

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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ERL - 15
Harlow:
Political Participation
Demographic Insights

c/o 201 E. 28th Street
New York 10016

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Mr. R. H. Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
535 Fifth Avenue
New York 10017

Dear Mr. Nolte:

The public meetings of the Harlow Urban District Council are, like the meetings of most local government authorities, addressed primarily to the press and posterity. They are little more than a rhetorical formality, as all decisions are made during the closed committee sessions or at the private Labor Group caucus. At the official public meetings, committee chairmen systematically review numbered capsule reports ranging from substantive matters to trivia and move acceptances of same. There are reactions, occasional amplifications, comments and some new business. Sometimes the debate is spirited, although the Labor majority is so large there is never a doubt as to the outcome of a vote.

I went to the first regular meeting of the HUDC shortly after I moved to Harlow with no expectation of entertainment and came out both amused and curious. I was amused by the efficiency of the Labor Group organization who run the HUDC like a model railroad and by the wit and spirit of the formal rhetoric declaimed, often as not, for the sake of rhetoric. Sitting in a town hall only 28 miles from London in a new town whose population was, I thought, mostly former Londoners, I was curious about the range of dialectics and accents enunciated by the council members. I didn't know a great deal about British regional accents, but I could tell that the chairman was a Scot and that among the other speakers were a Welshman, an Irishman, an Eastern European and a councillor whose first language was clearly German. So quite naturally I became curious about the background and origin of the members of HUDC.

The Harlow Urban District Council was born with the chartering of the new town in 1955. Initially it was a Labor Party monopoly. The Liberal Party became an active minority in the early 60's but it faded almost as quickly as it rose. The Conservative core of opposition has grown with the unpopularity of the Labor Government. The total membership of the HUDC is 37. What with the attrition of death and resignation there were 32 members when I moved to Harlow, 6 Tories. The minority has grown to 12.

With the cooperation of the Council's Public Relations Officer I asked each of the members to fill out a simple information questionnaire. After a modicum of prodding and a dollop of nagging, nearly all the members completed the form. One councillor twice declined to take part in the survey. Her explanation was unique and somewhat unnerving. The first time she was reminded of it, she said she saw no reason for an American to be so interested in British local government. The second time she argued that, "As long as the U.S. is fighting in Vietnam, no American should be so interested . . ." So the study is slightly incomplete.

In 1967, the second volume of the Maud Commission Report on local government, a profile of "the local government councillor," was released. The techniques of social science were mustered to prove the truth of an assortment of popular cliches. More than half the members of British local government turned out to be over 55 years of age; only one-fifth were under 45. Fifteen per cent have some further education, but 40% had only elementary education. Local government participation in new towns if Harlow is an example, is markedly unlike the national pattern. A profile of the new town partially explains some of the differences, such as age; and makes others, like professionalism and education even more impressive. Generally speaking, there are two kinds of people in the British new towns. The large group followed industrial jobs that moved to new town factories often because the job guaranteed housing. The second category of new town residents came from the skills pool. They were individually recruited for primarily non-industrial jobs. They include school teachers, civil servants, librarians, dentists, doctors, specialists and supervisors.

Harlow is a London over-spill new town. So most of the factories and workers came from the London area. Development Corporation figures show that over 70% of the rented dwellings have been let to ex-Londoners, including more than 1,000 retired parents of Harlow families. Harlow recruited people in the skills pool from all over Britain. Some deliberately chose to move to Harlow from older, established communities for reasons ranging from restlessness and simple inarticulated romanticism to specifically political curiosity about the "brave new world," beyond the Epping Forest.

The most obvious difference between the Harlow Urban District Council and the national study sample is, of course, age. Seventy per cent of the HUDC members were under 45; only one member was over 65. In family pattern, they reflect the new town. Half of Harlow's population arrived after 1960, forty-one per cent of the councillors came after 1960. As a group, the councillors have the average number of children (2+ each) and a high percentage of other relatives in the town (74%).

While in the national study 20% of all local councillors were shopkeepers and managers of small businesses, there were no shopkeepers at all on the Harlow Urban District Council. It is worth remembering that in a new town, the independent shopkeeper is no more established than his neighbor and in competition with equally new chain store operations. Neither shopkeepers nor managers of small businesses in the new town appear to have time or interest in local government.

Since 1962, by informal custom, the chairman of the HUDC in alternating years is always a teacher. While teachers have always been active in local government and party politics, lately the dominating force has been the scientists and engineers. As a group they form the largest employment category (18%) on the HUDC. They include the four members under 30, and the leaders of both the Labor and Conservative Parties, both of whom work for the same American-owned firm, Standard Telecommunications Laboratory--a subsidiary of ITT.

The British new towns were not planned to be scientific enclaves; it now appears to be turning out that way. In the case of the London over-spill towns, it happened quite naturally because in the post-War years, the science-based industries expanded rapidly and were forced to look for sites outside greater London. The Scottish new towns deliberately sought out science-based industries; others are now following suit (See ERL-11 for a flip account of the way the management of one new town views science based research and development). There are roughly 100 industries in Harlow, employing from three to 2800 people. With a generous definition of the term, 20 per cent are science based and/or include research facilities and/or require a high degree of technological sophistication from hourly staff. As a result of the largest merger in the British electronics industry by the A.E.I. and G.E.C., Ltd., Harlow has lost a large laboratory that employed 130. The largest single employer in Harlow is Standard Telephone and Cable, Ltd., a subsidiary of ITT.

The labor and facility base of the new town being set, Harlow's growth is now in specialized industries. In the last year for which there are assembled statistics, 1966, the greatest percentage of newcomers to Harlow, 28.4%, came to take jobs in either engineering or electronics. The second highest percentage, 15.8%, came in the professions or scientific services. These percentages were either equalled or outstripped by the other London over-spill new towns.

National census results are broken down by the Registrar General into seventeen socio-economic categories. The Harlow Development Corporation runs random checks on the new town and sifts the results into the same categories. Matching the council against the national census, the Development Corporation sample and the Maud Report, one can clearly see the professionalism of the HUDC.

Combined results of the Registrar General's categories 1-4: (1) Employers and managers--large establishments, (2) Employers and managers--small establishments, (3) Professional workers--self-employed, and (4) Professional workers--employees.

England and Wales (1961 census)	12.3%
Maud Commission--All Councillors	36.0
Maud Commission--Urban District Councils	41.0
Harlow (1966 sample)	13.0
Harlow Urban District Council (1967/68)	45.2

Category 4: Professional workers--employees

England and Wales (1961 census)	3.0%
Maud Commission--All Councillors	3.0
Maud Commission--Urban District Councils	4.0
Harlow (1966 sample)	3.0
Harlow Urban District Council (1967/68)	35.5

Categories 8, 9 and 10: (8) Foremen and supervisors, (9) Skilled manual workers, and (10) Semi-skilled manual workers.

England and Wales	49.5%
Harlow (1966 census)	59.0
Harlow Urban District Council (1967/68)	35.5

Category 11: Unskilled manual workers was 8.3% nationally, 4.0% in Harlow, and 3.57% on the Council last year. He didn't run again.

The professionalism of HUDC is rooted in higher education. In fact, the HUDC is almost as well educated as the House of Commons. In 1964, 63 per cent of Members of Parliament had some further education. In 1968, 48 per cent of the HUDC had either university or technical college degrees. There were ten university degrees and five technical or teacher training, an impressive total for any British local government.

The disproportionate representation of scientists in Harlow political life is emphasized by a new statistic Peter Wilmott of the Institute of Community Studies used in a speech arguing that social class and mobility are not changing as rapidly in Britain as people and the press think they are. Despite the hoopla about science, technology, research and development, class and social structure changes, he said, the percentage of scientists, engineers, and technicians, although it grew by 60 per cent in the past ten years, went from 0.9 per cent to 1.4 per cent of the British population. If science is the wave of the future, the tide is already rising in Harlow.

The character of the HUDC is closely tied to the changing Harlow Labor Party which was begun in 1949 by the residents of Old Harlow before the new town was even a tentative reality. Then it was a traditional, unquestionably loyal, organization, which, seen on the spectrum of the national Labor Party, was right wing. Its interests ran to goods and services not abstract policy or theoretical discussions. The Harlow Labor Party was not concerned with the merits of socialism but with proving its existence in Harlow. Its stalwarts included the late Councillor, Alf Brown, who, the story goes, once proudly told children at a school dedication ceremony, "Your Socialist Council has provided a crematorium so you can be buried on the rates." (He was.) In the late 1950's and early 1960's some of the young new town blood formed a discussion group which was organizationally absorbed into

BREAKDOWN OF HARLOW URBAN DISTRICT COUNCIL
 ACCORDING TO REGISTRAR GENERAL'S
 SOCIO-ECONOMIC EMPLOYMENT CATEGORIES

After the May local elections in which the Conservatives gained six seats, I re-pollled the HUDC. Half of the new Tory councillors are scientists. One is a housewife who holds an Actors Equity card. The party realignment emphasizes the energetic participation of the educated professional and technical classes in Harlow.

<u>Registrar General's Categories</u>	<u>HUDC 1967-68</u>	<u>HUDC 1968-69</u>
1. Employers and Managers of Large Establishments	1	1
3. Professional Workers, Self-Employed	2	2
4. Professional Workers, Employed*	11	14
5. Intermediate Non-Manual Workers	8	9
6. Foremen and Supervisors	2	2
9. Skilled Manual Workers	5	5
10. Unskilled Manual Workers	1	-
17. Indetermined (Housewife and Retired)	<u>1</u>	<u>3</u>
TOTAL RESPONSES	<u>31</u>	<u>36</u>

*Further breakdown of Category 4:

	<u>HUDC 1967-68</u>	<u>HUDC 1968-69</u>
Scientific	5	9
Academic	2	4
Other	2	1

the Victory for Socialism Movement and pushed it far to the left of the local and national party. Between 1961 and 1963, at the time of the national Liberal revival, and the mass demonstrations of the CND (Committee for Nuclear Disarmament) movement, the Harlow Labor Party had major international battles. The left won in Harlow and has remained in power. A few of the old diehards left the party, others merely faded into the background.

The radical debate of the early 1960's attracted many of the arriving intellectuals to the Party. The Harlow Labor Party found itself in the unusual position of being adamantly left, young and in office simultaneously. The teachers and scientists took the reins of the HUDC largely because they were interested in running for office, had the time for meetings and enjoyed the work. Make no mistake, most of the HUDC members (both parties) spend four to nine hours per week on Council matters. The leader of the Labor Group was elected at 24 and even now is trustworthy (i.e. under 30), even if his "position" places him within the Establishment.

The shifting fortunes of the Labor Party will affect the policies of the HUDC, but the pattern of participation in local government by the new professionals seems firm.

I wondered where the HUDC came from. It turned out that birthplace and origin was unimportant in describing the Council compared to education and career patterns. But it was interesting. If you honor the nationalist movements of Scotland(5), Ireland (1), and Wales (1) in counting, plus the European born from Austria, Germany and Czechoslovakia, there are almost as many foreigners on the HUDC (10) as Londoners (11). The Europeans came or were brought to Britain as political refugees. Almost all the members of the council were uprooted as a consequence of the Second World War. Only four came to Harlow from the town where they were born.

Sincerely,



Eden Ross Lipson

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