

*The Scrounging Controversy:
Public Attitudes Towards the Unemployed
in Contemporary Britain*

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THE threat of the scrounger has long pervaded discussions of the social security benefits paid to the unemployed. During 1976, however, public concern at the possible abuse of such benefits became more intense and was expressed more widely than at any time since the 1920s. Allegations of scrounging received extensive coverage in the press, and the response of the public to such claims became a major political issue. In November 1976, for example, the Labour candidate in the Workington by-election attributed his defeat to "the reaction of ordinary working-class people to so-called social security scroungers". Six months later the Conservative candidate at Ashfield was reported to have based his sensationally successful campaign upon the three issues of "prices, income tax and social security scroungers".¹ The campaign against the scrounger appeared to lose momentum towards the end of 1977. Nonetheless, public disquiet remained, and on October 29 Hugo Young, Political Editor of the *Sunday Times*, concluded that unemployment was "taking on a new political colour", since the "man in the factory" now saw himself "as more of a victim than the man in the dole-queue."²

The essence of the campaign was that abuse³ was rife, and that this necessitated both a reduction in the level of benefits paid — either directly or by making them subject to tax — and a stiffening of their administration. These specific demands can — and must — be distinguished from a more general concern as to the effects of a reduction in the gap between the income received by an individual when in work and when unemployed. Such a concern became widespread at the same time as the scrounger campaign was gathering force, and by the Spring of 1977 it was almost universally agreed that a combination of falling tax thresholds and pay restraint had weakened the incentive to work for many low paid workers.⁴

The twin issues of incentives and scrounging are, of course closely related. The fact that the loss of employment does not necessarily mean a decline in living standards gives added plausibility to stories of voluntary unemployment. Conversely, the apparent willingness of a large proportion of the electorate to believe that many of the unemployed are scrounging makes the size of the differential an extremely sensitive issue. Nonetheless, the view that steps should be taken to improve the relative position of those in employment is not synonymous with a belief in scroungers. Indeed, the need for greater incentives is frequently cited in support of arguments for increased family support, either through higher tax allowances or more generous child benefits. Thus, the left-wing Labour M.P. Jeff Rooker justified his attempts to raise the tax threshold during the Committee Stage of the 1977 Finance Bill in terms of the need to restore work incentives for the lower paid.

“They will not deliberately chuck up a job or become unemployed, but, when the opportunity arises, they will seek to swell the queues for voluntary redundancy, or they will not try to prevent a firm from closing down and moving — for example, from a once prosperous area like the Midlands to a development area. They will not fight to save their jobs, because they know that if they lose their jobs, their families will be better off.”⁵

Such comparisons are also put forward as evidence of the need for higher pay in various industries and occupations. In March 1977, for example, Sydney Weighall of the National Union of Railwaymen claimed that ‘several thousand’ jobs at British Rail remained vacant because they paid less than family men could receive in social security. Similarly, in June Lieutenant General Sir David House, the Officer Commanding Northern Ireland, was reported to have told the Ministry of Defence that the low level of service pay relative to the dole was undermining the morale of the troops.⁶

Statements such as these formed an essential backcloth to the scrounging controversy. Nonetheless the focus of this paper is upon those who sought the solution primarily in terms of restricting beliefs rather than in raising the incomes of the lower paid.⁷ It is concerned with the belief that much of the present unemployment results not from a shortfall in the demand for labour but from the over-generous benefits lavishly — and carelessly — provided by the State. Measures to improve the position of those in work may relieve the situation, but they would never solve the problem of the ‘born-tireds’, nor would they do anything to forestall the rapid growth of such practices as ‘working and singing’ or claiming benefit in respect of fictitious

dependants.

In the past there has been a tendency amongst commentators to deprecate these ideas, to associate them with a wide range of 'Col. Blimp' attitudes and to see them as having little significance for policy. It is argued here, however, that this view is patronising and unrealistic, and that the widespread resentment aroused by stories of scrounging warrants serious study, both as a phenomenon to be explained and as an important influence upon the manner in which benefits are administered. Such a study is attempted in the present paper. Though the paper pays particular attention to the closing months of 1976 — when the controversy was at its height — it also considers developments up to the end of 1977.

Before proceeding further, however, it should be emphasised that the paper does not discuss the precise extent of abuse. To do so would be both repetitious, since the available evidence is summarized elsewhere,⁸ and of doubtful relevance since the link between popular attitudes and actual evidence is tenuous to say the least. This is not to deny that abuse occurs. Prosecutions for fraud, for example have risen from 15,400 in 1975 to over 19,000 in 1976 and to an estimated 25,000 in 1977. It is not clear, however, whether this increase — which relates to all claimants and not just the unemployed — is due to a growth in fraud or improved detection.⁹ In any case, the amounts fraudulently received — £2.6 million in 1976 — are small in relation to the total cost of benefit. In its evidence to the Public Accounts Committee, for example, the Department of Health and Social Security said that detected frauds accounted for only 1p in every £32 paid out in 1976, and that there was "no reason to suppose" that undetected frauds were more than "two or three times" greater.¹⁰ Similarly, the view that a large proportion of the unemployed are content to live on benefit is not borne out by the investigations conducted by the Department of Employment and other bodies.¹¹ In short, the paper is based upon the premise that whilst scrounging exists, the degree of popular concern is out of all proportion to its extent, and may be fairly termed 'scroungerphobia'.

The Campaign Against the Scrounger

The attacks upon scrounging began in earnest in July 1976 with the allegations by Ian Sproat M.P. that at least 20% of claims to social security were fraudulent and that only half of those receiving unemployment benefit were really looking for work. These claims, together with the highly publicised conviction of 'King Fiddler' Derek Deevy¹², prompted a series of reports on what the *Daily*

Telegraph called the 'professional job-dodgers', men between the ages of 18 and 36 who were "idle to the back-bone and twice as devious".¹³ Some chronicled the difficulties faced by a variety of employers in trying to compete with the dole, others cited examples of workers who insisted on being allowed to 'work and sign'¹⁴. Examples of individual scroungers were readily paraded by the 'popular' newspapers. They were usually men with large families — and even larger televisions — who never failed to answer the door without a cigarette in one hand and a drink in the other. In most cases these 'scroungers' were entitled to the benefits they were receiving, and such articles were prompted more by resentment at the level of provision than by actual evidence of lax administration. A good example of this is a piece which appeared in the *Sunday Express* concerning a man with seven children who was drawing invalidity benefit. Though the reported acknowledged that the man could not work — he had applied for invalidity benefit at the suggestion of a social security officer — it nonetheless implied that it was improper for him to be better off than he would be if he were fit.¹⁵

The significance of these stories lay in the impression they created of State largesse and 'feather-bedded' claimants. They thus help to explain the furore surrounding the increases in benefit which took effect in November 1976. These made the front page of virtually every paper. "£8 a Week Dole Bonus" was the headline of the *News of the World*, "Outcry at £5,000 a Year Doles" that of the *Daily Telegraph*. Some reports claimed that large families on supplementary benefits would receive increases greater than those allowed to workers under the pay code, while *The Times* called for the re-introduction of the wage-stop under the heading "Where Help is Not Needed".¹⁶ The bulk of the coverage, however, was devoted to national insurance benefits, and in particular to the way in which the incomes of those who had recently become unemployed could be augmented by earnings related supplements and by tax refunds. The *Daily Mail*, for example, provided a table which illustrated how "the £75 a week man is better off on the dole".¹⁷ Similarly, David Howell, Opposition spokesman on Treasury and Economic Affairs, described as 'fiscal insanity' the fact that an average worker needed gross earnings of £77 a week to keep up with "the stay-at-home-Jones's",

"No wonder the world and our creditors look on bewildered. I do not believe such madness prevails on this scale in any other country or planet".¹⁸

The tone of this comment was typical of many made at the time. Indeed, the scrounger campaign as a whole was a heady mixture of

exaggerations, extreme cases and misleading statistics.¹⁹ Nonetheless, its political repercussions were formidable and by the end of the year senior Ministers were actively — and very conspicuously — considering whether national insurance benefits could be taxed.²⁰ The response of the Government is discussed in a later section. First, however, it is necessary to explain why the campaign made such an impact.

The Roots of 'Scroungerphobia'

Welfare claimants are only one of a number of groups which are regularly singled out as scapegoats for Britain's ills; immigrants, 'faceless bureaucrats' and unofficial strikers are among the others.²¹ Obviously, the press plays an important role in this process, and the debate over scrounging provides many illustrations of what the Glasgow University Media Group termed "agenda setting: the ability to give certain events public prominence whilst ignoring others".²² One notable example is the lack of coverage given to the results of the investigations conducted by the Department into cases of alleged fraud submitted to it by Mr. Sproat. In February 1977 Stan Orme announced that the first 196 cases had been found to contain 17 instances of fraud, and 9 of these were already under investigation. By June 441 cases had been examined and fresh evidence of fraud had been discovered in 22 of them.²³ The Minister's first statement was commented upon in the *News of the World*,²⁴ but was not reported in either the *Sun* or *Daily Mail*. The later findings were almost universally ignored. The same indifference was displayed towards the admission made by the Board of Inland Revenue in its *Annual Report for 1976-7* that there has occurred a 'significant decline' in its success "in detecting and countering tax evasion".²⁵ This received scant attention, as did the claim made in October 1977 by the London correspondent of the *Wall Street Journal* that Britain had become a "nation of tax fiddlers".²⁶ If either story had referred to social security abuse it would have made the front pages.

However, it would be ridiculous to suggest that the national pre-occupation with scrounging is simply a reflection of press bias, and any attempt to explain it must make some mention of societal values, and in particular to the importance of work as a source of social status. It is the latter, for example, which explains why controversy focuses almost entirely upon the unemployed, and ignores the possibility that those in work may be receiving more than they are formally entitled to by way of Family Income Supplement.²⁷ Nonetheless, there remains a high risk of cliché in this area. The

'Protestant ethic', for example explains little since the position is similar in Catholic countries.²⁸ Equally, explanations in terms of the imperatives of market capitalism ignore the work of Rimlinger and others on the Soviet Union. The scheme of unemployment insurance announced by the Bolsheviks in December 1917, for example, included a wage stop. Indeed, benefits for the unemployed were consistently paid at a lower rate than those for the sick and they were completely withdrawn in 1930 on the grounds that unemployment no longer existed. In 1932 Shvernik told the Central Trade Union Council:

"Bureaucracy and egalitarianism must be eradicated from social insurance. We shall handle social insurance as a weapon in the struggle to attach workers to their enterprises and strike hard at loafers, malingerers and disorganisers of work".²⁹

Perhaps the crucial point, however, is that popular agitation over abuse has not remained at a constant pitch, but has fluctuated considerably in recent years. The introduction of the four week rule in 1968 followed a 'welfare backlash' similar to that of 1976, while another — much weaker — campaign surrounded the deliberations of the Fisher Committee between 1971 and 1973. In contrast the early and middle 1960s seem to have been characterised by a more generous attitude towards the unemployed, and it is difficult to detect a shift in either the economic organisation or religious values of Britain since that period. It is perhaps true that the press coverage of 1976 owed much to a wider debate over public expenditure and the level of taxation, but a similar debate in 1966 had not prompted a welfare backlash.

The factors which influence the timing and intensity of periods of 'scroungerphobia' are complex, but there is no doubt that in the past concern at the abuse of unemployment benefit has not necessarily followed the actual exposure of such abuse. Quite the reverse: accusations of malingering have been made most frequently in periods of high unemployment and these have often led to stricter administration at such times. Thus in the 1920s some 3 million claimants were refused benefit on the grounds that they were not genuinely seeking work, although at no time in these years did anyone seriously suggest that the work which they were supposed to be seeking actually existed.³⁰ Over the last few years the likelihood of someone drawing benefit being denounced as workshy has similarly increased as their chance of finding a job has decreased. It should be remembered that the present scrounging debate of 1976-7 is being conducted against a background of rising long-term unemployment.

Some quarter of a million men were unemployed throughout the whole of 1976, five times the figure for 1966 unskilled workers for every vacancy notified to the Employment Services Agency, in the North West there were 128 such workers for every vacancy.³¹

Thus attitudes towards the unemployed seem to have hardened at the very time when it is most difficult for them to find a job, a paradox which is usually attributed to the fact that the same period has seen a fall in the standard of living of the population as a whole. David Donnison, for example, sees the 'panicky cruelty' of November 1976 as arising primarily from a loss of confidence in economic growth

"Once you convince people that their living standards will not rise — indeed that they may fall for some years to come — they are compelled to recognise that any help given to poorer people must be paid for by real reductions in their living standards. . . . When in addition, you allow tax thresholds to fall . . . to a point at which even the poorest workers are paying income tax, it is not surprising that the springs of compassion dry up pretty fast."³²

Perhaps the key statistic is that there were over two-and-one-half million more people paying income tax in 1976/7 than there had been in 1973/4. The results was aptly described by Jon Akass in *The Sun* as the "new national irritability":

"A man can be close to the breadline and still contribute to the welfare of the man next door who is not, to the naked eye, worse off."³³

Most of this is generally agreed. There is, however, one aspect which is frequently neglected, and this is the role played by anomalies. Historically the belief that a particular group was enjoying an unfair advantage has often aroused popular resentment and provided a rationale for restrictive measures. Past 'scandals' have included the payment of benefit to married women in 1919, to seasonal workers in 1931 and to young people congregating at coastal resorts in 1968. In each case the controversy led to the introduction of regulations which eventually affected a wider group of claimants than those originally cited. At the present time the most glaring anomalies occur in respect of tax refunds. As George Cunningham has shown, the date on which a person becomes unemployed is now crucial. A married man with two children and former earnings of £80 a week received no refund if he lost his job in April 1976, but if the same man became unemployed in September 1976 he was entitled to nearly £11 a week until April 1977, a total of £294.³⁴ This is, of course, blatantly unfair and a cause of much resentment. The main point, however, is

that the tables which appeared in the press showing the incomes of the unemployed assumed that maximum rebates were being drawn. The inclusion of the rebates gave a striking impression of prosperity amongst the unemployed, and this may help to explain why a Marplan survey conducted in the first week of 1977 found that 83% of respondents believed that the unemployed had “done well during 1976”.³⁵

To some extent, then, popular anxieties over abuse may be seen as a rational response to the press coverage described above. However, it would be more accurate to point to a deep-rooted hostility to the unemployed which becomes more intense in periods of recession and is then reflected and further inflamed in the press. Evidence of this hostility is provided by the ‘Quality of Life’ survey carried out in 1975 by the Survey Unit of the Social Science Research Council. One of the questions asked was:

“What is the ONE thing you would most like to change to improve the Quality of Life in Britain today?”

The topic most frequently cited by respondents was inflation, and a number of points relating to government and politics came next. In third place came “make people work” and “stop social security abuses”.³⁶ This was accorded a higher priority than crime, strikes, taxation, immigration or world peace — even though the national newspapers were carrying few stories of abuse at the time of the survey.³⁷ It thus seems reasonable to assume that the conclusion reached by Durcan and McCarthy in their study of the ‘state subsidy’ theory of strikes applies also to the ‘scrounger theory’ of unemployment. They consider that the widely held belief that the withdrawal of supplementary benefits from the families of strikers would lead to a reduction in the number of disputes is probably “impervious to evidence”:

“If it isn’t true then it ought to be. Like the cry of ‘shoot the referee’ that emerges whenever the home team is three goals down at half-time, the theory may be impossible to dislodge from parts of the public mind. For it may be performing the useful and supportive role of a reassuring social myth, externalising and objectifying widespread confusion and frustration by holding out the prospect of a simple and immediate remedy if only it could be tried.”³⁸

The apparent decline in scroungerpobia in the second half of 1977 should be seen in this context. Whilst the more restrained tone adopted by the press probably did reflect a reducing in public feelings,³⁹ there is no evidence of a major shift in attitudes. There were

two reasons why public anger became less marked. The first was the growing belief that 1978 would see an improvement in the living standards of those in work, itself a result of the reductions in personal taxation made during 1977 and the prospect of further cuts in 1978.⁴⁰ The second was the efforts made by both the Supplementary Benefits Commission and individual Ministers to correct some of the more obvious myths and distortions.⁴¹ Neither factor is likely to reduce the antagonisms revealed by the S.S.R.C. survey, and if hopes of economic recovery are dashed — or if the tax threshold is allowed to fall again — the events of 1976/7 are almost certain to recur.

Some Implications

The most obvious effect of the scrounging controversy was to reinforce the existing concern at the lack of work incentives. In evidence to the Royal Commission on the Distribution of Income and Wealth, for example, the Supplementary Benefits Commission stated that although there were few cases in which benefits exceeded potential earnings, there were “many more” in which an unemployed man returning to work “could well be demoralised” by the narrowness of the gap between the two.

“We are thus driven to the conclusion that there is little room for improvement in the level of minimum incomes that the . . . scheme provides for unemployed men and their families unless corresponding improvements occur in the earnings of unskilled workers or in the support given to their families through child benefit or other forms of benefit for those in full-time work.”⁴²

It could be argued, therefore, that the consequences of the controversy have been beneficial for low paid workers, some 2 million of whom were lifted at the tax net during 1977.⁴³ This is true, only insofar as those workers have been able to retain their jobs, since the implications for the unemployed have been less happy. The most serious aspect of scroungerphobia lies in its possible effects upon the manner in which benefits are administered at the local level. Clearly Ministers could not ignore the immense pressure for further measures against abuse, and felt that they had to provide some reassurance that the taxpayer’s money was not being wasted. It was extremely difficult for them to do so, however, without appearing to encourage a tougher attitude on the part of their local officials.

This is not a new problem. Over 50 years ago the *New Statesman* noted that the administration of unemployment benefit:

“necessarily consists mainly of the detailed settlement of individual

cases, and an unsympathetic temper at the centre is readily reflected in the mood of the local Exchanges.”⁴⁴

More recently, a number of writers have confirmed that the ways in which local officials use their discretionary powers is indeed influenced by their perception of what is expected of them by their superiors or the public. Olive Stevenson observed that the ‘very existence’ of powers to restrict payments to unemployed men or single women tended “to arouse suspicion in the minds of officers or to suggest to them that higher authority wants them to be suspicious.”⁴⁵ Changes in the regulations, however, are only one factor in what Michael Hill has called the “psychological climate in which officials operate”, and that “climate” is bound to be affected by the prominence accorded to abuse in the media and everyday conversation.⁴⁶ Officials read the same newspapers and pay the same taxes as everyone else, and it is difficult to believe that they are immune from resentment. The position is clearly aggravated by the anger of some officers at the effect of salary restraint upon their own standard of living, as compared to that of claimants.⁴⁷

The extent of recent measures against abuse is revealed in the Report of the Co-ordinating Committee on Abuse, published in December 1977. They include the re-design of girocheques and order books, the introduction of random checks on the identity of claimants, a 50% increase in the local manpower committed to the detection of abuse, and the issuing of “fraud awareness” packages to all local officers. These packages illustrate the chief forms of abuse and are used in the training of all benefit staff. The Report notes that they received an “enthusiastic reception” and lead to an increase in “the number of prosecution cases as Local Offices scrutinized existing claims more closely.”⁴⁸

How far such measures have led — or will lead — to a ‘clampdown’ is problematic. There is no doubt, however, that this has occurred in the past. In 1929, for example, John Hilton, then Director of Statistics in the Ministry of Labour, dressed as a workman and toured the exchanges of the severely depressed northern region pretending to be unemployed. He recorded his experiences in a report to his Minister, Sir Arthur Steel-Maitland, and presented a dramatic indictment of the administration of insurance. Everywhere he found the officials convinced of their ability to spot a scrounger — “a groundless and dangerous faith” — and frequently neglecting their duty to help claimants secure work. This, he believed, was a direct result of pressure from above.

“if they were told to cease bothering about ‘where were you last

Tuesday' and to devote themselves to finding out what they could do so help the claimant in his quest for work, they would throw themselves into the work with real enthusiasm."⁴⁹

Now it is not suggested that post-war governments have administered benefits with the callous indifference that was shown in the late 1920s. What is suggested, however, is that the present climate of rumour and suspicion gives rise to problems of central-local relations within the administration and that these problems are not lessened by either denying or ignoring them. In the more recent past denials have taken the form of either endowing local officials with super-human perception, or by simply assuming that they are saints. Thus in July 1968 Judith Hart expressed her 'amazement' at the ability of the staff:

"unerringly to distinguish between the man to whom sympathy and help and understanding should be extended and the one who is trying to get away with something."⁵⁰

At the same time she announced that claimants who had been unemployed for three months would be called in for interview. The interview would

"enable our officer to discover whether a man is simply not genuinely seeking work, or whether he has some disability or handicap. This is a judgement which our experienced officers are very well able to make."⁵¹

In truth no Minister made such a statement in either 1976 or 1977. Nonetheless, the manner which the new identity checks were announced in September 1976 was disturbing. Stan Orme was quoted in the *Daily Telegraph*

"We need the element of surprise, the spot-check, the unexpected interview, the off-beat home visit."⁵²

This emphasis on surprise recalls the language of the 1920s. In 1929, for example, the Ministry of Labour asked its Divisional Controllers to submit their views on the value of home visits. In their reply they saw home visits as having two advantages:

"(1) The claimant is unprepared for an interrogation as to his efforts to find work and has not had the time and opportunity of thinking out his answers, as may be the case when he is summoned for interview at the Local Office.

(2) Certain deductions may be drawn from his home surroundings and the general demeanour both of the claimant himself and

members of his family.”⁵³

Shopkeepers and insurance agents were regarded as ‘interested parties’, and neighbours were believed to be the best source of information.

“In actual practice it has proved more fruitful to call, ostensibly in error, at a neighbour’s house instead of at the correct address and to allow the line of enquiry to develop in accordance with the reception given by the neighbour. Although neighbours are often vindictive, generally it can be stated that very little information is obtained regarding the decent type of claimant, whereas the life history of the ne’er do well is readily volunteered.”

The willingness of people to provide information on their neighbours and relatives does not appear to have diminished. In November 1976 Jon Akass wrote an article in *The Sun*, asking for ‘real evidence’ of abuse. The letters poured in.

“There are an astonishing number of people prepared to denounce their friends and in-laws as scroungers, which seems to show that slander — like murder — is mostly a family crime.”⁵⁴

It is easy to exaggerate parallels with the past, and to over-generalise from isolated continuities. Nonetheless, it is contended that both the importance of staff attitudes, and the influence of such developments as the scrounging debate upon those attitudes have often been underestimated in the literature. In a sense Ministers are in a vicious circle; the greater the furore, the more urgent the need to respond, the more careful that response must be.

Conclusions

The scrounging controversy was stimulated by a number of factors, but in particular by a rise in benefits relative to net earnings coming after a sequence of scandals and well publicised allegations of abuse. At root, however, it was a result of the general fall in living standards in Britain. The Deevy case, the absence of a wage stop upon large families on supplementary benefits, and the anomalous position of tax refunds would all have attracted comment in earlier periods. They would not, however, have generated the hysteria which surrounded them in 1976 and early 1977.

That hysteria appeared to decline towards the end of 1977 as people became increasingly optimistic about their financial prospects. Nonetheless, there remained a deep suspicion of the unemployed, and with it the need for government action to preserve

— or restore — public confidence in the benefit system. As Professor Chester has recently stressed, social security has profound implications for the

“morale and attitude of the whole working population, from whom the resources are taken, and who want to be reassured that their contributions reach those most in need.”⁵⁵

Clearly that action must include a more imaginative programme of public education if the facts about abuse are to be widely appreciated. However, the effects of such a policy could only be felt in the longer-term. In the short-run a crucial issue will be the need to restore the incentive to work, and there is little dispute that additional help should be provided for the lower paid. This is likely to take the form of increased tax allowances, though the ‘better off’ problem could be more effectively tackled through the payment of higher child benefits to larger families.⁵⁶ This in itself, however, would not forestall the criticisms levied at the administration of benefit, and Ministers have felt it necessary to take a number of steps to detect and deter abuse. It has been argued in this essay that such measures could have a serious effect upon the local administration of supplementary benefit, an argument supported by the reaction of some local staff to recent statements by the Commission’s Chairman.⁵⁷

This, however, is not the only consequence of ‘scroungerphobia’, and perhaps its most tragic aspect is the way in which it distracts attention from the real problem of unemployment. At the end of 1977 the question most frequently asked was still “what should be done to the unemployed?”, rather than “what can be done for the unemployed?”. The chief legacy of the scrounging controversy may prove to be a new indifference to the problems of the workless.

References

¹ *Sunday Times* 21.11.76; *Guardian* 26.4.77. The same preoccupation was observed by Austin Mitchell in Grimsby, which polled the same day as Ashfield. *New Society* 6.10.77.

² *Sunday Times* 29.10.77.

³ Abuse and scrounging are notoriously vague terms. They are used here to refer to cases of voluntary unemployment as well as to fraudulent mis-representation. The chief forms of the latter are drawing benefit whilst working, claiming in respect of dependants who are in work and duplicate encashment of giro cheques. They do not, however, refer to payments such as those to unusually large families which are within the regulations but nonetheless excite popular resentment.

⁴ This was certainly the view of the Cabinet: for statements by the Prime Minister, Chancellor, and Secretary of State for Social Services respectively; *Daily Mirror* 25.3.77; *Daily Mail* 12.1.77; *Sunday Times* 6.2.77.

⁵ *Hansard* Vol. 933 Col. 744 (17.6.77) Recent disputes within the motor industry would appear to confirm this diagnosis. In February 1977, for example, the Leyland plant at Castle Bromwich was closed by a strike in support of a claim for redundancy pay rather than alternative work. See *Financial Times* 10.2.77.

⁶ *Daily Telegraph* 29.3.77; *Daily Express* 28.6.77.

⁷ There were, of course, a whole range of possible views on this question and the debate is best regarded as having been conducted from different points along a continuum rather than between two mutually exclusive positions.

⁸ Most recently in F. Field, M. Meacher and C. Pond *To Him Who Hath* (Penguin Books, 1977) Chapter 8.

⁹ The Minister for Social Security, Stan Orme, believes that the increase stems primarily from the "more vigorous approach" now adopted by his Department. *Guardian* 8.12.77.

¹⁰ *Ninth Report of the Committee of Public Accounts*. Minutes of Evidence. H. C. 532 of Session 1976-7. (H.M.S.O., 1977) Q. 2626. Total over-payments were £10.6 million, or 1p. in every £8, half were attributed to official error, one quarter to claimants' mistakes, one quarter to fraud.

¹¹ See; 'Characteristics of the Unemployed' *Department of Employment Gazette* June 1977 (and a supplementary article in the issue of September 1977); W. W. Daniel *A National Survey of the Unemployed* (P.E.P. 1974); M. Hill et al. *Men Out of Work* (C.U.P. 1973).

¹² In all Deevy used 41 aliases and fraudulently obtained over £36,000 in social security. He was convicted at Liverpool Crown Court on 13 June 1976, shortly before Mr. Sproat made his allegations. See *The Times* 14.6.76.

¹³ *Daily Telegraph* 27.7.76.

¹⁴ For example, see *Daily Telegraph* 16.11.76, 2.12.76; *Guardian* 18.11.76. For a more recent example, *Sunday Telegraph* 30.10.77.

¹⁵ *Sunday Express* 12.9.76.

¹⁶ *News of the World* 14.11.76; *Daily Telegraph* 15.11.76; *The Times* 15.11.76. The claimants most likely to be affected by a return of the wage-stop are unemployed men with more than four children. In December 1975 they numbered 40,000, or 7.4% of all unemployed claimants. The gross earnings necessary to ensure that such a claimant is better off in work varied from necessary to ensure that such a claimant is better off in work varied from £27.53 a week to £56.00 a week in March 1977, depending upon the take-up of means tested benefits. Supplementary Benefits Commission, *Memorandum of Evidence to the Royal Commission on the Distribution of Income and Wealth* (1977), p. 11.

¹⁷ *Daily Mail* 17.11.76.

¹⁸ Quoted in *Daily Telegraph* 15.11.76. A married man with two young children 'took home' £56.41 in November 1976. Unemployed he received £37.77 in benefits, £10.50 in tax rebates, £1.50 Family Allowance and £5.35 in rent and rate rebates. The £77 figures includes an estimate of travel expenses to and from work.

¹⁹ As such it was nothing new. Immediately after the First World War several newspapers conducted a similar campaign against the Employment Exchanges, which

they saw as a threat to their 'situations vacant' columns. In 1920 the Barnes Committee found their allegations baseless. Indeed the chief critic — Alex Thomson of the *Daily Mail* — refused to appear as his evidence was 'heresy only'. *Report of Committee of Inquiry into the Work of Employment Exchange* Cmnd. 1054 (H.M.S.O. 1920) p. 5.

²⁰ David Ennals was quoted on the front page of the *Evening Standard*; "Inequity it ought to be done . . . short-term benefits should be taxed" (15.11.76.).

²¹ It is perhaps significant that when these groups overlap, as in the payment of supplementary benefit to the families of strikers, the tone of the press coverage becomes even more strident.

²² Glasgow University Media Group *Bad News* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976), p. 9.

²³ In 297 cases there was no reason to suspect fraud, in 59 the person concerned had never been a claimant, 41 cases were inconclusive and 22 were already under investigation. For the first announcement: *Hansard* Vol. 925 Col. 303 (17.2.77). For a description of some of the letters, Pat Healy 'Last Word' *Social Work Today* (31.3.77.).

²⁴ Columnist Philip Wrack noted "it will be a long time before anyone again pays much attention to what he has to say" *News of the World* 20.2.77.

²⁵ Board of Inland Revenue *119th Annual Report* Cmnd. 6734 (H.M.S.O., 1977) p. 7.

²⁶ This was mentioned briefly in the *Daily Express* and *Daily Mail* (11.10.77).

²⁷ Family Income Supplement is paid for 12 months, irrespective of any change in the recipient's circumstances. In its *Annual Report for 1976* the Supplementary Benefits Commission states that 48% of the awards which expired during 1976 were not renewed. Cmnd. 6910 (H.M.S.O., 1977), p. 163. A recent essay by Jennie Popay has shown the relevance of the work of sociologists such as Stanley Cohen and Matza. *Fiddlers on the Hoof: Moral Panics and Social Security Scroungers* (Unpublished dissertation, University of Essex, 1977).

²⁸ See, for example, the work of Stuart Woolf cited in A. Deacon and A. Sinfield *The Unemployed, Policy and Public Debate* (stencil) S.S.R.C. Workshop on Social Security, March 1977.

²⁹ G. V. Rimlinger *Welfare Policy and Industrialisation in Europe, America and Russia* (John Wiley, 1971) pp. 279. R. Hutchings 'The Ending of Unemployment in the U.S.S.R.' *Soviet Studies* Vol. 19 pp. 29-52.

³⁰ For which see, A. Deacon *In Search of the Scrounger: The Administration of Unemployment Insurance in Britain 1920-1931* (G. Bell & Sons, 1976).

³¹ Cmnd. 6910 (op. cit.) p. 57. For a fuller account see, A. Sinfield 'The Social Costs of Unemployment' in K. Jones and S. Baldwin (eds), *The Yearbook of Social Policy in Britain 1976* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, forthcoming).

³² D. V. Donnison *Policies and Priorities for Supplementary Benefits* (Lecture delivered to the London Branch of the British Institute of Management, November 1976).

³³ *The Sun* 17.11.76.

³⁴ Assuming that he did find a job in the meantime. Conversely someone who was unemployed in April but found work in the following October would pay no tax until he had exhausted half his annual tax allowance. This, however, can compound the inequity since someone unemployed for a year from September to September could benefit by £600, whereas someone unemployed from April to April would get nothing. For a clear introduction to a confusing subject, see the article by Cunningham in the *Guardian* 8.3.77.

³⁵ Cited in A. Sinfield (Forthcoming) op.cit.

³⁶ For the survey see John Hall 'Subjective Measures of Quality of Life in Britain: 1971 to 1975' *Social Trends* No. 7 (H.M.S.O., 1976) pp. 47-60. I am grateful to John Hall for detailed information on the response to this question.

³⁷ Royal Commission on the Press. *Analysis of Newspaper Content*, Research Series 4, Cmnd. 6810-4 (H.M.S.O., 1977) p. 235.

³⁸ J. W. Durcan and W. E. J. McCarthy 'The State Subsidy Theory of Strikes' *British Journal of Industrial Relations* XII pp. 26-47 (1974). For an alternative view: L. Hunter 'The State Subsidy Theory of Strikes — A Reconsideration' *British Journal of Industrial Relations* XII, pp. 438-444 (1974).

³⁹ There were some notable exceptions. The *Daily Express*, for example, greeted the last *Annual Report* of the S.B.C. with the headline, "Life of Luxury on the Dole" (18.9.77).

⁴⁰ For example, a survey carried out for the *Financial Times* in September concluded that people were "more confident about their financial prospects than at any time since the beginning of 1970" (26.9.77).

⁴¹ For a discussion of those efforts, A. Deacon 'Scrounger Bashing' *New Society* 17.11.77.

⁴² Supplementary Benefits Commission (1977) op.cit.

⁴³ *Economic Progress Report* No. 29 (November 1977).

⁴⁴ *New Statesman* 25.10.74.

⁴⁵ O. Stevenson *Claimant or Client?* (George Allen & Unwin, 1973), p. 43.

⁴⁶ M. Hill *The Sociology of Public Administration* (Weidnefeld and Nicholson, 1972) p. 76.

⁴⁷ The up-rating of benefits in November prompted several to claim that they would be better off on benefit. For an example, *Daily Mail* 1.12.76, *Sunday Mirror* 5.12.76.

⁴⁸ *Report by the Co-ordinating Committee on Abuse* (D.H.S.S. 1977).

⁴⁹ Quoted in A. Deacon (1976), op.cit. p. 89.

⁵⁰ *Hansard* Vol. 768, Col. 935.

⁵¹ *Hansard* Vol. 769, Col. 213.

⁵² *Daily Telegraph* 22.9.76. It was frankly admitted that the changes were made to placate public feeling rather than to remedy any defect in the existing procedure. *Times* 22.9.76.

⁵³ This and the following quotation are cited in A. Deacon (1966) op. cit., pp. 59-60.

⁵⁴ *The Sun* 11.12.76.

⁵⁵ T. E. Chester 'Social Security, Work and Poverty', *National Westminster Bank quarterly review* (November 1977), pp. 38.

⁵⁶ For example, child benefit for fourth and subsequent children could be raised by £1 a week at an annual cost of £25 million (see note 16 above). The same increase for all children would cost £600 million a year.

⁵⁷ G. Weightman 'Under the Grille' *New Society* 5.1.78.