

## ‘A Society for People’

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Those who grew up in the war, as I did, could not fail to be aware of the lowering of social barriers and of the popular support for social reform. Whether by eating in communal restaurants and sleeping in air raid shelters, accommodating evacuees and the victims of the blitz, joining in firewatching and civil defence, doing holiday work on farms or serving in the armed forces, people were obliged to meet, and get to know, many others of different class, occupation and background. They had a common interest and a common purpose. One of my most vivid memories is of the shock felt by the middle classes in Black-pool upon the arrival of families evacuated from the Liverpool slums. As in many other places, people came to understand for the first time how the other half lived, and what the years of unemployment had wrought. Here were two nations confronted.

The rich were chastened by this sudden revelation of social misery and the young wanted to put an end to it. A respect for the problems of others, as well as patriotism, made people prepared to accept sacrifices. National Assistance was liberalised. Welfare foods and all kinds of benefits for mothers were introduced, stiff taxation was accepted and the most envied rationing system of the war raised the living standards of the poor. Experts who had been arguing seriously whether the number of ‘unemployables’ in the population was half a million or one million were shamed into silence. Infant and child mortality fell sharply, morbidity was amazingly low and, despite the apparent rigours of rationing, the submarine blockade, the bombing and everything else, a near miracle occurred – there was in 1942 a greater sense of national well-being than in any year of the Thirties.

Social objectives which had been sought from one Royal Commission to another were now secured within weeks and months, but few people were satisfied. The guilt of the Thirties had to be erased. The Beveridge Report successfully competed with the battles in Russia and North Africa for the front pages of the daily press. A coalition government produced the first White Paper on a National Health Service, more remarkable, in some respects, than the plan finally agreed. *The Times* even complained in the middle of the war that the government was dragging its feet in putting forward proposals for social reform. A new post-war society seemed ready to emerge.

In the Britain of 1945 it seemed possible to detect the two human impulses which, as I understand it, are necessary to any Socialist society. There was, first, an attitude of trust, tolerance, generosity, good-will – call it what you like – towards others; a pervasive faith in human nature. Then there was a prevailing mood of self-denial, a readiness to share the good things in life and to see that others got the same privileges as oneself; an urge to give everyone, including the poor, the sick, the old and the handicapped, the chance of having certain elementary rights or freedoms so that they could achieve individual self-respect. Tracing the ways by which these two impulses found expression, and then were frustrated, gives one of the most revealing, and depressing, insights into the difficulties of attaining Socialist objectives.

At first all seemed to go well. In the early years after the war a daunting programme of legislation was undertaken which seemed to match popular feeling. For a nation struggling with the economic consequences of the war the Labour government's programme was little short of breathtaking. But instead of gaining a sense of purpose and of confidence as the war-time plans began to take recognisable shape, ministers hesitated more and more; doubts crept into the discussions of social policy and the first flush of post-war enthusiasm began to wane. By 1950 the momentum following the war was spent and the Labour Party's victory at the polls was a hollow one, the succeeding year before the defeat of 1951 being one of the most painful and degrading in recent political history.

It is true that the government was severely handicapped by the Korean war and its slim parliamentary majority. But, apart from these extenuating circumstances, there was a succession of minor decisions, like the imposition of Health Service charges, the abandonment of a large part of the Exchequer share of social insurance and the faint-hearted singling out of the cement and sugar industries for nationalisation, which showed how quickly the Labour Party had reached a dead end. It was not simply that the two most formidable leaders, Cripps and Bevin, had been lost, nor that the Bevanite split had occurred without offering adequate alternative leadership, nor even that the party needed to recover its breath before resuming the assault. No one knew what to assault. Instead of realising that their work was only beginning, the Labour Party leaders thought it was at an end. They seemed to be drained of initiative by the effort of legislating. They no longer believed in any tangible social aim and had increasingly lost touch with ordinary people. These were the two frightening facts at the start of the Fifties. Those who had discussed the plans for a new society so ardently during and immediately after the war found their hopes sadly deflated. They were completely disillusioned.

I think this disillusion can largely be explained by the meaning given to the simple, but crushingly cold and complacent phrase, the 'Welfare State'. I want to attack this phrase, and all it is supposed to represent, first because it suggests, or rather, is taken to mean, that a country which is a Welfare State is soft and makes people soft, and second, that in a country which is called a Welfare State there can be, in some strange way, no just causes left.

The strict values of the unbending spinster have always had a cherished place in British society – the peculiar and varying discipline of the public school, the Church of England and the outside lavatory have seen to that – and it is not surprising to find them being expressed with peculiar vehemence as soon as the new health and social security services began to operate in July 1948. The general satisfaction created by the legislative achievements was quickly undermined. Britain, so the argument went, was going soft and everyone was being supervised from the cradle to the grave. Wage-earners had been granted improved insurance and assistance benefits in sickness and unemployment: no doubt they would be feckless and stay off work. Mothers were actually being paid a small allowance when they had two or more dependent children: no doubt they would spend it on perms or the pictures. The middle-aged and old were making extraordinary demands for wigs, spectacles and dentures: no doubt they would acquire them irresponsibly to entertain their grandchildren. Services were wasted on people who could not be trusted, who toddled off to the nearest doctor or national assistance officer to get what they could when they needed nothing.

All this may read like exaggerated parody. I only wish it were. The line of criticism could be documented at tedious and uniformly depressing length. When, in February 1958, the director of the Conservative Political Centre wrote in *The Future of the Welfare State* that we were 'squandering public money on providing indiscriminate benefits for citizens, many of whom do not need them and some of whom do not want them', he was simply repeating, and in a characteristically vague way (Which benefits? Which people?) the complaint that has been made down the years in the correspondence and editorial columns of the *Telegraph*, *The Times*, the *Economist* and, perhaps most revealing of all, the *British Medical Journal*.

It is remarkable what happens when we submit the various charges to the cool test of evidence. What about 'malingering' and 'abuse', for example? Everyone knows, or thinks he knows, of the individual instance, but is it significant nationally? Early in 1958 the *Lancet* published data showing that in one area a small minority of people made claims for sickness benefit said to be unjustified by the doctor, but the money they received was only three per cent. of the total paid. A year or two previously the National Assistance Board took a special look at those who had drawn assistance for long periods during unemployment. Its officers found that about 2,000 of the total of 32,000 were 'work-shy' (less than one per cent. of the unemployed, or 0.001 per cent. of the total working population, at that time). What is more, nearly *two-thirds* of this tiny group were physically or mentally handicapped. As for the run on spectacles, dentures and the rest that took place after July 1948, no proof has ever been offered of the widespread belief that many people were queueing up for these for no other reason than that they were free.

It is important to ask for evidence. It is also important to remember historical precedent. The same severe views have been expressed with considerable force for generations by some sections of society. The Poor Law reforms of the 19th century and the Old Age Pensions Act of 1908 were attacked as bitterly as any recent measure by those who saw them as 'undermining the sense of family responsibility'. The same people fought to preserve the distinction between the 'deserving' and the 'undeserving' poor. They believed firmly in charity and in the division of the population into first-class and second-class citizens.

The serious journals of the Establishment, such as the *Economist*, *The Times* and the bank reviews, have taken the criticism a stage further. They have given a good deal of support to the idea that the social services are an indulgence or an extravagance which should be withdrawn as soon as possible. With increasing national prosperity, it is said, more and more people should look after their own health, education and social security; the dwindling numbers of the destitute should be covered by selective services which assuage guilt by employing more palatable means tests. This is the 'self-liquidating' theory of the social services. So far as I am aware it has never been expressed in practical detail which indicates how the chronic sick, the disabled and the poor can pay for their own services and how state schools and hospitals can be handed over to private individuals. It is little more than a semiarticulate protest drawing on self-interest and class mistrust.

The social services are as necessary to modern-society as good drainage. Even in times of hot, as well as cold, war they must not be regarded as absorbing resources which might better be devoted to defence. That would be a false economy. They help to provide the necessary conditions for undertaking a programme of national preparedness. And without them there would be less worth fighting for.

### No Causes Left?

I have discussed one assumption about the Welfare State. The other, that there are no just causes left, is more pernicious. It implies that everything has been achieved. But were the achievements of 1945–1948 as remarkable as so many people suppose? Future historians will, I think, pick out the uncritical acceptance of the Beveridge recommendations as one of the most significant phenomena of domestic politics from 1942 to 1946. Here was a set of proposals for social security which caught the imagination of the public. Central to them was the idea that benefits should be enough without other resources for subsistence, yet this idea was never scrutinised. Beveridge took over the kind of measure used by those who had carried out surveys of poverty before the war. It looked bogus, was bogus and has been shown to be bogus; yet right up to 1954 successive governments stuck to it bravely and pretended that they were trying to live up to it.

The subsistence standard, even as Beveridge worked it out, has never, by a good many calories and proteins, been attained. How many people know that the unemployment and sickness benefits for a man in 1958 form a much smaller percentage of the average wage than they did in 1938, or indeed in 1912? Full employment, and not social insurance, has been responsible for the reduction in poverty since the war. The Beveridge scheme tidied up numerous anomalies and extended social insurance to the whole population (largely, it must be said, to the benefit of the self-employed and the middle-classes, some of whom now qualify for the full retirement pension of £2 10s. for a single person, or £4 for a married couple, after only ten years of tax-free contributions) but it belonged to the past, to the Thirties and not to the Fifties.

All governments pretend to the public that their achievements are greater than they are. In a democracy one hopes the pretences will be probed ruthlessly by an alert opposition. But where are the informed critics of today? Labour politicians have been happy to exaggerate the achievements of the Welfare State because they feel they can gain most of the credit. Tory politicians have been loth to disavow them because they can follow less guiltily a policy of cutting 'marginal' social service expenditure and reducing 'redistributive' taxation. This policy has indeed been followed since 1951: up to that year the proportion of the nation's resources devoted to the social services had been growing steadily, and then stood at about 11 or 12 per cent. (compared with about  $9\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. in 1938). Even now, in the Health Service, Britain is strikingly ahead of most other countries, but in many other services it has fallen strikingly behind. West Germany, for example, is now spending half as much again as Britain on social security.

The achievements in what is unreflectively called 'income redistribution' have also been exaggerated. Were the post-war trends so much in favour of the working class as both Socialists and Tories supposed? During the war differences in living standards had narrowed sharply and only grudgingly did the Labour government begin to let them widen again. That seems to be as near to the truth as we are likely to get. A 'redistribution' of income occurred in the war rather than afterwards. Not for some time did the middle-class counter-revolution come into full swing. Not until 1947 was the first important step taken to increase regressive, and lighten progressive, taxes. Bank chairmen have now talked unceasingly about the plight of the impoverished middle-classes and the *Manchester Guardian* and *Observer* have joined the other journals in printing lengthy discussions. Gradually an elaborate protective system has been built into the tax system and industry. Successive Chancellors of the Exchequer have loosened the rules by which

tax is collected. Allowances have been granted for more kinds of dependants, for some dependants for longer, and for superannuation and life insurance. Income tax consultants have become prosperous and more individuals have become aware of the expenses which, quite legitimately, count for tax relief. Many of these changes may be reasonable in themselves, but the cumulative effect should not be forgotten.

The changes outside the tax system have been even more important. Indirect income benefits today have reached such a pitch that mere comparisons between two persons' incomes tell us little about the real differences in their standards of living. There are luxurious cars bought and maintained at the expense of the firm, meal vouchers, season tickets, subsidised and free housing, salaries paid in full during sickness, large superannuation contributions, holiday expenses and free travel abroad. The recent Royal Commission on Taxation recognised all this, but failed to appreciate its significance.

### **Wealth and Income**

Subsidies to income explain part of the middle-class counter-attack. Capital gains explain another. Throughout the last ten years inflation has meant a large series of non-taxable capital gains. The seven and eight-fold increase in undistributed profits since 1938 has given a powerful boost to the value of shares (partly concealed by free and cheap issues of new shares to shareholders) and so a much bigger proportion than previously of the shareholder's income has come from capital gains than from dividends. Moreover, heavy death duties have caused the rich to look for ways of avoiding them. They can pass on their wealth late on in life, more than five years before they expect to die; or they can buy agricultural land and expand the family business, on which they pay less tax. The recent history of the reaction to the high tax rates of the war and early post-war years teaches that no economic measures intended to narrow income inequalities can last unless the Chancellor of the Exchequer remains both Socialist and vigilant.

All this could be documented in great detail and far better than I could pretend to. But would it go far enough? The arguments I have used are destructive rather than constructive. What is there to reform? To answer this question we have to know more about people's needs and how they live.

I work as a sociologist. I should like this to mean that I explore, and write about, present-day society so that others may understand it better. I should like it to mean that I spend a good deal of time observing and interviewing small cross-sections of the population before writing detailed reports which aim at keeping human beings to the forefront. Above all, I should like it to mean studying very carefully the life of the poorest and most handicapped members of society.

Why do I emphasise this last point? In the British population of 50 millions there are nearly 5,000,000 retirement pensioners, 500,000 widows receiving special benefits, nearly two million war pensioners, not far short of 250,000 people receiving industrial injuries and disablement allowances; almost 500,000 unemployed, and therefore around two million men, women and children dependent on unemployment benefit; and, on any average day, nearly one million wage-earners and their families dependent on sickness benefit. Altogether about  $2\frac{1}{4}$  million people are dependent at any one time on National Assistance allowances, most of them for extremely long periods. There are many more people, particularly the old (as a number of studies make clear) who would qualify for National Assistance, but do not apply.

## The Submerged Fifth

There are 300,000 so-called 'mental defectives' and persons of unsound mind, most of whom are in mental hospitals and other institutions; over 750,000 disabled persons, including spastics and the blind; there are hundreds of thousands of persons in chronic sick hospitals, institutions for the aged, children's homes, and even more chronic sick living at home. There may be nearly a million old people who cannot leave their homes unassisted. Finally there are many adults and children in large families, among whom recent surveys have confirmed nutritional deficiencies; many young and middle-aged widows with children to support and many working men still earning less than £7 or £8 a week. The figures I have given may overlap in some instances but if we are trying to estimate the proportion of the population with special difficulties over a long period, who cannot and could not be expected to overcome their problems on their own resources, we should think in terms of the submerged fifth and not the submerged tenth.

Mine is a Utopian view of the definition and scope of sociology. In fact the term covers an enormous range of different subjects. Many sociologists are in fact interested only in philosophy, in history or social evolution or in rather mechanical experiments in closed laboratories. These interests have their place somewhere, but one wonders whether the balance is right and why so few research workers study the submerged fifth. Among the last 100 main articles in the *British Journal of Sociology* only 20 report research into present-day society, six of these 20 dealing with overseas affairs, six with social status and ranking of occupations and two with the employment of sociology graduates. Clearly the graduates are not much employed on surveys of everyday life.

The more the sociologist tries to study and interpret contemporary society the more difficult it is to isolate his or her work from daily politics. If the sociologist visits a cross-section of people in their homes and tries to understand their lives and problems, he or she is made aware of their needs and of how government affects them. It should be terribly hard to write a report without revealing, or at least implying, what their needs are, even if the separate duty of going on to suggest how these needs may be met is shirked. It may be best for him or her to admit this dilemma rather than pretend it does not exist. He or she may then be less inhibited about studying social needs, and readier to concede that government officials and politicians always will, and perhaps should, look to sociology for evidence on which to base reform.

I have never realised the importance of these things more clearly than during the first more-or-less formal interviews of my life. I was supposed to be trying to find out what had been the effects of prolonged unemployment in 1952 on many thousands of people living in the Lancashire cotton towns. Already I had talked to officials of the National Assistance Board and of the Ministries of Labour and National Insurance and done my best to penetrate the fog of their statistics; I had done the rounds of borough councillors, trade union secretaries, personnel officers and welfare workers without finding much enlightenment. I could avoid the hardest job no longer.

## The Field Work

As I called at one home after another I began to understand something of the problems of the submerged people. One person I met was a widow with three young children and no close relatives. Another was a mother with two illegitimate children. A third was a



widower living in a hostel who suffered from double incontinence. Then there was a couple with two boys at grammar school: 'When our children were born we made up our minds that they would never go into cotton'. There was a bachelor living with his parents: 'The dole is nowt at all for a single man'. There were two middle-aged spinsters, one with chronic bronchitis; a family with a long history of tuberculosis, and many others. Again and again I found I was wrong in assuming that doctors, social workers, local government officers, trade union secretaries and others who spent most of their lives working in the area would have first-hand knowledge of the peculiar circumstances and problems of the people living there. For one thing they were often acquainted with no more than one odd corner of local society. On matters of detail falling within their specialised field of work they were helpful; on general matters involving the life of whole sections of the population, whether children, young families, the unemployed or the chronic sick, they were unbelievably wide of the mark. Many seemed to have little comprehension of the needs and circumstances of people living right under their noses. What people would like to happen, what people say happens and what in fact does happen are very different things.

The journey through Lancashire had left me in a confused but excited frame of mind. It had come in the middle of a two years' period of research among White Papers and Blue Books and I determined to seek the earliest opportunity to do more continuous research among people living in their own homes. I had set off with some questions I had been unable to answer. I returned with different questions, with a deeper respect for people like Charles Booth and Mayhew and also for D. H. Lawrence and George Orwell, and with a greater mistrust of the Welfare Establishment subscribed to by Socialists and Tories alike. At that time criticism was, however, so rare that it was easy to doubt one's judgment; and Richard Titmuss was the only university person of repute to give confidence and inspiration to a number of people like myself who were beginning to feel their way towards some evaluation of progress since the war. In fact he was the only person who seemed to understand what had been happening. The public debate about social policy had a strange air of unreality alongside the facts of people's lives.

In 1954, when Michael Young started the Institute of Community Studies, I had the opportunity to interview old people in Bethnal Green. What struck me hardest was the extraordinary diversity between people of similar age living in the same locality. It was deeply puzzling. All the stereotypes in one's mind had to be taken to bits. By the time I had finished counting exceptions to the politician's traditional picture of Darby and Joan living on the old age pension, there was nobody left. It was hard to fill in a truthful picture. At one extreme I met a man who was one of 22 children, married to a woman who was one of 18, and between them they had 17 children, of whom 12 were alive. They had about 60 relatives living within a mile, and on every occasion I called the house was alive with grandchildren. The family kept a stall in the local market and had many friends. At the other extreme was an elderly spinster who was the only child of an only child. Her father died when she was a baby and her mother some 15 or 20 years ago. Since then she had had literally no relative whatsoever. She lived in a single room at the top of a tenement block and consistently refused to apply for National Assistance. She had virtually no friend in the world and no close contacts with any of the neighbours.

Between these two were the widest variations imaginable. Dimly I tried to make sense of them and to group people so that generalisation might be possible. All the time I wrestled with and never properly resolved the apparent contradiction between

the comforting conclusion that the majority of old people lived reasonably secure lives within an affectionate family and the disturbing conclusion that a frightening number of physical, financial, occupational and social needs went unmet and, what is more, undetected, particularly among the minority of isolated or semi-isolated people with few or no relatives. I wondered whether the variations were due to my catching people at the end of life. Yet when I did another spell of interviewing with people of all ages in a tenement block in Stepney, they were even more marked.

Besides those who were very poor, perhaps as many as a fifth or more of the inhabitants were isolated and handicapped. They were elderly bachelors and spinsters whose parents and contemporaries had died, or merchant seamen who had drifted in from the docks, or divorced, separated or deserted people whose family life had been disturbed. Then there were the few who seemed to have led a hermit-like existence because of some deformity or disability or whose past was something of a closed book.

Around them was preserved the main texture of working-class society, the people whose parents lived there, whose brothers and sisters worked around the corner and whose children either lived there or nearby. Some two-thirds of the inhabitants were closely related to several people in the same block, parents, brothers and sisters, children, and grandchildren. Part of the sense of community, of solidarity and of neighbourly restraint arose and was in fact created by the ties of kinship.

### **The Lessons to Learn**

What lessons are there here for social policy? I believe that it is possible to get a better understanding of what are the needs of the submerged fifth and how they can be met by learning what are the strong features of working-class life. That is why the analysis of social diversity seems to me to be so important. The happiest and most secure relations between adults in a family for example, seem to be those in which all kinds of services are exchanged, as when the old grandmother cooks meals and cares for the grandchildren, and her daughter does the shopping and cleaning and works part-time outside the home. One-sided dependence is disliked and the ability to give, to be of use to others, to do one's share and to be independent is venerated.

This simple fact explains a lot of things. It explains why working people (supported, incidentally, by the trade unions) have always preferred to pay for social security by specific 'contributions', because they earn thereby their right to benefit in a way that they feel would not be possible through ordinary taxation. It explains why social services administered by systems of charity, patronage or means tests have never succeeded and always will be disliked if not hated. A man does not want to get anything according to his degree of misery or destitution, for that is humiliating. It affronts his dignity.

The central choice in social policy lies in fact between a national minimum and equality. Support for the establishment of a national minimum in some or all social services has a long history, and especially from the work of the Webbs at the turn of the century to the present day. All one has to worry about, so the belief runs, is the need to raise health and living standards to a bare minimum, a subsistence level from which individuals can themselves build by their own efforts. It is in the state's interest to ensure that this minimum is attained: to go further would be to interfere with individual freedom and to waste national resources. In theory the idea seems wonderful. In practice it evaporates. It is extraordinarily difficult to define what can be meant by a 'minimum' (bread? tea? cake?



newspapers? books? cortisone? 'invisible' bearing aids? plastic surgery?). It is all the more difficult to readjust one's ideas continuously during a period of inflation.

### National Minimum

The source of confusion is that the national minimum has been held to be the badge of equality. How noble for all citizens to be treated alike. What could be more equal than flat-rate benefits for all, financed by flat-rate contributions? Unfortunately this is a perfect example of doublethink. When the rate of benefit is kept below a 'national minimum', when the National Insurance stamp takes a far larger share of the wage of the lowest paid than the salaried earner, and when part of the population is allowed to exploit the tax system through a plethora of private insurance and 'top hat' pension schemes to gain very generous extras, the result is the opposite of equality. According to a *Manchester Guardian* supplement, half the pension contributions of those earning a few thousand pounds a year would otherwise go in tax. 'The greatest gainers are those with the highest rate of surtax. Thus the man with an income of £15,000 a year would lose only £7 10s. of net income per £100 premium, the remainder of the premium being offset by tax saving.'

Two separate standards of social value exist at one and the same time. In old age the living standards of the poor now fall more sharply than do those of the rich. I have interviewed middle-class people whose incomes were about the same or higher after retirement than before. They had paid off the mortgages on their houses, some had received large tax-free gratuities; and some were getting the advantage of the generous tax concessions now allowed on any further earnings. Their difficulties are as nothing compared with those of people now living on an income of £3 or £4 a week who were recently earning a wage of £10, say, or more. There are millions of people living on £3 or £4 a week – and some on even less.

The problem for the future is to refuse to tolerate two standards of social value and apply one: to see that the privileges of the few can be transferred to the many. One obvious course is a complete recasting of social security, to reduce poverty and gross inequalities in living standards. The Labour Party has tentatively approved the principles of a national superannuation scheme with graduated contributions and benefits which favours the lowest paid. The plan could be the biggest contribution to social equality since the end of the war. I say 'could be' because the interpretation of a few of the crucial principles of the scheme remains in doubt.

But the changes in social security cannot stop there. The same principles will have to be applied to sickness, unemployment, widows' and industrial injuries benefits. They may be applied partly by obliging the employer to pay full wages (as well as full salaries) for the first months of sickness and also by obliging him to make adequate redundancy payments (one day's notice and one week's pay are still all too frequent). Children's allowances (both direct family allowances and tax allowances) need to be revised and increased. This general reform would logically entail the drastic revision of the tax concession laws and the eventual withering away of the National Assistance Board, with people whose needs cannot be met by social insurance being transferred to the care of casework agencies.

Too many social services, and not only those concerned with payments of money, are still governed by the belief in a 'minimum'. These clothes will do for the boys and girls in this children's home; they are cheap but hard wearing. The meals in this institution

only cost 15 shillings a week per person, but they give adequate nutrition; the inmates are used to simple meals. The children in this school are far from reaching 11-plus standards (what do you expect in such a district?); that is why they are housed in an ancient building in classes of 50. The people queueing up outside this surgery (housing office, labour exchange, welfare office) have been waiting a long time; but they are used to waiting.

### **What Can Be Done?**

We have hardly begun to understand how to abandon the double standard of values in the social services and treat people as we ourselves would like to be treated. What can be done? To a large extent the deficiencies can be remedied by good legislation and government. Take housing, for example. As many as  $2\frac{1}{2}$  million households in this country (17 per cent, of the total) have no piped water, well over three million no water closet (23 per cent.) and  $6\frac{1}{2}$  million no fixed bath (45 per cent.). When we know that millions of people must live for decades in old housing, why is there no adequate plan, supervised by the Ministry of Housing, for its modernisation and maintenance? Why do we allow slum clearance schemes to remove many solidly built terraced houses (sometimes, as in Bethnal Green, to make it easier to view the hideous old tenement blocks of Victorian England, which are the worst slums and about which nothing much is being done)? And why must they be carried out with gross insensitivity to community and family life? Housing management seems to be almost as much of a national scandal as the procedure by which patients lodge complaints against doctors and others in the Health Service.

Or take the services provided in the home. Part of the business of treating people as we ourselves would like to be treated is respecting the desire to be independent and to live a normal home life. Throughout recent years there has been growing professional emphasis, in the medical and psychiatric as well as the social-work world, on the value of care at home rather than in an institution. Most children taken into care by local authorities and by voluntary societies, old people in need of care and attention, and young and old in mental and general hospitals may be better cared for in ordinary private homes within the environment of a normal or substitute family rather than in institutions. For one thing the selfless devotion of institution staff makes more acute the separation of patients or residents from society. The idea that others are giving up their lives for your benefit and you can do nothing much about it makes you give up trying, or it makes you aggressive because you want your independence. The trend towards smaller hospital wards and smaller old people's homes (including many single and double rooms); the establishment of more contacts between institution and community (shown in the more generous visiting hours and more frequent 'holidays' outside institutions); the development of boarding-out schemes for both children and the aged taken into care – all these are indications of a complete change in outlook.

In the first place, therefore, priority should be given to the home and community health services, including district nursing. By comparison with hospital services (except for mental hospitals) far too little money is being spent on domiciliary health and preventive services. The development of health centres and group practice has been much too slow, and the education of general practitioners barely touches on psychological and social medicine and thus offers no training for over two-thirds of their future work.

In the second place, a Family Help Service should be created. The purpose of this would be to enable the old, the sick and the handicapped to lead a normal life at home within an ordinary community, by supplying those who have no relatives or who are separated from them with the services normally provided by the family – like shopping, cleaning, cooking meals, washing laundry and so on, and by giving support to those relatives bearing a heavy burden of care – through personal attendance allowances, for example, or relief at night and during holidays. In the population there are many with few or no relatives. About a quarter of the old are unmarried or childless. There is the nucleus of a home help service and no doubt this could form the basis of the new service. It would have many additional functions, like the systematic visiting of the isolated aged by skilled workers to assess need, the supervision of special housing schemes and welfare homes and the provision of occupations for the homebound. The emergence of a major new service to take its place alongside Social Security, Health, Education and Housing may be justified.

### **Planning is Not Enough**

If there is any lesson in the experience of the last ten years it is that no social aim can be achieved merely by planning, and passing, the necessary legislation. The various services do not exist as self-perpetuating systems untouched by worldly sin. They need money and they need good staff. They therefore depend on political decisions about priorities and on all the subtle twists and turns of social and human change. Almost imperceptibly since 1945 the needs of the submerged people have grown and the differences between the rich and the poor in their living standards have widened. Powerful arguments can be advanced, as I have tried to show, for a new and ambitious policy, geared to the principle that the best possible standards of service should be available to all on the basis of equal sacrifice. This could be followed with imagination, hope and enthusiasm. There is just one condition. It is useless paying lip-service to equality.

You cannot live like a lord and preach as a Socialist. Equality of sacrifice is not an ideal which applies to others but not yourself. It is essentially personal and is not just a matter of avoiding ostentatious displays of wealth. To be scornful about cigars, extravagant receptions and hunt balls would be easy. The real test comes in all the trivial details of life – in choosing whether to dodge some taxes, use the firm's stamps for personal letters, add a pound or two to the bill for expenses, or jump the queue at the hospital; in asking repeatedly whether certain of our privileges look as reasonable to others as they so often do to ourselves. How many business lunches cost more than the National Assistance Board is paying a man to keep himself for a whole week? How many professional people, and how many workers, have four, six or eight weeks' holiday, a working week of less than 30 hours, and a centrally heated and carpeted workroom? The more privileges you have the fewer there are for others.

### **Faith in People**

It is more than a personal ethic of self-respect, of fighting hard to avoid conforming to a double standard, and failing often. It is also a faith in people, in the fundamental goodness of man. People live very differently and it is sometimes hard to understand what drives them to act as they do. To give them the benefit of the doubt, to assume they have good

rather than bad motives when we know little or nothing about them, and to concern ourselves with their needs rather than their failings – these are generally regarded as being Christian virtues, and yet they are the essence of Socialism.

The sort of Socialism advocated by William Morris, or any simple expression of faith in the goodness of man, frightens and embarrasses the intellectual. He does not want to be taken for a sucker in public and you rarely find him saying anything so straightforward and naive. He is much too cynical and self-conscious. Yet if he is not prepared to live his Socialism, it stands little chance of attainment. He wants to stand apart from the crowd, to be original, to wear an outrageous shirt, condemn the mass media and talk of commitment, positivism and Free Cinema. He wants to reject many of the values of society. He may be right but continually he runs the risk, in his thoughts and actions, of alienating himself from ordinary people. There are few harder conflicts to resolve. Somehow he must preserve his independence and his right to criticise and yet keep in touch with people of every age and class, and laugh and cry with them, in his private life as well as in his public utterances. This is his one hope of becoming a constructive and not simply a destructive critic of society. For to believe in people is to subscribe to their strengths, their pride, their capacity to recognise humbug or to shrug off propaganda, their fair dealing, their unselfishness and their willingness to bear pain without fuss, but above all the strengths which are given them by their lives within their families.

Terms such as 'equality', 'privilege', 'the Establishment' and 'class' are imprecise and call up different images for different people. One is conscious of the risks in using them. But if that overdone phrase 'a classless society' means anything, it is a society where differences in reward are much narrower than in Britain today and where people of different background and accomplishment can mix easily and without guilt; and also a society where a respect for people is valued most of all. For that brings a real equality.

### **Note**

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