dwellers, he told Parliament, could be
divided into two groups in terms of housing preference: those people who
desired to own their home and those who were content to rent. The Savings
Bank Bill would promote the interests of the former while the Kensington
scheme was designed to provide rent relief for the latter. Quoting from
evidence before the Select Committee on House Rents, Dacey remarked that
there was an 'absolute necessity for the Government to step in and assist private
enterprise in supplying houses for the people.'

Commercial expansion and
government resumptions in his electorate of Alexandria and elsewhere in Sydney
had reduced housing accommodation and increased congestion. He believed,
like other legislators, that the day was past '...when free Australians were
content to be herded together in terraces of mere dog-boxes.' Nation-building
demanded that the state demonstrate the superior advantages of modern,
hygienic and planned housing. Dacey informed Parliament:

We propose to establish a garden city, and to offer the people
healthy conditions of living. It has been truthfully said that the city
beautiful and the home beautiful will yield big dividends to the
nation. We propose to establish a city beautiful, to which
Australians abroad will be able to point with pride and say, 'There,
that is how Australia builds its garden cities.'

Treasurer Dacey was inspired by George Cadbury and Lever Bros. whose
'model villages', he believed, had broken free of the taint of charity associated
with earlier housing schemes. In Dacey's opinion there was no 'submerged
ten' in Australia and he had no desire to bestow government charity on the
working-class. 'Anything of that kind', he declared, 'is very repugnant to me
and to the party to which I belong.' Excluding property owners, the state-
owned houses would be rented to any persons requiring them, 'irrespective of
their occupations.'

In the end, Dacey's dream of a model government landlord was rejected
by the conservative Opposition. The only redeeming feature of the housing
scheme, according to Opposition leader Wade, was the commitment to house
Sydney's citizens regardless of their class background. The centrepiece of the
Housing Bill - the proposal to build 800 state-owned cottages at a cost of
£500,000 - was criticised not as a threat to property interests but as extravagant,
risky, leasehold-dominated and incompatible with the liberal ideal of individual
home ownership. As V. Parkes, MLA for Canterbury, put it:
If the hon. member (Dacey) had brought in a scheme by which, in every suburban area, those workmen who desired to establish a home would be able to obtain money from the Government, and build on the rental-purchase system, there would have been some reason and sense in the proposal, and Parliament might readily have fallen in with it.  

Parkes, who had been chairman of the Rocks Resumption Board, argued that the model housing suburb would be as uneconomic as state housing investment in the Rocks area. That expensive resumption, despite returning less than 3 per cent, continued to be bedevilled by worker demands for rental reductions.

In the Legislative Council, Dacey's Housing Bill received a more sympathetic second reading following a motion to refer the legislation to the Public Works Committee. The Hon. F. Flowers, Government leader, explained that the Bill proposed the creation of a three member Board to take control of all government resumed properties, including the Rocks area. As constructing authority, the Minister could erect on any resumed lands, buildings for residential, business or other public purposes. The Board, as managing authority, could then lease the land and buildings for a seven year term provided that the rent was sufficient to pay 4 per cent interest on the capital value and the overhead costs of administration, rates and maintenance. The Board would also act as an agent for the Government Savings Bank by constructing houses and disposing of properties purchased from the Commissioners. Flowers recalled the public pressure for the resumption of the Rocks area and suggested that popular support for Dacey's housing scheme was even greater. Since the Rocks resumption, slum clearance had spread to encompass the inner suburbs of Surry Hills, Chippendale, Redfern and Waterloo. If private enterprise would not make provision to rehouse city-dwellers, the work would be undertaken by the Government.

The Rocks resumption experience was a major debating point in the Legislative Council. In view of the sorry record of state housing reform, the honourable and learned member, Sir Joseph Carruthers, doubted that 'Daceyville' would return a satisfactory rate of interest. He claimed:

The Rocks area never paid interest on the capital cost. It was rigidly administered... Over and over again, complaints were made against the evictions of people who would not pay, yet notwithstanding that strict administration, it never paid, even 3 per cent on the capital
outlay. I entreated the Municipal Council time after time to take it over. It was a white elephant on our hands.69

The lesson of the Rocks resumption venture, Carruthers added, had been amply demonstrated in the 'old country'. In London great tracts of working-class housing had been razed but the modern tenements erected in their place let at rents which the evicted slum-dwellers could not afford. During his premiership a number of model dwellings had been built in the Rocks and let for 22s.6d, putting them beyond the reach of ordinary wage labourers. Indeed, Carruthers pointed out that there was no provision in the Housing Bill which addressed the demands of dispossessed working-class groups.70

The Hon. T. Hughes, an ex-mayor of Sydney who had lost municipal control of the Rocks area, continued the rehousing debate. He was disillusioned by the 'half-baked' schemes of resumption that had been forced upon Sydney's citizens since 1900. In contrast to Britain, where the Local Government Board insisted on a rehousing programme before slum clearance began, the practice in Sydney was to demolish dwellings and worry about rehousing considerations later. It was not, however, the disruptive impact on the lives of the displaced inhabitants which perturbed Hughes, so much as the slum-widening effect engendered by the absence of rehousing. Slum resumption schemes, he argued, were self-defeating because the dispossessed inevitably created more problems for the future. As Hughes saw it:

The same principle is coming into force here as has been shown to exist in Great Britain - that people of slum areas, when they are dispossessed, and no provision is made for their accommodation, are simply driven to make other slums in regions which may not for the time being be slums in themselves, but which rapidly degenerate into slums, and reproduce the evils which we endeavoured to abolish in the first instance.71

The rehousing problem, he believed, was a question of choice between two schools of thought. Sydney could either adopt the tenement form of building, as had occurred in London, or establish a separate garden suburb outside the crowded metropolis. Model tenement buildings, however, had proved ineffective because they were not accessible to poor tenants, who as a result sank into lower slums, whereas the experimental suburb proposed by Dacey promised greater comforts and benefits for the citizenry. Therefore Hughes
concluded that the Housing Bill was 'worthy of sympathetic consideration' and commended it to the honourable members.⁷²

Housing reform legislators were beginning to appreciate the lesson that state intervention could be a mixed blessing for working-class groups. Despite their dramatic results, slum reform solutions, they suggested, contained the seeds of future housing tension. Whilst a model garden suburb sold the benefits of better and healthier homes to city-dwellers, the entry price might be too high for the poor. Yet rent regulation, an especially popular interventionist form among inner-city tenants, terrified landlords and threatened to drive them from the housing market. The only guiding philosophy to unite the legislators, remained their unquestioning faith in the transformative power of physical environment. Working people should be given every incentive to vacate their sordid surroundings. For many reformers, helping workers to acquire their own homes appeared the most rewarding and least troublesome of all interventionist forms in this period. Others argued, however, that local government had an important role to perform.

**Municipal Housing Reform**

While the 1912 Housing Bill faced amendments in the Legislative Council, Arthur Griffith, Public Works Minister, rose to move the second reading of the Sydney Corporation (Dwelling Houses) Bill in the Legislative Assembly.⁷³ The Bill, which J.D. Fitzgerald had drafted and sent to Parliament a decade before, sought to give the City Council the authority to resume land and borrow money to build dwellings. Rehousing powers had been available to municipal authorities in England since the late nineteenth century but were non-existent in Sydney, due to increasing centralisation of city functions and parliamentary indifference to metropolitan government. Introducing the municipal housing legislation, Griffith stated:

> Private enterprise is not constructing new houses speedily enough to provide the necessary accommodation, and it is desired that the City Council shall be in a position to emulate the municipal authorities of the old world and build residences for the class of persons most in need of them. It is not our business to discuss to what extent this will be a payable proposition.⁷⁴

Opposition leader Wade agreed. Given the 'special circumstances' which applied to the City of Sydney, he replied that he had no objections to granting
housing powers to the City Council. Public resumptions and dwelling demolition had joined to worsen the general housing shortage and it was only right to give the Town Hall the legislative tools to build workmen's dwellings.\textsuperscript{75}

The subject of enlarging local government powers in the housing field had been addressed by Griffith during the annual conference of the Local Government Association in 1911. The Public Works Minister told delegates that he hoped soon to see municipal councils vested with greater powers to effectively control building operations and sanitary conditions in their local areas. The quality of the urban citizenry, Griffith explained, was determined by the housing conditions under which people lived. When they were forced to live in slums it was impossible to preserve health and decency in the community. Indeed, it was a simple fact that if the Archbishop of Canterbury or Lord Chancellor dwelt in a London slum for three years, the former would become an atheist and the latter an anarchist. Municipal enterprise, moreover, was best placed to achieve housing reforms. If private individuals could buy up land, create subdivisions, rebuild and make big profits, local governing bodies should also be permitted to obtain land, plan suburbs and provide municipal dwellings for the citizenry who created the increased land values. Municipal ownership and management of property should not be compulsory, but in Griffith's words, a 'proper and legitimate extension of the self-governing powers of a locality.'\textsuperscript{76}

Apprehension as well as enthusiasm were expressed concerning the question of City Council housing enterprise. V. Parkes, MLA for Canterbury, purported to speak for all property-owners in Sydney whose interests had been injured by unrewarding City Council ventures in past years. It was the responsibility of Parliament to adopt the role of watchdog and constrain its wayward cousin from engaging in reckless financial schemes. Parkes' attitude summed up the fears of conservative landlords and like-minded legislators in Macquarie Street who distrusted the City aldermen. The member for Canterbury warned the House:

In this measure there appears to be very little with which we may quarrel. But the functions of the City Council have always been very much circumscribed by Parliament. We have always to safeguard the ratepayers against proposals made by the City Council itself... I think we ought to have had from the Minister some guarantee that the ratepayers of Sydney - whose property and rates will really be the assets upon which this money will be borrowed, as
well as the aldermen - are willing for the money to be used for this particular purpose.\textsuperscript{77}

Financial mismanagement had been the hallmark of the City Council. The scandal surrounding the Council's involvement with the Victoria Markets site during the 1890s, Parkes argued, had reflected poorly on Parliament and showed that the aldermen could not be trusted to make wise investment decisions. Personally, Parkes scoffed at the idea of a housing crisis in Sydney and was opposed to granting 'unlimited power' to the City authority.

The arguments of the member for Canterbury highlighted the tensions between city and central government in early twentieth century Sydney. Conservative resistance to the progressive ideal of a Greater Sydney Council was well entrenched. The colonial Legislature had shown little interest in urban planning, building regulation and rehousing in the late nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{78} The belief that urban investment decisions were too important to be left to an unruly group of aldermen had been reinforced by the plague crisis of 1900. Now, in spite of political reform, an enlarged franchise and increased revenue base, the Council continued to bear the odium of nineteenth century incompetence and corruption. In terms of political and economic power it remained the poor cousin of Parliament. Privately indeed, many parliamentarians would have agreed that the Town Hall bureaucracy was better employed at everyday refuse removal and street cleaning than the higher affairs of State.

R.D. Meagher, MLA for Phillip and a Sydney alderman, thought otherwise. Meagher's working-class electorate had a higher incidence of overcrowding than other inner-city Wards and included the Chippendale area where large tracts of housing had been demolished.\textsuperscript{79} He attempted to put the parliamentary debate in perspective by pointing to municipal housing reform in Britain:

The great housing schemes in all the great cities of England, Scotland and Ireland, under the Act of 1890, have been due to the fact that the municipal bodies there have been fully trusted to carry out city improvements, either from a sanitary point of view, or for the purpose of giving better accommodation to the congested population. This has a deeper significance than the question of trusting the aldermen.\textsuperscript{80}
People displaced by government resumptions could not easily find alternate lodgings. Meagher stated that in his own electorate the evicted had crowded into inadequate accommodation and that in numerous instances two or three families rented the same dwelling. Furthermore, it was impossible for city labourers to move to the suburbs when they worked around the Darling Harbour railyards. Rail travel from the City to the suburbs was congested and inconvenient. Meagher explained:

A working-man who has been carrying heavy sacks of grain all day, does not look forward with any pleasure to rushing to an overcrowded tram, and standing on the footboard while he is conveyed out into the fresh air of the suburbs, especially as he has still further in front of him the prospect of rising at 4.30 or 5.45 on a winter’s morning, dressing by candlelight, and taking his chance of getting a footing on an overcrowded tram in order to get to his work.81

The most practical solution, it seemed, was to build model dwellings close to the city core for working people dependent on nearby employment. Meagher stated that there was a proposal before the City Council to rehouse three hundred families in the resumed Chippendale area 'under ideal hygienic conditions.' He argued that despite the high land cost of between £13-25 per foot, the buildings would rent around 14s. a week and provide the Council with a 10 per cent return.82

The question of ideal and low-cost municipal housing invited further parliamentary debate. Fears were expressed that the poor would be locked out of Meagher's housing scheme. There was a general consensus that the City Council should rehouse the slum-dweller but vehement protests against workmen's tenements. 'If they build tenement buildings or flats disaster must result', one member remarked. Whilst Labor members were understandably anxious to squeeze municipal tenants into their inner-city electorates, critics argued that the Council had to be prevented from rearing another generation of slum-dwellers. T. Henley, MLA for Burwood, summed up a popular sentiment:

The working-man ought to let his wife and children live in the pure atmosphere of the suburbs. There is no need to import into Australia housing conditions such as exist in the old land, and which we condemn.83
Others echoed these comments. Prohibitive building costs in the City meant the imposition of tenement blocks which undermined the foundations of healthy family life. If the Council was given power to build them, it would 'reinstitute the slum conditions we have so eagerly sought to abolish', declared Alderman Cocks.

The Legislature's widespread misgivings about the decadence of city tenement life pointed to powerful cultural and environmental anxieties driving the housing reform debate. There were ample warnings sounded about the dangers of block dwellings in the unhealthy city, yet little demonstration or understanding of how best to satisfy the immediate housing demands of working-class groups. The City Council had aggravated the shortage, and it was Parliament's duty to see that the aldermen did not overstep their authority in correcting the problem. Whilst it was argued that investment in multi-storeyed accommodation, in contrast to private cottages, yielded the Council a higher rate of return, the weight of parliamentary opinion opposed the provision of high-rise City tenements.

The outer suburbs with their broad unbuilt acres appeared the least divisive of all housing reform solutions for Sydney's unwanted working-class. If encouraged to congregate in city tenements, it would surely reproduce the slum environment so despised by housing reformers. The question of extending general housing powers to suburban municipalities, a recommendation made by both the 1909 Royal Commission on City Improvement and 1912 Select Committee on House Rents, was not debated. Indeed, during the committee stage the Sydney Corporation (Dwelling Houses) Bill was amended in order to specifically confine the Council's housing powers within the City boundaries. Further, a second but unsuccessful amendment attempted to impose stringent allotment standards on municipal housing schemes for fear that the City Council would engage in unscrupulous building practices!

Political jealousy was also a potent factor behind the paltry municipal housing powers ceded by Parliament. In 1913, R. F. Irvine, Professor of Economics at Sydney University, argued that the acrimony existing between the rival political structures had stifled the pace and direction of state housing reform. Irvine's observations of European housing policies suggested that local and State government relations in Sydney lagged well behind those on the Continent. In Germany, for example, he found the 'closest relation between the legislatures of the various States and experienced municipal authorities.' At home, however, a coordinated urban reform strategy remained illusory, despite
the recommendations of the 1909 Royal Commission on city and suburban improvement. Professor Irvine reported to the Holman Government that:

So far as I can see the public have forgotten the recommendations made. Nobody appears to know whether the council or any other authorities are using these recommendations as a working-plan. The municipality of Sydney has done some notable improvement work... but whether it is going to do more, and what lines it will follow, are not clearly understood by the people. Obviously much cannot be done until a Greater Sydney is created and clothed with adequate powers.86

In the meantime Irvine, who probably envisaged the introduction of comprehensive housing and town planning legislation, attempted to account for the legislative inertia and policy confusion.

Under the surface deep fissures had opened up between the competing power structures. Housing policy was increasingly being brought under the wing of the State government. Irvine observed that wherever the central executive imposed its authority over popularly elected institutions, local government's 'enterprise and sense of responsibility' suffered.87 This centralising process was well illustrated by the passing of the 1912 Housing Act. The tendency of the legislation had been to by-pass municipal authority by creating a government-appointed Housing Board, or what Irvine termed a 'sub-department of State'. He argued:

In passing over the Local Authority, it agrees with the New Zealand Labourers' Dwellings Act, on which it appears to be modelled. Except that, at the request of the Commissioner of the Savings Bank, the Board may construct buildings for any person, the Act offers no encouragement to local authorities or to societies to enter upon town planning or housing schemes. Its tendency will be to make all this a function of the Central Government.88

In effect, this political arrangement locked local authorities and cooperative societies out of the housing reform process. If local government was not regarded as an important vehicle for housing reform, then local working-class pressure for municipal house-building would also be marginalised. This outcome was not a deliberate strategy of housing reform legislators but a reflection of the growing autonomy of state functions in pre-war Sydney.
Greater central control, however, could only be achieved at the expense of alternative reform ideologies and practices.

Municipal landlordism was therefore not fated to influence housing reform outcomes, despite the efforts of Griffith and Meagher. Professional reform interests were indeed dismayed by the desultory housing powers acquired by the City Council in 1912. John Garlick, the head of the Local Government office, complained that the municipal legislation 'only touched on the fringe of the problem'. The loss of inner-city housing stock, the consequent overcrowding and increasing city land values, were beyond the ability of the Council to respond. Municipal housing provision, moreover, would have little impact on the problem unless it was undertaken in the suburbs and the tenants could 'purchase their own homes'. Garlick indeed questioned the wisdom of municipal house building in the City. Escalating site values meant that it was 'increasingly difficult to erect buildings which can be used as dwellings and let at rentals which men working on a daily wage can afford to pay'.

Superficially, this explanation suggested that state housing interventions were motivated by an economic strategy. It could be argued, for example, that municipal house-building simply aimed to give poorer paid groups access to an acceptable home by keeping dwelling costs low. However, beneath this supply response lay deeper forces which were competing to use the housing reform movement as an instrument for the achievement of broader social ideals. For much of the period these underlying currents did not seriously disturb the surface of the reform movement. Nevertheless, it was the range of housing interventions which signalled the possibility of further social change and in turn allowed the reform tensions to emerge. The dominant reform strategy in pre-war Sydney was guided by a theory of environmental determinism which assumed that physical and social arrangements influenced housing outcomes more decisively than economic structures.

This ideology was generally accepted by all reform groups and shaped the policy debate over ideal housing types. Contemporaries understood housing primarily in terms of its ability to provide health, comfort and protection for the working-classes. Supply and distributional aspects of the housing question did not really motivate reform strategies. Even professional reformers who pointed to housing supply problems were reluctant to see local authorities in competition with private builders. The locational and cost advantages of block or row housing could not compete with the social ideal of separate and wholesome family accommodation. It was their unknown 'effect on the health of the
inmates' which led Garlick to condemn tenements and terraces as unsuitable house forms for working people. There was nothing to recommend them, he remarked, 'except that of dividend earning'.\textsuperscript{92} Similarly, when Professor Irvine argued that no citizen desired 'to see either the London or New York tenement system in Sydney',\textsuperscript{93} he gave voice to a profound environmental anxiety that working-class enclaves were alien and bred harmful 'miasmas' which enfeebled their inhabitants.

The 1913 Fair Rents Bill

By 1914 the State Labor Government had written much of its housing programme into the public statute books. Under the 1912 Housing Act a Housing Board had been created and the building of Daceville was underway. In 1913 the Government Savings Bank (Amendment) Act was finally passed which allowed the establishment of a home lending department in the Government Savings Bank. At the municipal level, limited house-building powers were conferred on the City Council by the 1912 Sydney Corporation (Dwelling Houses) Act. Less successful however, were attempts to institute a fair rents court in New South Wales. This section highlights the main themes of the chapter by revisiting the rent regulation debate and examining the major controversies caused by the introduction of the 1913 Fair Rents Bill. How would the machinery of a tribunal to regulate disputes between landlords and tenants work? How serious were Opposition claims that the Holman Government's legislation was subversive and 'socialistic' in nature?

The notion that a fair rents court in Sydney would admonish the slum landlord and deliver wage justice to the worker had remained an article of faith for many in the labour movement since the election of the McGowen Government. In September, 1912 a deputation representing the combined Labor Leagues of Sydney urged the Premier to put the question before the people. The deputation complained that greedy landlords had raised their rents on inflated housing values and were sweating the 'unearned increment' from the brow of working people. Mr Dempster, the president of the Mascot Labor League, told McGowen:

\begin{quote}
We want the Government to bring in a bill to deal with this problem. Let them send it to the Upper House. We know it will get 'passed out' there. Then the Government can go to the country on it. It is about the only question the Government will get back on.\textsuperscript{94}
\end{quote}
Dempster remarked that Daceyville was 'going ahead too slowly' and that the proposed rents were 'too high for workers'. He also wanted the Government to regulate the practice whereby tenants paid agents key money to gain the occupancy of a dwelling. Mr Brock, a representative from the Darling Harbour League, accused the Government of 'rack-renting' its tenants in the Rocks area. 'The vote at Darling Harbour depends on this housing problem and fair rents', he remarked.

The workers' demands pointed to the growing polarisation of the housing debate. Taken by surprise, the Premier was forced to 'back-pedal' on his record of reform. McGowen replied that the Government had every sympathy with the deputation. Housing reform, however, was a question of moral justice and not a vote catching exercise. The cost savings realised by the State Brickworks and Daceyville, for example, showed how greedy middlemen had been 'robbing the consumer and producer'. Furthermore, the Government's rental policy in the Rocks did not aim to profit from the dwelling stock but only to recoup interest on the cost of resumption. The Government had to 'make haste slowly' over the rent question, McGowen remarked, and any 'solution must be sound economically'.

The following day, the *Herald* devoted an editorial leader to the housing problem. Noting that the deputation had obtained little satisfaction from the Premier, the editorial was anxious to scotch further talk of rent control. The *Herald* commented:

Yesterday's deputation complained of two things - lack of housing accommodation and excessive rents. The one is, of course, bound up with the other. Increases in wages and the cost of building materials, higher rates and taxes, building restrictions, and other factors may have contributed to the very considerable additions which have been made to the rents of all classes of property in Sydney and the neighbourhood during the past decade. But the artificial increment which is the cause of most of the grumbling is due to the scarcity of dwellings... If there were sufficient houses of a satisfactory character for the people to live in not much would, we think, be heard about high rents. That really disposes of the agitation for fair rents courts as a solution for the present difficulty... Congestion and overcrowding cannot be removed by the creation of yet another addition to our complex judicial machinery. Houses are not built by fixing a rent.
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The editorial summarised succinctly the arguments of property-owners in Sydney. If the 'welfare of the metropolis' was to be secured, added the Herald, it would not be achieved by 'ephemeral measures' but statesmanship, foresight and town-planning. By procuring an ample supply of building labour and bringing the municipalities under the umbrella of a Greater Sydney Council, future housing demand would be met.97

Such conclusions contained little comfort for the growing number of victims of Sydney's housing famine. Professor Irvine's investigations in 1913 indicated that high rents could consume as much as one third of the basic wage. Large families were forced to sub-let and overcrowding resulted. In one severe case, Irvine found fifteen people crammed into a five-roomed dwelling. Overcrowding had become general in congested suburbs such as Surry Hills and Woolloomooloo. Some thirty families unable to find cheap houses in the city had 'squatted' in the hills near Long Bay. Their accommodation at 'Eucalyptus Town' consisted of huts built out of galvanized iron, kerosene tins and packing-cases. Irvine noted that squatters paid as much as £10 to occupy these makeshift dwellings, despite the threat of Council eviction.98

In the same month that Irvine's report was tabled in Parliament, a Bill to regulate house rents was introduced by Public Works Minister Griffith. The aim of the 'experimental legislation' was the creation of a tribunal to determine the 'fair rent' of dwellings which let up to 30s. a week. In working-class suburbs, Griffith argued, poor tenants were forced to pay high rents owing to their inability to strike a reasonable bargain with the landlord or build homes for themselves. While higher returns on new housing investment reflected increased building costs, the same situation did not apply to the owners of 'old tumble-down ramshackle buildings' who had reaped unfair rentals due to the housing shortage. Griffith stated:

The purpose of this court will principally be in such cases to provide a means of bringing the rental down to what is a fair return on the value of the property. We all know of the existence of old cottages, the rents of which have been raised from 10s. or 12s. to 15s. or £1, without any increased expenditure on the part of the landlord. Assuming that the original rent was a fair one, the increased rent is obviously an unfair return, and the purpose of the court will be to prevent the exaction of rent out of all proportion to the value of the building.99
Obviously it was an assumption that house agents and landlords rejected. The 1911-12 Select Committee on House Rents had heard evidence that Sydney's house market was stagnant in the early 1900s. Demand was weak, suburban dwelling vacancies were high and rental returns had slumped. It was reported that some owners had allowed tenants to occupy properties almost rent-free. Arguably, if landlords were at the mercy of tenants during bad times, they would attempt to recover past losses by getting higher rents in inflationary periods.100

Griffith argued that rent regulation was only one arm of government housing policy. He doubted that fair rents legislation alone would 'provide a solution of the present difficulty of unreasonable rents.' However, he believed that together with two other measures - the building of Daceyville and the provision of cheaper state loans - the housing crisis would be overcome. As Griffith put it:

One will provide a large number of houses erected by the Government for persons who are not in a position to erect or purchase homes of their own. The second will provide means for men who have a little money saved, sufficient to buy the ground, to put up structures, and to pay for them on the credit Foncier system... The third will be the machinery proposed by this measure to reduce rents which are extortionate to a reasonable figure.101

The simple machinery of the Court, which would comprise a magistrate, registrar and land valuers, was designed to deal expeditiously with the rival claims of the landlord and tenant. The gross return to the landlord was not to exceed 10 per cent of the capital value. The figure included an allowance of 2.5 per cent for maintenance and expenditure which gave the investor a maximum net return of 7.5 per cent. The capital value was equivalent to the replacement cost of the dwelling, with a reasonable deduction for deterioration. The Court could determine rents below these percentages but it was not allowed to go above them. Accordingly, Griffith stated that the intention of the Fair Rents Bill was not to fix rents but to furnish the Court with a formula to limit the maximum rental of a dwelling.102

How would the Court's machinery operate in practice? A tenant seeking a reduction of his rent would apply to the registrar and be sent a form requesting information concerning the value and description of the property. The information, including a statutory declaration, would then be forwarded to the
landlord. The landlord in turn would be given an opportunity to rebut the tenant's statement by supplying his case with statutory declarations. If the two statements differed over the value of the dwelling, the registrar would instruct an expert valuer to assess the property. The magistrate would therefore have three sworn statements and definite guidelines to determine the 'fair rent' of the dwelling. The Bill also sought to deter unscrupulous landlords from acting unfairly. A tenant could not be evicted during the period of arbitration. Furthermore, the payment of a bonus would be counted as part of the rent and house owners or agents who black listed tenants could be prosecuted. Tenants in arrears, however, would not be allowed to make an application to the Court.103

The Fair Rents Bill was hotly debated by the non-Labor forces in the New South Wales Parliament. Opposition leader Wade dismissed the Bill as a cheap trick designed to grab votes at the forthcoming elections. Abnormal house rents were best left to the discipline of the market place which would inevitably call forth a stronger supply response from the building industry. Wade argued that:

If there is a scarcity of houses it is quite natural that the demand being in excess of the supply should lead to increased rents. But if the supply exceeds the demand the competition among landlords naturally brings down rents... The same laws that operate in the ordinary transactions of daily life...also operate in regard to house rents.104

By imposing an outside arbiter between the landlord and tenant, the Government would interfere with the housing price mechanism. A Fair Rents Court would send the wrong price signal to landlords and encourage them to leave the market. The intervention was therefore contrary to the Government's policy of increasing the supply of low-cost worker housing in Sydney.

This critique was further developed by T. Waddell, MLA for Belubula. The legislation, he told Parliament, reminded him of the draconian price fixing measures of the French Revolution. As a member of the Select Committee on House Rents he had supported the recommendation regarding the easing of housing credit by the Government Savings Bank. While the Report appeared to enjoy bi-partisan support, Liberal members of the Committee had been 'absolutely opposed' to the concept of rent regulation. Waddell put forward three objections to the Bill. Firstly, it threatened to destroy the freehold title of land by allowing Governments to determine the income that a property owner
received. Secondly, it followed that the value of income-producing property would fall and therefore undermine the security of the house mortgage market. Finally, Waddell warned that if the legislation was passed it would 'prevent private citizens from erecting further buildings' and 'instead of improving the position we shall make it ten times worse.'

The argument that rent regulation would cripple Sydney's house-building industry was a serious one. If the future return from residential property was limited to 10 per cent gross, regardless of housebuilding conditions, the speculative builder might be driven from the market. This was a central dilemma for housing reform legislators. Indeed, was it possible to strike a 'fair rent' which would satisfy both landlord and tenant? Griffith himself had stated that house-building in Sydney was a risky business and that speculators had left the market because 'they find that the cost is so high they cannot get interest on the money they invest.' This evidence allowed D. Levy, MLA for Darlinghurst, to argue that Griffith's Bill was 'opposed to all economic principles and theories and practices...' and that it failed to take into account housing market conditions. Levy declared:

He (the Minister) knows a fair rents court cannot go into those matters - into the increased cost of labour and material, the increase of population; the demolition of houses and cottages by the Government; the growing and popular demand for cottages in preference to terrace houses... These are the real causes that now underlie the increase in the rentals of houses about Sydney, and with all these things the fair rents court has nothing to do.

This explanation was undoubtedly true. Nevertheless, Griffith maintained throughout the course of debate that his legislation aimed to outlaw the rack-renting landlord minority in Sydney. Whilst the machinery of the Court was designed to enforce a settlement upon the two parties it could only be set in motion after the tenant or landlord lodged an application for the alteration of the house rent.

The most eloquent speech on the second reading of the Fair Rents Bill was delivered by the former Government member and future federal arbitration court judge, George Beeby, MLA for Blayney. Early in 1912, Beeby, as Acting Premier, had declined to give his support to a deputation advocating a rents limitation bill. He now had the opportunity to articulate his opposition to the Government's legislation. Beeby began with a sober statement:
I think it is to be regretted that a bill of such importance should be discussed at this hour of the morning. I regard this measure as one of the most important which has been discussed in Parliament for many years past. This proposal is the first definite assertion of a new principle promulgated during recent years, namely, that the community can affect the cost of living by the arbitrary regulation of prices; and it marks a distinct and new economic development.<sup>108</sup>

The 'new principle', Beeby argued, sought to extend state regulatory power from the industrial arena into the commercial market place. Two criteria therefore had to be considered. Firstly, would the proposed legislation be economically sound, and secondly, would it achieve the desired aim of the legislators? On the first score Beeby believed that the economic harm to the house-building industry far outweighed 'any temporary benefit' from lower rents. Furthermore, as few landlords made 10 per cent, the maximum allowance provided by the Bill would not have 'any serious effect in the reduction of rents'. The reform strategy was therefore inconsistent with Beeby's utilitarian philosophy:

Its net result to the community - and we have to look at the matter from the point of view of the whole community - is to initiate a system of regulation which, no matter how we may argue against it, will have some effect upon enterprise, and the providing of more homes for the people. That is my objection to the principle involved... No one was more anxious when I was a member of the Government than I to see if a system of this kind could be devised. I believe it cannot.<sup>109</sup>

Beeby defended the right of the state to deal with economic monopolies and collusion but dismissed the proposition that a group of landlords had combined to force up house rents in Sydney. The high rents were the result of the housing shortage and the Government would be better advised to remedy the problem by 'encouraging an increase in the supply of houses.'<sup>110</sup>

The <i>Herald</i> shared Beeby's view. In an editorial titled 'Fair Rents, Few Houses', the columnist feared that rent regulation would foster further overcrowding of the housing stock. The spectre of slum creation had returned to haunt the housing policy debate. The editorial warned:

The Fair Rents Bill, which is at present, going through the Legislature, will create more of those slum areas in our midst, the existence of which Professor Irvine has of late been deplored and
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which we all regret. It will not bring about the erection of a single
dwelling that would not otherwise have been constructed, but it will,
on the other hand, prevent many ever seeing the light of day, which
would at least have given shelter to eager tenants, who will under its
operation have to crowd with others in flats or in slums.\textsuperscript{111}

The \textit{Herald} editorial need not have troubled its readership with visions of
disease-breeding barracks. On October 1, 1913 the Fair Rents Bill reached the
Legislative Council where it was swiftly despatched.\textsuperscript{112}

Conclusion

By 1914 the combination of house inflation, high rents and legislative
intervention had begun to fracture the fragile reform consensus. Divisions had
opened up in both the parliamentary forum and among the major protagonists in
the housing reform movement. The liberal programme of the leadership was
subject to increasing strain from more radical groups impatient with the pace of
political change. Government promotion of home ownership for the working-
classes had to contend with demands for greater state investment in worker
housing. Workmen's suburbs, municipal house-building, and rent control all
pointed to alternative housing reform strategies. Legislators stressed, however,
that state housing schemes should not undermine private investment nor lower
environmental standards.

The 1912 Housing Act established an administrative structure at the state
level yet imposed few housing obligations on local authorities. State housing
initiatives became the responsibility of a bureaucratic Housing Board. Placing
political control in the hands of a professional group of managers had the
potential to depoliticise the reform movement. Further interventionist pressures
could be checked by a more professional and preventative approach to housing
reform. Few policy-makers wished to see the state saddled with more
responsibility for housing the working-classes in this period. Disquiet had
already entered the debate over the environmental results of municipal slum
resumptions. The plight of the city poor seemed as bad as ever.

State intervention had clearly moved beyond earlier measures to regulate
Sydney's urban environment through building laws, city improvement works
and sanitary reform. Governments were now directly involved in housing
projects in the Darling Harbour/Rocks area and at Daceyville. These
interventions, however, did not necessarily presage greater public investment in
working-class housing. Rather, they highlighted the ability of reform groups to
mobilise state power in support of short-term remedies to adverse environmental conditions. In West Sydney government housing provision for waterside labour was the outcome of local political and environmental pressures rather than a calculated attempt by the state to rectify housing market behaviour. By locating Daceyville well beyond the built urban environment, the state showed little interest in relieving the shortage of low-cost housing for city workers. Forms of housing intervention in this period depended upon the interaction of institutional policies, reform ideologies and the fortunes of parliamentary governments. State provision of working-class housing was only one among a range of possible policy outcomes.

While the policy debates occasionally focused on housing demand and supply relationships, the reform movement continued to search for environmental remedies to the housing problem. Reformers argued that state intervention in the urban environment would be more effective if it addressed the relationship between individuals and their external surroundings. There was growing concern that earlier interventionist methods had not fostered the personal development of the city-dweller. Impoverished housing districts appeared impervious to improvement measures. Housing reform strategies now turned away from the congested city environment to the lower-density suburbs. As a result, the City was effectively abandoned as a proving ground for preventative housing reform.
Endnotes


4. SMH, 1 September 1911; also see DT; 14 December 1910, and 15 February 1911.


6. Ibid., pp. 607-09.


8. Ibid., pp. 613-15.


10. Ibid., pp. 630-33.

11. Ibid., p. 634.

12. Ibid., pp. 636-38.


14. Ibid., p. 11.

15. Ibid., p. 11.


17. Ibid., p. 16.

18. Ibid., p. 17.

19. Ibid., p. 33.

20. Ibid., p. 4.

21. Ibid., p. 35.

22. Ibid., p. 35.

23. Ibid., p. 25.

24. Ibid., pp. 29-30.

25. Ibid., p. 31.

26. Ibid., p 76.


42. *SMH*; 13 May 1911.


47. *SMH*, 11 January 1912.


49. *SMH*, 1 January 1912.

50. *SMH*, 4 January 1912.

51. *SMH*, 30 December 1911.

52. *SMH*, 17 February 1912.


58. Ibid., p. 3082.
59. Ibid., p. 3085.
60. Ibid., p. 3086.
61. Ibid., p. 3092.
62. Ibid., p. 3250.
63. Ibid., p. 3251.
64. Ibid., p. 3251.
65. Ibid., p. 3251.
66. Ibid., p. 3268.
67. Ibid., p. 3267.
68. NSWPD, 1911-12, Vol. 45, pp. 3951-53.
69. Ibid., p. 3956.
70. Ibid., pp. 3956-59.
71. Ibid., p. 3959.
72. Ibid., p. 3960.
73. Ibid., p. 3971.
74. Ibid., p. 3971.
75. Ibid., p. 3972.
76. SMH, 27 September 1911.
77. NSWPD, 1911-12, Vol. 45, p. 3974.
79. See Chapter 4.
80. NSWPD, 1911-12, Vol. 45, p. 3975.
81. Ibid., p. 3976.
82. Ibid., p. 3976.
83. Ibid., p. 3981.
84. Mayne has argued in Fever, Squalor and Vice that bourgeois society constructed an alarming image of urban slum culture in Victorian Sydney.
86. Ibid., p. 116.
87. Ibid., p. 117.
88. Ibid., p. 36.
90. Ibid., p. 297.
91. Ibid., pp. 297-8.
92. Ibid., p. 297.
94. SMH, 17 September 1912.
95. Ibid.
96. Ibid.
97. Ibid.
102. Ibid., pp. 657-58.
104. NSWPD, 1913, Vol. 50, p. 660.
105. Ibid., pp. 667-71.
109. Ibid., p. 1360.
110. Ibid., p. 1361.
111. SMH, 15 September 1913.
Introduction

Most commentators who studied the housing problem in pre-war Sydney premised their interventionist methods on the relationship between the individual and his physical environment. They did so because they believed that a home environment bereft of individual responsibility was destined to breed poverty, disease and dependency. While liberal reformers could not deny that other social groups were equally concerned with housing improvement, they were reluctant to address their competing demands. The arguments of worker dwelling associations, municipal housing supporters, and fair rent advocates, it was assumed, would quickly be dissipated once environmental reforms began to pay real dividends to society. As a result, middle-class improvers allowed their interventionist theory to drive them towards outcomes which were unacceptable to other reform groups. They indeed seemed unaware that such a course could further aggravate social tensions, and in turn, challenge the very theory of environmentalism.

The chapter begins with government attempts to reinvigorate the colonial tradition of self-reliance, vitality and social improvement among turn-of-the century city-dwellers. The 1901 Blockholders Act, which aimed to resettle landless families on Crown lands near Botany, represented an early environmental response to urban overcrowding. It also presaged other housing interventions in the area including the emergence of Daceyville on the eve of the First World War. The acclaimed benefits of the Blockholders Act never eventuated, but the foundations of environmental determinist theory had not been seriously challenged. A decade later, however, they were subject to much greater scrutiny.

Ever since the outbreak of bubonic plague the inner-city had served as a proving ground for the ideas of the housing reformers. They were confident that selective civic surgery was the method to restore a natural harmony between individuals and their housing environment. However, by 1912 this no longer seemed the case. Other reform groups had begun to protest the outcomes and in
the face of growing opposition, governments and housing reformers were forced to reassess the results of their interventionist strategies. Earlier optimism now gave way to increasing frustration and disappointment. Liberal reformers realised that slum resumptions and city tenement schemes had not solved Sydney's housing problem. They observed that the physical removal of impoverished living quarters mostly manufactured more poverty, dependency and life-threatening slums.

Discouraged by this dismal prospect, housing reformers searched for new methods of intervention and understanding. The increasingly professional leadership now turned its attention away from city housing policies and towards more 'scientific' analysis and foreign example. Environmental determinist theory, however, was not replaced by a more radical critique of Sydney's housing problem. Reformers talked in terms of town planning intervention for the suburbs rather than a redistributive state housing policy for the poor. Charitable housing measures, they argued, would not regenerate the destructive slum nor cultivate a better citizen.

Sydney's civic reformers had always seen in the 'old country' a reflection of their future housing fate. They believed, nevertheless, that it could be avoided in a new nation. If Victorian England had paid a high price for urban congestion, her progressive scientific institutions now promised a brighter future. On the eve of the First World War Sydney's housing reformers discovered the delights of the British Garden City example. It provided them with an opportunity to fortify their theory of housing reform. Quantitative evidence was added to the reform debate, eminent authorities were quoted approvingly, whilst prestigious 'scientific' argument proved beyond doubt that suburban housing environments produced better individuals.

The emergence of a professional grouping of housing and civic reformers in this pre-war period was a notable development. They articulated many of the English ideas, organised Town Planning Associations and generally stamped their authority on the reform process. The dominance of the middle-class professionals overshadowed the presence of other reform groups in the housing debate. Worker housing activists seemed ready to listen to the civic reformers and anxiously awaited developments at Daceyville. Whilst the reform leadership undoubtedly hoped that town planning ideology would strengthen its position, no reform group could confidently claim to have resolved Sydney's housing problem before the First World War.
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The Role of the State

Colonial governments were not important agents of housing improvement for the lower orders. Social policy initiatives developed in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, historians have argued, were grafted onto a private charity network which viewed the city poor with a mixture of suspicion and disbelief. There was no centralised charity authority in the colonies, and not until the end of the century did liberal reformers begin to question the effectiveness of private charity, and agitate for greater state involvement. Like private relief organisations, governments had no desire to foster dependency among the poor or breed a generation of paupers. The philosophy behind government welfare intervention was to allow the poor a modicum of material security so that they could reclaim their independence and self-respect.¹

The model dwelling movement in Victorian England had no equivalent phase in nineteenth century Australia. Philanthropic housing societies in the colonies were virtually unknown and cheap boarding house accommodation characterised the lowest end of the housing market. In 1882 a Model Lodging House Company opened its doors in Sydney to overnight boarders but soon faced financial difficulties. The ninepence tariff was both too much for the destitute and insufficient to pay the shareholders a profit. After 1886 patronage declined and the charge for two-bed rooms was raised to one shilling per night. Philanthropists were buoyed by the moral environment of the Kent Street Lodge although the problem of attracting low-paid labourers proved troublesome. Under such circumstances, men who were anxious to save a few pence preferred to spend sixpence a night at a common lodging house.²

Discussion of the problem of improved housing for Sydney’s labouring population was periodically enlivened by English social reform. Colonial authorities, for example, applauded the 1875 Artisans’ and Labourers’ Dwellings Improvement Act in Britain. The 1876 Sewage and Health Board Inquiry into Sydney’s sanitation recommended similar resumption and rehousing powers for the Board of Health. Professor John Smith, who chaired its special committee on overcrowding, wanted unhealthy tenements replaced by broad thoroughfares and the inhabitants rehoused in wholesome dwellings.³ However, this humane sentiment went unheeded. Private philanthropists, health authorities and journalists were more enthused by the idea of relocating the lower-classes beyond the City boundaries.⁴ After all, what had the royal commissions probing the slums of the ‘old country’ discovered? Surely the evidence showed that if working people remained in their slum environment
mother England would rear an impoverished and enfeebled city race? Housing reformers were appalled by the prospect. They believed that the spatial transformation of housing space and the cultivation of self-reliant habits were vital for the cultural cohesion of the new nation.

If colonial authorities appeared reluctant to alter the urban housing market they were much more accommodating in the country. By the end of the nineteenth century nearly all of the Australian colonies had introduced mortgage assistance for rural settlers affected by drought and indebtedness. The relief sought to uphold self-sufficiency and independence by keeping settler households on the land. State Advances Boards were set up to allocate the loan funds to eligible applicants. By the time of Federation, colonial governments had gained a reputation as significant mortgage lenders as well as traditional capital borrowers. As one liberal observed, a new cultural institution had emerged:

These Advances Acts, as they are usually termed, are meant to be permanent. They are not intended to be mere exertions of public generosity put forth to enable some deserving class to tide over some short, sharp crisis. They are to be a new sphere of State activity, a complete and lasting assumption by the State of the part of money-lender.5

In some colonies, borrowers were permitted to make property improvements and erect farm buildings. The New South Wales Advances to Settlers Act of 1902 enabled individuals to borrow up to £500 at 4 per cent interest for 31 years.6

Patrick Troy has suggested that the first 'urban' response to the housing problem in New South Wales was embodied in the 1901 Blockholders Act.7 Under the Act workmen could secure a 99 year lease on a block of Crown land in the vicinity of Sydney or other urban areas. While the loan terms were not as liberal as the Advances to Settlers Act, blockholders could borrow a maximum of £50 or up to half the cost of any permanent improvements. The lease conditions required the tenant to reside on the property. As a practical scheme of urban land reform, however, the Blockholders Act did nothing to relieve overcrowding in the metropolis. According to Troy the government scheme made only a 'token contribution' to the housing supply.8

The Blockholders Act was promoted by the Hon. W.P. Crick, Secretary for Lands in the See Ministry. As a measure aimed at relieving overcrowding
and homelessness, the legislation reflected a popular assumption that illiberal land laws had led to an unnatural concentration of urban dwellers in New South Wales. A former Lands Minister, Joseph Carruthers, was fond of the argument. He claimed that Sydney was overpopulated because colonial governments had not provided sufficient inducements for the workman to claim a 'share of his heritage' in the country. Denied the benefits of closer settlement, the worker remained in the City where he invested his savings in a bank or building society. What Carruthers and other legislators feared was, that if thrifty workmen were given inferior blocks and insufficient incentive, they would be unable to scratch a livelihood from the 'sandy wastes of Botany'. 'Crickville' would become another failure like Pitt Town. In short, Carruthers conceded that without greater government assistance there was little chance of the city worker becoming his own landlord.

In August 1901 Crick explained the advantages of his urban relief scheme. He informed Parliament that large tracts of Crown land existed between Randwick, La Perouse and Botany, 'in much the same state as when Captain Cook landed'. After survey and subdivision he expected to settle 3,000 families in the area. The size of the blocks varied from a half to ten acres, and would be in easy reach of Sydney once the Botany tramway was extended and roads were made. However, it was useless to provide a workman with land unless he was assisted 'to build a tenement'. By advancing a maximum loan of £50 the Government would ensure that a satisfactory standard of dwelling was erected. The therapeutic benefits of this self-reliant and hygienic settlement would soon become self-evident:

These people will live in the fresh air, and each family will have its own plot of land. Proper regard will be paid to sanitation. People will be able to have their little fowl yard and their garden, and, within twenty to twenty-five minutes of leaving their work in Sydney, instead of having to go to huddled-up terraces in Kent-street or Sussex-street, they will be able to reach home by tram, and so will practically be living in the country.

The Secretary for Lands was concerned, like contemporary urban liberals, to demonstrate the uplifting results of a private, sanitary and sober home environment for working people. The village of 'Crickville' would serve as an 'object lesson' to be repeated in other population centres. The Government, however, would not sell the freehold of the land.
Providing the propertyless city worker with a sizable block of Crown land was only the first step. Persuading him to improve it by building a family-type dwelling was more difficult. William Schey, Chief Labour Commissioner of New South Wales, believed he had a remedy. Anxious to assist the labouring poor and discourage state charity, Schey had furnished Crick with a detailed proposal to build and finance workmen's dwellings at Lillyville (near Botany). Schey deplored the failure of Pitt Town and the pauperisation of its settlers. He argued that 'a block of land, even on the easiest terms', bestowed no benefit on the individual unless he received 'assistance to build a house on it'. Experience showed that banks would not finance improvements if leasehold conditions were too restrictive. Liberal concessions were therefore necessary 'to make a large number of steady and industrious working men eager to obtain the blocks and fulfil the conditions imposed'. Schey argued that the Government should build a variety of workmen's dwellings on the blocks 'at a fair rental to be extinguished by periodical payment'. He believed that it would be a 'splendid prospect for the landless and property-less workman to look forward to, and quite within his means to compass'. Furthermore, Lillyville could become a 'model suburb' so that workers might witness the material security which came from thrift and self-reliance.12

Schey's housing assistance scheme pictured the state and the working-classes in a mutually beneficial partnership. The Government would serve as a finance lender and instrument of moral reform while the worker, through his saving habit, steadily acquired a healthier and independent home environment. The Government, Schey argued, would recoup its outlay in fifteen years and the tenant would become the owner of a 'comfortable cottage and half an acre of land'. The community good that would accrue from having working-class families reared on their own soil and in absolute possession of their own home was boundless:

Space will not permit of dilation on the many advantages to be derived from the translation of workmen's families from the overcrowded insanitary city to an open breezy estate, where pure air and sunshine may be enjoyed by all; but one feature must never be forgotten; the family is the unit of the State; and, we hope, may ever remain so. In large cities, family ties and influences continually tend to loosen and deteriorate. Away from the city they tend to tighten and improve. This, of itself, is a prime consideration for the citizens of our young nation.13
As administrative head of the Government Labour Bureau, Schey was appalled by the moral and social squalor of Federation Sydney. Poverty, epidemics and dependency appeared to stalk the back-streets. Middle-class moralists feared that the City's parks and lanes were rearing a useless generation of unemployed, drunkards and vagrants.14

What lessened the appeal of Schey's proposal was the problem of housing the working poor. Commissioner Schey confessed that the wages of casual labourers were 'of such a small and precarious nature that they could not afford to pay rent', and that his scheme was 'more applicable to men in fairly regular employment...'. In effect it was an admission that a self-supporting government housing scheme would have difficulty targeting Sydney's poor. This problem, however, did not deter Schey who argued that dependent individuals should be transferred to State industrial farms. His main point was that governments could behave like building societies and advance mortgage capital to individuals, 'even if they did not go for the profit which an ordinary building society seeks to make'.15

Removing workers from their slum quarters and rehousing them in an environment free from the institutional and predatory culture of the City made sense to liberal reformers in early twentieth century Sydney. Given the shortage of low-cost city building sites, and an abundance of unimproved suburban land, it seemed an economically sound proposition. As a housing reform strategy, however, it rested on the popular assumption that the working-classes would all be accommodated peacefully in the land of promise. When questioned more closely however, environmental reformers like Schey believed that state assistance was best allocated to industrious individuals who, removed from impoverished surroundings, would regain their self-reliance and begin to exercise moral and social responsibilities.

Schey's housing relief proposals were not embodied in the 1901 Blockholders Act. Nevertheless, they contained the germ of future housing reform policy in New South Wales. Government housing assistance was not social support for nothing in return. Administered in an uplifting environment, liberal reformers viewed the intervention as a form of social insurance or investment in the able-bodied individual. By repaying their mortgage obligations to the state through thrift and hard work the recipients stood to acquire property and a more secure future. As a responsible loan institution, the state in turn was relieved of any notion that it existed as a charitable agency for the poor. In an emerging nation eager to exorcise the spectre of poverty and
dependency, no housing reformer wanted to rear another generation of charity-mongers or slum-dwellers. Indeed, on the eve of the First World War, reformers, labour leaders, and legislators protested that city tenement schemes would reinstitute the very environment they wished to banish.

Retreat from City Tenements

In the early 1900s the State Government intervened in the Rocks area to combat the plague epidemic and gain control over the port infrastructure. The public health crisis confirmed the warnings of sanitarians and social reformers that undisturbed and congested pockets of working-class housing were hot-beds of epidemics and moral infamy. Urban improvers believed that such plague spots constituted an unsuitable housing environment in which to raise the new nation's citizenry. Not surprisingly, there was a public outcry when later in the decade governments began to house workmen in closely-built tenements on the resumed lands. Once again political dissension erupted over the reform strategy. Outwardly, working-class groups appeared to side with the housing reform leadership. Beneath the surface, however, they were as anxious as ever to promote their own reform remedies.

This section therefore discusses the reaction to government tenement building in the City and the implications for working-class housing reform before the First World War. By 1912 the State Labor Government had retreated from further tenement investment in the Rocks. The City Council's tenement project at Chippendale fared little better. In 1913 Lord Mayor Cocks claimed that the housing scheme was one of the 'biggest mistakes' ever made by the municipal authority. Housing and social reformers argued against housing workmen in compact quarters on expensive city sites. Instead, they looked to government assistance to colonise unbuilt suburban areas. The general consensus was that seemingly abundant and cheaper land outside the City offered working people lower-density living conditions on the one hand, and an opportunity to become their own landlord on the other. This housing improvement strategy, however, rested on the assumption that other reform groups had the same faith in environmental and cultural solutions as the liberal middle-class leadership. It was therefore premised on the belief that class allegiances and political differences could be contained without fracturing the housing reform movement.
i) Revisiting the Rocks Area

In February, 1911 the Daily Telegraph reported that the Rocks resumption had destroyed many hovels, 'but the authorities are creating new slums, which, according to the local people, are in some respects worse than the old residential quarters'. The journalist described the government tenement blocks as barrack-like and institutional in appearance. Anyone viewing them, he remarked, might believe that 'a penitentiary was being built instead of homes for the people'. Mr Healy, a local stevedore, was quoted:

I unhesitatingly say that this class of workmen's dwelling is inimical to the moral and physical welfare of the people. They drive the men to the public-house parlours. They destroy the family life. They strain the marriage-tie. The herding together of families in this fashion enhances the chances of infections and contagious diseases.18

Healy had participated in a number of deputations opposed to the government tenements. 'We have pleaded for separate homes for these people, but it is all in vain.' He feared that the barrack-system bred the barrack-child and led to 'race suicide'.19

Such concerns were not uncommon among the labour movement in early twentieth century Sydney. There was a widespread belief that multi-storeyed flats endangered family survival and the fitness of the race. What is remarkable, however, is that workmen should oppose a government rehousing venture designed to assist them. Healy argued that there was ample vacant land in the Rocks area for the Government to build separate cottages for waterside workers. It was a false economy to crowd them into indecent tenements simply because the land was too costly.20 The Telegraph was inclined to agree but speculated that if higher-density dwellings were unavoidable then 'surely our architects could plan the dwellings so that they would escape the designation of 'slums'. Its reporter suggested:

In short, could not tenements for working people be planned on lines similar to the best mansion flats, and thus destroy that tenement environment that must manufacture physical and moral degenerates in a wholesale manner?21

Common stairways, inadequate sound insulation and poor lighting blighted all the Government tenements in West Sydney.22
Working-class opposition to government tenement housing in this period was orchestrated by the Sydney Trades and Labor Council. Its social reform platform endorsed the principle of a separate home for every worker's family. The Labor Council's most forceful advocate of this socially desirable standard was Kate Dwyer. 'I do not think land should be more valuable than human life', she had told the 1909 Royal Commission on city improvement. Dwyer argued that the physical form of accommodation was important to the welfare of the working-classes, and like Healy, did not believe that dwelling standards should be sacrificed for the sake of profits. Governments had a duty to house working people in proper sanitary dwellings regardless of rehousing costs.\(^{23}\)

Wharf labourers were concerned that tenement dwellings would impoverish their living conditions and endanger the public health. Mr Thorbjornsen, a member of the Coal Lumpers' Union and resident of Millers Point, argued that the government tenements were inferior in design and accommodation compared with those condemned by the City of London Improvement Commission. Thorbjornsen, who had knowledge of the tenement system in London and New York, also claimed that any deterioration of the British physique was the result of the 'slum life of the great cities'. By building tenements on small areas of high-cost city land, Governments were unfortunately 'setting a bad example to private landlords' in Sydney.\(^{24}\)

The McGowen Government reacted swiftly to the anti-tenement protests. Overnight, the Public Works Minister proclaimed the end of further tenement development in the Rocks neighbourhood. 'It is my present intention', Griffith told the Telegraph, 'that the remaining buildings to be erected for the accommodation of waterside workers shall be cottages...' The Labor Government would build seventeen 'single-fronted cottages' containing five rooms and a kitchen, rentable for 21s. a week. The dwellings would be designed to accommodate three workmen - a married man and two lodgers.\(^{25}\)

Griffith did not, however, have the final word on the Rocks rehousing question. A 'monster deputation' from the Labor Council, waterside unions and the Darling Harbour Labor League resolved to put the tenement problem before the Premier. Campbell Carmichael, the Acting Treasurer, received the deputation on 6 March 1911. The Government was castigated for ignoring the anti-tenement recommendations of the 1909 Royal Commission on city improvement. Mr Duncan, President of the Trades and Labor Council, warned that tenements were inappropriate for casual labourers and young families. Archdeacon Darcy-Irvine suggested that the Government would do better to
build model workmen's dwellings on the vacant north shore. Darcy-Irvine's remedy was supported by the medical opinion of Dr Macky who argued that infant lives were more important to the young nation than high land values.\textsuperscript{26}

Carmichael took umbrage at some of the issues raised by the workers' deputation. The Labor Government was opposed to the tenement system for workers and would not construct any more block dwellings. However, demands for rent reductions and tenement demolition were irresponsible. Further state intervention to protect the living conditions of the Rocks neighbourhood meant higher taxation for suburban dwellers. The thirty acres of resumed land housed about 500 coal lumpers and wharf labourers - or 10 per cent of the combined union membership. Obviously few waterside workers lived close to their work, and housing them on quarter-acre blocks would give shelter to only 120 families. Carmichael stated that the Government was now losing £12,000 annually in the Rocks area.\textsuperscript{27}

In pinpointing the debt problem Carmichael highlighted a subject of growing concern to State Governments. A Treasury finance statement showed that the Rocks Resumption had been a poor commercial performer since its purchase in 1901. At the end of the decade the area had not recovered the outlay invested in the resumption. High resumption costs, improvement works, demolitions and non-revenue producing property had all burdened the capital cost. 'Uncollectable rents' during the first seven years of management amounted to £500 annually.\textsuperscript{28} Despite grandiose plans to redevelop the site, there was a growing perception among legislators that the Rocks Resumption had become, in ex-premier Carruthers' words, a 'white elephant'.\textsuperscript{29}

On 13 March 1911, Premier McGowen made a personal inspection of the troubled area. 'If his progress was not triumphal', the Telegraph declared, 'it was at least exciting and interesting'. Beginning in Harrington Street the cavalcade made its way to the infamous 'Dyer's buildings'. With the aid of matches McGowen climbed to the first floor before crying 'enough'. The 'first principles of sanitary and hygienic science', the reporter noted, 'demanded the demolition of this pile of four-storeyed tenements'. The Premier was pulled in all directions by government tenants urging him to inspect their flats. 'I'm getting a roasting', McGowen complained, as he went from house to house. In Gloucester Street, 'serious complaints were made concerning the treatment alleged to be meted out by the resumption area officers'. The 'disgraceful condition' of the government tenements prompted McGowen to order immediate repairs at the end of his inspection.\textsuperscript{30}
The recurring argument that the nation's welfare was inseparable from any resolution of the rehousing question in pre-war Sydney suggests that state housing policy was shaped more by social and cultural ideals than economic structures. After all, the optimum use of scarce capital, residential land, and high site values seemed to predict the development of higher-density tenement living for city-dwellers. However, neither middle-class housing reformers nor labour groups argued that governments or private landlords should seek to maximise their economic returns by crowding the working-classes into this form of housing. As a rehousing solution it was clearly incompatible with contemporary public health anxieties and an environmentalist ideology which stressed that desirable reform outcomes were governed by physical and social relationships. The 'soundest policy with regard to housing', advised the *Herald* in 1913, lay 'in building in the outer suburbs and improving the transit facilities thereto'.\(^31\) In essence, it was a question of persuading superfluous city workers to vacate the City and to adopt the more thrifty and wholesome habits of their suburban neighbours.

**ii) Strickland Flats**

While the State Government was retreating from tenement development in the Rocks, the City Council was being urged to build workmen's dwellings in Chippendale. The tenement scheme, the first municipal housing experiment in Australia, was the pet project of Alderman R. D. Meagher, MLA for Phillip. Meagher's political manoeuvring and determination overode major opposition to the rehousing proposal.\(^32\) In 1911 Town Clerk Nesbitt had reported that any dwelling scheme in the resumed area would be 'found financially unsound'.\(^33\) Nesbitt's advice reinforced Lord Mayor Taylor's belief that the land was 'much too valuable to be set apart for the purpose of workmen's dwellings or workmen's flats'.\(^34\) Nevertheless, the Sydney Corporation (Dwelling Houses) Act of 1912 was a powerful stimulant to Meagher's campaign, and work on the scheme began the next year. The City Council opted to build a tenement block rather than workmen's cottages in order to lower costs and recoup 'fair interest' from the venture.\(^35\)

The Chippendale flats were officially opened by State Governor Strickland on 9 April, 1914. The seventy odd self-contained dwellings, bounded by Meagher, Dale and Cleveland streets, were designed to accommodate 300 residents. The rents ranged from 12s 6d to 25s. a week and the *Herald*
presumed that preference would be 'given to tenants dispossessed by the resumptions that have taken place'. It described the Strickland flats:

They are of attractive appearance, each has an entrance of its own, and there is a balcony for every tenant. Everything has been designed for comfort and privacy, and the rooms are large and airy. Each has its own kitchen, bathroom and other conveniences. They are all provided with electric light and gas, the latter for cooking and heating.

The Lord Mayor told the gathering that municipal house building in England and Europe had spurred the City Council to undertake the enterprise. In the 'old country' thousands of families had been housed by local authorities under the 1890 Housing Act. Alderman Meagher stated that the scheme represented a victory over the forces of commercialism and warned that a new nation could never be reared in the slums.

Fear of the debilitating tenement environment, which had bedevilled state house building in the Rocks, also haunted the Strickland flats. The survival of future generations, critics argued, would be endangered by the presence of a predatory housing environment. Alderman Arthur Cocks, ex-Lord Mayor of Sydney and chairman of the Greater Sydney Commission, was most alarmed. In 1915 Cocks told the Victorian Housing Commission, visiting Sydney, that the 'big brick edifice' should not have been built on land valued at £25 per foot. 'When you build under such conditions, there is no opportunity for the children to attain their legitimate growth, as would be the case if you arranged for cheap railway and tramway services, and took the people out 10 or 15 miles from the city'. The biggest obstacle to suburban resettlement, Cocks stated, was the slum-dweller 'who clings to his old environment'.

If ex-Lord Mayor Cocks was critical of the Strickland flats, so too was John Neale Breden, the Controller of City Assets. Breden was unsure about the profitability of the tenement scheme. 'This is the first municipal experiment in regard to "housing"', he informed the Victorian Housing Commission, 'and it no doubt still depends upon the success of this scheme as to whether the council will extend its operations in this direction...' Breden also stated that in future ventures, 'areas of less land value should be chosen, in order to give the scheme a chance of being remunerative to the council'. Appearing before another parliamentary committee in 1915, Breden conceded that the Strickland flats were
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a municipal experiment. More importantly, however, the City Council had now decided that 'the scheme did not justify their repeating the experiment'.

Although the Council's tenement experiment was barely self-supporting, Breden rejected the proposition that it had remedied the City's slum problem. 'I do not think we have dealt with the slum tenant at all... there is practically only one labourer in the place', he remarked. The biggest group housed in the flats were respectable, regularly employed and reliable rent-payers. Anxious to provide the best social environment for them, the Council allocated room space according to family size and gender. Breden believed that many of the residents were sufficiently independent to move to the suburbs 'where they could live in separate tenements and pay their fares into town'. As to the fate of the slumdwellers, the City Council had 'made no provision whatever for the housing of the dispossessed tenants'.

Like other local government officers in early twentieth century Sydney, Breden assumed that a separate dwelling environment was superior to multi-storeyed tenements. The latter type, he argued, had been built as an expedient for workmen who were dependent on local employment. Public authorities regarded their housing schemes as profitable enterprises. However, it was considered that high land values would prohibit separate workmen's dwellings from being built in the metropolis. Why should the worker be housed in the 'heart of the city', Breden asked? 'Is it not more desirable to get him out of the city and to get him to his work by means of quick transit?' Breden indeed doubted that governments could ever make 'a business proposition of the housing question'.

Breden's reservations were not new. They had earlier been acknowledged by sanitary reformers in Victorian England. Despite their avowed aim, model dwellings discriminated against the poor in favour of the able-bodied artisan. High standards of accommodation and scientific sanitary technology, embodied in Prince Albert's Model Cottages at the Great Exhibition of 1851, delighted slum reformers but were beyond the reach of the unskilled and labouring poor. When the Garden City movement emerged in the early twentieth century it claimed to have a practical formula for providing dwellings at rents which all classes could afford to pay.

If English housing reformers were more concerned with rehousing a specific social class at a minimum rent, liberal progressives in pre-war Sydney had a different reform strategy. They sought to reinvigorate the individual home environment by advocating higher physical and moral standards among
city-dwellers. What prevented slum inhabitants from becoming responsible and self-reliant citizens was their debased existence and dependence on charity. 'The more they are separated and put in between higher-class people', ex-Lord Mayor Cocks argued, 'the better chance they have of elevating their habits and mode of life'. Few housing reformers of the period would have dissented from this vision of personal freedom and social integration. Most believed that spacious suburban cottages rather than city terraces or tenements furnished the ideal environment for its realisation. How environmental determinism caused social improvement, however, did not seem to trouble middle-class housing reformers. They simply assumed that satisfactory reform outcomes would result from their interventionist strategies.

iii) Suburban Colonisation

The notion of suburban colonisation was viewed as both desirable and problematic for city workers in late nineteenth century Sydney. Sanitary reformers and colonial legislators saw the seemingly endless supply of unbuilt land as an escape valve from the congested and morally polluted slum. At the same time they were confronted with the problem of providing an incentive to encourage more working people to vacate their unhealthy homesites for low-density dwellings. The most popular measure urged was improved means of communication between the City and suburbs. Urban historians have argued, however, that the expansion of Sydney's transport network in the late nineteenth century benefited commerce and the middle-class more than working commuters. 'For the majority of the population the only alternative was residence within walking distance of their place of employment, even though commercial, office and retail building were progressively reducing the available residential space'. In early twentieth century Sydney the spatial separation of residence and workplace continued to widen as a result of inner-city resumptions and rising land values. These developments now led housing reformers to urge governments to do more to remove workers from the built-up City.

Campbell Carmichael, acting Treasurer in the McGowen Government, believed that the state had an important role to perform. In March 1911, following the anti-tenant protests in the Rocks, Carmichael announced a practical housing programme for the City's unwanted working-class. His policy rested on the assumption that over time the 'naturally circumscribed area' essential to business in Sydney would result in 'excessive crowding of the city area'. Regrettably, the exigencies of city life had prevented a working-class
exodus to the wider environment of fresh air and open acres. Carmichael's reform strategy was therefore to give workers access to the healthier suburbs 'at the same price that they pay for the inconvenient and demoralising condition of the slums'. Building societies had been notable institutions of 'thrift in the community', but greater government support was required for 'all classes of the people'.

However, several factors frustrated the shift to suburbia. Firstly there was the problem of commuter transport costs. Whilst a city workman could rent a five-roomed house for 14s. a week in 1911, the cost was 'practically the same to get a house in one of the less distant suburbs, and in addition, he has the fares for himself and family morning and night'. Hence the workman who desired the 'benefit of fresh air and better surroundings' for his children, had to 'pay heavily for that privilege'. Carmichael argued that by extending penny workmen's trams to the distant suburbs, the Government could end the disparity. Secondly, the city-dweller had difficulty buying a separate suburban dwelling. The sale of government-built dwellings to wage earners could help to correct the problem. 'There seems no reason why the Government should not erect dwellings for workmen and others in the suburbs and sell to them on extended credit at cost price', Carmichael declared. The Government proposed to subdivide suburban property close to railway transport and house workmen on 66 feet wide allotments. The modest city-dweller would therefore be nurtured in a more wholesome housing environment:

Starting in a small way, the township could be gradually extended, the streets formed and made as the area became more populous and popular, and by this means I have great hopes that better conditions and better surroundings can be given to the working man with moderate means and his family.

Carmichael expected that a workman would be able to purchase a five or six-roomed cottage 'extending over a period of years at a rental of something like 14s. a week'. Finally, more liberal loan assistance was required for the suburban-dweller who desired to build or improve his own home. The Government Savings Bank Commissioners, Carmichael suggested, could offer advances to workers in the same way that they assisted rural settlers. By broadening the availability of state home loans, governments would become permanent lending institutions for the urban population. Carmichael argued:
There is no reason why the moneys at the disposal of the commissioner should not be utilised to enable a working man in the city, under reasonable restrictions, to build a home for himself, or improve, any more than as at the present in assisting the man in the country to create a home for himself and his children there.\textsuperscript{49}

By focusing on these preconditions for vacating the City - cheaper transport services, government house-building and home loan mortgage assistance - the programme would relieve congestion and regenerate working-class living conditions. Carmichael's reforms aimed to 'wipe out' Sydney's slums or at least, 'prevent their increase and the continued existence of the deplorable conditions that have grown up in some of the older cities of the world'.

The ideas and reform strategies behind suburban settlement schemes before the First World War were at times inconsistent. Contemporary opinion, for example, differed over whether the individual or the environment was to blame for slumdom. Moralists like William Schey and Alderman Cocks endorsed the former view while liberal reformers such as Campbell Carmichael observed that economic factors locked working people into their slum neighbourhoods. Regardless of competing political and moral values, however, state administrators, labour leaders and conservatives agreed that slumdom was a national disgrace and a canker on the city-bred race. Furthermore, they believed that it could be remedied by environmental intervention which eschewed charity. Governments, like building societies, intended to assist individuals who helped themselves. By extending the building society ethic of self-help to the urban slum-dwellers, the state would promote individual thrift and home ownership obligations for the young nation.

Carmichael's programme of suburban colonisation in pre-war Sydney reflected a general consensus that growing commercial demand for city property would displace worker housing as a competing land use. The narrow and clogged City was an unhealthy laboratory for conducting a housing reform strategy. Coupled with this notion was the assertion that governments should desist from their practice of exploiting expensive city land by squeezing workers into tenements. Surely it was more prudent for them to vacate the City as a homesite than build block dwellings which, housing reformers and residents argued, enfeebled the health and fitness of young families. The terraces and tenements at Darling Harbour/Millers Point, the Rocks and Chippendale were all associated with institutional conformity, the absence of privacy, and the destruction of infant life.
So far the chapter has interpreted housing reform policy in terms of the assumptions and relationships which governed the individual, the state and city environment in early twentieth century Sydney. Housing reformers believed that state action could banish the back-slum, elevate city-dwellers and release them from a debilitating cycle of poverty and dependency. Nevertheless, their reforming faith in simple environmental remedies for bad neighbourhoods had reached an impasse by the First World War. The continued presence of poverty, congestion, and sickness among city-dwellers gave pause for reflection. Anxious to harness the human potential of the young nation, reformers advocated more preventative intervention in the housing environment. They now responded not by embracing eugenic theory, although the imagery was sometimes borrowed, but by turning to the more prestigious 'science' of city organisation. Preventative town planning would become the progressive vehicle upon which the housing reform leadership advertised professional solutions to urban inefficiency and degeneracy in pre-war Sydney.

Housing Reform Re-examined

In 1913 Dr James William Barrett, a Melbourne physician, scientist and social reformer, stated that his interest in the slum problem was motivated by the desire to 'prevent those conditions developing in a young country which have developed in old countries'. Housing reform in the new nation would result from 'being strictly accurate and strictly temperate in advocacy than by making any exaggerated comparisons'. Barrett's authoritative statement to the Victorian Select Committee on the Housing of the People in the Metropolis, advocated a more scientific and less subjective approach to the housing question. 'It is no good knocking slum dwellings down', he observed, 'unless you offer some alternative to the people there'. In short, Barrett was calling for an evaluation of the success of the slum reform movement in Australia.

James Barrett's appeal for a stock-take of housing reform was indeed timely. Housing reformers in Sydney were already having second thoughts. On the eve of the First World War, middle-class enthusiasm for slum destruction and improvement schemes was being tempered by growing unease over the physical and moral fitness of the outcasts. The backlog of charitable work left by the earlier resumptions showed that they were not the panacea promised by mayoral tours and city improvers. This section will highlight the political and institutional impediments which frustrated simple solutions to health and housing improvement in Sydney before 1914. It will also focus on the increasingly
professional preoccupation with preventative reform, given the contradictory results of prior state intervention in the housing field. John Daniel Fitzgerald, for example, now linked the better housing of the working-classes to his campaign for a Greater Sydney and for national efficiency. Senior health authorities identified serious shortcomings in public health administration and the struggle against suburban nuisances and disease. Sydney's local government system was viewed as a barrier to preventative reform. Without a strong central agency to enforce municipal reforms, permanent environmental improvement would not be possible.

Municipal resumptions, whatever their intentions, had some detrimental results: they reduced the private-rental stock in the City, disrupted community support networks and forced poor families to overcrowd. According to the Herald, however, the reforming efforts of City Mayoralty were praiseworthy but ineffective because they had stopped short of raising slum-dwellers from a 'sordid and debasing environment'. The result had been to devalue self-reliance and increase social dependency. Moral rehabilitation in the blighted areas had become the responsibility of religious groups and private charities. Working people had not been released from their sordid existence but trapped by a 'new phase of slum life'.

Churchmen were appalled by the overcrowding effect of the resumptions. In 1911, the Rev. S.D. Yarrington, a missioner from the Church Society, likened Sydney to London's East End. 'Few men who motor through the city have any conception of the congestion of population in places like Waterloo and Alexandria and the poorer parts of Newtown'. Yarrington attacked parasitical landlords who sought to 'crowd two houses upon a piece of land hardly enough for one house'. He regularly visited dwellings where families ate and slept in the same room. 'The work we are called upon to do, the drain upon our mission funds, is not decreasing but increasing', he remarked.

Mr Moore of the Sydney City Mission had a similar story to tell. The Wexford Street resumption had dislocated the neighbourhood and intensified relief work in the mission district. Moore could not understand why the inhabitants clung to their city habitats:

The cottage, with its bit of garden, seems to have no attractions at all as compared with the life in and about the city streets; and so the Wexford street residents, instead of moving out of the city, have established themselves as near to their old homes as they could.
Salvation Army officers in Goulburn Street observed that the resumptions had not relieved distress among the city poor. 'Our slum workers have just as much to do now as previously, because altering the location does not lessen the necessity for this kind of work'. The institution had recently opened a 'workmen's metropole' in Sussex Street to accommodate 470 inmates. In Harbour Street the 60 beds of its women's shelter were full every night.55

i) Preventative Reforms

If municipal slum resumptions could not cure inner-city dwellers of their habitual tendency to overcrowd, other methods of intervention had to be considered. Some housing reformers argued that permanent environmental improvement demanded new municipal machinery and more forceful intervention in urban living conditions. In this pre-war period of growing anxiety about national fitness and efficiency, liberal progressives such as J. D. Fitzgerald began to promote the fundamental unity of the individual and society. Fitzgerald's critique of earlier slum reform strategies turned on two arguments. First, civic intervention had mistakenly placed the 'sacredness of property' before the value of individual life. Second, it had been motivated by short-sighted remedial rather than preventative goals. Progressive civic culture, which distinguished other world cities, lagged behind in Sydney. As Fitzgerald saw it:

The new ideal of the government of a city places human life first and property next. All modern city government - as all true statemanship everywhere - is directed towards making life better worth living for the individual, in endeavouring to make each individual life more valuable, more productive to the whole State, and thus levelling up the collective standard of life of the whole nation and improving the race.56

In Sydney, however, local government policy had been to 'keep down rates'. Inadequate property rating prevented such things as road repairs, workmen's dwelling schemes, and better administration of the public health.57

The belief that bad environment and urban degeneracy were strongly correlated led Fitzgerald to urge more thoroughgoing state intervention in city life. 'To do this effectively', he declared, 'we must destroy and rebuild a great portion of Sydney'. He described the City Council's resumption schemes as 'well-meant but futile efforts' at city improvement. The vital unity between
urban society and human freedom had been severed. 'The area is improved, but the conditions of the people who dwell therein are not improved'. Enthusiastic slum clearance was wasteful and no substitute for a preventative housing reform strategy:

Level up your housing and you will have happier homes, healthier men, women, and children, less poverty, less disease, less crime, less degeneracy, an abolition of "town diseases", greater efficiency in the workers, and a greater all-round standard of comfort. Above all, you will give the mothers of the race...a chance, under healthy conditions, to bring forth healthy children capable of surviving the crucial first year and of becoming strong efficient creators and contributors to the corporate wealth of the community.\textsuperscript{58}

Like most environmental reformers, Fitzgerald did not explain how better housing contributed to the preservation of infant life and the welfare of the nation. 'A slum house makes a slum person, a nice house makes a nice person', he told the Victorian Housing Commission in 1915.\textsuperscript{59}

Underpinning Fitzgerald's housing reform strategy was the implicit assumption that urban society was an interdependent organism. The individual's welfare in the urban system was more important than membership of an organised group or social class. Accordingly, housing reform strategies which drew individuals together were more powerful and progressive than those which divided them. The modern city could indeed be likened to a great ocean liner whose passengers and crew had to cooperate for the sake of the ship's safety. 'If the squalor of the steerage causes epidemic disease, the denizens of the saloon cannot remain wholly unconcerned, for they may be the next victims'.\textsuperscript{60}

In this liberal conception of the urban environment, the state existed as a neutral arbiter waiting to be commanded by the captain, his professional officers, engineers and technicians. In Sydney, this ruling elite would form the nucleus of Fitzgerald's Greater Metropolitan Council and town planning efficiency would become the new orthodoxy.

Using state power to 'level-up' the working-class housing environment in early twentieth century Sydney was a rational and optimistic response to the housing problem. As a professional strategy it appealed to liberal progressives as ethically superior to the prospect of competing social classes in the modern city. By definition it excluded property relationships, eschewed charity and focused attention on the physical and social quality of the housing environment. According to this interventionist philosophy, if working-class housing
arrangements could be elevated to the morally and culturally approved standards of middle-class reformers, the health and wealth of the nation-state would be enhanced. It was a theory which assumed the existence of a community of interests between the individual and urban society.

**ii) Local Government Barriers**

Local government structures, however, continued to cause problems. Tighter central control over municipal health authorities, reformers urged, was essential for the sake of more efficient metropolitan administration. In 1913, Dr W.G. Armstrong, who now held the position of Metropolitan Medical Officer of Health, cautioned that the Public Health Act was unfavourable to further sanitary reforms. Armstrong argued that the powers of the central Board of Health were seriously deficient. 'Most of the public health work of local authorities is carried on under the Local Government Act', he observed, 'and under that Act the Board of Health has very little powers'. In 1913 sanitary inspectors employed by local councils were not answerable to the central health authority.  

Sydney's public health administration before the First World War often suffered from legal paralysis. When the Health Board proceeded against recalcitrant councils it frequently became bogged down in a 'very expensive and difficult process'. The Board had no punitive powers to prosecute an offender nor could it prevent the recurrence of a nuisance. Armstrong reported, for example, that he had found the nightsoil service of a suburban municipality in a 'most disgusting condition' and yet the local authority had 'absolutely refused' to prosecute the contractor. The Health Board would remain hampered, he argued, until it was given the powers of a local authority 'under every Act of Parliament'.

Local authorities were also reluctant to enforce the closure and removal of unhealthy dwellings. The Public Health Act empowered every municipality to conduct regular house-to-house inspections for the purpose of identifying dwellings unfit for human habitation. How routine and rigorous the practice became, of course, depended on the priorities of the local council and the size and capability of its sanitary inspectorate. 'In some cases', Town Clerk Nesbitt noted in 1913, 'we find that sanitary inspectors do not even possess the requisite certificate of the Sanitary Institute'. Furthermore, to obtain a closure order the local authority had to prove in Court that the dwelling was 'injurious to
health'. This was difficult, Armstrong remarked, 'even in cases where the dwelling was manifestly unfit for human habitation'.64

The most pernicious factor undermining suburban sanitary reform, however, was the 'operation of local influence'.65 Historians of late nineteenth century Sydney have argued that local government was open to 'widespread negligence and considerable corruption' in matters of building control and subdivision.66 The public health domain was no different. In 1912 Dr Armstrong told the Sanitary Inspectors' Association of New South Wales that suburban mayors willingly prevented prosecutions by withdrawing summons 'on very slight pressure from the offending party'.67 Defending his centrally appointed and funded position, the Medical Officer of Health explained:

The theory is that public health duties will never be always and regularly efficiently carried out by local authorities unless they have some spur behind them, because local influences are so overwhelming on governing local authorities. Some members of every council are very keen on carrying out public health; some councils are entirely very keen for a time, and then, after a few years as the composition of the council changes, you may get a body of men...who allow themselves to slacken off, and then the spur is required.68

It was his experience that local influence was greatest in Sydney's smallest municipalities. Unless there was a powerful and independent health authority, parochial councils would never carry out nuisance suppression and town planning duties.

In sum Dr Armstrong saw that sanitation and housing reform went hand-in-hand. It was a lesson earlier taught by the plague panic in Sydney. Extending Fitzgerald's metaphor of the interdependent ocean liner, he argued that the public health of a small locality affected the welfare of adjoining districts and could not be 'shut off by watertight compartments'.69 All of Sydney had an interest in preventative health measures - a responsibility too great to be entrusted to local aldermanic groups. Indeed, in 1912 Dr Armstrong questioned the efficacy of leaving public health administration in the lap of local authorities.70

Given its limited resources and expertise, local government in pre-war Sydney could contribute little to efficient city organisation and housing reform. Professional reform groups now distrusted the idealism behind earlier municipal resumption schemes, the resultant waste, and disruptive impact on individual
life. Municipal house building had not delivered the benefits it promised; rents remained high and slum-dwellers showed little sign of improvement. By stressing the relationship between preventative environmental measures and national efficiency, the housing reform leadership had become more 'scientific' in its claims and less subjective in its analysis. Attention increasingly turned away from a preoccupation with the built City and towards prestigious town planning theory. News from England appeared encouraging and professional reformers in Sydney soon had an ally in Charles Reade, a propagandist with the Garden Cities Association.

Town Planning Intervention

The liberal progressives who had engineered the housing reform debate since the early 1900s now wanted to reorganise the working-class housing environment in Sydney. They hoped to avoid repeating past mistakes by devising practical and preventative methods of housing improvement. Their reform measures, however, continued to flow from environmental and national anxieties. State provision of working-class housing, an emerging policy solution to contemporary supply problems in English cities, won no sympathy from the liberal reform leadership in Sydney. In October 1913 their professional interests and outlook were given formal expression with the foundation of the first Town Planning Association of Australia. The objectives of the Association were unambiguous:

To advocate proper planning of Australian cities and towns, modern building legislation, efficient municipal government, up-to-date water, sewerage, and lighting service, to watch Federal City developments and other matters in keeping with the objects of the association...

John Sulman, an expatriate English architect who moved the motion, declared that the dawn of town planning intervention had arrived in Australia. Town planning promised to create new cities and reconstruct the haphazard arrangements of existing towns which had bred physical and moral degeneracy. Town planning, by preventing new slums, represented an economic saving to the young nation. Sulman's motion was seconded by J. D. Fitzgerald and carried unanimously.

The Town Planning Association was convened in anticipation of Charles Reade's lecture tour of Australia. A month after the inaugural meeting at
Sydney Town Hall, the delegates attended a Town Planning Exhibition at the Royal Art Society to view the latest creations of patriotic and practically-minded men. Plans from the 1909 Royal Commission on Sydney Improvement and pictures of Harbour Trust works were displayed. The first-prize design of Walter Burley Griffin's new Federal capital attracted considerable attention. The spatial separation of residential, commercial and recreational zones in his Canberra panorama appeared both scientific and artistic. Other exhibits included pictures of the great European capitals, Central Railway Station and the model suburbs of Haberfield and Rosebery. Delegates later adopted the constitution of the Town Planning Association and elected John Sulman as President and Fitzgerald and Irving as Vice-Presidents. George Augustine Taylor, who edited the journal *Building* with Florence Taylor, was made Honorary Secretary.74

This section of the chapter attempts to put the town planning movement in its historical and cultural context. It turns abroad to discuss town planning theory and the 'scientific' evidence emerging from the English Garden City movement of the early twentieth century. The Town Planning Association in Sydney was a reflection of this new spirit of scientific intervention in the urban environment. Its practitioners sought to professionalise the housing reform debate through liberal education, persuasion and the study of comparative sociology. As a result, less interest was expressed in the moral condition and greater emphasis given to the physical and procreative potential of the urban citizen. Housing reformers in early twentieth century Sydney indeed believed that the key to permanent housing reform lay in the practice of town planning principles beyond the 'unregenerate city'.75

i) **English Model Suburbs**

There was no shortage of literature and energy to sustain the new town planning faith. In 1902 the Englishman Ebenezer Howard published his celebrated *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*. The theme of his influential work was that nineteenth century urbanisation had bled the country of population and driven the inhabitants into poorly serviced and badly arranged towns. The apparent failure of housing to keep pace with population growth and the social evils which arose from over-crowding led Howard to promote the development of model suburbs or planned 'Garden Cities' capable of combining 'all the advantages of the most energetic and active town life, with all the beauty and
delight of the country'. Howard, however, did not support a romantic back-to-the-land movement. Rather, he envisaged taking the towns to the open fields.\textsuperscript{76}

Howard advocated a Garden City solution to the problem of urban congestion. He outlined a scheme providing for the private purchase of a tract of agricultural land which would rise in value following its conversion into building property. The company's dividend would be limited to 5 per cent and any surplus devoted to rate reductions, the provision of public buildings and recreational space for the inhabitants.\textsuperscript{77} By virtue of sole proprietorship, the Garden City could be planned in its geographic entirety, its environment controlled and the complexities of municipal intervention avoided. Howard supposed that cities of about 30,000 inhabitants surrounded by a productive hinterland and serviced by a social and cultural infrastructure, were most likely to approximate his ideal.\textsuperscript{78} Like so many utopian reactions to late nineteenth century urbanisation, Howard's vision of self-development in a socially engineered and mutually interdependent order was an appealing but also an authoritarian one.

Howard's ideas spawned the Garden City Association and gained currency at the 1901 Garden City Conference held at Bournville. The laying-out of new model towns, delegates were informed, demanded the separation of dwellings, the isolation of residential and industrial areas, ample recreational space and rapid commuter transport. In 1903 the First Garden City was proclaimed on a 3,800 acre site at Letchworth in Hertfordshire. Here neatly arranged cottages, limited to twelve per acre, were augmented by larger detached houses separated from the factory area. Public buildings, shops, schools and a recreational 'green' completed the rural idyll.\textsuperscript{79} Cheap land, power and rates attracted a range of industries to Letchworth and by 1912 nearly 1,300 houses dotted the landscape. Much of the housing stock was erected on a private or cooperative basis and long leaseholds ensured the benefits of freehold tenure. Houses could be rented by individuals who did not wish to buy or build.\textsuperscript{80}

Letchworth Garden City was not a company town like Lever Bros. housing estate at Port Sunlight. This earlier model community, begun by Sir William Lever in 1888, was the product of a mixture of Victorian philanthropy and paternalism. Lever abolished the conventional gridiron design of working-class districts and housed his employees in semi-detached and grouped cottages with curving roads and wide frontages, all maintained by his company.\textsuperscript{81} Disillusioned by the cost of municipal improvement schemes in English towns, Lever told the 1905 Housing Conference in Sheffield that:
There is a great monotonous sameness about all these housing schemes. They are all more costly and expensive on account both of the value of the land acquired and also because it is an established fact that in building you can provide rooms in a two-storey cottage at less than half the cost per cubic foot of space than...in a five or six storey so-called 'model' tenement block. Such buildings will never do other than burden the rates and produce a race of feeble physique that can never be the backbone of the nation.\(^2\)

The rents of Lever's respectable cottages, however, were kept down by profit-sharing rather than economies of construction. His aesthetically pleasing housing estate was complemented by a scientific working environment. Workshops were heated and ventilated, management and workers sat on occupational health committees, the sexes worked separate shifts and single women were hired in preference to those married.\(^3\)

Meanwhile George Cadbury, another factory employer, had created a model garden village at Bournville near Birmingham. While Bournville also strove to demonstrate the advantages of a low-density planned community, Cadbury's philanthropy was not as bountiful as Lever Bros. and Bournville workers were always a minority of the residents. Houses were built six to the acre and dispersed along winding roads and culs-de-sac. No dwelling was allowed to occupy more than one quarter of an allotment and the rents were loaded with estate costs which proved burdensome to working-class tenants. After 1900 Bournville was managed by a company and rentals were fixed to return 4 per cent net.\(^4\)

The industrial housing experiments of Edwardian England produced an ambivalent attitude among housing reformers in Sydney. While liberal reformers cheered the social objectives of these model schemes, they denounced the charitable element involved in their realisation. As a protected and dependent working-class housing estate, Port Sunlight threatened to undermine self-advancement and independence. *Building* preferred the residential mix at Bournville where workmen appeared to be more self-reliant. 'Humanity cannot look to great employers for the solution of the housing problem. And employees do not want philanthropy', it declared.\(^5\) In 1913 Professor Irvine referred to Lever's experiment as 'benevolent despotism' which repressed the 'healthy democratic pride and self-reliance so noticeable in co-partnership enterprises'.\(^6\)
There was no whiff of philanthropy about the Hampstead Garden Suburb near London. The 240 acre site was purchased by a trust in 1907 and laid out under an Act of Parliament. Barry Parker and Raymond Unwin, whose partnership had designed Letchworth, also presided over the spatial arrangement of the Hampstead suburb. An irregular and narrow road system was adopted to avoid uniformity, enhance vistas and encourage economies of development. House types ranged from substantial residences to grouped cottages, and ample space was reserved for parks and gardens. Co-partnership housing societies and individuals leased land from the trust under strict building provisions and a large number of workers' dwellings were built by the Hampstead Tenants' Society. 'Situation, surroundings and the scheme of development', Irvine remarked, 'all combine to make Hampstead a very attractive place of residence for all classes'.

ii) Planners' Models

In the early 1900s town planning advocates used the terms pre-planning and re-planning to distinguish two methods of physical intervention in the city environment. Pre-planning, was applicable to unbuilt areas in and adjoining existing towns. It aimed to create wholesome physical and living conditions which would have an uplifting influence on the individual. Pre-planning, in contrast to re-planning, was regarded as preventative intervention and was favoured by the Garden City movement. Re-planning, however, was associated with municipal improvement schemes in built-up towns. It aimed to cure past evils through slum resumption, street widening and rehousing. In pre-war Sydney town planning professionals described the City Council's resumption programme as re-planning. They considered that it was socially disruptive, wasteful and an impractical policy instrument for local authorities.

Town planning groups in Sydney preferred to place their reforming faith in preventative pre-planning. They also began to take heart from sociological studies and surveys in England. Garden-city enthusiasts regularly tabulated weight and measurement statistics to show that children reared in wholesome surroundings were more physically fit than those raised in slum environments. Ebenezer Howard, for example, cruelly compared the infant mortality rate at Letchworth in 1909 with the big cities of London and Manchester and informed delegates at the 1910 Town Planning Conference of the 'marvellous result'. The founders of Letchworth, he argued, had undertaken the enterprise 'with a
view to earning a dividend for the State'. This economic saving was now being realised in the form of improved health and the preservation of infant life.\textsuperscript{89}

Comparing the physiognomy of slum-bred and garden suburb-reared children was another analytical method of the scientific slum reformers. In 1911, the \textit{Herald}'s 'special correspondent' took the obligatory tour of the experimental garden villages. He recorded his findings like an anthropologist:

The first thing I noticed in Sunlight was the number of men and boys digging in the garden allotments. The next thing was the prosperous, well-dressed appearance of the girls. It was the same at Bournville and Letchworth, but especially the former. The first thing that struck one about the children was that their cheeks were red and their calves were filled. In ordinary factory districts in London and Birmingham the most noticeable thing is the thin, pasty faces of the children, and the way in which the stockings hang in creases over their scanty little shins. You knew for certain before seeing the statistics that the children of Bournville, Sunlight and Letchworth were growing up healthier than those in the crowded suburbs nearby.\textsuperscript{90}

Statistical comparisons emphasised the superior physique of children nurtured in wholesome home surroundings. Bournville boys at twelve years, for example, were said to weigh 8½ pounds more and stand 2½ inches taller than their stunted Birmingham cousins. Crude death rates were also cited to highlight the divergence between the planned garden suburb and the congested city slum.\textsuperscript{91}

The belief that the city slum was injurious to personal health and national well-being led housing reformers to argue that town planning would reduce state welfare costs. John Burns, the British M.P. and author of the 1909 Housing and Town Planning Act, complained of the poor state of the nation's health when he opened the 1910 Town Planning Conference in London. Bad housing, overcrowding and malnutrition were blamed for the alleged deterioration of British physique and fitness. What lent prestige to Burns' argument and other town planning reformers was the aura of scientific impartiality surrounding their pronouncements. Burns argued bluntly:

\begin{quote}
Fifty per cent of our total pauperism, more than sixty per cent of its total cost, much of our lunacy, a great deal of our crime, debility, and dependence are due to sickness. We cannot avoid disease unless we let in the sun and air into our houses and our streets. So long as casual labour broods in squalid lairs, in sunless streets, and ugly
\end{quote}
dwellings are its only habitation, we shall continue to turn out nervous mannikins instead of enduring men.  

Indeed, Burns could have reminded his audience that the 1902 Maurice Committee had found an alarming level of physical rejects among Boer War recruits from the city slums. It was a disturbing finding and one which Sydney town planners were quick to exploit. 

John Burns viewed the Australian environment as a town planning laboratory. 'There is no country in the world better adapted for town planning than Australia', he told a Herald correspondent in 1911. 'There are few cities in the world that have the physical advantages which Sydney and many of Australia's great cities have'. Such faith in environmentalist reform, coming from an eminent British authority, was welcome grist to the town planning mill in Sydney. Yet Burns had little knowledge of the political realities and local government system of early twentieth century Sydney. Under the 1906 Local Government Act, town planning powers already existed. The problem was that they were inadequate and seldom invoked. Suburban councils could prepare a town plan but were unable to compel a private sub-divider to comply with it. Furthermore, unlike England's local government system, there was no Greater Sydney Council to approve town planning schemes or oversee town planning policy. When Charles Reade, a New Zealand journalist visited in Sydney, he was critical of the acclaimed achievements of Burns' town planning legislation. 

Reade had a political agenda to fulfil. As spokesman for the British Garden Cities Association he was anxious to identify defects in English municipal town planning law and highlight the practical benefits of the Garden City alternative. Reade argued that under Burns' Act, local authorities had been empowered to prepare town planning schemes for unbuilt areas outside their boundaries yet were hindered in applying the legislation to built-up towns. Town planning and land purchase proposals required Local Government Board approval and local authorities had no power to purchase property at cost value. 'This is one of the principal reasons why so many municipal schemes are financial failures, in that they entail a charge on rates, whilst in the endeavour to recoup the charges for heavy expenditure in land purchase, the houses are built not less than twenty to the acre'. In other words, the heavy economic costs of municipal re-planning precluded better living arrangements and improved public health. The Garden City strategy, by contrast, prevented the recurrence of slum
conditions by offering cheaper land, lower rents and socially-mixed housing estates.

Charles Reade found a receptive audience among the founders of the NSW Town Planning Association. Sulman, Taylor and Fitzgerald were excited by the practical application of Garden City theory and hoped to enlist business support for a Town Planning Act. Outlining the history of the English Garden City movement, Reade acknowledged Howard as the founding father and pointed to the professional character of the Garden Cities Association and the freedom the organisation enjoyed from 'political parties and prejudices'. His major point, however, was that the movement had by-passed municipal housing constraints and embraced practical schemes of reform free from philanthropy. Reade told his audience:

It is quite a mistake to imagine that charity or other similar sentiments play any part in garden city management. The essence of the movement consists in helping a man to help himself, helping his children by healthy environment, social opportunity, and technical training, to get as quickly as possible out of the quagmire of slumdom on to the high road of good citizenship. In short, it was unsubsidised housing assistance which elevated rather than entrapped its recipients. This was the message which housing reformers and town planners in Sydney wished to hear. Housing reform programmes had to show that they could regenerate the working-class slum environment, reduce rents and improve social efficiency in the growing nation. Indeed, when Reade's colleague W. R. Davidge told Sydney citizens in September 1914 that the single family home was synonomous with domestic happiness and national progress, the Town Hall burst into rapturous applause.

By 1915 town planning theory had effectively raised the problem of housing the working-classes to a more universal level. Fitzgerald and his followers now began to appeal to an 'international brotherhood' of middle-class professionals who were all dedicated to pushing back the frontiers of civic science. Their specialised knowledge and training made them the best equipped group to lead the housing reform movement:

The city planners of to-day are not mere dreamers or enthusiasts. They are generally men of professional training, who have a salt of enthusiasm and humanitarianism added to the elements in their composition. A great number of trades and professions are confluent
The promotion of a professional planning elite obviously diminished the role of working-class housing interests in Sydney. Their improvement programme, which was tied to a redistributive reform strategy, could not hope to compete against the 'scientific' and unarguable propositions of the civic planners. Fitzgerald's argument was that the wage worker shared the same reform goal as the professional leadership. 'His is really the only class, outside the town planners, which is consciously studying and grappling with the problems of human degeneration and human inefficiency'. The housing reform movement, however, had first to augment the 'wealth-creating capacity of the individual' before the working-classes could claim their share.

Conclusion

The maxim of 'one family, one house' was well entrenched among Sydney's town planning fraternity. By 1915 professional reformers were convinced that the social ideal could not take root in the 'unregenerate city' environment. To them, the built city was incapable of 'levelling-up' housing conditions for the working-classes. They believed that it manufactured exploitation, dependency and disease. The owners of houses for rent, whether they were private or government landlords, had no business profiting from 'the misery of the poor'. It was indeed 'folly', reformers and town planners argued, to build workmen's dwellings on the dearest city land. Such a costly housing programme, besides encouraging the landlord to squeeze the propertyless and dependent tenant, was an open invitation to tenement slumdom. Why attempt to make a business proposition of the housing problem in the City, they asked, when working people could be efficiently 'housed on the cheap land on the outskirts'.

Town planning ideology, which stressed economy, social efficiency and classlessness, neatly dovetailed with the housing reformers' programme in pre-war Sydney. Reformers freely borrowed those elements of English Garden City theory which bolstered their critique of the 'unregenerate city' environment. Beyond the metropolis they saw a wonderful opportunity to rebuild a low-density housing estate which would save infant life, reward thrift and rear a
Chapter 6 Vacating the City

socially-mixed but self-supporting population. It was a professional reform strategy which prescribed environmental and preventative measures rather than simple remedial responses to solve Sydney’s housing problem.

Housing and town planning reformers were therefore excited by the state housing experiment at Daceyville. It was beginning to take root in the sandy scrub between Kensington and Botany. While the model garden villages of England were built by private companies and co-operative housing bodies, Daceyville was the culmination of a series of government-assisted settlement schemes in New South Wales. By 1914 the housing scheme boasted nearly 100 dwellings set on generous building frontages. Chapter Seven will attempt to locate the experimental housing estate in the context of the liberal housing programme of early twentieth century Sydney. By reviewing the development of Daceyville and the differing expectations held for it, the chapter attempts to avoid the problem of historical hindsight and offer a more critical interpretation of the model garden suburb.
Endnotes


6. Ibid., p. 348.


8. Ibid., pp. 13-14.

9. *NSWPD*, 1901, Vol. I, pp. 580-1. Pitt Town was one of three village communities established in the 1890s to re-settle city labourers. It failed and was abandoned within a few years.

10. Ibid., pp. 881-2.

11. Ibid., p. 883.


17. *SMH*, 16 October 1913.


19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.


29. See *NSWPD*, 1911-12, Vol. 45, p. 3956.


31. *SMH*, 16 October 1913.

32. See 'City Improvements - Chippendale Area, Workmen's Flats' in *TCAR* 1911, p. 135. Aware of English municipal rehousing responsibilities, the *Herald* was supportive of City Council intervention. Its editorial of 16 October, 1913 argued that 'an obligation does definitely rest on a public body which dishouses a section of the population to replace the housing accommodation which has been removed if this cannot be adequately supplied elsewhere'.


34. See Lord Mayor's Minute to the Finance Committee, 'Utilisation - Chippendale Resumption', 13 December 1911, in *R&PSCC*, 1912, p. 405.


38. *SMH*, 10 April 1914.


47. DT, 30 March 1911.

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid.

50. Eugenic theory generally held that hereditary factors were more important than environmental surroundings in maximising the social potential of the individual. See S. Garton, 'Sir Charles Mackellar: Psychiatry, Eugenics and Child Welfare in New South Wales 1900-1914', Historical Studies, Vol. 22, No.86 (April 1986), pp. 24-5. Prof. Irvine rejected the 'biological dogma' of hereditarians who argued that the 'germ cell' was uninfluenced by the social environment. Irvine believed that 'the problem of how to produce a superior civilisation [was] both biological and sociological'. See SMH, 26 February 1914.


52. SMH, 29 May 1911.

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid.

55. Ibid.

56. The Worker, 3 August 1911.

57. Ibid.

58. The Worker, 24 August 1911.


60. The Worker, 3 August 1911.


62. Ibid.

63. Ibid., p. 263.


65. Ibid., p. 326.


71. *DT*, 18 October 1913.


73. Charles Reade was a lecturer with the British Garden Cities and Town Planning Association. See 'President's Report to Council', 13 December 1922, *Minutes of the Town Planning Association of New South Wales*, 1919-1924. M.L.


75. The term was coined by Prof. Irvine. See R.F. Irvine, 'Town Planning: What it means and what it demands' (Town Planning Association, Sydney 1914), p. 7 ML.


87. Ibid., pp. 69-72. On 18 June, 1913 some 200 Australians and New Zealanders visited the Hampstead Garden Suburb where they were officially welcomed by Sir William Lever and Raymond Unwin. Notable Sydney guests included ex-premier Sir George Reid, Health Board President Dr Ashburton Thompson and real estate entrepreneur, Richard Stanton. See DT, 22 July 1913.


89. E. Howard, 'Town Planning ab initio', in Transactions of the Town Planning Conference, 1910, Royal Institute of British Architects, London 1911, p. 701. M.L. At the conference Howard claimed that the infant mortality rate at Letchworth in 1909 was a low 31.7 per 1000 births compared to the London rate of 107.9 and 134 for Manchester. These social statistics were distorted in view of the size of the population samples, their differing age structures and income levels. Howard was obviously anxious to see the result as a 'dividend for the State' given that Letchworth's shareholders had not yet received a dividend from their company.

90. SMH, 10 April 1911.

91. Ibid.

92. See John Burns' address in Transactions of the Town Planning Conference, 1910, Royal Institute of British Architects, London 1911, p. 65. M.L.


95. SMH, 18 March 1911.


99. Prior to Reade's arrival, the three housing reformers had addressed members of the Millions Club on the economic and social benefits of town planning and garden suburbs. 'When we get the Town Planning Act we're asking for', Sulman remarked, 'you'll see things move. What we are aiming at is, in two words, the social salvation of the people'. See *SMH*, 20 March 1914.

100. *SMH*, 1 May 1914.

101. *SMH*, 1 September 1914.


105. *SMH*, 18 November 1913.
Chapter Seven

A Worker's Suburb? Daceyville or Calicotown?

Introduction

Between 1900 and 1915 Sydney's civic reformers ran the entire gamut of the housing reform debate. The ideas and principles of the reformers were often confused and contradictory, but there was sufficient agreement among them to constitute a genuine progressive movement. Earlier chapters have shown that the concept which united the housing reform vision, though never fully articulated, was the principle of environmental determinism. As a single body of belief it offered the civic reformers a point of reference from which they could approach and attempt to understand the housing problem. If the slum environment nurtured the slum-dweller, as most reformers agreed, then physically superior housing arrangements must bring forth a better individual. Despite their determinist response to the housing problem, however, the reformers were not fatalists. Their theory of environmental determinism led them to argue that the city slum-dweller was not 'natural' and that his impoverished existence was not inescapable. The individual had the capacity to alter his immediate surroundings and, by improving his physical environment, avoid the cramped housing conditions of his English and European cousins.

The first part of this chapter aims to revisit the housing reformers' programme in early twentieth century Sydney and interpret their various ideas and arguments. Unifying themes developed in earlier chapters will be drawn together. These included, for example, the self-reliant home owner image, the fear of the enfeebling city slums, an enthusiasm for the open suburban environment, and opposition to subsidised housing solutions. Among others, these were the major points of agreement which united the housing reform movement. They were held together by a simple yet unshakeable faith in environmental determinism. Nevertheless, the questions which divided the movement were no less profound.

The most vexing issue for reformers was the plight of the inner-city poor. Reformers understood this question in terms of the slum-dweller and his environment. Bad housing conditions could only make slum-dwellers more
dependent and less self-reliant. If the poor were therefore housed in a closed environment removed from the wider community, was there not a terrible danger of reproducing that very embodiment of housing inequality in early twentieth century Sydney - the unhealthy and enfeebling slum? This nightmare alarmed the reform movement and distracted it from other dimensions of the housing policy debate.

How then could claims for a cheaper workers' dwelling scheme in Sydney be reconciled with the environmental anxieties of the reform movement? The final section of the chapter will argue that conflicting strands of argument in the housing debate crystallised in the war-time controversy over Daceyville and Calicotown. Reformers and town planners saw Daceyville as an alternative housing environment to that found in the destructive slums. Here the housing problem could be studied under controlled experimental conditions. Calicotown, in contrast, was officially viewed as a temporary remedy to the housing problem. Many reformers argued that Calicotown was an incarnation of the contaminated city slum and a regrettable development. Others viewed it as an embryonic workers' scheme - creating a home fit for workers.

Conflicting Reform Strategies

The housing reform movement in early twentieth century Sydney was led by a spirited and liberal-minded group of civic and social reformers. They mostly observed the residential remains of an ageing city whose core had been progressively vacated by the middle-classes and was now the preserve of the working poor. The concerns and anxieties of nineteenth century sanitarians, who warned of the physical and cultural dangers arising from the city slums continued to influence the outlook of the reformers. The principal factor separating the city poor from, and preventing their participation in, the wider community appeared to be their 'unregenerate' housing environment. Unless slum-dwellers outgrew their oppressive housing conditions they would forever remain dependent upon grasping landlords and never become self-reliant citizens.

Central to this argument was the reformers' idealisation of the independent housing environment. They thought that the suburban frontier rather than the predatory city fostered self-reliant habits and values. The most potent symbol of this self-reliant attitude was the private ownership of a separate house and garden. Until individuals could point to this possession their contribution to the growing nation could not be maximised. Thomas Dobeson, an immigrant
tradesman from Victorian England, was the model of resourcefulness and self-reliance in late nineteenth century Sydney. He had built a modest cottage for his family at Botany:

There is no landlord who has a habit of knocking at the Door every Monday morning in his three storied hat, a black Bag and pocket Book to receive the rent. No, my friend, is it not sad to think that our friend the landlord has no business here? We are our own Landlord and glad of it too. Our house is 28 feet by 20 not quite finished yet but will do at present.¹

Housing reformers applauded this approach to self-improvement in early twentieth century Sydney. They endorsed the primacy of environmental values in urban society and assumed that it was possible to change slum-dwellers by using state power to change their physical existence.

If the inner-city had a corrosive influence on its inhabitants, reformers were more likely to blame the dominant house type rather than the slum-dweller. In the early 1900s darkest Sydney was home to the old-world terrace, tiny back yards and insanitary lanes overrun by neglected children. The terrace row, reformers argued, was simply a rent-earning device and an incubator of epidemics and degeneracy. It was an exploitative and destructive house form. To allow such sordid conditions to exist was dangerous to the health of mothers, infants and unborn generations. Terrace housing, reformers concluded, was not fit to raise working people - the future wealth-creators of the nation.

Sydney's housing reformers also agreed that the working-classes should not be shoe-horned into tenements. Again this view sprang from their central belief in environmental determinism. The tenement was a culturally alien house form which retarded the individual's physical and moral development. Housing reforms were possible without sacrificing working people to the fatal barracks system which had been condemned by overseas authorities. Reformers had no desire to reimpose a denser housing regime on city-dwellers, and saw no reason why they should be denied the house-and-garden lifestyle of the suburbs. The most consistent aim of the reformers was to purge the city housing environment and rescue its inhabitants from overcrowding, poverty and disease.

To pursue their reform agenda in early twentieth century Sydney, housing improvers had to turn to the state. Unlike their environmentalist ideology, however, the reformers' attitude to governments as agents of housing improvement was less coherent. Whilst they agreed that government
intervention was needed to 'level-up' dwelling conditions, liberal reformers tended to see public authorities as housing finance-lenders rather than house-builders. This attitude was reflected in the creation of the 'Advances for Homes Department' in the Government Savings Bank. Those who argued that housing reform was a municipal responsibility were disappointed by the limited powers given to the Council in 1912. At the same time the centrally-appointed Housing Board prevented further municipal involvement in Sydney's housing problem. Housing powers were transferred to a sub-department of the State. Whether housing assistance schemes should be a local or central responsibility in this period remained problematic in the absence of a Greater Sydney Council.

What then of the workers and their representatives? Like the middle class housing reformers, working people looked to the state to civilise the city housing environment and promote home ownership. They too had an aversion to tenement building and sought more generous government assistance in order to secure some equity in their dwellings. Rent relief campaigns among city workers and trade unionists conveyed the desire of low-income households to obtain greater security of tenure and independence from exploitative landlords, both private and government. Nevertheless, city workers were more sensitive to rent rises and less impressed by slum demolition remedies than the reform leadership.

It was due to the results of slum demolition and urban renewal that the reform discourse broke down. The immediate aim of the liberal reformers was to tear down existing dwelling forms and remodel city living space in the expectation that such environmental intervention would deliver a socially desirable outcome to workers. When the expected fruits of this determinist process failed to materialise a mood of frustration followed. As J.D. Fitzgerald later noted:

The destruction of slum areas by the city council, without any provision for re-housing, was one of the principle factors in producing the congestion which now exists amongst the working classes of Sydney... An agitation was got up which succeeded in having the demolitions stopped. Bad as the houses were, they were a shelter - a home.²

On the eve of the First World War housing reformers pronounced the City as 'unregenerate' and switched their environmental focus to professional and
scientific intervention. A less problematic and more wholesome proving ground was chosen - the uncorrupted outer suburb.

Housing reformers assumed that the outer suburb offered everything that the City could not. It had a lower population density, a lower housing acreage, and more pure air and open space compared to the cramped and crumbling terrace of the City. Sydney's unbuilt suburban acres allowed city-dwellers the chance to regain their self-reliance which had been injured by the enfeebling environment of the city slum. All the preconditions which housing reformers identified as necessary for the nurturing of better citizens seemed to be readily available on the suburban frontier. Political and social structures seemed less rigid compared to the City. Exploitative landlord groups were unknown, land costs were lower, epidemics appeared less virulent and state housing assistance could be directly targeted at the individual.

This strategic manoeuvre deserves emphasis because it had important implications for working-class housing reform in Sydney. If civic and social reformers dominated the debate in the first decade of the century, their organising priorities were taken to greater extremes by the 'scientific' discipline of town planning. Its zealotry was unbounded:

The town planner calls a halt in the interests of the race and of civilisation to the murder of infants, to the degradation of men and women, to the maiming and crippling which are the results of bad environment. He arraigns bad environment as a universal public enemy, and extols good environment as the hope of mankind...We cannot in a moment rebuild our cities... But we can multiply our Daceyvilles, our Roseberys, Haberfields, in Sydney; our Hampsteds, our Port Sunlights, Bourneville, and Letchworths, in the outer world.3

Determined to counteract the deficiencies and destructive influences of the slum environment, town planners attached more importance to ideal housing conditions than questions of economic cost and equity. The profession talked of 'levelling-up' the working-class housing environment and was unsympathetic to public housing remedies which reduced health standards and weakened self-reliance.

The town planning profession quickly imposed its own reform agenda on working people. Working-class demands for fair rents, city rehousing schemes and social justice were made irrelevant by the planners' new model housing environment. Foremost among town planning priorities was the concept of the
private house-and-garden. Its aesthetic qualities and obvious appeal to wage workers suggested that it could be made to accommodate all social groups in early twentieth century Sydney. The town planning professionals attempted to test this theory at Daceyville. By reorganising the physical and spatial form of the housing environment they believed that they could solve the housing problem. The interests of the city poor, that social group most in need of decent low-cost housing in this period, were pushed aside.

Two conflicting strands in Sydney's housing reform movement then - one environmental and the other social - were clearly apparent before the advent of Dacey Garden Suburb. The dominant body of belief, best described as environmental determinism, simply proposed that changing the urban dwelling form would lead to higher health and moral standards among individuals. The social plank in the reform movement, mostly represented by working-class groups, was less interested in transforming physical and dwelling forms and more anxious to free rent payers from the exploitative social relations in which they found themselves. The former strategy, which seemed to offer a programme of social change, suffered from a crude and unquestioning faith in the regenerative capacity of the physical environment. The latter strategy, motivated by issues of housing equity and access, overestimated the preparedness of governments to build better and cheaper worker housing in early twentieth century Sydney.

The Town Planners' Ideal

On 12 April, 1912 the Hon. J.R. Dacey died in office before the foundations of the first state cottages had been laid at Kensington. The Colonial Treasurer had approved proposals for the Housing Board to lay out 336 acres of Crown land at the junction of Gardener's and Bunnerong roads, situated within the municipalities of Mascot and Botany. 'The contour of the land generally speaking is of an undulating character', the Board reported, 'and well adapted for building purposes'. The Housing Board also noted that John Sulman and J.F. Hennessy, who had been appointed to lay out the model suburb, were 'two of the best authorities in Australia on town planning'. Together with J.D. Fitzgerald who, according to Sulman, was 'instrumental in inducing the Government to develop' the site, the men formed a planners' triumvirate.

As first chairman of the Housing Board, Fitzgerald was well placed to pursue his town planning ideal. An indefatigable foe of bad environment, he could now test his theory of environmental determinism among new and
wholesome surroundings. At Daceyville, men and women would no longer be brutalised by their dwelling conditions, but civilised by a properly planned housing system. Fitzgerald explained:

We were instructed to lay out a plan, and after conversation with the late Mr Dacey... it was understood we should carry out a modern garden village housing scheme; that we were to erect a good type of house, one suitable for the occupation of working-men and their families, that the rents should not be high, and that we should... introduce the garden surroundings that are known in connection with such villages as Bourneville, Port Sunlight in England, and Essen in Germany.6

Influenced by foreign examples and confident in their conviction that a wholesome dwelling environment would bring forth a better individual, the town planning profession did not probe too deeply the limitations of their housing reform strategy. A physically-planned housing scheme under controlled conditions must, by definition, be good for the working-classes. The planners seemed unperturbed by suggestions that their ideal home might exclude the poorer members of this social group.

The tendency of town planners to see Daceyville as an experimental housing estate rather than a public housing model can be explained by their professional outlook and environmental anxieties. As architect, town planning lecturer and scientific slum reformer, John Sulman deplored the emergence of slum conditions in a new country. Since 1890 Sulman had been an advocate of housing and town planning reform for Australian cities. 'Town planning is non-political. It is simple humanitarianism', he remarked in 1914. 'I believe in town planning, because I want to see conditions established for evolving a better type of men and women to carry on our civilisation'.7 Hennessy, Sulman's planning partner and president of the NSW Institute of Architects, argued that Garden City planning would regenerate the moral and commercial life of Sydney.8 'We must not forget that we are aiming for prevention, as well as cure, of disease and degeneracy...', he remarked in 1911.9

It was this scientifically-informed approach to state intervention which increasingly dominated the housing reform debate in pre-war Sydney. The town planning experts generally agreed that low-density residential development beyond the 'unregenerate city', regardless of tenure, enriched people both physically and morally. Richard Stanton, the real estate developer who saw Daceyville as a rival to his model suburb at Rosebery, understated the
experimental nature of the state housing scheme. Daceyville, Stanton remarked, would lay the 'groundwork of a very interesting comparison between the benefits of State Socialism and private enterprise...' State competition, however, did not motivate Daceyville's planners. Rather, they were concerned to show how state planning and building controls raised health and housing standards and put to shame the old-world slum environment. Buoyed by the preventative potential of Daceyville, Fitzgerald declared in January 1914 that the government scheme could even be compared to a 'small experiment in eugenics'.

Preventive pre-planning increasingly became the motivating force behind the creation of Daceyville. Fearful of the degenerate city terrace row and its 'miasmatic' atmosphere, professional planners sought to maximise the amount of air, space and light surrounding the state cottages. Diversity in dwelling design rather than the replication of monotonous style was the order of the day at Daceyville. Whilst planners judged the outcome as environmentally healthier for the individual, its realisation did not deal with the problem of supplying low-cost dwellings for the working-classes. Progress was slow and by 30 June, 1918 only 267 houses had been built and let at the model garden suburb.

William Foggitt, the Housing Board architect, remarked:

What we term a four-roomed house contains a living room, two bedrooms, a kitchen, a bathroom and pantry. We place the laundry in the kitchen. Otherwise the kitchen is used as a living room, and the living room as a parlour, which I do not think is necessary. The placing of the laundry in the kitchen prevents overcrowding and living in the room in which the meals are cooked.

If the Housing Board wanted to prevent sub-letting it was also determined to cultivate domestic habits and moral hygiene among the tenants. 'Our rent collectors are practically health inspectors', Foggitt observed, 'and if they notice anything undesirable they report it to the Board'.

Although the Housing Board experimented with different building methods and materials at Daceyville, planning professionals declared that the four-room brick and tile bungalow was the desired model for healthy family living. Two decent sized bedrooms, a living room and kitchen comprised their ideal cottage in wartime Sydney. Building costs, however, showed no sign of falling. Frustrated by Sydney's stubbornly high house rents, the Local Government Office remarked in 1915 that 'the only avenues for cheapening the cost of
erection lie in the design of the house itself. However, as environmental determinists, the planners had few options available. Eschewing denser housing designs such as terraces and tenements, they attempted to simplify the internal living space of the bungalow. The executive officer of Local Government, John Garlick, suggested that 'the parlour of a cottage could be omitted and the dining-room made a little larger and used as the general living-room'. He also pointed to the environmental benefits of 'substituting specially-designed sleeping porches or verandahs for some of the bedrooms.'

By the end of the First World War, middle-class planning professionals had stamped their authority on the housing reform movement in Sydney. Their belief that low-density residential and spatial forms positively influenced social relations made them environmental determinists rather than public housing agitators. Convinced that working-class housing conditions could be 'levelled up' by preventative environmental intervention, the planners sought to design an ideal home at Daceyville. The semi-detached cottage had not been unsuitable, Fitzgerald admitted, 'but we have tried to realise the ideal of the town planner by providing a separate house for each family and for that purpose we are now building single houses only.' The state permitted design modifications to some of the cottages but was reluctant to compromise health and building standards for the sake of economy.

Private housing enterprise was not on trial at Daceyville. The town planners were not confronted with a choice between public or private housing goals for the young nation. There had never been a consensus within Sydney's housing reform movement that state competition was the 'correct' solution to the housing problem. Reformers wanted to see their liberal self-help ethic bolstered by state housing assistance, not undermined by it. As John Garlick soberly observed in 1915:

The most hopeful direction in which public authorities could... move with a view to helping towards the solution of the housing difficulty is... not so much in building houses to be let as in aiding workmen and others to acquire homes of their own.

Daceyville had not really settled the housing question. It had provided a suitable terrain for planners to test their theory of environmental determinism. The state had shown that it was possible to raise housing standards for working people. However, tensions and conflicts over housing reform strategies had not been resolved. Old problems re-emerged when dissatisfied working-class
groups began to question the 'success' of the model housing scheme. They challenged the town planners' attempt to dictate the terms of the housing reform debate at Daceyville.

The Workers' Ideal

If Daceyville served as a proving ground for the environmental determinists it also exposed old divisions in the housing reform movement. Not all reform groups shared the determinists' desire to change individuals by changing their physical environment. A vocal group of low-paid workers and their representatives were disappointed by the results of the housing experiment at Daceyville. What benefit was the modern, single-family dwelling if it was beyond the means of the working poor? The promises and problems of the model housing estate overlapped most notably in terms of the conflicting ideals of the planners and workers. The planners were proud of their work at Daceyville. To them, it represented a visual and spatial triumph over the city slum. Low-paid working people were unimpressed. They had their own housing ideal to promote and defend.

The major source of tension between the two social groups sprang from their differing perceptions of who should be housed by the government. Burdened by high rents and an exploitative landlord market, many wage labourers assumed that the state would build a worker's suburb at Daceyville. Unless the government intervened to house impoverished rent payers, the housing problem would remain. The planners and managers of the model suburb did not recognise this ideal. Indeed, the very thought of a single-class or charitable housing estate appalled them. The government houses would not be reserved for any social group. Low-income workers would have to compete against other members of the general public.

Just who the model garden suburb should house had indeed been sorely contested during the passage of the 1912 Housing Bill. The McGowen Government was repeatedly attacked for retreating from its electoral promise to house the working poor of Sydney. One member accused the Government of abandoning the 'submerged tenth' of society. Increased building costs, he argued, would be reflected in higher rents. This meant that the Government would simply be housing people who could 'find houses for themselves'. Public Works Minister Griffith argued that Labor did not intend to house some 'submerged tenth' at uneconomic rents. The Government would embarrass slum landlords by building more cheaply and scientifically. The dwellings, Griffith
presumed, would let at rents which working people were able to pay - 10s. or 12s. a week. Dacey's scheme would be an instructive exercise in state house building, not an alternative housing sector for the poor.

From the outset eligibility practices at Daceyville effectively prevented the creation of a worker's suburb. Housing applicants were not classified according to income, craft or class. 'We ask them what rent they are prepared to pay', the Housing Board chairman informed the Public Works Committee in 1912. Fitzgerald's admission obviously raised the question as to who benefited from the Government scheme. He was asked:

Q. Do you not think your Board should make some inquiry of the people who apply for these houses, because it is not possible that persons who may be well able to pay more will get the advantage of a cheap house, others including workmen being kept out?

A. There has been no evidence of that so far. We cannot discriminate; but, so far, there has been a genuine working-class application, as shown by those who have applied.

The Housing Board chairman was referring to skilled tradesmen and better paid labourers in Sydney. Badly lodged applicants would not be given priority access. Indeed, slum-dwellers and others lower down the social scale would, according to Fitzgerald, 'have to trust to their luck'.

In early twentieth century Sydney there was a commonly held view among the working-classes that a day's wages should pay a week's rent. The yardstick was asserted by workmens dwellings' associations and acknowledged by Reade's Town Planning Tour. Planning advocates in Sydney tended to see it as a workmen's ideal rather than an achievable goal at Daceyville. Building tradesmen, for example, who received 13s. a day in 1913 could have paid the minimum rental with a day's wages. The ordinary labourer, by contrast, did not want to pay more than 10-12s. for rent. When rents were high working-class families reduced housing costs by taking in lodgers or sub-letting rooms for 4-5s. a week. Newcastle workers referred to the practice as 'double-banking'.

On 30 June 1913, some 67 cottages had been let by ballot at Daceyville. Rentals ranged between 14s 6d and 21s. for family-type accommodation of varying size. Mr Justice Heydon, who presided over the 1913 inquiry into a living wage in New South Wales, declared that 'it would be a happy day if
Drawing evidence from a wide field, including the household budgets of working-class families in Sydney, Heydon noted that rentals for three rooms and a kitchen ranged between 7s 6d and 18s per week. After careful deliberation he fixed the average rent of a worker's dwelling at 12s, or a quarter of the living wage. A labourer receiving 48s. a week would, therefore, have had to pay nearly a third of his income in rent at Daceyville in 1913.

Details of the house types and rents at the model garden suburb are shown below in Table 7.1. The last column includes overhead costs such as drainage, sewerage and landscaping. Land values are excluded.

### Table 7.1: Cottage Types and Rents at Daceyville, 30 June 1913

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>No. Built</th>
<th>Accommodation</th>
<th>Rental</th>
<th>Cost (£)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Four rooms, kitchen etc.</td>
<td>17s; 18s</td>
<td>595</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Two B.r.; l.r and kitchen combined</td>
<td>14s.6d</td>
<td>505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Three large rooms, kitchen etc.</td>
<td>18s</td>
<td>640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compet. Design</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Three large rooms, kitchen etc.</td>
<td>21s</td>
<td>640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Three rooms, kitchen etc.</td>
<td>16s</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Three rooms, kitchen and laundry com.</td>
<td>16s</td>
<td>525</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Few wage labourers could make such a sacrifice in pre-war Sydney. Both low wages and the cost of fares excluded them from renting a state cottage at Daceyville. In September 1913 Arthur Vernon, secretary of the United Labourers' Protective Society, told the State Treasurer that general labourers could not afford more than a day's wages for rent. Daceyville had not fulfilled the workers' housing ideal. 'The Daceyville scheme, from a worker's point of view, is not an ideal one. What we want is a cheaper house and a lower rental', another delegate complained. The Holman Government was urged to borrow 'a
couple of hundred thousand' to build a more modest workmen's suburb between Daceyville and Long Bay. A low-cost alternative scheme, Vernon argued, would help to relieve the city slums.30

A wave of parliamentary criticism now followed. The Government was attacked for failing to provide houses for badly lodged city-dwellers. W.H. Wood, MLA for Bega, led the charge:

If the Government could show that they had found houses for 100 families who could not procure houses elsewhere, or who could not properly house themselves owing to the rentals charged elsewhere, I should say that they had done a humanitarian act, and that they had conferred a benefit upon people who could not help themselves. But they have not done that. They have merely transferred people from houses in some other suburb, in which they were paying a little more rental, into these cottages.31

Daceyville, it seemed, had lodged a labour aristocracy rather than the lower-paid workers in Sydney. 'The great mass of the working-classes are rent-payers', another member remarked, 'and unless the Government come to their rescue they will remain rent-payers for the remainder of their mortal existence'. There could be no permanent benefit until a cheaper worker's cottage was built - fit for those who earned less than the living wage. 'It is amongst that class of people where the real congestion is, and two or three families are forced to live in one house', Parliament was told.32

In March, 1914 debate over the extension of Daceyville was renewed. Attempting to deflect Opposition criticism, Government support for the model scheme now swung behind the planners' ideal. Labor members increasingly recognised that the housing ideal of the working-classes could not be satisfied. As J.P. Osborne, MLA for Paddington, acknowledged:

Our idea was to create a model suburb, to build the best class of houses, to show people how houses should be built, to do away with the terrace system, so that men could live under decent conditions... It was never intended to put the people out there in barracks.33

J. Storey, who had chaired the 1913 Public Works inquiry into Daceyville, also conceded that the scheme would 'not afford very great relief to the people who are anxious to get cheaper houses...' Daceyville, in effect, had become the plaything of the planning profession. Storey now argued that it would show 'what a model suburb is, what town planning is, and what is the class of home
which will go to make the life of the workers a little more pleasurable than it is to-day'. Storey indeed claimed that bad housing conditions determined the 'loose habits of the working-classes'.

If the idealised worker's suburb was still alive in pre-war Sydney, by now it was incapable of resuscitation. Whilst the physical dimensions of Daceyville were reduced and design innovations introduced, the planners' self-contained cottage system remained too rigid to permit cost economies. Charles Reade, the garden-suburb publicist, wrote in The Salon:

Let it be admitted that these Government Departments as much as, if not more than private builders or individual architects, have succeeded in bringing a type of house within the means of a certain class of people that originally they could not obtain at the price. The fact remains that the methods of design are too expensive and the standards of accommodation and construction are too high to permit of cheaper building.

As environmental determinists, state housing reformers had a too-perfect vision of the separate family bungalow. Their disapproval of single-class housing estates and enthusiasm for the spacious and private home environment remained undiminished in this period. In 1915 Frederick Hall, the Housing Board manager, remarked of Daceyville, 'men of the better class go there; not those who can only afford to pay 8s. or 10s. a week. We are not catering for them'.

What then was to become of the weakest members of Sydney's working class; the slum-dweller, the unskilled and casual labourer who could not fend for themselves in the housing market? The environmental determinists had not solved the housing problem of this social group. It was among the labouring poor that the housing crisis was most acute and the separate family cottage least idealised. Undoubtedly, slum-dwellers were entitled to a better home environment but their wages limited the amount of living space they could afford to rent. The failure of the reformers to solve this problem meant that a significant group had been locked out of the housing reform debate. In late 1914, while Daceyville was demonstrating the planners' housing ideal, a less edifying settlement was creeping across the sandy soil further south. Situated near the junction of Bunnerong and Maroubra roads, 'Calicotown' had become a makeshift settlement of cheap houses for the impoverished families of government workers. Their government accommodation, however, immediately renewed concern about appropriate living arrangements and housing standards.
for Sydney's poor. Underlying cleavages in the housing reform movement were again exposed by the search for new solutions to a seemingly intractable problem. Calicotown quickly became a focal point for the political and environmental tensions of the day.

Calicotown

The outbreak of the First World War forced governments to rethink assumptions about the self-reliant housing environment. Fear of promoting charity or disguised poor relief had always made public authorities wary of low-cost worker housing schemes. Excluding men in essential occupations, such as the Darling Harbour wharf labourers, it was assumed that the mass of urban wage workers could secure suitable housing beyond the City. Daceyville set new housing standards which city-dwellers were expected to seek. Nevertheless, by 1914 it was obvious that not all social groups in the reform movement aspired to the town planners' housing ideal. The poor had not shared in the vision. The Holman Government's attempt to make alternative housing arrangements available to them refocussed the housing debate. The spectre of a cheap worker's suburb now returned to haunt the environmental determinists.

Pressure to build cheaper worker housing at Daceyville had induced the Labor Government to investigate a wooden cottage scheme in 1912. The Minister for Works announced in September that construction would begin on 'some hundreds of wooden houses immediately'. The cottages were expected to rent for about 10s. weekly. The Housing Board, however, advised against the proposal. Chairman Fitzgerald argued that the scheme was impractical and uneconomic. 'To erect wooden cottages as proposed would... be entirely out of keeping with the excellent ideas and intentions of the Government, as embodied in the Housing Act'. The purpose of state intervention, all agreed, was to raise slum-dwellers from their sordid condition, not to drag them down. Cheaper dwellings, it seemed, meant abandoning the planners' ideal, lowering working-class housing standards, and reordering policy priorities.

Many slum-dwellers, of course, had never experienced healthy living conditions nor concerned themselves with the niceties of model garden suburbs. High rents in pre-war Sydney forced them to overcrowd or seek cheaper lodgings. In 1913 Professor Irvine dramatically illustrated their plight at the squatter settlement of Eucalyptus Town. Situated on Crown lands near Long Bay, the stark iron shacks were a vivid reminder of the severity of Sydney's housing problem. The makeshift appearance of the settlement must also have
confirmed the worst fears of housing reformers. All agreed that the type of
dwelling at Eucalyptus Town could not breed good or happy citizens.

In October 1914, the Holman Government announced that it would
establish an emergency accommodation scheme in the same area. Beset by an
industrial slump and rising unemployment, Cabinet had devised a job-sharing
arrangement for employees of the Public Works Department. Labourers and
tradesmen were put on half-time in order to provide work for hundreds of
unemployed. Unable to pay market rents many families now faced eviction
and homelessness. Calicotown was the Government's policy response to the
crisis. In early November the Herald reported that some 100 labourers were
'engaged in building "Calico Town" to the order of the Minister for Public
Works'.

An acrimonious debate now began within the Government and the housing
reform movement over the desirability of the scheme. In Parliament, Works
Minister Griffith defended it as a temporary expedient designed to accommodate
500 families, 'the breadwinners of which are unable to pay the ordinary rents
asked for houses in the metropolitan area'. The government dwellings,
however, would not be substantial bungalows like those in neighbouring
Daceyville but huts made from calico with rubberoid roofs. Sanitary facilities
would be shared rather than private. Nevertheless, the calico dwellings were
'practically rent free' as the tenants had only to pay the Housing Board 1s. a
week for water and garbage services. There was dissenting opinion. One
member suggested that the distressed families should occupy the model
dwellings at Daceyville. F.J. Page, MLA for Botany, was appalled at the
prospect of a shanty town in his electorate. 'At Daceyville there have been built
places which are a credit to the Government, but I have no hesitation in saying
that this calico city is a disgrace'.

Calicotown disappointed the expectations of both housing reformers and
civic planners. Since the turn of the century the housing reform leadership had
sought to demonstrate that there was a destructive relationship between bad
environment and the individual. Government intervention, by raising the slum
dweller from his impoverished surroundings, was expected to arrest the process
and assist individual self-reliance. However, by creating the foundations of bad
environment at Calicotown, the Government had flatly contradicted the
principle. As a Herald columnist observed:
If, as all evidence goes to prove, the surroundings make the slum dweller, and not the slum-dweller his surroundings, it seems only too probable that in Calico City Sydney has the nucleus for the most degrading slum area that she has yet known. One cannot conceive, after an inspection of the new suburb, to give it its courtesy-title, that any human being could live there and retain his or her self-respect.44

As Daceyville was supposed to demonstrate, good environment was a precondition for preventative housing reform. The presence of Calicotown, however, signified a radical reversal of this canon of thought.

Griffith's low-cost housing solution also aggravated old strains between the state and local authorities. The Mayors of Mascot and Botany Councils resented the Government's contravention of municipal health and building laws. The former's Mayor Hicks accused the Government of aiming 'a death-blow at the good work the councils have been doing for years'. He complained:

The function of a Government should be to lift up surroundings, not degrade them in this manner. One shudders to think of the conditions which will exist here. Picture 500 families, drawn from every quarter, living in a limited area of 500 calico houses, about 20ft apart, which, when lighted up, are quite transparent... The rooms, two to each house, are 8ft by 10ft and 6ft high (instead of 10 by 10, and 10ft high); generally no floor other than the loose, dirty black sand. The fireplaces are of second-hand galvanised iron and are absolutely death-traps, being within 18 inches of the calico walls... How a community can be expected to live creditably and be law-abiding amongst such surroundings as will be created is out of the question.45

Botany's Mayor Stephen also argued that Calicotown was not fit for human habitation. 'If I had my way', he told the Herald, 'I'd condemn the whole thing straight away'.46 When the City Council raised concerns, a Public Works official replied that 'the only danger of disease in the new settlement may arise from the transfer of families from the slum areas under the control of the City Council'.47 Competing reform strategies, mutual rivalry and distrust were all brought into the open by the creation of Calicotown.

In November 1914 a Board of Control was appointed to manage the housing scheme. Chaired by Frank Brennan, Superintendent of the State Labour Bureau, the Committee was represented by Sydney Labor Council Secretary, the Hon. E.J. Kavanagh, MLC and union leaders Vernon and
O'Sullivan. Brennan presided over the allocation of the calico dwellings. Many of the applicants were inner-city dwellers trapped in poverty. They gave details of their family size and the type of accommodation usually rented from landlords. 'This has disclosed a very undesirable state of things that has existed in the slums', Brennan observed. He discovered a married couple with several children occupying a single room. 'You could hardly conceive that a man would have to have recourse to that in Sydney', he remarked. Some families had been denied poor relief because the breadwinner was working up country. Unable to pay rent, they had 'practically been thrown into the street'. Whilst the Board of Control had no authority to make Calicotown a permanent fixture, Brennan believed that the Government would face 'considerable difficulty in closing it down'.

Some housing reformers wanted to see Calicotown improved and extended. Kate Dwyer of the Women's Organising League believed that the settlement had come closest to satisfying the housing ideal of low-paid labourers. 'Mr Griffith has solved the problem of housing the casual workers', she told the N.S.W. Citizens' Association in 1915. Dwyer disapproved of the Harbour Trust housing environment and the City Council's high rents at Chippendale. Calicotown was successful, however, because it had housed the average worker for less than a day's pay. Dwyer claimed:

The most remarkable thing about the whole scheme is that it evoked vials of wrath and a stream of adverse criticism long before the houses were completed. Many of those for whom it was done were prejudiced and did not apply for a house. But the settlement could have been ten times as large if all the applications had been granted to those who applied.

By April 1915 additional rooms had been added, the dwellings were all floored and more weather-proof building materials such as corrugated iron had begun to replace the calico. The improved accommodation cost about £10 and rented for 2s 6d weekly. Some 358 people, including 230 children, now lived at Calicotown.

Despite Dwyer's optimism, working-class interests mostly viewed the housing scheme with undiluted contempt and hostility. The Australian Worker accused the Holman Government of squandering a 'fine chance to assist the working-classes in the science of housing'. After designing 'aristocratic' Daceyville it had gone to the 'other extreme' and erected a suburb which 'has
indeed few virtues'. One worker feared that the inhabitants would be seen as 'outcasts from society'. He remarked:

Between Calicotown and Daceyville there is a great gulf fixed, as great as that between the rich man and Lazarus. Two ridiculous extremes there are, the one too expensive, the other too cheap, for the great mass of workers.

Unionists who accepted Calicotown were emphatic that it was a necessary evil which would disappear once the wartime emergency was over. Kavanagh considered it 'simply a gift to the poor of £5,000'. He told a Herald journalist that 'no Government would want people to live in such places permanently'. As an impoverished social group, however, the poor were expected to quickly adjust to their new surroundings. 'Don't forget that the people who will be living out there', Kavanagh remarked, 'will be mostly used to that sort of life - women who have been accustomed to rag-bag or galvanised iron shelters, following their husbands along the railway lines...'

Conclusion

Political antagonisms, class loyalties and cultural prejudices all spilled over at Calicotown. The episode clearly illustrated the extent to which individuals and social groups held strong opinions about state housing reform. It also showed that there was no neat solution to the problem of improving working-class housing in early twentieth century Sydney. The Government's policy of housing those most in need at Calicotown conflicted with the environmental determinism of the housing reform movement. The state, most reformers agreed, was an agent of housing improvement and not a benevolent institution for the poor. To ignore environmental conditions and use state power to build a cheap worker's suburb was to ask the poor to exchange one sordid housing existence for another. Policy remedies like Calicotown could not elevate their inhabitants, reformers protested, only entrap them.

State housing reform obviously contains the seeds of political conflict and division. Government sponsored housing programmes, meant to satisfy the demands of a particular social class, frequently pose problems for competing interests and groups. In the period from 1900 to 1915 the housing problem in Sydney remained fundamentally the same but the locus of contestatory activity changed. Earlier concern with decaying city slums, resumptions and rehousing increasingly shifted towards environmental planning solutions for the lower
density suburbs. Civic reformers had never been overly interested in the politics of public housing, economic grievances, or the wages of the poor. By 1914 their environmental determinism had become more 'scientific' and professional in outlook. As social scientists they talked in terms of selective civic surgery and preventative planning intervention rather than public housing remedies. Nevertheless, the underlying tensions which framed this period of state housing reform remained.

In 1900 bubonic plague in the City of Sydney called forth new political and social structures to deal with the public health crisis. At the end of the period similar anxieties about wholesome housing and living conditions had re-emerged on the suburban frontier. Civic reformers and planners looked upon their creation at Daceyville as the exemplar of a healthy housing environment. The model suburb pleased the environmental determinists but disappointed wage labourers who demanded lower rents. Daceyville's shoddy neighbour at Calicotown certainly reduced costs yet satisfied neither the planners nor the workers. Its unwelcome appearance and inferior conveniences reaffirmed a continuity of belief that subsidised dwelling schemes were not a socially desirable solution to housing the workers in pre-war Sydney.

People without a settled way of living in this period remained suspect in the eyes of housing reformers and government agencies. By failing to improve their housing conditions they were the most visible of all social groups and yet the least likely to benefit from state housing policies which favoured self-supporting individuals. Ironically, when state intervention was targeted at particular groups - the Darling Harbour wharf labourers and Calicotown dwellers for example - the housing type provided was regarded as neither sound nor sanitary. Moreover, in both these cases the intervention was justified as an expedient and paternalist response rather than a desirable or permanent policy solution. The divisiveness of state housing reform in the years from 1900 to 1915 was obviously due to the competing political demands of the various actors. Nevertheless, by the end of the period the environmental determinists had emerged triumphant. Their unifying belief that bad housing environments made bad individuals showed that they had absorbed the dominant ideas and influences of Sydney's nineteenth century sanitary reformers.
Endnotes


12. See 'Dacey Garden Suburb'- Housing Board publication (Govt. Printer Sydney, 1918), p. 12.


29. *Ibid.*, pp. 135-36. The 'living wage' was the monetary equivalent of a basket of goods and services required for the maintenance and reproduction of an adult male worker and his family. The principle was first defined by Justice Higgins in the 1907 Harvester judgement. Heydon based his standard on a family of four persons living in a house of three rooms and a kitchen. See Walker, *loc.cit*, pp. 36-47.


37. *SMH*, 26 September 1912.

39. See Chapter Five.
41. *SMH*, 4 November 1914.
44. *SMH*, 3 November 1914.
45. *SMH*, 29 October 1914.
46. *SMH*, 5 November 1914.
47. *SMH*, 10 November 1914.
50. K. Dwyer, 'The Housing Problem', *Building*, Vol. 15, No. 95 (July 1915), p. 120.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 120.
54. *Australian Worker*, 22 October 1914.
55. *SMH*, 5 November 1914.
56. *SMH*, 4 November 1914.
Chapter Eight

General Conclusion

This study has sought to identify and interpret the significance of housing reform activity in Sydney during the period 1900-1915. By examining the interplay of political, economic, social and cultural currents in these years, the aim has been to draw out the streams of thought which separated this period from the preceding century yet also shared a continuity of tradition with that age. The early 1900s played host to increasing political and social change throughout the Australian Commonwealth including the formation of Labor governments, the development of state arbitration and the emergence of welfare reform for the working-classes. These developments all influenced the political character of the pre-war period but left undisturbed urban and housing problems inherited from the nineteenth century. The housing reform movement which emerged in early twentieth century Sydney carried with it not only the fears and anxieties of earlier slum reformers but also an optimistic faith in environmental improvement.

The leadership of the reform movement was composed of a group of liberal progressives and middle-class intellectuals who believed in reason and human progress. The New Liberals despised the existence of old inner-urban working-class areas and assumed that the inhabitants had been debased by their housing environment. The appearance of such unsightly living quarters at the beginning of the twentieth century suggested that something had gone wrong with colonial liberalism. In these sordid localities a process of visible degeneration and destruction had replaced traditional habits of self-help, nation-building and social progress. To contemporaries it seemed that all the evils of the old-world slum had taken root in a young and vibrant culture. All agreed that the consequences for unborn urban generations would be catastrophic unless state intervention was forthcoming.

Housing reformers were confident that they had the knowledge and tools at hand. If modern sanitary science, municipal reforms and civic surgery were all applied to the affected areas the cause of the problem would be rooted out. Health authorities, city aldermen and clergymen in pre-war Sydney all advocated simple mechanical remedies to a complex problem. Their
environmental determinism taught them that once the evil slum was destroyed its inhabitants would undergo a process of physical and moral regeneration. Slum-dwellers would acquire the self-reliant values and virtues of civilised citizens. They would no longer be dependent on their physical environment but be free to take their place in an emerging nation.

The slum reformers and environmental determinists who spearheaded the intervention looked upon slum-dwellers as a monolithic social group. Who they actually constituted was of little concern because as victims of bad environment their behaviour and outlook was predetermined. According to this theory slum-dwellers drawn from places such as the Rocks, Athlone Place, the Wexford Street district, or Chippendale all belonged to the same mould. All that was blocking their natural social development was the existence of 'old world' housing conditions. These destructive influences could, however, by the actions of enlightened civic reformers and governments, be exposed and eliminated. Despite setbacks and contradictory outcomes, Fitzgerald and his followers never seriously departed from this housing reform theory in pre-war Sydney.

This theory of housing reform therefore emphasised process rather than a specific set of policy goals. It was built upon powerful cultural and environmental assumptions which overrode the search for political solutions. Given the appropriate conditions to act upon, reformers assumed that the process would unfold itself logically and harmoniously. Indeed, the reform leadership believed that its own goals and values were no different to other social groups in this period. The separate family home, located in a low-density and hygienic suburban setting, seemed to have universal appeal. Furthermore, there was a ruling consensus that governments were neutral arbiters of housing reform in early twentieth century Sydney. State authorities were expected to set socially-desirable dwelling standards, extend home loan assistance to city-dwellers and regulate house rents. State intervention provided the catalyst for the production of a better individual and housing environment.

Some observers suggest that this period of state intervention had minimal impact on family poverty in New South Wales. O'Brien found that despite the introduction of social and welfare reforms, a larger proportion of the population were in 'institutional care' in 1911 compared to earlier decades. If state welfare initiatives did little to ease the plight of the poor, then housing reform activity also fell short of its goals. In many instances the process of state intervention did not remedy old-world housing poverty but aggravated it. From the turn of the century to the First World War, Sydney City was subjected to a
recurring cycle of inner-suburban resumptions and slum clearance. The aggregate housing stock was reduced and thousands of rent-paying poor were forced to find alternative lodgings. Far from reducing the social segregation and dependency of slum-dwellers, these actions simply dislocated kinship patterns and intensified overcrowding and ill health.

The rehousing schemes of the period were not especially imaginative, nor extensive, and did little to alleviate poverty and hardship. The self-supporting principle underlying government house-building prevented significant rent reductions and tended to exclude the dishoused and slum-dweller. When government schemes benefited the poorer groups - those housed at Darling Harbour and Calicotown for instance - the interventionist activity was justified as an expedient response to extraordinary circumstances. These non-profit housing ventures generally had more critics than supporters. Their non-traditional dwelling form offended popular norms and many reformers feared that they would become old-world slums.

How then does this period of housing reform activity relate to other interventionist programmes of the time? The historian Martin Daunton argues that there are pitfalls in the way in which historians choose to interpret state housing history. The 'teleological' view of British public housing, for example, suggests that the provision of Council housing after 1919 was the outcome of a heightened public consensus about the benefits of municipal building activity. This 'Whiggish' interpretation of British housing policy, Daunton argues, neglects the complex interplay between urban culture and its social environment. The emergence and acceptance of a new housing institution in post-war Britain was not guided by an inevitable historical agent. Daunton himself concludes that state-subsidised intervention was the "outcome of the particular circumstances of the war and reconstruction".  

The distinction between public and private housing in Australian history has caused some observers to describe the early twentieth century as the "failure of public housing". New South Wales, it seemed, had a public housing history like Imperial Britain, but one which was unfortunately aborted at birth. Political chicanery, bureaucratic incompetence and Australians' inherent love of the private family home have all been blamed for the untimely death of Daceyville and public rental housing. The reader is left with the impression that the state had a historic opportunity to build a low-cost rental sector after the First World War but somehow squandered it. Housing reformers were
motivated to advocate state housing investment yet remained too entranced by home ownership to successfully defend it.

The problem with these conventional interpretations is that they suffer from inadequate contextual treatment and offer a limited causal explanation of state housing intervention. In particular, observers of working-class housing reform in Australia have neglected to explore the interaction of the state and the social groups pressing for reform measures. The causes and solutions of the housing crisis were not always apparent to the protagonists of the period. Their attitudes and remedies to the urban and environmental hazards of a modern metropolis differed according to professional allegiances, economic interests and political and class loyalties. As this thesis has argued, battles were fought not just between the supporters and opponents of public rental housing but also among rival political structures and within the housing reform movement itself.

State housing policy in pre-war Sydney should therefore be seen in a wider historical context. There is insufficient evidence to suggest that the period signalled the first halting steps towards a comprehensive public housing programme. The ideas of the reformers were too disparate and nineteenth century policy traditions too inchoate to produce such a linear outcome. State house-building, whilst a favoured solution of the working-classes, was only one arm of Labor's legislative reform programme and, in the case of Daceyville, remained a problematic form of intervention. Moreover, the range of housing interventions between 1900-1915 occurred under both non-Labor and Labor governments and were all subject to competing tensions and conflict. Different groups stood to gain different ends from the housing reform process, and the fact that none of them could be fully realised, was dramatically illustrated by the showdown at Calicotown.

This period of housing reform is best seen as an attempt by the state to grapple with persistent urban and environmental anxieties reaching back into the nineteenth century. The arena of reform was contested not between public and private housing crusaders, but between competing social groups which all hoped to profit from increasing state regulation of Sydney's housing environment. The ruling consensus uniting the reform groups was periodically subject to stresses and strains. These occurred because the cultural assumptions which housing reformers and planning experts used to base their interventionist theories upon were often removed from the everyday concerns of working people. In this period the housing reform leadership believed that improved worker housing was the means to achieve wider community goals such as better public health,
greater moral cohesion and even wealth creation. The habitations of the inner-city poor were so many fetters frustrating the fulfilment of this theory of social improvement. Those groups for whom housing reform was being undertaken, however, were less interested in the reform process and more motivated by immediate results. Thus working people and their representatives agitated for cheaper dwellings, greater security of tenure and independence from landlords. If middle-class reformers despised the slums as hot-beds of congestion, disease and social deviancy in early twentieth century Sydney, ordinary rent-payers regarded them as the unacceptable outcome of an unfair housing system.

In 1915, political structures in Sydney were more centralised compared to the turn of the century. No countervailing metropolitan government had emerged to contest the various options at play in the housing question. Local authorities were progressively weakened as the state brought health and housing responsibilities under its administration. Municipal house-building, an interventionist programme championed by working-class groups in the early 1900s, had become a victim of these centralising forces by the end of the period. The creation of a central lending agency in the Government Savings Bank saw home loans directed to private borrowers and not local authorities as later occurred in Britain.

The private landlord market emerged relatively unscathed from the housing interventions of the period. State Socialists indeed were critical of Sydney’s housing industry but not especially interested in its structure or workings. Their condemnations remained inconsistent and vague. The inability of reformers to reach a general consensus over this question highlighted the divergence of opinion between those groups leading the housing interventions and those subject to them. Neither of the major groups had seen their reform programmes satisfied by 1915 and the subsequent passing of the Fair Rents Act indicated that the housing debate was far from exhausted. There were no permanent solutions to the environmental and housing anxieties of the period because the remedial responses all contained the seeds of future conflict and division. Slum demolition, worker dwelling schemes, home loan advances and fair rents legislation reflected the organisational strength of the competing groups. They also suggested that governments were unable to decisively resolve the housing problem to the satisfaction of any reform group.

Many of the problems which confronted housing reformers at the beginning of the century therefore continued to trouble them at the end of the period. Slum clearance and government housing ventures were unable to
conceal deep-seated fears over the condition of the city housing environment. The dual governmental structure of the City survived and continued to cause tensions, despite political reforms. The vitriol hurled at the State Government for the public health nuisance at Calicotown was no less caustic than that reserved for the City Council during the plague crisis of 1900. By the First World War the housing debate had shifted to the growing suburbs. However, no reform group could confidently claim that Sydney had shaken off the shackles of old-world housing poverty.

The ideas of the environmental determinists have not entirely departed the stage. Contemporary debate, concerning the condition and future of Australian cities suggests that urban and environmental anxieties continue to influence public policy makers. The tensions of urban growth are increasingly being felt in the suburbs where the Australian preference for low-density housing has remained undiminished since the late nineteenth century. Earlier fears for the future of city-dwellers are now crystallising around questions of suburban housing habits and the desirability of existing living arrangements. Since the 1980s the catchcry of governments and planning groups has become 'urban consolidation'. Again the implicit assumption driving this policy is that the entrenched habits and values of twentieth century suburbia are endangering the emergence of better and fairer cities. Dominant dwelling and spatial forms, it is argued, must be modified in order to prevent an urban catastrophe. The physical remedies which this school of thought prescribes, however, appear no less problematic than those propounded by the civic reformers and environmental determinists of early twentieth century Sydney.


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