Season’s greetings from The Policy Press

As the festive break is now upon us, The Policy Press would like to wish you all season’s greetings and a Happy New Year.

We would also like to thank everyone for your contributions and support in 2009. It has been a very exciting year for The Policy Press; we have launched a new website, and with it our blog, published over 60 new titles and continued to produce our highly prestigious journals. Why not get involved in The Policy Press community, you can write an entry for our blog, add your views to current blog posts, sign up to our e-newsletter or comment on individual books using the customer review feature on our website.

As in previous years we will be donating the money we would spend on Christmas cards and postage to charity. In honour of Peter Townsend this year we will be supporting the Child Poverty Action Group. The Child Poverty Action Group campaigns to raise awareness, bring about change and ultimately abolish child poverty in the UK.

The Policy Press office will be closed from 24th December 2009 to 4th January 2010 inclusive. The opening hours for our distributors, Marston Book Services, are detailed below:

Closed from 12pm on 24th December
Normal opening hours: 29th – 31st December
Closed: 1st – 3rd January 2010
Normal opening hours from 4th January 2010

You can still order from our website during this period and receive 25% off ALL our titles.

Claire Sollars, Marketing Executive, The Policy Press

Why the Right to Buy policy was so successful

How do you judge whether a policy has worked or not? Obviously, this is an important question, but the answer is by no mean clear cut. The reason I say this is because in my new book, Housing Policy Transformed: the Right to Buy and the Desire to Own, I argue that the most successful piece of public policy since the Second World War is the Right to Buy (RTB), which allowed social tenants to buy their dwelling at a substantial discount.
a considerable discount. Yet the RTB must be one of the most hated policies ever enacted. It is accused of causing a massive increase in homelessness, the residualisation of social housing and helped to create the apparently fatal fetishisation of owner occupation that led to the crash in the housing market in 2007.

So how can we claim that the RTB was so successful? The complaints about the RTB are all concerned with the effects of the policy on other issues rather than the policy itself. But if you look at the explicit aims of policy as set out in 1978 it is clear that the RTB achieved exactly what it was set up do. The Conservatives had two purposes: first, to extend owner occupation more widely amongst working class households, and second, to diminish the influence of local authorities over rented housing.

So when we consider that 2.5 million households bought their dwelling and local authorities now own less than 2 million dwellings instead of the 6 million in 1979 we must conclude that the RTB worked spectacularly well. The policy achieved precisely what the government intended it to.

So why is this not recognised in the literature? The reason is that virtually all the discussion on the RTB is conducted on the basis of the integrity of social housing. Quite simply, most academics and commentators see that social housing is a more legitimate tenure than owner occupation. Social housing is taken as the normal tenure around which the others ought to be judged. Therefore, what happens to social housing is all that matters.

Yet clearly this view is absurd when we consider the manner in which governments have to operate within the real world, where a majority of households are owner occupiers and a significant part of the minority aspire to it. Political parties, if they wish to get elected, have to respond to the aspirations of their populations, and this means that owner occupier will always be seen as more important than social housing.

Peter King
Centre for Comparative Housing Policy, Department of Public Policy, De Montfort University

Housing policy transformed: The right to buy and the desire to own is now available with 25% discount.

Peter King was interviewed for the article ‘30 years on, the right to buy revolution that still divides Britain’s housing estates’ in The Observer, click here to read more.

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Public transport – an update

Published December 8, 2009 Uncategorized Leave a Comment
Tags: Bristol, Integrated Transport Authority, public transport, sustainability, transport

Well, the end of November has come and gone, and, miraculously, we still have a bus service through my village!!

In some respects, I am heartened by this as an example of how ‘people power’ can have an effect, with many passengers signing our petition, and, probably more importantly, individually expressing their dissatisfaction to the bus company, local authority, parish council and local MP.

Depressingly, though, it appears that political machinations may also have had a part to play, as only a couple of days after the announcement of the revision of the planned ‘service changes’, which arose as a result of a meeting between the local authority’s transport committee representative and the bus company, plans for a 2-year study to consider the feasibility of an Integrated Transport Authority for the Greater Bristol area were also dramatically thrown out, by the same transport committee representative and his counterparts in the other two unitary authorities that surround Bristol. Could it be that compromises to the
planned cuts were offered as a bargaining chip by the bus company to counteract the prospect of a severe curtailment in its power and influence in the future under an ITA? (There was also a strong rumour that another operator had expressed an interest in providing buses along an extended route which would have represented better service and better value for money for passengers.)

What was particularly noticeable, in the immediate aftermath of the decision, was the alacrity with which the latest changes to the services were publicised – all of the players scrambling to take maximum credit for ‘a creative solution to this problem’ on their websites and in the local press – a striking contrast indeed to the silence surrounding the original proposals …

Jo Morton
Production Editor, The Policy Press

Traffic jam: Ten years of ‘sustainable’ transport in the UK – A timely analysis of the UK government’s sustainable transport policy 10 years after the publication of A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone.

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Peter Townsend’s Legacy – The Next Steps

The death of Peter Townsend in June sent shock waves through multiple social science communities in which he had made seminal contributions, including fields as diverse as ageing, disability, health, poverty and human rights. In each of these fields he not only provided the key scientific reference points for other researchers and for policy makers but he also campaigned tirelessly, on all fronts, to try to improve conditions for the most excluded and vulnerable, both nationally and globally, and to create a more equal and socially just society. This combination of academic excellence and passionate pursuit of social justice was the essence of Peter Townsend’s career and it is this that should be foremost in attempts to take forward and build on his legacy.

This process is well underway. Before he died Peter had set in motion with Policy Press a volume of extracts from his work. The Peter Townsend reader will be published on 28 January with substantial extracts from across his massive contribution and introductory essays from leading experts in each field. In November two events took place which combined a celebration of his legacy with projections of how it could be maintained. The first was a memorial service celebrating his life and work. (A limited edition booklet of selections from his work across six decades will be available shortly from CPAG). The second was a one day memorial conference in which the speakers reflected on his work and how to take forward his legacy. Already annual memorial lectures are planned by the Townsend Centre for International Poverty Research and the Hong Kong Baptist University (from which Peter received an honorary degree in 2006) and there are likely to be more. Also Policy Press will publish a festschrift for Peter in early 2011, Fighting Poverty, Inequality and Injustice: A manifesto inspired by Peter Townsend which will spearhead the campaign to continue his mission.

Alan Walker, Professor of Social Policy & Social Gerontology, The University of Sheffield

Without more context it is very hard to tell what is meant by "That is what it was like." As it's given in this excerpt, it really doesn't make sense. That being said, the phrase "that is what it was like" can mean several different things, as the word "like" can have many different meanings. The most common, I think, is to describe how it felt to experience something. In this case it seems a bit more likely that "that is what it was like" is describing something physical, i.e. that it was ancient, rather than something subjective (how he felt...).