

NEW SOCIETY

8 April 1988
vol 83 No. 1319



COVER: The Dover scene by Monique Cabral. See page 8. Inset: Primo Levi by Jerry Bauer.

CONTENTS

- 3 LEADERS
- 4 AS I PLEASE
Sean French
- 5 NEWS
Plus parliamentary answers, society week and reports.
- 8 SICK TO DEATH AT DOVER
Amanda Mitchison
Easter brought the seamen's strike to a head at Dover

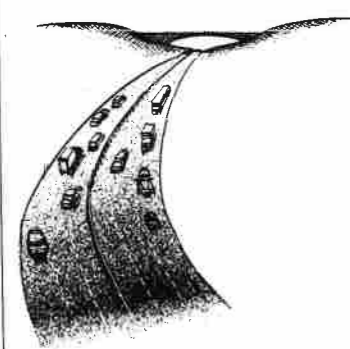


10 THE LESSONS OF AIDS
Geoff Rayner and Karen Gower
US drug-taking and AIDS

13 KILLING FOR KINDNESS
Ivy Walker
The effects on a doctor of euthanasia.

14 STANDARDS OR CHOICE?
Steve Platt
Do better housing standards reduce choice for those in most need?

16 VENTILATING THE SLUMS
Hugh Pearman
The government is trying to encourage housing associations to use private finance to increase the supply of rented housing. One company has been doing it for 100 years.



17 MOTORWAY MADNESS
Bob Davis
New motorway safety measures have been announced following a review initiated in December after horrific crashes. But do they miss the point of road safety?

19 GUIDE TO THE SOCIAL FUND
Tony Lynes
An explanation of the social fund legislation.

21 ANALYSIS
Carry on planting:
Amanda Mitchison
We argue that Britain is still lumbered with a forestry policy dating back to the first world war.

22 LETTERS

23 PERSONAL VIEW
An inhuman society:
Sheila Rowbotham

24 BOOKS
Carole Angier
'The Drowned and the Saved' by Primo Levi

Peter Taylor-Gooby
'Public Issues, Private Pain' edited by Saul Becker and Stewart MacPherson

David White
'The Passion of John Aspinall' by Brian Masters

Justine Picardie
'Good Girls Gone Bad' by Susan Nadler; 'Insiders: women's experience of prison' by Una Padel and Prue Stevenson

David Mitchell
'Berlin: the dispossessed city' by Michael Simmons

Colin Ward
'The Truly Disadvantaged: the inner city, the underclass, and public policy' by William Julius Wilson; 'Out of the Poverty Trap: a conservative strategy for welfare reform' by Stuart Butler and Anna Kondratas

Prabhu Gupta
'Broken Windows, Broken Lives' by Adrian Pluss

Reviews in Brief

33 YOUR BENEFIT
Tony Lynes
A weekly feature in which a leading expert on social security answers readers' inquiries.

34 INITIATIVES
Larkin' about at school:
Adriana Caudrey

34 TAILGUNNER
PARKINSON

44 DATABASE
Juvenile crime
● Classified advertisements on pages 35 to 42



Pp 29 to 32

Rosemary Brown visits a citizens advice bureau in the week before the social security reorganisation

Why are the unions wooing voluntary sector workers? asks Ken Edwards.

New Society 8 April 1988

Unsolicited manuscripts will be returned only if an SAE is sent.

Acting editor Steve Platt
Assistant editor Anna Dedhar
Books editor Tony Gould
Art editor Caroline Heler
Production assistants Joy Melville/Claire Sanders
Education Adriana Caudrey
Social services Jeremy Laurance
Home affairs Kirsty Milne
Politics John Lewis
Race and Society editor Yasmin Alibhai
As I Please Sean French
News reporters Amanda Mitchison/James Stephenson
Editor's PA Morag Jeff
Books/Art PA Ingrid Dammers
Editorial secretary Paula McDonnell

Display advertising: Teresa Knight
Classified advertising: Hazel Stevens/Laura Andrus/Chris Gallagher
Advertising production: Brian Cushion
Advertising secretary: Linda Ring
Publishing manager: Robert Hall

Editorial and advertising offices: 42-43 Lower Marsh, London SE1 7RQ
Tel: Editorial 01-620 0255
Tel: Advertising 01-620 0244
Fax: 01-633 0981
Telex: 28449
Subscriptions: N. S. Services, Foundation House, Perseverance Works, 38 Kingsland Road, London E2 8BA. Tel: 01-739 1737.

Distribution: N. S. Distribution, 102 Curtain Road, London EC2A 3AA. Tel: 01-739 4807.
Panel of academic advisers: Tessa Blackstone, Daniel Bell, Bernard Crick, W. W. Daniel, Nick Deakin, Andrew Dilnot, David Donnison, Anthony Giddens, Michael Harloe, R. W. Johnson, Rudolf Klein, Adam Kuper, Ann Oakley, Ray Pahl, Bhikhu Parekh, Michael Parkinson, David Piachaud, Robert Reiner, Pat Thane, Mary Warnock, Christine Whitehead, Michael Young.

Copyright © New Society 1988
Member of the Audit Bureau of Circulation.

Second class postage paid at New York, NY. Air freight in US by Speedimpex USA Inc. US Postmaster: Address changes should be sent to New Society, Speedimex USA Inc, 45-45, 39th Street, Long Island City, NY 11104.

New Society 8 April 1988

From poor to poorer

Underlying every system of welfare is the principle of redistribution. "Society," as Professor A.H. Halsey has written, "means a shared life. If some and not others are poor then the principles on which life is shared are at issue: society itself is in question. All societies have either solved the question or perished."

The sort of redistribution that Halsey, and before him Beveridge, had in mind was that from rich to poor. But the government, in its wisdom, has re-interpreted the notion. The new welfare safety net, to be implemented next week less than a month after a £2 billion hand-out to top rate tax payers, will be funded by a redistribution among the poor.

The government's own figures bear this out. There will be gainers: nearly 3,200,000 of them. But there will be more losers: 3,650,000 of them. The total social security budget is due to rise this year. But taking account of inflation and the 20 per cent rates contribution that every claimant will now have to make, overall there will be no extra money in claimants' pockets.

A key question, then, is whether the

losers, already among the poorest in the land, can afford to lose. The gains will be spread more thinly than the losses; in a few cases families stand to lose as much as £50 a week (see, for example, Tony Lynes, NEW SOCIETY, 18 March).

To prevent hardship, the government is providing transitional protection. But this merely converts an immediate cut into a gradual one. Most of those on supplementary benefit who would get less on the new income support (because there will no longer be extras like heating additons) will continue on their existing benefit levels. These will be frozen, and will therefore fall in real terms, until the new income support rates catch up.

On top of this, nearly one million people will lose immediately because of the cuts in housing benefit for which no transitional protection is on offer. Most of these will fall foul of the new rule which limits housing benefit to those with less than £6,000 savings (under the old rules savings were not taken into account).

The next question is whether the reforms

are worth the extra hardship they will cause. The government had two principal objectives: to target help on those genuinely in need and to simplify the complex structure of the benefits system. The problem is that these two aims are contradictory. Targeting implies complexity: you have to have sophisticated means tests to pick out just those families and individuals in genuine need.

The result is that though the new system is in some ways simpler it is also less fair. The neediest clients who previously got the most help are among the hardest hit.

The most important task in the coming months will be to watch closely what happens as a result of next week's reforms. Yet the budget for research on social security is tiny: only £13.60 for every £1 million spent on benefits. As the Social Security Advisory Committee notes in its annual report out this week, research has "a vital role to play" both in assisting policy makers and in "enabling the rest of society to judge whether the right choices are being made."

Could a "value for money" government dare to disagree? ■

Teachers' new realism

Inspired by the salty spume of Scarborough, the largest teachers' union has this week radically revised its response to government education plans. It has resolved to play the government at its own game. Gone is blanket rejection of the Education Reform Bill; gone are vows to boycott national testing; gone, too, are the strike threats.

Instead, NUT leaders persuaded their annual conference to set up an independent education commission to vie with Baker's multifarious advisory bodies on the bill. Creating a think-tank of teachers, parents, governors, unions and industry, is a shrewd move. It is designed to stop the government from playing teachers and parents off against each other. It should also clear teachers of the charge of irresponsibility—the basis of the government's anti-teacher rhetoric.

But the NUT has to beware of ditching important principles on the road to the "new realism." Its stance on gay teachers, for example, is particularly ambiguous. One minute delegates were giving a standing ovation to a lesbian teacher calling for an end to discrimination against gay teachers. The next minute they threw out an amendment urging support for teachers victimised for conveying positive views of homosexuality.

The NUT's stab at new realism shares much with the Labour Party's own revamp. Like Labour, the NUT has been spurred by the failure of previous approaches, by the staying power of Thatcherism and, not least, by loss of members. The union has clearly decided that constructive criticism may work better than arm-wrestling with an iron lady.

And like Labour the NUT is in the midst of leadership battles. The executive elected Doug McAvoy, a moderate and engineer of new realism, as new leader. But delegates have voted overwhelmingly against his appointment.

The NUT may now be in a stronger position to influence education policy. But it remains to be seen whether teachers can achieve limited success through playing the government's game, or whether they will be fatally compromised. ■

Classy soap

Even when soap-watching became a socially acceptable activity for the educated middle classes (post *Brookside*, *EastEnders* and the Barlow-Baldwin affair in *Coronation Street*), one soap opera was doomed forever to remain on the outside. *Crossroads*, which finished this week after 23 years and 4,510 episodes, was always too ordinary, too unobjectionable, too lower middle class to be fashionable.

In part, at least, this was its problem. Viewing figures remained high right up to the end—though well down on the programme's late-1970s peak of 17 million. But they weren't the viewers that the advertisers wanted. They were, well, too old, too ordinary, too lower middle class. Midland Englandism—a truer testimony to Thatcherite hegemony than the traditional Toryism of its southern heartlands (and far more important electorally)—may reflect the mood of the country, but it's just not sexy enough to sell advertising.

EastEnders, *Coronation Street* and even, with its much lower viewing figures, *Brookside*, have no such problems. The Conserva-



tive-thinking nanny statists might regard drugs, rape, crime, homosexuality, marital infidelity, lust, greed and violence as unacceptable manifestations of inner city low life, not fit to be shown on the TV screens.

But like the tits, bums and scandal-strewn splendour of the tabloid press, they know the public will buy it. Thus, through the soaps, the otherwise unheard accents of working class Britain—provided they're not of the Brummie variety voiced in *Crossroads*—are effectively deployed in the sale of everything from bank accounts to booze.

Crossroads, in keeping with its failure to latch onto the advertisers' credo, gave up without a fight last Monday. The much speculated-about disaster scenario, in which the entire cast was killed off in one go, failed to materialise and the series terminated not with a bang, but a whimper. Thatcherism, whose values it represented more closely than any of the other soaps, is unlikely to go so quietly. ■