

by Penny Wilson

Introduction

Since the 1966 Social Security Act created a new Ministry of Social Security, which took over many of the functions of the National Assistance Board with the Ministry of Pensions and the National Insurance, many people were concerned to see how the new principle of the 'right to benefit' affected individual applicants. The 'Mothers in Action', set up as a pressure group in 1967 for unsupported mothers, sent out a questionnaire devised by Shirley Frost to all its members in 1968 to find out how they were treated by the Ministry of Social Security. As a member of Child Poverty Action Group, I have been helping the Mothers in Action group to analyse the results of the questionnaire.

We suspected that the policy of the Ministry of Social Security might be very different in theory and in practice, as the carrying out of policy largely depends on individual officers. The Ministry's policy is set out in the 'A Code' which is not available to the public and is not enforceable at law. Indeed, it is covered by the Official Secrets Act. Mothers in Action wanted to know whether members were aware of their rights and whether the Ministry of Social Security was effective in informing them of their rights. The questionnaire asked members how they were treated by officials; whether they were under pressure to go out to work if they had children; or to put their children into care; or to move to alternative accommodation, and what members thought about conditions in the Ministry's offices. The questionnaire also covered such topics as special needs, grants, fares to Ministry of Social Security offices, hospitals, prisons and additional earnings. They also wanted to know whether members were penalised by the policy of the Ministry of Social Security on co-habitation and affiliation orders, in the reduction or refusal of benefit, and whether members appealed against the decisions of the Ministry. It was not intended as a scientific survey, but simply to collect information about the treatment of unsupported mothers and to bring the findings to the attention of the Ministry of Social Security and to the public. Where the questionnaire showed a discrepancy between stated policy and practice, we asked the headquarters of the Ministry of Social Security for their comments, and took up individual complaints resulting from the questionnaire.

Unsupported mother means:- (1) Single mothers, (2) divorced and separated mothers, (3) widowed mothers and (4) women whose husbands are incapacitated for work.

At the time of writing, the members were mainly the most vocal and articulate of the group who are anxious to improve the position of all unsupported mothers. The group may have come about as a result of increasing numbers of middle-class mothers who are less likely to accept abuses than the possibly less articulate working class ones. Out of the nine hundred questionnaires which were sent out, only about seventy were returned. Of these we took the first fifty questionnaires which were sent in, and attempted to come to some conclusion. Inevitably the results of the questionnaire may be biased and unscientific, as the mothers who answered the questionnaire are likely to be the most indignant and to feel the most strongly about their treatment. In their answers, many of them are releasing pent-up feelings. If we tend to pick quotations and examples from the questionnaires which appear to be highly emotional and negative about aspects of Social Security, it is because we want to emphasise the way in which receiving supplementary benefit affects many unsupported mothers. We think their feelings are as important as the receipt of supplementary benefit can rarely be a matter of indifference to people in need. Moreover cases where benefit has been reduced and where people have been treated badly cannot be entirely dismissed on subjective grounds. The results of the survey suggest that abuses do

exist, and that in practice the principle of the 1966 act is still not universally applied. The Poor Law attitudes of grudgingly granting relief for the undeserving are still carried on by the successors of the National Assistance Board.

Hostile Behaviour of Officials

Single mothers are a particularly vulnerable section of the community as they not only have to support themselves and their children on their own, and deal single-handed with all the problems of child-rearing, but they are also isolated from society by their unmarried status; they are constantly in opposition to some of the traditional norms. We were particularly concerned to see what mothers felt about the attitudes of officials. Nearly half the mothers reported some kind of hostility from officials, although some said they had received polite and sympathetic treatment. These attitudes would vary from deliberate unpleasantness to normal bureaucratic indifference. The Ministry, when asked what they would do about complaints of aggressive or improper behaviour by an officer visiting a mother in her home said that it was difficult to take any action as both parties would tell a different story. Clearly, home visiting should only be carried out by officers who have shown themselves to be reasonably free from bias. Even women visitors have been reported displaying hostile attitudes. Even so, there was a disturbing number of incidents where mothers were insulted in public, or where mothers alleged that sexual approaches were made to them. One mother was told that if she was copulating with a man in public, she could not expect anything from the Ministry. Many mothers were lectured on their immoral behaviour, on the lines that they were undeserving and were wasting taxpayer's money, while others were questioned in tremendous detail about their personal habits and the events which led up to the birth of their children. One mother was accused indirectly of horroving a baby in order to claim money from the Ministry. There was also an allegation of prejudice towards a claim made on behalf of a child with a coloured father.

Denis Marsden, in his book 'Mothers Alone', suggests that many of the attitudes of officers of the Ministry of Social Security reflect attitudes in the community. This conclusion would appear to be supported by many of the answers to the questionnaire. It would seem that some officers have nineteenth century attitudes towards applicants. It is sad that these attitudes should persist, and that these should be expressed by officials who are paid to provide a service. Undoubtedly these officials are underpaid and overworked, but this does not explain their hostile treatment of single mothers. When mothers need to apply for supplementary benefit in very difficult circumstances often in the last stages of pregnancy, unhelpful bureaucratic treatment can significantly influence their own feelings of isolation and rejection from society. This will have the effect of making them reluctant to seek help subsequently. One mother in our survey was turned away from the local office an hour before closing time when she was eight months pregnant. An example of unhelpful treatment is where mothers who have not sufficient national insurance stamps are given a grant for their baby from the Ministry only after the baby is born, in case, as one official put it, 'your baby is born dead'. This is in striking contrast to the maternity grant which can be claimed before the baby is born so that equipment and clothing can be bought in good time.

Officials in the Ministry of Social Security regarded such hostile treatment by officers with concern and told us that mothers who have been treated badly should complain. In fact, if applicants do complain they are more likely to get better treatment from the local manager, whose views tend to be more liberal than their officers. In the one instance where a mother complained, she received an apology from the local manager, but generally, attempts to reach the manager are intercepted by staff. Considering the questionnaires were sent out to the more articulate mothers of their type, it is surprising that there was only one official

complaint made to the Ministry. Some of the mothers are not aware that they are entitled to complain, and lack knowledge of the machinery for making a complaint. (Possibly mothers fear reprisals from the office concerned).

We discovered that the principle of entitlement to benefit was not applied in practice to many unsupported mothers who had children under sixteen. Many of them were under pressure from officials to go out to work. One mother was expected to return to work shortly after the baby was born: "The 'humiliating' N.A.B. man implied I was barmy because I preferred to look after my child in poverty than to leave her with a baby-minder and earn a good wage as a dispenser (my job before I was pregnant). Thought of offering him 'Child Care and the Growth of Love' by John Bowlby but decided he wouldn't appreciate it."

One mother was told to get a job and refused benefit. Some mothers were under pressure to have their children fostered or adopted and a few were asked to move to cheaper accommodation. In theory mothers should know that they are entitled to benefits and cannot be compelled to work while their children are under sixteen. In practice many mothers will not be aware of this. The effect of all this unofficial pressure only accentuates the feelings of insecurity. Officers are not social workers and therefore they are not in a position to give skilled advice on whether children should be fostered, adopted or put into care. The Ministry of Social Security consider that their officers are competent to advise people receiving supplementary benefit on a wide range of welfare matters, but the giving of such advice by people without relevant training or qualifications can be positively harmful. Pressure from officers to move to cheaper accommodation may arise when the rent exceeds the rent allowance. Even so, officers should bear in mind the difficulties of finding alternative accommodation, especially with young children. It is illegal to discriminate against coloured people in letting accommodation, but not against mothers with children.

Conditions at the Local Office

As more than half the mothers who answered the questionnaire received benefits for the first time at the local office of the Ministry of Social Security, the conditions at the offices may have significantly affected their reactions to receiving supplementary benefit. Mothers were asked to describe the standard of cleanliness, the average waiting time, the standard of amenities, the methods used for dealing with the applicants and the attitude of officials towards applicants. Bearing in mind that the answers were mainly subjective, we were concerned to discover that more answers were negative than positive in respect of conditions. It seems that some of the offices were considered to be filthy, lacking privacy, and have longer waiting times than others. In these offices the behaviour of officials was less sympathetic than in offices which were more efficiently run. It is possible that external conditions have a detrimental effect on both officials and applicants. Dirty offices are particularly upsetting to many mothers who come from a middle class background.

"It was so dirty and depressing that I thought I would rather go without food than wait".

A long waiting time can cause considerable hardship to mothers with young children or expectant mothers waiting for the first time. Nearly half the mothers waited for over two hours, a long time by any standards, and some waited all day. One mother suggested that some offices should have facilities for eating, 'running buffets' and for changing babies' nappies if they are to wait all day.

Many offices lacked some necessary facilities, in particular adequate privacy which should be essential in an office which deals with the very private nature of applicants' affairs. Some mothers described the methods of dealing with applicants as 'open grillings'. A few mothers were enthusiastic about a system of private interviews which were run on a card system. In general mothers of private attitudes of officials in the office as indifferent and impersonal.

although some mothers described officials' behaviour as sympathetic and helpful, and a significant number reported rude behaviour. Some mothers commented on the value of a middle-class accent which would draw a different response from officials than applicants who had other accents.

One mother who became pregnant as the result of an assault for which the offender was sentenced for 15 years imprisonment was visited by an officer who asked for a photograph of the father, even though a welfare agency had written beforehand to the Ministry recommending sympathetic treatment. The mother, who was no doubt still suffering psychologically from the experience, became so distressed that other people in the house came to see what was happening.

While it is difficult for overworked officials to deal quickly and sensitively with applicants, it ought to be possible for officials to give polite and efficient service in a clean setting, with minimum facilities in some settings where large numbers of people are served. The difference seems to be where the customers can buy a service they are free to complain. At the Ministry of Social Security, although, theoretically, applicants are free to complain, too often the attitudes of MSS officials tend to be inherited from the old days of the Poor Law, in that applicants are still very much the recipients of state charity. If rates of pay for officials were higher, recruitment would be easier and staff morale would improve, but this would not necessarily help if there was no selection of officers within the Ministry, to ensure that competent staff were employed in this department. It is not known what criteria would apply here.

Award of Benefit

In the section of the questionnaire concerning the application and the award of benefit, mothers were asked how and where they first applied. The majority of answers show that they first applied at a local office of the Ministry. Inevitably their attitude to receiving was affected by their initial reception by officials and by the conditions which they encountered in terms of the general standard of cleanliness and the length of waiting time. Less than half of the mothers had the scale of rates explained to them, although possibly this was because only half of them asked for explanations. However, we consider that the explanation of scale rates is essential in order that applicants are fully aware of their rights. We asked officials of the Ministry whether explanations of awards could be automatically written on slips when payment was made. Slips are, after all, included in wage packets. However, we were given the usual civil service answer that this would involve too much work. In theory, a written explanation can be requested but very rarely is. One mother wrote that her benefit was reduced every time she applied, although her circumstances changed from pregnancy to having a child. She was given an 11/- rent allowance when she moved in with her parents, despite the fact that her parents wanted £4.00 rent. An official told her to write to Mr Crossman if she wanted an explanation.

Over half the mothers experienced some delay in receiving benefit due to them, and many of their answers point to inefficiency and unnecessary red tape. The most frequent excuses given to them were loss of files and forms being lost in the post; the blame generally being attributed to shortages of staff. One mother had to wait for her benefit until officials had heard from the father of her child. In some instances, the Ministry were not satisfied with the mothers relationship with their boyfriends.

One fifth of the mothers had their benefit stopped completely or were threatened with withdrawal of benefit. We asked Ministry officials whether it was their policy to deny or threaten mothers with stoppage of benefit in order to compel mothers to take up affiliation orders or go out to work, or to move away from boyfriends. In the event of a benefit being dependent on the taking up of affiliation orders and returning to work, we were told that this was not Ministry policy, although it was policy to deny giving benefit to mothers who were living with a boyfriend.

More mothers had their benefit reduced than withdrawn. In one instance benefit was reduced with the objective of compelling the father to pay more. There were two cases where mothers were wage stopped on the grounds that their previous earnings exceeded the level of supplementary benefit. This raises a dubious principle that the mothers should have saved in anticipation of being off work. This principle does not seem to apply to unemployed men who receive supplementary benefit. On the contrary, their benefit is reduced if their previous earnings are less than supplementary benefit level.

Of the ten mothers who were refused benefit, one mother had to ask her parents to support her. Another mother was not getting any financial support from the man she was living with, but was still considered ineligible. Again, it is not the policy of the Ministry to attach special conditions to the benefit, although in practice, many mothers had their benefit made conditional of taking out affiliation orders. It appeared that some mothers experienced difficulties in obtaining milk tokens and in getting full rent expenses, which automatically reduced the value of their total benefits.

Special Needs Grant

We wanted to know whether mothers were aware of the various provisions to which they may be entitled and which could possibly make a difference to their standard of living. There seems to be no general policy on the part of the MSS to inform its applicants of the availability of all these provisions. (1) There is a leaflet 'The Right to Help' which is 'designed as a general guide to the supplementary benefit scheme for social workers and others in a position to advise others who may benefit from the scheme' and is not for general release. There is another very brief leaflet which is obtainable from the Post Office, but this leaflet does not explain some of the provisions. The officers themselves are in a good position to provide explanations to applicants about their entitlements but again, this depends very much on their inclinations. About two-fifths of these mothers were not aware of the special needs grants, and out of those who were aware, only two of them read about it in leaflets. The others mainly discovered this through friends and social workers.

The special needs grants are designed to meet exceptional needs which are not covered by the scale rates. As normal allowances are intended to cover food, heating and rent they do not stretch to clothes, furniture, outings or toys for young children. In addition, many single mothers do not qualify for the 10s long-term addition which is payable to old age pensioners and people who have received supplementary benefit for more than two years, continuously. Officials in the MSS said that mothers should save weekly if they want to keep up with children's clothing, but the experience of many mothers suggests that making ends meet on the allowance and lasting through the week is difficult enough and any small amounts of money would automatically be spent on food or rent or household essentials. Special needs grants are discretionary and vary from office to office and among individual officers. Less than half of the mothers applied for special needs grants and out of these, five applications were not granted. Many of these would be needs generally regarded as exceptional. These included refusal of H.F. payments for a gas cooker. Even less understandable, help was denied with an electricity bill which was high on account of keeping a premature baby in a temperature of 80°f. Mothers felt that half of the grants which were made were insufficient. Examples were given of £4. being issued for a jacket, a pair of trousers and books; £12 for lin. in three rooms; and 12/6 for a pair of shoes.

(1) The Ministry has since published the 'Supplementary Benefits Handbook' which sets out in part the principles on which claims are determined.

Very few mothers were aware that they could claim reimbursement for journeys to the Ministry's office, hospitals (for consultation) and H.M. Prisons. As only half of these mothers claimed reimbursement of fares, it is possible that many mothers did not know how to claim them: certainly some mothers did not know that they could approach the medical social workers who could possibly have helped them a great deal on some of the visits to hospital which were virtually inevitable with young children.

Additional Earnings and Alternatives

It goes without saying that a person with dependent children cannot live entirely on part-time earnings. But many mothers on their own with young children would welcome the opportunity to have a part-time job, rather than having to seek full-time work when their children are very young. It is important to understand that there is no choice of a compromise available, except to mothers with private or independent income. The system of awarding benefits (by disqualifying people in full-time work and restricting part-time earnings for those receiving benefit) creates this stale-mate. The possibility of mothers on benefit doing part-time work is not solely determined by the mother's motivations but by local employment opportunities and wage levels. Many mothers welcome the opportunity to do a part-time job because it provides additional income and they get some relief from the strain of coping with their children and being at home all the time. They have a chance to meet other people; they tend to feel more self-sufficient and less reliant on the welfare state.

Many of the children who live in isolated home circumstances benefit from the opportunity to play with other children. Unfortunately, the earnings rule of the Ministry of Social Security limits additional earnings to £2, and it is not always possible to find work which pays exactly this amount of money. Single mothers receiving supplementary benefit are less fortunate in this respect than old-age pensioners who are allowed to earn up to £6.10s without deductions from their pensions. Apart from the remunerative aspect, free child-minding facilities are difficult to find; play-groups are still often confined to middle-class children because of their fees; public provision of day nurseries is pitifully inadequate and very often, part-time workers are excluded. Thus earnings are very often cancelled out by child-minding expenses. One mother was unable to go out to work as the local day nursery required a minimum attendance by the child of 30 hours per week which would have meant that she would have had to work for more money than is allowed by the Ministry of Social Security. This mother felt that her accommodation was completely unsuitable and that her child needed the environment of a day nursery. One half of the mothers who answered the questionnaire had at some time earned the extra two pounds. The work included baby-sitting, private tutoring, part-time secretarial work, cleaning and dressmaking and book-keeping. Many mothers complained of the lack of availability of jobs, and others felt unable to leave young babies. In theory, it is possible to offset certain employment costs against the total part-time earnings but many mothers do not seem to be aware of this provision. But the end result is always the same: the claimant is not allowed to benefit from part-time earnings by more than £2 per week. It would be worth considering whether mothers might be allowed additional earnings on a seasonal basis, i.e. during a holiday period, or where a job was available for a limited time, by earning larger amounts, but not more than a cumulative total of £2 per week within a three, six or twelve monthly period.

Affiliation Orders

It is the policy of the Ministry of Social Security to advise mothers receiving supplementary benefit to take out affiliation orders or maintenance orders where the fathers refuse or are unable to contribute voluntarily, partly because this is one way of proving the desertion, and of substantiating her claim to supplementary benefit. In another respect this policy reflects the attitude of society that the father of the child is somehow to blame and must not be allowed

siderable pressure of threats of reducing or refusing benefit.

"I was told that unless I took out an affiliation order, the Ministry would not give me any money for the baby as the rules were that this was the father's responsibility and they said after I had the baby that I must contact a solicitor as soon as possible, so that I could take out the order."

One mother put her child in a nursery and went out to work when the Ministry refused to pay compensation after a private agreement was broken.

Another mother was underpaid by £1. 12s p.w. for 18 months, on the grounds that the father should pay more - her appeal was successful. This policy causes considerable suffering and unhappiness. As one mother said, "At the start, they asked where he was and when I said I did not know they made an attempt to find him - despite the fact that this was the last thing I want." Some mothers want to forget and start their lives on a fresh footing. Others want to avoid taking out affiliation orders out of concern for the father. In one instance a mother feared that an affiliation order would break up the father's marriage. Another felt that the father had contributed enough. Chasing men through court can damage existing relationships and the possibility of future support, with a detrimental effect on the children concerned. Going to court can be a terrifying experience and the collection of money when it means going to court can be tedious, time consuming, and, in many cases, futile: since many men avoid paying court orders. The Ministry of Social Security can take over affiliation orders when they are not complied with, but they rarely initiate proceedings for orders. This might possibly avoid a great deal of stress and anxiety for mothers.

Cohabitation

The problem of cohabitation did not directly concern the majority of mothers who answered the questionnaire, but cohabitation is a problem which indirectly affects all unsupported mothers who receive supplementary benefit. The policy of the Ministry on cohabitation is intended to prevent a situation where a couple who are cohabiting are better off financially than a married couple. In a situation where a couple are openly cohabiting, the man, if he has no other source of income is expected to claim supplementary benefit for himself and his cohabitee just as he would if he were her lawful husband. The major difficulty which inevitably leads to considerable hardship and suffering is that the Ministry has no clear definition of cohabitation. The Social Security Act of 1966 says:

"Where a husband and wife are members of the same household their requirements and resources shall be aggregated and shall be treated as the husbands and similarly, unless there are exceptional circumstances as regards two persons cohabiting as man and wife."

It is not clear whether two people living in the same house are considered to be cohabiting, or whether they are only having sexual relations but living apart, or whether the man is only giving financial support. Officials in the Ministry consider the practical definition of cohabitation as a situation where a man is living with a woman as if she is his wife. The implication here is that living together as man and wife is a definable norm, apart from legal contract. But marriage may cover a variety of circumstances: couples may live together for many years without sexual relations; or the husband may not be giving his wife adequate or, indeed, any financial support. Suspicion falls on all single mothers receiving supplementary benefit who have sexual relations with their boyfriends, or who have boyfriends who give presents. In particular, mothers who may not want to reveal to the Ministry the names of the fathers of their children are under direct suspicion because Social Security officers tend to put pressure on mothers to take fathers to court to prove desertion in order to satisfy themselves that their claims are not fraudulent.

The application of the Ministry's policy on cohabitation appears to be inconsistent, arouses mistrust and suspicion on both sides, and leads to such abuses as very early morning and late night visiting by officers and intimate questioning. It can result in investigation of home circumstances by special investigators. Any mother who is suspected of cohabitation may have her allowance withdrawn, unless she appeals and provides evidence to the contrary. She is guilty until she proves her innocence. Five mothers had their benefits reduced or withdrawn because of suspected cohabitation. Three mothers were living with their boyfriends. One mother was living in the same house as a man with whom she said she had no contact. None of these mothers was receiving regular financial support from a boyfriend.

The evidence for cohabitation is often flimsy and drawn from anonymous letters. A woman who openly declares she has a lodger may not have her allowance withdrawn, but if she is found with a man, she stands self-convicted. In one of our answers, we found that the burden of proof depended on their being two beds in a bedsitter. On another occasion a student was told that she would have been entitled to benefit if she had been sharing her flat with a girl friend. Many mothers are not aware of their rights to refuse questioning and deny entrance to special investigators. However, if they do so, they may be suspected of guilt by implication, and their allowances withdrawn. One mother reported that her allowance was withdrawn because the man in whose house she was living refused permission for house inspection.

All these mothers appealed or are appealing against the decision of the Ministry. We did not get much information about the outcome of the appeals, but it appears that lack of knowledge of the machinery of appealing (one officer refused to tell a mother how to contact a tribunal) and lack of representation may have counted against the mother. One mother was in the process of appealing. Two mothers were successful in their appeals, although in one case it appears to have been the decision of the local manager and the mother did not appear to have obtained the full allowance. One mother was so frustrated at having her allowance reduced that she went out to work.

The effects of the Ministry's policy on cohabitation were felt indirectly by many mothers who answered the questionnaire, and who were not cohabiting. Some of them felt that Social Security officers were a kind of secret police, bent on questioning and examining their private lives. In one instance, much to the embarrassment of the mother concerned, her baby-sitter was closely questioned on her whereabouts. As one mother said:

"On the whole, MSS officers were very rude and with every breath uttered inferred it was a lie. They use sneaky methods of trying to establish such facts as whether you are living with the father. 'If he was the first man' etc."

Another mother said: "I find it most annoying when the visiting officers insist on looking in every room. My place is scrupulously clean and tidy. I don't know what they hoped to find. Also when they call without sending a visiting card first. After being on their books for two years, they must have a record of the conditions I live in as satisfactory and therefore there should be no necessity to keep searching the place."

And another wrote: "I was visited at 10.30 p.m. one evening by a young, good-looking officer who said he was doing overtime. He asked me lots of questions about the child's father which were deliberately meant to confuse me or were just misinformed. I kept him on the stairs and said I couldn't possibly see anyone without prior warning and definitely not after office hours."

There was no direct evidence to show that the private lives of mothers were directly affected, apart from increasing general feelings of insecurity and vulnerability. However, this policy could have affected the mother's relationships with their boy friends, and made it difficult for them to establish steady relationships with or without the prospect of marriage, with psychological harm to themselves and their children. Three of the five mothers who were suspected of cohabitation were involved with the fathers of their children, and this policy would have the effect of discouraging a continuing relationship. It may not be the intention of the Ministry to impose a moral code of behaviour on their claimants, but in the application of their policy it would appear that unsupported mothers are often denied many benefits of social life, which are considered normal for young people in different circumstances.

Many of the answers to Mothers in Action questionnaire reflect the feelings as well as the experiences of unsupported mothers who receive supplementary benefit. Despite the 1966 Act their treatment may vary in individual offices. In some offices they need to assert their rights not to work and bring up their children on their own. They need to feel free to refuse to take the fathers of their children to court if they do not wish to do so. They need to be aware of their right to refuse questioning by special investigators and to deny entrance to officers of the MSS arriving for the purpose of checking fraud. They need to know how their allowances are assessed and whether they are entitled to special needs grants and fares to MSS*offices. Above all, they need to know how to complain of hostility in treatment and how to appeal against wrong decisions. For the system can only change if applicants are aware of their rights and are able to appeal. The difficulty of appealing seems to be that appeals are made first to the local office where abuses occur in the first place. It would be much easier if complaints could be made to an impartial authority, such as a local ombudsman. A far clearer definition of cohabitation needs to be worked out and spelled out to individual officers and to applicants. In practice the vague policy of the Ministry on cohabitation tends to affect all unsupported mothers in that it increases the suspicion of officers towards them and generally increases their own feelings of vulnerability and insecurity. As one mother said:

"They ask the same old question, make you feel the size on a pin, and make (me at least) feel very guilty for wanting to stay at home and bring up my son. The sooner we get a fatherless allowance by right, the happier I and most other unsupported mothers will be."

1. We are delighted

at the decision of the British Medical Association that it is not "unethical" to give Artificial Insemination by Donor (AID) to lesbian women. Other authorities must now recognise that we have a right to bear children if we want to. No-one should be able to decide over our heads whether we'll be "fit" mothers. That we want the children is enough.

2. Once we have children

, we must not be forced to live in constant fear of losing custody. Everyone knows that it is the mother who looks after the child, whose life is tied up most closely with the child's and who suffers most if the child is torn away. We know that children grow up just as happily in lesbian households as in heterosexual ones. The authorities have no right to step in and take our children away just because we choose to sleep with women, rather than with men. We refuse to choose between our sex lives and our children. Every woman is entitled to both.

3. Every woman has the right to money

she needs to provide a decent standard of living for her children, and to be able to live at a decent standard herself, whether she has children or not.

With women's wages at little over half of men's, and Social Security levels punitively low, women without men are often confined to the poverty trap of small bedsits and small change.

No woman should be deprived of her means of earning her living.

We must not be sacked from our jobs for being lesbian.

We must not be labelled criminals if we go on the game.

Every woman is entitled to financial independence from men.
Every woman has the right to choose who she loves and how.

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Shoplifting for a few neighbours

YOUNG housewives are running a highly lucrative shoplifting service for friends and neighbours, says a police chief, even preparing "shopping" lists from orders they are given by their "customers."

These petticoat pilferers organise systematic raids in the shopping centre at Romford—and the big stores are the main targets.

John Ardener manager of Tesco Romford, said: "This

organised shoplifting is going on in a colossal way—much bigger than people can imagine. Only two weeks ago we had two women admit in our office in front of police they were shoplifting for their friends."

"We have dealt with a number of cases where young housewives have formed themselves into shoplifting clubs," said Chief Inspector Bryan Mulligan, head of Romford police, though the term housewife is really misleading. These women are hard professional criminals who are making a living out of this.

Stores, he said, should be extra vigilant to combat the racket.

At Debenham's Keith Adams, assistant general manager, said: "This area is notorious for shoplifting and to put goods behind glass or bars would be ridiculous. If staff look aware that is usually a big deterrent."

A total of 295 adults and 314 juveniles have been accused of shoplifting in the town in the first half of the year. This is very slightly down on last year's figures for the same period.

WOMEN WORKING MEN BE WORSE OFF?

Only very rich families can pay high rates of tax. It is all right for the poor families. It is true that families would pay a bit more tax, but in most cases get that tax and more back each week in cash from the Post Office. The Family as a whole would have been better off. The Government believes that working men will object. We believe they've got more sense.

WHY MUST CHILD BENEFITS BE INCREASED EACH YEAR?

Family Allowances have been raised at least once a year since 1963 and are now worth less than at any time since they began in 1945. Child tax allowances have been increased more often but also have not kept pace with inflation. We must make sure that Child Benefits are better protected against inflation than the allowances they replace. They must be increased annually and increased like all other social security benefits.

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP?

Get as many people as possible to sign our petition, and let your MP know how you feel about Child Benefits now. Send for packets, cut stickers, leaflets, petitions, and badges. An order form is enclosed. Donations

Deal reached on child benefit plan

By MARTIN ADENEY, Labour Staff

A compromise proposal on the Government's child benefit scheme which will be postponed after this year to avoid cutting into male pay packets and endangering the pay policy was reached yesterday between representatives of the Labour Party, the TUC, and the Government. It would bring in the scheme in full by April 1979.

The proposals, which will have to be approved by the Government's intention to bring in next April only for the first child. But it means that the father's tax allowances to the mother's cash benefits, which was postponed, will be set in train and will be completed in April 1979.

For their part, the Ministerial representatives have made it clear that while no commitment can be given about the additional resources they will advise the Government that the TUC and Labour Party representatives expect the Government to accept that there is a financial commitment in the agreement.

This is a considerable victory for campaigners for the scheme. Mr Callaghan and Mr Healey have so far resisted moves to set dates for the scheme. It now appears that the Government will facilitate to do this.

WHAT ARE CHILD BENEFITS?

Child Benefit is a tax-free cash allowance for each child in every family, that would be paid weekly to mothers. No amount had been decided but we had been pressing for at least £2.70 to £3 which would have made all ordinary taxpaying families better off.

CHILD BENEFITS NOW

Ev. just away to avoid raising F.A. - by 1979 we'd be had to raise them anyway - and way to be really getting on.

CHILD BENEFIT? and is not a genuine child benefit scheme. They are introducing by allowance of for all children. It is and will be of passing in and up. Families will get support to help families deal support to all new into the hands of independence. Families - the in two children will any one-parent tax allowance. (L...)

WOULD WORKING MEN BE WORSE OFF?

Only very rich families who pay high rates of tax would be worse off. In all other two-parent families it is true that fathers would pay a bit more tax, but mothers would get that tax and more back each week in cash from the Post Office. The Family as a whole would have been better off. The Government believe that working men will object. We believe they've got more sense.

WHY MUST CHILD BENEFITS BE INCREASED EACH YEAR?

Pensions and other Social Security benefits are now raised at least once a year to protect people against inflation. Family Allowances have been raised only once since 1968 and are now worth less than at any time since they began in 1945. Child tax allowances have been increased more often but also have not kept pace with inflation. We must make sure that Child Benefits are better protected against inflation than the allowances they replace. They must be reviewed annually and increased like all other Social Security benefits.

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP?

Get as many people as possible to sign our petition, and let your MP know how you feel about Child Benefits Now. Send for posters, car stickers, leaflets, petitions, and badges. An order form is enclosed. Donations towards the cost of the campaign are welcome.

ORGANISATIONS SUPPORTING THE CHILD BENEFITS NOW CAMPAIGN:

British Association of Social Workers
British Union of Family Organisations
Child Benefit Action Group
Family Service Units
The Fawcett Society
Gingerbread
London Council of Social Services (Family Services)
Low Pay Unit
Marshall Association of Probation Officers
National Board of Catholic Women
National Council for Civil Liberties: Rights for Women
National Council for One Parent Families
National Council for Women
National Federation of Women's Aid
Prisoners' Wives Service
Union of Catholic Mothers
Women in Media
Women's Liberation Campaign for Legal and Financial Independence

For further information on the
CHILD BENEFITS NOW campaign

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CHILD BENEFITS NOW

WHAT ARE CHILD BENEFITS?

Child Benefit is a taxfree cash allowance for each child in every family, that would be paid weekly to mothers. No amount had been decided but we had been pressing for a least £2.70 to £3 which would have made all ordinary taxpaying families better off.

WHAT ABOUT FAMILY ALLOWANCES?

Child Benefit would replace Family Allowance which is taxed and is not paid for the first child in a family. Child Benefit would also replace child tax allowances which normally go to fathers.

ISN'T THE GOVERNMENT INTRODUCING CHILD BENEFIT?

No. The Government had promised to introduce the Child Benefit scheme in April. They have gone back on that promise. Instead they are introducing a £1 Family Allowance for the first child in a family. Family Allowance of £1.50 will continue for other children and child tax allowances for all children will stay. This new £1 will be taxed twice, as Family Allowance is, and will be worth only 30p to ordinary taxpaying families. The Government is calling this extended Family Allowance Child Benefit. There is talk of phasing in the full scheme - but not until 1979. We cannot wait that long.

WHY ARE CHILD BENEFITS SO IMPORTANT?

The cost of feeding, clothing and housing children goes up and up. Families with children are suffering most from inflation but are receiving least support from the Government. What's more, food subsidies which do help families are being phased out. Child benefits would have provided real support to all families bringing up children. They would have put the money into the hands of mothers themselves and would have provided some measure of independence for women unable to work because they are caring for children.

Child benefits would have given most help to the very poorest families - the 200,000 working families too poor to pay tax. A family with two children not paying tax could have been nearly £4 better off a week. Many one-parent families, though they pay tax, are unable to claim the child tax allowance. They too would have gained.

CAN WE AFFORD IT?

Yes. Most of the cost would be met by the money saved from Family Allowances and child tax allowances. The rest was provided for in next year's Budget but is now being spent by the Government on other things. Child Benefit was part of the Election Manifesto of the present Labour Government and a similar scheme was planned by the Conservatives. Liberals and the nationalist parties also support the principle of Child Benefit.

March 8 / The Tor. Star

Children better off in foster homes, mothers union says

By JO CARSON

The clenched first was shown yesterday as 100 members of the Mother-Led Union demanded a raise in allowance payments.

They marched from the Legislative building, Queen's Park, to a punched Macdonald Block room to present their case before representatives from the Ministry of Community and Social Services.

Clenched fist posters were displayed and voices edged with anger punched out their complaints against Premier William Davis and Social Services Minister Rene Brunelle.

Bearing the brunt of the criticism for the Ontario Government were Mr. Brunelle's assistant deputy minister, John Anderson, and Len Heale, executive director income security division for the ministry.

Both found themselves without a defence as the women charged that the men were "only caretakers" with no authority to speak to their demands.

Jean Lance, mother of four, pointed out in a presentation that the recent increase of 13 per cent given as a children's allowance "figured out to be 25 cents more a day per child."

"But unions around us every day are striking. We're learning from the nurses why their raise of 50 per cent. We demanded a 50 per cent increase on top of an already enormous salary."

Mrs. Lance pointed out that mothers who receive benefits work against overwhelming difficulties to raise their children.

"Would the Government rather that they do their job half-right . . . and see these future citizens instead in penal institutes or repeating the poverty cycle?"

She said the cost to the taxpayer would be much higher if the mothers neglected their responsibilities.

"Would the Government think it better if all benefit mothers give up their children? Would the taxpayer not have to pay higher taxes because foster mothers receive three times more than we mothers do for doing the same job?"

"Maybe that's the answer: we all switch our kids around in foster homes and then we will know that our kids are financially taken care of," she said to loud applause and bitter laughter.

Mrs. Lance said the Mother-Led Union demands the right for benefit mothers to earn more without being penalized on their allowance payments.

She outlined the inequity of the present allowable earnings: A mother with one child may earn \$100 a month, but the mother with eight children is allowed only the same earnings.

"How can her children benefit? We are asking that the amount be \$100 per month for each mother, plus \$25 for each child . . .

"As it is now, mothers can work only two days a week. Where can you find work for two days a week? Besides, our earnings can be almost wiped out by paying babysitters, transportation and for clothes. It does not pay for most mothers to work with the present setup . . . How could a mother get day care?"

Her group cannot get part-time day care, Mrs. Lance said. She argued that the work done in the home should be considered as part of a full-time job.

"We are ostracized and

can't get day care because we are told we do not work full-time. So the only alternative for benefit mothers is to pay a babysitter."

"We believe the day-care system should be changed so that if a mother wants to work part time she can get day care, or if she wishes some time away from her children for a break she can get day care too."

Joan Clark, chairman of the Mother-Led Union, attacked a statement made by Premier Davis. She quoted: "Ontario is a place where men women and children of every walk of

life and every background thrive and prosper in an atmosphere of decency and dignity."

Mrs. Clark noted that the Government's proposed guaranteed annual income schemes, according to the Ontario ministers, have been designed to give people the opportunity to work their way out of welfare.

There was loud applause as she said: "If work was the way to get off welfare, there certainly wouldn't be any mothers on welfare."

Mrs. Clark argued that 3,500,000 Canadian women with

children should be regarded as full-time members of the labor force.

"Decency and dignity require this," she said. And if the Government is serious about a guaranteed annual income, a good place to start would be to bring family allowances in line with other child support programs—for example the foster child rates of more than \$100 a month per child.

Because most women fall into the working-poor class when they enter the labor force, she cautioned the audience to examine closely any discussion of a guaranteed annual income.

"It would be very wise at this point to be sure that women are not being divided against each other. Whether she decides to work in her home or takes a second job outside the home, she is being

handed the same amount of peanuts."

Mrs. Clark voiced the suspicion that proposals for the guaranteed income are political games "to keep taxpayers mad at the poor and let government off the hook for all their mismanagement, waste and inability to set up priorities that would make Ontario the place described by Premier Davis."

When Mr. Anderson prepared to say thank you and accept the presentations for Mr. Brunelle, he was faced with an antagonistic audience.

Sally Stamm, mother of two children, said she was not ready to accept a mere thank you. "We are going to come back and back. We will not be divided by the stupid, bureaucratic little ploys of being passed from one caretaker to another. Deliver that message to Mr. Brunelle."



Members of the Mother-Led Union march at Queen's Park to ask for more money.