HOMES FOR THE PEOPLE
The Peter Lalor Home Building Co-operative: 1946–2004

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✠ VOLUME I ✠
Statement of Authorship

This thesis is entirely my own work.

This thesis contains no material previously published or written by myself or another person, except where reference is made in the thesis itself. This thesis has not been previously submitted towards a degree or diploma in any university or other higher education institution.

Moira Scollay
16 September 2010

This research study has received clearance from the Human Research Ethics Committee at the Australian National University: Protocol 2005/290.
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Abstract

Hidden within the Melbourne suburb of Lalor, lies an intriguing story. Named to honour the leader of the Eureka Rebellion, the Peter Lalor Homebuilding Co-operative Society was formed after World War II during a chronic housing shortage. It was composed mainly of ex-servicemen and their families who were driven by a self-help ethos and a determination to see working-class men and women fulfil the great Australian dream of owning their own homes. Further, the members aspired to create a new co-operative way of living dedicated ‘to those who died to make this a better world.’ Subsequent residents from new immigrant groups shared some similar dreams, but transformed the social landscape. The timescale of the thesis—1946 to 2004—provides the opportunity to trace the sweeping changes that occurred in this suburban setting.

This thesis analyses the co-operative and situates its genesis within the international and Australian co-operative movements, the ‘garden city’ movement, the Australian labour movement and Catholic social doctrine. The members adapted these ideas into their own unique experiment. Prosopography has provided the methodology for understanding this remarkable community: home by home, family by family, street by street. New archival material has emerged on the Victorian co-operative movement and, particularly, from the Peter Lalor membership through the provision of co-operative and personal records, and written and oral testimony.

I argue that the co-operative provided affordable housing for a community of 800 people, and the members gained enhanced control over their lives through the creation of social capital—a civic space between the individual and the state. By this means they were ahead of their time in addressing a democratic deficit. The individual ethnic communities of Lalor subsequently formed what I have termed ‘parallel communities’. They co-existed in Lalor, not necessarily through hostility, but parallel nonetheless. Each created its own institutions of social capital but collectively they lacked cohesion. Ultimately there are lessons for the 21st century as we face the further challenges of affordable housing and community development.

Apart from these conclusions, the history of Lalor has been resurrected from the footnotes of history. We meet some inspirational leaders, whose biographies have been written for the first time, but ultimately this is the history of ordinary men and women co-operating in the creation of a community. Some of their stories are told here; they are worth telling.
Abbreviations

AA  Australian Army
ALP  Australian Labor Party
ANU  Australian National University
Anzac  Australian and New Zealand Army Corps
AWAS  Australian Women's Army Service
AWM  Australian War Memorial
BDM  Births, Deaths and Marriages (Register)
CofW  City of Whittlesea
CRST  Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme
CSIR  Council for Scientific and Industrial Research
Cr  Councillor
DLP  Democratic Labor Party
DVC  Department of Victorian Communities
GTO  Group Training Organisation
Helping  Whittlesea District Branch of the Helping Hand Association for
Hand  People with an Intellectual Disability Inc
LCCS  Lalor Consumer Co-operative Society
Lalor Fire  Lalor Sub-Branch of the Epping Fire Brigade
Brigade
LSSC  Lalor State School Committee
LWSC  Lalor Women's Social Club
NAA  National Archives of Australia
NLA  National Library of Australia
PLC  Peter Lalor Co-operative
PLHBCSL  Peter Lalor Home Building Co-operative Society Ltd
PL  Peter Lalor
PMG  Post Master General's (Department)
PROV  Public Records Office of Victoria
RAIA  Royal Australian Institute of Architects
RVIA  Royal Victorian Institute of Architects
RSL  Returned Sailors', Soldiers' and Airmen's Imperial League
  of Australia
SEC  State Electricity Commission
SLV  State Library of Victoria
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<tr>
<td>TAFE</td>
<td>Technical and Further Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TELK</td>
<td>Thomastown, Epping, Lalor and Keon Park Men's Club (also called Lalor Men's Club, or Lalor and District Men's Club or Doghouse Club)</td>
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<tr>
<td>THC</td>
<td>Trades Hall Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNSW</td>
<td>University of New South Wales</td>
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<tr>
<td>VC</td>
<td>Victoria Cross</td>
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<tr>
<td>WSH</td>
<td>War Service Homes</td>
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<td>WSHD</td>
<td>War Service Homes Division</td>
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<td>WSC</td>
<td>Whittlesea Shire Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>WWI</td>
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Map of the Statistical Area of Melbourne and Suburbs, 1950

Source: ANL Maps Collection, G8991 E25.

Note: Whittlesea Shire is outside the metropolitan area boundary and Lalor—situated between Thomastown and Epping—does not yet appear on the map.
Introduction

On a very cold Autumn night in Melbourne in 1948, a big crowd, perhaps five hundred strong, gathered at the Assembly Hall on Collins Street. Their demand was for more cement for home building to help alleviate the chronic housing shortage. Ex-servicemen were in the majority, and all were dressed in jumpers and coats to withstand the elements for what they expected would be a long night. The meeting had been called by Leo Purcell in his capacity as Secretary of the Ex-Servicemen’s Committee of the Central Executive of the Victorian Branch of the Australian Labor Party (ALP). He had undoubtedly publicised the meeting through his weekly radio program, ‘Servicemen’s Question Box’ during the Labor Hour on 3KZ. The meeting is being held for the purpose of protesting at the present method of allocating building materials, read the circular advertising the meeting, and although Purcell’s immediate aim was to garner cement supplies for the Peter Lalor Home Building Co-operative Society, and the Ex-Servicemen’s Building Co-operative Society, he appealed to a broader audience as well: ‘Dwelling houses—we believe—must at all times be No.1 priority in this allocation; this is the only logical policy that will speed up construction and reduce costs of homes.’

1. *Sun*, 29 April 1948, p. 3. The report estimated the crowd at more than 500 people.
2. L. Purcell, ‘Circular’, undated. It advertised a meeting to be held at 8.00pm on Wednesday 28 April 1948, contained in the personal papers of Jack Harvey, in possession of Neil Harvey, Melbourne.
3. The program commenced in 1945 under the title, ‘Servicemen’s Question Box’, but, by 1948 it was being referred to as ‘Ex-Servicemen’s Question Box’, a title it retained until the mid-1950s. For example, in *Labor Call*, 2 May 1946, p. 6, it is called ‘Serviceman’s Question Box. *Labor Call*, 16 April 1948, p. 7 refers to ‘Ex-Serviceman’s Question Box’. An exact date for the change of name is not known.
4. Ibid.
The meeting passed a motion directed at the newly elected Liberal/Country Party state government led by Thomas Hollway. Those present demanded that the government revoke its recent decision to cut by twenty-five per cent cement allocations for housing projects. A deputation of four men and one woman was elected to go immediately to Parliament House to demand a meeting with either Premier Hollway, or the Minister of Housing, Arthur Warner. Not to be left out of the action, the crowd escorted the deputation up Collins Street. Purcell warned the crowd not to march on Parliament House with rebellion obviously on their minds. Instead, he said, '[j]ust stroll along quietly and when you get there fill in a card and seek an interview with your local member'.

'After 20 or 30 men and women had walked into the entrance hall at Parliament House the door was closed by a policeman... When police reinforcements arrived, the Sun newspaper the next day reported, 'they were greeted with laughter and jeers'. Ironically, and conjuring up the image of Eureka, a man called out, 'They'll be sending the troopers along next.' Arthur Warner was not in Parliament House that evening so the deputation was admitted to an interview with the Minister of Transport (Mr Kent Hughes). The Premier joined the discussions when he could be spared from the Assembly. Meanwhile, the Leader of the Opposition, John Cain directed the Premier's attention to:

a deputation [that] was arranged by people who are co-operating in building homes in Thomastown. I think they have 60 to 70 houses built or in course of construction, and they are incensed because of the decision of the Government to cease supplies of cement. What is happening to cement I cannot understand.

Unable to resist a jibe at the government, Cain continued:

When the present Government came into office it was said it would deal with the problem. The members of the co-operative society are mainly ex-servicemen. They are building a good type of house on cheap land. Materials other than cement, I understand, are not so difficult to obtain. ... I brought the difficulties of these people under ... [the] notice [of the Housing Minister] some time ago, and he admitted that they had a reasonable case for consideration. Now building operations are held up again.

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5. Victoria, Legislative Assembly, Debates, vol. LA226, 28 April 1948, pp. 758–763 & 4 May 1948, pp. 777–780. This debate affirmed worldwide shortages of coal after the war. Closer to home, limited supplies of black coal from NSW were seen as the cause of coal shortages in Victoria and South Australia, flowing on to shortages in the production of cement. At p. 779 a table depicting cement allocations for Victoria for one week generally supported the concerns raised by the public meeting.

6. Sun, 29 April 1948, p. 3.

7. ibid.

8. Victoria, Legislative Assembly, Debates, vol. LA226, 28 April 1948, p. 758. All references to John Cain are to John Cain Senior.

These sentiments were echoed by Shadow Minister of Housing, William Barry:

The members of the Peter Lalor Home Building Co-operative Society, people who are doing a good deal of their own home-building work and have not the money to pay the expenses and commission of architects and builders, are unable to obtain supplies of cement.\(^{10}\)

Barry called into question the recent allocation of cement to the newly created, large ready-mix concrete companies. He suggested to the Premier:

that those companies should not be receiving big supplies of cement while members of a co-operative building society and [primary] producers ... are being deprived of cement necessary to complete their home-building operations.\(^{11}\)

Cain concluded by seeking special consideration for the Peter Lalor Home Building Co-operative.\(^{12}\)

The Premier initially responded more to the nature of the deputation than to the shortage of cement for the co-operative, lending weight to the press reports about the size of the group:

With reference to the gathering of members of the Peter Lalor Home Building Co-operative Society which came to Parliament House tonight, at the outset I wish to voice my strongest exception to a large number of people coming to Parliament House in a body and then standing around on the steps of the House.... Parliament is not going to be overwhelmed or over-awed by any number of people coming to Parliament House and by sheer weight of numbers endeavouring to impress members.\(^{13}\)

Finally he did agree to 'take up the matter with the Minister of Housing and see if some additional allocation of cement can be given to them'.\(^{14}\) 'The steps of Parliament House were packed until nearly midnight with people awaiting the result of the deputation,' the Sun noted.\(^{15}\)
This thesis is predominantly a history of the Peter Lalor Home Building Co-operative Society Ltd which existed as a formal co-operative between 1947 and 1954. While two related co-operatives sponsored the rally, it is the Peter Lalor Co-operative (PLC), including its community, which is the central concern here. The thesis is in two parts, and this history forms the first and largest part.

Few people today have heard of the PLC which formed the nucleus of the Melbourne suburb of Lalor. Even fewer know of its main founder, Leo Purcell. Given that the co-operative was possibly one of the largest home building co-operatives in Australian history, this lack of recognition is mysterious. Why has this remarkable venture been relegated to the footnotes of history? The quest to explain this lapse of historical memory will be one focus of this thesis. I argue that there are many reasons why this history has remained hidden and some are entwined with judgments about the co-operative’s success or failure. On the surface, the co-operative failed financially and therefore does not deserve a place in history. A more in-depth analysis, however, reveals there are social, political, economic, personal and place-based criteria through which to consider this unique experiment. The reasons for the silence surrounding its story are intimately connected with these and wider events in Victoria and Australia, including the split in the Australian Labor Party (ALP) in 1955, which resulted in the creation of the Democratic Labor Party (DLP).

The second part of the thesis traces the history of Lalor to 2004, during which time waves of migrants swept into the suburb. Many of the themes and issues that arise through analysis of the founding co-operative continue on a similar trajectory more than sixty years later. The timescale—from 1947 to 2004—provides an opportunity to trace the development of Lalor from an isolated co-operative settlement of about two hundred homes to the embedded triangle of suburbia it became by 2004. I analyse how the different sub-groups have lived in ‘the place’ Lalor, and how these communities have developed over time, making Lalor their own.

The creation of Lalor hastened Melbourne’s development northwards. The large rural shire of Whittlesea held a population of around 3,500 people in 1947. At the time of the 1971 Census, it had grown almost tenfold to more than 30,000 people. By 2001 the population had leapt to 115,000. This growth was almost exclusively in the southern riding in which Lalor is situated. Italian, Macedonian, Greek, Maltese, Lebanese, Turkish, Vietnamese, Sudanese, Pacific Islander, and other migrants and refugees, have all played their part in this exponential growth and interacted in sometimes unexpected ways.

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16. The Peter Lalor Home Building Co-operative Society Limited will be abbreviated to simply the Peter Lalor Co-operative (PLC), sometimes the co-operative or the society. In footnotes, it will be abbreviated to PLHBSCL. The two Peter Lalor Co-operative Housing Societies were called ‘PL nos. 1 & 2’ prior to a name change to ‘Northern nos. 1 & 2’. The PL abbreviation will be used for these societies. See the diagram in vol. 2, p. iii.

One transitional aspect of this growth was the impact of migration on the identity of the original co-operative community. I explore what appears to have been an increasing sense of grief as the close-knit settlement felt the loss of its cohesiveness in the face of such rapid and far-reaching change. After all, they had worked so hard to create it. The Lalor citizens' capacity to handle the enormous changes wrought on their community by the overwhelming number of migrants who arrived first in the 1950s—and have continued to flow through ever since—requires an understanding of their consciousness. How did the members of this community, reared as they were within the prejudices of the White Australia Policy, react to this phenomenon and how did their co-operative roots help position them for it? I argue that initially the co-operative remained virtually untouched. Migrant communities grew up close by, but in many respects a world away. A few individual migrant families were made welcome inside the soldier settlement boundary, but for perhaps two decades, the co-operative's own internal cohesion served as a largely unconscious process of exclusion. This theme is developed further below.

From the 1948 protest described above it is possible to glean many of the themes that emerge throughout this thesis. The home building co-operative societies were able to attract support for such a large demonstration because of the perceived unfairness of the allocation process for building supplies in the context of the housing shortage after World War II (WWII), and because of the oratorical and political skills of Leo Purcell. Comprised mainly of ex-servicemen, the protesters' sense of injustice and anger sprang from the fact that so recently these people of meagre means had fought for their country, only to find that with the peace, big business appeared to be unfairly gaining access to extremely limited resources. Deprivation is so demonstrably a relative perception and it fired their resolve. They had dreamed of a new and fairer world order at war's end.

For more than two thousand individuals and families, the PLC became the focal point for that dream. They believed that collective action and an independent self-help ethos could achieve together what none could afford alone. By using co-operative principles, doing much of the work themselves, and buying cheap land between the city and the bush, they could manufacture affordable housing, participating for the first time in the emerging great Australian dream—owning their own homes. In addition, we will see that they actively pursued a range of other social and economic objectives designed to benefit the wider community. In this they were the willing foot-soldiers of the Chifley Government’s post-war reconstruction plans and they were ahead of their time. Drawing on the camaraderie developed through their wartime experiences, the ex-service members of the group believed such nation building action would honour those who did not return. The originators of the scheme wove together the threads of the formal international co-operative movement and the spirit of co-operation between men generated directly as a consequence of the war. Not surprisingly this combination became an unofficial
but effective form of post-war rehabilitation. Despite the central role played by ex-
servicemen in the formation and building of the PLC and the suburb of Lalor, it is
puzzling that this and other soldier settlement experiments after WWII, have been
similarly overlooked by military historians. Ultimately the co-operative built, or was
the impetus for building, 200 homes accommodating around 800 people. It was
well short of their vision, but a significant achievement nonetheless.

The symbolism of the Eureka legend is another theme discussed in Part One.
What did the participants seek to evoke in using the name of Peter Lalor, the Irish-
born hero of the Eureka rebellion from a century earlier? For although they did not
use the Eureka name specifically, their construction site was called the Stockade,
 further reinforcing their intention to directly connect their planned actions with
those of Eureka. Oral testimony from surviving early Lalor residents sheds some
light on their motivation, with the caution that, over the intervening sixty years,
the dynamic nature of the Eureka legend has evolved within the broader Australian
society and has undoubtedly influenced their recollections.

These original co-operative members have many ways of describing what the
symbolism of Eureka meant for them. In essence their views can be distilled as
representing a collective fight against injustice and a rallying call invoking political
and social change. Perhaps too they hoped it might mean they would metaphorically
‘strike gold’. Almost certainly the founders selected such a prominent episode in
Australian history as their namesake, because they too were intent upon making
their mark and hoped that one day their co-operative experiment would be similarly
influential as a reform movement: this adds to the irony of the neglected nature
of this story.18 Leo Purcell, himself of Irish stock, identified with Peter Lalor and
perhaps suggested his name for the home building co-operative for that reason.
Nonetheless, those of English background on the Committee of Management also
undoubtedly understood the connection between the miners’ rebellion at Eureka and
the Chartist and land reform movements so closely aligned with co-operativism.19

One manifestation of the impact of the Eureka legend is encapsulated in the debate
over the pronunciation of the name ‘Lalor’. The original residents’ insistence on the
Irish pronunciation of the name as ‘Lawlor’ has been a highly contested issue since
the naming of the co-operative in January 1947.20 They still pronounce the word
with such determination in their voices, one suspects that even today they revel in
its underdog status. For most people dwelling there in the twenty-first century, it is
pronounced ‘Laylor’, further adding to the schism between the vision of its founders

18. See Paul A. Pickering, ‘Ripe for a Republic: British Radical Responses to the Eureka Stockade’, Australian Historical
19. ibid.
20. See for example an advertisement for Lalor in the Argus, 16 January 1947, p. 13, in which ‘pronounced Lawler’ is
     written underneath the name. See also ‘It’s Law-lor by Tradition’, Whittlesea Post, 2 November 1961, p. 7.
and the failure of its newer arrivals to know and understand the significance of its past. 21

The naming of the co-operative after Peter Lalor has been one aspect to draw comment from the few local histories that have made mention of the co-operative scheme. The History of the Formation of the Shire of Whittlesea, a local history, was written in 1961 by S.T. Grey at the request of the local Shire. 22 The history was serialised in several issues of the Post, and through the newspaper the author called on the community for items of interest about the shire. 23 The PLC attracted only a few paragraphs and contained some significant errors. Grey was more interested in recounting the story of Peter Lalor’s exploits at Eureka, despite his assertion that ‘the story of the Eureka Stockade does not fit into a Whittlesea History story’. Clearly he could not make up his mind. He subsequently failed to draw any connections between the actions of Peter Lalor, and what these might have symbolised for the PLC.

Another local history written about the Plenty Valley and the Shire of Whittlesea by Michael Jones, Nature’s Plenty: A History of the City of Whittlesea, similarly refers only briefly to the existence of the PLC. 24 Jones, in acknowledging that the suburb was named after ‘the hero of the Eureka Stockade’, also provided no serious explanation attaching to its meaning for the co-operative. Instead he speculated that those who named the suburb ‘were possibly attracted’ to the name of Lalor because Peter Lalor’s grandson J.P. Lalor was a doctor who reportedly died gallantly on Anzac Day 1915, while serving at Gallipoli. 25 Such speculation is a sure sign of Jones’s inattention to the PLC and demonstrates that he certainly did not bother to check this view with the locals.

While Jones misjudged this connection with the Anzac legend, for a soldier settlement to call itself after Peter Lalor begs questions about the relationship between the Eureka and the Anzac legends and how they were manifested through the actions and values of the co-operative. Alistair Thomson, in his insightful analysis of the Anzac legend, has demonstrated the iterative way in which some Gallipoli veterans interacted with that dynamic legend throughout most of the


twentieth century.\textsuperscript{26} The impact is directly felt on each individual’s sense of identity and self-confidence and this can change as the broader society changes its stance in relation to the legend. As the servicemen and women of subsequent wars have been absorbed into the Anzac tradition, a similar analysis can be applied to the ex-service community of Lalor. By considering the attitudes and values of some of the co-operative’s members, it is possible to gain insights into the ways they identified with the dynamic Eureka and Anzac legends. This is another theme that recurs throughout Part One of the thesis.

Students of urban history and urban geography have been the others who have paid passing attention to the story of the PLC, and the emphasis has ultimately been on judging its success or failure. To venture into such an assessment must, however, be a subtle and nuanced exercise for the historian. In \textit{The Making of the English Working Class}, E.P. Thompson stated that the ‘only criterion of judgement should not be whether or not a man’s actions are justified in the light of subsequent evolution’.\textsuperscript{27} Later, in \textit{The Poverty of Theory}, he made the point more clearly when he wrote:

\begin{quote}
Only we, who are now living, can give a ‘meaning’ to the past. But the past has always been, among other things, the result of an argument about values. In recovering that process, in showing how causation actually eventuated, we must, insofar as the discipline can enforce, hold our own values in abeyance. But once this history has been recovered, we are at liberty to offer our judgement upon it...Our vote will change nothing. And yet, in another sense, it may change everything. For we are saying that these values, and not those other values, are the ones which make this history meaningful to us, and that these are the values which we intend to enlarge and sustain in our own present.\textsuperscript{28}
\end{quote}

Thompson’s standard for historical practice is a tough one and assumes that the process of recovering the history can be done with the historian’s values ‘in abeyance’. Nonetheless, I do see my task as an attempt to understand deeply this unique home building co-operative experiment and the community it spawned, and to bring my value judgements to their achievements against the criteria they set for themselves: in the first instance, ‘better living conditions for the working classes’.\textsuperscript{29} As Thompson said: ‘Their aspirations were valid in terms of their own experience’, and they must be seen in this light.\textsuperscript{30} The co-operative saw as its initial project the building of a garden suburb in Thomastown. They promised employment ‘for the

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{26} Alistair Thomson, \textit{Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend}, Melbourne, 1994.
\end{thebibliography}
majority of breadwinners.... and the whole community will enjoy homes of their own'. They also aimed to provide 'trading and recreational facilities managed co-operatively' with the added 'advantages of living in a clean, neighbourly, spacious and picturesque environment'. Ultimately their objective was the 'fostering of a genuine community spirit' and to create an 'organic society' in which 'the happiness of the people themselves is the best answer to the threats of the present social order'. I seek to analyse how well they achieved these aims. In their publicity material the co-operative described the successes of the Rochdale Pioneers and used the language of the 'garden city' movement to entice prospective members. I also try to understand what these concepts and ideas meant for them, and the extent to which the PLC adhered to the Rochdale principles and to the principles laid down at the end of the nineteenth century by English idealist, Ebeneezer Howard, for the 'garden city' movement. The founders also brought to the venture distributist theories, both from British socialism and from Catholic social doctrine. These are elaborated further in Chapters 1 and 3.

Architect Robin Boyd, as President of the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects (RVIA), was one contemporary observer who momentarily suspended his usually acerbic view of suburbia to comment favourably on the PLC. In 1948 he sounded an enthusiastic note about the opening of the suburb and was pleased to see architect designed houses and town planning principles applied. 'It is an ambitious, brave experiment, the first of its kind in Australia', Boyd said. He was, however, concerned to stress that the co-operative should not concentrate too heavily on the dwellings at the expense of 'a heart that will make it work'. 'To justify its promises, the Peter Lalor society cannot afford, in the bleak site it has selected, to let the parks and amenity buildings lag too far behind the houses', Boyd argued. For him, the physical trappings of urban design were seen as a precondition for a sense of community, which leads me to ask how important was the sense of place for the Lalor folks in the development of their community? This theme is discussed further in the thesis.

Within four years, in Australia's Home, Boyd briefly described the PLC scheme and concluded 'there seemed to be little future in such ventures. Material shortages finally defeated the Lalor scheme. Such a bald assessment from an important contemporary observer requires further investigation because by this analysis, 'they remain,' as E.P. Thompson has suggested, 'condemned in their own lives, as casualties.' I demonstrate that while material shortages affected both the timing

32. ibid.
34. ibid.
of the building and the finances of the co-operative, there were many factors at play which led to its voluntary liquidation in 1954.

By the time of Grey's serialised history of Whittlesea in 1961, there was a small community in existence in Lalor to influence any judgments about its progress. In explaining the financial problems that had beset the co-operative, Grey stated that, 'after a few years, the War Service Homes Department took over the project, completed many homes and soon had the area being gradually built up'.37 A detailed study of the archives of the War Service Homes Division (discussed in Chapter 6) shows a much more complex and nuanced relationship between the co-operative and this government agency, and the distortion is made more damaging by later writers who have uncritically adopted Grey's view.38 After thirteen years of open drains and muddy roads Grey cheerily concluded, 'When the council constructed the roads and paths in 1960, the once unfinished township became a trim and desirable suburb.'39 How glibly smooth and simple he makes it sound. Nonetheless, Grey's assessment does point to a community that had stabilised and appeared to be a relatively calm and contented place at that point in time.

Thirty years after the formation of the co-operative, there was a small resurgence of interest about its past, perhaps ignited because the PLC home financing societies had finalised all their debts, nine months ahead of their due termination date.40 In 1978 Gary Johns wrote a short occasional paper for the Department of Geography at the Melbourne State College.41 For the first time, the PLC had achieved a small degree of recognition and, as if to illustrate their pride, those remaining original Lalor residents, when I interviewed them between 2005 and 2007, nearly all still retained photocopies of this paper. Johns, later a member of the Hawke Labor Government in Canberra, was in 1978 a member of staff at Melbourne State College and used his students to conduct a survey of the original residents of Lalor in September 1977. Unfortunately the findings are not reproduced in the paper and Johns no longer has copies of them.42

As a friend of Di and Reg Lynch, one of the early couples to settle in Lalor, Johns apparently had access to oral testimony, particularly from Bill King, who had been one of the originators, and although his testimony is rarely specifically referenced, it is clear that Johns relied on it for much of the history. Information gleaned from

38. See J.W. Payne, The Centenary History of the Whittlesea Shire, op. cit., pp. 42; Michael Jones, Nature's Plenty, op. cit., pp. 338. The War Service Homes Commission, established in 1919, became a Division of the Department of Works and Housing in 1947. I will refer to it as the War Service Homes Division (WSHD) throughout this thesis as this title covered most of the relevant timescale for the co-operative.
40. This will be discussed further in Chapter 8.
these sources has provided some historical leads which have proved invaluable for my project and would have been lost if they had not been recorded by Johns at that time. Johns' paper is also important because it is the one cited by later urban historians, none of whom have done their own research.

Discussing the symbolism of Peter Lalor, Johns believed that he 'fought for his ideals at Eureka Stockade and became one of Australia's few working-class radicals to gain notoriety'.\(^43\) While Johns is incorrect to describe Lalor as 'working class', he is more accurate when suggesting that at Eureka he fought for his ideals.\(^44\) In passing judgment on the co-operative though, Johns documented some of its internal financial and political struggles. His conclusions were more focussed on what Robin Boyd had described as 'the heart that will make it work'. Rather than examining the physical manifestation of the suburb, which Johns believed was an insufficient means of assessing the co-operative's achievements, he believed that '[t]he feelings and actions of the people that helped build Lalor were more important'. 'The Lalor Co-operators created not just a place, but a sense of place', he concluded.\(^45\)

To the extent that he assessed them as having failed, Johns argued that the reasons lay in the fact that they were trapped within the structural relationships of society: 'They all existed within the system of wage labour, a system which tends to deny each of us the opportunity of building our own communities.'\(^46\) I agree with Johns that there were underlying structural issues which disadvantaged this working-class scheme, but I cannot agree with the specific manifestation of it described by him. I particularly reject Johns' strange implication that they did not build their own community. Johns' ultimate explanation for their failure, was that 'all of them had legitimate work tasks already'.\(^47\) I will return to these assessments of the co-operative as part of my analysis. As a short project in social geography Johns' paper is a useful place to start, but the narrow disciplinary focus and its brevity means that it fell far short of the comprehensive study required to appreciate the full significance of this unique experiment.

Another interesting piece representing the renewed interest in the PLC came in the mid 1980s when film maker Mark Davis, then at the Swinburne Film School, received funding from the Australian Film Commission to make a short film about the co-operative.\(^48\) Titled Stockade, the script was written by Mark Davis after he spent many hours interviewing and filming Leo Purcell, as the principal instigator of the PLC scheme. Purcell died on 31 August 1984 at the age of 80, while the film

\(^{44}\) John Molony, Eureka, Ringwood, 1984.
\(^{46}\) ibid., p. 24.
\(^{47}\) ibid.
\(^{48}\) Mark Davis later became an independent film maker with the SBS program Dateline.
was being made. During the course of the interviews, Mark Davis and Leo Purcell developed close rapport and Purcell’s family believed Leo was delighted that, at last, there was to be a small amount of recognition for what had been attempted at Lalor. 49

Purcell was possibly aware of the Gary Johns paper, which, as discussed, had been influenced by another of the originators, Bill King. So it may be that for the first time he felt the acknowledgement personally, for his considerable leadership role in the formation of the co-operative. Although the film takes some creative licence with the chronology, the script for the film represents a kind of posthumous manifesto of Purcell’s ideals and is the only such insight we have available. Although frail in health, the passing decades had done nothing to blunt Purcell’s sharp sense of injustice that big business and conservative governments stymied the efforts of decent working-class people to gain a better deal. While Purcell was quoted as being proud of the achievements of the co-operative venture, he did not hide his anger that a much greater vision could not successfully confront the status quo. These interviews represent another important source for this thesis but one that requires careful interpretation.

Two urban historians have also passed judgment on Lalor. 50 Robert Freestone in his major analysis of the ‘garden city’ movement in Australia in 1989 drew attention to the PLC in his discussion of ‘[s]ome quite ambitious schemes [that] were projected in the early post-war period’. In his judgement it was one of ‘the more successful ventures’ undertaken in Melbourne, which ‘established the nucleus of a garden suburb planned by veteran surveyor Saxil Tuxen’, but he provides no explanation for this assessment. 51 In Patrick Troy’s seminal work on the history of European housing in Australia in 2000, Tony Dingle refers to the PLC in the context of the significant ‘do-it-yourself’ movement after WWII. Citing the Johns article mentioned above, Dingle regarded the PLC as the ‘best documented and most ambitious scheme of this kind’. Dingle’s judgement says more about the paucity of literature on this and other possible examples than it does about the size or quality of the research into the PLC. ‘Nevertheless, such formal arrangements constituted only a tiny fraction of all self-help activity’, he concluded. 52

49. Mark Davis, Stockade, Swinburne Film School, Melbourne, 1984; Desmond Purcell, transcript of interview with the author, 22 January 2007, pp. 37–38. Note: all the interviews with the author have been transcribed and bound copies of the transcripts will be deposited in the Mill Park Library in the City of Whittlesea. Further references to interviews will cite the transcripts.

50. David Nichols has written about town planner Saxil Tuxen, who at the end of his distinguished career designed the layout for the PLC site. In that context Nichols has made scant references to Lalor. See David Nichols, ‘The Merrilands Triangle,’ Melbourne Historical Journal, vol. 28, 2000, pp. 60–73.


In 1981 a completely different picture had emerged. Ross Dean, the art teacher at Lalor High School, uncovered the disheartening fact that the school students who lived in Lalor were apparently too ashamed to say where they lived. What had happened to this proud community in the intervening period? Dean initiated a school project to investigate the history of Lalor and he and his students were amazed at the richness they found. Already for most, the story was hidden behind the doors of the Peter Lalor houses, still occupied by some of the now ageing original Lalor co-operative members. The students designed and crafted a mural and an accompanying exhibition of written and photographic material called ‘With Our Own Hands’. It opened at the birthplace of the co-operative—the Melbourne Trades Hall—on the 10 September and those still in the ‘soldier settlement’ at Lalor were invited to attend. While this exhibition focussed on uncovering a story which still quietly existed for those who cared to look, the dynamically changing suburban environment of Lalor, represented by the 1980s cohort of high school students, provides the dominating context for the second part of the thesis. I uncover parallel communities, with semi-porous boundaries, but parallel nonetheless.

By the turn of the century the southern half of the City of Whittlesea had become a case study in multiculturalism. By contrast with the Ross Dean experience, Robert Pascoe’s 2001 study of the local history and culture, Community Portraits: Lifetimes in the City of Whittlesea, was commissioned by the City of Whittlesea to celebrate this extraordinarily rich cultural diversity. What became of the parallel communities over these two decades? Pascoe’s book draws on oral testimony, photographs and other monuments and memorabilia to bring to life the people who lived in the municipality in 2001. In doing so Pascoe used a collection of oral history interviews, including some with original PLC members, which had been commissioned by Whittlesea Council in 1998.

Pascoe used this oral testimony to look back at many of the issues which were important to the people of the PLC. These are further elaborated in this thesis: the sense of community; the pride in home ownership; the difficulties some faced during the building; and confrontation with various levels of government. The bonds created by the common experience of life in the armed forces for the men also speaks loudly through the oral testimony. As a further indication of core values, most of the streets in Lalor were named after Victoria Cross (VC) winners and in an appendix to the book, Pascoe documented the ‘legendary streets of Lalor’, attaching to each name a summary of the outstanding military achievement of its bearer. Ironically, the streets with names representing such bravery were unmade, muddy roads for years. The lack of infrastructure was part of a recurring theme for those

54. This highly professional collection of oral history interviews was conducted by Dr Ruth Ford of La Trobe University in 1998. The bound collection of transcripts, some video footage and the sound recordings are held at the Mill Park Library in the City of Whittlesea. See City of Whittlesea and Yarra Plenty Valley Library Service, ‘Peter Lalor Oral History Project’, vols. 1 & 2, Whittlesea, 1998.
early residents, which was captured by Pascoe. He too recounted the ongoing debate about the pronunciation of the name Lalor. The subsequent challenge of integrating waves of migrants into the Lalor community was subtly if briefly addressed. Pascoe had a positive view of the PLC: ‘Despite its financial failure, the Co-op achieved a great deal.’ The full transcripts of the interviews used by Pascoe have been a significant source for my thesis, discussed below.

Stories of ‘the common people’, or ‘history from below’ as it is sometimes described, are often hard to find in the written record. E.P. Thompson’s much quoted ambition was:

> to rescue the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the ‘obsolete’ handloom weaver, the ‘utopian artisan, and even the deluded follower of Joanna Southcott, from the enormous condescension of posterity.

Similarly, sixty years after those WWII veterans and their families embarked on their quest for a home in Melbourne’s north, there are considerable challenges in retelling their story. But my objective remains the same as Thompson’s: their story is worth telling and by this measure, criteria for success or failure seem meaningless. An iterative combination of oral testimony, prosopography and painstaking archival research allows a remarkable story to emerge. Often, when a road block in the research was reached, an interview would lead to a breakthrough with archival material.

The historical analysis of the PLC—between 1946 and 1954—in part one of the thesis, also includes a comprehensive social profile of the community. Relying on written sources and oral testimony, I have constructed a database that contains information on more than 700 families who lived in the ‘soldier settlement’ part of Lalor in the first two decades of its evolution. In some cases there is a remarkable amount of information supported by oral tapes, videos, photographs and other memorabilia. In other cases the entry is little more than a name and a one-time address. It has also been possible to reconstruct streetscapes for almost all of the original 200 homes and to establish who lived in each house, the method of building and the length of their stay.

I have used the methodology of collective biography or ‘prosopography’ which historian Lawrence Stone argued serves ‘to make sense of political action, to help explain ideological or cultural change, to identify social reality, and to describe and analyse with precision the structure of society and the degree and the nature of the

56. For further analysis of historians who have been the architects of this genre in British history, see Ann Curthoys & John Docker, *Is History Fiction?* Sydney, 2006, p. 125.
movements within it'. Material from the database of residents has provided the basis for what Stone has described as 'mass' prosopography through which I have sought to answer questions about many of the characteristics of these pioneers—occupational status, religion, war-time experience, number of children, educational level and more. From this information I have also identified their networks, associations and affiliations, their struggles and their successes. Through this bottom-up and personalised analysis, I am able to make generalisations about this group. Mass prosopography forms part of Chapter 6 when the community itself is analysed.

There is also sufficient material about some individuals to pursue what Stone has called an 'elite' prosopography. This is a collection of short biographical pieces about the co-operative's main activists and, in some cases, biographies of residents, like those of any community, who never receive any recognition in the predominant histories of great men or dominating institutions. They are not found in the Australian Dictionary of Biography. Stone described elite prosopography as the study of 'small-group-dynamics' in which economic, social or political connections are made between members of a limited group of individuals. He stated that the objective is 'to demonstrate the cohesive strength of the group in question'. So while the word 'elite' might be a rather unlikely term to attach to those whose biographies have been written in this thesis, there can be no doubting that they were the elite when it came to initiating or building this unusual experiment.

I have conducted oral history interviews of approximately two hours each, with most of the remaining original residents and some of their children, who are now adults in their 50s, 60s and 70s: about 60 people in all. These interviews are enhanced by the interviews already conducted in 1998 by Ruth Ford. Ford's interviews are particularly important as all of the men she interviewed have since died. Other co-operative members I have interviewed have died during the course of this research, heightening the sense of urgency I have felt.

One important aspect in my research has been the consideration of questions which arise from the use of memory in history including an analysis of collective memory. As I have worked towards the completion of this thesis, my involvement with this community has raised questions for me about the role of a historian to some extent embedded in a community, in much the same way as anthropologists come to know and understand the communities they study. If as Paula Hamilton says, 'the

59. ibid., pp. 107-140.
60. ibid.
61. It is very pleasing that as a result of this research, there will now be an entry by the present author on Leo Purcell in volume 18 of the Australian Dictionary of Biography.
interview is ... an intersection of two subjectivities, then one has to come to terms with being inscribed in the project as well. I recognise the need to be sensitive to the impact of my presence in the process of taking oral testimony. Semi-structured interviews have pursued individual biographical information together with broader aspects of the Peter Lalor residents' lives and the history of this unique place. As I have retold parts of the history to the co-operators, partly to jog their memories and also to report back to public meetings, I have had to be alert to those who, usually through the grapevine, tell me the story which they have only recently learnt.

There are also insights from understanding those aspects of Lalor’s development and community identity that have been created through collective memory and, just as importantly, the act of collectively forgetting. The oral testimony provides evidence to support the position put by Paul Thompson and Raphael Samuel in The Myths We Live By:

We can observe the displacements, omissions, and reinterpretations through which myths in personal and collective memory take shape...They should be seen, not as blurred experience, as disorderly masses of fragments, but as shaped accounts in which some incidents were dramatized, others contextualized, yet others passed over in silence, through a process of narrative shaping in which both conscious and unconscious, myth and reality, played significant parts.

The oral testimony from the original Lalor community has provided stories that are repeated, almost verbatim, by practically all residents and clearly have become embedded in the community's memory of those early days at Lalor. These rehearsed collective stories of the PLC experience centre principally on the sense of place. Though told with considerable humour, they reflect the terrible hardship created by the lack of infrastructure and resultant confrontations with government. What is also remembered is that the PLC was named after the Irish born leader of the Eureka rebellion and the main originators were Leo Purcell and Alf Greenwood. They also know that Lalor was an important place for ex-servicemen and they all willingly explain that the streets were named after VC winners. All the witnesses remember Doss Lawson as the central keeper of the memory who knew what went on; all fondly recall the activities of ‘the great Salvation Army lady’, Muriel Cooper.

What has been forgotten, though, comes as a complete surprise. PLC records from the 1940s reveal an aspiration for co-operative living that was to provide a range of advantages for ‘the working classes’ as they described themselves. However, by 2005

66. Barbara Breaks, interview with the author, 8 December 2005, p. 3.
to 2007—when the interviews were conducted—at least the women interviewed remember those aspirations solely in terms of the need for a home of their own in times of terrible housing shortage. For young working families this was no small ideal in post-WWII Australia, and for women in particular, such an aspiration is not surprising. What is surprising is that so few people recollect the ideals of the co-operative and of the ‘garden city’ movement which existed so clearly in the co-operative’s written record of the time. Most original co-operative residents do no longer know, if they ever did, that Rochdale Square, also in the centre of their street layout, was named after the Rochdale Pioneers in England, who were regarded as the founders of the co-operative movement from the 1840s. The square is now pronounced, though not renamed, ‘Rockdale’. During one interview with two of Lalor’s earliest residents, when I explained its connection with the pioneers of the co-operative movement, Dot Thompson turned to her friend Honor Mackie and said ‘Oh gee, that’s something we’ve learnt Honor’.

The decision, consciously or unconsciously made by the co-operative members, to allow their important story to slip away requires explanation and I suggest that the reasons are many. However, if the participants themselves have not kept the co-operative story alive, perhaps my harsh treatment of later historians should be tempered a little.

My quest for sources has provided the opportunity to add to the public archive in ways I did not envisage. Those remaining original Lalor settlers and their descendents have proved willing assistants in the belated telling of this story. After establishing the important role played by Leo Purcell, and eventually tracing his descendents, it was heartening to find his five offspring to be intelligent and sensitive oral history subjects. They brought great insights, describing their father’s exploits with care, with humour and astonishing accuracy.

There was also a radio play in the ALP archives, written by author Niall Brennan and read on the ALP station 3KZ in 1948 by Doug Burgess as part of the Young Labor Association’s Youth Week activities. It concerned the issues for youth in post-war Melbourne. Burgess, an employee of the Trades Hall Council, had taken over Leo Purcell’s normal radio segment on that day. This play serves to demonstrate the depth of Purcell’s networks and friendships as well as providing early signs of the dampening of post-war optimism.

After two years of involvement with the community including four public meetings, two separate and invaluable sets of documents were produced. One was an almost complete set of the minutes of meetings of the co-operative’s Committee of Management between late 1946 and early 1949. They belonged to Jack Harvey,

67. Honor Mackie & Dot Thompson, interview with the author, 1 May 2006, p. 41. Both these women have remarkable memories and have proved an excellent source for this thesis. It is most probably a fact they never knew.

Committee member and Lalor carpenter/builder, and access was kindly provided by his son, Neil Harvey. The other was a large collection of PLC newsletters belonging to Kevin Gunn and access was provided by his daughter through John Waghrain of the Whittlesea Historical Society. Generous access was also provided by Mavis Burgess to the material in the ‘filing cabinet in the garage’, belonging to the now deceased Doug Burgess; and by Norma Greenwood, to the ‘camphor chest’ belonging to Alf Greenwood, one of the co-operative’s organisers who died in 1976.

There have of course also been disappointments and setbacks: for example I have found very few official records of the PLC. Also, I have found no records for the Lalor branch of the ALP for the early period, or for the Epping sub-Branch of Returned Sailors’, Soldiers’ and Airmen’s Imperial League of Australia (RSL). None of Leo Purcell’s regular Sunday broadcasts on the Labor Hour between 1946 and 1955 appear to have been kept in any archive.

Despite the scarcity of these records, there is still a rich confluence of sources available, including a body of government based archival material: rates books; the register of births, deaths and marriage (BDM); the War Memorial’s nominal roll for WWII veterans and the written war records of the ex-servicemen and women in the National Archives. Several copies of the co-operative’s ‘Rules’ have been unearthed from PLC families, and an advertising brochure has been kept in one household. I have been given the ballot lists for those co-operative members whose ballots were drawn between February and November 1947, and a copy of two building syndicate agreements. There is a diary that charts the group building process of one building syndicate, and a diary of one of the co-operative’s original members who left Lalor in 1950 because his wife wanted to rejoin ‘civilisation’. There are house plans, building specifications, numerous contemporary newspaper reports and Whittlesea Shire Council (WSC) minutes of meetings. The Whittlesea Post has been an invaluable source. This combination of sources has facilitated the unusual combination of inter-disciplinary methodology and diverse subject matter which, I hope, makes a new contribution to the social history of Australian housing and to the history of the Australian co-operative movement.

Clearly one challenge is to contextualise the story of the co-operative and its emergent themes within the international and national co-operative movements, the ‘garden city’ and Australian labour movements, and to situate it in the post-war social, economic, political and urban history of Melbourne. A particular challenge is to locate the story in relation to the experience of other WWII veterans, struggling to reintegrate into society at the end of the war, when the literature appears to be
minimal. By comparison with the extensive research that has been undertaken into the experience of service men and women during 1939–45, studies of veterans have been few and far between. There is, to date, no major piece of historical research about ex-service men and women after WWII similar to Marilyn Lake’s work, Limits of Hope, which provided a comprehensive analysis of soldier settlement after WWI. The rehabilitation of ex-servicemen through the PLC scheme, as a deliberate and successful strategy, will be a theme which unexpectedly emerges from the research (see Chapter 4).

From a gendered perspective, there can be no doubting the very masculine nature of this enterprise. Whatever links are made between the dynamic Eureka and Anzac legends at work in Lalor, there is no doubting their masculine emphasis. This will be discussed in Chapter 2. It is undeniable, though, that the women of the PLC were every bit as important to its development as the men, though the written record of their achievements is even more difficult to find than those of their working-class mates. Did women—involved mainly in the domestic and neighbourhood realms of the co-operative experiment, a handful of whom were also ex-service personnel—have principles and ideals that differed from the originators? Did they shape the experiment according to their needs? These aspects will be explored in Chapter 7.

Finally I do emphasise those values that I believe important to sustain us in the present, as E.P. Thompson suggested, and I analyse the PLC and the subsequent suburban development of Lalor through the lens of current values and I make brief reference to important contemporary debates about affordable housing and community development. The term ‘affordable housing’, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, applies to the provision of housing, not just for low income households, but the shortage has become so acute, it applies to medium income households as well. ‘Social housing’ is the term within the affordable housing debate which usually applies to the provision of subsidised, low cost housing available for rent. While social housing is a major policy challenge for Australia, it is not the focus of my conclusion. The PLC believed that the dream of home ownership was a basic right for all who aspired to it and the co-operative achieved this dream—in association with government secured home loans—for about two hundred families. While this fell far short of its dream, this was still a great achievement. A chronic housing shortage, such as that felt in the immediate post-war era, is again on the horizon. Housing supply is systemically falling behind demand, resulting in

the great Australian dream once again slipping from the grasp of many low and medium income families, particularly young people. It is, in my view, possible to transport some of the theories, methods and actions of the PLC into today's context to assist with this entrenched social, economic and political policy crisis. I argue that we have something to learn.

Community development is a sweeping and widely used term. Since the 1960s, housing developers have made empty promises to create a sense of community within the housing estates they have erected across Australia. Increasingly governments use the term because of their concern about a perceived lack of community spirit. In the twenty-first century, we see governments at all levels heightening their involvement in trying to generate greater social cohesion and sense of community for its perceived social and economic benefits.

For example, in 2004 the Department of Victorian Communities (DVC) published a framework for indicators of community strength. The framework included such criteria as: attendance at community events, membership of organised groups, parental participation in schools, and people on decision-making boards or committees. Other criteria measured the extent to which people feel safe in the streets, especially after dark, the extent to which people feel valued and whether or not there was a sense of social isolation. The PLC promised to 'foster a genuine community spirit', and the co-operative and its residents delivered on this promise for at least two or three decades from the late 1940s. They would have passed any DVC test with flying colours. However, assessment of the PLC is not done in order to judge a community that began in the 1940s against standards developed for the twenty-first century. Rather, I aim to demonstrate how they achieved this and to ponder whether their example is relevant in today's world, given that so much has changed in the social context in the intervening sixty years.

Central to the discussion of community development is the concept of social capital, which was made popular by Robert Putnam in his best-selling book, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* in 2000. Not surprisingly social capital is a contested term. It is not a term I particularly like because, by its inclusion of the word 'capital', it suggests that the important realm of the social, can be

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reduced simply to that which can be counted. I reject that view of the social realm.\textsuperscript{76} I will use the term, however, because of its currency and because it provides a useful framework for analysing the Lalor community over time, but I will define what I mean by it.

The analysis of the concept of social capital by political scientist, Barbara Arneil, is particularly useful.\textsuperscript{77} Arneil draws a distinction between the American and European schools of social capital, placing Putnam at the centre of the American school and drawing on French cultural theorist Pierre Bourdieu, ‘but with roots in the thought of Karl Marx and Antonio Gramsci as well as the analysis of civil society by Jean Cohen and Andrew Aranto (1992)’.\textsuperscript{78} For Putnam, social capital is defined as ‘the connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them’ ... that ultimately ‘enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives’.\textsuperscript{79}

Arneil asserts that Putnam is explicitly part of the school of thinking which defines social capital as centred on the family, community organisations and the positive development of children, and as such she asserts that this formulation places an undue weight on women for the development and maintenance of social capital.\textsuperscript{80} This is a relevant consideration in the context of the PLC and is discussed in Chapter 7. Underlying Putnam’s positive view of the existence of social capital is his view that in the bygone era of the 1950s, social capital and therefore civic society was strong. It has now been lost in modern day America and should be regained. Arneil rejects the meta-narrative associated with Putnam’s formulation which supposes three broad stages: ‘past glory, present malaise or collapse, and future revival’.\textsuperscript{81} Rather, her analysis includes perspectives from the histories of women and cultural minorities which do not so neatly comply with Putnam’s framework.\textsuperscript{82}

Turning to the French school of thought on social capital, the main distinction Arneil draws is that:

Like Marx’s analysis of economic capital, Bourdieu believes that social (and cultural) capital are largely accumulated in specific ways as a result of


\textsuperscript{77} Barbara Arneil, Diverse Communities: The Problem with Social Capital, Cambridge, UK, 2006.

\textsuperscript{78} ibid., p. 7.


\textsuperscript{80} Barbara Arneil, Diverse Communities, op. cit., pp. 4 & 6.

\textsuperscript{81} ibid., p. 11.

\textsuperscript{82} ibid., pp. 10–11.
historical relations of power...Moreover, the opportunities for social capital accumulation are not equally open to all.\(^{83}\)

Ultimately this less positive view highlights an 'ideology of inclusion and exclusion'. Arneil is broadly sympathetic to this French strand, but she disagrees with Bourdieu’s analysis on two counts: firstly through her insistence on a broader analysis than class based determinism, specifically by including women and cultural minorities; and secondly her emphasis on the impact of 'agency by historically subordinated groups'.\(^{84}\) Both of these factors are vital additional ingredients to the social capital debate and provide a very useful framework for my analysis of the development of Lalor over a sixty year time frame.

The other important aspect of the social capital debate that helps us to understand the complexity of the changes that have occurred at community level in Lalor over the time horizon of this thesis is Arneil’s call for a shift in focus away from the binary analysis of the ‘rights-bearing citizen of liberalism’ and the ‘equality-bearing state of social democracy’. Rather she seeks to stress the ‘civic space in between’.\(^{85}\) The resulting analysis is not a new emphasis on localism which could limit the horizons of bolder experiments in social and economic change. Rather, in the Australian context, it is a recognition that ordinary Australian working families and new immigrant settlers still live within structural power relationships over which they have little or no control. Nonetheless, grass roots action at community level involves their agency and has the potential to influence important aspects of their daily lives and the aspirations they have for their children: so too, for the co-operative, it was at the level of community that, to paraphrase E.P. Thompson, ‘the agency of working people... contributed by conscious efforts, to the making of [this] history’.\(^{86}\) Although my analysis is confined to this one geographic location, similar situations probably now exist in other multicultural, middle-ring suburbs in Melbourne and Sydney.

Another concept drawn from political science has also proved relevant for this study. Students of modern democracy have found that an absence of faith in formal politics, caused by what some have labelled a 'democratic deficit', has resulted in a new form of grass roots political activism at community level, thus adding a more directly political aspect to the social capital debate.\(^{87}\) It is within this broadly defined social capital framework that the PLC and its community structures will be

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81. ibid., p. 8.
82. ibid., pp. 9–10.
83. ibid., p. 1.
analysed. I argue that from 1948 the PLC and the many other representative bodies it spawned, constituted the ‘civic space in between’ the state and its citizens, and by this reaction to their democratic deficit, they anticipated later developments by about fifty years. 88 They also represented a remarkable case study in the broader development of social capital. Through this lens I analyse the relationship between their co-operative organisations, and, on the one hand, the different levels of government representing the state; and, on the other hand, those citizen members of the co-operative community who we come to know and better understand through the biographies and the prosopography researched through this thesis.

The struggle, often experienced by the co-operative, seemed mostly to manifest as one between its self-help ethos and the agents of conformity: capitalism and the governments that supported it. It will therefore be necessary to investigate the ways in which those individuals, institutions and structures wielding power in Victoria reacted to this group who were determined to take action into their own hands to alleviate the housing shortage and introduce ‘a new order’ at the end of the war. The changing role of governments over the sixty year timeframe is important here, particularly in the provision of services to communities. The history of local government in Australia is not yet a rich area of research, and understanding the context of local government in Victoria has involved further primary research (see Chapter 5).

Lalor in 2004 is home to around forty different nationalities. Here oral testimony is less important—I have spoken to only a handful of representatives from the local communities—as other sources for analysis abound. 89 The council, representing as it did in 2004, the first groups of migrants (Anglo-Celtic, Italian, Greek, and Macedonian) seems to have a relationship with its citizens that is more direct than the council did in the late 1940s and early 1950s when the PLC commenced its building operations and the first residents began to organise themselves. In 2004, there appear to be agents of social capital within ethnic communities, but few intermediary and independent agencies to broker between the state and its citizens on matters that concern the whole community. The implications of this are explored in the social capital terms outlined above and will be the task of Chapter 8.

At the time of the 1948 protest march described at the beginning of this Introduction, though, this financially undercapitalised co-operative venture was teetering on the edge of a chasm of financial collapse as the prolonged shortage of materials, especially cement, halted their operations. For prominent politicians such as John Cain and William Barry to single out the PLC for special treatment is one measure of the regard with which their efforts were held by some at that time. The co-operative was, after all, building homes for ex-servicemen and women in

89. The Whittlesea Council has commissioned a series of oral history interviews with many of the migrant groups. The transcripts and recordings are available in the Mill Park Library in the City of Whittlesea.
the context of a chronic housing shortage. Politically the co-operative’s association with the ALP was, however, to prove a double-edged sword, as was Purcell’s antigovernment and anti-capitalist oratory on 3KZ. As non-Labor governments held centre stage both at federal and Victorian state level by the end of the 1940s, and as Purcell then antagonised many within the ALP, the co-operative was politically isolated and economically damaged. Nevertheless, I argue that it remained a robust community that continued to gain momentum. When the building operations of the PLC stalled, a syndicate system was created through which groups of families co-operated to build each others’ homes. Through adversity and the isolation of their site at Lalor, a common purpose and community flourished. Although increasingly distanced from the formal co-operative ideology of the originators of the scheme, much of the co-operative ethos remained amongst the early residents.

This once close-knit community has now largely dispersed, as most of the few remaining members have moved into retirement homes and because all but a handful of the second and third generations have moved on. Nonetheless the community is still connected, with ongoing bonds that are exceptional in twenty-first century Australian society. A large number of the original Lalor families who occupied those first 200 homes have been involved in this study because they can be traced through community connections. Communication amongst this one-time Lalor community is swift. Many of the homes they built are still standing proudly after sixty years, but in physical terms almost nothing else remains in Lalor except a few survivors of the first and second generation who still doggedly cling to the pronunciation ‘Lawler’. Ultimately it will be important to consider the strength of its legacy.

It is first and foremost a ripping tale of human endeavour. For the reader, as for those participating, it is a roller-coaster ride which reaches into the heart of humanity. The PLC scheme was breathtaking in the scope of its vision and the boldness and vigour with which it was pursued. There is struggle, anguish and for some of those who nurtured the co-operative dream, there is empty despair as they left the co-operative with nothing and lost their deposit. For those who eventually owned a home of their own, there was often struggle and anguish of a different kind, mixed with quiet but deep-seated pride in what had been achieved: a home of their own and a safe and nurturing community that paid dividends for their children. Through a fine-ground lens it has been possible to reach inside the hearts and minds of some of the participants, and at this sometimes microscopic level of analysis, there are no ordinary Australians here. Love, laughter, sweat and tears are found in abundance through this lively tale. The first co-operative members, and the people of different cultures who followed, are part of a rich but neglected urban and social history that has created Australia’s dominant living style, suburbia.

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Peter Lalor Materials Stockade, signage (probably June 1947). Les Strachan (left) built in Vasey Avenue, Lalor; Bertie Lloyd, also a Co-operative member, built in Reservoir. The man in the centre has not been identified.
Source: Johns (1978).
The most serious single problem of Australia's postwar reconstruction today is summed up in two imperative words: 'Wanted Urgently.' No problem is greater than the nation's many housing needs and is apparently so far from adequate solution. In this country 150,000 people need new homes—thousands of these need those homes with a desperation that cannot be satisfactorily alleviated by those more fortunate people and politicians who can show sympathetic sympathy; smile their brows, and go back to their oases and the comfort of real living.

By PETER RUSSELL
1

Genesis of the Idea

A step towards a new way of life dedicated by men who returned, to those who died to make this a better world.¹

The founders of the Peter Lalor Home Building Co-operative Society (PLC) had already lived through two world wars and the Great Depression. As they designed their post-war scheme they looked in equal measure forwards and backwards: with hope and with energy they sought to play an active role in creating a new and better future for humanity. With determination they sought to honour those who had died for their country by ensuring that the mistakes so etched into their own personalities, were never again repeated. They were not to know then that good economic times would flow for most of the next two or three decades. From their vantage point at the closing years of the war, and shortly thereafter, the potential for further economic depression and the devastating social consequences of high unemployment were constantly in their sights. This time they were not going to sit idly by. Their determination to act was for them about seizing the moment, and taking control of their lives.

Public memory portrays the co-operative as the brain-child of a small group of ex-servicemen: further, that they were working-class men affiliated with the Australian Labor Party.² This view has been recounted by participants and historians alike, but when we analyse the initiators of the scheme, the picture that emerges is more complex.

². The website for the suburb of Lalor announces that Lalor was started by a group of ex-servicemen.
My task in this chapter is to investigate and analyse the lives and motivations of each of the men who initiated this extraordinary scheme, and as far as sources will allow, try to understand what drove them. Who were they and where did they meet? If, as they stated, they were trying to create ‘better living conditions for the working classes’, were they of that class? What was the range of ideas, drawn upon by each of these men, which when combined resulted in their grand vision: to firstly provide ‘a home of their own’ for people who ordinarily could not afford one, and, secondly, to provide a pioneering example of a possible new world order? How well suited was each of them for the task that lay ahead? Given that the future of their venture depended to some extent on the strengths and weaknesses of the different personalities, it is essential that we try to get to know them.

In broad terms, their ideas were drawn from an eclectic range of ‘social movements’ including the Australian labour movement, the international co-operative movement, the ‘garden city’ movement, and distributism, including Catholic social doctrine. All men were driven by a highly developed sense of social justice and the desire to make the world a better place. Tracing how they found and adapted these ideas and values into their own unique experiment will be the central part of this chapter. The group banded together to initiate an experiment which, through formal co-operative structures, would build homes, amenities and infrastructure, and build a community, all at a time of chronic housing shortage. Their small collection of co-operative organisations was designed to fulfil a range of roles: housing developer, financier, builder and manager of this community.

In post-war Australia there were examples of private developers (such as A.V. Jennings) and government developers (such as the Victorian Housing Commission) that had the potential to subdivide large tracts of land and organise for the building of homes and amenities. These could be financed through various means. Immediately after the war, however, as demobilisation and new family formation placed enormous pressure on the need for housing, the few large private developers chose not to re-enter the private home-building market, taking the safer option of bidding—usually successfully—for the growing number of Housing Commission and other government projects. However, these government initiatives were slow to start. It was this context which led the originators of the co-operative to take control themselves. They formed the umbrella organisation: the PLC.

Co-operative Housing Societies had been rapidly expanding as a means of financing home loans since the Victorian Government introduced facilitative legislation in 1944. There were two Peter Lalor Co-operative Housing Societies, registered in

5. See the organisation chart in vol. 2, p. iii.
July 1947, and they were no exception. However, for a co-operative to aim to buy and subdivide land, to create a building construction prefabrication factory and to build and finance homes, and then to organise for community infrastructure was, I argue, a unique combination for both Victoria and Australia more generally. In addition, their desire to introduce 'a new order', in which a 'model suburb' run on co-operative lines would be an example for others to follow, shows that their aspirations were high indeed. Just as importantly, through this co-operative scheme, they sought to honour those who had recently died in war, and simultaneously to harness their own energies to assist the Chifley Federal Labor Government with its post-war reconstruction and rehabilitation program. Such was their bold vision.

Four of the five central figures who initiated the PLC scheme were members of the Australian Army (AA) Pay Corps during WWII and this is where they met. Leo Purcell was the driving force, and together with the very influential figure, Alf Greenwood, they formed the core around which the whole co-operative scheme was built. Bill King became involved a little later and probably contributed some ideas, but he was almost certainly not the originator of the scheme nor was he its driving force, though he later saw himself as one of the founders. Stephenson (called Peter) Fox played an official role as Treasurer once the formal meetings commenced, and though it is unclear if he was involved in the formation of the original ideas, his desire to create employment programs to avert the effects of another depression, had a major impact. Peter Russell, journalist, and would-be architect and urban planner, was the Director of the 'Practical Homes Bureau' of the Argus newspaper. He was another critical influence, at least in the initial meetings of the PLC. He was not an ex-serviceman. I shall now examine each of these individuals in more detail.

Leo Purcell was a complex, contradictory character. He wore his rebellious, Irish, working-class heritage with pride and the family name was pronounced with an emphasis on the first syllable, 'Purcell', in keeping with Irish tradition. He was a member of the ALP and passionate about social justice. He and his siblings, even as adults, gathered in the family home on Sunday afternoons and often created

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6. By 4 May 1948 the Premier and Treasurer reported to the Legislative Assembly that there were 106 such societies registered in Victoria. See Victoria, Legislative Assembly, Debates, vol. LA226, 28 April 1948, pp. 777–779.
7. This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2.
8. PLHBCSL, 'Progress & Promise', op. cit.
9. Leo Richard Purcell, individual war record, NAA, series B883, VX108201 & V4378, Arthur Alton Greenwood VX10665 & V124214, Stephenson Fox UKX5; NAA; William Thomas King, individual war record, NAA, series B884, V27378; AA Pay Corps, 'War Diaries', AWM Archives, Series 52:15/1/1-10.
13. Fuller biographies of all these originators of the co-operative are in Appendix A.
a ‘family parliament’ where they argued about the best way to put the world to rights. Leap's father, Richard Peter Purcell, had been Secretary of the Northcote Branch of the ALP in the 1920s, a role Leo filled in the late 1930s. This is where he met John Cain (Snr) and with his support in 1937 and 1938, Purcell contested the Northcote City Council elections as the Labor candidate for the North Ward. He was unsuccessful, but greatly increased Labor's share of the vote. Devoutly Catholic, Purcell claimed never to have missed a Sunday mass until he drove an army jeep over a cliff and crushed one leg in the latter stages of the war. The subsequent time in an army hospital on the Atherton Tablelands in Queensland was probably responsible for his subsequent commitment, as his mind raced with ideas and schemes to solve a housing crisis that was looming for ex-servicemen.

Purcell had grown up amidst dairying and fruit growing in Victoria. Throughout his childhood and early working life he saw at first hand the farm-based production co-operatives that dominated the milk industry in Warrigal and Swan Hill and the fruit industry in the Goulburn Valley basin. Purcell's oldest son, Frank, born in 1931, recalled:

I remember he was always talking co-operatives. ... dairy farming on a soldier settlement block out of Swan Hill, I'm sure that's where he came across co-operatives, because the countryside was covered in co-operatives. [T]hey were very much a community-driven development at that time. ... Down in Gippsland where the rest of our family lived, they were all dairy farmers and share-holders in co-operatives and so on. Co-ops were just taken for granted.

By the mid 1920s Purcell had started working as a depot starter on the cable trams out of the Clifton Hill depot, later becoming an inspector. Leo's daughter, Leonie, wrote a thoughtful analysis of the family's values and assessed some of the events that occurred in her father's life that she felt had sharpened his world view. Writing of his time as an employee of the Tramways Board and a delegate of the Australian Tramways Union, she stated that he vividly remembered 'the conditions in the 20's just before his employment and the fight for the end of an unjust casual labour force,
which forced men to report each day without a promise of work or any appearance wage.\textsuperscript{20} She also recalled his sense of injustice at:

the State Government's promise to employ more people during the depression if those employed would take a reduction in wages. The unions agreed; wages were reduced by half and within three months a large proportion of those already employed were dismissed.\textsuperscript{21}

Purcell was one of the lucky ones who kept his job during the depression, staying with the trams until he joined the Army in 1940.\textsuperscript{22} According to his family, he was also involved in the late 1930s in proposals for a co-operative store in Preston. This may well have been the Northern Suburbs Co-operative Store which was registered in 1940.\textsuperscript{23} Some of these co-operators were English migrants who were familiar with co-operatives in Britain and may have introduced Purcell to the ideas of the British consumer co-operative movement and the famous Rochdale Pioneers who set up a formative co-operative trading enterprise in 1844.\textsuperscript{24} These Rochdale Pioneers were followers of Robert Owen, a reforming factory owner and social philosopher, who believed the capitalist system based on competition, should be replaced by co-operation.\textsuperscript{25} However, while the Rochdale co-operative movement may have been one source of inspiration, Purcell’s co-operative ideas sprang more from his connection with what has been termed the ‘distributist school of social Catholicism’.\textsuperscript{26} As we will later discuss, such views permeated his upbringing and family values, though he did not adopt these views without reservation.

He was assigned to the 3\textsuperscript{rd} District Accounts Office, AA Pay Corps, later spending time in Queensland, New Guinea and islands to the north of Australia. He was commissioned a lieutenant—an unusual rank for a man of working-class background. After the war, Purcell used his deferred army pay as a deposit on a general store in Miller Street, West Thornbury. According to his son, Desmond, this pushed Purcell’s economic position temporarily into the lower middle classes, ‘and I think that gave him the security to, sort of chance his arm on some of these

\textsuperscript{20} The full title for the union was the Australian Tramway and Motor Omnibus Employees' Union. Leonie Purcell, 'Justice Expectations: An analysis of the collision of “consciousness” between the Vatican Curia and Dr. F.J. Purcell', B. Ed. paper, La Trobe University, 1978, p. 31. This information was based on an interview with Leo Purcell.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{22} Leo Richard Purcell, individual war record, op. cit.

\textsuperscript{23} Registrar of Industrial and Provident Societies, ‘Register’, Melbourne, PROVYPRS 8277/P/0001, 1940. Although there is no evidence of Purcell playing a formal role on the Committee of Management, the war might have intervened to prevent this occurring.

\textsuperscript{24} Frank Purcell, interview with the author, op. cit., p. 19. Frank stated: ‘See a lot of English people knew co-ops and there were quite a few English people in it as I remember.’


dreams’. Purcell, however, never wavered in his identification with the Australian labour movement.

As the war ended, the names of Leo Purcell and William Ruthven (both representing the Tramways Union) were approved by the State Executive as nominations to contest preselection for the Legislative Assembly seat of Preston, a battle from which Purcell then inexplicably withdrew. At about the same time, Purcell wrote to the Central Executive of the Victorian Labor Party to initiate a ‘campaign to oppose propaganda levelled at destroying the Servicemen’s confidence in the A.L.P. and suggesting appointment of ex-servicemen as a Committee.’ The request was taken seriously and referred without delay to the Executive Officers Committee (consisting of well known Labor figures including Vic Stout, Pat Kennelly and Jean Daley). Purcell and Greenwood attended as ex-servicemen together with Opposition Leader, John Cain, and Senator Jim Sheehan. The minutes of the meeting recorded in muted form what we can imagine as a passionate performance by Purcell: ‘Mr. Purcell stated that most servicemen did not know what the present Federal [Labor] Government had done or intended to do for the serviceman and women. Turning his attention to the senior ranks of the military, he accused ‘Senior Officers’ of using ‘subtle propaganda to swing the serviceman aware [away] from the Federal Government’. He also referred to Salt and other armed services papers in which the federal government had been misquoted. He proposed that the ALP organise some means of refuting incorrect press statements about matters affecting servicemen and that a service should be established ‘where servicemen could be advised to what they were entitled’. Greenwood agreed.

J.V. Stout (President Melbourne Trades Hall Council) and Jean Daley (Secretary of the Women’s Organising Committee) suggested a committee be formed as part of the political body, to liaise with the Trades Hall Council committee on matters of industrial rehabilitation. The committee became known as the ‘Ex-Servicemen’s Committee of the Central Executive of the Victorian Branch of the ALP’. Ex-service personnel, it was argued, could write in with problems which could be answered on the ALP radio station 3KZ in a special segment known as ‘Servicemen’s Question

27. Desmond Purcell, interview with the author, 22 January 2007, p. 25.
31. ibid.
32. ibid.
33. ibid.
34. ibid. John Cain (snr) moved and J.V. Stout seconded a motion to temporarily appoint such a committee, the membership of which was the four Executive Officers as named in the text above, Greenwood and Purcell with approximately five other ex-servicemen. They were to deal with cases as submitted.
Box’ during the popular program, *Labor Hour*. So began Purcell’s broadcasting career. Aired every Sunday afternoon, Purcell’s son, Desmond, credited this segment with creating a sense of empowerment for those with no public voice:

the soldiers weren’t organised and they didn’t have much support and they could all be individually fobbed off...So he used the Ex-Servicemen’s Question Box basically to get the soldiers talking about, yes, what they had expected [after the war] what they’d hoped for, what their needs were, how they were going. It was in many ways I think a bit before its time in the sense that it was a good bit of psychology for the returning soldiers.

By March 1947 Purcell was suggesting that the Ex-Servicemen’s Committee had been ‘created for the purpose of assisting in the rehabilitation of service personnel’.

Certainly, by this time, rehabilitation had become its main focus. Purcell ran the Ex-Serviceman’s Question Box for nine or ten years from 1945 to the time of the split in the ALP, when, as a right-wing Catholic, his position became untenable. The fact that he refused to defect to the DLP counted for naught.

Purcell was a dedicated Labor man and a quintessential grass-roots activist. He made several attempts to become a Labor politician both before and after the war, at local, state and federal level. Although his losses were sometimes by slim margins he never won. He was not a supporter of B.A. Santamaria and his tactics. Speaking frankly about his father’s abhorrence of the ‘Movement’, Frank Purcell recounted:

Dad refused to join the DLP and was not too popular around Thornbury parish because of that. He and his brothers were all ALP, in spite of their criticisms of Labor—a characteristic of all true believers. I can remember their sessions at my grandmother’s place in Hayes St Northcote where all the families gathered regularly. All ... were scathing in their views on Santamaria and his failure to understand the coalition nature of the ALP—Catholics, Orange/Masons, Socialists, Comms etc. Dad always remained a good friend of Calwell.

Purcell was in his element as a political ‘wheeler and dealer’ who operated through his contacts in a way that caused one person who worked for him to say, ‘he wasn’t

35. On 19 May 1947, the Manager of 3KZ, John Madden, wrote to Dinny Lovegrove about the 3KZ *Labor Hour* program in which he stated, ‘If I may humbly say, the “Labor Hour” enjoys great popularity with a large and far flung audience. Evidence to that fact is forthcoming in the large number of letters which are received.’ See, Victorian Labor Party, Executive Officers, ‘Minutes’ op. cit., 19 May 1947, folio 108. Many of the Lalor residents stated that they heard of the co-operative scheme through Leo Purcell’s broadcasts.

36. Desmond Purcell, interview with the author, op. cit., p. 4.


39. ibid. The ‘Movement’ was the popular title for the Catholic Social Studies Movement. See, for example, Paul Ormonde, *The Movement*, Melbourne, 1972.
in the fore at all; he did tend to like to sit back but he worked from behind'. Frank claimed that Leo was Cain's numbers man in the Northcote branch until they had a falling out in 1952. Purcell subsequently ran for ALP pre-selection for the seat of Northcote against Cain. Apparently their argument centred on a land deal. However, this was the 1952 pre-selection debacle when another major Labor figure, and Cain's close ally, Pat Kennelly, was unseated by the 'Movement'. In the minds of many in the Victorian Labor Party it could have been assumed that Purcell also represented the 'Movement', given his right wing Catholic views. Tensions within the Victorian ALP were heightened almost to breaking point and, although Purcell survived on the Labor Hour for another couple of years, and remained a loyal ALP man all his life, after the 1952 contest with Cain he began to run out of political allies. ALP bitterness from this time still runs very deep and his close association with the PLC scheme undoubtedly contributed to its growing political isolation and the way in which it faded from public memory.

While he was the man, more than any other, responsible for starting the Peter Lalor scheme, initially he was not in one of the most prominent roles. From the beginning Greenwood was Chairman, Fox was Treasurer and Russell was Secretary. Purcell was Public Relations Officer while King was Assistant Treasurer. Purcell only took over as Chairman in February 1947 when Russell left and Greenwood became the Manager.

Arthur Alton Greenwood, who attended the meeting of ALP Executive Officers with Purcell, was another initiator of the Peter Lalor scheme. Known to his colleagues as Alf, he was considered a gentle, likeable person, with a sound grasp of numbers. He, too, was a staunch Labor supporter. As we have seen, it was Greenwood who chaired the co-operative’s first public meeting in December 1946.

Urban geographer, Gary Johns, claimed that the three founders of the PLC—Purcell, Greenwood and King—came from working-class backgrounds. He was wrong about Greenwood. He came from a well respected, Methodist, middle-class, business family. In the early decades of the twentieth century they owned considerable land holdings in the Ringwood area, living in Greenwood Street which was named after Alf's father. It was here that he may have first come in contact with the co-operative

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43. PLHBCSL, Committee of Management, 'Minutes', 17 January & 28 February 1947.
45. Argus, 10 December 1946, p. 3 cited ‘Mr. J. Greenwood’, but it was a misprint. It was certainly Alf.
movement as the Ringwood Co-operative Food Stores were opened in 1926 and continued their operations until well into the 1950s. Alf went to private schools, including for a short time as a day student at Wesley College, leaving at about sixteen years of age. He joined his father's firm as a clerk doing accountancy work; not usually considered a working-class occupation.

By 1929, at the height of the depression, Greenwood had lost his job at his father's firm, so he travelled to Perth carrying with him a range of references from his father's business associates, from the Methodist Minister at Ringwood and from his Uncle Edmund, a Victorian Nationalist MP. It is not clear what Greenwood did in Perth, except that in July 1930 he joined the Tuxis Society of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). He could have met Peter Fox at that time, another member of the Perth YMCA, and another influential figure in the formation of the scheme. Returning to Melbourne in 1931, Greenwood remained unemployed for about two years. His family's financial situation at that time was serious. Greenwood then found work in the sales and accounting departments of city firms. He was still living at home with his parents in Camberwell when he enlisted in the Army in March 1940 and obtained a reference from human rights campaigner and federal Labor MP, Maurice Blackburn, who spoke highly of the family. He was assigned to the AA Pay Corps and served in both the Middle East and the Pacific theatres of war returning to Melbourne in 1944. He too reached the rank of lieutenant. He was sent for a short time as Paymaster to the large prisoner-of-war camp at Murchison in northern Victoria. It was here that he met his future wife, Norma Isobel Simpson, also a member of the AA Pay Corps. By early 1945, Greenwood was in the AA Pay Corps headquarters in Melbourne where he joined Purcell, King and Fox.

Frank Purcell insisted that Greenwood was from a 'different world' to his father. 'My gut feeling was he's from south of the Yarra. We were all north of the Yarra, which is real working class. He was an educated man compared to our world.' Nevertheless, Greenwood had strong social justice values that probably came, at least in part, from his Methodist upbringing. Suffering financial hardship through the depression probably also helped to sharpen his social conscience and political perspective.

49. Methodist Minister, Methodist Parsonage, Ringwood, reference, 8 February 1989 (the signature is unclear); Edmund Greenwood, reference, 25 February 1929 in A.A. Greenwood, personal papers, held by Norma Greenwood, Hobart. Edmund is listed in the Victorian Parliamentary register as Nationalist, but he never sought party endorsement.
50. Taxation Services of Australia, reference, 2 February 1940 in A.A. Greenwood's personal papers, op. cit. The signature on the reference cannot be deciphered.
51. Maurice Blackburn, reference, 4 January 1940, in A.A. Greenwood's personal papers, op. cit.
52. Frank Purcell, interview with the author, op. cit., p. 12.

CHAPTER 1: GENESIS OF THE IDEA
Greenwood aptly fitted the description, by Ashton and Pickering, as a ‘friend of the people’. Referring to the Chartist movement in Britain of more than a century earlier, they believed that such friends ‘demonstrated that individuals of goodwill could work together across the divide of social class and, in this way, they helped to preserve a pattern that persists in popular politics to this day’.53

In other ways too, Alf Greenwood and Leo Purcell stood apart. Purcell always had a grand scheme, idea or innovation he pursued with great enthusiasm. He was a dreamer; Greenwood was an implementer, a finisher. As a political activist, Purcell spoke his mind, ‘took no prisoners’ and railed at bureaucratic constraints; Greenwood was tactful, smooth and able to work within the system. Such a sharp distinction in their modus operandi has been described by Andrew Jakubowicz as typical of differences between the working and middle classes. Those brought up in the inner urban and largely Catholic ALP worked with political processes ‘based on understandable conditions of friendship, family ties, deals and intimate personal knowledge of the actors’, a fundamental characteristic of Purcell. Greenwood, on the other hand, held to that ‘middle class principle of bureaucratic impersonality [which] worked in fact as a middle class political process rewarding those with the greatest ability to work a bureaucracy’.54 Purcell and his wife Annie had a life resembling a roller coaster ride with recurring ‘rags to riches’ episodes, whereas Greenwood and his wife Norma lived an organised, reliable and steady life.

Both Purcell and Greenwood were, as noted, driven by a common sense of social justice and both were brilliant advocates. Purcell was an orator who could stir people with great passion. Greenwood was always able to make an idea sound credible. Their complementary strengths made for a powerful duo as they commenced their journey to build a model suburb. They became great friends during their time together in the war and remained so, long after they both had left the PLC. Scarcely a trace of any written record of Leo Purcell’s life exists, turning oral testimony, odd press clippings and official documents into vital sources. However, Alf Greenwood, in keeping with his middle-class upbringing, had obtained written references during the early phases of his adult life, and this has made it possible to piece together his story.55

William Thomas King did not contribute to the original conception of the co-operative. His claim to a central role was based on the fact that he saw it through from the first meetings almost to the last.56 He was similar in age to Purcell and

55. A.A. Greenwood, personal papers, op. cit.
56. It is probable that Bill King’s role began after some of the ideas had already evolved, despite the fact that Gary Johns in 1978 stated, based on oral testimony from King, that the ideas were developed in Melbourne at the end of the war when he was present. Gary Johns, ‘Building a Suburb’, op. cit., p. 7.

CHAPTER 1: GENESIS OF THE IDEA
Greenwood and was born into a working-class Catholic family in Malvern in 1907. He remained in the Malvern area throughout his early life, staying at school until he attained the merit certificate at age 14. He married Lillian Valerie King in 1929 and they had two daughters. Prior to the war he worked initially as a grocer and later as a commercial traveller. He enlisted in 1942 and was attached to the 3rd Military District Accounts Office, AA Pay Corps Southern Command. For reasons which are not explained in his war record, he remained in and around Melbourne for the duration of the war. Made a sergeant in January 1944, he was certainly in the right place to participate in the discussions with Purcell, Greenwood and Fox at the AA Pay Corps in Melbourne in 1945, where they are said to have further developed the possibilities of a home building co-operative. King decided to remain in the Army as a volunteer for a further two years at the end of the war. He was discharged in June 1947 when he resumed his work as a commercial traveller. After the war, he demonstrated his political allegiances by actively seeking ALP pre-selection at both state and federal level.

King was probably also a member of the Ex-Servicemen’s Committee of the Central Executive and was active from the earliest meetings which formed the co-operative. He was elected as one of the seven original committeemen, and, as discussed, first served in the role of Assistant Treasurer. Interviewed for an article published in The Age newspaper in 1977, he recalled having had high expectations of the PLC and expressed his ‘great disappointment’ that it did not eventuate as planned. The implication was that he planned it. The article also stated that, as a member of the Hawthorn Branch of the ALP ‘he was close to the former Prime Minister, James Scullin’ who was quoted as saying that ‘Lalor could have fulfilled a socialist dream of “garden suburbs near Melbourne, planned as neighbourhood units”’. Doss Lawson, one of the original settlers at Lalor, said of King: ‘He was meticulous... he had that sort of brain... he asked questions and hit the nail on the head... and he would have been very observant of... all the things that were happening.”

Stephenson Fox (known as Peter) was the fourth member of the AA Pay Corps to play a significant role. Like Greenwood, Fox came from a middle-class background (although the family’s property holdings were not extensive) and he was also a Protestant—Anglican rather than Methodist. Like Greenwood, Fox had experienced financial hardship and had witnessed the significant suffering caused by the depression. There is considerable written evidence about Peter Fox, much of it in his own hand. In 1985 he wrote a book entitled Golden Pyramid: Gateway to a Golden Age through Full Employment. In it, he elaborated on theories he had adopted before

57. There is no record of her maiden name.
58. William Thomas King, individual war record, op. cit.
and during the war when involved with Clarence Streit’s ‘Federal Union’ movement: ideas calling for a powerful world governance organisation of democracies, seeking peace, disarmament and full employment.\(^\text{62}\) Fox’s focus was on creating a safer and more prosperous economic future on a world scale. In 1995 he published an autobiography entitled, *Stephenson called Peter: A Life*.\(^\text{63}\) Using the material contained in Fox’s own writings, together with PLC ‘Minutes’, official war records and oral testimony from those who remember him, it is not difficult to sketch an outline of his life.

Fox was born in Letchworth, England, in 1912, the first of Ebenezer Howard’s ‘Garden Cities’. Although this is a connection Fox himself does not make, it seems certain that he was influenced by it. His father owned a small dairy farm and opened a dairy shop near Letchworth station; he was killed in action in WWI in 1916. Peter was of a similar generation to the others in the original PLC group. When Peter turned eight, his family migrated to Albany, south of Perth in Western Australia. His mother’s parents and older brother had recently migrated and bought land there. Peter gained entry into Perth Modern School which resulted in the family moving into Perth. Fox believed it was through the philosophy of the Perth Modern School, and the teachings of the economist and, in his words, ‘socialist’, H.C. Coombs, that he began to develop his ideas about full employment.\(^\text{64}\) Probably because of tight family finances, Peter left school at 15 after completing only his ‘Junior’ schooling and joined the National Bank of Australasia though he later completed a Diploma of Commerce at the University of Western Australia. By 1935 he had qualified as an accountant, the only one of the co-operative’s founders to achieve this educational level, and the next year he left for England to continue his work for the bank.

Fox joined the AA Pay Corps in 1940 from Britain. He was a commissioned officer and, as a captain, he held the highest rank of any of the PLC group. He described in his biography how, when he was serving in the Middle East and later in Ceylon, he conducted study circles to educate the troops about the ‘Federal Union’ (described above).\(^\text{65}\) On arrival in Melbourne he continued with his activism on these issues.

Fox’s autobiography devoted a tantalisingly small segment to his experience with the PLC and he chose to understake his role. He said that he was invited to join the co-operative by ‘a number of ex-servicemen,’ as though he joined it when it was already formed. He made no mention of how or when he had met the originators. His biography reveals his attendance at the early meetings and he noted with satisfaction, the reference to full employment in the aims of the co-operative, which


\(^{63}\) Ibid. The cover jacket described Fox as ‘a cultured, sensitive man, a poet and singer—and a public accountant’.

\(^{64}\) Peter Fox, *Stephenson Called Peter*, op. cit., pp. 20–21.

\(^{65}\) Peter Fox, *Stephenson Called Peter*, ibid., pp. 26–37; see also the Streit Council for a Union of Democracies.
he believed was there at his instigation. He said that he learnt subsequently that he had been asked ‘to join the society because the boys reckoned I was the most reasonable Liberal they knew’. Fox had certainly been mixing with the conservative side of politics in the UK and Australia to try to advance his causes, so the links with those Labor ‘true believers’ who initiated the PLC seemed an unlikely relationship.

By December 1944 Fox was in the Melbourne Land Headquarters of the AA Pay Corps Southern Command with Purcell and King. Greenwood was serving at the prison camp in Murchison until April the following year, but it is possible that Fox and Greenwood knew each other from their time in the AA Pay Corps in the Middle East, or even before the war in Perth, and this could have been the connection that brought Fox into the network. While Fox’s own account minimises his role, minutes of meetings lay bare his considerable involvement and influence as Treasurer of the PLC from December 1946 and Chairman of the Finance Committee. His influence continued as he succeeded Greenwood as Secretary/Manager in March 1949 until he left suddenly for New Guinea in August 1949. Some of the original co-operative members who remembered him held some suspicion of him, perhaps because of his university education, his rank as captain or his rushed departure. However, there is no documentary evidence of any wrong doing, though, as we will see, he remained ignorant of the society’s financial situation throughout his tenure as Treasurer, which is all the more damning given his accounting qualifications.

Peter Russell was the other of the central group of five who initiated the scheme. He brought to the group an emphasis on building and urban design. Like Purcell, he was a complex character. Gary Johns ascribed to him a central role: ‘The stimulus required to begin the operation probably came from Peter Russell, architect and journalist with the Melbourne Argus newspaper.’ It may well have been Bill King’s oral testimony that provided this perspective and there can be no doubt that the person who wrote under the name Peter Russell was closely involved with the establishment of the PLC in late 1946 and early 1947. He was elected Honorary Secretary ‘pro tem’ at the 9 December public meeting and he became Secretary/Manager at the first public meeting in 1947.

Urban historian Seamus O’Hanlon has placed Peter Russell with Roy Grounds and Robin Boyd in the modernist school of architects who tried to reform the building industry in the post-war period. However Russell was not an architect,

\[\text{CHAPTER 1 : GENESIS OF THE IDEA}\]

67. ibid.
68. PLHBCSL, Committee of Management, ‘Minutes’, December 1946 to April 1949 (incomplete); also Peter Fox, *Stephenson Called Peter*, op. cit., p. 55.
70. PLHBCSL, Committee of Management, ‘Minutes’, 9 & 13 December 1946.
but a ‘building expert’ who employed architects and others to assist with the *Argus* ‘Practical Homes Bureau’. An advertisement for Peter Russell’s services which ran in the *Argus* in January 1947 announced that he was ‘in association with the Victorian Architectural Centre’. Another advertisement in February 1947 stated that registered architects would be ‘instructed by Peter Russell’, probably making him an ideal candidate to be a housing developer.

Born in 1911 in Eastbourne, England, Peter Russell was christened Eric James Graham Granville Newsome Russell-Clarke. He came from a middle-class, Anglican background and his father was a teacher. He changed his name to Peter Russell-Clarke and migrated to Australia where he studied theology with the Anglican Church in Ballarat and later become an Anglican priest. By the time of his marriage to dress-maker Mavis Augusta Wren in 1932 he was working as an advertising representative. According to his son, he had been defrocked for not adhering to a ‘hellfire and brimstone’ version of Christianity. Peter Russell was the only one of the main five originators who was not an ex-serviceman, although during the war he held a senior position in the Civil Construction Corps (CCC). He claimed that as a young lad he had trained as a craftsman carpenter. After the war he became a journalist and commentator on the housing crisis and he published under a range of names, the main ones being Peter Russell and Eric Clarke. Under the name of Peter Russell, he wrote articles for the *Australasian Post* from March 1946 and was Director of the *Argus* ‘Practical Homes Bureau’ throughout 1946 and 1947. He also ran a radio show on 3AW with June Jago called, ‘This Man’s Castle’ in which housing issues were canvassed.

In February 1946 Russell penned an article in the *Argus* under the headline ‘The Homeless Cry Out’:

> As the days go by my mail contains more and more correspondence from returned soldiers, workers discharged from the CCC, married couples too young to have known actual warfare, but not too young to have known love and the desire to create a home. Pitiful letters, heartrending in their naïve

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72. *Argus*, 16 January 1947, p. 12; Neil Clerehan, telephone conversation with the author, 13 July 2007. Neil Clerehan was editor of *Smudges* in 1946, (magazine of the RYIA students’ society based at Melbourne University). He apparently ran a scathing article about Russell. Clerehan recalled being summoned to the *Argus* to confront Peter Russell who had threatened to sue. No copy of the article has been located in the incomplete collection of the magazine in the Melbourne University archives. Russell’s son, Peter Russell-Clarke, confirmed that his father was not an architect, in a telephone conversation with the author, 16 July 2007.

73. *Argus*, 20 February 1947, p. 12.

74. Peter Russell-Clarke, telephone conversation with the author, op. cit.


78. Peter Russell, ‘The Key to Your Home’, a pamphlet advertising the ‘Russell Pre-fabricated Home’, was produced by Peter Russell and is held by his son, Peter Russell-Clarke. The cited edition of the pamphlet is dated 1 March 1949.
optimism, or disillusioned hopelessness. Letters to stir the conscience and rouse to action the practical man in the building trades.\textsuperscript{79}

Russell was caustically critical of the bureaucratic bungling he saw dominating the housing industry. He objected to being ‘fobbed off’ with platitudes. His article concluded, significantly, by asking if there was a ‘wiser middle course’ between ‘bureaucratic bungling’ and the ‘manipulations of big business’ which ‘disregard all humanitarian principles’.\textsuperscript{80} Was it this article that caught the eye of the AA Pay Corps schemers?

Throughout \textit{1946} Melbourne readers were treated to a series of passionate articles in which he analysed the housing problem. For instance, in March 1946 in an article entitled ‘Hurry Along with those Homes’, he outlined the magnitude of the housing crisis in Australia, arguing that the problem was extreme, even compared with Britain, Russia, and the USA.\textsuperscript{81} ‘\textit{Wanted 700 000 homes in 10 years!}’ was another headline.\textsuperscript{82} Russell strongly supported the creation of the Commonwealth Housing Commission and used its research to quote the latest housing demand statistics. When the federal government lost the \textit{1944} referendum to retain its war-time controls and some powers had reverted to the states, he lamented that ‘the picture grows grim indeed’.\textsuperscript{83} By June 1946 Russell was contending that the ‘most serious single problem of Australia’s post-war reconstruction today is summed up in the two imperative words: “\textit{Wanted Urgently}”’. This was the wording on a banner painted in large letters above a group of men who were photographed while marching in protest at the appalling housing situation. Another banner proclaimed, ‘Ex-Servicemen United’. Again, in the article, Russell provided statistics about the crisis in housing supply, materials and labour.\textsuperscript{84}

Russell argued for solutions to the crisis. He proposed a range of important new ways to increase the production of houses—ideas he had gleaned from the USA, and from architects he admired, such as Roy Grounds and Robin Boyd, and from the \textit{1944} ‘\textit{Final Report}’ by the Commonwealth Housing Commission.\textsuperscript{85} In March 1946 Russell called for a revolution in building and construction. He accused the craft-based sub-contractors of being ‘willing slaves to ancient custom’. His solution was for Australia to adopt a ‘Fordist’ factory-style production system for building houses, stating that the current methods of home building were obsolete and the housing shortage would not be solved unless homes were ‘built, bought, sold and

\begin{thebibliography}{1}
\bibitem{79} \textit{Argus}, 19 February 1946, p. 12.
\bibitem{80} ibid.
\bibitem{81} \textit{Australasian Post}, 9 March 1946, pp 22–23 & p. 47.
\bibitem{82} ibid., p. 22.
\bibitem{83} ibid., p. 23.
\bibitem{84} \textit{Australasian Post}, 20 June 1946, pp. 9–13.
\end{thebibliography}
traded-in like cars. Pre-fabrication, used to great effect in the USA, was discussed approvingly and Russell strongly supported propositions from South Australia and Victoria for ‘nucleus homes’. Providing ‘a compromise between permanent and temporary structures’, nucleus homes utilised limited building materials for the core of a dwelling, with a view to extending bedrooms and verandas as supplies became available. Writing in the *Australasian Post*, Russell viewed political parties as inept, but he saved his most vehement criticism for the post-war building and construction industry which he considered to be completely incapable of rising to the challenge confronting it. He railed against the number of middle-men in the housing construction supply chain who, he said, were taking money from the pockets of consumers. However, he did approve of the introduction of Co-operative Housing Societies by the Victorian State Government. His weekly columns also urged ordinary folk to make a start and for a small deposit, build themselves a home to an architect designed plan, a new one of which he included in his column each week. Is it any wonder the men from the AA Pay Corps were attracted by these words?

While the ‘Practical Homes Bureau’ had as its audience the individual home owner and builder and their specific needs, Russell also had grander perspectives about urban design and urban planning. In May 1946 in an article entitled ‘Must Melbourne Endure the Shame of Its Slums’ Russell drew causal links between poor housing conditions and declining public morals, in much the same way as the slum abolition movement had forcefully argued before the war. The preaching quality to the tone of this article perhaps harks back to his recent experience at the pulpit. He argued that the solution to Victoria’s housing problems lay in proper town planning. He drew eclectically upon many of the urban planning theories of the time, and while not acknowledging the influence of, for instance, the ‘garden city’ movement, he did call for a boundary to be placed around the ten mile limit of the city, with a five mile green belt surrounding it. ‘Within 10 miles of the GPO,’ he stated, ‘there is ample room for 2,000,000 people to live in properly planned suburbs, with adequate recreational areas.’ He also called for ‘model townships’ to be built around zoned industrial developments, placing workers and their factories in close proximity, but with the factories outside the metropolitan limits. There would have been much in this article to appeal to the group from the AA Pay Corps, and while he often used his pen to attack all sectors of the building industry, ultimately it would appear that Russell sided with industrial capital, identifying the

88. By 1949 Russell had his own company manufacturing nucleus homes.
workers as the necessary cogs to keep the wheels of industry turning. Such views should have sounded alarm bells for a man like Purcell, with strong anti-capitalist leanings. Johns, after interviewing Bill King, stated that 'Russell had complete faith in the ability of the private sector to solve the housing shortage'.

Russell was of the same generation as Purcell, Greenwood and King, but there is no evidence available on how they met. Perhaps Purcell and Russell made contact as both men were responding to a similar set of issues. As we have noted, Purcell had started broadcasting on 3KZ in the second half of 1945 and while his Servicemen's Question Box purported to address any issues of concern to ex-servicemen after the war, in fact the program soon became overwhelmed by matters to do with housing. Purcell, Greenwood, King and Fox had already made some plans for a co-operative housing scheme for ex-servicemen, and it is possible that when they read Russell's articles, they took a proposition to him, arguing that with his apparent building and urban design expertise, they could set their plans in motion.

By the time the first article appeared in the Argus on 5 December 1946, publicising the co-operative scheme, they were clearly all working together. Russell at the Argus 'Practical Homes Bureau' was the contact point for the scheme, and was said to be designing the 'preliminary plans for the homes'. At the first meeting on 9 December, Purcell 'explained the workings of co-operative schemes in other centres and overseas', and Russell 'explained how the proposed co-operative suburb could be built and how it could function', in terms similar to those he had expressed in the May 1946 article on town planning. By the Committee meeting of 13 December, Russell tabled a draft constitution for discussion. Further enquiries about the proposed co-operative could be made at the offices of the Argus 'Practical Homes Bureau' which were at that stage the official premises for the co-operative. Purcell also arranged for Russell to use his time slot on the 3KZ Labor Hour to publicise the scheme further.

Startlingly, Russell's relationship with the co-operative scheme ended abruptly. On 23 January 1947 an advertisement for the PLC appeared in the Argus, and made reference to the fact that the co-operative was 'sponsored by the Ex-Servicemen's Committee of the Central Executive of the Victorian Labor Party' using the same terminology as for the meeting just one month earlier. The Victorian Branch Executive of the ALP objected to this wording and Purcell was called to account at a meeting of Labor Party Executive Officers. Six weeks could be a long time in Victorian Labor Party politics. Purcell explained that Russell's actions were not

93. PLHBCSL, 'Minutes of Meeting convened by the Ex-Servicemen's Committee of the Central Executive of the Labor Party of Victoria at the Trades Hall', 9 December 1946; see also the Argus, 'Weekend Magazine', 18 May 1946, pp. 2–3.
authorised by him, as the Public Relations Officer, and that following the publication of the advertisement, ‘Mr. Russell was summoned to attend the Committee Meeting and was put off the Committee.’ Purcell assured the Executive Officers meeting that ‘It was made clear at all meetings of the Society that same was non-political and had nothing to do with any Party’. Jean Daley, who attended at least one of the first public meetings of the co-operative as a member of the Ex-Servicemen’s Committee, supported Purcell’s account.95

Russell’s involvement with the co-operative was short lived, but by all accounts it was very effective. At least by the time he left, the scheme had been launched and his innovative ideas on factory-style production of houses fundamentally influenced the way the scheme progressed. As well, with Russell publicising the scheme in those first two months through the Argus and on radio 3AW, and Purcell broadcasting through 3KZ, there can be no doubting that they managed to reach many Victorians.

Russell also brought a different emphasis to the venture which could have been at the heart of the rupture. His priority was housing and urban design, not a co-operative way of life, and this is perhaps best illustrated by the naming of the society. When foreshadowing the first meeting in December 1946, Russell wrote that ‘Melbourne ex-servicemen are planning to obtain better housing accommodation and will form a company to function as a co-operative society’.96 At a committee meeting immediately afterwards, King moved and Purcell seconded that the society should be called the Peter Lalor Home Building Co-operative.97 It is not clear if the suggestion had come from the floor of the public meeting on 9 December, but Purcell is widely attributed with suggesting the name. Russell then tried to register the name ‘Peter Lalor’ but discovered ‘there was a great deal of interest’ in it, and to avoid delays, he registered the new society in his own name, calling it ‘Peter Lalor Home Building Construction Company’ with the word ‘co-operative’ not appearing in the title. Subsequently, there were no issues with the original name the society had chosen.

The capricious ‘dismissal’ of Russell illustrates the extent to which the Victorian Labor Party was already caught up in the turmoil that would eventually engulf it, resulting in the split in the ALP in 1955. The minority Cain Labor Government in Victoria, in early 1947, was engaged in confrontation with the Communist dominated unions which were increasing the frequency of stoppages in essential industries such as coal, steel, and transport. At the same time the government was supporting the formation and expansion of industrial groups to combat this Communist influence.98 Demands by workers for a reduction in working hours

98. Kate White, John Cain, op. cit., pp. 120–121.
and an increase in the basic wage and margins for skill were not unreasonable in the light of war-time wage pegging and their legitimate post-war expectations. However, the Chifley Federal Government kept tight controls and the Cain State Government struggled with shortages of finances and building materials as it tried to support the community and economy in their transformation to a peace-time footing. With B.A. Santamaria manoeuvring to gain control for the ‘Movement’, and Trades Hall Secretary J.V. Stout manipulating many different factions, there was extreme sensitivity within the Victorian Branch of the Labor Party about which organisations were purporting to represent it. It was this highly charged context that sent Purcell scrambling to cover his tracks.

This incident is also interesting because on the surface it appeared that Purcell cast Russell adrift with apparent ease. Perhaps the fundamental differences in world views—the socialist versus the capitalist—had blown open a rift that could not be mended. The immediate effect was that newspaper references in the Argus simply stopped, and the co-operative quietly moved its base from their offices. The ‘Minutes’ of the society’s Committee of Management implied a more nuanced picture than the black-and-white assessment presented by Purcell to the Victorian Labor Party Executive. No mention was made of the rift, rather Russell was simply absent and:

Mr King and Mr Gleave [two committeemen] thanked Mr Russell saying ‘we would not be where we are today without Mr Russells [sic, involvement?] and this view was endorsed by the Committee’. A motion was suggested that Mr Russell be appointed Housing Adviser at 1/- per annum and was defeated by a narrow margin.

It is impossible to assess the real impact of Russell’s departure on the future success or failure of the venture, but clearly several of the Committee were concerned that they had lost a vital source of advice on the house building and urban design aspects and they were probably right. Russell had also promised to provide preliminary plans of homes, free of charge. Not surprisingly, Russell was angry or at least annoyed. By March he had sent a bill to the co-operative for more than £15 as reimbursement for advertising and other expenses, which presumably the co-operative had assumed would be free. He later wanted a £5 refund for the deposit towards one share. Perhaps, though, the most damaging aspect of his departure was the necessary

99. See, for example, Tom Sheridan, Division of Labor: Industrial Relations in the Chifley Years, 1945–49, South Melbourne, 1989, who described in detail the wage controls and the basic wages cases.
100. Tom Sheridan, Division of Labor: op. cit.; Kate White, John Cain, op. cit., pp. 118–119; see also Robin Gollan, Revolutionaries and Reformists: Communism and the Australian Labour Movement 1920–1955, Canberra, 1975.
105. ibid., 18 June 1947.
rearrangement of the positions of power on the Committee of Management. Purcell moved from being Public Relations Officer to Chairman and although the scheme was based principally on his ideas, he wore his heart on his sleeve and his temperament was not ideally suited to this role. Greenwood was moved aside as Chairman to take up Russell’s role as Secretary, later taking on the full-time job as Secretary/Manager.  

106 We will see that it was partly through this configuration that the Committee eventually appeared to fracture, further weakening its chances of survival.

From what we know of these originators of the scheme, it is possible to ponder the basis of their initial group cohesion. 107 It was not politics, class or religion. Purcell and King were working-class, but in the tradition of ‘friends of the people’ it is perhaps significant that Greenwood and Fox had experienced hardship and had been politicised as a result. It is also worth considering the importance of the fact that the three men who were ostensibly middle-class—Fox, Greenwood and Russell—initially occupied the key positions of power within the organisation. Purcell and King were in the minority as the two men of Catholic faith. Fox, and probably Russell, were Liberal supporters, but the others were strongly aligned with Labor. It is testament to Purcell’s sense of responsibility for this project that he included two ‘accountants’ in his team, as he knew himself to be a poor manager of money. 108 Purcell, King, Russell and Greenwood were all aged between 38 and 42 years when the December 1946 meeting was called, with Fox younger at 34 years of age.

The common bond for all but Russell was experience in the AA Pay Corps, and this may provide another explanation for why Russell’s relationship with the group was ephemeral. The strength of camaraderie born of wartime experience has been written about at great length as the Anzac legend in Australia has evolved, grown and adapted to subsequent wars. 109 For the Peter Lalor men, the bond contained within it a common call for action in the face of a crisis and the strong egalitarian belief that they could act for themselves collectively. The immediacy of wartime memory held this bond firmly. It remains to be seen if it was enough to hold the group cohesively as the war memory faded and the harsh realities of managing a complex project came into play.

For Purcell and Greenwood who served together, there were undoubtedly occasions when they spoke deeply about the issues that concerned them. Such experiences built lasting friendships that crossed religious and class boundaries, drawing on

106 Ibid., 28 February 1947.
107 Here I am referring to Lawrence Stone’s description of ‘elite’ prosopography, discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, in which he states that the objective is ‘to demonstrate the cohesive strength of the group in question’. Lawrence Stone, ‘Prosopography’, op. cit., p. 108.
108 Fox was a university qualified accountant and Greenwood was a book-keeper.
109 See for example, Alistair Thomson, Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend, Melbourne, 1994, for a thoughtful analysis of the ways in which the Anzac legend has evolved.
a basic sense of humanity. From this initiation, their relationship could build around a common sense of social justice and a determination to take action to fix a glaring social and economic problem. Differences in religion, class and temperament in this context were able to become a source of great strength. King was of a similar religious and class background to Purcell and was in the right place and time to be captured by Purcell’s capacity to articulate a vision, and it sat well with his values and his compulsion to act. The relationship with Russell was ultimately expedient. Russell was in some ways like Purcell: he was an ideas man, creative and passionate. He too was an initiator by temperament, but he probably could not operate within the constraints imposed by Purcell, and did not share the common bond of group cohesion. He used his influence, though, in a brilliant short burst of energy that may well have been crucial. Fox was more of an intellectual and while initially he may have been caught up in the ideas as a means to pursue his own agenda, he played a key role on the committee. There were sufficient points of connection with Fox to share the group dynamics, but, although his background was similar to Greenwood’s, he lacked Greenwood’s highly practical humanitarian conscience and their political differences gradually became more marked.

My next task in this chapter is to take what we know of this ‘elite’ group of individuals and to analyse in more depth the range of ideas they combined to create the PLC. These are best encapsulated in their brochure called ‘Progress & Promise: Towards Better Living the Peter Lalor Way’. It was probably written by author Niall Brennan, in collaboration with Leo Purcell. This investor’s brochure or prospectus is a significant document. At the front of the brochure, and repeated in the ‘Rules’, is a *cri de cœur*. It revealed a feeling still closely held by members who had survived the war. Inspirational in its intent, it simply stated: ‘A step towards a new way of life dedicated by men who returned, to those who died to make this a better world.

Those creators of the PLC who were ex-servicemen knew deeply, and at first hand, the extent of sacrifice of those who did not return. Had it been worth it? Undoubtedly they believed that they had fought, and many had died, for a higher ideal, a better way of life, and if this was not achieved then the sacrifice would represent an inglorious and tragic waste. Certainly, most of the group of 200 or more men who built the first houses at Lalor were ex-servicemen and, perhaps, unexpectedly it was this bond, above all else, that created their unifying ideal. Returned serviceman, V.H. Lloyd wrote later about:

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110. See the biography of Purcell in Appendix A. The Brennan family lived opposite the Purcells’ house and a cryptic reference to the brochure appears in the PLHBCSL Committee of Management, ‘Minutes’, 9 May 1947. It refers to Purcell discussing the brochure with Niall Brennan.


113. This will be elaborated further in Chapter 6.
the quite noticeable idealism of the war years. Whenever the long and
desultory conversations then touched on the shape of the postwar world it
was always suggested that, when we returned, we would never let things
settle back to the same old spectres of unemployment, poverty, class
distinction—all the problems that had dogged the prewar years.\textsuperscript{114}

There can be no doubt that the PLC housing scheme was designed with ex-
servicemen in mind. Newspaper headlines heralded its arrival: ‘Soldier’s Suburb’,
‘Ex-Servicemen’s Model Suburb Plan’ and ‘Co-operative Homes for Ex-Servicemen’.\textsuperscript{115}
Nonetheless, the Society was not—as S.T. Grey in his 1961 history suggested—
‘exclusively for ex-service members’ and only ‘later extended to accept any
prospective home purchaser’. Whether he created this myth or just perpetuated it is
unclear, but the formal position from the very first meeting was that the co-operative
was ‘open to any homeless person who would co-operate’.\textsuperscript{116} Even before the rift with
Russell occurred, another committee resolution was fulsome in expressing their
intent in terms of politics, class and religion:

\begin{quote}
\textit{it was resolved on the voices that the movement be non-political and non-
sectarian, that it be not limited to any section of the community, but that
anyone who desired a home within the suburbs and was prepared to
loyally abide by the Co-operative principles laid down should be admitted to
membership.}\textsuperscript{117}
\end{quote}

Clearly, it was also an expansive venture they had in mind. While their advertising
targeted ex-servicemen, their desire for democracy and equality drove an
inclusiveness which was particularly important, given that so many men and women
were conscripted into essential industries. Conditions of full employment under
industrial conscription, described by historian Brian Fitzpatrick, meant that all
workers, including more than half a million in war industries, were subjected, to the
‘come-hither and go-thither dispositions of a Manpower Directorate’.\textsuperscript{118} In addition,
someone in the group with an eye to the finances of the scheme might have thought
it prudent not to limit the group simply to ex-servicemen.

Of the five men involved in the creation of the PLC, Purcell was the most politically
involved with ex-servicemen’s issues and concerns. In addition to his broadcasting
role with the ‘Servicemen’s Question Box’, he was also a member of the Preston
branch of the RSL and the Anzac House Committee on Housing. In 1946, the

One such man is quoted here. He was not a Peter Lalor Co-operator, but encapsulated their ethos.

\textsuperscript{115} Argus, 5 December 1946, p. 14, 10 December 1946, p. 3, 13 January 1947, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{116} Argus, 10 December 1946, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{117} PLHBCSL, Committee of Management, ‘Minutes’, 3 January 1947.

31st National Annual Conference of the RSL called for 85 per cent of all homes being built to be made available to ex-servicemen. This was the kind of content Purcell broadcast on the Labor Hour.

The vision for the co-operative scheme was best articulated in ‘The Idea’ which formed the bold introduction to the brochure ‘Progress & Promise’. ‘The Idea’ was clearly influenced by all members of the founding group as each of their perspectives is contained within it. Although not written until May 1947, after Russell’s departure, his impact is clearly evident. It contained seven paragraphs and each will be analysed below. A shortened version of ‘The Idea’ (five paragraphs) also appeared in a printed version of the Society’s ‘Rules’, which emanated from its registration in July 1947.

‘The Idea’ critically assessed existing society and espoused an ideal for a new order. Beginning with, ‘[t]he aim of the Peter Lalor Home Building Co-operative Society is better living conditions for the working classes’, it was a statement that came from a mixture of their traditions. As we have seen, Purcell and King were of and from the working-class tradition of trade union activism and local ALP branch involvement. They came from a political world that relied on collective action and analysed their economic and social position in terms of class and particularly in terms of their class antagonism to the ruling class—big business, large property owners and conservative governments. They were part of a labour movement which, as a minimum, sought to achieve a fairer distribution of the spoils of the capitalist economy, through to its more radical manifestation that sought its outright abolition. They were more unusual in believing that improved conditions for the working classes would come from the co-operative movement, as this was not mainstream ALP policy. For Purcell and King the confidence in co-operativism was part of the Catholic social justice doctrine that was central to their upbringing (discussed further below).

Alf Greenwood was more typical of the middle-class humanitarian social reform movement which had, for example, been concerned with issues of slum clearance for the working classes before and during WWII. Prior to the war, Methodist housing reformer Oswald Barnett and others sought better living conditions for working-class families, and part of their motivation emanated from the Christian socialist tradition and its belief that proper housing would lead to a more moral way of life. Peter Russell also shared this view. And for those who feared an uprising of the working classes, in the wake of the Communist Revolution in Russia, existing

119. RSL National Conference, ‘Minutes’, 24 July 1946, available at Anzac House, Albert Street, Melbourne. It is not known if Purcell was a member of that committee at the time of this conference.
122. See, for example, Renate Howe, ‘Reform and Social Responsibility; the Establishment of the Housing Commission’, New Houses for Old: Fifty Years of Public Housing in Victoria 1938–1988, edited by Renate Howe, op. cit., pp. 20–44.
social relationships were of course less likely to be threatened if ‘the working classes’ were allowed to live with dignity. Greenwood was a genuine man and there was probably little motivation for him other than to see the housing crisis solved in a co-operative, sensible and humane way.

Fox’s intellectual, middle-class, liberal progressive views were typical of those who also believed that better conditions for the working classes would result in better conditions for society generally. These views were exemplified in Robert Menzies’ radio broadcasts in 1942 to the ‘forgotten people’. And while Menzies specifically targeted the middle class, his scope was broadly inclusive and, at least at the level of rhetoric, sought to negate class divisions.

None of the men was calling for a revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist system. For Purcell, Greenwood and King at least, each in his different way, hoped that showing people a middle way would persuade the population that a new world order was possible. As we will see throughout this thesis, despite their different perspectives, they all seriously underestimated the powerful nature of the forces supporting the status quo.

‘The Idea’ continued with a call to action—‘The society does not stop at preaching; its specific aim is action as well’—and it is here that the shared military experience of all except Russell is relevant. According to Johns, as members of the AA Pay Corps, they ‘moved to whatever area within the Command where they were required, including overseas. It was this connection that led to their friendship.’ Purcell, Greenwood and Fox served overseas in that role. It was also this experience, practical and innovative, that probably provided them with the confidence to believe they could just get on with building a suburb. Barrett, in his study of WWII servicemen, cited one soldier known only as VX29041 as an example of someone who ‘had been able to approach post-war life with confidence because that was what he had learnt in the trained, disciplined, seasoned 9th Division’. Although the name ‘Pay Corps’ might imply men confined to an office and a desk simply calculating soldiers’ pay and conditions, the truth was quite different.

The Official ‘War Diaries’ provide a glimpse of the kind of army life they lived. They had to be practical, responsive and inventive. Assigned to a particular

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123. See for instance, Leonie Sandercock, Property, Politics, and Urban Planning, op. cit., p. 112, in which she stated ‘These arguments provided the political impetus for the establishment of a public housing programme for they appealed to Christian humanism, to economic reason and to political prudence.’


126. John Barrett, We Were There, op. cit., p. 409.

127. ibid., p. 303, in which a sergeant in the AA Pay Corp ‘had to take a suitcase of new money into Tobruk’.

128. AA Pay Corp. ‘War Diary’, AWM 52: 15/1/6 (Greece) & AWMS4 57/1/1 (New Guinea).
Division, the Pay Corps paid for local labour and supplies—for example fuel for vehicles and food for soldiers. They opened bank accounts, organised local currency. They constantly monitored personnel and their movements: their pay records, those who were injured, those who spent time in military hospitals, those who arrived and those who left. ‘Troops fed, given change of underwear’ was the terse notation in one ‘War Diary’ that belied the effort required to achieve it. Their service had undoubtedly given these men a range of skills in organisational logistics and self-confidence in their ability to get a job done, no matter what the obstacles. From supporting an army, it was a small step to building a suburb.

As we have seen previously, Fox and Greenwood both served in the Middle East with the AA Pay Corps. As their tours of duty in 1940 and 1941 overlapped, this may have been where they met. Greenwood and Purcell then later met in Queensland and New Guinea. By 4 March 1943 Purcell’s war record placed him as Paymaster-in-Chief in Australian Military Forces Northern Command, District Accounts Office, Queensland, based in Brisbane. By May 1944 Greenwood was cited in the relevant ‘War Diary’ as the Paymaster, similarly working out of Brisbane with the Northern Command.

Various reports have provided different scenarios concerning ownership of the original idea of the co-operative. They are not completely incompatible, but the emphasis varies according to the source. As already noted, Johns, who interviewed King, believed that, when all four men were working out of the Southern Command Headquarters of the AA Pay Corps in Melbourne by the middle of 1945, ‘they began to discuss and work through the ideas of co-operation’. Contemporaneous press reports add another dimension. The Australasian Post interviewed Greenwood and, on 12 February 1948, reported that: ‘The whole plan began in the steamy, dirty loneliness of Merauke, in Dutch New Guinea when Greenwood and Lieutenant Leo Purcell decided to do something about the building problem for servicemen. Another article about the society by Eve Gye in the Australian Women’s Weekly in January 1949, written after she visited Lalor and interviewed Purcell, stated, ‘Leo Purcell, one of the founders, worked out the scheme during the war, when a patient in a military hospital’.

129. AA Pay Corps, ‘War Diary’ of the AIF Base Pay Office in Greece, March to May 1941, written by Major A.S.T. Linley, discussed the 6th Field Cash Office in Egypt. AWM 52: 15/1/5.
130. Fox was there from January 1941 to the middle of 1943 and Greenwood from April 1940 until June 1943.
131. AA Pay Corps, ‘War Diary’ AWM 52: 15/1/8; Leo Richard Purcell & Arthur Alton Greenwood, individual war records, op. cit. Purcell arrived in Port Moresby 4 days before Christmas in 1943 and stayed in New Guinea for 31 days. He returned to New Guinea in April 1944 for another 8 days. Greenwood served in New Guinea for longer, a whole year from August 1943 to August 1944. In November 1943 a minute signed by Lieutenant-General Morshad, Commander of the New Guinea Force, called for extra AA Pay Corps staff to assist with the large number of units fighting on the North East Coast. Purcell was one of those in the AA Pay Corp despatched to New Guinea almost certainly in response to this request, overlapping with Greenwood.
133. Australasian Post, 12 February 1948, pp. 8–9.
134. Australian Women’s Weekly, 8 January 1949, pp. 44–45.

CHAPTER 1: GENESIS OF THE IDEA
All three accounts probably hold some truth. As noted, Purcell was in hospital in Queensland where he probably first thought through the idea of creating a co-operative to build homes for ex-servicemen, which had the potential to usher in a new co-operative order. The important point, however, is that Purcell clearly did not suddenly think up the idea. Purcell’s upbringing in social Catholicism, his experience with co-operatives, his drive to take action to set the world to rights, and his personal aptitude for generating ideas and grand ‘schemes’, made the PLC a logical progression for him. Purcell and Greenwood had ample opportunity in 1943 and 1944 in Queensland and New Guinea to take these ideas further.

It is unlikely that Greenwood had the original idea. None of the Purcell family I have interviewed knew whether there were others involved in the creation of the concept, but Frank Purcell did not believe that the inspiration came from Greenwood. He recalled that ‘I never saw Alf as an ideas man; I saw him as a good accountant’. What a great foil he was for Purcell as they worked through the ideas together. As we have seen, Greenwood was of a much more practical bent than Purcell and probably, more than anyone else, translated Purcell’s grand idea into something that could be implemented. The gathering of the four men in Melbourne—Purcell, Greenwood, King and Fox—in the last days of the war probably refined the ideas still further. They were clearly all of a mind to continue the kind of collective self help and ‘can do’ ethos that had empowered them through their wartime experience.

Alongside their urge to take action and gain control of their lives, their ideas were deeply embedded in the range of social, economic and political movements that coalesced eclectically into their ideals. Paragraphs two and three in ‘The Idea’ in the brochure, were not included in the ‘Rules’. The first of these paragraphs, which appeared to derive from the writings of Peter Russell, discussed ideas from the ‘garden city’ movement. It read:

> Throughout the world, town-planning authorities agree that the era of the overpopulated, over-centralised, and heavily industrialised city with its long distances between places of residence, employment and recreation and its congested areas, is over; and the era of the ‘green-belt town’, the ‘satellite town’ and the ‘garden suburb’ is at hand.

‘Garden city’ ideas had been actively discussed in Australia since the early part of the century and would have been part of the world view of the Peter Lalor group. The ‘garden city’ movement had first developed in Britain in the late nineteenth and

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135. Anne Wirth (née Purcell), interview with the author, 17 November, 2006, p. 12. Anne said, ‘But he was a great entrepreneur, Dad. He always had a scheme.’

136. Frank Purcell, interview with the author, op. cit., p. 6.

137. PLHBCSL, ‘Progress & Promise’, op. cit.

early twentieth centuries. Its main inspiration came from Ebenezer Howard who published *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* in 1898.\textsuperscript{139} Howard envisaged a new system of urban development in which the best elements of city and rural life were combined to create a new, sustainable, social and economic community. There would be great tree-lined avenues, green belt zones for primary production to support the population, and industrial areas with transport links to the housing estates. Amongst his most radical proposals was a scheme by which the ‘garden city’ would be owned and managed co-operatively by a Board of Management. These ideas were utopian and radical and, although Howard endeavoured to describe how a system devoid of private property might work, he never did properly explain the economics of the proposal, nor did he understand the strong political and social forces that would make the more radical elements of his plan unattainable. As a moderate, liberal man, it is clear he never contemplated revolution to achieve his vision.\textsuperscript{140}

Nonetheless, his ideas had far reaching impact, perhaps in the main because the idea of a ‘garden city’ had, and continues to have, such widespread appeal. Moreover, the more radical elements could easily be removed, leaving behind some innovative ideas for urban planning and design which were adopted quite broadly in Britain and around the world in the first half of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{141} Urban historian Robert Freestone argued that the radical garden city proposals of Howard were soon reduced to nothing more than the development of suburbia. He quoted British garden city planner, Sir Raymond Unwin, as saying in 1906 that ‘[i]f the garden city movement stood for anything, it stood for “a decent house and garden for every family.... that is the irreducible minimum”’.\textsuperscript{142} Freestone concluded that the ‘general ideological appeal was to liberal rather than radical thought’.\textsuperscript{143}

In Australia, the less radical elements of the ‘garden city’ movement arrived into a European community in which suburbia was already well established.\textsuperscript{144} Australian architect John Sulman after he retired from practice in 1908, devoted the remainder of his life to promotion of the ‘garden city’ movement in Australia, publishing a seminal work on *Town Planning* in 1921.\textsuperscript{145} The ‘garden city’ movement had been evoked by the Peter Lalor leadership group. Fox, as we have seen, was born in Ebenezer Howard’s first experimental ‘garden city’ of Letchworth, which opened in 1903, and it seems inconceivable that he did not express a view about it.

\textsuperscript{139} Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*, 1960, London. Howard’s 1898 book was re-issued under this new title in 1902.


\textsuperscript{141} Robert Beesley, *The Garden City Utopia*, op. cit.

\textsuperscript{142} Robert Freestone, *Model Communities*, op. cit., p. 19.

\textsuperscript{143} ibid., p. 33.

\textsuperscript{144} ibid., p. 42.

\textsuperscript{145} ibid., p. 73; see also Ken Taylor, *Canberra, City in Landscape*, Canberra, 2007, pp. 39–41.
In advertising the first co-operative meeting in December 1946, there was also a promise that 'The layout proposed is based on the modern town-planning principles, to which members of the AIF became accustomed when on leave in Haifa and Tel Aviv during the early years of the war'. This could have applied to Greenwood and Fox as they were both in Haifa and Tel Aviv during the war.\textsuperscript{146} The development of garden suburbs in Palestine occurred when Jewish immigrants brought Howard's ideas from Europe. According to Yossi Katz, the first garden suburb was Tel-Aviv which was developed prior to WWI near to, but separate from, the port city of Jaffa. Jewish garden suburbs followed on Mount Carmel near Haifa and in other settlements as well.\textsuperscript{147} The use of these impressive examples, cited by the PLC, was probably an attempt to attract those AIF ex-servicemen who had seen them at first hand. Perhaps they also sought to give the co-operative an international, cosmopolitan feel.

The second paragraph of the 'The Idea', not to appear in the 'Rules', told also of the virtues of co-operativism: 'a constructive step towards the New Order' which was 'politically democratic and economically desirable'. The 'English Rockdale' [sic] co-operative model was quoted as having assets 'amounting to £700 million, an annual turnover of £300 million and nine million members'. These examples were cited to highlight the fact that the co-operative movement was not just a theory, but was reality. 'World dissatisfaction' illustrated the need to provide an alternative to 'the top-heavy trading services of a system, based, not on services, but on profit-making'. These ideas would have primarily come from Purcell, though it is not clear how much experience of co-operatives Greenwood had gained during his upbringing. Importantly, this paragraph gives expression to a concept that was to be more than a consumer co-operative of the Rochdale kind. The PLC was proposing to become the launching pad for a new co-operative movement in Victoria. It would be both a consumer co-operative and a producer co-operative and, when applied particularly to the factory-style building of homes and other amenities, was a new concept. The system was 'politically democratic' because, in line with co-operative principles, anyone with a share had a vote, while ownership of more shares did not buy more votes. It was 'economically desirable' because profits would be reinvested into the community and commodities would be cheaper because supply-chains would be simplified. Profit-taking by middle men would be removed. As both builders and consumers of homes, people in the co-operative could expect cheaper homes and more amenities. This was their proposition. It will be explained further in Chapter 3.

Purcell's experience with agricultural (production) co-operatives and the Preston consumer co-operative has already been discussed, and he keenly watched co-

\textsuperscript{146} Arthur Alton Greenwood, individual war record, op. cit.; Stephenson Fox, individual war record, op. cit.
\textsuperscript{147} Yossi Katz, 'The extension of Ebenezer Howard's ideas on urbanization outside the British Isles: The example of Palestine', Geojournal, vol. 34, no. 4, 1994, pp. 467-473.
operative developments in Australia and overseas. Leo's son, Frank, recalled that in 1948, when he (Frank) was studying at Parade Christian Brothers College, he wrote an assignment on co-operatives simply called 'Co-operation'. He claimed his father told him the facts, and he just wrote them down. There can be no doubt that the older Purcell had a significant hand in the content of this essay and it is the closest thing we have in writing—even at one remove—to his own philosophy. Although it post-dates the formation of the PLC by two years, it provides the best indication we have of his thinking at this time. It situates the Purcells' ideas on co-operatives squarely in the context of Catholic social doctrine, which originated with the Papal Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* of 1891, and this article reflected directly, the Australian Catholic Bishops' Social Justice Statement of 1948. This too post-dated the formation of the PLC, but was only one of many such statements made by the Bishops between 1940 and 1966 and it is indicative of the way in which the Purcells translated the Bishops' messages into practical steps for change.

Race Mathews quoted the Catholic scholar, Maurice Reckitt, as saying in 1932, '*Rerum Novarum* is the charter of Social Catholicism, and stands to that movement in the same relation as the *Communist Manifesto* of Marx and Engels does to revolutionary socialism'. Mathews demonstrated how this doctrine was translated from the English distributist writers Hilaire Belloc and Gilbert and Cecil Chesterton into Australian Catholic Action through Cardinal Moran and others. Catholic social doctrine at the time favoured small independent units, a philosophy that supported 'a “society of owners,” where property belongs to the many rather than the few'. Small holdings of private property, including home ownership, were seen as essential to maintaining a civil society, requiring that power should not be concentrated in the hands of monopoly capitalists or in the hands of the state. As Mathews argued, mutuality and co-operativism were close allies of these distributist philosophies.

Frank's Parade College article began with reference to a pamphlet by the Catholic Bishops on socialisation. In line with distributist philosophy, the article argued the dangers of too much state control and too much capitalist control and concluded by decrying the dual evils of communism and capitalism. Seeking an 'economic philosophy' that avoided these extremes, the answer was co-operation. 'The system, brought in to benefit the working man of the smaller income group' had as its aim,
to eliminate the middle-man and keep prices down with any profits being handed back to the members.\textsuperscript{155} The article argued that co-operativism could be applied to ‘anything within the country’. Such a democratic system could apply to banks and industries such as mining and steel. Strikes would be avoided because workers would have a share in their workplaces, thus ensuring good working conditions. ‘Thus all men will share in the wealth of the country.’ To prove that this was not just theory, the article concluded with examples of successful co-operatives from Newcastle and Wonthaggi.

Desmond Purcell, Leo’s second youngest son and a Catholic Priest, outlined two other major influences on his father. First, he was greatly influenced by Father John Egan at St Mary’s Church in Thornbury. Desmond recalled how strange it was that during the sermon at St Mary’s, the men would walk outside with the curate, leaving the Parish Priest saying the Mass, whereupon ‘they would plan social Catholic Action for the next week’.\textsuperscript{156}

Desmond Purcell also remembered that his father was fascinated by the Antigonish Co-operative Movement in Nova Scotia in Canada. Mathews devoted part of his article on distributism to the Antigonish movement, arguing that it was through this Canadian movement that the previous British ideas were kept alive. The Catholic Priests who led this movement, Father Moses Coady and Father Jimmy Tompkins, ‘created a new distributism on the basis of adult education, Rochdale co-operation and Raiffeisen credit unionism’.\textsuperscript{157} Leo Purcell would have known about the Antigonish movement, since Coady’s book \textit{Masters of Their Own Destiny} and a 1944 pamphlet by Fr. J.G. Murtagh, were both widely circulated in Australian Catholic circles at this time.\textsuperscript{158}

As a working-class Catholic, it is likely that Bill King held similar views to Leo Purcell, though there is less direct evidence to support this contention. He was undoubtedly exposed to the same doctrines and his involvement in the Lalar society suggests that he embraced them at least in part. It is possible that Bill King was reflecting these views when he said that, ‘capitalism had been allowed to make too much capital’,\textsuperscript{159} adding ‘home ownership is conducive to good citizenship and good citizenship is conducive to disciplined family life’.\textsuperscript{160} Clearly, the most radical element of Ebenezer Howard’s ‘garden city’ movement, the co-operative ownership of the land, was not being proposed by anyone involved with the PLC, and for Purcell and King, Catholic teaching at the time would not have countenanced it.

\textsuperscript{155} Frank Purcell, ‘Co-operation’, op. cit., pp. 23–24.
\textsuperscript{156} Desmond Purcell, interview with the author, op. cit., p. 6.
\textsuperscript{157} Race Mathews, \textit{Collateral Damage}, op. cit., p. 94.
\textsuperscript{159} Gary Johns, ‘Building a Suburb’, op. cit., p. 7.
\textsuperscript{160} ibid., p. 11.
While the amenities and infrastructure for the community were to be co-operatively owned, the Catholic Church was in favour of the private ownership of property, and the teachings emanating from the church were about not owning too much of it. The middle-class members of the group would not have supported any proposal that threatened such a fundamental tenet of their world view as the principle of private property.

Apparent also is the ease with which the Catholic distributist tradition could be merged with the Protestant-based English tradition of co-operativism. At its heart was a common desire for individual ownership of land. As peasant farmers were forced off the land during the Industrial Revolution, historian Malcolm Chase has argued, 'it led to an enhanced awareness of how inequality in the ownership of land, “the womb of wealth,” reinforced inequalities in all other spheres of activity.' And while for some land redistribution meant nationalisation, overwhelmingly it was understood that ownership of land meant power, control, independence and a stake in society. Not surprisingly, those without it wanted their individual share of it. In post-war Victoria, voting rights in local government elections were allocated according to the amount of landed property owned by the voter: no land, no vote; multiple votes for those who owned more land, and a higher property qualification for the right to stand for election. The Legislative Council in Victoria was completely controlled by conservative landed interests.

Purcell’s personal philosophy involved more than an unquestioning adherence to distributist doctrine. His views were an eclectic mixture. Like many Catholics, he was a dedicated Labor man, and from what we know of him, was probably wedded to the ‘socialist objective’ which lay at the centre of the ALP ideology at that time, even though it was differently understood by the disparate groups that comprised that broad church. So, while Catholic social doctrine was wary of the power of the state, Purcell was a strong supporter of the Chifley Labor Government’s campaign for the commonwealth to keep its wartime powers over control of prices and for a planned post-war economy. He was a passionate supporter of Chifley’s call for nationalisation of the banks in August 1947. In fact this was one source of strong disagreement between Purcell and Greenwood. Frank Purcell recalled:

161. Race Mathews, Jobs of Our Own, op. cit., p. 5 argued that distributism married the two different stands of thought: ‘those of British socialism as exemplified by the socialist revival of the 1880s, and the Catholic social teachings which Pope Leo XIII... set out in 1891’.
164. Frank Bongiorno, The People’s Party: Victorian Labor and the Radical Tradition 1875–1914, Melbourne, 1996. See pp. 164–167 for an explanation as to why so many Catholics were aligned with Labor. See also Bruce O’Meagher, The Socialist Objective: Labor and Socialism, Sydney, 1983, p. 7. He stated that the Socialist Objective of ‘The socialization of industry, production, distribution and exchange’ should be dated from 1921.
Dad and Alf had one almighty argument the day Ben Chifley announced that he was going to nationalize the banks. Alf was working upstairs in the offices above the next door shop to us in Miller Street, Thornbury. The housing co-op had an architect working there as well. It was a real screaming match. \(^{165}\)

For Purcell, the Chifley Government was seen as a benevolent power working for the good of the people. When interviewed just before his death in August 1984, he still harboured an acute sense of injustice that the Chifley Government's plans were thwarted by strong conservative forces such as the High Court and big business: 'It's ridiculous that the most esteemed—and unelected—lords of the legal system can, at a whim, pick off the legislation of an elected government.'\(^{166}\) Nationalisation of 'the people's bank' may not have appeared to him to be starkly different from the co-operative ownership his son Frank advocated in the Parade College article the following year. Taken together, these ideas nonetheless represent an attempt on Purcell's part to peacefully, but fundamentally, alter class relations between labour, capital and the state, through co-operativism, individual ownership of land, a planned economy, and nationalisation of some important pieces of community infrastructure.\(^{167}\) It may be that he believed, as many Owenites did more than a century earlier, that '[c]o-operative communities would solve the problems of class.'\(^{168}\)

The remaining four paragraphs of 'The Idea' were printed in both the 'Rules' and the publicity brochure, and can be seen as a manifesto that encapsulated the co-operative's beliefs. Again co-operativism was presented as the sole means of lifting living standards: 'It is now recognised that the only way to get a real increase in wages is by co-operative living', a sentence that went to the heart of Purcell's thinking. The remainder of the paragraph recognised that 'men need to live like human beings, and not in slums and congested areas, to be able to enjoy any wages at all'. This reflected the views of the pre-war slum clearance movement. An essential ingredient of any new world order as envisaged by the PLC would be the eradication of such morally, economically and socially debilitating living conditions. Only decent, clean and well-designed living spaces would allow family and economic life to

\(^{165}\) That day was 17 August 1947. Frank Purcell annotated the transcript of the author's interview with Ted and Val Purcell, 2 September 2006, p. 1, highlighting the fact that Purcell disagreed with Greenwood over this issue. While Frank went on to state that 'I think Dad realised then that Alf was a Liberal', this was probably more a term of abuse in the course of the argument than any seriously held view. According to Greenwood's wife, Norma, Alf Greenwood was a solid Labor man all his life. See Norma Greenwood, interview with the author, 17 April 2007, p. 13.

\(^{166}\) Mark Davis, Stockade, op. cit. It is clear from the transcript that even in the 1980s Purcell still harboured considerable anger at the High Court's decision in 1947 to neuter a key section of the <i>Commonwealth Bank Act</i>, 1941. He clearly regarded the legal system as an agent of capitalism. For an analysis, see Robin Gollan, <i>Revolutionaries and Reformists: Communism and the Australian Labour Movement 1920-1955</i>, Canberra, 1975, pp. 157, 223 & 229–230.

\(^{167}\) Stuart Macintyre, <i>The Labour Experiment</i>, op. cit., p. 4. I have adopted Macintyre's analytical method here as he stated that his 'principal aim is to establish the extent to which labour was able by political means to alter class relations, and the concepts employed...[were] those of class analysis—labour, capital and the state'.

flourish. A place, located where ‘the city met the country’, in Ebenezer Howard’s terms, would be an ideal start.

The next paragraph of ‘The Idea’ reflected the philosophy of the urban planning movement at the time, and was probably influenced by Russell. It combined many of the features Russell had outlined in his article on urban planning for Melbourne, including the causal links between proper accommodation and an appropriate environment for families. It stated:

With proper planning of small population units it is possible to provide employment, shopping facilities, recreational facilities and amenities, and necessary social services all adjacent to the homes of the people; and in an area which retains its natural beauties, provides ample light, air and space for the raising of families and the fostering of a genuine community spirit.

Outlined here in practical steps are the necessary ingredients to create ‘better living conditions for the working classes’. The objective of creating a community was about friendship, trust and security. This was how the founders believed a co-operative would work.

The penultimate paragraph returned to concerns about the world order the founders wanted to change. ‘It was the industrial revolution of the last century, with its false emphasis on the power of wealth and profits which created the slum town,’ it stated. ‘[F]rom this traversy [sic] of civilization has come unrest, uneasiness and insecurity.’ The rallying cry, however, ended this paragraph and the sentiments would have been held by all members. It stated:

The remedy is action; and the most effective action is the creation of ‘organic’ societies, in which the happiness of the people themselves is the best answer to the threats of the present social order.

In particular, the ideology contained here can be traced almost directly back to the 1941 Social Justice Statement of the Catholic Bishops entitled Justice Now. In the introduction, Most Rev. J.C. Simonds made reference to the ‘organic conception of society which Pope Pius XI [in Quadragesimo Anno of 1931] envisaged as the only sound substitute for the sad condition of class warfare which disgrace modern social life’. Belloc and Chesterton, in rejecting capitalism as a ‘distortion’ arising from the Reformation, proposed instead a ‘natural “organic” form of human society’, comprising small property holdings which harked back to the co-operative craft guilds of thirteenth century Europe.

171. Robert Murray, The Split: op. cit., p. 44.
The concluding paragraph of ‘The Idea’ opened with a simple sentence: ‘This is the aim and ideal of the Peter Lalor Society.’ The authors here combined the distinct concepts of pragmatism and idealism. They did not perceive them as contradictory. They had no doubts that their ideal is realisable. ‘The Idea’ envisaged that its ‘first project is the building of a garden suburb’. Importantly it suggested that their intention was to use the Lalor experiment as a pilot project with expansion, perhaps to other parts of Victoria, as the benefits of this scheme became irresistible to others. The remainder of the paragraph reiterated many of the points discussed earlier. It summarised concisely, and in practical terms, their dream:

In this township, employment will be found for the majority of breadwinners of the community and the whole community will enjoy homes of their own, trading and recreational facilities managed co-operatively, and the advantages of living in a clean, neighbourly, spacious and picturesque environment.

Fox later recalled that he was pleased his thoughts on employment were included in the scheme.  

It may be that Purcell, with the writing skills of Niall Brennan, and influenced by Russell, was the man who best articulated the ideals that formed ‘The Idea’. He was the utopian who could see with great clarity the problems of the existing order and what a new co-operative world order might look like. Greenwood and King were down-to-earth and brought to the scheme the practicalities that were essential to its functioning. They were the pragmatic realists. Fox had his own priorities for changing the world, which for a time converged with those of the co-operative and his influence was pervasive. Importantly, ‘The Idea’ represented a consensus which incorporated everyone’s views at the time. Each of their hands helped to compose the manifesto. The combination of ideas, experience and enthusiasm was enough. Without Purcell the scheme would never have begun, but without the others it might not have been put into effect. Soon others rallied to the cause.

\[\text{172. Peter Fox, Stephenson Called Peter, op. cit., p. 51.}\]
The Co-operative Way

"The Peter Lalor Co-operative Builds for Better Living"

So read the banner on the feature article in Change Over, the official magazine of the Federal Labor Government’s Ministry for Post War Reconstruction. The journal was directed at ex-service personnel adjusting to civilian life, and it was up-beat in its appraisal of the Peter Lalor Home Building Co-operative (PLC). The magazine sought to inspire others through this most powerful demonstration of what could be achieved when ex-service folk pulled together. Co-operation was heralded as an ‘inspiration to the whole community’, and in particular:

The men of Lalor are doing more than building homes. They are doing more than building a self-sufficient satellite town. They are building a community based on co-operation and aiming to establish a better way of life for its members...The Co-operative is worked on the now famous Rochdale system, through a committee elected annually.²

The previous chapter provided insights into the main initiators of the PLC scheme and as part of these sketches, I endeavoured to uncover the origins of the ideals that inspired the formation of the co-operative. This chapter takes a broader view by setting the scheme against the history of the co-operative movement both internationally and within Australia—particularly in Victoria—and by considering it against the various models that had developed. By so doing, more of the story of the co-operative unfolds and I argue that the highly creative way the PLC entities

2. ibid., pp. 3–5.
coalesced around the place ‘Lalor’ to the north of Melbourne, was and still is, unique in Australian history.

The pervasive influence of a veteran’s perspective on the PLC ideology should not come as a surprise, given the proximity of its formation to the war so recently fought. What is surprising and significant is the way that the PLC scheme married the camaraderie emanating from wartime experience and the rehabilitation of ex-servicemen, with the broader ideals of co-operation. The impact of what might be called this ‘co-operative rehabilitation’ on the Peter Lalor venture will begin to be clarified in this chapter. There were few examples in Australia where this was attempted and none which were completed on such a large scale as Lalor. Perhaps because it was unexpected, or because in the end, government support was short-lived, fading quickly as the focus on demobilisation declined, the unique union of rehabilitation and co-operation has attracted little attention from historians.

For the PLC, with its dedication to both remembrance and rehabilitation, the connection to the co-operative movement adds yet another dimension to the evolving Anzac legend. Though the Peter Lalor men themselves never described themselves as part of that tradition, with hindsight it is possible to speculate on the ways the dynamic Eureka and Anzac legends became entangled by the PLC venture and have, perhaps, been enriched by it. This will also be discussed below.

The parent body for the Peter Lalor scheme was the Peter Lalor Home Building Co-operative Society Ltd (PLC). As discussed in Chapter 1, it drew its inspiration in part from the practical achievements of the Rochdale Pioneers in Britain from 1844. Rochdale was not the first co-operative society, but it was the first successful one. There had been many prior attempts throughout Britain to sustain different types of co-operatives in response to the terrible human misery born out of the Industrial Revolution. The ideas of Welsh industrialist Robert Owen had been instrumental in driving many such experiments. E.P. Thompson believed that by the 1830s Owenism had seen a revival of an older communitarianism ‘and the language of rationality was translated into that of brotherhood’. For the poor he tells us, ‘Owenism touched one of their deepest responses—the dream that, somehow, by some miracle, they might once again have some stake in the land’. When the 28 flannel weavers met in August 1844 and formed a co-operative

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3. This will be discussed further below.
4. See the organisational diagram in vol. 2, p. iii.
5. According to Johnston Birchall, the Rochdale Pioneers solved the basic problem faced by prior attempts at co-operative stores: the ‘inability to distribute some of the fruits of co-operative trading to the members, so that they would remain loyal’. Birchall continued, ‘the Rochdale Pioneers solved the problem by admitting unlimited numbers of members and distributing surpluses as a dividend on the purchases’. Johnston Birchall, *Co-op: The People’s Business*, Manchester, 1994, p. 31.
8. ibid., p. 883.
enterprise in Rochdale, their vision included the creation of a self-supporting colony with production, distribution, education and governance. They also intended 'to purchase and to assist with the erection of houses for members on a mutual self-help basis'. Those who planned the PLC in Victoria a hundred years later held the same comprehensive and inspired vision. For them, the poor deserved a stake in the land and access to the power and privileges that flowed from it.

The Rochdale co-operators had learnt powerful lessons from previous experiments. By intelligent analysis they had established a clear set of operating principles: principles that worked for them. These were subsequently adapted into the principles underpinning a worldwide co-operative movement. In summary they were: voluntary and open membership; democratic control (one member, one vote); distribution of surplus in proportion to trade (the 'divvy'); payment of limited interest on capital; political and religious neutrality; cash trading; and promotion of education. As Gary Lewis has documented, these principles were also adopted, to varying degrees, in many different co-operative experiments in Australia over the next century.

The Peter Lalor co-operators knew these principles and drew confidence from them. In 1947 they were able to admiringly report that the 'great English Rockdale [sic] Society has assets amounting to £700 million, an annual turnover of £300 million and nine million members'. One of the original Lalor residents, Gwen Hawkins, who attended the first meetings, recalled that films were shown about the Rochdale co-operative movement. One such film was Men at Rochdale. Another Lalor resident, Roy Wicks, remembered:

I had two booklets at one time based on a similar idea in Scotland. ... Only thin little books you know. But they were interesting, it was based on the same sort of thing—people getting together and helping one another.... That's why Rochdale Square's down there [in Lalor].


Johnston Birchall, Co-op, op. cit., p. 54.

Gary Lewis, 'The Quest for a "Middle Way"', op. cit., vols. I & II.


Gwen Hawkins, transcript of interview with the author, 6 November 2006, p. 20. All further references to interviews will cite the transcriptions of the interviews.

PLHBCSL, Committee of Management, 'Minutes', 15 June 1948. When the co-operative spirit was waning amongst members of the PLC in mid 1948, Greenwood suggested that Men at Rochdale be re-screened. There is, however, no record of it at the National Film and Sound Archive in Australia or the National Film and Television Archive in Britain.

Roy Wicks, interview with Ruth Ford, 23 November 1998, pp. 359–360. Gwen Hawkins and Roy Wicks were in the minority in knowing about these educational resources.
In the previous chapter I outlined how, in addition to the inspiration drawn from the Rochdale pioneers, the Peter Lalor scheme drew its ideas from the Jewish experiments in the Middle East, and Purcell for one, was greatly impressed by the Antigonish movement in Canada. Sweden provided another working example of co-operation that impacted at least on Purcell’s thinking and could have been known to the others in the original group. Motivated by the Rochdale example, the co-operative movement in Sweden blossomed during the second half of the nineteenth century. By the early stages of the twentieth century Sweden had a central co-operative organisation, the wholesale Cooperative Union (or KF), which aided and supported a myriad of producer and consumer co-operatives in a range of food and non-food produce and merchandise, and services such as insurance. The movement had been thrust into the international spotlight in the 1930s by the publication of a book called Sweden: The Middle Way by American journalist Marquis Child. The book became an international bestseller and the United States President, Franklin D. Roosevelt, organised a deputation to Sweden to try to uncover the reasons underlying such success. Child’s central thesis was that Sweden had created a unique blend of social and economic development that was ‘a middle way’ between the capitalist controlling elites, such as those in the United States of America and heavy-handed, state-controlled, Communist Russia. In essence he argued that the effects of the capitalist economy had been ameliorated in Sweden through a strong co-operative movement, supported by a well-directed involvement in the economy by the Social Democrat-led government. Although the Child book was later shown to have over-stated the case, its impact in the years following its publication was considerable. We know this message had reached Australia. Under his father’s guiding hand, young Frank Purcell wrote in 1948, that ‘[o]ver the last one hundred years, co-operation has grown from small beginnings in England to a nationwide concern as in Sweden today’.

There have been very few studies of Rochdale consumer co-operatives in Australia. Gary Lewis, in his 1989 thesis on the Rochdale co-operative movement in New South Wales, lamented the fact that ‘[v]ery little scholarly literature has been devoted to it; it is as if co-operation has occupied a blind spot in Australian historiography.’ Ian MacPherson has argued that, to the extent that research has been done, the Rochdale co-operative experience has been overwhelmingly ignored: ‘It is as if the movement, despite its statistics, capacity to reflect socio/economic change, and remarkable range of activities, has never existed, and has somehow disappeared.”

Recently Nicola Balnave and Greg Patmore have provided several reasons for this, including a traditional preference for labour historians to study production, not consumption. They argue that consumption has been perceived by some within the labour movement as a distasteful topic—a dirty word—until rescued by the cultural studies and feminist movements. They highlighted the undeniable fact that labour history has been dominated by studies of the great labour institutions such as the trade union movement and the ALP. There are clearly inherent tensions, too, between the different ideologies involved: between those concerned with production and those with consumption. Sometimes they are in outright opposition: “The desire to have lower prices may conflict with the right of workers involved in the provision of goods and services to earn a decent wage.” These tensions are evident in the story of the PLC and will be further explored in subsequent chapters.

The fraught nature of the relationship between the co-operative movement and the labour movement was discussed by Lewis in the context of NSW. His analysis revealed a complex relationship, but in essence he stated that co-operatives failed to deliver on their promise, and for many in the labour movement any co-operativist ‘middle way’ was not a sufficiently radical alternative to the capitalist system. Although these issues are important, they are not sufficient to explain why the Rochdale model, and the PLC in particular, have been almost totally ignored.

Historical invisibility of the broader Rochdale consumer co-operative movement in Australia emanated in part from the disorganised state of the movement itself and I demonstrate below how this impacted in Victoria. Lewis argued that the ‘co-operative movement’ in Australia was not cohesive enough even to be called ‘a movement’:

There has never been a co-operative movement as such in Australia, rather a loose assemblage of frequently contesting co-operative sectional interest groups including farmer co-operatives, building societies, credit unions together with the radical and Rochdale traditions.

Nonetheless, Balnave and Patmore conclude that although ‘the Australian movement did not achieve the success of its British counterparts, it was significant for workers and their families in a number of localities’. Lalor was one such location of significant, though isolated, impact.

24. ibid., p. 1.
In 1946, the PLC knew of many Australian examples from which to draw inspiration. At the first public meeting of the co-operative in 1946, Purcell described the 'long running' Wonthaggi Co-operative. This example drew attention to the most successful site for Rochdale-style co-operation in Australia: the mining town. In Victoria, the mining towns of Leongatha and Yallourn had co-operative societies and in Wonthaggi, a co-operative store and co-operative theatre formed a part of the social and economic fabric of the community along with the Powlett River (or Wonthaggi) Branch of the Miners' Federation. The store played a significant role in supporting the miners, economically and socially, during their successful five month strike. Historian Humphrey McQueen believed that 'Wonthaggi's co-op store contributed more financially than could the [miners'] federation until its nationwide levy began to muster some strike pay.

The PLC men knew of the impact of the concerted community action by the Wonthaggi miners and their townsfolk, to save their jobs, their pay and conditions. In particular they admired the important economic and social role that co-operation played in that campaign. Peter Cochrane concluded that 'the Wonthaggi strike was instrumental, towards the end of the Depression, in the revitalisation of a disgruntled Victorian labour movement'. For Purcell, Greenwood and King, Wonthaggi was a practical case study that epitomised how their dual passions—the co-operative and the labour movements—could be combined. Not surprisingly, Chairman Alf Greenwood was despatched to the Wonthaggi Co-operative Society after the December 1946 meeting to explain the PLC's grand plan and to forge ties with other like-minded co-operators in Victoria. He returned enthused by his meeting, stating that 'he had had lengthy and informative discussion with officials ... who had promised their full support for the movement'.

By the time of their December 1946 meeting, the PLC group considered themselves to be central players in what they believed to be the early stages of a reinvigorated co-operative movement in Victoria. They also believed, on evidence provided by the official government magazine, Change Over, that they were not alone in their...
ambitions. In the minds of those in the federal department who edited *Change Over*, there was a practical and very logical progression from their conception (however idealised) of mateship and camaraderie in the armed forces, to the creation of self-help co-operative schemes and ultimately to community development. A central part of their message was that co-operation would help with rehabilitation if ex-servicemen had the opportunity to work together through the practical tasks of post-war reconstruction. The editorial in the second issue of October 1946 stated:

> Initiative and mateship ... These are the traditional characteristics of Australian troops. They are qualities which have paid dividends in war, and can continue to do so in peace. They are important in this transition period of re-establishment and reconstruction.

Purcell drew on this theme in his speech to the December public meeting. Included in his account were other projects which were directly relevant for housing ex-servicemen: one in Serviceton in Queensland, the other in Kalgoorlie in Western Australia. The potential PLC members were undoubtedly reassured to hear from Russell that ‘similar schemes [were]... already operating in Australia and overseas’, though in reality the few Australian examples were in their infancy. Just prior to the Lalor meeting, a large article had appeared in the *Labor Call* discussing these Queensland and Western Australian examples and an identical article appeared in *Change Over*. It is not clear which was the original and which one was the copy, but it provided an example of the support being provided to such ventures at this time by both the labour movement and the federal government. Post-war optimism was infectious. The articles indicated that their authors were reflecting what was happening, not leading these grass roots movements.

The proximity of wartime experience was expressed in the leading paragraphs of this article in large and bold type:

> The initiative and resource of Australian ex-service-men is asserting itself at Kalgoorlie, in W.A., and Serviceton, Queensland, where these men are overcoming the acute housing shortage by their own efforts. Co-operative building schemes have been launched in each locality, a reflection of the co-operative spirit which played such an important part in these men's service careers.

36. This is itself an amazing story for a government department.
The practical, 'can-do' ethos, already demonstrated to exist in the Lalor scheme, was found here also:

The spirit of self-help is the common key and already there is plenty of proof that other local problems can be solved by the same attitude adopted by the men in these two widely separated parts of Australia.42

The two schemes for ex-servicemen described by Purcell were quite different in nature. The story of the Kalgoorlie scheme is yet to be written, but I have pieced together a sketched outline.43 It would seem that the scheme consisted initially of twenty members of the 2/28th Battalion Association who pooled their resources and raised £1300. They 'were in bad straits regarding housing and were meeting with exasperating delays from official quarters'.44 According to WWII veteran George 'Rip' Heyhow, the driving force behind this scheme was Barry Bracegirdle, a Tobruk Rat, who had been decorated with the Distinguished Conduct Medal.45 He, together with a group of his 2/28th Battalion mates, had been well known sporting identities in Western Australia prior to the war and like the Lalor men, decided to take action themselves on their return. The Kalgoorlie Repatriation Committee added to the men's own reserves and advanced £2000 with more promised if required. Two of the men flew 400 miles to the vanishing mining town of Wiluna in central Western Australia where they purchased the empty Lake Way Hotel, consisting of 22 rooms from which they planned to build six homes.46 Later they bought a few of the deserted houses from the ghost parts of the town. Tomp (sic) Jessop, 'a highly respected Kalgoorlie resident' who ran a heavy haulage business, brought the materials from Wiluna into Kalgoorlie for the building to begin.47 The Kalgoorlie example proved to be a much smaller venture than the PLC. Rip Heyhow stated that about 10 or 12 homes were built in total and the men drew ballots for the houses. According to Heyhow, the success of their venture was not so much the houses they built, as the fact that it jolted others into believing that something could be done.48

The Serviceton Co-operative in Queensland was designed along similar lines to the Peter Lalor scheme.49 The Serviceton Co-operative Society of Ex-servicemen Ltd, according to the Labor Call report, had already purchased 850 acres of a planned 1200 acre subdivision in a place which was described as 'not far from Brisbane',

42. ibid.
43. I am indebted to Sarah Gregson, UNSW, and the Eastern Goldfields Historical Society for putting me in touch with Rip Heyhow. Rip was aged 94 when I interviewed him by telephone on 12 November 2007; see also Labor Call, 21 November 1946, p. 5.
44. Labor Call, 21 November 1946, p. 5.
45. Kenneth Barry Bracegirdle, individual war record 'WWII Nominal Roll', WX4251.
46. Labor Call, 21 November 1946, p. 5. Wiluna was resurrected in the early 1980s when uranium mining commenced.
47. George (Rip) Heyhow, telephone conversation with the author, op. cit.
48. ibid.
49. The history of Serviceton was written and produced by the local historical society in 2007; see Fred Clark & Vicki Mynott, Serviceton - the Soldier Settlement that became Inala, Richlands, Inala and Suburbs History Group Inc, 2007.
known today as the suburb of Inala. It was ultimately expected to provide 2000 homes ‘besides churches, schools, theatres, shops, parks, sporting ovals, swimming baths, playgrounds, child care centres, factories and other community needs’.\(^{50}\) The Lalor and Serviceton schemes both provided for all retail stores in the housing development to be run on a formal co-operative basis, ‘so that after provision for expansion, all profits will return to the shareholders as rebates on purchases’, or the ‘divvy’\(^{51}\). One difference was that the Lalor plan proposed that money be set aside for educational purposes and covered co-operative ownership of all community amenities in addition to retail stores. The two projects were further aligned in terms of their urban design. Serviceton, like Lalor, was to be ‘laid out according to the latest town planning principles’, the master plan for Serviceton being designed by urban designers Hennessy and Hennessy.\(^{52}\) The Serviceton development was ‘to ensure a safe-guard of natural trees, none of which can be cut down without permission’ and in both places all ‘avenues and streets will be tree-lined’.\(^{53}\) As the Serviceton scheme also included factories, it may have proposed a broader social and economic agenda, just as was planned for Lalor. Unlike the Lalor example, though, this society was limited solely to returned servicemen and women, and it was more expensive. Two thousand shares, costing £50 each, entitled the owner to select one house site in the new development.\(^{54}\)

The driving force behind the Serviceton Co-operative was ex-serviceman Harold (Hock) Davis. He served in the Middle East from December 1940 to January 1942. In Palestine ‘he saw early kibbutzim and was so impressed by the co-operative achievements that he talked of establishing a similar collective’.\(^{55}\) In Brisbane after the war, he was desperate for housing for his family. He called a meeting in early 1946 at the Brisbane RSL where he put forward his plan ‘for a self-sufficient soldiers’ settlement at Beaudesert’.\(^{56}\) About thirty ex-servicemen signed up on the night of the meeting. A further 120 signed up shortly afterwards and land was bought in Darra on the site of a US Army Camp. Three families moved in immediately, using the army huts for shelter. However, problems arose and the co-operative built only seven houses. Ultimately, in 1950, they sold the land to the Housing Commission.\(^{57}\)

\(^{50}\) Labor Call, 21 November 1946, p. 5.

\(^{51}\) ibid.

\(^{52}\) ibid.; Robert Freestone, Model Communities, op. cit., p. 224.

\(^{53}\) Labor Call, 21 November 1946, p. 5.

\(^{54}\) It is not clear if the £50 covered the cost of the building block. If the £50 covered only one share, this was not a scheme designed for working-class families. The pricing for the Peter Lalor scheme was: one share cost £10, and a block cost £35 (though the price later increased to £39). Either way, the Lalor scheme was less expensive for the share and land package.

\(^{55}\) Fred Clark & Vicki Mynott, Serviceton, op. cit. p. 55.

\(^{56}\) ibid., p. 56. Upon his return to Australia, Davis spent some years at the Bonegilla army camp in Victoria as a motor bike instructor. By November 1944 he had been posted to Queensland where he stayed after his demobilisation in September 1945.

The Serviceton concept was very similar to the one proposed by Peter Lalor. It is impossible to know whether Hock Davis had crossed paths with any of the men of the Lalor scheme, or whether the similarities in the concepts came about because all faced the same problems and such ideas were being discussed by ex-servicemen during and after the war.

Both Labor Call and Change Over, steeped as they were in the hopeful ethos of the Labor Government’s post-war reconstruction effort, found several reasons to be ecstatic about the Kalgoorlie and Serviceton schemes. Each served ‘to drive home the importance of community activity in forwarding Australia’s national development’. The article continued:

The experience of the war years is being turned to good account when these men and their families can work with one another in a spirit of comradeship not only in solving immediate and pressing problems but with the vision of a better future for themselves and their children. ...We need to continually stress this type of social activity which highlights a national community consciousness based on the spirit of self-help and is alive to future progress.58

Robert Freestone, in his study of ‘model communities’ in Australia, asserted that there were no real examples of co-operative housing schemes in Australia until after the WWII. In the post-war context, he mentioned a few ‘quite ambitious schemes’ such as Peter Lalor and Serviceton, and he correctly assessed the PLC as ‘one of the more successful’. Nonetheless he concluded, ‘[m]aterials shortages, undercapitalization, and waning idealism doomed the larger schemes’.59 For the PLC at least, this assessment can now be tested. By the mid 1950s a few other home building co-operatives had commenced, but foundered for financial reasons. These did not specifically target ex-service personnel. Between 1953 and 1960 in NSW, the Metropolitan Homes Community Advancement Society Ltd and the Commonwealth Community Cooperative Homes Ltd reportedly constructed about three hundred homes before land prices and problems with land acquisition put paid to their ventures.60 In Victoria, the Young Christian Workers (YCW) Building Construction Division folded within two years of the construction of some eighty homes.61

Although the history of the co-operative movement in Victoria has not yet been written, if we look back to the first half of the twentieth century, there had been other co-operative efforts that provide context for the PLC venture, in addition to

58. Labor Call, 21 November 1946, p. 5.
59. Robert Freestone, Model Communities, op. cit., p. 224.
the high profile Wonthaggi Co-operative. In 1902 in Melbourne a group of state public servants created the Civil Service Co-operative store as a buffer against harsh treatment by the government. It reportedly had 3500 members. In 1905, the same group also created the Co-operative Credit Bank which was still a viable entity in the mid 1960s. In 1915, the Housewives Co-operative Association attempted to redress escalating food prices as a result of WWI. Although after the war the word ‘co-operative’ was removed from the title, the Housewives Association continued with some co-operative activities throughout the inter-war period. It represented a strong, Protestant moral force that by the late 1930s also took up the cause of working-class housing in the context of the slum clearance movement. Overwhelmingly, though, the co-operative movement in Victoria was dominated by agricultural production and distribution co-operatives.

The enabling legislation for co-operative operations was the business and trade-focused, Industrial and Provident Societies Act. Between the two world wars in Victoria, co-operatives were formed using the Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1928. The Act was specifically designed to broaden and strengthen the operating rules for co-operatives and similar organisations, and to align it with similar legislation in England. When first introducing amendments in 1924 the Victorian Attorney General, William Slater, commented that since 1873, nearly 200 societies had been registered in Victoria. He believed that the Act had been of particular relevance to rural Victorians as ‘country provident and co-operative societies have been most active in taking advantage of this legislation’. The Victorian Wheat Growers Corporation was one such society mentioned in the debate. In modernising the legislation, the definition of a society was expanded, ‘herein called an industrial and provident society’ and was described as ‘a society for carrying on any industries, businesses, or trades specified in or authorized by its rules, whether wholesale or retail, and including dealings of any description with land’. This provided a wonderfully broad mandate: the previous legislation had simply referred to ‘any labour trade or handicraft’. The PLC used the 1928 Act for registration in July 1947, and just as the drafters of the legislation had intended, a newly imagined, interesting and innovative range of activities came to fruition under the PLC banner.

64. Victoria, Legislative Assembly, Debates, vol. LA167, 17 September 1924, p. 441. This was the second reading speech by Attorney General, William Slater. The 1928 Act was based on the Provident Societies Act which had first been introduced in 1873 and updated in 1915. Although the amendments were passed in 1924, the legislation was consolidated with a range of other legislation in 1928. It remained unchanged but it this explains why the legislation is always referred to as the 1928 Act.
67. ibid.
In the decades between the passing of the legislation in 1924 and the early 1950s a rich variety of organisations creatively used this legislation to achieve their own ends. As Attorney General William Slater had described for the earlier period, agricultural co-operatives dominated. Most had fruit, wheat, citrus, grains, dairy, fish, seafood or eggs somewhere in their titles and it was growers who registered their production, marketing and distribution co-operatives and cool storage facilities. Farmers, trappers, fishermen, engineers and boot-makers also formed co-operatives. Almost a quarter of the registrations included the names of rural townships. In some cases the titles indicated the purpose. In other cases it is impossible without further investigation to know what they did. Lewis concluded that in Victoria ‘rural co-operation in the dairy industry was strongly established but Rochdale was quite weak with the exception of a few “genuine” stores at Wonthaggi, ... Cheltenham and elsewhere’. Although Lewis underestimated the diversity of the agricultural co-operatives in Victoria, he was correct in his assessment of the Rochdale co-operatives. Victoria’s co-operative activity was uncoordinated and there was almost no relationship between the disparate agricultural co-operatives and the few Rochdale ones.

Christian groups, however, were responsible for the revival of the fledgling consumer co-operative movement in Victoria in the early 1930s and it had a strikingly internationalist flavour. Presbyterian Reverend R.W. Macauley launched the Movement Towards a Christian Social Order in 1932, and a range of Protestant groups invited Japanese Co-operation organiser, Dr Toyohiko Kagawa, to Australia in 1935. Central to Kagawa’s approach was the need to combine all facets of co-operative activity. He argued that there were ‘seven elements of co-operation’: production, marketing, consumption, mutuality, service, insurance and credit, with the last as the necessary foundation of any co-operative new order. The Christian Co-operative Fellowship, ‘with Branches in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia’, was formed as a direct consequence of Kagawa’s visit.

Similar action was underway among Catholics in Victoria, as discussed in the previous chapter. These ideas were influenced by the distributist ideals which permeated Catholic Social Action at the time, emanating from the Campion

68. Registrar of Industrial and Provident Societies. Register, op. cit., 1924 - 1960. Agricultural co-operatives comprised almost half of the 150 or so registrations.
69. The Tyabb Co-operative and Trading Cool Stores which operated from 1926 to 1977 being examples.
70. As a case in point, the Cheltenham and Districts Co-operative Society, registered in 1936 and transferred to the Cooperative Act in 1954, is mentioned by Lewis.
71. Gary Lewis, ‘The Quest for a “Middle Way”, op. cit., vol. I, p. 223. There is nothing, though, in the title to lead us to believe Cheltenham was a Rochdale Store, but it seems that Lewis knew that it was.
72. Registrar of Industrial and Provident Societies, ‘Register’. op. cit., 1935. Sunnysia was registered in 1935 as Victoria was emerging from the depression. It appears never to have really got off the ground.
74. Ibid.
75. Ibid., vol. I, p. 201.
The ideas were given further impetus with the formation in 1937 of the Australian National Secretariat of Catholic Action (ANSCA) and from 1940 through the National Catholic Rural Movement. Both these organisations fell under the dominant influence of B.A. Santamaria. With the formation in 1941 of the Catholic Social Studies Movement (known as ‘The Movement’), as Race Mathews argued, the pre-occupation with fighting Communism put paid to the progress of distributist ideals through these channels. Young Christian Workers (YCW) was another Catholic body proselytising distributist doctrine, but not under the sway of Santamaria. This strand of distributism originated in Belgium, and the Australian organisation began in 1941 largely because of the influence of Father Frank Lombard. He was curate and then chaplain of Purcell’s (and John Cain’s) own parish of Northcote.

In 1941, D.H. McKay and E.L. French, ‘at the direction of the Christian Co-operative Conference Committee of Victoria’, produced a small book called The Co-operative Economy. It was structured almost as a textbook for beginners. It began with an assessment of the struggling nature of their history, but continued with apparent optimism about the future of the movement:

The recent formation of the Christian Co-operative Movement, and Co-operative League has given a fresh impetus to co-operation in Victoria. One result has been the registration of three consumer co-operatives and a credit union during 1940.

McKay and French sought to expand the movement, firstly by spreading Rochdale-style co-operative stores throughout the suburbs and secondly, by suggesting ‘a generation of leaders in co-operation, who, if prepared to train adequately and give a life of service, may help Australia to become ultimately the world’s leading Co-operative Commonwealth’. Undoubtedly, Purcell, Greenwood and King saw themselves as part of that leadership.

Activity to foster the co-operative movement took a back seat for the duration of the war, but perhaps the PLC members read this little book and were inspired by it. It

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78. David Griffiths, Not for Us, but for All, op. cit. Leo Purcell and his family were all involved in YCW which by the 1950s came to have a major influence on the co-operative credit movement in Victoria.
79. D.H. McKay & E.L. French, The Co-Operative Economy, op. cit., p. 46 & pp. 50–51. According to the ‘Register’ of Industrial and Provident Societies, op. cit., the three consumer societies were the Melbourne Rochdale Consumers’ Co-operative Society Ltd, Hobson’s Bay Co-operative Society Ltd and Northern Suburbs Co-operative Society Ltd which was situated in Preston. The credit union, which predated its enabling legislation by 13 years, was the Christian Co-operative Fellowship Credit Union Ltd.
could have been this book which set Purcell thinking as he lay recuperating in the Army hospital in Queensland. It stated:

Just as consumers’ stores found long ago that co-operatives became really worthwhile when they federated into a wholesale that bought or manufactured in bulk for them, so when building societies can federate and actually undertake the construction of homes with the services of their own architects, surveyors and builders, and [sic] advantages of co-operative building will become apparent.\(^8\)

This is precisely what the PLC did.

In 1943 three of the Victorian Rochdale co-operatives were involved in the Commonwealth Consumers’ Co-operative Congress in Canberra and over the next couple of years other attempts were made from NSW to form a national co-operative entity to unite the movement.\(^9\) But as Lewis explained, this Federation was torn by a range of ideological, geographical and practical fissures that did nothing to build the movement in Victoria.\(^10\) There were, however, groups in Victoria who saw Rochdale co-operatives as ‘a middle way’ between capitalism and communism. Often they were strongly influenced by Christian ideals. They sought to ameliorate the effects of profit-taking by big business and through ethical, collaborative, localised action they sought to return any profits as a dividend to individual shareholders and as a means of building community. Their efforts were un-coordinated and piecemeal and ranged from proposals for local Rochdale-style co-operative stores, through to socialist inspired activism aimed at threatening capitalism and directed towards a new world order. Throughout 1945 and 1946 ‘letters to the editor’ of The Age newspaper reflected these views.

As industrial disputation increased after the war, particularly under the influence of the Communist-led unions in essential industries, there were calls for co-operation between employers and employees. In other cases production co-operatives were mooted, or at least some form of industrial democracy was suggested, in order to give workers a greater share and say in their workplaces. One such letter from W.J. Anderson, of Ringwood stated, ‘I am convinced that the distinction between employer and employee must eventually disappear under co-operation on a Christian basis’. He believed the war had been fought to make possible a new world order. He went on to suggest that all those who urgently needed housing, or who wished to solve other social problems, should ‘meet and investigate the possibility of forming a co-operative movement to attack the problem at its roots’.\(^11\)

\(^8\) ibid., p. 33.
\(^10\) Gary Lewis, ibid. See for example pp. 168–69.
\(^11\) The Age, 28 November 1946, p. 2.
Throughout the latter part of 1946, as the Peter Lalor originators were preparing for their first meeting, the letters to *The Age* escalated into a conversation, with the writers using the media to inform each other of proposals for co-operative ventures around Melbourne. Many referred in glowing terms to the Rochdale example. Oakleigh, Kew, Coburg, Essendon, Kingsville, and Preston were all likely candidates. Momentum was building as ordinary people tried to gain control of their lives through co-operativism. W. Baguley, Secretary of the Oakleigh Co-operative Guild, wrote: ‘Co-operation is an ethical movement working through material means, and when fully developed places economic power in the hands of those who use it for the advancement of the community.’ He pointed to co-operative guilds being established in several Melbourne suburbs. For him co-operative guilds represented ‘a midway movement ... that avoids conservatism and extreme radicalism’. He explained the social and economic benefits:

A co-operative guild is a movement existing before the registration of a co-operative society, and continues as the heart of the society after trading commences. Co-operative guilds may begin with a house meeting of a few enthusiasts, who have faith that the principle of co-operation is destined to lead the world to paths of social peace.

It was precisely sentiments such as these which troubled those in the labour movement who were calling for a more radical overhaul of the capitalist system. Nonetheless in the case of Oakleigh, persistence paid off. The Oakleigh Consumer Co-operative was registered in March 1947, began operations in October 1947 and by April 1948 had its own premises, capital of £2,450 and membership of more than 300 people. There was, however, never enough community-based support for these isolated cases to become anything like a Victorian co-operative movement.

With the exception of the Federal Minister of Post War Reconstruction, John Dedman, who was explicitly supported by his department through the magazine *Change Over*, there are no indications that these efforts were systematically supported by the major political parties. The overarching attitude to co-operatives of Victorian Branch of the ALP was at best opportunistic. Co-operativism was not official ALP policy. In October 1945 a letter to the *Labor Call* was headed, ‘The Co-operative System’, and the author asked, ‘Sir—Would it not be better

85. ibid., 13 January 1947, p. 2.
87. ibid., 18 January 1947, p. 2.
88. ibid.
89. *Change Over*, op. cit., vol. 2, no. 4, p. 3 (undated but probably mid 1948) ran an article on the successful Oakleigh Co-operative Food Store.
for the Australian Labor Party to introduce a co-operative progressive system.\footnote{91} And although the first meeting of the PLC was organised by the Ex-Servicemen’s Committee of the Central Executive of the Victorian ALP, we have already seen how quickly the Victorian Executive distanced itself.

Nonetheless, in February 1947 the State Labor Minister for Housing, William Barry, announced that he supported co-operative stores being opened on Housing Commission estates.\footnote{92} When the men from the PLC group built their construction factory in their Stockade fortress on the Peter Lalor Estate in June 1947, Labor Premier John Cain was photographed, hammer in hand, lending support to their efforts. His attendance was an opportunity to support his friend Leo Purcell, while not missing a photo opportunity to show the rest of Victoria that progress on housing was being made. When it was formally opened in April 1948, John Cain, then the Opposition Leader, attended and \textit{Labor Call} appeared delighted to associate Labor with its success. The headline read: ‘Co-operation Triumphs in Completion of First Lalor Homes’, and the sub-heading stated, ‘Success of the Peter Lalor Co-operative Society proves that Labor’s way of co-operation is the road to success’.\footnote{93} The paper was not so clear about what ‘Labor’s way’ was. As we have seen, three weeks later Cain and Barry pleaded a special case in Parliament for the PLC as they protested their shortage of cement.\footnote{94} In the next chapter, we find that while it was in office until November 1947, the Cain government assisted the PLC with access to resources as best it could. However, it was a piecemeal effort and in no way represented wholehearted support for their co-operative cause.

Another Labor newspaper was not as sanguine as \textit{Labor Call}. The \textit{Labor College Review}, issued by the Labor College from the Trades Hall in Melbourne, wrote that the Australian labour movement should understand that the co-operativist ideas of Robert Owen were appropriate in their time and in their country of origin, but they were not appropriate in Victoria a hundred years later. The author argued that the modern co-operative movement had discarded the idealism of the founder of the movement and was simply seeking material gain. ‘The weakness of the co-operative is that it attracts those with a Capitalist outlook, who look for a few more crumbs under the present system,’ the article concluded. ‘In that way it sidetracks many who could be valuable workers for Socialism.’\footnote{95} This author at least appeared not to understand the socialist and potentially radical nature of Owen’s co-operative movement and that some in the co-operative movement in Victoria a hundred years later similarly wanted to see the end of capitalism.\footnote{96} The ideological problem for the

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item 91. \textit{Labor Call}, 11 October 1945, p. 10.
\item 92. \textit{Labor Call}, 20 February 1947, p. 1.
\item 93. ibid., 9 April, p. 8.
\item 94. See the Introduction to this thesis.
\item 95. \textit{The Labor College Review}, August 1947, p. 3.
\item 96. Paul A Pickering, \textit{Chartism and the Chartists in Manchester and Salford}, op. cit., p. 105.
\end{itemize}
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socialists in the co-operative movement was that by the end of WWII, the ALP, on paper at least, was coupled to state socialism. The ‘zeal of earlier forms of socialist fellowship’, which had inspired the ALP half a century earlier had, by 1947, ossified into a much more hierarchical and monolithic form.  

The Victorian Parliamentary Labor Party had nonetheless supported the co-operative financing of housing by agreeing to the passage of the *Co-operative Housing Societies Act* in 1944 when in opposition. Building societies, friendly societies and life offices had been lending for housing finance for almost a century and the new formulation after WWII proved popular. They were strongly supported by the Federal Labor Government as well. The Act provided for government guarantees on loans and some indemnity to societies against losses. The creation of a Registrar ensured that new societies were regulated. Over time several Labor affiliated unions—for example the Federated Clerks, Building Workers Industrial Union and Carpenters and Joiners—took advantage of these arrangements for co-operative housing finance. The Melbourne Trades Hall lent its weight to members wanting housing finance through Co-operative Housing Societies, as one of its employees, Terry A. Collins, became Secretary to at least five associations: The Victoria Police, Rosanna, Ivanhoe and the P.I. Nos. I and 2 Co-operative Housing Societies, to be discussed below. Within four years more than one hundred such societies were registered in Victoria, representing close to 10,000 members.

An even closer connection to the Victorian Labor Party was the Young Labor Association—the junior arm of the Party—which in March 1950, launched the Young Labor Association Co-operative Housing Society. The driving force behind it was Doug Burgess, who was Assistant Secretary of the Young Labor Association and had been mentored by the powerful Trades Hall Council Secretary, J.V. Stout. Burgess was a friend of Purcell and he became a part of the PLC and built his home in Lalor.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s there was rising interest from those who saw the synergies between these co-operative housing societies and Rochdale consumer

99. ibid.
100. ibid.
101. A pamphlet containing the ‘Rules’ for these five societies is included in the papers of Kevin Gunn, provided to me by John Waghorn of the Whittlesea Historical Society; Leo Purcell’s brother, Frank Purcell, was Secretary of the Victorian Police Association and at one time it was suggested that the Secretary Manager of the PLC, Alf Greenwood, should also provide managerial support to that organisation. While the PLC approved this arrangement, it never eventuated.
103. *Labor Call*, 3 March 1950, p. 3.
104. For a biography of Doug Burgess, see Appendix A.
stores and wanted to see them linked.¹⁰⁵ Ten branches of the Labor Party submitted formal resolutions in support of consumer co-operatives to the 1950 Victorian ALP Easter conference. One ALP member who wrote to the Labor Call wanted:

to make it Labor Party policy that consumers' co-operatives should be financed as housing co-operatives are being financed, by a Government-Guaranteed overdraft sufficient to cover the acquisition of trading premises where necessary and the first month's stock.¹⁰⁶

The Easter conference did not endorse any such measure. Instead the meeting was pre-occupied with the organisation of Industrial Groups which had been formed by the Victorian ALP in 1946 to combat Communist Party influence in trade unions. As Prime Minister Robert Menzies fuelled Cold War tensions, this anti-Communist distraction lends weight to Race Mathews' argument that B.A. Santamaria's anti-Communist 'Movement', derailed a much more important co-operative and distributist agenda.¹⁰⁷ It was within the context of this dishevelled co-operative activity in Victoria that the PLC originators believed they could provide a working example of co-operative living which others could follow.

The momentum towards co-operativism which was building in Victoria in 1946 came to very little. In the end, the PLC was not part of a powerful movement, but in its unique combination of co-operative entities, it was an isolated example. This did not deter the co-operators' resolve to pursue their dream, but made their task that much harder.

Balnave and Patmore outlined the variety of types of co-operatives from which they had to choose:

By the early 1950s, one definition of the Australian co-operative movement included Rochdale consumer co-operatives, producer co-operatives, building societies, credit unions, community advancement societies, agricultural co-operatives and friendly societies. Co-operation was viewed as a way of 'helping each other', which emphasised not only 'self help but mutual help'.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Victoria, Legislative Assembly, Debates, vol. LA226, 1947-48, pp. 778–79. A review of the list of 106 co-operative housing societies which had registered in Victoria by May 1948 reveals that many of the places that had recently opened Rochdale Co-operative Stores also had registered Co-operative Housing Societies. In NSW, Lewis noted a similar confluence as a 'new wave of co-operative enthusiasts [became] interested in both Rochdale and financial co-operation in building societies and credit unions believing that these could help a co-operative new order.' Gary Lewis, 'The Quest for a "Middle Way"', op. cit., vol. 1, p. 194.

¹⁰⁶ Labor Call, 10 March 1950, p. 15.


¹⁰⁸ Nikola Balnave & Greg Patmore, 'Localism and Rochdale Co-Operation' op. cit., p. 48.
Throughout the years of the PLC experiment, from 1946–1954, several of these different co-operative forms were adopted, as the dedicated band of home builders at Lalor strove to find the most appropriate organisational and legal structures to suit their unique scheme. In the remainder of this chapter, I analyse how this was done.\(^{109}\)

As noted, the foundation association was the Peter Lalor Home Building Co-operative Society Ltd (PLC) and it performed an unusual range of functions. It attempted a role which would be described in today’s terms as a model housing developer: the society bought land for subdivision and arranged for the site to be designed by an urban planner, in accordance with the principles of garden city planning; it commissioned an architect to design a range of houses to be available to society members; it adopted a relatively new concept—an on-site construction factory—which found and bought building supplies, and where necessary or expedient, it manufactured some materials on site; it pre-cut timber house frames, windows, and doors to be delivered and assembled on the house site; it built homes or supplied materials for homes; it planned for social, physical and cultural amenities for a new community which would be co-operatively owned and managed; and it created other co-operative legal entities to finance the purchase of homes and to establish a standard Rochdale-style co-operative general store.\(^{110}\) As Change Over announced in January 1947, apart from the fact that members were to become home owners at a time of a chronic housing shortage, every house owner ‘will be a shareholder in the Community and its co-operative enterprises, its shops, light industry, Picture Theatres, Buses and Hotels’.\(^{111}\) Finally, as described in Chapter 1, the PLC had an overarching social and economic agenda in line with the Chifley Labor Government’s post-war reconstruction plans. Two main planks of this agenda were: affordable housing for low income earners; and economic development and employment generation for the inevitable times of economic downturn. In their quest to build community, they saw no direct role for government. Community development would arise naturally from their co-operative way of living in their garden suburb environment, free from the pollutants of capitalist city development. Herein lay the genuine strength of their self-help ethos.

The PLC created two financing entities to help fund the purchase of homes, a move made possible by the explicit policy of federal and state governments to ensure ready availability of finance as one means of addressing the housing crisis.\(^{112}\)

Initially called PL Nos. 1 and 2 Co-operative Housing Societies, they were later renamed Northern Nos 1 and 2. These were terminating building societies and were

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\(^{109}\) See the organisational chart in vol. 2, p. iii.

\(^{110}\) For discussion of different types of pre-fabrication, including ‘pre-cut’, see Alastair Gregg, The Stuff Dreams Are Made Of: Housing Provision in Australia, 1945–1960, Melbourne, 1993, pp. 84–85.


\(^{112}\) M.R. Hill, Housing Finance in Australia 1945–56, Melbourne, 1959. The different timescales for repayment allowed poorer members a longer period to repay the loans.
established under the Co-operative Housing Societies Act 1944 to provide housing finance. The two societies received a total of £300,000 from the Commonwealth Bank and 223 loans were made at an initial interest rate of four and a half per cent a year.

The residents of Lalor, nonetheless, flexibly and cleverly adopted a range of strategies to finance their homes, sometimes individually, but most often because the PLC attempted to organise the best solution for each of its members. From the start, the Committee of Management had planned to finance the home building through its own co-operative financing societies. In January 1947 a troupe from the committee visited the Registrar-General, A.E. Rasmussen, ‘to make sure that no bar existed to form a financing co-operative under the 1944 Act’. By March 1947 the committee had agreed on the detail of the two PL Co-operative Housing Societies: one was for a term of 22 2/3 years, and one for 30 2/5 years. An officer of the Commonwealth Bank had advised Greenwood that ‘he would have no difficulty in obtaining of £150,000 per society’. The co-operative had already co-opted one ‘Mr Heffey’ as their solicitor as he played this role for ‘several other Co-operative Housing Societies’. Even so there was a temporary glitch. The cheapest, weatherboard homes were, under the bank’s rules, supposed to be financed under terms for 22 2/3 years. The bank withheld its approval when the society included a large percentage of these houses in loan applications for the longer time period in order to meet the hardship conditions of some co-operative members. There was considerable concern within the Committee of Management that these poorer members should not miss out. Eventually Greenwood used contacts in the Melbourne branch of the bank to gain the necessary approvals. This would not be the last time Greenwood wielded this influence.

Central to the Peter Lalor plans was also a Rochdale-style co-operative store. In January 1948 the society announced its intention to hire a manager for the ‘first of our trading activities which will consist primarily of Groceries and other goods.

113. Terminating societies ended when the agreed life of the society ended and all loans had been repaid. See M.R. Hill, Housing Finance in Australia, op. cit., pp. 26–33.
114. The Age, 2 December 1977, p. 2. From oral testimony and PLHBCSI. Committee of Management ‘Minutes’, I believe the loan was from the Commonwealth Bank. However, M.R. Hill, Housing Finance in Australia, op. cit., p. 81 stated that the Commonwealth Bank did not lend for housing until 1930. The State Bank of Victoria was the main home lender. It may have been Prime Minister Chifley’s influence, discussed in the next chapter, which caused this specific policy alteration.
117. ibid., 20 December 1946. Mr Heffey was almost certainly another contact arranged through the Melbourne Trades Hall.
118. Access to other credit facilities was not required until the residents began to occupy their homes, and by the early 1960s, the residents formed a little Co-operative Credit Society through the Bedgling St Luke’s Catholic Church, which later expanded into the Plenty Community Credit Union which still operates. This will be discussed further in Chapter 8.
119. ibid., ‘Minutes’, 21 April 1947, 9 May 1947, 6 June 1947, 4 July 1947. This will be discussed further in Chapter 3.
required daily by the housewife. By mid 1948 Greenwood had gained committee approval to spend £350 on materials to erect the trading store. Initially operating out of the Stockade, it was primarily for trading building products, but very soon was operating as a post office and general store for a limited range of items. By early 1949, Fred Hunt, who managed the general store, reportedly asked for use of the workers’ amenities hut to ‘enable the store to progress in the proper manner’. However, communal land had been identified for a co-operative general store in Gratwick Street and it moved to that location. The Lalor Consumer Co-operative Society Ltd (LCCS) was formally registered in May 1950, opening its doors for business shortly afterwards.

Lalor residents paid £5 for shares in the co-operative store and the rules confirm that it would have passed the test as a Rochdale co-operative. In the first few years of its operation the store served as post office and general store. It was a central location for social networking, lending weight to observations that communities would be strengthened by such ventures. Doss Lawson described the ‘wonderful’ way Fred Hunt and Dot Thompson introduced new people into the community through the store. When the society moved the post office back into the Stockade, Lalor resident Flo O’Connor opened a little wooden nook at the side of the store through which she sold fruit and vegetables. This co-operative store temporarily ceased operations in 1954 when the main society went into voluntary liquidation, but as a result of concerted action by the LCCS, a store continued on the same site for a few more years.

The other main entity which ultimately organised and financed the social infrastructure for the community was the Lalor Women’s Social Club (LWSC). It is not clear how it was constituted, but it was probably not a formal co-operative. Its significance was that it fulfilled many of the functions which the PLC had undertaken to provide in a democratic and inclusive way in keeping with the

122. ibid., 18 February 1949.
124. ibid. The PLHBCSL legally transferred the store to its subsidiary, the LCCS on 1 December 1950. It appears to have been paid £594/10/- for the transaction though if this is accurate, it was a grossly inflated price and the consumer co-operative did not have that kind of cash available. Perhaps this annotation referred to the amount of capital available to the store.
126. Barbara Breaks, telephone conversation with the author, 12 November 2006. Barbara and several other older children worked in the shop after school.
127. Corporate Affairs Office, ‘Index to Defunct Company, Association and Business Name Registrations’, PROV, VPRS 8268, Melbourne, 1864-1990 (sic). The LCCS was not formally wound up until 9 February 1988. In August 1954 the LCCS presented a petition to the WSC which contained forty-one signatures, requesting permission to build a new store on the site where the temporary building had been. The Council granted approval (Whittlesea Post, 19 August 1954, p. 7). The registration under the Industrial and Provident Societies Act was cancelled on 23 November 1954 and the registration of the society transferred to the newly enacted Co-operation Act 1953 the next day. Later the store was taken over by a private store-keeper.
spirit of the original ideals. The LWSC was the owner of the site in Vasey Avenue for the building and operation of the kindergarten and community hall (called the 'kinderhall'). It held regular meetings which were formally constituted with a president, secretary, treasurer and members. Despite its lack of formal legal underpinning, it would probably have complied with the definition of a co-operative as 'an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise'. The LWSC is analysed in Chapter 7.

These four separate entities comprised the intricate co-operative network under the PLC umbrella, and were a unique combination. No one else in Victoria or Australia created a scheme quite like this. In later chapters I demonstrate how powerful these associations were in the creation of social capital. Each in its own way provided an outlet for social interaction and for economic stability. And each provided an intermediary power base through which the citizens of Lalor could conduct relationships with governments at every level, and in some cases the private sector.

There was one more entity which was created alongside the Peter Lalor group of co-operative entities which must be mentioned. Six months after the registration of the PLC another co-operative was formed. It was registered as the E.S. Co-operative—an abbreviation for the Ex-Servicemen's Building Co-operative. In January 1948 Labor Call reported that the new venture 'will operate separately from but in conjunction with Peter Lalor'. Purcell announced that while the intention had been to limit membership of the new society to 300, more than double that number had attended the inaugural meeting.

The function of the E.S. Co-operative was 'to aid those ex-servicemen owning their own block in different parts of Melbourne'. A new organisation of this kind was required because, by the time building had started in the larger Thomastown area in late 1947, the soldier settlement—the place—had already appropriated the name of 'Peter Lalor' for its housing estate. Purcell sought a similar society in order to expand his original dream to other places. After all, through his 3KZ broadcasts and RSL contacts, Purcell had plans that were grander than simply the housing experiment.

128. See the website for the International Co-operative Alliance: <http://www.icoop/coop/index.html>. See also the brochure for 'Co-operation and the Politics of Consumption'; Australian Association for the Study of Labour History, Conference, 17 March 2006.

129. Registrar of Industrial and Provident Societies, 'Register', op. cit., no. 116, 1948. The registration took effect from 11 February. This co-operative was mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis.


131. ibid.
at Lalor. He foreshadowed that the E.S. Co-operative would ‘provide yet another example of what could be done through co-operative enterprise’.132

The E.S. Co-operative had been launched at a public meeting at the Melbourne Trades Hall on 7 January 1948. Purcell was the Secretary and the registered address was his address at 145 Miller Street in Thornbury.133 It appears likely that it was a personal venture on his part and may not have been strongly supported by the others in the group. The E.S. Co-operative adopted a constitution with ‘Objects’ almost identical to the PLC. There were two major differences. Firstly, members were required to be servicemen or women.134 Secondly, as this was also an exercise in raising much needed capital, other societies registered under the Industrial and Provident Act 1928 were eligible to join. The minimum purchase was five shares at £10 each.135 With its exclusive membership rules, the society was breaching the Rochdale principle of ‘voluntary and open membership’. However, as I will show, it was also potentially building a wholesale co-operative with a production arm, and another important co-operative concept was in play here—the mutuality principle, or co-operation between co-operatives.136

The catalyst for the formation of the new society was another one of Purcell’s grand schemes, or an opportunity which had presented itself. The plan was for the new co-operative to take out an exclusive licence to operate a company called Junget and Junget’s Building Constructions Proprietary Limited. For £3000 the new E.S. Co-operative would take over their factory in Northcote.137 The company was owned by Danish-born engineer W. Junget, and designed and manufactured an innovative flat-roofed concrete house. ‘The house is constructed of hollow concrete and is warm in winter and cool in summer. Floors are of a cork-sawdust composition,’ reported Labor Call.138 Purcell probably thought the new co-operative was investing in a sound proposition with concrete construction, as the Victorian Housing Commission was likewise beginning to build its signature concrete houses.139

132. Change Over, op. cit., vol 2, no. 2, undated (but probably February 1948) p. 5. Because such a large investment had already be made in the Stockade factories, it may have been prudent for Purcell to use the E.S. Society for individual veterans to build at any location, using co-operative Stockade products, rather than emphasising the importance of community development in whole co-operative suburbs as in the original plan.


134. The E.S. Co-Operative Society Limited, ‘Rules’, Clause 4, p. 2. Members of this society were required to be ‘an “Australian Soldier” as defined by the Commonwealth War Service Homes Act 1918–1947, or any statutory modifications thereof, or the “female dependant” of an “Australian soldier” as defined in the said Act.’

135. ibid.


137. Labor Call, 28 January 1948, p. 8. Although the report proposed the location to be Northcote, it probably was in fact in nearby Preston.

138. ibid.

It was predicted that the cost of a home would be a very modest £100 a square, and within three months, full production would provide for four new homes a week. There was to be full collaboration with the PLC as it was agreed that fifty percent of output would supply the PLC’s housing needs, with Peter Lalor providing fittings, fixtures and other manufactured materials required, using their production factories and trading and distribution store. The two organisations shared a car and a contract was signed for both co-operatives to share the expertise of the PLC architect, Stanley Frew. Prior to this, however, it was decided that the E.S. Co-operative should work the blue metal quarry on the Peter Lalor Estate, fulfilling the dual agendas of employment generation and much needed materials for road making.

For the PLC, the Junget deal looked like a way out of a looming crisis. By January 1948 building had slowed through material shortages, and the promised building schedule began to falter. Men employed in building work would have to be laid off if they could not access materials. Such an outcome was unthinkable for a group which had set its sights on maintaining employment in difficult times. In this fraught situation, it is easy to imagine how Purcell desperately sought other alternatives through every contact he had, in order to find a way out of the impasse. The available evidence is also sketchy about what actually happened. After the legal documents were drawn up and just prior to signing, Junget appeared to withdraw from the deal. The reasons for rejection provide an insight into what was initially planned. Firstly, Junget baulked at granting a non-exclusive licence within Victoria for 15 years. Secondly, he was not prepared to grant a patent exclusively for returned servicemen. Thirdly, Junget would not allow the society to operate outside Victoria.

Within another month, building almost stopped at Lalor because cement supplies had run dry. This led to the large demonstration on the steps of Parliament House. Desperate to adhere to their building schedule and keep their bricklayers employed, in February 1948 the Peter Lalor and the E.S Societies combined with some small builders to buy and operate a co-operative (concrete) brick kiln. Capital of £10,000 was available. This was almost certainly the Junget deal, perhaps under different arrangements than previously suggested. It was the Truth which later reported the situation in this way:

The E.S. (Ex-Servicemen's) Co-operative Society, an offshoot of the Peter Lalor Society, [has been] formed for 330 men who want concrete homes built from component parts manufactured in their own factory, under licence on a

142. ibid., 13 February 1948.
144. This demonstration was described in the prologue to this thesis.
145. Labor Call, 20 February 1948, p. 3.
patent obtained by the Peter Lalor Society in February 1948. The E.S. Society members had to be eligible under War Service Homes conditions, and each took out five £10 shares to build the factory.¹⁴⁶

Change Over also reproduced a photograph of the unusual Junget concrete home with its flat roof. The caption read: ‘The Junget Home embodying new features of building construction will be factory-produced for members of the E and S Building Co-operative who are financed through War Service Homes Commission.’¹⁴⁷

Original Lalor resident Jack Follett, when interviewed in 1998, confirmed that he was an employee of this concrete brick making factory in Dundas Street, Preston. He recalled:

They were part of Peter Lalor. The Ex-servicemen’s [Co-operative] that was another one that they formed... but in conjunction with the Peter Lalor Estate, and ... what they were making were these concrete houses, and it was a design actually—Junget, [sic] a German chap.¹⁴⁸

Follett described the houses in detail, including the concrete bricks, the concrete floor, ceiling and walls, and described the outstanding thermal qualities of the homes. He concluded that when he and his friend Ron Moore were building their houses at Lalor, as part of a co-operative syndicate, the only reason they did not use the roof design was that they found the components too heavy to lift. Nonetheless, these two men did use the concrete bricks. Follett explained that they were lent the use of the factory at weekends so they could make the bricks and this helped the co-operative, as the men’s presence acted as security when the factory would have otherwise been idle and empty.¹⁴⁹ It is not clear what happened to this venture. The E.S. Society was not mentioned again after 1948 in the context of the PLC.³⁵⁰

These were the five societies that formed the PLC network. By the use of the Peter Lalor name, and their emphasis on wartime camaraderie, they were, however unconsciously, contributing to the evolution of both the Eureka and Anzac legends. When the members of the co-operative adopted the name Peter Lalor, they consciously evoked Eureka.¹⁵¹ Almost a century had elapsed since the rebellion over miners’ rights on the Victorian goldfields, and for these co-operators Peter Lalor had

¹⁴⁶  Truth, 18 September 1948, front page.
¹⁴⁹  ibid., p. 112.
¹⁵⁰  Records of the E.S. Co-operative Society suggest that it remained operative and under Purcell’s stewardship at least until the end of 1949. After that time the Registrar complained of a failure of the society to lodge the requisite returns. By 1952 Purcell was apparently no longer involved and it went into voluntary liquidation late in 1959. See Registrar of Industrial and Provident Societies, ‘Register’, op. cit.; and detailed records of co-operative societies, PROV, VPRS 497, Unit 7 (these are uncatalogued boxes of records).
¹⁵¹  PLHBSCl, Committee of Management, ‘Minutes of Meeting’, 27 December 1946.
become a hero of the little people, and the miners’ concerns he represented came to symbolise social and political reform. Fundamentally he was seen as a leader who stood against injustice and oppression. As Purcell represented it:

We called it the Peter Lalor Co-operative Family Scheme because Peter Lalor was a pioneer of a better way of life for the people of the 1860s, [sic] and that’s what we are trying to do for the people of the 1940s.

Lalor’s defence of miners’ rights slid easily across a century into the co-operators’ concerns with workers’ rights. Just as the miners at Eureka had done, they wanted to stand together to attain what none could achieve alone. Purcell reminisced many years later, the co-operative:

was started by people who always had second best. And it offered them things that they couldn’t afford as individuals. It was going to have all the things the people could want, but it meant that we had to build them ourselves.

For PLC members there was an easy continuity between the miners at Eureka and their own co-operative ethos. Sixty years later, those remaining original Lalor co-operators still hold reunions under the Eureka flag, symbolising their independence of spirit.

What is unexpected, however, for a society bearing the name of the Eureka hero, is the prominence of the Anzac tradition in the early deliberations of the society. Writing in 1982, Bill Gammage argued that even before WWI had ended, the tradition was ‘already a forum for stating such conservative values as the necessity for loyalty, conformity to the state, and acceptance of middle-class quiescence, and it has remained so ever since.’

Ostensibly at least, the combination of a tradition of rebellion against the State with the values of those who had fought and died for the State seems to be a contradiction.

With closer attention, however, it is clear that this is a false binary in several respects. On the one hand, it is important to remember that the motivation at Eureka was based on claims for constitutional rights, being denied by the State. They were free-born Britons. This was entirely in keeping with the Anzac tradition of


153. Unidentified press clipping, held in the City of Whittlesea historical collection, 5 April 1948.

154. Mark Davis, *Stockade*, Swinburne Film School, Melbourne, 1984. These words from the transcript may not be Purcell’s exact words. The transcript documents his views as compiled by Mark Davis after many hours of interviews.

155. ibid. The Anzac legend has been highly contested and has been since war historian C.E.W. Bean ‘more than anyone, gave the Anzac tradition substance and direction.’ See Bill Gammage, ‘Anzac’, *Intruders in the Bush*, edited by John Carroll, Melbourne, 1982, p. 63.
citizen soldiers, volunteers defending the values of the nation as patriots, and much of the original ethos survived in men like Purcell and his comrades. The Anzac tradition was never explicitly named as such by the co-operators, even though WWI historian C.E.W. Bean, had by the end of WWII 'found in the men of the Second AIF essentially the same qualities he had pictured in the first', and which 'emanated from the character of the men themselves': characteristics such as resourcefulness, 'initiative, endurance, reliability, courage and mateship'. For the men of the PLC, their Anzac ethos was a collective, can-do determination to simply get on with the job, and it threaded seamlessly with their understanding of the Eureka legend. At the same time, both the Anzac ethos and the Eureka legend became entangled, for these co-operators, with those earlier communitarian notions of brotherhood reaching back to Owenite co-operativism.

Secondly, the ostensible contradiction between the idea of conservative diggers embracing the values of rebellious miners, fails to take account of the sharp distinction within the Anzac legend between officers and other ranks. As discussed, the Ex-Servicemen’s Committee of the Central Executive of the Victorian ALP had been formed after WWII, when Purcell raised concerns about senior officers undermining the rehabilitation efforts of the Chifley Labor Government. Greenwood told the Central Executive that 'at every election there had been a definite Labor majority from the troops in spite of organised opposition from higher ranks.' Alistair Thomson found a similar division within the Anzac tradition. After conducting interviews with twenty-one WWI working-class diggers, he stated:

The interviews did highlight certain contrasts between the experiences of working-class diggers and my perception of the Anzac legend. ... They recited familiar anecdotes about the egalitarian Anzacs and AIF, but their emphasis was sometimes different from that of conventional stories. For example, mateship was a sacred memory, but it was the creed of the diggers in the ranks and did not necessarily include officers.

The same sentiment was echoed by the hundreds of veterans of WWII who flocked to sign up to the PLC scheme. Thomson concluded that 'to a certain extent, the memories of working-class veterans thus represented a forgotten and even oppositional history'. The independent and strongly minded working-class people who formed the PLC similarly represented this 'oppositional history'. Gammage

157. ibid., p. 62.
158. See above pp. 76–77.
159. This was discussed in Chapter 1.
162. ibid.
evoked the image of brotherhood for both the bush and the Anzac traditions, but for him it was hierarchical and exclusive. Feminist writers and those studying indigenous and multicultural Australian history have similarly pointed to this issue and this will be discussed further in later chapters, but in terms of class relationships, the communitarian brotherhood tradition of the co-operators at Lalor placed them squarely in the camp of the oppositional working-class diggers of WWI described by Alistair Thompson, and the diggers at Eureka.

Thus it is possible to understand how the PLC experiment is situated within the Anzac legend. The co-operators’ focus on remembrance, rehabilitation and co-operation born of wartime camaraderie that coalesced to create the ‘soldier settlement suburb’ of Lalor forms a critical part of PLC story. As discussed in Chapter 1, they had formally dedicated their co-operative housing estate to the memory of those who so recently died in war, their streets were named after VC winners and their motto was a ‘step towards a new way of life dedicated by men who returned, to those who died to make this a better world’.

However, for those living through the ‘interlude of hope’ immediately after WWII, their primary concern was not on their place in the Anzac legend. Demobilisation and rehabilitation represented an enormous and very practical logistical exercise. Nearly a million Australians had served in the armed forces. Almost one fifth were still in uniform when hostilities ended and most were demobilised within six months. The PLC was established to assist with this transition to a civilian way of life, with affordable housing, and a new co-operative order, their ultimate dream.

From its inception, the PLC saw itself as part of the broader co-operative movement, both in Australia and overseas, and it built on the few developing co-operative networks, including ex-service examples, in an attempt to strengthen the movement more generally. In the early stages of their activities, Purcell introduced Mr E.E. Blake of Dawn Engineering Company to the Committee of Management explaining that he had ‘wide experience in construction work and had been associated with the Committee that existed to promote the adoption of the Rochdale principle Co-operatives in Victoria’. Purcell organised for Blake to be co-opted onto the committee; a move that lasted only a few weeks as Blake recommended some (unspecified) changes to the society which the Committee ignored, and Blake left.

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164. PLHBCSL. ‘Progress & Promise’ op. cit., front page.
165. Robin Gollan, Radical and Working Class Politics: op. cit., pp. 144–205. Gollan used the expression ‘interlude of hope’ as the chapter heading covering this period.
In September 1947, Purcell as Chairman visited NSW and organised a deal with the NSW Co-operative Wholesale Society for a supply of wall tiles and reinforcing rods. According to Lewis's analysis of this society, it represented the most inflexible and doctrinaire aspects of the co-operative movement in Australia, and its management constantly tried to tie affiliated consumer co-operatives into binding and exclusive purchasing deals through it. As Lewis argued, this was contrary to the Rochdale voluntary principle. Nonetheless, Purcell took the bait. On his return he sought to organise alterations to be made to the PLC premises in order to accommodate the NSW Co-operative Wholesale Society. While the NSW society was due to pay for these alterations, it is not clear if they ever actually occurred. It was also resolved that the PLC would become shareholders in the NSW wholesale organisation and the Purchasing Officer and Secretary were ‘instructed that the New South Wales Co-operative Wholesale Society are to be the first contact when ordering supplies’.

There is no evidence that this decision was implemented, but it may have been this network which provided some materials to the co-operative venture when the normal Victorian channels were blocked. Contact between the two organisations was also maintained, as a couple of years later the NSW Co-operative Society visited the PLC in its offices at 388 Russell Street in Melbourne to discuss possible industrial development. It serves once again to reinforce the diversified nature of the PLC vision, and its desire to maintain a connection with the broader movement.

Seeking to unravel the complex web of legal, financial and business organisations which comprised the PLC scheme underscores the bravery and determination of the men and women involved in it. No risk, it seems, was too great in pursuit of a worthwhile objective. Nor were these pioneers overawed by the formal rules under which they sought to realise their vision. They were empowered by their achievements on the battlefield and by the example of other co-operatives elsewhere in Australia and as far away as a Lancashire mill town 100 years earlier. How do we then categorise this unique blend of co-operative entities which made up the PLC housing scheme. Were they Rochdale co-operatives, and if so, to what extent did they adhere to the Rochdale principles? Blnave and Patmore appear to pass judgment on whether or not an enterprise is a ‘true Rochdale co-operative.’ Would the PLC have passed such a test? These questions are discussed further in the next chapter.

168. ibid., 26 September 1947.
169. ibid., 10 October 1947.
170. ibid.
171. ibid., 1 April 1949: See also the biography of Fox in Appendix A.
Co-operation in Action

"The Prime Minister said that he admired our courage and indicated that a good manager must be appointed to be responsible for the building program."

Much of the history of co-operativism in Australia is not yet written and opportunities to examine the intricate workings of a co-operative enterprise are few and far between. The exhaustive collection of written and oral evidence used in this thesis allows us to get inside one organisation, to pull up a spare chair at a committee meeting, and to better understand its aspirations and its shortcomings. Those who have written about the co-operative movement, whether in Australia or elsewhere, have highlighted the many dilemmas that can afflict the uneducated or unwary. In previous chapters I have outlined the Rochdale principles: voluntary and open membership; democratic control (one member one vote); distribution of surplus in proportion to trade (the ‘divvy’); payment of limited interest on capital; political and religious neutrality; cash trading; and promotion of education.\(^3\)

Despite the fact that the international co-operative movement has almost invariably utilised these principles, many co-operatives discovered that they were not so easy to implement. Other issues were also important: loyalty of customers, effective distribution of goods, wholesale federation, employees as members, and the role of managers.\(^3\) For Gary Lewis:

\(^1\) PLHBCSL, Committee of Management, ‘Minutes’, agenda no 1, file no. 3, ‘Conference with Prime Minister and Mr Calwell’, 19 March 1947.


The central internal dilemma was the perpetual contest between the co-operative democracy principle and the need of co-operatives to capitalise themselves adequately. The tensions this generated produced a fatal divergence between idealists stressing co-operation's social mission and pragmatists preoccupied with its economic progress.¹⁴

These issues, and many of the co-operative dilemmas mentioned above, were confronted by the Peter Lalor Home Building Co-operative Society (PLC). In this chapter, I highlight how this highly innovative collective of co-operatives confronted almost all of these critical issues and ethical dilemmas. It demonstrates in a practical way how these people of goodwill tried to manoeuvre a passage through them with varying degrees of success. As the analysis delves more deeply into the way the scheme operated, the roles played by the main individuals emerge as a key thread in this history. I continue to assess how well each of the originators was suited to their task.

The PLC scheme had some big players on its side, including Prime Minister Ben Chifley. Peter Fox, the society's Treasurer, met with him in March 1947, and Fox considered that the meeting went well.⁵ Chifley, ever the pragmatist and the money man, provided advice, encouragement and caution in equal measure.⁶ A possible deputation to the Prime Minister had been the topic of correspondence between the society and another great labour activist, Victorian Senator Don Cameron.⁷ He was at the time the Postmaster General in the Chifley Government.⁸ Purcell knew Cameron through his earlier involvement in the Victorian Executive of the ALP and in the Trades Hall Council. Greenwood and King may well have known him through these channels as well. In the end, though, it was the Minister for Information and Immigration, Arthur Calwell—a man Purcell called his friend—who clinched the meeting.⁹ The ALP right wing Melbourne City Councillor, J.C. Madden, was also involved in the organisation of the meeting. It was Madden, and the co-operative’s Treasurer, Peter Fox, who attended.¹⁰ Fox, making no mention of Madden, recalled:

On one occasion the society needed to send a representative to meet Prime Minister Chifley, to request financial assistance. I was chosen as the

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9. Ted Purcell, transcript of interview with the author, 17 November 2006, p. 31. All further references to interviews will cite the transcriptions of the interviews. Leo’s son Ted said, ‘Dad was very, very close with Calwell. Like we’d go in there to the Labor Hour and they’d come out after Dad had finished—they’d stand on the steps of the Trades Hall there for an hour sometimes, you know, talking politics before they’d go home.’
delegate. I went to Canberra and sat in the office of Arthur Calwell all day, while waiting for the interview with the PM. Calwell talked on a wide variety of subjects that day. Chifley saw me at about seven o’clock.11

Why the Committee chose to send ‘the only Liberal’ to meet the Labor Prime Minister is hard to understand. It may have been because as Treasurer he could answer detailed financial questions; it might have been a reflection of his passionate advocacy of employment outcomes; or it might have been that he was simply the only one who could afford to go, though Greenwood could probably have covered his own costs. Perhaps the committee believed his accounting qualifications and rank of captain might give their venture credibly, even though such achievements were usually viewed with suspicion by the Labor faithful. Why Madden was there representing the society, when no other mention of him appears in any other context to do with the society, is also unclear. Nonetheless, the pair wasted no time in making the most of their opportunity to lobby on behalf of the co-operative, when they visited the national capital on 19 March 1947.

The day started with a meeting with Calwell and they sought his help to publicise the PLC through Australia House in London. Calwell agreed and suggested the society provide publicity leaflets. As if to place the situation in context, though, Calwell’s Secretary stressed to the deputation ‘that these leaflets should frankly state the housing shortage and housing material shortage in Australia’.12 Wily Calwell was undoubtedly aware too that the scarcity of international shipping immediately after the war would mean that the PLC would not be immediately overrun with potential British co-operators. Calwell and Chifley were at this time both consciously trying to walk a fine line between competing priorities: on one hand, promotion of a hugely ambitious immigration program which could provide a much needed skilled workforce for economic development, while on the other hand not inflaming the chronic housing shortage or jeopardising their policy objectives for full employment.13 On his return to Melbourne, Fox recommended to the PLC’s Committee of Management that such a leaflet be produced and sent to Calwell for distribution.14

The support of the Prime Minister provided great encouragement for the Peter Lalor group, but their specific reasons for seeing Chifley in March 1947 were more related to his role as Treasurer. The society wanted Federal Treasury support for

14. PLHBCSL, Committee of Management, ‘Minutes’ agenda, no. 2, ‘Conference with Minister for Information and Immigration’, op. cit. As already noted, Niall Brennan, son of Labor MP Frank Brennan, was probably commissioned to write the brochure called ‘Progress & Promise’ which was analysed in depth in Chapter 1. Niall Brennan was a regular visitor to the Purcell home. He taught elocution to Leo Purcell to help with his *Labor Hour* broadcasts.
the purchase of the land; they requested access to an immediate grant of £30,000 to launch their activities; they wanted Chifley to ensure the Commonwealth Bank approved their applications, both for £150,000 for each of the two co-operative building societies, and up to £1,000,000 in advances for their ambitious plans. Finally, they wanted smooth passage for import licences to ease wartime restrictions for products necessary for building homes.\(^\text{15}\)

Chifley dismissed the £1,000,000 request immediately, but told the society that he would discuss the other matters with the Commonwealth Bank.\(^\text{16}\) Treasury approval was required before the bank would approve the co-operative housing loans. Chifley may have spoken to the bank on the society’s behalf, but that did not alter the fact that there was a crushingly long delay in Treasury approval. The reason was probably as Chifley expressed it on the day: that the purchase price for the land was too high—an average of £55 per acre—compared to the bank’s valuation of £20.\(^\text{17}\) Perhaps this was the first sign that the PLC committeeemen were not good businessmen.

When Treasury did eventually sanction the deal, it approved purchase of only half the land sought. Greenwood’s message to the membership was subdued:

> You are now advised that Treasury consent to purchase half the land authorised by the members at General Meeting is received, and the half is that land abutting the line and main road. The remaining half which has been refused by the Treasury is that land furthest [sic] from the main road and the grounds for refusal were that the price asked was too high as it was the same price as that placed on the land for which consent has been given.\(^\text{18}\)

The delay had damaging consequences. After Fox’s positive feedback from the meeting with Chifley, they had assumed agreement would be immediate and they had set action in motion. Their procurement manager, L.C. Cooper, was told to prepare to build ten houses a week from 15 May 1947 and, while he did not actually spend excessively, he had to watch helplessly as scarce items, which he knew to be essential, were snapped up by others who had ready cash. For instance, by mid March he had located two ex-Army sleeping huts for the Stockade factory. They were an ideal size—sixty feet by eighteen feet—and were being sold cheaply.\(^\text{19}\) By the time Treasury approved the purchase and the Commonwealth Bank approved the loan, it was July 1947 and the huts had long since gone to another buyer.

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15. PLHBCSL, Committee of Management, ‘Minutes’, ‘Conference with Prime Minister and Mr Calwell’ op. cit.
16. ibid.
17. ibid.
Thirty thousand pounds was calculated as the amount necessary to carry the cooperative up to the end of May 1947. It would cover deposits on the land, building materials for a month, some of the machinery necessary for the building factory and—the item holding the most risk—wages for just two weeks. While the total bill for these items would be more than £38,000, members’ contributions made up the difference. The society was not directly asking the government for this money, but sought either a government guarantee for a loan from the Commonwealth Bank, or government approval ‘of an advance from the industrial section of the Commonwealth Bank’.  

The Prime Minister told Fox and Madden that as far as import licences were concerned, purchases in the Sterling Block did not require a licence, and for others an import licence should not be withheld provided the amounts involved were not substantial. Chifley, apart from telling them to get a good building manager, also expressed doubts about the effectiveness of the society’s plans for the hire of day labour. Through the day labour system building workers were employed and paid wages, and were not subcontracted at a fixed price for a job. Fox was wedded to the employment agenda and rejected Chifley’s advice. He reported:

The Prime Minister was advised that the Society’s policy was to appoint a good manager when the financial requirements of the Society are in order and that it was thought that our member builders etc. would have an incentive that was lacking ...[in other places]. It was pointed out that the Unions in Victoria desired to experiment on our project to see if day labour is satisfactory.

Overall, Fox reported back on the meeting with the Prime Minister with a great deal of satisfaction. ‘The general atmosphere of the discussion was cordial and friendly and besides giving sound advice, the Prime Minister exhibited a good deal of sympathy.’ One final piece of advice Chifley gave in passing was not to ‘make your building blocks too big, because it will be too much work for the old man.’ Oral testimony from a few of the men, sixty years later, bears out what a shrewd observer of humankind Ben Chifley was.

Fox’s assessment of the meeting was quickly reinforced, when Chifley and Calwell dropped in on a PLC Committee of Management meeting. The Peter Lalor office was opposite the Melbourne Trades Hall. Bert Gridley, a committee member, and

21. ibid.
22. ibid.
23. ibid.
24. Peter Fox, Stephenson Called Peter, op. cit., p. 52.
at that time a volunteer worker with the society, kept a diary throughout this time. His entry for 8 April conveys the impact: ‘Met Mr Chifley and Mr Calwell at PL meeting. Very thrilled.’ 26

The PLC group had good reason to feel optimistic. It had top level support and in early 1947, the Registrar-General of Co-operative Societies, A.E. Rasmussen, asked Greenwood to ‘congratulate the Committee on the thoroughness with which they had prepared the Constitution, and to congratulate them on their work’. Rasmussen also ‘wished the Society God speed’ and in line with federal government policy, he offered practical assistance: ‘that anything and everything which his Department could do to ensure its success would be forthcoming, and that this promise meant action, not words’. 27

By May, and perhaps as a result of Chifley’s intervention, the Manager of the Industrial Department of the Commonwealth Bank told Greenwood that ‘equities would have to be established by the society to obtain an advance for plant required in our undertaking, also finance available to enable us to establish a stock pile’. 28 Greenwood was ideally suited to these kinds of negotiations. He reported that the ‘interview was carried on in a most cordial atmosphere and we were assured that moneys would be available on the establishment of equities that would be smaller than is usual to other clients’. 29

Clearly the scheme was off to a flying start. How then did they succeed in their attempts to apply the Rochdale principles to their different activities? The PLC was primarily a consumer co-operative because its basic premise was to provide high quality goods—a house on a quarter acre block—to its members in accordance with the Rochdale principles. The co-operative also included a production and wholesale arm by virtue of the pre-fabrication factories, bulk-buying hardware and plumbing stores in the Stockade. The organisers believed they could reduce many of the costs that would normally accrue to a developer and they would eliminate ‘middle men’. 30 They believed that by collaborating, pooling resources, buying in bulk, buying cheap land, prefabricating on site, and doing most of the work themselves, they could keep expenses to a minimum. Their brochure, ‘Progress and Promise’, boldly announced that ‘[j]t is certain that present costs can be reduced by one-third’. 31

Because they were working men, with many from the building trades amongst their

26. Herbert Percival (Bertie) Gridley, ‘Diary’, Melbourne, 1946–47. I am indebted to Gridley’s three daughters for access to relevant references in this diary.
29. ibid.
30. Purcell would have known of the Antigonish Co-operative’s ‘Little Dover’ success through which local fishermen built their own lobster processing factory and removed the middle men who were grinding them into poverty. See Race Mathews, Jobs of Our Own: Building of a Stakeholder Society: Alternatives to the market and the state, Annandale, NSW, 1999, pp. 155–56.
membership, they expected to be able to combat the post-war shortages in skilled labour in order to deliver on their promise. Their (unofficial) links to both state and federal Labor, both of which were in office at the time, reinforced their belief that they would not be disadvantaged when it came to the necessary approvals, permits and acquisition of materials. As long as those governments were in office, they had reason to be sanguine. At the state level, Victorian Premier John Cain, Housing Minister William Barry, and Minister for Transport Clive Stoneham all appeared to help. Federally, Prime Minister Ben Chifley, Immigration Minister Arthur Calwell, Works and Housing Minister Nelson Lemmon, Minister of Post-War Reconstruction John Dedman, Postmaster General Don Cameron, Tasmanian MHR, GWA Duthie, and Victorian Senator Charles Sandford all lent their weight to the co-operative at some stage.

The PLC’s social and economic objective of affordable housing was their highest priority as in the main, their membership comprised people who had never known home ownership. Purcell espoused their motto: ‘Homes of the highest standard at a price that could be managed by all.’ The ‘Lalor pioneers’, a term they used, would almost without exception, be the first in their family’s history to own a home. In some cases, the women had worked in war industries on wages that were higher than average for women’s pay at the time, and they had managed to put a bit away. This, combined with the ex-servicemen’s deferred pay, meant that the £60 share price, plus £25 for land and £25 for a house deposit were manageable.

However, there were many members for whom this £60 financial commitment was still outside their reach. The PLC tried to find ways to help. As discussed in the previous chapter, initially the society pressed the Commonwealth Bank to accept 30 year loans for those buying the cheapest weatherboard homes. Greenwood’s contact in the Melbourne Branch of the Bank was ‘distressed’ that his central office rejected the society’s application and in effect told the PLC to fudge the figures and resubmit its request:

He suggested that we should name a reasonable percentage in reply to the bank and that the Melbourne branch would reiterate the recommendation.

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32. PLHBCSL, Committee of Management, ‘Agenda for discussion with the Prime Minister on 19 March 1947’. It stated that the membership was 511, and of these, 100 were trained in building or allied trades.
33. Stuart Hornery, A.O., ex-Chair of the property developer, Lend Lease, commented that the Peter Lalor project’s scale and timeframe were enormous. Some 4,000 people were to be accommodated in a few short years. Even developments today would find this overly ambitious, and impossible if it included approval times, which the Lalor project required.’ Stuart Hornery, correspondence with the author, 3 June 2010.
34. The extent of their support will be discussed in the next three chapters.
35. ‘The birth of Lalor’, unnamed and undated press clipping provided by Alma Boyle of Lalor. The article quoted Purcell and was written in the late 1960s.
37. See for example, Doss Lawson, interview with the author, 8 December 2005, p. 5; Lorraine Harvey, interview with the author, 1 February 2008, p. 7. See also Marilyn Lake, Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism, St Leonards, 1999, p. 188.
to Head Office that the advances be made irrespective of the percentage of timber-framed homes required by P.L. No. 2 Co-operative Housing Society. He was of the opinion that the loan would be granted under these conditions.38

The loans were approved by early June 1947.39 Later in the year the issue resurfaced, with the Registrar refusing approvals for some loans for lower income earners. The committee members were outraged. The PLC was supposed to be providing the social benefit of homes for those who could not ordinarily afford them. King and Gridley moved a motion that, for those ineligible for PL nos. 1 and 2 loans, as many as possible be referred to the War Service Homes Division (WSHD) which had more lenient conditions than the PLC financing societies were allowed to offer.40 If this avenue was not possible, the parent body should look at taking out a second mortgage for the difference required before a loan approval would be granted.41 The first proposal was implemented. The second proposal was heart-felt but impractical and never eventuated.

Confronted by this clash between their social aims and government regulation, Purcell and Greenwood again utilised their contacts. This time it was Victorian ALP Senator, Charles Walter Sandford, who took up the PLC cause with the Federal Minister for Works and Housing, Nelson Lemmon. He asked for financial assistance for PLC members through the War Service Homes Act. In late 1947 Lemmon organised for the Lalor committee to meet with Sydney Lucas, the Director of the WSHD in Melbourne, to discuss how the two organisations could work together to achieve their mutual aims.42 As a minimum, this meeting may have smoothed the way for potential Lalor residents to access War Service Homes loans in a timely way.43 Records of the meeting suggested that WSHD officials ‘were as helpful as it was possible to be’.44 By December 1947 the committee had decided to hold a meeting of all members of the PL Co-operative Housing Societies to advise them of the advantages of switching to a War Service Homes loan, and offering PL no. 1 and no. 2 financing opportunities for the places vacated to other members still seeking

40. A comprehensive coverage of WSHD lending after WWII can be found in M.R. Hill, Housing Finance in Australia 1945–56, Melbourne, 1959, especially Chapter 4.
42. Correspondence between Nelson Lemmon and Senator Sandford, 18 November 1947. I am indebted to the Purcell family for making this letter available, personal papers of Leo Purcell, in possession of Leonie Purcell, Melbourne, 2006.
43. M.R. Hill, Housing Finance in Australia 1945–56, Melbourne, 1959, p. 57, reported that because of the lag in approvals for WSHD loans, people needed to find temporary finance. This is what many ex-servicemen in Lalor did. They used the PL financing societies as bridging loans until the more lenient WSHD finance became available. Also in 1947 a change to the Act encouraged the WSHD to begin group building schemes but it could not find builders. Hill continued, ‘in an effort to overcome the difficulties of securing builders the Division also encouraged co-operative building schemes among applicants.’ p. 55.
finance. They were also able to refer others to WSHD who had not been successful with a PL loan. At least this helped the low income earners who were eligible ex-servicemen.

Together with affordable housing, full employment was the other major policy aim. The society had within its ‘Rules’ the power to take full advantage of the Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1928, and to ‘establish, acquire, carry on, and conduct at any place or places within the State of Victoria any business trade or industry for the benefit of members as may be considered desirable’. The brochure held the promise:

The Society has also introduced a scheme guaranteeing employment in time of depression. This scheme has been examined by, and a promise of assistance received from the Minister for Postwar Reconstruction.

Fox and Madden had visited the Minister for Post-War Reconstruction, John Dedman, during their Canberra visit in March 1947 and discussed the PLC’s forward-thinking proposals for delivering on the federal government’s full employment agenda. It was as if they saw themselves as a ‘co-operative’ arm of government. And why wouldn’t they? They had read the government’s white paper, Full Employment in Australia which had been tabled in Parliament in May 1945. H.C. (Nugget) Coombs, who was Head of the Department of Post-War Reconstruction, and a former teacher of Fox at Perth Modern School, was reinforcing the messages as well. In a speech delivered in July 1944 Coombs had broadcast the government’s intention to work much more closely with industry to ensure increased investment and enhanced economic development. Government would have a greater say in determining the location and nature of industrial development and full employment would be one outcome of this controlled economic growth. It was against this background that Fox boldly explained to Dedman how the PLC was able to assist. Employment policy was, after all, Fox’s passion and industry development was a part of their co-operative plan. When the government spoke to ‘industry’, the PLC listened and responded. What the co-operative members naively did not realise was that ‘industry’ would be reluctant to include a co-operative enterprise as part of their club.

At the meeting in Canberra, Fox explained to Dedman that employment creation was one of the ‘Rules’ of the Society and ‘for which purpose it is proposed to

45. ibid., 6, 8, & 13 December 1947.
47. ibid.
49. Robin Gollan, Revolutionaries and Reformists: Communism and the Australian Labour Movement 1920–1955, Canberra, 1975, pp. 111–112. By the time of Fox’s visit, though, the 1944 and 1946 powers referenda had been lost.
establish an employment capital fund of £70,000', though this amount would be reviewed when better industry development statistics were available.\textsuperscript{50} Fox's plans were grand. He reported back to the Committee of Management saying that he believed that 'the Society will be called upon to provide employment for certain persons not provided for by the government's plan.\textsuperscript{51} With a touch of arrogance, he had requested that Dedman provide the society with up-to-date information on unemployment rates and an estimate of those likely to need work on a month by month basis. He also asked Dedman to inform him of the most appropriate industries for the PLC to establish, in order to deliver on its full employment agenda. Dedman politely referred Fox to the Commonwealth Employment Service for the unemployment information, and proposed an office could be opened in Lalor. He also asked the PLC to resubmit the industry development request in a few months when he had better information about economic development options.\textsuperscript{52} Under these circumstances Fox believed the society should limit its plans and:

a. Draw up a general emergency plan to meet the difficulties of a depression.

b. To provide the employment Committee [of the Society, Chaired by Fox himself] with day to day statistics on which to base immediate plans for employment for those requiring work from day to day.\textsuperscript{53}

Reporting that they needed to await advice about appropriate industries that could be expanded 'to meet an emergency and yet still pay for itself', Fox continued:

In conjunction with such an industry it will be necessary in an extreme emergency to introduce public expenditure by the suburb on such things as improvements to the suburb, e.g., building a town hall, etc; the amount of £70,000 was mentioned to the Minister as I considered that a fund of at least that amount will be required to provide emergency employment.\textsuperscript{54}

Dedman's response that he would be 'pleased to help us in any way he can' was optimistically interpreted by Fox as a 'promise of assistance' which appeared in their brochure.\textsuperscript{55} Fox did not understand how government ministers could finesse their language when faced with difficult propositions.

It is important to reiterate that for those who had grown up during the depression, the scourge of unemployment was still fresh in their minds. They were not to know

\textsuperscript{51} ibid.
\textsuperscript{52} ibid.
\textsuperscript{53} ibid.
\textsuperscript{54} ibid.
\textsuperscript{55} ibid.
that an extended period of relatively smooth economic growth lay ahead. However, Fox’s policies to generate employment added further layers of complexity to their co-operative housing scheme, which brought to the fore the conflict between their social ideals and the reality of their economic situation. And this employment policy had not been worked through in Purcell and Greenwood’s initial deliberations. Almost certainly Greenwood cautioned against the co-operative taking on more than it could handle and it is not hard to imagine the heated debate that ensued. For co-operators this was a well trodden path. As British economist C.R. Fay had warned, regarding a Rochdale store:

When [workers]...spend their wages at their cooperative store, their object is not to employ as many workers as possible, but to get the best value for their money....The store...is not cluttered up with workshops that have been started to provide employment.\textsuperscript{56}

By mid to late 1948, as the society struggled with escalating costs and fixed-price contracts for houses, their labour-hire and employment policies were seriously called into question. There was internal bickering and there were accusations of mismanagement, but in fact their explicit policy had been to employ bricklayers on wages to guarantee their employment. The problems arose when these men had to be paid, even though the society could not access bricks or cement for several months. Chifley had warned them about this. Other men with minimal skills were hired as part of an explicit labour hire program. But without the necessary government support and confronted with unreliable delivery of essential materials, the co-operative found itself unable to adequately train them for the urgent and skilled nature of the work at hand, despite the existence of the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme (CRITS) to which some of the men had signed. In many ways the PLC foreshadowed aspects of the more sophisticated labour market programs which were introduced in the 1990s by the Hawke-Keating government under the Working Nation banner.\textsuperscript{57} For a non-government organisation in the late 1940s, however, the employment agenda simply served to place additional stress on the already stretched finances and management capability of the PLC. The fact that the £70,000 that Fox thought might come from Dedman did not come to pass, eventually only made matters worse.

Imagination, optimism and a good cause were a heady mix. Affordable housing, ambitious though it was as an objective, was not enough. For them affordable homes had to be part of communities. Such a breadth of vision carried with it the need to provide the social and economic infrastructure that would breathe life into their communities. One explicit aim was:

\textsuperscript{56} C.R. Fay, \textit{Co-Operation at Home and Abroad}, op. cit., p. 43.
\textsuperscript{57} See for example, P.N. Junankar & Cezary A. Kapuscinski, \textit{Was Working Nation Working?} <http://hdl.handle.net/1085/41755>, Graduate Program in Public Policy, RSSS, ANU, 1997.
To provide, sponsor, and encourage within the garden suburbs and community settlements such social activities, amenities, and services (including co-operative trading activities) as may from time to time be considered desirable, especially those which foster the growth of active community spirit.\(^{58}\)

In discussing the PLC’s arrangements, Robin Boyd stated that ‘the new town is planned to provide co-operative trading and entertainment in which everyone will share the expenses and the profit’.\(^{59}\) Eve Guy reported in the *Women’s Weekly* in early 1949, after interviewing Alf Greenwood, that:

> The overall plan for the new suburb of Lalor includes parks, wide tree-lined streets, avenues of shops and offices, factory areas, generous playing fields, and a unique community centre with a restaurant, beer garden, a theatre for concerts, plays and art exhibitions, a library, modern swimming baths, tennis courts, billiard rooms, dance palais, picture theatre.\(^{60}\)

This community centre was most likely to have been situated in Rochdale Square and would be the place-based heart of the community. Their grand plans for other amenities included co-operative management of a medical centre, a hospital, sporting grounds and community garden. One acre in every eight was to be set aside for parks and children’s playgrounds. All were to be communally owned. In addition there was provision for an adequate number of churches and schools on specifically dedicated land.\(^{61}\)

Their ‘Rules’, nonetheless, adhered as closely as was practicable to the Rochdale principles. They provided for two kinds of membership: initial membership and full membership, the difference being the quantum of the membership fee that was paid. Full membership consisted of the purchase of one share valued at £10. Initial membership was subject to payment of a £1 application fee and acceptance of the application by the Committee of Management with the remainder of the fee paid by instalments.\(^{62}\) Each member was allowed only one share and one vote, confirming the democratic principle. The net profits of the society were to be distributed in the following way:

> a. 5 per cent. of net profits shall be set aside as an education fund.

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\(^{58}\) PLHBCSL, ‘*Rules*,’ op. cit., p. 1.

\(^{59}\) Robin Boyd, ‘*How to Make a Suburb*,’ ‘Small Homes Section’, *The Age*, 14 April 1948, p. 3.

\(^{60}\) Eve Guy, ‘Ex-servicemen help to build each other’s homes’, *Australian Women’s Weekly*, 8 January 1949, pp. 44–45.


\(^{62}\) PLHBCSL, ‘*Rules*,’ op. cit., p. 2.
b. 45 per cent. of the net profit shall be paid into a consolidated fund to be used in the business of the Society.

c. 50 per cent. of the net profit shall be rebated to the members in the proportion of their purchase.63

Clearly the society adopted the ‘divvy’ principle and the requirement for promotion of education. The 45 per cent allocated for the business of the society was initially to fund the ongoing capital investments in the building and construction workshops. By the time Eve Guy was writing in January 1949, Greenwood believed that 45 per cent of profits from all the anticipated trading enterprises would soon be reserved for ‘community activities, such as hospitals, crèches, and kindergartens’.64 By this means, this working-class co-operative sought to build their community and its essential physical, economic and social infrastructure. There was still no mention of the role governments might play. At this level at least they were planning to go it alone.

Their plans for medical services provide a good example of the breadth of their vision. Early in January 1948 a medical practitioner, Dr Hughes, wrote asking if he could establish a medical practice in the new housing estate at Lalor. Fox and Gridley moved a motion at the Committee of Management meeting that ‘a Medical scheme be prepared for the members of Lalor for consideration by the next General Meeting’.65 The proposal was to be for a co-operatively run clinic through which the PLC would employ its own doctor. In the meantime, though, they agreed to respond to Hughes’ letter by informing him that his application would be considered along with others, so that a doctor could be in residence by March 1948.66 Hughes was not heard from again, but it was, after all, private practitioners who were the first doctors to service Lalor: Drs Bacon and Wilson.67

In keeping with their mission of remembrance and rehabilitation, they agreed that ‘the Chairman and Manager be authorised to sound out the R.S.L. to sponsor our Hospital as a Memorial to the Nursing Sisters of the Services’.68 The hospital

63. Ibid., p. 9.
64. Eve Guy, ‘Ex-servicemen help to build each other’s homes’, op. cit., pp. 44–45.
66. Ibid.
67. Dr Bacon was the father to five children of whom Jim Bacon, formerly Premier of Tasmania and journalist Wendy Bacon, are the best known. The two first doctors were mentioned in many interviews. According to Harry Fielding (interview with Ruth Ford, 19 November 1998, pp. 190–191) Bacon was an ex-servicemen, who had been an Army doctor with the 2/19 Battalion and wounded at Tobruk. The ex-service members of the PLHB CSL always asked to see Dr Bacon of the Oakland Clinic in Reservoir. Once a week the two Doctors used a room in the Symes’ home, and later had a surgery in the Stockade. The Reservoir Chemist, Val Preston, would collect the prescriptions from the Doctors at the end of surgery, fill and scripts and deliver them to the newly occupied Lalor households.
68. PLHB CSL, Committee of Management, ‘Minutes’, 2 January 1948. The gendered aspects of this co-operative will be considered in Chapter 7.
was to be managed by the not-for-profit Returned Nurses’ Association.\(^6\) In a similar vein, the co-operative commenced discussion with the ‘Rehabilitation Department’ as a means of both establishing a market garden and assisting with this necessary employment service for ex-servicemen and women damaged by their war experience.\(^7\)

It is very clear, therefore, that the PLC was no ordinary Rochdale consumer co-operative. The most glaring omission from the principles was that there was no explicit statement about ‘voluntary and open membership’ or ‘political and religious neutrality’ in the ‘Rules’. Statements about the open, non-political, non-sectarian nature of the society had been made from the first meeting, so it may have been assumed that, as the ‘Rules’ did not express any restrictions on membership, it must therefore be open.\(^8\)

In terms of the Rochdale principle which limited interest on capital, Gary Johns believed that the society offered two and half per cent interest on share capital, though there is no evidence in the co-operative’s records that this amount was ever paid.\(^9\) According to the ‘Rules’, the society anticipated having 5,000 members, all paying £10 for a share, providing capital of £50,000.\(^10\) In the end, membership reached less than half of this figure, which was nonetheless a very significant number of families to have been involved. The highest reported number of shares issued was 2,463, though some members had by then taken out more than one share.\(^11\) There had also been a significant number of withdrawals, partly because shareholders were able to find other means of solving their housing difficulties, and these shares were usually transferred to new members, thereby increasing the overall numbers involved.\(^12\)

There was considerable confusion amongst the membership about how the scheme would work, and while the organisation tried to educate them, the committee struggled to keep its membership abreast of the Rochdale-style principles they were to follow. As we have seen, initially they screened films describing the Rochdale system. Books about Rochdale were circulating amongst the membership and the 1941 book by McKay and French would almost certainly have been on the reading list. The Committee of Management was itself also alive to the need to understand co-operative developments and, at their third meeting in February 1947, agreed that the Secretary Greenwood ‘should select and purchase books for the Library for the

\(^{69}\) The Age, 5 April 1949, p. 3.

\(^{70}\) PLHBCSL, Committee of Management, ‘Minutes’, 26 November 1948.


\(^{74}\) PLHBCSL, Committee of Management, ‘Minutes’, 12 August 1948.

\(^{75}\) ibid. The minutes reflect these transactions at almost every meeting, at least throughout 1947.
committee'. In April the PLC made contact with the British Trade Commissioner, initially to ascertain if baths, basins and electric stoves could be brought from Britain, but those present took the opportunity to quiz him on the working of co-operative societies. Nonetheless there were stumbling blocks which further serve to illustrate how closely the PLC venture reflected the issues afflicting the broader co-operative movement. Their failure to fulfil the education principle meant that many members of the co-operative’s Committee of Management were unfamiliar with the co-operative principles they were trying to administer, and many later residents were completely ignorant of their import. This was perhaps one of the reasons why the co-operative roots of this scheme have been forgotten by many.

The first major clash with the Rochdale principles was whether or not to allow for members to accumulate credit with the society. As Chairman Purcell well knew, cash trading was a fundamental tenet that would be broken at their peril. At the March meeting in 1947, Fox as Treasurer recommended that the society should allow credit. The Chairman ruled against it. What followed was a very heated and acrimonious debate. Purcell vacated the chair. His Deputy, Bill King, took over and there was a vote which only disallowed credit by virtue of the acting Chairman’s casting vote. Fox, not satisfied, moved that the matter be considered again at the next meeting, at which the motion was passed. Lobbying had occurred between meetings. When the committee reconvened on 27 March, a note was circulated explaining the ‘interpretation from the Chairman [sic] ruling that this Society is not permitted to grant credit’. Purcell appeared on the back foot from the start. Clearly under pressure, and possibly torn by the heart-wrenching nature of the issue, he explained that ‘on giving his ruling ...[it] was to be interpreted in the most liberal sense’. The arguments put in favour of granting credit were in part because the committee was striving to confront the pressing needs of the low income membership, as was the usual issue for co-operatives. So, in line with the dilemma painted by Lewis, the long term financial viability of the society, and hence its capacity to deliver on the dream of home ownership, was potentially put in jeopardy by the urgent and legitimate needs of poor householders. And, as Purcell had told the Whittlesea Post only a week earlier, the housing crisis was producing devastating personal tragedies among those who were not even the very poorest people:

These were not requests from social outcasts, but from men and women who would despise, under ordinary circumstances, any person who begged

76. ibid., 28 February 1947.
77. PLHBCSL, Committee of Management, Mr L. C. Cooper, Procurement Manager, ‘Report’, no. 4, 26 April 1947.
78. C. R. Fay, Co-Operation at Home and Abroad, op. cit., p. 325.
80. ibid., 27 March 1947, file note, no. 5.
81. ibid.
82. See pp. 90–91 above.
for assistance. However, caught up in the set of circumstances, they are in a desperate plight and are searching every possible avenue to obtain reasonable housing accommodation.\textsuperscript{83}

Fox argued before the Committee of Management:

It may be necessary to assist certain members in building their homes by allowing them to owe the Society an amount equivalent to 50% of the rebate which would be refunded on his house.\textsuperscript{84}

Fox bolstered his argument with a comment that:

It is also thought that housewives would desire to open monthly accounts for the purchase of such things as groceries and such a purchase is generally allowed in the co-operative suburbs around Melbourne.\textsuperscript{85}

The point which probably swung the meeting was that, in this time of chronic material shortages, it may be necessary to lend to their vendors just to be assured of their ‘complete output’ coming to the society.\textsuperscript{86} In the end Fox won the battle; in fact he won more than he had sought. Members were allowed credit to the value of their ‘estimated rebates on purchases to date and the value of their share’. Important, it was at the discretion of Treasurer Fox, ‘provided he is satisfied that the financial position of the society is sufficiently strong to adopt that policy’.\textsuperscript{87} A year or so later, when the society faced financial difficulty, it transpired that Fox—a qualified accountant—did not know, nor did he inquire into, the means of calculating the pricing of the homes, and therefore the reliability of the rebate, and he was ignorant of the overall financial position of the society when he argued the case for credit.\textsuperscript{88} The Rochdale cash trading principle had been included because earlier experience had demonstrated that long term co-operative survival depended upon it.\textsuperscript{89} As for the vendors, the Committee of Management was more circumspect and agreed that ‘credit will only be granted to persons other than members with the approval of the Committee’.\textsuperscript{90} From the start, the society was undercapitalised. The decision on cash trading served to limit its capital even further.

This incident, within only four months of their formation, laid a pattern of personal differences which flared periodically over the next two years and undermined the

\textsuperscript{83} Whittlesea Post, 5 March 1947, back page.
\textsuperscript{84} PLHBCSL, Committee of Management, ‘Minutes’, 27 March 1947, File Note Number 5.
\textsuperscript{85} ibid.
\textsuperscript{86} ibid.
\textsuperscript{87} ibid.
\textsuperscript{88} ibid., 23 March 1948.
\textsuperscript{89} Johnston Birchall, Co-op. op. cit., p. 31.
\textsuperscript{90} PLHBCSL, Committee of Management, ‘Minutes’, 27 March 1947, File Note Number 5.
brotherhood and solidarity, or 'group cohesion', needed to successfully execute their ambitious plan. The argument between the Chairman and the Treasurer created a rift that never properly healed. Increasingly, Greenwood sided with Purcell, and King sided with Fox. As for the Treasurer's role, Fox was nothing short of negligent and of all the men in the originating group he was the least suited to his task. With hindsight, it was undoubtedly a pity that Purcell and others on the Committee allowed themselves to be persuaded by him. Greenwood was a match for Fox, but did not always win the numbers on the Committee of Management.

The cash trading principle, however, only applied to full members, who had by definition fully paid for one share. To be eligible to be included in a ballot for a block of land each member was required to pay £25 for the land, and a further £25 as a deposit on a house, although the cost of land soon increased to £35. In some cases these amounts were paid as cash up front.91 An exception was made, though, for all ex-service members in order to meet their implicit objective of rehabilitation support. In praising the scheme, contemporary commentator and architect Robin Boyd noted that, '[x]servicemen may even start with less money, if they pledge the £25 advance from their gratuity.92

The selling price for building blocks was another issue that caused misunderstanding. 'Progress and Promise' led prospective members to believe that the land would be sold to them cheaply. It stated:

> The Society is offering building sites at broadacre value instead of sub-division value. The blocks are being offered at £25 and this may still further be reduced by rebates upon finalisation of sales and conclusion of the sub-division plan.93

Later, Secretary Greenwood clarified the 'confusion in some of the members' minds as to what the contract price for their homes should be'. He reiterated the 'Rochdale Principle of Co-operative Trading'.94 Seeking to explain in simple terms the way the 'divvy' worked, he explained that the co-operative society would make what was called 'a first charge' which was always the market value of the commodity irrespective of whether it was 'land, the house, or subsequently an item of Grocery'.95 Later it would be possible to reimburse members as savings were made by co-operative efforts. That was the dividend (or 'divvy') that was reimbursed to members. Greenwood continued:

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91. PLHBCSL, 'Progress & Promise', op. cit.
92. ibid., p. 3.
94. ibid.
95. ibid.
For instance, we consider that the market price of the land before any building took place at Thomastown was £25 a block and members were charged accordingly. Whereas, the land account now reveals that there will be a rebate of £4 in each £25 sale. Likewise, for the building, the members will contract or buy their home for the current market price which we know will allow an almost immediate rebate of 2/- in £1.\(^6\)

In reality, the co-operative was not successful in buying the land at broad-acre rates. The shrewd farmers who saw the needy co-operators on their doorsteps concurred with the PLC’s assessment that this was ‘the only obtainable land of the required acreage within 15 miles of Melbourne’ and charged real estate prices: hence the Commonwealth Bank’s assessment that the price was too high.

To further reinforce to members that their society was properly established according to Rochdale principles, Greenwood elaborated with one further example:

> When you start to trade with the store you will pay the ordinary trade price for butter, bread, etc., and at the end of each accounting period it will be revealed at what rate a rebate can be made to the members from the Trading Accounts, as distinct from the Land and Building Accounts.\(^7\)

At this stage at least the society was handling the discrete aspects of its co-operative arrangements by separate accounting methods, though as their financial worries escalated, these delineations gradually blurred.

When the Prime Minister advised the PLC to appoint a good manager to take care of the building program, he was stating the obvious. As a developer, the society had a complex logistical exercise on its hands with war-time government regulations applying restrictively on many aspects of the building process, and a chronic shortage of materials and skilled labour. The co-operative had hoped to use many of its members as skilled tradesmen on the building work, but delays in attaining financial approval meant that most were already in steady work by the time the building operations began in late 1947. A co-operative enterprise added another layer of decision making to the mix.

For the co-operative movement more generally, Balnave and Patmore have highlighted ‘the potential for tension between shareholders, management committees and appointed managers that led to poor business decisions’.\(^8\)

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*PLHBCSL, Committee of Management, ‘Minutes’, 13 March 1947.*


*Nikola Balnave & Greg Patmore, ‘Localism and Rochdale Co-Operation: The Junee District Co-Operative Society’, *Labour History*, no. 91, 2006, p. 50. This was also the experience in the UK. See, for example, C.R. Fay, *Co-Operation at Home and Abroad*, op. cit., p. 151.*
The democratic principle, so close to the hearts of these men who wanted to take control over their own lives, had to be balanced against the needs of a building program which required quick and decisive action and clear lines of accountability. Again the PLC provides an insight into how this issue played out in practice.

When Russell left the society in January 1947, we have seen that Greenwood resigned as Chairman and took over acting in the role of Secretary until the matter was resolved. In February the society appointed Mr L.C. Cooper as the procurement manager, charged with responsibility ‘to buy materials for 10 houses a week, using 15/5/47 as the target for commencement’. Greenwood gained two months leave from his employer, the Wheat Board, and commenced working full-time for the co-operative from mid March when the society agreed to reimburse him for his loss of salary. The democratically elected management committee was nonetheless hands-on and interventionist to the point of meddling. While Greenwood was an administrative manager, dealing with banks, establishing the housing finance societies, handling members’ queries and the like, it was the Committee of Management that in fact tried to manage the building program. It divided itself into four sub-Committees: the Procurement Committee, the Contracts Board, the Finance Committee and the Land Committee. The Building Committee was added shortly afterwards. Additional members were co-opted on to these committees to help with the workload. By May the co-operative had called for applications for the position of building supervisor despite there not yet being any approval for the purchase of the land. At least they were taking Chifley’s advice seriously.

Even at this early stage, the Committee of Management realised that there was a major logistical problem looming, in the main caused by failure to gain Treasury approval to buy land. Greenwood voiced his frustration about the lack of progress on many fronts, and the Committee of Management agonised over their failure to ‘lay down a definite plan of procurement and the position in regard to the progress that should have been made to this point in the land, plant and supplies’. Again they called on one of their friends in government and the ‘Secretary was instructed to keep Mr A.A. Calwell fully informed as to the position re Treasury Consent’. If they ever were, they were no longer going it alone.

100. ibid., 17 March 1947. Leo’s son Frank recalled, ‘I remember being quite stunned when Alf Greenwood took the job with them...because he was obviously an accountant of some kind and he could do books. And he was an educated man, by our standards anyway...I don’t know how they paid him, but anyway they did somehow.’ Frank Purcell, interview with the author, 20 April 2007, p. 15.
102. ibid., 23 May 1947.
103. ibid.
104. ibid., 6 June 1947.
By mid year 1947, Bill King urged the Committee of Management to focus on a real plan of action. Called the ‘Organisation of Works Plan’, King’s military background surfaced as he called for ‘an organised plan of campaign’. He itemised the tasks, and the order in which they must be done, including the bureaucratic hurdles to be jumped before real action could proceed. He understood clearly the need for the parent body and the two finance societies to work in complete collaboration because ‘no construction can commence until an advance has been approved to a member by one of the finance societies as the act forbids an advance for the purchase of a building under construction.’ The committee understood that they would suffer significant cash-flow problems unless houses could be built quickly. He begged the committee to set aside a whole day to work through a project plan. It appears unlikely that they agreed with his request. Ultimately, though, while his analysis of the tasks at hand was useful, he failed to address the one major issue which was immediately within their control to fix: the confusion of roles between the managers, the sub-committees, the Committee of Management and the membership.

In mid 1947 Rennie Beale Edward was employed as the Building Supervisor. As another member of the AA Pay Corps District Accounts Office, he was known to most of the committee for his work during the war. He had been seconded to the Procurement Committee in January. He had served three years in the Army Workshops in different parts of Victoria, reaching the rank of Warrant Officer Grade II, and it was this experience that was called on to handle the building program at Lalor. It is not clear if he was co-opted either because no-one more suitable applied or because he was well known to the committee. He had worked as a clerk prior to enlistment and it is hard to assess if he had gained the necessary skills though his time in the AA Pay Corps. In any event, he seemed a decent man who tried his best under difficult circumstances.

By November 1947 Greenwood had been made General Manager ‘to devote the whole of his attention to carrying out of the Policy and Development programme of the Society’. He relinquished his position as Secretary of the PI No. 1 and No. 2 Co-operative Housing Societies and the role was taken by Terry Collins from the Trades Hall. Greenwood had, nonetheless, established these co-operative financing societies on a firm financial footing. World War I veteran, Noel McHaffie, was appointed Secretary/Accountant of the PLC. Fox had wanted the job as General Manager, but would not work with Purcell unless his powers as Chairman were curtailed. Fox wanted all matters of policy decided by the Committee of Management.

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106. The first reference to him is his building supervisor’s report in September 1947 though he may have been doing the job prior to that. See PLHBCSL Committee of Management ‘Minutes’, 12 September 1947.
Management, but Purcell was of a character to impulsively decide and act, and inform the committee later. From Purcell’s perspective, he consistently used his various networks to get action happening, and it was not always feasible to check everything back with the committee. None of the issues on which Purcell took unilateral action was large on its own, but together they represented a significant level of intervention. As for Fox, we have seen that as Treasurer, he paid scant attention to the society’s finances, and there is no evidence that, contrary to Chifley’s advice, ‘management by committee’ was appropriate for such a complex project.\textsuperscript{111}

By the end of 1947 the co-operative was in financial difficulty and following bickering within the Committee of Management, Bert Gridley and Leslie Blizzard considered it necessary to move a motion of confidence in Greenwood as General Manager. Significantly, King and Fox dissented. Throughout the next six months there was ongoing alarm about the society’s capacity to survive financially and in mid 1948 there was a vote of no confidence in Greenwood which was supported by the builder John (Jack) Harvey as well. Again it was unsuccessful, though the alliance of King, Fox and Harvey remained a fairly solid voting block within the committee from that time onward. The upshot of the meeting was that McHaffie was sacked as Secretary/Accountant and Greenwood was appointed Manager-Secretary for an interim period. The sub-committee system continued with the Committee of Management still running the business. The Manager and the Building Supervisor each reported independently through sub-committees to the main Committee of Management.\textsuperscript{112} The democratic principle was operating but was leading to poor business decisions. It was also at this meeting in mid 1948 that for the first time the system of day labour was abandoned and a contract labour system commenced.\textsuperscript{113} Their employment objectives had to be subjugated for the overall survival of the society. Greenwood had his way at last on this issue at least. Surely it was not lost on the management group that such social safety-net policies were not critical in times of labour shortages.

A long report from Greenwood mid 1948 highlighted the management confusion. Even as General Manager, he had exercised no control over McHaffie’s work, and it appeared that the society’s accounts were in disarray. What had Treasurer Fox been doing? Greenwood was angry. His disdain for many on the committee was clear from these words of advice he gave to them:

\begin{quote}
    they should as far as possible refrain from giving direction to those whose responsibility it was to conduct the Society’s activities at a profit.
    He contended that decisions in Committee such as the Committee’s first decision to employ all labour available irrespective of quality, and to employ
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{111} See a biography of Fox in Appendix A.
\textsuperscript{112} PLHBCSL, Committee of Management, ‘Minutes’, 17 May 1947.
\textsuperscript{113} ibid.
bricklayers before bricks were available on the site ..., had contributed to the loss in construction, and had therefore been an infringement on the works supervisor’s department, and he at least could not be asked to accept any responsibility in these decisions.\footnote{114}

He argued that all departments should report through him as Manager and he would report to the committee. Greenwood finally pointed out that ‘he had no power to dismiss or discipline either the Architect, the works supervisor, or the Secretary, when that post existed.’\footnote{115} Management by many had resulted in chaos.

By August 1948, Greenwood and Rennie Edward had resigned. The committee tried to persuade both to stay, but Edward would not. Scapegoats were found but ultimately Edward somewhat laconically contended that ‘supplies were the key thing, and always governed production’.\footnote{116} Unexpectedly, it was Fox who asked Greenwood to stay on for three months. Greenwood reluctantly agreed to withdraw his resignation provided ‘the Manager be given full control of the Society’s management’.\footnote{117} The committee agreed. It became clear later that Greenwood’s bargaining power was strong. The Commonwealth Bank would foreclose on the society if Greenwood was not the Manager.\footnote{118} It, at least, had confidence in him.

The controlling role of the Manager did not last long before it was questioned again. Committeeman Stephan Neate in February 1949 tried to wind back the clock when he proposed a ‘Re-organisation of the Society’. In essence he wanted an organisation with no manager and departmental heads reporting to sub-committees of the Committee of Management. He also made it clear that he, for one, did not have any broader social agenda. He wanted his ‘divvy’. He said:

> the sooner we got back to the principles laid down by the pioneers of this movement the sooner we would achieve our goal, namely the first dividend. He wanted to see the Committee shoulder their responsibilities and face facts, and take charge of the show and remove all dead wood on what promised to be a flourishing show, but is not a co-operative Society in any sense of the word.\footnote{119}

Neate’s proposal did not gain acceptance, but it served again to demonstrate the extent to which the democracy principle and the role of a manager remained a highly contested issue in the co-operative.
Faced by mounting debt early in 1949, the society was refused the additional £20,000 it sought from the Commonwealth Bank, so the co-operative began a search for another organisation that might refinance their operations. In the meantime there was a significant reduction in the building operations of the co-operative, with almost all Peter Lalor home building ceasing except for that support which was provided through the Stockade production factory for the syndicate group building system (which will be discussed further below). Greenwood finally resigned in March and Fox took over the role of Manager in April 1949, but not before Greenwood and Purcell had spoken again to Senator Sandford who had discussed the matter with the Prime Minister and the Minister for Works and Housing and a partial solution had been found to the society's financial crisis. Another meeting was arranged with Sydney Lucas, Director of the WSHD in Melbourne, and Greenwood announced to the committee that it seemed likely that as many as 500 blocks could be bought by the WSHD for £35 each, producing £17,500, a figure close to the required amount. In the event, in August 1949, the WSHD bought 483 blocks at £33 each, for a total of £16,085 greatly alleviating the co-operative's financial distress.

As Greenwood departed, his friend and colleague Leo Purcell wrote a reference which is worth quoting at length because it provides a brilliant summary of the state of play. As ever, Leo put the most positive interpretation on the situation:

As Manager he was responsible for all the functions of the Society, the purchase of our estate and its subdivision, obtaining the services from public bodies, purchase of plant and building supplies to enable the society to commence operations. During the last year he also took over the duties of Secretary which included the control of our accounts. By April 1949, what had been three farms at Thomastown had commenced to transform into a Model Suburb. There are over fifty homes completed and about the same number in progress. Huttage for joinery, plumbing, pre-cutting and tile making shops and for storage and office space were completed. Also the Society had established and is conducting a General Store, a Joinery Shop, a cement tile factory, a hardware and builders supply store a pre-cutting shop and timber yard. All this was done between October 1947 and April 1949 which was the hardest period for supplies the building trade has known. Concurrently with all this Mr Greenwood found time to form

\[120. \text{ ibid., 24 January 1947.}
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\[121. \text{ ibid., 4 February 1949.}
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\[122. \text{ ibid., 18 February 1949.}
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\[123. \text{ WSHD, 'Disposal of Land', NAA, MP599/i/14990, Melbourne, 24 April 1956. This will be discussed further in Chapter 6.}
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two co-operative housing societies, each with a government guarantee of £150,000.124

The PLC had modelled itself on Rochdale principles but its diversified activities place it as a hybrid which defies neat categorisation into any one of the normal co-operative entities. Leo Purcell believed that all aspects of economic life could be co-operatively organised and he at least did not seek to draw distinctions between production, wholesaling and consumer activities. Frank Purcell, penning the concepts dear to his father’s heart had stated, ‘If the country was run on nearly 100% co-operative basis, every family would have some basic interest which would, through co-operation between co-operative societies, give them an interest in every co-operatively run industry such as mining, steel works and factories.’125 Within Australia more broadly the co-operative movement seemed unable to draw together the strands of producer, consumer and wholesale co-operatives into a unified movement. At Lalor, though, this was exactly what they attempted. Co-operative principles formed the basis of their actions and their dilemmas.

The PLC included secondary or industrial production in its suite of co-operative activities, the diversity of which is clear from the Purcells’ reference cited above. Within the Stockade construction fortress, the co-operators manufactured tiles. Their joinery and pre-fabrication workshop pre-cut timber frames for houses, and manufactured windows and doors. While initially looking to supply their own needs, the PLC intended also to become a wholesale distribution network for others across Victoria. Ultimately, the society collaborated with others to buy and operate a co-operative brick kiln for the manufacture of bricks. At Lalor, they built in the order of 40 houses, erected the frames for about 30 more, and had footings in place for another 20 or so. They built, or partly built, about 90 houses in total.126 When the PLC stopped building houses, the Committee of Management also organised for a co-operative, syndicate building scheme to continue the work, whereby people banded together to build their own houses, using Peter Lalor house plans, Stockade products and under the watchful eye of Peter Lalor builders as supervisors. At least another 40 homes were built in this way. By 1954 there were approximately 200 houses in Lalor, built under the auspices of the PLC scheme.127

While the factories themselves were managed through the PLC structure, it is unlikely that on a day-to-day basis, there was much industrial democracy on the worksite. But they were an example of how a consumer co-operative developed the manufacture of secondary products—‘a production facility’ and gained access to

124. Leo Purcell, Chairman, PLHBSCL, reference for A.A. Greenwood, 11 May 1949, A.A. Greenwood personal papers, op. cit.
126. Australasian Post, 12 February 1948, pp. 7–9.
wholesale products to allow for high quality and lower cost items to be sold through the Stockade outlet—in this case housing and house building products. Certainly any profit from these enterprises was used ultimately to reduce the overall cost of the houses and caused the inevitable tensions, already discussed, between those consumers who wanted a low-cost product and the production workers who wanted a fair wage. As far as possible, the Committee of Management tried to employ members as workers in order to ameliorate this dilemma. The brick making co-operative that involved the PLC, ES Co-operative and other smaller brick operators appears, though, to have been a genuine production co-operative and another attempt at wholesaling. There seem to have been no issues with distribution.

While the co-operative strove to employ its members as workers—and particularly those with skills in the building trades—those who have written of the co-operative movement have highlighted the need for great caution when shareholders become employees. McKay and French had demonstrated in 1941 how ‘co-operative co-partnerships’ could allow members to be employees, but they warned that any such system needed great care. They stated:

The self-government of a co-partnership is not a matter to be undertaken lightly. The workers must be able to discipline themselves and elect able administrators.

The production factory in the Stockade was in effect one such co-operative co-partnership.

Therefore the men working in the Stockade were not employees as in any other private firm, because the majority were members of the society. When the suburb opened in April 1948 with six houses completed, there were 153 men employed. One contemporary report indicated that about 80 of these were members of the society. Another article reported Purcell as stating a higher figure, 60 per cent. These members had a say in the management of the society overall, either through membership of the Committee of Management, or through general meetings. The Australasian Post announced that ‘several are already working on their own homes—and being paid for it!’

This caused the kinds of problems identified in the wider co-operative movement, when confusion of roles surfaced. As shareholders became workers, lines of

129. ibid.
131. The Age, 5 April 1948, p. 3.
authority became blurred, and managers were caught in the middle. Greenwood understood the implications of this issue from the beginning. When he took over as Secretary/Manager early in 1947, he argued that as an employee he was not eligible to vote. Heated debate ensued and by resolution, the committee interpreted the constitution to mean that he did have voting rights—Purcell sided with Greenwood. In the end, Greenwood stated that no matter what the committee resolved, he would refrain from voting. This was not the end of the matter. At the next meeting there were further ructions, perhaps not least because others would be affected if they were not allowed to be both an employee and on the committee. This time the Secretary was ‘instructed’ to exercise his vote, but as if to soften the blow, Greenwood was also directed to seek advice on this issue from a ‘Mr Hocking of the University’.

The issue came to a head in the PLC when several of the men employed by the society realised the ethical dilemma posed by their dual status as employees and committeemen and several resigned from the committee. Bert Gridley, who had been working for the co-operative in a clerical capacity for nearly a year, resigned on the grounds that ‘he is opposed to employees of the Society being on the Committee of Management’. The Peter Lalor ‘Circular’, which announced the general meeting, stated that Mr Andreae was not seeking re-election for the same reason. Ultimately Alf Greenwood and Bill King took opposite sides. It was the King faction that prevailed. This was one of the catalysts for Greenwood’s later resignation as Manager-Secretary.

Lalor, like other co-operatives, boasted that it treated its workers better than other employers. Certainly, workers’ rights were taken seriously by the Committee of Management, given its links with the trade union movement. Discussions were held with the building trades’ peak trade union body, the Building Trades Federation, in June 1947 to ensure the workers’ conditions and amenities were suitable. While the Deputy Chair, Bill King, and one other committee man, Jack Patten, protested, the committee resolved that a 5/- loading would be paid, plus six statutory public holidays on all awards. In recognition of the long journey to Lalor, they resolved also to pay for a 44 hour week from Reservoir. One press report later announced that most of the men were being paid ‘better-than-award rates and [were] working

135. ibid., 23 May 1947. Most of those on the committee viewed the university as occupying a place in society that was well beyond their reach.
137. ibid.
139. PLHBCSL, Committee of Management, ‘Minutes’, 1 November 1948.
140. ibid., 4 July 1947.
141. ibid.
a 40-hour week'. While Purcell could have insisted on this given his years in the trade union movement, Fox was patronising in his perspective. In his autobiography he reminisced:

As the only Liberal on the committee I had an interesting time! When I was prepared to take a reasonable line with the workers, say, give them an extra day off at Christmas, the unionist member of the committee would say, ‘No! They don’t get anything they haven’t earned.’ If the extra day was just given to them by the boss, it apparently wasn’t acceptable. The day had to be fought for.

Fox must have been referring to his Labor friend, Bill King.

Balnave and Patmore also discuss the potential for nepotism in small communities. Certainly, there could have been these issues in Lalor, though the situation was a complex one. When the society stopped building houses and formal co-operative syndicates were formed through which the home owners collaborated to build each others houses, members were still able to access supplies from the Stockade. In many instances, the co-operative owed some money to these members, particularly where a deposit had been paid on a house. In these instances, the members accessed building supplies up to the value of the debt. With supplies running short, as a result of a general blockage in the supply of building materials, it was difficult to establish what the priority order should be for the allocation of these scarce resources. So while there may have been some deals struck to help out a mate, it may not have been corruption or theft, but pragmatically making do.

Michael Fielding, a teenager at the time, recalled from what he labelled ‘a child’s perspective’:

even though it was going to a good cause, there was huge pilfering happening at the Stockade. It was secure, but not that secure. And the people who worked there would just make sure that their mates who needed 200 tiles to finish their house, they got 200 tiles.

As discussed, it seems likely that the Stockade factory was to begin operations as a production co-operative, then afterwards to progress to being a ‘trading’ co-operative as well. By mid 1948 at least one member of the PLC, Stephen Neate, advocated ‘for the commencement of immediate trading activities’ outside of Lalor. Within

143. Peter Fox, Stephenson Called Peter, op. cit., p. 51.
145. Michael Fielding, interview with the author, 23 July 2007, p. 27.
two years, pre-cut timber frames, windows and doors were being transported to other parts of Melbourne. Fred Harris of Lalor reported that his family built a weatherboard house in Spotswood, south of Melbourne, in about 1950 and the PLC cut and supplied the frame. The front page of the Whittlesea Post in August 1950 advertised Stockade products: 'Pre-Cut Frames for Houses: Pre-cut to your own plans. Or we can supply plans... All joinery requirements can also be met. Prompt delivery.' Such trading of Lalor manufactured products was part of the plan for employment and an industrial base after the building of the suburb was completed.

The Lalor Consumers’ Co-operative Society (LCCS), which ran the general store, was more likely to have been allowed into the club as a purist Rochdale consumer co-operative. The store was there to serve the local community and for a few years it did. Doss Lawson recalled that the store started off on a secure financial footing thanks to member share contributions and a £200 PLC contribution to buy stock. Fred Hunt ran the store. As was noted in Chapter 2, it began in the Stockade as a hardware store, before selling groceries. As more residents arrived, the LCCS was formed and the Gratwick Street building opened for business in 1950. Deliveries were made to anyone in need. Fred described the opening of the store as follows:

The store was started off by getting everybody to come and deal at the store, and the people that were already up here helped build the store with off-cuts from the Stockade.

Within six months of opening in Gratwick Street, the LCCS decided to begin its own small production arm. It applied to the Whittlesea Council, under the Health Regulations, for a licence to manufacture ices, renewing its licence in December 1952.

Initially 'customer loyalty' was not an issue. Lalor was so remote from other retail outlets that most were loyal by necessity if not by philosophy. Their only other option for local buying was the weekly delivery, out of the back of a van, of meat and fresh vegetables. Milk could be bought from the local dairies. The LCCS Board of Management comprised many of the first Lalor residents, women and men, with Kath Griffiths taking over from Harry Fielding as Chair at the General Meeting in September 1951. By then there were a few more buses and a few people had bought cars, so access to shops at Reservoir and Preston became an option providing more choice of items and putting pressure on the viability of the store. Perhaps by then it had already served its purpose. But there were still some who wanted the co-

147. Fred Harris, interview with John Waghorn, Whittlesea Historical Society, 6 July 2006.
151. Whittlesea Shire Council (WSC), 'Minutes of Meetings', 14 February 1951, p. 156, & 10 December 1952, p. 140.
operative spirit to continue and although the topic was discussed in September 1951, and a special general meeting called in November 1951, the meeting unanimously agreed to continue trading. The store’s popularity improved for a while afterwards. At the general meeting of the LCCS a year later, Kath Griffiths reported that ‘the society had shown a fair profit over the past twelve months and that a rebate of £4/14d in the £1 purchase would be paid to shareholders’. The Board of Management believed that even more could be achieved if additional capital could be raised and it was agreed that more effort would be made to that end.

Fred Hunt recalled, however, that when the main society was facing financial difficulties, it siphoned the profits from the store. ‘Head Office,’ he said, ‘used to come down and take the money off us, to pay for [items] such as door handles.’ He also described how their financial worries were compounded by demands for the ‘divvy’. Alan Rose, a painter who had started building in Lalor with the first building syndicate, later decided that he would leave Lalor and move back to Williamstown to reunite his wife with her family. She felt very isolated at Lalor. Hunt laughingly described what happened:

So they decided to get their money back. Well their money amounted to, oh, about one pound eleven, which was a lot of money in those days...She used to go around skiting that ‘I got my money back, I got one pound eleven shillings out of all the profit.’...So everybody started going in to get their one pound eleven. Course, I went to the till one day and there was no money in the till... All the profit had gone.

Their ‘Rules’ made provisions for the allocation of the ‘divvy’ and it was not meant to work in that way. No ‘divvy’ was to be paid at all unless a range of prior commitments had been met, and then it was to be twice a year, and ‘60% of the certified net profits of the Society’, and only ‘in proportion to [members] respective purchases from the society’. In addition, all co-operative entities had to clearly stipulate how money was to be withdrawn and this co-operative was no different. Withdrawal of shares from the PLC was causing considerable distress, both to the membership and the committee, and the ‘Rules’ of the LCCS were very explicit about how and when members could withdraw their share capital. Since the Victorian ‘land boom and bust’ of the 1890s, legislation had been in place to prevent shareholders ‘making a run’ on the finances of little societies such as this one, and

154. This will be discussed further in Chapter 7.
157. ibid.
158. ibid., clause 26, p. 3.
the LCCS was certainly protected, at least on paper. In practice that was not much help at the time. What this story does indicate, though, is that up to that point, the co-operative store was run according to the Rochdale ‘divvy’ principle.

The two Co-operative Housing Societies, which provided home loans for the purchase of houses, would appear to have complied completely with the 1944 legislation. As no records have been found for these societies, I can only surmise about who actually took advantage of these loans. From oral testimony, and the rates notices which provided the War Service Homes number when houses were mortgaged to that organisation, it is clear that PL housing loans were provided to many more people than those who built in Lalor. By the time the original ‘soldier settlement’ part of Lalor had been built, the PL Nos 1 and 2 Co-operative Housing Societies had closed their books to new members. In total they funded 223 home loans. As the number of homes in that settlement only numbered around 200, and at least 54 used WSH loans, there were a good number of loans probably scattered throughout Melbourne. This was consistent with their original plan. In January 1947 when the scheme was first announced in Change Over, it was predicted that ‘the Company will build three complete satellite towns to the North, East and West of Melbourne’. There were many shareholders in the PLC scheme who were not successful in buying or building a home in Lalor. While some lost their money, others took their money out in products from the Stockade. Sometimes people just could not afford the wait and, as other opportunities for homes arose, they took their chances in other locations. In the early stages, these members did have the value of their share returned. It may well have been some of these people who took up the option of home financing through the Lalor societies.

Unravelling the complexity of this cluster of organisations, it is starting to become clear that the ability of the founding group to implement their roles had a significant impact on the cohesion of the group and ultimately on their effectiveness. The division between Purcell and Greenwood on the one hand and Fox and King on the other was not based on religion or class. Through wartime experience, Purcell and Greenwood were loyal friends and remained so long after they had left the co-operative. Both were clear about the Rochdale principles and how they should work. Greenwood was an effective administrator who put the basic co-operative infrastructure in place and was trusted by the bureaucracies with which he dealt. Purcell was brilliant but unpredictable, making loyal friends and political enemies, and lacked the ability unite the board as Chairman. Fox had grand but impractical plans and was negligent as Treasurer. King’s role is hard to fathom. He was clever, well organised and stayed longer than anyone else, but it would appear that he increasingly lost confidence in Greenwood, though it is not clear why. What is clear

160. Renamed from PL No. 1 and PL No. 2.
is that once Greenwood left, the society was worse off with Fox as Manager and its recovery under King's Chairmanship was slow and incomplete. Purcell was also more personally vulnerable and exposed without his steady friend at his side and almost immediately left the role of Chairman. It may have been that when Fox left in August 1949 Purcell began working for the co-operative. He worked for wages between 1949 and 1951, though there is no record about the role he played until 1951 when he was noted as supplying timber.162 If this was the case, it suggests that he was still on good terms with Chairman King. As I dig more deeply into this intriguing story, the role of these men will become even clearer.

The ethical dilemmas and personality conflicts that rent the committee were exacerbated—perhaps even precipitated by—a range of problems: the co-operative was under capitalized; delays cost money and wasted scarce resources; material supplies diminished; and impractical employment programs were unnecessary and expensive. Nonetheless, it is clear that the range of co-operative entities which together formed the PLC scheme was nourished by boundless optimism. They were inspired rather than constrained by co-operative examples they had heard about from other parts of the world and Australia. They were pragmatic in adopting some established principles for operating their co-operatives, in particular the Rochdale consumer co-operative principles, but they applied them inconsistently in the main because they were torn between important, competing social and economic objectives and they were inexperienced managers for such a complex enterprise. Despite this they created the seeds and the soul of a community. In applying co-operative principles to all their businesses they aspired to achieve their dream. Notwithstanding the financial failure by 1954, and therefore the building of fewer homes than planned, in important respects they succeeded. By combining production and consumption and even for a short time wholesale and distribution, they broke new ground in the history of co-operation in Australia.

162. Richard Leo Purcell, bankruptcy record, NAA B160/0, Creditors Petition No. 137/60, sequestration order no. 152/60, Melbourne; Frank Purcell, email, 3 December 2009 in which he stated, 'I thought Dad began working for the Cooperative full time in 1949'.
4

Building

‘Well we knew that we had to help each other. That was the main idea of the whole thing, to help each other build the houses and we did that. Yes.’

In the last chapter I showed how tardiness in Federal Treasury approval crucially delayed the Peter Lalor Home Building Co-operative Society (PLC) schedule, during which time scarce building materials were commandeered by others. Rifts appeared in the Committee of Management as the practicalities of implementing co-operative principles tested their competing values, and as personalities conflicted under pressure. In this chapter, I show how, undeterred, the society pushed ahead with its plans, and how the building of homes haltingly took shape. There were, however, further delays of another five to six months as access to materials stalled. Nonetheless, as more obstacles appeared in their path, their resolve to succeed simply strengthened. More importantly, a transitional phase unfolded: as financial crises crippled the society, the burgeoning Lalor community began to take cooperation into their own hands. Under the auspices of the PLC, they worked tirelessly to ensure their dreams of home ownership and of a degree of social and economic control were kept alive. Moreover, in this (and in subsequent chapters) we will meet some of the characters beyond the ‘founding fathers’ whom we have already come to know. By so doing I gradually build a picture of the collective characteristics of this community: the prosopography. This provides the insights that allow me to analyse the forces of cohesion which acted to create a sense of community and belonging for this largely ex-servicemen’s, working-class suburb.

1. Maurice Nelson, transcript of interview with the author, 4 April 2006, p. 18. All further references to interviews will cite the transcriptions of the interviews.
Ron and Ethel Moore's house under construction at 24 Middleton Street
Note the Junet concrete bricks (right front) and the 'temporaries' in the background. The two men are probably the two syndicate builders, Ron Moore and Jack Follett.

Source: City of Whittlesea, Lalor photograph collection.

Lalor Consumer Co-operative Society, General Store, 1950

Source: City of Whittlesea, Lalor photograph collection.
The extreme housing shortage in Australia following WWII has attained almost legendary status. From the Great Depression and through the 1930s a crisis developed as building came to a virtual standstill. While it began to rebound late in the decade, the onset of WWII saw every available resource diverted into wartime production. The chronic shortage of supply was compounded by a tidal wave of post-war demand. Expectation had been mounting throughout the war that the ‘great Australian dream’ of owning one’s own home should be an integral part of the better world for which so many had fought. The Curtin Government’s emphasis on post-war reconstruction led many to believe that such a dream might be within their reach. The Commonwealth Housing Commission in 1944 estimated an Australia-wide demand for 700,000 houses in the post-war decade.

In Melbourne thousands of families were ‘living in sleepouts, boarding houses, garages and other makeshift dwellings’. The 1947 census revealed the extent to which people were living in shared accommodation: there were only 877 dwellings for every 1000 households. Historian Tony Dingle interrogated the 1949 Australian Gallop Polls and concluded that while the ‘opinion poll found that in metropolitan areas one house in four contained an extra family or individual who would have moved into their own accommodation had any been available... this ratio rose to one in three in the houses of the unskilled’.

As the PLC was attempting to buy the land in the Thomastown area, the local Whittlesea Post ran a headline—‘Shortage of 20,000 to 30,000 homes’—and estimated that in Victoria 80,000 to 90,000 people were immediately affected. Purcell was quoted as saying that:

from personal knowledge gained by inspection and contact with this army of ill-accommodated people, the Labor Party [Ex-Servicemen’s] committee is aware of the tragic consequences that may result from the appalling and

2. M.R. Hill, *Housing Finance in Australia 1945–56*, Melbourne, 1959, p. 4, states ‘Dwelling completions fell from an annual rate of around 50,000 in the middle 1920s to under 10,000 in the early 1930s’.
8. Ibid.
major social tragedy of lack of housing. Much of today’s industrial unrest can be attributed to this problem.⁹

Stories from co-operative members reveal the desperation they felt at their living arrangements, giving personal meaning to the general statements about the housing shortage.¹⁰ Jack and Patricia Donnelly were one of many examples: they married in 1947 and a year later their first son, Brian, was born. Patricia described ‘the hell’ that was their accommodation situation:

We had rooms. A bedroom up the front of the house and a kitchen (or kitchenette) at the back of the house....It was the people that owned it. It was a woman, her husband, and then her daughter was there, and she had two children—they were alright. But... the old fella worked night shift—permanent night shift—so he slept in the day. So you can imagine with a baby....well Brian was about 14 months old... and one morning I’d just put his boots on—and you had to go down the passage past their bedroom to our kitchenette and she’d tell me off. And I just sort of thought, I just can’t stand this any more. I’ve got to get out of here.¹¹

In the interview, Patricia explained how she and Jack were offered a partly constructed house in French Street, Lalor. She continued:

So I mean—you’d jump at anything. I’d have lived in a tent in a paddock just to be on my own...And anyhow, so it wasn’t finished and we really didn’t have the keys and things like that—but I said ‘I’ve just got to get out of here’. So we just got out. And we went in and we bought a bed and a dressing table, kitchen table and chairs and we moved in, in June [1949]. ...there wasn’t any roads, the plaster wasn’t stopped...We didn’t have any taps on, so we bought a tap...There were no lights because the power didn’t come on for a while. We cooked over the open fire and ...it was heaven.¹²

In reality, it left a lot to be desired, but for Pat the memory reflected her relief that at last they had a home to themselves. Considering the Donnellys had paid their deposit in March 1947, they had waited more than two years to move into their

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9. Whittlesea Post, 5 March 1947, p12. We can see that ALP right wing Catholic Purcell was not aligned with those in the right wing Santamaria group who attributed industrial unrest to the work of Communists. See, for example, Race Mathews, ‘Collateral Damage: B.A. Santamaria and the Marginalising of Social Catholicism’, Labour History, no. 92, May 2007, pp. 89–112.


12. ibid. Pat and Jack had not been successful with the first ballot for a house through the PLC, but they were the fourth name on the second ballot. Their block had been allocated to someone else who had withdrawn.
unfinished home in Lalor. Little wonder they were desperate, but there were many who waited much longer.

Les Casbolt, who moved into Lalor in January 1950, explained that:

we were alright, we were renting a house down in Fairfield and it was quite a good house and that, but some of the other chaps, oh, they were in tears at times ...because they were living in very, very bad circumstances.13

He described Vic Michael’s situation as one such case. Michael, who would take over from Purcell as the strong and influential figure in the development of Lalor, described his family’s situation after he left the Army:

Housing was practically non-existent ... and my sister was married and lived in Market Street, Newport, and my wife and our...eldest daughter Carol, and myself were living on a back verandah. Things were ... desperate for accommodation.14

The Michael family did not move into their home until December 1951, but for them, the promise of a home of their own, however long it took, would be better than an offer of a room in a hut at the infamous Camp Pell which came to symbolise a shameful and squalid indictment of working-class housing policy after the war.15

Gwen Hunt, who was one of the first to move into Lalor, described her situation in terms that were similarly fraught. They had two small children, Gwen was pregnant with the third and they were living with her mother in Richmond. Their room was nine feet by nine feet. ‘We had a four roomed house, and my sister and her three boys had one room, we had another room and Mum had another room and we only had the kitchen in that very small place.’16 Heart-wrenching stories such as these heightened the sense of urgency felt by the Committee of Management of the PLC.

At the national level the federal Labor governments of both Curtin and Chifley had, as their top post-war priorities, full employment and a massive program of housing expansion. Chifley wanted to stimulate the production of building materials and develop and stabilise the labour force for the building industry.17 His central concern,

16. Fred & Gwen Hunt, interview with Ruth Ford, 21 November 1998, p. 326. When room numbers are cited, all rooms are included and not just bedrooms as is the common usage today.
17. Department of Works and Housing, Homes for Australia, Canberra, 1949, front page.
however, was to keep the very real threat of post-war inflation under control.\textsuperscript{18}

To achieve these aims the government attempted to retain its wartime controls on prices into the post-war period and Chifley himself orchestrated many steps to slow workers’ pent up demands for increased wages and shorter working hours.\textsuperscript{19}

Three referenda were held—in 1944, 1946 and 1948—to try to retain control of prices, but all were defeated. During the debates leading up to the first referendum, Chifley (then Minister for Post-War Reconstruction) and Dedman (soon to be his successor) tried to insist that ‘controls over building construction and building materials were essential for the success of the post-war housing programme’.\textsuperscript{20}

After this policy failed, in August 1945 the commonwealth government agreed with the premiers that it would retain some price controls under special legislation (the *Defence (Transitional Provisions) Act 1946*) to December 1947 and the states would refer their price control powers to the Commonwealth for at least three years: a move which was implemented in only an *ad hoc* fashion.\textsuperscript{21} In August 1946 all governments agreed to a ‘Ten Year Plan for the Building Industry’, directed at rapidly expanding the size of the construction workforce in an attempt to address chronic skills shortages in the industry.\textsuperscript{22} The government also took a range of initiatives to try to alleviate the shortfall of materials, such as reducing import taxes, planting timbers and re-prioritising Capital Issues Regulations to reinvest in ‘essential civil needs’.\textsuperscript{23}

In the short term, none of these measures worked. Despite the intent behind the Ten Year Plan, the building industry was grudgingly slow to respond. The Chifley Government reacted by reducing its tight controls on prices and the distribution of building materials.\textsuperscript{24} This came about because of sustained pressure from brick-quarry and timber-yard interests and pressures from the black market.\textsuperscript{25} The impact was clear: there was on average a 20 per cent increase in the price of new dwellings between 1944 and 1946 with the major impact falling on low income home builders.\textsuperscript{26} In essence, after the commonwealth failed in its bid to control the price and distribution of building materials, Chifley and Dedman devoted this responsibility to the states. Historian Michael Howard’s judgment was that this move

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\textsuperscript{19} Tom Sheridan, *Division of Labour: Industrial Relations in the Chifley Years, 1945–49*, South Melbourne, 1989, summarised at pp. 1–2.


\textsuperscript{21} ibid., p. 43; Tom Sheridan, *Division of Labour*, op. cit., pp. 30–31.

\textsuperscript{22} Michael Howard, ‘Beyond Full Employment’, op. cit., p. 25.

\textsuperscript{23} ibid., p. 28.

\textsuperscript{24} ibid., p. 29. This was done by changing the formula of controls from ‘the 1942 system of fixed absolute profit margins to the 1939 one of fixed percentage profit margins (1939 level) on current cost’.

\textsuperscript{25} ibid.

\textsuperscript{26} ibid., p. 28. Greig also reports that between 1945 and 1952 brick veneer houses increased by 229 per cent and weatherboard by 235 per cent. See Alastair Greig, *The Stuff Dreams Are Made Of*, op. cit., p. 35.

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was premature and led to inequitable outcomes. It fell to the states to organise quotas for the allocation of scarce materials by a system of permits. They attempted to protect ‘socially essential interests against unrestrained market forces’.

The Cain State Labor Government which was elected in Victoria in November 1945, tried to rise to the enormity of the challenge of the housing crisis. It kept some controls on the supply and distribution of building products to retain some semblance of equity, even though it added to significant delays. Labor power-broker Dinny Lovegrove wrote to Labor Call in February 1946:

State Cabinet’s decision to undertake State-controlled co-ordination of requisites of housing construction is welcome news this week. The gravity of housing shortage needs no emphasis.... Housing costs today are fantastically beyond reach of the average income earner. A reasonably designed brick house with land runs the home purchaser into nearly £2000.

There were many in the labour movement, including Purcell, who believed that there was a deliberate ‘go-slow’ on the part of the big building interests, whose aim was not to invest in construction until the controls were lifted. Building interests may well have decided that investment was not advisable until profit margins returned, but many workers wanted to see a continuation of the social contract the large companies had delivered during the dark hours of the war. Labor Call called on the government to take over the production and supply of building materials wherever private enterprise failed to meet the requirements of the housing program. Nonetheless, on Anzac Day 1946, Premier Cain made the state government’s position very clear:

I say emphatically, that the housing problem will be solved by the small builder and not by the Housing Commission. We are doing everything to encourage the private builder to get on with the job as quickly as possible.

The Cain Government agreed to allocate set percentages of building materials between public housing, private housing and non-residential construction, but as Tony Dingle pointed out, in the private housing market once a house was approved, everyone competed for materials. House sizes were, however, kept small to save on essential materials.

28. ibid., p. 29.
29. Labor Call, 7 February 1946, p. 3.
30. ibid., 21 February 1946 p. 4.
In January 1947 as the PLC was forming, Premier Cain announced enthusiastically that availability of building materials was now far in excess of pre-war supplies. He said:

New timber sources had been opened up. Brick, tile, cement and plaster works had been properly organised. The building trades labor forces had been considerably built up and the addition of ex-servicemen trainees would give further impetus to the program.\footnote{Labor Call, 30 January 1947, p. 3.}

While the situation in 1947 did show improvement, and the co-operative signed fixed price contracts in that context, it actually got worse in 1948 before it got better.\footnote{John Archer, The Great Australian Dream: The History of the Australian House, Sydney, 1996, p. 189.} The timing was indeed unfortunate for the co-operative. Throughout the first half of 1947, while the society was awaiting final Treasury sign-off, every meeting was consumed by the struggle to access building materials. As early as March 1947, Procurement Manager, L.C. Cooper, had placed an order for 20,000 bricks per week to be delivered from 1 June, but others hungrily garnered that consignment when the co-operative was forced to let it lapse.\footnote{PLHBCSL, Committee of Management, ‘Minutes’, 27 March 1947.}

The co-operative was also in search of an architect. With Peter Russell’s departure in January 1947, the society lost access to the resources of the ‘Victorian Architectural Centre’.\footnote{Argus, 16 January 1947, p. 12. They were expecting this service to be provided to the society pro bono.} Such a loss did not, however, cause them to question their need for their own architect. Well designed and properly constructed homes in a garden suburb were their unswerving ambition.\footnote{Whitflesea Post, 5 March 1947, back page.} They advertised for ‘an Ex-Serviceman with Architectural qualifications to plan and develop new co-operative centres’.\footnote{PLHBCSL, Committee of Management, ‘Minutes’, 25 March 1947.} The grandness of their plans is clear in this advertisement, as is the importance of the ex-service connection. Difficulties in attracting a suitable person at a reasonable price caused Treasurer Fox to unrealistically suggest ‘a panel of architects, one from England, one from Australia and one from Europe... to draw up plans for 20 houses’.\footnote{ibid., 11 April 1947.} Ultimately, the committee called on the help of the Victorian Chapter of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA). By May they had recruited New Zealand born Stanley Lewtas Frew who had qualified as an architect before the war, then enlisted, gaining the rank of lieutenant.\footnote{Stanley Lewtas Frew, individual war record, NAA, series B883, VX75221. Born in 1914, he served in the 2/6 Field Company.} RAIA records reveal that he was highly regarded, and award winning architects Bates, Smart and McCutcheon.
sponsored his application for associate membership of the institute in April 1947. The task ahead of him held enormous responsibility for one so newly qualified.

By contrast, seasoned surveyor and urban designer Saxil Tuxen was also contracted for the urban design of Lalor. Already in his sixties, Tuxen had a considerable reputation in the decades after WWI as a ‘garden suburb’ urban planner and surveyor. He was a key figure in the Victorian urban planning movement and before WWII was associated with Oswald Barnett’s group of committed Christians who were involved in the slum abolition movement. Undoubtedly Purcell and other members of the co-operative had links with this movement and Peter Russell was writing about slum abolition immediately after the war. By 1932 Tuxen had ‘designed or co-designed at least thirty suburban subdivisions, a majority of which could be termed “garden suburbs”’. It may also have been important that Tuxen had designed a large part of the newly developed areas north of Melbourne. Lalor was to be the latest addition. Although Tuxen did very little urban design work after WWII, perhaps he was inspired by the ambitious scheme proposed by the PLC and that is why he accepted their commission.

Another possible explanation is that Tuxen had also designed a housing estate for ex-servicemen in Sandringham in the early 1940s for the Sol Green Trust. This Trust, established by bookmaker and philanthropist, Sol Green, had proposed several housing estates for ex-servicemen and their families, though only two—in Sandringham and Brighton East—were completed before Sol Green’s death in 1948. Green had drawn on the expertise of some of the philanthropic ‘friends of the people’ from the slum abolition movement, including Tuxen, for this project. Well-known Melbourne architect, Marcus Barlow, designed the homes at no charge. Purcell again used his network of contacts to organise for Frew and Greenwood to visit Barlow, who offered Frew whatever plans, specifications or ‘knowledge that

42. RAIA, (Victorian Chapter), ‘Membership lists’, SLV, MS 9454Y; Stanley Lewtas Frew, individual war record, op. cit.; See also Miles Lewis, Philip Goad, & Alan Mayne, Melbourne: The City’s History and Development. Melbourne, 1994. p. 121. The firm of Bates, Smart and McCutcheon won, in 1932, the RAIA (Victorian Chapter) Architecture Medal for the design of the AMP building.
47. According to Dr David Nichols, Deakin University, both the Merrillands and Leslie estates at Reservoir, the Meadowbank at Glenroy and a lot of Keon Park were designed by Tuxen: David Nichols, email, 31 October 2005.
49. Chris McConville, ‘Green, Solomon (1868–1948)’, Australian Dictionary of Biography vol. 9, 1983, p. 94, stated that there was a development at Black Rock. This is disputed by the Heritage Alliance, City of Bayside, op. cit., p. 32.

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had been acquired during 4 years’ work on the Sol Green homes’,\textsuperscript{52} in return for an honorarium of one hundred guineas. The Sol Green homes were detached double-fronted brick villas of fairly conventional form and materials. However, Barlow had worked his genius to design houses ‘which would have individuality and chic as well as being soundly built and completely equipped for modern needs’.\textsuperscript{53} As a recent heritage study reports:

much praise was lavished upon the estate’s creators—the Sol Green Trust for its social conscience and architect Marcus Barlow, in particular, for the remarkable way in which he had brought it to fruition. Not only had he succeeded in producing standardised housing that was individualised, but he had done so at a saving of £300 per house on his original budget.\textsuperscript{54}

Greenwood was delighted. The Commonwealth Bank was also supportive and advised the society that ‘this type of construction...could not be faulted’.\textsuperscript{55} Greenwood reported to the Committee of Management that:

we would for 100 guineas have done for us work that would take Mr. Frew months to do and experience that he would have to acquire. In other words, we could get straight on with the job on a new method of construction that is completely acceptable to our bankers.\textsuperscript{56}

Almost certainly it was this generous support which allowed Frew to report, only a month later in June 1947, that he had completed 11 house designs with four elevations, which had already been lodged with the Whittlesea Shire Council (WSC).\textsuperscript{57} The house designs were for good quality, standard detached suburban homes in a mixture of weatherboard and brick veneer with two and three bedrooms. These would, with different degrees of modification, provide the plans and specifications for the building of probably more than 200 homes at Lalor, many of which are still standing proudly in the first decade of the twenty-first century. As a result of the present study, most will now, it is hoped, be protected by a heritage order.

By April 1947 Tuxen had completed a contour survey of the land,\textsuperscript{58} and within a month, two borrowed cars transported the Committee to Thomastown so Tuxen

\textsuperscript{52} ibid.
\textsuperscript{53} Heritage Alliance, \textit{City of Bayside}, op. cit., p. 28.
\textsuperscript{54} ibid., p. 29.
\textsuperscript{55} PLHBCSL, Committee of Management, ‘Minutes’, Secretary’s Report, 23 May 1947.
\textsuperscript{56} ibid.
\textsuperscript{58} PLHBCSL, Committee of Management, ‘Minutes’, 13 March 1947, 21 April 1947. He charged £75.
could explain his plan. As soon as Treasury consent was granted, Tuxen submitted the first part of his subdivision plan to WSC for approval. By March 1948 all sections of the plan had been submitted, with the whole plan containing 819 individual lots. The design reflected the ‘parliamentary triangle’ feature, bordered by Vasey and Curtin Avenues, reminiscent of the Walter Burley Griffin design for Canberra. It contained within it a line of parks and reserves along the centre, also echoing Anzac Parade in Canberra. The semi-circular arc of Newton and Sydney Crescents in Lalor were hallmarks of Tuxen’s designs.

The Committee of Management set the fixed prices to be contracted with co-operative members for building each of the eleven different house designs. The committee also agreed the order of streets by which building within the suburb would occur. Following the delays outlined above, a building commencement date was set for 18 August 1947. The lowest priced, two bedroom weatherboard home was £1004 while the largest, three bedroom house of brick veneer was priced at £1490. These were rich bargains. In accordance with co-operative principles they were theoretically charging market prices with a view to a subsequent ‘divvy’, but this appears unlikely. In fact no one on the Committee of Management subsequently seemed to understand how those prices had been fixed.

The impetus for innovation in design and construction, initiated by Russell, had gained enough traction with the rest of the management group and it remained a centrepiece of their approach. Shortages of materials, tools and skilled labour were driving many, both in Australia and overseas, to find smarter ways to plan and build. House plans were trimmed back to the basics and there was a considerable degree of experimentation with new materials, some of which had been used with success in the context of the war. ‘Mass-produced housing’ was also in vogue with the Housing Commission. The Commonwealth Experimental Building Station, which was established in 1944, provided expertise on building efficiency. Greenwood and Cooper visited the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research

61. Ibid., item 17, 12 November 1947, p. 294, item 17, 10 March 1948, p. 22; Whittlesea Post, 3 March 1948, front page.
62. David Nichols, ‘The Merrilands Triangle’, op. cit. It was known that Tuxen was influenced by Walter Burley Griffin.
63. P.L.B.C.S.L., ‘Minutes of Special Meeting’, 24 July 1947. While the prices were written by hand onto the minuutes by Jack Harvey (builder), these figures appear correct according to individual rates notices and were supported by oral testimony. See for example, Doss Lawson, interview with the author, 8 December 2005, p. 5.
64. See the previous chapter, p. 106.
(CSIR) in Cheltenham, and the State Housing Works, to investigate the latest in building technology and they inspected the concrete house construction for the Victorian Housing Commission in Holmesglen. An official of the CSIR assured them that cement tiles were equal ‘if not superior’ to other products, though cement sheeting and roofing were still subject to permits. Taking the CSIR’s advice, the society established a concrete tile making plant. However, this decision was to render the subsequent shortages of cement much more critical.

The central innovative feature for the PLC was the on-site building pre-fabrication factory located in the Stockade. The society was once again doing the government’s bidding, and it was in the minority. As Greig concluded, the state ‘failed to induce large firms to experiment seriously with prefabrication’. Nonetheless, the society believed there would be many benefits from this approach. Purcell ‘expected that total prices for homes will be kept well below present-day figures by mass-production techniques’, and ‘purchase of materials on a large-scale will ensure continuity of supplies’. The co-operative therefore believed there were three separate components which promised cheaper houses: co-operation, the Barlow designs, and mass production techniques.

Great thought had gone into how the flow of finances would work. The society was reliant on individual members paying £60 up front (£10 for one share, £25 for their house block and £25 deposit on the house, unless they were ex-servicemen who had committed their gratuity) followed by the individual members receiving their housing loans as homes were constructed, so they in turn could reimburse the co-operative. Planning for construction was therefore dictated by considerations of the weather—getting some houses up to roof covering—and the method by which the bank would finance the houses. As the ‘Minutes’ explained:

The reason for this plan is that the Bank will approve advances of 75% of the work done and the value of the land. Consequently a high return would be received to completion of foundation and approximately £50 per house plus war gratuities would be available for houses completed to this stage.

68. The CSIR was established in Melbourne in 1926, a precursor to the CSIRO which was established in 1949. See University of Melbourne eScholarship Research Centre, *Encyclopedia of Australian Science: (Council for Scientific and Industrial Research)* 2008, available from <http://www.eas.info/blogs/A001098.htm>.


71. Vic Michael, interview with Ruth Ford, op. cit., p. 148–49. Vic Michael stated, ‘And then—something that had never been heard of—in Victoria—in fact maybe in Australia, a pre-cutting plant was purchased’.


73. ‘Pre-Cutting Plant on Housing Estate’, unlabelled press clipping in the City of Whittlesea historical collection, dated in the week after the opening of Lalor on 4 April 1948.

This helps explain why the co-operative completed the foundations for so many more houses than it finished. As discussed, the War Service Homes Division (WSHD) only lent money on completed houses that met its standards of construction, requiring ‘some ex-service owner-builders to raise short-term finance to build and then transfer to a WSH loan’. All of these considerations required expert project management skills.

The ballots which decided the order in which building would occur were the crucial factor determining who eventually gained a home at Lalor. It was the task of architect Frew to allocate building blocks according to the owner's chosen house design. He adopted Marcus Barlow’s approach to streetscape, in which the aim was maximum variety with no identical house designs located side-by-side. Weatherboard and brick veneer were similarly mixed. This meant that members did not choose their block.

It was always a lottery as to how well each family fared in attaining a home at Lalor. Those whose names were drawn early gained very decent homes, moderately quickly. They also paid bargain prices which were reduced by as much as 30 per cent of the normal retail price, in part because of co-operative effort, in part because of the Barlow based designs, but also because they had signed fixed price contracts with the society at a time of escalating wages and prices. Perhaps also the co-operative had undercharged. This was to the detriment of the society and the other members in the end. By contrast, many waited a long time, only to lose their money. There are many stories of success and failure in between.

The ballot lists are worth lingering over more closely. The February ballot, not drawn until May 1947, contained the names of 112 people. These February ballot folk were the lucky ones. In theory, they had paid the full £60 by February 1947. More likely, most had paid no more than £35 because they had not yet received their gratuity. The ballots were predominantly in men's names, the majority being ex-servicemen. The men usually represented whole families, but five ballots were in the names of women. From the February ballot list, 68 families were successfully housed in

75. Tony Dingle, 'Self-Help Housing and Co-Operation in Post-War Australia', op. cit., p. 349; Peg Mackenzie, interview with the author, 13 October 2003, p. 6; Ron Moore, interview with Ruth Ford, 25 October 1998, p. 125. As previously discussed, many of Lalor's ex-servicemen had to raise short-term finance through, for example, the Peter Lalor Co-operative Housing Societies afterwards switching to a WSH loan.


77. The exact numbers of ex-servicemen cannot be established from the available information. From the data, at least 55 were ex-servicemen, though the number was certainly higher. The database containing the names of most ballot winners, 739 records in all, has been matched with on-line WWII nominal rolls. The ballot lists contained surname and initials, and sometimes the originating suburb of the member. Where names are unusual, clear matches can be made. Oral testimony can confirm identity in some cases though not for ballot winners who never lived in Lalor. More than 50 individual war records have also been investigated from the full records that exist in the NAA. There are many cases, though, where a clear enough match could not be made between several different possible war records. This has resulted in under-reporting of the numbers of ex-service personnel.
Lalor: 32 of whom had homes built by the PLC and a further 36 took over partially completed homes and finished them by various means.\textsuperscript{78}

The balloting process took place in a context of considerable social churn within the whole Australian community as the nation adjusted to the newly won peace. The Curtin-Chifley Government orchestrated a remarkably orderly discharge of servicemen through the dying stages of the war and at war’s end, but even so, large numbers of people were juggling the search for homes, for work, for new partners and a return to a normal civilian way of life. It took years for all these aspects to settle into place. In this context the co-operative was sympathetic to the many people who undoubtedly hedged their bets by investing in the co-operative, but later discovered a home at Lalor would be impractical. Many people paid the £1 deposit on a share, but subsequently requested a refund. Some who had paid the full £60 and won a place in the first ballot list had found other options before the homes were ready and decided not to proceed. There were 28 ballot winners in that category. These people had their money refunded and their places were taken over by others further down the ballot lists. There were seven February ballot winners whose houses were not finished by the time the co-operative stopped building and who were not prepared to take over the completion of their homes. The PLC arranged for these to be on-sold to the next available eligible members and the money, almost certainly, was refunded. Finally there were nine members, from the February ballot, who gained a block of land on which no building work had commenced. They sold their blocks, usually through the co-operative, and, depending on how long they had kept it, sometimes made a profit.\textsuperscript{79} All of this juggling was handled by the extraordinarily efficient administrative secretary, Ada Dunton (known as Belle).

The March ballot was conducted in June 1947. As might be expected, the number of who eventually gained a home in Lalor was much lower than for the February ballot. By December 1947, 822 people paid the required money, and had their names drawn, of whom only 160 built and lived at Lalor: a very disappointing result given the scale of their dream.\textsuperscript{80} However, this still represented more than three quarters of the 200 homes which had been built by the time of the 1954 census.\textsuperscript{81} There were

\textsuperscript{78} This information has been compiled by using the ballot lists and a comprehensive database about each of the households in this early Lalor settlement. The database was compiled from Rates Books, BDM data, WWII records, City of Whittlesea records, additional archival material, press reports and oral testimony.

\textsuperscript{79} ibid.

\textsuperscript{80} This will be discussed further below.

in addition later syndicate members who were not in these original ballots whose entry repaid some who had moved on.  

It was during the second half of 1947, when the outlook for materials had improved and prices were relatively contained, that the co-operative had signed members into fixed price contracts. One commentator suggested that the registration of the PLC was initially refused 'until the proposed Society agreed to act as contractor and erect homes for a contract price.'  

Certainly the working-class members themselves were keen to know the extent of their financial commitment as most were extremely cautious about their first move into home ownership. Fix priced contracts, however, became extremely significant. As the lifting of price controls unfolded, and the inevitable increase in the basic wage was granted, it was perhaps the most damaging factor to affect the society's financial position.  

In Purcell's memory of these events, no blame was attributed to the Cain Government for the escalating prices. In the transcript of the film, Stockade, he is quoted as saying:

> Because the Government had frozen the price of building materials, we decided that we could predict our costs and operate the co-operative without any profit margin.  

Rather, Purcell, like many in the labour movement, believed prices rose because of shortages and they sheeted home the blame to the big building firms. He was quoted as saying:

> Because the large builders had cornered all the supplies we had to set up our own factories to make tiles and bricks and mills to cut the raw timber to make house frames.  

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82. There is no list available for the ballot in December 1947. By November 782 names had been drawn from the ballots, so Gary John's figure of 832 in total by December is probably accurate. See PLHBCSL, 'Ballot Lists', February to November 1947; also Gary Johns, 'Building a Suburb: The Peter Lator Home Building Co-operative', Occasional Papers, vol. 1, no. 2, Melbourne State College, 1979, p. 12. Although no written evidence remains, Maurice Nelson, who joined the co-operative in September 1949, believed he was in the last of the ballots, though it is uncertain how many more names were drawn or how many other ballots there were between December 1947 and September 1949 though they were certainly not monthly as they had been in 1947. See Maurice Nelson, interview with the author, 4 April 2006, p. 11.  

83. S. T. Grey, 'The History of the Formation of the Shire of Whittlesea' in City of Whittlesea historical collection, Melbourne, 1961; Whittlesea Post, 27 April 1961 p.3. As I have stated in the Introduction (p. 7), there are significant errors in this article, so this statement cannot necessarily be relied upon.  

84. Clem Lloyd & Jacqui Rees, The Last Shilling: A History of Repatriation in Australia, Melbourne, 1994, p. 344. The point is made that the soon WSHD found builders unwilling to sign fixed price contracts because of such volatility, hence 'rise and fall' provisions were added to their contracts. It was probably too late for the co-operative to emulate this practice and was one the disadvantages of the trail-blazing efforts of the PLC.  

85. Mark Davis, Stockade, Swinburne Film School, Melbourne, 1984. Although the 1944 and 1946 prices referenda had been lost, the Ten Year Plan was supposed to keep prices in check and, as Tom Sheridan stated, 'the point to be stressed here is that in the key transitional period [after WW II] the government maintained control over the major economic variables'. See Tom Sheridan, Division of Labour, op. cit., p. 31.  

86. ibid.
He failed to remember that shortages also resulted from a systematic militant union industrial campaign.\textsuperscript{87}

Supplies of suitable timber soon became the next critical issue for the co-operative. The society had contacted Timber Control only to be told ‘that [it] could not help a project of this [medium] size.’ The Manager told the society: ‘He [the Manager] alone has on his book 1,000,000 feet of flooring for small home builders and he stated that he frankly did not know when the whole or part of these orders would be supplied.’\textsuperscript{88} On the other hand the State Housing Commission and ‘another big organisation, unnamed’ had sought the aid of Timber Control to procure timber from Tasmania.\textsuperscript{89}

This would not be the first time that the society felt itself to be falling between two stools. It was too large to be described as a small-scale home builder, but clearly not large enough to compete with the State Housing Commission or large building firms, A.V. Jennings being the only really large one. While the ALP was in office in Victoria, the PLC was able to lean on its friends in power to smooth its path. Purcell and Greenwood paid a visit to Housing Minister, William Barry, who assured them that ‘logs were to be made available to the Society to be sawn at a mill to be arranged.’\textsuperscript{90} Barry ‘instructed the Chief Inspector of the Forestry Commission to locate and arrange with a sawmiller to accept such logs and to saw them on our behalf.’\textsuperscript{91} The co-operative also received good news from the Australian Shipping Control Board that space could be available for cement on shipping from Tasmania.\textsuperscript{92} Builder Jack Harvey was quoted as saying: ‘We had to collect our own cement from the wharves when it arrived from Tasmania. And we had to go as far as Maryborough and Chewton to get bricks.’\textsuperscript{93}

Similarly, it was months before the society gained a permit to buy a truck. Despite a letter from the Federal Minister for Transport, the officer in charge of utilities in Melbourne could not comply. There were simply not enough vehicles and the PLC was too low on the priority list to qualify.\textsuperscript{94} A truck was essential to the production process in order to cart pre-fabricated building frames, doors, windows and other manufactured products from the Stockade onto house sites. Eventually they secured an ex-bomb carrier.\textsuperscript{95} The same story was repeated when it came to provision of electric stoves, so the society instructed Frew to design kitchens with both fuel

\textsuperscript{87} Robin Gollan, Revolutionaries and Reformists, op. cit., pp. 177–184.
\textsuperscript{89} ibid.
\textsuperscript{90} PLHBCSL, Committee of Management ‘Minutes’, Secretary’s Report, 23 May 1947.
\textsuperscript{91} ibid.
\textsuperscript{92} PLHBCSL, Committee of Management, ‘Minutes’, 23 May 1947.
\textsuperscript{94} PLHBCSL, Committee of Management, ‘Minutes’, Secretary’s Report, undated, but probably June 1947.
\textsuperscript{95} The Age, 3 April 1948, p. 3.
and electric stoves. The State Electricity Commission (SEC) was unable to bring power onto the Stockade site. The problem was a shortage of timber for poles. It was resolved by the society rather than the authority: the Peter Lalor men sourced a 30 foot pole to support the wires.\(^\text{97}\) Further delays were caused by the late delivery of reinforcement materials for the foundations.\(^\text{98}\) So the list goes on. These cases powerfully illustrate what is really meant when historians of this period state that there were ‘shortages of materials after the War’.\(^\text{99}\)

Nonetheless, when approval to proceed was eventually given in early July 1947, the co-operative burst into action. The Secretary of the Co-operative Brick Association promised bricks—at least there were some advantages in being a co-operative. The Tile Association promised tiles until the Stockade factory was operational, and 20 tons of cement was allocated by ‘Building Procurement’, even though cement from Tasmania had not yet been supplied.\(^\text{100}\)

By September 1947, nine months after their first meeting, building was underway. Greenwood could inform the membership that ‘work has commenced and the foundations for the first four homes have been poured and other work such as brick-laying has been started.\(^\text{101}\) The Herald also announced that controls on cement would be eased.\(^\text{102}\) For the next few months progress was rapid and in the early months of 1948 the Society received some positive publicity from a variety of outlets. The Australasian Post ran a three page spread entitled ‘Building Their Own Town in Three Years’.\(^\text{103}\) Change-Over published a major article featuring the PLC, including prominent endorsement in the editorial.\(^\text{104}\) Finally the Whittlesea Post was delighted to celebrate the progress being made to build a new township in their shire.\(^\text{105}\) By mid February, it declared that ‘the first house was ready for occupation; 47 others are in course of erection and foundations are in for a further 40’.\(^\text{106}\) All three articles underscored the self-help ethos and the co-operators’ determination to succeed. This was best summarised by the Australasian Post:

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97. ibid., 12 September 1947.
103. Australasian Post, 12 February 1948, pp. 7–9.
104. Change-Over, vol. 2, no. 2 undated (January or February 1948).
105. Whittlesea Post, 18 February 1948, front page.
106. ibid.
The most amazing aspect of this rapid growth of a township was the way in which the men had taken things into their own hands whenever a shortage arose. They found it would be easier, save valuable time, to transport their own timber, machinery, office equipment, food, tools. They got their own vehicles. There was a hold-up with the laying down of water mains. They dug their own trenches. They could not get tiles. They made, are still making, their own.¹⁰⁷

Despite their ingenuity, this self sufficiency came at a capital cost. Further, the society suspected that it was finding it even more difficult than most to access supplies, because they were a co-operative.

In the first half of 1947, as a developer and builder, they had sought to establish themselves within the building industry in Victoria. The society wrote to the Master Builders’ Association (MBA), the Hardware Association and the Chamber of Commerce applying for membership.¹⁰⁸ They were refused by them all.¹⁰⁹ As previously discussed, the founders of the PLC considered their scheme to be the new face of industrial development, creating ‘a new order’ confronting the capitalist system. They were now finding they could not both challenge the system and assume membership of it. They found themselves in a power struggle that was tougher than any had expected. They were shocked to find that they were in effect being locked out.

The MBA presented itself as a bastion of conservatism. When their journal, called Australian Builder, first appeared in 1949, it undoubtedly reflected long held views.¹¹⁰ In a segment called ‘Building Personality of the Month’ the journal presented ‘well known and highly respected’ members of the building industry. Many were Scottish, some almost certainly were Masons and they overtly supported the ‘establishment’.¹¹¹ In its August issue in 1949 the journal called for the end of the ‘Socialist’ Chifley Government: ‘Unless a change is effected, this election may well be a final one as far as Free Enterprise is concerned.’¹¹² A clash of cultures and vested interests was inevitable.

¹⁰⁷. Australasian Post, 12 February 1948, pp. 7–9.
¹⁰⁹. ibid., 18 June 1947.
¹¹⁰. Although it post-dated the events of 1947, it is unlikely that the ethos and philosophy changed in this time.
¹¹¹. See for example, Australian Builder, September 1949, p. 9, June 1951, p. 345 & August 1951, p. 489.
Nonetheless, Purcell believed that by being denied membership of these associations, ‘the society was handicapped in its efforts to secure materials for its big building project for ex-servicemen at Thomastown’.\textsuperscript{113} He continued:

The MBA refused to admit us as members on the grounds that we were not ‘reputable builders’. Apparently we were reputable enough when fighting for them—but not now.\textsuperscript{114}

Purcell’s indignation on this occasion revealed how strongly he harboured the belief that it was the working people who had won the war, but any gratitude for their efforts was quickly forgotten once peacetime activities returned.\textsuperscript{115} Qualified tradesmen were to be employed by the co-operative and it would be their task to train young apprentices, rehabilitate and re-train ex-servicemen and to organise the deliberate ‘day labour’ employment policy. This apparently was not good enough for the MBA.

Admission to the Hardware Association was refused on the grounds that the association was solely for wholesalers. Purcell considered this a spurious excuse, as under the \textit{Industrial and Provident Society Act 1928}, the PLC was allowed to trade and would do so once it was operational.\textsuperscript{116} More tellingly, the Hardware Association stated that it ‘was at liberty to determine who or what organisations would be admitted to membership’. Purcell argued that ‘if admitted to the Hardware Association we could set up our own trading show and buy materials at the right price’—hence their Stockade production and distribution plans.

In Purcell’s mind, this amounted to a ‘lockout’. When building supplies stalled, Purcell believed the Peter Lalor and the E.S. Co-operatives were being targeted and victimised. That is why, in early 1948, they were forced to open a co-operative brick kiln.\textsuperscript{117}Announcing that the newly formed co-operative’s bricks would be ready within six months, \textit{Labor Call}, in February 1948 declared:

Ever since its inception about 12 months ago, the Peter Lalor Society has struggled to get supplies. The Melbourne ring refused to sell it materials and the Society was forced to go outside the State for much of its requirements, most of which were obtained from New South Wales firms. Raw materials, such as timber, were obtained from Victorian firms outside the ring.\textsuperscript{118}

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{113} Un-named and undated press clipping in City of Whittlesea historical collection, titled, ‘‘Discrimination,’’ says Building Society: Difficulty Over Materials’.
\textsuperscript{114} ibid.
\textsuperscript{115} It is not known if he tried to use his networks in the RSL to influence these business associations.
\textsuperscript{116} See Chapter 3.
\textsuperscript{117} \textit{Labor Call}, 20 February 1948, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{118} ibid.
\end{footnotes}
Tasmanian Labor MP, G.W.A. Duthie, publicly supported the co-operative's attempts to ship cement from his state that were allegedly being blocked by Housing Minister Warner: a claim Warner did not deny. One newspaper headline quoted Purcell as saying that the co-operative was facing 'discrimination' over access to building materials.\textsuperscript{119} Purcell's view was that 'combines' or 'rings' of vested interests were 'jamming' supplies to the 'little people'.\textsuperscript{120} Nikola Balnave and Greg Patmore and others have highlighted other examples of co-operatives reporting their efforts being sabotaged by vested interests determined to see them fail.\textsuperscript{121} Throughout 1948, with state Labor in opposition, Purcell continued a relentless campaign against the conservative government, the building industry, and in particular the brick and tile makers.\textsuperscript{122} Through the \textit{Labor Hour}, 'for Sunday after Sunday [he derided them] until the brick interests called for mercy. It was the hard way. But he got the bricks and tiles.'\textsuperscript{123}

At least one Lalor resident wondered in hindsight if Purcell had gone from being the co-operative's greatest asset to its greatest liability. There would undoubtedly be longer term consequences from his uncompromising approach. Les Casbolt recalled his attempts to persuade Purcell to tone down these attacks, because he 'used to make some very derogatory remarks about the government and that... didn't help our cause actually...he invariably annoyed the government and we couldn't stop him'.\textsuperscript{124} Overwhelmingly though, the community remembered him admiringly and, at the time, shared his moral outrage. For most, the organised opposition to their co-operative served to galvanise their strength of purpose. Many early Lalor residents described how they crowded around their radios to listen to Purcell's segment on the \textit{Labor Hour} every Sunday afternoon.\textsuperscript{125} Jack Follett, the ex-serviceman who became Lalor's major cement tile maker, recounted:

\textbf{We never got much sympathy from the [conservative] government either. As a matter of fact we held a meeting there one time and went to parliament house and this was over materials that we weren't getting—and the}

\textsuperscript{119} "Jamming" Supplies Charge by Building Society", \textit{The Sun}, 7 November 1948; 'Who is Blocking Diggers' Self-Help Plan?" Truth, 18 September 1948, p. 1; Un-named and undated press clipping in the City of Whittlesea historical collection, titled, "Discrimination," says Building Society: Difficulty Over Materials'.

\textsuperscript{120} \textit{Labor Call}, 20 February 1948, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{121} Nikola Balnave, & Greg Patmore, 'Localism and Rochdale Co-Operation: The Junee District Co-Operative Society', \textit{Labor History}, no. 91, 2006, pp 50–51; Gary Lewis, 'The Quest for the "Middle Way": Radical and Rochdale Co-Operation in New South Wales, 1859–1915', PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1989, vol. 1, p. 63. See also Paul Hubert Casselman, \textit{The Cooperative Movement and Some of Its Problems}, New York, 1952, p. 9, who stated, 'Capitalists, financiers and business men may quarrel with the movement because they fear its spread may affect their business... The organized anti-co-operative efforts of certain Chambers of Commerce or of Tax Equality Associations fall into this category.'

\textsuperscript{122} Several Lalor residents reported that Purcell spoke his mind on his program, 'Ex-Servicemen's Question Box' and the whole Victorian listening community was treated to the vicissitudes of Lalor's development. See for instance, Les Casbolt, interview with Ruth Ford, 24 October 1998, p. 39; Dot Thompson, interview with the author, 1 May 2006, pp. 36–37.

\textsuperscript{123} \textit{Labor Call}, 9 April 1948, p. 8.

\textsuperscript{124} Les Casbolt, interview, op. cit., pp. 39 & 57.

\textsuperscript{125} See for example, Dot Thompson interview, op. cit., p. 31.
government didn't give us any sympathy whatsoever. As a matter of fact, well, they give us the idea that they were against Co-operative work.\(^\text{126}\)

Ex-serviceman George Jacobs, aged 83 when interviewed, added, 'actually it was the big firms, I reckon, that put the co-op out of business, because they [the co-operative] were building the houses too cheap'.\(^\text{127}\)

Amidst emotions that swung from positive and enthusiastic to angry and frustrated, Lalor was officially opened on Sunday 5 April 1948 when the keys for five homes were handed over to their new owners. The opening was attended by Senator C.W. Sanford representing the Federal Minister for Housing. Also at the gathering were the Leader of the State Opposition, John Cain, Mrs Jessie Vasey, President of the War Widows’ Guild, and a large crowd of prospective residents and onlookers. According to the Whittlesea Post, fifty-five other homes were partly finished, thirty-two more were underway, and there were 'foundations in for still a further batch'. Purcell was enthusiastic and up-beat in his assessment. He expected that 'a total of 1000 houses will be finished in two years. When the estate is built up, it is expected that it will house 4500'.\(^\text{128}\) Greenwood believed that 'maybe we'll even have everybody in the town working for the town'.\(^\text{129}\)

Three weeks later they would be protesting at Parliament House about material shortages, building would be at a near standstill and workmen and office staff were being sacked. Partly constructed houses stood like skeletons, warping in the weather, while prospective home-owners looked on helplessly. Only four more completed houses would be occupied between April and September.\(^\text{130}\)

Purcell heightened his attacks on the Holloway Government and the large companies which he held responsible. On Saturday, 18 September 1948, the Melbourne Truth devoted its front page to the story with the headlines: 'Hundreds of Ex-Servicemen Face Brick Wall in Housing Settlement: Who is Blocking Diggers' Self-Help Plan?' Referring to 'mysterious shortages' the article stated:

They can't get cement in Victoria. The cement they're able to buy in Tasmania, they can't get shipped. They can't get railway trucks for timber they are buying in Victorian country mills, and they're not allowed to get it to Thomastown by diesel trucks they bought to circumvent the railways hold up.\(^\text{131}\)

\(^{126}\) Jack Fellett, interview with Ruth Ford, op. cit., p. 127.

\(^{127}\) George Jacobs, interview with the author, 1 May 2006, p. 18.

\(^{128}\) Whittlesea Post, 7 April 1948, p. 4.

\(^{129}\) Ibid.

\(^{130}\) Gary Johns, 'Building a Suburb', p. 15.

\(^{131}\) Truth, 18 September 1948, p. 1.
Greenwood, Purcell and Materials Manager Bert Sansom were described as pulling no punches ‘in blaming the dead hand of officialdom, the building trade interests and Housing Minister Warner’. The following week Warner rebutted Purcell’s allegations and the battle raged in Labor Call, this time with Purcell’s ‘denunciation of the attitude of the State Government and the building interests towards the needs of the poor’. In late September, the Truth reported that more than 2000 people, including members of the PLC and the E.S. Co-operative Society, had held a public meeting at Wirth’s Olympia in Melbourne. Apart from Purcell, speakers included Labor member of the Legislative Assembly, S.M. Keon, and H. Ridout, ‘a former Commonwealth investigation officer on rents’, where the audience was informed of direct and deliberate action to thwart their access to building supplies. Whether the assessment of numbers was accurate or not, it was further indication of Purcell’s capacity to draw a crowd.

We will of course never actually know the truth of these allegations, though there is no doubting the sincerity with which the co-operators believed their rhetoric of victimisation. With the co-operative so closely associated with the Victorian ALP, though, the Conservative Housing Minister, Warner, would surely not have done them any favours. He purported to be fair, but the emphasis in his words perhaps told another story. Warner’s perspective was that:

More than 10,000 returned soldiers who did not belong to the Peter Lalor Building Society are trying to build homes at present and all cases would be treated strictly on their merits and without political bias.

One factor working against both co-operatives was their well-researched decision to rely on concrete products. No one was predicting a shortage of cement. When Housing Minister Warner wrote to the Truth on 26 September 1948, he stated that the PLC had received 335 tons of cement between August 1947 and September 1948. The E.S. Society had received 134 tons since May 1948. Not surprisingly Purcell saw the figures differently. The catch was that each Junget home needed nine tons of cement. Also the Peter Lalor tile making plant took one ton of cement.

132. ibid.
133. ibid., 26 September 1948, p. 1.
134. Labor Call, 29 October 1948, p. 2.
135. Standish Michael Keon was at the time the Labor member for Richmond and undoubtedly an associate of Purcell’s. He was also campaign secretary for Arthur Calwell, but, unlike Calwell and Purcell, he joined the DLP in 1935. Robin Gollan identified Keon as one of the ‘two most consistent exposer of communists in high places’. See Robin Gollan, Revolutionaries and Reformists, op. cit., p. 277.
137. As previously discussed their decision was based on the latest advice from CSIR, and the example evident by Commonwealth Housing Commission’s pre-fabricated concrete houses being manufactured at Holmsglen, and in the light of a lifting of war-time restrictions on cement.
139. ibid.
to make 1000 tiles, with 2,500 tiles per house.\textsuperscript{140} The fact that they were so hungry for cement relative to other housing construction methods was having a crippling impact.

By September 1948 the society’s failure to pay its suppliers may also have accounted for their failure to deliver.\textsuperscript{141} Doss Lawson recalled one case concerning a timber yard near Dandenong: the co-operative owed them money, but could not pay the bill. There was another timber yard near Narbethong which was still granting credit. A deal was struck whereby timber from the Narbethong timber yard was sent to the Dandenong company in payment of the debt. While this did nothing to help the co-operative with its supply of timber, for a short time it kept the debt Collectors at bay.\textsuperscript{142}

There have always been suggestions that when the society folded in 1954, many people lost their money.\textsuperscript{143} Clearly many did. What is not clear, however, is how many of the families who paid their deposits but did not build at Lalor actually did lose money. Had large numbers lost all their money there would almost certainly have been a public outcry. Only about 160 of those 822 who fully paid their deposit subsequently lived at Lalor, with one source alleging that ‘of the 800–900 members, most eventually lost £80 [£40] or more,’ though this probably overstated the case.\textsuperscript{144} There was considerable discussion, debate and consternation among the Committee of Management to ensure that they behaved ethically and treated everyone fairly. They knew their membership comprised struggling working-class families and the society did not seek to worsen their lot. At the same time, many members would have understood the risks they were taking and would have known that when they paid their money, they were committing the society to buy land, plant and building materials on their behalf. This made any large-scale withdrawal unfeasible.

From the beginning of the co-operative, members sought to withdraw and many received refunds. Most early meetings of the committee approved lists of up to a dozen people who requested and received their share of the money back. By the end of June 1947, 69 had withdrawn and received a refund, leaving a membership at that time of 718. Of these members, 480 had paid for land, five had paid £6 towards membership and 163 had paid only £1.\textsuperscript{145} At this point the society decided to adopt a more systematic approach to withdrawals. After heated debate, it decided that a 10/- administration fee should be charged. In addition, they agreed that members could be refunded the £25 for their land and £25 deposit on the house if a transfer

\textsuperscript{140} ibid. They were built by the E.S. Society and described in detail in Chapter 2.

\textsuperscript{141} Harold Fielding, interview with Ruth Ford, 19 November 1998, p. 182.

\textsuperscript{142} Doss Lawson, interview with Ruth Ford, 24 October 1998, p. 89. The situation she described probably occurred in the last quarter of 1948.


\textsuperscript{144} ibid.

\textsuperscript{145} PLHBCSL, Committee of Management, ‘Minutes’, 4 July 1947.
to another member could be organised.\textsuperscript{146} Often this was successfully achieved through Belle Dunton.\textsuperscript{147} This withdrawal policy was actively implemented until February 1948, suggesting that all withdrawal applicants to that point received a refund.

The delays in building cost money, putting pressure on cash flow and further complicated withdrawal policy. In October 1947 the Committee of Management became alarmed at its mounting debt. Treasurer Fox suggested that one solution would be for members to convert £20 of their £25 house deposit into shares and called on members to subscribe to as many shares as possible, up to 20 shares. The society offered 2 ½ per cent in interest. There is no mention in the minutes as to how this money would be repaid, and by November the society reported an overdraft of £3,348/8/1 with liabilities of £77,472.\textsuperscript{148} Just a glance at these figures reveals a crisis. Though concerned, the committee was not in any doubt that the society could rein in the debt once housing finance started to flow. The critical issue was to get houses built, and fast. The more houses completed, the more the start-up capital costs could be spread across them. It was hoped that the costs would eventually be amortised across a development of at least 800 households.

The delays in building, together with the public displays of anguish aired by Purcell, were in part responsible for increased numbers of people deciding to withdraw. It placed the society in a terrible quandary. By mid-year a special general meeting agreed to increase the price of land from £25 to £35 for a building block.\textsuperscript{149} To compound their worries, there were 75 requests for withdrawals which would involve refunds in the order of £900 in share capital, £1,900 in land deposits and £1,000 for home deposits. This represented a minimum of sixty members. Many of these applications for withdrawal were more than 90 days old and some had been lodged as far back as February 1948.\textsuperscript{150}

The society decided to review its withdrawal policy and held a special meeting with their solicitor, Hunt.\textsuperscript{151} They were shocked to find that there were no provisions in the ‘Rules’ for withdrawals of share capital except ‘when leaving the suburb permanently’. Fox ironically noted that ‘it may not be possible for a member to prove that he was leaving the suburb permanently as he was never there’.\textsuperscript{152} The situation looked dire for those members who, in order to help the society, had converted their

\textsuperscript{146} ibid., 6 June 1947.

\textsuperscript{147} See, for example, Pat Tuttle, interview with the author, 25 September 2006, p. 45; Roy Wicks, interview with Ruth Ford, 23 November 1998, p. 359.


\textsuperscript{150} PHHCS, ‘Minutes of Special Meeting’, 9 July 1948.

\textsuperscript{151} ibid.

\textsuperscript{152} ibid.
home deposits into shares. Hunt’s legal advice also confirmed that the society had no hold on land or house deposits if a member had not been successful in a ballot. The solicitor also tried to persuade the committee to stall for as long as possible before issuing any refunds and pointed to the arbitration arrangements.\footnote{153} Guilt stricken, the society passed a resolution, by a slim majority, asking the solicitor (against his advice) to arrange an amendment to ‘give us power to permit withdrawal in excess of the first share’.\footnote{154} ‘This was probably an academic exercise as the bank would not allow credit for refunds until the society had reined in its debts.’\footnote{155} The society did, however, own the land and there were instances where individuals received a building block, and many more over time took building products from the Stockade for construction of homes in Lalor and other locations, up to the value of their shares.

According to Johns, when King acceded to the role of Chairman in the second half of 1949, and ‘after receiving the treasurer’s report’ he applied to the Registrar of Co-operative Housing Societies, ‘for an investigation into the finances of the Society’.\footnote{156} The finding was that, following the sale of land to the WSHD, there were insufficient blocks available to meet the obligations to shareholders, who had paid a total of £26,667 as deposits on land.\footnote{157} While this could in theory have affected 762 people, each paying £35, the situation was much more fluid than this. Also it is clear from the rates books that there were still many Peter Lalor blocks available, though most still awaited construction of drainage. In short, those shareholders who had not already attained land at Lalor, no longer wanted it. Rather, they had made choices to live elsewhere and wanted a refund on their deposits. Greenwood’s correct assessment was that they would prefer cash rather than land, hence the sale to WSHD which, by Greenwood’s reckoning in April 1949, should have almost settled the society’s debts. It therefore remains a mystery why the PLC’s finances were in such crisis only a few months later. Fox’s hasty departure to New Guinea in August 1949 heightened suspicions about him, but there is no documentary evidence to implicate him in any wrongdoing.\footnote{158} When asked in 1977 King simply stated, ‘the time was not right to reveal all of what happened’.\footnote{159} He never did.

It was after the opening, and as the building program stalled through shortage of materials, that the additional ‘self-help’ style of co-operation took hold. More than 40 families built through PLC syndicates, which were established under the watchful supervision of a registered PLC builder. These syndicates used PLC plans and

\footnotesize{\begin{enumerate}
\item ibid.
\item ibid.
\item ibid.
\item Gary Johns, ‘Building a Suburb’, op. cit. p. 28, footnote 36.
\item ibid.
\item Greenwood was held in high regard by those who remember him.
\item The Age, 2 December 1977, p. 2. See the biography of Fox in Appendix A.
\end{enumerate}}
Stockade products, but the members built each others' homes in groups of two to six. Born of necessity by a society looking to find a way through a mounting burden of debt, and with their members still clamouring for homes, these syndicates were nonetheless an integral part of the co-operative scheme. Some members signed formal 'Syndicate Agreements' through which they agreed to abide by the objects of the society and:

between themselves to give their part-time services without fee or reward whether for the benefit of the said Society or for the benefit of members in assisting the actual work of building homes within the said Community settlement.  

Others had less formal arrangements, within families or between friends.  

By using the co-operative's builders as supervisors, the syndicates avoided a clash with the bank and the WSHD over funds that were not available to owner-builders.  

Vic Michael recalled that Bill O'Connor was our ghost builder to satisfy the WSHD rules.  

The first syndicate was comprised of men who were already working in the Stockade and were mostly qualified tradesmen. Known as the O'Connor Syndicate it had six members: two of the main Lalor builders, the brothers Jim and Bill O'Connor, who both had blocks of land in Vasey Avenue; two truck drivers, Clive Lawson and Doug Russell also in Vasey Avenue; Ern Smith, the plumber, who had a block in French Street, and carpenter/builder, Bill Syme, who was in Station Street.  

These men had much in common. All were ex-servicemen, five having served in the Army. Syme was a fitter with the Airforce. The older men were Jim O'Connor, born in 1907 and Ern Smith born in 1908. The other four were all born between 1914 and 1916. A few were Masons, either then or were drawn into the brotherhood by their syndicate mates at a later date. They were a model syndicate and in many respects gave the co-operative confidence that it could be done. Doss Lawson recalled:

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160. I am indebted to Doss Lawson for providing a copy of the 'Syndicate Agreement' of which her husband, Clive Lawson, was a member.

161. See Appendix B for a list of the Peter Lalor syndicate groups. The list is incomplete.


164. PLHBCSL, 'Syndicate Agreement', 14 October 1948.

165. United Grand Lodge of Victoria, 'Lodge Registration Books', Anzac House, Melbourne, Book 9, Eros Lodge, no. 416, p. 343. showed that Austin James (Jim) O'Connor aged 38, carpenter, 2/12/46 made application—admitted 12/2/47; Allan Murray O'Connor joined aged 30, carpenter, made application on 7/2/49—admitted 4/4/49. Book 16, Epping Lodge, revealed Clive Alexander Lawson, contractor also as a member of Eros Lodge, no date. However his membership came later than the O'Connor brothers. Doss Lawson recalled, 'Jim O'Connor asked Clive if he'd like to go into the Lodge, and Clive became Master in 1954.' Doss Lawson, interview with the author, 8 December 2005, p. 5. From the 'Lodge Registration Book', op. cit., the others in the syndicate were not members of Eros Lodge, and may not have been Masons, or they may have brought with them to Lalor, Lodge membership from other places in Victoria.
Fortunately they all worked out there, and they worked every night after work and every weekend and it took them just two years to build those houses.\textsuperscript{166}

Doss and Clive Lawson moved into their home in April 1949. Theirs was the second house within the group to be finished and those with houses still to be completed stayed with the Lawsons at weekends to continue building.\textsuperscript{167}

Vic Michael’s building syndicate story was very different. He recalled in the first instance how he and his wife Rea got their land:

When it looked like the Society would not be building any more houses and we were going to get involved in the group building... For instance, this one, there wasn’t a house on any of it and I was taken down by an officer of the Society and said ‘Do you want this block of land? Have that one. And so I said ‘Yeah, right. I’ll take it.’ So at least I had a block of land—even if it didn’t have electricity, water, gas or anything. It was a quarter acre and it was—belonged to my wife and myself.\textsuperscript{168}

Michael then described how he decided to become part of a syndicate:

I came out on a Saturday morning, and met this officer...standing outside, waiting their turn were two other fellas. And when I went in and spoke to him he said, ‘Well they’re not going to build any more houses.’ And he said, ‘But I’ve got an idea,’ he said, ‘Why don’t you build it yourself?’ I’d never had a hammer in my hand in my life. He said, ‘You know, you’ve got the block of land, and we’ll get someone to show you how...’ Famous last words. I said, ‘Oh, I’ll give it some thought.’ And the next two fellas went in—they got the same proposition, so we walked out together, and the three of us stood around, never knew them from a bar of soap, and we decided we would build our own homes.\textsuperscript{169}

Vic Michael, who worked filling petrol cans at the Shell refinery, boot-maker Bert Ansell and storeman Percy Murray, built each others’ homes through this formal syndicate arrangement. And it took a very long time. The Michaels paid their £60 for the February ballot in 1947. They moved into their home in December 1951 and theirs was the first of these three to be completed. Michael’s daughter Kathleen said:

\textsuperscript{166} Doss Lawson, interview with Ruth Ford, op. cit., p. 70.
\textsuperscript{167} ibid., pp. 91—92. Also from oral testimony it has been possible to recreate some of the syndicates and these are in Appendix B.
\textsuperscript{169} ibid., pp. 153—154.
They were an interesting threesome really... Bert Ansell was a very shy retiring man and ... Perc was a very outgoing sort of a bloke, yes. It's amazing isn't it that they would do that. 'We need a house, so we'll build it.'

Bert Ansell had been in the March ballot in 1947 and his house was completed by November 1952; and Percy Murray had to wait until June 1954, despite having been part of the November ballot in 1947. Their final achievement was celebrated in the *Whittlesea Post* with the headline, 'Long Job Finished':

The Michael Building Group ... have after five years two months of effort, completed their three homes, which were built only on week-ends and in spare time. The men began this tremendous task, not realising the heart-breaks, and blisters that they would have to contend with. Happy smiles on the faces of all members of the families are pleasing to see.

Clearly, there were different ways in which the groups were formed. Some formed between friends and relatives, while in other cases, complete strangers were thrown arbitrarily together, and not all were successful. Ron Moore and Jack Follett were neighbours living opposite each other in Preston, where they met. Both ex-servicemen, they subsequently discovered they had travelled from Morotai to Australia in the same ship, 'the LST', but did not know each other then. It took them about five years to complete the two houses. Follett explained their syndicate system:

They'd put three or four in one syndicate and another three or four in another, and this is how they started... but Ron and I, there was only the two of us—that's where we started off. Well then they... put two more on to us. But they sort of, well they didn't last too long, ...they could see the process wasn't too fast, and of course they give it away... Yeah... she was a rough old time wasn't it?

Both men remained long term friends and residents of Lalor.

For brothers Bill and Maurie Nelson, their syndicate was more of a family affair. A combination of oral testimony, and a family practice for keeping diaries, allows us to clearly understand how the pre-fabricated building process and collective

175. ibid., pp. 108–9.

CHAPTER 4 : BUILDING
methods actually worked. In April 1949, Bill and Lil Nelson's friends, Ken and Phyllis Lonne, bought a block on the Peter Lalor Estate and immediately persuaded the Nelsons to join the co-operative. In September that year, Bill's younger brother Maurie joined the co-operative and the syndicate as well. What is important about these dates is that clearly the society was still taking new members and presumably using the money to refund withdrawals. Unlike those who had joined in the early days, it is significant that they knew at the time they joined that the co-operative had stopped building and they would have to build themselves.

Bill Nelson was the oldest of the three, being born in 1914. Ken Lonne and Maurie Nelson were stereotypical Lalor ex-servicemen; both born in 1919. Both had served overseas with the Army, Nelson in New Guinea and the islands to the north, and Lonne in the Middle East. Lonne stumbled into a booby trap in 1942 and lost four of the toes on his right foot. Bill Nelson had sought to enlist but was disappointed to be rejected on medical grounds. The men had been raised in the Methodist and Presbyterian churches.

Working only at weekends and on holidays, they commenced building the Lonnies' house; Bill's was the second house and Maurie's was last. Lonnies' house was of brick veneer and was at 396 Station Street, while the Nelson brothers built in weatherboard and both were in Vasey Avenue. Maurie used the same house plan as his older brother, to make it easier to build. Progress was rapid. Bill and Lil Nelson met with Stanley Frew on 30 July 1949 to discuss their house plans and by 20 August they had been allocated their plot of land. By early September 1949 the complete syndicate team of Ken, Bill and Maurie dug the footings for Bill's shed to get his building started.


177. According to Bill Nelson's diary, op. cit., they joined the society on 28 April 1949 and had paid off their block by 28 July. They also joined the Peter Lalor No. 1 Co-operative Building Society on 13 April.

178. Maurice Nelson, interview with the author, op. cit., p. 11.

179. ibid., p. 18.


181. Kenneth Frederick Lonne, individual war record, NAA, series B883, VX/59/42; Maurice Stanley Nelson, individual war record, NAA, series B883, VX120055.

182. Kenneth Frederick Lonne, individual war record, op. cit. This resulted in his return to Australia. After some time in Army administration he was discharged as medically unfit in March 1944; Maurice Stanley Nelson, individual war record, op. cit.

183. Barbara Breaks, interview with the author, 13 October, 2005, p. 14. Barbara Breaks stated: 'Dad was a soldier for eight days. He had duodenal ulcers and he didn't pass the medical. And he got a certificate. He tried the air force and the army, and was rejected both times which upset him terribly.'


185. Bill Nelson was at 23 Vasey Avenue and Maurie was at number 3.
The building ran in tandem with the formal transfer of land from the co-operative to the Nelsons and with the necessary approvals by the local Council. Maurie Nelson recollected that the O’Connor brothers, the experienced builders working for the co-operative, were on hand with advice and assistance which was essential as Maurie Nelson explained: Ken Lonne had done a building course after he came out of the Army, ‘and that’s the only experience in the group. The other two were just hangers on, my brother and I. But we soon learnt the hard way, yes.’¹⁸⁶ Most of the professional work, such as plumbing, plastering and electrical had to be done by a licensed tradesman, but, as Maurie Nelson recalled, ‘fortunately a lot of it we’d be able to sneak in ourselves under the lap, but we’d always have a plumber (or equivalent tradesman) there too, to sign the papers for us.’¹⁸⁷ Bill Nelson’s diary noted payment to builder Bill Syme of £198 for pre-cut timbers from the Stockade. He paid caretaker and hardware store manager George Mackenzie 10/- to hire the stump hole digger from the Stockade, and the society’s driver Clive Lawson did the cartage. They were underway.

By the end of September progress had been remarkable. Bill Nelson’s house had been measured out and pegged. The post holes were dug and the stumps and sole plates completed so they were ready to add floor bearers by 1 October. At the same time the Lonnies’ house was at lock-up stage. By 5 October 1949 Bill Nelson received a telegram from the co-operative, informing him that his timber frame was ready for delivery. And so the process continued. While Bill Nelson worked as a compositor at the Government Printing Office through the week,¹⁸⁸ he also acted as building co-ordinator for his house, arranging to pay co-operative committeeman, Ern Smith, for plumbing and negotiating a good price with co-operative resident, Doug Bellinger, for tiles. At weekends the syndicate team persevered with the actual building work, completing the placement of the floor joists on Bill’s house.¹⁸⁹

The pre-cut timber frames meant that progress was also very quick and, as everyone was erecting pre-fabricated timber frames, they all helped each other. Maurie Nelson explained:

Yes, well if Freddy [Bayne, who was building alone] wanted a wall lifted up or anything like that we’d go around and lift the wall up for him. It could have been anybody. Everybody helped each other. And there was no worries there.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁶. Maurice Nelson, interview with the author, op. cit., p. 11.
¹⁸⁷. ibid., p. 20.
¹⁸⁹. Bill Nelson, diary, op. cit.
On the weekend of 15 and 16 October a working bee of Lalor men erected the walls for bedroom one, the bathroom walls, the side of bedroom two and the laundry for Bill and Lil Nelson’s house. On the next weekend, with intermittent rain, they erected the rear wall of the kitchen, the front lounge wall and the wall for the hall. By 12 November all the walls were in place and they ‘started straightening up’ the whole house frame. The next weekend they were able to ‘put all the ceiling joists on’.191 Although for many of these weekends, Ken Lonne was absent at work, the Nelson brothers had already worked on Lonnes’ house and knew what to do. They harboured no resentment. The land transfer for Bill and Lil Nelson was eventually transacted on 25 November 1949.192

Lil Nelson did a considerable amount of the physical work to contribute to the building process. Jack Follett recalled:

She used to harness the horse into the lorry, she’d go up to the tile shop; she’d load the tiles onto the lorry and take ‘em down to the block—this was through the week...so that they could do work on the weekend....but they were real battlers, there’s no two ways about that, well everyone was, they had to be I suppose.193

Bill and Lil’s older daughters, Barbara and Maureen, reminisced about their weekends at Lalor. Maureen stated:

We had no car so we had to get two trains and sometimes had to walk from Reservoir or Thomastown carrying tools like hammers, chisels, nails, lunches, thermos and drinks.194

Barbara continued:

Nearly always when Mum and Dad slept out here for the weekend, Maureen and I would come out—because Mum and Dad slept in a little packing-case shed they’d built.195

Although there was meant to be an orderly sequence to the building of the homes, material shortages caused them to work on whichever of the houses had supplies. Maurie Nelson recalled, ‘[w]e more or less worked on the three of them at times’.196

By early December, the three men started pitching the roof on Bill’s house and

192. ibid.
12 bags of cement arrived for Ken Lonne's house. Bill recorded in his diary that
he sought a quote from the PLC Stockade for windows and three external doors.
The quote was £94. He tried Inglis at Preston and ordered the windows from them.
Presumably they struck a better deal. On the other hand, Maurie Nelson got all his
materials from the Stockade because when the society was struggling financially,
'I got all my windows and doors, partially paid for by the money the co-op owed me.
I didn't lose much on that. That saved me a lot of money.'\textsuperscript{197} By Boxing Day they
had cleaned up Ken Lonne's site and throughout the early part of 1950 they clad Bill
Nelson's house with weatherboards. They installed a brick fireplace, built an outside
toilet with a concrete floor and tiled the wet areas. Lil primed all the weatherboard
planks and did most of the painting. For the first six months of 1950 the three men
worked on the three houses. The Lonnles were living in theirs, Bill and Lil spent
many nights in their shed before their family moved into their home by mid year.
The house was at lock-up stage, but not completed. At that time Maurie, Nita and
baby daughter Pam moved to Lalor to share with another family, (the Archibalds)
and work started on their house in earnest. When Maurie's house was half finished,
they moved in:

What we did was, we had a skillion on the back and we had the laundry, the
toilet and just a porch and a room and that was what we lived in. ...We had
no flooring in the main part of the house. It was there but it wasn't laid....
Actually we put down the flooring in most of the houses at night time after
we finished work and we'd come home and we'd have a lead running from
somebody next door who had got to a stage where they were locked up and so
they had power.\textsuperscript{198}

Maurie, like his brother Bill, worked for a government department, the Bureau of
Mineral Resources. He was a storeman. He described how he used his workplace to
help with the internal fixtures of his house:

Well....actually I was lucky because I pre-fabbed all my cupboards at work of
a night time. I'd stay back at work and they had all the machinery there and
I pre-fabbed and I'd cart them with me home by train, out to Lalor.\textsuperscript{199}

Maurie would descend the train at Thomastown and walk the mile or more home,
'carrying bits and pieces all wrapped up.' It was not an easy trip. 'I can remember
one night,' he recalled, 'I had some masonite and the wind was pretty strong and it
took me all this time to get there.'\textsuperscript{200}

\textsuperscript{197} ibid., p. 24.
\textsuperscript{198} ibid., p. 14 & 11.
\textsuperscript{199} Maurice Nelson, interview with the author, op. cit., p. 14.
\textsuperscript{200} ibid.
Syndicate arrangements such as these did eventually provide the homes that had inspired the dream. In some cases the building was remarkably quick, in others it was grudgingly slow. This may have been little different from others who were similarly building suburban settlements on the outskirts of all major Australian cities at this time. However, through their co-operative arrangements the PLC syndicates were more highly organised than the piecemeal, private efforts happening elsewhere, and in the main provided more support. In a few cases the syndicate builder of the first house reneged on the deal to help with later homes, causing considerable resentment. In the main, though, the process was a positive one: homes were built, skills were learnt, lasting friendships were made, and the process of ex-servicemen's collaboration created a transitional space between military and civilian life, which assisted their adjustment to an ordinary existence after the war. Writing in 1987 as part of John Barrett's investigation of returned WWII servicemen, C.C. Lee wrote:

The really big thing overlooked is the length of time it takes to really return to civilian life; it would average seven to ten years to get back to some sort of normal behaviour. 201

As Vic Michael commented later, however, the slow building process was particularly tough on the women:

I only speak about m'own family. I mean—I went in the army, six and a half years, and then—came out here—built a house, took six years, every weekend. Never talked about holidays—the family's holidays is—they'd come out and camp out here at Christmas...No it would never have succeeded without the support of the women. 202

By the time others started building in Derrick Street, the society had organised for the Stockade to build 'temporary', at £162/10/- each. 203 At least 39 of them were erected in Lalor between 1948 and 1949. Families lived in them until their houses were built. 204 Ron Moore remembered that they lived in their 'temporary' for about four years. 205 They were twenty-four feet by twelve feet bungalows made of cement sheeting. Four of the bungalows were in Middleton Street and ex-serviceman Bill Clark aged 94 at the time of interview, and his daughter Irene, described in graphic detail how primitive their living conditions were. Lined only with Sisalcraft,

204 See maps in vol. 2, p. v-vii.

CHAPTER 4: BUILDING
Irene recalled how the wind seemed to blow right through: ‘Oh it was freezing’\textsuperscript{206} They lived in their bungalow for seven years with no electricity or running water.

While the Clarks were a typical nuclear family inside their bungalow, Violet (Chubb) Burgess had her extended family staying with her. Her husband, ex-serviceman Dave, was one of four boys and a girl who had been brought up in orphanages. When Dave and Violet married, they took the youngest brother Lance from the orphanage and he lived with them for many years. They treated him like a son. At various times the oldest brother Harry and a younger brother Doug also boarded with them. By the time they moved into their ‘temporary’, they had two young baby boys as well. Violet’s memories of this time reflected more on her own childhood story of landlord evictions than the glory of her new accommodation, when she described her bungalow as: ‘No windows, no water, no electricity, no telephone, but my own front door. It was wonderful. Go through the cow patties to get up to the loo.’\textsuperscript{207}

By September 1949 there were 47 permanent homes completed and occupied in Lalor with 30 ‘temporaries’ occupied and 8 ‘temporaries’ ‘were in various stages of completion’.\textsuperscript{208} By December the population of this small community had risen to 403 people with ‘15 or more families moving in after Christmas’.\textsuperscript{209} The PLC then reversed its support for the building of ‘temporaries’, which were all congregated in the north eastern corner of the Peter Lalor Estate. The co-operative wrote to the council:

> Requesting that no further permits for the erection of temporary dwellings on the Lalor Estate be issued without the approval of the [Peter Lalor] Committee of Management.\textsuperscript{210}

The President Cr. J.A. Balharrie responded with ‘[t]he request seems to be reasonable as this society is doing a good job in regard to home building.’\textsuperscript{211} There are no society records for this period, and it is unclear who was driving this concern. Lalor homeowners may have highlighted their original garden city aspirations, and sought to ensure that their vision was not degraded by any expanded use of temporary accommodation. For those who had a block of land and little else, though, pressing housing needs outweighed all other concerns and it was this view that, at a practical level, won the day. The PLC, together with the council, continued to approve requests

\textsuperscript{206} Bill Clark & Irene Wood (nee Clark), interview with the author, 19 October 2006, pp. 4 & 10.
\textsuperscript{207} Violet Burgess, interview with the author, 20 April 2007, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{208} WSC, ‘Minutes of Meetings’, item 6, 14 September 1949, p. 225.
\textsuperscript{209} Whittlesea Post, 21 December 1949, p. 16.
\textsuperscript{210} ibid., 22 February 1950, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{211} Whittlesea Post, 22 February, 1950, p. 12.
for the construction of ‘temporaries’.212 There is no mention in the press that this issue divided the community as it never was intended to apply to those already there.

Outside the syndicate arrangements, some folk took over foundations and built themselves, or they gained a partly built house and organised for tradespeople to finish it for them. Leo Boyle, also an ex-serviceman, explained that he and his father built their house. They took over a block that belonged to somebody else who withdrew.213 They paid £90 for the block with footings already completed. Leo’s father, Thomas Boyle, gave Leo his very old Dodge car which proved invaluable for the building. Leo described one trip in this way:

It was roof timbers. I put a rig across the front of the car and across the back and I stacked the timber along the sides, to carry the roof timber. ’Cause I had to pick it up in pieces, you know, it wasn’t available in one lot.... [I] jumped in the door through the window. And I carted all the timber for the roof like that.214

They moved into their unfinished home in December 1951.

Some started from scratch and built alone, though as we have seen, even these people used a PLC plan and could call on a ‘working bee’ for help when a prefabricated frame needed hauling into place. Others simply paid a builder. All of these arrangements had been allowed under the original scheme, but it was never envisaged that the co-operative would build so few homes. It is easy to see why those first 35 to 40 families, who had PLC homes completely built or almost completed, were considered to be so lucky.215 As Doss Lawson stated, without venom, ‘the first people who got houses built for them, got them too cheaply. If you had them built it cost about £1,100 (2 bedroom) to £1,600 (3 bedroom), but those who did it themselves still paid £1,200.’ This was still much less than the benchmark £2,000 suggested by Dinny Lovegrove in Labor Call in 1946.216

Overall, it was a remarkable achievement, and even though the co-operative did not build its planned 1000 homes, nor did it build the promised infrastructure, it was recognised in the press as, ‘the first large-scale co-operative building scheme undertaken in Victoria’.217 It provided the impetus by which the suburb of Lalor was born.

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213. Leo Boyle, interview with the author, 24 February 2006, p. 11.
214. ibid., p. 12.
216. See the quotation on p. 127 (this chapter).
217. ‘Pre-Cutting Plant on Housing Estate’, unlabelled press clipping in the City of Whittlesea files, dated in the week after the opening of Lalor on 4 April 1948.
In this chapter I have outlined how, once the co-operative stopped building the homes, many of the membership rallied together by drawing upon a deeper and more enduring form of co-operation. The perception of many of those involved in Lalor that they were being discriminated against because they were a co-operative further strengthened their resolve and determination to persevere. Another defining feature for Lalor was the predominance of ex-servicemen, and for many, the self-help ethos, the team-based work, the camaraderie and drive to keep on building provided an unusual but effective form of rehabilitation. It is highly likely that this aspect, too, was part of Purcell’s plan and the women of Lalor were, in the main, complicit and supportive. In the three next chapters, I demonstrate how these ingredients formed the basis for an incredibly strong and vibrant community. I further analyse the composition of this community and highlight the ways in which they coalesced to build social capital and lobby for government services creating, in Ar Neil’s terms, ‘civic space in between the individual and the state’.218

5

Struggle

'The fact that it gave some battlers their houses—that was the best thing about the Co-op. You can put that in a short letter.'

As the post-war decade drew to a close, with cold war tensions on the rise internationally, and the Menzies government voted into office in Canberra, the broader Peter Lalor Estate began to take shape. It centred around the original triangle bordered by Station and Derrick Streets and Vasey Avenue, where as Gwen Hawkins recalled, 'the soldiers used to live'.

Not unexpectedly, the community sought basic infrastructure and confronted a council—as well as some state agencies—that choked and stalled over any assistance. According to the Whittlesea Post, when a deputation visited council in December 1949 they received a sympathetic hearing. They were seeking roads and drainage, but were turned away having been told that 'finance was the issue'.

In this chapter, I trace the development of the Peter Lalor Co-operative (PLC) to its voluntary liquidation in 1954. As the co-operative settlement evolved into the Peter Lalor Estate, it began to adopt many of the features of an ordinary outer suburb. Still at many levels it continued to be unique. I analyse how this co-operative scheme interacted with the different arms of state and local government which at every level impeded its progress. I demonstrate how well organised and self-sufficient the settlers were, and ironically how they became thwarted by their own self-help ethos.

1. Les Casbolt, transcript of interview with Ruth Ford, 24 October 1998, p. 65. All further references to interviews will cite the transcriptions of the interviews.
3. Whittlesea Post, 21 December 1949, p. 16.
4. Ibid.
and by the neglect, and perhaps hostility, of governments; revealing deep, structural limitations to the effectiveness of their agency. At this structural level, this undercapitalised, working-class group—like most others of their status—manifestly suffered from the stark dimensions of spatial disadvantage: the unequal allocation of resources throughout urban and suburban developments.\(^5\)

Hugh Stretton powerfully described the segregation of Melbourne between the poor to the north and west, and the rich in the south and east:

Forty miles of basalt and delta plain met with forty miles of valleyed hills and sandy beaches. As the poor spread thickly over the plain and the rich thinly over the hills and coast, neither love nor justice ever had much chance. Realism won without trying.\(^6\)

Stretton claimed that it is Melbourne’s topography which ‘may owe a good deal of its past and present unkindness to its poor’.\(^7\) Located four miles from the northern suburb ring because of a convenient coalition of both economic necessity and the ‘garden city’ ideals of a ‘green belt’, the Lalor settlers did not escape Stretton’s harsh geographical division: in many ways they endured the worst of it. Nonetheless, within the surrounds of their ‘soldier settlement triangle’ the pragmatic Peter Lalor co-operators were variously swept along by love, laughter, sweat and tears as they sought to meet their own aspirations for ‘a genuine community spirit’.\(^8\)

At the outset, the PLC Committee of Management had felt reassured that the necessary building materials, labour and infrastructure would be available. In their brochure, ‘Progress and Promise’ issued in May 1947, the society stated that ‘negotiations in respect of building materials are promising’ and they expected to be able to build ten houses a week when fully functional.\(^9\) They stated that electricity and water were already available on the site and that sewerage ‘will be possible when the number of homes justified it’.\(^10\) There was a motor train through to Whittlesea, an electric train service to Reservoir—with some trains going on to Thomastown, a mile to the south; the site was 30 minutes by road from the CBD and a bus was

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10. ibid.
soon to be provided. The society expected to have its first settlement of 4,000 people built within three and a half years.\textsuperscript{11}

As early as April 1947, \textit{Labor Call} announced that:

A supply of bricks is assured. A drying kiln will be erected to speed up the supply of suitable timber. Other home building machinery will be purchased by the Society. About 100 skilled building tradesmen have signified their intention to work on the scheme. Lalor will be a purely co-operative suburb. All businesses, stores, services and amenities will be conducted for the benefit of the residents.\textsuperscript{12}

With such promises of self-sufficiency, the councillors in the Whittlesea Shire Council (WSC) could have been forgiven for believing that the PLC would meet its own needs. Perhaps they envisaged the quiet arrival of some city folks who would quickly create a settlement. Its associated industry would provide development, and their rates would boost the coffers of this large rural shire. They were absolutely unprepared for what eventuated.

On 4 August 1947 the co-operative had purchased three separate and adjoining parcels of land, which totalled 241.5 acres, that had for nearly a century been owned by dairy farmers who supplied milk to Melbourne. The co-operative paid a total of £14,444/15/- for the land from membership deposits and a loan from the Commonwealth Bank.\textsuperscript{13}

The Wurundjeri Willam people had been the original indigenous owners of the land. As Dingle and Doyle noted, in 1883 William Thomas, Assistant Protector of Aborigines for the Melbourne area, reported that there was ‘a great population up the Yarra, Plenty, Kangaroo Ground and to Mount Disappointment’ and requested that reserves be established for them. Thomas also recorded that Aborigines were ‘working on stations in the Plenty’\textsuperscript{14}. By the time the members of the PLC arrived to build their ‘garden suburb’ at the southern end of the Plenty Valley basin, their eyes saw only the familiar farming legacy of the previous, and relatively short, one hundred years. Physical manifestations of the millennia of indigenous occupation had mostly been trampled under cloven hooves and crushed by logging trucks. The area of most significance, reportedly associated with male initiation rights, had

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\textsuperscript{11} Whittlesea Post, 18 February 1948, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{12} Labor Call, 3 April 1947, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{13} Gary Johns, ‘Building a Suburb: The Peter Lalor Home Building Co-Operative’, Occasional Papers, vol. 1, no. 2, Melbourne State College, 1978, p. 9, stated that the total sum paid was £14,939. He does not quote his source for this. It may well be that he had access to some co-operative records which demonstrated that this figure included additional costs such as conveyance fees. I have relied on the rates notices, WSC, ‘Rates Books’, Epping no. 1, 1942–1948, PROV, VPRS 14610/P0001/35/8–9.
\end{flushright}
been drowned beneath the Yan Yean dam which was built in the mountains to the north in the 1850s providing a main source of drinking water for Melbourne.\textsuperscript{15}

Prior to the settlement at Lalor, the number of non-indigenous people living in the whole basin of the Plenty Valley had remained relatively static increasing only modestly from 3,163 people in 1881, to 3,645 by the census of 1947.\textsuperscript{16} Thomastown, south of the area from which the suburb of Lalor was to emerge, Epping to the north and Germantown to the west, were small, isolated, rural hamlets. With the arrival of the PLC this was all about to change.

The first mention of the PLC reflected in WSC records occurred in June 1947 when Stanley Frew submitted the house plans for the new estate at Lalor. All of the plans were within the state government post-war limits of 12 squares for weatherboard or 12.5 squares for brick veneer, hence there was no need for the shire to seek approval from the Building Directorate. However, as the Shire Engineer (H.E. Griffiths) reported:

\begin{quote}
Only one of these does not conform to Council’s Building Regulations in that it does not have four rooms of a square each, but in view of the fact that the house had 8 ½ squares and that Council’s regulations were made before the days of kitchenettes and dining alcoves It [sic] is recommended that Council authorizes the Building Surveyor to issue a permit.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

The Engineer bluntly stated that the shire’s building code was hopelessly out of date.

What followed next was a disastrous error. Between July 1947 and March 1948, Saxil Tuxen had submitted for council approval, three different parts of the plan of subdivision. On each occasion the Shire Engineer certified that ‘the land as subdivided can be sufficiently drained as required by the Local Government Act’.\textsuperscript{18} Nothing could have been further from the truth. As the Lalor folks were to discover, large tracts of the land became swamp in wet weather and could not be developed for housing until a major drainage system was installed by the Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW).\textsuperscript{19}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{15} ibid., p. 12
\textsuperscript{16} Michael Jones, Nature's Plenty: A History of the City of Whittlesea, City of Whittlesea, 1992, pp. xiv & 170. According to John Waghoorn of the Whittlesea Historical Society, a subdivision of a similar tract of land had been planned in 1946 but did not proceed. Plans for the Newtown Park Estate can be found at PROV, VPRS 421/PO, unit 670. I am indebted to John Waghoorn for this reference.
\textsuperscript{17} WSC, 'Minutes of Meeting', 11 June 1947, item 14, p. 239.
\textsuperscript{18} ibid., 9 July 1947, item 27, p.233, 12 November 1947, item 17, p.29 & 10 March 1948, item 17, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{19} Whittlesea Post, 17 March 1948, front page, 20 October 1948, p. 8.
\end{flushright}
There is no record of this issue either in the council's records or those of the society. However, Peter Fox provided some insight. In his biography, written fifty years later he recalled:

We had one major problem: draining. The fall from one side of the land to the other was only about three feet. To obtain proper drainage, we had to go across an adjacent farm. Before the farm owner would allow this, the society had to arrange for a bank guarantee against any damage that might be caused to the farmer's property by the work. This was obtained... Our subdivision plan was approved.²⁰

Fox is silent about the problem. Clearly all the parties knew about the drainage problem; the question became, whose job was it to fix it. Tuxen presumably designed the estate on the assumption that a major drainage system would be installed in a timely way, though there is no record of this. There is no mention of any warnings from the Commonwealth Bank that some of the land was unsuitable when a bank official inspected the land with Alf Greenwood in June 1947.²¹ Was this an example of the ‘can-do’ approach of the Committee of Management serving to instil within the men a belief that all obstacles could be overcome? If Fox's account is correct, the Shire Engineer apparently certified that the land was sufficiently drained, on the assumption that the appropriate drainage would be forthcoming. Manager Greenwood and Procurement Manager Cooper had visited the WSC in May 1947, they had interviewed Bill Mann and Bob Seeber (two of the land holders) and Engineer Griffiths with Shire Secretary, R.G.C. (Chappy) Cook, and they had discussed road making and building regulations. At that time it was assumed it would be council's responsibility to manage drainage. No warnings were recorded in the minutes.²² We will probably never know the answer to these questions. The result of this comedy of errors was thick, muddy and impassable roads, open and rat infested drains, bogged vehicles and many, many building blocks lying idle.

Frank Hawkins described how he was first allotted a block of land in Anderson Street. When I asked him why he was moved to a block in Curtin Avenue he replied:

It was flat country. And we didn't know this, but I had started the foundations and I came back the next day and couldn't find them. They were under water. Two foot of water.²³

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21. PLHBCSL, Committee of Management, ‘Minutes’, 19 June 1947. It was Bill Mann's property which the Commonwealth Bank would not approve for purchase.
22. ibid., 9 May 1947.
It was more than a decade before the first drain and roads were made. This factor alone would have been enough to spell financial ruin.

In the early post-war period, there were no laws prescribing ‘developer contributions’ to require the co-operative, as the developer of the land, to pay for the basic roads, drainage and the like. By 1947 the MMBW was expected to supply major drainage, sewerage and a water supply, and local councils provided suburban streets and associated drainage, a rubbish disposal service and, where no sewerage existed, a regular pan service. Residents would be charged for the costs of these amenities by levies applied through the rating system. The MMBW in turn charged the councils. There were many instances, however, where the boundaries between state and local government responsibilities blurred, resulting in delays. Lalor was caught in the middle. For instance in May 1950 the council received a letter from the MMBW about the drainage at Lalor. It advised:

that although the Board may ultimately assume responsibility for the construction of a drain...north of Anderson St., the design and carrying out of such work cannot be considered until more urgent works already approved are completed.24

The import of the letter from the perspective of the council was not that the Lalor folks would have to wait a very long time, but ‘to establish that some responsibility will devolve on the Board of Works’.25 For WSC, its rural constituency was far removed from issues affecting urban councils. Its meetings were more concerned with registrations under the health regulations for businesses such as piggeries, boiling down plants, sale yards, and the manufacture of ices.26

In the immediate post-war period local government in Australia was an institution which harked back to an earlier century.27 With no constitutional power, local government had (and still has) only those limited functions which state government legislation provided to it. Branded the ‘Cinderella’ of the Australian system, government at the local level has a more restricted range of powers than anywhere else in the western world.28 In post-war Australia it served three very basic functions: minimal works and services; decentralised democratic governance (constrained by restrictive property rights) and a voice for constituents to higher levels of government.29 In the pages below I assess how well WSC performed on these three

25. ibid.
29. ibid., p. 197–8.
functions in the face of a rapidly expanding suburban development in the southern end of this large rural shire. It is not a happy tale.

The rate of growth can be seen through examining the growth in homes. Between the censuses in 1947 and 1954, the number of occupied private dwellings in the shire increased by 466, from 922 to 1363.\textsuperscript{30} This compares with an increase of just 81 dwellings in the previous 32 years.\textsuperscript{31} In 1954, the number in the soldier settlement triangle of Lalor accounted for a significant minority of that increase, 198 dwellings.\textsuperscript{32} This is an impressive number, but far short of the potential 819 home-building blocks in the original Tuxen design. Thomastown had grown to 416, while Epping remained a small hamlet with only 63 occupied private dwellings.\textsuperscript{33}

In relation to the provision of works and services, most councils in Victoria were concerned only with ‘rates, rubbish and roads’, but contemporary observer Alan Davies commented, ‘financial resources of municipalities at present do not permit them to carry out more than the simplest tasks.’\textsuperscript{34} But for the Whittlesea Councillors, even collecting the rubbish was beyond their imagination. Farmer and councillor, C.A. Smith, for example, seemed bewildered by the demand for garbage collection on the Peter Lalor Estate. ‘Most of the older residents keep fowls to consume their scraps’ he said.\textsuperscript{35} Shire roads were gravel, only periodically graded by a council-owned machine.

Over the first few years, the Peter Lalor co-operators formed themselves into an array of different lobbying organisations in order to try to effect some response from governments—mainly the shire. The first formal meeting with the WSC involved the PLC and it occurred in February 1948 when a ‘Deputation’ comprising King, Greenwood, Tuxen and Frew asked the council to start street construction and drainage works as they were empowered to do under the Local Government Act 1946. The Whittlesea Post record of the meeting provides a clear overview of their agenda:

Mr King said the movement was non-political and non-sectarian and represented 4,000 returned servicemen, who were anxious to erect their own homes. ... The Society had been in touch with the Board of Works, and it was proposed that eventually the area would be sewered, and a small treatment plant provided near the creek to deal with sewerage.


\textsuperscript{31} J.W. Payne, The Plenty: A Centenary History of the Whittlesea Shire, Kilmore, 1975, p. 44.


\textsuperscript{34} Alan Davies, Local Government in Victoria, Melbourne, 1951, p. 20.

\textsuperscript{35} Whittlesea Post, 23 February 1949, p. 1.
That, however, would not come for some time, and in the meantime some provision would have to be made for storm water house drainage.\textsuperscript{36}

When we learn that they waited 12 years for the drainage and road construction, and 25 years for sewerage, these statements appear hopelessly naïve. Had the co-operative group been listening with less optimism, the deputation might have heard a word of caution from Shire Secretary Cook, who thought 12 months' planning work would be involved and loan council funds required for the construction. He believed that if the PLC could find the money it might be done more quickly. While one councillor, L.P. Mitchell, wanted to assist the co-operative because it would help with the development of the shire, this was not a council that would readily borrow money to fund essential infrastructure.\textsuperscript{37} The council's thinking was a far cry from the fashionable Keynesian economic concepts that influenced the federal level of government. They were a conservative farming community for whom thrift was a core value,\textsuperscript{38} exemplified at the next council meeting which was concerned with an overdraft of £2,281, though rates were soon to be paid. At the same meeting the Shire Engineer forecast that the street and drainage work on the Peter Lalor Estate would cost £50,000.\textsuperscript{39} The council did not know how to proceed. It was prepared to start the design work but knew it needed to hire an assistant engineer to help with the workload. Tuxen offered to help the council 'at a cost of £260 per mile supervision.' The offer was never taken up. At the time there were probably fewer than a handful of office employees working for the WSC. They were simply not equipped to do the work.

By February 1949 when forty-two houses (including temporaries) were occupied at Lalor with fifteen families about to arrive,\textsuperscript{40} the PMG installed a phone booth and the shire agreed that the SEC could erect four street lights.\textsuperscript{41} While the slowly forming community waited for council to make proper roads, they sought to borrow the council grader and scarifier to improve the formation of Station Street. The labour was to be provided by the PLC, including competent drivers, and the residents were concerned that council understand that they wanted to help themselves.\textsuperscript{42} This kind of request was often repeated, and refused.\textsuperscript{43} 'We once had

\textsuperscript{36} ibid., 18 February 1948, front page. There is no record of when the meeting with the MMBW took place, however, the Lalor representatives had clearly taken from the meeting, the impression that the land could be adequately drained.

\textsuperscript{37} For example, according to WSC, 'Minutes of Meetings', item 27, 11 April 1951, p. 176, the state Treasury wrote to council wanting to know if it intended to borrow Loan Council funds. The answer was no.

\textsuperscript{38} Whittlesea Post, 18 February 1948, front page.

\textsuperscript{39} ibid., 31 March 1948, front page.

\textsuperscript{40} ibid., 23 February 1949, front page.

\textsuperscript{41} ibid., 24 November 1948, p. 8 & 20 October 1948, p. 8. PMG was the Post Master General's Department which at the time handled post and telephone services. The SEC was the State Electricity Commission. Both acronyms represented popular usage.

\textsuperscript{42} Whittlesea Post, 23 February 1948, front page.

\textsuperscript{43} ibid., 20 July 1949, front page.
about 150 blokes digging trenches on Saturdays and Sundays,' Jack Harvey recalled. 'We'd do anything to keep prices down.' 44

By July 1949, with Alf Greenwood gone and the financial troubles of the co-operative now visible, the council's stance became one of deliberate inaction. The Post quoted the Shire President's, ominous comment:

The President (Cr J.A. Balharrie) felt that the Council should be careful in matters such as these. Council was under no commitment to Peter Lalor, and should be careful in the matter of costs. 45

Council feared there would be insufficient residents to repay the costs and they appeared to have no confidence in the co-operative's capacity to pay its rates. Had the council looked more seriously, though, it would have seen the flurry of activity taking place on the estate. After all it was the individual owners who were the recipients of housing loans and were to be charged for such services. By September the council was able to issue 388 rate assessments at Lalor and expected 1,000 the following year for the Lalor and Thomastown part of the shire.46 It is possible, though, that had the estate developed at the pace which the co-operative originally envisaged, such issues of critical mass may not have arisen.

Despite the adversity produced by mud and maladministration, the community started to evolve. By May 1949 there were 65 families constituting a population of 273. 47 All the houses built by the PLC were occupied, the first syndicate had built two or three of their houses and many of the PLC built footings and frames were being completed by various means. By October 1950 the population had jumped to 500 'with the settling in of several new families and the recent arrival of several very new young residents'. 48 There was an urgent need for a kindergarten and a primary school. School aged children at Lalor were being bussed miles to Gold Street in Clifton Hill. Some were going to Preston and Reservoir. Some went to Thomastown. In December 1949 there were 30 school children in Lalor, the following school year there were an additional 40, with an additional 100 by 1951. 49

As the population grew individuals harnessed their organisational abilities and created social, sporting, political and economic societies which were all structured and run like trade unions according to time honoured procedures which E.P. Thompson had noted about the English working class of an earlier time:

44. Paul Ormonde, 'Love, Sweat and Tears', op. cit.
46. WSC, 'Minutes of Meeting', item 6, 14 September 1949, p. 225. Members paid rates for the unimproved value of the land and the PLHBCSL paid rates on blocks still owned by it.
47. Whittlesea Post, 21 May 1949, front page.
49. WSC, 'Minutes of Meeting', 14 December 1949, pp. 274–75.
It seems at times that half a dozen working men could scarcely sit in a room together without appointing a Chairman, raising a point-of-order, or moving the Previous Question.\footnote{50}{E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, London, 1991, p. 738.}

In Lalor, some individuals focussed on just one association, while others were involved in many.\footnote{51}{At Appendix C is a table aligning the individuals to the organisations. The amount of overlap is obvious.} Those men who occupied homes which had been completed by the co-operative, had time on their hands. They were not building every night and at weekends, as most of the rest of Lalor was doing. This group became the driving force for many of the first associations. Almost all the men in Gratwick Street formed the Lalor Cricket Club in late 1949, and they and a handful of their teenage sons were successful in the local competition, gradually expanding in membership as houses were completed.\footnote{52}{Whittlesea Post, 8 March 1950, p. 12. The team made it into the semi-finals in its first season.} The Lalor Women’s Social Club (LWSC) also began its determined drive to open a kindergarten, a school and community centre.

By mid 1950 the \textit{Whittlesea Post} in a front page article described how the residents were seeking ‘beautify their homes with gardens, trees, shrubs and lawns’.\footnote{53}{ibid., 3 July 1950, front page.} During dry weather, it was reported that Lalor was ‘thronged’ with visitors and sight-seers ‘who seem impressed by the variety of building activity’.\footnote{54}{ibid.} The article made a feature of the large number of organisations that were already formed. By then the formative residents’ association, the Peter Lalor Co-operative Centre No. 1 had been reconstituted as the Lalor and District Progress Association, as if to signify the early signs of a change from its co-operative roots to a more ordinary suburban development. Perhaps this more conventional title was also a wily attempt by the members to distance themselves from the poor financial reputation of the PLC. The list in the \textit{Post} also included:

A Consumers’ Co-operative Store, a sub-branch of the Epping Rural Fire Brigade, the ‘Dog-House’ Club whose intention is to found a workingmen’s club at Lalor; Lalor Women’s Social Club interested in social welfare and the establishment of a kindergarten and a school; Children’s Playground Committee; Lalor Youth Club; Lalor Sports Club.\footnote{55}{ibid.}

The creation of these organisations provides evidence that the people of Lalor felt empowered to build their own social infrastructure, and build social capital, but their political lobbying probably had a negative impact as they pressed for the broader provision of services by governments. Those in authority were not used to dealing with such organised solidarity at the local level.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[\footnote{51}]{At Appendix C is a table aligning the individuals to the organisations. The amount of overlap is obvious.}
\item[\footnote{52}]{Whittlesea Post, 8 March 1950, p. 12. The team made it into the semi-finals in its first season.}
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\item[\footnote{54}]{ibid.}
\item[\footnote{55}]{ibid.}
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Councillors became increasingly annoyed by the lobbying efforts of the different manifestations of the PLC. In 1951, when council had eventually agreed to spend £450 to gravel the surface of French and Gratwick Streets, Vasey Avenue and Newton Crescent, the President (Cr J.A. Balharrie) asked: ‘For how long will this satisfy the Lalor people?’ Cr. Orgill replied:

Judging by past experience, for about two minutes....The people of Lalor keep on ‘kicking up a fuss’, writing to council, interviewing councillors, and sending along deputations to air their grievances. By these means they get attention whilst others who send in moderate requests only now and again do not seem to fare so well.56

Late in 1949, Purcell and his family had moved to Lalor, and he immediately started organising the Lalor Consumer Co-operative Store (LCCS). He served on its first committee and journeyed through Melbourne with some of the early deliveries of supplies to the store. He had sold the newsagency in Thornbury and was working for the co-operative, 57 after a failed attempt to gain preselection for the ALP in the Senate.58 Bill King, who never lived in Lalor, took over from Purcell as Chairman of the PLC, and Lalor builder Jim O’Connor became Vice President. By 1951, at least two women were serving on the committee with Belle Dunton now Secretary and Nancy Walker on the Committee of Management. Nancy Walker was also Secretary of the Lalor Women’s Social Club (LWSC) so for the first time there appeared to be constructive formal links between the two main arms of Lalor development.59 All were relentless in their pursuit of the council and state government, for provision of essential infrastructure and services.

The men from Lalor started to attend the Epping Sub-Branch of the RSL.60 By January 1950 Stan Spencer had become Treasurer, and Jack Gunn played a major role organising ex-servicemen to donate blood. He eventually had a Blood Donors’ Committee formed of which he became the Chair.61 The next year, the Lalor men staged a virtual take-over of the Epping RSL. Harry Fielding had replaced

56. ibid., 28 February 1951. p. 8. The Engineer explained that the £450 was much less than the amount received in rates.
57. Frank Purcell, interview with the author, 20 April 2007, p. 15. Frank stated, ‘When Dad went and joined it and sold the shop, he was taking a big punt too. But I remember saying to him one time, “why do you want to do that?” and he said, “Oh I couldn’t be a shopkeeper for the rest of my days.”’
58. Purcell gained 12,641 votes, but came fifth in a large field, behind the four candidates, Senators D. Cameron, J.J. Devlin and J.M. Sheehan, plus R.A. Clarey, a Melbourne accountant, who were pre-selected. See Labor Call, 6 May 1949, p.1 & 2 September 1949, p. 1.
59. The LWSC will be further discussed in Chapter 7.
60. The Epping Sub-Branch was initially attached to the Preston Sub-Branch, of which Purcell was a prominent member, but became an independent Sub-Branch on 1 July 1951 because of the influx of ex-servicemen from Lalor.
61. Whittlesea Post, 24 January 1951, front page & 6 December 1949, front page. Born in 1920, Jack Gunn had served in the 33rd Flying Squadron with the RAAF and bought his PLC built home in Gratwick Street with a WSH loan. See William John Gunn, individual war record, WWII Nominal Roll, 034726. He played with the Lalor Cricket team, also serving on the Cricket Club Committee. Michael Fielding, interview with the author, 23 July 2007, p. 3. Fielding said, ‘Jack Gunn was a direct descendent of the famous Gunn family of England who were the makers of cricket bats. And if you had a Gunn and Moore cricket bat, you were made.’
Lt. Col McArthur as President, Lalor builder, Bill O’Connor, was one of three Vice-Presidents, Stan Spencer was re-elected Treasurer and Bill Winterton was a member of the committee. For at least the next two decades the Epping RSL was to become one of the strong social institutions for the area. Bill O’Connor was a driving force in building new club rooms, an infant welfare centre (attached to the RSL) and a new hall. The fund raising which occurred in parallel with the building work involved women and men, with Les Batten, a compassionate farmer from Wollert, organising fund-raising gymkhanas and the Women’s Auxiliary running the annual RSL ball.

When Stan Spencer moved away from Lalor and therefore the RSL in 1953, he was sincerely thanked by Harry Fielding, and his response confirms the positive role played by such organisations in building social capital. The Post spelled out its positive contribution in these terms:

his association with the Epping RSL had given him the opportunity to meet a fine bunch of men; to learn something of the administration of the RSL; to learn to stand up and have his say; to engage in social activities; to be able to participate as a donor in the Repatriation Hospital blood bank.62

Barrett’s survey respondents in 1987 recorded a similar experience, with as many as 86 per cent belonging to a veterans’ organisation. ‘The comradeship of the survivors, their pride and mutual support, were paramount in joining,’ he wrote.63 Such a sentiment aptly described the Lalor ex-servicemen’s involvement with the Epping RSL. Slowly, the WSC saw fit to support the RSL’s efforts, in the main because some of the men involved decided it had become necessary to try to join the council.

In April 1950 the council received yet another deputation from Lalor. This time it was three women from Derrick Street: Nola Klein, Marjorie Bradley and Esther Gregor, who clearly presented their case to council about the ‘deplorable conditions on the Lalor Estate.’64 They said that because the roads were impassable, the toilet pans had not been emptied for four weeks:

Most of the people living there were in the process of building homes and if a vehicle carrying building materials did get in generally it became bogged and its extrication made matters worse than ever. Tradespeople would not call any more.65

The council admitted that it could not keep pace with the speed of development and clearly there was a need ‘for it to plan ahead’. Belatedly, the council agreed to spend

64. Two of the three families were still living in temporaries.
65. Whittlesea Post, 12 April 1950, front page.
£500 of Lalor rates to make gravel roads encircling the settlement in an attempt to ensure some roads were passable through winter. 66

In February 1952 the Lalor and District Progress Association held a public meeting, attended by 70 people, which moved a censure motion against council for ‘the totally inadequate system of sanitary clearances’. 67 The pans were not cleared for five weeks over Christmas. 68 The April 1952 meeting further censured the council for failing to guarantee the necessary revenue to the MMBW so it could undertake the basic installation of water mains. 69 Relations between the Progress Association and the council reached their nadir in June 1952 when the association instructed one of its members to write to the council about the sanitary crisis:

I have been directed to write and convey to your Council the disgust and concern of the above association at the Council’s procrastination and refusal to face up to its responsibilities to ratepayers in connection with the sanitary contract. 70

The association lambasted the council which it claimed had ‘persisted in its ostrich-like attitude of blaming the contractor’. The letter concluded with a threat: ‘Residents of Lalor are alarmed at the present state of affairs and consider that the health of their children is menaced and should an epidemic break out the blame for the same must be borne by the Council.’ The council refused to accept the letter. 71

For twelve years the residents of Lalor struggled with open drains (into which people and pets sometimes fell) and muddy roads. The working bees that were used to banding together to erect house frames and dig drains, similarly combined to push cars and trucks out of bogs. There was a wooden box at the railway line (before there was a station in September 1959) where residents stored their muddy boots. They would change into their ‘good shoes’ before being dragged up on to the train to go to town, returning to their muddy boots at the end of the day. They fought for every street lamp, every culvert, and every load of gravel needed to lessen the burden of their swampy streets.

Sixty years later, these stories are central to local collective memories. Every oral history interview contains them. Forgotten, though, is the frustration, anger and overall sense of powerlessness in the face of council inaction. The recent oral

66. ibid.
67. ibid., 13 February 1952, front page.
68. ibid., 5 March 1952, p. 5.
70. Whittlesea Post, 18 June 1952, front page. Sports journalist, Les Casbolt, laid claim to the many letters the association wrote to council. See his interview with Ruth Ford, op. cit., p. 37.
71. ibid.
testimony is full of humour and sometimes a wry comment that today’s young people would not tolerate such conditions. With hindsight it is easy to laugh.

The fight to achieve a just system of decentralised democratic governance (the second function of local government) was just as strongly fought as the battle for basic infrastructure and amenity. The Lalor community quickly realised that their burgeoning suburb was not being well represented by the farmers who made up their council. Alan Davies’ view in 1951 aptly described how the Lalor folks felt:

No political institution of the modern state is more disheartening to a democrat of the personal participation school than local government. The very threshold of the state establishment, that part most within reach of the ordinary citizen, is as devoid of ordinary citizens as the grand banquet hall. But we are anticipating.72

The major reasons for their disempowerment were the property qualification for voting rights and the plural voting system. Those owning no property had no vote. Those owning property valued under £25 were allowed one vote; those with property valued between £25 and under £75 had two votes; and £75 and upwards had three votes. As Davies scathingly reported:

The property qualification for local government electors disqualifies half the Victorian adult community from direct influence on municipal affairs: wives, dependent adults, young men and women living with their families, and the lodger and boarding-house classes have no vote.73

One positive aspect of the Lalor scheme was that for the first time in their lives, most of the Lalor men and some of the women were eligible to vote in local elections. By 1954, more than 40 per cent of the blocks were either jointly or solely owned by women, though the low valuation of each block probably attracted only one vote.74

Voting was also not compulsory and most local government elections were not contested, with sitting members being re-elected unopposed. Some spent almost a lifetime on council. For instance, in September 1953 the WSC acknowledged over 45 years of service by Councillor T.H. Hurry, and in October 1953, the council celebrated Councillor Orgill for having continuously served council for 50 years.75

73. ibid., p. 25.
74. From the ‘Rates Books’ it would appear that 9 blocks were solely owned by women; 78 were jointly owned by women. It is unclear whether the Lalor blocks, for which they paid either £25 or £35, were valued by council as more or less than £25 thereby attracting one or two votes. WSC, ‘Rates Book’, PROV/VPRS 14620/P0001/66, 1948–1954. See the table at Appendix G.
There was a higher property qualification for eligibility to stand for council.76 For the 1949–1950 rating period, Epping Riding (of which Lalor was rapidly becoming the most populated part) returned about half the rate value of the shire with the other three ridings, Whittlesea, Yan Yean and Morang, together making up the other half.77

Confronted by a lack of rights some Lalorites decided to try to gain more direct influence by electing their own representatives onto council. Jim O’Connor was the first to stand. At 43 years of age he would have been the youngest had he been elected.78 Electioneering in August 1950, he thought that the ‘the farming and grazing sections of the shire have been faithfully served by many past councillors’, but he believed Epping Riding to be ‘on the brink of vast development as regards population and industrial growth’. He called for new blood, and none too subtly invited ‘all ratepayers who look for wide-awake councillors with a realistic approach to all council problems,’ to vote for him.79 He got 167 votes to the sitting member’s 468 votes.80 The plural voting system handed many more votes to the large property-owning farming community.

Saturday had become voting day in state elections in 1926 but a quarter of a century later the farmers of Whittlesea still voted during the week. In the 1950 election, 130 ratepayers in Epping Riding were therefore forced to vote using the post.81 Council meetings were also held during the day, from 11.00am to 3.00pm to allow the farmers time for milking. The Lalor residents believed that this represented another denial of their democratic rights, as no working men and women could meet during those times. The Lalor community also lobbied unsuccessfully for its own polling booth.82 This is a clear case of a democratic deficit.

These working-class residents commenced a campaign to assert their rights against the landed gentry. They had, after all, named their co-operative after Peter Lalor to honour the democratic movement represented by him a hundred years before. Deciding on a candidate, nonetheless, proved more fraught as the first sign of divided loyalties within Lalor assisted the sitting rural candidates.

For the election campaigns between 1951 and 1953, Purcell ran as the endorsed Labor candidate.83 His campaign was testament to his vision. While he called for

77. WSC, ‘Minutes of Meeting’, item 4, 14 December 1949, p. 270.
78. Whittlesea Post, 9 September 1953, p. 4.
79. ibid., 23 August 1950, front page. A biography of Jim O’Connor is in Appendix A.
80. ibid., 30 August 1950, front page.
81. ibid., 1 August 1951, front page.
82. ibid., 13 September 1950, front page.
83. ibid., 8 August 1951, front page. In 1951 Les Casbolt of Vasey Avenue was Purcell’s campaign manager. A biography of Casbolt is located in Appendix A.
urgent attention to the basic amenities needed for Lalor—weekly garbage collection, sewerage, roads, footpaths, drains, extension of water and electricity to all homes and street lighting—the other planks of his campaign focussed on a social and economic development agenda, which did not emerge within the council for many years.\textsuperscript{84}

Lalor resident Bill Winterton was another candidate. Winterton, Purcell’s neighbour, also clearly understood the local issues affecting Lalor, though was not as strategic in his vision as Purcell. He was well known through his weekly newsletter and was a radical grass-roots activist—rumoured to be a Communist—often broadcasting his political message at the Thomastown railway station through a megaphone. It was rumoured that Liberal-voting Arch Adams was instrumental in persuading Winterton to stand against Purcell (an unusual alliance to say the least), though the source of animosity between Adams and Purcell has never been revealed.\textsuperscript{85}

As the campaign progressed, the atmosphere between Purcell and Winterton grew bitter and just prior to polling day, ALP powerbroker Dinny Lovegrove, placed an advertisement in the \textit{Whittlesea Post} making it explicit that Purcell was the only endorsed ALP candidate.\textsuperscript{86} The result was quite close. The sitting member, John Bunting received 444, Purcell 328 and Winterton 119. If all Winterton’s preferences had fallen Purcell’s way he would just have crossed the line, but overwhelmingly they did not: only 33 per cent transferred between these neighbours, pointing to a deliberate trend. Perhaps this was evidence that there was a significant minority of the Lalorites who felt that Purcell’s confrontational style disadvantaged them in the face of conservative governments at all levels. Bunting received 523 (60 per cent) and Purcell 368 (40 per cent). At least this time voting took place on Saturday.\textsuperscript{87}

The following year Purcell had the support of the newly formed Lalor Branch of the ALP. In March 1952 he had called its inaugural meeting and invited a broad cross-section of the Victorian ALP to attend. Right wing Catholic ALP member Frank McManus was the guest speaker, with apologies from left wing Gordon Bryant and MHR Reg Pollard.\textsuperscript{88} At this formative meeting, Purcell was elected President and for the first time Vic Michael emerged on the political scene as Vice President.\textsuperscript{89} The other Vice President was Syd Waterfield, and the Treasurer was Eric Loader. All were ex-servicemen, making it not too dissimilar from the RSL. The Secretary

\textsuperscript{84} ibid. The economic and social agenda is discussed in Chapters 7 & 8.
\textsuperscript{85} Desmond Purcell, interview with the author, op. cit., p. 39. Desmond said, ‘the man behind Winterton was Adams, who for some reason hated Dad. And I don’t know what it was...the Adams kids were the closest friends of my brothers and sisters.’ The contest between the fathers did not stop the children all playing cricket in Middleton Street where they were neighbours. Ex-serviceman, Don Fitzgerald, from Vasey Avenue was Winterton’s campaign manager. Biographies of Winterton and Adams can be found in Appendix A.
\textsuperscript{86} \textit{Whittlesea Post}, 8 August 1951, front page.
\textsuperscript{87} ibid., 1 August 1951, front page.
\textsuperscript{88} McManus was assistant secretary of the Victorian Branch of the ALP 1950–1955. He became a DLP senator. Gordon Bryant was elected the ALP member for Wills in 1955 after the split. He served in the Whitlam Cabinet in 1972 as Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. ALP MHR Reginald Pollard was a civil libertarian, like Purcell he supported bank nationalisation, and he supported Evatt’s campaign against the referendum to outlaw the Communist Party.
\textsuperscript{89} Vic Michael has already appeared in Chapter 4. A biography can be found at Appendix A.
was Norm Griffiths, who became another very politically active member of the Lalor community.\textsuperscript{90}

As the 1952 election neared, the \textit{Whittlesea Post} noted with surprise that the Epping Riding might be contested again. It noted that:

The newly developing portions of the Epping Riding, with a consequent influx of new residents, all wanting roads, drainage, lighting etc for which requests are continually being made to council, is a different proposition to the more rural areas of the other three ridings. Consequently it would appear that every vacancy which occurs in the Epping Riding is likely to be contested.\textsuperscript{91}

This election was again a three way contest between Purcell, Winterton and the sitting Councillor, R.C.T. Creighton, a farmer from Wollert. Norm Griffiths was Purcell's campaign manager and Gordon Bryant assisted with his campaign. The result was closer for Purcell. He increased his primary vote by 4 per cent, but still lost. Winterton performed poorly with only 64 votes, and forfeited his deposit.\textsuperscript{92} Creighton received 674 votes (53 per cent), and Purcell, even with distribution of all Winterton's preferences, still lost by 103 votes (receiving 571 votes or 47 per cent).\textsuperscript{93} Despite the fact that the number voting had increased by nearly 30 per cent, the council had again refused to open a polling booth in Lalor.\textsuperscript{94}

During 1953 the Lalor branch of the ALP succeeded the Lalor and District Progress Association as the grass roots organisation which predominantly took the fight up to the council. Purcell once again obtained the official endorsement of the ALP for the council election. Cr C.A. (Cliff) Smith was this time the retiring councillor and he decided not to nominate again allowing farmer Les Batten to stand; this was how it was done amongst country gentlemen. Batten's nomination would have put the Lalor voters in a quandary. He was a great friend to many of the Lalor residents, and well respected, especially through his fund-raising gymkhanas for the Epping RSL. His farming interests involved him in the Whittlesea Agricultural Society, the Findon Harriers' Hunt Club, and the Epping Recreation Reserves Committee, as well as being a judge on the Equestrian Federation of Australia. He was also heavily involved in community work and was regarded as a great local philanthropist: he was a life governor of the Preston-Northcote Community Hospital (he donated the land

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{90} As a scholarship boy, Griffiths trained as industrial chemist and was in a protected industry during the war, working on the development of penicillin with the Commonwealth Serum Laboratories. A biography can be found at Appendix A.
  \item \textsuperscript{91} \textit{Whittlesea Post}, 25 June 1951, front page.
  \item \textsuperscript{92} ibid., 3 September 1952, front page.
  \item \textsuperscript{93} WSC, 'Minutes of Meeting', 10 September 1952, p. 88.
  \item \textsuperscript{94} \textit{Whittlesea Post}, 20 August 1952, front page.
\end{itemize}
upon which the PANCH was built) and a life governor of the Northcote North Ward Community Centre.  

Purcell immediately withdrew from the contest. The reason he gave was ill-health, a highly plausible ground for withdrawal as he was constantly troubled by his injured leg from the wartime accident. It seems likely too that once Les Batten decided to stand, Purcell lost heart, knowing he would again be defeated. He probably also realised that Batten would do a very good job for Lalor, and would hold more sway than he would with the other councillors. Moreover by this time Purcell was suffering considerable personal financial trouble. By year’s end he would be forced to sell the family home in Middleton Street and to return to live in Thornbury with his parents-in-law. This was surely the lowest point in Purcell’s life.  

It was too late for the Lalor Branch of the ALP to replace their candidate. Purcell resigned as Branch President and Vic Michael ascended to that post. The following year would see Michael and Griffiths contest the right to stand. But for 1953, Batten was elected unopposed to council as its youngest member. He immediately had an impact, lending his support to the Lalor community and the RSL at every opportunity. He brought a more worldly and big-hearted approach which often left the other councillors following bewilderedly in his wake. The council was changing, but for Lalor it was not changing fast enough. Griffiths scathingly remarked that ‘as long as WSC continued to hold day meetings, no working man could afford to lose at least twelve working days per year in wages in order to attend council meetings.  

The next man to attempt to gain a council position, with Lalor’s interests at heart, was also a farmer. The successful candidate on this occasion was Bill Mann who owned the land next to the Peter Lalor estate and his cows supplied milk to the Lalor community. He was a great friend to the developing Lalor community, lending assistance to the LWSC in its bid to build the ‘kinderhall’, and supporting him gave the Lalorites their best chance of success. The election in February 1954

95. ibid., 12 August 1953, p. 8. In the next chapter we will also see that he donated the flooring timbers for the Lalor ‘kinderhall’. Still in the first decade of the 21st century, the Muriel and Les Batten Foundation makes philanthropic donations, particularly in the area of children’s health.  


97. This terrible episode in Purcell’s life was never discussed at home. The children found the situation very shocking. While they do not know the details of their father’s business, they believed their father had invested too much in the Co-operatives. See Frank Purcell, interview with the author, op. cit. p.11. Upon selling the house, Purcell discharged all his debts and was not declared bankrupt. He became bankrupt, however, in 1960 as a result of a failed timber business. Again, from the bankruptcy data, it would appear that Purcell was doing his best in a difficult situation: another great scheme that was undercapitalised and therefore unprepared for adversity, in this case consistently bad weather and an accident with machinery. Attorney-General’s Department, Bankruptcy Branch, Victoria, ‘Richard Leo Purcell, Bankruptcy Record’, NAA, B160/0, Creditor’s Petition No. 157/60, sequestration order no. 152/60, Melbourne, 1960.  

98. Whittlesea Post, 9 September 1953, p. 4.  

99. ibid., 19 August 1953, p. 6.  

100. Just prior to Batten’s election, he had succeeded in having land at Wollert approved for subdivision. Similarly, Mann was also in the process of developing his land into a housing estate known as Bella Vista, making council membership an attractive proposition. See WSC, ‘Minutes of Meetings’, 9 July 1952, p. 63, 15 April 1953, p 181 & 10 June 1953, p. 207.
was a bi-election caused by the resignation of Creighton. It was a four-way contest between three farmers and Bill Winterton. This time Winterton received 168 votes, with 131 of his preferences supporting Bill Mann, who won by only 15 votes. Clearly, Winterton’s tilts at council were not solely directed at Purcell. At this election, Lalor had a polling booth and Bill Nelson was the returning officer.101

By the council elections of 1954, Lalor was clearly evolving from a co-operative soldier settlement into a relatively normal developing suburb in the north of Melbourne. To mark this change, a new era started with the election of Vic Michael to the WSC. The contest for pre-selection between Norm Griffiths and Vic Michael within the Lalor Branch of the ALP has reached legendary status. The contemporary newspaper report read:

Mr Norm Griffiths and Mr Vic Michael, who stood for pre-selection at Lalor Labor Branch last Saturday, really set members a poser, both being very popular. Mr Jack Wallish and Mr Jack McGuinness (returning officers) reported a heavy poll which ended in a win for Mr Vic Michael by one vote.102

Vic Michael’s election started an era in Whittlesea history during which time he exercised extraordinary influence over the affairs of the shire for a generation. Lalor now had three sympathetic voices on council and while still a significant minority, the council started to fundamentally change. This will be discussed further in Chapter 8.

The last of the three roles of local government identified earlier was the capacity to represent the cause of its local constituents to higher levels of government. WSC certainly played this role better than the other two. There were several occasions when the council took some action. On issues which were the responsibility of the state, the shire had little hesitation in adding its voice to the local clamour for services such as extension of the electric railway line to Epping or a primary school for the Lalor estate. With added representation from Lalor, by the mid 1950s, the WSC became a greater ally for the Lalor residents in their efforts to gain services from state government level. What actually occurred in relation to the provision of infrastructure and services at Lalor, however, represented an astonishing failure of government at every level.

In one sense it represented a complete disconnection between the promises made by post-war governments and what they were geared up to do. Take, for example, the statement by Premier John Cain to the annual conference of the Municipal

102. ibid., 30 June 1954, p. 5.
Association of Victoria in 1946. His view was that the first priority was to develop water resources:

The second objective is housing. This is a problem not only in the city. The Premier said that he would like to see housing schemes being carried into effect in country districts to enable the establishment and development of industries in the country.\textsuperscript{103}

The founders of the PLC promised this, and more. Their venture would fulfil all these objectives and be located as a ‘green-belt town’\textsuperscript{104} where the advantages of both city and country could be enhanced.

In another sense it represented, at best, lack of interest and, at worst, deliberate neglect. For the co-operators who had started their venture in December 1946, commenced building in September 1947, occupied their first homes in February 1948 and had built 200 homes by 1954, they waited a scandalous amount of time to gain the most basic of amenities. Despite continuous representations and lobbying, they waited until November 1950 for the Thomastown Automatic Exchange to be operational before the people of Lalor had access to private telephones; most hot water systems could not be connected until the SEC installed a new transformer in early 1952, a garbage collection service commenced in early 1954 when the primary school also opened. The roads and drainage were eventually finalised after twelve years, in 1960, but sewerage was not supplied until 1973, twenty-six years after they first set foot on their housing estate. As for council’s role representing the co-operative to government at the federal level, it played no part. The co-operative’s relationship with the federal government is the subject of the next chapter.

At the beginning of this chapter I highlighted the general disadvantage faced by the working class in the allocation of resources across urban and suburban development, and this held true for all Australian capital cities.\textsuperscript{105} It would appear, though, that Lalor was among the most disadvantaged. Any explanation for this must take into account their original decision to build so far outside the suburban ring, which in large part, too, reflected their disadvantage. At the broadest level, they were working-class people on the outskirts of Melbourne and they would have to wait until governments, and their agencies, reached the very bottom of their respective lists of priorities. In a sense they were victims of their own aims. They sought to help themselves and, without much pause, governments at all levels were prepared to let them get on with it.


\textsuperscript{104} PLHBCSL, ‘Progress & Promise’, op. cit., p. 2.

A Soldier Settlement and a Suburb

‘Members are advised that there is a possibility that War Service Homes will commence a group building scheme in this area late this year.’

When Alf Greenwood resigned as Manager and Leo Purcell handed the Chairmanship to Bill King in mid-1949, both undoubtedly held the expectation that a healthy partnership had been established between the co-operative and the War Service Homes Division (WSHD), and that together the two organisations would provide affordable homes for ex-servicemen and women on the Peter Lalor Estate. In this chapter I investigate the nature of the relationship between the two organisations and once again discover dreams shattered and lost. Nonetheless, as the co-operative slowly evolved into a suburb, I reflect more deeply on these people, who they were and how they thrived, despite these setbacks.

The last contact the society had with the Chifley government was in mid-1949, when Chifley probably applied political pressure to the WSHD to buy many of the remaining blocks of land from the financially struggling co-operative. One of the pieces of collective memory from the original settlers at Lalor is a perception that when the society stopped building houses in 1949, the WSHD took over the project and finished the job. This view is repeated in J.W. Payne’s local history. He stated:

Unfortunately, rising costs and inadequate finances forced the co-operative to dispose of their buildings and equipment literally ‘for a song’. The War

1. PLHBCSL, ‘Circular’, no. 37, 1 September 1949.
Service Homes Commission then took over the project and completed the first section.\(^3\)

This was almost certainly the intention of the Chifley Government and was the expectation of the Peter Lalor Co-operative (PLC) in 1949.\(^4\) Such a view was confirmed by a ‘Circular’, which, as we can see from the above quotation, informed the membership in September 1949, that the WSHD intended to commence a group building scheme at Lalor and any eligible member who had paid a deposit should apply through the society, and not the WSHD, to be part of this scheme: the co-operative would supply the land from its remaining stocks.\(^5\) Whittlesea Shire Council (WSC) President John Balharrie echoed a similar view when he told the Local Government Advisory Board in November 1949 of his expectation of a rapidly expanding population:

At the present date, 75 families are resident on the land [PL Estate] which eighteen months ago was being farmed. The aim of the Society, conjointly with the War Service Homes Commission, is the establishment of a housing estate of at least 800 homes.\(^6\)

Balharrie’s use of the word ‘conjointly’ suggests that there was a working partnership, but a month later Chifley had lost office and the relationship between the co-operative and the WSHD soured irrevocably. Perhaps now that Director Sydney Lucas’s political masters had changed in Canberra with the election of the Menzies Government, he could vent his resentment at having been politically pressured into acting by Chifley. Given its legislated mandate, active support for the co-operative housing venture was the logical next step and the WSHD ought to have acted. Instead, there is not a shred of evidence that they did anything meaningful after Chifley’s departure: on the contrary the evidence points overwhelmingly to a hostile relationship that led to them profiting as a result of their inaction.

In February 1950 the WSHD wrote to the A.V. Jennings Construction Company, seeking ‘priced bills for quantities’ for building some houses at Lalor, confirming Greig’s view that there was a close relationship between the big construction

\(^3\) J.W. Payne, *The Plenty: A Centenary History of the Whittlesea Shire*, Kenmore, 1975, p. 42. Payne’s timing is also incorrect here. The WSHD took over the land in 1949. The Stockade was sold ‘for a song’ in 1954. Payne has probably taken this information from S.T. Grey who asserted that the WSHD gradually built up the area, and ‘completed many homes’. Grey believed that ‘about 160 homes were taken over in the early 50’s while to date that number is trebled’. See S.T. Grey, *History of the Foundation of the Shire of Whittlesea*, May 1961, p. 3. There is no evidence of this in the WSHD files, nor in the rates books, nor was this confirmed by oral testimony. It is completely false.

\(^4\) WSHD, Group 74R Thomastown, ‘Disposal of land’, NAA MP599/1, 14999, Melbourne, 28 August 1953.

\(^5\) PLHBCSCL, ‘Circular’, no. 37, 1 September 1949. This confirms my argument from Chapter 4, p. 145, that members who wanted to withdraw, did so because they no longer wanted to be at Lalor, not because they could not gain access to a building block.

companies and government. Meanwhile the PLC began advertising the sale of pre-cut frames for houses: 'pre-cut to your own plans. Or we can supply plans. ... All joinery requirements can also be met. Prompt delivery.' It begs the question why the WSHD did not seek to enhance the building capacity of the PLC production factory, operating on site and employing ex-servicemen.

Certainly it is true that the WSHD provided invaluable housing loan support for about one quarter of those in the soldier settlement community of Lalor, in the same way as for every other ex-serviceman or woman in Australia. And when the WSHD purchased 483 blocks of land from the co-operative at £33 per block in August 1949, it paid a relatively fair price. The WSHD paid a total of £16,085, and a profit was returned to the PLC, which had bought the total area of 819 blocks in 1947 for £14,444/15/-10. Notwithstanding this, there is no escaping the conclusion that the WSHD did very well out of its association with Lalor. Blocks were at the time selling through the society for £35, and the subdivision and house designs were already in place for all to use. At the time of sale, the plan was for the WSHD to commence a War Service Homes Group Scheme.11 Between 1950 and 1952 the WSHD made half-hearted attempts at negotiating with council, the State Electricity Commission (SEC) and the Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) to secure the necessary services for the construction of houses on the site. Initially the plan was for 84 houses, later reduced to 54 houses. By May 1952 WSHD decided not to proceed, mainly due to a downturn in the building industry.12 Lloyd and Rees, in their history of repatriation, confirmed that the WSHD was finding similar situations elsewhere, and that the Lalor site was not unique. They stated:

The War Service Homes Commission made some experiments including the encouragement of co-operative building schemes. ... In the face of persistent shortages of labour and materials, it was difficult to find builders for either group or single projects. Group housing projects were also restricted because local government authorities could not keep pace with demand for essential services.13

This makes it all the more astonishing that the WSHD did not look to the PLC production factory to build its homes. Except for eight blocks of land in Vasey

7. WSHD, Group 74R Thomastown, 'Correspondence', NAA MP797/1/0, G13125, Melbourne, 21 September 1950; Alastair Greig, The Stuff Dreams Are Made Of, op. cit., pp. 77–79.
9. From available information it would appear that there were about 50 such loans.
11. The land became known as the 'Lalor Station Estate', but for WSHD purposes it was Group 74R (v) Thomastown. NAA, MP992/115016, Melbourne.
12. WSHD, Group 74R (v) Thomastown, 'Creation of Reserves', NAA, MP992/1/0 G14574.
Avenue and Derrick and French Streets which were sold to ‘eligible’ individuals, the land remained idle for several years.

By 1953 a further attempt was made to begin a WSHD Group Scheme. The WSHD attempted unsuccessfully to sell a large number of blocks by open tender.\textsuperscript{14} This prompted a letter from the co-operative, signed by Chairman Bill King, questioning why the lots were not being reserved for ex-servicemen. The tone of the exchange provides an insight into the now poisonous relationship between the PLC and the WSHD. Lucas personally involved himself with this issue. As he wrote to his Deputy C.T. Bell: ‘When we purchased this land valuations were given which indicated that the purchase was quite a good one. Is it the general view now that we will not be able to recover the cost of this land?’ His officers were equivocal in their response, though they were hoping to fetch £125 per lot. They forwarded to Lucas the contents of the PLC letter and he instructed that a stern letter be returned to the society.\textsuperscript{15}

The society’s letter had stated that it had been led to believe, by Lucas, that land at Lalor was to be reserved for those eligible for WSH loans and that preference would be given to members of the society. The letter asked if this policy had now changed and if the WSHD would now be prepared to sell the land back to the society and at what price. Clearly their financial situation had improved. The letter continued:

We are prompted to seek this information in view of the fact that we have on record members who desired in the past to purchase land from the Division, and who were eligible for War Service Homes finance, but due to the unreasonable delay in finalizing their application for finance, vide your letter G49/12944 dated 23\textsuperscript{rd} February 1950, were forced to seek land and finance elsewhere.\textsuperscript{16}

Bell wrote an internal letter to Lucas stating that:

The members of the society who, it is alleged, were forced to seek land and finance elsewhere were only precluded from proceeding with their applications in the normal way in February 1950 because of the society’s failure to honour its contractual [sic] obligations in respect of those homes which were then in course of construction. ... In view of the society’s past record as a building organisation, it would seem no criticism could be levelled at the Division.\textsuperscript{17}

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\textsuperscript{14} Of the original 483 blocks bought by the WSHD, 8 sold to applicants, 5 transferred to council for road making purposes, and 4 retained by WSHD. This left 466 blocks.

\textsuperscript{15} WSHD, Group 74R Thomastown, ‘Disposal of Land’, op. cit., 28 August 1953.

\textsuperscript{16} ibid.

\textsuperscript{17} ibid.
Clearly, the WSHD believed the co-operative's problems were entirely of its own making, a harsh judgement indeed. Lucas directed that the reply to the society should state that there was no change in policy, that the WSHD could sell its land in the best interests of the Commonwealth, that there was no reason why the society could not buy the land on the open market but:

The Society's reference to delays by the Division ignores the facts of the case and the most unsatisfactory dealings we had with the Society and the Society is to be informed of this.18

On 23 April 1953, the WSHD informed the Department of Works that:

Owing, however, to the excessive tenders received for the erection of the homes, it has now been decided to abandon completely the contemplated scheme.19

The WSHD was by that time pessimistic about the likelihood of selling the land. In an internal memo of 17 December 1953, Bell lamented:

It is also considered unlikely that any further subdivisions will be undertaken for some time due to the limited demand for residential sites in this locality.20

Prospective buyers could not fail to notice the appalling lack of infrastructure on the Peter Lalor Estate.

The PLC almost certainly did not enter the 1953 WSHD tender process. It is not clear if WSHD publicly called for open tenders or if specific firms were invited. By 1953, however, the co-operative's finances were in remarkably good shape. In addressing the half yearly meeting of members, Chairman King announced that 'during the past two years many outstanding trade creditors had been paid off'.21 This had left the society undercapitalised again, but 'with contracts for some £24,000 ensured, it was only reasonable to assume that the society's affairs would go on improving'.22 Significantly, the meeting was attended by a large number of people who were not Lalor residents. King paid 'tribute to the patience and forbearance of those members who had subscribed to the society, but as yet had not received any benefits'.23 This would suggest that it was the ex-servicemen and women, who were the last in the

18. ibid., 31 August 1953.
19. WSHD, 'Correspondence', op. cit., 27 April 1953.
22. ibid.
23. ibid.
line to receive any reimbursement of the money owed to them. Nonetheless, after this positive report from King, it came as a surprise that within a year, the society was in voluntary liquidation. Was this prompted because the WSHD had by then made it clear they would not honour the expectation to be partners in their venture?

In 1954 the WSHD stood by while the Stockade factory was sold for a very low price. In fact it never acknowledged the existence of this construction factory resource in the centre of its landholding, nor did it attempt to collaborate with the Stockade to return a profit and reimburse the ex-servicemen and women who were owed money. After all both organisations were struggling to achieve the same objective of providing housing for ex-servicemen and women. Also, it did nothing to help build community infrastructure. Rather, its dead hand had a negative impact. It contributed to the Council’s reluctance to provide amenities in Lalor, as such government instrumentalities were not required to pay rates, thus reducing council revenue, and council was pessimistic about ever recouping the kind of return from infrastructure investment they would normally expect from individual ratepayers.24

Inaction by the WSHD was also responsible for delays in the opening of the Lalor primary school. The state Department of Education was supportive of the need for a school to be built in Lalor. By September 1951, the Department had written to the WSHD seeking to purchase ten lots on Maxwell Street to allow access to the school grounds which included land being bought outside the Peter Lalor Estate. Departmental Secretary, D. H. Wheeler wrote that the ‘need is particularly urgent as the nearest school, Thomastown, is seriously overcrowded’.25 Local federal member, R.T. Pollard, wrote to the WSHD in support of the Education Department in June 1952, but the WSHD delayed.26 A sale price was finally determined in April 1953. Titles had to be drawn up subsequently.27 The school took its first pupils in the summer of 1954.

After two more years, the WSHD sought to sell 446 lots at public tender.28 WSHD put the total value of the land at £20,500.29 The first group of 95 blocks (to the north of the subdivision) were auctioned on 21 April 1956 on the open market. The

24. The WSHD also initially held back its approval for the street construction proposals. Whittlesea Post, 16 May 1957, p. 1, reported that the WSHD had blocked the Lalor Street construction scheme ‘by refusing to pay the £3500 for the 40 blocks it owns’ in the relevant section of the PL Estate. After an outcry, it withdrew its objections. Whittlesea Post, 30 May 1957, p. 1. For individual PL owners who wanted to erect garden fences on blocks adjoining those owned by the WSHD, there were often considerable delays. See WSHD, Group 74R Thomastown, ‘Fencing’ NAA, MP 797/1/0 G 13116, Melbourne, 1950–59.
25. WSHD, Group 74R Thomastown ‘Proposed sale of 10 lots to Education Department’, NAA, MP599/1: 14801, 14 September 1951.
26. Labor MHR Pollard was invited by Purcell to the inaugural meeting of the Lalor Branch of the ALP but as discussed in Chapter 5, he was an apology.
28. WSHD, ‘Disposal of Land’, op. cit., 21 October 1955. Prior to the sale, 29 lots had to be withdrawn because the Shire Engineer deemed the drainage was unsatisfactory. He added that ‘I do not think that the [MMBW] Board will build the necessary drain for some years’.
sale price was an astonishingly high £20,555. The Commonwealth Department of Interior considered that ‘the prices realised are considered exceptional taking into account previous sales in the area’. With the sale of just these 95 lots, the WSHD had received more than its valuation for the whole estate. Had the co-operative been capitalised enough to have maintained ownership of this land, it too would have been able to repay the small shareholders who had initially sought housing at Lalor, and perhaps afforded some social infrastructure as well. It was so much easier for a government agency to sit and wait.

The files for WSHD are incomplete and it is not clear exactly how the remaining lots were sold. Initially two further auctions of 104 lots and 247 lots were also planned for later in 1956, but it appears that the WSHD decided to keep the group of 104 lots (along Maxwell and Derrick Streets) and these were renamed the ‘WSH Estate.’ Between 1957 and 1960 the WSHD paid contractors to construct homes for eligible applicants on just 25 of these lots, again making a profit. The Lalor residents would have legitimately felt some irony had they seen the WSHD internal memo which now promoted the area:

This estate is still in a remote part of the metropolitan area but within itself is developing with housing on the east and industry on the west of the railway line. The railway station is adjacent to the group as is a new state school. The shopping centre is gradually increasing in size [Lalor stalwarts such as Fred and Gwen Hunt and Jim and Flo O’Connor had built shops there]... A kindergarten is on the estate [all built by Lalor voluntary labour].

The remaining WSHD blocks were sold in piecemeal fashion up to the mid-1970s, presumably at considerable profit with rapidly escalating land prices. It is not clear how many went to ‘eligible ex-servicemen and women’. The 247 lots (to the north-east along Curtin Ave and Burton Street, including Cherry and Hamilton Courts) were sold off in large parcels to real estate agents in the latter part of 1956. Although the sale prices are not recorded, the amounts involved were all profit once the first 95 were sold.

30. ibid., 24 April 1956.
31. ibid.
32. ibid., 21 April 1956.
33. WSHD, Group Building 74R (V) Thomastown, ‘Building Sub-Group 1’, NAA, MP797/L1/112136, Melbourne, 1957, involved 5 timber-framed homes; Group Building ‘Sub-Group 2’, NAA, MP797/L1/112134, Melbourne 1957, involved four timber dwellings; Group Building 74R (V) ‘Sub-group 3’, involved four weatherboard homes, NAA, MP797/L1/112144, Melbourne, 1957; Group 74R (V) Thomastown, ‘Sub-Group 4’, NAA, MP797/L1/112154, Melbourne, 1957, involved 4 timber homes, 1957; Group Building ‘Sub-group 5’, Melbourne, 1957, NAA, MP797/L1/112157, involved four dwellings.
34. WSHD, ‘Building Sub-Group 1’, op. cit.
Rather than a constructive and profitable partnership between two organisations ‘conjointly’ seeking to achieve the same outcome, as Councillor Balharrie had described it, from December 1949, the WSHD largely ignored the existence of the co-operative. Perhaps it was simply preoccupied and did not really understand the cooperative resources it had available to it through its on-site building plant. Perhaps it considered the society to be inefficient, it did not like its Board members, or thought it too closely aligned to Labor once the Liberals were in power. At the very least, it appears that the bureaucrats in the WSHD lacked the vision to grasp a good idea and lend weight to its fulfilment. Had the WSHD really ‘taken over and finished the job’, as the literature would have it, all the debts to ex-servicemen and women could have been settled from the profits on the land, and the influence of the WSHD could have pushed for essential services to the settlement of Lalor in a much more timely way. For the Menzies conservative government, though, the PLC was not even on the radar. A week is a long time in politics.

When the co-operative had initially sold its land to the WSHD it had retained a number of vacant lots, and all the land set aside for community purposes. This land continued to be owned by the community and was available to ensure that members who still might want land could have that option. Although the co-operative was in liquidation from early 1954, the administrators took advantage of rising land prices and on 24 April 1956 sold almost all their holdings (less the community reserves) to a real estate company called Coolnong Estates Pty Ltd, a holding company which quickly on-sold at even greater profit. From the proceeds of the Peter Lalor Estate, though, we can perhaps assume that more debts were settled, hopefully this time to some of those ex-servicemen and women who were the little shareholders. In an interesting twist, Coolnong Estates was a family company owned by T.M. Burke Pty Ltd, which did much of the land sale at Lalor. Burke himself, who had died in 1949, was of Catholic background, and had somewhat disreputable links with the early co-operative movement in Victoria.

Not surprisingly, there was within Lalor an overall sense of disillusionment with the powerful elites, which was symptomatic of the general democratic deficit they experienced. They were nevertheless ahead of their time in being so politically and socially active at the community level. They created their community on their own terms with its own brand of social capital: which, in its spirit at least, was in accordance with their original dream. In the next chapter we will see how the women of Lalor played a pivotal role in social capital formation. However, before

37. ibid: See also Coolnong Estates Pty Ltd, Company Register, VPRS 80269/P0001. Registered 1931, by 1941 Burke family names were added to the list of Directors. The link between the Coolong Estates and T.M. Burke Pty Ltd is further reinforced as T.M. Burke resold the Lalor estate land on behalf of Coolnong. See also Gary Lewis, ‘The Quest for a “Middle Way”: Radical and Rochdale Co-Operation in New South Wales, 1839–C1986’, PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1989, vol. II, notes p. 81; Tony Hannan, ‘Burke, Thomas Michael (1870–1949)’, Australian Dictionary of Biography, Melbourne, vol. 7, 1979, pp. 486–87.

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doing so, a task of collective analysis remains to round out one aspect of the history of the PLC. At this time of transition from co-operative settlement to suburb it is possible to analyse Lalor’s development—home by home, family by family, street by street—in order to better understand the basis of its cohesion.38

Writing about the formation of the Australian working class, labour historian Stuart Macintyre has suggested that:

another valuable approach would be by means of the individual working-class community, using the techniques of social anthropology to throw light on how different occupational groupings cohered in a specific context.39

Among the tools of the social anthropologist, broadly defined, it is useful to turn to the techniques of prosopography or ‘collective biography’ to bring to life some of the individuals and families in this localised, specific context, to reveal the nature of their group cohesion.40 I have already shown that formal co-operative structures had been created in an effort to achieve, amongst other aspirations, ‘better living conditions for the working classes.’41 ‘We were all working class people in those days,’ former resident Lorraine Harvey recalled.42 Moreover, their decision to call themselves after Peter Lalor suggests that the roots of their cohesion were already present. I have also shown that the impact of wartime experience added a further layer of camaraderie, at least for the men, which manifested socially through the RSL and politically through the local ALP branch. The collective biography discussed below adds another dimension to this analysis.43

In a prosopographic analysis of a Victorian era street in England, Michael Erben described its inhabitants as an ‘unaffiliated or disinterested group’. By this he meant:

a set of persons who are spatially similarly located and are representative of, and consequent, upon a set of socio-economic forces, but who between their households do not have prefiguring affectual or instrumental ties, in short their affiliation is abstract.44

40. A description of both elite and mass prosopography is to be found in the Introduction to this thesis at pp. 14–15.
42. Lorraine Harvey, interview with the author, 21 February 2008, p. 11. See a short biography in Appendix A.
43. The material described in this prosopography is contained in a database which has been specifically designed for this project. The data has been compiled from a large range of official sources, newspaper reports, oral testimony, diaries and other personal papers. Hundreds of specific references have been used to collate the information in these paragraphs. It was impractical to include them in the thesis. The database results are to be found in Appendices B to K in vol. 2. They are also illustrated in the maps in vol. 2, pp. v–vii.

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Already, it is clear that Lalor stands in stark contrast with this statement, but the prosopography outlined below will further demonstrate that there were 'prefiguring affectual or instrumental ties', making Lalor typical of a pattern that will be familiar to students of labour history.45 (Other similar circumstances occurred in mining towns, and this may help to explain why the Australian co-operative movement was strongest in these places.)

One way to begin this analysis is to take a brisk walk down any street in Lalor and quickly investigate who lived inside. Take for example, Middleton Street in the second half of 1954.46 It was named after Victoria Cross winner, Flight Sergeant Rawdon (Ron) Hume Middleton. 47 Looking south from the Stockade, it was towards the middle of this small triangle of the Peter Lalor Estate which in 1954 had been under construction for seven years. Middleton Street started from the railway line (Station Street) in the east to join Chowne Street in the centre of the settlement. It is a short street, of only 24 potential homes, and is one street to the south of Gratwick Street, which was initially the main street, built by the PLC and the first to be fully occupied from 1948.

The first striking feature of Middleton Street in 1954 was that it was still in the process of construction. Starting at the railway line, the first block on the left—the low side—was vacant, and opposite, the two blocks on the right were being actively farmed for vegetables, and a large bonfire was in construction for Guy Fawkes' celebrations. The streets were unmade with a gravel surface, making for significant grazing of elbows and knees as the kids tried to play cricket when the soil was not boggy. Deep, open drains on each side of the road had planks across to allow access from the street to the homes. There were no street lights, so particularly in winter, it was common to see workers returning home by torchlight, taking care not to fall into the drains. At most a handful of the homes looked established, with gardens planted, and few if any had fences. In a novel set in the 1950s Steven Carroll described a picture that could have been Middleton Street: 'Cattle refuse to accept the newly drawn suburban boundaries and graze where they always have, even if it is now somebody's front yard.'48 Several of the homes were 'temporaries', either still occupied, or recently vacated and the majority of homes were weatherboard.

The vacant lot on the left, number 2, was owned by the WSHD and was lying idle, along with more than 400 others elsewhere on the estate. Next door, Eric and Hilda Loader may just have occupied their home. Gaining ownership of their land in 1949, they camped in a tent (with at least two boys in tow) until they moved

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46. See a diagram naming of the occupants of this street at Appendix D. This format was used by Geoffrey Bolton in his book, *Daphne Street: The Biography of an Australian Community*, Fremantle, 1997.


into the Stockade as caretakers in 1951. Slowly they built. Born in 1914, Eric was an ex-serviceman and motor mechanic. Both Eric and Hilda were central players in the Lalor community, Eric holding official positions on the PLC Committee of Management, the ALP, and the Men’s Club (TELK). He was a Mason. Hilda was in the LWSC and on the Kindergarten Committee. The home we would see from the street was weatherboard, and they used a WSH loan. This was an active couple. They were chiefly responsible for organising the mock weddings which were legendary not only as events to raise funds but also as a source of community spirit. Typical of the community ethos of making do, the weddings were staged within the frame of their partly built house. They were both also active in the youth club. In their spare time, they catered for parties and functions and in 1954 the entrepreneurial Hilda opened a cake shop in Thomastown with her friend, Mrs M. Mott who lived down the street at number 14. The use of prosopography as a methodology for the study of working-class communities almost inevitably runs into problems such as this; the occupant of number 14 is only known to us as ‘M. Mott’. For this reason many exponents of the approach limit its application to the examination of elites. As outlined in the discussion in the Introduction to this thesis, Lawrence Stone’s famous definition actually denotes the approach as ‘elite prosopography’. More recently labour historians have rejected this limitation, developing strategies to overcome breaks in the data. M’s husband, Ron, was an ex-serviceman and engineer, who was involved in some fund-raising activities and she for a short time was Secretary of the LWSC. They appeared to have three children, but it is not clear how many of them had been born by 1954, as Ron was amongst the youngest of the servicemen, being born in 1923.

Jack and Jean Dacey’s weatherboard house was next door at number 6. Jack was born in 1922 and had served in the RAN. Jack was one of the main plasterers for the Lalor houses, but, as the collective memory would have it, he was just as notable for his role acting as a bridesmaid in the mock weddings and for using his plastering skills to make the wedding cake. Both Jack and Jean were active members of the RSL. By 1954 they had a boy and a girl, and would soon have twins. Number 8 was another block which had been bought by WSH in 1949, but through the PLC an arrangement was made to sell the block to ex-serviceman Jim McVicar in October 1950. As evidence of the WSHD uncompromising approach, Jim, who had already

49. Whittlesea Post, 5 September 1951, p. 8; Dot Thompson, transcript of interview with the author, 1 May 2006, p. 10. All further references to interviews will cite the transcriptions of interviews.


53. One reason for the failure to establish a given name for Mrs Mott is that oral testimony has been used to gain this information for many of the women. However, the Motts left Lalor in 1953, making it difficult for people in their nineties to remember her name.
paid the co-operative £25 or £35 for a block of land, discovered that there was some confusion over who owned the land assigned to him in Chowne Street. Therefore negotiations with WSHD resulted in Jim buying number 8 Middleton Street, but WSHD sold the block to him for £98 (WSHD had paid £33). He recouped the money then owed to him by the co-operative as all his windows were provided from the Stockade, free of charge. In 1951 Jim (born in 1924) married Peg Gordon (born in 1928) who lived over the back boundary in Gratwick Street (they had known each other from a childhood in Clunes). She had arrived in Lalor as a teenager in 1948 and lived with her older brother Doug and mother Maureen. Jim was part of a syndicate with teacher Jim Charters whose house in Station Street was built first. The McVicars lived in a bungalow on their block while their 6 room, weatherboard house was built. They moved in when their first boy was six weeks old in 1953.

Ex-serviceman Tom Charters (younger brother of Jim) was born in 1924 and was a policeman. He and his wife, Ellen, lived in number 10 in a weatherboard house built jointly by Tom and a private contractor. They had a WSH loan. Ellen was a popular Secretary of the Kindergarten Committee and Tom was active in the youth club. We have already met tile maker, ex-serviceman Jack Follett, and ex-serviceman Ron Moore, who through a syndicate built their homes using the Junget concrete brick system. Jack was born in 1915, and together with his wife Elsie Millicent (Min) they lived at number 12 and both were active in the football club. They had been married during the war and had a boy and a girl before arriving in Lalor. They were well established in 1954. We will see more on Min in the next chapter.

Number 16, next to the Motts, housed another ex-serviceman, born in 1923. He was Les Males and worked with the Stockade as a carpenter, builder and wood machinist. He pitched the roof and put in the cupboards for Jack Follett. Les's wife is also nameless in the public record, though in 1954 they had at least one daughter called Maree. They moved into their weatherboard house in 1951, which he probably built himself, given his skills. Ex-Serviceman George Mackenzie and his wife Peg and one daughter Pam built their brick veneer home at number 18 while working as caretakers in the Stockade in the late 1940s. They were part of a syndicate. George was considerably older than Peg. Born in Scotland in 1902, he migrated at the age of 21. Peg was born in the Melbourne suburb of Brunswick in 1924. He was an ex-serviceman who became blind in one eye shortly after the war. He sponsored his sister Mary Archibald and her husband David to come to Australia after the war and they too lived in Lalor. Little is known about John and June Auld who moved into a modified PLC designed 5 roomed brick veneer home in 1950, at number 20. He was employed as an electrical fitter and they were both active on the Pre-school

55. When Peg's mother died in 1951, they moved back into the Gratwick Street house with Doug, where they stayed until they moved into their house.
57. Archibald family took over and finished a partly built home in Paschke Crescent before moving into it in 1951.
committee. No war record has been found for either of them. Next door at number 22 Bernie and Moya Keys were still in the process of building their own home. They were amongst the youngest couples in Lalor, and for that reason Bernie was last on the list to build through a syndicate. Bernie was a printer, and Moya a hairdresser and both were too young to have served in WWII. The last house in the street, at number 24 we meet again Ron and Ethel Moore. Ex-serviceman Ron was born in 1921 and worked as a tile maker with Jack Follett and was later employed at Dave Burgess's plaster factory. Ron's brother, Viv, built on the opposite corner at number 7 Chowne Street.

Returning along the other side of the road, the four houses at numbers 21 to 15 all had 'temporaries' and in 1954, some of the houses were not yet finished. Joe and Elizabeth Nash were already living in their self-built brick veneer home. Joe had been in a protected industry during the war, working at the ammunition factory in Maribyrnong. Little else is known about them, though they were well established in their home by 1954. Ernie Witt bought the block next door for £700 in 1951, which included a temporary dwelling and partly built house. They moved straight into the 'temporary', and Ernie, a plasterer, slowly finished the house. No war record has been found for them. His wife, known only as Mrs Witt, was apparently feisty as the Whittlesea Post reported that 'she locked her husband in the shed to go to a Mother's club meeting'. She was active in the LWSC, though the couple were to leave Lalor the following year. At number 17 we have already met shoe repairer, Bill Clark and his wife Eunice, who lived in their 'temporary' for seven years with two children. As we walk in front of their partly constructed home, the tap that supplied all their water would be a lonely feature at the front of their block. Trained to cook in the Army, he baked a loaf of bread for our interview in 2006 when he was aged 95. In early 1954, Bill stopped his voluntary role as rubbish collector using the horse and cart from the Stockade. He and his brother-in-law Bill Auhl, who lived in a 'temporary' over the back boundary at number 16 Derrick Street, were the mainstays of this effort.

At number 15 Middleton Street in 1954, was Bruce and Edna McIntosh. They too occupied a partly built weatherboard house and 'temporary', which they bought for £660 in 1954. Little is known about them, although his occupation was listed as driver. Nonetheless, they had a family and were immediately active in the youth club. Next door at number 13 were Frank and Nellie Lees in a four roomed weatherboard home. They were an older couple and Frank was very active within the Masons organisation: so much so that he was apparently pulled into line by the society for

58. It is unlikely that the original owner, ex-servicemen Geoffrey O'Neill, would have lost any money on this deal.
59. Whittlesea Post, 23 September 1954, p. 8. This would have been a meeting of the LWSC.
60. Again, it is unlikely that the previous owners, George Blackburn and Caroline Mann, lost money on this. They had bought the block, 'temporary' and foundations from Harry Mote in 1952 for £440.
an over-zealous membership drive in Lalor. He started the Masonic-based Fidelity Club, was active in the youth club and was on the campaign trail for Catholic Leo Purcell in his tilts at council, making this street politically very intriguing. Lees was an active member of the Lalor Branch of the ALP. He and Nellie were neighbours to the Purcells until, as we know, the Purcell family left in late 1953. The Purcells’ brick veneer house, at number 11, was bought by David and Bernadette Jackman who moved into their home in early 1954. Little is known about this couple, but David worked as a salesman and immediately joined the Board of the Lalor Consumers’ Co-operative Society (LCCS). House number 9 was owned by ex-serviceman and machinist, Frank Jean and his wife, Victoria, who with their young family, moved into this small, four roomed, weatherboard home in 1953. They had previously been building at 14 Chowne Street and it is not clear why they moved. Labourer Roy Gray and his wife Margaret lived at number 7 Middleton Street. Roy was part of a syndicate with George Mackenzie. Little else is known about this couple except that they had at least one daughter. No war record has been found for either of them. Beside the Grays lived Bill and Maggie Winterton, an older couple whom we have already met. Bill managed a hotel in the city and Maggie worked at the Crestknit factory in Epping. The last two blocks of land at numbers 3 and 1 (owned by Kelly and O’Berg) were the vacant lots.

What does our walk tell us about these people—their collective experiences and their lives in aggregate? From our survey of Middleton Street the most striking feature is the very precarious nature of this venture for many of these people. Clearly, on at least two occasions, co-operative members had given up building at the point where they were living in ‘temporaries’ and had started to build. Lack of choice must have been the only reason why Bill and Eunice Clark remained for seven years in their ‘temporary’. Moreover, it would appear that the older residents were well settled in their homes in 1954, while the younger couples, in the main ex-servicemen who had only served for a short time in the AIF because of their young age, were either quite newly arrived, or had been living in ‘temporaries’ for some years while finishing their homes. By 1954 the syndicate system had run its course, the Stockade had closed as a source of on-site prefabricated materials, and these younger, later families were almost certainly less supported in their building ventures than the earlier co-operators. It is likely that this was because the established residents had now turned their attention to the urgent need for social and educational infrastructure.

The number of family connections is another striking feature. It is very clear that, unlike Erben’s Victorian Street, the residents of Middleton Street could not be described as an ‘unaffiliated or disinterested group’. In their classic study of family and kinship in East London at almost the same time as Lalor was taking

61. Dot Thompson, interview with the author, op. cit., p. 50.
62. At Appendix E there is a list of Lalor resident familial relationships, to the extent that they are known. This is intended to be indicative and is almost certainly incomplete.
shape, Michael Young and Peter Willmot emphasised the importance of the mother-
daughter relationships and extended family.\textsuperscript{63} Another report by Brian Jackson
similarly highlighted the strengths of a kinship system, especially for women:
‘there was abundant mutual help—looking after children, cooking meals, sharing
shopping.’ Extended family played a role in supporting men as well as women and
the extended family was ‘absorbed into a “linked” system of households.’\textsuperscript{64} Stuart
Macintyre, however, has warned of the dangers of overemphasising family among
political communities. In his \textit{Little Moscows} he found ample evidence of domestic
and intergenerational conflict.\textsuperscript{65} For Lalorites, there undoubtedly was some conflict
within and between families but it has remained hidden from the historian’s gaze.
The community newspaper contains no evidence of disputes that came before
courts. Rather there is considerable evidence of collaboration that, as a minimum,
was immensely practical: house building between brothers; childcare amongst the
women, and house sharing and job search assistance between the generations. It
may have been borne of necessity, but for many there was considerable familial
affection as well. Moving to such an isolated location also made family all the
more important. When they arrived a sense of common purpose strengthened the
networks even further. One of the earliest residents, Dot Thompson, expressed the
sense of unity within the ‘soldier settlement triangle’, when she laughingly recalled
that ‘[w]e were all in the same boat; we all wanted a house; we had no money.’\textsuperscript{66}

If we now stand back and investigate the Peter Lalor settlement by using what has
been called mass prosopography, a snapshot of the community in 1954 provides
the evidence upon which Dot might have placed this assessment. According to the 1954
census, approximately 800 people were living in 200 dwellings in Lalor. Close to
half of that number were adults. With records from a myriad of sources it has been
possible to create a database and uncover at least some details about 379 of these
adults (211 men and 168 women). Although this is below what statisticians deem
to be a valid sample (400) it is sufficient to present a reasonably comprehensive
impression of this community at that point in time.\textsuperscript{67}

There can be no doubting that Dot was right: they all wanted a house. For that
reason the houses in Lalor were almost exclusively owner-occupied (although
mortgaged).\textsuperscript{68} We also know there were many factors influencing choice of building

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{63} Peter Willmott & Michael Young, \textit{Family and Class in a London Suburb}, London, 1973, pp. 61–86.
  \item \textsuperscript{64} Cited in Brian Jackson, \textit{Working-Class Community: Some General Notions Raised by a Series of Studies in Northern
  \item \textsuperscript{65} Stuart Macintyre, \textit{Little Moscows}, op. cit., Chapter 6.
  \item \textsuperscript{66} Dot Thompson, interview with the author, op. cit., p. 24.
  \item \textsuperscript{67} Bureau of Census and Statistics, \textit{Census}, 30 June 1954, vol. II, part. IV, p. 13. The census understated the number of
  homes (196 according to the census, 208 according to the Rates Book) and therefore almost certainly understated
  the number of people. However, the numbers presented here are not intended to present statistically valid samples.
  The numbers are too small and the data too sketchy. The best that can achieved is to create an impression of the most
  likely dominant features of this community.
  \item \textsuperscript{68} There is no evidence of any house being purchased without a mortgage.
\end{itemize}
materials used in the construction of the homes. Weatherboard houses were cheaper than brick and there were experiments with different types of concrete products introduced to the market post-war. For example, two houses were built of steel and concrete (conite), two more were made of concrete blocks, four were rendered concrete. The majority were either brick veneer or weatherboard construction, but, unlike Middleton Street, there were three brick veneers for every two weatherboards. The preponderance of brick suggests that the majority were marginally more affluent. From oral testimony, it has been possible to piece together the method of building for a large proportion of the homes.\textsuperscript{69} About forty were built by the PLC, though some were still short a coat of paint or a bath-tub. It is known that foundations and a few timber frames were in place for a similar number again, but it is unclear where these were located. Nearly forty more homes have been identified as having been built by the syndicate system, with a few of these being built on existing PLC foundations, though this record too is incomplete. At least another 29 homes were self-built and at least 38 families lived in bungalows or ‘temporaries’ while they built their own homes, either in syndicates or alone. However, these statistics mask the heartache that was involved in this enormous accomplishment, as we saw in the last chapter. Part of the obligation of the prosopographer is to preserve individual experience and that is no more evident than on this point. About 60 houses were built by private builders, including PLC builders who became contractors when the co-operative ceased its building operations.

The PLC triangle of streets was called the ‘soldier settlement’ for good reason, because more than 60 per cent of households contained at least one person who had served in the armed forces.\textsuperscript{70} The matching of war records understates the numbers, but as a minimum 90 men and 5 women served in the Army, 22 men served in the Air Force and 9 men in the Navy. The majority of those serving in the Army were the lower ranks, either private (41.8 per cent), corporal (14.25 per cent), gunner (6.65 per cent), or signalman (4.75 per cent). Few gained the higher ranks, but four were ranked as sergeant (4.75 per cent) with one staff sergeant and one lieutenant. Of those who served in the RAAF most were leading aircraftman (57 per cent), with three sergeants, two flight sergeants and one flight lieutenant in their numbers. Fifty per cent of the Navy men were classified as able seamen, with the remainder serving as steward, cook or mechanic. Overwhelmingly these Lalor co-operators had played their part in the war effort, in the terms Purcell had described them: ‘just as “the little people” had won the war, so they can win the peace’.\textsuperscript{71}

\textsuperscript{69} See maps, vol. 2, pp. vi-vii, which attempt to paint a picture of the development of the housing estate. The maps are as accurate as the sources have allowed. Data tables to support the prosopography are contained in vol. 2. See 1954 residential data at Appendices F & G.

\textsuperscript{70} War service data is at Appendix H.

Clearly these were ordinary men (and women) with few pretensions; very few were commissioned officers.

The co-habitation and collective building effort of so many ex-service personnel appears to have been a positive force in their post-war rehabilitation, and while most had to adjust psychologically to civilian life, some had suffered physical injuries and illnesses as well. Geoff Thompson's untimely death in 1950 at age 33, from a war-related brain tumour, was the first such death to rock the community. In 1953 Russian-born Oli Bondarenko died of injuries sustained in the RAAF. Doss Lawson recalled that Snowie Mantell, who suffered 'shell-shock', 'died in the hall when we were all there one night'. Although it was debilitating rather than fatal, Bill O'Connor suffered from recurring bouts of malaria and several of the other ex-servicemen were periodically reported as hospitalised at the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital. As previously discussed, Ken Lonne had been discharged early after losing four toes, but clearly these records are also incomplete. Given the high proportion of service personnel, it is surprising that the rates books only document about 50 homes being bought with WSH loans. Perhaps there was under-reporting, though the mortgage data appears to have been methodically kept. Rather it may reinforce Hill's point about the long waiting lists and the difficulty of attracting a WSH loan when a house was under construction, reinforcing a similar point made by the co-operators.

Some who found their way out to the isolated housing development at Lalor were used to the rural life. The records contain birthplace information for 46 per cent of the adult group. Of these a third had been born in and around small Victorian country towns, but, almost without exception, their place of residence prior to Lalor, was within the confines of the Melbourne metropolitan area. Generally, both the depression and the war had brought many to the city. The 1947 Census made special mention of the fact that '[f]or the first time at an Australian Census, an actual decrease in numbers was recorded in rural areas'. The remainder of those at Lalor contained a sprinkling of people who were born in other Australian states (19 in total) and 16 were migrants from the United Kingdom, with one resident born in the USA and one in Switzerland. Clearly the impact of the post-war migration campaigns, including the forerunners to the well-known 'Bring Out a Brit' campaign inaugurated in 1957, had not impacted on the demography of Lalor. Of the rest, almost fifty per cent were born in the suburbs of Melbourne and by war's end, the vast majority were, as Hugh Stretton described it, living to the north and west: in

73. See the known cases in Appendix C. Although outside the 1954 snapshot, it is worth noting that at least another dozen of the men who served in the armed forces did not reach the age of 60.
74. See Chapter 3, fn 43, p. 97: See also this chapter, letter from Peter Lalor to WSHD, p. 180.
75. Biographical data sheets are at Appendices J & K.
fact 118 Lalor adults had lived in suburbs that surrounded the railway line between the Melbourne GPO and Thomastown—working-class suburbs such as Richmond, Collingwood, Preston, Northcote, Thornbury and Reservoir.

As we might expect for a new housing estate in the post-war period, the largest group of residents comprised young married couples with one or two small children, and more to come. Finding birth dates for the women has been extremely difficult and the numbers uncovered are insufficient to point to meaningful trends. However, there is sufficient data to suggest that their date of birth was probably similar, or slightly later than their spouses. Birthdates exist for the 61 per cent of men and for whom a war record has been found.77 Of these the greatest proportion (40.8 per cent) were born in the baby boom after WWI (the years 1919–1924). This meant they turned 21 years of age during WWII, and were still in their 20s when they were drawn in the PLC ballot. Nonetheless, it would be unwise to stereotype the whole Peter Lalor Estate in this way as the adults’ birth dates in 1954 spanned from the last decade of the nineteenth century through to 1932. For the 10 or so residents born in the 1890s, at least six people were married couples who came with adult children who also built in Lalor: for example, the Wintertons (who lived for a while with their daughter, Maggie Rettig and her husband Stan); the Wallish’s son Bob lived with them and soon afterwards married Jean and moved a few doors down the road in Station Street; Malcolm and Margaret Ferguson gained their block of land in Derrick Street through the successful ballot of their ex-serviceman son, Ian. They moved to Lalor with another ex-serviceman son, Malcolm, and with their daughter June Jacobs and ex-serviceman son-in-law George, they built their own house, and June and George built in David Street immediately afterwards. At least one third of the residents in Lalor by 1954 are known to have had family connections of this kind.

To continue this analysis a little further, 20 per cent of residents in 1954 were born in the first decade of the twentieth century and they arrived at Lalor with children already in high school, and a large cohort of nearly 29 per cent were born between 1911 and 1918 and most of these also had school aged children on arrival in the estate. The youngest adults—those born in the latter part of the 1920s and the early 1930s—were, in the main, the children of original Lalor co-operators, who had recently married and stayed on in their own newly built homes in Lalor (Maureen Nelson, Norm Casbolt, and Peg Gordon for example).

Educational attainment of residents has been more difficult to discover. Oral testimony has revealed a familiar pattern for both young men and women: to attend school until the merit certificate and then leave at around the age of 14. Almost without exception, all proceeded immediately into the workforce. Many of the men had learned a trade before the war (such as Jack Harvey, builder, and Jack Donnelly,

77. A bar chart is at Appendix K.
boot-maker), though some changed occupations as a result of wartime training (Roy Wicks became a draftsman after training in the RAAF) and several gained a new start through the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme (CRTS): Ken Lonne trained in building and Dave Burgess trained as a plasterer. Another example, Jim McVicar, received a gun blast hearing injury during his war service, and was subsequently unable to work machines in factories, so retrained as a carpenter through the scheme.78 Overwhelmingly the men trained on the job and had little, if any, additional formal education.

In 1954, of the 181 men whose occupations were listed, the great majority were employed in blue collar jobs with the two biggest groups being those in the building trades (31) or factories (30). There was a sprinkling of butchers and bakers, and as if to reflect the hard manual work prevalent at the time, 11 men were described as book clickers, boot repairers or boot makers.79 Boot repairer Jack Donnelly devoted hours of his voluntary time over many years, mending the boots of the boys in the Lalor Football Club, as the boots were handed down from one boy to the next. Eleven men were general labourers. About a dozen of the men were clerks, and a similar number were salesmen. A few were classified as managers, and there were two policemen and one teacher.

After leaving school the majority of women entered occupations such as textiles, clothing, and processing factories, or retail, until the war saw them join the wartime production process or the services. There were a few exceptions, with some attaining higher levels of education through talent and scholarships. They then entered white collar occupations as teachers or nurses.80 In most cases this meant they were better educated than their men. Unlike the men, these Lalor women appeared to have had no opportunity to enhance their occupational status by gaining additional training, either through their wartime service, or through enrolment in the CRTS, but most were by 1954, occupied in the unpaid workforce, bearing and raising children. For those women who were joint or sole owners of their homes, the rates books list their occupations almost exclusively as ‘home duties’. They were housewives, but such labelling conceals the fact that some were also in paid employment. These women were used to working and, around their caring responsibilities, many of them did. This will be discussed further in the next chapter.

78. Jim McVicar, interview with the author, op. cit., p. 3.
79. Boot clickers cut out the leather for the different parts of the shoe.
80. For example, Kath Griffiths was dux of her school and gained a scholarship to university to train as a physical education teacher. Beth Indian, Pat Donnelly and Doss Lawson all won scholarships to continue on at school. Beth partially trained as an art teacher. Pat did well in mathematics, but Doss’s aunt persuaded her mother that she did not need to attend an independent girls grammar school for which she had gained entrance. Irene Hertzog attended Bowen High School (Queensland) for three years where she was dux. She won first prize in a free scholarship examination and completed a one year qualification in accounting and secretarial work in Brisbane. See Kath Griffiths, interview with the author, 20 October 2006, p. 24; Beth Indian, interview with the author, 13 March 2006, p. 18; Pat Donnelly, interview with the author, 13 December 2005, pp. 11–12; Doss Lawson, interview with the author, 8 & 12 December 2005, p. 11; Judy Davis (nee Hertzog) email 15 March 2009.
Religious denomination has been established for almost half of this small population and two thirds were Protestant (86 people of a total of 129 records). These were overwhelmingly Church of England (48), and a contingent of at least 24 Presbyterians who worked tirelessly to ensure the building of their little church in Maxwell Street. Eleven were Methodist and three were known to be Salvation Army. The other main group were Roman Catholics who numbered 42 (or a third of the sample) and, as we will see in Chapter 8, they dedicated their efforts towards building St Luke’s Catholic Church. There were a few instances of mixed marriages between Catholics and Protestants, which may have caused some friction with extended families. Twenty-one of the men were known to be Masons, and of these three were Catholic, though, as this was quite a secret society, it is likely the total numbers are understated.

Through this kind of analysis, it is possible to understand more deeply, why Dot Thompson stated that they were ‘all in the same boat’. They were in very similar circumstances, building their homes and their suburb against the odds in a remote and largely hostile location. The majority of men shared wartime experiences and the women shared motherhood and home-making. This role for women will be discussed further in the next chapter. In terms of the obvious sociological variables, the analysis clearly demonstrates similar backgrounds in terms of education, religion (Christian, largely mono-cultural) and occupational status. As many also had familial ties within the Lalor settlement, it is little wonder that they perceived themselves to be almost ‘one big family’. With a population of 800, it is unlikely that ‘everyone knew everyone’, as they so often related in the oral testimony, but their social circles were broad, residents’ faces were familiar, and they knew when new folks arrived and when strangers were in their midst. There were many very close friendships. Their myriad of organisations also provided many levels on which they could meet and interact.

A prosopographical analysis at this aggregate level allows us to better understand who these people were who together formed the PLC. Also, by walking along a single street we can get a better sense of individual experience. In both cases we find typical working Australians, living out their lives as best they could, and while we know that they had many laughs, we can see that at times, life was tough and there was undoubtedly conflict that has, not surprisingly, failed to emerge to any large extent in the oral testimony. The liquidation of the society in 1954, marked the close

81 For example, Peg Adams was Catholic and Arch only became ‘half-heartedly’ Catholic upon their marriage; Nita Nelson was Catholic, but Maurie stayed away; Gwen Hawkins was Catholic and Frank only joined and became active in St Luke’s Church later in their lives, and Peter Kyle was active in the Catholic Church and Marla was for a short time active in the Presbyterian. See also Siobhan McHugh, ‘Not in Front of the Altar: Mixed Marriages and Sectarian Tensions between Catholics and Protestants in Pre-Multicultural Australia’, History Australia: Journal of the Australian Historical Association, vol. 6, no. 2, 2009.
of one chapter in Lalor's history. In the next chapter I will backtrack to look more closely at how the Lalor community had by 1954 further developed its own social and economic infrastructure along broadly co-operative lines. The role of women was central.
Lalor Women

‘We [the women] raised a lot of money out of people that didn’t have any’ (laughter). We were all stony broke.’

So far this thesis has been predominantly a chronicle of men’s actions born of wartime camaraderie, a spirit of co-operation and a deeply engrained sense of obligation to provide basic shelter for their families. Alongside this highly male gendered story lies an equally powerful women’s history. While the home building was often painfully slow—done mostly by the men who worked weekends and evenings after work—the majority of the women played a central role in post-war Australia by bearing and rearing children. As the Peter Lalor Co-operative (PLC) settlement took shape, however, an additional and deliberate role for the women emerged: building community. Significantly, in the early days of the settlement, it was the women, through the Lalor Women’s Social Club (LWSC), who actively and consciously kept alive the original ideals of the co-operative venture. They took to heart ‘The Idea’ from the PLC ‘Rules’, which espoused the aim as providing ‘ample light, air and space for the raising of families and the fostering of a genuine community spirit’. At its baldest, the men built the homes, the women built the community. This dedicated undertaking will be the focus of this chapter.

It tells the story from the perspective of the Lalor women, but as is often the case for women, their lives centrally focus on the relationships that surround them. It is impossible to recount their pioneering struggle to create their community’s social

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1. Kath Griffiths, transcript of interview with the author, 20 October 2006, p. 12. All further references to interviews will cite the transcriptions of the interviews.
2. These were spelt out in Chapter 1.
infrastructure without understanding how they worked with and through their men and for their children.

The centrepiece of their community building work involved the planning, fundraising, supervision, organisation and maintenance of a community hub called the ‘kinderhall’. Its history is written here in some detail because it epitomises the women’s foresight and dedication, their resourcefulness and co-operative community spirit. Nothing came easily for these women. The ‘kinderhall’ construction also raises some important questions about the real extent of their agency and the breadth and depth of involvement of the Lalor women in the successful creation of this safe and vibrant community. There is enough evidence to mount a credible argument that some of the Lalor women cleverly wielded their influence, both separately, and through their men, to create the kind of community they thought was important, particularly for their children, but also for young mothers and for community infrastructure.

Doss Lawson, who could perhaps be described as the matriarch of Lalor, died on 25 February 2009, aged 93. She had been living away from Lalor for nearly thirty years. However, her funeral at Cordell Chapel in Fawkner (not far from Lalor) was packed with a very large crowd of mourners, many of whom had travelled hundreds of kilometres to be there.4 Doss’s death brought about another reunion of the PLC community, still strong after more than sixty years. Many of the children who had been raised in Lalor—now elderly themselves, in their sixties and seventies—and although physically dispersed, were there, still coalescing as part of that community. Such broadly-based and long-term community cohesion is unusual, and provides further evidence of the successful efforts made to build a new way of life for the children being raised in this co-operative soldier settlement in the 1950s.

The Lalor women consciously set out to grow social capital, placing their energies first and foremost on the educational, recreational and social needs of their children. They understood, as many progressive women before them have understood, that education was vital as a means to create better lives for their children. The emphasis they placed on kindergarten education was, however, unusual for a group of working-class women, because until WWII, the impetus for this social and educational focus was predominantly reserved for educated, middle-class women.5 The Lalor women, though, understood that investment in early childhood education would lay the foundation for future advancement for their young. They understood the limitations of their scant resources and made the strategic decision to focus their energies on this one social and economic intervention, but cleverly encompassed broader social and economic concerns along the way. For example, they cared about

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5. This is discussed further below.
the potential social isolation of the early Lalor settler women so they organised an array of inclusive, kindergarten fund-raising activities, and subsequently expanded their kindergarten concept to encompass the community hall. The result was that, unlike the very negative experiences of some women in suburbia recounted in feminist literature, many of the original Lalor women speak fondly of their pioneering efforts. The remoteness of the Lalor site perhaps also acted in favour of most of the women, as they had little choice but to band together for survival. Initially Lalor was more like a village than a suburb.

The energy expended by the Lalor women to build community reinforces Arneil's concerns about the disproportionate and therefore unequal burden on women to do the work of generating social capital. Gender segregation within this working-class co-operative was acute. Nonetheless, it would be unwise to overstate this burden. The men were often the willing partners of their women's efforts and, as already discussed, the men too created their own social capital. The fundamental difference lies in the fact that the men's actions predominantly existed within the male domain. The women's actions involved the whole community. For example, Lorraine Harvey said, of her husband Jack, 'Well he was a blokey man. He loved being in the company of men... Yes well in those years men did like one another's company, didn't they? You know, to get together and have a drink and a chat.' In 1980, Daphne Gollan in her own biographical study, represented this view by saying that husbands 'sought and found companionship elsewhere yet regularly returned for rest and recreation to the family units of which their wives were the indispensable core'. Her judgment was, however, harsher than this: '[p]roletarian morality in the private sphere, a repressive version of bourgeois morality, was fully equipped with double standards'. This may have been true from some in Lalor, but certainly not all. Even Lorraine went on to say of Jack that he 'was very good in lots of ways because he tried to involve me in a lot of the outings and that'.

In the previous chapter I examined the characteristics of the community in 1954, aggregating the women and men. The community, however, was clearly segregated and, as a consequence, it is worth lingering over the lives of the women separately. We noted that their employment history has been difficult to trace because even for those recorded in the rates books as sole or joint owners, their occupations were listed almost without exception as 'home duties'. This concealed a great deal. Mirelda Mackintosh, who was a sole home owner, provides a stark example. According to her son, Bill, 'my Mum had an indomitable spirit. She worked very

7. Lorraine Harvey, interview with the author, op. cit., p. 5.
hard... 'cause my Dad had Parkinson's [disease] and my elder brother had polio.¹⁰ She nursed at the Fairfield Infectious Diseases hospital, but 'a lot of the time she had three jobs.'¹¹ When Dot Thompson became a sole owner after Geoff’s death, and became the bread-winner with the sole care of their young boy, she was nonetheless recorded as 'home duties'.¹² Isabel Tunzi continued her nursing career at night while her husband minded the children. One wonders when she slept. The fact that she had stayed in the workforce became critically significant later, when her husband died of a war-related heart problem.¹³ Honor Mackie sewed beading on women's dresses as piece-work while the children slept.¹⁴ As children reached school age, many more Lalor women resumed working, often for no other reason than to boost the family income, though the opportunity for social interaction through the workplace was appreciated by some.¹⁵ Still none were recorded as having an occupation. A few women, such as Flo O’Connor, Hilda Loader and Mrs M. Mott, operated small businesses.

Marilyn Lake has reported how previous feminist writers, such as Edna Ryan and Anne Summers, have portrayed women's retreat from the workplace at the end of the war as 'opportunities cruelly cancelled, doors closed, hopes and dreams dashed—one step forwards, two steps backwards'. Lake asserts that the problem with such accounts of the 'reassertion' of the traditional role is that 'they fail to see the historically changing structure of femininity itself'.¹⁶ From the example of Lalor, there is evidence to support this view, although there is no reason why the older view cannot stand alongside it. Having said that, the situation in Lalor was far more complex. Some Lalor women may have regretted their loss of employment at war's end but for most a return to their pre-war factory employment held no romance. On the contrary most relished the opportunity to play out a 'traditional' role. In reality, however, what they did was not 'traditional' and it is a mistake to discuss it as such. Mostly, their emotions were very mixed: they were in a new, soldier settlement housing estate, with homes of their own, often in newly formed families, but simultaneously removed from many of the amenities and services they had experienced before and during the war. The fact that most seized the moment is at the heart of this gendered history.

¹⁰ Bill Mackintosh, interview with the author, 23 July 2007, p. 11. Bill continued, 'Yes so this Leo Purcell was a terrific bloke. He was on the Labour Hour...And he helped her a lot.'
¹¹ ibid., p. 24. Several biographies of the Lalor women are contained in Appendix A.
¹² Dot Thompson, interview with the author, 1 May 2006, p. 20.
¹³ Isobel Tunzi, interview with the author, 22 March 2006, pp. 5–7. Whittlesea Post, 30 June 1966, p. 3 reported his death at the age of 48. See also William James Tunzi, individual war record, NAA, series B883, VX51148.
¹⁵ For instance several of the Lalor women worked at the Crestknit factory in Epping: Jeanne Eastham, Maggie Winton, Honor Mackie, Grace Bayne to name a few. While it was factory work, they enjoyed the fact that their friends were there.
In the planning stages of the scheme, women did not serve on the PLC Committee of Management. They may not have been welcome, but weekly meetings that started at 7:30 pm and often dragged on until midnight, were not a practical proposition for most. Once building commenced on site in Lalor, however, women asserted their role both in terms of fund raising and community building. A Lalor Ladies Social Club—soon renamed the Lalor Women’s Social Club—was formed with Eunice Johnson as President and the organisation immediately sought to meet with the PLC Committee of Management. 17 Initially, though, they had to contend with a patronising and domineering response from the men’s committee which sought to decree how they were to manage their affairs, though not everyone agreed with this approach. At the meeting between the two committees, proceedings started well enough:

It was MOVED by Mr. Greenwood, seconded by Mr. Fox that the Ladies Committee themselves, without outside assistance draw up a Constitution to govern their objectives, and then to meet the Committee of Management, after these objectives had been re-submitted to the Committee of Management. 18

This motion was, however, lost. Bert Gridley, a conservative Catholic, moved, and Les Blizzard seconded, another motion: that ‘the Committee of Management define the objects and scope of the Ladies Committee.’ 19 This motion was passed. Such attempts to marginalise the women’s group just served to strengthen their resolve. Once in residence on the site, the LWSC simply ran its own show, taking responsibility for some aspects of community development which had been promised by the PLC.

The Management Committee did, nonetheless, recognise the contribution of women to the war effort. In August 1947, when Leo Purcell had written to the Central Executive of the Victorian Branch of the ALP seeking its permission for Lalor to be ‘the Official Labor War Memorial for Victoria,’ he sought also to recognise the important role of women in the war. 20 A month earlier, the minutes of the Committee of Management recorded:

17. Lalor Social Club, ‘Circular’, undated by probably October 1947, held in the personal papers of Jack Harvey, in possession of Neil Harvey, Melbourne. The meeting occurred on 10 November 1947. Eunice May Johnson was married to Francis Webb Johnson (ex RAAF) and they moved into their home at 386 Station Street, probably late in 1949 or early 1950. Although she did not remain in the President’s role for long, her initial enthusiasm meant the society got started. The committee was initially called the Ladies Committee, but was quickly renamed the Lalor Ladies Social Club before being renamed the Lalor Women’s Social Club.


19. ibid.

The Secretary was instructed to obtain the name of the girl who had lost her life in dealing with scrub-typhus experiments and to obtain the name for the Senior sister of the AAWS and the names of posthumous V.C. Winners for the purpose of using these names in the streets.21

In the end V.C. Winners were clearly celebrated with street names, but Dora Mary Lush, who lost her life experimenting with scrub typhus was not commemorated, nor was there a street named after Sybil Howy Irving who was head of the AAWS from 1941 to 1946.22 Even at the level of symbolism, it seems the Committee of Management could not see past the valour of its male wartime heroes.

At an important pragmatic level, though, joint ownership of property was facilitated by a motion that allowed the transfer of shares 'to joint account of Husband and Wife or intended Husband and Wife'.23 The change to include women's names did not jeopardise their place in the ballot queue. Joint ownership of property—importantly their home—became the logical next step and brought with it not only some level of economic security, but voting rights in council elections for many women who had never expected to achieve such status in their lifetimes. We saw in the last chapter how this facilitated a transition to joint and sole ownership which by 1954 encompassed more than 40 per cent of the women—though in three instances, sole ownership occurred because of the tragic deaths of the men.24

Economically, we have seen that the women of Lalor were in very similar circumstances: they were poor. They collectively sighed with relief that a home was at last within their reach. Many of these women had suffered the terrifying prospect of landlord evictions as children during the depression, and were suffering the same fate when they became the mothers of young children immediately after the war. Honor Mackie reflected that '[w]e never dreamed we'd ever have a house'.25 At the level of their feelings though, the way each one reacted to the development site in the cow paddocks of Thomastown varied according to their backgrounds, their individual circumstances and their personalities. Some loved the place immediately, some grew to love it and call it home, while others hated it from the beginning and either had to learn to tolerate their lot (often escaping after their husbands died) or they persuaded their husbands to leave.

21. PLHBCSL, Committee of Management, 'Minutes', 17 July 1947. The motion also stated that the naming of the streets was to be left to the Chairman (Purcell) and the Secretary (Greenwood).


23. PLHBCSL, Committee of Management, 'Minutes', 8 August 1947.

24. At least three women had become widows since moving to Lalor: Dot Thompson, Valerie Bonderenko and Annie Mackintosh.

As Doss Lawson said, ‘nobody loved Lalor more than we did in those early days’. Brought up in the tough Mallee country during the depression, she thought ‘it was just heaven to get out there into the country again. ... Because out in front of our place at Lalor was all open’. The Rose family, however, who lived for years in a ‘temporary’ in Derrick Street, decided to return with their two girls to Williamstown, where Mrs Rose’s mother lived. Mrs Rose (who remains otherwise nameless in the written record) felt a terrible sense of isolation at Lalor. Fred Hunt believed ‘she didn’t like the idea—the area for a start’.

Emotions about finally attaining their own homes at Lalor, were also very mixed. In Chapter 4 we witnessed Gwen Hunt’s determination to move into her new home. On arrival though, she felt isolated and lonely. Sixty years later she still struggled for the words to precisely explain these mixed feelings and the determination to cope:

Oh well, we felt as if we were isolated ’cause there was only the other one family living there then. And, but, knowing Mum was on the same [railway] line, it wasn’t so bad. I used to go down at least once a week to Mum. And—it wasn’t so bad for me, but others... who had their families down Williamstown way. It was a long way for them, in those days to go. But I felt very comfortable up here because I had my family and that.

Millicent Turner (called Bub) initially avoided thinking about moving out to Lalor, though warmed towards it later, but she had regrets about having to leave her city-based employment. She had been married to Harry Turner before the war and she and her daughter June lived with another family in South Yarra.

‘cause Harry was away at the war at that time and I used to go to work—June used to stay at a crèche... Then she started school... Mr Henry, elderly man, and—it was him that told us about the land at Thomastown. ... I wasn’t very interested because I thought well, Thomastown, right in the back—back blocks you know.

Bub described how they moved into their new PLC built home in Gratwick Street, in June 1948. She was a joint owner.

27. ibid., 12 December 2005, p. 17.
31. ibid., p. 273.
We used to come out occasionally of a Sunday to look... and the time went by and when I saw the house taking shape, I thought, 'Oh yes, it might be alright', you know. But I wasn't very interested at all at first, because I thought it was too far away... We moved in and it was a real mud heap, you know (laughs) And I thought 'Oh', and of course I... gave up my job then, working, and of course, I used to like going to work.33

Harry's mother had paid for them to have carpet in their new home and Bub said 'I was sooo proud because we had wall-to-wall carpet'. Bub's reaction epitomises the importance which some of these new suburban mothers placed on the physical manifestations of a 'good home-maker'. The post-war, consumer-driven economic boom had begun. Bub also described how pleased she was that she no longer had to struggle with a chip heater in order to have a bath. As one of the first houses at Lalor, she had running hot and cold water and 'the height of luxury for me was just to be able to turn the taps on and have a bath'.34 Historian Kate Darian Smith has described the context well: 'housework in the 1940s was unmechanised drudgery... Almost one quarter of all homes in the Melbourne metropolitan area obtained water from outside at the gully-trap and fewer than one fifth had a hot water service.35 Modern household appliances which began to flood the market after the war were some consolation for those who did not so wholeheartedly embrace the concept of the suburban dream isolated out on the urban fringe, though their stretched financial circumstances kept most waiting a long time for them. All but the first few PLC houses faced delays in connecting their hot water systems as the Thomastown electricity supply could not handle the load.

Beth Indian was a city girl, while Anne Ramsay had been brought up in country Victoria. They were part of the same building syndicate and did not settle in Lalor until the early 1950s. They each had young children. Their conversation about the facilities when they arrived in Lalor provides some insight into how their different backgrounds affected their experiences:

**Beth:** the electric stove wasn't connected. We had to wait for ages to get that. When you bought your stove it had a sticker on it. And you went in a queue to get your electricity put on... And the same thing with phones. When you applied you went into a queue... It was very difficult living conditions in those days. ... And then we had a fuel stove in there because you had to cook on something.

**Anne:** Oh they were good Beth.

34. ibid., pp. 275–76.
Beth: Oh they were shocking. ...The fire kept going out on me. And tea would be late because the fire had gone out again.

Anne: Well I was used to a wood stove.

Beth: Well I wasn’t used to it and, oh, I used to have a lot of trouble.36

Pat Donnelly eloquently summarised the transition they experienced, from the bustle of urban life, apparently travelling back in time to a rural scene of a bygone era in Lalor. ‘So having come from Richmond where it was three minutes into the city on the tram [laughs] you can imagine, you know, and no power. We had a lamp with candles.’37 Then she described how they slowly watched and shared the creeping arrival of suburban services:

But when the power first came out—course the gas company wouldn’t come in those days—they were all powered electric in those days. And ... you’d get the word. ‘Come and have a cuppa. We’ve got it.’ And you’d go around and they’d switch the lights on and you’d look as though you’d never seen one of these things in your life before (laughs).38

Those fortunate to gain early access to a service quickly ensured others were not excluded. Pat continued, ‘And then I remember ... Corrie [Mantell] came around and she says to me “bring your towel around and have a bath. We’ve got the hot water on” (laughs) because we used to be boiling up a kerosene tin.’39

From the arrival of the first Lalor settlers, Lalor women were acutely aware of the need to directly address problems of potential isolation, particularly for women, so they worked assiduously to ensure that new families were quickly integrated into the community and made to feel welcome. Rea Michael remembered:

I think everybody wanted to help each other. And they did. They really did. And you know, if you just wanted a cup of tea and somebody to talk to there were just so many doors open to you. There really were.40

Efforts were explicitly made to ensure that the co-operative community created and maintained high standards for the tone and appearance of their neighbourhood. While this was made extremely difficult by the Whittlesea Shire Council (WSC)

36. Elizabeth Indian & Anne Ramsay, interview with the author, 13 March 2006, pp. 30–31. Their building syndicate was made up of four families: Harry and Phyllis Martin, Reg and Dianne Lynch, Alan and Anne Ramsay and Hugh and Beth Indian. They built in that order.
38. ibid.
39. ibid.
40. Rea Michael, interview with the author, 25 July 2007, p. 34.
and state government failures to provide sewerage, drainage, paths and roads, the residents were determined that there would be no return to slum-style living conditions. They still aspired to deliver on the promises outlined by the co-operative in 1947. With 14 homes occupied in late 1948 the society reported:

> The residents are already manifesting a great sense of civic pride in that gardens are already taking shape, boundaries are being defined by back, side and front fences, and the general outlook evidenced by the industry of our first occupants augurs well for the future appearance of Lalor.\(^{41}\)

At a time when the physical appearance of a neighbourhood was seen as an indicator of its social and moral standards, oral testimony allows us to see behind this façade to try to understand how several of the women of Lalor dictated a set of community values and moral standards to which the majority then conformed. In this way, women exerted significant power and control. Doss Lawson, Kath Griffiths and Lil Nelson provide examples of women who built both formal and informal forms of social capital. In each case they appear to have played a role as equal partners in their marriages, ignoring overarching power structures which often legally handed control to their spouses.\(^{42}\) This is a significant point that can be easily lost in an attempt to focus on military and gender history as separate topics. We must preserve the idea of the couple as an agent of social change. A few examples underscore the point that we cannot understand the women without their men and visa versa.

Doss and Clive Lawson moved into their syndicate-built home in April 1949. Clive, as the semi-trailer driver for the co-operative, was part of the first syndicate (the O'Connor syndicate) and, as discussed in Chapter 4, theirs was the second house finished. Both Doss and Clive were wedded to the co-operative's ideals and went out of their way to put them into practice. The co-operative's semi-trailer was in use, with Clive at the wheel, seven days a week. Clive toured Victoria to garner building supplies, and every Saturday, Clive drove the collected 'rents' into Terry Collins—the Secretary of the two PL Co-operative Housing Societies—at Melbourne Trades Hall.\(^{43}\) Kathleen Jones remembered her childhood:

> when we were kids... as I say we didn’t have any play equipment or anything... Clive who had trucks, he took the steel framing off one of the trucks and it had wood along the bottom and then it had the framing and

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41. PLHBCSL. ‘Periodical Circular’, undated. Only page 2 is available, but it probably dates from late 1948 or early 1949 as 14 homes were occupied.

42. There are many more women who could just as easily have been written into examples. However, the abovementioned women were selected, both for the dominant roles they played and because information about them was available from oral sources.

43. Doss Lawson, interview with the author, 29 May 2006, pp. 17–18. While residents called them 'rent', they were in fact the repayments for housing loans from the PL Nos. 1 & 2 Co-operative Housing Societies. Such language is further symbolic evidence that home ownership was a new achievement for them.
then a piece up the middle. He put it up there and put it solidly on the ground and we used that as a monkey bar. 44

With two young children (Nola born before the war, and Rod born after) Doss was mainly the person at home, taking delivery orders, collecting ‘rents’ and organising the extra uses for the truck. On at least one occasion, though, she (with young Rod in tow) helped unload a full load of timber at a timber yard in Dandenong. 45

As soon as the Lawson family moved into their Lalor home, it became a centre for those still building. Doss recalled:

When the Symes and I moved out—we—the others all came to our place—or we took food down to them... and when the Smiths came out, they did the same, you see. So ... they were well fed once a house or two got out there. But once you got out there, you ... were home to the rest of your group, you know, any time they’d come out. 46

As the first syndicate, this co-operation set the tone for relationships within Lalor. Doss maintained this role for nearly thirty years, always speaking well of people and acknowledging each person’s contribution to the community. 47 She was like the community ‘glue’, a crucial figure in setting the standard for behaviour that would build and bond community.

Kath and Norm Griffiths also played a central role. For instance, they were instrumental in supporting the informal youth club which operated out of the Stockade, probably from 1950. Kath, a scholarship girl who trained as a physical education teacher, recalled:

I went up there one evening and I said, ‘Look if you want me to, I’ll come up and take a class with you for a while. But,’ I said, ‘I don’t want to interfere with your club.’ So I just went straight back home and let them talk it over and decide and then by the next evening I think it was, two of the boys came down and knocked on the door and said, ‘Yes, We’d like you to come’ (laughter). 48

44. Kathleen Jones, interview with the author, 19 April 2007, p. 21.
45. Doss Lawson, interview with the author, 8 December 2005, p. 1, as discussed in Chapter 4, p. 143.
46. Doss Lawson, interview with Ruth Ford, op. cit., p. 92. The ‘Smiths’ were Ern and Mag Smith, French Street, and as previously discussed, he was the plumber in the syndicate.
47. Doss Lawson, interview with the author, 8 & 12 December 2005, pp 19–23. It was typical of her generous spirit, that when I interviewed her in 2005 she had prepared a list of the ‘quiet achievers’ in Lalor who she thought needed to be recognised through this study, for voluntary contributions each had made to the community. She mentioned John and Pauline Peterson who helped so much with the pre-school and the school; Peter Kyle who, through his employment at the Herald, organised printing for most Lalor formal occasions; Ken Groves who was a bank manager and did everyone’s accounting, Joy Klein who taught elocution, and was active in the Presbyterian Church. Doss said, ‘What I was trying to find was the people who gave of their knowledge and everything to everybody,’ (p. 23.)
The Whittlesea Post reported in December 1952:

The members of the Lalor Youth club presented Mr and Mrs Griffiths with a silver salver, as a mark of appreciation for the splendid service rendered to the club by this popular couple.49

It is notable that Kath was one of the few women to hold a formal role in one of the co-operative's entities, the Lalor Consumer Co-operative Society (LCSCS), serving as President between 1951 and 1953. She was also President of the LWSC in the mid-1950s and Norm Griffiths was for many years Secretary of the Lalor Branch of the ALP and also involved in most community-based activities.

Bill and Lil Nelson were another couple who had an impact. Not only was Lil exceptional in providing a major source of labour on the building of their syndicate home in Lalor, but no sooner was their home occupied than she began a temporary kindergarten in the Stockade.50 She had, by then, two teenaged daughters and her youngest daughter Judith, born in December 1945, was already past the age of needing such care. Lil opened the kindergarten because the women of Lalor decided that this was the most pressing need. Both Bill and Lil Nelson were major drivers in the community's endeavour to create a permanent community centre in Lalor.

Rea Michael was another woman who made a lasting contribution, but she was a woman in a different mould. She was the quiet home-maker who cared for two girls while her politically active husband, Vic Michael, came to represent the public face of Lalor, serving on council for decades from 1954. He actively pursued Lalor (and the Shire's) interests through several terms as Shire President and Mayor and by serving on numerous boards and committees. Like many women of this era, Rea seemed not to want to be the subject of her own story, believing that it was not worth telling. She said, ‘I didn’t do much really, I was just there as a—you know “behind every good man, there’s a better women” sort of thing (laughs).’51 Rea did not like the limelight, nor did she like having to speak in public. She only reluctantly agreed to be interviewed for this thesis, arguing that she had done nothing of significance.52 Nonetheless, almost immediately after Rea moved into her new Lalor home in December 1951, and before Vic was elected to council, she helped to organise a gymnasium and callisthenics program for the girls of Lalor. She formed a friendship with pianist Min Follett from Middleton Street; Ruby Kinna did the accounts, and together they ran programs for many years, finishing each year with a concert at the

50. Some of the other women with school aged children also helped with the building. However, it was Lil's contribution which was often mentioned through the oral testimony.
52. Ibid., pp. 36–37.
Epping Shire Hall. They enlisted the support of Leo Purcell in the campaign. The Whittlesea Post failed to mention the first link in the chain of activism for the school, when it said of Purcell that he ‘was the chief instigator in securing the school for Lalor.’ Whittlesea Post, 30 June 1954, p. 5.

57. Adele Casbolt, who was a major worker for the Helping Hand (in both a voluntary and paid capacity) has written an unpublished history of the Whittlesea District Branch of the Helping Hand Association for Persons with an Intellectual Disability. I am indebted to her for making this available to me.
59. ibid.
60. ibid.
She also mentioned that she had been taking up a collection, as part of the Sunday School and reported to the Salvation Army that ‘I had quite a bank balance because I put it into the bank for the Sunday School’. The Army was of course delighted.

The Sunday school moved into the ‘kinderhall’ when it opened in early 1955, and over many years, Muriel drew in quite a number of the Lalor community, including the older teenage girls who helped with her many excursions to places like Coburg Lake, Mordialloc Beach and Preston. Muriel expanded on this theme:

But we’d all get here and this is where Nola Lawson and the other girls, they were older than most of the other kids, and this is where they helped me. And it was wise to get them to help.

These are just a few examples of the kinds of conscious efforts made to create an atmosphere of harmony, safety, mutual support and co-operation. With many key players leading the way, they set the tone for lasting community cohesion that lives in the recollections of subsequent generations. As Bill Mackintosh recalled, ‘there was a great community spirit, wasn’t there’. It was also seen as unusual. Michael Fielding stated:

the friendship part of it was just really quite—I don’t think it was general all over Melbourne. I just think that anyone who came here in the early part were treated like one big family and like they ate at each other’s places, went to the same places to have a drink, followed the same sport and got involved in lots of things as a community.

For Kathleen Jones this spirit provided a sense of security as a child growing up in Lalor:

There was always someone looking after you and always someone watching over you. You know that you felt that we were all in this together. And the school had that sense too.

Memories are often tinted by the rosy colour of hindsight, but there is force in the collective nature of these memories, and the corroborative evidence of frequent, very large and very friendly reunions swiftly assembled thanks to an efficient grapevine.

61. Between 1956 and 1960, the Cooper family followed Arthur’s work to Yarraville, during which time a Salvation Army Hall was opened in Lalor. When Muriel returned she resumed her Sunday school duties.
62. Muriel Cooper, interview with the author, op. cit., p. 15.
64. ibid.
encompassing perhaps as many as one hundred families. This lends weight to the
view that what was created in Lalor at the level of community was quite special.

The centrepiece around which this strong sense of community evolved, was
the building of the 'kinderhall'. Significantly, the women were instrumental in
the creation of this social infrastructure. The building took from 1949 to 1955
and became the organising framework around which most social activity was
nurtured and it was all orchestrated by women. Put simply, the fund raising for
the 'kinderhall' was a social, educational and economic necessity as well as an ever
present excuse for a good party.

Nancy Walker was the woman who convened the first meeting of the LWSC on the
Lalor site. 'And yes, she did it very well and it started off a really good women's club
and that was her mark,' recalled Doss Lawson.66 She was almost certainly by then
a member also of the main Committee of Management.67 From the earliest days of
the settlement at Lalor, most women were involved, either on the LWSC Committee,
in the boarder membership, or simply in fund raising social events. Rea Michael
remembered that she was Secretary at one stage, though the LWSC was underway
when she arrived in Lalor:

There were lots of ladies in it. They all got on very well. Ran all sorts of
things to raise money, you know, and did very well really.68

By August 1950, the LWSC had 46 active members, representing almost a quarter
of all households.69 This would appear to be quite an achievement: that nearly 50
women were meeting every Thursday fortnight, when many of them were young
mothers. Reminding us again of the value of having active couples, men cared
for the children while the women planned their political strategies, organised
fundraising action and debated issues of significance, all while having a really good
time.70 Almost certainly, the skills learnt during these night time meetings gave
confidence to many of the women that they could take charge of other community

67. There are no records for the society for this time period, however, elections for positions on the Committee of
Management were held every six months and the term was for at least one year. The Whittlesea Post records the fact
that Nancy Walker stood down from the Committee in August 1951 (see 5 September 1951, p. 8).
69. See the women's list of Lalor residents' affiliations/memberships at attachment C. See also Whittlesea Post,
5 September 1951, p. 8. Nancy Walker lived at 1 Newton Crescent. See WSC, 'Rates Book', Thomastown Riding, PROV,
VPRS 14620/P0001/59, September 1948.
70. Not forgetting of course that Mrs Witt had to lock her husband in the shed to get away to a meeting. See Chapter 6,
p. 189.
based organisations as the need arose. Many more women, who were not members, attended the regular social gatherings organised by the LWSC.

The LWSC was formally structured. The President was Ivy Egan, Vice President was Hilda Perrott, the Secretary was Nancy Walker and the Treasurer was Mrs Skinner. The first objective of the LWSC was ‘the establishment of a Kindergarten on the Estate’. Fund raising had begun. By December 1950 £204 had already been raised. At this time Councillor J.A. Balharrie was asked to open a fundraising event. In his remarks he ‘congratulated the Lalor women on their enterprise and wished them a successful day. He admired their co-operative spirit, and would be glad to help them in any way possible.’

In 1951 the LWSC conducted a census of the number of children living on the Peter Lalor Estate. The results were indicative of the post-war baby boom. There were 79 children who had not yet reached kindergarten age (aged three), 42 children were of kindergarten age, and 72 were school aged. In total 135 children were aged under five. It was in response to this census that at the beginning of 1952, Lil Nelson opened a temporary kindergarten in the Recreation Hall in the Stockade. As she was not a trained kindergarten teacher, she sought help from a qualified teacher she knew, who provided her with activity schedules and learning activities which Lil studied and put into practice for the children of Lalor. She was very popular.

Action for a more permanent solution was concurrently underway. Belle Dunton of the PLC arranged a deputation to the August 1951 meeting of council to discuss ‘the establishment of an Infant Welfare Centre, Kindergarten and playground.’ As already noted, the PLC had dedicated two and a half acres at Lot 244 for that purpose.

71. In this respect the LWSC was continuing in a localised way, some of the tradition established by the Women’s Cooperative Guild in the UK in the 1880s. Liddington and Norris have argued that: ‘For the first time, working class women found in the Guild... and similar groups, a forum to express their grievances and work out their own ideas and campaigns. They also found, again for the first time, outlets for their talents of leadership and organization.’ J. Liddington & J. Norris, *One Hand Tied Behind Us: The Rise of the Women’s Suffrage Movement*, London 1978, p. 41, cited in Heather O’Connor, “Life as we have known it”: the Women’s Co-operative Guild 1883–1927”, M. Ed paper, Monash University, 1981, p. 4.

72. *Whittlesea Post*, 6 December 1950, front page. Married to Gordon Skinner, no given name has been found for Mrs Skinner in the written record. The Skinners were part of a syndicate, in which theirs was the first house built in Vasey Avenue. Hilda Perrott occupied a PLC built home in Chowne Street. Ivy Egan lived at 10 Gratwick Street and played the piano for the first church service held in Lalor. It was a Methodist service held at the Recreation Hall in the Stockade on Sunday night 30 August 1950. See *Whittlesea Post*, 23 August 1950, front page. See also WSC, ‘Rates Book’, op. cit., no. 39, September 1948.


74. ibid., 6 December 1950, front page.

75. The names, birthdays and level of schooling are all hand written in a note-book provided by Maureen Adams (nee Nelson) as a contribution to this research. Maureen’s mother Lil Nelson ran the first Kindergarten and the names are written in her handwriting. I am indebted to Maureen Adams for this material.


77. Vic and Rea Michael’s daughter, Kathleen recalled that on one occasion when Mrs Nelson was ill, she refused to go. See Kathleen Jones, interview with the author, 19 April 2007, p. 27. The *Whittlesea Post*, 21 July 1954, p. 8 also reported, ‘Mrs Lil Nelson is off-duty from the kindergarten through illness. All the kinder-children miss their teacher very much and hope that Mrs Nelson will be back with them soon.’

78. *Whittlesea Post*, 1 August 1951, front page.
purpose and it is extremely significant that years before state governments mandated 'developer contributions' for infrastructure such as this, these struggling, working-class people consciously contributed a parcel of their co-operatively owned land for such an important purpose. Ownership of the land was in the name of the Lalor Kindergarten Committee.\textsuperscript{79} The LWSC placed such priority on the need for a kindergarten that the women organised the building of it themselves.

As the kindergarten movement had developed in Australia in the late nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth century, it was predominantly driven by middle and upper class philanthropic women who saw kindergartens as a means of social control: of alleviating some of the worst slum conditions for inner-city working-class children, providing them with at least one proper meal and educating working-class parents about hygiene.\textsuperscript{80} Kindergarten as an educational and creative hub for early childhood development was not necessarily their priority, though the educationalist voice began to be heard more strongly by the 1930s.

During WWII, the number of kindergartens expanded and their role changed to increase the emphasis on childcare, as many young mothers became part of the army of industrial workers. Many Lalor women were in this category.\textsuperscript{81} Middle-class women also began to see the benefits of this kind of childcare for their own children. In 1943 the Curtin Government agreed to sponsor day care centres and Victoria took the lead during the war through its decision to provide pre-school education, importantly, through the state Department of Health and not the Department of Education.\textsuperscript{82} Through the Victorian Pre-school Act 1944, the Victorian Government matched privately raised funds and the numbers of kindergartens rapidly expanded in the decade after the war though mostly in middle-class suburbs.\textsuperscript{83} John Murphy summarised the actions of the women:

They were doing it partly for the 'future welfare and happiness' of their children, but also as an expression of the self-help and neighbourly achievement of an 'epoch of community spirit'.\textsuperscript{84}

\textsuperscript{79} WSC, 'Rates Book', op. cit., vol. 66, 1948–1954: One hundred and forty blossoming gums and other ornamental trees were provided by the Forestry Commission for planting in the grounds. Whittlesea Post, 18 July 1951, front page.


\textsuperscript{81} For example, Doss Lawson, Lorraine Harvey, Marla Kyle and Bub Turner.

\textsuperscript{82} Lyndsay Gardiner, The Free Kindergarten Union of Victoria, 1908–1980, Burwood, 1982, pp. 102–112. While this move emphasised the strand of the kindergarten movement more concerned with the health and hygiene of young children, than the educational benefits, this should not be overstated. It was more a bureaucratic ploy to evade the educational restriction on the funding of denominational education which could have precluded funding of denominational kindergartens.

\textsuperscript{83} Spearritt, Peter, 'The Kindergarten Movement', op. cit., p. 594; see also, Kate Darian-Smith, On the Home Front, op. cit., p. 129.

\textsuperscript{84} John Murphy, Imagining the Fifties: Private Sentiment and Political Culture in Menzies' Australia, Sydney, 2000, p. 24. For example, a group of women raised funds and also helped with their labour to extend a kindergarten and add a community centre in the Sydney suburb of Castlecrag.
As for the working-class PLC housing settlement, the LWSC selectively adopted ideas from the Free Kindergarten Movement about the social stimulation and early childhood development benefits of kindergarten education. It was also one important aspect of their attempt to build a new order and continued a long tradition of radical education, stemming from Britain in the early nineteenth century (and based on earlier traditions), which sought justice for an underprivileged class. And although they never intended to operate the kindergarten as full time childcare, unlike the Free Kindergarten Movement they were certainly not ‘openly opposed to the paid labour of women’. These working-class women were used to combining work with their own childcare commitments.

For their deputation to council in August 1951, Lalor’s political lobby groups arrived in force: Hilda Perrott (now President) Lil Nelson (now Secretary) Kath Griffiths and Doss Lawson all attended as representatives of the LWSC; Chairman Bill King represented the PLC; and the Lalor and District Progress Association was represented by Lalor plumber, Ern Smith. The group put to the WSC a well thought out proposition.

The Lalor community offered to give the land to the council, and the £400 already raised by the LWSC towards the building of a kindergarten, in order to maintain continuity of trusteeship. In consultation with the Public Health Department, it had been made clear, that if the council had stewardship of the project, matching funding would more readily flow, though as a registered society the PLC could receive funds. They understood that funding of £2 for £1 was available which would increase the funds to £1,200. The Lalor community also offered assistance with the fencing of the reserve: half the cost would be borne by adjoining land owners, and the people of Lalor would contribute half the balance for timber and would supply all the labour to erect the fence. As money could only be reimbursed for funds already spent, the Lalor group suggested that the council was in the best position to borrow up front. Alternatively the council could be guarantor, allowing the PLC to borrow. Initially the LWSC planned to open just one building for use as both kindergarten and baby health centre, collaborating with Preston Council for part-time services of the qualified ‘sisters’. The LWSC guaranteed to continue its fund-raising efforts both for the building and on-going maintenance. The facilities would be available to the whole district.

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89. Unfortunately at the time the PLHBSCL was carrying a debt of approximately £40,000 so was in a weak borrowing position: See *Whittlesea Post*, 22 August 1951, front page & p. 8.
Hilda Perrott argued that Lalor was being ‘developed on suburban lines’: ‘Statistics had shown that in suburbs where kindergarten facilities were provided, juvenile delinquency was lessened.’\textsuperscript{90} The little community of Lalor was not at the time concerned about this issue, but was taking preventative action nonetheless. The meeting was also attended by Mrs Graham, who probably represented the Free Kindergarten Movement. She pointed out that ‘Baby Health Centres and kindergartens are provided in a number of other municipalities’.\textsuperscript{91} The minutes of that council meeting made it abundantly clear, that ‘council was not being asked to finance the scheme but merely to give it its backing’.\textsuperscript{92}

Today it seems inconceivable that the council would not welcome such an offer with open arms. But it did not. Perhaps the councillors felt that previous proposals by the co-operative had over promised and under delivered and they were wary. The council President recalled investigating childcare previously and it had discovered that it was prohibitively expensive to provide kindergarten and infant welfare services.\textsuperscript{93}

The President made Council’s priorities clear by responding that ‘Councillors had not disparaged the views of Lalor people, but simply did not have the funds to do more than it was doing’.\textsuperscript{94} Council had also received a letter from the Department of Health, Maternal and Child Hygiene Branch, advising that the City of Preston was ‘not disposed to participate in any proposal for part-time Infant Welfare Service for the residents of the Peter Lalor Estate’.\textsuperscript{95} The discussion was adjourned and the Lalor deputation was asked to put its proposition in writing.

While funding was the excuse, this incident in reality reflected a clash of two world views. The LWSC and the people of Lalor represented modernity. They were young, urban and looking to build a new future after the war with adequate housing and educational opportunities for their children who stood at centre stage. The women’s aspiration was to nurture their community through their kindergarten. The councillors were overwhelmingly older men with farming backgrounds who represented a conservative patriarchy. This rural world would eventually be overtaken by an encroaching suburban sprawl.

Two months after the initial meeting, the Shire President (Cr J.A. Balharrie), Shire Secretary (R.G.C. Cook) the Engineer (S.J. Bowden) and six councillors visited the Peter Lalor Estate to inspect the site of the proposed kindergarten and infant welfare

\textsuperscript{90} Whittlesea Post, 22 August 1951, front page & p. 8.
\textsuperscript{91} ibid.
\textsuperscript{92} WSC, ‘Minutes of Meetings’, Deputations, 8 August 1951, p. 223.
\textsuperscript{93} Australian Municipal Journal, vol 25, no. 522, 20 August 1945, p. 54. Certainly, the Journal had published figures on the costs of kindergarten as £10 per child per annum. The state government contribution at that time was £4 which, according to this journal, left local government to find the balance.
\textsuperscript{94} Whittlesea Post, 22 August 1951, front page & p. 8.
\textsuperscript{95} WSC, ‘Minutes of Meetings’, item 14, 8 August 1951, p. 217.
clinic. The Shire President declared that he was ‘a little disappointed with the land; it will need draining and will have to be built up and graded’.96 This was true of much of the Peter Lalor Estate. During the discussion it also became apparent that the WSHD owned several of the adjoining lots and the council was pessimistic about the likelihood of extracting half the fencing costs from them. Shire Secretary Cook said that ‘the Commission does not even pay rates on its vacant land’.97 Eventually council passed a motion by six votes to five which only partially accepted the Lalor proposition and placed stringent conditions on it. The motion stated that:

Council accept the transfer of the land as proposed by the Society conditionally on –
1. The Society at its own expense to first provide and completely erect the fencing to the Council’s satisfaction
2. Clear title to be given to the land in question
3. Council to accept responsibility of payment of one quarter of the total cost of fencing materials employed
4. Council’s entire financial liability being limited to that set out in Clause 3.98

The Lalor community was affronted by this response. These terms were not acceptable. The core group of associations which had been represented at the council meeting decided that the PLC community would build the kindergarten themselves.99 It was to be no easy task. A special residents’ meeting was called in February 1952 to discuss the issue. If there was any doubt about the role of the women, the meeting was sponsored by the LWSC. As the Whittlesea Post reported it, the situation ‘had reached the stage where additional aid was required [therefore] the ladies called the meeting in order to spread the responsibility and enlist the aid of others’.100

From this time onward, the women would elicit support from any source which might lend a helping hand. But there was considerable cause for despondency. The government had withdrawn its £2 for £1 subsidy (thereafter £1 for £1 though at the time the LWSC believed the subsidy had been removed entirely).101 Perhaps more depressing was the fact that the meeting itself was very poorly attended. While the need for a kindergarten in Lalor was obvious to the residents of the Peter Lalor Estate, it was mainly co-operative members with older children who attended the meeting; despite the obvious need for a kindergarten, they were past the stage of

96. Whittlesea Post, 17 October 1951, front page.
97. Ibid.
98. Ibid., ‘Minutes of Meetings’, item 31, 10 October 1951, p. 248.
99. Ibid., item 8, 12 December 1951, p. 266; Whittlesea Post, 27 February, 1952, p. 6.
100. Whittlesea Post, 27 February 1952, p. 6.
101. Ibid.
needing one. There may have been many reasons why young parents were absent: pressures on young families were great, houses were still being completed, gardens planted, drains continuously cleared. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that for some time at least, there were a committed few who dragged the rest along with them: Nancy Walker, Lil Nelson, Doss Lawson, Kath Griffiths were crucial, and this episode highlights the crucial role of leadership in community development and the altruism of those involved.

It was thought that £2000 would be required for the building. It was at this stage that a small band of women showed great determination and resolve to push ahead with their plans. It was decided to get started on an approved plan and to build as finances could be raised. The amount in the kitty had already increased to £550. A building committee was formed which comprised PLC builder, Jim O’Connor, as the supervisor, driver Clive Lawson as labour organiser, with Fred Bayne (who had no children), Eric Loader, Lil Nelson and Min Follett elected to it as members. They agreed to a ‘house-to-house canvass for man-power, materials and money’.  

Fund raising began in earnest. There were dances, balls, picture nights, fetes, children’s fancy dress parties, card nights, fashion parades and gymkhanas. They had plenty of fun. After their period in the doldrums, they regained momentum. Events appeared almost weekly in the Whittlesea Post. The highlight, which, as we have seen, has remained alive in the collective memory of Lalor was a ‘Mock Wedding’. As you might expect from a soldier settlement, the comedy was acted in the cross-dressing tradition of an army theatre production and all the characters were acted by the men of Lalor. After a mock ceremony on the floor joists at the Loader’s half constructed house, the whole troop moved to the Recreation Hut in the Stockade for the ‘breakfast’. As The Whittlesea Post recorded:

[it] was definitely one of the best suppers yet enjoyed in this hall, and the ladies are to be congratulated on their efforts. Speeches by the ‘wedding’ party and several humorous and topical telegrams kept the large crowd amused until fairly late in the evening.

The Post also stated that the community drew two lessons from the event. Firstly, that ‘if all on the area work together as did the people responsible for the entertainment, there is no limit to what can be accomplished’. Secondly, the Post reported that ‘the recreational facilities are inadequate and a new and larger hall is a definite must’.

102. ibid., 27 February 1952, p. 6.
103. Whittlesea Post, 11 June 1952, front page.
104. ibid.
It was at this point that the community decided that the kindergarten would be built in such a way that it could also be the community hall, in the process perhaps also broadening its appeal to those who were not yet helping with the building.\(^{105}\) Government restrictions were still in place for the building of halls, so this second planned use was not publicly disclosed for some time. Nonetheless, the community called its kindergarten the 'kinderhall' and, as Kath Griffiths recalled, 'the women were the ones that did the fund raising to build the kindergarten, or which was the hall actually, and that was a big proposition'.\(^{106}\)

Amongst this community action, Lalor's development was interrupted often by accidental or war-related deaths. As discussed, Geoff Thompson was the first one in August 1950.\(^{107}\) This was a terrible shock to the community. There were also fatal car accidents. In all cases, the community banded together to help, including fund raising to assist the families. Tragedies such as these drew the community together, but also slowed progress on 'kinderhall' fund raising efforts.

By December 1952, action had commenced on the kindergarten in earnest. This time the LWSC was seeking agreement to the plans, though by now it was blatantly named the Community Centre.\(^{108}\) The women's committee was becoming very impatient for building work to begin and, in March 1953, it did. Builder Bill O'Connor supervised the working bee and a request was circulated for a big turnout the following Saturday.\(^{109}\) Work, though, was not as rapid as the women hoped and it muddled on throughout the year.

At the beginning of 1954, there was progress for the school aged children when the Lalor primary school took its first pupils. This spurred the community into doing more work on the 'kinderhall', although the LWSC was now torn between fundraising for essential school equipment through the school committee system and completing and maintaining the 'kinderhall'. The Lalor branch of the ALP (with membership of both women and men) offered to organise completion of the building 'which was proceeding apace'. The Whittlesea Post reported, that the 'kindergarten building which is being erected by voluntary labor [sic] by members of the TELK Men's Club and the Lalor branch of the ALP is taking shape slowly

\(^{105}\) Shire Secretary Cook remembered this differently. By his account, the hall was the first priority, with the kindergarten an addition when they needed to call on a government grant. See Whittlesea Post, 24 March 1966, p. 1. This view is not supported by the written evidence through the Whittlesea Post nor by Doss Lawson or Kath Griffiths.

\(^{106}\) Kath Griffiths, interview with the author, op. cit., p. 12.

\(^{107}\) Dot Thompson, interview with the author, op. cit., pp. 19–20; Geoffrey Thompson, email, 27 October 2009. Wayne has since taken his father's given name, Geoffrey.

\(^{108}\) Whittlesea Post, 10 December 1952, p. 12.

\(^{109}\) Ibid., 4 March 1953, front page.
but surely'.\textsuperscript{110} It is notable here the extent to which the local branch of a political party was seen as part of a community network performing a role well beyond the preselection of candidates or the conduct of election campaigns.

As Isobel Tunzi later recalled, ‘the kindergarten was built by all voluntary labour and I think probably every bit of material in it was given. ... Almost every man in Lalor put a few nails in that’.\textsuperscript{111} George Jacobs recalled that he and his father-in-law, Pop Ferguson, dug half the stump holes and June Jacobs recalled that later she helped with the painting and Dot Tate got up the ladder to hang the drapes for the stage.\textsuperscript{112}

By July 1954 the LWSC had reportedly raised £1,200, all of which had been spent on materials for the hall which measured 30ft by 57ft. The LWSC was aiming for the kindergarten to be opened in 1955 under the direction of a trained teacher and the necessary materials were already being gathered together by the women. In fact, none of it would have happened without the women in the LWSC. This was not lost on the Post’s reporter:

> The Lalor Kindergarten Hall will, for many years to come, be a memorial to the co-operative spirit of the residents, and some pride is felt that every penny spent has been raised by the people themselves through the Lalor Women’s Social Club.\textsuperscript{113}

The roofing for the ‘kinderhall’ understandably seemed to take a very long time. As the building was nearly ready, the LWSC decided that at last it would seek a donation from the WSC. They thought that as they had raised £1,236, the council might consider making an appropriate contribution. At least one councilor was still wrong-footed. The Whittlesea Post reported the meeting without a note of sarcasm:

> CR Bunting moved that a donation of £10 be given.
> CR ORGILL: They might send it back and tell you to keep it till it grows.
> CR BURING: Very well. I’ll withdraw that motion and move that we give them £100.

\textsuperscript{110} Whittlesea Post, 31 March 1954, p. 1. Hugh Indian took over as building supervisor, assisted by Bill Nelson and Norm Griffiths. There was a call for more volunteers. The LWSC provided morning and afternoon teas for the workers. The Lalor Men’s Club (by then called the Thomastown, Epping, Lalor and Keon Park Men’s Club or TELK) also offered its assistance, with both labour and fund-raising. The men’s group organised a Bush Christening and variety night raising £41/6/5.

\textsuperscript{111} Isobel Tunzi, interview with the author, 22 March 2006, p. 6.

\textsuperscript{112} George and June Jacobs, interview with the author, 1 May 2006, p. 22.

\textsuperscript{113} Whittlesea Post, 14 July 1954, front page. It seemed that every Sunday there was work to be done of some kind. Concurrently with the building of the Lalor ‘kinderhall’, Bill O’Connor was also taking the lead role in the building of the Epping RSL Hall which was due to open before Christmas. In the meantime, Eric Gunten’s home in Mackey Street had burnt to the ground and had to be rebuilt by donations, fund-raising and working bees. For a biography of Gunten, see Appendix A.
Cr McDonald: You'll get on now. You'll have an absolute majority at the next election (laughter).\textsuperscript{114}

Councillor Bunting, who never seemed to understand the powerful position of the LWSC, lost his council seat to Lalor's Vic Michael within a month of his blunder. For the first time, the co-operative settlement had one of its own on council and a strong advocate he proved to be.

The Lalor women were, after all, politically savvy. They tactically used their voting power and wisely counselled their successful male candidates on issues that affected them.\textsuperscript{115} For example, the Lalor branch of the ALP had held a ballot to decide between two very popular potential candidates: Norm Griffiths and Vic Michael. When Vic Michael won the pre-selection by one vote, two women, Bertha Boughton, and Norm's wife, Kath, were each credited with Michael’s success. Rea Michael recalled:

Apparently from what I can understand... Kath never ever said anything to me and I never heard anything official, but she didn’t vote for Norm [her husband], she voted for Vic... And then another one... Bertha Boughton, she wasn't going to vote was she, and then she thought, ‘Oh, I’ll have to go and vote in case someone else gets in and not Vic.’ So she toddled off and voted.\textsuperscript{116}

The fact that anyone who voted for Michael might have argued that their vote was decisive, is interesting. It is significant that women publicly sought to claim it. Before that council election, the inaugural meeting of the Lalor Kindergarten was held and a thirteen member committee was formed. The three Epping Riding Councillors, (all hoping for re-election) Bunting, Batten and Mann were nominated with Bill Mann elected President. Bill Bradley was Treasurer and Vic Michael was also elected to the Committee. A younger generation of women was amongst new faces elected. Some if not all had been tutored through the LWSC: Isobel Tunzi and Nita Nelson became Vice Presidents, Hilda Loader was Secretary and Phyllis Lonne, June Jacobs, Kath Griffiths and Mrs Witt were committee members.\textsuperscript{117} At this meeting, Mrs Gage from the Hawthorn Free Kindergarten gave a talk on the features of a government subsidised kindergarten. The following year she became the first teacher at the kindergarten.\textsuperscript{118}

\textsuperscript{114} Whittlesea Post, 19 August 1954, front page.
\textsuperscript{115} See this point made more generally in Marilyn Lake, Getting Equal, op. cit., pp. 12-13.
\textsuperscript{116} Rea Michael, interview with the author, op. cit., p. 21.
\textsuperscript{117} Whittlesea Post, 19 August 1954, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{118} ibid., 10 February 1955, p. 8. Mrs Gage, Director of Hawthorn Kindergarten, then of the Lalor Kindergarten was not cited as having a given name or initial.
The building, however, was still not quite finished. Alan Ramsay organised the painting during September and October and, although the Christmas Fair was booked to take place in the hall on 27 November, there was still no flooring. Doss Lawson recalled how, on one occasion, farmer, philanthropist and Councillor, Les Batten, asked Clive Lawson about progress on the ‘kinderhall’. When told about the flooring, ‘Les came down with a cheque for Clive to go and buy the flooring. That was great’.119

Carols by Candlelight was held at the new ‘kinderhall’ for Christmas 1954—the first of hundreds of community events to be held in this new community hub. The hard working and unassuming Lil Nelson received an award for her three years of dedicated service running the unofficial kindergarten at the Stockade.120 During her time in that role she probably cared for about eighty to one hundred children. She had created a caring atmosphere, in which the children felt safe, loved and stimulated. She had a roster of helpers, but she also worked incredibly hard herself.

Over the summer break further work was required for the kindergarten to reach the necessary standards for government approval. At last a state government grant for £4,500 was received and on 8 February 1955 the Lalor kindergarten opened. The Whittlesea Post report emphasised the contribution of volunteers and commented on their assiduousness:

Many local men and women who had worked hard for up to five years saw the results of their sustained efforts come to fruition on this morning, when the Lalor Kindergarten opened in the new, almost completed Kindergarten Hall, built entirely by voluntary labour given by local people.121

But the women never rested. The LWSC continued to fund-raise and manage the use and maintenance of the hall, while the Kindergarten Committee, later renamed the Pre-School Committee, organised the running of the kindergarten. They immediately launched a Tuesday afternoon toddlers’ group at the kindergarten to provide assistance to young mothers and to allow the youngest members of the community to get used to the kindergarten hall. The LWSC also started a new fund for hall maintenance and running costs and established the Kindergarten Hall Building Fund. Political meetings, dances, wedding breakfasts, birthday parties, church services, Sunday School and the kindergarten were all held in the multipurpose ‘kinderhall’. It was the heart of the community. Eight years after Robin Boyd warned the co-operative to ensure attention be paid to amenities as well

119. Doss Lawson, interview with the author, 8 December 2008, p. 2; Whittlesea Post, 11 November 1954, p. 8. The newspaper simply recorded that ‘a generous donation by a local resident had enabled the floor of the new Kindergarten Hall to go down’.

120. Whittlesea Post, 16 December 1954, p. 8. Rea Michael was also thanked for the time she filled in for Lil Nelson.

121. ibid., 10 February 1955, p. 8.
as homes, the LWSC delivered on the first of these promises as manifested in built form. However, the ‘heart that will make it work’, as Boyd described the need, was delivered by the people, through their volunteerism and their co-operation, long before—and for long after—the built form existed.

Over many years the LWSC quietly pursued its community activities. Formal meetings were held, Presidents, Secretaries and Treasurers reported on its activities and formal accounts were kept and were open for scrutiny. At any one time its membership was in the order of forty to fifty women, though clearly there were a handful of women who determinedly drove its progress in the early days, with the older generation gradually handing over control to those women with younger children.

While the LWSC had succeeded in providing a kindergarten and community centre for Lalor and the surrounding districts, it initially failed to gain a Baby Health Centre for the Shire. However, working through their men, who now completely dominated the Epping Sub-Branch of the RSL, a Baby Health Centre opened in the RSL buildings in Epping in August 1956.122 If they could not get what they wanted through one organisation, they would use another. By 1957, with the aid of a government grant, the LWSC had also raised enough money to add a nine square extension onto the ‘kinderhall’. It included a new kitchen, septic toilets, wash rooms, storeroom, dining room and office. The Committee also announced that its plan for the year was to raise enough finance to line the main hall.123 By January 1960 the LWSC had succeeded:

> The many organisations which use the Lalor Kindergarten Hall will be delighted with its improved comfort, and appearance, now that the ceiling has been lined. It is a great credit to a small but hard-working band. The LWSC who have stuck to their self-appointed task are continually improving amenities at the hall which they struggled for years to have erected, and which is in continual use throughout the year.124

The constant and varied use of the ‘kinderhall’ put enormous pressure on the LWSC. The little hall quite literally groaned as it accommodated so many groups. The presence of the pre-school, which paid the LWSC £40 per annum for the use of the building during weekdays, meant government-mandated accommodation standards were required. Eventually it became an impossible task without a further injection of capital. By the mid-1960s the LWSC and the associated Pre-School Committee started negotiations to have the council take over the building. More than a decade after the council first baulked at becoming involved, this time Lalor had three of its

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123. Ibid., 24 January 1957, p. 7.
own as councillors and a few new councillors from other ridings on side. Some had begun to see the importance of the new capital that was starting to flow into the southern most end of the shire, stemming from the growth of suburbia. They now understood the need to be supportive. (This is discussed further in the next chapter).

In October 1965 the Lalor women wrote to council initiating discussions. By 24 March 1966 council agreed to take over control of the ‘kinderhall’. The LWSC handed over £12,000 of assets on the understanding that the council would renovate the building at a cost of £8,000 and, most importantly, the building was to continue its dual role as a kindergarten and public hall: the community hub.125 George Jacobs recalled that Councillor Vic Michael insisted that the council pay the women’s club fifty cents so a formal contract of sale could be transacted.126

The women of Lalor had made a very conscious decision to make the most of their circumstances as they settled in their new homes, four miles from the outskirts of Melbourne. Their isolation, their similar demographic and economic circumstances and their co-operative ideals combined to generate a powerful drive to build a wholesome community. Overwhelmingly the post-war generation—who were the beneficiaries of their efforts—are testimony to their success, as the majority appear to have had rewarding lives with much higher educational and occupational attainment than their parents.127 By combining the need to generate social activities for social inclusion, with the drive to provide social and educational infrastructure, a vibrant community was created which lasted until the early 1970s when it started to physically disperse. Between 1970 and 1973 a cluster of the original Lalor men died, and by the 1980s several of the widows decamped to the Old Colonists Homes in North Fitzroy, directly down the railway line from Lalor.128 A small splinter of the co-operative community continued on there for several years.

These were all busy women who did what they could, according to where their own priorities lay. Home-making and childcare were definitely their prescribed roles. In the main they did not question it, though most did much besides, including paid work. These women were not inspired by middle-class feminist theory about the individual rights of women. Rather, theirs was a collective consciousness through

125. ibid., 28 October 1965, p. 1, 24 November 1965, p. 4, 24 March 1966, p. 1. Although on 14 February 1966 Australia moved to decimal currency, the figures quoted in March 1966 were still in pounds.
126. George Jacobs, interview with the author, 1 May 2006, p. 27.
127. This statement was made after considerable contact with this community. There has not, however, been a statistical survey done of the educational or occupational attainment of the second generation as it was beyond the capacity of this study. Nonetheless, as we will see in the next chapter, and unlike the surrounding areas of Lalor, many of those who grew up in the co-operative, soldier settlement triangle became professional people, academics, teachers, lawyers, nurses, or small business people such as hair salon proprietors.
128. Yvonne O’Connor, written correspondence with the author, 12 October 2006. Doss Lawson, Flo O’Connor, Beet and Jack Groves, Jean Dixon, Lil McLeod, were some of those who went there. See also Doss Lawson, interview with the author, 12 December 2005, p. 22, & interview with Ruth Ford, op. cit., p. 99.
which they saw themselves in solidarity with the working-class neighbourhood of both women and men.\textsuperscript{129}

If the men worked together in working bees, it was the women who crucially provided the impetus, the bulk of the funds, and also refreshments for the workers and activities for the children. Just a glance at the list of memberships and affiliations (at appendix C) demonstrates the single-minded focus of the women on the LWSC, compared with the dispersed activities of the men. The women concentrated their limited time. And it was through these collaborative processes that community building spirit continued to grow. If there was any ill-feeling about some not pulling their weight, this only rarely surfaced. Social harmony was seen to be of the highest importance, even in the collective memories of those who remain.

It seems as though the women quietly understood that the camaraderie the men felt from their wartime experience was perpetuated through physical building work in Lalor: first through the home-building syndicate system and then through these other collective projects for community infrastructure. And they knew that it was helping with the rehabilitation of the men after the war. As Lalor seamlessly glided from co-operative soldier settlement to an outer suburb of Melbourne, the important role of women became little different from that played out in a myriad of different situations throughout Australia. The dogged determination and foresight of the LWSC does, however, remain a very special story that has never before been written. The women themselves do not think they did anything very special. It is very clear that they did.

LALOR PRIMARY SCHOOL OPENING 1954
Source: City of Whittlesea, Lalor photograph collection.
Census Division of Lalor, 1966
Source: SLV Maps Collection, 821.09 ECC.
More Change

Everything was changing. 'Cause see we got this great influx of migrants which changed the complex of the whole place. You didn't have to be anti-migrant to know that things were changing.¹

On 5 December 1977 a symbolically significant party was held in the Police Club in McKenzie Street in Melbourne. The party celebrated the closure of the Northern No. 1 and Northern No. 2 Co-operative Housing Societies, which had commenced their operations under the names, Peter Lalor (PL) No. 1 and No. 2 Co-operative Housing Societies. They were terminating building societies and they were able to close their books, nine months early, as the last remaining 41 members paid their final housing loan repayments, clearing their mortgages. Finally they owned their own homes. After the societies had paid all their legal expenses, sufficient funds remained for the members to each receive a 'divvy' of $15 and to fund the cost of another classic Lalor party.²

The event spawned an article in the Age entitled 'Pioneers recall the Lalor frontier', capturing some of the ethos of the early co-operative members.³ It conjured an image of the citizenry of Melbourne in the late 1940s watching incredulously as the co-operators attempted to build a new way of life, miles from the metropolis and assuming the group 'must be mad.' Journalist John Lahey graphically reported:

¹ Elizabeth Indian, transcript of an interview with the author, 13 March 2006, p. 37. All further references to interviews will cite the transcriptions of the interviews.
the small band of ex-servicemen who first humped their shovels to the cow paddocks, and put in their own roads, piped their own water and scrounged their own bricks and nails in a time of desperate shortage were utterly sane. All of them wanted a house. And some of them, perhaps a majority, were fired by a socialist ideal of building a suburb in which ‘community’ was the most important word.  

A few months later, another article appeared about the Peter Lalor Co-operative (PLC) by Catholic historian Paul Ormonde, called ‘Love, Sweat and Tears: A Dream of Utopia in the Suburbs’. It also made reference to the winding up of the co-operative housing societies. He compared the building of Lalor to the materialistic world of the 1970s and judged the scheme positively:

Suburbs aren’t made any more the way the people of Lalor made theirs. It was built in a spirit of co-operation and comradeship that, sadly, would be almost impossible to reproduce in Melbourne, or any other city in Australia today.

Ormonde also recalled their dream:

To many of them, it was a socialist dream—of sharing, living, co-operating in the better world which just had to come after the suffering and austerity of the war years.

Lahey’s article was based on an interview with Bill King, who had remained as Chairman of these two societies until he retired in May 1974. It is not clear how many Lalor co-operators were interviewed by Ormonde, but his article cites Don McKenzie who had moved into his PLC designed home in Paschke Crescent in December 1951 and quotes Jack Harvey from the PLC Committee of Management, still living in Vasey Avenue with his wife Lorraine. Both had maintained connections to the co-operative movement as Ormonde had recently met these men at the annual conference of the Federation of Terminating Housing Societies. The PLC story was told to the conference delegates, clearly impressing Ormonde who was inspired to write the article. Both Lahey and Ormonde commented on the novelty of the housing co-operative financing system in those days. Lalor was ‘probably among the first five or six established in the State’. Both authors also praised the sense of community in Lalor in 1977 which was still strong after thirty years. Ormonde reflected a tone of defiance, which one can imagine came directly from those he

4. ibid.
6. ibid.
7. ibid.
interviewed, and even after thirty years, sounded an echo of their original Eureka ethos. He stated:

And if people in trendier parts of Melbourne today find it hard to see the unpretentious weatherboards and brick veneers of Lalor as the stuff of dreams, the locals don't apologise for seeing it differently.  

I have argued that such strength of community cohesion appears to be unusual in Australian suburban history. However, by the time these glowing obituaries of the co-operative were published, Lalor had been swept by overwhelming change. The numbers of original co-operative members within the small triangle of 200 or so houses had begun to dwindle. Many more Lalor pioneers had died, their children had grown up and most had left the area. In response to the changes, many couples and widows had moved away. As evidence of their social cohesion, however, their sense of community transcended place. It has emerged clearly from my research that, despite being dispersed, their bonds of friendship remained strong. As we have already seen, large numbers of these original families converged on subsequent community events, such as the funeral of matriarch Doss Lawson. Many more were on the grapevine.

This chapter traces the development of Lalor through the 1950s and 1960s to the formal end point for the PLC entities in 1977. Fresh faces emerged as community leaders, and new populations of migrants began to arrive, almost as a vanguard of sweeping changes which quickly followed. Although nothing could quite match the unique circumstances which had created the co-operative settlement, there were, nonetheless, persistent threads of continuity and consistent themes around which the suburb evolved. In this chapter, I continue to analyse the central issue of the degree of agency the residents felt in an otherwise overwhelming series of developments. At the level of community some citizens rallied to build and maintain their community's social capital in an effort to effect control over the upbringing of their children: for them, it was a litmus test of agency. In some of this activism we can hear the echo of the original idea. If fragments, often muddled, of the story of the co-operative have made it into the public record, this legacy has remained entirely hidden from history. In part, I will draw upon some more biographical snapshots of suburban residents to provide a deeper sense of outer suburban social and political life and to demonstrate again the richness of the stories which can lie hidden within suburban streets.

When the PLC closed its doors in 1954 Lalor was a thriving community. While clearly the PLC scheme failed to deliver on many of its promises, the co-operative experiment—and the community which grew from the seeds it planted—achieved

something very special: they adhered to the core of their self-help ideals and actively built the kind of social life they wanted for themselves. At the same time, their close knit social environment allowed them to collectively engage in the socialisation of their children. An important aspect of this process, for any later consideration of community development, is that to a large extent they were not dependent on governments for this.10

We saw in the last chapter, the strength and resolve required to build the ‘kinderhall’. The creation of the St Luke’s school and church in Lalor was also the product of a substantial effort in community building for those of the Catholic faith. Most of the co-operative members who were Catholics played a role in the early days. By 1950 a Lalor Catholic Residents’ Association had been formed.11 The first Holy Mass was celebrated at Lalor in November 1951 ‘in a temporary chapel’ which was in fact the ‘Rec Hut’ in the Stockade, which would have been hurriedly cleaned from the dance the night before.12 Monthly Mass was held there for some years, probably until the Stockade was demolished in the mid-1950s. The Catholic Church bought land in David Street from Bill Mann in 1955 and fund-raising continued apace.13 By 1959, with the congregation at St Peter’s in Epping, bulging under the pressure of Lalor and Thomastown residents, Father Chamberlain agreed to follow the example of other denominations and say Mass in the ‘kinderhall’.14 By 1959 the Salvation Army had its own pre-fabricated church in Mackey Street, which reduced pressure on the overtaxed hall. The Presbyterian Church moved to William Street the following year, making further space.15

By 1961 the Catholic Church had a little hall built on the site in David Street, which housed the school and an office. On Sundays, the desks were cleared away for the Mass.16 The Post was astonished to discover that ‘although it had only just been opened ...[the school] was already full’.17 What is more surprising is that the journalist was incredulous. Overcrowding had been happening for years within the government school system in the same part of the shire.

A lasting legacy of the PLC commenced in 1963, when a small group of the Peter Lalor original co-operators and others in St Luke’s parish, decided to open a credit

10. Except, importantly, for the provision of state schools.
15. ibid., 16 July 1959, p. 7, 29 October 1959, p. 15. Both the Salvation Army and Presbyterian churches also had strong though smaller communities developing around them.
co-operative.18 This was a direct lineage from the distributist movement brought to the original PLC through Purcell and King. As I discussed in Chapter 1 much of this distributist agenda was sidelined by B.A. Santamaria’s fight against communism, but within the Catholic Church, the Young Christian Workers (YCW) stayed true to its ideals, keeping its focus on the potential of a co-operative movement. Between 1943 and 1964, starting slowly and building momentum by the mid 1950s:

the YCW Co-operative Movement established a permanent building society, a trading and insurance co-operative, a land purchase co-operative, 23 housing co-operatives, 63 credit cooperatives and a Co-operative Development Society.19

The first parish credit society was established at St Gabriel’s in Reservoir in 1956 and the following year the Association of Catholic Co-operative Credit Societies was formed with three credit societies as its base.

St Luke’s Credit Co-operative was part of this movement. It operated out of a little shed on the Catholic Church grounds in David Street. Lalor original co-operator, Marla Kyle, said that ‘when they went to Church they used to pay what they wanted to pay into the credit union’.20 Initially called the St Luke’s Lalor Co-operative Credit Society Ltd, it catered for the diverse needs of the growing Catholic community in Lalor, but within three years it had become the Lalor and District Co-operative Ltd and opened its membership to all residents in the Shire.21 By 1972 the co-operative had combined with St Raphael’s in Preston, had opened offices in Lalor and Preston and had a membership of 900. Emphasising the benefits of co-operatives to low income earners, one co-operative employee was quoted as stating an identical ethos to that espoused twenty-five years earlier by Peter Lalor members:

The success of this locally inspired and run co-operative is ample proof of the ability of the average person to master his own destiny financially and otherwise, by combining with others and demonstrating that unity is strength.22

18. Brian Donnelly, writing of his father, Jack, stated, ‘One of his notable contributions to the local community was input to the St Luke’s Credit Union. He was one of the early directors of the credit union, which provided financial support to many local residents.’ See Brian Donnelly, email, 15 November 2006, p. 2; Plenty Community Credit Union, ‘Our History’, <www.plentycredit.com.au>.


20. Marla Kyle, interview with the author, 13 October 2005, p 5. Marla had written on a scrap of paper, ‘Peter also assisted in the setting up of the Plenty Credit Union at the back of St Luke’s Church Hall.’ She also said that Peter had printed their tally sheets and reconciliation books at the Herald where he worked. Kevin O’Rourke married Peg Adams, the oldest daughter of Arch and Peg Adams. He was one of the founding members of the credit union. See Pat Adams, correspondence with the author, 28 March 2006. Pam Summerville was also on the committee: See also Marla Kyle, interview with the author, 13 October 2005, p. 5; Barry Kyle, interview with the author, 19 October 2006, p. 20.


22. ibid., 11 October 1972, p. 8.
The credit union supported all the diverse groups emerging within Lalor and further merged with other credit unions in the northern suburbs. In 2004, it was still operating as the Plenty Community Credit Union in May Road in Lalor with more than 12,000 members.\textsuperscript{23}

The success of the local Catholic community in establishing such religious and social infrastructure does not appear to have led to a strong sectarian division within Lalor—at least this is overwhelmingly how it is remembered today. As part of their initial collective struggle, the different groups raised funds for separate religious, community or sporting associations, and most of the community attended these events and put their small contributions towards whatever appeal was fund-raising on the day.\textsuperscript{24} Lalor was not immune, however, from the sectarian shadow, though it would appear that it affected women more than men. Jude Davis (nee Hertzog), remembering her childhood, recalled that ‘we didn’t have much to do with the State School kids; there was a bit of angst but not many dramas’.\textsuperscript{25} It seems likely that the boys were less affected. Jude recalled that because her brother played sport, he mixed more than she did across sectarian lines.\textsuperscript{26} This commentary serves to strengthen my view that it was community organisations and institutions that either segregated or coalesced the community. For example, Lil Nelson’s kindergarten had enrolments from all residents who had young children irrespective of religion, and many mothers, both Protestant and Catholic, were rostered on to help.\textsuperscript{27} By school age though, children went to segregated schools, and as the mothers’ time became absorbed by support for school activities, it had the effect of segregating them as well. Even the LWSC appears, by the mid-1950s, to have been dominated more by Protestant than Catholic women, not by design, but because the Catholic women were by then busy gathering the resources for St Lukes.

For the men, the good hearted banter between the strong Masonic and Catholic groups for the most part did not cause deep ructions within the community, in part because the war service bond appeared to surmount potential rifts. The RSL played an important role here.\textsuperscript{28} Marla Kyle also described how both Catholic and Protestant men often drank together at the Epping Pub on a Saturday morning. ‘I think they were that used to men talking to each other ...during the war and that.’\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{23} It is now called the Plenty Community Credit Union. See Plenty Community Credit Union, ‘Our History’, <www.plentycredit.com.au>.
\textsuperscript{24} As we have seen, devout Catholic, Leo Purcell, is attributed with having played a major role in the fight to gain a non-denominational public school in Lalor. Dave Burgess, although a Mason, appears not to have favoured the ‘brotherhood’ in his employment policies. Catholic Jack Kernaghan played a key role for Burgess in delivering the plasterwork for the Olympics ahead of time.
\textsuperscript{25} Jude Davis, ‘Some Hertzog History’, email 15 March 2009.
\textsuperscript{26} ibid.
\textsuperscript{27} Lil Nelson, kindergarten enrolment books, provided by Maureen Adams (nee Nelson).
\textsuperscript{28} Two central players, Jim and Bill O’Connor, were Masons who were reared as Catholics.
\textsuperscript{29} Marla Kyle, interview with the author, 19 October 2006, p. 19.
At the political level, throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the people of Lalor strove to advance their democratic representation within the local council. By the mid-fifties, with conservative governments entrenched at state and federal level, it seemed that funding facilities or services in any Labor strongholds were simply not a priority. Resentment and anger about such cynicism on the part of governments was one factor that drove Vic Michael to take over from Leo Purcell as the voice of the people of the co-operative settlement. He served more than three decades as a local councillor. According to his daughter, Kathleen Jones, it was a deep-seated sense of social justice that drove his career. She said:

at that time working class people didn’t have any clout... and I think that was one of the things that drove Dad really and drove his career. That it wasn’t fair that people had to go without those things: that they had to make a noise to get roads and sewerage and all the amenities that other people had, because of the area that they lived in and because of the wealth that was behind them or the representation that they had.\(^{30}\)

With a redistribution of ridings in 1956 all seats were spilled. Les Batten successfully moved to represent the Morang Riding. The Secretary of the newly formed Thomastown Progress Association,\(^{31}\) Rupert Uren (known as Rup), Vic Michael and Bill Mann were elected unopposed for the newly created Thomastown riding.\(^{32}\) Lalor now had four councillors advocating its interests, but still were three short of a majority. When Mann did not seek re-election in 1961, Lalor resident W.A. (Bill) Smith was pre-selected by the Lalor Branch of the ALP and he too was elected unopposed.\(^{33}\) So began an ALP based partnership between Michael, Smith and Uren that lasted almost two decades, with each serving several times as Shire President, and subsequently as Mayor. As Harry Jenkins (Jnr) described its evolution:

The key was that they were allowed to run their Riding separate to what was going on elsewhere, so long as they came up with fair results, even though it was a nine and three.\(^{34}\)

It was, he said, a clear case of ‘the tail wagging the dog’.\(^{35}\) The election of Vic Michael to Whittlesea Shire Council (WSC) in 1954 signalled a ‘changing of the guard’ in the Whittlesea Shire. The idealists who had created the original PLC had gone.\(^{36}\) It was

\(^{30}\) Kathleen Jones, interview with the author, 19 April 2007, p. 24.

\(^{31}\) Whittlesea Post, 13 September 1956, p. 6.


\(^{33}\) Whittlesea Post, 24 August 1961, p. 5.

\(^{34}\) Harry Jenkins, interview with the author, 25 October 2006, p. 23.

\(^{35}\) ibid.

\(^{36}\) Jack Harvey from the original committee still lived in Lalor, but was not one of the originators. Bill King, not a resident, continued his role as Chairman of the two PL Co-operative Housing Societies for most of the 30 years of their existence, resigning in May 1974, three years short of their closure in 1977. See The Age, 2 December, 1977, p. 2.
now the residents who took charge of local matters. New family names such as Burgess and Jenkins began to appear as community leaders alongside those original families, such as Hunt, Lawson, Griffiths, Nelson, Michael, O'Connor and Cooper.  

The ‘Burgess brothers’, as they were known in Lalor, both played an important part in the development of Lalor. Their professional lives took different paths, but their family unity was strong. As noted, their success was all the more remarkable given their difficult childhood as they and three other siblings were divided between an orphanage and a boys’ home. Violet Burgess, who married Dave, had also come from a poor background as the oldest of ten children whose father was a wharf labourer.

Dave Burgess became an entrepreneur; his younger brother, Doug, was a trade union activist. Doug knew about the PLC from its inception and suggested his brother join. In the late 1940s, Doug had been a young, but keen observer of the formation of the PLC from his vantage point inside the Trades Hall. In 1952 he was the driving force behind the formation of the Young Labor Association Co-operative Housing Society, modelled on the PL home financing co-operatives. From 1949 he attended ALP National Conferences as a representative of the Miscellaneous Workers’ Union, gaining a seat on the Central Executive when John Cain died in 1957. By 1969 he had reached the summit of his trade union career: he was elected President of the Melbourne Trades Hall Council.

Doug and Mavis bought their incomplete PLC home in September 1952 from an ex-RAAF teacher who had been transferred out of Melbourne. Using a housing loan from the Federated Clerks Co-operative Housing Society, Doug spent all available hours finishing the building which they moved into in April 1953. By 1958 he was President of the Ratepayers Association of Thomastown and in the same year joined the executive of the Lalor Branch of the ALP, a political association that lasted until his death in 1998.

37. These are but three examples. Many families could have been selected for mention. Some are in the biographies in Appendix A.
39. ibid., p. 1.
40. Labor Call, 2 September 1949, p. 5.
42. Victorian ALP & THC papers, op. cit.
43. Clarence Arthur Love, individual war record, WWII Nominal Roll, V55698 & 429709; PHBCLS, ballot list, February 1947. He for one made a profit on the sale and would have recovered the cost of his co-operative membership.
44. Doug Burgess, personal papers, op. cit.
45. Whittlesea Post, 4 April 1957, p. 1.
46. ALP, Lalor Branch records, held in the office of Harry Jenkins (Jnr) Bundoora. See also, Mavis Burgess, interview with the author, op. cit., p. 23.
Dave Burgess was a very different character. He married Violet (known as Chub) in 1943 when they were respectively nineteen and eighteen years of age. When Dave was discharged from the Army in 1945 he trained as a plasterer through the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme. Starting with nothing, Dave began his plasterworks business in 1954 when he rented 'old chook sheds' on the corner of Epping and Settlement Roads in Thomastown. The business, known as 'Burgess Wood and Co—Fibrous Plasterers of Thomastown', became very prosperous, employing as many as 170 people, including many Lalor residents and young men on apprenticeships. 'If any boy wanted a job,' Violet recalled 'come down.' Violet described her husband's plastering business as 'one of the biggest in Victoria at the time. ... but he built it up from working in this chook shed'.

Dave built the only factory in Lalor after the demolition of the Stockade. It was a large steel framed building on Epping Road near Arndell Street. He won the contract for the plastering work on the 1956 Olympic Games site and boasted that the 'work was completed in less than 12 months' and ahead of schedule. However, the cyclical nature of the building industry caught Dave Burgess with too many creditors, and ironically a union black ban, and by the late 1960s Dave went temporarily into receivership, only to revive the business again close by at a factory in Mahoney's Road. Dave was not a political activist like his brother, but was involved with fund raising for the kindergarten, was active in the Lalor Football Club and was a member of the Men's Club (TELK). Both brothers were Masons and particularly active in the community assistance work and social activities associated with the Lalor Fidelity Club.

The Jenkins family was another to have a significant impact. Dr Henry Alfred Jenkins (Harry), his wife Hazel (known as Wendy) and family arrived to live in Main Street, Thomastown in the mid 1950s. Harry was a scholarship boy, and he and his friend from Ivanhoe Grammar School, Dr John North, opened a medical practice in
Epping Road at Lalor in the mid-1950s. The Lalor/Thomastown community was delighted to gain its own medical practice. However, it only operated until 1961 when Jenkins won the state seat of Reservoir for the ALP. John North then moved away.

Jenkins was politically active. He was Treasurer of the Lalor Branch of the ALP by February 1958 and President the following year. By June 1959 he had been elected to the Central Executive of the ALP by the Victorian Annual Conference, like Doug Burgess, representing the Miscellaneous Worker’s Union. The Post in 1964 declared that Jenkins was ‘well known for his association with local schools and organisations, Monash University and several of Melbourne’s large hospitals. He would go on to win the federal seat of Scullin in 1969, serving in the Whitlam government and subsequently becoming Speaker of the House in the Hawke Government between 1983 and 1986. Harry was a Mason; Wendy was also politically involved and active in the community, in addition to her role as mother of four. She was the first woman to be elected to the WSC in 1981. One of the early successes for the Jenkins couple was the creation of the Promote Thomastown Committee in 1958, which will be discussed further below. Their oldest son Harry (Jnr) was elected to council in 1979 and won the seat of Scullin in 1986 on his father’s retirement.

These examples help to demonstrate the different ways in which grass-roots people contribute to building communities: economically, politically and socially. While similar stories would exist for most communities across the country, generally they are not acknowledged. However, it is through activism such as this that social capital is created.

We saw in the last chapter, how child-centric their community development was. One important aspect of this focus on children was the ongoing debate about the relationship between the growth of their dormitory settlement and the development of industry. How close should the creation of jobs be to the homes of the people? These debates had emanated more broadly from the ‘garden city’ movement. The original PLC ideal had been ‘to provide employment ... adjacent to the homes of the people.’ As we have seen, the Stockade had provided employment for some on site but by mid-1950, the co-operative had formally requested that no permits for

56. Harry Jenkins (Jnr) interview with the author, 25 October 2006, p. 1. Prior to their arrival the nearest doctors were Drs Wilson and Bacon from Reservoir. See Chapter 3, footnote 67; Beth Indian, interview with the author, op. cit., p. 23; see also Lorraine Yeomans, email, ‘Re: Peter Lalor Estate Research’, 30 November 2006.
57. Dr North decided to close that practice when Dr Jenkins left. He later moved to Tasmania.
58. Whittlesea Post, 15 June 1961, p. 7 reported that Dr and Mrs North were moving to Ivanhoe, though Dr North reportedly stated that he would continue his work in the district.
60. ibid., 18 June 1959, p. 7. See also Australia, House of Representatives, Main Committee, Condolences, 4 August, 2004, pp. 32191–2, Condolence Motion speech by Martin Ferguson, MHR. According to Ferguson, Jenkins’ medical practice in Thornbury, which he operated prior to Lalor, was just as well regarded.
61. Whittlesea Post, 11 June 1964, p. 3.
62. See Chapter 1.

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factories be issued within the areas of the Peter Lalor Estate. This request from a residents’ meeting was probably recognition of the fact that the settlement would be much smaller than originally planned. Instead, Lalor was to be a child-friendly and safe garden suburb, with fresh air and healthy children. The Burgess plaster-works was across the railway line. Men’s work, close to home, was no longer a high priority, though the nearby townships of Thomastown and Epping were deemed suitable for industry. It was nonetheless an important policy decision ahead of imminent industrial expansion.

From the time Vic Michael attended his first council meeting in September 1954, he brought a more strategic and dynamic force to bear. Consistently arguing the case for the residents of Lalor, he also urged for the development of the shire as a whole. ‘I think we should approach every avenue to encourage industries to come out and establish themselves in the district,’ he told the Post in November 1954. For the first time the shire began to position itself as a site for industrial expansion because there was a ready-made workforce in the rapidly growing northern suburbs of Melbourne, a few miles to the south. The expanding ‘satellite city’ of Preston, together with the ring of suburbs from Coburg to West Heidleberg would provide ‘manpower’, including the large Housing Commission estate of Broadmeadows to the West.

The council, however, faced an impasse. It could not attract commitments from water, electricity or railway authorities until industry was present; and industry would not commit to the shire until the necessary infrastructure was there to support it. By 1958, when Michael was elected to his first term as Shire President, he was fiercely critical of the lack of services in the shire, whereas Housing Commission residents had ready access to water, gas, electricity, good roads and paths. ‘If you are a pioneer you have to fight to establish your home,’ he said. He commenced a political campaign to gain a seat on the Board of the Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) and was successful in 1962.

A small group of councillors, professional and business people decided to take action themselves and in 1958 they formed the Promote Thomastown Committee. A fund-raising dinner, organised by Harry Jenkins, was held at the Savoy Plaza. They raised

65. ibid.
66. ibid., 18 November 1954, p. 6.
68. Vic Michael later called this ‘the same old merry-go-round... The Board [MMBW] refused to sanction subdivision because of absence of water, but would not connect water until there was progress in the area.’ Whittlesea Post, 14 August 1958, p. 1.
69. ibid., 16 May 1956, p. 1.
£2,000 for a promotional program. Vic Michael was Chair of the event and President of the committee, Harry Jenkins was Secretary and Wendy was Assistant Secretary. Dave and Violet Burgess attended in their role as local business people and made a donation. Speakers highlighted the ‘phenomenal growth of industry across Victoria’, while Thomastown had been by-passed.

The local state member, Harold Kane pointed to the unique nature of this venture: ‘It was the first in his experience where a community has set out to help itself’. In fact, the Lalor residents were simply carrying on a tradition started twelve years earlier. Several of the instigators of the Promote Thomastown Committee were closely aligned to the Lalor Branch of the ALP and strands of the original co-operative ideals can be seen within this scheme. Vic Michael, Rup Uren and the Jenkins couple worked tirelessly between 1958 and 1960 to launch the campaign and it was consistent with the type of co-operative business association which Robert Owen would have supported more than a hundred years earlier. The people were different, but the idea was not too dissimilar.

The Committee was sensitive to the request of the Lalor residents for their urban planned area to remain a dormitory suburb. In addition, the placement of Lalor in dairy country, four miles north of the suburban ring (which terminated at Reservoir) meant that significant suburban and industrial infill was required in order to connect Lalor to the mainstream suburban development. The little rural township of Thomastown, situated in the middle between Reservoir and the Peter Lalor Estate, became the focus of development.

The aim of the Promote Thomastown Committee was for the larger area of Thomastown to be both a residential and industrial heartland of the shire, creating employment as foreshadowed by the PLC, ‘adjacent to the homes of the people’. This time, close, but not too close. The committee understood the importance of attracting an economic base for their growing community.

Vic Michael claimed that ‘one of the considerable attractions from the industrialists’ point of view’ in Thomastown was the large labour pool available on its doorstep. Although jobs and housing for migrants were not mentioned in the promotional material it is impossible to know whether he was also referring to a migrant workforce as part of the equation. Given its previous record it would not be surprising if WSC had not then understood the significance of migrants to their

71. These positions were retained until at least 1962. See Whittlesea Post, 6 July 1961, p. 5. The group of 24 were still meeting regularly at the home of Harry and Wendy Jenkins in April 1964. See Whittlesea Post, 2 April 1964, p. 3.
73. Ibid.
labour force and to their community. In all likelihood they were simply ignoring the growing migrant presence in keeping with an overarching policy framework which called on migrants to simply assimilate. The same is not true of the committee. By this time no-one living in Lalor (or Thomastown) could ignore the fundamental change that was staring them in the face every day.

In the post-war period, the Australian government orchestrated an immigration program that became one of the world’s most successful. Between 1947 and 1985 almost five million migrants arrived in Australia. Arthur Calwell, as the first Minister for Immigration, announced in 1945 that there would be a large-scale program. He promised that the overwhelming majority would be British: people just like us was the inference and, besides, immigration was constrained within the strict confines of the White Australia Policy which Calwell strongly supported. Concurrently, the Chifley government ensured the union movement was on side: deals were struck to guarantee that award wages would be paid; hard-won working conditions would be maintained, and Australian jobs would not be lost. Ultimately, less than half the migrant intake came from the United Kingdom and Ireland. These migrants gained assisted passages and were, by all accounts, quite quickly integrated into mainstream Australian society and employment. Unlike post-war refugees, they could return home if their new home was not to their liking, and some did.

Between 1948 and 1952, 170,000 displaced persons from refugee camps in Europe commenced their long journey to permanent settlement in Australia. Upon arrival most were placed in camps, such as Bonegilla, and, through two year indenture arrangements, could be sent anywhere their labour was required. Displaced persons, described often in Australia as ‘Balts’ or ‘Reffos,’ were provided with minimal English language training and sometimes families were separated by compulsory working arrangements. Anguish, hurt, isolation, discrimination and prejudice greeted many non-English-speaking new arrivals as they were expected to just simply assimilate. They were mostly given the dirty work which white Australians refused to do.

76. ibid., 16 May 1957, p. 5.
79. ibid., p. 10.
80. ibid., p. 28.
81. ibid., p. 14.
83. Glenda Sluga, Bonegilla: A Place of No Hope, Melbourne, 1988. The camp at Bonegilla was euphemistically called a ‘Reception and Training Centre’.
84. ibid., p. 26.

CHAPTER 8: MORE CHANGE
As displaced persons began arriving in Victoria in large numbers in the late 1940s, some who came from Holland, Germany, Poland and the Ukraine found their way to the Whittlesea Shire. According to the recollections of Shire Secretary Cook, they settled largely in the Thomastown area 'on land that had been subdivided, [but never sold] during the 1920s and 1930s'. Cook's description draws obvious parallels with the co-operators' experience:

There were no made roads, there was no sewerage, there was absolutely nothing, and these people came in here and they had nothing themselves except a few bob they were able to save after their employment here.

Some too built 'temporaries' while they slowly saved enough money to build their own homes, and, similarly, often with the help of family members. Unlike the Co-operators, there were no approved house plans readily available, nor any formal co-operative structures or working bees to help them, nor were they eligible for Commonwealth-backed housing loans. There is also no evidence that they made use of the Stockade, which until 1954 was providing pre-fabricated building materials on their doorstep.

As the displaced persons' scheme wound back, and more shipping became available, the immigration program was expanded to include migrants from Southern Europe. These migrants mostly paid their own way, often borrowing the money from family members, sending money back to their homeland as soon as they had gained employment. Some were brought out by family members who had already made the journey to Australia, with chain migration making up a considerable portion of the migrant intake into the 1950s and beyond. In Victoria, these migrants initially congregated in poor inner city areas such as Carlton, Collingwood, Brunswick, Footscray, Richmond and Fitzroy. Soon, though, many moved again: fanning out around the outer reaches of the Melbourne metropolitan area.

It would appear that the largest congregation of migrants moving to the north were Italians. They travelled along High Street and the railway line, settling in large numbers in Northcote, Thornbury and Preston. Some extended their reach further to find the cheap land at Thomastown and Lalor. Fewer people who registered as Greek moved north in still significant numbers. Some within this group were Slav
Macedonians, who did not identify as Greek, and formed their own communities on arrival in Australia.91

By the census of 1954, 8.4 per cent of the population of the Whittlesea Shire had been born in Europe (excluding the UK).92 Most were living on the southern edge of Lalor. From August 1956 successive Shire Presidents conducted almost monthly naturalisation ceremonies as the non-British migrants fulfilled the residential requirement for citizenship and committed to their new country.93 Within less than two decades, the population of Whittlesea born overseas had reached 33.7 per cent, one of the highest in Victoria and Australia.94

Between 1966 and 1971 the shire grew by 80 per cent almost exclusively concentrated in Thomastown and Lalor. Not all were migrants, but The Post aptly described the population surge with the headline, ‘Shire Goes Boom’. Whittlesea was the second highest growth area in the greater metropolitan area.95 Harry Jenkins (Jnr) reflected from his time in council, which commenced in 1979:

Another one of the problems was that the City of Whittlesea was never quite the gold medal winner in growth. They never could say, ‘We’re the fastest growing municipality in Victoria’. But the real problem was that for the past 25 years [or thereabouts] they’d been in the top four. Now over time, it’s not just this year that they’ve been worried about, it’s the 25th year.96

The inference was that government services might be directed towards the highest growth area, but there was a failure to acknowledge the enormity of the pressure on communities which nonetheless grew exponentially, year in and year out.

Initially this growth was on the edge of the Peter Lalor Estate, creating infill to the south, and eventually surrounding it. In the early fifties, because much of the land to the north and east of the soldier settlement triangle lay idle under the ownership of the WSHD, the land to the south and the west was developed first. Although outside the original Saxil Tuxen plan, this land, between Thomastown and Epping, adopted the name of Lalor. The new settlers were also working-class, and included large numbers of migrant families. Pushed to the extremities of settlement, they similarly took advantage of cheap land. By 1953 Bill Mann’s farming land adjoining the southern boundary of the Peter Lalor Estate was converted to a housing development.

94. Department of Immigration, Statistics Division, ‘Overseas Born: Local Government Areas’, op. cit., p. 3. Of a total Whittlesea population of 30,327, 3,415 had less than five years residence. 5,435 were British nationals. 3,120 were from Italy and 2,131 from Greece.
96. Harry Jenkins, interview with the author, op. cit., p. 22.
and blocks were sold from Station Street in the west to Dalton Road in the east. Housing development began along David Street, with some migrant families building there. It soon appeared to merge into the PLC settlement. Later William Street was developed but remained separate.

Mann's land along Station Street became the shopping strip, with the Peter Lalor Estate snuggled at the northern-east end. It ran parallel to the railway line and was built alongside the informal and dangerous Mann's Crossing, which for years was the site which housed the residents' muddy boots. In 1955 Fred and Gwen Hunt opened the first shop in Station Street, having left the PLC store. It was a newsagency and post office. Jim and Flo O'Connor then built a fruit and vegetable shop. A butcher and service station and a few other stores gradually opened. Mostly the places were two storeyed with accommodation above. According to the Whittlesea Post, by mid-1958 'with one new shop opened, two others approaching completion, and another in the course of erection, the Lalor Shopping Centre is fast approaching adulthood.' By the mid-1960s all the shops appear to have been owned by migrant families.

The Peter Lalor Estate otherwise remained isolated. A large paddock separated it from a housing development which commenced in Lalor along Messmate Street to the south, housing a majority of migrant families. Only the shops provided a physical point of connection for the two settlements. Italian Connie Testagrossa described Lalor when she first moved there in 1959. 'There was nothing there, just paddocks; that's all it was.' For her, the soldier settlement to the north across the paddock, was too far away. Her home in Messmate Street was amongst a few scattered new houses, mostly being built or recently settled by Italians and Macedonians. This was the beginning of 'Laylor': close by, but in many respects, worlds apart from 'Lawlor'.

For about two decades the soldier settlement at Lalor was partially cocooned within its triangle of streets. By 1954 most houses in the soldier settlement were occupied, and while the usual turnover in home ownership saw a sprinkling of migrants move seamlessly into the community, the strong friendships and co-operative spirit generated during the early co-operative days appear to have remained the dominant ethos. However, Macedonians, such as Chris and Luba Stambanis and others in their families, began building several homes alongside the Peter Lalor Estate, in David Street in 1952. They initially gained access to water only through the friendship offered by PLC originals, Hugh and Beth Indian. The Stambanis tapped

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97. See the biography of Luba Stambanis in Appendix A.
98. WSC, 'Minutes of Meetings', 13 May 1953, Shire Engineer's Report, item 29, p. 197.
100. ibid., 31 July 1958, p. 7.
into the Indian's water supply across the way in Derrick Street. Chris and Luba had moved in with their two young children in 1954. Luba recalled that she was made to feel very welcome by the Peter Lalor community, and some years later, one of her younger siblings married into the family of Vic Michael's sister, also living in Lalor.102

Josie Ciccone (later Minniti) moved into Vasey Avenue in 1961. The Post could report that Lalor was 'a lovely little township.'103 As an Italian-born thirteen year old, who had migrated to Australia in 1953, she believed there was a kind of 'protectiveness' about the Lalor community. Couples like Arthur and Muriel Cooper looked out for her and her mother as the community came to know them.104 Just as Janet McCalman reflected for the whole Australian population, 'millions of ordinary Australians have learnt to change their ideas and feelings, to tolerate difference, to recognise their common humanity with people from other cultures'.105

From the picture painted above, it could seem as though a seamless integration evolved. In fact, a feature of the growing migrant presence in Australia was the creation of ethnic sub-communities. The power of kinship extended beyond the immigration process into the settlement process, creating discrete ethnic communities which were similarly, partially cocooned.106 Extended families and others from the same village, settled close to each other on arrival in Australia in order to soften the harshness of the gulf that lay between their own and their host’s culture. This cultural isolation, exacerbated often by a lack of English language, meant the migrants too had to co-operate amongst themselves and be self-reliant. By this means, migrant groups helped those in need within their communities and thereby found ways to maintain their own cultures. Gradually they built their own forms of social capital. The migrant settlements in Lalor were no different.

The walls surrounding these parallel communities were, however, semi-porous and, at the formal institutional level and the informal organisational level, there was mingling, particularly amongst the children and the families of school aged children. At primary school the Lalor children found a growing number of migrant children in their midst. Again, as migrant mothers became involved in school committees, they too had contact across the ethnic divides. Pauline O’Day (nee Adams) has described St Peter’s Catholic School at Epping, which many of Lalor’s Catholic children attended, as European children began arriving. She recollected with an element of surprise:

104. Josie Minniti, interview with the author, 4 March 2009, p. 36. See the biography of Josie Minniti in Appendix A.
Yes [there was] a whole multicultural society in our little school community. My first friends I think ... apart from Judith [Hertzog], who was third generation Aussie, were Hungarian, Polish, Lithuanian. ... It was probably a unique little place at that time in that school room.107

For many migrants, the church provided the most overt way through which they could come to terms with their complex, mixed emotions as they struggled to adjust to a new country.108 And in Lalor, it was to the little Catholic Church of St Luke’s that they went.

Lalor co-operator, Frank Hawkins recalled that when ‘we first started in St Luke’s it was practically all Aussies’.109 However, as Marla Kyle remembered, it wasn’t until ‘they handed it all over to the Italian Priest that they got a church going.’110 Gwen Hawkins agreed, highlighting the multi-racial nature of the support:

Well as the Italians came, we were just starting out with St Luke’s. ‘Course Father Birollo, when he was here was a great organiser for that sort of situation. ... Certainly the Italian community—and the Maltese community.’111

Gwen’s view, which is almost certainly tinged with hindsight, is nonetheless making the point that irrespective of ethnicity, they were all Catholic. She said:

But from the point of view of the people in the church—you would never know who was what nationality. In regards to the church, the different nationalities just melt in.112

By 1970, St Luke’s Church mirrored the changes taking place in Lalor and the population of the parish consisted of 40 per cent Italian speaking, 30 per cent English speaking, 30 per cent other languages.113 At this point the Catholic hierarchy decided to replace the Anglo diocesan priests with three priests from the Scalabrini Congregation. At least there was recognition within the Catholic Church that assimilation was not a reasonable response to migration, and that community development services in appropriate languages would be required. The three priests—Fathers Remigio Birollo, Dante Orsi and John Mellow—were specifically

109. Frank and Gwen Hawkins interview with the author, op. cit., p. 41.
111. Frank and Gwen Hawkins, interview with the author, p. 40.
112. ibid.
113. St Luke’s Parish, Together We Are the Church, op. cit., p. 12. Similar figures were reproduced in the Whittlesea Post, 16 September 1970, p. 3.
trained to work among migrants.\textsuperscript{114} Separate Masses were conducted in English and Italian, and parish newsletters became bilingual.\textsuperscript{115} This was long overdue, but with a parish of seventeen different nationalities, it clearly did not meet all the needs. At least there was now an acknowledgement from this church group of the needs of the expanding migrant community to be treated with more compassion and respect. A grand new church was opened six years later on the site in David Street.

The following three short biographies will, however, reveal how the migrant residents of Lalor actively created their own community infrastructure in much the same way as the early co-operators had done.\textsuperscript{116} Chain migration played a part in all three of these stories and in each case several family members built in Lalor, just as the original co-operators had done, relying on familial connections. We will see significant areas of overlap and integration with the PLC, while strong ethnic sub-communities developed in tandem.

Connie Testagrossa came to Australia from Messina, Sicily, with her mother, brother and sister in 1954.\textsuperscript{117} Like many families, her father had made the journey two years earlier and worked cutting cane, unsuitable work for a hairdresser.\textsuperscript{118} Six months after his family had joined him in Queensland, the family moved to North Melbourne to live with others who had migrated from their village. In 1957, her mother persuaded the family to buy land in Lalor. She bought number 21 Messmate Street, Connie’s future husband, Italian-born Carl, bought number 23. Carl had also been cane cutting in Queensland. They bought the land from Italians and paid £310 for each block. Connie was married in 1957 and her husband started building their home in 1959. By then a few others were building, and a few had just moved in. Connie’s grandparents migrated to join the family in 1957 and moved with Connie to her new home in Messmate Street in 1961 taking care of Carl and Connie’s two-year-old boy while they both worked. Connie’s parents later moved to join them on the block next door. Several other family members then moved to Messmate Street.

Connie’s world revolved around the St Luke’s Catholic Church. As Italian numbers grew, they formed a separate group and began fund raising efforts for the church. According to Connie, they mostly lived in Messmate Street, French Street and David Street. They held dances at the Epping Memorial Hall with had cross-cultural iconic

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\textsuperscript{114} ibid.
\textsuperscript{115} John Lack & Jacqueline Templeton, \textit{Bold Experiment}, op. cit., p. xiii.
\textsuperscript{116} Fuller biographies and biographies of other migrants are in Appendix A.
\textsuperscript{117} Connie Testagrossa, interview with the author, 5 March 2009. A fuller biography of Connie Testagrossa can be found in Attachment A.
\textsuperscript{118} As Templeton reports, prior to WWII there was a strong presence of Italian workers in the timber and cane cutting industries of Western Australia and Queensland. Men often stayed for long periods, sending money home. In 1935 a royal commission investigated this issue in Queensland. See, Jacqueline Templeton, ‘Here, There or Nowhere? Italian Sojourners Write Home’, \textit{The Australian Immigrant in the 20th Century: Searching Neglected Sources}, edited by Eric Richards & Jacqueline Templeton, Canberra, 1998, pp. 76–77.
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events such as the ‘Miss Lalor’ charity ball.\textsuperscript{119} Connie’s early memories of Lalor are filled with the busy life of a young mother. Her son played football (AFL) with the Lalor Football Club and one of the PLC fathers ferried him to and from the matches.\textsuperscript{120} Sports became an initial means of crossing ethnic divides. Many years later Connie became President of the Italian senior citizens’ club.

Another resident of Messmate Street was Mick Dimos. Christened Vladimir Dimovski (‘I call myself Macedonian’), his name harkens back to former homeland territorial conflicts in the 1920s. Mick and his brother Steve (Christened Tilemahos) were born three years apart in 1933 and 1936 in a village they call Opsirina (now known by the Greek name of Ethniko). In Australia they changed their surnames to Dimos.\textsuperscript{121} Born to very poor peasant farmers, their father, Chris, left immediately after Steve was born to join his father, cutting cane in Queensland.\textsuperscript{122} Thirteen years later, in September 1949, Mick joined his father, whom he hardly knew.\textsuperscript{123} Fourteen-year-old Steve and his mother, Velika, who had not seen her husband since Steve was born, arrived in January 1951.

When Mick married in 1956 he decided that he and his Macedonian wife, Stella, should look to build. Their sole reason for buying in Lalor was the low cost of the land:

I was looking in the papers for land to get an idea. And then land was dear, but this land here was cheap. And I said to myself, why pay so much money for living near the city, just to move further out a bit and save a bit of money, which I did.\textsuperscript{124}

They found a builder and on Anzac Day 1960 they moved in at number 147 Messmate St.\textsuperscript{125} He reported conditions in 1960 in terms that were almost identical to those of other pioneers. There was ‘nothing’, only ‘parrots’ and ‘farmers’.\textsuperscript{126} With no roads, no sewerage, no drains, and constant rain in 1960, he believed the street was appropriately named ‘because it is a mess’.\textsuperscript{127} Later Steve and his new wife moved to Thomastown. Mick said, ‘There are streets where nearly every house is Macedonian/Italian, Italian/Macedonian.’\textsuperscript{128}

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\textsuperscript{119} Connie Testagrossa, interview with the author, op. cit., p. 11.
\textsuperscript{120} ibid., p. 16.
\textsuperscript{121} Mick and Steve Dimos, interview with the author, 4 March 2009, pp. 2–3. Biographies of Mick and Steve Dimos can be found in Attachment A.
\textsuperscript{122} ibid., pp. 2–3.
\textsuperscript{123} ibid., p. 6.
\textsuperscript{124} ibid., p. 10.
\textsuperscript{125} ibid., p. 10.
\textsuperscript{126} ibid., p. 11.
\textsuperscript{127} ibid., p. 12.
\textsuperscript{128} ibid., p. 11.
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Both Mick and Steve were factory workers and they found their community through the Lalor Branch of the ALP for which they have worked tirelessly as volunteers for more than forty years. Despite his strong feelings about his Macedonian heritage, Mick thought deeply about political issues and for him workers’ solidarity was more important than racial identity, at least at the political level. He fought unsuccessfully against the formation of ethnically-based ALP branches: Italian, Greek, Lebanese, Turkish, Maltese and Macedonian. His conviction was ‘we are here as one. Why divide ourselves? We must work together’. Mick and Steve were in the Lalor Branch along with Lalor icons like Vic Michael, Doug Burgess and Hugh Indian. Through being part of a grass-roots political organisation and using political influence and fund raising to help people in need, the ALP provided a valued and very important part of the process of integration and acceptance into a new land. The Macedonian community also built its community around the construction of a church in High Street Epping. It was burnt and then rebuilt. They also built a chapel in Kinglake. In 2001, Mick received a Centenary Medal ‘for serving the Macedonian community’.

Peter Koulkoulas was born in Kalamata in Greece in 1944 and arrived in Australia aged nineteen. He had left home at fourteen and trained as a pastry cook. As one of ten children, he followed two older sisters to Australia. They had arrived in the late fifties and early sixties. Their future husbands had arrived earlier and invited them out. On arrival, Peter worked in a factory making roller doors. He told a poignant story, highlighting the difficulties of the language barrier:

And that was all Italian people in there. And I thought I was learning English. And I was going out and nobody understands me. I think, ‘what’s going on?’ (laughter). And then I realised it was Italian [I was learning] not English. So yeah, after that I went to school a bit in George Street in the night time.

When Peter arrived his future wife was a young girl, living with her family in Fitzroy, although by Christmas 1963, they had moved to 42 Curtin Avenue in Lalor. There were only about four or five houses in Curtin Avenue then. When she and Peter were married in 1972, Peter moved to Lalor also. Peter remembered that there were many Greeks living in the area by the late 1960s, including about 500 children who would be collected from the public schools and taken to after-school

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129. Mick showed me a photograph of a presentation in recognition of his forty years service to the ALP. The strength of his involvement is also apparent from the local ALP records. See Australian Labor Party, Lalor Branch, ‘Branch Papers’, held in the political papers of Harry Jenkins, MHR. Bundoolna.

130. Mick Dimos, interview with the author, op. cit., p. 15.

131. Whittlesea Post, 24 January 1974, p. 4. This chapel was lost in the 2009 bushfires.

132. Held in the private papers of Mick Dimos.

133. Peter Koulkoulas, interview with the author, 4 March 2009, p. 5. A biography of Peter Koulkoulas can be found in Attachment A.
classes. The pupils were rotated through, so each child attended two hours, twice a week. They learnt the Greek language, dancing and culture. Through this process the Greek community felt it was staying true to its roots, while watching a parallel integration of Greek children into the mainstream Australian culture through schooling. Peter Koukoulas kept even closer ties with the original co-operative. Two of his daughters married and bought PLC built homes at number 16 and 26 Gratwick Street, and prior to his death in 2009, Peter worked to restore them to their original state.135

In a similar way to Mick Dimos, Peter Koukoulas joined the ALP which formed the springboard through which he could contribute to his new community as a volunteer. Harry Jenkins (Jnr) reflected on the community-grounded nature of the ALP at that time:

Definitely, the thing that Dad impressed upon me, and I have had reinforced by others that were members of the Lalor branch, even through to the seventies, was that the branch was your classic community organisation. And if any of the comrades of the branch were under hard times, the branch would pitch in.136

In this it is important to see the local branch as the successor to the co-operative; born of the same commitment to social justice and characterised by the same hands-on approach to community activism.

Apart from the Italian, Macedonian and Greek experiences told above, those of communities of Maltese, Turkish, Lebanese, then Vietmanese, Samoans, Filipinos, Somalis and others are slowly starting to be told as well.137 It is hard to imagine what those might have been happening in their minds, comparing a home in Lalor to their previous lives in North Africa, the Middle East, Asia or the Pacific. For the locals, Janet McCalmann expressed the view that after the war, ‘urban Australians, especially the poorest ones, found their local worlds overrun by strange people speaking strange languages’.138 For some of these communities the change was fundamental but was not easy. This was true for Lalor too. From the point of view of the original settlers of Lalor, their working-class community eventually became like many others in the outer suburban boundaries of Sydney and Melbourne. They were the recipients of wave after wave of migrants who often spoke no English, brought

134. Whittlesea Post, 27 May 1970 p. 1, ‘Migrants pour into riding’. Two out of five adults living in the Thomastown Riding were European migrants. ‘Nearly half of the migrants come from Italy and Sicily. The country of origin of the next largest group is Greece.’
137. The City of Whittlesea Council has from time to time organised oral history interviews with some of these groups. Their stories are held at the Mill Park Library.

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different customs, cultures and religions, and, for some, threatened what they felt was their Australian way of life, however defined. It may have been particularly hard for the Lalor co-operative members, as their bonds of unity had been so strong.

By the early 1970s fundamental change had begun. The PLC baby boom generation grew up, was educated and most started to leave home. Their memoirs of the Peter Lalor Estate in the 50s and 60s, tell of a carefree, happy and overwhelmingly safe place, in keeping with many such memories of the baby-boom generation. Jan Wesselman (nee Indian) recalled ‘[w]e would roam the streets at night playing our games ... It was a safe environment’. It was nonetheless very deprived of infrastructure (for example, no swimming pool or library) and some were glad to leave. From the early 1970s several of the original co-operators died: Clive Lawson died in 1972, followed in 1973 by Jim O’Connor, Stan Murray, Nellie Lees, Rus McArthur, Nancy Wicks and perhaps others. Key families—like Dave and Chub Burgess and Norm and Kath Griffiths—had moved away and the hard core of Lalor originals became smaller, making the ever expanding number and diversity of migrants appear all the more overwhelming.

Looking back from the perspective of the 1990s the oral testimony reflects sadness rather than hostility. The sadness was as much about their sense of loss of the original community, as it was about the influx of new people. For the first two decades, they felt they knew everyone. Then, as Les Casbolt said, ‘the gradual dying off of the original members’ and the ‘big influx of ethnic people out here... I’m not derogatory ... it’s just one of those things’. It was the social fabric of their community they felt was unwinding. Harry Jenkins believed:

a lot of that idealism had died out of—I thought—either literally died out, or from those who had survived had deadened for the original Lalor core. Because by then the nature of Lalor had changed, because every wave of migration has had to be accommodated in Lalor and Thomastown.

There was perhaps some underlying racism in their feelings, but to the extent that it existed amongst some, most people swallowed their prejudices and remained

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139. Many of the children of the estate, now in their fifties and sixties, have written their memoirs for this project. They are listed in the bibliography.

140. See for example, Steven Carroll, The Art of the Engine Driver, Melbourne 2001. Set in a northern suburb of Melbourne, just south of Lalor, this award winning novel provides a literary backdrop which complements the stories told by Lalor baby boomers.

141. Jan Wesselman, ‘Memories of 65 Derrick Street, Lalor, where I spent the first 25 years of my life’. (Handed to me at a public meeting on 28 November 2007.)


144. Les Casbolt, interview with Ruth Ford, op. cit., p. 53.

145. Harry Jenkins, interview with the author, op. cit., p. 17.
overwhelmingly polite. The co-existence of parallel communities in some ways made it easier. However, accusations of racism surfaced in the broader Lalor and Thomastown area in 1973, when La Trobe University published the findings of 'an exploratory study' of 58 Lalor and Thomastown housewives. It reflected a younger generation and wider catchment than the Lalor originals. The Post's headline read 'Many Do Not Like Migrants', and although the Council protested the findings, the Federal Labor Minister for Immigration, Al Grassby, suggested the community take them seriously and he asked the Good Neighbour Council to extend its presence to Thomastown: federal government services arrived twenty years after the first waves of post-war migrants. Thirty-six Australian and twenty-two non-Australian housewives were interviewed and the issue which caused the furore was that half of the Australian housewives believed that there were too many migrants, they were 'too noisy, stay together [and] don't try to learn English'. There was truth in the Council's assertion, however, that the report was unbalanced. Notwithstanding the accusations of racial hostility, the report concluded that: 'people were generally satisfied with their lot. A term such as “urban crisis” does not apply to people in Thomastown [and Lalor], at least as they see it.' Perhaps of more interest were findings that reinforced the existence of what I have termed parallel communities. It stated:

The strongest feature of Thomastown social organization is the barriers that exist between various language groups. These groups look upon one another with coolness if not dislike, and the divisions which exist between them define the kinds of social interaction possible.

Those with young children had the most opportunity for social interaction and the 'institutions which provided nodes of articulation between people were of great importance'. Such nodes are the basis for the formation of social capital and preschools, schools and particularly the Catholic Church were mentioned. The study found little sense amongst the women of 'self-government' and the report made the finding that 'the notion of community per se did not really exist. The sense of connection with an institution did.' It seems that the researchers were expecting to find one multicultural community. They were shocked to find many sub-communities. Had they really looked inside the Peter Lalor Estate, they would have found one strong community, as Lahey and Ormonde had in 1977, diminishing in size, but strong nonetheless.
In 1976 Ross Dean, a new art teacher, arrived at Lalor High School. As he described it, 'the school stands as a grey mausoleum fenced off from its immediate surroundings'. For him it symbolised a disconnection between the school and its local area and what he described as 'the pessimism of the community of Lalor'. When asked, he recalled that students would deny they were from Lalor. From this nadir, the mural project 'With Our Own Hands,' was born. It was 'developed principally as an effort to turn a number of negative attitudes and feelings into a more positive outlook'. It investigated the history of the PLC which was already lost to many of those who now lived in the greatly expanded area of Lalor. The students interviewed some of the original cooperators and an exhibition celebrating the co-operative, including the mural, photographs and personal effects was held on 10 September 1981, back in the Trades Hall.

When seeking to find explanations for the dysfunctional community described by Ross Dean in 1976, apart from the enormity and diversity of the population growth, it is clear that there were structural reasons why the social situation had deteriorated. Many factors contributed. The long economic boom of the fifties and sixties ended in the early 1970s to be replaced by economic instability. Unemployment began to rise, particularly for migrants and unskilled youth, and especially in manufacturing, the main source of employment in the northern suburbs of Melbourne. The decline in manufacturing left a deep scar throughout the region. Paradoxically the numbers of married women entering the workforce began to rise, as did the economy's dependence on consumerism and consumer-based services. The impact of these changes which were euphemistically called 'structural adjustment' was profound in places like Lalor. The influx of migrants and the different processes for their community formation would have been fraught enough without these over-riding forces impacting as well. In circumstances such as these, we might expect that governments at all levels would direct their energies and resources to supporting the places of greatest impact. Unfortunately they did not. As Nieuwenhuyzen stated 'for almost the first twenty-five years of the [migration] program governments ignored the social impact of immigration'.

For Lalor, from the 1950s, successive federal governments were uninterested and state governments failed to keep pace with the demands for basic services. In the mid 1970s, for example, Lalor High School became the biggest in Victoria with more than 1300 students in a building designed to take 700, and this situation culminated

154. ibid.
155. Ross Dean, 'Art and the Community', op. cit.
in a teachers’ strike. Similarly, the Lalor Technical College operated out of 35 portable classrooms, which were haltingly provided and plonked unceremoniously on swampy land, before a permanent building eventuated after years of promises. Intermittent crime waves in the main were an index of the number of bored, unemployed youths.

Social disadvantage and neglect inspired some activists (as it had done with the Lalor pioneers) and it also led to apathy and quietude. Ultimately, it was the working-class people of outer suburbia—places like Lalor, where people learned to accept division and change with remarkable equanimity. Harry Jenkins (Jnr) recalled:

> Now in a way I think that we have managed to accommodate [the fact that] we’re under constant change... Now that is the thing that this community should either be acknowledged for or should be proud of, because it has accommodated [these changes] without the place becoming an awful ghetto where you can’t cross one side—where you don’t know the proper code word.

The broader Lalor community, through all its ‘sub-communities’, worked hard to fill the gaps in services despite the increasing pressures on their own resources as economic and social circumstances changed. As for the earlier period, it was the institutions and organisations creating social capital—the football and youth clubs, cubs, guides, scouts, parent committees, the ALP and the churches—which provided the opportunities for interaction between the cultural sub-communities. The informal youth club which had started in the Stockade, probably in 1949, was formalised in 1956 and gained council backing for a hall in French St. By 1971 the club premises had been extended twice and at least 400 members participated. And while the ethnic groups also had separate activities, the mainstream activities increasingly contained the full mix of nationalities. By this stage it was no different from any suburban youth club in a working-class area.

In other ways, however, Lalor retained some of its original ethos. A further cooperative surge in Lalor occurred in 1971. Again spawned by the original PLC, this time ‘The Thomastown, Lalor & Epping Community Improvement Co-operative Ltd’ was created as the entity to support a community newspaper called *Outlook*. The editorial board contained names of original Lalor families, such as Tate and Wicks, as the next generation of Lalor activists combined with some with European

159. Ibid., 29 March 1972, p. 3.
160. Ibid., 21 August 1974, p. 1, ‘Thieves Hit 18 Homes in Crime Wave’; see also 9 October 1974, p. 2; ‘900 crimes this year’.
161. Harry Jenkins, interview with the author, op. cit., p. 22.
162. It was probably a monthly publication, with the first issue appearing in March 1971.
names. It could be argued that the same, much smaller core—a second wave—kept struggling, but in a larger pool. Their newspaper tackled challenges such as those posed by their ethnically diverse community. They had lost nothing of the original PLC self-help ethos. In addressing the ‘challenges and problems... posed by the multi-national composition of our population’, the editorial stated in part:

it seems that the solution to this matter lies, not with the government or local Council, but with us, the citizens. If each of us is prepared to exercise such personal qualities as tolerance, friendliness and patience, we will then promote that mutual understanding required to meet this challenge.

Just as the first generation toiled to create the ‘kinderhall’, the activism of this second co-operative venture centred on the need for a municipal library, since on 27 February 1971 the State Lending Library in Swanston Street closed its lending services to the general public. According to Outlook, ‘it did so because 90% of municipalities in Melbourne now have libraries of their own’. The council claimed it was too stretched for resources; Outlook challenged Council’s spending priorities. A library opened in May Road, Lalor on 11 November 1976.

The overarching conclusion of these decades has to be seen in the context of sweeping change: a shift from a rural to an urban environment; a compounding increase in population numbers, including an influx of large numbers of different migrant groups; structural changes to the economy with a long post-war economic boom giving way to a decline in manufacturing and an increase in unemployment. Underneath these changes, there are constant themes: struggling working-class families moving to the furthest reaches of suburbia to find the only land they can afford on which to build their homes. Each group sees itself as pioneers, struggling with muddy conditions, lack of infrastructure and neglect on the part of government. Like the Peter Lalor Co-operators, the migrant families were largely left to their own devices.

Often within the confines of the local circumstances that they could control, many devoted their voluntary time, skills and compassion to growing their communities as strong and vibrant reflections of their cultures and their values. Parents did their best for their children, socially, economically and physically. For those who had first

163. Outlook, April 1971, p. 2.
164. Ibid.
165. Ibid.
166. Ibid., p. 3.
168. Lalor Library plaque, May Road, Lalor. Also, in July 1974, the Whittlem Government funded a Citizens’ Advice Bureau to be opened in Lalor with twenty volunteers and interpreter services. This, along with the Good Neighbour Council, was a concrete step from the federal government, to provide active support for a policy of multiculturalism. See Whittlesea Post, 10 July 1974, p. 1.
built through the PLC, they fulfilled the dream of owning their own homes and providing for several decades, 'ample light, air and space for the raising of families and the fostering of a genuine community spirit.'\(^{169}\) The migrant pioneers boldly followed an almost identical path. While they did not have formal co-operative arrangements to help them, their extended family and ethnic ties helped them form communities within communities, as they too gradually settled into their new surrounds. Some agents of social capital created links between the sub-communities, especially through schools, where children learnt English and the lives of the second generation in some cases improved with higher educational outcomes enhancing their employment prospects.\(^ {170}\)

The PLC ethos, however, had little impact outside its geographic parameters but even so a small flame still burned inside, as we will find in the epilogue which follows.\(^ {171}\) The waves of working-class people, whether migrant or not, who surrounded and then infiltrated their borders, seemed ignorant of the suburb's co-operative roots, and apart from St Luke's Credit Union and for a short time, the Outlook co-operative group, no formal co-operative organisations remained after the closure of the funding societies in 1977. The dormant Lalor Consumers' Co-operative Society Ltd was also officially deregistered in 1988.\(^ {172}\)

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\(^{169}\) PLHBCSL, 'Progress & Promise', op. cit., p. 2.

\(^{170}\) Jock Collins, *Migrant Hands in a Distant Land*, op. cit., pp. 187–221. Collins evaluated the extent of upward mobility of the second generation of migrants in Australia. The results were mixed, as 'class, ethnicity, gender and time of arrival become central features in determining the broad contours of migrant life.' (p. 154). Collins concluded 'that while Greeks and Italians have a high proportion of students who carry on to tertiary education, they also have a high proportion of those who drop-out before finishing secondary school' (p. 189).

\(^{171}\) To be discussed in the Epilogue.

\(^{172}\) Corporate Affairs Office, 'Index to Defunct Company, Association and Business Name Registrations', PROV, VPRS 8268-P1, Melbourne, 1864-1990[sic].

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CHAPTER 8: MORE CHANGE
EPILOGUE

‘Flag for Golden Memories’

‘The Lalor district has always been characterised by hard work and a pioneering spirit—a reflection of the man it was named after.’

These words were spoken by Peter Batchelor, MLA for Thomastown, at the 50th anniversary celebrations at Lalor Primary School in 2004. The Eureka Flag was hoisted in honour of the namesake of their suburb and the 150th anniversary of Eureka. Lalor Primary School was now educational home to more than 40 nationalities and, despite its significant challenges, continued its long tradition of outstanding pedagogy.

This marked an appropriate moment for another snapshot of the Lalor community in 2004 and to make a few points about the decades since the mid 1970s. I focus on Lalor’s continued relative disadvantage and its continuing parallel communities. There is room for optimism, however, as the Peter Lalor Co-operative (PLC) left behind a legacy of ongoing policy inspiration. I address two of them: affordable housing and community development.

After nearly sixty years, there were only thirty of the original co-operators and second generation offspring still scattered around the soldier settlement triangle. Importantly, they all owned their own homes. However, in terms of public space, there was no longer a sense of place they could call their own. Even if co-operative finances had permitted the building of their promised iconic Rochdale central

2. ibid.
square in 1949—with ‘a restaurant, beer garden, a theatre for concerts and plays, and art exhibitions, a library, modern swimming-baths, tennis courts, billiard rooms, a dance palais, picture theatre’—one wonders if this would have been sufficient to keep their dream alive through successive generations. Their much more humble ‘kinderhall’, after decades of providing a community hub, was demolished in 2004 and a new kindergarten was rebuilt on the original site, once owned by the LWSC. It nonetheless held firm to its original and important educational purpose, just as the original LWSC women would have wanted.  

The intervening years from the mid 1970s to 2004 have seen a further dwindling of the original co-operators’ population through natural processes of attrition, mobility and ageing. Nevertheless, throughout those decades, many of those who remained, including those from the second generation, continued to build the community’s store of social capital. For instance, June Smith, Beth Indian, Glenys Le Roy (later Williams) and Barbara Nelson (later Breaks) were just a few of the women actively involved in Girl Guides, while Anne Ramsay organised Scouts. Some—like Rea Michael, Min Follett, Barbara Breaks and Adele Casbolt—maintained the co-operative ethos generated by the LWSC, and worked tirelessly for the Women’s Auxiliary of the Helping Hand (an organisation helping those with an intellectual disability). The menfolk were also involved in the community through the Lalor Football and Youth Clubs and the RSL.

In 1979, the representational imbalance in Whittlesea Shire Council (WSC) between the highly populated south and the sparse rural lands to the north was finally redressed when there was a complete spill of all councillors. Bill Smith and Vic Michael from Lalor were both returned. Among those newly elected was Harry Jenkins, who was beginning his political career. Several new faces from the migrant community joined council with Italians Nick Ascenzo and Chris Montalti from Thomastown and Egyptian George Ishkan from Lalor. As Jenkins recalled, 1979 was ‘the first year of it starting to be a big change politically’ with nine of the twelve councillors Labor. By 1981 Bill Smith had retired and WSC’s first female councillor, Wendy Jenkins, was elected in his place and by the mid 1980s there were more representatives of migrant groups on council. Vic Michael remained until the 1990 elections, as the last representative from the soldier settlement triangle.

By 2004, Lalor, and its close neighbour, Thomastown, were still amongst the most disadvantaged communities in Victoria, squeezed between rapidly gentrifying

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5. Whittlesea Leader, 13 April 2004, p. 8. However, in recognition of the increasingly ageing demographic, the new pre-school was now combined with another from William Street, which closed.
7. Harry Jenkins, transcript of interview with the author, 25 October 2006, p. 15. All further references to interviews will cite the transcriptions of interviews.
older inner northern suburbs to the south, and the new suburbs on the northern and eastern fringe. As urban policy researcher, Brendan Gleeson, noted, many such middle ring suburbs remained in capital cities by the mid 1990s, with the 'differences between rich and poor areas appear[ing] to be growing'. Ironically, it is because of this level of disadvantage that it has been seen as attractive by waves of people, particularly refugees and other migrants, who could not afford to live anywhere else. Nothing had changed in nearly sixty years. Throughout the decades from 1960 to 2000, wave upon wave of migrants flooded into Lalor and Thomastown. The new suburb of Mill Park opened to the northeast, and Epping enclosed Lalor from the north. The industrial heartland in Thomastown that had been initiated by the Promote Thomastown Committee was replicated by WSC in Cooper Street in Epping, in readiness for anticipated further growth and housing development expected from 2004.

Lalor’s place within the urban development of the City of Whittlesea continued on a trajectory which had been set for it nearly sixty years before. When the co-operative pioneers moved out to the Peter Lalor Estate, Robin Boyd had warned them about their bleak site. The people made it work, despite the site and lack of infrastructure. The homes, the urban and house designs and materials, together with the block sizes, were of middle-class proportions in accordance with a dream of decent standards and social betterment. They planted their avenues of trees, and tended their gardens. They had great aspirations for their children. As an original Lalor ‘baby-boomer’, Lorraine Yeomans, put it, it ‘generally meant for girls to work in an office and boys to have a trade rather than work in a factory’. As discussed, although no rigorous statistical analysis of the second generation of this small co-operative community has been undertaken for this study, the impression from the evidence is that, in this regard as well, the co-operative triangle was an oasis. Unlike the suburb as a whole, the second generation—reared in such secure, friendly and unusual circumstances—has been remarkably successful in later life. Nonetheless, the suburb began as a collective of relatively poor people who first and foremost sought to put a roof over their heads and this objective remained unchanged for the new arrivals in 2004.

The population that followed the original settlers also sought affordable housing and for most of them, the homes they built, or later the homes they bought in Lalor, were simply that. Given their disadvantaged circumstances, for many it also represented the first time they had ever owned a home of their own. The aesthetic of those who followed was different, and before long the avenues of trees planted earlier were

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8. The SEIFA index of disadvantage for 2006, rated Lalor and Thomastown on the lowest decile of 1, a percentile of 7, and a ranking of 25 and 26 respectively. By comparison Bundoora was ranked with a decile of 7, percentile of 65 and a ranking of 369. Mill Park was similar to Bundoora.
felled, and some of the original houses were demolished to make way for Italian, Greek or Macedonian housing preferences. Some of the original large Saxil Tuxen corner blocks were subdivided for two and sometimes four units. The heritage value of the site was a well kept secret.

The 2001 census is worth pondering over in some detail as it provides an insight into the complex social and economic circumstances found in Lalor. From the humble beginnings of 200 households and 800 people in 1954, by 2001 Lalor had been completely transformed. It was home to more than 20,000 people, divided almost equally between those born in Australia and those born overseas. Almost 50 nationalities were represented. Approximately one third (6,698 of the 20,822 residents) spoke only English at home. Newer immigrants arriving in Lalor had predominantly come from North Africa and the Middle East and there was a significant population from Vietnam of almost 600. Between 2001 and 2004, migrants from Lebanon, the Pacific Islands and the Sudan made an important contribution to this growth. Three quarters of the population were Christian, overwhelmingly Catholic and Orthodox, and the next largest religion, with 1,856 followers, was Islam.

While the newer immigrant groups were typically young families with children, often renting and sharing, those Italian, Greek and Macedonian migrants who had built in Lalor in the 1950s made up a considerable ageing population. Of those who arrived before 1986, 1,941 people claimed they could not speak English well, or did not speak it at all. This created considerable challenges for aged care facilities and for services such as ‘meals on wheels’ to be conducted in culturally appropriate ways. The LWSC had actively sought to ensure young mothers were not isolated in suburbia, no one imagined that within fifty years, ageing migrant populations would be suffering similar potential isolation. Councillor Frank Merlino described the situation and continued failure of governments to appreciate the implications of migrant settlements:

There’s the issue of the ageing population. So the people who came here in the 50s who were migrants, whether it’s Greek, Macedonians or Italians, now those people are in their seventies and eighties and some of them are suffering. There are not sufficient homes for the aged and we have this

14. Among those aged over 65 years, the sum of Italian, Greek and Macedonian migrants numbered 1,470 people compared with 454 Australian born. Australian Bureau of Census and Statistics, ‘2001 Census of Population and Housing for postcode 3075’, (Lalor), op. cit.
situation where when the families can’t look after them, they get placed in a home where the nurses don’t speak their particular language, where the older people revert to their original language. There are a lot of human tragedies. And that is not appreciated, especially by federal governments who believe, ‘Oh well, the Italian community is well established, why do we have to help them out?’

By far the most pressing issue for the population in Lalor in 2001 was its very low educational attainment. More than 90 per cent of those aged over 15 were not attending any form of education, and only 6.2 per cent were attending TAFE or university. Life long learning was not a concept embedded in this community. More than 10.5 per cent of people over 15 years had left school before Year 8 and almost 400 adults had never been to school. Only about 17.5 per cent of people had any form of post-secondary education compared with an Australia-wide average close to 50 per cent. Research conducted by the Australian National Training Authority in 1999 drew attention to the high number of adults, Australia-wide, who felt under-educated and who would have loved to have been learning, but lacked the confidence or resources to do so. The Victorian network of ‘neighbourhood houses’ was deemed to be one of the most inclusive and least threatening of many post-secondary educational experiences. Nonetheless, unsure adults, particularly men, and especially those from non-English-speaking backgrounds, needed considerable encouragement to make a start.

The Lalor men fitted this profile: they were overwhelmingly employed in manufacturing, as were the majority of women, making them increasingly vulnerable to the ongoing exodus of much manufacturing off-shore, except for isolated pockets of highly skilled, value-added work. The women were, however, more evenly spread across retail, health and community services and other similar industries. About half the population (including children) used the internet, and lower than average computer ownership was reflected in high library computer usage.

In 2004, Lalor had the lowest median house prices in the City of Whittlesea, $238,000, with Thomastown the next most affordable at $250,000. South Morang, on the other hand, had a median house price of $279,300. While a significant minority of the Lalor population had resided in the suburb for many years, and would virtually live out their days there, others were almost certainly transitory.

16. ibid.
20. ibid. See also ‘Australian Household Survey, Lalor, 2004’, City of Whittlesea, statistical section.
As many of the new arrivals were finding their feet in 2004, some were preparing to upgrade to the newly emerging and wealthier suburbs opening up in Epping North. The movement north from the CBD, following High Street, which began post-WWII, would continue for a few more kilometres yet.

In 2004, the people of the City of Whittlesea had much to celebrate. The Whittlesea Leader ran with a headline ‘It’s an Open Hearted City’, as a small cross-section of the population was interviewed for ‘Harmony Day’. All reported that they had been ‘welcomed with open arms’. The council was now unusually popular with the residents of the city, as an independent study commissioned by the State Department of Victorian Communities assessed Whittlesea Council as ‘the top performer of all councils in middle and outer Melbourne for 2004’. By year’s end, an RACV Insurance report ranked Whittlesea with one of the lowest burglary rates in metropolitan Melbourne. By contrast, unemployment increased to 8 per cent, with youth unemployment an ongoing issue; homelessness was a constant source of distress with a very low rate of rental accommodation available (1.4% well below the Victorian average of 3.2%). The ‘Whittlesea Hotspot Study’ for 2002, which had previously focussed generally on public services, became singularly focussed on youth drug and alcohol abuse.

After opening in 1976, the Lalor Library had been well utilised. It was later remodelled, and in 2004 was packed mainly with students and young mothers, as well older residents who wandered in to read the newspapers available in multiple languages. A homework service was introduced by the council, to assist the children of newly arrived migrants to cope with these pressures. The small meeting room was heavily in demand, particularly by different ethnic groups, pensioners, women’s groups and the like. The Lalor Living and Learning Centre—a neighbourhood house in Cyprus Street which opened its doors in 1986—taught English language, TAFE and Adult Education programs, and provided another community meeting place. In 2004 the Centre moved to a new building in French Street, next door to the original Lalor Youth Club.

By 2004 the Lalor shopping strip along Station Street, first built by the Lalor co-operators, had expanded along the parallel May Road. It was a pumping, cosmopolitan centre. Nonetheless, the shops reflected the poor demographic, and

21. VicUrban, the Victorian government developer of the Aurora Estate in Epping North in 2004, based its marketing on a demographic which assumed the “natural market” for Epping North housing will be the south western precincts of the City of Whittlesea. See The Hornery Institute, ‘Aurora Context Study’, 1 April 2005, p. 17.
the separate ethnic groups meeting there, still reflected the parallel communities which had been forming since the 1950s. Macedonians, Italians, Maltese and Greeks had all created active, but separate, Senior Citizens’ Clubs, as had the Lalor and Thomastown Combined Pensioners’ Association, consisting mainly of Australian born residents. One of Lalor’s original residents, Honor Mackie, was Secretary in 2004. Luba Stambanis, who had established a Macedonian Women’s Group years before, served in an executive role with the Macedonian senior citizens’ group, while Connie Testagrossa was President of the Italian senior citizens’ club.

None of these developments within Lalor could have been imagined by the small group of co-operative members who humped their picks and shovels into dairying country to build their garden suburb in 1947. It begs the question: is there any legacy left from the PLC with its ambitious economic, social and political objectives? The remainder of the epilogue will consider this question.

The co-operative’s most important contribution was that it provided the impetus for the construction of at least 200 homes at a time of chronic housing shortage and thereby the nucleus of the suburb of Lalor was created. More than a hundred of their original architect designed homes are still standing. Some of these homes have been sensitively renovated; some are still well kept in their original condition while others are creaking under the strain of more than six decades. Many of these homes continue to provide affordable housing for new comers to the housing market. The Saxil Tuxen plan survived with just a few aberrations; the public reserve that housed the Stockade was still a park, though in 2004, scarcely used. The public area of Rochdale Square, which was to have been their community centre, in 2004 was in a similar state. Apart from the kindergarten, the Plenty Credit Co-operative in May Road continued as a successful and ongoing direct legacy of the Lalor Co-operative and St Luke’s Catholic Church, first started by co-operative residents, is still the heart of Lalor and the surrounding district for thousands of people of Catholic faith.

Another powerful social legacy has been the sense of community which has transcended the place. Despite physical dispersion, the original Peter Lalor co-operators, who were still alive in 2004, and their second generation offspring who were reared in the Peter Lalor Estate, have maintained bonds of friendship that are extensive, and, as I have previously identified, the networks were responsive. Physical gatherings still occurred for significant events, beneath the Eureka flag.

Perhaps the best legacy, though, arises directly from their inspirational story. While by their own standards their achievements fell short of their ideals, their smaller scale development nonetheless achieved something special and unique. In policy areas of affordable housing and community development, it is worth considering whether there are lessons to be learnt from their experience that can be translated into the changed circumstances of the twenty-first century.
Affordable housing in Australia remains an intractable problem. While home ownership still remains the great Australian dream, it is becoming increasingly difficult for people of low or middle incomes to realise it. As the Age economics editor, Tim Colebatch, wrote in March 2010: ‘If rising house prices make you and me as homeowners better off, they make our kids worse off. It’s a zero sum game.’ He quoted comparisons between 1987 and 2010, drawing the conclusion that as house prices had risen by 433 per cent and incomes by only 195 per cent, this meant that the ‘cost of a typical home... used to be 333 years’ disposable income. But now it costs six years’ income.’ Supply is not keeping up with demand, and is putting upward pressure on prices. Public debate is polarised between those wanting increased populations housed within existing urban boundaries, and those who want governments to orchestrate release of additional greenfield sites in the peri-urban areas on the outskirts of the major cities, often encroaching on our diminishing food bowl. There are strong environmental, cost and infrastructure arguments involved and, inevitably, considerable vested interests. Leaving aside these debates, it is clear that policy makers could seek inspiration from aspects of the PLC scheme. I discuss just one: the simple solution that was at the core of the scheme. Despite government and private sector inaction, they built the homes themselves.

One problem with housing supply is the shortage of people skilled in the building trades. There are many reasons for this: poor apprenticeship wages, the unstable and cyclical nature of the building industry, and young people (particularly women) are simply not attracted into what has been termed ‘dirty work’. Since the privatisation of many of the government instrumentalities such as electricity and water, apprenticeship opportunities have also diminished and been amortised across many smaller firms. Group Training Organisations (GTOs), which originated in the construction industry through Lend Lease in the early 1970s, were created to address some of these issues. They are non-profit organisations which employ and train apprentices, organising where necessary their rotation through different employers, as economic and skilling needs require. By June 2000, more than 2,000 GTOs were employing more than 36,000 apprentices in many different trades and industries. One lesson from Lalor is that non-profit entities such as these could, in my view, be put to a broader purpose.

As a small extrapolation from the PLC construction experience, GTOs could be given an expanded role to co-ordinate a system whereby groups of apprentices build their own homes. They could be established in small to medium sized collectives through which they would build their own homes, to gain the necessary building and construction on-the-job experience. A similar scheme was trialled in Birmingham,

28. Ibid.
29. Senate Select Committee on Affordable Housing in Australia, A good house is hard to find: Housing Affordability in Australia, Canberra, 2008, Chapter 5.
England, in which a group of unemployed men and women learned skills in the building trades by building their own homes, and they earned a percentage of equity in the homes once they had completed the number within the collective.\textsuperscript{30} Architectural commentator, Kevin McLeod, pointed to the benefits of this program:

The great thing about this project is that it shows how buildings, and the act of building itself, can make communities. It’s a terrific achievement to have built not only your own home, but your neighbours’ homes as well.\textsuperscript{31}

In Australia, a similar training scheme in 1992, called the Liverpool Project, was organised through the ACTU-Lend Lease Foundation and, after a successful trial, was expanded by 1999 to more than 50 individual projects. The emphasis of this scheme, however, was solely on skilling and employment without the added incentive of home ownership. However, the Maclean housing project in Cherbourg, Queensland in 1994 provided a successful example through which 22 indigenous Australians used the apprenticeship system to build 16 homes for Aboriginal communities in Maclean and nearby districts.\textsuperscript{32} As the Birmingham example demonstrated, unemployed young people gained trade level qualifications and gained equity in their own homes. By group building methods, including both men and women and through collaborative decision making, they also built a community. The comparisons with the PLC are striking. The prize of owning one’s own home could generate additional incentives for young people to join the building trades, and some might stay in the industry. Such a scheme would involve the reallocation of existing federal and state resources currently focussed in training and housing.

The creation of community on a broader scale is less tractable. Community strength was achieved in Lalor through struggle, isolation and external opposition as well as a dedicated community spirit and sense of post-war optimism and camaraderie. It was also a small community of only 800 people. It is not so clear how a diverse community of 20,000 people such as Lalor is today, can generate similar community cohesive strength, and perhaps it is not necessary. There are strong ethnic sub-communities co-existing in Lalor, which are predicated on their shared experiences. Each has its own agents of social capital, and many members have outside networks through employment, leisure, technology and other modes of contact that are not necessarily dependent on Lalor, the place.\textsuperscript{33} Many ethnic links are broadly based across Melbourne. At a general level there is also increasing evidence

\textsuperscript{30} Grand Designs, \textit{<http://www.channel4.com/4homes/on-tv/grand-designs/episode-guides/birmingham-the-team-build-o8-o6-12_p_2.html>}.  
\textsuperscript{31} ibid.  
\textsuperscript{32} This scheme was similarly sponsored by the non-profit ACTU-Lend Lease Foundation. See ACTU-Lend Lease, Foundation, \textit{You Can Make a Difference}, Sydney, 2000, pp. 41 & 73. It is an extra-ordinary omission that the housing being built for indigenous Australians in the Northern Territory and North Queensland, as part of the federal government’s ‘intervention’, is not similarly skilling indigenous tradesfolk as part of home ownership schemes.  
\textsuperscript{33} See for example, City of Whittlesea Statistical Section, ‘Australian Household Survey, Lalor, 2004’, op. cit.
that the concept of a neighbourhood is not as important in social relations as it might have been in the days of the co-operative. 34 I doubt that this is true of Lalor, as it continues to provide home to an ageing and settled population as well as providing a place where new arrivals seek to put down roots in a new country.

The suburb undeniably has ongoing social problems that reflect pockets of isolation, homelessness youth boredom and an extremely low educational base. The lesson of Lalor is that the solution does not lie in government intervention. Community strength is not created by government, though government funding is part of the solution. This was most startlingly demonstrated by the Lalor co-operators. Rather the solution lies in creating opportunities for lifelong learning and for inter-cultural co-operation around specific areas of community need to build shared experiences. This is not to imply an effort in government-sponsored social engineering. Rather, as in the case of the PLC, what is called for is the creation of organic, grass roots activism, which builds bridging social capital that in turn enhances the strength of the separate cultural identities, currently co-existing in the suburb, while at the same time, expanding opportunities for building intercultural strength and cohesion. Such grass roots activism as a community building tool is a potentially powerful legacy of the co-operative which could begin the address the current democratic deficit.

The essence of my argument here follows from the analysis of social capital discussed in the Introduction to this thesis. The original co-operative consisted of a group of people who explicitly were working-class. 35 If nothing else this provided a framework for their relationship to government and shaped their expectations. Accordingly many of the pioneers expected support from Labor governments and they received it at least in some measure. They expected nothing from Liberal governments and the record suggests they were right. Nevertheless, they built political and social organisations, or social capital, which provided the outlet for their interaction, activism and their empowerment. As we have seen, they were unable to effect structural change, but at the level of community, they had agency. The co-communities in Lalor could similarly benefit from mobilising collective activism. Although it may initially address only local issues, community cohesion could build from small beginnings to address broader issues of disadvantage. They are still overwhelmingly Labor voters but their expectations are less. Lalor, like many communities, still suffers from a democratic deficit reflecting a profound disillusionment with formal politics. The once vibrant and vigorous Lalor Branch of the ALP is moribund, existing in name only. Nevertheless, through this absence of faith in elite politics, new community networks and alternative forms of grass roots political activity can once again flourish. The peculiar circumstances of their

inception meant that the Peter Lalor Co-operators anticipated this development and have shown how it can be done.

On Harmony Day, 2010, the City of Whittlesea Council announced a new program called ‘Localities Embracing and Accepting Diversity, (LEAD) with State and Federal governments providing $900,000 over three years. The rationale is that, according to the CEO of VicHealth, Todd Harper, ‘[c]ommunities that support cultural diversity have been found to have better health outcomes’. Whittlesea had been chosen for this pilot program ‘due to its strong history of supporting diversity and ability to trial new and innovative approaches to complex social problems’. The emphasis of the program is to reduce discrimination ‘in order to build productive, socially cohesive and inclusive communities’.

In a major international study which first began in 1967, called the Whitehall Study Michael Marmot demonstrated the effect on health outcomes of the amount of control people felt they had over their work. Whitehall II in 1997 further investigated this issue. Ultimately poor health outcomes were associated with lack of control and better health outcomes were found when individuals felt empowered. This epidemiological study was partly translated in the World Health Organisation’s report into the Social Determinants of Health. Marmot was quoted in 2008 as stating that the power of grass roots organisations cannot be underestimated in creating better health outcomes. I am therefore hopeful that the funding obtained by the City of Whittlesea might be directed to its poorest neighbourhood, Lalor, and that this funding might in part be used to encourage the creation of grass roots organisations (social capital) in areas which would hearten the residents to take power and control over aspects of their lives that, at least at the local level, can be addressed by them.

By raising a Eureka flag, Lalor primary school celebrated an independence of spirit in Australia’s past. Teaching students about the diggers on the Victorian goldfields and the link to the co-operators who, in Peter Lalor’s name, formed the nucleus of their suburb, the children, representing 40 nationalities, were being given an opportunity to create social capital. In this process they might begin anew a pioneering tradition. Without necessarily ever knowing it, they may re-discover ‘The Idea’ that inspired the soldier settlers.

37. ibid.
Conclusion

'I think if we were all truthful, we all wanted a house. But, the idea was very good, and it’s the same, you know, if everyone works together, you can do things.'

The Peter Lalor Home Building Co-operative Society (PLC) began with a bold vision. It promised home ownership for working-class people in a time of chronic housing shortage and it sought to create a ‘new order’ of co-operative living. It combined ideals from the co-operative and ‘garden city’ movements, distributism and Catholic social doctrine. The PLC planned a subdivision of 1500 homes, accommodating more than 4000 people. It was to be the first of many co-operative housing settlements which promised a range of broad social and economic objectives. Their pre-fabrication and construction plant was built with this scale in mind.

Collective and individual biographies of those involved have revealed a community of people of scarce financial means. Symptomatic of this undercapitalisation, the co-operators bought land four miles north from the outer ring of suburbia, just north of the little village of Thomastown. Initially, the Commonwealth Bank refused to fund half of their proposed land purchase. Then, as the co-operators found the land became swamp in wet weather, they assumed the necessary drainage would be quickly installed by the local council and the Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW). This did not eventuate, further reducing the number of available lots for distribution amongst it membership. The local council was poorly equipped to handle the influx of new residents. As the scale of the PLC operations dwindled, the start-up costs could either be spread across fewer people or original investors would lose money. By default, they chose the latter. The council, a wary onlooker, then consolidated its reticence to invest in infrastructure. Waterlogged, impassable streets, open rat-infested drains and intermittent night pan services meant that

1. Doss Lawson, transcript of interview with Ruth Ford, 24 October, 1998, p. 93. All further references to interviews will cite the transcriptions of interviews.
many shareholders in the co-operative understandably had second thoughts about proceeding and wanted their money back. The War Service Homes Division (WSHD) failed to honour the spirit and the letter of its mandate and the defeat of the Chifley and Cain governments meant the PLC faced what was at best benign neglect and at worst active opposition from conservative regimes supposedly committed to promoting self-reliance and enterprise. Ultimately the co-operative built, or partly built about 90 houses; another 40 or so were also built by syndicates; and many others were self-built or built by private contractors. In all, about 200 homes laid claim to PLC impetus. Set against its promise it was a disappointing result, but set against the obstacles it was a remarkable achievement. Voluntary liquidation was the financial result and some members forfeited their deposits.

Many factors conspired to reduce the initial size of the development to one that was economically unsustainable. After an initial flurry of support by state and federal Labor governments, the PLC found itself isolated. The Peter Lalor co-operators adopted the English Rochdale co-operative model. Inspired by their defeat of fascism, and in accordance with its distributist ideology, the PLC sought to find ‘a middle way’ between the profit-making exploitation of capitalism and totalitarian state communism. Many in the labour movement shared the co-operators’ anti-capitalism and all were broadly nestled under the umbrella of socialism, but few thought co-operativism was the way to achieve it.

Despite their attempts to adhere to political neutrality in accordance with the Rochdale principles, the co-operative was clearly aligned with Labor. It had allies in government and, provided Labor remained in office both federally and in Victoria, it had some support. The co-operators were, to a large degree, doing the government’s bidding—or at least that was their perception. So, although they struck out on their own independent, middle way, it was on the assumptions that: the Chifley dream of a post-war controlled economy would come to fruition; that standard government-provided infrastructure—such as power, water, drainage, sewerage, telephones, transport and education—would be forthcoming; and that there would be federal government support for their employment programs as part of the Chifley government’s full employment agenda. By their assessment, at the end of 1946, all these were realistic expectations.

In reality, none eventuated. Rather, the Cain government was replaced, in late 1947, by the conservative government of Tom Hollway. Aggressive businessman Arthur Warner was made Minister for Housing and Materials, and many Lalor co-operators were convinced it was because of Warner and his big business associates that the PLC was unable to secure building materials and basic infrastructure. At heart they believed that they were starved of supplies because, by reinvesting profits, the co-operative was selling the houses too cheaply. And as Purcell intensified his personal attacks on Warner on radio and in print, a political struggle became a personal
vendetta, further isolating the co-operative. Finally, after the Chifley government’s powers referendums of 1944, 1946 and 1948 were defeated, dreams of a controlled economy faded, and by the end of 1949 bank nationalisation and the Chifley Government had gone as well.

As housing developers, the co-operators saw themselves as a ‘middle way’, positioned somewhere between the government-owned Victorian Housing Commission and private sector housing developers. As a one-off institutional structure, the PLC had no power base. It soon also became clear that, to the extent that any large building firms existed immediately after the war, they initially confined their activities to bidding for government contracts, effectively removing what, to many in the labour movement, should have been a sharp distinction. In the allocation of scarce supplies, the Victorian Housing Commission was understandably the state government’s highest priority. The federal government’s priority was the WSHD. This left most private housing construction to small enterprises or owner builders.2 Government quotas of building materials went in large measure to the Housing Commission and the WSHD (effectively to the few contracted big companies). The remainder was then, in practice, divided between master builders and owner builders (of which there were rapidly expanding numbers).

Amongst these arrangements was one medium-sized co-operative housing developer: the PLC. It did not fall within any of the above categories and was starved of supplies. By the end of 1947, with 153 building and construction workers employed at the pre-fabrication plant at the Stockade, the co-operative was perhaps one of the largest non-government construction enterprises building homes in Victoria. The Master Builders’ Association and other construction industry employer groups rejected the co-operative’s attempts to join their ranks. The PLC had hoped to be the vanguard of a wider movement, but as no other co-operatives followed their lead, they were isolated. Within this context, they became simply a group of committed working-class folk collectively trying to build homes by using the principles of the co-operative movement.

The blocking role played by the WSHD, following the change of government at federal level in 1949, was at best an opportunity missed. Had the organisation’s management seen the potential of the co-operative’s ideals, the WSHD could have partnered with the co-operative, ensuring that the small ex-service shareholders in the co-operative did not lose their money. Instead, their dead hand further served to cripple the PLC venture and those who suffered most were those for whom the WSHD had been created—ex-servicemen and women. WSHD simply made a profit.

At the broadest structural level, the Peter Lalor co-operators were working-class people on the outskirts of Melbourne and as such they were at the very bottom of the governments’ priority lists. They were victims of their own aims. They sought to help themselves and without much pause, governments at all levels were prepared to let them get on with it. As their material stocks dwindled, and they adhered to their employment programs, their self-help ethos moved into top gear and they greatly expanded their own production factory capacity well beyond their original plans, further putting pressure on their low capital stocks.

There can be no doubting that there was mismanagement. In the main the group was not equipped to manage such a complex and difficult venture. As for many co-operative ventures in Australia and overseas, they found the Rochdale principles a difficult framework, which ultimately proved unsuitable or such a complex undertaking. That said, in my view, Greenwood was competent, and so was King. It was a difference in values and allegiances that saw them on opposite sides of a management group which had divided by the middle of 1948. Purcell held true to his original vision, and his many contacts were essential ingredients in their early success. Unfortunately his strident political views also made powerful enemies which ultimately worked against the co-operative’s interests. We have seen that the collective was not served well by Fox; and the ALP did the PLC no favours in its rejection of Peter Russell whose building and urban planning knowledge was a vital missing ingredient after his departure.

Finally, by the early to mid 1950s, the co-operative movement was engulfed by the growing tensions inside the ALP. Even within Catholic circles, the Young Christian Workers (YCW), which strongly supported a co-operative movement, took a stance against the Santamaria led ‘Movement’ whose distributist agenda came a long second behind its anti-Communism. It was within this highly charged context of the Victorian Branch of the ALP that the PLC was situated. Although Labor was returned to office in Victoria between 1952 and 1955, Purcell had by then undoubtedly burnt many bridges after he contested the ALP pre-selection for the seat of Northcote against John Cain. Some believed, incorrectly, that Purcell ran as a member of the ‘Movement’, and this alienated those opposed to their tactics.³ He still had enough influence to pressure for the opening of the Lalor primary school in 1954, but by the time of the ALP split in 1955, it is likely that few were prepared to forgive him. This is surely one reason why the PLC story has been forgotten. When Purcell got caught up in the rancour that engulfed the Victorian Branch, the idea of co-operation lost one of its staunchest defenders and few in the ALP had any interest in keeping the story alive. It was not a light on the hill.

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Far more important, however, was the relationship at the very outset between the problem and the solution. The Lalor pioneers all shared an understanding of the problem—a chronic lack of housing—they all shared the aim—to provide good housing for working people who saved the world from fascism—but few of them shared an understanding of the particular solution, the co-operative. Of course, they embraced it at a general level: they were working together, struggling as working people do, as the diggers (miners and soldiers) had done. This is why they named their suburb Lalor (‘Lawlor’) as a flag of determination and defiance. But co-operation as a formal system was a vision cherished only by a few. Without them it quickly faded. It is for this reason that some of the stalwarts of this noble enterprise have forgotten—if they ever knew it—that Rochdale is pronounced with an ‘h’ not a ‘k’. The self-same people, however, still bridle when ‘Lawlor’ is pronounced ‘Laylor’. At one level this is simply a reflection of the fact that their original pronunciation—‘Lawlor’—has been under constant challenge and it still is almost every time someone opens their mouth. But leaping to the defence of ‘Lawlor’ is not merely a habit. The constant challenge to the pronunciation has kept alive the original idea that inspired the choice of name in the first place. Their defiance, at least, is alive.

The reasons for their financial failure were therefore social, economic, political and personal. At root, though, the failings were systemic. From the beginning, like all disadvantaged folk of meagre means, they suffered the spatial dimensions of disadvantage by being forced past the suburban fringe. Their poor, isolated site lacked amenities. Their working-class base meant they were under capitalised and their efforts to help with a post-war housing crisis were also unsuccessful because they were inspired by a post war-optimism which eventually left them isolated and powerless. In the end, Freestone’s summation of ‘[m]aterial shortages, undercapitalization, and waning idealism doomed the larger schemes’ appears close to the truth.4

They did, nonetheless, achieve something very remarkable. They provided a ‘garden city’ suburban design, which still today forms a central core of Lalor. Many of the 200 homes they built are still standing and those original residents achieved, through the co-operative, the great Australian dream of owning their own homes. They successfully created funding societies and, for as long as necessary, a co-operative store met their needs. A collective of Lalor’s women pioneers was determined to provide social and economic infrastructure for their community and they used a multitude of strategies to cleverly wield their power and bring the whole community along with them. The development and management of the ‘kinderhall’ is an inspirational story in its own right. Theirs is a remarkable achievement. At the community level the co-operators were politically and socially active and through their own creative efforts—their agency—they built their community with its own

brand of social capital: in its spirit at least, it was in accordance with their original dream. It remains strong, though physically dispersed to this day.

As the story has unfolded we have witnessed an ongoing struggle between dominating power structures and the agency of Lalor’s groups and individuals as they sought to gain some measure of control over their lives. As I proposed in the Introduction, by analysing their actions at the community level, we have been able to see how they carved out for themselves a civic space between the state and its citizens, within which they were able to wield some power and confront their democratic deficit, ahead of their time. They created social, political, and educational organisations through which they gave expression to their activism. Their experience in the labour movement ensured that all their organisations were formally constituted.

What of the role of the significant individual? It is undoubtedly true that, without Leo Purcell’s vision, drive, extensive political networks and persuasive skills, there would not have been the Peter Lalor co-operative venture. Despite the fact that his over-zealous defence of the co-operative may have alienated some key players, the co-operators of Lalor in the main remember him very kindly, and history will undoubtedly smile on him as well. He was not the first initiator of a great scheme to lack the capacity to implement, nor will he be the last. Lalor was also fortunate to find its own strong man in Vic Michael. There can be no doubting that the improved state of living for those in Lalor throughout the 1960s and 1970s was because of the individual agency of Vic Michael: his political toughness, his astute mind and unswerving dedication to improving the lives of those around him. In both cases, these men effectively used a political power base within the ALP for the direct benefit of those they served.

Later waves of migrants have transformed the suburb and made a significant contribution to its development. The early migrants were also pioneers who struggled with similar disadvantage and also created their own social capital, mainly within the confines of their ethnic communities. Today they co-exist in what continues to be one of Victoria’s most disadvantaged suburbs. Ironically, one advantage of the perpetuation of such disadvantage is that for sixty years Lalor has provided the means by which the poorest home owners have gained entry into an otherwise impenetrable housing market. Other solutions for lack of housing affordability must be found. And if the levels of disadvantage are not to be perpetuated for another sixty years, newer migrant groups need to be provided with more resources to encourage their participation in learning activities and the creation of grass roots organisations, within and between cultural groupings, which can empower their participation in actions to effect change, at least in their local area.
Sixty years on it is easy to point an accusing finger and say that the pioneers were idealistic failures and that their dream was doomed from the outset; that ‘The Idea’ was a bad one.5 Yes, the pioneers paid too much for unsuitable land that was too far from central Melbourne. Yes, the site they chose was poorly drained and unlikely to receive state services for years. Yes, the co-operators had limited expertise in a raft of critical areas: commerce; project management; building; finance. Yes, they had an unfortunate combination of ideological certainty and politically naiveté. Yes, they took crucial decisions based on compassion for individual members that cost the collective. Yes, they failed to realise that democracy and commercial success are a bad mix. Yes, despite their wartime experience in logistics they had little idea what it would take to make their dream a reality. Yes, they embarked on the scheme with an assurance that they could access essential materiel. Yes, they took the promise of a better world following the defeat of fascism at face value. They were guilty of hope.6

Under the weight of this litany of errors, the financial collapse of the co-operative is not surprising. Nor, it must be noted, is it unusual. Indeed, it is worth recalling that businesses—especially small businesses—fail all the time: often through a combination of poor planning and wild-eyed optimism. Could Lehman Brothers have done any better?

Moreover, if blame is to be apportioned, it cannot end with the Lalor pioneers: as we have seen, there were many failures deserving of a finger of rebuke. However, itemising the manifold failings of the Lalor pioneers should not blind us to their successes. They built a community that produced significant social capital of an enduring nature in a range of important local institutions and a network of personal relationships that survives to this day.

At the end of the day, however, the desire to apportion success or blame is a failure on the part of the historian. The establishment of Lalor is a story that is worth telling; it deserves a place on the historical record either way. Once the story has been recounted the historian has earned the right not to congratulate or condemn but—as Edward Thompson said, in the inspiring passage in the Introduction to this thesis—to embrace or reject values.7 If the Lalor pioneers were ultimately guilty of hope, so am I.

The greatest inspiration and lasting legacy arising from this remarkable story of human endeavour is provided by their capacity to co-operate in the building of homes and the strength of community that was created by the original PLC


6. They were not the only ones. As already discussed, Robin Gollan named the immediate post-war years, from 1945 to 1947, ‘the interlude of hope’. See Robin Gollan, Revolutionaries and Reformists: Communism and the Australian Labour Movement 1920–1935, Canberra, 1975, pp. 144–205.

7. See the Introduction p. 8.
residents. At a time in the twenty-first century when some, at least, appear to be wearying of the era of individualism and its materialistic values, Lalor (Lawlor) has the potential to inspire others. Although tinged with disappointment that much of their vision has been lost and their place in history, until now, forgotten, the original settlers might have been satisfied with this legacy.