



REVERSAL OF FORTUNES

THE POST-INDUSTRIAL CHALLENGE TO WORK & SOCIAL EQUALITY.
A CASE STUDY OF 'THE PARKS' COMMUNITY OF
NORTHWESTERN ADELAIDE.

By

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ABSTRACT

In 1938, the South Australian Housing Trust embarked upon its first attempt at building a large public housing estate in Adelaide's north-western suburbs. For the next twenty five years, over 3000 homes were built, with the majority for public rental to a labour force overwhelmingly employed in local manufacturing plants, government authorities and service industries. By the 1970s, this area became popularly known as 'The Parks', comprising the suburbs of Ferryden Park, Woodville Gardens, Athol Park, Angle Park, Woodville North, Mansfield Park and Pennington.

During the 1970s, the long-boom of the 1950s and 1960s had drawn to a close, with a series of factory closures, plant rationalisations and retrenchments causing the local unemployment rate to increase dramatically, from 3% in 1971 to over 16% in 1981. The collapse in unskilled and production line work, combined with the relative absence of alternative employment opportunities, contributed to a deeply recessed and unresponsive regional economy. In the twenty years to 1991, the local labour force had been halved, and the unemployment rate had peaked at 30%. At the end of 1999, it had taken a further nine years and an unprecedented period of national economic growth to reduce the local unemployment rate to a post recession low of 18%.

The Housing Trust, responsible for the construction of a stereotypical streetscape of double units and a residential area scandalously under-resourced in terms of its social and recreational infrastructure, began the long process of rebuilding the community in the late 1970s. A modest redevelopment program involving the selective demolition and refurbishment of its ubiquitous double-units provided a range of alternative housing types for both single-parent families and elderly residents. By the early 1990's, over four hundred new and refurbished homes, aged care units and multi-storey residences had been completed by the Trust and its private contractors.

However the State Bank financial debacle, the reduction in Commonwealth funding, a large public sector debt and the increasing reliance of tenants on rental subsidies, forced a re-evaluation of the Housing Trust's activities and the future management of its estates. In 1994, the State Government announced a major redevelopment of the area, based around a large-scale program of demolitions and the forced relocation of public housing tenants over a ten to fifteen year period. The project was officially launched in 1999, with the first tenants from Stage One relocated and their homes demolished, allowing for the completion of the display village and sales and information centre in 2000.

By focussing on a detailed study of The Parks community, it is anticipated that a better understanding under Australian conditions can be provided of: (1) the special, socially constituted nature of place; (2) the interplay of the global-local and the impacts of economic restructuring; (3) the inseparability of labour and housing markets; and (4) how the agency of private markets and the state interpenetrate each other (and can reinforce disadvantage).

In summary, The Parks and its constituent labour force was established by the state to underpin the profitability of industrial capital. It is now to be dismantled, its residents dispersed in order to recreate the conditions for renewed profitability (this time for development or property capital in the form of Pioneer Projects Australia P/L and the South Australian Housing Trust).