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An approach to social policy

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NATIONAL ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

An Approach to Social Policy

NATIONAL ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL PUBLICATIONS

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NATIONAL ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL CONSTITUTION AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. The main task of the National Economic and Social Council shall be to provide a forum for discussion of the principles relating to the efficient development of the national economy and the achievement of social justice, and to advise the Government through the Minister for Finance on their application. The Council shall have regard, *inter alia*, to:

- (i) the realisation of the highest possible levels of employment at adequate reward,
- (ii) the attainment of the highest sustainable rate of economic growth,
- (iii) the fair and equitable distribution of the income and wealth of the nation,
- (iv) reasonable price stability and long-term equilibrium in the balance of payments,
- (v) the balanced development of all regions in the country, and
- (vi) the social implications of economic growth, including the need to protect the environment.

2. The Council may consider such matters either on its own initiative or at the request of the Government.

3. Members of the Government shall be entitled to attend the Council's meetings. The Council may at any time present its views to the Government, on matters within its terms of reference. Any reports which the Council may produce shall be submitted to the Government and, together with any comments which the Government may then make thereon, shall be laid before each House of the Oireachtas and published.

4. The membership of the Council shall comprise a Chairman appointed by the Government in consultation with the interests represented on the Council

Ten persons nominated by agricultural organisations,

Ten persons nominated by the Confederation of Irish Industry and the Irish Employers' Confederation,

Ten other persons appointed by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions,

Six persons representing Government Departments comprising one representa-

tive each from the Departments of Finance, Agriculture and Fisheries, Industry and Commerce, Labour and Local Government and one person representing the Departments of Health and Social Welfare.

Any other Government Department shall have the right of audience at Council meetings if warranted by the Council's agenda, subject to the right of the Chairman to regulate the numbers attending.

5. The term of office of members shall be for three years renewable. Casual vacancies shall be filled by the Government or by the nominating body as appropriate. Members filling casual vacancies may hold office until the expiry of the other members' current term of office and their membership shall then be renewable on the same basis as that of other members.

6. The Council shall have its own Secretariat, subject to the approval of the Minister for Finance in regard to numbers, remuneration and conditions of service.

7. The Council shall regulate its own procedure.

NATIONAL ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

An Approach to Social Policy

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PART I

**THE COUNCIL'S COMMENTS ON
"AN APPROACH TO SOCIAL POLICY"**

INTRODUCTION

1. According to its Constitution and Terms of Reference, the National Economic and Social Council has as its main task the provision of "a forum for discussion of the principles relating to the efficient development of the national economy and the achievement of social justice". The Council must have regard, *inter alia*, to:

The fair and equitable distribution of income and wealth of the nation, and
the social implications of economic growth, including the need to protect the environment.

2. After its establishment, the Council set up a Social Policy Committee, whose main concern is with the social rather than the economic or regional matters which fall within its terms of reference. During the initial discussions in the Social Policy Committee, it was clear that, while there was general agreement on the scope and definition of (for example) economic policy, there existed a wide range of views on the meaning of social policy. In the Committee's view, social policy was (and had to be) more than a mere combination of social services currently being offered.

3. In its pursuit of a concept of social policy that would provide a unifying theme for the Council's work, the Social Policy Committee sought expert advice from Professor David Donnison, director of the Centre for Environmental Studies, London. His broad terms of reference were to report on the scope and aims of social policies and to make consequential proposals to help the Committee plan its future work. His paper is published in Part II of this Report. A draft of his paper was discussed by the Social Policy Committee at its meeting on 16 January and 27 February, and by the Council at its meeting on 20 March 1975. The draft was also discussed at a one-day seminar attended by members of the Council and persons involved in social research and administration on 5 December 1974.

Summary of Professor Donnison's Report

4. In Professor Donnison's view:—

"the social policies of Government are those of their actions which deliberately or accidentally affect the distribution of resources, status, opportunities, and life chances among social groups and categories within the country, and thus help to shape the general character and equity of its social relations. Social policies are thus concerned with fairness. They can be roughly distinguished from policies primarily concerned with the economy, social control, public utilities, medical care, agriculture and other functions".

Professor Donnison points out that it is too readily assumed that social services will have equalising results: this assumption should not be made unless there is evidence to support it.

5. In relation to the cost of social policies, Professor Donnison makes the following points:—

(a) "We should beware of the assumption that at times of crisis economic rectitude demands reductions in the real value of provisions such as family allowances and pensions which are regarded as social, while the total value of tax reliefs on private pension schemes and medical expenses continues to rise, because they are regarded merely as an incidental aspect of the fiscal system."

(b) "We should not assume that in times of inflation the nation cannot 'afford' equalising social policies."

(c) "We should not assume that equalising policies must necessarily be expensive."

6. Professor Donnison believes that social policy must be concerned with the distribution of the following within the community:

(a) command over resources—of which income and wealth are usually the best, but never the only, indicators;

(b) social status—the way in which people are treated by others, particularly by those upon whom they are dependent for the resources for living;

(c) the power that people have to control their environment and to contribute to the development of the society in which they live;

(d) the security of all these and the extent to which potentially harmful changes can be predicted, avoided or made good;

7. Professor Donnison points out that no one seriously advocates the uniformity of complete inter-personal equality. The equality to which it may be rational to aspire is not uniformity but a state of affairs in which differences due to taste, talent or luck are as nearly as possible randomly distributed.

8. In Professor Donnison's view, the five main causes of inequality are:—

(a) the life-time cycle of income: families tend to be least well off when the children are young and during old age (periods when the family unit has a relatively high proportion of dependants or non-earning members). The social services, taken together, have been devised mainly to help people in the trough of this cycle;

(b) social stratification in urban industrial societies: the development of an urban industrial society has created new and more clearly marked patterns of social class. By recruiting abler people to higher classes and shedding the less able to lower classes, social mobility for the individual strengthens the rigidity of the class system as a whole. Position in the class structure will significantly determine access to education, jobs and houses, and credit ratings. Access to these can be regarded as a new form of property, and one which may be of more value to many people than property as conventionally defined. These new forms of property may now be allocated to a greater or lesser extent by the State, but this is no guarantee that they will be more equally distributed than material wealth;

(c) urban-rural and interregional inequalities: economic development is never evenly distributed throughout a country. This

may mean that the more prosperous regions are the ones which attract young people, new industries—and therefore new sources of employment—and better services;

(d) intra-urban inequalities: other inequalities are to be found on a smaller intra-urban scale afflicting particular areas within large cities. These areas have high unemployment rates, inferior services such as housing and education, and poor job opportunities. While many of these areas are within the "inner-city" these problems also occur in new housing developments in the suburbs. It should not be assumed, however, that all of the poorest people will be found in these areas, nor that bringing social segregation to an end by moving the poor out or others in, will necessarily make things better, or that deprived urban areas are necessarily worse off than deprived rural areas;

(e) discrimination: in Professor Donnison's view, there can be systematic discrimination against categories of people—on the basis of, for example, job opportunities, pay, conditions and status—people similar to their fellow citizens in every respect save their race, religion, sex or some other characteristic. At the core of such problems lies the fact that in the course of generations in which its opportunities have been restricted, the group discriminated against may have become less well-equipped to compete in urban industrial society.

9. Professor Donnison believes that searching for equality poses many problems and causes conflicts. Policies designed to solve one problem may conflict with those appropriate to another. An understanding of such dilemmas, however, need not inhibit action. It may show which inequalities are most severe, and suggest ways of resolving them which will not exacerbate other inequalities.

10. Having examined social policies in Ireland, Professor Donnison concludes that:

(a) more and better information is needed about the degrees of inequality and the redistributive effects of any policies proposed to reduce them;

(b) more and better informed public discussion is required about inequality and the steps necessary to move towards a more egalitarian society;

(c) there should be consultation with those who will use the social services provided, so that these will be moulded to their needs and used effectively.

The Council's Comments

11. In past discussion in Ireland, the impression may sometimes have been given that economic and social policies could often be in conflict with each other. Consequently, economic policies (aimed for example at increasing employment and raising output) tended to be distinguished from social policies, whose main concern was with redistribution or the provision of services (e.g. health and education) that could be provided adequately only as public services. However, it may be more realistic to think of Government policies as having (in varying proportions) economic, social or regional implications rather than to attempt to identify policies as being specifically economic, social or regional.

12. We agree with Professor Donnison's view that policies have social implications "to the extent that they influence the distribution of resources and opportunities between different groups and categories of people". In Ireland (as in many other countries) virtually all policies implemented by Government have social implications in this sense. Sometimes the policies may be specifically designed to affect the distribution of income, wealth and opportunities. Sometimes the effects on the distribution of these may occur incidentally (or even accidentally) as a result of the implementation of policies whose aims are predominantly economic or regional. For example, monetary policy aimed at influencing the overall levels of output and prices will necessarily have distributional effects, to the extent that they bear more heavily on some sectors and activities than on others. The Council must therefore be concerned with the distributional (i.e. the social) consequences of all

policies and not merely with policies which are specifically labelled social.

13. Accepting that the social implications of policies are those that affect distribution, two questions arise. First, the distribution of what? Second, what criteria should be used in judging whether any change in distribution is "better" or "worse"? We do not think that the Council's attention should be limited to the distribution of money incomes and material wealth. These, of course, are important, but the life chances and everyday well-being of individuals and groups are influenced by the way they are labelled and treated by others—particularly by organised institutions. Moreover, it can be affected by the degree to which individuals and groups feel they can influence the environments in which they earn their living and live their lives.

14. As well as the distribution of income, wealth, social status, and ability to influence the working and living environments, account must also be taken of what Professor Donnison refers to as "new forms of property". Depending on their social class or occupational groups, individuals may or may not be assured of a pension on retirement, hospitalisation without delay, security of employment, access to education, training and re-training, the right to increments or extended sick leave on full pay, or the right to practice a particular trade or profession. These new forms of property are unequally distributed.

15. Each generation inherits a particular distribution of income, wealth, "new" property, social status, and the ability of individuals and groups to influence the environments in which they live and work. As a result of economic and technical progress and developing awareness of social and human problems, each generation bequeaths a different distribution to its successor. There are no objective criteria by which any inherited pattern of distribution, or any change made in it, can be judged "good" or "bad". Both individuals and groups have their own differing subjective criteria. This means that the undesirability (or otherwise) of any given pattern of inequality in the distribution of income must be a matter of personal judgement and of social and political debate. Since no objective or universally accepted criteria exist, consensus may not be easily reached. However, what is of basic importance is that the relevant issues are raised and debated.

16. While there will be difficulty in reaching consensus, it is equally important that the differences in attitudes towards changes in distribution should not be overstated. The Council believes that any change is desirable which brings nearer a situation in which the disadvantaged are brought nearer to the level that assures their self-respect and the respect of others, in which all are assured of equal access to education, medical care, satisfactory housing and satisfying jobs, in which opportunities for improving their living standards are as nearly as possible equalised, and in which the human dignity of all individuals is respected.

17. Agreement about what would constitute an ideal distribution of income and wealth may be difficult to achieve. Again, however, differences must not be overstated. There is agreement that income should be redistributed to the disadvantaged to assure them not only of the necessities but also of the basic amenities of life. However, there are differences of view on the extent to which this should be carried. There is also agreement that every member of our society should have every incentive to contribute to the full extent of his capacities to the welfare of the community—but there are differences of view, for example, about the size of the income differentials that may be necessary to ensure that this happens.

18. In our society, redistribution of income and wealth is effected mainly by the provision of social services financed by taxation. The social services have been developed to help people at critical stages in the family life cycle (e.g., children's allowances, free education, health services, old age pensions) or to assist those with a particular need (e.g., unemployment benefit, widows' pensions, pensions for the disabled). However, when account is taken of the structure of the tax system, the level of tax-rates and allowances (that is, of what has been called "fiscal welfare") as well as the social welfare system, the redistribution which actually occurs may differ from that which is normally thought to occur. The relationship between payments and benefits in money and kind from the State may not always work towards greater equality in the distribution of real income. This question is being investigated by the Social Policy Committee.

19. The Council in its work on social matters will be mainly concerned with the distributional aspects and implications of public policies and programmes, and with particular social services, institutions or groups. Advice on particular services or the needs of particular groups is normally sought from special *ad hoc* committees established to give it. The Council in its concern about distribution will obviously be more interested in some policy areas than in others—for example, more interested in fiscal policy and social welfare than in foreign affairs. But since every public service can have distributional aspects and implications no policy area will be entirely outside the Council's field of interest.

20. In general, the Council's interest in distributional questions will be egalitarian, though (as recognised above) there may not always be agreement on the degree to which it would be acceptable to approach equality. The emphasis on a move towards greater equality accords with the declared views of political parties, the trade union movement, the Churches, and organisations interested in social policies. Action is needed to make progress towards greater equality: left to itself the world will drift towards making the rich richer and the poor poorer.

21. Initially, the Council will try to help the public to recognise that the concept of greater equality means many different things in practice, each of which calls for different policies which are often apt to conflict with each other. To call a policy egalitarian is to pose, not to answer, questions. With better data, the Council should be able to reach different and more sophisticated conclusions about the relative importance of different kinds of inequality and the relationships and priorities between policies. The Council has a role in promoting and clarifying the discussions, both private and public, about these issues.

22. When important changes in policies, programmes and procedures are proposed the Government should publish estimates of the amount and the distribution of the benefits likely to be conferred. These estimates are necessary if rational decisions about social matters are to be made.

23. The most important benefits will often be definable in words

rather than figures ("better education" cannot be measured only in school leaving ages and certificates, and the incidence of broken marriages will not be a sure way of assessing progress towards "strengthening the family"). Often a policy will have secondary and tertiary effects, increasingly difficult to predict, which may be more important than its primary effects (increasing industrial employment in farming areas may increase agricultural production and incomes as cash becomes available to invest in farms). Subsequently, too, it will often be impossible to attribute causes to effects with any precision. Nevertheless, the Council cannot do its job and progress cannot be made in social policies unless it becomes a regular convention that estimates and forecasts of this kind are made, and in the more important cases publicly discussed, and their outcomes investigated later.

24. The Government should also publish estimates of the amount and the distribution of the costs of change. These requirements pose similar problems, and some additional ones. Costs to public funds would have to be distinguished from other costs borne by the community. Opportunity costs, measurable in real resources and production foregone, would have to be distinguished from one person or group to another.

25. There is, of course, nothing fundamentally new about these recommendations: the likely effects of proposed changes are presumably estimated before decisions are reached about them. The Council's task will be to try to ensure that the distribution, and not only the totals, of costs and benefits are considered, and—in important cases—publicly discussed.

26. The Council in its future work will try to get at least an approximate picture of the extent of the main inequalities in Irish society. Even for this, considerable improvement in the quantity and quality of Irish social statistics is required. For example, very little is known about income distribution or about the net effects of Government policies in redistributing income. Reliable and adequate data are necessary for the formulation of social policies or the measurement of the social implications of economic policies. The Council would see its role as helping to

choose the questions to be considered and the categories to be compared, to supply interpretative comment, and to add any conclusions it may wish to draw from the exercise.

27. It may be very difficult to produce comprehensive and consistent social priorities. Because social policies deal with questions of distribution and equity, they call repeatedly for choices between conflicting interests which only the Oireachtas has the authority to make. The Council can help to formulate the issues at stake, and promote more widespread, more rational and better-informed debate about them. The most vulnerable people in society are ill-equipped, virtually by definition, to gain for themselves a hearing in the political market place. Their interests can only be protected as concern for them is built into the national consensus about social priorities. That is one way in which a more just society can be created.

28. In these comments, the Council has been concerned with the concept of social policy that should guide its thinking and its future work. Narrow definitions of social policy that limit it to social services must be rejected. In its work, the Council will be concerned with the social (i.e., the distributional) effects and implications of all major policies. In adopting this approach to social policy many matters not touched on in this report will arise—for example, the problems that the State may face in acquiring the resources for redistribution, the effects of changes in distribution on incentives, the rules and mechanisms by which changes in distribution might be achieved,* the influence which economic developments and policies can exert on the distribution of the fruits of production, and the standards of living to which it might be feasible to aspire in Irish circumstances. Some of these issues will be discussed in the studies of the tax system, public expenditure and inflation which are now under way. Others will be discussed in future comments on the distributional implications of particular policies or changes in policies.

*E.g., should tax allowances for dependent children be abolished and a more generous children's allowance be paid, or should social benefits be universally or only selectively available?

PART II

AN APPROACH TO SOCIAL POLICY

by

David Donnison

I INTRODUCTION

1. I was asked by the Social Policy Committee of the NESc to examine the meaning and purposes of social policy and critically review the social policies of Ireland. This report, tentative at many points, is intended to provoke rather than conclude discussion. It was prepared with a great deal of help from members of the Committee and their staff, among whom I particularly want to thank Ms Catherine Keehan for her constant support and critical advice. Many others gave generously of their time and energies in commenting on a first draft of the report. Specially helpful was a one-day seminar held for the purpose in Dublin. (Participants in this seminar are listed in an appendix, but such errors as remain in this report are the author's responsibility, not theirs.)
2. Section II of this report discusses the meaning of social policies, and leads to the conclusion that they deal not with particular institutions and programmes such as the social services, but with the distributional consequences—who gains and who loses—of all government actions. They are thus concerned centrally with relations between people and with equity or fairness.
3. Section III discusses the main patterns or types of inequality which pose the problems of equity which are most likely to concern the Social Policy Committee, showing that policies required to deal with one kind of problem often conflict with those required for others.
4. Section IV deals with Ireland. It briefly examines the case, and the scope, for more egalitarian social policies in this country, and then considers in turn the types of inequity identified in Part II in order to learn which deserves most attention in Ireland and to suggest in what

order of priority they be tackled. Authoritative conclusions about such questions call for evidence which is not yet available and consultation with an informed electorate which has scarcely begun. I hope this report may suggest the kinds of evidence that must be gathered and the kinds of discussion that will be required, and contribute in a small way to both.

II WHICH POLICIES ARE "SOCIAL"?

5. Ireland has foreign policies, farm policies, economic policies—but what is a "social" policy? Does she have one—or need one? The Social Policy Committee of the NESG began its exploration of these questions by asking each Department of Government "What are the main social objectives of the Department? What progress has been made in the achievement of these objectives . . . ?" The Departments which replied—and one, the Department of Education, never did—listed the institutions, programmes or clients for which they were responsible. They briefly described the work of agencies such as the hospitals, the Land Commission, the National Manpower Service or the prisons; they recalled proposals for the development of specific services made in the Government's election manifestoes, in subsequent Ministerial statements, and in EEC Directives; and some referred more generally to the welfare of farmers, low-paid workers, or other groups which depend on their services.
6. If these answers seem rather cautiously pedestrian, it must be remembered that any Department which attempts to formulate social objectives extending beyond its own administrative sphere or beyond its Minister's probable term of office may provoke destructive controversy among the country's interest groups and political movements, and with other Departments of Government. The Department of Justice said as much (. . . "any definition of (its) social objectives . . . is to a large extent, and unavoidably, a political statement about which differences of opinion can exist not only as between different Administrations but also as between different sections of the community. The same applies with even greater force when it comes to assessing progress in the achievement of objectives . . ."). Educative though such controversies might be, it is not the job of civil servants needlessly to provoke them.
7. That does not mean that the Departments never look beyond their own immediate tasks. The Department of Finance has the job of co-

ordinating the work of all branches of Government. It pointed out that all Departments continually consult each other, and proposals submitted to the Government for decision first run the gauntlet of inter-departmental discussions in which their broader implications and consequences are considered. But if these discussions bring to bear social priorities or criteria for decision-making which are more comprehensive than those stated by Departments responsible for specific services, the Department of Finance did not tell the Social Policy Committee what they are. It showed that the other Departments' replies were by no means the whole story, but it did not offer the Committee a much better story.

8. According to a formidably large literature (mainly by American political scientists*) there could not be a better response to the Social Policy Committee's quest for comprehensive social objectives. For under peacetime Parliamentary democracy, it is argued, there can be no authoritative, comprehensive prescription of social objectives, for that would require a consensus which is unattainable. In practice, policies evolve disjointedly and incrementally through the continuing interplay of pressures generated by competing interests. Democratic governments cannot impose consistent principles on the political market places in which they seek their authority, nor is it their job to try. It is their job to survive—by managing the pressures and arbitrating between them, doing their best to "make a friend of every hostile occasion": † Having done their democratic duty, they can rest assured that "any active and legitimate group will make itself heard effectively at some stage in the process of decision" ‡.

9. Critics of this view of policy-making would argue that it amounts to a restatement, in the language of political science, of nineteenth century liberal doctrines formulated by Adam Smith and abandoned

*The briefest and wittiest exposition of these arguments is still Charles E. Lindblom's "The Science of Muddling Through", *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 19, 1959; p. 79. For an Irish version of this view see Hugh Munro, "The Myth of the Common Good", *Irish Times*, 19 March, 1966.

†The phrase is Michael Oakeshott's. (*Rationalism in Politics*, Methuen, 1962; p. 127.)

‡Robert Dahl, *A Preface to Democratic Theory*, University of Chicago Press, 1956; p. 150.

long ago by economists. The approach often provides pretty accurate descriptions of what happens—particularly in a massive continental society such as the United States, created by immigrants from all over the world with nothing in common but their suspicion of governments and ruling classes. But as description it may be less suited to a small country with a resilient and deeply rooted sense of national identity. In Ireland (as in Sweden, Norway or Israel) consensus may occasionally seem suffocating but it's not unattainable, and it need not be inhumane, irrational or unchanging. If those responsible for the development of such a country's policies find it difficult to formulate comprehensive social priorities, that suggests (these critics might argue) that important decisions are either taken in secret, or are the product of insufficiently rigorous and far-reaching analysis—or both.

10. When it comes to prescriptions—settling what ought to be done—it would be rash to assume that the most vulnerable people will make themselves "heard effectively" if they are left to fend for themselves in the nation's political market places. Those who do best there are often the people who also do best in economic market places. Thus Governments, and every leader of opinion who is concerned about the fate of the weak, cannot merely be content with responding to political pressures. They must create and recreate an evolving social consensus which will protect the weak.

11. Presumably it was thoughts of this sort which led the Social Policy Committee to press its inquiries further in the hope of contributing to the development of decision-making processes which are more rational, more humane, less secretive* and ultimately more democratic. Whether that is feasible is a profoundly important question in a country in which social policies are bound to make growing demands on the economy and on the political system. It is also an open question: no country has found a really satisfactory answer to it.

*The growing responsibilities of Government call for sensitive re-interpretations of conventions about confidentiality. The problem was well posed by Professor Patrick Lynch: "The public has no right to penetrate the anonymity of Civil Servants' advice, but to protect himself no less than to inspire public confidence the Civil Servant must recognise the necessity for revealing the quality of the thought that informs public policy". 'The Economist and Public Policy', *Studies*, p. 258, Vol. XIII, Autumn 1953.

on the problem or the target group? There is no way forward to a definition of social policies through this thicket of unanswerable questions.

14. Take a second example. The Government wants to relieve poverty (the problem) among elderly farmers in the West of Ireland (the target group). To achieve that it can, in principle: (1) raise pensions, reduce the minimum pensionable age, soften means tests, reduce taxation, or in other ways increase the incomes of the target group, (2) subsidise farming in various ways to increase the productivity of the land in Western Counties or the incomes of those who make their living from it, (3) make generous grants to farmers who retire, and consolidate holdings to increase the income of those remaining on the land, (4) provide free or subsidised housing, transport, medical and residential care and other services required by the target group, (5) through policies for industrial and urban development increase opportunities for work and earnings among younger members of the households of the target group, (6) by action designed to enrich opportunities of every kind in the West, try to stem emigration and the break-up of families in these areas and to retain a better balanced age distribution there, or (7) through tax relief, and in other ways, encourage younger relatives at home and abroad to contribute more to the support of the target group. Once again, practically every Department and most of their services could—indeed do—contribute in some way to the Government's attempts to help this target group. Are *all* public services and their policies therefore to be described as "social"?

15. The common characteristics of these and many other situations to which the term "social" is apt to be applied, are not the institutions, the problems or the client groups involved, but the essentially distributational character of the decisions to be taken. In the first case, the Government has to capture, for housing, resources which would otherwise be devoted to other uses, and ensure that particular kinds of people (overcrowded families in Dublin) get that housing, while others are excluded from it. Whether the Government itself provides the houses, or gets others to do so, or enables the target group to compete more successfully for houses already available or operates

12. What would these decisions, or the evolving consensus underpinning them, be about? They could be described in terms of the fields of public service involved (income maintenance, health services, housing, and so on), or in terms of particular needs and problems (mental deficiency, delinquency, overcrowding, and so on), or in terms of particular clients of the social services (children, "the family", the blind and so on). But although each of these may be useful ways of dividing up and organising the work of government, all of them will be too restrictive and too ill-defined for the Social Policy Committee. They miss the point. Two examples will explain why.

13. The Government wants to improve housing conditions (the problem to be tackled) for overcrowded families in Dublin (the "target group"). To achieve this it can, in principle: (1) build houses and let them at subsidised rents to the target group, (2) buy houses in the open market for the same purpose, (3) help the tenants of municipal housing to buy homes elsewhere, thus freeing space for the target group, (4) by subsidised lending, favourable tax treatment, or in other ways, encourage private enterprise to build for these purposes, (5) by regulation and inspection try to prohibit overcrowding, (6) by increasing children's allowances, tax reliefs, and in other ways, increase the incomes of the target group in the hope that this will enable them to compete more successfully in the housing market, (7) by attracting industry, providing training, subsidising public transport, or in other ways, enlarge the job opportunities and earnings of the target group or (8) by education, professional advice and the provision of facilities for birth control, enable the target group to plan the growth of their families in ways which make it easier for them to pay rent, accumulate savings for house purchase, or match the sizes of their homes and their households. These are only the more obvious ways of tackling the problem: they include action which might be taken by Departments responsible for housing, town planning, industrial location, public health, medical care, income maintenance, taxation, transport, education and employment services—to say nothing of action by voluntary bodies. Which of these are "social" services, and which are not? Or are all to be regarded as "social" when applied to this kind of problem, or to this sort of target group? Could we be sure, in advance, whether any of these actions would make any impact

in other ways—these are questions of method which do not determine whether the policies should be described as "social". Secondary effects on the behaviour of the target group—important though they may be for other purposes—are likewise irrelevant. Rehousing may, in a general sense, have the social objective of making people happier, healthier, more productive or less delinquent; it may make their neighbours safer or their politicians more likely to secure re-election, or it may make for a more equal or a less equal society. What distinguishes a policy as "social" is not these putative consequences but the fact that it deals with the distribution of resources, opportunities and life chances between different groups and categories of people.

16. In the other example given, the policies being followed are "social" in so far as they are designed to improve the living conditions of the target group (elderly farmers in the West): that may or may not have to be done at the expense of the rest of society (sometimes all may gain from the policy) but the aim is to make the target group better off than it used to be in relation to other people. Whether it is the Department of Social Welfare or the Land Commission or the Department of Finance which takes the necessary action is again a question of method. Whether the ultimate outcome increases or reduces the total national product, makes people happier or longer lived, makes Ireland a better or more equal society, or the reverse—these too, though far more important questions, are not the defining characteristics of a social policy.

17. It follows that every Government Department, programme and policy may have social aspects. Meanwhile social policies always have other aspects which for many people will be more important. Health and education services, for example, are primarily designed to raise general standards of health and learning, usually without much regard to their distribution or distributional consequences. Policies for these services become social, in the sense defined here, when they deal with the allocation of resources and opportunities between potentially competing groups, and—as a consequence which may be more distant but equally important—with relations between groups in society, their status and self-respect, their powers and their access to broader social opportunities.

18. Electricity and transport services, for example, are public utilities (about which the first question to ask is "are they efficient?") and the courts and prisons are agencies for social control and the arbitration of disputes (about which the first questions to ask are "are they just, humane, prompt and reformative?"). But the operations of each may also have major social implications. Do transport and electricity services work in ways which tend systematically to extend the opportunities of some regions, communities and social groups, while stunting those of others? Do the courts and the professions associated with them give all groups—rich and poor, men and women, young and old—equal access to justice? If free legal aid is provided, does it enable the poor to secure the services of lawyers attuned to the needs of the rich, or does it create a service equipped to deal with the legal problems of the poor? These are distributional—and therefore social—questions; and, like every aspect of social policy, they pose problems of equity and fairness.

19. Thus far this argument has been analytical—explaining what social policies are about, without commitment to any particular kind of policy. But those who have stressed the importance of distributional social questions have generally wanted a more equal or a more humane society. In their *Statement on Social Policy*, published in 1973, The Council for Social Welfare* asked for both. Their first recommendations were: "1. that the aims of social policy be—(i) to remove gross inequalities within the community and (ii) to strengthen the bonds of the community itself". Long before, that great and Christian teacher Richard Tawney had said: "What a community requires, as the word itself suggests, is a common culture, because, without it, it is not a community at all. . . . But a common culture cannot be created merely by desiring it. It rests upon economic foundations. . . . It involves, in short, a large measure of economic equality. . . ."[†]

20. It is at this prescriptive stage of the argument that confusions tend to arise. Because many people have sought to make the world a more humane and equal place by providing social services it is too readily assumed that expenditure on these services will necessarily have

*A Committee of the Catholic Bishops' Conference.

[†]*Equality*, Allen & Unwin, 1933; p. 41.

humane and equalising results. But unless evidence is available to prove the point, it must not be assumed that the effects of the benefits distributed through the social services are necessarily equalising—or necessarily should be. If these effects are indeed equalising, other Government programmes not usually described as "social" (regressive indirect taxes or industrial subsidies, for example) may exert a more than counterbalancing influence. The distributional effects of these other policies must also be examined by anyone interested in social policies.

21. We should beware of the assumption that the programmes of the Left—because they are described as "social", or even "socialist"—will necessarily redistribute in an equalising fashion throughout the range of incomes. The hardships of the poorest people may be due in part to their exclusion from rights provided for the majority of working people, often under legislation introduced by Governments of the Left. In many countries there can be seen the exclusion of immigrants and itinerants from subsidised housing, the eviction (even from public housing) and the subsequent break-up of families whose parents are too poor or too disorganised to pay their rent regularly, the failure of the largest and poorest families to use free child health and other services, and a general tendency for the "take-up" rates for social benefits to fall at the bottom ends of the income distributions.*

22. We should be aware of the assumption that at times of crisis economic rectitude demands reductions in the real value of provisions such as family allowances and pensions, which are regarded as "social", while the total value of tax reliefs on private pension schemes and medical expenses continues to rise, because they are regarded merely as an incidental aspect of the fiscal system. Since both affect the distribution of resources and opportunities between different sections of the population, both are, wittingly or unwittingly, part of the Government's social policies.

23. We should not assume that in times of inflation, scarcity and crisis the nation cannot "afford" equalising social policies. It was precisely

*See for example, David Donnison, (ed.) *A Pattern of Disadvantage*. National Children's Bureau 1972.

in such times, during the last world war, that many countries adopted their most radically equalising policies. If such times come again Governments may be unable to retain the support and social cohesion of the governed unless they adopt similar policies.

24. We should not assume that equalising policies must necessarily be expensive. If the gains made by those who benefit must all be paid for by others who lose, the political cost of the policy may indeed be high: the contenders are playing what is sometimes called a "zero-sum game". But there are "positive-sum games" to be played too. The Commission on the Status of Women concluded, after thorough analysis, that "there are considerable advantages to be gained from equal pay both for women themselves and the community as a whole".* A reduction in the subsidies paid for the very expensive education of medical students (about 71 per cent of whom subsequently emigrate) might ultimately cover the costs of retraining much larger numbers of less skilled workers who are now unemployed or under-employed in Ireland.

25. The costs of equalising policies generally have to be met soon; benefits follow later. (Professors of medicine cannot be re-deployed to train motor mechanics and electricians). Thus redistribution is politically easier in times of sustained economic growth when those who are to benefit can be given more without too heavy burdens being laid upon others. Egalitarians must therefore be concerned about economic growth. But it must not be assumed that growth will necessarily have an equalising influence. A recent study of this question in 75 countries concludes that "short-term economic growth rates are not significantly related to income distribution in our results."† Growth provides opportunities for redistribution, but other steps must be taken if the opportunity is to be used.

*Report of the Commission on the Status of Women, Prl. 2760, December 1972, para. 170. They added, however, "that the advantages of equal pay are likely to accrue mainly in the long term, while most of the adverse effects will occur in the phasing-in period".

†Oscar Gish: "Emigration and the Supply and Demand for Medical Manpower: the Irish Case," *Minerva*, Vol. VII, No. 4, 1969.

‡Irma Adelman and Cynthia Taft Morris, *Economic Growth and Social Equity in Developing Countries*, Stanford University Press, 1973; p. 187.

26. The conclusion reached thus far is that every country has social policies of some kind—explicit and deliberately planned, or implicit and accidental. For the social policies of Governments are those of their actions which deliberately or accidentally affect the distribution of resources, status, opportunities and life chances among social groups and categories within the country, and thus help to shape the general character and equity of its social relations. Social policies are therefore concerned with fairness. They can be roughly distinguished from policies concerned primarily with the management of the economy, social control and delinquency, public utilities, medical care, education, agriculture and other functions. But there are social policy aspects and implications in the work of the Departments concerned with *all* these functions. Certain programmes and groups—the social services and their clients—have conventionally been assumed to occupy the centre of the social policy stage because they have often been the main instruments and objects of these policies. But further information about the distributional consequences of every kind of Government action will be needed before any conclusion can be reached about the distributional effects of these particular programmes or of Government social policies in general. These are complex questions. Information by itself will not be enough to enable the public to understand these complex issues. Such information must be regularly analysed, interpreted and publicly discussed if ordinary people are to participate effectively in debates about policies which impinge upon all of us.

III DIFFERENT KINDS OF INEQUALITY

27. The Social Policy Committee should be concerned with questions of distribution—but the distribution of what? The essentials can be briefly summarised under four headings:

- (i) *Command over resources*, for which income and wealth are usually the best—but never the only—indicators. People rely increasingly on their public services for education, medical care and much else that is provided free or at subsidised prices, and their rights to these services may be as important to them as cash incomes.
- (ii) *Social status*, meaning the way in which people are treated by others, and particularly by those upon whom they depend for the resources for living—employers, landlords, doctors, bank managers, social security officials and so on.
- (iii) Their *power* to control their environment and to contribute to the development of the society in which they live—and particularly those elements within it on which they depend most heavily.
- (iv) The *security* of all these conditions, and the extent to which potentially harmful changes can be predicted, avoided or made good.

28. The discussion which follows deals with all four of these things. If, for the sake of brevity, it is the first—and particularly the distribution of income—which is most often mentioned, that does not imply the other three are less important.

29. The Social Policy Committee will have to decide what constitutes a maldistribution of these good things and which maldistributions to attend to. The Committee will naturally respond to public opinion about

such matters but they would not be doing their job if they took up every, and only every, issue which attracted sufficiently noisy public interest. Governments appoint such bodies to advise them and the country about social policy in the expectation that they will not only express public opinion but inform it, and occasionally change it. In the longer run, the fate of the most vulnerable members of society will depend heavily on the Committee's capacity to do that. In this section of the paper I explore some of the distributional problems which the Committee is likely to deal with.

30. One point should be promptly clarified. No one seriously advocates the uniformity of complete inter-personal equality. Plenty of inequality will always remain in any open, evolving society. Some people will inevitably be healthier, more talented, more lovable or luckier than others, and all will be free to decide within broad limits how much time and energy to devote to money-making and how much to devote to their families, to leisure or to unpaid work.

31. The equality to which it may be rational to aspire is not uniformity but a state of affairs in which differences due to taste, talent or luck are as nearly as possible randomly distributed. Then, on average, the poor, the injured, the unemployed or those in trouble with the law would not differ in *other* respects from the rich, the healthy, the employed, or the law-abiding. The former would all need help, but their problems would be the problems of individuals, their families and associates, not the "gross inequalities within the community" to which the Council for Social Welfare drew attention.* People are dragged into uniformity by poverty, which brutalises them and allows few choices in the struggle for survival, and also by deference and the slavish adherence to fashion dictated by competition for status in unequal societies. Individuality and variety flourish better in more equal societies.

32. Individual problems become social problems of the sort that will concern the Committee—problems, that is to say, of "gross inequality" posing questions about the structure of society and the policies of its Government—when:

*See paragraph 19 above.

- (i) specific inequalities are more extreme and more lasting than could be accounted for by differences in taste, talent and luck, or
- (ii) specific deprivations and privileges are correlated, so that the poor, the injured, the unemployed and the delinquent (to adopt the previous examples) are much more likely than their fellow citizens to be afflicted in other ways, while the rich, the healthy, the employed and the law-abiding are much less likely to be so afflicted, or
- (iii) deprivations and privileges tend to be transmitted from one generation to the next so that children tend to succeed to the good or bad fortune experienced by their parents and grandparents.

33. It is inequality on this scale which poses the major problems of equity or social justice which the Committee will be concerned with. It arises from different causes which cannot be distinguished with any precision when considering the case of particular people or families—for to him that hath (in any respect) it shall be given, and from him that hath not. . . . But their influence can be approximately distinguished when considering larger groups and categories and it is important to keep these distinctions in mind because inequalities arising from different causes call for different remedies. In Ireland these patterns differ in some respects from those to be found in other countries, and so therefore will the mix of social policies required. I will briefly distinguish five of the main types or patterns of inequality; they could be described as the causes of poverty were it not that the mixture of factors involved and the causal relations between them are more complicated than that phrase suggests. After noting some of the consequences of these patterns for social policy I will consider the implications of this discussion for Ireland in the next section of this paper.

(1) The life-time cycle of income

34. It was Seebohm Rowntree who in 1899 first described and named "the poverty cycle" which afflicts households at predictable stages of

their development when large proportions of their members are dependent and few are earning.* Poverty thus tends to be more common and more severe in childhood, in early parenthood, and in old age. The pattern is an ancient one, but its impact on the family was greatly sharpened by industrialisation and the growth of cities which postponed entry to work, prolonged the initial period of dependency required for education and training, reduced opportunities for part-time work for children, women and the elderly within productive units based on the family, imposed increasingly rigid retirement ages and, by prolonging life, greatly increased the numbers of people surviving into retirement.

35. Most of the social services which together constitute what is often called "the welfare state" have been devised, at least partly, to help people in the troughs of this income cycle: family allowances, free education, pensions, free or subsidised health services (which tend to be used most heavily by children, old people, and mothers about the time their children are born) and subsidised housing (for which overcrowded families and old people are often given priority)—all these are often more effective redistributors between age groups and household types than between income groups and social classes.

36. As the taxes required to provide these services have grown heavier, so increasingly elaborate allowances and reliefs have developed with the aim of lightening the burden of those who find it hardest to bear. Thus, alongside the social services, there has developed a parallel system of "fiscal welfare",† the benefits of which may be more valuable than those conferred by the social services themselves. If to allowances for tax-payers supporting wives, children and elderly relatives are added further reliefs to help them buy pensions, housing, education and medical care (all also available through the state's services) then citizens rich enough to pay income tax have the protection, in effect, of two "welfare states". Table I illustrates this point in respect of one type of benefit: family allowances and tax

* *Poverty. A Study of Town Life*, Macmillan, 1902.

† The term was invented by Richard M. Titmuss, "The Social Division of Welfare", Eleanor Rathbone Memorial Lecture, Liverpool University Press, 1956, reprinted in *Essays on the Welfare State*, Allen & Unwin, 1958.

remissions for those supporting children, both expressed as a proportion of the ILO's Standard Weekly Wage. (Family allowances have increased considerably in Ireland since the date at which these figures were completed).

TABLE 1

Family allowances and tax remissions for families with 3 children as a percentage of the Standard Weekly Wage, 1969

	Family allowances	Tax remissions
	%	%
Austria	19	12
Germany	6	6
Ireland	5	13
U.K.	7	8
Denmark	7	0
Netherlands	13	0
Canada	4	3
U.S.A.	0	5
New Zealand	8	4
Australia	4	4

Source: P. R. Kaim-Caudle, *Comparative Social Policy and Social Security*, Martin Robertson, 1973; p. 283.

(2) Social stratification in urban, industrial societies

37. Differences in status and life chances reflecting differences in wealth transmitted through the generations by marriage and inheritance are also of very ancient origin.* But the development of urban, industrial society creates new and more clearly marked patterns of social stratification—social classes, in fact. It is not that mobility between classes becomes harder; for the individual it generally becomes easier. But by recruiting abler people to higher classes and shedding the less able to lower classes, social mobility for individuals strengthens the rigidity of the class system as a whole. Within classes, which have

* For an account of the way in which such processes worked in pre-industrial Ireland see Conrad Arensbury, *The Irish Countryman*, MacMillan, 1937.

increasingly well defined competing interests, people develop a sense of their shared fate and common ideologies and views of the world. Their position in the labour market determines not only their incomes but their life-time pattern of earnings and aspirations (distinguishing, for example, those whose earnings rise to a peak in their early twenties and thereafter advance only in so far as their class as a whole advances, from those who follow a "career" in which earnings reach a peak later in life and depend more heavily on individual effort). These patterns go far to determine people's opportunities for saving, their credit ratings, and hence their opportunities for house purchase, their housing standards and geographical location. These factors then help to shape educational aspirations and opportunities, and hence the skills, earnings and geographical and social mobility of the next generation.

38. At the time when Karl Marx and his followers made their first analyses of social stratification the system rested heavily on property transmitted by inheritance, which gave its owners an income and control over the propertyless classes' access to employment. The more advanced economies in which such stratification was to be seen were all capitalist, and Marxists naturally assumed that the fundamental injustices of the system could only—and then readily—be eliminated by the overthrow of capitalism. Since the ruling class in such societies created and disseminated the "ruling ideas" of the society,* thus controlling not only the forces of law and order but also society's beliefs, conventions and culture, they expected that overthrow would have to be violent. Any attempt to ameliorate social injustices by providing social services within this framework could only institutionalise and perpetuate the fundamental inequalities of capitalism and weaken the impetus for revolutionary change. The Government in parliamentary democracies could be no more than "a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie".†

39. Thus in the parliamentary democracies it was left mainly to social

* Karl Marx and Frederick Engels vividly explain this point in *The German Ideology* Lawrence & Wishart, 1955; (e.g. p. 60).

† *Communist Manifesto*. For a more recent discussion of the British Government's social policies which presents a similar view, see Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, Weidenfeld & Nicholson 1969.

democratic and Christian democratic parties to construct the programmes and services which have helped to protect the working class from the grinding stresses of industrial and urban development, to succour the casualties of this development, and to open up opportunities for mobility between classes. Regulation of wages, working hours and conditions, legal recognition of trade unions and industrial bargaining procedures, regulation of housing conditions and food and drugs, protection of tenants' rights, and the attempt to achieve full employment—these are among the most important steps which have been taken to this end. But other programmes already mentioned, for the maintenance of incomes in retirement, unemployment and sickness, and for the provision of housing, education and health services on terms which do not depend on people's ability to pay, also owe a great deal to this tradition and the political movements which created it. In the market economies, expenditure on the social services tends to be higher, as a proportion of the national income, in countries in which a strong political labour movement has had a continuing influence on the social policies of governments—in Austria, Germany, the Netherlands and Scandinavia, for example, rather than in Canada, the USA, or Ireland.

40. Programmes for the amelioration of these two patterns of inequality together constitute what might be called the standard social-democratic "package" of social policies, sometimes labelled the "welfare state". They have transformed the situation described by Marx. Access to the labour market and to the market for housing, education and medical care, and security of income in retirement, widowhood, unemployment or sickness no longer depend mainly on the ownership of old-fashioned forms of property. They depend on Government policies for the management of the economy, and on new forms of "property", often allocated or regulated by Governments, such as the right to a pension, a hospital bed, a University education or a municipal house, rights to practice a trade or profession (as a doctor, taxi-driver, lawyer or bookmaker, for example) and rights to farm land, build on it, or secure subsidies for these purposes.

41. Traditional Marxists, still with us, who assess progress towards equity only with distributions of the kinds of income and wealth which

can be most easily measured in money terms have failed to note the importance of this transformation and the new kinds of property it has created—a failure for which they have paid the basic political price of consistently losing democratic elections. (Electoralates have generally been more interested in housing, health services and social security than in nationalisation or the revolution). But it does not necessarily follow that the new rights are distributed more equally than the old.

42. Traditional social democrats have too readily assumed that regulation and allocation by Governments must operate in fairer or more egalitarian ways than the mechanisms of the market. Sometimes they are right. But they have been too slow to compare public expenditure which helps relatively poor families to rent houses with the public expenditure which helps relatively rich families to acquire and improve their own houses (and the effects of inflation and tax relief on both); or public expenditure on the education of a doctor's son who enters his father's profession with expenditure on a bus-driver's son who does likewise—or the power either profession exerts in regulating entry to its own occupation. Comparison of the legal, social service and tax procedures brought to bear when poor wives and rich wives are deserted by their husbands would in many countries tell a similar story; so would comparisons of the effects on rich property owners and poor tenants of town planning controls which often increase the shortages, and thus the price, of houses and building sites, conferring benefits on property owners at the expense of tenants and those buying a house for the first time. In these and many other ways the "welfare state" often institutionalises and legitimises inequities which seemed less defensible when they were the product of an unregulated market.

43. Even when resources are generously redistributed, that may be done in ways which presume invidious distinctions of status and power. Technically excellent health services may keep people waiting for half a day to see a doctor who does not trouble to explain what they or their children are suffering from; good public housing may be built in barrack-like, poorly maintained estates from which anyone who had a choice would plainly flee; good schools may be so stigmatised as inferior by the procedures for allocating pupils to them that teachers and children alike come to accept cruel, self-fulfilling prophecies of

failure; employment services may become so subservient to their employer-customers that they refuse to offer jobs to any employee-customer suspected of poor work habits, thus making frail or unstable workers unemployable.

(3) Urban-rural and inter-regional inequalities

44. Economic development is never distributed evenly across the map. It attracts people—particularly young people—to the centres of new growth, and leaves an ageing and impoverished population in areas which depend heavily on the industries which are being superseded. The problem is too well known to the Irish to merit long description. Neither is this the place to add to the long debates on centralisation and decentralisation provoked by documents such as the Buchanan Report.* The NESc has already reviewed them at some length.†

45. But distributional aspects of these questions do call for more attention and better evidence than is yet available. Economic development is never merely economic. What is changing is a whole way of life. The problems of poorer regions and rural areas will not be resolved simply by the introduction of new jobs in growth industries such as light engineering and tourism. Local people who adopt the new ways may quickly grow prosperous as they acquire the new skills of the factory, buy cars to take them to work, convert decaying cottages for week-enders and commuting executives, sell the newcomers petrol and groceries and take them fishing. But older and less adaptable people may gain little from these changes and lose a great deal. If jobs cannot be found for both men and women, and for a wide range of skills and classes, and if local services are poor, then younger people will continue to leave the district. The local shop, school, doctor and policeman may be replaced by larger units serving bigger populations from a town easily accessible by car. Bus and rail services may deteriorate or disappear. The house which used to be available for a few shillings a week may have been sold to a city dweller for conversion to modern standards with the help of Government grants and tax reliefs at a cost

* Colin Buchanan and Partners, *Regional Policy in Ireland*, Dublin 1968.

† NESc, *Regional Policy in Ireland: A Review*, Pp. 4147, Dublin 1975.

of thousands of pounds. This is not to suggest that the new urban ways of life should, or could, be kept out: younger people will go in search of them elsewhere if such opportunities cannot be brought within their reach. But we should be alert to the losses and conflicts which all modernisation brings in its wake, and do our best to avoid or ameliorate them whenever we can.

46. In most countries Government programmes for dealing with this pattern of inequality are less well developed and often less successful than those for dealing with the patterns already discussed. These inequalities arise from the manner in which innovations are disseminated across the map. They can never be permanently resolved except in a completely static economy, for new innovations will repeatedly create new disparities in unforeseen places. (In Britain, Belgium and other long-industrialised European countries, high levels of unemployment, low household incomes and obsolete urban structures are concentrated in places, such as Glasgow and the Rhondda, which were the booming growth centres of the 1880's and 1890's.)

47. The study already quoted of growth and social equity in 75 countries, ranging in wealth from Malawi, Dahomey and Chad to Venezuela, Japan and Israel, suggests that the poor frequently suffer from economic growth, particularly during the earlier and middle stages of progress through this range. Countries which achieved greater equality in the distribution of incomes appear to be characterised by high proportions of people continuing into secondary and higher education, a high level of government investment in the public and private sectors of the economy and the modernisation of production methods in all sectors of the economy, avoiding clear-cut sectoral or geographical cleavages between traditional and modern methods.*

48. Findings such as these suggest that in impoverished regions and rural areas high priority should be given to the development of indigenous enterprise and skills. Ireland has an important resource in the large proportion of her people who come from an independent farming or trading background. In recent years many of those who had

*Adelman and Morris, *Economic Growth and Social Equity in Developing Countries*.

emigrated to the UK have returned with their families to settle in Ireland. A sizeable proportion of them have used their accumulated capital and skills to set up on their own, by buying a farm, pub, or shop or becoming independent builders, or engineering and farm improvement contractors. While no official statistics on the extent of this movement are available, the trend is known to the National Manpower Service, the Industrial Development Authority and organisations concerned with emigration and immigration, and has been commented on in the press. The Industrial Development Authority has given financial assistance to a number of returned emigrants to set up small industries in Ireland. A recent study of 22 of the most successful Irish entrepreneurs operating in Ireland (there are plenty more in other countries) showed that "over half had as their family background a farm, a pub, a garage, a shop, a manufacturing business or the agricultural movement".* In a paper under the same title circulated at the same time the author added that "the settled middle-class professions which were the traditional goal of academically bright young Irishmen rarely appear in the list of entrepreneurs' parents".

(4) Intra-urban inequalities

49. Other inequalities are to be found at a smaller, intra-urban scale afflicting particular wards and neighbourhoods within the larger towns of industrial countries. In poverty programmes, "priority area" schemes, community development projects and the like, many Governments have given increasing attention to this sort of problem recently. Ireland is no exception. The places on which they typically concentrate are decayed inner-city areas where there is a good deal of semi-skilled, poorly paid and insecure work, often done in shifts by people who cannot live far from their jobs. Unemployment may be common and immigrants, broken families and others who have had difficulty in gaining a foothold in more prosperous or settled parts of the housing market may be concentrated there. Large municipal estates populated by people rehoused from inner areas have also been a focus for such programmes. In both kinds of area, educational attainment tends to be poor and truancy high among local children. They do not get into the

*Michael Fogarty, *Irish Entrepreneurs Speak for Themselves*, Broadsheet No. 8, p. 26, ESRI, Dublin, 1973.

high status schools and colleges which may be found there. The jobs open to these children call for few qualifications, and those who do secure better paid work cannot find the housing or the social environment which they want without leaving the area altogether.* Their escape increases the segregation of such neighbourhoods from the rest of the city.

50. These are not new problems: Engels called attention to them vividly 130 years ago.† But the evidence about inequalities of this kind is thinner, and the administrative and political experience and the academic thinking underpinning priority area policies is less extensive than for the three previous types of poverty discussed in this paper. Three questions must be answered before much progress can be made in dealing with problems of this kind.

51 How concentrated, spatially, is urban poverty? British studies suggest that although there are neighbourhoods in which privations of many kinds are exceptionally common—and others where the privileged concentrate—most of the "deprived" are not living in "deprived areas" and most of those who live in such areas are not specially "deprived" (however those terms may be defined).‡ The differences between the living standards of different regions in Britain are much smaller than in most European countries, and differences between urban and rural areas are also small. In Ireland where inter-regional and urban-rural differences are much more dominant, the concentration of poverty in inner-city neighbourhoods is likely to be even less marked.

52. In places where privations are most heavily concentrated does their concentration exacerbate or ameliorate conditions for the poor? People have assumed too uncritically that concentration is itself an additional hardship. In some respects that must be true: the develop-

*For a brief account of such areas and their educational problems in Dublin, see the Annual Report of the School Attendance Department of Dublin for the year ended 30th June, 1973.

†*The Condition of the Working Class in England* (first German edition, 1845).

‡A. H. Halsey (ed.), *Educational Priority*, HMSO, London, 1973. Alan Little and Christine Nabey, "Reading Attainment and Social and Ethnic Mix of London Primary Schools", in David Donnison and David Eversley (eds.), *London, Urban Patterns, Problems and Policies*, Heinemann, 1973.

ment of children must suffer in areas where crowding, violence, noise and pollution are inescapable, where there is no safe open-air playground, no book-shops and few people who have found schooling a satisfying or profitable experience. But these very hardships show that their families do not congregate in such neighbourhoods without good reason, and simply to move them elsewhere may only make matters worse, depriving them of the political power which concentration may confer, increasing the proportion of adults who are unemployed, and increasing the costs of housing and of travel to work, shops and the homes of relatives.* Other common assumptions—such as the assertion that deprived areas lack leadership and the capacity to organise—are true of some places (where there are mobile populations, for example, or where residents accept the values of the surrounding community and the low status it gives them), but they are plainly untrue of others, as some of the poorest neighbourhoods in Northern Ireland have conclusively demonstrated—in the Bogside and Sandy Row, for example.

53. If there are intra-urban concentrations of poverty which exacerbate the problems of those who live in such neighbourhoods, it must then be asked whether the action required should be focussed on these neighbourhoods (possibly helping by the benefits conferred to tie their residents more tightly to them) or on the city as a whole and the surrounding region (to open up opportunities for the deprived elsewhere, and to prevent the development of neighbourhoods inhabited only by the rich—a phenomenon which guarantees concentrations of poorer people somewhere).

54. The deprived inner urban areas certainly deserve serious and continuing attention. Middle class people—who include most of the Government and their senior public servants—too easily forget how small a patch of the city poor people actually use and know. Since they also move house less often and less far than the middle class, the poor may spend most of their lives within a few blocks of the house in which

*Hirschel Kasper, "Measuring the Labour Market Costs of Housing Dislocation" *Scottish Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 20, June 1973.

they were brought up.* But priority area policies, aimed at such neighbourhoods, should not replace more conventional social policies. Nor should it be assumed that most of the poorest people will be found in such areas, or that bringing social segregation to an end by moving the poor out or others in will necessarily make things better, or that deprived urban areas are necessarily worse off than deprived rural areas. We should particularly beware of terms like "ghetto" which imply that we already know the answers to these difficult questions.

55. More strikingly than any of the previous patterns of inequality discussed, this one shows the importance of differences in status, power and security. These deprived areas are often found in the biggest cities where opportunities for work and overtime for all the family may be reasonably good, and the schools, hospitals and other public services include some of the best in the country. Resources are fairly plentiful. But the most deprived people in such neighbourhoods may be low on the waiting lists for housing, and powerless against planners, social workers and officials of every kind; their children may never enter the good schools, their dustbins may remain unemptied, and the reputation of the neighbourhood may make it difficult for them to get jobs, tenancies or credit. Meanwhile the people of high status neighbourhoods not far off may be capable of diverting urban motorways, preventing the reorganisation of local schools which give their children specially privileged treatment, getting their larger volume of rubbish disposed of regularly, and getting their cheques accepted anywhere in town.

(5) Discrimination

56. Systematic discrimination against categories of people who are accorded work, pay, conditions and status inferior to those of other people similar in every respect but their race, religion or some other characteristic has in many countries been the source of most bitter social conflicts. At the core of such problems lies the fact that in the course of generations in which its opportunities have been restricted, the group discriminated against evolves social roles and a life style

*Dr F. Boal provides some of the best evidence of this, e.g., "Territoriality and Class: A Study of Two Residential Areas in Belfast", *Irish Geography*, VI, 3, 1971, p. 229.

which make it in some ways less well equipped to compete in urban, industrial society and—more damaging still—the victims may come to accept their own inferiority. In a growing economy the other inequalities considered in this paper can in time be ameliorated in ways which satisfy most of the interests concerned: even "class war" can be relatively benign in a country producing each year a surplus sufficient to raise the incomes of workers while still permitting some increase in profits and the salaries of executives. But when political power, civil rights, housing in overcrowded areas, and jobs in underemployed parts of the economy are at stake—as they often are in cases of discrimination—any advance achieved by one group entails a loss by others: the contenders are engaged in a "zero-sum" rather than a "positive-sum" game.

57. In Northern Ireland conflicts between the majority and minority communities about inequalities of this kind have come to dominate all other social issues. In many parts of the United States ethnic conflicts have in recent years been an almost equally dominant feature of debate about social policies. But the Republic of Ireland, with no large ethnic or religious minorities, has been spared these conflicts. Here the most obvious unsolved problems of discrimination, common to many other countries, are a small one and a very large one (numerically speaking)—the position of itinerants (0.3 per cent of the population) and the position of women (50 per cent of the population). The country is now making progress in dealing with these issues, but it will be a long time before they are entirely resolved.

Some questions not considered

58. Before concluding this Section I should briefly comment on a few points which some would have expected to see discussed in it. Nothing has been said about many of the most immediate and harrowing causes of poverty such as mental and physical illness, injury, bereavement, separation and desertion of parents, unemployment, criminal injury, eviction, the destruction of homes by flood or fire, and so on. Their omission does not imply that these disasters are unimportant; they may completely overwhelm the people involved. But, inadequate though the care given to the sufferers often is, there are Departments of Government, professions, advisory committees, and in

some cases major pressure groups, which are already concerned with these needs and those who suffer from them. The Social Policy Committee would, therefore, do better to consider them in the broader context of the "gross inequalities" to which the Council for Social Welfare called the country's attention.

59. The question can be posed in another way. If the more fortunate members of society (senior executives, civil servants and professors, for example) are injured or sick they can secure whatever treatment society can offer, and for a considerable period their incomes will be unaffected; they are rarely, if ever, unemployed and would have little difficulty in finding alternative work if they were; they can retire without serious loss of income; if their houses burn down they are well insured—and so on. These events may pose harrowing problems for them, but if the Social Policy Committee are concerned with "gross inequalities" they will ask why most people fare less well in similar circumstances, and what can be done to give them the kind of protection that more fortunate people already have.

60. "The culture of poverty" is a term much used in discussions of deprivation—but not here. Invented by Oscar Lewis,^{*} the meaning of the concept was well summarised by Professor Ivor Browne who explained that continuing poverty may produce and be reinforced by "a whole system of learning, largely negative and maladaptive which is passed on from generation to generation."[†] Such patterns are certainly to be seen, but the concept and the evidence on which it is based have been severely criticised, and for the Committee's purposes it would be wiser to regard these patterns as a response to privation (which they clearly are) rather than in any general sense its cause (which would be to go beyond the evidence available).

Conclusion

61. These five patterns of inequality are the main, but not the only, ways of describing and explaining the persistence of affluence and poverty in the more developed countries. For individuals, the extremes

^{*}*La Vida*, Panther, 1968; and *Pedro Martinez*, Panther, 1954.

[†]"The Physical and Psychological Effects of Poverty". *Social Studies. Irish Journal of Sociology*, August 1972, p. 427.

are found at the intersections of these patterns—the richest among highly educated, healthy, upper class people who have no dependants to support, who live in the most prosperous places and draw their incomes from the most buoyant and profitable sectors of the economy; the poorest among those who suffer all the opposite handicaps. It would be pointless to try to distinguish the relative importance of each cause in such cases, but it is important to distinguish them when considering the country as a whole and its major social trends and patterns, for policies designed to solve one problem may conflict with those appropriate to another.

62. To call oneself an egalitarian without further explanation is to pose questions, not to answer them. Policies intended to redistribute income over the life span (through wage-related pension schemes attractive to all income groups, for example) may conflict with policies intended to remedy the major inequalities of the class system (because wage-related pensions will continue into retirement the inequalities of earnings in the labour market). Policies intended to promote the development of depressed regions may conflict with both the preceding strategies (because they provide loans, subsidies, and professional advice for local entrepreneurs who are likely to be abler, richer and less burdened by dependants than their neighbours). Policies intended to extend opportunities in deprived inner-city neighbourhoods may conflict with those for regional development (because they bring additional money and professional staff into the biggest cities which are in general wealthier and better served than the rural areas and peripheral regions). And policies intended to end unfair discrimination (by giving equal pay to men and women, for example) may conflict with most of the other strategies (by reducing the living standards of families with young children in which wives cannot responsibly go out to work, families in which the women are unskilled or physically unfit for work, and families living in regions and neighbourhoods where opportunities for work are poorest).

63. These apparently insoluble dilemmas should not deter the Committee from its search for more rational social policies. On the contrary; they remind us that equity means many different things, that the attempt to create a fairer society will inevitably encounter the main social con-

flicts thrown up by a complex world, and that social policy therefore calls for the most thoughtful and well-informed statesmanship which the community can bring to bear. An understanding of these dilemmas need not inhibit action. It may show which inequalities are, at a particular place and time, most severe, and suggest ways of resolving them which will not exacerbate other inequalities. To take this discussion further we must now consider the particular place and time of Ireland, 1975.

IV SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR IRELAND

64. The argument of this paper has thus far been conducted in a fairly abstract and analytical fashion. It is time to place it more firmly in an Irish context and to consider its practical implications.

65. Perhaps the main virtue of the approach to social policy adopted in this report is that it encourages policy-makers and the public to think in terms of a crude form of double-entry book-keeping: "crude" because the credits and debits do not necessarily balance. Of any action proposed, whether by Government or by commercial or voluntary bodies, we must ask "Who benefits?", "Who pays the costs?" and "When?" "How will these streams of benefits and costs accrue over time"? Although these are the central questions of policy and politics, it is surprising how seldom they are asked or publicly discussed in any systematic fashion.

66. But this approach cannot prescribe (no analytical method could) what the country's social policies should be. Whether to aim for a more or a less equal society and which kinds of inequalities to tackle first must be for the Government, and ultimately the electorate, to decide. How to create a fairer and more equal society without sacrificing toleration and freedoms so far attained has been a continuing theme of social and political thought since the industrial revolution and much earlier. This theme, and the closely related one of expanding the Government's social expenditures, have been stressed in Ireland recently by all the main political parties, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, voluntary bodies, Church authorities and the country's economic planners.* Public expenditure in general and social expenditure in par-

*E.g. *Winning Through to a Just Society*, Policy Statement by Fine Gael, 1969; Brendan Corish, *The New Republic*, Labour Party, 1968; *Economic and Social Development* ICTU, Discussion Document, 1972; *Housing in the Seventies*, Prl. 658, Stationery Office, Dublin, 1969; Council for Social Welfare, *A Statement on Social Policy*, 1973; *Children Deprived*, Memorandum by CARE, 1972; *Third Programme, Economic and Social Development*, 1969-72, Prl. 431, 1969.

ticular have in fact been growing fast. Expenditure on services for which the Department of Social Welfare is responsible (mainly social insurance and assistance, and children's allowances) will almost double in two years, rising from £151 millions in the financial year 1972-73 (or 6.8% of GNP) to £295 millions in 1974-75 (over 8.5% of GNP).^{*} The personal social services are being expanded, and large increases are also being made in public expenditure on housing and education.

67. Thus how to move towards greater equality, rather than whether to do so, seems to be the question to which the leaders of opinion expect the Social Policy Committee to address themselves. Is that a reasonable aspiration for a small country with the lowest income per head in the EEC? Some would argue that in stormy economic times Ireland would do better to concentrate on increasing her income before redistributing it. But economic difficulties need be no bar to redistribution: many countries have found that it is when hardships rather than benefits have to be shared that their people press for greater equality. Moreover, the question of Ireland's relative poverty deserves closer examination. Table 2 shows that the Irish are (within the EEC) relatively poor, if their living standards are measured in dollars per head (line 1). But such comparisons are apt to be misleading: a large proportion of Irish heads are under five years old, the proportion of income distributed in wages and salaries is high (line 2), and Irish consumption of meat, eggs, butter and fresh milk (section 3) is amongst the highest in Europe. Irish housing standards are also reasonably good. The rate at which real incomes are increasing (line 5) is also high, though not quite so high if estimated in earnings per hour (line 6). These figures suggest that in the next stage of their development the Irish are likely to catch up with the rest of the Community in their use of motor cars, television sets and telephones. That is a stage at which Governments can make more deliberate choices between the distribution of any increase in incomes between social groups, and between private consumption and social expenditure.

How unequal is Ireland?

68. How unequal is Ireland? It is notoriously difficult to answer that kind of question but there is a good deal of somewhat impressionistic

^{*}Opening statement to the Dáil by the Parliamentary Secretary on his Department's estimates for 1974.

TABLE 2—Indicators of incomes, living standards and growth rates in the EEC

	Ireland	Belgium	Germany	France	Italy	Luxembourg	Netherlands	UK	Denmark
1. Gross national product in \$ per capita 1972	1,777	3,350	3,868	3,504	2,005	3,431	3,193	2,673	3,844
2. Wages and salaries as % of national income, per person employed, 1972	94.4	79.9	81.9	89.5	79.2	90.1	81.7	83.3	83.4
3. Food consumed in kg per unit of consumption, 1971-72:									
Meat	85.9	84.6	86.9	95.6	59.3	NA	67.2	77.8	63.1
Eggs	13.5	12.6	16.8	12.6	10.7	NA	11.1	16.0	10.9
Butter	10.6	6.7	6.2	7.2	1.6	NA	1.7	6.3	7.1
Fresh milk (litres)	212.0	75.0	73.0	70.0	71.0	NA	103.0	140.0	82.0
4. Per 1,000 inhabitants, 1972:									
Private cars	140	219	253	256	207	291	220	222	228
TV sets	164	216	299	227	181	209	243	298	277
Telephones	109	224	249	185	188	346	280	289	356
5. Increase in wages and salaries in real terms (1960=100), 1972	180	181	192	182	219	161	194	142	167
6. Increase of average gross hourly earnings of workers in industry in real terms (1960=100), 1973	193	202	191	182	NA	179	203	147/153	189

Source: EEC Report on the Development of the Social Situation in the Community in 1974; Brussels, 1975; pp. 220 et seq. See Report for further notes to table. * = Provisional figures. ¹ = 1970, ² = 1971, ³ = Men/Women, NA = Not available.

evidence to suggest that Ireland is an unequal society." That is due partly to the earlier stage of industrial development at which she stands: the later stages of industrialisation and urbanisation often produce somewhat more equal distributions of earnings and proportionately larger social service expenditures as they proceed. Ireland's social expenditures were until recently fairly low, but are now increasing rapidly. ‡ Her taxes may however be less redistributive than her neighbours.**

Who are those at the bottom of the heap?

69. In a paper published in 1972, Séamus Ó Cinnéide estimated that at least one fifth of his countrymen must have been living at a standard below that provided in Northern Ireland by Supplementary Benefits. Farmers were much worse off than other workers. "One must also remember," he added, "that the cost of living is higher on this side of the border."^{††}

70. Irish education compares reasonably well in duration with her neighbours. The proportion of Irish seventeen-year-olds still in full-time schooling in 1968-69 was slightly higher than in Britain. Yet 15 per cent (in Britain none) were leaving under the age of fourteen.^{††} and considerable numbers never attended a secondary school.

71. Since much of this data was assembled, Irish social expenditure and the social services have been greatly extended. But has this increased effort been directed to remedying inequalities? More evidence will be needed to form a judgement about this; without it no one should

*Seamus Ó Cinnéide, "The Extent of Poverty in Ireland" *Social Studies, Irish Journal of Sociology*, 1, 4, August 1972.

†Harold Lydall, *The Structure of Earnings*, Oxford 1968.

‡Finola Kennedy, "Social Expenditure and Social Policy in Ireland, 1947-1974", Dublin, ESRI, Broadsheet No. 11.

**See John O'Hagan, "Who pays the taxes?", *Management*, Vol. XII, December 1974.

††Ó Cinnéide, "The Extent of Poverty in Ireland".

‡‡*Children, Deprived*. The CARE Memorandum on Deprived Children and Children's Services in Ireland 1972, p. 42. The raising of the school-leaving age to 15 in 1972 has probably reduced this figure significantly since the CARE Memorandum was produced.

assume that social expenditure necessarily operates in an equalising fashion. Increases in retirement pensions, industrial injuries benefits, and family allowances, the reduction of the starting age for contributory pensions, the provision of new benefits for unmarried mothers and the continuation of slum clearance must have had broadly equalising effects. But the provision of free secondary education and much more generous grants for higher education must mainly benefit families whose children take their education furthest. Among EEC countries, Ireland subsidises an exceptionally large proportion of its housing but has taken fewer steps than most of them to ensure that this help goes to households with the greatest needs. The Government expects to continue providing half the capital for new building but its proposals for more generous grants for private housing, and for more active public acquisition of land for housing (without any convincing means for retaining betterment values for the public) are likely to maintain these patterns of indiscriminate subsidy. Irish fiscal traditions, relying unusually heavily on indirect taxes which tend to take proportionately more from the poor than the rich, are only slowly moving—with the levying of income tax on farmers—in more redistributive directions.

72. Whatever the distribution of income and social services, many have assumed that the other things mentioned in paragraph 27 above—status, power and security—will be more equally shared in Ireland, where human relations are thought to be more democratic, than in class-dominated neighbouring societies. But this assumption too has recently been challenged. Professor Basil Chubb reports the findings of a hitherto unpublished survey of Dubliners' expectations of public officials and the police, using questions previously asked by Almond and Verba in other countries.* These findings suggest that the Irish have less confidence in public officials and the police than the Americans, the British and the Germans. The Irish study was made in Dublin only, and some have said that country attitudes would be more favourable. That may be so, but further evidence would be needed to prove the point. In the other countries studied, countrymen were generally more suspicious of police and officials than townsmen were. Professor Chubb's findings have been criticised, but although Raven

*G. Almond and S. Verba, *The Civic Culture*, Princeton, 1963.

TABLE 3
Responses to questions about the public's expectations of officials and the police

	Dublin	U.S.	U.K.	W. Germany	Italy	Mexico
Treatment by public officials						
They expect equal treatment	55	83	83	65	53	42
They don't expect equal treatment	35	9	7	9	13	50
They expect to be ignored	17	6	5	5	11	27
Treatment by the police						
They expect equal treatment	75	85	89	72	56	32
They don't expect equal treatment	20	8	6	5	10	57
They expect to be ignored	10	11	5	4	12	29

Source: Basil Chubb, *The Government and Politics of Ireland*, Oxford, 1970; p. 311.

has done research—partly conflicting and partly supportive—in pilot studies of comparable questions,* no systematic attempt has been made to confirm or refute Chubb's evidence.

73. These findings, summarised in Table 3, may be partly related to the fact that most Irishmen's main experience of Government has probably been with the tax gatherer, the policeman, the administrator of means tests, and to a lesser extent the staff of hospitals, old people's homes and other institutions. The country has had no universal, free health service and no public child care or personal social service with a general duty to help people in their own homes and promote the nation's health and welfare. The services provided by voluntary bodies and the Churches, like the statutory Home Assistance Schemes, are not regarded as rights which the citizens can rely on. How unusual Irish patterns have become can be glimpsed in Table 4 which shows that the country has fewer doctors but more hospital beds in relation to its population than any other country in the EEC.

*John Raven, "Some results from Pilot Surveys of Attitudes, Values and Perceptions of Socio-Institutional Structures in Ireland", *Economic and Social Review*, Vol. 4, No. 4, 1973.

TABLE 4
Bed/Population and Doctor/Population Ratios in EEC Countries

	Acute hospital beds* per 1,000 population	Mental hospital beds per 1,000 population	Doctors per 10,000 population
Ireland	6.1†	5.1‡	12.0
Belgium	4.6	2.6	15.5
Germany	7.5	1.9	17.2
France	4.6	2.2	13.4
Italy	6.5	2.2	18.1
Luxembourg	6.4	4.1	10.6
Netherlands	5.2	NA	12.5
UK	4.5	2.7	12.4
Denmark	5.6	2.2	14.4

*Excludes mental hospitals (but includes psychiatric beds in general hospitals); excludes tuberculosis hospitals (but includes tuberculosis beds in general hospitals); excludes geriatric hospitals and convalescent homes; excludes mental handicap institutions.
†More up-to-date figures for Ireland give a figure of 5.8. The figure of 6.1 is retained to make the comparison more valid.
‡The number of mental hospital beds in Ireland is not given in the WHO publication and was obtained from Department of Health statistics.

Source: *World Health Statistics Annual*, 1969 (beds); *World Health Statistics Annual*, 1970 (doctors).

Public opinion and public education

74. The conclusions reached thus far are that leaders of opinion in Ireland are more concerned with equity and social questions than for many years past, and there are good reasons for their concern and some scope for action. Action, indeed, is already being taken on a scale which may generate massive commitments to public expenditure in future without careful thought about the distributional implications of these policies.

75. But what does the electorate think? Social policies cannot be effective without the voters' support. Because the larger questions about distribution have rarely been discussed in Ireland, and the country's political labour movement has not taken the actively educative role adopted, for example, by their opposite numbers in Sweden,* it is unlikely that there is any coherent public opinion about many of these issues—certainly not a reforming opinion. A recent study† of a small town in the South East of Ireland made by Sue Leigh Doyle showed that a representative sample of 100 mothers with children at school had generally conservative attitudes about social policy, although their families were at a stage of the income cycle at which many of them must have needed all the help they could get: 49 of these 100 mothers said they personally knew someone "on the dole" and most of the rest were aware of such people in the town, yet 54 said the service was "abused", was "bad for morale, bad for men, makes them lazy, encourages them not to look for work", and so on. Of the total, 52 said they were satisfied with family health services and wanted no improvements.

76. Such attitudes will not change of their own accord. New generations may succeed the old but they will not necessarily be in closer touch with the changing needs of their fellow citizens or the changing scope for meeting them. The median age of the Irish population was 26 in 1926 and still 26 in 1971. But the median age of voters rose over the same period from 43 to 47.

*See Richard Scase, Ph.D. thesis at University of Kent, "Social Democracy in Sweden: A Comparative Assessment", for an account of the role of the trade unions and the labour movement in Sweden in forming the attitudes of the working class.

†Sue Leigh Doyle. Unpublished Master's thesis. U.C.D. 1974.

77. Striking changes of opinion about social issues can be brought about. Something of this kind appears to have happened in recent years to public attitudes to unmarried mothers, for example. When they are given the opportunity people will flock to discussions about poverty and social policy and set up further meetings of their own to explore these problems, as the Kerry Seminars organised by Bishop Casey have recently shown.

78. It is not enough only to consult the average citizen; there is no tyranny like the tyranny of majorities. Those proposing new developments in the social services should also try to consult the people for whom they are intended. Evidence that there is some support for a proposal among the people it is supposed to serve should be as regular a requirement before decisions are taken as evidence about the costs of the proposal. The distribution of a growing proportion of the nation's output through public services or with the support of subsidies frees the community from the constraints of market mechanisms. But the market at least gave consumers a voice of some kind. If steps are not taken to ensure that the "target groups" to whom public services are directed are heard, it will be the providers of the services (administrators, doctors, teachers, social workers and the political spokesmen of majorities) who shape the character and distribution of these services. The results are well known. First class nursery schools have been provided for the children of working mothers who could make no use of them because they were not open throughout the working day or during school holidays. Landscape architects have planted trees and grass on the bare, hard ground between tenements when local residents preferred to hang their laundry and play football there. Appointments systems in outpatient departments, clinics and juvenile courts have been designed to suit those who man them, rather than those whom they are supposed to serve.

79. An informed public opinion will depend on, and then demand, much better evidence about the distribution of incomes, services, social conditions, and the general social trends of the country. Figures will not be enough; regular interpretive analysis and commentary will also be needed, and that will often come best from experts outside the

public service—independent research workers and specialist correspondents, for example. Comparisons should be made from time to time with similar data for other countries.

80. It is easy to talk about wealth, poverty and inequality and not too difficult, in extreme cases, to agree about their meaning. But the analysis of social policies repeatedly calls for finer distinctions. How much larger must the income of a three-child family be than that of a two-child family if both are to attain the same living standards? How much less does an elderly widow need? Do those in Dublin need more or less than those in the West? Government allowances and subsidies which are based on—or at least imply—answers to such questions are in most countries little better than rules of thumb. Better informed public discussion of distributional questions will require the construction of "equivalence scales" which provide estimates of the income needed to attain given standards of living in different kinds of households. A simple version of such scales was well used in the Report of the Commission on the Status of Women.*

81. Brief though it has had to be, it would be a great mistake to regard this discussion of public opinion, public education, and the collection and interpretation of social statistics as a digression from the main theme of this report. Public understanding of the essentials of social policy, public capacity to use social services and public willingness to pay the taxes, insurance contributions and charges required for them are precious assets which must be carefully nurtured. I have said that those responsible for developing a country's social policies should not merely respond to public demands, but neither should they merely prescribe for the public—however well informed they may be. They must help to develop public understanding of social policies and social services, and beware of moving too far ahead of it. Thus as I turn in this final section to consider priorities for Ireland it should be remembered that action should start whenever possible from the needs which Irish people understand and the services which they can use.

* Pages 155 *et seq.*

82. It should be clear that we do not have enough evidence to formulate any authoritative prescriptions. All I can do is to illustrate how the approach I have outlined might be used to examine the options and debate priorities more productively. If that provokes fruitful discussion the exercise will have served its main purpose.

The life-time cycle of incomes

83. Rowntree's poverty cycle bears more heavily on Ireland than on most countries: the proportion in the working age group between 15 and 64 years old is much lower than in any other EEC country, families are larger, unemployment is higher, and the proportion of women in employment seems to be low too (although the figures for female employment have not been given in Table 5 because they are not strictly comparable with those for other EEC countries.) The male unemployment rate may be exaggerated by the exclusion from these figures of public servants and the self-employed, among whom unemployment is rare, but that bias will be somewhat counterbalanced by the inclusion of people over 65 who would in other countries be treated as outside the labour force. It may be argued that these figures are slightly misleading because many Irishmen of working age work abroad, sending money home to their relatives. But remittances from abroad do not radically change the picture; in 1973 they amounted to a net sum of £32.2 millions, or 1.19% of national income.

84. Young countries with high birth-rates often have the advantage of a mobile and rapidly growing labour force which can be more easily deployed in the most productive occupations, but Ireland's high unemployment and her position on the periphery of the British economy have given her the awkward combination of the highest birth-rate and the most slowly growing population of any of the EEC countries.

85. Policies for helping those who are in the troughs of the life-time cycle of incomes therefore deserve high priority. The hardships which may afflict the family with lots of young children to support or the elderly (particularly the single and widowed left on their own) are well understood and command ready sympathy. How that help can best be brought to bear (through children's allowances, pensions and other

cash payments, through free health services for selected groups, new housing priorities, or some combination of such programmes) should not be decided till evidence about the extent and distribution of the relevant hardships and the effectiveness of public services in each of these fields has been considered.

Urban-rural and inter-regional differences

86. Regional differences in opportunities and living standards are still so large that they threaten to create within Ireland two nations living in different eras. Table 6 shows that at one extreme the East and at the other Donegal, the North-West, the West and the Midlands (and sometimes the Mid-West) stand out from the rest. With rare exceptions, the four poorer regions have a more thinly scattered population, higher rates of emigration, lower incomes per head, slower growth in incomes per head and greater dependence on agriculture. Yet, these regions have not had appreciably more, per head, than an average share of grant aid for the attraction of new industries.

87. Regional policies, explicit and implicit, have always made heavy demands on public expenditure in Ireland, and that pattern will continue for many years to come. It is a pattern, moreover, which is well understood and has strong public support. Reports such as that made by the OECD on *Manpower Policy in Ireland** have drawn attention to some of the defects of these policies and urged greater attention to training, manpower planning and community development, a diversion of subsidies from capital investment to employment, concentration of development in fewer and larger centres, and other steps which go beyond the terms of reference to this Report. The conclusion suggested by these studies is that Ireland needs better, rather than more expensive, regional policies.

88. There is little evidence about urban-rural differences, but it is clear that these remain important even in the wealthier regions. The South-West may stand so high in the league tables because of the dominant influence within it of the City of Cork, and Limerick-Shannon may contribute a similar influence to Mid-West figures. Parts of West

*Paris 1974.

Source: Report on the Development of the Social Situation in the Community in 1974; pp. 220-232.

Country	Annual increase in population 1958-72 (%)	Distribution of population by age-groups, 1973 (%)				Live births per 1,000 inhabitants, 1972	Unemployment as % of civilian labour force 1973
		0-14	15-64	65 and over	100		
Ireland	0.4	31.3	57.6	11.1	100	22.3	6.0
Belgium	0.5	22.8	63.5	13.7	100	13.4	2.5
Germany	0.9	22.9	63.6	13.8	100	10.3	1.0
France	1.0	24.4	62.4	13.2	100	16.4	2.1
Italy	0.7	24.3	64.8	10.9	100	16.0	3.5
Luxembourg	0.7	20.8	66.3	12.9	100	10.8	0.0
Netherlands	1.3	26.9	62.8	10.3	100	14.5	2.5
UK	0.5	24.0	62.6	13.5	100	14.0	2.3
Denmark	0.7	22.8	64.2	13.0	100	14.3	0.9

Some demographic comparisons

TABLE 5

Cork and Clare are as poverty-stricken and as isolated from urban services as any of the western districts.

The Future

89. But although these patterns are likely to remain the dominant themes of social policies for some time to come, they may change in future. As more young Irish men and women are able to stay at home and have their families in Ireland rather than emigrating, and as rising expectations of life increase the numbers of old people, so the ratio of dependents to the working population may remain high—and possibly increase still further above the European average.* But within these families the numbers of children may in future decline. That, certainly, has been the experience of other countries. Thus the life-time cycle of incomes may exert a less dominant influence on Irish social policies as time goes by.

90. Table 7 shows that the total number of people working in Ireland changed scarcely at all between 1961 and 1973. But within this total there was a massive decline of 31 per cent in the numbers working in agriculture and related industries, and compensating increases in every other industry. The decline in the farming labour force is now likely to proceed even faster, partly because there are at the moment large numbers of elderly farmers and partly because EEC policies are likely to hasten the consolidation of the smaller, uneconomic holdings into larger and more profitable units. Other industries are now growing more rapidly—so rapidly, in fact that there has been a growing flow of workers returning to Ireland from other countries (although the current economic situation may have an effect on this trend).

91. If poverty arising from the life cycle and from regional and urban-rural imbalances grows less severe, greater priority will have to be given to righting the fundamental social inequalities of urban society and its class system. That will sometimes call for the abolition of means tests and other forms of selection which have been stigmatising and degrading: progress is now being made in this direction in the field of

*See *Population and Employment Projections, 1971-1986*, NESC No. 5, Pri. 4193, Dublin 1975.

Sources: *Regional Policies in Ireland*, NESC No. 4, 1975; *IDA Annual Report, 1974-73*.

Regions	% of population aged 0-14 or 65+	Inhabitants per Sq. Km	Net Emigration per 000 1966-71	% unemployed (1971)	Personal Income per Head £ at current prices (1960)	Growth in Income per Head 1960-69 at real (1960) prices	% employment in agriculture 1971	Grants for new Industry £ per head 1961-71	Grants for new Industry £ per head 1973-74
East	41.0	152	0.1	5.1	517	105	6.4	9.8	1.1
South West	42.2	38	2.6	5.2	409	83	39.7	22.4	4.7
South East	43.6	35	4.1	4.9	380	70	34.4	20.4	6.3
North East	42.7	43	3.7	5.6	380	82	33.5	34.8	4.9
Mid-West	44.0	34	5.2	5.7	311	77	34.3	27.5	4.6
Midlands	43.6	26	9.8	4.9	325	52	42.8	34.8	4.6
West	43.6	23	9.8	7.4	324	64	52.3	18.1	5.1
North West	43.3	24	9.7	5.6	316	61	51.4	29.6	4.3
Donegal	43.7	22	6.3	13.8	305	57	44.1	11.6	2.1
Average	42.3	43	3.7	5.5	420	86	26.2	17.4	4.1

TABLE 6
Regional Comparisons

TABLE 7
Numbers of persons at work in Ireland, by industry

(Thousands)

	1961	1973
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting	379.5	261
Mining and quarrying	9.6	10
Manufacturing	177.8	217
Building and construction	59.6	79
Electricity, gas, water and sanitary services	10.2	14
Commerce, insurance and finance	159.0	174
Transport storage and communications	54.2	61
Public administration and defence	40.6	55
Other non-agricultural economic activity	162.0	181
Total at work	1,052.5	1,052
Unemployed	55.6	66
Total labour force	1,081.1	1,118

Sources: *Review of 1970 and Outlook for 1971*, Pl. 1799, Dublin 1971. *Review of 1973 and Outlook for 1974*, Pl. 3774, Dublin 1973.

ensions. But an educational system which has excluded a considerable proportion of children from schools to which the majority go, while maintaining for an elite minority a top layer of highly selective schools, clearly demands reappraisal and reform: it is likely to be stigmatising, wasteful of talent, and socially divisive. If Peter Kaim Caudle was right to conclude, from his ten-country study, that Ireland's "free general medical services for the least well off . . . were a good example of the maxim that 'a service for the poor is a poor service' ",* these services, too, will need critical study.

92. It would be wrong to conclude, however, that all selectivity must go. Elsewhere greater selectivity may be needed, particularly in the fiscal system (where progressive income taxes are being extended,

* *Comparative Social Policy and Social Security*, p. 305.

and attention is turning to wealth taxes) and in the distribution of housing subsidies and support for the rapidly growing system of higher education (where people with higher incomes and few dependants need not be so generously subsidised).

93. Fundamental to all these problems, however, are the basic inequalities in wages and working conditions, and the prevalence of unemployment which weakens the bargaining position and undermines the self-respect of workers. The aim of reducing unemployment to minimal levels by 1980, to which Irish Governments have long been committed, is almost certainly unattainable. Apart from the impossibly high rate of industrial growth it would entail,* successful progress in this direction is likely to be self-frustrating as it brings unemployed or under-employed Irish workers back from Britain and more secondary earners—particularly women—into the labour market. This is a point at which economic policies have a central part to play in any strategy for social policies. Incomes policies which would reduce the present large differences in earnings cannot be pushed to a point which would increase unemployment and frighten away foreign investors whose capital is powerfully helping to increase jobs, production, and exports.

94. The problem of discrimination against women and against itinerants, noted in the previous section, arise on very different scales. To deal fairly and successfully with itinerants will call for professionally and politically sophisticated policies which enable these thousand people to earn a better living and to raise their children in ways which they find satisfying: attempts to integrate or submerge them within the settled community have never succeeded.† But on a national scale the resources required are very small.

95. To accord equal rights to women will call for a continuing and pervasive programme of action which must be complemented by the

* Garret FitzGerald, *Planning in Ireland*, Institute of Public Administration 1968, pp. 192 *et seq.*

† For a thoughtful and well-researched study of the needs of similar groups in the UK and policies for the future, see Barbara Adams, Judith Okely, David Morgan, David Smith, "Gypsies and Government Policy in England. A Study of the traveller's way of life in relation to the policies and practices of central and local government".

provision of increased child allowances or other support for women at the stage when they want to stay at home and care for their children. The Commission on the Status of Women has already done very good work on these questions to which I cannot usefully add. But if progress is to be made in dealing with other kinds of inequality discussed in this report, priority should be given to extending opportunities for work and raising wages for women in the most deprived families and regions. It would be a pity if the movement for women's rights led *only* to greater opportunities for the most highly educated women to gain their share of the spoils in a thoroughly unequal labour market.

96. Each problem of discrimination tends to be treated as a new, unforeseen and separate issue. We should instead regard them as recurring dilemmas of a fundamentally similar kind, and learn something from the solution of each which may equip the country to respond more promptly and more humanely to the next. It would, for example, be tragic if large numbers of Irishmen long resident in Northern Ireland or in Britain were compelled by disturbances there to move to the Republic; but if that were to happen the ensuing competition for jobs, housing and other opportunities would pose fundamentally familiar problems of discrimination which the country would have to resolve as fairly as possible.

Poverty Programmes in Priority Areas

97. Ireland is already committed through the work of its Advisory Committee on Pilot Schemes to Combat Poverty to a variety of experimental projects for which the support of the EEC has been given. By concentrating resources for carefully monitored experiments in selected areas it should be possible to gain a better understanding of interrelated social problems which are usually dealt with in isolation by separate services; ways may be found for giving deprived people greater autonomy, self-respect and some influence over the development of services intended to help them; and the lessons learnt can later be applied in public services and social policies throughout the country. That approach, which the Advisory Committee has wisely adopted, treats selected areas not as "ghettos" within which social problems are to be solved, but as "test-beds" on which to develop

new models of social policy which can ultimately be used in many other places. Programmes of this sort for the development, testing and dissemination of planned innovations should be a continuing feature of social policy.

Conclusion

98. In this section I have only made a start on the discussion of Irish problems and policies, aiming to show how the concepts outlined earlier in the paper might be used. For brevity's sake, complex issues have been dealt with too dogmatically. These are some of the main conclusions suggested by this discussion.

99. Ireland has severe problems of regional imbalance and rural poverty. They will demand high priority for some years to come, but in the form of better rather than more costly policies focussed on the development rather than the relief of depressed regions. Ireland already has a good deal to teach the rest of the world about these difficult questions.

100. Irish families with larger numbers of children, higher unemployment, fewer opportunities for women to work and poorer pension rights than are found in most neighbouring countries, face a particularly severe poverty cycle. Thus the redistribution of income across the life-span to help those in the troughs of this cycle should also have high priority—as should services which will in future enable parents to decide for themselves how many children they have and when to have them.

101. But policies for dealing with poverty-stricken regions and rural areas and the inequalities of the life-cycle of incomes should take forms which prepare the way for what will later become the dominant theme of social policy: the equalisation of opportunities, living conditions, status and power among the classes of an urban, industrial society. That will call for the replacement of stigmatising selectivity now operating at the bottom of the social scale by other forms of selectivity concentrated more often at the top of the scale to ensure that those best able to pay bear a larger share of tax burdens and get no exorbi-

tant share of social benefits. Policies for wages, labour relations and the attainment of full employment will form a continuing and central theme of any attack on these inequalities. It will be important, too, to involve the labour movement more deeply in the formulation and implementation of social policies.

102. Social policies, as I have defined them, deal essentially with relationships between the major interests and groups in an evolving society. Those concerned with social policies should therefore know their country well and the changes going on within it, and give first priority to the needs their countrymen understand and the institutions and services they are accustomed to use. But they should not stop there, or rest content merely with responding to public pressures. If social policies, and the public opinion in which they must remain firmly rooted, are to evolve humanely, accurate and more revealing information about living conditions and the distribution of opportunities and attainments among different groups of people must be regularly published, expertly interpreted, and discussed at all levels of society. Information by itself will rarely lead to important changes; for that, political pressure and conflict will often be needed. But accurate information and patient education are essential prerequisites for constructive innovation in social policy. The message need not be shrill: once it is understood, the truth about inequality is explosive enough.

APPENDIX

List of Participants at the Seminar held on 5th December 1974 to discuss a First Draft of Professor Donnison's Paper

Name	Organisation
Dr. S. Barrett	Trinity College, Dublin
Mr. T. Barrington	Institute of Public Administration
Mr. T. Brown	Office of the Minister for Social Welfare
Mr. M. Byran	Poverty Committee
Mr. M. Buckley	Department of Finance
Mrs. Helen Burke	National Economic and Social Council
Dr. E. Casey	Bishop of Kerry
Miss Clare Cearney	University College, Dublin
Mr. D. Chambers	National Economic and Social Council (Secretariat)
Mr. G. Collins	Department of Social Welfare
Mr. T. P. Ferris	National Economic and Social Council (Secretariat)
Professor D. Hannon	National Economic and Social Council
Mr. R. Hayes-McCoy	Federated Union of Employers
Mr. P. Hourigan	National Economic and Social Council
Mr. J. Hughes	National Economic and Social Council (Secretariat)
Rev. Dr. J. Kavanagh	Council for Social Welfare
Miss Noreen Kearney	Irish Association of Social Workers
Ms. C. Keehan	National Economic and Social Council (Secretariat)
Professor P. Lynch	National Economic and Social Council
Mr. A. Matthews	Irish Farmers' Association
Mr. P. McQuillan	South Eastern Health Board
Mr. D. Murphy	National Economic and Social Council
Mr. D. Nevin	National Economic and Social Council

Name

Mr. T. O'Cearbhaill
Mr. S. O'Cinneide
Mr. J. O'Hagan
Miss M. Rowntree
Professor W. J. L. Ryan
Miss M. Sheehan
Rev. Sr. Stanislaus
Mr. D. Staunton
Mrs. R. Torode
Mr. S. Trant
Mr. J. White

Organisation

National Economic and Social Council
Institute of Public Administration
Trinity College, Dublin
Eastern Health Board
National Economic and Social Council
University College, Dublin
Poverty Committee
National Federation of Youth Clubs
Eastern Health Board
Department of Health
Queen's University, Belfast