

social democracy, market liberalism, and the experience of a new town

Thatcher's Progress: From Social Democracy to Market Liberalism through an English New Town

By Guy Ortolano

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There are three reasons why you should read this book. First, with the prospect of a Labour government on the horizon, Ortolano provides a timely reminder of the potential value of a genuinely social democratic approach to housing and planning. His study of Milton Keynes illustrates what a Labour government could do when it wanted to—and then what happened when Margaret Thatcher and Michael Heseltine took over responsibility for the project.

Second, the book offers a powerful examination of the New Towns programme and Milton Keynes in the broader context of modern British history. In so doing, Ortolano adds to our understanding of how political and economic forces shape urban development. This book should be required reading for all undergraduate and postgraduate students of planning.

And third, the book examines how Milton Keynes came about. Ortolano sympathetically explores Fred Pooley's efforts to promote the North Bucks New City for 250,000 people. Then he looks in some detail at the efforts to prepare the *Plan for Milton Keynes* and to create some parts of the city. Page after page, he brings the efforts of the Milton Keynes Development Corporation to life.

Serious scholars and 'Milton Keynes geeks' have a fourth reason—the footnotes. Although a Professor at New York University, Ortolano worked for weeks at a time over several years in the Buckinghamshire Archives, deep in the basement of County Hall in Aylesbury. It shows. His notes and references provide a rich guide to relevant academic literature and demonstrate the rigour of his research.

This is an unusual book. Ortolano combines an easy-to-read exposition of significant features of 20th-century Britain's political economy with thorough empirical research. He brings an understanding of social democracy and market liberalism to life and tells stories about some key players and a few of the

places that they built in Milton Keynes. He focuses mainly on the period between the mid-1960 and the mid-1980s, including the challenges from both Labour and Conservative governments.

Ortolano does not promise a comprehensive narrative about the project over 50 years. Nor does he look in any detail about how the Corporation invested over £250million a year (at 2023 prices) and the risks that had to be taken. However, in every chapter, He offers new insights into how a social democratic government can use powers and resources to build and create new places. Those who have been involved with Milton Keynes might challenge some of his interpretations and the odd fact. These could be healthy debates. Of more importance, as we prepare for a Labour government, this book will help to rebuild our confidence in British town and country planning.

If you buy one book about planning in 2023, buy this one. As a bonus, it includes 'Mahood's Map of Milton Friedman NewTown' from *Punch*.

Lee Shostak

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