

INTRODUCTION

City symposium

Forget middle England. Think city. Cities may be the key to survival in a global economy, because only cities have the people and the infrastructure to connect the local - whether that's national or small community - to the movements of a global economy. But it is in cities that many of the most extreme forms of poverty and alienation exist, and the inner-city community has recently been told by government that it must help itself.

Can the city governance, from the city council to the many agencies, shape the city as a creative, inclusive, decent place? Last year, the Urban Task Force, chaired by Lord Rogers, produced its report, *Towards an Urban Renaissance*, and the Government followed that with a White Paper on urban regeneration. The city will be a vital political battle-ground for the next few years. (Whether Britain's three new, symbolic of the millennium, cities - Aberdeen, Brighton and Walsall - will prove to have those qualities is much in doubt.)

We want to promote that vital discussion on the nature and future of cities, looking not just at their economies but also at the question of the 'recovery of the mastery' of cities, as it was put in *Cities for the Many Not the Few* published recently by Ash Amin, Doreen Massey and Nigel Thrift. For this issue of *Soundings* we have therefore asked several people to make a contribution to the debate.

In *Soundings* 13, Nick Henry and Adrian Passmore put forward a trenchant critique of the efforts of Birmingham City Council to re-make Birmingham as a

major player in the global economy. The focus on rebuilding the centre to make it pleasing to international investors and conference-goers and to brand-name shoppers has, they suggested, not only excluded local residents outside the circuit of smart money; it has also ignored the potential supply of money and energy that Birmingham's many races, religions and cultures could provide.

Here, Jon Bloomfield, one-time Londoner and now Head of Birmingham Council's European and International Division - giving his personal views - responds to their critique: come and look, he says, Birmingham is far from being the exclusive, big money centre that its critics imagine. Nick Henry, also a resident of Birmingham, responds to his rejoinder.

The model of a 'boosterist', entrepreneurial city council, frantically marketing itself and its heritage as a special attraction, is common to most cities today. Kevin Ward, Co-Director of the International Centre for Labour Studies, University of Manchester, compares the policies and methods of three 'second cities' in England. All three look and feel better places to be, he says, but those policies of 'McGeneration' have worsened the inequalities which are so marked in cities. David Donnison, past Chairman of the Supplementary Benefits Commission, turns our attention from the big space of globalisation to its ugly sister, those communities that have given up and been given up; these are the perennially blamed urban poor, many now stuck in 'publicly-funded transit camps'. Today, inequality works by pressing those outside the smart money circuit into intractable poverty from which they do not have the resources to extricate themselves. This could be changed by strong measures ranging from PR in elections through the quality of public services to the state accepting a role of final guarantor of employment and income

Meanwhile Phil Hubbard, Lecturer in Human Geography at Loughborough University, questions the starting premise that the city is a fixed place, with fixed workers and residents, which has to attract international investment to itself. A world city, he argues, is a place which can co-ordinate, even direct, the *flow* of capital or labour, and for this it must have the sort of producer service firm which has not yet settled in cities outside London. So, to truly connect to the global economy, city policies must think flow, not place.