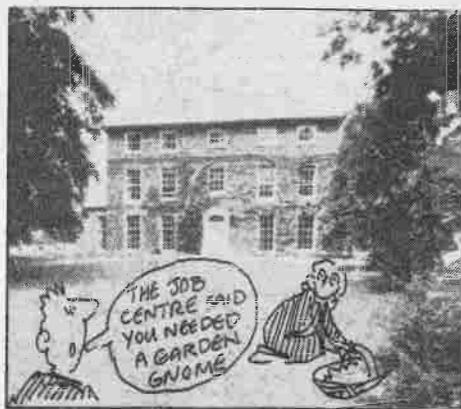


be given a legal responsibility to make our kids have access to the help they... She points out that this makes economic... if children can be helped at four or five to language, "then they could go back into stream schooling and they wouldn't have supported by the state because they're out of job in later life." Kirsty Milne



Graffiti by Nigel Paige

South-south divide

East England suffers from a south-south divide, whereby pockets of poverty and unemployment coexist with the affluent commuter belt and high-tech boom areas, says a report published this week by a group of Labour councils. For many people, the triangle of the south east provides employment opportunities, inadequate services, poor schools and bad housing. The South East Economic Development Strategy group. December 1986, 355,800 people were recorded out of work in the south east (including London), and one fifth of the parliamentary constituencies had unemployment over 10 per cent. A quarter of the households in the south east as a whole had a weekly income of less than £100 a week in 1983-84; including London the figure would be even lower. The outer south east area lost 200,000 jobs in manufacturing between 1971 and 1984. At the same time, service industries and high-tech industries created more part-time, typ-

ically female jobs which tend to be poorly paid and insecure. Nearly half of the working women in this area were in part-time jobs in 1986.

Resources and services in the south east are also unevenly distributed. In Basildon, 7 per cent of the population have received some form of higher education, while in Hook, near Aldershot, the figure is 27 per cent. There is also, according to the report, the paradox of boom towns containing poor or overcrowded housing. In the Battle ward of Reading, for instance, 18 per cent of the households do not have baths or toilets.

Worst hit are the coastal towns such as Portsmouth and Southampton where, it seems, the regional economy has contracted inwards, leaving a rim of unemployment behind. Another unemployment black spot is the eastern Thames corridor, stretching from

the east end of London to Sheerness in Kent, where port-related industries have declined and poor communications and infrastructure have discouraged new industries from coming into the region.

"Poverty still exists in the more affluent south east," says Ruth Lister, director of the Child Poverty Action Group. "It is just better hidden." Amanda Mitchison

Wandsworth's wasted homes

Wandsworth council—whose housing policies were singled out for praise by the environment minister, Nicholas Ridley, at this week's launch of the Conservative election manifesto—has been criticised as "uncaring and disinterested in the plight of homeless people" by the housing charity, Shelter.

Nicholas Ridley said on Tuesday that Conservative Wandsworth is "transforming housing conditions by turning over its capital and reinvesting it." He argued that Wandsworth showed how the Tory policy of selling off council properties made available "more resources to invest in those areas where housing is suffering from disrepair and neglect."

But a new report by the Wandsworth Shelter group (*Roofless Wandsworth*, free from 47 Totteridge House, Yelverton Road, London SW11 3QQ) takes issue with this claim, and Shelter told NEW SOCIETY this week that "the human cost of Wandsworth's sales' policy is

an ever-increasing housing waiting list, rising homelessness and poorer conditions for those tenants who can't afford to buy."

Wandsworth council has sold 9,400 council properties since the Tories first took control in 1978, and they plan to sell a further 10,000, reducing the council stock to 20,000. In some cases, one-bedroom former council flats are now being sold for over £100,000—which the Wandsworth Shelter group secretary, Harry Fowler, says is out of the reach of ordinary local families. Of 300 inquirers at the new Falcons development (formerly the Livingstone estate before being renovated for sale by private developers) only nine lived locally; most came from other parts of London.

Shelter also complains that the sales policy has led to over a thousand council homes in the borough being left empty, at the same time that more than 200 homeless families are languishing in bed and breakfast accommodation. Steve Platt

EEC cuts hit voluntary groups

Drastic changes in the use of money from the European Social Fund, are threatening the future of many voluntary organisations. Following an alleged "secret memo" from the employment minister, Lord Young, earlier this year, £500 million of ESF money will now go straight to the Manpower Services Commission. Groups in the voluntary sector will lose 20 per cent of their funding, and those assisted by local authorities 50 per cent.

Large amounts of ESF money first flowed into the UK in 1983, and the effect was dramatic. Hundreds of training bodies were set up, many of them for women, disabled people and ethnic minorities.

"1983 was a halcyon year," says Annie Falder, outgoing European policy adviser to the Association of London Authorities. "It is in the spirit of the ESF to give most of its help to the voluntary sector, and until now this has always been recognised by governments. But we are now the only country in Europe which is putting large amounts of ESF money into central government funds."

In 1983 and 1984 the MSC's share was only a few thousand pounds; this year's £500 million will be equally matched by the Treasury, giving the MSC £1 billion in all. The MSC, however, is not known for making special provision for women, ethnic minorities or the disabled. According to Annie Falder, it is the responsive and "sexually democratic" voluntary sector which will suffer from the ESF changes, with disastrous results.

The 26 organisations which are members of the Women's Training Network are typical of the groups to be affected: 25 of them will suffer a 20 per cent cut, and one 50 per cent. The South Glamorgan Women's Workshop, which teaches new technology, carpentry, plastering, business studies and other subjects to women of all ages, will lose £17,000 this year. The Haringey Women's Training and Education Centre, which teaches building skills, mainly to black women, will have its budget cut by at least £12,000. William Hatchett



David Modell

ADRIANA CAUDREY

A taste of the polls

The Gallup pollsters reveal connections between party preference and consumer brand loyalty.

After a day with the Gallup girls in Edmonton, this is your picture of a likely Conservative: partial to Black Magic chocolates and committed to Kleenex lavatory paper. Alliance man usually prefers After Eights and listens to James Galway. Labour will be faithful to Andrex but spurn chocolates.

In the run-up to the general election, opinion pollsters are tripping over each other in Edmonton Green shopping centre. The "girls," Jean and Pip, are brandishing their consumer survey—a banal hotch-potch, where political questions are padded out with toilet paper and tissue quizzes. Inevitably you find yourself wondering what a stranger's favourite brand of loo paper might tell you about their brand of politics.

Although Gallup's consumer survey is longer and more intimate than its general election one, the punters seem to find it more entertaining. They can show off how many building societies they've heard of and need never reveal that they don't know what Mrs Thatcher's policy is on education.

Here in the north mall of the shopping precinct we are at the nerve centre of Edmonton—referred to in Gallupspeak as: X0 (for outer London) and 026 (for the constituency). Edmonton is a marginal seat. Ian Twinn, the Conservative MP, took it over in the last general election when he unseated the Labour MP.

Pip and Jean have installed themselves between Hibberds bakery and the Railway Tavern. They're both wrapped up from ankle to chin in track-suit trousers and padded jackets and carefully made-up. Jean, a cheery Liz Taylor look-alike, finds her first victim, a retired postman. A jocular man, in a buff

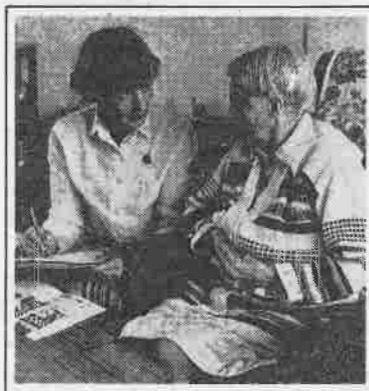
raincoat and cloth cap, he thinks Kinnock is a good leader. Has he had more or less money left in his pocket this year than last? "I've had nothing left and I only had tuppence left last year," he jokes, dancing slightly on the spot. Which building society does he think is most friendly? "Dunno, I haven't come across any friendly building societies yet—they don't cater for pensioners." (What would he answer to the same question about the political parties, though?)

Jean asks him, in the same confidential tone, which chocolates are made with the best ingredients. And what do women most like to eat? "Men," he bellows. Jean now has one Labour-voting man aged over 65 from social category DE in the bag. For the consumer survey they have to interview five men and five women in five age-groups between 16 and 65, from all social categories. For the general election one they don't need any professional or managerial A.B.s. Classifying people's occupations can be awkward. Jean and Pip tell me of a case recorded in Gallup's newsletter: "One woman was a prostitute. Head office was asked how to classify her and replied matter-of-factly: "as a c2—skilled manual worker, naturally."

Jean's next target—a young man, with wavy blond hair and gold sleepers in his ears—looks to my untrained eyes like a c2. But he is a factory foreman with more than 25 people under him, so he qualifies as an AB. He thinks the Conservatives are "doin' pretty well" at keeping down inflation, doesn't know too much about food prices because "I only buy hamburgers." On chocolates, he's one of the Pip the pollster (above) in Edmonton shopping centre.



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Black Magic school of Conservative supporters. Asked which are "perfect for women," he groans: "God, it's got to be Black Magic again."

He is less consistent when it comes to party politics. Asked which party he reckons best serves his interests he answers "SDP" although he plans to vote Conservative. As for whether he'd go in for tactical voting, he hisses: "was-sat?" and Jean has to read out the long printed spiel which absolutely no one can follow.

Pip, meanwhile, is darting out at people. She has interviewed her quota of men and exclaims: "I need women." A passing bus inspector rejoins: "I've been saying the same thing for years." (Women get the unabridged questionnaire which includes questions on toiletries.) Finally she corners a thin woman with dyed blonde hair and a crimson coat. She doesn't like "her" at all and doesn't like "him" either, suspects the Conservatives will have an easy victory, but would like Labour to get in.

Political tissues

She bends down over the question sheet and mutters her answers. She buys Sainsbury's, Kleenex and Andrex toilet paper. Why does she buy them? "Well, because they're the softest." Which is the loo paper that's soft, strong and extra long? She struggles to remember. She could almost be describing Mrs Thatcher's purported qualities and anticipated terms in office. She hasn't been given any chocolates in the last few weeks. "Ah," Pip sympathises. "I'm on a diet," the woman snaps. More political questions, and then more tissues. The woman looks round as if for an escape. And, finally, we're onto Heinz spreads. She's never tasted them. Could that just be to avoid answering more questions? Curiously, none of the women admit to having sampled them. It's their avoidance of Heinz spreads which unites them.

Shoppers are more prepared to stop for the election quickie, which takes about five, instead of 15 minutes to answer—but they find it harder. A shopkeeper's wife, in a brown leather coat, wheeling a shopping trolley, answers "Conservative" to nearly every question. When it comes to unemployment, she hesitates: "I think if the Liberals got in..." With strikes and industrial disputes, she is back on firm ground: "I think Mrs Thatcher has done wonderful with the miners. "Who does she think will win in Edmonton?" I think it's half-half because last time the Labour man lost his seat and Ian Twinn got in and I think he could lose it again." Jean politely translates for her: "So it'll be a close fight."

Next comes a rustic looking woman, with a shy smile, missing a few teeth. She considers violence and unemployment to be the key election issues, believes that Labour could best tackle unemployment, but plans to vote Conservative. "But they've all got their good points." Who would do best for education? "Conservative," she answers. For law and order: "Conservative." For industrial disputes: "Er, I don't know really." For the NHS: "Again, I don't know really." And which party would make Britain more democratic? "Conservative," she replies, but it sounds like



Jean on the look-out for victims to question about tastes and politics.

a question. Like many others, she seems to have made her choice on the basis of just a few policies.

A young man in a jeans jacket, chewing gum, stops reluctantly. What does he consider the key election issues? "Health and housing." He supports the Conservatives on everything except unemployment, strikes and the Common Market. Those areas are "don't knows." What did he vote in the previous general election? "Can't remember," he mutters and takes another stick of gum. Jean shows him the list: "Nationalist," he hisses under his breath. Very politely Jean suggests: "ah, that

will be other." Afterwards she tells me: "He voted National Front but he's too embarrassed to say so."

Another session is over. The girls return to the local cafe which they call "the office." Jean's completed election sheets (she's done 13 and has seven left) show Labour and Conservative neck and neck—with four Edmonton voters each. The Alliance is only slightly behind with three, leaving one "other" and one "don't know." Her answers are now part of a 1,000-strong Gallup sample. But how much attention can one really pay to people's at times arbitrary answers? Political parties are, after all, singularly intangible. Unlike loo paper or chocolates, you can't touch them or taste them.