Welfare, Work and Poverty

Welfare, Work and Poverty Lessons from Recent Reforms in the USA and the UK

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welfare systems. Prior to serving as Welfare Policy Centre director, he served as director of Hudson's Madison, Wisconsin, field office. He also served as manager of a Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development welfare reform policy team. In both of these roles, Hein was instrumental in assisting the state of Wisconsin design and implement its ground-breaking welfare replacement programme. Jay Hein's other past professional positions include executive assistant, Illinois Department of Public Aid; assistant to the Illinois Secretary of State; and deputy director, Illinois State Library. He is currently co-authoring a Hudson Institute book on Wisconsin's successful effort to replace welfare with a work-based system.

Richard Pryke read philosophy, politics and economics at Oxford, then worked at the research department of the Labour Party (1958-1964). He was Labour parliamentary candidate for Portsmouth South (1964) and the Eye division of Suffolk (1966). He worked briefly at the Cabinet Office but resigned in protest at the 1966 economic cuts, arguing in Though Cowards Flinch, MacGibbon and Kee, 1967, that the government should have devalued. He undertook research on the nationalised industries at the Department of Applied Economics, Cambridge, became lecturer and then senior lecturer at the Department of Economics and Accounting, University of Liverpool. Dr. Pryke is the author of numerous works on nationalised and regulated industries, including Public Enterprise in Practice, MacGibbon and Kee, 1971; (with John Dodgson) *The Rail Problem*, Martin Robertson, 1975; and The Nationalised Industries, Martin Robertson, 1981. Previous publications on income distribution and poverty include Taking the Measure of Poverty: A Critique of Low-Income Statistics: Alternative Estimates and Policy Implications, IEA, 1995.

David Smith has been the economics editor of *The Sunday Times* since 1989, writing on economic and policy issues, including welfare reform. He is also an assistant editor and policy adviser to the newspaper. He writes regularly for a number of other publications, including *Management Today*. He studied economics at the universities of Wales, Oxford and London and worked as a professional economist before entering journalism. He has written a number of books, his most recent, *Will Europe Work?*, examining the prospects for European economic and monetary union in the context of inflexible labour markets. Two of his books, *The Rise and Fall of Monetarism* and *From Boom to Bust*, analyse post-war economic policy in Britain, while another, *UK Current Economic Policy*, is widely used by students. Other books include *North and South* and *Eurofutures*.

Foreword

Welfare, Work and Poverty is the first publication of the Institute for the Study of Civil Society (ISCS), previously known as the IEA Health and Welfare Unit. It is edited by David Smith, the distinguished economics editor of *The Sunday Times*.

Norman Dennis, a lifelong member of the Labour Party, writes with sadness about New Labour's failure to recognise the importance of marriage. On economic issues, New Labour has freed itself from the class-war mentality of the 'aberrational' Labour Party which dominated the 1970s and 1980s but, on cultural questions, many of its leaders still cling to the old mind-set. The family remains suspect as a haven for male domination and child abuse—images born of reliance on ideology rather than concrete experience.

David Smith examines the New Deal for the 18-24 age group and finds its impact to have been very limited. Buoyant economic conditions largely explain falling unemployment. The New Deal itself has been a huge waste of money.

Richard Pryke's essay suggests that efforts of the Government to tackle 'social exclusion' are based on the exaggerated claims about the extent of poverty made by the 'poverty-wallahs' and on a misunderstanding of its causes.

John Clark and Jay Hein of the Hudson Institute suggest the lessons from America, where responsibility for welfare has been decentralised to states leading to countless experiments which have produced dramatic reductions in benefit dependency and a renewed focus on self-sufficiency through work. As the welfare reforms of the Blair Government have evolved, the influence of American reforms has become apparent but so far the Government has been reluctant to learn the lessons of the most successful American states such as Wisconsin and Florida, where all who are capable of work are expected to take a job.

This study forms part of the wider research programme of the ISCS. The focus will be on four areas: health, welfare, education and the family, each underpinned by a single unifying theme: deepening public understanding of the institutions, beliefs and values which are fundamental to a free and democratic society.

The balance between the powers of government and the liberties of the individuals and organisations that make up a society is never resolved, and each generation must find its own solution. Today there are still areas where the realm of political decisions may have encroached too much onto the territory best left to the initiative of FOREWORD ix

individuals freely co-operating in their own localities. This is the special domain of the ISCS. The term civil society is intended to emphasise that in social affairs the alternatives to government are not exhausted by commercial services alone. There are also mutual, church and charitable organisations, quite apart from the informal support of neighbours and within the family.

The goal of ISCS studies of health care is to arrive at methods of provision which are unstinting in their support for the less fortunate but avoid the underfunding and lack of responsiveness to patients that, by common consent, bedevil the NHS. Similarly, education systems in this country and overseas will be examined to discover whether there are better ways of ensuring universal education, high standards, and parental involvement.

Studies of social security will ask whether there are alternative methods of providing a safety net, no less secure than the present system, but without its disadvantages, particularly its tendency to undermine personal responsibility and erode the social fabric by crowding out voluntary action. Analyses of the family will focus on improving understanding of the methods of raising children which have worked best, including families based on the lifelong commitment of both parents to each other and to their children.

David G. Green

Editor's Introduction: The Economics of Welfare Reform

David Smith

Cince there has been publicly-provided welfare, which in the case of England and Wales goes back at least 400 years to the Elizabethan poor laws, there has been a debate about welfare reform. From time to time that debate intensifies, and we are currently in the middle of one such period. Welfare reform has been one of the hottest political topics of recent years and the interest shows little sign of diminishing. The reasons are familiar. The return of economic stability and near full employment has failed to impact significantly on high levels of social security spending. Taxpayers, if not in open revolt over the burden of maintaining expensive and inefficient welfare systems, support political parties which pledge to do something about it. In an era where governments are concerned about their ability to maintain the tax base, particularly in the case of corporate taxes, this is a pressure that has to be taken seriously. Ageing populations, the emergence of a growing, welfare-dependent underclass and the sapping effects of modern welfare states on incentive, initiative and enterprise, also point the way clearly to the need for reform.

The term 'welfare reform', however, is also one of the most misused by politicians. Tiny measures, designed either to embellish the welfare state or to trim it around the edges, are dressed up as welfare reform when they are no more than good (or bad) housekeeping. Thus, late in 1999 Tony Blair was able to refer to changes in the benefit regime for the disabled and proposals to restrict benefits to criminals who refuse to fulfil community service orders as welfare reform. It is an area where politicians often appear incapable of seeing the wood for the trees. Perhaps they don't want to. And, by identifying welfare reform too often with only welfare cuts, they risk giving it a permanently bad name.

In this collection of essays, I hope that we have avoided this trap. I hope that we have also shown something of the range and variety of topics in this area. In my own essay, on two of the Blair government's bigger ideas, I have tried to show, firstly, that most welfare reform ideas have been around, perhaps in slightly different form, before. Recycling and rebranding are the names of the game. This is no bad thing if, in their new form, the policies are an improvement on what

has gone before. In the case of both the New Deal and the working families tax credit (WFTC), however—and this is my second point—it is far from clear that this is the case. When the Labour government took office there was an intense debate, led by the minister for welfare reform Frank Field, over the corrosive effects of means-tested benefits. The WFTC is a means-tested benefit, even if it is delivered as a tax credit, and its coverage is wider than the family credit it replaced. This might be more acceptable if the labour market effects of the WFTC were clearer. They remain, however, very uncertain.

However, welfare reform can work. John Clark and Jay Hein of the Hudson Institute, in their essay 'The Political Economy of Welfare Reform in the United States', describe the impact of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), passed in 1996 by a Republican-dominated Congress against the opposition of the Clinton White House. Despite its messy political antecedents, Hein and Clark describe PRWORA as the most important piece of domestic legislation passed in Clinton's time in office and, in consequence, argue that 'the 1990s... proved to be the most significant and innovative period for social policy in the United States since the 1930s' (p. 6). The single most unexpected development of the past decade has been the decline in the United States in the numbers receiving public assistance, over and above what can be explained by the strength of the US labour market. The authors argue persuasively that this, in turn, is largely due to the increasing onus on welfare recipients to work as a condition of receiving public assistance, embodied, for example, in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the 1990s' replacement for Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC).

It is easy, with the benefit of hindsight, to see the decline in US welfare claimants as a natural consequence of reform. And so it is. Hindsight, however, ignores the deep gloom there was about the prospects for welfare in the early 1990s. The Bush presidency saw the biggest expansion of welfare numbers since the Great Society programme of the 1960s. Increasingly, welfare had come to be seen as the insurmountable late-twentieth-century problem. Everybody knew about the sapping effects of welfare dependency and the emergence, as Charles Murray had pointed out in *Losing Ground*, of a growing underclass, detached from the rest of society, and apparently unresponsive to both carrot and stick. The drop in the number of welfare-recipients, of between 30 and 50 per cent in most states, has therefore, as Hein and Clark put it, been 'stunning'.

The decade of the 1990s has also been an extraordinarily fertile period for creativity in welfare reform. Led by states such as Wisconsin, no fewer than 43 US states have put into place welfare reform programmes that would have been barred under the old AFDC rules. The result is that, according to Hudson Institute projections, by 2005 fewer than two per cent of the population will be in receipt of TANF, which is roughly the same reach the welfare state had in 1960, before the great post-war expansion got into its stride.

Britain has much to learn from the experience of the United States in the 1990s. Unfortunately, in many respects welfare thinking in Britain has not moved on that far from the 1960s. Richard Pryke, in his essay, launches a powerful attack on the 'poverty-wallahs' in Britain, those who not only overstate the problem of absolute poverty—and therefore the need for welfare—but who also take it as read that the main problem for those they define as poor is that they do not receive enough benefits. If welfare is the problem, however, piling on more welfare is rarely the solution. There is, of course, genuine poverty in Britain, as there is in all developed economies, although the blurring of the lines between absolute and relative poverty serves nobody well, least of all those in genuine need. 'Today, as on every other day, 2,000 children will be born in Britain,' said Alistair Darling, the Social Security Secretary, in the summer of 1999. 'And in this, the last six months of the twentieth century, a third of those children will be born into poverty. If we do nothing, many of those children will not only be born poor but will live poor and die poor.'1

In saying this, the government minister with direct responsibility for this important area of policy is falling straight into Pryke's poverty-wallah trap, that of trying to show that 'the extent of poverty is worse than it appears'. As Pryke puts it:

The most fundamental criticism of the poverty-wallahs is that they have, due to their flagrant bias and ideological preconceptions, ended up by betraying the interests of those whom they seek to serve: the low-income population... Because the poverty-wallahs regard almost everybody who happens to have a low income at a particular point in time as living in poverty, they have failed to draw useful and necessary distinctions. In particular they have failed to inquire whether Britain has an underclass consisting, for instance, of those who are persistently poor (pp.34-35).

The real problem, on Pryke's analysis, is the existence of an underclass living in social housing, who have low or non-existent work incentives, and whose children, like their parents, suffer from poor educational achievement and low career expectations. Within this underclass crime is high, having children without cohabitation (let alone marriage) is the norm and those born into it suffer from serious inequality of opportunity. Pryke also explains how the existence of this underclass, which owes much to the system of housing benefit, has a corrosive effect that stretches well beyond its boundaries. It is the underclass, apparently living permanently on benefit, without much

of an onus upon them to do anything, which creates a mood, first of anger, and then of deep discontent with the system, among the hardworking poor. 'The fact that the underclass does so little work, and is mainly dependent on state benefits, means that the tax/benefit system is grossly unfair', he writes. 'Income is redistributed to the underclass from the working poor, although the latter are little or no better off' (p. 43). It also provides a powerful incentive for dishonesty and fraud. The government would claim, of course, that its reforms, and most notably the working families tax credit, are tackling this problem. But it is hard to see, when ministers are content to use such broad brush definitions of poverty, that they have even begun to understand the nature of the problem.

An official failure of understanding of the problems of modern society, and the willingness of successive governments to preside over 'sex free from consequences', lies at the heart of Norman Dennis' powerful polemic. In parts of Britain today, two-thirds of conceptions are to women whom the man had not needed, and usually did not intend, to marry. Nearly three million children in Britain are being raised by lone mothers—in one-and-a-half million households with children there is no father. Children born out of wedlock are more likely to suffer abuse, and more likely to die prematurely. As Dennis puts it: 'Children conceived and raised by both their married parents did better on the average ... than children conceived and raised under all other domestic or "care" arrangements' (pp. 50-51). As for policies of getting lone mothers into work, his position is that he would not start from there. Combining motherhood with work is hard enough, doing so without the father present as a committed and permanent member of the household significantly harder. And yet that is the best that the British government now offers.

Attempts to roll back the tide of lone parenthood are thus feeble in the extreme. Instead, the new political correctness not only involves the removal of any fiscal incentives for couples to organise themselves as a traditional nuclear family, but sees lone parent families as an equally valid (and equally treated) alternative model. According to this mode of thinking, the traditional family becomes a mythical construct that, if it ever existed, did so only at the expense of the exploitation, and often the abuse, of the mother. Or, it was purely a matter of economic convenience, not something that people, and certainly not most women, entered into as a matter of free choice. Dennis's attack on such views, on the arguments of Anthony Giddens, Tony Blair's favourite academic, and on the government's 1998 consultation paper *Supporting Families*, are so coruscating as to be entertaining. The point underlying them, however, is deadly serious. As he puts it:

On both the political right and the political left the case has been argued that the decline of the institutionalised family is already affecting the economy through the creation of a generation of poorly motivated young men. Sex without consequences, for all practical purposes complete for the male, is resulting now in the production of successive generations of boys who are not required to be, and do not feel they will have to be, adults whose lives will be governed by their responsibilities for their own children, and the mother of their children. The economic consequences are revealed most dramatically in the emergence of an unemployable male underclass, depending on state benefits and the proceeds of crime instead of productive work. In a vicious circle, the sons of these unattached 'circulating males' are brought up by unmarried and other lone mothers in households without the model of what male adult work would mean to them (p. 55).

If this sounds pessimistic, then perhaps it is. However, as Dennis puts it: 'The intellectual battle for ... the family, has at least and at last begun' (p. 80). The experience of the United States in the 1990s, as set out by Clark and Hein, shows that the traffic is not all one way. Starting from a position that was in many ways worse than that in Britain, intelligent welfare reform has achieved real progress. There are thus important lessons from America, not least in the importance of initiatives at state and local level. In Britain the philosophy tends to be that if something cannot be made to work nationally, there should be no attempt to make it work at all. In Britain, too, welfare management and control—usually failed control—over welfare spending have been substitutes for welfare reform. Britain (and its politicians) probably deserves the welfare state it has got. That welfare state has promoted the growth of an underclass and for too long has sapped incentive and honest effort. It need not be like this. And it is not too late to change.

The Political Economy of Welfare Reform in the United States

John Clark and Jay Hein

The Revolution in Social Welfare

\[\] elfare has been reformed in America. This essay describes how this transformation took place, and what it means for those who remain poor in the world's wealthiest nation. Through the unlikely partnership of a Democratic president and Republican Speaker of the House in 1996, the United States witnessed the most dramatic revolution in social policy since the New Deal reforms of Franklin Roosevelt in 1935. Ironies abound around this history-making initiative. It was Bill Clinton who campaigned for president calling for 'an end to welfare as we know it', yet he vetoed the first two welfare reform bills passed by a Republican Congress. A third attempt, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), was passed by the 104th Congress in mid-1996 over Clinton's opposition. He signed the bill against the advice of his closest advisers on welfare matters, many of whom resigned in protest. After signing the measure, Clinton campaigned for re-election both boasting about 'ending welfare as we know it' and appealing for votes as the best person to undo major parts of the reform.

Regardless of the ironies of its passage and implementation, the reform of welfare is indeed the most important piece of domestic legislation of the Clinton Administration. The 1990s in fact proved to be the most significant and innovative period for social policy in the United States since the 1930s. The word 'revolution' has been overused, all too often reduced to a mere cliché. This chapter argues that, in at least three respects, the changes in welfare policy are genuinely revolutionary.

First, the 1990s saw a stunning decline in the numbers of those receiving public assistance, dramatically reversing what had seemed to be an inexorable upward trend, and surprising even the most fervent proponents of reform. This decline in welfare rolls will probably go down in history as the single most fundamental unexpected social trend of the 1990s. While some claim that this trend is simply a response to the strong economy, past economic cycles prove

the point unconvincing. Consider that, during the Reagan years, the US added 20 million new jobs, yet welfare caseloads increased 13 per cent. And during the recent (late 1980s/early 1990s) recovery, the US added seven million new jobs and the welfare caseload went up 17 per cent. Further, recent Bureau of Labor Statistics statistics indicate that single-parent, female-headed households' employment rate increased dramatically in the mid-1990s, which is inexplicable without reference to welfare reform.

Second, the volume and ambitions of the policies implemented dwarf anything seen since the New Deal. Even before PRWORA was signed, a total of 43 states had received waivers from the federal government to implement policies formerly not allowed under the existing welfare law, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). This tendency among the states to require more work and responsible behaviour in exchange for public benefits combined with PRWORA to shrink the range of 'entitlements' for the first time since the establishment of America's welfare state in the 1930s. Simply meeting particular requirements of income and household size no longer entitles an individual to aid. Instead, after receiving aid for two years, recipients are expected to find a job (a version of Clinton's 1992 presidential campaign slogan, 'two years and you're out'). Moreover, most recipients will be limited to a total of five years of welfare eligibility over the course of their lifetimes. Withdrawing such a central set of entitlements certainly marks a major shift in the direction of US social policy and programmes. House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Bill Archer calls it the 'most significant change in American social policy in a generation', and on this point, at least, he is correct.

Third, the 'end to welfare as we know it' deserves being called a 'revolution' because it is leading many economists and social scientists to rethink the connection between the economy and public policy. Welfare policy is 'economic' in many respects. It makes up a significant percentage of government spending, and thus strongly affects macroeconomic performance. It has microeconomic impacts as well, shaping the economic choices made by individuals, households, and firms. But the economy is embedded in a larger social system. Moreover, much of what is most interesting and most important about the economics of social policy lies in the middle, between the microlevel of individuals and the macro-level of the aggregate economy. Examining welfare policy highlights the fact that the economy does not exist apart from the political system, apart from institutions and ideologies, or apart from individuals' normative beliefs and moral understandings.¹

The Beginning Of Welfare As We Know It

In 1935, responding to the Great Depression, Franklin Roosevelt introduced the Social Security Act. Title IV of the Act provided states with a cash grant that would allow them to aid needy children in families lacking one or both parents. This was to become what was at least symbolically the most important component of the American welfare system, Aid to Dependent Children (ADC). This programme was modelled after the Mothers' Pension funds of many states, which provided assistance to single mothers (at the time, mostly widows).² As with most social policies, the rationale for the programme was both moral and economic. Widows were seen as worthy of aid since they came to their condition through no fault of their own. More importantly, at a time of 25 per cent unemployment, legislators sought to remove from the labour market widows who might have taken the few available jobs from able-bodied males. At a microeconomic level, then, the direct subsidy ADC provided to families headed by a lone mother was meant also to serve as an indirect subsidy to households headed by able-bodied men. By assuring men that, even if they were to be killed, their wives and children would be cared for, that is by socializing some of the risk facing families, ADC reduced the amount of money they felt they had to save to cover unfortunate contingencies.

ADC was driven by institutional, meso-economic concerns as well. Cost concerns played a role since it was believed that providing a small grant allowing poor mothers to continue to care for their children would be less expensive to society than paying for the care of children in orphanages. Families, even those headed by a lone mother, were deemed better institutions for educating and instilling values in children, that is for developing human and social capital.

The Social Security Act and ADC were formed with the belief that certain institutions were unable to meet the needs of an increasingly integrated national economy stretching across the North American continent, unable to cope with economic crises on a magnitude of the Great Depression. One set of inadequate institutions were the private charities, both religious and secular, which had for the first century and a half of the United States' history been most responsible for providing for the poor and needy. A second set of institutions considered inadequate for the challenges of the 1930s were the state and local governments. The federal government alone was seen as possessing the nation-wide taxing powers needed to mobilise public assistance on a large scale. Later it was argued that the Federal government alone could claim to stand above the narrow interests of local communities and governments in order to meet the needs of the poor and the unfortunate in a just and professional manner. ADC

began a sixty-year process in which competencies and responsibilities for providing public welfare flowed from private organisations and local levels to Washington, DC, a process that began to be reversed only with the adoption of PRWORA in 1996.

From 1940 to 1960, changes in the nature of ADC paralleled changes in the broader American society. When the programme began in 1935, eight out of ten recipients were widowed; by 1960 fewer than one in ten on the welfare rolls were widows. The vast majority of cases on ADC were divorced or never-married. In 1961 the ADC programme was renamed 'Aid to *Families* with Dependent Children' (AFDC), signalling a new social contract with the nation's poor. Whereas Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal intended to support children whose lone mother had no capacity to support them on her own, the 1960s generation considered welfare a valid, even positive, end in itself for poor families.

This change in attitude and subsequent policies led to the greatest expansion of the number of families and individuals receiving AFDC. From 1964 to 1972, the number of families receiving AFDC more than tripled, from less than a million to more than three million.

The reason for the dramatic increase in welfare cases in the 1960s was not a Great Depression-style collapse of the American economy. In fact, the economy was booming, overheated by the massive government spending on the Vietnam War (which created an acute labour shortage by removing hundreds of thousands of uniformed young males from the civilian workforce). Instead, three major transformations within American society contributed to the increase of cases.

First, many Americans—especially policy experts—began to think of poverty differently. Rather than being the hapless victims of particular circumstances outside their control (as were the widows and poor children originally targeted by AFDC) or being responsible for their own conditions, the poor came to be seen as victims of the broader economic system. The most influential exemplar of this perspective was perhaps Michael Harrington, whose *The Other America* greatly shaped the thinking of the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations.³ The change in thinking that saw the poor as deserving as much dignity and respect as the prosperous was matched with a more troubling view that saw the receipt of public assistance as a profession deserving as much respect and dignity as gainful employment.

One sign of this thinking was the rise of a powerful 'welfare rights' movement that actively informed the poor of their opportunities to receive AFDC, food stamps, and other public benefits. At its height in 1971, the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO) had 540 local organisations across the country and a membership of tens of thousands of poverty lawyers and public interest attorneys, welfare caseworkers, social advocates, and grassroots activists. NWRO moved

beyond providing information to the poor: it actively recruited potential recipients. Sometimes, welfare rights advocates even tried to convince able-bodied poor people who would be willing to find work that by leaving the rolls they would be betraying the causes of justice and dignity to which the NWRO was committed. 4

A second broad social change contributing to the expansion of welfare in the 1960s was the civil rights movement. In their quest for equal treatment within society, African Americans were driven by a desire to compete as equals with whites, no longer to be barred from jobs because of the colour of their skin, no longer to be denied places in universities because of official and unofficial prejudice. Along with these demands went a demand that the African American poor be entitled to the same public assistance that whites received. The removal of formal and informal barriers to African Americans led to an increase in the total number of recipients of AFDC as well as an increase in the proportion of recipients who were black.

A final social transformation that redefined welfare was the changing status of women in American society. Women of all classes increased their participation in the workforce during the 1950s and 1960s, increasing their opportunities for self-sufficiency, independent of husbands. Divorce and separation were less stigmatised, and the birth of children to unwed mothers became much more common. The result was a growing bifurcation among women. Fewer married mothers were willing or able to remain outside the labour market and devote themselves full time to raising their children; at the same time, an increasing number of those women who could stay home by receiving AFDC and other forms of public assistance were unmarried mothers.

Gaining dignity for the poor, bringing African Americans into society as fully equal members, and providing women with the opportunity to achieve independence on their own merits, were noble causes that transformed existing institutions such as AFDC in ways unforeseen by those who created the institutions in the 1930s. (Many opponents of radical welfare reform implicitly assume that reform will intentionally or unintentionally roll back these achievements for women, the poor, and ethnic minorities. Many advocates of reform have not adequately addressed or even acknowledged these fears, which has led to the failure of many reforms in the past to generate widespread social support.) Welfare was intended to protect widows from economic hardship, to preserve the integrity of the family. But by the 1970s, it was becoming clear that it was contributing to the formation of many fatherless families. Welfare was intended to meet the needs of those unable to work, yet it eventually penalised any meaningful attempts to gain work experience or save money.

Table 1
Recipients of AFDC, 1960-1980

Year	Recipients	US Population	% of US
			Population
1960	3,005,000	180,671,000	1.7
1961	3,354,000	183,691,000	1.8
1962	3,676,000	186,538,000	2.0
1963	3,876,000	189,242,000	2.0
1964	4,118,000	191,889,000	2.1
1965	4,329,000	194,303,000	2.2
1966	4,513,000	196,560,000	2.3
1967	5,014,000	198,712,000	2.5
1968	5,705,000	200,706,000	2.8
1969	6,706,000	202,677,000	3.3
1970	8,466,000	205,052,000	4.1
1971	10,241,000	207,661,000	4.9
1972	10,947,000	209,896,000	5.2
1973	10,949,000	211,909,000	5.2
1974	10,864,000	213,854,000	5.1
1975	11,165,185	215,973,000	5.2
1976	11,386,371	218,035,000	5.2
1977	11,129,702	220,239,000	5.1
1978	10,671,812	222,585,000	4.8
1979	10,317,902	225,055,000	4.6
1980	10,597,445	227,726,000	4.7

Source: Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/news/stats/6097rf.htm

It became apparent that the extension of welfare had developed its own momentum, as each policy change produced new and unanticipated economic incentives for recipients. This 'Law of Unintended Consequences' is well summarised by Mickey Kaus, who says that the expansion of welfare under the Great Society began a decades-long process in which liberals tried to eliminate the perverse incentives of welfare by broadening its coverage. Unfortunately, each extension of welfare created new problems, which in turn could seemingly be solved only by extending welfare still further. If the problem was that unemployed fathers were deserting their families, then (liberals argued) you should offer welfare to poor families with unemployed fathers who hadn't deserted. But that created an incentive for fathers to become unemployed. To eliminate that incentive, it was necessary

to extend aid to families who were employed, but nevertheless poor, which created another perverse incentive for the family to split up if the husband began earning enough to move out of poverty.⁵

As a result of the broad social changes becoming evident in the 1960s and the self-propelling momentum of welfare extension that was unleashed, the amount of money being spent on welfare increased greatly. In constant dollars, welfare spending increased more than four times between 1960 and 1980. While total public spending on welfare was increasing, however, the amount each family received began to shrink.

The reason that benefits were allowed to shrink could have been because many Americans began to change how they viewed those receiving assistance. For instance, the increased number of African Americans overcoming previously existing legal barriers to receiving assistance led many whites to view welfare as 'a black problem', even though far more whites than blacks were on AFDC. Working mothers expressed resentment that they had to sacrifice their family life to make ends meet while 'lazy' single mothers received money for nothing. In fact, whereas an increasing percentage of children in families receiving AFDC were born to single mothers, many Americans began to draw the unsupported causal connection that the desire to receive more assistance motivates poor women to have more children out of wedlock. Finally, the increasing proportion of women in the workforce led to a questioning of the original rationale for AFDC in the 1930s, to prevent impoverished widows from taking jobs away from men. In short, a growing number of recipients of welfare led to an increase in total social spending on public assistance; at the same time, a growing perceived distance between those working and those receiving assistance resulted in shrinking benefits per recipient family.

Table 2
Total Benefit Expenditures and Average
Monthly Family Benefit, 1960-1994

	1960	1970	1980	1990	1994
Total Benefit Expenditures (millions, 1996 dollars)	5,407	16,803	22,445	22,414	24,802
Average Monthly Family Benefit (1996 dollars)	559	734	523	470	397

Source: 1998 Green Book: Background Material and Data on Programs within the Jurisdiction of the Committee on Ways and Means, US House of Representatives, Washington DC: 1998, Table 7-2, p. 402.

The hazardous consequences of long-term receipt of welfare were becoming clear by the 1970s. Individuals detached from the labour market experienced an erosion of much of the human capital they had accumulated when they stopped acquiring new skills and education. Worse, perhaps, was a loss of social capital by the non-working poor. Without jobs, poor people failed to form the network of contacts and associations that are critical for moving up the career ladder. Nor does it seem easy to obtain and maintain 'soft skills' such as punctuality and respect for authority without the discipline of regular work. This latter consequence mirrors what Tony Blair often refers to as social exclusion.

Policy makers were quite aware of these social and economic dynamics. One aspect of the changing view of AFDC since the 1960s was a rethinking of the economic rationale for public assistance. It was originally intended to provide husbandless mothers with a substitute for paid work. With the changing position of women in the broader labour market, however, welfare began to be conceived of as a way of smoothing or facilitating the entry or re-entry of recipients into the workforce. Welfare recipients could use the period of time during which they received public relief to search for a job that best fitted the recipient's skills and experience. §

Similarly, welfare began to be seen as a possible way for individuals to gain further education or acquire new skills. The period of time spent receiving public assistance would be used to invest in human capital, which would make the individual more productive when she re-entered the workforce. These new visions of the possibilities and limitations of welfare were reflected in a host of reforms attempted since the late 1960s. Some were variations of 'workfare', making receipt of welfare contingent on accepting government-created jobs. Others tied public assistance to enrolment in school or training programmes. None were considered an unqualified success. The federal government appears to have been ill-equipped for designing training programmes that fitted local labour markets. Make-work jobs did not provide recipients with the sorts of skills and experiences that would make them employable in the private sector. And most programmes proved vulnerable to various forms of fraud.

A growing popular dissatisfaction with welfare during the 1970s was a leading factor behind the presidential victory of Ronald Reagan in 1980. Paralleling the influence of Harrington's *The Other America* on the War on Poverty in the 1960s, Charles Murray's *Losing Ground* helped provide the 'Reagan Revolution' with an economic critique of welfare.⁷ Murray argued that the perverse incentives of welfare lead to increased rather than reduced dependency, and make the poor

worse off than they would have been had they received no aid at all. Yet 12 years of Republican presidents whose administrations treated Murray as unquestioned truth did not see an end to welfare. The numbers did not go down during the strong economic recovery of the 1980s, and got much worse during the recession that followed the end of the Cold War. The Bush years (1989-1993) witnessed the greatest expansion in the numbers of welfare cases since the second half of the 1960s.

Table 3
Families Receiving AFDC, 1981-1996

Year	Recipients	US Population	% of Population
1981	11,159,847	229,966,000	4.90
1982	10,430,960	232,188,000	4.50
1983	10,659,365	234,307,000	4.50
1984	10,865,604	236,348,000	4.60
1985	10,812,625	238,466,000	4.50
1986	10,996,505	240,651,000	4.60
1987	11,065,027	242,804,000	4.60
1988	10,919,696	245,021,000	4.50
1989	10,933,980	247,342,000	4.40
1990	11,460,382	249,913,000	4.60
1991	12,592,269	252,650,000	5.00
1992	13,625,342	255,419,000	5.30
1993	14,142,710	258,137,000	5.50
1994	14,225,591	260,372,000	5.50
1995	13,652,232	263,034,000	5.20
1996	12,648,859	265,284,000	4.80

Source: Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/news/stats/6097rf.htm

An observer around the year 1992 could justifiably have concluded that the chances of reversing the percentage of families receiving welfare was about the same as the chances of implementing meaningful and effective reform in the welfare system: almost none. This is why the decline of welfare cases in the 1990s has been so stunning. Declines of 30 to 50 per cent are the norm for most states. Some counties have seen the number of families receiving public assistance fall from the thousands to the dozens (see Table 4).

Table 4
Change in Selected States' Welfare Caseloads
Since Enactment of 1996 Welfare Reform

State	August-96	December-98	Per cent (96-98)
Idaho	21,780	3,128	-86
Wyoming	11,398	1,913	-83
Wisconsin	148,888	33,807	-77
West Virginia	89,039	27,529	-69
Mississippi	123,828	43,499	-65
Florida	533,801	227,156	-57
Texas	649,018	330,616	-49
Michigan	502,354	279,245	-44
North Carolina	267,326	148,782	-44
Ohio	549,312	319,912	-42
Pennsylvania	531,059	325,546	-39
Illinois	642,644	414,872	-35
California	2,581,948	1,850,898	-28
New York	1,143,962	833,045	-27
Indiana	142,604	113,680	-20
Minnesota	169,744	138,030	-19
US Total	12,241,489	7,648,649	-38

 $Source: \ Department \ of \ Health \ and \ Human \ Services, \ Administration \ for \ Children \ and \ Families, \ http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/news/stats/aug-sept.htm$

Just how much of this decline can be attributed to new policies, and how much results from other causes? We return to this question in the final section of the chapter. Before answering it, however, it is important to clarify how welfare policies have changed in the 1990s.

Components Of The New Welfare System, And Their Implications

On 22 August 1996 President Clinton signed into law the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA), a comprehensive welfare reform plan that dramatically changed the nation's system of public assistance into one requiring work in exchange for time-limited aid. The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) programme replaces AFDC, ending the federal entitlement to assistance. PRWORA is part of a much broader stream

of social policy changes and innovations during the 1990s; likewise, PRWORA itself is composed of many diverse strands and tendencies. Untangling these strands helps make sense both of what has been implemented as well as of what lies ahead for social policy reform in the United States.

Moving the able-bodied poor from welfare to work. Expecting, even compelling, individuals to work rather than to rely on welfare cheques is seen as the most important aspect of American welfare reform. With few exceptions, TANF recipients must work after two consecutive years on assistance. Families who have received assistance for five cumulative years (or less if defined by the state) will be ineligible for cash aid under the new welfare law. By the year 2002, each state is expected to have moved half its 1997 welfare caseload into some form of employment. A recipient's failure to participate in work requirements can result in either a reduction or termination of benefits to the family.

PRWORA continues to conceive of welfare as ideally helping individuals to search for an optimal match of skills and jobs, or to invest in human capital. To count toward state work requirements, recipients are required to participate in unsubsidised or subsidised employment, on-the-job training, work experience, community service, 12 months of vocational training, or they may provide childcare services to individuals who are participating in community service. Up to six weeks of job-search (no more than four consecutive weeks) would count toward the work requirement. However, no more than 25 per cent of those meeting the participation rates of each state's caseload may count toward the work requirement solely by participating in vocational training or by being a teen parent in secondary school.

Devolution of primary responsibility from the federal level to states and cities. Before, states received money from the federal government to administer AFDC according to very strict requirements. PRWORA, by contrast, gives states enormous flexibility to design their TANF programmes. Except as expressly provided under the statute, the federal government may not regulate the conduct of states.

This tendency toward devolution had begun in the 1990s before the passage of PRWORA as states such as Wisconsin were granted waivers from federal mandates in order to experiment with new programmes. A political trend in the 1990s, of which the importance perhaps only now in retrospect becomes apparent, has been the election of several politically astute and innovative governors in American states. Without this pool of strong leadership, the increased authority for states to experiment with reforms might not have been fully utilized.

Moreover, the 104th Congress came to power in 1995 committed to sweeping decentralisation in many policy spheres, not only welfare. Welfare policy was, however, the only area in which the groundwork for decentralisation had been prepared by years of local trials and errors. Thus what had been exceptional waivers in the first half of the decade have now largely been institutionalised.

In TANF, states operate their own programmes rather than merely administering federal programmes. States receive a block grant allocation covering benefits, administrative expenses, and services with a requirement that they maintain a historical level of state spending known as 'maintenance of effort'. (Congress wishes to avoid charges that states are being encouraged to make draconian cuts in their welfare provisions.) States themselves determine eligibility and benefit levels and the services provided to needy families.

At the same time, the increased freedom to design their own programmes comes at a cost for states, which find themselves under stringent pressure from the federal government to shrink their welfare rolls. By the end of 2002, each state will be expected to reduce the number of families receiving welfare to 50 per cent of those receiving aid in 1994, or face a sharp reduction in the money it receives from Washington.

Despite the effort to give states greater freedom to define their own programmes, Congress still sought to shape the goals states each would pursue. According to the law, states may use TANF funding in any manner 'reasonably calculated to accomplish the purposes of TANF'. This wide-ranging set of purposes goes beyond just pushing welfare recipients toward employment, and includes:

- providing assistance to needy families so that children can be cared for in their own homes
- preventing out-of-wedlock pregnancies
- encouraging the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

Shift in the locus of social power from state to market. An increased emphasis on the labour market is only one aspect of the shift from state to market. Another is the trend toward contracting out the provision of welfare services to private companies. An example of this is Lockheed-Martin, the largest defence contractor in the United States, which has contracts in several states to calculate and issue welfare benefits, and to help potential recipients find work or training.⁸

Again, Wisconsin was the leader, the first state to privatise entire parts of its welfare delivery system. State officials initiated competi-

tion between county governments and private agencies for service delivery rights, and 63 counties won the right to administer the Wisconsin Works (W-2) programme. But although only nine private firms won contracts, they serve the majority of welfare cases in the state. For example, Milwaukee holds 80 per cent of the state's caseload, and five private agencies administer welfare in that region. As an added incentive, contractors can earn profits through administrative efficiency and programme effectiveness. In November 1998, W-2 agencies applied for their first share of these returns. The Milwaukee agencies earned more than \$8 million in profits and more than \$2 million in community reinvestment money.

Increased competition appears to be working in ways predicted by economic theory, as costs are falling and (after initial periods of learning) services are coming to be delivered more efficiently. But more important than the micro-level changes have been meso-economic changes in the institutional culture of welfare delivery. In many states, former government employees in the welfare system have been transformed into employment and training specialists. Rather than sitting behind a computer and determining eligibility, staff can now actively engage with families to help identify assets, solve problems, and provide on-going support and encouragement. The welfare offices are also being transformed. Rather than the process- and rule-driven bureaucracies that characterised the AFDC environment, today's operation is often a state-of-the-art workforce development centre, where welfare staff work in collaboration with other local employment, education, and safety-net agencies. Quite often, these agencies are even located at the same facility to offer one-stop shopping for clients.

Ideally, in an increasingly competitive environment, the welfare system should be no longer about processes, but performance. Many of the contracts which are written between states and local agencies feature clear expectations about outcomes. And good performance is rewarded. In one private agency, the financial and employment planners can earn between \$45,000 and \$60,000 a year based on how effective they are at placing participants into jobs. To illustrate how powerful incentives and culture change can be, this same agency reports that some union employees have become some of the highest-performing staff, even though they cannot receive additional pay due to their union contracts. Why is this? The agency director believes it's because the employees now understand what a 'win' is—which is getting participants into jobs and helping them connect to the workforce. Also, he believes people are naturally competitive and that colleagues always try to outperform one another.

Re-emphasis on civil society. States would not be alone in trying to

reduce the numbers of families receiving public assistance. The new welfare law greatly increased the ability for government to contract out the provision of services to for-profit corporations and not-for-profit organisations. One of the most controversial parts of the new law, called 'Charitable Choice', allows faith-based organisations (FBOs) to provide services to welfare recipients without impairing the religious nature of the organisation. This is a significant departure from past government practices, which forbade the use of public funds for religious activity. Indeed, if a faith-based organisation provided job training or counselling prior to 'Charitable Choice', the group was forced to exclude any reference to spirituality. Under the new law,

- The state cannot infringe upon the religious nature of the organisation. It cannot demand that it remove crosses, religious books, statues, icons or other symbols of its faith.
- The organisations retain their independence from federal, state, and local governments. That means the state cannot tell the organisations they cannot discriminate on the basis of religion, nor can it interfere with the 'definition, development, practice, and expression of its religious beliefs'.
- FBOs cannot refuse to serve people who do not embrace their religious beliefs.
- If a recipient does not want to be served by a group with a religious affiliation, the state must provide an accessible alternative within a reasonable period of time.
- An individual cannot be discriminated against for refusal to take part in a religious practice.
- While the state cannot discriminate against an organisation merely because it is religious in nature, neither is it obligated to contract with such a group; this is not an affirmative action programme for FBOs. All organisations must prove they are capable of rendering quality services to the beneficiaries and of meeting the terms of their contracts or agreements.
- FBOs may not use any of the government funds for sectarian worship, instruction or proselytizing, and the state has the right and responsibility to audit these funds to assure their use for intended purposes.
- States with laws prohibiting or restricting the use of state funds in or by religious organisations, (and there are several states with such statutes), are not obligated to expend their own funds in this way. While states without such provisions may use their own

funds as well, states are only mandated by this law in regards to federal monies. These particular funds are those allocated to the states by TANF in the form of block grants.

'Charitable Choice' represents one of the more intriguing efforts to redefine the institutional infrastructure of welfare provision in the United States. Seen purely in traditional economic terms, it is a way of reducing the cost of offering public assistance. Opening competition for government contracts to FBOs increases the number and variety of organisations competing. Moreover, by drawing on the volunteer energies of the faithful in providing services, it is hoped that costs can be cut even more.

But for those who most forcefully advocated its adoption, 'Charitable Choice' represents a new way of thinking about how individuals are shaped by institutions. Engaging FBOs, claim these advocates, is not only a way to cut costs, but also to change the motivations and belief structures of welfare recipients. It is, in other words, part of a new understanding of the meso-economics of welfare, perhaps even a new understanding of the relation between economy and public policy.

Rethinking The Relation Between Economy And Policy In The Future

The causes and implications of the dramatically falling caseloads in the United States are disputed. Proponents of reform attribute the massive flight from welfare to the new law, and to the numerous state-and local-level reform initiatives made possible by the new law. Benefits have been trimmed, time limits imposed, and welfare caseworkers now push aid recipients to find jobs rather than remain idle.

Critics of welfare reform, by contrast, claim that even had Clinton vetoed PRWORA (a course recommended by many Democrats), the booming economy has generated such a strong demand for workers that many erstwhile and potential recipients of welfare would have found jobs. Proof of this, they say, is that caseloads were falling across the country even before PRWORA went into effect. The danger of mistaking coincidence for cause will become painfully clear when the current boom inevitably comes to an end. The least skilled and most vulnerable who will be among the first to lose their jobs will fall through a social safety net that has been slashed by 'reforms'. The consequences for poor families, they say, will be appalling.

At a conference in late 1998, bringing together some of the top economic experts in the US, most agreed that as low-skill workers, former welfare recipients are particularly vulnerable to an economic

downturn. A future recession will cut the job opportunities for these workers by as much as half. Based on models from previous recessions, a downturn comparable to that of the late 1980s could lead to an immediate welfare caseload increase of some eight to ten per cent. Finally, because of the time-limits and resource reduction of PRWORA, states will be unable to cope with the increased demand for welfare. ¹⁰

Unfortunately, by basing their models on previous recessions, the experts are missing some of the ways fundamental demographic and economic trends shape the worlds of work and welfare, both today and in the future. 'The end to welfare as we know it' should be attributed not to astute legislation or to a cyclical upturn of the American economy. Instead, 'the greying of America' has made possible the demise of the welfare system. This may seem surprising. An ageing population, after all, requires more rather than less assistance. Providing pensions and social security for the retired, medical care for the elderly, convalescent care for the infirm ... all will increase greatly as the 'Baby Boom' retires. Many predict that these escalating social costs will necessitate an expansion rather than reduction of the welfare state.

True, the needs of an ageing America will place pressures on government resources. Hudson Institute's *Workforce 2020*, like most other analyses of demographic trends, focuses primarily on the distressing economic implications of the shrinking ratio of the working to the retired population. It should not be forgotten that older citizens tend to vote more often than younger. An outcome of the 'greying of America' thus could be an increasing tax burden imposed on workers to fund transfers to the politically more powerful elderly. (Avoiding this sort of self-consuming 'political arithmetic' will be one of the major challenges for America's leaders in the next century.)

What matters for the future of the welfare system in the decades ahead will not be a greying America's demand for government assistance, but rather a greying America's demand for workers, and in particular for relatively unskilled workers. The demand will be for much more than people to polish shuffleboard courts and provide sponge baths. For instance, several of the fastest growing occupations through the year 2005 will be in health care. Much of this increased demand results directly or indirectly from the greying population, and most of the jobs will require low- to semi-skilled workers.

In short, we could soon be returning to the past in a fundamental way. The percentage of this country's families receiving welfare in the near future will be about the same percentage as in the distant past. Given the emerging pattern of demand for low- and unskilled workers, given the requirements to reduce their caseloads being imposed on

states, and given even the most pessimistic assumptions about national economic growth into the next decade, we estimate that by the year 2005 about 1.7 per cent of American families will receive Temporary Assistance to Needy Families. This is exactly the percentage of families receiving aid in 1960.

As we move 'back to the future', the critical arena will be the post-welfare status of families. The economic and demographic future of the United States all but guarantees that 'ending welfare' will succeed in the long term. The 'worker dearth' and taut labour markets stretching as far as the eye can see mean that virtually every able-bodied adult who wants a job will be able to find a job. To put it bluntly, it's easy to 'end welfare as we know it' because these days it's easy to chase people off welfare and into a job.

However, it is one thing to leave welfare, and another thing to leave poverty. The consensus is clear. The old AFDC-style welfare system was incapable of moving families from poverty to economic well-being. In order for PRWORA to do any better, the challenge will be for programme administrators to do a better job of preparing welfare-to-work participants for their jobs and careers in local labour markets. The first job after welfare may not pay much more than the welfare package. If a new worker remains at that wage, welfare reform will not have achieved its promise. But if that job leads to increased wages and a career progression, these families will be able to escape poverty permanently and be in a better position to help their children avoid future welfare dependency altogether.

How to deal with the intractable hard-core, and how to ensure that those who do find work are able to provide a decent and rewarding life for themselves and for their families? These questions will dominate the welfare debate in what can effectively be called the 'post-welfare reform' era in the United States.

Welfare and Work

David Smith

Welfare, which for the purposes of this essay I define in the narrow sense of social security or public assistance, is living proof of the rule that throwing money at a problem will rarely solve it. In 1949, at the dawn of the Beveridge welfare state, UK social security spending, in 1997 prices, totalled £12 billion, 14 per cent of all government spending and roughly five per cent of gross domestic product (GDP). By 1998-9, social security spending had risen to £100 billion, a third of government spending and 12 per cent of GDP. And yet, according to the Labour government's own assessment, this is money poorly spent:

Inequality and social exclusion are worsening, especially among children and pensioners, despite rising spending on social security; people face a series of barriers to work, including financial disincentives; and fraud is taking money out of the system and away from genuine claimants.¹

If high levels of social security spending are so harmful, one obvious solution would appear to be to reduce them. A system that encourages fraud, produces serious disincentives, and does little to solve the problems it is intended to solve, has so little to commend it that dismantling it and starting again would appear to be the obvious solution. This, unfortunately, is not what has happened. With each government, each minister even, the social security system has acquired new layers. As a former permanent secretary at the Department of Social Security told Nicholas Timmins: 'You have to remember that every minister who went through here wanted to leave his or her mark on the system and very few failed entirely'.²

Even without these planned additions to spending, social security appears to defy normal controls. One of the lasting achievements of the Thatcher government, it is often said, was to break the link between benefits and earnings, the annual uprating of the basic state pension and a range of other benefits being linked instead to the retail prices index. By the mid-1990s this saving, on its own, was worth £8 billion a year. So why was this not reflected in significantly slower growth in the overall welfare budget, which rose by an average of four per cent a year in real terms between 1979 and 1997? The answer was that containment in one area of social security spending simply added to demand in others, such as income support, housing benefit and the

various disability benefits. One Treasury official likened it to trying to flatten a lumpy mattress. Downward pressure exerted in one area simply resulted in additional spending elsewhere. In the 20-year period 1978-98, the number of people claiming incapacity benefit, for example, tripled to 1.75 million. Only towards the end of the Conservative period in office, in the mid-1990s, did the rate of growth of welfare outlays slow, and this largely by toughening the qualification criteria for certain benefits.

Governments have not found it difficult to define the welfare problem. The Labour government's green paper, *A New Contract for Welfare*, produced when Frank Field was the minister for welfare reform, summarised it well:

The welfare system has failed to keep pace with profound economic, social and political changes. The machinery of welfare has the air of yesteryear. It often fails to offer the kind of support needed in today's world. It chains people to passive dependency instead of helping them to realise their full potential.³

Moving beyond definition to action has, however, proved to be a much more difficult challenge. Piecemeal containment, as we have seen, does not work. If the spirit of Beveridge was that of the universal safety-net, to prevent people falling into poverty, the spirit of modern Britain is increasingly that of a claimant culture, increasingly supported by legal judgments. It is hard now to recall that a serious concern of social security ministers and officials was once the low take-up of certain benefits.

Eight Principles Or One?

The 1998 green paper set out eight principles for welfare reform. They were:

- The 'new welfare state' should help and encourage people of working age to work where they are capable of doing so
- The public and private sectors should work in partnership to ensure that, wherever possible, people are insured against foreseeable risks and make provision for their retirement
- The new welfare state should provide public services of high quality to the whole community, as well as cash benefits
- Those who are disabled should get the support they need to lead a fulfilling life with dignity
- The system should support families with children, as well as tackling the scourge of child poverty
- There should be specific action to attack social exclusion and help those in poverty

- The system should encourage openness and honesty and the gateways to benefit should be clear and enforceable
- The system of delivering modern welfare should be flexible, efficient and easy for people to use.

Of these, the last six need not detain us. They are the welfare equivalent of motherhood and apple pie. The second, which so far has only emerged in the sphere of 'stakeholder' pensions, is potentially interesting. The Labour government appears significantly less radical in this area, however, than its Conservative predecessor. The most relevant and important principle, therefore, is the one that emphasises the importance of work.

Work suffuses this government's welfare reform agenda. It includes the New Deal for the young (18-24) unemployed for more than six months, as well as older age groups unemployed for longer periods and single mothers. It includes the working families tax credit and the childcare tax credit. The initiatives abound, all directed at the aim of steering increasing numbers of welfare claimants into the labour market. The strategy, which has its origins in Labour attacks when in opposition on soaring social security spending as the rising 'bills of failure', can claim support from bodies such as the International Monetary Fund and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. So-called active labour market policies are very much in vogue.

On the face of it, there would seem to be very little to disagree with in such a strategy. Encouraging people to work rather than exist on benefit, 'a hand-up rather than a hand-out' in Tony Blair's phrase, would appear to have everything going for it. Dependence is replaced by self-sufficiency, low self-esteem by pride. 'Hysteresis', where unemployment breeds further unemployment because the long-term unemployed lose their ability to reconnect with the labour market, is reversed. The vicious circle of high unemployment boosting the social security budget, which in turn requires an incentive-destroying increase in the tax burden on the employed, is broken. Instead, there is the development of what Gordon Brown describes as a 'work-your-way-up' society.

It all looks astonishingly simple. Why did the previous Conservative government not latch on to it, instead of presiding over mass unemployment and a consequent failure to contain and control welfare spending? Has Labour hit on the solution to a welfare problem that has dogged British governments for 30 years or more? The promise of full employment, which ministers have become bolder in restating as a policy goal, would also appear to offer the prospect of a return to something like the situation of the 1950s, with the welfare effort

mainly directed at those who, through no fault of their own, were unable to work. The enticing vision of a combination of full employment and a more minimalist welfare state is apparently once more on offer. Or is it? Every minister, as Timmins noted, comes to the job determined to reshape Britain's welfare state. It follows that there is very little in this area that is entirely new, whatever the political spin put on it. It is in this context that we should analyse Labour's initiatives on welfare-to-work.

The Not-So-New Deal

In the 1980s, the Conservative government recognised the problem of youth unemployment. Young people leaving school, college or university and graduating directly to the dole queue appeared to indicate a failure of society, let alone the economy. Idle hands often turned to mischief or crime. In that period there was a particular demographic problem of the 1960s' 'baby-boomers' entering the workforce. A variety of schemes was therefore introduced in an effort to ameliorate the problem. Nigel Lawson, in his autobiographical account, *The View from No.11*, gives a flavour of these:

There were a great many specific policies introduced in the Thatcher years to improve the working of the labour market. By the time I became Chancellor in June 1983, some £2 billion a year was already being spent on special employment and training measures for 850,000 people. New government measures included the Youth Training Scheme; the Community Programme to give work to the long-term unemployed; and the Enterprise Allowance Scheme, which paid people unemployment benefit while they set up in business on their own.⁴

Interestingly, these measures were widely criticised, particularly by the Labour opposition for either being crude and pointless 'make-work' schemes for the unemployed, or for being a blatant political attempt to massage the unemployment figures down. Labour felt no qualms, however, about proclaiming its own scheme, the New Deal, on being elected in 1997. The New Deal was financed in a special way, by means of a £5.2 billion 'windfall' (i.e. one-off) tax on what the government said were the excess profits of the privatised utilities. Just over half of this £5.2 billion, £3.15 billion, was earmarked for the expenditure over five years on the so-called flagship New Deal programme, targeted at 18-24 -year-olds unemployed for six months or more, in order to meet Labour's election pledge of getting 250,000 young people off benefit and into work. (This initial estimate of the cost was revised down to £2.2 billion by 1999.) A further £350m was aimed at long-term unemployed in other age groups who had been out of work for two years or more, with £200m budgeted for a separate but related New Deal for lone parents. A quarter of the amount raised by the windfall

tax, £1.3 billion, was allocated for an entirely different purpose, that of 'tackling the run-down infrastructure' in Britain's schools, and buying computers for classrooms. Thus, something less than £4 billion over five years was allocated for the labour market aspects of the New Deal, not much more, in 1997-8 prices, than the Conservatives were spending annually on labour market measures in 1983.

Proponents of the New Deal would argue that it is different, and better, than earlier schemes, because it is tightly targeted on specific groups, notably the 18-24-year-olds, because it involves a greater element of preparing people for the labour market, the 'Gateway', and because it offers greater flexibility and choice between a variety of options. The Gateway, up to four months of personalised help (although many New Dealers have in practice remained within it for longer) is either followed by a move into an unsubsidised job or one of four options—six months in a subsidised job, six months with a voluntary sector organisation or with the environmental task force, or a move into education and training. As ministers say, there is no 'fifth option' of staying at home. Those who refuse to co-operate face the loss of their benefit.

The New Deal remains relatively young—the pilot programmes only began in January 1998 and the scheme went national the following April. It has operated in benign economic circumstances, with employment rising strongly. Indeed, this appears to have been a central factor in the performance of the New Deal so far. At the end of October 1999, David Blunkett, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, announced that the New Deal had enabled 144,600 young people find work, with a further 92,100 on either the environmental task force (20,200), working in the voluntary sector (21,100) or in education and training (50,800). These were, on the face of it, impressive figures. Closer inspection revealed, however, that of the 144,600 jobs, only 106,870 were 'sustained'. In 37,710 cases, the young people had returned to benefit, jobseekers' allowance, within three months. No figures were provided for others who had returned to benefit, but after a longer period in employment. In a period of labour market strength, this was a high figure. It also opens up the serious possibility that for many the New Deal is mainly about ensuring continued eligibility for benefit. Before it was set up, it was envisaged that the main route out of the Gateway would be into subsidised jobs. In fact, a relatively small proportion of New Dealers have taken this option, with employment and training the most popular destination. It may be that, for people taking part in the New Deal, a subsidised job carries with it a stigma, or it may be that re-entering full-time education or training offers an easier option.

Whatever the reasons, it is clear that the New Deal is a long way from being the success ministers have claimed it to be. Most of the New Dealers who got unsubsidised jobs would or should have got them anyway if the Employment Service was doing its job. Despite the fact that 58,000 employers have signed up to the New Deal, many bemoan the quality of the candidates they are provided with or, more frequently complain that, despite being willing to recruit from the scheme, they are offered no candidates at all. If the New Deal is mainly a way of directing the young long-term unemployed into education and training, that could be a good thing. Initial evidence suggests, however, that two-thirds of those who complete their period of education and training return to benefit.

The real test will come with the next downturn in employment. There is also the question of whether the government chooses to maintain the New Deal beyond 2002 and, with the easy option of the windfall tax on the utilities having been used up, finances it out of general taxation. In such circumstances, one would expect the Treasury to take a more critical look at the effectiveness of the scheme than has so far been the case. What the New Deal has not done, despite the hyperbole, is transform the labour market prospects of even its target group. As John Philpott, director of the Employment Policy Institute, puts it:

One should not forget that the New Deal has been presented as a big deal: an end to youth unemployment, the provider of a better skilled workforce, and a pointer to a new 'third way' for welfare. Who can blame people therefore for expecting big things to come of the New Deal, or fail to understand the disappointment felt in those cases when the reality does not quite match up? Only when reality fully conforms to the rhetoric can the New Deal truly be counted as a success.⁵

Will The Working Families Tax Credit Work?

More significant even than the New Deal, at least according to the government's own publicity, is the working families tax credit, launched in October 1999. The WFTC, modelled on the US earned income tax credit (EITC), is an in-work benefit and a direct replacement for family credit, which was payable through the social security system. As its names suggests, however, it is a tax credit, payable through wage packets or salary cheques and administered via the PAYE (pay-as-you-earn) system by the Inland Revenue.

There are very few new ideas in welfare reform and the WFTC is no exception. Prior to the introduction of family credit in 1988, the Conservative government proposed delivering this in-work benefit as a tax credit (hence the name), closely modelled on the EITC. It was forced instead to make it part of the social security system because of two sets of objections. The first was from employers' groups, and in

particular the small business lobby, over fears that the administration of the new credit would impose an unacceptable burden on them. There have been powerful echoes of that in the response to the introduction of the WFTC, although the Blair government chose to ignore the objections. The second was from other groups, including Labour politicians of the time, notably Frank Field, who argued that it was better to pay the new credit as a benefit directly to women (as in the majority of cases child benefit, for example, is paid) rather than to the man in his pay packet. This 'wallet versus purse' argument, based on the question of whether men disclose their take-home pay to their wives, in other words whether money so paid finds its way into the household budget, had faded somewhat by the time the Blair government introduced the WFTC, although it did produce the concession that, by choice, the new credit could still be paid as a welfare benefit.

The WFTC was rubber-stamped by a task force under the chairmanship of Martin Taylor, the former chief executive of Barclays. Having been asked by Gordon Brown to examine the EITC with a view to introducing a similar tax credit in the UK, it was always likely that Taylor's task force was going to find in favour. (The other members of the task force were officials from the Treasury, Department of Social Security, Inland Revenue and Department for Education and Employment.) Taylor found four arguments in support of a tax credit. It would, he said, streamline the tax and benefits system, opening up the possibility of administrative savings. It would reduce the stigma associated with claiming benefit. It would be more acceptable to taxpayers than an increase in welfare benefits—'it is noticeable that the US Administration has secured widespread political support for the EITC at a time when the US welfare budget more generally has been under remorseless attack'. And it could improve work incentives for those caught in the poverty trap by reducing marginal rates of tax/benefit withdrawal, which were as high as 97 per cent.

Taylor also found, however, certain problems with the introduction of an EITC-type credit in the UK. The US tax system, he noted, has as its typical unit the couple or household, rather than the individual; it is normal for all US taxpayers to complete a tax return, compared with only 30 per cent in the UK, and tax is normally over-deducted during the year in the US, with a refund at the end of it. More telling was the problem of adapting from family credit, which could change rapidly with changes in work circumstances (and for many low-income earners the reality of a succession of jobs), to a tax credit which, given the nature of Britain's tax system, would adapt much more slowly:

If the credit was completely integrated into the tax system it might not respond

quickly to changes in need. The tax system works by looking back on the whole year and it could only be made to respond to in-year changes by using estimates of entitlement after the end of the year, and support would sometimes have to be claimed back. 7

Taylor was also concerned about the compliance risks of paying the credit through the wage packet. Could there be situations in which unscrupulous employers would either refuse to pay the credit or would divide it with the employee? He was also concerned about the administrative burden, particularly on smaller firms. There was also a worry about the loss of confidentiality— employers knowing in detail the entitlement of individual employees to the credit. And:

A particular concern is that if employers were part of the information gathering and assessment process, they would be in a position to use the information to depress wages. To a large extent, however, the minimum wage will protect employers by establishing a floor for wages.⁸

This is a point I shall return to later.

Surely, however, as long as the WFTC has succeeded in its basic purpose of reducing the very high marginal rates of income tax/benefit withdrawal for low-income earners, these objections can be put aside? There are two points to be made on this. The first is that a reduction in high marginal rates could have been achieved within the framework of family credit. The second is that reducing high marginal rates for the relatively few people caught in the extremes of the poverty trap was only achieved by virtue of increasing the number of people facing unacceptably high marginal rates. The Treasury's own estimates, published on the launch of the WFTC, showed that after its introduction the 5,000 people facing marginal rates of 100 per cent or more would no longer do so, while the number facing marginal rates of 90 per cent or more would fall from 130,000 to 20,000, the number facing rates of 80 per cent or more would drop from 300,000 to 200,000, and for 70 per cent rates and over, it would fall from 740,000 to 260,000. These were welcome developments, but the sting was in the tail. The number of people facing marginal rates of 60 per cent or more would rise, according to the Treasury, from 760,000 to over 1.01 million (figures revised to 730,000 and 950,000 respectively in the November 1999 pre-budget report). According to David Willetts, the Tory MP and critic of the WFTC (who as a member of Margaret Thatcher's policy unit in the 1980s recommended the adoption of a UK version of the EITC):

The WFTC makes the blunderbuss look like a model of accurate targeting. The Chancellor is taking high marginal rates of 60-70 per cent of taxation and benefit withdrawal right up into the middle of the earnings scale. He is creating a new poverty trap in which middle-income families will find that getting promotion or

earning a bit of overtime or the wife going back to work will bring with it a hefty penalty. He is playing a very dangerous game indeed with working incentives at a very important part of the earnings scale.⁹

This, indeed, brings in another potentially corrosive feature of the WFTC. In launching it in October 1999, the government made much of the fact that even apparently well-off households, with an income of more than £20,000, could benefit. Families, in other words, who had never been near the social security system, apart from receiving child benefit, could qualify for the new credit. The government would describe this as extending incentives up the income scale, although as we have seen from its impact on marginal rates, this cannot be said to be the case for these higher-income families. In reality, it is extending dependency to those on higher incomes.

All this might be forgivable if the WFTC were going to have a significant impact on employment. There is scant evidence, however, that this will be the case. Preliminary calculations by the Institute for Fiscal Studies suggested a very modest employment effect. Even supporters of the WFTC make few claims for its employment impact, although they do discern another motive. According to Professor John Hills:

If it's remembered for nothing else, the WFTC will be remembered for the money it shifts to a group of low-income families... It is possible, and I'm sure Gordon Brown has examples, where you can literally be worse off in work than out of work, but it really is quite difficult. But there is a very widespread belief that you may not be very much better off in work than out of work, and that it's a hassle and it's a risk to take work compared with what Alan Marsh once described as the 'bleak security of income support'. The WFTC is an attempt to change psychology and I've no idea whether that's going to work, but if the climate of beliefs about what pays changes, then we will look back on it as a redistributive measure which, after many years of Budgets which had redistributive measures in the other direction, had a redistributive effect towards those with relatively low incomes. ¹⁰

Perhaps this, in the end, is what it is all about. Dressed up in all the arguments about reducing the stigma of family credit by offering it as a tax credit, of improving work incentives by reducing the highest marginal rates of tax at the bottom of the income scale (while leaving most of them still high enough to act as a serious deterrent), we are left with a basic truth about the WFTC. Under its cloak it was politically much easier to increase the amount paid by government to lower-income households, without Labour facing the charge that it was relaxing its grip on public spending. The amounts involved are not insignificant— when fully operational WFTC will cost £5 billion a year more than family credit. Whether there is a significant labour market return on such a large sum is in serious doubt.

Unintended Consequences

There are two basic lessons to be drawn from the post-Beveridge experience of Britain's social security system. The first is that measures introduced with the aim of saving money in the medium and long-term usually add to spending. The second is that most reforms create unintended consequences, which tend to be damaging.

It was noted above that, in Martin Taylor's assessment of the WFTC, one argument put forward was that the minimum wage would, by establishing a floor for wages, prevent unscrupulous employers from fleecing the government by, in effect, claiming the whole amount they pay their employees in the form of the tax credit. It looks, on the face of it, quite persuasive, and it was this that persuaded the Commission on Public Policy and Business, a group of businessmen assembled by the Institute for Public Policy Research ahead of the May 1997 general election, to give its backing to the minimum wage. Thus, the climate for the introduction of the minimum wage was, from the government's point of view, much improved.

In fact, the argument is a complete red herring. There was little evidence, despite attempts to find it, of family credit being exploited in this way, and there was little likelihood, similarly, of this being a serious factor in the case of the WFTC. The danger, indeed, is precisely the opposite one. It is that employers, rather than offering market wage levels, will see the minimum wage, £3.60 an hour at the time of writing, as a government-approved level of wages and pay no more than it. Far from saving on the cost of the WFTC, in other words, the minimum wage could add to it.

Another unintended consequence will be for children. Integral to the New Deal is the aim of getting lone parents to work, and an integral part of the WFTC is a new childcare tax credit worth 70 per cent of childcare costs up to £100 a week for families (including lone parents) with one child, and up to £150 a week for two children or more. This, as many commentators have pointed out, creates perverse incentives. Grandmothers who currently look after the children of their working daughters or daughters-in-law free of charge will have an incentive to bill for their services, at the taxpayers' expense. Two women living next to one another could adopt a similar strategy, looking after each other's children. It is more likely that this government-endorsed (and taxpayer-financed) childcare will reduce further the number of children being brought up at home by their mothers. Some would see this as progress. The risk is that it is a reform that will throw up serious problems for society in the next generation.

Poverty-wallahs, the Underclass and Incentives

Richard Pryke

The Poverty-Wallahs

T he poverty-wallahs have made a large negative contribution to the identification and measurement of low income, and to devising schemes for the alleviation of the problem.¹

Their object has been to show that the extent of poverty is worse than it appears. To this end, they have often made assumptions of the most bizarre type. It has, for example, been implicitly assumed that those in prison are part of the poverty problem, and that, if wives do not have independent incomes, they will be naked and starving.² Inconvenient arguments and research have been either disregarded or, when this is no longer possible, rubbished. The considerable movement in and out of the bottom reaches of the income distribution has been ignored by the Child Poverty Action Group, and dismissed by Professor John Hills who, although not a full wallah, argues that problem poverty constitutes 80-90 per cent of the amount observed at any one time. He regarded anybody who spent two years out of his four-year period in the bottom quintile as a problem case, together with some of those who spent only one year at the bottom.³ One can prove anything by making the gate for entry into the problem category sufficiently wide, and the rules for membership less strict than the rules for exclusion.

Another characteristic of the poverty-wallah is the assumption that money income is all that matters. That benefits in kind have a value is something which the wallah either refuses to concede or, if he concedes in principle, makes no attempt to quantify in practice. A good example of the failure to discuss benefits in kind is provided by Alissa Goodman and Steven Webb of the Institute for Fiscal Studies in their study *For Richer For Poorer*. Hills concedes that cash incomes take no account of the benefit in kind obtained by owner-occupiers who own their houses outright, and that if they were included the distribution of income would be more equal. However, he ignores my estimates

I would like gratefully to acknowledge the computational help of Eric Nowell and the financial assistance of the Wincott Foundation.

which showed that, when allowance is made for all the costs and benefits from housing which are disregarded in the official low-income statistics, the proportion of the population with incomes of less than half the average falls by about a third. Moreover, Hills dismisses my estimates of the value of the additional leisure time, which is for instance enjoyed by the retired, on grounds which are either inapplicable (because I did allow for those with low money incomes having a low value of leisure) or which apply wherever prices or wages are used for the purpose of valuation (*viz.* his assertion that it is necessary to value all leisure time).

Poverty-wallahs have a simple remedy for the low-income problem: the government should give more money to those who live in poverty. Fifty three professors of social policy and sociology have called for this in a letter to the *Financial Times*. 'If [as they believe] people have been impoverished and excluded through acts of social and fiscal policy, then there is', they declare, 'no need to seek complicated causes and remedies for their poverty and exclusion'. In other words, they imagine that the principal cause for low incomes is the fact that, since the early eighties, benefits have not been increased in line with earnings. Their ignorance is startling. The principal and underlying causes are the absence of any rise in real wages for those with low earning power, and the growth of inactivity. Simply pushing up benefits would, as Professor Howard Glennerster has argued, make it more difficult to achieve welfare reform, because it would absorb limited fiscal resources, and make it more expensive to compensate those who lose out when old benefits are discontinued.8 Moreover, an increase in benefits would tend to reduce the incentive to work.

This is of little concern to the poverty-wallahs because they do not believe that incentives matter. Thus, according to Professor Eithne McLaughlin, one of the signatories of the letter, 'out-of-work benefits do not determine the wage levels people seek. People, including long-term unemployed people, want a job and give only peripheral consideration to whether that job pays more than out-of-work benefits'. It is therefore scarcely surprising that the poverty-wallahs have made almost no useful suggestions as to how the poverty and unemployment traps should be eased.

The most fundamental criticism of the poverty-wallahs is that they have, due to their flagrant bias and ideological preconceptions, ended up by betraying the interests of those whom they seek to serve: the low-income population.

The Underclass

Because the poverty-wallahs regard almost everybody who happens to have a low income at a particular point in time as living in poverty,

they have failed to draw useful and necessary distinctions. In particular they have failed to inquire whether Britain has an underclass consisting, for instance, of those who are persistently poor.

According to Christopher Jencks, an underclass has four main characteristics. First, there is the impoverished underclass: those who are poor for a long period, and whose poverty is due to unemployment and inactivity rather than to old age, disability or low wages. Second, there is the jobless underclass which obtains its income from state benefits, and perhaps irregular work and crime. Third, there is the educational underclass consisting of those who are poorly qualified. Fourth, there are those who engage in violent crime, and women who do not postpone childbearing until they are married (or at least partnered). This is the reproductive underclass. ¹⁰

My hypothesis is that there is now an underclass in Britain; that it is to be found in dwellings owned by local authorities and housing associations, i.e. in social housing; and that this underclass, and not mass poverty, is the real social problem. The existence of such an underclass may seem too obvious to require investigation and proof. Even the poverty-wallahs are concerned about problem estates. However, the underclass is by no means confined to a limited number of difficult areas; and housing tenure has been given insufficient attention by the wallahs in discussions of unemployment, single parenthood and movement in and out of poverty. I shall begin by considering whether there is an impoverished underclass, as defined by Jencks.

Inactivity And The Impoverished Underclass

Social housing is where those who are unemployed or inactive are concentrated. My source of information was the Family Expenditure Survey (FES) for 1995-96. Heads of household and their partners were regarded as potential workers if they were between 15 and state retirement age, unless they were in full-time education or had retired early and were not on benefit. These potential workers were regarded as inactive if they said they were unemployed, or if they did not work full time and were dependent on benefits (apart from child benefit and those intended to supplement low earnings).

My concept of inactivity that is a problem differs from the one suggested in the green paper on welfare reform. It says that success or failure should be judged by whether there is 'an increase in the number of working-age people in work'. If so, those who are in full-time education should immediately leave and go out to work; so should those who have stayed at home to look after their children, and impose no burden on state funds. This is ludicrous: the government's implicit definition of undesirable inactivity is loose and baggy.

It should, however, be recognised that my inactive group will itself include some people who are genuine long-term sick and disabled. In principal, it would be desirable to exclude them but, in practice, they cannot be identified. ¹²

The overall inactivity rate for social tenants was 56 per cent, as against 11 per cent for owner-occupiers, and 27 per cent for private tenants. Among social tenants, the inactivity rate is lowest for female partners who do not have young children. However, even here it is 41 per cent, compared with ten per cent for owner-occupiers. The rates are highest for lone mothers, namely 93 per cent for those in social housing who have young children and 80 per cent for those with older children. The comparative rates for owner-occupiers are 64 and 24 per cent. However, very few lone mothers with young children are owner-occupiers. The inactivity rate for male heads of household occupying social dwellings is 53 per cent, as against ten per cent for owner-occupiers.

High inactivity rates are not confined to a limited number of problem council estates. Inactivity rates are high throughout the social housing sector. For men, the lowest inactivity rate identified was for the small group who lived in non-metropolitan districts with a low density of population. But, even here, the rate was almost 40 per cent. The highest rate was for the small group living in flats and maisonettes in metropolitan areas. Here it was 72 per cent. Among women, the variation in rates was much smaller, ranging only from 52 per cent to 63 per cent.

It is, of course, true that a high proportion of all those who are inactive do not live in social housing. In 1995-96 almost half of the inactive were owner-occupiers or lived in private rented accommodation. However, the proportion of inactive owner-occupiers and private tenants who find jobs within a year is relatively high. Half of owner-occupiers who were unemployed in 1994-95 had found jobs within a year, compared with little more than a quarter of social tenants. But the best way of throwing light on the extent to which owner-occupiers, and private renters, are birds of passage is to look an income mobility.

Income Mobility And The Impoverished Underclass

My source of information was the British Household Panel Survey which tracks individuals. Data was analysed for the first waves of the survey, covering the period 1991-2 to 1995-6.

Attention was confined to those between school-leaving age and state retirement age, *viz*. those who can hope to better their lot through their own efforts, and who can be assisted by improving work incentives. Poverty among pensioners in the aggregate is not as serious a

problem as it is for non-pensioners. At any given level of money income, a substantially greater proportion of pensioners say they are living comfortably or doing alright. In the bottom quintile, 42 per cent of pensioners say this, as against 31 per cent of non-pensioners; and only 12 per cent of pensioners say they are finding it difficult to manage, compared with 27 per cent of non-pensioners. Moreover, pensioners are far better off than they appear. A high proportion are owner-occupiers who enjoy a valuable benefit in kind without having to pay a mortgage. Pensioners also have the advantage of possessing an exceptional amount of leisure time. If this were of no value, there would be much less early retirement, and pensioners would be clamouring to return to work.

At the first wave, half of all social tenants were in the bottom fifth of the income distribution. This quintile contained slightly fewer social tenants than owner-occupiers, and a small contingent of private tenants. Approaching half of the social tenants who were in the bottom quintile at wave one were still there at wave five and had never left. For owner-occupiers the proportion was a fifth, and for private tenants only about 30 per cent. Approaching half of owner-occupiers and of private tenants escaped at waves two to five and did not return. The proportion for social tenants was only a quarter, and a substantial proportion of them did not escape until the final year, and were likely to return.

The final category consisted of those who left the bottom quintile but subsequently returned. They formed about a third of owner-occupiers, but little more than a quarter of social tenants. Moreover, the proportion of owner-occupiers from the bottom quintile who only returned once was twice as great as the proportion of social tenants. (The rehousing of the poor from private accommodation to council and housing association dwellings will not have somehow biased the figures, because the initial tenure was used throughout.)

Another way of viewing the situation, and one which is useful when trying to explain why social tenants tend to remain at the bottom, is to restrict attention to waves one and five and to discover who escapes from the bottom quintile. Over three-fifths of owner-occupiers in the bottom quintile at wave one were no longer in the bottom quintile at wave five, and the proportion for private tenants was just under three-fifths. For social tenants the proportion was only a third. Moreover, those who occupy private housing escape more rapidly. Around 60 per cent of the owner-occupiers and private tenants make their (initial) exit at wave two, as against only about 40 per cent in the case of social tenants. A quarter of them do not leave until wave five, compared with about 12 per cent for owner-occupiers.

Explanations And Non-Explanations For Immobility

A relatively high proportion of owner-occupiers in the bottom quintile at wave one are located near the boundary line, and the escape rate is exceptionally high for those who are so positioned. However, a breakdown of the quintile shows that, in each income bracket, a substantially higher proportion of owner-occupiers (and private tenants) escape. When social tenants are assumed to be distributed within the bottom quintile in the same manner as owner-occupiers, it is found that only about a tenth of the difference in escape rates is explained by the bunching of owner-occupiers near the boundary (3.2 percentage points out of the total difference of 27.8 points).

Do poor qualifications explain why the escape rate for social tenants is so low? To discover whether this is the case, a household education index was calculated for those of working age.¹⁵ The escape rate for social tenants where there was a significant improvement in qualifications, or where the level of qualifications was more than minimal, was somewhat higher (at nearly two-fifths) than where the level of qualifications was very low or fell (at a quarter).

What is more striking is that, when qualifications were held constant, the escape rates for owner-occupiers were much greater. The rate for owner-occupiers where the qualification level was low, or fell, was (at 50 per cent) substantially greater than the escape rate for those social tenants who were in better qualified households, or where qualifications improved. Moreover, the standardised escape rate for social tenants, which shows what it would have been if they had had the same distribution of qualifications as owner-occupiers, reveals that only a small part of the difference between the two escape rates, i.e. just over a tenth, was due to the higher proportion of owner-occupiers with better or improved qualifications.

A household work index was also calculated for those of working age. ¹⁶ A high or increased level of work turned out to be the high road out of poverty. Approaching three-quarters of those from households with a high work effort at both waves, and from households where the work level increased, escaped from the bottom quintile. But for those who belonged to households where the amount of work remained low or fell the proportion escaping was a paltry 17 per cent.

Only a third of social tenants in the bottom quintile at wave one belonged to households with a high or increased work effort, and 56 per cent came from those with a low or reduced level. The reverse held good for owner-occupiers (and private tenants): 62 per cent had a high or increased work level, and only 28 per cent were members of households where the amount of work was low or fell.¹⁷

It is possible by standardisation to discover what the escape rate for social tenants would have been if they had had the same work composition as owner-occupiers. Half of them would have escaped from the bottom quintile, instead of a third. This means that three-fifths of the gap between their escape rate and that of owner-occupiers would have been eliminated. Here, then, is the principal explanation why so few social tenants escape from the bottom quintile. (The proportion of those with a low or reduced work effort who escape is substantially greater for owner-occupiers than for social tenants. This explains nearly a fifth of the gap between the overall escape rates. The relatively high escape rate for owner-occupiers with a low or reduced work level is largely due to enhanced income from pensions and investments.)

Why is the proportion of social tenants who belong to households which have a high or increased work effort so low? One plausible reason is that, unlike owner-occupiers, social tenants receive housing benefit.

If this is the explanation, it is to be expected that where housing benefit is being received there will be little or no work, and no increase in work effort, because work income will lead to a loss in benefit. What is not to be expected is an increase in work, unless this leads to a substantial rise in income. Where housing benefit was received by social tenants, work effort was low and remained low in a high proportion of cases, *viz.* for 62 per cent. For a further seven per cent there was a decline in work effort. For only 26 per cent was there, contrary to expectations, an increase in work, and approaching three-fifths of this group escaped from the bottom quintile.

Where housing benefit is not received, it is more difficult to predict what will happen. Because there is no benefit to be lost there may be an increase in work and work income, or, alternatively, work may be reduced so as to obtain housing benefit. In a quarter of cases, where there was no benefit, work rose, and in a quarter it fell. Where there was a rise the extra work appears to have paid off because they almost all escaped from the bottom quintile.

These findings suggest that housing benefit may well explain why social tenants with low incomes do not increase their work effort. Only a small minority of cases were inconsistent with this thesis. Because the data on housing benefit was poor, it is remarkable that there were so few exceptions to prove the rule. However, for private tenants, perverse cases, where those with housing benefit increased their work effort, were more numerous than those with the predicted response of continued low work effort. Moreover, three-fifths of private tenants who did not receive benefit increased their work effort. Although the number of cases was small, this appears to confirm that private tenants with low incomes do not behave like social tenants.

The Educational Underclass

The educational underclass is concentrated in social housing. Information has been extracted from the British Household Panel Survey on the highest educational qualification obtained by those under state retirement age who are no longer in school or in further education.

In the mid-1990s, 55 per cent of those who lived in social housing did not have a single good 'O' Level/GCSE (i.e. grades A-C) or its equivalent, and two-fifths did not have a qualification of any type. Only a quarter of owner-occupiers (and of private tenants) did not have a good GCSE or its equivalent; and a mere 16 per cent of owner-occupiers were completed unqualified. And those owner-occupiers who were poorly qualified had a substantially higher average age than the social tenants.

Only something over a fifth of social tenants had any 'A' Levels, their equivalent or a higher qualification; and a derisory three per cent had a degree. Well over half of the owner-occupiers (and of private tenants) had 'A' Levels or their equivalent, and this included 13 per cent of owner-occupiers with a degree.

Although those with poor educational qualifications are concentrated in social housing, it is nevertheless true that 60 per cent of those who were completely unqualified lived in owner-occupied housing, and only a third were social tenants. However, this is somewhat misleading. A considerable proportion of those who initially fail to gain qualifications subsequently do so, and the proportion is higher among owner-occupiers. The proportion of unqualified owner-occupiers between 25 and 39 who gained a qualification over a period of four years was 70 per cent greater than the proportion of unqualified social tenants who did so.¹⁹

The Reproductive Underclass And Lone Parents

The last of Jencks' categories that will be considered is the reproductive underclass. I shall begin by considering a broader category, namely lone mothers. No illusions are more fondly cherished by the chattering classes than those concerning lone parenthood. It is believed that this originates from every rank of society, and, by implication, that its incidence and nature are more or less uniform. The belief that lone parents come from every walk of society is true but trivial: the other suppositions are false.

The FES shows that, in 1995-96, lone mothers accounted for 43 per cent of all women with dependent children who were social renters. This compares with eight per cent for owner-occupiers, and 34 per cent for private tenants. Three-fifths of all lone mothers are to be found in

social housing, even though it accounts for only something over a quarter of all mothers with dependent children.

The lone parents who live in social housing have distinctive characteristics. Only a small proportion of them work and are not benefit dependent, even where their children are of school-age. In consequence, three-quarters of all lone mothers who are on benefit live in social housing. Moreover, approaching half of all lone mothers in social housing have a child under school-age, compared with 12 per cent of those who are owner-occupiers and two-fifths of private tenants.

It is evident that the duration of the partnerships which preceded single parenthood is much shorter for those who live in social housing. Indeed a high proportion of single parents in social housing never had a live-in relationship with the father, and therefore certainly belong to Jencks' reproductive underclass.

An official survey, conducted in 1989, showed that nearly two-fifths of all unpartnered parents, who lived in social housing, were dependent on income support and had not been cohabiting when they first entered lone parenthood. Moreover, a further nine per cent received income support and had been cohabiting without marriage. And marriage is important, if only because marriages are more durable than simple cohabitation. In owner-occupied housing only 14 per cent of parents without partners were dependent on income support and had not been cohabiting, or had been cohabiting outside marriage. However, the figures for private renters are similar to those for social tenants.

Social housing accounted for over three-quarters of all unpartnered parents who were dependent on income support and had not been cohabiting when they entered lone parenthood.

These findings are open to the objection that social housing only contained so many lone parents because lone parents had moved into council and housing association dwellings. However, information can be extracted from the British Household Panel Survey on those who already lived in social housing. Over a four-year period two-fifths of women with a child under the age of one were not residing with its father, and had not been cohabiting a year earlier. The corresponding figure for owner-occupiers was only six per cent, and for private tenants around 14 per cent.

Are Low Employment And High Single Parenthood Inevitable?

One obvious comment on my findings is that all I have been doing is to spell out the operations of the class system. Housing tenure is one of the prime determinants of social class, and so it is not surprising that many of those who live in social housing have working-class characteristics. Moreover, since class is a permanent feature of society, there is nothing much that can be done, except perhaps to embrace the policy of the poverty-wallahs and hand over some more public money.

This criticism is mistaken. The adverse features displayed by so many of those who live in social housing are not those of a working class but of an underclass, or lumpen proletariat, if one prefers Marxian terminology. Nor is it true that these features are inevitable for the simple reason that until relatively recently the picture was very different.

The employment rate for male heads of household of working age, who lived in social housing, averaged about 93 per cent between 1960 and 1975. However, by 1995-96 it had fallen to only 46 per cent. It will be said that these figures prove little because—and we have it on the authority of the IFS—a large part of the decline in employment has been due to better-off tenants buying their council houses.²⁰

Information on those who, since 1979, have bought the social dwellings in which they lived can be extracted from the Survey of English Housing. When this group is combined with existing social tenants, it is found that their joint employment rate was around 62 per cent in the mid-1990s. It is clear, therefore, that only a small part of the decline in the employment rate for social tenants has been due to the sale of social housing to better-class tenants.

Nor have lone parents always been concentrated in social housing. In 1963 single parents formed the same proportion of social tenants as they did of the population as a whole. 21

Does The Underclass Matter?

There is no need to be concerned about a substantial proportion of those who appear to be in poverty. A clear majority of those in the bottom quintile—roughly those in poverty using the customary definition—live in private sector housing, and approaching half of this group escape and do not return during the following four years. Only a small proportion remain in the bottom quintile for five years or more. Moreover, 37 per cent of owner-occupiers in the bottom quintile say they are living comfortably or doing alright, and only 22 per cent say they are finding it difficult. If a satisfaction score is computed (by assigning a value of five to 'living comfortably', a value of one to 'finding it very difficult', and values of two to four to intermediate replies) it is found that the owner-occupiers in the top quintile are only a third better off than those in the lowest.

What does appear to be a matter for social concern is the growth of an underclass living in social housing. It would be wrong to simply assume that those who belong to this class are, for the most part, desperately unhappy and anxious to find work. It is, for instance, well known that the level of job-search among the unemployed is low, and, as we have seen, the most important reason for social tenants' failure to escape from the bottom quintile is low or falling work effort. Although those who are inactive often have low incomes, they appear to obtain a substantial benefit from their additional leisure.²²

There are, however, a number of good reasons for concern about our underclass:

- It is extremely costly and absorbs a large amount of public money which could be better devoted to other objects, or at least spent more effectively on providing greater incentives to work.
- The fact that the underclass does so little work, and is mainly dependent on state benefits, means that the tax/benefit system is grossly unfair. Income is redistributed to the underclass from the working poor, although the latter are little or no better off.²³ The working families tax credit should, however, somewhat alleviate this problem.
- There is, as the government now recognises, a large amount of benefit fraud, and this is morally corrupting.
- The children of the underclass are disadvantaged because, for instance, they are not provided with satisfactory role models. Hence poor educational achievement, lack of work habits and single parenthood are passed on from generation to generation.²⁴ Those born into the underclass are thus denied equality of opportunity, or anything approaching this.
- The geographical concentration of the underclass has undesirable consequences. Crime is high, there are few workers to pass on information about vacancies, lack of effort at school is the norm, and having children without cohabitation becomes socially acceptable.²⁵
- Even if the underclass is, as I believe, maximising its welfare in the short run, it is unlikely to be doing so over the long term. Its behaviour is myopic.²⁶

Conclusion And Principal Findings

The poverty-wallahs are wrong: there is no problem of mass poverty. The bulk of those of working age in the lowest fifth of the income distribution live in private housing. Approaching half of them escape from the bottom fifth over a five-year period and do not return. Only about a fifth remain in the bottom quintile for the whole period. This contrasts sharply with social tenants, almost half of whom remain at

the bottom.

The major explanation why the escape rate from the bottom quintile is so much smaller for social tenants is their low or declining work level. Around 55 per cent of social tenants in the bottom quintile belong to households where there continues to be little or no work, or where the amount of work declines. In contrast, the work level remains high or rises for over three-fifths of those in private housing.

The real social problem is not mass poverty but the existence of an underclass in social housing. This is where those who are inactive and poorly educated are concentrated; and also where the bulk of lone parents, and mothers unpartnered from conception, are to be found.

- The rate of inactivity and benefit dependency among those of working age is about 55 per cent for social tenants.
- 55 per cent of social tenants do not have a single good GCSE, or its equivalent.
- About three-fifths of lone mothers, and of those who had their children out of partnership, live in social housing.
- In social housing two-fifths of those becoming mothers do not reside with the child's father.

This underclass is a problem because it absorbs so much public money, because income is unfairly redistributed away from the working poor, because its children do not have a fair chance, and because its behaviour is myopic. The underclass that lives in social housing is a fairly recent development, and its elimination is a prime task for the government. There is no evidence that better education will have much effect even in the long term, but the reform of housing benefit is an urgent priority.

Beautiful Theories, Brutal Facts:The Welfare State and Sexual Liberation

Norman Dennis

The great social engineering project to free sex from consequences was started with high hopes in the 1960s. Sex free from consequences seemed then a possibility which some saw as a way to enhance the gaiety of nations and enrich the public stock of harmless pleasure. Others saw it as a painless way of enabling the undergraduates' revolutionary dream to come true, of destabilizing capitalist society through sex and drugs. But the project is still far from completed.

It is true that for men sexual behaviour freed from consequences has been largely accomplished, and is condoned by public opinion. Contraception, abortion, the sexual liberation of women, the disappearance of the ban on pre-marital sex, and the furious rejection of inculcated conceptions of male sexual honour have all done their liberating work. In 1997 68 per cent of all pregnancies in Liverpool were to women the man had not needed to marry. In Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham the figure was 66 per cent. In Sunderland it was 62 per cent. Given the efficiency of modern contraception, the number of pregnancies outside marriage is a weak indicator of the extent of sexual intercourse outside marriage.

The meaning of a man's 'marriage' has been hollowed out. In 1996 there were one-and-a-half million divorced men. It is estimated that by 2021 there will be 2.3 million.²

Sex without consequences for women still has a long way to go. Women, like men, have responded to the promises of the 1960s. But if there are consequences, it is the women who get pregnant. The women, not the men, have to have abortions or babies. The result of men's sexual and childrearing liberation has been an increase in the number and proportion of children being brought up in a home without their father.

In the 1990s contraception just about kept in check the consequences for women of the higher levels of illegal male heterosexual activity resulting from the newly inculcated beliefs. Among girls under 16 there were 7,800 conceptions in 1991; in 1996, 8,800; in 1997 8,300. In 1997 53 per cent of the conceptions to under-16s were terminated by legal abortions, and (unlike previous years) none led to marriage.³

The promised land for women too, however, still beckons, and still seems within reach. 'A group of young women aged 14-16', for example, after working on a 'sexual health project' at Hebburn Comprehensive School, recently produced a glossy brochure to dispel myths and the wrong information often given by friends, TV, and people at school. The 14-16-year-old girls' brochure, instead, gives people the 'correct information' on 'having sex' and 'feeling good'. (Though, 'don't forget!!! It's illegal for young men of any age to have sex with girls under the age of 16!!') The only consequences they consider are unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. The uniform message is that both disease and unwanted conception can be avoided by taking advantage of contraceptives. These the girls can 'buy almost anywhere' and 'get FREE from any Family Planning Clinic', five of which are listed for the school's area. If the worst comes to the worst, 'you can get emergency contraception from your doctor or Family Planning Clinic'. Although 'there is no known cure for HIV or AIDS', and there are conditions where 'there is evidence to suggest' that there is an increased risk of cervical cancer or infertility, syphilis is only a matter of treatment 'as soon as possible' with antibiotics. Other conditions are 'easily' treated with antibiotics, and others again are 'easily' treated with lotions from the doctor or the chemist's shop. The sense is palpable that sex without consequences, even for 14-year-olds, is in sight. If it is for them, then of course it is for older women.⁴

The effects of releasing education about the sexual act alone from the dense culture that controlled its ramifications were demonstrated a few months later—as it happens, among comprehensive school pupils at Hebburn. A 12-year-old was set upon by a gang of 25 of her school mates. She had allegedly 'taken a fancy to the boyfriend' of the girl who led the attack. Describing what had happened, the victim said, 'one of the girls grabbed me by the throat. She butted me and I fell to the floor. As I looked up they started punching and kicking me ... As soon as I got to my feet they knocked me down again. I thought I was going to die. I kept blacking out, but every time I came round they started kicking and hitting me again'. Another group of school children came on the scene. Instead of helping the girl they joined in the attack, 'laughing and cheering'. At South Tyneside Youth Court eight girls were convicted of assault, as well as one boy. The ringleader was also convicted of witness intimidation. She had learned her lesson about the safety of sex at school. The lesson she learned about sexual jealousy and sexual revenge was that, if taken to extremes, it could cost her parents as much as £120—or if the worst came to the worst £320. She was given a two-year conditional discharge and ordered to pay £120 costs. Her parents were bound over in the sum of £200 for two years.⁵

The Consequences For Children

In the period 1979-1983 12 per cent of mothers of dependent children were lone mothers. The figure had risen to 17 per cent during the period 1988-1991. By 1992-1995 it was 21 per cent. In 1996 there were over one-and-a-half million households without fathers, where lone mothers were looking after nearly three million dependent children (amounting to 20 per cent of all dependent children). This represents a doubling of the numbers since the mid-1970s.

The sexual freedom of adolescents and adults is something which 'society' has now chosen, in the sense that little effective opposition exists to it. But there is of course no question of the children who are born as a result of that sexual freedom having had any choice. They have been the main losers in the collapse of the institutionalised family of life-long monogamy. The consequences for children of the liberation of sex from marriage and the man from the family are severe and incontestable.

The National Child Development Study of children born in 1958 showed that allowing for birth weight and the mother's class and age, the death rate by the age of seven was 36 per thousand among children whose parents were married when they were born, and 52 per thousand among children whose parents were not married when they were born.⁸

In a re-analysis of census data, Judge and Benzeval showed in the early 1990s that the children of 'unoccupied' parents, of whom an estimated 89 per cent were lone mothers, had a death rate 42 per cent higher than children in occupational social class V. Injuries accounted for 60 per cent of the deaths.⁹

The most recent figures are those supplied by Jeremy Schuman, who examined the records of children born in England and Wales in 1993, 1994 and 1995. 'Infant mortality is strongly associated with marital status.' Among babies born in 1995, for example, the infant mortality rate was 532 per 100,000 where the parents were married when the baby was born. The infant mortality rate was 892 per 100,000 where the two unmarried parents, living at different addresses, had registered the baby. The infant mortality rates in all three years were substantially lower for children born inside marriage than for children born under any other parental arrangement.¹⁰ Roberts and Pless, in the *British Medical Journal*, concluded that 'the children of lone mothers have the highest death rates of all social groups'.¹¹

When we turn to the oppression and abuse of children, the picture is clear. Unmarried partners are statistically much more likely to be abusive to the children in the household than are married parents to their own children. Thirty-five children were killed in their homes

1968-1987 whose deaths were the subject of public inquiry reports. Only one in a hundred of all children lived in households where their never-married mother was living with a man who was (a) not married to her and (b) not the father of the child. But eight out of the thirty-five fatally abused children were from such households, that is, not one in a hundred, but nearly one in four.

By household type, by far the lowest risk of being killed by abuse was experienced by children in the homes of their two married parents, 0.31. In the lone-mother situation the risk was 0.95. Children living with their unmarried father and mother were eighteen times more at risk of fatal abuse than were children living with their married father and mother. By far the highest risk was experienced by the child of a never-married mother living with a man who was not married to her, and was not the father of the child. Such children were 74 times more at risk than children living with their married parents. 12

In 1983 the NSPCC ceased to distinguish between marriage and cohabitation in its statistics on the settings of abused children. For all we know about the parental situations of abused children from the Department of Health's annual report, *Children and Young Persons on Child Protection Registers*, the children who had suffered the ultimate consequences of sex without consequences 'might just have landed from Mars'.¹³

Confusion between, on the one hand, 'families' as *any* sexual or childrearing arrangement and, on the other, the institutional married family, is nowadays so complete, and hostility to the institutional family so widespread in the political, academic, and media community, that—an intellectual disgrace—'child abuse', which proportionately predominates in the *non-married* 'setting', is one of the sticks with which the *married* family is then beaten.

Jasmine Beckford's father was not married to her mother, and Jasmine was born when her mother was cohabiting with a man who was not her father. Jasmine's setting at the time of her death was with her mother who was living with another man who was not Jasmine's father. Tyra Henry's father was not married to her mother. Her unmarried father and mother were 'probably mainly cohabiting' at the time of Tyra's death. Kimberley Carlile's parents were married when she was born. Her setting at the time of her death was with her mother who was cohabiting with a man who was not Kimberley's father.

So Beatrix Campbell, the famed author and socialist, who is frequently called upon by television, the radio and the press to comment on family matters, writes of these three cases: 'The ghosts of dead children—Jasmine Beckford, Tyra Henry and Kimberly Carlile, *all* destroyed by *their fathers*—smiled from the newspapers ... these

children died within the family, *the institution* sanctified by Thatcherism.'14

Non-fatal accidents are also more frequent if the child is in a loneparent household. Like the mortality rate, this is true of other countries as well as the United Kingdom and, as in the United Kingdom, the facts were known from an early stage—and lost in the clouds of wishful thinking. In the United States, for example, a 1981 study showed that the cumulative incidence of injury in children of lone mothers (14 per cent) was twice that of children in two-parent families (seven per cent) in their first year. 15 In Canada, Larson and Pless's study showed that lone parenthood was the strongest risk factor in injury (mostly falls in the home) to children under the age of three.¹⁶ In their study of 17,500 British children born in 1970, Wadsworth and others found that the admission rate to hospital for injury to children from lone-parent households was twice that of children from two-parent households, even though the 'two-parent household' category contained not only the comparatively much safer married family, but also the much more dangerous household where the resident man is neither the father of the child nor the husband of the mother.¹⁷ Roberts' findings were that the risk of pedestrian injury in a traffic accident was over 50 per cent higher for children of lone mothers.18

Children not being brought up by their married parents contribute much more than their proportionate share of victims of abuse and neglect. Sixty per cent of the children on the NSPCC child protection registers were living either with their mother alone or with their mother and her 'boyfriend or other father substitute' at the time they were abused.¹⁹

It is not a matter only of the two-parent family versus the loneparent family, but also of particular types of two-parent arrangement. There is an even greater tendency for child abuse to occur under certain two-'parent' arrangements than in lone-parent households. Patricia Morgan has drawn together international data on this matter.²⁰ Wilson, Daly and Weghorst showed that in the USA in 1976 children were abused seven times more frequently in step-parent homes than they were in the homes of genetic parents. ²¹ The figures for Australian children in the later 1990s show that a child living with a man other than its father is five times more likely to suffer abuse than a child living with both its natural parents.²² Wilson and Daly later wrote that 'the presence of a step-parent is the best predictor of child-abuse risk yet discovered'. 23 In Leslie Mangolin's study of nonparental child abuse, boyfriends amounted to only two per cent of all non-parental childcarers, but they amounted to 50 per cent of all nonparental child abusers.²⁴

Where else would such proven and severe dangers to babies and infants lead, not to measures to preserve and foster the safer arrangement for children in the here-and-now, but to measures which favour and multiply the arrangements that are more dangerous for children? But that is what has happened. If we consider only income: in writing about the importance of voluntary associations in the new welfare state, Beveridge pointed out the obvious: 'If money is paid on any condition, it tends to bring that condition about; if it is paid or given on degrading conditions, sooner or later it degrades.'25 Using the Department of Social Security's tax-benefit tables Patricia Morgan shows how financially disadvantageous the state had made marriage by 1998. A lone parent earning £200 a week, for example, and claiming a lone parent's £60 a week state allowance for childcare costs, ended up with a net income of £210. On the same gross earnings, and with the same number of children, the married man and his wife ended up with £153. A lone parent working 20 hours a week at £5 an hour, to take another example, received more than a married man at £5 an hour working 40 hours a week.²⁶

In England, among married and cohabiting households aged 20-24, 28 per cent were housed in the public sector in 1997-1998. The figure for never-married lone parents aged 20-24 was 79 per cent. Among 30-34-year-olds the gap was wider still: 14 per cent for married or cohabiting households as contrasted with 70 per cent for never-married lone parents.²⁷

Roberts and Pless attribute the dangerous and sometimes deadly experience of lone-parent childhood to the lone parent's poverty, poor housing and social isolation. 'The poverty, poor housing and social isolation of lone mothers are neither inevitable nor irremediable.' Social policy, it appears to them, has failed to increase the lone parent's income sufficiently, failed improve her accommodation sufficiently and failed to ameliorate her social isolation to the extent that would lead the discrepancy in the mortality, injury and abuse figures to disappear.²⁸ (Barry Pless is professor of paediatrics and epidemiology at McGill University, Montreal.) On this view, society is to blame for resisting, or not advocating, income redistribution, state housing and state childcare for non-marital parents and their children, when the problem is, surely, the dismemberment of the institutional family.

The Employment Situation And Income Of Lone Mothers

Eight or ten years ago 'experts on the family' still claimed that it was 'changing not deteriorating'. Research evidence overwhelmingly showed then, as now, that children conceived and raised by both their married parents did better *on the average*, on virtually every criterion

of performance and condition generally regarded as desirable, than children conceived and raised under all other domestic or 'care' arrangements. Critics of the institutionalised monogamous family either ignored these data, or conscientiously refrained from making themselves familiar with them.

Finally beaten by the weight of evidence, they have turned to arguments which start with the recognition that married families have been better for children up to now. They do what Roberts and Pless did. They magnify the undoubted importance of money and things that money can buy. The problems for children in non-marital households, then, are for them the result of being in households with lower incomes than the average (calling it 'poverty'), in poorer housing conditions than the average, and suffering from certain things that can be cured with better public transport, a job, subsidised childcare or more money for outings, such as the 'social isolation' of the mother.

They argue that it is not a matter of 'structure', but of 'substance'—as if the structure of two people committed in marriage is not the way in which the substance of commitment is produced with greater certainty than where that structure is discarded. It is like saying that the structure of tasks in a factory is not important, it is knowing who can be depended on to be doing what and when; or that a hurricane is not dangerous in itself, it is just the speed of the wind and the volume of the ocean it is disturbing.

They argue that the state is able to raise the resources from the rest of the population. Or they argue that the state will be able to raise the resources necessary to provide daycare for the children of non-marital parents by paying fewer state benefits to, and by taxing the enhanced earnings of the parents, if they can be drawn into the labour force.²⁹

Flying in the face of experience, it is argued or assumed that, as the proportion of non-family childhood arrangements continue to expand and diversify, the state can supply substitutes for the family—trained social workers, certified counsellors, licensed childcarers, and so forth—who across the board and over time would be as effective in calling forth emotional and physical commitment as the complex cultural and structural system of married parents and their kin. Kinship produces its failures and tragedies. Non-kin arrangements produce their successes. Children are killed and neglected and abused in any culturally-controlled setting or in the absence of cultural control (just as some smokers remain in robust health through to a grand old age, and some non-smokers die early of lung cancer). That is not in question. The question is: what empirically is, and what in the future will most likely be, the *relative proportions* of good outcomes and bad outcomes for children?

What are the realistic prospects of the problems of the non-marital household with children being overcome, to explore one example, within the structure of lone parenthood, with all the benign help the state could possibly muster?

Though sharing in the rising standard of living, in relation to the rise enjoyed by the general population, lone mothers have become progressively worse off economically. Fifty-seven per cent of households where there were lone mothers of dependent children were in receipt of less than 50 per cent of median income in 1984-1987. By 1992-1995 the figure was 70 per cent. In 1984-1987 lone mothers were seven times more likely than what *Population Studies* calls 'couple mothers' to have less than 50 per cent of the median income. By 1992-1995 they were ten times more likely.

Work has improved the economic and therefore the domestic power of women in general. In the 1980s, the proportion of women aged 24-49 who were working rose from 60 per cent to 75 per cent, a more rapid growth than in other otherwise comparable European countries. ³⁰ In the same decade, the real monthly earnings of men rose by 23 per cent, but of women by 92 per cent. ³¹

The proportion of lone mothers with dependent children with a paid job fell from 45 per cent in 1979-1983 to 41 per cent in 1992-1995. In 1979-1983, for every ten couple mothers with dependent children with jobs, there were only eight lone mothers with dependent children with jobs. By 1992-1995 for every ten couple mothers with jobs, there were only four lone mothers with jobs.³²

Among lone mothers themselves, work liberates those who are better off far more frequently than it liberates poorer lone mothers. The women in better-paid jobs can afford nannies and daily helps. Among the smaller number of women in the upper half of the income distribution, 93 per cent of lone mothers with dependent children were working. Among the much larger number of lone mothers in the bottom half of the income distribution, only 40 per cent were working.³³

Writers for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation are not noted for publicising the idea that any adverse consequences can be attributed to the breakdown of the family as an institution. But Kempson, writing in 1996, states that the number of those defined by Rowntree as being on low incomes trebled between1979 and 1995, and that this was a phenomenon 'of lone-parent families in particular'. ³⁴

If the money which enables the lone mother *both* to work *and* look after her child is not provided by the absent father, and cannot be earned by the lone mother, then state benefits and state expenditure on non-family childcare facilities must subsidise the work-and-motherhood combination. Patricia Morgan has shown the financial

implications of children living in households without their father, and the extent and degree, therefore, of reliance on state benefits and state-subsidised non-family care.³⁵ She deals with the inferiority of non-family childcare to family care in her *Who Needs Parents?*³⁶

Combining motherhood with paid work outside the home is *unavoidably* difficult. Combining them as a lone mother is unavoidably more difficult than combining them when the child's father is a permanent and committed member of the same household. Combining them if you are poor is more difficult still. By 1996 there were 2.7 million children in households without their father; 1.8 million of them were in households dependent upon government income support.

According to the most recent figures, 43 per cent of lone mothers assessed themselves as being in 'less than good health'. The figure for couple mothers was, by comparison, 30 per cent.³⁷ Earlier studies, using the General Household Survey in the 1980s and 1990s, found marked health disadvantages for lone mothers compared to couple mothers in the form also of acute illness and chronic illness. Evidence from the Health and Lifestyle Survey of the 1980s and from the National Child Development Study showed higher levels of psychosocial malaise and psychological distress among lone mothers than among women in other circumstances.³⁸

The small élite of better-off lone mothers in education, politics, pressure groups, entertainment, advertising, and journalism have an impact on morality, on institutional structures, and on the personal conduct of their admirers, out of all proportion to their numbers. They propagate as public policy what works best for them, in their situation, in the light of their own personal interests; or easily accept that such policies are desirable or necessary.

In this case, they propagate or approve freeing sexual conduct and childrearing arrangements not only from legal hindrances but also from the non-legal judgements of approval and disapproval of other people. There can be sexual self-denial, as well as sexual licence. But it must be strictly a matter of *private* choice. There can be a commitment to life-long loyalty, as well as fleeting consent to 'injuries caused for sexual purposes' (which the Law Commission recommends should be legalised). But there must be no public *mores*; there must be no *institutional* regulation, whether legal or informal, of either sexual practices, or procreational choices, or domestic childrearing arrangements.

The *Population Studies*' category 'couple mothers' does not separate out married mothers from cohabiting mothers. Had that been possible, it is very likely that the contrast between the married mothers among the couple mothers and lone mothers would have been shown to be starker still.

The Economic Consequences Of 'Sex Without Consequences'

The pursuit of sex without consequences has necessarily led to adults in advanced industrial countries having fewer children than their predecessors. When the death rate was cut by rising standards of living and medicine, their culture and deficient means of contraception meant that they more than reproduced themselves. Now culture—or rather the insistence that sexual activity must not be culturally controlled—and the availability of abortion and efficient mechanical and chemical contraception mean that the population is not reproducing itself. Women born in the United Kingdom in 1940 had an average of 2.4 children. Those born in 1950 had an average of two children. Those born in 1960 had an average of only 1.95 children. 40 (In developed countries an average of 2.1 children per woman is required for each generation to replace itself.) The United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland stand out as countries where childlessness has substantially increased. In the United Kingdom, one in ten women born in 1940 was childless; among women born in 1960, one in five was childless.41

In 1997, 34 per cent of conceptions outside marriage were ended with an abortion. 42

This change in fecundity will have a significant impact on the size of the economically active population,⁴³ as well as on the size and structure of consumer demand. The stimulus to demand of a rapidly rising population has now been removed.

The breakdown of the family as an institution has been, therefore, beneficial to the economy in the short run. Divorce, unmarried parenthood, and living alone without the bother of having to adjust domestically to anybody else at all, have all come to the rescue. Where one dwelling was needed, now it is two or three; two or three ovens instead of one; two or three fitted carpets. The child's and youth's command over resources—consumers who are relatively vulnerable to the vagaries of fashion, clamouring for and discarding expensive goods and services at a healthily rapid rate—is notoriously strengthened when each separated parent, especially the non-custodial one, seeks to cope with the situation by shopping and spending with the child.

'Two can live as cheaply as one.' So the demand for goods and services rises when each potential pair does not want to, or finds that it after all cannot, take advantage of that fact, and as teenage sons and daughters find they can no longer tolerate the way their parents behave, and leave home.

For many people the short run is sufficient. The one proposition on which all economists are agreed is that in the long run we are all dead. But some people have always paid some attention to the consequences

of the conduct of one generation on the next, and upon generations yet unborn.

On both the political right and the political left the case has been argued that the decline of the institutionalised family is already affecting the economy through the creation of a generation of poorly motivated young men. Sex without consequences, for all practical purposes complete for the male, is resulting now in the production of successive generations of boys who are not required to be, and do not feel they will have to be, adults whose lives will be governed by their responsibilities for their own children, and the mother of their children. The economic consequences are revealed most dramatically in the emergence of an unemployable male underclass, depending on state benefits and the proceeds of crime instead of productive work. In a vicious circle, the sons of these unattached 'circulating males' are brought up by unmarried and other lone mothers in households without the model of what male adult work would mean to them.

The effects by August 1999 were clearly marked in a study of a housing estate in Sunderland. The study has the advantage of eliminating altogether both questions of ethnic discrimination, the people concerned being not only almost exclusively white Englishmen, but almost exclusively Sunderland-born, and questions of remoteness from places of working-class employment, the area being one of mixed council-built dwellings and industrial estates. Ninety businessmen from firms in the locality were interviewed. A majority (59 per cent) said that they expected their firm's turnover to increase in the coming year. Yet, in some areas of the large post-war estate of mainly semidetached houses with gardens, Pennywell, unemployment is 80 per cent. Male attitudes to work and the future have been so poor in their modern, well-equipped schools, and subsequently, that the report pinpoints illiteracy as a major factor in explaining the high level of unemployment. 'One of the keys to regenerating and accessing employment for areas such as SR4/Pennywell lies in the reduction and elimination of illiteracy. We need to begin to plan a strategy to achieve this.' There needs to be 'a massive drive' to improve literacy skills. The larger businesses in the area were asked why Pennywell residents were absent from their workforces. Replies included: 'not skilled enough'; 'not suitable, do not have right qualifications'; 'attitude to work poor, not interested'; 'poor attitude'; and 'people not applying from those areas'. Pennywell's reputation for crime, the report says, could be stopping existing businesses from expanding, and new businesses coming into the area. It recommends the installation of CCTV cameras on the main roads and on the Pallion and Pennywell industrial estates. 44

But from the top to the bottom of the income, housing and education scale, and not by any means only in an underclass, the sexual liberation of men severely reduces the incentives for boys to be socialised and educated, in preparation for the serious and self-disciplined responsibilities of life-long work for their children along-side the mother of their children. Increasingly boys and men take advantage of educational opportunities—and even the opportunities provided by, for example, the local municipal swimming baths—less than girls and women do.

The exponents of sex without consequences constantly seek to stigmatise their opponents as backward-looking. Instead of addressing the present and the future, they are wasting their time on things that cannot possibly be reinstated. Irving Kristol is one of a group of thinkers about the family and the economy associated with the American journal *National Review*. Kristol insists that his concern about the consequences of the passion for sex without consequences is not about the past, but a crucial matter for the future. His case is, he writes, resolutely free from nostalgia. 'It, too, claims the future'.

Daniel Bell, not by any means easy to place on the right of the American political spectrum, basically agrees with Kristol's concern and analysis. (He co-edited a book with Kristol, *Capitalism Today*.) 46 Institutions are disintegrating, Bell says, because of the disappearance of the values that sustain them. This is the deeper cultural crisis, which, in the long run, undercuts the will to subordinate oneself to rules, confuses the motivations of individuals, and devitalises all the structures of society. 47

This burgeoning egoism, as it affects males, thus threatens all the social fabric including, crucially here, the hitherto culturally moderated individualism of the economic system itself. 'The lack of rooted moral belief is *the* cultural contradiction of society, the deepest challenge to its *survival*.'⁴⁸

Allan Bloom also sees as an eventual threat to economic efficiency the decline in male attachment to sexual and childrearing rules that transcend the immediate personal interests of the individuals seeking or engaged in sexual intercourse. People who are 'unconnected, isolated, with no inherited or unconditional connection' to other men, women or children, he says, 'can be anything they want to be, but they have no particular reason to want to be anything in particular'.⁴⁹

The economic consequences of the sex-without-consequences revolution are, on this view, profound. The institutional family is the source of the socialisation into steady, economic productivity of male children, and the moral regulation of sexually mature men. Men who are not bound to their children and the (sole) mother of their children

in a life-long, socially honoured, and socially enforced relationship of trust and responsibility are 'destructive to themselves *and society*'.

This has been for long a comic notion. Housman's Shropshire lad sang:

O, when I was in love with you, then was I clean and brave, And miles around the wonder grew, how well did I behave, But now the fancy passes by, and nothing shall remain, And miles around they'll say that I am quite myself again.

It is far from comical if, not needing to be reliable providers for their wife and children, they undervalue education, shun self-disciplined and regulated employment, and regress to drugs, to the muscle and to the phallus. 50

The Rationale And Core Institutions Of The Judæo-Christian Family

Historically there have been many variations in the institutional family of life-long monogamy even in the same country over the same period—the family of the respectable working class and the upper-middle-class family, for example, in this country between 1850 and 1950.

Until the 1950s, however, the key Judæo-Christian institutional elements, in all their English variations and changes, remained intact. Children were to be conceived, born and reared by their own biological parents whose relationship was that of husband and wife. Marriage was 'the voluntary union for life of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others'. 51 Those who complied enjoyed various rewards of prestige and assistance. The institution of marriage made provision for failures (as do all institutions). A society does not reach its moral destination as the crow flies, as Michael Oakeshott said. 52 In marriages there would be unavoidable tragedies. There would be disdained but inevitable deviations from the norm. There would be spouses who could not make their marriages work. One of the main purposes of public policy and community reaction in all those cases was to protect the children, as far as possible, from the adverse consequences of a parent's death or conduct. Another main purpose was to prevent the number of failures from multiplying, by protecting the institution of marriage and the family. There is a tendency for any amelioration of the adverse consequences of failure to reduce the motivation to succeed in the face of difficulties. As in all institutions, these provisions in marriage took this problem into account. A less pressing purpose was to ameliorate, where and to the extent deemed appropriate, the adverse consequences to adults of the exercise of their own autonomy.

A strong distinction was made between lone-parent families that had been created by the death of a spouse and lone-parent families created by the failure of the spouses to find a *modus vivendi*. (The adjustment of the industrial working class was for men to spend their time principally with men, and women with women.) Widowhood was an honourable estate. Divorce was legally difficult (though made easier from the middle of the nineteenth century, and especially from the middle of the 1930s). Divorce was a disgrace, especially for a divorcee who was known or believed to be the 'guilty party', 'to blame', 'at fault' in the breakdown of the marriage. (The disgrace attached to divorce gradually, and then, from the early 1960s, rapidly, diminished.)

An even stronger distinction was made between lone-parent families created through the death of a married parent, and lone-parenthood created by a man and a woman having a child outside marriage. Widows and orphans were in an entirely different category from the unmarried man and woman and their children. The unmarried woman and the child were scorned and sometimes pitied. The man who did not marry the mother of his child was despised. The essential purpose of marriage was to provide each child with two adults who would bear the ultimate, full-time and permanent responsibility for its emotional and physical welfare.

These institutional requirements were successfully inculcated as the normal and desirable conduct of all less-than-saintly adults. (Saintly adults, having won or been blessed with 'the gift of continence', refrained from sexual intercourse altogether.)

The statistical evidence on the proportion of children born out of wedlock and the number of children in families broken by divorce shows that, for centuries, conduct and attitudes did largely conform to family law and family *mores*. The graph of the figures on children born outside marriage appears from a present-day perspective as a low, flat line. It is only from the 1960s that the graph curves rapidly upwards. The graph of children living in a household without their father due to their parents' divorcing shows a gradually rising trend from the middle of the nineteenth century. Again, it is from the 1960s that the curve turns rapidly upwards, only to level off in the 1990s as marriage itself fades from the picture as a prerequisite for adult heterosexual intercourse and conception.

The incidence of gonorrhoea has been identified as a sensitive indicator of trends in sexual behaviour. Among females aged 16-19, cases of gonorrhoea diagnosed and reported increased by no less than 34 per cent in the single year 1995-1996. The rise in the numbers and rates was greater among 16-19-year-old females than among 16-19-year-old males, and the rise in the 16-19 age group for both sexes was

greater than for any other age group.⁵⁴ Widespread rises were also seen for genital chlamydial infection. Important effects of sexually transmitted infections include pelvic inflammatory disease and infertility, cervical cancer, and increased susceptibility to HIV infection. For some of these factors teenagers are at greater risk than older women.⁵⁵

Ken Livingstone MP is a popular political figure among members of the general public. He says what he believes in an engagingly open way. Livingstone gives an account of changing attitudes among the English political élite to the monogamous heterosexual family with children. Twenty years ago a lifestyle outside that of the conventional family, as favoured, he said, by the 'solid working-class' ex-miners of Trimdon Working Men's Club, was material for politically damaging accusations. 'Now it is almost an accessory for Cabinet membership.' The reason for that, Livingstone says, is that for Labour to win, it must secure the votes, not only of traditional Labour voters of the diminishing respectable working class, but also of 'the radical urban perverts'. 'Humour', his interviewer remarks, 'is an essential Livingstone weapon to disarm opponents.' But whatever way he said it, he no doubt meant what he said.

The lingering preferences of the first group are of interest to metropolitan intellectuals only in their desire to keep them politically dormant as they now die rapidly away.

The Government's Consultation Paper 1998, 'Supporting Families'

Supporting Families is the government's current consultation document on these matters.⁵⁷ It is the work of a ministerial group on *the* family.⁵⁸ Their work was on a programme to strengthen *the* family.⁵⁹ 'This the first time that any government has published a consultation paper on *the* family'.⁶⁰ 'There is now a widespread recognition that a new approach supporting to (sic) *the* family is needed.'61 'Marriage is still the surest foundation for raising children.'62 'We want to strengthen the *institution* of marriage.'63 These are all unambiguous references to *an institution* that is *already in existence*.

There are also a number of strong statements which, while they are ambiguous, can be easily taken to refer to the *institution* of the family, in the light of the fact that other statements do refer unambiguously to the family. These are not just verbal quibbles. They go to the heart of the empirical and policy muddle. 'Family life has continually changed— and changed for good reasons as well as bad.' That cannot very well be a reference to the vicissitudes of individual households. It must mean change in the divorce law, new BBC rules which allow

explicit sexual activity to be shown and obscene language to be used, the disappearance of the once strong informal rule prohibiting unmarried men and women sleeping together at a parent's or host's home, and so forth.

'Family life is the foundation on which our communities, our society and our country are built.' That can be read as *family* life—the institutional stress. Only *family* life can be reasonably described as 'the foundation' of 'our communities'. But it can be read, alternatively, as family *life*—the way in which people engaging in sexual, procreational, and domestic childrearing actually behave in relation to the institution, complying with its rules, bending them, evading them, or flamboyantly defying them.

Some statements can be read most readily as meaning simply family *life*, even when the phrase 'the' family is used. But not necessarily. They seem to retain an institutional tinge. 'Rising crime and drug abuse are indirect symptoms of problems *in the* family.'65 'There is more child poverty, often as a direct consequence of *family breakdown*.'66 The large and increasing proportion of lone unmarried mothers as a cause of child poverty is due to *relationship* breakdowns, in the plural. An institutional family was never formed in the first place. 'Family breakdown' must logically mean here, therefore, (but probably does not) the breakdown of the institution of the family.

'We are committed to strengthening family life.'67 'Families are at the heart of our society.'68 'Families are central to this Government's vision of a modern and decent country. They are as important now as they have ever been.'69 That could be intended to mean no more than 'people are central to this Government's vision of ...', and probably does.

Then there are the statements in which 'families' clearly do *not* mean the institutionalised family of life-long monogamy. They mean nothing more than 'citizens of the United Kingdom' who are in some sort of domestic circumstances involving sex and children—or even sex alone—however they are behaving, within or against the law, or in compliance with or outside the rules of marriage as formerly institutionalised. 'What all families have a right to expect from the government is support. This includes a modern Health Service equipped to meet their needs; local schools to provide a good education for their children; safe streets; strong communities; and a welfare system which offers security for those who can't work, and helps those who can into work. We are striving to deliver this.' All 'families'? What, then, are the 'non-families' that are to be excluded from these benefits?

Then again there are statements—the old slogans repeated *ad nauseam* by anti-family lobbyists and commentators—that pour cold water on the idea that the family was ever a useful institution, or has any possible future. The government cannot 'turn the clock back'

(adding, 'even if it wanted to'). The ack to basics' fundamentalism, trying to turn back the clock ..., is not credible any more. There never was a golden age of the family. We also need to acknowledge that ... family structure has become *more complicated*, with many more children living ... in single-parent households. The family is not deteriorating, it is only becoming more complex. In the standard anti-family style, 'serious problems' of *non-family* life, much more than the problems of *family* life, are all gratuitously and falsely attributed to the family, 'including domestic violence and teenage pregnancy'.

Politicians, *Supporting Families* insinuates, have no right to support vigorously one sexual or childrearing arrangement rather than another—an idea concealed in the statement that 'families' 'do not want to be hectored' by politicians. Of course they do not: neither 'families' nor anyone else 'want to be hectored' by anyone. 'We must not preach and we must not give the impression that members of the government are any better than the rest of the population in meeting the challenge of family life. They are not.'75 Who wants to 'preach' or to be 'preached' at? 'Preaching', as used here, is a pejorative term even among clergymen. What is insinuated by the omission of 'some' members of the government and 'some' of the rest of the population is that *no politician* is better than *anyone else in the population* at fulfilling his or her institutional role as spouse or parent.

What 'families' want, *Supporting Families* says, is clear advice to be available when they need it 'on everything from their children's health to their own role as parents'. In the course of a single sentence the referent of 'their' switches from 'families' to the heterogeneous population of individually demanding 'parents'.

"They ["families"] also want financial support which recognises the extra costs of bringing up children.'76 It sounds better if 'families' 'want financial support'. For then the statement feeds parasitically on the residual notion that the family as an institution is a good thing to be supported by governments. To say openly that any given parent or collection of parents 'wants' financial support for the extra costs of children—the only meaning that the passage can carry—would immediately raise awkward questions in the minds of even the least politically sophisticated. What do you mean, he or she wants financial help? Why should the government give him what he, or her what she, 'wants'? What good will it do in the long run if all men and women know that other people will be coerced to give them financial support if they become a parent, whether married and by intention, or accidentally in the failed private pursuit of sex without consequences, whether under 16 or over 16—and if all children grow up with that conviction instilled into them?

The support of the family as an institution is an important public interest. The care of all children, of whatever parentage, is an important public interest. But the *claim* to financial support for their own children cannot stem from the individuals who have become parents through the exercise of what are now defined and insisted upon as their private and free choices. Nor can it come from their supporters who for propaganda purposes have transformed the 'family' into 'the diffuse population of individual parents'.

Supporting Families then presents its Third Way, between 'back to basics fundamentalism' on the one hand and, on the other, an 'anything-goes liberalism' which 'denies the fact that how families behave affects us all'. Two straw men and a deus ex machina!

The government's family policy needs to 'recognise the new reality' that 'women increasingly want to work and have careers as well as being mothers'. It needs to 'recognise the new reality' that 'many fathers want more involvement with their children's upbringing'. 78

Recognition of these realities, however, is not the same as setting priorities; so government family policy 'also needs to be founded on clear principles'. None of the principles include a mention of the family of institutionalised life-long marriage.

The first principle is that 'the interests of children must be paramount'. The government's interest in family life is primarily an interest in ensuring that the next generation gets the best possible start in life.⁸⁰

The second 'principle' is not a principle at all, but an empirical statement about children, together with the correct observation that there is an overlap between the several worse distributions of outcomes for children whose parents are never-married or divorced, who are living alone or with a partner, and the better distribution of outcomes for children whose natural or adoptive parents are married. 'Children need stability and security. Many lone parents and unmarried couples raise their children every bit as successfully as married parents do.'⁸¹

The third 'principle' is a tentative, mixed statement of intention, without reference to either principle or fact. 'Wherever possible, government should offer support to *all parents* so that they can better support their children, rather than trying to substitute for parents.' What is this undesirable 'substitute for parents'? Is there some terrifying consequence hinted at here, if government 'support' to parents is not forthcoming, of hundreds of thousands of children having to be taken into the care of social services departments?⁸²

It is not surprising, therefore, that the ensuing policy list accords priority to the institutional family of life-long monogamy in only one

phrase, 'strengthening marriage'. In the body of the report, however, the measures for 'strengthening marriage' depend for their success on what content will be given to the concept of 'marriage' by state counsellors. On the basis of *Supporting Families*, of experience with social-worker ideology and action, and of state-funded sex education in schools, what expectation can there be that the state counsellors actually selected, trained, and faced with their clients and peers, will want to advocate that Judæo-Christian marriage is 'superior' to any other sexual and childrearing arrangement whatsoever? Would such advocacy be allowed?

In the spring of 2000 the Secretary of State for Education, David Blunkett, agreed with church leaders to amend the Learning and Skills Bill, at that time before parliament. A legal duty would be placed on teachers to promote 'family values'. He also agreed to insert a clause in the Bill stating that marriage was the foundation of society. There were immediate protests at the highest levels of government.

The Secretary of State for Health, Alan Milburn, wrote to the Education Secretary. He said that if the government used the law to support marriage as an ideal, it opened itself to accusations of hypocrisy. (There are two ways of avoiding hypocrisy. One is to try to live up to some idea of good conduct. The malign conduct is abandoned. The other is to make no claim that one is trying to live up to any ideal. The benign standard is abandoned. That a government has avoided 'accusations of hypocrisy' is not, in itself, proof that its policies are socially beneficial.) Furthermore, he said, promoting family values and advocating the superiority of marriage would undermine the government's drive to provide informative sex education.

Baroness Jay, the minister for women and a former health minister, also protested that the promotion of marriage would prevent teachers giving the necessary information to vulnerable teenagers. The Culture Secretary, Chris Smith, 'raised his concerns' that teachers should be legally obliged to promote heterosexuality rather than homosexuality. 'Several members of the Cabinet', *The Daily Telegraph* reported, 'have made it clear that they do not think it is the government's job to tell people how to run their lives'. Other government ministers also objected: promoting family values could leave 'many children' feeling 'inadequate'; and unmarried teachers, with or without children, who themselves were in sexual liaisons, would be put 'in an awkward position'.⁸³

The discussion paper suggests that the government's policy should be one of ensuring that all parents have access to the advice and support that they need and strengthening the ways in which the wider family and communities can nurture and support family life; improving family prosperity; reducing child poverty and ensuring that the tax and benefit system properly acknowledges the cost of bringing up children; strengthening marriage and reducing the risks of family breakdown; and tackling the more serious problems of family life, including domestic violence and teenage pregnancy.⁸⁴

The first fruits of these proposals were to have been plucked from the pilot programmes prior to bringing the Family Law Act 1996 into effect. But the Act's pilot programmes revealed so many difficulties and contradictions that in June 1999 some of its main proposals had to be 'effectively shelved'.⁸⁵

The Intellectual Establishment's Underpinnings Of The Third Way On The Family

Is *Supporting Families* simply a committee-concocted muddle that will painlessly pass into deserved obscurity? Or does it in its unskilful way give expression to an intellectually significant version of how individuals should handle, and collectivities should support (or undermine), one or another set of sexual and childrearing preferences and arrangements—the state, the churches, newspapers and broadcasting organisations, theatres, neighbourhoods, schools, universities?

In the reaction against state socialism, what was being said on the relationship between markets and governments in the 1970s could be found in a clear and explicit version in the works of a single authoritative intellectual figure, Friedrich von Hayek. Real 1990s what is being said about the relationship between families and governments can be found explicated in the work of a single authoritative intellectual figure, Professor Anthony Giddens.

Hayek was, in his later lifetime, and Giddens is now, pre-eminent in his profession. Giddens, a Fellow of King's College, was Professor of Sociology at Cambridge, and became Director of the London School of Economics. Giddensian sociology faces fewer challenges than did Hayekian economics. Hayek had to share his Nobel Prize for economics. If there were a Nobel Prize for sociologists, there would be no equivalent to Myrdal standing side-by-side on the podium with Giddens.

Giddens is at the intellectual centre of what used to be called The Establishment, and is the main exponent of current Establishment views on sexual regulation and childrearing practices. On *this* subject (his economic views may be another matter) his political importance lies in his relationship to the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, as his close confidant. Hillary Clinton, a prominent figure in the US Establishment, went out of her way to associate herself with Giddens as a familiar associate, and with Giddens' views on the family, when he delivered his Reith Lecture on the subject in Washington DC in April 1999.

Giddens is the most prominent English academic to have, as he says, 'abandoned' the orthodox view that sociology should be restricted to description and explanation.⁸⁷ As 'a radical social theory', he writes, sociology must not take the social world as given. It must pose the question: 'What types of social change are feasible and desirable, and how should we strive to achieve them?' In Giddens' view, in an 'era suspending [sic] between extraordinary opportunity on the one hand and global catastrophe on the other', nothing is more vital to the social sciences that this radicalism.⁸⁸ His ambition for sociology, then, is no less than to provide the globalised theory, and the *persuasively efficacious* formulations, which can decisively affect the future of the whole of humankind.

The intention of this 'critical social theory' is to 'outflank Marx from the Left'. 89 The theory, that is, is Marxism, but Marxism purged of its 'limitations'. Marxism had been *perversely* taken in the direction of totalitarianism by historical accident and capitalist ill-will. The Soviet Union developed its freak totalitarian Marxism, 'as a society undergoing very rapid industrialisation in an environment surrounded by hostile capitalist powers'. 90 Critical sociology—Marxism outflanked from the left—therefore deals with the issues of human *emancipation* which were 'inadequately analysed in Marxist texts and in the writings of most subsequent Marxists'. 91

Giddens' own textbook view is that what Marx said about capitalism 'remains the case in modern economic relations'. Capitalist production, driven by the capitalist enterprise's pursuit of profit, is 'anarchic'. Contemporary defenders of capitalism recognise government failure, but do not recognise market failure. Markets are understood by them, he wrote in 1994, to be *frictionless* machines *guaranteeing* economic growth that is *endless*. 92

Market mechanisms relate producer and consumer, but there is no directing agency which connects production to human *needs*. Marx's analysis is correct, Giddens says, 'save that some of these "anarchic" elements are located in the world economy rather than within the economies of particular countries'. ⁹³ 'A redistribution of productive wealth in the direction of Third World nations is a matter of urgency'. ⁹⁴

According to Giddens, four areas have been neglected by 'unreconstructed' Marxists. The first problem is that of 'the contemporary stress upon *economic* development', common to both socialist and capitalist societies, which is 'tilting the world towards ecological disaster'. What is needed to 'complement the traditional concerns of Marxism' is 'ecological radicalism'. ⁹⁵

The second is racial or ethnic oppression, including ethnic oppression in the advanced industrial societies, which cannot be understood except in the context of Western colonialism.

The third is the nation-state system. The world lacks any 'overall coordinating political apparatus'. 96

The fourth is sexual oppression. For Giddens' radical 'Marxism outflanked from the Left', sexual oppression remains a key issue. 'Feminism may well be more radical in its implications for social life than Marxism.'97 By the late 1980s there was much that was 'Thatcherite' in Giddens' economic views. On economic issues he has steadily moved further in a Thatcherite, in a Hayekian, direction.'98 The 'long march through the institutions', which in Marxian theory should have been via the factory floor, went instead through the bedroom.

Giddens' treatment of the family is built around the notion that it is intrinsically an instrument of exploitation for the benefit of the adult-male oppressor. He only occasionally covers himself with a guarded phrase or two about the difficulty of drawing up a balance sheet of benefits and losses, gainers and losers, from the eclipse of the traditional family. On rare occasions he concedes that good elements exist in the traditional family that should be preserved under the new freedom and equality for women and children—but with new elements of state coercion beneficial to the latter, in the form of expanded and extended children's legal rights. 99

The Dual Standard

In his Reith lecture on the family in April 1999 Giddens stated that marriage 'was *never in the past* based upon intimacy and communication'. Where does the term 'to love and to cherish', as one of the things upon which marriage was based, come from? Does it appear as an original idea in an as yet unpublished draft of a Home Office regulation for the government's new counsellors on the Third Way family? How many times has it been given as a vow? For how many centuries?

Giddens informs us elsewhere, first, that men have 'traditionally' been regarded as requiring 'sexual variety' for their 'physical health'. Secondly, it has 'generally' been thought acceptable for men to engage in 'multiple sexual encounters' before marriage. Thirdly, 'the double standard after marriage was a very real phenomenon'. 100

We are told that the 'rigid dual standard' existed 'until quite recently'. A single act of adultery by a wife was 'an unpardonable breach of the law of property'. Discovery brought into play 'highly punitive' measures. Giddens quotes the historian Lawrence Stone: adultery on the part of a husband was 'widely' regarded as 'a regrettable but understandable foible'. ¹⁰¹

Is he talking about England? Is he including the respectable working class in England? What does 'quite recently' mean? When was the 'quite recent' time when 'highly punitive' measures were applied

against the adulterous wife? The institutional family in England for the whole of the twentieth century has been free from any doctrine of the ownership of the wife by the husband. If it could be shown to have unofficially lingered anywhere it could only be as an expression of personal eccentricity. The law put the adultery of men and women on exactly the same footing in 1921. Does 'until quite recently' cover 'since long before I was born'?

The inequality of men and women, he claimed in his 1999 Reith lecture on 'The Changing Role of the Family', was 'intrinsic to'—irremovable from—the 'traditional family'. *Evidence* of adjustments towards equality, within the framework of life-long monogamy as the setting for conception, childbirth and childrearing (making provision for inevitable failures), does not, apparently, come into the question. Giddens' radical sociology, the sociology that outflanks Marxism from the Left, has long ago abandoned the despised orthodox sociology that was dully 'restricted to' description and explanation.

Yet again, Giddens disguises—quite possibly from himself—contrariety to empirical fact by the specious use of logic.

'All men are mortal.

Socrates is a man.

Therefore Socrates is mortal.'

 $\hbox{`All traditional families are deeply and unchangeably inegalitarian.}$

The English family of life-long monogamy in 1999 is a traditional family.

Therefore the English family of life-long monogamy in 1999 is deeply and unchangeably inegalitarian.'

'Orthodox' sociology, 'abandoned' by Giddens in his best-selling and widely-used textbook, regarded its main job as looking at the conclusion of that syllogism *first*, to see it fitted the facts. As a matter of interest, it might have looked at the syllogism's major premise—but with the strong expectation that what would be found would be variations significant for the men and women experiencing them, not uniformity.

In practice colleagues might have felt a bit resentful at the usurpation of such a general term for such a narrow purpose. But orthodox sociologists would have had no principled objection to someone clearly stating that, for the purposes of the particular research project, he or she would *take* the term 'traditional family' to mean '"family forms" that are "necessarily", "uniformly", "deeply", and "irremediably" "inegalitarian", defining all the terms in such a way as to make his or her findings and conclusions refutable on the basis of researchable data.

For, on the danger of 'proving' something, to your own satisfaction or the satisfaction of a complacent audience, by wilfully or inadvertently

building your 'proof' into the definition itself, orthodox sociologists thoroughly agreed with Thomas Hobbes. 'Words are wise men's counters \dots They are the money of fools.'

The Human Impossibility Of Life-Long Fidelity

In order to suggest that life-long monogamous marriage in modern populations is not only undesirable, but for most people a human impossibility, and in order to in some sense normalise present-day divorce rates, divorce is equated with widowhood. Giddens again appears to lean on the authority of Lawrence Stone. Stone says that 'it looks very much as if modern divorce is little more than a functional substitute for death'. ¹⁰³ The loss of a married parent through death was as frequent in the past as is the loss of a parent through divorce today.

Giddens echoes this theory: 'Some commentators have argued that the relative proportion of children affected by "broken marriages" was at least as high in the past as it is today'. 104 People cannot stand being at close quarters for a long lifetime. In the past husbands and wives were protected from this fact. They did not realize what a boon widowhood was. Now divorce has to do the job openly. Broken-family children were 'at least' as numerous then as now. So what's the big deal? This theory is now a staple of anti-family journalists, academics and lobbyists. Were the figures accurate, equivalence of numbers does not prove equivalence of social impact. In particular, the meaning *for the child* of losing a father through death is not at all the same as the father's leaving the household through divorce.

But the theory of the equivalence of numbers is itself based on the irrelevant fact that up to the beginning of the twentieth century the expectation of life was 45 years or so, and it is now 70 years or so.

However, prior to the twentieth century, people did not all die when they were 45. They died, broadly speaking, either as babies or when they had completed the human life-span of three-score years and ten. The relevant figure is not the expectation of life *at birth*. It is the expectation of life *at marriage*. The assertion that 'divorce is the equivalent of death' is thus a statistical error. That has not prevented it, however, from being academically propagated by eminent sociologists, nor has it prevented it from becoming established as a journalistic truism in the socially libertarian broadsheet press.

The (At Best) Economic Irrelevance Of The Judæo-Christian Family

One of the most powerful statements of the economic importance of family institutions is Freud's. In *Civilization and its Discontents* Freud

argues that civilised achievements and civilised conduct depend upon the sublimated energies of regulated sex. In his BBC Reith lecture on the family, Giddens does not appear to have taken this well-known and influential argument into consideration.

Instead, he makes the remarkable counter claim that the economic development of the Third World depends on the replacement of its preindustrial traditional family, not by something like the Western European Christian family of the nineteenth century, but by the Western world's current pursuit, as a primary goal and as the subject of constant media attention, of sex without consequences. For Giddens, there is on the one hand the current sexual and childrearing régimes of Western Europe and the enlightened parts of the United States. On the other hand there is the traditional family of reactionary fundamentalism. There is nothing in between. The *essential* classificatory criterion is the presence or absence of the oppression of women through the role-specific division of labour, overwhelmingly favourable to men, and unremittingly enforced by them through violence and the manipulation of religion, politics and public opinion. All other criteria are nugatory.

On Giddens' argument, the wonders wrought by the English bourgeoisie and the English proletariat in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the first hundred years of which were so eloquently described by Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto*, ¹⁰⁵ were premature. Theoretically, the English should not have been able to manage that before about 1961, at the earliest.

Giddens says that it is the 'Thatcherite' who wishes to see the 'moral regeneration' of families, for 'Thatcherites', he says, believe that there is a firm link between family sentiment and the accumulation of property by conscientious labour. ¹⁰⁶

The family is seen by these commentators whom Giddens describes as Thatcherites as essential for the production of those values of honesty, trust, conscientiousness in the fulfilment of obligations to others, and other 'vigorous virtues', without which market capitalism cannot function. In their absence, or if they are feebly developed, the only alternatives are economies and all other areas of social and private life strongly controlled by the state, or 'bandit-' or 'mafiacapitalism', where 'he shall get who has the power, and he shall keep who can'.

Giddens writes that the New Right '*ignores* or cannot cope' with 'that "non-contractual element in contract" which Durkheim, drawing on conservative ideas, long ago identified'. (Here again, if 'the New Right' is *defined* as 'those who ignore or cannot cope...', the statement must be true. The addendum, '*or* cannot cope with', is also typical of Giddens' style. That his opponents *ignore* the problem is demonstrably

untrue. But the addition of the vague alternative 'cannot cope with', which can be read as being exclusive, produces a statement that *in some sense* must be true, and which is certainly incontrovertible. 'The non-contractual element in the contract' is *explicitly at the heart of the concern felt by 'the Thatcherites*' for the family, just as it is implicitly at the heart of the ethical socialists' concern with the family as the cradle of the virtues indispensable for the realisation of their envisioned society.

The Judæo-Christian Family As An Illusion That Never Existed (And A Reality That Can Never Be Resurrected!)

His opponents are merely yearning for 'a traditional family that never existed'. Have we here another example of Giddens guaranteeing the absolute truth of his statement by *defining* 'right-wing nostalgia' as that which expresses a yearning for a country full of blissfully happy, loving and harmonious couples, and their children conceived after a marriage of virgins, all sharing equally in the benefits of care and companionship derived from a fair division of labour and power.

Giddens uses the term the 'traditional family' in an astonishingly loose fashion. His 'traditional family' is tied neither to time, nor to place, nor to social group. It slips all over the centuries and all over the world. It is sufficient that there is one unifying feature: the subjugation, oppression, and exploitation of the gender-class of women by the gender-class of men.

It is difficult to comment on Giddens' assertion that 'the more we learn from historians about traditional families, the more oppressive they often appear to have been'. Every element of the phraseology of the assertion helps to make it both unprovable and immune from refutation. More oppressive than they *appeared to* have been to whom? How often is 'often'? Which 'historians'?

George Orwell was quite wrong in his description of the English economy as it would be by the middle of the 1980s. The level and kind of poverty he foresaw for England actually occurred in countries like East Germany. But he also describes transformations in political and moral life.

In 1984 the human-scale measurements of feet and pints have been abolished in favour of abstractions. ('A 'alf litre ain't enough. It don't satisfy. And a 'ole litre's too much. It starts me bladder running.')¹¹⁰ A National Lottery with its weekly payout of enormous prizes becomes a major public event.¹¹¹ Pornography becomes a national pastime. (Julia had worked for a year in Pornosec, the subsection of the Fiction Department that 'turned out cheap pornography for distribution among the proles'.)¹¹²

In particular, only one version of history is permitted, and all 'goodthinking' intellectuals must believe it to be true. This history 'rejects and vilifies every principle for which the Socialist movement originally stood, and chooses to do so in the name of Socialism': the controlling intelligentsia, Orwell writes, 'systematically undermines the solidarity of the family'.¹¹³

Of course, in a crucial sense, that families are oppressive is a truism, if 'oppressive' means 'restricting the autonomy of the individual'. By definition institutions control, restrict and (if that is the word one wants to use) oppress individuals. But the idea that everybody would be better off where no conduct was institutionalised is truly a figment of the imagination. Even the altruistic anarchism of influential utopians like Godwin, Proudhon or Kropotkin only ever claimed that the institutional activities of *the state* were *intrinsically* malign (of course, particular forms of any institution could be malign) and that without the state's interference a spontaneous institutional order would flourish.

Giddens means oppressive in the sense of the abuse of the adult female by the male in the institutional family (but also the married father's abuse of his children). He is preoccupied with the liberation of the adult woman from ages-old and unremittingly unjust male dominance.

Ever since the early 1970s radical feminists (most of them educated at universities enamoured of one or other of the various versions of 'Marxism' and Freudo-Marxism popular among students at the time) have been vehemently anti-family. For them, too, the family is primarily an instrument for the subjugation of adult women. Female oppression has been, for them, the function of the family in all forms ever since men subverted the primordial and sustaining matriarchy.

There can be no doubt that many sexually-exclusive, life-long monogamous families often actually were oppressively abusive. Giddens does not need to say 'appear to have been'. But to condemn the family on these grounds, it would have to be shown to have been significantly worse than its alternatives. It may be that women generally were more physically and sexually abused and sexually unfulfilled under the old regime of institutional families than they are today. Without having firm evidence one way or the other, my guess is that they were. But if the fact of more abuse were established by evidence, that would not answer the family question. The answer would be likely to be different for upper-class women and working-class women. In that specific social stratum, at that specific past time (say, the respectable English working class in areas of heavy industry in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s), were sexually active women who were

married more or less abused by men than sexually active women who were not? Amid all the difficulties they had to face, was the family, in the form in which it was institutionalised, overall a boon or overall a burden for adult women of the respectable working class?

That is the past. Hardly anything even purporting to be evidence is ever produced to show either that proportionately wives are *now* oppressively abused more severely or more frequently than are unmarried female partners. Giddens himself actually states as an established fact that, as the institutional control of the family by the father has broken down, the 'compulsive character of male sexuality' has been revealed in the '*rising* tide of male violence towards women'. ¹¹⁴

That such-and-such state of affairs, desired by their opponents, and believed by them to be a threatened norm of good conduct, 'never existed' is a standard phrase of the destabilising left. In discussing the Columbine High School killings, in Littleton, Denver, for example, Julia Reed of *Newsweek* wrote: 'When we ask, "what went wrong?" we are really expressing nostalgia for a well-ordered, idyllic society that never existed'. ¹¹⁵

The Littleton killers enjoyed one of the highest material standards of living anyone in the world has ever known. But free of the 'judge-mentalism' of parents and other adults, they had been exposed to the products of an entertainment industry fixated on casual sex, violence and obscenity. Their favourite performers were the industrial-rock band KMDM—Kein Mitleid für die Mehrheit, no mercy for the majority—or Marilyn Manson (named after the serial killer Charles Manson) who claims to be 'AntiChrist Superstar'. The favourite video game of one of them was Doom, one of the most popular on the market. The manufacturer, suitably named 'id Software', advises players to 'prepare for the most intense mutant-laden, blood-spattered action ever. You don't just play Doom—you live it'. The idea is not just to kill, but to kill with glee.

These incidents are particularly difficult to incorporate into the views of theorists, like the Director of Comparative Media Studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, who insist that poor material circumstances are the explanation for bad conduct. According to him, the attempt to victimise violent video games is simply the latest strategy to shift the focus from the obvious root causes of violence: squalid urban conditions, poverty, and other forms of social injustice. ¹¹⁶

But there is no need either to defend an existing explanation or make any theoretical adjustment if there is no increase in problem conduct to be explained. If there have always been Columbine school massacres or their equivalents by the same sort of criminals with the same frequency as today—if there has 'never been' a time when things have been any better—then these things cannot be the cause of the non-existent increase in the problem.

In saying a traditional family 'never existed', is Giddens referring to the family as an institution? He says 'a' traditional family, and not 'the' traditional family; but he can hardly have meant to say that 'rightists' yearn for a single example of a traditional family to reappear, like bird watchers hoping to spot a dodo.

Yet obviously the institution of the family *has* existed. The fundamental elements, childbirth within marriage only, and life-long monogamy, were once and for long highly institutionalised both in English law and in the distribution of honour and disgrace in informal social life.

Christianity is currently weak in England, but it has been strong. The papal encyclical *Familiaris Consortio* crystallises and confirms centuries-long Catholic doctrine on the family as an institution. ¹¹⁷ The Bible is in some sense a handbook of Christian institutions, and the Archbishop of Canterbury is in some sense an authoritative interpreter of what the Bible says. As recently as August 1998 he affirmed that he saw 'no room in scripture' for any sexual activity 'outside matrimony', matrimony being exclusively a heterosexual relationship between a husband and wife. That was 'what we have all held Anglican morality stands for'. ¹¹⁸

At the other end of the religious scale, Marx and Engels poured scorn on the capitalist in the middle of the nineteenth century because he did not live up to the institutional claims of the family. In an otherwise ambiguous passage on the future of sexual and parent/child relationships, their one definite statement is that 'self-evidently' communism would bring an end to the promiscuous sexuality of prostitution. They fulminate against modern industry because it 'tears asunder' the unhypocritical family ties of the honest proletarian. If Marx and Engels believed family relationships were 'hallowed', and that 'even the most radical' flared up when the abolition of the family was 'infamously' proposed, that means that they believed that the family was institutionalised. ¹¹⁹

Two core normative demands *maximised the chances* that each child would be brought up by its own two married parents in a stable and safe home: birth within marriage and life-long monogamy. The statistical evidence on the proportion of children born out of wedlock and the number of children in families broken by divorce shows that, for centuries before the 1960s, the conduct of *families* did largely conform with family law and family *mores*, that is, with the main elements of the family as an institution. The rise in the proportion of

children of unmarried parents and in the proportion of children whose parents no longer live together are phenomena of the recent past. As late as 1979 over 80 per cent of all children under 16 lived with their two married parents. By 1992 there had been an unprecedentedly steep 14 per cent fall to under 70 per cent. Evidence supporting the proposition that 'a traditional family' existed could be endlessly multiplied, but such evidence is redundant on a matter so obvious.

It is, then, indubitably wrong—academically speaking shockingly wrong—to say that a traditional family in the institutional sense 'never' existed. But what if Giddens' remark is not a denial of the existence of institutionalised childbearing and rearing only within matrimony, life-long mutual support and sexual exclusivity, and (less strongly institutionalised) abstention from pre-marital full sexual intercourse? What if he does mean to say that there has never been an actual family in the history of 'the traditional family' that has managed to conform with its institutional requirements?

Was there never a family that met the basic demands of marital fidelity, life-long monogamy, and the dutiful care and support of child and spouse in riches and in poverty, in sickness and in health? Was there never a couple who had adhered to the rule, into the bargain, of pre-marital chastity? Beyond the call of duty, were there never spouses who could exaggerate only slightly and feel comfortable with the old Roman boast, *sine ulla querella*—'never a harsh word? Was there never a family of loving parents and loving children? Was there never a wife and husband who, having done all that, have also loved one another for a long life together, and was the memory of an aged 'loved one' never cherished after death? Giddens *says* 'never'. The use of the word 'never' shows how indifferent to evidence and how careless in language success has made opponents of the institutional arrangements which permitted conception and childrearing only within the constraints of life-long monogamy.

The Destruction Of The Judæo-Christian Family As A Left-wing Cause?

Giddens will not allow that a pro-family stance can be the result of competent research. It can only be evidence that one has grasped the transformation of daily life 'by a *dogmatic* stress on traditional values in the family and elsewhere'. To be pro-family is to be either nostalgic for something that did not exist or to hanker pointlessly after something that cannot be reinstated.

A pro-family stance cannot be the result of competent study. It must be the result of political prejudice, and that can only be right-wing political prejudice. Giddens will not allow that it is possible to be left and pro-family. I have been Labour all my life. I have been a Sunderland councillor. I am an active member of Colliery branch. In my provincial but wide Labour circles my views on the family as an institution, so far as I can tell, have been regarded, until recently and increasingly, as so representative as to be thoroughly unremarkable. I am pro-family, therefore, so far as the winners in the labelling game are concerned, I am not Old Left but New Right. Heaven forbid that I should count as an *ethical socialist*!

Giddens' tone and logic when dealing with the family side of the issue of the relationship between the family and the economy can be caught in the following passage:

New Right authors are fond of tracing the supposed decline of the family ... to permissiveness spread by intellectuals or leftists. Yet as an explanation of 'family disintegration' this view is fatuous. Structural changes affecting the family ... are stimulated by the very influences which the New Right ... promotes. If one is going to advocate individualism and individual initiative in the economic sphere it makes no sense not to extend it to ... the family. ¹²¹

Thus, for Giddens, it 'make no sense' for the New Right to advocate both large elements of control in the family, and large elements of individualism in the economy. But it *does* make sense for Giddens to reverse this, and advocate both large elements of individualism in the family, and large elements of control in the economy. For Giddens, it is 'fatuous' for the New Right (or a member of Colliery ward Labour branch, Sunderland) to claim that intellectuals have been influential in undermining family institutions. But it is not fatuous for Giddens to reverse this, and claim that intellectuals have been influential in undermining socialist economies.

Yet he is quite wrong to make the constant but unstated assumption that support for the family of life-long monogamy is empirically and historically a 'rightist' monopoly. The family as an institution was a concern of English ethical socialists, not prominently discussed only because its virtues were taken so much for granted. It is clear from what they assumed about the family, and from their explicit obiter dicta, that rightly or wrongly, English ethical socialists of the Tawney type, Old Labour properly so-called, saw each successful, decent family, egalitarian in its division of labour and benefits through the willingness of each to be self-sacrificing for all the others, as itself a socialist commonwealth in action. Such families were believed to be both common in the respectable working class and achievable as the norm in all classes. Their widespread existence—as these ethical socialists believed—proved—that it was not 'against human nature' to be dutiful and unselfish. No loss of reputation has been swifter or steeper on the left than that of the working-class male: from heroic proletarian father to unspeakable abusive beast in one generation.

Much of the muddle of *Supporting Families*, and of academically highly respectable thinking on the family—the Establishment thinking—that lies behind it, is due to the failure to make two distinctions which have been salient in the past, and in the past clearly drawn. One is the distinction between, on the one hand, institutions with their impersonal roles and rules and, on the other hand, what people do in those roles and with those rules. The other is between the human compassion that, on the one hand, is embodied in institutional rules which are designed to minimise the number of cases requiring compassion and, on the other, compassionate institutional rules, or compassionate private conduct, that multiply the number of cases requiring compassion.

Institutions And Conduct

For most of human history, concern for the future was, curiously enough, expressed in respect for the past. The traditions of a particular set of people were what they had come to think were the 'best ways of doing things, including the best ways of minimising problems, on the whole, for most people, from one generation to the next'. 'Sufficiently useful' conduct is protected, by placing its origins, artificially if need be, where 'the memory of man runneth not'. That says nothing, of course, about how close to, or far from, 'the best ways of doing things' any practices actually were. 'Best' for some societies has meant that, taking the useful with the useless and the pernicious, the whole package was good enough to enable them to barely survive from one generation to the next.

The job that 'sacred' tradition once did is done, in modern societies, by institutions—sets of inculcated and sanctioned, but constantly scrutinised and adjusted, rules, including the rules for changing the rules. Institutions, like traditions, systematise what Hayek called 'knowledge stored up in habits and practice'. It is easy to point to 'traditions' that were recently invented, and it is a commonplace of social anthropology that 'twice makes a custom'. But as an ideal type the 'traditional' denotes beliefs and practices that are enforced and adhered to unreflectively; that are protected by taboos; that are fluid because not written down; that are crudely adapted to their original social function; and that are sluggish in their response to changes in their setting.

Traditions can be, therefore, the happy hunting ground of the bigot and the ignoramus. That is why 'traditional' is such a useful form of abuse when a critic is attacking the *institution* of the family. The institution of the family has been the subject of a series of consciously undertaken parliamentary reforms, since 1928 under a regime of

universal adult suffrage. Up to the 1960s the family, in legal and community terms, had been moving steadily in the direction of 'companionate' life-long monogamy for a century at least.

The desirability of 'bad conduct' being defined and controlled legally is a matter of contestable principles. If justified in principle, judgements have to be made on the future effectiveness of the law in the particular case. Countless types or incidents of 'bad conduct' are in principle or in practice inappropriate subjects of legal control. Many are nevertheless appropriate subjects for institutionalised community controls without legal sanctions. Community controls may also be inappropriate or ineffective in particular cases. There is still the question of what is 'good' behaviour, and whether the general way of behaving, or the particular action, is good in its effects on the actor or on other people. Where 'judgementalism' such as this is inappropriate or counter-productive, there remains the judgemental question: 'Is this the kind of behaviour that *I* ought to adopt, or not condemn in myself?'

It is characteristic of 'liberationist' arguments that they assume that if *illegality* is proven to be inappropriate, then all other forms of control or disapproval have also been proven to be inappropriate.

In the heyday of the sociology that has now (as Giddens tells us) been 'abandoned', C. Wright Mills wrote that an essential feature of 'the sociological imagination' was its work on the interplay between what is personal and what is institutional. Problems that beset the individual, but were caused by his character and were resolvable by his own decision, he called 'troubles'. Problems that beset the individual, but could be properly attributed to institutional malfunction, he called 'issues'. 'Consider marriage. Inside a marriage a man and a woman may experience personal troubles, but when the divorce rate during the first four years of marriage is 250 out of every 1,000 attempts, this is ... a structural issue having to do with the institutions of marriage and the family ...' All classical work in social science, he said, made and used this distinction. 122

Sometimes the distinction between what the person actually does in a given situation, and what rules governing behaviour in that situation require him do, is described in a more careful (or obscure) way. But the distinction was made by all sociologists. It was made by those who believed that rules are usually stunting in all societies or some, as well as by those who believed that rules usually enlarge the aggregate of freedom, in all societies or some. It was made by those who believed that most or some institutions are easily destabilised, as well as by those who believed that all or some are resistant to efforts to change them. Sociologists sometimes write as though all human behaviour was always heavily institutionalised. Some write in apprehension that

all human behaviour is becoming 'anomic'—taking place without institutional control.

Giddens' own formulation of 'institutional analysis' is as follows:

All social interaction is expressed at some point in and through the contextualities of bodily presence. In moving from the analysis of strategic conduct to a recognition of the duality of structure, we have to begin to 'thread outwards' in time and space. That is to say, we have to see how the practices followed in a given range of contexts are embedded in wider reaches of time and space—in brief, we have to attempt to discover their relation to institutionalised practices.

Institutional analysis in sociology, Giddens continues, is that which 'places in suspension the skills and awareness of actors, treating institutions as chronically reproduced rules and resources'. 123

On the vital question of the relationship between traditions, institutions, and personal conduct, therefore, this is the level of illumination that students and society receive from our current illuminati. This is sociology as Marxism 'outflanked from the Left'; sociology as Marxism 'purged of its limitations'.

In his conclusion to his Reith lecture, broadcast in the presence of senior Indian academics, journalists and politicians, ¹²⁴ Giddens acknowledged that 'the sacred' was *somehow* extremely important. But what he said, while being entirely incompatible with a nihilistic worldview, was reconcilable with an entirely individualistic view of morals. If there was nothing worth dying for, he said, there was nothing worth living for.

But one can live and die for the morals incorporated in institutions—for example, as symbolised in 'Harry, England and St. George'. But, as Giddens' statement stands, one can also live and die, like the Columbine school killers, for a personal moral code devised strictly by and for oneself.

Effective Compassion And The Kindness That Kills

The distinction between the two radically different kinds of compassionate arrangements was until recently so much to the forefront of political, academic, religious and serious journalistic thought that it would have been regarded almost as the stock-in-trade of statesmen and intellectuals of all sorts.

John Stuart Mill formulated it in the standard fashion. The danger was, he argued, that compassionate assistance in solving the individual's problems could destroy the rules of good conduct which keep down the number of problems. *Individual assistance must be rendered to all 'hard cases'*, but never in a form that attracts people into the conduct that created their problem in the first place. One way of coping with the dilemma is to allow unconditional aid to be supplied in the

case of hardship when it does occur in their circle by kinsfolk, or close neighbours, or workmates, whether the hardship was the result of misfortune, or of folly or vice. Compassionate aid is supplied without the integrity of the *mores* being threatened.

Those who have created their own problems by making choices they need not have made must never be put in a position of being able to count upon assistance *from the community in general* which will make them as well off as those who have prudently and perhaps with difficulty acted in conformity with the requirements of institutionalised conduct. If the 'hard case', as a matter of a 'right' which must be met by the general community, can depend on being as well off as the person who has kept himself or herself from being a hard case, the compassionate assistance, Mill says, is 'mischievous'.

If, on the contrary, the compassionate assistance is universally available 'but leaves to everyone *a strong motive to do without it if he can*' then, and only then, can it be 'for the most part beneficial'.¹²⁵

The legal rules that govern the provision of compassionate assistance in the individual case; or the family, neighbourly, or private assistance rendered, must as far as possible be efficacious in preventing damage to the institutional defences against the multiplication of hard cases.

When the Labour party increasingly lost sight of this distinction in the 1970s and 1980s, or found it being deliberately obliterated in the interests of social unrest, it was *Labour* voters who bore the brunt of the explosion in problems as the institution of the family was weakened by, for example, *preferential* treatment being accorded failed cases of the sex-without-consequences revolution. It was *Labour* voters who suffered from the increase in sub-criminal disorder and crime in their neighbourhoods. Better-off people could for long dismiss all this as 'moral panic'—until they began to suffer the consequences as well. *Labour* voters saw the damage done to *them* by the fashionable dismissal, as based on their supposed ignorance of the facts and their moral bigotry, of the distinction that controlled most of their behaviour, that between the few rough and the many respectable, between the deserving and the undeserving poor.

'Letting things go' is not terribly consequential in a large house with adequate facilities. University students, in their digs or rooms in their halls of residence, can live in the utmost domestic squalor, waste and carelessness, and suffer no great harm. But 'letting things go' in a working-class household could still easily mean, even into the 1970s, no money for food by Wednesday, nothing but dirty or unmended clothes, filth and infestation by vermin, endless squabbling, the father drunk and the mother in bed, even though she might be suffering from 'nothing that a Provi check wouldn't cure'. All this body of opinion,

when it was known, was ignored by those whom Weber dismissed in his time as the 'literary, academic or café-society intellectuals', focused on their own 'needs and chatter'. 126

English Ethical Socialism attributed the Thatcherite election victories of the 1980s partly to the fact that by then, in these areas of *family* values and policy, Margaret Thatcher's views represented the real and justified concerns of the respectable working class much more effectively than did the increasingly curious Labour party of the 1980s. 127

The great and peculiar difficulty in the case of sexual conduct is, of course, that of applying the rule of less eligibility to the adults while not applying it to their babies, who had no say in the matter. The 'multiplier effect' of Mill's 'mischievous' compassion is here especially difficult to control. Put crudely, these adult dependents on compassionate aid have a hostage; and society is bound to be very ready to pay the ransom.

Conclusion

Those who have sought sexual liberation have largely achieved it. Those who have sought divorce on demand have largely achieved that. Legal, religious, political, intellectual and community support for lifelong monogamy has ebbed away. The main gainers, in their own estimation and in the short run, have been well-endowed, skilful and attractive men. Sexually active, enthusiastic and attractive women, never quite free from the chance of an unwanted conception, are close behind them, and many feel they are far ahead. The main losers have been children. Others who would have been 'stakeholders' in the old institution of marriage—such as current never-married mothers—in their own estimation range between them.

Beyond the immediate individual calculations of felt present benefit, however, loom remoter consequences for everyone as they feed through into the structures of civic order, the economy and the welfare state, and into the attitudes and values that people bring into them.

It would be one thing if politicians and the social affairs intelligentsia were doing the family to death, or the general public was, on the basis of clarity of thought, integrity of intention and respect for the facts, letting the last traces of life drain from it. It is quite another when it is being done on the basis of a hopeless factual, logical and moral muddle. The intellectual battle for the market was won by unintimidated intellectuals. The intellectual battle for its moral underpinning, the family, has at least and at last begun.

Notes

David Smith (editor's introduction)

1 The Rt Hon. Alistair Darling, Secretary of State for Social Security, speech to launch the government's first annual report on poverty and social exclusion, 21 September 1999, Tower Hamlets, London.

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- For a connection of this aspect of social life to more conventional economic concerns see Denzau, A.T. and North, D.C., 'Shared mental models: ideologies and institutions', *Kyklos*, Vol. 47, No. 1, 1994, pp. 3-31.
- 2 See Skocpol, T., *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995.
- 3 Harrington, M., *The Other America: Poverty in the United States*, New York: Macmillan, 1962.
- For a sympathetic account of NWRO, see 'The goals of the National Welfare Rights Movement: why we still need them thirty years later', *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 1, Spring 1998, pp. 65-78.
- 5 Kaus, M., *The End of Equality*, New York: Basic Books, 1992, p. 112.
- 6 Hotchkiss, J.L., 'The effect of transitional employment on search duration: a selectivity approach', *Atlantic Economic Journal*, Vol. 27, No.1, March 1999, pp. 38-52.
- 7 Murray, C., Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950-1980, New York: Basic Books, 1984.
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- I used equivalised gross income, during the last available month. Net income is available but not for all of the sample. The rank order correlation between gross and net income is 0.985 at wave 1, and only seven per cent of households in the bottom quintile using gross income do not appear in the bottom quintile for net income. Weighting was not employed because I found, like others, that it makes little difference.
- Although a quarter of all social tenants remained in the bottom quintile throughout, a somewhat larger proportion were above throughout. However, a third of this group transferred to private housing over the period. Nevertheless, although there is an underclass in social housing, by no means everybody in the sector belongs to it.
- The households in question were, of course, those to which the individual who was being tracked happened to belong at waves 1 and 5, and may not have had the same membership. The following values were used: four for a degree; three for teaching, nursing or other higher qualifications; two for 'A' Levels or their equivalent; and one for those with any other qualifications. A household education index was then derived by expressing the aggregate score as a proportion of the possible maximum. Minimal qualifications are defined as an index of less than 0.14 at both waves, or at wave 5 when there is no data for wave 1.
- Those normally working 30 hours or more were given a value of three, those who worked 16-29 hours a value of two, and those who worked 15 hours or less a value of one. An index was then derived for each household, using the same method as for education. Households with an index of a third or less were regarded as engaging in little work, and those for whom it was two-thirds or more were deemed to have a high work effort.

- Where, between waves 1 and 5, the index increased from low or medium, the work level was regarded as having risen; and where it declined from high or medium, it was regarded as having fallen.
- 17 The figures do not add up to 100 per cent because of households with a medium work effort, or which consisted of students, at both waves.
- Housing benefit was imputed where none was shown but income support was being obtained. The FES indicates that renters who receive income support almost always receive housing benefit. The poor nature of the statistics may well explain why the proportion where the work effort remained at little/none, or fell, did not increase with the amount of benefit (although the escape rate did).
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