Urban Marginality and Labour Market Restructuring: Local Authority Tenants and Employment in an Inner London Borough

Paul Watt

Summary. This paper examines the changing employment circumstances of local authority tenants in the inner London borough of Camden within the context of the radical labour market restructuring which occurred in London during the last third of the 20th century. It draws upon survey data from the 1960s and 1990s in order to assess the scale and impact of employment and housing changes on Camden’s local authority tenant population. The final part of the paper uses qualitative work history data to illustrate how the tenants themselves have experienced the increasingly ‘flexible’ and precarious metropolitan labour market. Various types of employment trajectory are outlined in relation to labour market participation, unemployment and gendered patterns of paid and unpaid work.

Introduction

Wacquant (1999) has discussed the onset of a ‘new regime of urban marginality’ in Western cities characterised by a combination of widening social inequality, growing unemployment, welfare state retrenchment and the spatial concentration of poverty in stigmatised parts of cities. The latter places constitute the major repositories of the ‘new urban poor’ who are spatially concentrated within the inner cities of the US and the inner cities and outer suburbs of Europe (Mingione, 1996; Wilson, 1996). In terms of identifying these marginalised or socially excluded people and places in Britain, attention has often focused on housing estates composed mainly of local authority (i.e. council) or housing association rental property, although concentrated poverty can also occur within inner-city areas dominated by home-ownership (see inter alia Jordan et al., 1992; Department of the Environment, 1997; Lee and Murie, 1997; Smith, 1997; Page, 2000; Smith and Macnicol, 2001). This paper, based on survey and work history research undertaken among local authority tenants in the inner London borough of Camden, examines the social dynamics of urban marginality in the context of the labour market restructuring accompanying London’s transformation into a post-industrial, global city.
Employment and Housing in London

Labour Market Restructuring in a Post-industrial City

The changing nature of the London economy remains one of the most spectacular urban transformations of the last third of the 20th century. Deindustrialisation and large job losses as a result of recession, restructuring and relocation have been remorseless (Dennis, 1978; Fothergill et al., 1986; Turok and Edge, 1999). Although London’s position as a global city resulted in an expansion of financial and business services during the 1980s (Sassen, 1991), the increase in the numbers of highly paid professionals and managers has not compensated for the total jobs lost. Instead, there have remained chronically high levels of non-employment as seen in unemployment and economic inactivity rates (Green and Owen, 1998).

Buck and Gordon (1998, 2000) and Gordon (1999) have developed a model of metropolitan labour market change. They suggest that two processes can be used to understand the severity of such change in London since the late 1970s, characterised as it is by high and sustained levels of joblessness. The first process is that of ‘turbulence’ and instability in the labour market, as seen in high rates of job turnover. Although London’s distinctiveness in terms of having higher rates of moving from job-to-job is actually greatest for skilled workers, such ‘turbulence’ can increase the risks of downward career paths and unemployment for those at the lower end of the metropolitan labour market. The second process is that of ‘sedimentation’ and ‘bumping down’. Within conditions of prolonged high levels of unemployment, there is a risk that individuals will descend into employment positions below their full capacities—i.e. ‘sedimentation’. They are thereby involved in ‘bumping down’ whereby an inflexible wage structure, individuals respond to demand-deficient unemployment by lowering their sights, taking a job one tier down, in a position where they outcompete others displaced to the tier below, and so on (Buck and Gordon, 2000, p. 187).

The result is structural as well as demand-deficient unemployment (Gordon, 1999). Turbulence and sedimentation are said to affect all levels of London’s labour force, but they have powerful negative effects on the low-skilled who may well find themselves increasingly marginalised, a phenomenon which particularly affects the middle-aged.

For some people at least, youthful turbulence seems to be followed by a form of sedimentation in the sense of downward mobility, leading to possible marginalisation. … In extreme cases this leads to people descending beyond long-term unemployment into effective disengagement from the labour market, in some form of concealed unemployment (Buck and Gordon, 2000, pp. 186–187).

These patterns of turbulence, sedimentation and marginalisation are illustrated in a longitudinal study of low-income employees and the unemployed in London by Lee and Townsend (1994). They found evidence of improved economic status for some, notably the young, and also for some women who had moved back into the labour market after childcare or who had upgraded from part-time employment. However, Lee and Townsend also uncovered evidence of a marked labour market deterioration for many. Their findings highlight the disjointed nature of employment trajectories at the bottom end of the London labour market since “career paths can be complex, especially among poorer people” (Lee and Townsend, 1994, p. 592). There were not only higher levels of unemployment and economic inactivity but also “a much higher rate of sub-employment— insecure employment, part-time, seasonal or casual employment and marginal self-employment, as well as simply lower paid employment” (Lee and Townsend, 1994, p. 592).

Both Buck and Gordon (2000) and Lee and Townsend (1994) have developed
powerful accounts of the ways that marginalisation has occurred at the lower end of the London labour market. However, in one sense ‘bumping down’ is not necessarily a recent phenomenon for all workers. This relates to the way that married women’s employment in Britain has routinely embraced occupational downgrading after childrearing, not least as a result of the dominance of such women in part-time employment (Crompton, 1997). Wheelock has argued that

men who have lost jobs through unemployment and redundancy are following the patterns already established by women who return to the labour market after a period spent caring: upon return they obtain lower wages, are placed in less skilled jobs, and are more likely to be unemployed again (Wheelock, 1999, p. 84).

Also, in London, the decline in manufacturing, alongside the privatisation and restructuring of former public services, has involved a shift away from male-dominated Fordist employment based around full-time, unionised workforces towards more ‘flexible’ and casual forms of non-unionised, increasingly female, service employment (Sassen, 1991; Fainstein et al., 1992; Cox and Watt, 2002). The notion of ‘bumping down’, therefore, needs to contain a greater acknowledgement of the gendered nature of employment and labour markets.

**Local Authority Tenants and Employment**

Employment interacts with housing to produce specific social and spatial configurations of unemployment and urban marginality. Hamnett (1991) has argued that widening social inequality in London has taken the form of ‘socio-tenurial polarisation’. This refers to a widening socio-economic disparity between the home-owning and council-renting tenures. The growing numbers of professionals and managers attendant upon London’s global city status have come to dominate owner-occupation through gentrification. House prices and private rents in the inner core are therefore pushed beyond the level which manual workers can pay. On the other hand, the local authority sector has become increasingly residualised, taking in higher proportions of the poor, unemployed and unskilled (London Research Centre, 1994). The twin impact of gentrification and residualisation within inner London has effectively trapped the increasingly impoverished remnants of the working class in council housing.

Research based on official statistics has demonstrated the extent of joblessness and deprivation among London’s council tenants (see *inter alia* Pinto, 1996; Lee and Murie, 1997; Department of the Environment, 1997). However, such studies tend to read off labour market advantages and disadvantages from variables, such as ‘economic inactivity’ or ‘unemployment’, whose meaning is increasingly ambiguous in the face of the radical employment changes which have taken place during the past 20 years (MacKay, 1999). Moreover, official statistics can fail to capture adequately the social processes which underpin economic marginalisation and social exclusion (Wacquant, 1997).

In contrast, such processes have been illuminated by qualitative research (for example, Page, 2000; Smith and Macnicol, 2001). In their account of a south London council estate, Smith and Macnicol (2001) emphasise that blanket notions of ‘benefit dependency’ and permanent exclusion from paid work are overly simplistic. Instead, they found that many tenants moved in and out of formal work, informal work and reliance on state benefits at different points during their lives. The residents’ main complaint was not so much about the lack of jobs, but about the low wages and insecurity associated with many of the available formal jobs. The residents of the estate maintained a strong work ethic, but they operationalised this within the local opportunity structures open to them. Smith and Macnicol’s study provides an extremely valuable insight into the daily ‘survival strategies’ used by London’s council estate residents. It also raises the question of whether there may be more opportunities for informal economic activity in cities such as
London compared with areas previously reliant on large-scale heavy industry (Morris, 1994; Page, 2000; Cox and Watt, 2002). Having discussed London, the spatial focus will now shift to Camden.

Camden

The London Borough of Camden encompasses a prominent area of central and inner north-west London (Figure 1). Camden is extremely socially diverse as well as unequal. It contains a large minority ethnic population, many of whom live in council housing, made up of long-term Irish and Cypriot communities and more recent Bangladeshi and African migrants. While not as deprived as some east London boroughs, Camden was nevertheless the 17th most deprived local authority area in England (Flatley and Bardsley, 1998), with high levels of homelessness, overcrowding, joblessness and poverty (London Research Centre, 1993; London Borough of Camden, 1996).

**Housing and Socio-tenurial Polarisation**

In 1991, around one-third of households in Camden rented from the council, a further third were owner-occupiers, over a fifth rented from private landlords and nearly a tenth rented from a housing association (Walker, 1994). This tenure pattern represents a radical change from the 1960s when Camden was dominated by private rented housing, much of it of a poor standard (Glass, 1970). During the 1960s and 1970s, Camden Council, under Labour control, put considerable efforts into tackling its lengthy waiting-list (Wistrich, 1972). This involved...
an extensive programme of new building as well as a proactive municipalisation policy of purchasing private properties and converting them into local authority dwellings. By 1981, local authority renting had become the largest tenure in Camden accounting for 39 per cent of all households (Pope et al., 1982).

Since then, public housing has contracted as a result of central government controls on council building and also as a result of the sale of local authority properties under the ‘Right-to-Buy’ legislation, the 1980 Housing Act. This contraction was severe by Camden Council’s own standards as a champion of public housing provision and also in relation to its reduced capacity to house adequately the borough’s less affluent residents (London Research Centre, 1993). However, the decrease in Camden’s local authority stock during 1981–91 was one of the lowest in England (Forrest and Gordon, 1993), partly as a result of the extremely low level of sales under the Right-to-Buy during the first half of the 1980s (Forrest and Murie, 1991, pp. 118–119). As Camden’s public housing sector contracted, its population became both poorer and more socially diverse as it came to accommodate increased numbers of the homeless and minority ethnic groups (London Borough of Camden, 1988; London Research Centre, 1993). By the 1990s, many of Camden’s council estates were deprived by national criteria (Department of the Environment, 1997).

Despite such evidence of inner-city deprivation, Camden also contains a large and generally prosperous middle class. The latter is prominent in Hampstead and Highgate, two long-established middle-class areas in the north of the borough, but the gentrification of previously working-class neighbourhoods is visible throughout Camden. House prices in the borough are among the highest in the capital reflecting its desirability among young professionals.

The social inequalities found in Camden have a strong spatial component with some wards ranked among the 50 most deprived in London, while others were among the most wealthy (London Borough of Camden, 1996). Many of the most deprived wards contain high concentrations of council housing which is prominent in the south and centre of the borough. Socio-tenurial polarisation in Camden often takes the form of gentrified properties adjacent to run-down council estates.

**Employment and Unemployment in Camden**

There is no such thing as a discrete ‘London labour market’ given the fact that many Londoners and Home Counties’ residents commute several hours a day to their place of work (Buck et al., 1986). Over 80 per cent of the Camden workforce travelled into the borough to work (Howes, 1997). However, it is also the case that around half of Camden’s residential workforce were actually employed within Camden itself (Howes, 1997). Therefore, although Camden clearly does not constitute a self-enclosed local labour market, the borough itself plays a major role in relation to the employment opportunities available to its residents.

During the early post-war period, the area of Camden had a highly varied industrial structure, but what distinguished it most of all was the presence of the three major railway stations, Kings Cross, Euston and St Pancras, and their associated goods yards; these offered low-skilled employment for many local residents. In addition, manufacturing in the Camden area was substantial, even if it was never as industrialised as east and south London (Shepherd et al., 1974). From the 1950s, Camden suffered a decline in employment, particularly in manufacturing but also in construction, distributive trades, transport and communications (Shepherd et al., 1974; Dennis, 1978; Campbell, 1983; London Borough of Camden, 1996). Moreover, the declining industries have tended to employ the highest proportions of Camden residents.

It was estimated that only 14 per cent of private-sector jobs in Camden were taken by local residents compared with around 25 per cent of public-sector jobs (Manpower Services Commission, 1988). In its early years,
Camden Council played a key role in employing local manual workers, particularly males. Running counter to private-sector job losses, the council nearly doubled its workforce from 4260 in April 1965 to 7897 in September 1980 (Watt, 2001). By 1979, manual workers made up around half of the total council workforce; they were disproportionately Camden residents since 57.6 per cent of the manual workforce lived in the borough compared with only 34.3 per cent of non-manual staff (Watt, 2001). However, during the 1980s and 1990s, Camden Council, in common with many other local authorities, was pressurised by central government financial restrictions and regulatory regimes to make large-scale cuts in its labour force (Marinetto, 1997). As a result, by April 1997 there were 5331 posts in the council of which only 5 per cent were manual (Watt, 2001). By the late 1990s, only 18 per cent of the council’s employees lived in Camden (Long and MacLaughlan, 1997). Clearly, it is the local Camden population, particularly male ex-manual workers, who have borne the brunt of the council’s contraction of its workforce.

Unemployment in Camden during the 1960s and early 1970s fluctuated between 1000 and 3000, but from 1980–83 it shot up to stand at nearly 12 000 people chasing just 720 vacancies in March 1983 (Campbell, 1983). From 1981 to 1993, 38 000 jobs were lost in the borough, around half in manufacturing (London Borough of Camden, 1996). Such severe job losses in traditional industries were only partially offset by the rise of employment in the financial services’ and arts’ industries since there was a net 10 per cent fall in employment in the borough from 1981 to 1993 (London Borough of Camden, 1996). The official unemployment rate in Camden reached a peak of 15 761 people (17.6 per cent) in August 1993, although since then it has fallen in line with national trends (London Borough of Camden, 2001). Nevertheless, unemployment has remained above the national average and is higher in those areas with the densest concentrations of local authority housing.

The Research

The research findings in this paper are drawn from a case study of local authority tenants and social class in Camden (Watt, 2001). Two main types of data are referred to here. First, survey data from the 1960s and 1990s are used to illustrate aggregate long-term changes in the tenants’ employment positions and demographic characteristics. The 1960s data come from a secondary analysis of the Housing Rents Study carried out in 1967 (Centre for Urban Studies, 1969; Glass, 1970), while the later data come from a survey of tenants carried out by the author in 1993.1 Secondly, qualitative work history data allow an in-depth examination of how tenants have themselves experienced and responded to the changing nature of the inner London labour market (Watt, 2001).2 This provides an experiential perspective on processes of social mobility which are frequently reduced to outlines of occupational schemata (Bertaux and Thompson, 1997).

Employment among Local Authority Tenants from the 1960s to the 1990s

Employment, Unemployment and Occupational Change

The Housing Rents Study was undertaken at a time when public housing was far smaller than in the 1990s; only one in five of all households in Camden were council tenants in 1966. Not only that, but local authority housing contained many middle-income households

the people in the public sector are not a race apart. The majority of council tenants are neither affluent nor are they in dire poverty (Glass, 1970, pp. 20–21).

The borough, therefore, did not contain ‘two nations’ divided by tenure. This had already begun to change by the early 1980s. Hamnett and Randolph (1987) examined the changing social composition of council housing in Camden and Lambeth based on the 1971 and 1981 Censuses. They concluded that “the council sector now accommodates a higher
skilled manual workers and this has led to an expansion in both the bottom and top of the SEG hierarchy. The numbers of semi-skilled and unskilled manual heads have increased, as have those in professional and managerial SEGs. This shows that there has not in fact been a uniform downgrading of the tenants’ occupational profile since the 1960s. This was partly brought about by Camden Council’s municipalisation programme whereby professionals who had been renting from private landlords were converted overnight into local authority tenants.

Having indicated something of the changes which have taken place since the 1960s, it is necessary to examine the tenants’ labour market position in the 1990s in greater detail. This is done in Figure 3 for survey respondents and their partners under retirement age with reference to both gender and social class differences; the latter is based upon a five-fold version of the Goldthorpe class schema (Marshall et al., 1996). Both male and female Camden tenants were heavily skewed towards the bottom of the class structure in the ‘non-skilled’ category—i.e. unskilled and semi-skilled manual, personal service and sales occupations (Goldthorpe classes IIIb and VII). Women were also overrepresented in class IIIa, clerical work, but markedly underrepresented in skilled manual and petty bourgeois occupations, although there were examples of women working in male-dominated skilled manual work such as train driving. Most of the petty bourgeoisie were in fact self-employed skilled manual workers rather than small employers. Part-time employment among the tenants was very much a female phenomenon.

Table 1. Local authority tenants: socioeconomic group of head of household, 1967 and 1993 (percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SEGs</th>
<th>1967</th>
<th>1993</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional and managerial (1–4, 13)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other non-manual (5,6)</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled manual (8, 9, 12, 14)</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-skilled and unskilled manual (7, 10, 11, 15)</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, it was also strongly associated with social class since the majority of non-skilled females worked part-time compared with only 14 per cent of the salariat. Figure 3 shows that domestic labour and childcare were very important for women right across the class structure, but insignificant for men.

Rates of economic inactivity among the men, in the form of premature retirement, sickness and disability, were strongly affected by class since they were far higher among those in manual and routine non-manual classes compared with the salariat. In the cases of both male skilled and non-skilled workers, the majority of the economically inactive were sick or disabled, as was also the case with the non-skilled female workers. This indicates the ‘discouraged worker’ phenomenon whereby ex-manual workers below the age of 65 have exited the labour market altogether following redundancy since they have few realistic prospects of getting another job (Westergaard et al., 1989). Among the male respondents as a whole, over half of the sick and disabled had been out of work for over five years suggesting that long-term sickness or disability was associated with withdrawal from the labour market.

Unemployment was extremely high right across the class structure. Surprisingly, it was not a great deal higher among the manual workers than the salariat, although several of the latter were employed in inherently insecure artistic professions such as acting. However, further analysis of the length of time the tenants were unemployed did reveal an association with social class since rates of long-term unemployment (over 12 months) were higher for unemployed clerical and non-skilled workers (both over 80 per cent) than either the salariat or skilled manual workers (both around 50 per cent).
**Joblessness, De-industrialisation and Labour Market Restructuring**

The above discussion has highlighted the profound changes in the employment circumstances of local authority tenants from the 1960s to the 1990s, notably increased levels of unemployment, economic inactivity and household joblessness. In terms of explaining the concentration of high levels of joblessness among the new urban poor in US inner cities, Wilson (1996) has pointed to two factors: first, the impact of deindustrialisation and occupational change; and, secondly, social and demographic changes in inner-city areas. These two factors are also relevant in terms of explaining the high levels of joblessness among Camden’s council housing residents.

Clearly, the restructuring of the inner London labour market is a major factor, notably the sheer rise in unemployment. Unemployment in Camden itself peaked at nearly 16,000 in August 1993 (London Borough of Camden, 2001) around the time the survey was conducted, a level way above that of the 1960s and early 1970s. More specifically, the impact of deindustrialisation on the tenants can be gauged by examining how many were employed in manufacturing in the 1960s and 1990s. The Housing Rents Study found that around a quarter of the ‘chief earners’ (four-fifths of whom were men) were employed in manufacturing (Centre for Urban Studies, 1969), but by 1993 this accounted for just over 4 per cent of all tenants’ jobs. A further indication of the impact of industrial restructuring can be seen by looking at the last industry the unemployed tenants worked in. Of the unemployed aged between 20 and 60 in 1993, 13 per cent had been previously employed in manufacturing while a further 8 per cent had been employed in construction. In each case, this was three times as many as were actually employed in these industries at the time of the survey.

It is also because it was the locally based industries that contracted which resulted in Camden tenants being so hard hit by unemployment and non-employment. Thirty years ago, the Centre for Urban Studies report found that like most of the rest of Camden’s population, council tenants need to live where they are. Their jobs are close by. About half of the chief earners work in Camden itself—most frequently in St Pancras (Centre for Urban Studies, 1969, p. 59).

The report also noted that ‘working wives’ were even more likely to be locally employed than their husbands, a familiar gendered pattern (Hanson and Pratt, 1995). Many of the manufacturing, transport and construction jobs would have been based in Camden itself in the 1960s, but by the 1990s only a minority were. In 1993 only 30 per cent of all tenant manufacturing employees worked in Camden, a quarter of transport employees, but not a single construction worker. Only one out of the six tenant railway employees worked in Camden, again a very different situation from the early post-war period. There is a good deal less manual work available locally in comparison with the 1960s as a result of job losses in transport, manufacturing, construction and local government and this has had a major impact upon Camden council tenants, particularly males.

However, despite such changes, the local area has continued to play an important role in providing job opportunities for Camden’s council tenants. For example, over half of all tenant local government employees worked for Camden Council, whilst the most localist employer was the Post Office with over 80 per cent working in Camden. Overall, exactly half of all tenant employees worked within Camden’s boundaries in 1993, 44 per cent worked elsewhere in London and only 6 per cent worked outside London. As in the 1960s, there was a gender difference since 46 per cent of men worked in Camden compared with 54 per cent of women.

There were also important class differences, as seen in Table 2. Both male and female professionals and managers in the salariat were the least dependent upon Camden for employment; only around one-quarter worked in Camden. In contrast, be-
Table 2. Local authority tenants (employed only): area employed by social class, by gender, 1993 (percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Social class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Salarit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men Camden</td>
<td>25 64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside Camden</td>
<td>75 36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women Camden</td>
<td>29 52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside Camden</td>
<td>71 48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


between one-half and nearly two-thirds of non-skilled and clerical workers did so. Only a third of the petty-bourgeois men worked in Camden, as did 41 per cent of male skilled workers. Male skilled manual workers, particularly the self-employed, were therefore more likely to work outside Camden than the non-skilled. The latter, both men and women, have remained very reliant on the immediate locality for their employment, although many of the jobs are low-paid, part-time and typically ‘women’s jobs’. In fact one-quarter of all the employed female tenants worked in what Crompton (1997, p. 80) has described as ‘domestic caring occupations’—i.e. those involving either cleaning or various forms of caring, such as childminding.

If the tenants suffered from being concentrated in declining industries, their capacity to enter the expanding industries in both Camden and London, notably banking and financial services, was extremely limited; only just over 2 per cent of tenants were employed in these industries in 1993. Despite the close spatial proximity of such industries to the Camden tenants, they seem to have hardly touched them in terms of providing accessible job opportunities. Why had so few Camden tenants obtained office work in the expanding commercial sector? Lack of skills and qualifications are undoubtedly part of the explanation (Manpower Services Commission, 1988; South Bank Polytechnic, 1989; CAG Consultants, 1997). However, there is also evidence that ‘local people’, in other words ex-manual workers, as well as the disabled and ethnic minorities, were discriminated against when central London firms recruited for office jobs (South Bank Polytechnic, 1989). Many employers did not use the borough’s job centres when recruiting (Manpower Services Commission, 1988).

Joblessness and the Changing Population of Local Authority Housing

Another factor in explaining the high level of joblessness among tenants is the demographic shift in the composition of local authority rental housing from the 1960s to the 1990s. Newcomers to the tenure have increasingly been drawn from the ranks of the homeless rather than the general waiting-list, while there has been a filtering of better-off households, particularly dual-income families, into owner-occupation under the Right-to-Buy (Watt, 2001). Married/cohabiting couples made up 61 per cent of all tenant households in 1967 but only 38 per cent in 1993. The proportion of lone
parents, on the other hand, more than doubled during the same period to account for over a fifth of all households and two-fifths of households with children under the age of 16. Ninety per cent of lone parents were female and three-quarters of the latter were not in paid employment. Since the 1960s, local authority housing has also accommodated a younger population. Only 3 per cent of heads of household were aged under 30 in 1967, but this went up to 13 per cent by 1993. Not only were newer entrants to the sector younger than established tenants, but they were also often unemployed.

Council housing in Camden also became more ethnically heterogeneous. The 1993 survey shows that all of the tenants who entered the tenure from 1939 to 1969 were White, but by the 1990s a third of new tenants came from non-White minority ethnic groups. The latter are generally disadvantaged in the London labour market (Fainstein et al., 1992). Asian and Black male tenants in Camden were more likely to be unemployed than their White counterparts, while among the largest minority ethnic group, the Bangladeshis, most of the women had never been in paid employment.

It can be seen that there has been a marked demographic shift in Camden’s council housing population. From being dominated by White, middle-aged, married couples in the 1960s, it included more young people, female lone parents and ethnic minorities by the 1990s—all groups with significant labour market handicaps (Brown and Scase, 1991; Fainstein et al., 1992). As council housing contracted during the 1980s and 1990s, new tenants were increasingly homeless and jobless with only the most disadvantaged managing to gain entry, while the better-off families exited into home-ownership via the Right-to-Buy. The result has been a concentration of those Camden residents with the weakest labour market capacities in local authority rental housing. Exactly how the tenants have themselves experienced the changing London labour market is the subject of the next section.

Employment Histories and Experiences

The qualitative data in this section are based upon interviews with those working-class tenants whose current or last job was either in a manual or routine non-manual occupation and who were non-graduates, rather than the minority of salariat (or ‘service-class’) graduate interviewees in professional employment. These professionals were atypical in a number of ways (Watt, 2000), whereas the working-class interviewees are likely to be far closer to typical Camden council tenants.

It is important to recognise that there was considerable divergence in the working-class tenants’ employment experiences. At a personal level, their narratives displayed the effects of chance, an often-ignored element in the analysis of social mobility (Bertaux and Thompson, 1997). At a more structural level, given the disparity in their ages, they faced a varied set of social conditions, ranging from those who entered the London labour market in the 1940s to those who entered it in the 1980s. Nevertheless, given these caveats a number of common patterns stand out. First, the majority of the tenants had at least one period of non-employment during their working lives, whether as a result of redundancy, dismissal, childcare or simply leaving a job. Secondly, unemployment and economic inactivity were in the main transitory states, although there was also evidence that some sick and disabled tenants were effectively disengaging from the labour market altogether. Thirdly, there was evidence that joblessness and homelessness went together, as discussed above. Although the interviewees became council tenants through a number of different means, including the waiting-list and as a result of Camden Council’s municipalisation policy, homelessness was a common entry route particularly for those who became tenants during the 1980s. Homelessness was often synchronous with periods of non-employment. Finally, ‘bumping down’ following non-employment was a very common, although by no means universal, experience.
A Typology of Employment Trajectories

It is possible to construct a four-fold typology of the tenants’ employment trajectories based around the notion of ‘bumping down’ (Buck and Gordon, 2000) discussed above. Each group will be discussed in detail below.

(1) Those who did not bump down.
(2) Those who bumped down but managed to regain similar or even better positions.
(3) Those who bumped down and did not manage to regain a similar position.
(4) Those who bumped down and then went further down into eventual disengagement from the labour market—i.e. ‘bumping down and out’.

First, despite the general picture of turbulence and marginalisation which the interviews revealed, a few tenants had unusually stable employment histories even during the labour market restructuring of the previous 25 years. Therefore, they did not ‘bump down’. These were men who had either continuous unbroken employment with the same organisation or alternatively only very short spells of unemployment. The unbroken employment was found among those working in large unionised workplaces or in small specialised firms. Amina’s husband, for example, had worked as a low-paid waiter at the same ‘Indian’ restaurant in the West End for 15 years. Vivien’s husband had only ever worked on the railways, as his father had done before him. He had been a fitter based at one of the London railway stations since the 1950s; he had managed to avoid redundancy and eventually retired from there. Jenny’s husband had also worked as a fitter on the railways on the south coast when she married him in the early 1960s. They could not find a place to live, so returned to London where Jenny came from originally.

We came back to London and my husband walked the streets to find a job. He went into a garage in the East End and asked them ‘do you want fitters?’ He got taken on and has worked there ever since for 37 years. He retires in two years time.

Secondly, there was a mixed-sex group who had experienced bumping down, often as a result of childrearing in the case of the women, but who had eventually managed to regain either a similar or even slightly better employment position. At the time of the interviews, all of this group were either full-time employees or self-employed. One typical example was Linda who was in her thirties and living with her partner and children. After she left school, Linda worked as an office junior and then became a receptionist. She became pregnant, left her full-time job, became homeless and eventually managed to obtain her council flat as a single parent. After a break of a few years, she re-entered paid employment doing a few hours cleaning for a doctor, facilitated by her mother looking after her young son. The cleaning job proved a lucky break for her

I ended up working for a doctor who I got on with extremely well and who liked me, and then she asked me to do some work in the surgery where she was working. … She just said to me, we sat down one day talking and she just built up, you know, sort of like a friendship with me, and she said ‘I don’t mean to be rude but I think this is just sort of wasting your time sort of cleaning, you’re never going to get anywhere with it’.

Consequently, Linda was offered a receptionist position at the doctor’s surgery, an example of middle-class paternalism which is discussed in more detail below. From there, Linda subsequently managed to obtain a part-time administrative job at a charity and then became full-time. As well as her own modest social mobility, Linda met her partner shortly after moving into her council flat; at the time of the interview, he was employed as a roofer. Despite living in a dual-income household with a high joint income by the standards of her neighbours, Linda did not feel that either her own job or that of her partner was secure. She was concerned at the imminent prospect of restructuring in her present organisation because of cutbacks in
public finance, while her partner had been made redundant twice since she had known him and this had placed considerable strain on their relationship.

The third and largest group were those men and women who had bumped down from a higher- to a lower-tier job but had not managed to regain their former position. Most of the men had been employed at some time during the previous five years, but by the time of the interviews they were unemployed, sick or retired. They tended to have had several periods of unemployment during their working lives. The women, on the other hand, were either looking after dependants, unemployed or working in a variety of low-paid jobs, often casual in nature. They had left employment either because of childcare, redundancy or dismissal. A minority of this third group supplemented their benefits with informal cash-in-hand work. In comparison with the two groups described above, this group of tenants were on downward trajectories. Three examples will be used to illustrate this group.

As seen above, a few of the middle-aged tenants had remained in large-scale Fordist organisations for many years. However, several men had experienced the collapse of these relatively secure and reasonably well paid ‘jobs for life’ as a result of economic restructuring, privatisation and relocation. Patrick was a retired widower in his seventies. He came to London from Ireland in the late 1940s and despite not having any formal qualifications he had no problem in getting a railway porter’s job at one of the London railway stations. He transferred to Euston station and then gained promotion to foreman and finally was a restaurant supervisor. However, he was made redundant in the late 1980s following the contracting-out of services by British Rail in the prelude to full privatisation. Following redundancy, Patrick did not bother looking for another job straightaway because he had a railway pension and because, as he said, “the jobs started to get scarce”. After several months out of work, he took a low-paid job doing ‘odds and ends’, mainly cleaning and taking messages, in a car showroom which he did for a few years before retirement.

In contrast, later migrants who came to live in Camden found it difficult to enter the low-skilled Fordist employment of the previous era. Hamud was a Somali refugee in his thirties who had come to London in the late 1980s. He lived with his wife, who was also from Somalia, and their young children. From having been a farm manager in Somalia, Hamud was unemployed for over a year when he arrived in Britain. Despite going on an IT training course, he still could not get a job, although during this period he managed to obtain his council flat. Then in the early 1990s, a Somali friend told Hamud about a job at a bakery in north London. He worked there on the night shift for several months but left because he could not adjust to working at night. He was then unemployed for two years before getting a temporary job as a packer in a factory being paid £300 a month for 40 hours a week. When this job finished, a job he would have liked to keep, he was unemployed for a few months before going to college to take further qualifications. Hamud then obtained a part-time cleaning job at a local school which he did for a year, but left because of health reasons. He had subsequently been unemployed for a further two years, but was committed to getting another job

Yes looking, desperate looking every day. Go to the job centre, look from newspaper, go to the factory and ask. … Unfortunately I did not get work. … When you apply for many jobs and you are rejected then you become disappointed, so you don’t like that. You need something to do yourself.

Hamud found it extremely difficult to break out of the ‘low pay–no pay’ cycle (Stewart, 1999), despite going on training courses—a problem which was undoubtedly exacerbated by racism in the labour market. Also, apart from occasional contact with fellow Somalis, Hamud was quite socially isolated.

Zoe was a single parent in her thirties with two teenage children. She had left school at the age of 16 with no qualifications and had
worked full-time at a shop for two years until she became pregnant with her first child. She managed to obtain a council flat and lived with the child’s father until he left her a few years previously. Following a break when her children were small, she re-entered the labour market working casually at home as a part-time childminder. Later on, she switched to cleaning, because it was better paid. Once her partner left her, Zoe did occasional cleaning jobs to supplement the £72 a week she received in benefits for her and her two children. She walked to the ‘big houses’ in Hampstead up the hill from her estate. However, she was worried about working ‘off the cards’ and going beyond the amount of hours she could legally work because some of her friends had been caught ‘fiddling’ by the DSS. In the future, Zoe wanted to go on a training course, but at the time of the interview she was effectively caught in the poverty trap. The low wages on offer for unskilled women in the local labour market, plus the loss of housing benefit, made sole reliance on formal employment an unrealistic option for Zoe and others like her.

I mean a lot of my friends do the cleaning because it’s money in the hand, and they get more money doing the cleaning than what they would if they was working full-time, and it’s cash, but I suppose you’ve got to do it. … Even when you pick up the local paper and look through for jobs and that, when you look at the money sometimes you think ‘is it worth doing’? But then I suppose if you want the money, you want nice things you’ve got to do it. A lot of my friends they have worked on the cards and left the Social, but they’ve had to go back on because of the money they get. … It seems just pointless working, you’d have to really earn a fortune to be able to pay full rent, your poll tax, everything. At the moment you get benefits, reductions off of it.

As Smith and Macnicol (2001) found, ‘doing the double’ is increasingly a rational option for people on benefits in London if anything remotely like a decent standard of living is going to be obtained. The fourth group in the typology consists of those male and female middle-aged tenants who had exited the formal labour market and were unlikely to return to it. Moreover, they were not participating in any kind of informal paid work either. This group of tenants were all chronic sick and disabled. It was often during one of their prolonged periods of non-employment that they actually became local authority tenants. Two examples will be used to illustrate this group of tenants.

Alice was a divorcée in her fifties and was disabled with chronic arthritis. She had come to work in Britain from the West Indies in the 1960s as a student nurse. However, she did not qualify and instead went to become an auxiliary nurse in London. In the 1970s, she had a career change and went to work for Camden Council as an administrator and then became a home help. During the mid-1980s she became ill, left her job and had not worked since, although she described her job as being very important to her because

I needed money to look after my daughter and myself. I didn’t like the idea of not working because I saw the homeless people always desperate and I said I hope I never get into that situation. … I didn’t like the idea of not working, even now, but I can’t work.

In the early 1990s, Alice became a council tenant following her private landlord’s threats to sell the flat she had been living in. Kevin was in his forties and had separated from his live-in partner. He was long-term sick having taken medical retirement from his previous job as a security guard. When he first came to London from Ireland in the early 1970s, he worked for several years as a sales assistant at a department store. The firm restructured in the late 1970s, Kevin’s department was closed down and he took a warehouse job at another site. After working there a year, he walked out, mainly because he did not get on with his supervisor. He then spent a few months unemployed before getting another warehouse job. However, his boss sacked him after a year because Kevin
had a dispute over working conditions. Again he was unemployed but eventually obtained a messenger position at one of the London councils. However, he was made redundant from that job, he felt because he was a union activist. At the same time, other aspects of his life began to fall apart.

My job finished, my relationship finished, I got psoriasis severely. I was having treatment in hospital three times a week and I was in a bit of a mess.

Around this time, Kevin was living in bed and breakfast hotels and then he stayed at a friend’s flat. He applied to Camden Council as homeless and after a great deal of difficulty managed to obtain a council flat. Altogether, he was unemployed for five years until the late 1980s: “I couldn’t get a job anywhere and I applied to every G*d d**n menial job that you could find”. Eventually he obtained a job as a security guard, but he left that for medical reasons after a few years. By the time of the interview, he did not consider himself employable.

Because I’ve been retired as a civil servant because I’m not suitable for work. I’m an alcoholic. I have a lot of personal problems that I’m finding difficult to cope with. My nerves are, you know, stretched to the limit. I know I’m only 46 but … I will not go and clean someone’s floor. I will not. I have nothing against cleaning if it’s a proper rate of pay and I’m a union member, but I won’t go and work on the basis of the only work that’s left now is casual work. I would, I have swept the streets, not a problem, it needs to be done. But it has to be done within a proper structure—i.e. employed by the authority with full union recognition, full rights and everything else. But all the type of work now that I would be considered for at my age is all casual, and ‘if you don’t like it, f**k off’, yes. And I mean I won’t do that. … I’ll not work when you’re treated like s***t. … Technology has by-passed me … I’m not going to catch up, not now.

It is possible to see the complex sets of circumstances which meant that Kevin had several periods of unemployment, resulting in him taking lower-grade jobs earlier on in his life, and then later on, as his health deteriorated, he eventually left the labour market altogether. Kevin’s and Alice’s trajectories represent the nadir of the ‘bumping down’ process with effective disengagement from all forms of paid employment and sole reliance on benefit income.

Explaining Employment Trajectories

It has been seen how a varied range of identifiable employment trajectories were in evidence among the tenants, with childcare arrangements being a particularly important consideration for the women (Smith, 1997). In trying to explain such variation, two important factors are ill health and skills. While the interviews did not include specific questions on health, it was clear that ill health had played a considerable role in people’s employment and housing histories, notably among those who were on downward trajectories. Several of the middle-aged men described how they had been extremely conscientious workers when they were younger, doing a lot of overtime for example. However, their labour market capacity was affected by accidents and illnesses, some of which were connected with jobs or lack of jobs as well as with their living conditions, notably poor-quality housing and periods of homelessness (Fitzpatrick and LaGory, 2000). Such ill health could result in an erosion of their original skills. For example, Pete had been a trained gardener when he was younger, but his capacity to grip with his hands diminished as a result of arthritis which meant that eventually he had to give up gardening altogether. Ill health could therefore mean that the range of jobs the tenants could do, particularly manual work, progressively narrowed over time and so increased the risk that they would bump down and not recover their previous position.

In relation to the possession of skills, the survey data showed that long-term unemployment was generally higher among the
non-skilled as opposed to the skilled manual workers. The interviews also demonstrated the significance of skills and qualifications in being able to re-access jobs after unemployment. However, if the possession of skills was an important factor in preventing or alleviating the impact of bumping down, it was also socially mediated since

skill is a very problematic concept, as often involving judgements about trustworthiness as about specific manual or mental capacities, and with both stereotypes and signalling playing a role in hiring decisions for skilled jobs (Gordon, 1999, p. 91).

The social mediation of skill took three forms: by a worker’s reputation, appearance and social capital.

On the first, having a reputation as a ‘good worker’ enhanced an individual’s capacity to secure certain kinds of jobs, but this reputation need not necessarily be based upon possession of any kind of formal qualification. Despite having had several periods of unemployment, Brian had never been out of work for very long and did not worry about job security, “because I could get another job … , because well people know me, I’m reliable and that I’ll get the job done”. Brian had not gone through any kind of apprenticeship or training but had instead picked up his various manual skills ‘on the job’. His reputation and social contacts helped to ensure that he could get paid work, both formal and informal.

As well as reputations, there was also evidence that a worker’s appearance played a role in being able to access certain kinds of jobs, notably personal service and domestic caring occupations which were significant in Camden (Cox and Watt, 2002).\(^5\) The interviews revealed the existence of a selective paternalism on the part of employers towards those working-class women, and to a lesser extent men, whom they singled out as being worthy of ‘help’ based around perceptions of their ‘respectability’ (Skeggs, 1997), as seen in the case of Linda above. Following redundancy, Patrick had been offered a job cleaning and driving a private car because the ‘guv’nor’ had said Patrick was the “only one that’s decent”. Appearing ‘respectable’ was probably more significant for the women than the men, reflecting the importance of ‘feminine’ standards of behaviour and appearance in many female service occupations (Adkins, 1995). In contrast, the outwardly worn appearance of some of the male tenants could signify ‘roughness’ and so automatically disqualify them from many ‘front region’ personal service jobs such as waiting (Zukin, 1995).

Finally, as the jobs on offer increasingly took on short-term, casualised forms, the role of social capital, in terms of having well-connected networks of family and friends, increased in relation to obtaining employment (see Jordan et al., 1992). Social capital refers to the resources an individual can draw upon as a result of membership of social networks (Bourdieu, 1984). As the example of Brian above shows, ‘reputation’ needed to be transmitted by word-of-mouth to others, either employers or those involved in a similar line of work. Hence being enmeshed in wide-scale networks was important since the possession of social capital was crucial in providing the routes along which information about jobs and workers’ reputations circulated. This social capital tended to operate along stereotypical gender lines with certain manual jobs associated with men, such as building, and others associated with women—notably childcare and cleaning jobs. Access to such networks could make the difference between bumping down and not bumping down (see Smith and Macnicol, 2001).

Table 2 showed that the male skilled manual workers, self-employed and employees, were less likely to work in Camden than the non-skilled. From the interviews, those skilled manual workers who had been self-employed for lengthy periods of time were involved in metropolitan-wide social networks of similarly placed males. Thus, they were less dependent upon formal means of job information and allocation, such as local job centres or newspapers. Instead, they re-
lied on their network of contacts to get work which in turn meant that ‘bumping down’ either did not occur or that it was only of limited duration. When asked whether his job was secure, Jimmy, a self-employed construction worker replied

Yes. I’m not being a bighead, but I’m good at my job and the construction industry is small enough, there’s a lot of people in it but it’s quite a small community in a way and I know, I’m quite well known and I know a lot of people. So like say, for example, I did leave this firm a few months ago. I had a disagreement with this guy in charge and I just walked away. Come home here at 4 o’clock and at 6 o’clock I had two jobs. People on the phone, ‘are you not working Jimmy at the moment, yeah come down in the morning, oh yeah come down’, so I didn’t know which one to go to.

Informal as well as formal work was also based on possessing the right combination of skills, reputation and contacts (Jordan et al., 1992; Smith and Macnicol, 2001). Those who were either outside or on the margins of the social networks connected to job information, because of ethnicity or social isolation, were in a far weaker labour market position. Training and the acquisition of qualifications did not necessarily guarantee labour market advantages in the absence of such social networks, as we saw in the case of Hamud discussed above.

Gender and Employment

The women who were interviewed invariably took the major responsibility for childcare and domestic labour, as the survey findings also suggest (Figure 3). All of them had undertaken some form of paid employment, usually full-time, prior to childbirth. However, both the married women and the lone parents tended to leave their jobs when their first child was born. With one exception, they all later returned to the labour market after a variable length of time, but mainly to a lower-grade occupational and/or employment status, often as part-time. Therefore, although the female tenants were affected by labour market restructuring in many ways, ‘bumping down’ was usually associated with leaving paid work because of childcare. Although paid employment was very significant for their living standards, whether they were living alone or with a partner, such work was effectively ‘fitted in’ around the demands of childcare, as other studies of council tenants have indicated (Jordan et al., 1992; Smith, 1997). Such ‘fitting in’ did not seem to be much in evidence among the admittedly small number of men interviewed who had children.

Childcare demands were also one of the factors tying the working-class women to the local labour market—i.e. that immediately available in the Camden area of north London where the majority were employed. This included working in ‘typically female’ occupations, such as sales assistants at local shops and market stalls, and receptionists at doctors’ surgeries, as well as childminding and cleaning. Working in schools was especially prized by the younger women. For example, Nancy was a single parent in her thirties and although she calculated that she was only £15 a week better off working as a classroom assistant than she would be if she was on benefits, this was compensated by the symmetry between her paid and unpaid work hours.

The nice thing is, I mean, I can work, I do term time only, get all the school holidays, start and finish the same time so I haven’t got to rely on childminders. It’s bliss, it’s brill and I love it.

Cleaning was a hardy perennial which many of the women had done at one time or another in their lives, notably as a way of getting back into the labour market after full-time childcare. Moreover, demand for domestic cleaners was high in this part of north London among middle-class households near the council estates in which the women lived (Gregson and Lowe, 1994; Cox and Watt, 2002).

Although most women worked in ‘typi-
cally female’ occupations, a few had managed to penetrate male-dominated workplaces and hence better-paid manual jobs, as the survey also suggested. Jenny, for example, was in her fifties and had worked full-time for the Post Office in a north London sorting office for nearly 20 years. She enjoyed her job enormously and was very proud of the fact that she was one of the first women on the night shift and had weathered the overt sexism which was commonplace (Siltanen, 1994)

No man was going to help me. I went through all the jobs. You had to prove yourself, especially on nights. The daymen gave me hell, the language they used.

Although some of the women had either been made redundant or dismissed, redundancy was generally more common among the men and it was also the latter who experienced multiple redundancies. In addition, there was routine denigration by the men of the locally available jobs for not paying ‘proper wages’. Pete mentioned that a new shopping centre had opened up in the north of the borough but, “They’re offering peanuts, £3.20 an hour—I can’t live on that, I’ve got Child Support to pay”. By ‘proper wages’, the male tenants were referring to the wages they were used to when they had been employed in full-time manual work. As seen in the case of Kevin, some men objected to what they regarded as exploitative or demeaning working conditions. The processes of taking up and leaving certain jobs was bound up with the middle-aged men’s desire to maintain a sense of masculine ‘respect’, often in straightened circumstances, as Jordan et al. (1992) also found in their study.

Despite the fact that the women invariably took time out of the labour market to look after their children when they were young, the way that they actually talked about paid employment suggests less discontinuity than the men, particularly those middle-aged men who had bumped down. The women seemed more accepting of the nature of the jobs on offer, notably part-time jobs, despite the fact that they also complained about the low wages. In fact, there were remarkable continuities between the employment circumstances of the women in the 1990s and those of the respondents’ mothers in earlier decades

“My Mum brought up six children all by herself, she was so hard working, but poor. Everyone was in the same situation then in the street. She done cleaning, served behind bars, making jewellery, cleaning in offices, she used to clean on a Sunday afternoon, all key jobs. Not one of us on a free dinner either” (Vivien).

In contrast, the middle-aged men whose early working lives involved reasonably well-paid and previously secure jobs within Fordist organisations seemed to have the greatest difficulties in adapting to the more ‘flexible’ London labour market of the 1990s. Based on maintaining traditional masculine notions of respect, they railed in vain against the lack of ‘proper jobs’ available.

Conclusion

Labour market restructuring in London has had a profound impact upon local authority tenants living in Camden, increasing their risks of social marginalisation and exclusion. The industries many of them were employed in have relocated, closed down or otherwise shed labour with devastating consequences for their employment prospects. The result has been a collapse of the ‘proper jobs’ associated with the male-dominated industries from the early post-war period. In addition, as council housing itself contracted during the 1980s, it also increasingly accommodated those who were both in the greatest housing need and in the weakest labour market positions.

The employment histories revealed the complex social processes underlying the aggregate statistical patterns. They showed how joblessness, homelessness and entry to local authority housing often went together, and also provided examples of how the new urban poor in Camden struggle to get by in an increasingly precarious metropolitan labour
market. Work was shown to be casual and insecure for many tenants, while ‘bumping down’ to lower-tier jobs following unemployment or childrearing was common. The interviews also revealed that a few tenants had managed to remain in stable jobs, while some were better able to cope with occupational downgrading than others. Ill health and possession of skills played a part in such differentiation but, in an increasingly ‘flexible’ labour market, having the right reputation and social contacts were probably as important as mere possession of training certificates. The working-class tenants in Camden have had to adapt to this ‘recasualised’ labour market (Lee and Townsend, 1994) by adopting a variety of survival strategies which for some may include working for periods ‘off the cards’ (Smith and Macnicol, 2001). Far from the right-wing media stereotype about ‘welfare scroungers’ living the high life by ‘fiddling benefits’ (Golding, 1999), among the minority of tenants who had supplemented benefit claiming with some form of cash-in-hand work, this work was of a sporadic, casual nature and merely staved off the worst effects of benefit-level poverty as well as helping to prevent boredom and isolation.

Gender differences were crucial in understanding the ways the tenants engaged with the new post-industrial London economy. The emphasis many of the middle-aged men placed upon maintaining respect can be regarded as part of a wider ‘crisis of masculinity’ that has affected both young and older men. However, if there is such a crisis, it is one that is intimately linked to economic restructuring and its effects on working-class men, rather than men per se (McDowell, 2000).

This paper has highlighted some of the social dynamics of urban marginality in relation to employment and housing processes as they apply to local authority tenants in Camden. The combination of survey data and work history data within a long-term time perspective allows for a linking together of the ‘private troubles’ of individuals with the ‘public issues’ emanating from profound social change (Mills, 1970). The tenants themselves have lived through a radical phase of labour market restructuring, to which they have had to adjust, but with varying degrees of success.

Notes

1. The Housing Rents Study included a census of council tenants which achieved an 88 per cent response rate (Centre for Urban Studies, 1969). The 1993 survey had a 41.4 per cent response rate and included 653 tenants (Watt, 2001).

2. The qualitative data are based on semi-structured interviews with 31 female and 19 male tenants, the majority of whom were followed up from the original survey; 6 respondents had in fact bought their flats under the Right-to-Buy scheme by the time of the interview. Their ages ranged from 25 to 77 years, but most were aged between 30 and 60 and therefore the sample is skewed towards the middle-aged. The interviews were mostly carried out during 1997/98—i.e. prior to the more interventionist labour market policies enacted by the Labour government (notably the minimum wage and New Deal).

3. The 1967 data are based on the SEG of the household’s ‘chief earner’—i.e. those heads in paid employment—whereas the 1993 data are based on the SEG of all heads of household, both economically active and inactive, but minus SEG 17.

4. The 1967 figure is based on marriage, whereas the 1993 survey did not distinguish between marriage and cohabiting.

5. A number of sales, waiting, cleaning and driving jobs advertised at a Camden job centre included being ‘well presented’ as a prerequisite (author’s field notes).

6. No fewer than one-tenth of all the female tenants in the 1993 survey, including many elderly women, had a current or previous job as a cleaner.

7. Lloyd (1999) has similarly noted how young men make a clear distinction between a career and a ‘crap job’, with most available jobs being of the latter type.

References


URBAN MARGINALITY AND LABOUR MARKETS


