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**WORKING-CLASS EXPERIENCES OF MALE UNEMPLOYMENT IN  
DARLINGTON**

TREVOR LLEWELLYN

Thesis presented in partial fulfilment for the degree of  
Master of Arts at the University of Durham.

August 1989

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## ABSTRACT

This research is focused upon variety in working-class experiences of unemployment. It explores how such variety may reflect differentiation within the working-class in employment opportunities in the context of recent economic change. Experiences of unemployment are examined with regard to the implications for standards of living, and domestic and social relations. Particular attention is paid to the degree and nature of deprivation associated with unemployment and the consequent fall in income. Finally, given the electoral victories of the Conservatives despite high levels of unemployment, this research asks if unemployment constitutes a central political issue for the working-class and whether any variation in attitude is discernible according to the labour market positions of different sections of the working-class. Interviews with twenty working-class households with varied employment histories are utilised to explore these issues.

An important conclusion is that the unemployed do not constitute an homogeneous group nor is unemployment a uniform experience. For many of the unemployed the experience is likely to be a temporary one, though their subsequent employment is likely to be less favourable than previous jobs in terms of wage levels and working



conditions. There is nevertheless a section of the workforce who experience long term unemployment, unskilled manual workers being particularly disadvantaged. This group is likely to be subject to considerable hardship as a consequence of dependency on social security benefits as a main source of income. Yet it is past employment experiences rather than those of unemployment which tend to shape attitudes both to domestic relations and a range of political issues, hence the value of the concept of career history. Significant differences according to experiences of unemployment did exist, however, in attitudes to government measures aimed directly at the unemployed, such as its income maintenance measures.

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Finally I would like to extend my thanks to all my family, who accepted my absences without complaint.

## INTRODUCTION

'Any government which tampered seriously with the basic structure of the full-employment welfare state would meet with a sharp reverse at the polls.' (Tony Crossland, 1956, p61)

In 1983 unemployment in Britain stood in excess of three million people, a post-war record. A Conservative government had been in office for four years during which unemployment rose from 1,402,000 to 3,172,000, with approximately one and a quarter million people unemployed for a year or more.<sup>(1)</sup> In an election year there was considerable and often vitriolic debate about the causes of unemployment and possible solutions and a great deal of discussion about the consequent social, economic, and psychological costs.<sup>(2)</sup> Unemployment was of course spread unevenly across the country, being more pronounced in those areas traditionally reliant on heavy manufacturing industries. In order to promote nationwide awareness of the far reaching effects of such deep-rooted structural decline the T.U.C. and Labour Party organised public demonstrations throughout the country around the theme of 'fight for the right to work'. The government was accused of abandoning the post-war Keynesian consensus committed to the macro-economic goal of full employment.

The Conservative government in their turn rejected any suggestion that they did not consider the goal of full employment as important. Departing, at least in rhetoric, from orthodox Keynesian fiscal and monetary policy, they preferred instead the monetarist doctrines of economists such as Milton Friedman.<sup>(3)</sup> Monetarism, if little understood, became part of the public vocabulary. The conquest of inflation, the creation of 'sound money', was regarded as essential if the economy was to achieve confidence and stability and recover full-employment. Much of the debate on economic policy pivoted on whether monetarist policies could generate the desirable conditions for full-employment or whether they had in fact contributed to accelerating levels of unemployment by strangling aggregate demand.

It is a matter of history that the Conservatives were re-elected to office with a significantly increased majority, a success repeated in 1987. The reasons for such an outcome are complex and diverse and are of interest to this survey insofar as they may reflect attitudes towards the manifold issues of unemployment. An immediate question that arises is whether the sentiments expressed in the above quotation by Crossland still prevail, and if not, why not? Is unemployment still regarded a social evil? And how were the panaceas offered by the respective political parties received? Such questions take us immediately

beyond the art of psephology, requiring a much more detailed analysis of the numerous conditions through which political attitudes are formed and changed.

Current unemployment levels are symptomatic of significant changes in market relations between capital and labour, which invariably have been accompanied by social and political changes. A term commonly used to describe such change is **re-structuration**, whose meaning is often assumed to be understood, but which in fact requires much closer analysis than it is usually given. As manual workers have been most effected by unemployment, I propose to confine my analysis to this group, seeking to identify generally their changing pattern of employment opportunities and more specifically the consequences of unemployment.

Because many of the consequences of unemployment are experienced in the private domain, within the home, such experiences cannot be easily generalised. Accurate information of this personal nature can only be gained by talking to the unemployed themselves. This study therefore intends to use data acquired from a series of interviews taken from a group of unemployed people, but also includes employed people to facilitate a comparison of career histories. As Harris et al (1987) have emphasised, the concept of career history allows for a much fuller

evaluation of employment opportunities than analysis based simply on current employment status. I will be particularly concerned to contrast the career histories of manual workers with varied labour market positions seeking to identify the nature of differences in employment opportunity and how this is reflected in lifestyles and outlook.

The group of households on which this study is based will be discussed in Chapter 3. It is drawn from households living in Darlington. Darlington provides an interesting case study with a slightly higher than national unemployment rate of 12 per cent (March, 1988), and being one of the few constituencies in the North to have returned a Conservative M.P., for the second time in succession. It is a marginal seat, a fact emphasised by its hung council, with the Labour and Conservative Parties sharing power.

### Political responses to unemployment

Any assessment of the complexion of political responses to unemployment immediately runs into problems of definition. I can perhaps illustrate this by reference to my own experience when working as a co-ordinator of Darlington Centre for the Unemployed. The T.U.C. nationally launched the idea for such Centres in the early



eighties as the level of unemployment rose inexorably toward three million, and by 1986 over 270 had been established, albeit with considerable variation in size, function and organisation. One of the stated reasons for such an initiative was the need for the trade-union movement to maintain active contact and involvement with the unemployed, who might otherwise find themselves politically isolated. It was felt that the traditional work-based orientation of trade-unions alienated and often excluded unemployed members. Moreover, a consequence of this orientation was that the broader issues raised by unemployment were frequently marginalised or regarded more the domain of party politics. Centres for the Unemployed were intended to provide the necessary facilities for the unemployed to organise, campaign, and publicly articulate their problems and needs, helping to overcome their political isolation. The activities of Centres were anticipated to closely tie-in with the organisation of the wider labour movement and it was hoped thereby to provide an effective vehicle for social change.

Centres for the Unemployed do of course perform a variety of functions in attempts to deal with the many problems resulting from unemployment, often offering a welfare rights service, educational courses and several other community services. Yet much of the debate within the trade-union movement has been concerned with whether

Centres have been successful in engaging people in political campaigns around the issues of unemployment. This is not the place to review the problems and difficulties confronting Centres. The interested reader is commended to a short pamphlet by J. Barnes (1983). I simply want to make the point that in terms of this avowed goal, Centres in most areas of the country despite good intentions have achieved little. In my own experience very few people are prepared to use Centres on a regular basis, and this seldom manifests as any form of political activity.

This lack of political involvement was an issue which both frustrated and intrigued me in the course of my work and provoked a number of forceful questions providing the impetus to this research. It was a phenomenon that could not be simply attributed to apathy. Enough people had expressed strong opinions about unemployment to dismiss such a view. It demonstrated the need for a careful evaluation of the manifold conditions by which unemployment is constituted as a political issue.

## CHAPTER 1: NATIONAL PATTERNS OF EMPLOYMENT

### Post-War Levels of Unemployment

The 1944 White Paper on Employment Policy made a clear commitment as a major policy objective to the achievement of a 'high and stable level of employment'. Between 1948 and 1966 the average number of people on the unemployment register was just over 350,000, less than 2 percent of all employees (Hawkins, 1979). A broad consensus began to emerge that high levels of unemployment were phenomena of the past and that it was possible for the government to maintain full or near full employment as well as other macro-economic objectives such as low rates of inflation and steady economic growth. Such low unemployment in this period helped inspire confidence in the ability of Keynesian economic policies to sustain high rates of employment through the deployment of an array of fiscal and monetary policies. This optimism, however, began to be eroded as unemployment rose gradually from the mid-1960s onwards, coupled with low growth rates and accelerating inflation. Between 1971 and 1976 unemployment increased from 1.5 percent to 5.7 percent with the mid-seventies experiencing a major crisis, inflation reaching 25 percent and the economy a zero rate of growth, providing fertile ground for the revival of monetarist doctrines as unemployment rose sharply (CSO, 1983). A

change of government in no way checked this startling growth in unemployment. On the contrary, as table 1 indicates (p.20), between 1979 and 1987 unemployment veered beyond the precipice of three million, a figure which has aroused considerable political controversy. It has been estimated some 1,200 net new jobs would have to be created every day between 1986 and 1991 if full employment is to be achieved (Metcalf, 1986)).

Since the middle of 1986 the unemployment rate has slowly began to fall, although still significantly higher than 1979. As I consider below, there is some debate about the extent to which this reduction is genuine or the consequence of a combination of factors responsible for artificial movements, such as changes in the basis by which unemployment figures are computed, special employment and training measures, or the 'tightening up' of social security rules. Notwithstanding this fall in unemployment figures, as a social issue unemployment continues to be very relevant. Unemployment this decade remains far higher than any other in the post-war period. As table 2 indicates (p.20) long-term unemployment remains a serious problem. Over 1.25 million people were registered continuously unemployed for a year or more for much of the 1980s, and although the figure has in the last year dropped sharply, presently at 744,000 (April 1989), it is still high compared to much of the post-war period.

The number of people unemployed for five years or more has increased dramatically since 1983, more than fourfold, reaching 250,000, only recently falling slightly to 217,000 (April, 1989). Moreover, as I indicate below, the most acute forms of unemployment tend to be concentrated in specific geographic areas and amongst specific disadvantaged groups (White, 1983; Independent 27. 11. 87). Even if significant economic revival is possible, it is quite likely these groups will continue to experience high unemployment in the immediate future with the attendant personal and social costs.

**Table 1 National Unemployment Patterns**

<u>Year</u>	<u>DE count</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>DE count</u>
Apl.1979	1,319,700	Apl.84	3,012,300
Apl.1980	1,456,200	Apl.85	3,176,200
Apl.1981	2,452,300	Apl.86	3,196,800
Apl.1982	2,715,100	Apl.87	3,021,400
Apl.1983	3,021,100	Apl.88	2,455,000
Apl.1989	1,883,600		

**source:** Dept. of Employment, seasonally adjusted.

**Table 2 Long-term Unemployment**(unemployed for a year or more)

<u>Year</u>	<u>DE count</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>DE count</u>
July,1982	1,070,506	July,85	1,326,791
July,1983	1,102,637	July,86	1,347,801
July,1984	1,234,389	July,87	1,238,294

**source:** Dept. of Employment, seasonally adjusted.

## The Demography of Unemployment

As table 3 below indicates, when unemployment figures are broken down into regions it can be readily seen some have fared much worse than others, particularly those reliant on manufacturing industries.

**Table 3 Regional Unemployment (April 1989)**

	<u>DE count</u> (adjusted)	
South East	374,300	4.0%
(Greater London)	(223,200)	(5.2%)
East Anglia	35,500	3.4%
South West	101,600	4.8%
West Midlands	174,100	6.5%
East Midlands	112,900	5.7%
Yorks and Humberside	183,800	7.7%
North West	272,000	9.0%
North	149,200	10.2 %
Wales	101,200	8.4%
Scotland	243,400	9.7%
Northern Ireland	108,200	15.7%
Great Britain	1,748,200	6.3%
UK	1,856,400	6.5%

Based on Dept. of Employment percentage rates which include an estimate for self-employed when assessing "Working Population".

**source:** Unemployment Unit Briefing, May, 1989.

Table 4 Employees in Employment by Industry<sup>(1)</sup>

(figs in 000's)	<u>1971</u>	<u>1979</u>	<u>1981</u>	<u>1986</u> <sup>(2)</sup>
manufacturing	8065	7253	6222	5240
services	11627	13580	13467	14495
agriculture, forestry & fishing	450	380	363	329
energy & water ind.	798	722	710	539
construction	1198	1238	1130	992
all industries & services	22139	23713	21891	21594

(1) Figures for the U.K. as at June each year

(2) Estimates of employees in employment take account of the results of the 1986 Labour Force Survey

**source:** Social Trends, C.S.O., 1988, p.71.

The T.U.C. have suggested that nine out of ten jobs lost since 1980 have been in manufacturing (T.U.C., 1986). They point out that one-in-five jobs in the manufacturing industries has disappeared completely and that this decline continues unabated. As table 4 indicates, employment in this sector dropped from 7,253,000 in 1979 to 5,240,000 in 1986. Of course the size of manufacturing industry has been receding since the mid-1960s, when employment in this sector declined by nearly 17%, almost 1,200,000 workers (Metcalf, 1986). Whilst the burgeoning growth of the service industries during the 1960s and early 1970s helped compensate for the net losses in manufacturing, increases since 1974 have been insufficient to do so. This is reflected in disparate employment patterns throughout the U.K., although we must be cautious about accepting a simplistic North-South divide.

**Table 5 Composition of the male labour force of working age in Great Britain: socio-economic group by whether working or unemployed.**

socio-economic group	economically active men			
	working %	unemployed %	total %	all men %
Professional	8	2	7	7
Employers and managers	21	7	19	19
Inter-mediate non-manual	10	5	9	9
Junior non-manual	7	8	7	7
Skilled manual and own account non-professional	38	41	39	39
semi-skilled manual and personal service	13	27	14	14
unskilled manual	3	11	4	4

**source:** General Household Survey 1986

As can be seen from the above table, male manual workers have suffered disproportionately from unemployment, accounting for nearly 80% of the unemployed though only 57% of the economically active. Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers account for 38% of the unemployed and yet only 18% of the economically active. A clear relationship exists between level of skill and vulnerability to unemployment.

In addition to regional differences there are also significant differences between the unemployment rates of men and women, although as I indicate below, official



figures do not provide an adequate reflection of the situation. Between 1959 and 1979 there was a 25% increase in the number of women in work, with women now accounting for approximately 47% of the working population (Metcalfe, 1986). However, it needs to be borne in mind that 40% of working women are in part-time employment. Indeed, 83% of part-time workers are women. An issue I shall return to is whether women's participation rates vary with those of men. For male unemployment will usually lead a household to claim state benefit, which may in turn be affected by female earnings. Although female unemployment is lower than that of men, since 1975 it has risen about three times as fast (Metcalfe, 1986).

Another important variable influencing employment opportunities is age. Nearly 40% of unemployed people over the age of 55 have been out of work for more than two years, compared with 25% of unemployed workers between the ages of 25 and 40 (Taylor, 1987). This is despite the fact that most unemployed men aged 60 and over are taken off the official unemployment register. The likelihood of someone between the ages of 55 and 60 finding employment is about half that of someone aged 20 to 30. Young people too, find themselves disadvantaged, with 5% of all unemployed claimants included in the official count being 16 to 18 yearolds who have not held a job since leaving

school. As discussed below, this ignores the number of young people on Youth Training Schemes.

Ethnic origin is also a significant variable. The rate of unemployment amongst workers of West Indian origin is double that of whites, and among workers of Pakistani/Bangladeshi origin three times that of whites (Taylor, 1987, p.73). Whereas white workers aged 16 to 24 have an unemployment rate of 16% for young workers of West Indian origin it is 34% and of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin 48%. This pattern of disadvantage occurs to varying degrees at all ages. More research is needed in this area to indicate the true extent of inequality and the problems faced by ethnic minorities in securing employment.

### Hidden Unemployment

The basis of official unemployment figures has been criticised for failing to reflect the true extent of unemployment. (1) Several categories of people who would regard themselves as available for work and actively seeking it, are ignored. The Department of Employment's monthly count only includes the unemployed who are registered as claiming benefit. This means everyone satisfying the availability conditions but not claiming benefit will be excluded. Married women, for instance, may be actively seeking paid employment but if not claiming

benefit are unlikely to 'sign on'. The Unemployment Unit, basing their calculations on the 1984 Labour Force Survey, argue the number of people not included in the official count because of this rule could be as high as 870,000.

Participants on government special employment and training schemes are also likely to be omitted. In March 1988, for instance, 223,000 were actually involved on Community Programme schemes, many of whom would not be registered unemployed (Unemployment Unit, 1988). Also, the official count has been affected by a series of administrative changes, nineteen in all (early 1988), which have occurred since 1979. So for example, all men aged 60 or more no longer have to sign on if unemployed, an administrative change which, when introduced in 1983 reduced unemployment figures by at least 54,000. More recently the Department of Employment introduced a tighter availability for work test. The Unemployment Unit (Winter, 1986) predicted that after one year of operation this measure will have reduced official figures by 95,000 by deterring or disqualifying people from registering as unemployed. A more rigorous interpretation of the law is now applied with the burden of proof of availability placed far more heavily on the claimant, who can now be deemed as not available for work even if s/he has not refused a job. Some of these measures will be considered in more detail later in this survey, but for now they

serve to illustrate the inadequacy of official figures in reflecting the true level of unemployment.

### The Costs of Unemployment

Unemployment involves numerous costs that can be collected under the general headings of personal, social and economic. The economic costs are perhaps the most easy to quantify and it is to these I initially refer, although I propose in this survey to assess each of these categories in detail. Sinfield and Frazer (1985) have attempted to assess the real economic costs of unemployment and have suggested that for 1985 these nationally might be in the region of some £20 billion, approximately £7,000 per registered unemployed person. These costs include the following: direct Exchequer costs of benefits and services for the unemployed such as social security benefits, estimated by Sinfield and Frazer to be £7,140,000. Then there are indirect costs. The government loses revenue from taxes, direct and indirect, that people would have paid if in employment, estimated to be respectively £5,690 million and £2,100 million. Redundancy payments to people losing their jobs also carry Exchequer costs in the contribution from the Redundancy Fund which in 1985 bore about 46% of the state scheme, amounting to about £300 million. A further cost is the loss of national insurance contributions an unemployed person would have

paid if in employment, representing a further loss of £5,200 million.

Unemployment not only imposes costs on national government but also local. It will inevitably increase pressures on local services. For instance, more children will need help with school clothing and will be claiming free school meals. More children will be staying on to the sixth form rather than risk the dole queue. Greater demand will be made of the local career services. Revenue will be lost due to fewer businesses paying rates. These are just some of the costs facing local authorities, estimated by Sinfield and Frazer to amount to £490,000 per extra 1,000 unemployed.

If, however, the full economic costs of unemployment are to be accurately established, Sinfield and Frazer argue account must be made of the value of lost production, which on the basis of M.S.C. figures they estimate to be £880 million. They point out that lost output in turn means lost investment and reduced future productive potential. Moreover, this potential output would have produced wages, rent and profits upon which the government would have been able to levy taxes. And, arguing within a traditional Keynesian perspective in terms of multiplier effects, they suggest that a

consequent contraction in consumer spending will result precipitating a process of reduced demand.

Economic costs therefore possess a variety of dimensions. From the examples offered we can see financial costs are substantial. And less obvious costs such as increased use of health services due to unemployment, have not been considered. And as will be stressed throughout, unemployment incurs considerable social and personal costs, which will be examined in the main part of this study.

## CHAPTER 2: DARLINGTON'S LOCAL ECONOMY

### Introduction

Darlington has existed as a settlement since Saxon times, although it was not until the nineteenth century that it significantly expanded. It became famous as a railway town, the Darlington to Stockton railway being the first public railway, with a number of allied manufacturing industries flourishing as a consequence. By 1951, 22% of its male workforce was employed in railway work.

Although it still remains a focal point of rail communications, the loss of its North Road Wagon Shops in 1963 and the more recent closure of Shildon Wagon Shops, has signalled its demise as a railway town. This of course has had a knock-on effect forcing numerous dependent local manufacturers to close.

### Industrial Structure

Darlington currently has a population of 100,000. Whilst its manufacturing base is more varied, this sector has declined since the mid-seventies and even traditionally 'safe' employers have been forced to make significant reductions in their workforce. Companies such as Cummins Engines, Whessoe Engineering, Cleveland Bridge have all for many years been major employers who've each

since 1979 have reduced their workforce by well over 50%. The decline of British manufacturing is especially evident in Darlington. More so than most of County Durham in which the town is situated, although the former has been badly hit also. Between 1965 and 1978 Darlington lost more than 4,500 jobs in manufacturing so that a quarter of employment in this sector in 1965 was in establishments which had closed by 1978 - compared to less than 20% for Durham as a whole (Storey, 1982).

Even relatively new sources of alternative employment like Rothman's Ltd., cigarette producers, who've been able to offer good working conditions and levels of pay, have not been impervious to this process, recently declaring 140 of its workers redundant with speculation of further job losses. Whilst Darlington and Simpson Rolling Mills, half owned by British Steel, could boast record profit levels for 1985 with an increase of 227% on the previous year, nevertheless since 1979 the firm has engaged in major retrenchment reducing its workforce from 1,000 to 600 employees.

As table 6 indicates, between 1978 and 1984 the number of full-time jobs in manufacturing fell by nearly 30%. Jobs in heavy engineering have especially suffered and workers from this sector find themselves with skills in scarce demand or even obsolete. Opportunities for



employment elsewhere in the region are limited with neighbouring Tyneside and Cleveland experiencing some of the highest levels of unemployment in the country.

Even the 20% growth in full-time jobs in the service sector has not been enough to compensate for this decline in manufacturing which, when combined with dramatic job losses in construction (65%), has meant that overall during this period there was an aggregate job loss of 11%. Male full-time employment dropped by 15%, female employment dropped by 2%. Part-time employment continued to be accounted for largely by women, nearly 90% in 1984.

**Table 6 Employment by Industry**

<u>Industrial Sector</u>	1978			
	Male (f/t)	Male (p/t)	Female (f/t)	Female (p/t)
Primary	485a	0a	14a	24a
Manufacturing	11618	110	1743	282
Construction	3894	24	233	71
Services	7412	989	6906	5594
Total	23409	1123	8896	5971

<u>Industrial Sector</u>	1984			
	Male (f/t)	Male (p/t)	Female (f/t)	Female (p/t)
Primary	564b	46b	73b	36b
Manufacturing	8090	65	1348	263
Construction	1297	12	140	50
Services	10031	878	7146	6851
Total	19982	1001	8707	7220

**source:** Annual Census of Employment, Dept. of Employment  
a) no figures were available for agricultural workers  
b) these figures do not accurately reflect the number of agricultural workers

## Patterns of Unemployment

We have noted the decline in full-time jobs in manufacturing and construction to have occurred in the 1970s and early 1980s. In 1961 the number of people in Darlington recorded as seeking work was 3% of those economically active, which by 1981 was 9% (O.P.S.C.). (1) Between 1979 and 1986 unemployment increased almost three-fold reaching 7,431 before falling, as table 6 below indicates, to 5,954, 12.2% of the working population (Dept. of Employment, 1979, 1986, 1988).

**Table 7      Unemployed Claimants in Darlington Travel-to  
Work Area (for April of each year)**

	<u>Male</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>female</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>All</u>	<u>%</u>
1961a	830	3	280	2	1010	3
1971a	1110	4	485	3	1595	4
1981a	3177	11	1228	7	4405	9
1985	5109	18	2267	11	7376	15
1986	5121	18	2310	12	7431	15
1987	4485	16	2040	10	6525	13
1988	4111	15	1843	10	5954	12

a) census covering slightly different area though nearly co-terminous, using definition of unemployment in footnote above.

**source:** Dept. of Employment, Northern Region Unemployment Statistics, 1985-1988.

A number of observations may be made about the recent fall in unemployment figures. As indicated in the last chapter this can be partly explained by a series of changes to have occurred in the way official unemployment

figures are compiled. In Darlington there is an additional local factor in so far as the above figures relate to its travel-to-work area, the boundaries of which were changed in March 1986, incorporating rural areas with low rates of unemployment. So whilst we may concede a fall in unemployment in Darlington since 1986, this is much smaller than official figures would suggest. The unemployment rate for Darlington remains above the national average of 8.9%.

**Table 8 Male Unemployed Claimants By Age And Duration In Darlington Local Authority Area**

age group	number unemployed	% of unemployed in age group	number unemployed > 1 year	% of unemployed > 1 year
16-19	318	7	43	1
20-24	702	17	168	5
25-34	905	25	350	10
35-44	688	19	378	10
45-54	535	15	293	8
55-59	406	11	249	7
60+	113	3	6	0
total	3667	97	1487	41

figs. for April 1988, source Jurvos.

One particular issue for concern is the high number of long-term unemployed, with 36% of those currently unemployed in Darlington having been so for more than a year - the figure being higher for men for women at 41% (Durham County Council, 1988). And official figures only

record continuous periods of unemployment and thus underestimate the problem of long-term unemployment. Moreover, as indicated in the last chapter because of the way official figures are compiled the number of unemployed indicated for the 16-19 years and 60+ years groups will be under-stated.

The current unemployment figures remain a cause for concern as they continue to be much higher than at any time in the post-war period prior to the 1980s. Moreover, as table 9 indicates, in Darlington there are presently 2,751 people on special employment and training schemes and if all these were included in the official unemployment count then the figure for the town would be approximately 18%.

**Table 9    Participants on Government Special Training and Employment Schemes in Darlington, May 1988**

Youth Training Scheme	1,217
Community Programme	866
Adult Training	307
New Job Training Scheme	111
Enterprise Allowance Scheme	250

**source:** M.S.C., May 1988

Given that for the first week of April 1988 there were only 509 vacancies advertised at Darlington Job Centre (Dept. of Employment, May 1988), (2) many of which were part-time and low paid, we can see unemployment is still a serious problem in the area. We have noted the growth in service sector employment which is traditionally low paid for manual workers. I have calculated that the average weekly wage for full-time jobs for the second week of June 1988 was £105. (3) For manufacturing the figure was £143 and for construction £134. Many unemployed people with families will find as a consequence the majority of jobs they can apply for will pay less than the social security benefits they receive, forcing them into the unemployment trap, an issue to which I shall return in fuller detail.

### Future Prospects

A recent report pointed out that in Darlington and South West Durham employment had dropped from 75,653 jobs in 1976 to 64,002 jobs in 1981, and predicted that if the present recession continued there would be a further 9.77% fall by 1990 (Boswell,1982). It also observed that the North's G.D.P. was in the bottom quarter of European regions. Whilst Darlington has not been so severely hit as some of its neighbouring towns like Bishop Auckland (16.5% unemployment) or Hartlepool (20.4% unemployment) (Dept. of Employment, June 1988), there is little hope of

improvement in employment prospects in the immediate future. To compound its problems in 1985 the government announced that Darlington would be one of the areas to lose its urban programme status. This followed the decision in 1982 to relegate Darlington from a Development Area to an Intermediate Area in terms of regional assistance.

What then, can we expect? It is worth concluding here with an observation taken from Durham County Council's Structure Plan (1985):-

' The prospects for County Durham are very much dependent upon national economic policies. Nationally, there have been major job losses in basic industries. At the same time, manufacturing capacity has been created elsewhere in the world and much of British production in textiles, vehicles, ships and domestic electricals has been replaced by more advanced and/or cheaper facilities in countries such as Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. These kind of "old" manufacturing jobs are unlikely to return to this country. The government's views on where jobs are to come from is "in private services, including information and entertainment services and leisure activities..." Increasing dependence on services is likely to create and sustain jobs in the established services complexes, notably London...rather than peripheral areas like Durham. '

## CHAPTER 3      METHODS OF INVESTIGATION

### Introduction

Much of the data of this study was based on interviews with an opportunity sample of twenty households resident in Darlington. The households were drawn equally from two areas of Darlington with significantly different housing stock in order to compare the experiences of unemployment, as well as attitudes to unemployment in working-class households with contrasting employment records. A household's position in the housing market is likely for several reasons to be closely related to their labour market position, giving rise to distinct patterns of socio-spatial differentiation (see Morris, 1987b), as is indicated below. Thus the contrast deliberately built into the study reflects my interest in the varied nature of working-class experiences of unemployment, and will serve more sharply to illustrate some of the characteristics of this variation, not only in terms of employment histories but also lifestyles (in and out of employment). Work by Pahl (1984) for instance, has suggested that increasing social polarisation is occurring between those with employment and the unemployed. Differences in labour market position are also claimed to be producing divergent political allegiances within the working-class (Crewe, 1987; Marshall et al, 1988), a key issue this research wishes to explore, if in the context

of unemployment. Important methodological considerations attendant on my choice of households are considered in detail below.

I have chosen to focus on male unemployment because for many households, especially within the working-class, the male wage still provides the principal source of income and is often a crucial factor determining domestic roles and relationships. The specific choice of age group allows the inclusion of respondents who will have at least several years employment experience and who are presently economically active and are likely to remain so for the foreseeable future. Within these constraints, and because research has indicated that the consequences of unemployment may be influenced by the different stages of the domestic cycle (Fagin and Little, 1984), I have sought to include households that span a number of stages (see tables 11a and 11b) and thus have concentrated on households where the male partner is aged 25-50 years. These choices have inevitably circumscribed the type of responses possible, allowing me to address some issues whilst excluding others. The issues, for instance, raised by unemployment amongst the young or ethnic minorities will not be the same, although they will be inter-related in a number of important ways.



Moreover, as Massey (1984) has pointed out, due to varying combinations of socio-economic and historical influences, local labour markets are likely to differ. This does not mean that generalisations cannot be made from any single case study, but that the factors contributing to the uniqueness as well as the similarity of areas must be identified. As such, this study reports on certain characteristics of two groups of working-class people in a specific locality, seeking to compare its findings with the results of other relevant research. It will hopefully contribute to the growing volume of studies on unemployment and help to further our understanding of political responses to unemployment.

#### The Two Estates.

Because this research was primarily concerned with an illustration of the nature of differences within the working-class in employment opportunities and experiences of unemployment, two groups of manual workers likely to manifest contrasting employment histories were chosen by identifying two contrasting housing areas. Chosen for this purpose were Greenmoor estate and Whiteside estate (1). Census data and employment statistics, combined with my own experiences of working with the unemployed when Manager of Darlington Centre for the Unemployed, indicated these two estates would be the most likely to provide the kind of contrast I wanted.

**Table 10 Selected social indicators for Greenmoor and Whiteside, 1981**

social indicator	Greenmoor	Whiteside	Darlington
resident population	5,636	1,310	98,700
households, owner-occupied (%)	26	98	77
households, council tenants (%)	70	0	21
households - other (%)	3	1	1
economically active heads of households, social class 1 (%)	1	5	5
social class 11 (%)	4	16	23
social class 111 non-manual (%)	29	53	14
social class 111 manual (%)	29	16	35
social class IV (%)	23	7	17
social class V (%)	12	2	6
unemployed males as a % of economically active males	22	5	11
unemployed females as a % of economically active females	10	3	7
households with 2 or more cars	4	18	12
households with no car	65	15	45

**source:** 1981 Census, OPCS.

Housing on Greenmoor consists mainly of council tenancies, built just after the second world war. Tenure on Whiteside is almost exclusively owner-occupied, most of the houses built in the last twelve years. Whereas 93% of Greenmoor's economically active heads of households are manual workers, only 25% of Whiteside's are. This reinforces a point made earlier in relation to socio-spatial segregation. Whiteside is clearly a much more affluent area than Greenmoor, though housing prices are still within the range of the more advantaged sections of the working class. A very high percentage of households on

Whiteside are headed by non-manual workers, with a much higher representation of social class 111 than for the rest of Darlington overall. Though the number of households with class 1 and 11 heads is the same as for Darlington, it is not as great as certain areas of the town, particularly the west end where house prices are usually a good 25% higher on average. Manual workers on Whiteside, as is suggested below, are likely to have enjoyed a career history of relatively secure employment, probably with above average wages. Unemployment was much lower than for Darlington as a whole, reflecting the high number of non-manual workers resident in the area. Semi-/unskilled workers were under-represented on the estate, comprising only 9 per cent of the households compared with 23% for Darlington.

Seventy-five per cent of Greenmoor households lived in local authority tenancies. The majority of household heads were manual workers, 35% of them either unskilled or semi-skilled, compared to 23% for Darlington. This is reflected in the male unemployment rate which was twice as high for the estate as for Darlington and four times as great as for Whiteside. In addition to housing tenure another indicator of wealth is car ownership. 65% of Greenmoor households owned no car compared with a figure of only 15% for Whiteside and 45% for Darlington.

## Characteristics Of Sample

The reasons for wanting to compare households with contrasting employment histories have been outlined, as has the choice of estates from which the sample was selected. It is now necessary to indicate the selection criteria for the sample and examine the means by which it was constructed. Two groups are selected for analysis, which are termed respectively disadvantaged and advantaged. For each the following criteria were specified:-

a) the disadvantaged group

i) All those included in this group must currently be without full-time employment and in the majority of cases have been continuously so for at least one year, though no less than six months in any instance. Such a period would suggest difficulties of re-entry into paid employment which could be analysed to illustrate some of the implications of economic change for employment opportunities. Unemployment of this duration, combined with previous labour market disadvantage (see iii below), is also likely to give rise to changes in lifestyle with probable decline in standards of living (Moylan et al, 1984), key issues this research wishes to explore.

ii) To allow consideration of the problems of the long-term unemployed at least half the group will have been unemployed for at least 2 years. This group will be particularly disadvantaged both in terms of employment

opportunities and consumption patterns. It is intended to explore these disadvantages in detail to reach a better understanding of the precise nature of the hardships experienced by the long-term unemployed and consider the extent of its exclusion from the rest of society (see Townsend, 1979).

iii) The career histories of this group in the majority of cases will have been characterised in general by low/average wages. This is to allow portrayal of how sections of the workforce disadvantaged in terms of labour market position have experienced changes in the employment opportunity structure, and the implications of this for lifestyles and political outlook.

These criteria are meant to focus attention on the problems of workers with weak labour market positions who find themselves unemployed. Surveys by White (1983) and Moylan et al (1984) have indicated this type of worker is particularly vulnerable to long-term unemployment, and as such their position requires detailed analysis.

b) the advantaged group

i) To facilitate comparison of attitudes to unemployment of working-class households with significantly different employment experiences, this group will include men who have never experienced unemployment. Consideration of such a category will also be useful for an exploration of the differential structure of employment opportunities for the working-class which has been suggested by research

(Ashton, 1986).

ii) The majority of this group will currently be in employment and will have enjoyed for most of their working lives relatively secure employment with average/high wages. This will permit comment on the implications of economic change for a group which have traditionally enjoyed relatively strong labour market positions and serve as a valuable point of comparison with disadvantaged workers.

iii) This group will, however, include at least three households having experienced unemployment in the last 3 years, allowing consideration of the reasons for success or failure in securing employment subsequent to unemployment. Analysis of the nature of this employment with reference to other research will give some indication of the changing structure of labour market opportunities.

It might be objected that inclusion of workers with experience of unemployment in the category 'advantaged group' is not warranted, that only the inclusion of those enjoying continuous employment with decent levels of pay is justified. For the purpose of this research such a definition would be unnecessarily narrow and restrictive for several reasons. Harris et al (1987) have rightly argued that analysis of labour market position can be more fruitfully conducted in the fluid context of career histories rather than the static context of current employment status. Appraisal of career histories will

provide better indicators of labour market advantage/disadvantage for as will be elaborated in the next chapter employment opportunities must be seen as part of a continuous process. In consequence, the category 'advantaged group' seeks to embrace both workers currently enjoying good working conditions and those who have until recently shared similar circumstances, in order to explore the implications of economic change for differentiation within the working-class. The employment experiences of each of the above 2 groups are discussed in detail in the next chapter.

#### Construction of sample

The two estates were chosen because they were likely to include households with the aforementioned characteristics. The procedure adopted to achieve this will be first described. This will be followed by my reasons for such an approach, with a discussion of its limitations. Finally, some comments on the general features of this sample will be offered.

Having chosen the two areas from which to contact respondents, households were called upon to collect the specified groups. Using experience gained at Darlington Centre for the Unemployed, as well as analysis of local area census data, I selected those streets from each estate which seemed best to represent the characteristics

I was interested in. I then proceeded to call house by house until the target number of households meeting the specified criteria had been reached.

Screening for Greenmoor initially involved identifying households occupied by males (with partners) aged 25-50 years who had been without full-time employment for at least six months. Once this was done the preliminary questions indicated in appendix 1 (1A, 2A-2E) were asked to establish eligibility for inclusion (ie relating to employment history and family household composition). One particular problem arose here, for both groups, as there were no completely accurate measures for deducing general wage levels of respondents simply from their career history. This I had to infer, if crudely, from a number of indicators. Because I was anxious not to alienate respondents at the outset, detailed questions about financial circumstances were deferred until the latter parts of interviews. Instead, supplementary to the above initial questions, respondents were asked generally whether their employment histories were characterised by low, average, or above average wages for manual workers. As it was, in the course of interviews the long-term unemployed were usually not able to give detailed information about wages beyond this level of generality and even those currently employed were usually only able to give precise details on present or recent wages.



Therefore in deducing wage levels over a period of time a number of factors were taken into account which, though not guaranteeing absolute accuracy, were likely to be indicative. Respondents own descriptions were obviously relevant, as were their career histories, and the further factor of housing tenure and type was also of help. A similar procedure was adopted for Whiteside, although the initial question on employment related to either being currently employed or recently employed in manual work (employed until three months ago).

In both areas it was possible to construct a selection of households outlined earlier to meet the varied employment criteria by doorstep screening interviews. The refusal rate is based on assumptions of eligibility defined in terms of how each household responded to the initial question on employment status indicated above, as further data was not usually possible for those who declined to participate. For Whiteside the refusal rate was 40%. This is quite high, which can be partly explained by lack of fieldwork experience and also the sensitivity of the subject. Unfortunately, in recording refusals for Greenmoor I omitted to distinguish between eligible and non-eligible households, which makes a refusal rate impossible to calculate. Though regrettable this does not influence the outcome of interviews. In any research the characteristics

of those who refuse to participate is always an important issue, although this is less so for this kind of study, based as it is on non-probabilistic techniques.

The general characteristics of the two groups of households are described below, as are the methodological implications of such a selection procedure. Techniques were used which purposely produced two groups with contrasting employment histories to allow an exploration of, and comment on, the underlying processes shaping differential employment experiences within the working-class.

The interviews were semi-structured and comprised a combination of open and closed questions (see appendix 1A and 1B). This allowed both quantitative and qualitative information to be collected. In order to provide more detailed information about contrasting experiences of, and attitudes to unemployment, a second interview was arranged with two households deliberately chosen to focus specific issues raised by the first round of interviews (see appendix 1B), as well as providing 2 extended case studies of the varied household circumstances to be found amongst the working-class.

Because of illness initial interviews were staggered, conducted in July 1986, February 1987 (Greenmoor) and July

1987 (Whiteside). This meant Greenmoor respondents were interviewed prior to the general election and Whiteside respondents after. Where appropriate and possible, questions were addressed to partners separately to prevent the views of one partner dominating. This, however, was not always possible, as some partners felt uneasy about being questioned separately and in such cases careful note was made of the different ways each partner participated.

#### Some methodological issues.

Whilst the adopted procedure obviously provokes questions of bias and typicality, to be returned to shortly, the above techniques commended themselves for several reasons. Most prominent is the limitations on time and resources confronting any student undertaking part-time M.A. research whilst engaged in full-time employment. It is accepted that probability techniques are more preferable in terms of achievement of representativeness and identification of bias, for instance through analysis of sampling error. Yet the size of the sample I was in a position to interview would have rendered many of these techniques either inappropriate or too time consuming. The justification of the techniques opted for was that respondents satisfying the specified criteria could easily be contacted, and that the target numbers were anyway too small to warrant significance testing. The

study is, therefore, by its nature and design, exploratory.

Thus, statistical inferences or generalisations cannot be made on the basis of my study. This is not my intention, which is, rather, to illustrate and explore the variegated nature of working-class experiences of unemployment by focussing upon households likely to manifest contrasting characteristics. The decision to focus on such households in itself raises problems of representativeness. These households, identified respectively as 'disadvantaged' working-class and 'advantaged' working-class were defined according to a range of characteristics intended to highlight a range of differences referred to earlier. Yet the question of typicality, both in relation to other sections of the working-class, and to the categories they are purported to represent, is important. The issue of typicality is not an easy one, even if rigorous probabilistic techniques are used, for as Massey (1984) has pointed out classes are not only differentiated in socio-economic terms but also spatial, the working-class is neither homogeneous or differentiated uniformly across different parts of the country.

Though generalisations or claims of typicality cannot be made on the basis of this sample the data generated by

analysis of specific cases can be valuably related to broader research undertaken elsewhere. Making connections with evidence of other research will therefore be an integral part of my approach. Twenty households were interviewed in this study in considerable detail. The data collected can be used to elaborate speculative findings which can be evaluated by reference to other research. Such comparison falls within a well established tradition of triangulation (see Burgess, 1984) in field research. My findings are therefore speculative and illustrative rather than conclusive.

Some general features of households selected

**Table 11A**            GREENMOOR

<u>Family</u>	<u>age of male</u>	<u>age of female</u>	<u>no. of children &lt; 5 years</u>	<u>no. of children 5-16 years</u>	<u>no. of children 16+ years</u>
Bell	26	25	1	1	0
Collinson	36	34	0	3	0
Craig	46	40	0	1	1
Daley	31	29	0	2	0
Dewer	29	26	2	0	0
Fulton	38	36	0	4	0
Pryce	32	34	1	2	0
Reynolds	46	43	0	3	1
Walker	34	32	1	1	0
Wallace	44	40	0	0	1

<u>Family</u>	<u>main occupation of male</u>	<u>current employment status of male</u>	<u>aggregate male* unemployment in last 10 years</u>	<u>current employment status of female</u>
Bell	labourer	unemployed	4½ years	not employed
Collinson	joiner's mate	unemployed	3½ years	not employed
Craig	electrician	p/t employed	7¼ years	p/t employment
Daley	machinist	unemployed	7¼ years	not employed
Dewer	machinist	unemployed	4½ years	not employed
Fulton	labourer	unemployed	9¼ years	not employed
Pryce	warehouseman	unemployed	4¾ years	not employed
Reynolds	labourer	unemployed	9¼ years	not employed
Walker	labourer	unemployed	3¼ years	not employed
Wallace	chipper	unemployed	11 months	p/t employed

\* At time of interview

**Table 11B**                      WHITESIDE

<u>Family</u>	<u>age of male</u>	<u>age of female</u>	<u>no. of children &lt; 5 years</u>	<u>no. of children 5-16 years</u>	<u>no. of children 16+ years</u>
Banks	34	36	1	0	0
Burke	45	40	0	0	1
Day	47	45	0	0	2
Donaldson	47	48	0	0	2
Johnson	39	36	0	1	0
Kirk	32	28	2	0	0
Lee	28	28	1	0	0
Severs	25	24	0	0	0
Stevens	25	28	0	0	0
Thomas	38	38	1	2	0

<u>Family</u>	<u>main occupation of male</u>	<u>current employment status of male</u>	<u>aggregate male* unemployment in last 10 years</u>	<u>current employment status of females</u>
Banks	machine op.	f/t employed	none	not employed
Burke	HGV driver	unemployed	1 month	p/t employed
Day	asphelter	f/t employed	2 years	p/t employed
Donaldson	fitter	temp. employed	1¾ years	not employed
Johnson	welder	f/t employed	1 month	not employed
Kirk	plater	f/t employed	7 months	p/t employed
Lee	machinist	f/t employed	8 months	p/t employed
Severs	mechanic	f/t employed	1½ years	f/t employed
Stevens	electrician	f/t employed	1 year	f/t employed
Thomas	tv engineer	f/t employed	none	p/t employed

\* At time of interview.

Whilst the next chapter deals in detail with the employment characteristics of the two groups, a few general comments can be made now. Because of the selection criteria used for this study to achieve a contrast of households, unemployment for the Greenmoor group is far higher than for the estate from which it was drawn, though as we have seen male unemployment here was twice as high as for Darlington. Male unemployment for the whole of the Whiteside estate was only 5 per cent, a figure reflecting the high number of non-manual workers resident there. Though the level of unemployment was likely to have been higher amongst manual workers (constituting 24% of the economically active household heads), as indicated in Chapter 1 and elaborated below, this unemployment figure is a static rather than dynamic measure only accounting for current unemployment, therefore underestimating the numbers with experience of unemployment. The selection

criteria for the Whiteside group required at least three households with experience of male unemployment in the three years prior to interview for reasons indicated. As it is, seven of the Whiteside men in this study satisfied this criteria, though only one was currently unemployed at the time of interview. Whilst it is unlikely that 70 per cent of male manual workers on Whiteside estate have experienced unemployment in the last three years (though see below) this group may still be regarded, as stated earlier in this chapter, as either having had/ and or having current experience of an advantaged career position in terms of manual workers. Career history will therefore be an important concept in analysing employment experiences. It may be that households with experience of unemployment were more prepared to participate in this study than those without. This will be borne in mind when considering their responses and every effort will be made to refer to other research in any consideration of my findings.

As mentioned above, for both estates the unemployment figure does not indicate the number of people to have experienced unemployment because it is only a measure of current employment status. Each month there will be significant flows on and off the unemployment register (Daniels, 1981), though Department of Employment statistics only indicate for a specific period the number



of new claims and the number leaving the register. They do not tell us, for instance, how many of these new claims are by the intermittently employed or groups with no previous experience of unemployment. National data from the Social Attitudes Survey in 1986, when about 3.1 million of the labour force were unemployed at any one time, suggest that three out of ten of all men and women in the labour force had some experience of unemployment in the last five years (quoted in Marsh, 1988, p351). The figure is likely to be higher for manual workers and to vary regionally.

One noticeable difference between the two groups of households in this study is that on average Greenmoor had more children aged under 16 (2.2 on average) than Whiteside (0.8). Census figures (1981, OPCS) suggest similarities between the two areas in terms of the number of children of this age. They account for 26% of the population of Greenmoor estate (compared with 49% of the group in this study) and 24% for Whiteside (compared with 24% of the group in this study). Differences between group and estate arise because of the deliberate decision to concentrate on couples where the male is aged 25-50 years, and likely to belong to households including children. Differences between the two groups may again in part reflect my selection criteria. Households with long term male unemployment are likely to have more children than

households with less experience of unemployment (Moylean et al, 1984). Nevertheless there is sufficient variety in household composition for both groups to illustrate how employment experience and domestic cycle stages may influence each other.

## CHAPTER 4    DIFFERENTIAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

### Introduction

As has been indicated, two<sup>estates</sup> likely to produce significantly different employment experiences for manual workers were selected for this study in order to explore and provide illustrations of the salient features of such differences. This chapter seeks to identify some of the main reasons for the differential employment opportunities of the men selected for this study and compares its findings with those of other research to make certain suggestions about the changing structure of employment opportunities for working-class men. It notes that employment opportunities will vary not only between different sections of the working-class. They will also be subject to change for any particular section of the working-class as labour market conditions are transformed, and hence the position of groups within it. Unemployment provides one striking manifestation of this labour market re-structuration, but there are other symptoms as well such as wage levels, security of employment, or general working conditions. Case histories will be used to illustrate these points.

### Some Key Issues

In considering the employment opportunities of different sections of the working-class, there are several

issues to address which can be subsumed under the following broad questions:- a) to what degree have employment opportunities changed and what factors most influence this? b) what sections of the working-class are most advantaged/disadvantaged in terms of changing employment opportunities and are there significant disparities? c) in what ways have changing employment opportunities for men affected employment patterns for women? d) to what extent has economic change caused people to re-define their expectations of paid employment?

#### Patterns of Male Unemployment amongst Greenmoor and Whiteside Men

Whilst the divergent patterns of unemployment for the men in this study is a product of the selection criteria adopted, a number of features warrant comment. As pointed out in chapter 3, it was intended at least half of the Greenmoor households chosen for this study would be characterised by continuous male unemployment of at least two years and in the majority of cases at least a year. As table 12 indicates, nine of the Greenmoor households in this study had been continuously unemployed for a year or more, half of the households for three years or more, and three of the households for five years or more. For the whole of the estate continuous unemployment for a year or more for men was approximately 60% <sup>(1)</sup> of those unemployed (July 1986), significantly higher than the national

average. The Greenmoor households in this study were characterised by very long continuous periods of unemployment, two with men unemployed now for more than nine years each. This reflects a trend discerned in a recent study of the long-term unemployed in Durham (Durham Study Group, 1989), the county in which Darlington is situated. By analysis of 'on-flows' and 'off-flows' of the long-term unemployed, this study found that only 29% of the men continuously unemployed for two years or more left the list of claimants in the ensuing year, suggesting extreme difficulties the long-term unemployed face in securing employment, a finding apparent in this present study.

For purposes of comparison it was intended that households selected for the Whiteside group would in the majority of cases be characterised by current male employment and a career history relatively advantaged in terms of employment opportunities for manual workers, though with the qualifications indicated in Chapter 3. In seven of these households men had experience of unemployment in the last five years, for six of whom the duration was more than six months, and for four for more than a year.

Table 12 Patterns of Male Unemployment

<u>employment status</u>	<u>Greenmoor</u> (number in each sample = 10)	<u>Whiteside</u>
currently unemployed	9	1
experience of unemployment in last year	10	2
experience of unemployment in last 5 years	10	7
experience of unemployment in working life	10	8

The bulk of unemployment for both estates has occurred in the last ten years. This applies to both skilled and semi/unskilled workers. The worst unemployment has predictably occurred during the last five years. Of the nine semi/unskilled workers aged 30-50 years, eight had experienced some form of unemployment prior to 1977. Four of the skilled workers in this age group had experienced some unemployment in this period. But much of this unemployment for these men regardless of skill was short-term, frictional, only lasting a few weeks. Only two workers, both unskilled, had experienced continuous unemployment of more than a year during this period. So whilst experience of unemployment prior to 1977 was not a new phenomenon for either skilled or semi/unskilled workers, what did change was its severity.

Table 13 Patterns of Male Unemployment in this Study

Employment Record (estate average in years)	Greenmoor			Whiteside		
	25-30 age group	31-40 age group	41-50 age group	25-30 age group	31-40 age group	41-50 age group
number of jobs in working life	2.0	4.8	4.7	2.3	2.2	5.0
longest period with any employer	4.5	5.2	15.3	5.3	13.0	17.3
average period with each employer	3.5	2.0	5.8	3.5	8.2	6.1
total unemployment in last 5 years	3.5	3.7	3.3	0.7	0.2	1.3
total unemployment in last 10 years	4.5	5.6	5.8	1.1	0.3	1.5
total unemployment in working life	4.5	6.7	8.3	1.1	0.3	1.9
total unemployment prior to the age 25	1.8	0.4	0.5	1.9	0.1	0.3

Table 14      Patterns of Male Unemployment in Last Five Years

<u>Unemployment</u>	<u>Greenmoor</u>	<u>Whiteside</u>
experience of 6 months continuous unemployment	10	6
experience of 1-2 years continuous unemployment	9	4
experience of 2-3 years continuous unemployment	7	0
experience of 3-5 years continuous unemployment	5	0
experience of 5 years + continuous unemployment	3	0
total for each estate = 10		

As indicated earlier, the two estates Greenmoor and Whiteside were selected for this study as they were likely to produce households that would provide the kind of



contrast in employment opportunities for male manual workers I was interested in. Tables 12 to 14 quantify these differences according to estate . I now wish to examine the nature of variation in the career histories of the couples interviewed, with specific focus on the varied experience of male unemployment. This is the principal concern of this study and the rest of this chapter therefore concentrates on comparisons between different households according to the male's labour market position rather than the estate upon which the household is resident.

#### Changing Employment Opportunities

Research (General Household Survey, 1986; Harris et al, 1988; Westergaard et al, 1988) has indicated that skilled manual workers are less likely to be unemployed than unskilled manual workers, and that employment opportunities are likely to be influenced by age, with the 25-40 years old group enjoying greater labour market advantages than other age groups. But in addition to skill and age, other factors may also be important, particularly in 'tight' labour markets. Transferrable skills, for instance, will be of advantage in job seeking in an area dominated by traditional industries which are in decline (Thames Television, 1988). As Morris (1988) has observed, social networks may be significant in the provision of

valuable information about job vacancies as well as serving as informal channels of recruitment. Fagin and Little (1984) have shown the relevance of the different stages of the domestic cycle in mediating the experience of unemployment. Reference to the experiences of the manual workers in this study should help illustrate some of these issues.

Until the mid-1970s most men enjoyed relatively secure employment. Industries varied of course in terms of levels of pay, job security and working conditions. But as we have seen the extent of long-term unemployment then was no-where as severe as now. Traditional industries provided a stable source of employment. Evidence from my own study would suggest that both skilled and unskilled workers in manufacturing tended to remain with the same employer and would have done so were it not for redundancy. Frequent job changes were the exception rather than the norm. This was especially the case with major employers in the town where levels of pay and working conditions were usually the most favourable in the area.

Only two men in this study had no experience of unemployment, one a television engineer for a national company, the other an unskilled machine operator for an international tobacco company. Neither had been employed in the traditional manufacturing industries of the area

which have, as we saw in Chapter 2, significantly reduced their workforce in response to recession.

Mr. Thomas, aged 38, is a television engineer and has worked for the same firm since leaving school. He started his working life in a period of near full employment, though he points out that even then there was considerable competition for the kind of work he is employed in. He states that the majority of his school friends were able to leave school at fifteen years and secure an apprenticeship, though he opted to stay on at school to sit C.S.E.s. While he acquired only two O level equivalents, in technical drawing and in metal work, he believes this helped him get his job. Nevertheless, he is philosophical and admits he could quite easily have accepted employment with one of a number of big firms in the town which have drastically reduced their workforce in the last ten years.

Mr. Banks, aged 34, has worked for ten years for an international tobacco company, since it opened in Darlington, as an unskilled machine operator. From the outset this firm had an attractive reputation as an employer paying high wages and offering good working conditions. Mr. Banks was therefore prepared to give up a skilled job as a toolmaker with a small engineering firm, primarily because of the high wages being offered.

In contrast, structural unemployment in traditional industries in the area has deprived men during the last decade of a sense of a secure job. Men employed in manufacturing, especially heavy engineering, are some of the most vulnerable to unemployment. A brief analysis of the work histories of those men in this study who have been mainly employed in heavy engineering during their working lives will help underline the above points. Until 1980, of the five skilled workers three had remained with the same employer all their working lives, one of the other two had been with the same employer for 17 years and the other had recently joined a larger firm after an eight year stint with an employer. All of these had experienced unemployment in the last five years, with one, Mr. Dewer, now unemployed for over four years. Case histories of four of these men are referred to in later sections of this chapter.

There were four semi/unskilled workers mainly employed in this sector, whose work experience can be differentiated easily by reference to age. Two of these men, both more than 40, had been in employment with either their present or last employer for at least ten years. Both were/had been employed by large firms, although admitting more frequent job changes earlier in their working lives when they had been employed by smaller firms. Eventually securing employment with what they

regarded a good employer, this left them disinclined to leave their jobs through choice. Neither of the other two unskilled workers, both aged 25-30, have ever served more than three years with any employer. The four semi/unskilled men were all currently unemployed, but all coming from Greenside this in part reflects the selection criteria as indicated earlier. Nevertheless, it is interesting that despite their different ages, each of these men believed that their age combined with lack of skill placed them at a severe disadvantage in terms of job chances. Two case histories will illustrate this point, though the others are referred to in a later section of this chapter.

Mr. Wallace, aged 44, has worked for the last 17 years as a chipper with a bridge building firm of international repute. He has been unemployed nearly a year following redundancies of over half his firm's workforce. His work involved "cutting jobs to size" using a "pom-pom" hammer. Because of a sharp reduction in orders as a result of a combination of a slump in world trade and increasing competition, the workforce was drastically cut, though several hundred men were subsequently re-employed when orders picked up. Mr. Wallace was not one of them, which he believes was because new computerised machinery had rendered his skills obsolete and his firm was only interested in re-training younger workers. He expressed

pessimism about his prospects of finding alternative work, due not only to his age and nature of his skills, but also because his work experience was industry specific and could not easily be transferred to other industries.

Mr. Bell, aged 26, presently unemployed for just over three years, is a labourer and has had three jobs with different firms, each lasting on average about two years. He left school with no qualifications and following a brief spell of unemployment acquired a job assembling steelplate storage boxes in a munitions factory. This he left for what he described as health reasons, feeling he was badly allergic to certain fumes to which he was exposed during the course of his work. He then worked at a wire mills, being made unemployed when the firm closed down. His final job with a heavy engineering firm involved "stoking up the furnaces". Because of declining orders he was made unemployed and has remained so since. None of his employment experience he feels has any value in providing skills necessary to secure employment. "Labourers are ten a penny these days. I never had a chance of an apprenticeship. And without much job experience, who wants to know?"

Case studies of skilled workers in manufacturing industries who secured employment after redundancy are reported in the next section. The one skilled

manufacturing worker in this study to remain unemployed is Mr. Dewer, who worked for British Rail as a machinist until made redundant four and a half years ago. Unlike Mr. Lee reported in the next section, who was employed in the same workshop and served the same apprenticeship, Mr. Dewer has been unsuccessful in his job search. This underlines the point that in 'tight' labour markets it is quite possible for workers starting in similar positions in job hunting to experience different outcomes. Perhaps, and this is speculative, the difference between their two positions could be related to the stage of domestic cycle they had reached. Mr. Dewer had been married for only two months when made redundant. Mr. Lee was about to be married but postponed this for 18 months, working in low paid employment in the meantime. It may well be that Mr. Dewer did not regard this a viable option given that he could probably claim more in benefit than Mr. Lee could have done because of different household circumstances.

Heavy engineering has traditionally been a major employer in the area but other industries too have been severely affected by recession. The building and allied industries, as we saw in the last chapter, has suffered sharp decline. It is interesting to compare the employment histories of building workers in this study with those of manufacturing. Five men in this study have been mainly employed as building workers, two skilled and

three semi/unskilled. Their employment histories are typically more broken than for men employed in manufacturing. Short-term contracts had traditionally been more common in the construction industry which anyway has been much more sensitive to market fluctuations in terms of what has been called "flexible" employment practices. (2) Yet though these men were more often than their manufacturing counterparts unemployed during the 1970s, they were nevertheless usually able to tack together a continuous period of employment. In this period unemployment was usually only short-term lasting a few weeks due to the high demand for labour.

Again, the situation deteriorated from the late 1970s onwards. All these men have experienced at least one continuous period of unemployment lasting a year or more and at this time only two are in full-time employment. One is Mr. Day, aged 47, an asphelter, who was unemployed nearly fourteen months before his present job. He has accepted jobs "away from home" for most of his life, many of them well paid, and in much of his later working life has been employed as a gang leader. The other in employment, Mr. Stevens, aged 25 years, was unemployed a year before his present job as an electrician with the local authority direct labour department. Two of the unemployed building workers have worked only occasionally, contracts often only lasting three to six months, with



intervening periods of unemployment much longer. The other unemployed building worker, an electrician, currently on a Community Programme scheme, has been continuously unemployed for four years. His following comments are revealing and suggest any analysis of employment opportunities must go beyond labour markets, taking into account broader sociological considerations, an issue to which we return :-

"I'm 46 and most employers consider that too old. There are too many younger electricians unemployed... For a number of years I took contracts away from home. Doing maintenance on oil rigs, working in a holiday camp for a while, doing a stint in Cumbria with British Rail. But I got sick. It's alright if you're single and unattached. But at my age and with my family commitments it's not on."

Three of the five building workers had worked away from home on several occasions, though with great reluctance. This work usually lasted eight to twelve weeks and often paid in excess of £200 per week. Such opportunities were rare, however, and usually involved poor living conditions such as ill-equipped caravans or portacabins. One of the building workers presently employed who was referred to a little earlier, an asphelter, finds his work frequently takes him away from home but feels he has little choice.

The facility for building workers to deploy skills outside the formal economy has been noted by Henry (1978) and Pahl (1984), and has provided the theme for recent

television dramas such as Boys From The Blackstuff. It is a trend related to the more fluctuating nature of demand for labour in the building industry than for say manufacturing, the former also having lower capital costs of production than the latter. The building workers in this study seemed to have greater opportunity for occasional work than their manufacturing counterparts, be this short-term contracts or "work on the side". This, of course may be crucial in relieving hard pressed finances of households with male unemployment, an issue to be returned to in the next chapter.

#### Declining Opportunities

In this section I propose to concentrate on the structure of employment opportunities for those presently in work. In the next section I shall consider the prospects of those in the study presently unemployed, especially the long-term unemployed.

Of the nine men currently in full-time employment, six had experienced unemployment in the last five years. Of these few expressed satisfaction with their present job compared with their previous employment. Each complained of lower pay and poorer working conditions as well as feelings of pronounced job insecurity. Reference to some of their case histories and comments should illustrate this.

Mr. Donaldson, aged 47, is currently employed on a temporary contract as a fitter with a multi-national car component plant. He has been in this employment for only a week, and has a three months fixed-term contract which may be renewable depending on orders. He had worked for another major car component firm for eighteen years until redundancy in 1983. During this period of employment he gained several promotions, initially to foreman until eventually being appointed as engine warranty inspector. This latter job was well paid, allowed considerable autonomy and had numerous fringe-benefits:-

"It was a brilliant job... lots of money. You had to travel all around the country visiting garages with complaints about the components we provided. My job was to check to see if we were to blame for any faults. I saved the firm a lot of money...The firm's secretary got me to claim all sorts of expenses, so I would go somewhere cheap and put in a claim for an expensive hotel. I could clear £200 per week easily. It meant being away from home but the rewards were worth it. The pay was good and you weren't tied to the factory floor. You didn't have all the hassles with the bosses or the men."

Mr. Donaldson expected redundancy due to declining orders, though was sad to leave the firm "which had been good to him". Because of his considerable experience on leaving this job he was confident of finding alternative employment and initially made no attempt to find work but rather spent the first few weeks of unemployment "taking a well earned rest". This was followed by an energetic period of job search which proved fruitful, though in an unexpected way:-

I started to look hard for a job but didn't get anywhere. I had a few interviews but the jobs were spoken for, you could tell. Then my son-in-law phoned to say there was a vacancy at his factory...the following day I was invited for an interview and given the job. Nowadays it's not what you know but who."

This illustrates the importance of informal contacts in gaining access to employment opportunities (Morris,1984, 1986). In my own study, of the six men to have become unemployed in the last five years, three subsequently secured employment through an informal contact (friend or relative), one was contacted by his former employer, one secured employment by a direct approach to an employer, and one obtained employment through a job centre.

There are various channels through which an individual might acquire a job, although as the research by Morris (1984, 1986) indicates increasing unemployment is modifying these, especially the ability of older workers to provide younger workers access to the job market.

Mr. Donaldson found himself £50 per week worse off though nevertheless describing his work as a "canny number". Much of his work involved repairs and with considerable new equipment there were long periods when there was little to do. After just two years he was again

made redundant due to erratic overseas' orders. Because of the short term nature of his service he was one of the first to be chosen for redundancy. His most recent period of unemployment lasted 18 months and his present position is extremely precarious. His confidence about finding secure employment in the North East has diminished and he is now seriously contemplating moving to another part of the country for work.

This feeling of insecurity was echoed in several interviews with men currently unemployed. When asked whether they regarded their jobs as secure (i.e. unlikely to be made redundant in the next 5 years) five of these men answered no. At the time of interview only four of these nine men were earning more than the regional average for manual workers (£180 per week, 1987), although four men stated a period in the past when their earnings had been higher. Whilst these men in terms of other sections of the working-class in the area may be regarded as advantaged, changing economic conditions have clearly diminished their position. In a later chapter I shall consider the consequences of this, advising caution when using the term 'affluent worker'. For changing economic conditions will invariably affect the price of labour, and no advantage is guaranteed.

Mr. Lee, aged 28, a machinist, provides a useful illustration of the above point. He left school at 16 and was offered an apprenticeship with British Rail. Both his father and elder brother were employed by the same plant and Mr. Lee believed their reputation as good workers helped him secure his job. When he started there was no indication of impending rationalisation and closure and he thought he'd "landed a job for life". He enjoyed what he described as good working conditions and wages. There was the opportunity to work nights at enhanced rates once in every three weeks as well as regular overtime. Just a few months before he was due to be married closure was announced, causing him to postpone his marriage by 18 months. (3) He was unemployed for 8 months before securing a temporary full-time position on a Community Programme scheme. In the eleventh month of the scheme he managed to find work with a small light engineering firm (12 employees). Until recently his gross wage was only £110 per 40 hour week and he found he had to work at least 15 hours overtime per week to earn a "wage you can live on". Long-term employees doing the same work were earning £20 per week more, and it was only after Mr. Lee threatened to leave and after protracted negotiations that management relented and allowed parity. He continues to work a similar number of hours "to get his family back on their feet" and is still searching for better employment. With the future of the firm uncertain due to declining orders,

he feels extremely vulnerable because of his short term of service.

Mr. Kirk, aged 32, a plater, accepted voluntary redundancy from the firm that had employed him since leaving school. This was the same bridge building firm that had employed Mr. Wallace, referred to earlier. By volunteering for redundancy Mr. Kirk qualified for additional severance pay, which he regarded an inducement as he anticipated eventual compulsory redundancy anyway. His other reason was that he had been offered what he thought was lucrative contract work in Germany. Unfortunately, after four months he had to return home because of the failure of his sub-contractor to pay regular wages. After seven months unemployment Mr. Kirk was contacted by his first employer and offered a six months contract which was subsequently made permanent. He feels his future is now relatively secure.

Of the four respondents regarding their present employment as secure, three had worked with their current employer for more than 8 years. Only one of this four had experienced more than 3 months unemployment, and each were earning higher than the regional average for manual workers. Even so, the relative nature of security needs to be underlined. Mr. Banks, a machine operator, earns £185 per week working for a multi-national cigarette

manufacturer. In the last 2 years there have been frequent rumours the plant might be closed, though Mr. Binks' fears were allayed when a sister plant in Ireland was closed instead, guaranteeing (he believes) the future of his own. Mr. Johnson, a welder, works for a large heavy engineering firm that has made over 500 redundancies since 1979. Mr. Stevens, an electrician, has been employed by the borough council's direct labour department for nearly 3 years, whose no compulsory redundancy policy is under increasing pressure.

#### The Long-Term Unemployed - Some Key Features

In this section I propose firstly to focus briefly on the general characteristics of the category of men least susceptible to long-term unemployment. Then, to analyse the circumstances of those men who are long-term unemployed. Such a contrast, it is hoped, will help identify some of the principal reasons for long-term unemployment, and why certain sections of the working population are more vulnerable.

##### a) The advantaged worker:-

As we have seen, the skilled worker aged 25-40 is least likely amongst manual workers to be long-term unemployed. It is not that this group is able to avoid unemployment, but they seem more successful than other



categories of manual workers in finding employment more quickly for a number of reasons.

Firstly, while there is a surplus of unskilled labour in the area there is still less competition than for unskilled jobs, for the latter do not usually require any recognised period of training. The market for skilled labour is far more homogeneous than for skilled. And as a section of skilled workers might be prepared to accept unskilled work, competition for jobs in this sector is more intense. The market for skilled labour is more segmented, imposing various restrictions on entrance (Rubery, 1982). It is extremely unlikely, for instance, that an unskilled worker or a joiner would be accepted for work as an electrician. So having a recognised skill should enhance an individual's 'employability' provided of course there is a market demand for that skill.

Secondly, to be aged 25-40 also confers certain employment advantages. This group will usually have had at least 10 years employment experience yet with a considerable part of their working lives ahead, employers know there will be less need to look for replacements than with older workers, and also less time off work through sickness. This group of workers are more likely to have the combined advantage of experience and fitness conducive to better productivity than other age groups, though this

will obviously depend on the nature of the job.

Thirdly, workers at this age are more likely to have young families and hence less likely to engage in behaviour that an employer might regard as disruptive.

b) the long-term unemployed:-

If certain sections of skilled labour are now experiencing long-term unemployment, this is not as pronounced as amongst unskilled labour, more of whom are confronted by the grim probability of permanent unemployment for the rest of their lives (Westergaard, 1988). The steep contraction in demand for both skilled and unskilled labour in the area, coupled with the relatively homogeneous nature of markets for unskilled labour, means that it is extremely difficult for unemployed unskilled workers to find employment. And as indicated in Chapter 1, the sharply increased supply of unskilled labour over demand has helped depress wage levels. I shall argue in the following chapter that in certain circumstances this may cause an individual to have a tenuous attachment to the labour market.

Long-term unemployment of course, is not a phenomenon just confined to unskilled workers. In this study (cf OPCS, 1989) there were 2 skilled men who had each been without full-time employment for 4 years. Yet for reasons

I have outlined unskilled workers are more likely to experience long-term unemployment.

I propose here to concentrate on the men in my study who have been without full-time employment for a total of 3 years or more in the last ten. 9 households fall into this category. Of these 7 were unskilled, 2 skilled. All 9 stated they were actively seeking full-time employment. What this actually means requires further explanation, particularly in the wake of the government's recent introduction of a more rigorous interpretation of 'availability' for benefit purposes. (4) I shall refer to case histories for illustration.

For these respondents the main source of information about job vacancies is the Job Centre. Though interestingly the 2 workers in this group with the most employment experience in the last 5 years (approximately 2 years each), both building workers, secured employment, usually short-term contracts with small contractors, through informal contacts. We shall return to the importance of informal contacts shortly. Other forms of job search included newspapers and contacting employers direct. Though the Job Centre was the commonest source of information about job vacancies for these men, it is significant that 3 men had not visited this in the last fortnight. Their reasons merit attention.

The first important point to note is that 2 of these men had been unemployed for more than 9 years and the other six years. All 3 regularly visited the Job Centre when first unemployed, but now only go sporadically. For 2 inter-related reasons. 2 of these men had families of 4 children, the others 2 children, and all were in receipt of supplementary benefit. All of them expressed the view that the majority of vacancies they could apply for paid very much less than their benefit levels. Moreover, in their combined years of unemployment only one of them had been called for interview, a Mr. Reynolds, twice in 9 years. Visiting the Job Centre was generally regarded pointless, though nevertheless occurred if infrequent.

Of these 3 men, Mr. Reynolds had the best employment record. Although now unemployed for 9 years, prior to this he had spent 14 years with the same company that specialised in rolling stock. He had worked all his life in heavy engineering and felt this experience "worth something". He believed he had been both a hard and reliable worker, and is resentful about his current situation though resigned to remaining unemployed in the foreseeable future.

Mr. Reynolds was not alone in his expectations about future employment prospects. All the 3 men referred to did not expect to acquire employment in the forthcoming year.

The reasons they offered for their outlook echo the points made earlier, "there are not enough jobs to go around...there's nowt at the Job Centre...all the jobs they (the Job Centre) have are either part-time or pay slave wages" (examples offered were security guards paid £1 per hour, a job frequently advertised, various labouring jobs paying only £2 per hour). A further point conveyed by most of the long-term unemployed in this study was the perception that employers actually discriminate against the long-term unemployed:- "They think you don't want work...that there's something wrong with you for being on the dole so long". This once again suggests the need for a comprehensive analysis of employers' recruitment practices. A pervading feeling throughout these interviews was that the longer an individual was unemployed the harder it was to secure employment. This clearly affected both self-confidence and the way men perceived they were treated by society, important issues to be considered in detail in following chapters. A similar finding was referred to in a recent study of the long-term unemployed in Durham (Durham Study Group, 1989).

Mr. Reynolds was resigned to remaining unemployed and did not expect his situation to improve. Neither Mr. Fulton, unemployed 9 years, or Mr. Daley, unemployed 6 years, had nearly the same employment experience as Mr. Reynolds. Mr. Daley, aged 31, had 5 different jobs in the

space of 8 years of leaving school (butcher's apprentice - 1 year, slaughterman - 1 year, control operator and machinist- 2 years, machine moulding operator - 1 year, machine operator - 1 year). Mr. Daley left the first 3 jobs of his own accord, though in the last 2 he was forced to leave because of labour cuts.

Mr. Fulton, aged 38, similarly has a chequered employment history, his longest period with any employer being 6 years in the army as an infantryman. He has worked variously as a trainee baker, Butlin's waiter, building worker and pipebender. All jobs involving little skill, in different industries, often of a casual nature, facts which Mr. Fulton believes militate against him securing employment.

These men wanted a job but one that paid more than the supplementary benefit they receive. Because of the lack of such jobs and their continued failure to secure employment, job searching efforts for most of these men appeared spasmodic. Even with the possibility of Family Income Supplement if they accepted a job with low wages they did not think this would make them significantly better off than on SB because of likely reductions in housing benefit and deductions from wages in the form of taxes and national insurance. This phenomenon has been referred to as the poverty trap, which particularly hits low waged workers with children. Hence the spasmodic job

searching of these men reflects a realism about their situation and a desire not to waste energy on a futile exercise of seeking work from which they are excluded, as well as a need of some form of psychological defence against perceived failure. Suffice to say that circumspection is advised when defining 'availability for work'. Just because men are not making concerted efforts to secure employment doesn't mean they do not wish to work. It may reflect rather a determination to avoid exploitation by refusing to be available for employment that pays poverty wages.

I have focussed on the most extreme cases of long-term unemployment to underline the reasons for certain sections of the workforce experiencing pronounced employment disadvantages. These reasons may vary by degree according to individual circumstances, but would certainly appear relevant to all the 9 long-term unemployed in this study. These had typically been employed in heavy engineering or construction, were usually unskilled, had few or no informal contacts they could exploit for access to job opportunities, and because of family commitments were unable to accept the type of low waged employment that was usual as Job Centre vacancies. In the context of a sharp reduction in demand for manual labour in the area, they represented an extremely vulnerable section of the workforce.

Of the 6 other long-term unemployed, only 7 job applications had been made in the last year, for reasons outlined above. 3 of these had been made by Mr. Dewer, a skilled machinist, 2 by Mr. Craig, an electrician, and one each by Mr. Pryce, a warehouseman, and Mr. Collinson, a joiner's mate, no-one even reaching interview. Significantly 6 of these applications were made by skilled workers for jobs offering higher wages than benefit levels. As we shall see in the next chapter, it is not generous benefit payments which deter people from work. The experiences of the long-term unemployed in this study reflect Townsend's findings (1979) and those of Moylan et al (1984) that the long-term unemployed experience acute poverty. Yet the widespread low wages being offered for manual work, particularly unskilled, together with intense competition for fewer jobs limits opportunity and incentive to take full-time employment.

#### Female Patterns of Employment in the Formal Economy

Several factors will influence patterns of female employment for as Morris has observed (1987a, p.86),

' a "household strategy" is not constructed by individual household members in freedom of external constraints, but is shaped by the structure of employment opportunities, the nature of welfare provision, and the content of local ideas and beliefs about gender roles.'



The pattern of employment for couples interviewed was as follows:-

in 8 homes both partners were unemployed;

in 4 homes the man was employed full-time, the woman part-time;

in 3 homes the man was employed full-time, the woman unemployed;

in 1 home the man was employed part-time, the woman part-time;

in 2 homes the man was unemployed, the woman worked part-time;

in 2 homes the man was employed full-time, the woman full-time.

TOTAL 20

My own study reflects traditional employment patterns where the male is principal wage earner. Nevertheless, in 9 of the 20 households women were employed, 2 on a full-time basis and 7 part-time. Though in every household except one the man earned significantly more than the woman, it became obvious from the interviews the woman's earnings were critical in enabling couples to maintain their current standards of living. 4 couples readily conceded were it not for the woman's earnings they would not have been able to afford their present homes. These were all from Whiteside who had moved from homes with lower mortgages. Thus the woman's wage was crucial in securing the type of home and lifestyle than otherwise would have been possible. This seemed to apply right across the stages of the domestic cycle. 3 of the women

working in this group had children under the age of 5 and typically worked either at a week-end or an evening or when 'baby sitting' arrangements would allow.

As has been reported elsewhere (Cooke, 1987b) this means of material improvement seemed denied to the long-term unemployed. The main reason for this is the earnings restriction imposed on couples in receipt of supplementary benefit. Of net wages, apart from small allowances for certain expenses, only a £5 disregard for either partner's earnings, or £15 when one of the couple has been unemployed continuously for two years or more (April 1988), which means in effect most of any wages paid will be cancelled out by lost benefit. In consequence, there is little incentive for either partner to work part-time and hence low income families are denied an important resource for supplementing their income. As a consequence these families may find themselves gripped in the unemployment trap, a point to which I shall return in the next chapter. The consequence of male unemployment in this context is often to render both partners unemployed, exacerbating disadvantage and inequality of opportunity and creating greater income disparities between the employed and unemployed (Pahl, 1984).

Only 2 of the women in this study worked full time, in each case this being essential to enable their

household to live in their present home. Both women admitted delaying having children due to financial circumstances. An issue to be discussed in Chapter 6 is the status of male/female employment and its relation to gender identification. All but two women in this study stated they would prefer not to work but did so out of necessity.

### Patterns of Employment in the Informal Sector

Employment in the informal sector<sup>(5)</sup> may assume a variety of forms. It may simply involve an exchange of services, for example between family and friends, where no money is exchanged and the transaction is perfectly legal. Or the transaction may be part of the 'black economy' where goods and services are offered for either money or goods in kind, and the transaction is technically illegal, for example where goods are stolen from an employer to be used for personal consumption, or paid work not declared to the authorities. Having earlier considered opportunities in the formal economy, what of the formal economy?

As S. Henry (1979), and Pahl (1984) more recently, have observed opportunities in the informal economy are far more common when employed in the formal economy than when unemployed. Mr. Walker, for instance, has worked

mainly in the building industry. When in employment he found "work on the side" much easier to come by. Workmates provided convenient access points to the black economy. Consistent with Henry's observations a social network of reciprocal relations was established, where participants not only provided each other with information about "jobs going" but would also form dependable gangs working together with each member expected to fulfil certain obligations regarding quality and regularity of labour.

With unemployment such gangs have tended to disperse. Access to information about "work on the side" was therefore more difficult. Additionally, access to cheap or "knocked off" materials was much more limited. Mr. Walker also believed that because of high rates of unemployment there was a growing number of people from outside the trade offering their services as builders and so increasing competition. Colloquially referred to as "cowboys", he felt such workers ought to be banned. Moreover, because "jobs on the side" were frequently done for family, friends and neighbours, the acceleration of unemployment amongst these groups has caused them often to undertake the necessary work themselves as they could not afford even cheap labour

The risk of prosecution for black economy activity is much higher when unemployed because of the activities of

social security fraud squads, a fact of which Mr. Walker was acutely aware:-

"There's always someone ready to shop you. If you do get work on the side you're always looking over your shoulder. You're worried in case you get caught, because the Nash will stop your benefit...If you're working and you're caught you won't lose your job. you'll probably just be fined for not telling the tax people."

3 other men currently unemployed admitted to occasional black economy activity but this tended to be sporadic and low paid and could not be depended on for providing a regular income. The same patterns were evident amongst the women in this study, although even less activity was indicated, primarily due to lack of opportunity. Only 2 women, both married to unemployed men, currently did undeclared work. One was a part-time cleaner who seldom earned more than £20 per week. The other woman's work was even more tenuous, being employed as a relief for sickness and holidays in a local bakery. The justification offered for not declaring earnings was the same for both women, namely that benefit levels were "not enough to live on".

Amongst the couples where the man was in full-time employment, 3 men admitted to doing some kind of work in the black economy and no women. In terms of opportunities in this sector, these men were more advantaged than their unemployed counterparts in 2 important respects (cf. Pahl,

1984). As indicated earlier, they had access to tools and materials from the employer in the formal sector. But also, in the course of their work in the formal sector they were able to make contact with potential customers for "work on the side". Mr. Thomas, for example, is a television engineer:-

Often when I'm called to mend someone's T.V. I'm asked if I do work on the side. Or I have to tell them that their set is no good and they might ask me for a re-conditioned one on the side. There's always a chance to make a few extra bob that doesn't go into the taxman's pocket."

Opportunities in the black economy were influenced not only by employment status but also the skills a person has to offer. As suggested earlier, employment in heavy engineering did not appear to facilitate the development of marketable skills for the black economy. Whereas employment in the building industry was much more conducive in this respect.

#### M.S.C. Special Employment and Training

Of the men to have experienced unemployment, only 4 had tried M.S.C. special employment and training measures, 2 Community Programme and 2 T.O.P.s. Of these, only 1 subsequently secured employment, and this was in no way related to the programme he had been on. Each of the 2 men to have received Community Programme training expressed grave reservations about the quality of training and experience they each received. One respondent,

formerly a machinist in heavy engineering, was employed on a Community Programme as a joiner and complained of "having nowt to do all day". The other is presently on a gardening scheme for pensioners, which usually simply involves tidying overgrown gardens all day. There was little opportunity to develop new skills and he similarly was most dissatisfied.

The 2 men to have experience of T.O.P.s schemes both did welding courses and seemed more positive in the comments they had to offer. Each regarded the training they received as providing concrete new skills, though both were rather sceptical about the value of the qualification they were given, feeling it was neither recognised by employers or trade-unions.

There was considerable criticism amongst the long-term unemployed of government schemes for employment and training. This raises issues to be considered in Chapter 7. The main criticism to emerge related to the adequacy of allowances for such schemes and also the standard and value of training.

### Discussion

I have examined the increasing precariousness of employment opportunities for manual workers, noting a pattern of increased job insecurity and deterioration of

wage levels and job dissatisfaction for many of the men in this study. In its most pronounced form this manifests as long-term unemployment, and as we have seen unskilled manual workers are the most vulnerable to this. These trends have been confirmed by studies elsewhere (Harris et al,1987; Thames Television,1988). I also noted that even the more 'advantaged' sections of the working-class are susceptible to unemployment though more likely to secure employment elsewhere. Skilled men, aged 25-40, are in the strongest position in this respect.

Harris et al (1987) have made the important observation that whilst the combination of skill and age might provide a reliable indicator of continuous unemployment, in 'loose markets' they usually cannot alone account for market success. For the supply of workers of the 'right' age and skills will inevitably exceed demand. Other factors have to be considered. Involvement in social networks with access to employment opportunities will be crucial and provides one such example.

Harris et al also make the important point that in evaluating patterns of employment/unemployment it is vital to examine the career history of each worker rather than merely the current status of employment. For particularly in the present economic climate job security is greatly diminished, with a dramatic increase in short-term



contracts. The study by Harris et al of redundant steel workers in South Wales revealed a significant number of workers with an intermittent (or 'chequered') pattern of work . As a consequence they developed a broader indicator of market success which not only included the categories employed/unemployed but also 'non-continuous' unemployed.

In my own study I have focussed on households from contrasting sections of the working-class, the relatively 'advantaged' and 'disadvantaged'. As has been indicated elsewhere (Westergaard et al, 1988) there has been a significant increase in unemployment and job insecurity amongst even the 'advantaged' sections of the working-class, and the experiences of households in this study would certainly illustrate the suggestion of Harris et al (1987) that increasing sections of the labour-force find themselves subject to what Marx has termed 'the play of chance and caprice in the market'.

As we noted in Chapters 1 and 2 there has been a significant growth in the numbers of long-term unemployed since the beginning of the 1980s. In this study in households with male long-term unemployment both partners were disadvantaged in terms of employment opportunities in both the formal and informal sectors of the economy. We have reached similar conclusions to Morris (1987) and Cooke (1987b) about how such households find it difficult

to supplement their income, which is usually supplementary benefit, by women working. This is an issue to which we shall return in far greater detail in Chapter 6.

We have noted the more limited opportunities for employment in the informal sector of the economy for households with male long-term unemployment. The work of R. Pahl (1984) on the Isle of Sheppey has been especially instructive in this area. Pahl was concerned to identify the forms and the amount of work done by the employed and unemployed. (6) As we have seen in this present study, limited resources severely restricts the ability of the unemployed to undertake paid work outside the formal sector, and as Pahl (1986,p.120) suggests there is a growing divergence 'between households with multiple earners and high income undertaking many forms of work... and those households on low income with far few opportunities for work'.

### Conclusion

Within the region there has been considerable structural unemployment, particularly in manufacturing and especially in heavy engineering. These industries have traditionally been major employers in the area and their decline, as indicated in the last chapter, has not been compensated by greater employment in the service

industries. This has resulted in significantly increased unemployment amongst manual workers and growing long-term unemployment. Other industries too have been affected by the recession and the confident expectations of full-employment of the 1960s has, as this study has sought to illustrate, given way to feelings of insecurity and pessimism.

The decline in demand for manual labour has been most pronounced in the market for unskilled labour. This has had several consequences. Because of the homogeneous nature of this sector of the labour market and the increased competition for such work, unemployed unskilled workers are particularly vulnerable to long-term unemployment. This problem is reflected in and exacerbated by the extremely low wages now typically offered for vacancies in this kind of work, often paid below benefit levels, deterring rather than encouraging people to work.

Even the more advantaged sections of skilled workers find their situation increasingly precarious, experiencing longer periods of unemployment than ever in their working lives. For most of this group in this study employment conditions have deteriorated with lower wages and less job security.

Because of benefit regulations families with male unemployment find themselves less able than families with male employment to supplement their income through women working. Thus income disparities between the 2 groups are made more pronounced. Though the majority of working women in this study chose to work part-time, their income nevertheless significantly helped to improve household finances. Male unemployment imposes constraints on the scope for women to accept paid work, thus inflicting further burdens on low income families.

Opportunities for the unemployed to alleviate their finances through activities in the informal sector are limited. Less so than for the employed who enjoy better access to information, capital, materials and are less liable to prosecution.

The high level of unemployment in Darlington has had the affect of increasing job insecurity and depressing wage levels. Because of labour market constraints in the context of wide-scale economic change, together with the present framework of welfare provision, certain sections of the community are acutely disadvantaged.

## CHAPTER 5 UNEMPLOYMENT AND HOUSEHOLD INCOME

### Introduction

Unemployment usually results in a drop in household income, which may cause financial hardship and poverty (Moylan et al, 1984; Cooke, 1987). Between 1979 and 1983 the number of people in unemployed families receiving supplementary benefit (SB) tripled to 2.6 million (Piachaud, 1987, p.23). In the following sections I seek to assess the financial circumstances of households on the man last becoming unemployed. I then seek to relate this to duration of unemployment assessing the extent of change in lifestyles, being particularly concerned to consider the incidence of poverty as well as how we might define this term. Finally I consider the relation between benefit levels and incentives to work.

### Financial Circumstances On Last Becoming Unemployed

In the earlier chapters I described some of the salient features of the households in this study. A few points are worth re-iterating before proceeding to compare financial positions of households at the onset of unemployment and at the different stages of unemployment. As indicated earlier, selection criteria were adopted for this study designed to produce households with varied male employment histories. Eleven men in this study were

unemployed at the time of interview, seven for more than two years, two for more than a year but less than two years, one for eleven months and the other a month. Nine of these men had each experienced at least three years aggregate unemployment out of the last ten, and four at least seven years each. Of these nine, the majority had previously worked in low paid unskilled/semi-skilled jobs, although two had been involved in skilled work. Of those men currently employed seven had experience of unemployment in the last five years, four for a continuous period of longer than a year, though not more than two years. The majority of these men experienced only a single period of unemployment, were skilled and had enjoyed average/above average wages prior to unemployment. As we shall see, vulnerability to poverty will be influenced by several factors, prominent of which will be past wage levels and duration of paid employment as well as the duration of unemployment (cf Sinfield, 1981; Moylan, et al, 1984).

Of those unemployed a year or more prior to the interviews all had been in receipt of SB and had been so since registering as unemployed or within the first year of unemployment. Usually this was because their main or only income was unemployment benefit which, given the resources of their households was below the definition of need for SB purposes. An issue to be explored more fully



in a later section is that this reflects the failure of the National Insurance system in Britain. For Beveridge had envisaged a comprehensive system of social security founded on principles of social insurance with means-tested benefits occupying a very limited role. This presumed unemployment benefit levels significantly higher than the subsistence levels of means-tested benefits. And also, crucially, the realization of full employment. As we shall see, mass unemployment and the high incidence of long-term unemployment has helped undermine such assumptions.

**Table 15 Savings on last becoming unemployed (a)**

<u>levels of savings</u>	<u>households with experience of unemployment</u>
£ 0 - 500	7
£ 501 - 1000	2
£1001 - 1500	1
£1501 - 2000	2
£2001 - 3000	1
£3001 - 4000	1
£4001 - 5000	2
£5000+	2
Total	18 (b)

(a) At 1987 prices. For the majority these figures represent crude indicators as respondents usually had to remember at least several years back, sometimes much more.  
 (b) 2 men had never been unemployed.

If we first consider the households with low or no savings on last becoming unemployed. In 4 of these employment had generally been short-term lasting 2-3 years, and low paid, interspersed with increasingly longer periods of unemployment. The other 3 households had little savings due to long-term unemployment in the last 5 years. An issue to which I shall return shortly is that this section of the population is especially vulnerable to acute poverty given the lack of opportunity to accumulate either material resources and/or savings whilst in employment. However, there were two households characterised by low wages with in excess of £1,000 savings on the man last becoming unemployed. Both men were aged 40-50 years, employed in their last jobs respectively 14 years and 17 years, their savings reflecting a combination of a long period of stable employment and entitlement to redundancy payments.

In one of the latter households, Mr. Reynolds, unemployed 9 years, found himself in the first 6 months of unemployment in the unprecedented position of feeling "flush". Never before or since in his life have his savings been so high, though they were drawn on quickly to enable him to satisfy the capital requirements for SB. Even with earnings-related benefit Mr. Reynolds needed to claim SB because of his previous low wages. (1) Nevertheless he was able to use his savings to purchase



items he had never been able to afford on his low wages (i.e. a good quality carpet and dining suite). As we shall see in the following section on financial problems, this initial 'help' is far from sufficient to avoid poverty in the face of long-term unemployment. It should be remembered that the purpose of the Redundancy Payments Act 1965 was to compensate a long-serving employee for a loss of a right s/he had in a job (Selwyn, 1982). Redundancy payments were not intended as a benefit to tide the redundant employee over a period of difficulty.

An important theme of this study is that the experience of unemployment is not uniform. Certain households will be more vulnerable to poverty as a consequence of unemployment than others. Research by Berthoud (1984) and Moylan et al (1984) indicates that households with career histories characterised by unsilled low waged employment and with children are more likely than other sections of the work force to experience long-term unemployment and poverty. In the 1986 General Household Survey (1989) 29% of married men with four or more children were unemployed compared to 9% of married men with one child. Case studies will be utilised from my interviews to illustrate these trends. Yet this study also includes households to have experienced continuous unemployment of more than six months who did not report hardship, four of whom did not need to claim supplementary

benefit. Brief reference to their circumstances will help explain the reasons.

Mr. Donaldson had nearly £15,000 savings when the man was first made unemployed in 1981 but following 2 periods of unemployment lasting respectively 7 months and more recently 18 months, these have now been eroded to just over £4,000. He has just secured employment on a one month temporary contract which may be extended. Though these savings, substantially the highest in this study, have been greatly diminished the situation has been ameliorated by 4 factors:- Firstly, the receipt of unemployment benefit (UB) for claimant and partner. Secondly, the receipt of housing benefit (HB). Thirdly, this household had paid off its mortgage prior to unemployment. Fourthly, when initially made unemployed only 1 of 2 daughters was living at home, about to leave college to commence employment as a nurse. The other had been married for several years. Hence costs were lower than they would have been at an earlier stage of the domestic cycle.

Mr. Stevens, an electrician, was unemployed for a year but the combined income of his wife's wages and his own unemployment benefit took him well above the supplementary benefit level. They have no children. The same situation applied to Mr. Kirk with regard to income,

a plater, unemployed for seven months. Mr. Lee, was single and living with his parents when made unemployed. In consequence his unemployment benefit took him above the supplementary benefit level. Two other households were in a similar situation to Mr. Donaldson. Mr. Day, aged 47 years, an asphelter had capital in excess of £3,000 when last made unemployed. Moreover, his unemployment benefit combined with his wife's earnings from part-time work took him above the supplementary benefit level. His requirements as defined by supplementary benefit were low as both his children were married and his mortgage payments were low. Nevertheless, Mr. Day, unemployed for 14 months, found that he qualified for supplementary benefit after a year. Mr. Burke, an HGV driver, aged 45 years, has been unemployed a month now though because of his savings, and also because of the combined income of his wife's part-time earnings and his unemployment benefit, he does not qualify for supplementary benefit. Like Mr. Day he has low mortgage repayments and his only child is married. Each of these examples illustrates how career history and domestic cycle interact to influence the financial implications of unemployment (see Fagin, 1984; Berthoud, 1984).

#### Financial Problems And Sources Of Help.

A combination of factors will be relevant in determining whether a household experiences financial

hardship as a consequence of unemployment, including the following:- duration of unemployment; general wage levels over career history; stage of domestic cycle; level of extended family support; current financial commitments. An analysis of changing patterns of expenditure and the types of problems experienced by households in this study will be illustrative.

#### A) Changing patterns of expenditure

An important point to which I shall return is that only one household in this study described itself as no worse off due to male unemployment, and this was because of already being on a low income. I initially propose to examine how this is reflected in household expenditure patterns and then proceed to identify the main areas of financial hardship.

Table 16 reveals some interesting changes in household expenditure patterns, particularly when duration of unemployment is considered. Before I comment on some general trends, a few caveats need to be made. This table obviously only indicates relative changes within a household's spending pattern as a result of unemployment. It does not indicate how much each household spends on each item listed. So it is possible, for instance, that one household might be spending less than previously on a specific item yet still be spending more than other households. Nevertheless this table is useful in

indicating the general impact of unemployment on individual household spending patterns. In Appendix 2 I utilise case studies to compare standards of living of families in different circumstances

**Table 16 Changing household expenditure patterns**

area of expenditure	spending less than when employed		spending more than when employed	
	unemployed > year	unemployed < year	unemployed > year	unemployed < year
clothing - self	11	3	0	0
clothing - children	7	0	0	0
food	6	1	0	2
household furniture	9	0	0	0
household equipment	9	0	0	0
household fixtures	9	0	0	0
bedding	9	0	0	0
fuel costs	5	1	3	1
leisure activities	10	3	1	1
holidays	9	3	1	0
other	4	2	5	3

experience of unemployment > year = 13, < year = 5

The general pattern of changes in household expenditure is both a reflection of the duration of unemployment and the kind of resources households have to draw on at the outset of unemployment. For a number of households because of a relatively short period of unemployment combined with considerable savings, and in certain circumstances partners in employment, they were able to report consumption patterns had not dropped substantially and certainly not to the point of hardship.

Case histories indicated earlier illustrate the significance of the interaction of career history and domestic cycle in influencing the financial implications of unemployment. The majority of long-term unemployed in this study had little opportunity to accumulate resources to buffer them against the loss of a regular wage, a problem exacerbated by their duration of unemployment.

In most of the important areas of household expenditure the majority of households with long-term male unemployment reported sharp reductions occasioning numerous examples of hardship. For some of these households, however, there were actually increases in certain areas of expenditure as a consequence of unemployment. For instance, 3 households found themselves spending more on fuel costs. In these homes it was explained that whereas previously fuel costs had been kept lower by the woman visiting family, friends and neighbours, men were less likely to do so (cf. Berthoud, 1984).

In some areas of expenditure it was very difficult for the long-term unemployed to cut back due to their very frugality even when the male partner was employed. I have already indicated that on the man becoming unemployed savings levels for most of these households were low and in consequence absorbed after only a few months

unemployment. Moreover, household expenditure was generally described as low even with male employment due to poor wages. This was often reflected in the poor material conditions of the homes of these respondents which were typically sparsely furnished and enjoyed few of the 'luxuries' taken for granted by the households characterised by what I have termed 'advantaged' career histories in this study. Although a detailed analysis of household expenditure for the households in this study was not attempted, there was sufficient information to clearly suggest that the majority of the long-term unemployed had experienced some degree of poverty, a point to which I shall return.

As we might expect, the selection criteria for what I have termed the 'advantaged' manual worker produced a group of households that were in a strong position to avoid such hardship. This was because, as indicated above, these households had sufficient resources to prevent any significant changes in lifestyle, at least for a short period of unemployment. The main areas of expenditure to suffer for this group were leisure and holidays. Savings were certainly drawn on and for at least 3 of these households were reduced to below £500. But because of comparatively short periods of unemployment, existing capital and stocks of furniture and household equipment, clothing, etc., little change in lifestyle

occurred. This was most definitely not the case with the households characterised by I have termed 'disadvantaged' manual work where long-term unemployment often meant that not even basic household items were replaced.

b) types of financial problem and sources of help:-

general:- Whereas 9 of the households with long-term male unemployment complained of financial difficulties as a consequence of unemployment, 3 of the households characterised by experience of unemployment of less than a year did so. And as I shall indicate, the nature of financial problems arising from unemployment differed quite markedly according to career history.

The main financial difficulties reported by households with long-term unemployment were food costs, clothing (especially children's), replacement of basic household furniture and equipment. It is significant that 6 of these households reported spending less on food as result of unemployment. For research by the London Food Commission (1986) has suggested that people on low incomes face serious food problems. Food was a 'flexible' item on the household budget which tended to get cut back when money was short. My own findings, though perhaps more impressionistic, certainly seem to re-inforce these conclusions.



6 households with experience of long-term unemployment stated difficulties in providing adequate levels of clothing. There were at least 4 interviews where parents admitted they did not have sufficient money for school uniforms, receiving no help whatsoever from either the school or the local education authority. These parents were particularly anxious their children should not suffer and confessed to "going without" to cloth their children so they "would not look different" from other children. This meant often wearing clothes until they were completely worn, perhaps keeping aside one set of clothes for "best", though this was not always possible. Of 10 Single Payment claims for clothing (excluding claims for maternity needs) 4 were for footwear (in each case an adult had only one pair of serviceable shoes), 3 for overcoats, 2 for night-clothes and 1 for a pair of trousers. As the weekly amount of SB is supposed to cover such items, the majority of the above claims were disallowed (cf Albeson and Smith, 1984).

4 of the households with experience of long-term male unemployment had at one time or other been unable to pay a fuel bill, and 8 had experienced difficulty (cf. Berthoud, 1984). Though none of the households with less than a year's experience of male unemployment had ever been unable to pay a fuel bill, 2, notably with young children, indicated experience of difficulties. Fuel costs

presented major difficulties for long-term SB claimants and was an area of expenditure these households found hard to cut back on as it was usually felt further reductions would present a serious threat to health. "Economies" were made with families tending to concentrate in one room for much of the day (and so reducing personal privacy), having fewer baths, etc., but there were limits on such reductions. Also, several instances were reported where cutting back on heating had resulted in false economies causing damp and structural damage. Indeed, several households commented that the poor conditions of their homes meant they needed to use more heating.

The pattern of Single Payment claims listed in table 17 below indicates the nature of financial difficulties facing households dependent on SB.

**table 17    Single Payment Claims**

<u>Item</u>	<u>Number of</u> <u>Single Payment Claims</u>
clothing & footwear	10
maternity needs	7
bedding	7
essential household furniture	14
miscellaneous household furniture	9
re-decoration	6
fuel debt	4
total	57

Single Payments are one-off grants to meet areas of exceptional need not provided for by weekly SB. Although I intend to discuss these provisions in more detail in the next section, a few observations are needed:- a) the number of such claims provides only a superficial indication of perceived need as there were certain areas of need identified e.g. help with clothing, fuel costs, purchase of household equipment where it was recognised the D.H.S.S. seldom if ever allowed such a claim, thereby deterring many people from claiming; b) of the 9 households to have received a Single Payment, 7 stated the money they received was inadequate to purchase what they required; c) certain labour saving devices possessed by every household in this study characterised by 'advantaged' manual worker career histories were much less common in those households characterised by 'disadvantaged' manual worker career histories, e.g. half these households had been without a washing machine for at least a year, 6 without a refrigerator, 3 without an electric Hoover. Such absences inevitably increased the amount of housework, duties nearly always undertaken by women. The implications of unemployment for domestic relations will be discussed in Chapter 6.

9 of the households with current male unemployment thought levels of SB were inadequate to meet weekly needs, compared with 4 households with current male employment.

However, the pattern of response was far more complicated than these figures would suggest, an important issue to be examined in Chapter 7. For the present suffice to say that a clear pattern emerged in my sample, with the degree of dissatisfaction with levels of SB becoming more pronounced the longer the duration of unemployment a household has experienced.

#### Case Study MR. and Mrs. Collinson

Mr. and Mrs. Collinson have 3 children aged 12, 10 and 6 and receive £87 SB per week and £19 rent allowance (1986/87 prices). Even with what they described as a "very basic" diet, up to £60 of their income is devoted to food alone. The normal weekly SB payments were supposed to cover such needs as clothing, fuel, food, washing and after changes to the Single Payment regulations in 1986, most major items of domestic expenditure. As Mrs. Collinson points out, one consequence is that there is often difficulty with even essential items of expenditure such as children's clothing:- "They grow out of their clothes so quickly and though you try to cope it's far from easy. The Social gives no help with school uniforms, so how can you be expected to afford it? Most of my kids' clothes are second-hand, which makes me feel ashamed".

Their last fuel bill was £189 which they were unable to pay. Their home is all electric and because of cold and

damp they have no alternative but to use the convex heaters they received from the D.H.S.S.. They find this arrangement far from satisfactory and are critical of the D.H.S.S. for not allowing a Single Payment for cheaper alternative sources of heating such as night storage heaters but instead insisting on convex heaters.

Single Payment regulations were subject to further criticism by Mr. Collinson. Under these regulations he had applied for a payment for re-decoration as his home had not been decorated for 5 years and was in a poor state due to persistent condensation. He had to wait 3 months before his claim was attended to, and then was given a visit by a Benefit Officer to check the validity of his claim. An allowance was eventually paid by the D.H.S.S. but not for the full claim because it was considered by the Adjudication Officer that the condition of some of the walls was satisfactory. As a consequence, only part of the house was decorated, resulting in areas where new and old wallpaper were juxtaposed, creating the impression of a "patch-up job". Only £1.50 per roll (1986 prices) was allowed, providing for what Mr. Collinson regarded as extremely poor quality paper.

#### Help from family and friends

A household's ability to cope on SB will very much depend on the range of resources they are able to draw on,

and extended family support may be important in this respect. By such support I here refer to the assistance parents, siblings (and their respective spouses), aunts and uncles are able to offer. This assistance may be financial or in kind and usually involves a complex network of relationships based on reciprocity and mutual obligation. The nature of assistance and the manner it is given will very much depend on the specific roles of the households concerned. And of course the ability to help will be determined by the personal and material resources upon which a household can call.

A number of classic sociological studies (Rosser and Harris, 1965; Willmott and Young, 1965; Bott, 1971) have noted the variety of forms of assistance provided by the extended family. Financial help is typically offered on the occasion of specific events in the domestic cycle when a household's income and security are under pressure. 'Setting up a home', the birth of a child, children starting new schools are just a few occasions when relatives, especially parents, often offer financial assistance, usually in the form of gifts. Clearly when unemployment and low income are widespread among families, such a gift relationship is sundered, imposing greater strains on potential recipients. Indeed not only potential recipients but also potential donors may be affected by unemployment. Extended family relations involve diverse

gift exchanges, the nature of 'giving' being dependent on an individual household's position within that network. So the unemployment of a grandparent for instance will not only affect the welfare of potential recipients of gifts that would have been made if employed, but also the grandparent finds him/herself unable to fulfil certain social expectations. In this context it is useful to compare the nature and level of extended family support for the households in this study. I do so through random examples, though recognising this as an area of interest warranting more systematic and comprehensive consideration. Very little sociological analysis has been done in this area, although more recently research has begun to address the incidence of unemployment within nuclear families (Payne, 1987).

For the purpose of this section I wish to concentrate on the range of extended family help received by households who have experienced male unemployment. However, distinguishing what is meant by 'help' is not necessarily straightforward and unequivocal. Certain practices may be perceived as the normal pattern of social intercourse and not necessarily responses to unemployment. Several households from both estates, for example, were regularly invited by parents for a meal. An occasion whose symbolic meaning was not fixed or reducible to a single value. Even such an apparent simple exchange is predicated

on a complex matrix of mutual expectation and obligation determined within specific social conditions and as such subject to change. Mr. and Mrs. Dewer, for instance, have regularly visited both sets of parents for a meal since marriage, perceived as the normal pattern of socialising. Yet since Mr. Dewer's unemployment these visits have assumed greater significance and in a small but important way have reduced pressures on their weekly income.

I have earlier identified specific events within the domestic cycle where "gifts" from relatives are particularly helpful. This will be even more the case when the family is on a low income. A couple of contrasting case studies may serve to underline this point:-

Mr. Dewer had been married for 2 months when made unemployed. His father and father-in-law have been unemployed respectively 4 and 7 years, live on a council estate and are "struggling to manage". Mr. and Mrs. Dewer could not afford a mortgage and so were dependent on the local authority for housing. Because they had little savings they needed to apply to the D.H.S.S. for a Single Payment to help furnish their home. It took 4 months for their claim to be processed despite repeated visits to the D.H.S.S., and they spent the first 6 months of their marriage with their home only partially furnished. The D.H.S.S. eventually made a payment but the Dewers regarded this far from adequate. The Single Payment regulations (in



1982) only allowed for second-hand furniture and the Dewers found themselves having to "muck around junk shops" to furnish their home. Later, when they had their first child, they were awarded a Single Payment for maternity needs which they again described as inadequate. They were allowed, for instance, only £30 for a pram. For each item they claimed for, relatives had only been able to offer minimal support due to adverse financial circumstances.

Mr. Lee. unemployed 8 months, deferred marriage until he had secured employment. On his marriage each set of parents gave £1000 "to help get us started". Also, he and his wife received nearly 100 wedding gifts from family and friends, and whilst these were typically small items, e.g. sheets, towels, crockery, etc., cumulatively their affect was to significantly reduce financial burdens at a time of considerable pressure. When Mr. and Mrs. Lee had their first child grandparents on one side of the family bought a new pram and from the other a cot and a variety of baby utensils. Other relatives and friends contributed gifts of clothing, thus ensuring an adequate wardrobe for the child during the first year of its life.

Analysis of households in this study suggests that extended family support was a significant factor influencing a household's ability to cope when unemployed. Of the 9 households to have made Single Payment claims

for instance, only 2 stated they could have approached parents or relatives for financial help if they had wished (see Fagin and Little, 1984).

I have indicated earlier that certain households suffered little or no material hardship due to significant levels of savings and unemployment of relatively short duration. Whereas for most of the households with experience of long-term male unemployment there was a persistent struggle to meet basic subsistence needs, for these households this was not the case. 3 households indicated they had experienced financial problems as a consequence of male unemployment, but this seemed mainly due to heavy financial commitments taken on when in employment. I here refer to Mr. and Mrs. Kirk to illustrate this and to again demonstrate the significance of extended family support.

Mr. Kirk was paid approximately £2000 for redundancy, which was spent almost immediately on a new car as he had been promised contract work abroad. Unfortunately the subcontracting firm which took on Mr. Kirk went bankrupt owing him several months wages. After returning home he was unemployed for 7 months. He had high mortgage payments as well as considerable credit sales repayments with which he had difficulty. However, with an indefinite interest free loan from his parents he found himself able to cope.

## Recent Single Payment Changes

Single Payment provisions as we have seen were subject to particular criticism by those households who had recourse to them. They were generally perceived in this context as insufficient to meet the needs they were supposed to satisfy, too narrow in their scope, and took too long to process involving cumbersome bureaucratic procedures often insensitive to the claimant's sense of self-esteem. Yet these criticisms notwithstanding, Single Payment provisions clearly offered an important source of help to families on extremely low incomes. In view of this, we might speculate on some of the implications of changes to Single Payment regulations in 1986 as well as the consequences of the 1986 Social Security Act, which has taken effect from April 1988, replacing the Single Payment system completely by a Social Fund.

Single Payment regulations were changed significantly in February 1986 and this came into effect in August of the same year. The general effect was to impose severe restrictions both on the type of payment and on qualifying conditions. This can be seen by reference to some of the above examples. Mr. Collinson, for instance, had prior to these regulation changes received a grant for re-decoration, as he satisfied the general qualifying conditions as well as the specific condition of living in his home for more than a year. After August 1986 a similar

claim would have been disallowed. For in addition to the aforementioned conditions Mr. Collinson would have had to satisfy the further condition that a member of his household was either a pensioner, chronically sick or mentally or physically disabled. An issue I shall be returning to in Chapter 7 is that the imposition of these categories resonates with the Poor Law distinction between the deserving/undeserving poor.

Mr. and Mrs. Dewer would similarly have been worse off under these new regulations. They had under the 'old' regulations received a grant for such items as carpets, dining tables and chairs, cupboards and a number of small items of equipment. They were awarded a payment sufficient (as interpreted by the law) to purchase second-hand goods of reasonable quality. The August 1986 changes made no provision for such itemised payment. For the purchase of all the items he claimed for his new home, under the changed regulations Mr. Dewer would have been allowed in total £120, that is £70 for himself and £50 for his wife. Because there were no compensating increases in weekly benefit, many claimants found their benefit had effectively been cut (Walker and Walker, 1986). As we have seen from my own sample, the long-term unemployed were extremely vulnerable to such cuts and already experiencing acute hardship prior to them.

These regulation changes were strongly criticised and it has been suggested that they were introduced in anticipation of the complete abolition of the Single Payments system by the provisions of the 1986 Social Security Act which came into effect in April 1988 (Social Security Consortium,1986; Walker and Walker, 1986). I shall be considering the political implications of the new legislation in Chapter 7. But a few points are worth noting here. It has replaced the Single Payment system with a Social Fund which contains 4 key elements to have been widely opposed (Social Security Consortium,1986):- loans; cash limits; discretionary determination of claims and no independent right of appeal. Most needs for which Single Payments were previously allowed will be for the majority of claimants only be met through loans and even then rigorous conditions will have to be satisfied. The Social Security Consortium, whose membership represents a wide range of groups seeking to promote the wide interests of claimants, had this to say (1986,p.14):-

'The Social Fund, combined with the reduction in benefit which some claimants face,will inevitably lead to the further impoverishment of already poor claimants. The replacement of grants by loans will mean large numbers of claimants living permanently below the minimum level set by Parliament. As claimants are expected to buy out of their weekly benefit items that used to be met by Single Payments the real value of their benefit is, in effect, being cut. One result could be to drive claimants ever more into the hands of money lenders. Another will be to increase the demands made on charities and local authorities.

### Financial Circumstances At The Time Of Interview

At the time of interview 9 of the households in this study were in receipt of SB. Only one of these households had in excess of £500 savings, 3 had savings of approximately £100 (money put aside for bills) and 6 had no savings as such. This compares with households with current male employment with 3 having in excess of £4,000, 4 £2,000-3,000, 1 £1,000-2,000. Of course, as mentioned earlier, this is only a crude indicator and does not take into account capital possessions (i.e. value of house) or accumulated consumer items. In Appendix 2 I shall use case studies to compare lifestyles.

Another indicator of differences in lifestyle is per capita disposable income. For purposes of this comparison I have included all state benefits. The average disposable income for households with long-term male unemployment in this study was £105, compared with £171 for households currently/recently employed (1987 prices), meaning the former was about 60% of the latter. However, these figures become more pronounced when we consider the average per capita disposable income which for former was £24 and for the latter £62. These latter figures indicate different household compositions, with the average household size for the households with long-term male unemployment being 4.4 and for the other households 2.8

One further point needs to be re-iterated here. As I have already indicated, though subsequently securing full-time employment 4 men claim to be paid less in their present job than their old. As such, the average disposable income figure for this group indicated above underestimates their earning capacity over the past decade/s. They have had in the past more opportunity to accumulate financial and material wealth and whilst in at least 4 cases a drop in pay had been experienced, the persistent income differences between the current long-term unemployed and current employed indicated here will invariably re-inforce the disparities in their respective material positions.

#### Discussion:- The Experience Of Poverty

I have indicated the consequences of unemployment for the material lifestyles for households with different male employment records, indicating the substantial hardship amongst the long-term unemployed. I have used the term poverty without really defining what is meant by this. The following definition offered by P. Townsend (1979,p.67) provides a good starting point:-

'Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the type of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or at least widely encouraged or approved, in the societies to which they belong. Their resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are, in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities.'

An important component of Townsend's concept of relative poverty relates the level of income of a family to their ability to fully participate in the life of their community. Townsend offers a means of assessing the extent to which unemployment limits or denies opportunities to engage in activities, lifestyles, consumption patterns 'common to our society'. Though there are analytical problems in defining what is meant by 'common to our society', we can reasonably infer that the majority of disadvantaged households in this sample were not only experiencing poverty in this relative sense, but also in certain instances in an absolute sense. Basic necessities such as adequate diet, heating, clothing, were on occasions lacking making it questionable whether dependency on SB in the long-term pushes claimants even below the subsistence level. It is important to realize, as S. Macgregor (1981) has cautioned, that in focussing on the issue of relative poverty, we must be careful not to assume the disappearance of absolute poverty in our society. In my own study the majority of the households with current long-term male unemployment described themselves under great pressure coping on SB, as lacking what they perceived as basic items. These perceptions reflect certain assumptions about social equity and indeed the role of the welfare state which I shall explore more fully in Chapter 7.



Despite its vagueness the concept of relative poverty is nevertheless of considerable value because it takes us away from definitions shackled to the subsistence principle and treats the concept of need in a socially defined way. This then broadens our analysis by requiring us to consider questions of wealth and income distribution in our society. And this should lead us to an analysis of power, that defines poverty as the outcome of determinate socio-economic forces in capitalist society. Townsend is to be congratulated for his seminal analysis of the conditions and deprivations experienced by low income groups, exploding the myth of universal prosperity and exposing many of the inadequacies of current welfare provision.

I have indicated the level of material deprivation associated with the long-term unemployed in my study. Respondents when assessing their position utilised certain assumptions about social welfare and justice. Though these will be examined more systematically in Chapter 7 a few of their comments will illustrate that groups do incorporate points of reference when evaluating the 'justness' of their own position:-

a) "The kids want the same cloths, toys, things that their friends have. He'll (referring to son) come home and ask for a new ski jacket or Adidas training shoes or whatever's the fad...I always have to say no, that makes me feel bad, I know they blame me."

b) "A lad I was at school with was no brighter than me...just jammy that he landed a firm that didn't go bust."

We (club snooker team) went back to his house the other night for a few cans after hours. He lives in a posh part of town, has a nice house with all the modern cons - video, micro-wave, car -the whole lot, and can still afford brilliant holidays abroad. Look at me, I've nowt and it's not my fault. I'd work my guts out to get what he has given half the chance."

c) "I've got 4 kids and still have to do washing by hand! They (Social Security) wouldn't do it but expect me to. It's bloody unfair; no one does washing like this these days."

In the context of the above comments the following comments by Tony Walters in his book 'Hope On The Dole' seem most apposite (1985, p.109):-

'For most of the unemployed it is very painful to have been invited to the feast of consumer society, and then have the door slammed in your face because you have lost your ticket - a paid job in the formal economy. For many unemployment means sitting dejected on the doormat watching through the window at the feast going on inside.'

I have described certain aspects of material deprivation examining various areas of household consumption. These have been the easiest areas to measure changes in opportunity occurring as a consequence of unemployment. There are other important areas of consumption such as health and education that are more difficult to evaluate in a study of this kind. It was for instance beyond the scope of this study to assess the educational performances of children belonging to families whose main income earner is or was unemployed. Certainly there is enough evidence to suggest that children from low income groups do less well than children from other income

groups (Karabel and Halsey, eds, 1977). And there is also a growing body of evidence to suggest that low income groups experience poorer health than other sections of society due to such factors as poor accommodation, inferior diet, stress (Black Report, 1980; Whitehead, 1987; Townsend, Phillimore and Beattie, 1988). What my own research has indicated quite clearly is that long-term unemployment forces families to make significant reductions not only in so-called luxury expenditure (in terms of SB definitions) but also in basic areas of consumption essential to the well-being of households. As research by Townsend (1979) and Mack and Lansley (1983) have convincingly demonstrated, SB levels are inadequate to meet the needs of the long-term unemployed and sometimes do not fully meet even subsistence standards.

### Back To Beveridge?

I have highlighted the inadequacy of SB levels to meet the basic needs of the unemployed, especially the long-term unemployed, and have suggested some of the criticisms of the 1986 Social Security Act. As Lister (1987) has pointed out, political opposition to these changes in many respects remains predicated on the Social Insurance principles of Beveridge and does not directly challenge many of the conservative assumptions he advanced, which I summarise below.

Beveridge envisaged a comprehensive system of social security based on the principles of social insurance with the hated means-test occupying a very limited role. Support from taxation would be restricted and he hoped the system he advocated would, like all good insurance schemes, be self-supporting. Influenced by the surveys of Rowntree, he anticipated that benefits would be paid at a subsistence level and following the tradition of Lloyd George at a flat-rate. Such a scheme was not intended to supplant the operations of the market but to encourage and foster private initiatives and voluntary actions.

These proposals were widely heralded as visionary and exercised considerable influence on the form of post-war social security provision (Macgregor, 1981). Yet with over 7 million people dependent on SB claims of success must be viewed with circumspection, even in terms of Beveridge's own aspirations. National insurance benefits have fallen well below subsistence levels, particularly unemployment benefit, compelling many of the unemployed to claim SB.

Beveridge's proposals did little to challenge the status quo and redress major inequalities. There was no suggestion of extensive redistribution to reduce income disparities in society. Poverty was not perceived as the concomitant of wealth. Beveridge acknowledged the system he advocated could only be viable in the context of full-

employment which, with the arrival of Keynes and rapid post-war economic expansion seemed a possibility. High unemployment was bound to undermine any social security provision based on social insurance.

The subsistence levels advocated by Beveridge were extremely frugal reflecting Rowntree's distinction between primary and secondary poverty. Little allowance was made for social needs, an omission relentlessly criticised by such commentators as Townsend (1979). Moreover, a system based on contribution levels meant that many women did not qualify for benefits in their own right. Indeed, Beveridge's proposals made the assumption of the nuclear family with a male 'breadwinner' as the norm.

Classification of insurance benefits by category (i.e. unemployed, sick, widowed) and not by need has meant that many recipients of such benefits need to claim the means-tested SB. Dependence on SB, as we have seen, may often mean a life of poverty, particularly if we define this term as Townsend has suggested.

Comprehensive proposals for a radical alternative have been little in evidence, although the recent outline elaborated by Esam et al (1986) offers a powerful remedy to this tendency. The authors begin by exhorting against a return to Beveridge(p.27):-

'The position which the labour movement has taken up - arguing for a return to the principles of 1943 - provides few answers to the main contemporary problems: low pay; high housing costs; racism, sexism; inequalities in the state-pension scheme; low incomes due to disability; the relationship between taxation and benefits; long-term mass unemployment.'

Central to their approach is the view that income maintenance should have as its over-riding goal the meeting of needs and reduction of inequality. They argue the present system compounds inequalities and divisions, seeking to transfer the state's responsibility for welfare to the family, forcing women into the role of dependants, discriminating racially, and promulgating legislatively a series of distinctions between the deserving and undeserving poor. Some of these issues I have already touched upon, especially the failure of current benefits to adequately reflect need, as well as the categorisation of the unemployed as the undeserving poor. I return to a fuller consideration of their political implications in Chapter 7.

#### Benefit Levels And Incentives To Work

I have indicated the hardship experienced as a result of unemployment, particularly long-term unemployment. It is not surprising therefore that as suggested in the last chapter each man in this study stated that they were actively seeking full-time employment. The extremely limited employment opportunities for unskilled workers was

noted, supply far exceeding demand in local labour markets, with consequent high unemployment and depressed wage levels. We also noted the importance of benefit levels in determining what was considered suitable as a wage. When men who had experienced unemployment were asked the minimum wage they were prepared to work for (net wages), on average the reply was £20 in excess of SB levels. For the unskilled men in this sample, as a rough approximation this worked out at about £140 per week gross (1987 values). Few of the vacancies advertised for unskilled labour offered this much in wages, as we have seen offering many of the unemployed with little incentive or opportunity to accept paid work.

This connection between incentives to work and benefit levels has led a number of right-wing economists and politicians to call for reductions in benefit levels. The influential neo-classical economist Patrick Minford has advanced the argument (1984):-

'My estimates suggest that at rates of pay only 10 percent below existing market rates, unemployment would effectively disappear. In other words, 2.25 million more jobs exist at rates of pay up to 10 per cent below the rates workers will now not willingly accept. These jobs are not taken...because they are too low paid relative to benefits... This is lunacy. The community has a right to expect people to work if they can...Therefore my principle will be to create inducements for the unemployed to take jobs that potentially exist at lower wages... We propose to put a ceiling on benefits receivable as a fraction of previous work income. That ceiling would be set at 70 per cent, so providing in general at least a 30 per cent incentive to work.'

Similar views can be found in a variety of Conservative Party policy documents. The implicit assumption is that markets for labour would clear if wage levels were allowed to assume their natural level, and that benefit levels provide one reason (others are also cited such as alleged trade-union restrictions) for this not occurring.

In Chapter 7 I challenge these assumptions, arguing that they are part of a political strategy seeking to restore favourable conditions for profitability on behalf of capital by lowering standards of living for certain sections of the working-class. At this point I would wish to make a few general observations. The problem of the 'poverty trap' has been recognised by all political parties though their solutions differ significantly (Lister,1987). Any benefit system designed to keep benefit levels as a fraction of previous wages, as proposed by Minford, would no longer be based on the principle of need and would discriminate against low wage groups. 8 of the households in this survey for instance, all long-term unemployed, would have received less SB than at present. Given the problems we have identified of households coping on current levels of benefit, such a measure would further exacerbate existing levels of poverty.



## Conclusions

In the context of current social security provision, the ability of a household to cope financially when the man is unemployed will depend on the following factors:- duration of unemployment; employment history (length of employment/incidence of unemployment); employment pattern of partner; household composition vis a vis domestic cycle; extended family support; current financial commitments. Similar findings have been reported by Moylan et al, 1984; Cooke, 1987a).

The long-term unemployed in this sample had usually been low waged employees with few resources to draw on when unemployed. As such, because of low rates of SB they had difficulty meeting even basic subsistence needs and could be said to be experiencing both absolute and relative poverty. Long-term dependency on SB for them meant considerable hardship and deprivation. The new Social Security provisions are likely to exacerbate the situation for a group already denied amenities and opportunities enjoyed by the majority of society.

The group in this study most able to cope with unemployment was those workers who had been able to accumulate considerable resources (relative to the group identified above) due to a career history of well paid employment. Even this group had to draw heavily on their

savings for relatively short periods of unemployment and would be unlikely to escape the difficulties I have identified with long-term unemployment.

Dependency on SB for the majority of families in this study usually resulted in a significant deterioration in their material quality of life and often great hardship. The men in these households were anxious to find work but at rates of pay higher than the SB they received. To work for less would be to accept wages below a harshly defined poverty line.

## CHAPTER 6 DOMESTIC AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

### Introduction

There has been considerable literature on the relation between work, the family, and social networks (Willmott and Young, 1962; Rosser and Harris, 1965; Bott, 1971). In this chapter I shall seek to address the question of the extent to which these multifarious relations have been affected by unemployment. Is it possible to identify any fundamental changes and if so, in what circumstances will these occur? To locate our discussion the distinction made by Morris (1985, p.402) between the 'domestic division of labour' and 'division of domestic labour' will be most useful. The former term is defined as 'the distribution of paid work outside the household between its members', and the latter as 'the distribution of tasks within the household between its members'. This will inevitably require us to evaluate the implications of unemployment for the way gender roles are defined and (re-)negotiated within the household.

In the last chapter I indicated some of the implications of male unemployment for household income. Attention was focussed on changes in income **between** households rather than **within** households. In this chapter I propose to extend this analysis by examining patterns of

income flow within households. The control, management and budgeting of household finances will very much reflect the nature of power relations within the home. As J. Pahl (1983) rightly points out discussion of the affects of unemployment often treat the household as a unit with a homogeneous standard of living, failing to consider the differential consequences for the individuals that comprise that unit.

The above 2 areas of interest are of course inter-related and will give some indication of the nature of power relations within the household and how these might be influenced by unemployment. Households are of course situated to varying degrees in wider social networks, the composition of which will both influence and be influenced by the nature of domestic relations. I therefore propose in the final section of this chapter to assess patterns of social activity to identify the process by which social networks not only contribute to the mediation of the experience of unemployment but are also changed by such experience. This, as we shall see, is a dynamic process irreducible to any single factor of causality.

#### Women In Formal Employment

As indicated in Chapter 4, women in 9 households were engaged in paid employment in the formal economy at the time of interview, 7 part-time, 2 full-time. Of the

households where the man was not in full-time employment, there were only 3 where the woman was working, all part-time. Significantly in 2 of these households the man had been unemployed for less than a year and in the other was on a Community Programme scheme. Of the 9 households where the man was in full-time employment, in 6 there were women in employment, 4 part-time, 2 full-time.

This suggest certain trends documented elsewhere (Cooke, 1987b). Firstly, that women are more likely to be employed part-time than full-time. Secondly, that women whose partners are unemployed are less likely to be in employment than those women whose partners are not. There are several reasons for this. In Chapter 5 we noted the 'discouragement affect' of SB limitations on earnings, with low disregards offering little incentive to accept paid work. 3 women with unemployed partners indicated they would be prepared to take on part-time work were it not for these restrictions. However, there were only 2 households where the woman gave up employment because of their partner's unemployment, contrasted with 1 household where the woman took on employment because of male unemployment (in the latter the man subsequently secured employment, with both partners continuing to work). In 4 households women continued working part-time despite their partner's unemployment. In each case the man subsequently secured employment within 18 months.

The evidence from this study re-inforces research conclusions elsewhere (Moylan et al, 1984; Joshi, 1984; Cooke, 1987b), suggesting that in the initial stages of male unemployment women are less likely to withdraw from the labour market than when male unemployment becomes long-term. This could be for 2 reasons. Initially, women may be prepared to continue working in the anticipation of their partner finding employment in the near future. When this expectation changes so might the incentive to work because of the continued application of SB earnings rules. Another consideration is that of perceived gender roles. Research would seem to suggest that many unemployed men feel threatened by the prospect of their partner working (Sinfield, 1981; Marsden, 1982). The role of 'breadwinner' may be seen to be compromised with simultaneously continued male unemployment and female employment.

Only 2 women in my study worked full-time, both with partners in full-time employment. Only one woman had such employment when their partner had been unemployed. This reflects social and cultural definitions of gender roles, which typically define the main role of women as that of 'home-maker' and in consequence marginalises their role in the labour market confining them to jobs that are often low paid and part-time. Only one woman in this study had an earnings capacity greater than their partners. The combination of limited employment opportunities, SB

earnings restrictions and cultural gender definitions means women with unemployed partners are far less likely to be in paid employment than women with partners in employment.

### The Division Of Domestic Labour

As we have we noted, there is little evidence of any significant change occurring in the way labour is distributed outside the home as a result of male unemployment. So what of labour within the household? Again, the conclusions of this study would seem to support those of other studies (Morris, 1985; Laite and Halfpenny, 1987; Leaver, 1987), in so far as there appeared to be little change in traditional household roles, and a number of instances where unemployment re-inforced such roles. Traditional household segregation has been well documented (Willmott and Young, 1962; Rosser and Harris, 1965; Bott, 1971), based as it is on specific socio-cultural definitions of gender. Here the principal role of the male is perceived to be that of 'breadwinner', responsible for providing the main source of income to the home through paid employment, whilst in contrast the woman's role is perceived to be that of 'home-maker', her sphere of responsibility being predominantly that of domesticity. Social networks are typically single-sex, leisure companions often drawn from the sphere of work to which a man or woman belongs. As I shall indicate, such role

segregation, though certainly modified, continued to influence the way respondents in this study identified gender roles.

In their study of the consequences of male unemployment for family relations, McKee and Bell (1986, p.140) have observed, 'In many cases the traditional attitudes towards men's and women's roles seemed to harden and be re-inforced in relation to breadwinning. The loss of the male economic provider role struck deep chords among both wives and husbands and a passionate defence of men's right to provide was invariably raised.' In my own study it was clear that great efforts were usually made by both partners to ensure that any re-negotiation of the division of domestic labour did not compromise established gender identities. This was clearly reflected in the way tasks within the home were distributed subsequent to male unemployment.

Whilst there was some evidence of slight modifications of domestic roles, with men participating more in domestic activities, as table 18 indicates this was usually of a limited and selective nature. Domestic roles remained generally segregated. Whilst men were prepared to help more with responsibilities like shopping, washing up, cooking, taking children to and from school, the majority of domestic tasks were still done by women.



Indeed, as suggested earlier, a drop in household income in consequence of unemployment often intensifies the woman's role as household manager. Even more ingenuity and effort has to be exercised in budgeting, attempting to provide the same quality of care on a reduced income. This may involve "more shopping around", attending jumble sales, doing repairs, mollifying children's unmet demands. This, needless to say, can be the cause of frustration, tension, misunderstanding and conflict.

**Table 18 Performance of domestic tasks in households with experience of male unemployment of a year or more (a)**

<u>Household task</u>	<u>Men</u>			<u>Women</u>		
	<u>never</u>	<u>sometimes</u>	<u>often</u>	<u>never</u>	<u>sometimes</u>	<u>often</u>
house-cleaning	4	9	0	0	0	13
washing (clothes)	10	3	0	0	0	13
child minding	4	9	0	4	0	9
cooking	5	8	0	0	0	13
washing up	1	10	2	0	13	0
decorating (internal)	0	8	5	2	9	2
decorating (external)	1	4	8	8	5	0
shopping (general provisions)	1	6	6	0	3	10
shopping (household items)	2	7	4	0	1	12
sewing	13	0	0	3	5	5
repairs (internal)	0	4	9	3	10	0
repairs (external)	2	2	9	10	3	0
gardening	2	2	9	4	6	3

(a) Only details of these households have been shown as I was concerned to assess whether unemployment influences the distribution of household tasks and felt this was more likely to occur in households experiencing long-term unemployment. When referring to how often these tasks were performed by each partner, this was in the context of the number of times the task needed to be performed overall.

There were certain distinct tasks which men did little or not at all, good examples being washing and

ironing, washing of floors, cleaning of toilets and sinks, mending clothes. If there was any relaxation of traditional domestic roles as a consequence of male unemployment, there were nevertheless certain tasks perceived by partners as gender specific, and this usually resulted in women doing more of the housework, even when they were employed part-time and their husbands were unemployed (cf. Morris, 1985; Mckee and Bell, 1986; Wheelock, 1986; Laite and Halfpenny, 1987).

Male Unemployment And Patterns Of Household Finance:-  
Conceptualising Household Finance

J. Pahl (1983) makes the crucial distinction between control, management, and budgeting in her analysis of household finances. 'Control' refers to general decisions relating to the system of allocation of household income, that is to what different uses the money will be put, and who will be responsible for each area of expenditure. 'Management' refers to the process by which income is administered for different areas of designated expenditure. Here it is important to note the difference between executive and administrative powers. 'Budgeting' refers to patterns of expenditure within categories. Another important distinction is to be made between household income and domestic income (Morris, 1984b). Household income refers to the total income available to household members, whilst domestic income refers to the

total income available for domestic consumption (i.e. food ,fuel). The above provide important concepts of analysis for any discussion of household finances.

From her conceptual distinctions Pahl is able to differentiate between orchestration power, the 'the power to make important and infrequent decisions that do not infringe on their time but determine lifestyle and most important characteristics of family', and implementation power which is concerned with the day-to-day management and budgeting of household income. In enunciating a typology of the different systems of allocation of household finance, Pahl identifies 2 further criteria essential to an adequate understanding of the relationship between power and control of economic resources within the household:- a) how is responsibility distributed between and within expenditure categories? b) does each partner have access to household funds other than those for which s/he is responsible? By addressing these issues Pahl is able to develop a typology identifying the general characteristics of different systems of income allocation within the household. This typology has been further elaborated by Morris (1984b) and Leaver (1987). For purposes of my own analysis I choose to incorporate the model of household finance developed by Morris though it should be noted there is much in common in each of the above typologies.

## Finance models

Morris identifies the following 4 models of finance (1984b, p496):-

Model A:- All the man's income, in either wages or benefits, is handed over to the woman. He may or may not receive back a specific amount for personal spending. Where the woman herself has a wage or receives benefit it is added to the household income under her control - similar to Pahl's whole-wage system.

Model B:- The woman receives a regular amount of money from her husband, usually conceived of as housekeeping allowance, whilst the money he retains provides for his own personal spending, and is also commonly used for the payment of large bills (i.e. fuel and rent). Where the woman herself earns or receives benefit her income may be added to the housekeeping allowance, banked for items of collective expenditure (eg holidays) or used as personal spending money. (this corresponds to Pahl's allowance system).

Model C:- The man keeps all the money he receives in the form of wages and benefits and the wife asks for money as she needs it. Where she receives her own wage or benefit this may be used in any of the 3 ways described above (B). Pahl includes this in her whole wage system.

Model D:- The man puts his wage or benefit into a kitty or joint account from which he and his wife draw money as and when required. The woman's income might be similarly placed in the kitty, or might be saved separately to cover specific areas of personal or collective expenditure. This roughly corresponds to what Pahl has called the shared-management system.

Before applying this typology to my own data a few general observations are needed. Firstly, it is common in many households that the male is the recipient in the first instance of the main source of household income, be this a wage or a social security benefit. This was the case in all but 2 households in this study. Whilst the control of this income will be subject to culturally

defined expectations as well as certain economic pressures, and also in certain circumstances the possibility of legal sanction, in times of conflict this can nevertheless leave women and children extremely vulnerable. This has led commentators like Esam et al (1986) to argue for a radical reform of the social security system to allow carers of children sufficient income for independence. Secondly, and relatedly, we need to bear in mind throughout our analysis of Pahl's distinction between orchestration power and implementation power. Both are the outcome of a power relationship that is constituted through a complex of socio-economic, cultural and political relationships.

Patterns of household finance<sup>(1)</sup>

**Table 19 Patterns of household finance (a)**

<u>models of household finance</u>	<u>when male employed</u>	<u>when male unemployed</u>
Type A	7	12
Type B	9	3
Type C	0	0
Type D	4	3
total =	20	18 (b)

(a) these models of household finance were developed by L. Morris (1984, p.496).

(b) 2 men in this study had never experienced unemployment

Consistent with the research findings indicated above, the commonest types of household finance in this

study was Type A (whole-wage system) and Type B (allowance system) (see above table). Level of income and family size were 2 key determinants influencing which of these systems were adopted. An allowance system was more likely when income was higher with any given family size and where there was a significant surplus of income after collective needs had been adequately met. Households would often oscillate between these 2 systems of allocation when there were variations in household income, especially when there was an opportunity of over-time, or bonuses were varied. There were at least 3 households who reverted to an allowance system from the whole wage system as a consequence of over-time. Here the man apportioned all or at least some of the extra income for his own personal spending. This demonstrates, as Morris (1984; 1988) has observed elsewhere, that labour market status both influences and is influenced by the system of household finance. In these examples willingness to accept over-time was probably contingent on the man increasing the amount of money he had for "pocket money".

There were 4 examples of Type D system of allocation, that is 'shared-management'. In 2 instances both partners were in full-time employment, in 1 instance the woman worked at least 24 hours per week, and in the other instance the woman had no formal employment. This would

seem to re-inforce the conclusions of both Pahl (1983) and Morris (1984).

The implications of male unemployment for household finances

One conspicuous change to have occurred as a consequence of unemployment is the adoption of the whole-wage system. Of the 18 households to have experienced male unemployment, 12 had operated such a system of allocation. This was usually because the consequent drop in household income meant nearly all that was available was devoted to collective needs. This, as we shall see, often results in the intensification of the woman's role as household manager, increasing her responsibilities and often causing stress (McKee and Bell, 1986).

I discussed in the last chapter the hardships caused by unemployment, particularly long-term unemployment. Yet these privations are not necessarily experienced equally within the household. A frequent source of conflict in a number of households in this study was the amount of money the man should have for personal expenditure. As we saw in the last chapter, one area of household expenditure usually reduced as a consequence of male unemployment was leisure. It is interesting that in the majority of households operating the whole-wage system of allocation of household finances, there was usually some allowance,

even if small, for the man's personal expenditure. Men were more likely than women in their patterns of socialising to incur expenses, which frequently involved "a drink with the boys at the pub", whereas women were often much more home-orientated in their patterns of socialising, involving less expense. As Morris (1984) has suggested, loss of personal spending money may pose a threat to the man's sense of identity, a threat widely perceived by both men and women in my study. This seems most pronounced when there are strong, separate single-sex social networks where specific patterns of socialising constitute an integral aspect of identity. In the case study below I indicate a possible source of conflict when the man's commitment to his peer group compromises the collective interests of the household.

Another area of possible conflict may arise over the issue of how domestic income is spent. As McKee and Bell (1986) have pointed out, responsibilities for household expenditure usually fall upon women, and whilst there are aspects of this which may be burdensome - either because of the monotony, or hard work, or stress in managing limited resources - nevertheless this is a sphere where women have a significant if limited degree of autonomy. Yet even this limited autonomy might be eroded by male unemployment. In their study, and in my own, there were examples of women complaining of interference from their



husbands in their day-to-day work, for instance criticising how domestic money is spent without any related attempt to relieve responsibilities. This is but one example, there are more to follow, of the way unemployment may threaten existing gender roles and place increasing pressure on domestic relations.

#### Case Study - Mr. And Mrs. Walker

Mr. Walker, a building labourer, has worked only sporadically over the last 5 years, being intermittently employed for in total about 2 years. When in employment his wages were variable, though sometimes his earnings capacity was quite high due to favourable opportunities for bonuses, over-time and perhaps undeclared earnings. He would give his wife a regular allowance for housekeeping with which she was expected to pay all household bills. There was a rigid division of domestic labour with clearly defined roles. Mrs. Walker never actually saw her husband's wage packet and had no definite idea of his earning levels. She did not object to this arrangement provided her husband was reliable with the housekeeping, that is regular and "reasonable" with what he allowed (that is, adequately providing for collective needs). Mr. Walker socialised most nights with his peer group at the local working-men's club, though 2 nights a week were usually reserved for the Walkers to socialise together,

usually at the same club. Mrs. Walker's "one night out on her own" was to play bingo with her sister.

On becoming unemployed Mr. Walker cut back on his "nights out", though still insisting on a specified amount of pocket-money even when Mrs. Walker described household finances as hard pressed. When he secured occasional work he would increase his number of nights out, though also increasing the allowance he paid as housekeeping. Mrs. Walker continues to have full responsibility for household expenditure and quite frankly admits to "awful rows" over the amount of money Mr. Walker sets aside for personal use. She receives considerable help from her parents, which enables her to cope. She feels her husband doesn't always realise "how much it costs to run a home".

#### The Use Of Additional Income By Households Dependent On Social Security Benefits

I have suggested that where there is male unemployment the majority of households resort to a whole-wage system of allocation of resources, though 3 households continued with an allowance system. As indicated earlier, men generally were allocated more personal spending money than women - this was the case at the time of interview in 10 instances, in 7 it was the same, in 3 the woman was allocated more. Yet as I explained these figures must be approached with caution as

expenditure on certain areas of household need was sometimes conflated with the woman's personal expenditure. My findings suggest that in the event of male unemployment this specific form of gender identification becomes more pronounced reflecting the intensification of the woman's role as household manager.

This can be usefully illustrated by reference to how households where the male is/was unemployed allocated any income that was additional to their social security benefits. 3 types of income in this context can be identified:- earnings in the formal economy; earnings in the 'black economy'; gifts in the form of money. I shall deal with each of these and assess the implications for the allocation of household income.

6 women were employed part-time and at least 1 full-time for at least part of the period of their partner's unemployment. In every case, there was an arrangement for the man to have some form of 'pocket-money' that was seen as distinct from domestic consumption. There were only 2 households where women were allocated the same amount or more of household income for similar purposes. Here, this arrangement had existed prior to male unemployment. What appeared to be happening in 5 of these households was that pocket-money dropped for both partners as a consequence of a reduction of weekly household income. But that form of

personal allowance, even if token, was maintained for the man in a manner that was far more formal and regularised than for the woman. It was not that women were not allocated any proportion of household income for personal use, but that they gave collective needs priority, while it was generally acknowledged by both men and women that the former were far more dependent on some form of personal income to maintain social ties as well as a sense of gender identity. Women were far more likely than men to forego either completely or significantly personal spending in order to support collective needs, and were usually expected to "make greater sacrifices". Nevertheless, as indicated earlier, a frequent source of conflict was the threat of the man compromising collective needs by excessive demands on household income for personal use. And whilst women more often required less income to maintain established patterns of social activity, any threats to such activities from pressures of male demands for more personal income, would frequently be the cause of delicate negotiations between partners, possibly leading to conflict.

So if the greatest part of women's part-time earnings were typically devoted to collective needs, what of men's? The first point to note is that only one man was employed part-time, on a Community Programme, though 4 men admitted to "doing work on the side" occasionally. The information

here therefore is limited. It did seem nevertheless that part of the additional income in each of these cases was kept by the man for pocket-money, with much of the remainder being allocated for collective consumption. Moreover, as Morris (1984) has pointed out, the implications of such activity are not only financial but also cultural, for occasional work may help re-affirm the man's role as "breadwinner".

It is interesting in the light of what has been said so far, that 4 women, 3 of whom were married to men unemployed for longer than a year, reported using money they had received as a gift for themselves at a birthday or Christmas on collective needs. This was not true for many of the men. Once more this seemed to attest to both the intensification of the woman's role as household manager as a consequence of unemployment as well as the further conflation of women's needs with collective needs.

#### Patterns Of Social Activity

In Chapter 4 I noted the significance of informal contacts in securing access to employment opportunities. Morris (1984a) found in her study of redundant steel workers that a correlation could be established between the type of pattern of social activity and an individual's chances of finding employment through informal means. Individuals who have a pattern of social interaction that

she describes as collective (p.345), would appear to be most advantaged in this respect, especially in relation to short-term contract employment and employment in the 'black economy'. Informal means of recruitment are particularly important in these kinds of economic activity as employers will frequently want workers at short-notice, who are 'flexible' in their work practices, and who are reliable - usually both in terms of work discipline and 'discretion' about illicit work.

In her analysis of informal processes of recruitment Morris (p.345) classifies the following types of social activity:- **Collective:** Interaction is collective, tends to occur in an institutional setting (e.g. a pub or social club) and to foster some sense of shared group identity.

**Dispersed:** Interaction is dyadic and locality-based, and though there may be interconnections between the number of social contacts of individual, there is no sense of a collectivity.

**Individualistic:** Interaction is on a one-to-one basis, with few interconnections between the social contacts of any given individual, and no common setting.

While it is beyond the scope of this study to analyse patterns of social activity in any great detail, a few points can be made in relation to Morris's observations. Each of the men currently unemployed to have admitted to

some form of 'black economy' activity were quite dependent on their social network to secure their work and their patterns of social interaction could each be described as collective/dispersed. Yet 4 other men currently unemployed had similar patterns of social interaction but have not found such work. Access to these types of social networks is therefore not enough if they do not in turn have access to employment opportunities. 3 of the 4 workers to have engaged in black economy activity were in the building trade, emphasising as I have noted certain kinds of skills will be in greater demand in the informal sector.

I noted in Chapter 4 that 6 men subsequently secured full-time employment following unemployment in the last 5 years. 3 of these did so through informal contacts, 2 of which were friends with whom they socialised at a local club. So the nature of social contacts was clearly significant in this context. Research on long term unemployment in the county of Durham, of which Darlington is a constituency, has similarly suggested that informal contacts constitute an important channel for job hunting (Durham Study Group, 1989).

### Leisure And Unemployment

I have earlier referred to the importance of maintaining existing patterns of social activity and the pressures unemployment puts on this. I shall now explore

these issues a little further. As there is a vast literature on the relation between employment and leisure, I propose to confine my comments to the implications of unemployment for leisure. As a frequent complaint of unemployed men in this study was the acute boredom associated with too much free time (see also Thames Television, 1988), it is useful to preface my observations with Rojek's (1985) important distinction between leisure time and free time. Rojek has suggested that leisure time is implicated in a system of legitimation and is critical of the way many social commentators conflate these 2 terms. In my own sample respondents were anxious to strongly differentiate between leisure time and "time doing nowt during the day". All but 2 male respondents to have experienced unemployment stated boredom as their main problem after loss of income.

For many of these respondents what I shall term 'rituals of hedonism' were essential to their lifestyle. For these respondents social contacts at the pub or the club provided and continue to provide an important source of psychological support. Here the emphasis is on the pursuit of hedonism, "having a good drink", a gamble, a "good laugh". Both in and out of employment this pattern is important in maintaining social ties and conferring a positive sense of identity. In Chapter 5 I indicated that one means of coping with a reduced income was to cut back



on leisure activities. Whilst for the majority of unemployed men this was usually the case with visits to the pub or club occurring less, there was nevertheless a general feeling that when an opportunity for "a night out" did arise, this should conform to long established expectations. Some attempt would be made to preserve a semblance of former leisure patterns, even if this just meant "going out with the lads" just once a week but "doing it in style". Rituals of hedonism will vary according to social class and sub-culture, but nevertheless provide a crucial outlet not only for the pursuit of pleasure but also the expression of self-identity.

Mr. Reynolds, for example, has been forced to cut down on his nights out. Whereas when previously unemployed he was able to visit his regular pub most nights, after 9 years of unemployment he now manages only once or twice. But this one night out provides an important point of social contact and self-affirmation:- "I go out to see my mates, have a good drink and laugh, be normal for a change. I don't want to be always watching the pennies - it gets you down. It's the one night I can let go. It keeps me sane." Mr. Reynolds declared being extremely bored during the day and as such as having a greater need to socialise but being frustrated by lack of money.

## The Implications Of Male Unemployment For Female Activity

I have indicated the importance attributed to the need for a man to have access to at least, if not more than, a small part of household income for personal expenditure. As I have suggested, because of existing gender role definitions the collective needs of the household are often conflated with those of the woman. Consequently women are less likely to have a similar pocket-money arrangement, a fact reflected in the patterns of social activity in this sample.

For example, of the men in this study currently long-term unemployed, 1 man regularly had 3-4 nights out per week, 1 man 2-3 nights, 4 men 1-2 nights, 3 men 0-1 night. Now if we consider their partner's pattern of socialising incurring similar levels of expenditure (though not necessarily visiting a pub or a club) we find that 2 women have 1-2 nights out per week, 3 women 0-1 night, and for 4 women a "night out" occurred only occasionally.

For the majority of women in this group the main form of social activity tended to revolve around domestic tasks, particularly child-minding, usually either in the company of female relatives - typically their mother - or with other women in a similar position in the domestic cycle. As McKee and Bell (1986) have noted, the presence of the unemployed man can considerably disrupt this

pattern of socialising, and a common observation from women in my sample was that friends were often reluctant to visit when their husbands were at home. I earlier suggested definitions of leisure are implicated in a system of legitimation. This can be clearly be seen in the way the leisure time of men and women in this study was distinguished. Leisure is widely perceived as a reward for work, a point which has considerable political implications. Moreover, because in our society many leisure activities are integrated into a capitalist economy, the unemployed find themselves excluded from a wide range of activities enjoyed by the employed.

### Conclusions

We began with a consideration of the implications of unemployment for household finances. We noted the tendency for households to adopt a whole-wage system of allocation of household income when on a low income. This usually resulted in an intensification of the woman's role as 'domestic manager', having to devote greater time and ingenuity to budgeting household finances, a task often occasioning stress. Even when income was low there was usually some recognition by both men and women of the need for the man to have some provision for pocket-money. In contrast, the needs of the woman and collective needs were frequently conflated, and women were more likely to "go without" in order to ensure the facilitation of collective

needs. When analysing household finances, therefore, it is important to examine gender relations within the household rather than treat the household as a homogeneous unit. A common source of conflict occurs when men make excessive demands on household finances to the detriment of collective needs.

Gender plays an important part not only in the control of household finances, but also in the domestic division of labour as well as the division of domestic labour. The implications of unemployment for the household can only be properly understood in the context of gender roles within the framework of wider familial and social networks. Because of the primacy attributed to the woman's role as home-maker, and because of the present structure of labour market opportunities, women were more likely to be employed part-time if at all. When the man was unemployed she was even less likely to be in paid employment because of SB restrictions on earnings, and possibly because this may threaten the male's role as breadwinner.

These gender identities were clearly crucial in determining the pattern of division of domestic labour following male unemployment. Whilst there was some move towards what Morris (1988) has described as 'traditional-flexible' conjugal roles, with the male undertaking more

domestic duties than hitherto when employed, he nevertheless did significantly less than the woman, with distinct areas of domestic tasks gender specific (cf. Wheelock, 1987). The performance of domestic duties was closely associated with perceptions of gender, and in certain respects unemployment served to re-inforce established gender roles. A drop in household income, for instance, frequently resulted in an intensification of the woman's role as domestic manager. Moreover, unemployment threatens self-identity in a number of ways and a typical mode of adaptation was to seek to maintain patterns of social behaviour existing prior to unemployment.

This latter fact is evident in the types of social activity men and women engaged in following male unemployment. Unemployment potentially threatened to disrupt existing patterns of social activity for both men and women, especially where there existed close-knit single sex networks. Commitment to these networks could act as both a source of support and of conflict. This might be, as we have seen, in terms of providing access to employment opportunities. Or it may simply involve patterns of socialising significant in maintaining gender identities. Yet, as was noted, commitment to single sex social networks may on certain occasions be to the detriment of collective household needs and be the cause of marital conflict.

The experience of unemployment is mediated by complex social, economic and political relations. The implications for men and women, whilst sharing certain common features, will not be identical. There is little evidence to support the view that there has been any significant breaking-down of traditional segregated conjugal roles as a result of unemployment, though we can identify modifications in certain areas of domestic relations. The division of labour, both within and outside the home, and the system of household finances existing within this sample suggests that definitions of gender roles predicated on the distinction between home-maker and breadwinner continue to be powerful influences on the way men and women respond to the experience of unemployment.

## CHAPTER 7 THE POLITICS OF UNEMPLOYMENT

### Introduction

In the preceding chapters I have indicated in some detail the changing nature of differential employment opportunities for male manual workers. For the majority of men in my study there has been experience of varying degrees of unemployment, job insecurity, and reductions in wage levels (cf Harris et al, 1987; Westergaard, 1988). We have noted the unemployed do not constitute an homogeneous group, with particularly the long-term unemployed experiencing severe and often sustained disadvantage. Given the sometimes pronounced deterioration in circumstances, it is now pertinent to consider attitudes to unemployment as a specific political issue. I am especially interested to compare the responses of that section of manual workers comparatively advantaged in terms of employment opportunities with those who are disadvantaged. This will allow an exploration of possible divisions within the working-class and the likely implications for political action. For a number commentators (Hobsbawm, 1981; Gorz, 1982; Crewe, 1987) have suggested that the working-class is increasingly becoming politically fragmented. Implicit in these approaches is the assumption that economic change is producing a core of manual workers advantaged in terms of employment conditions, the majority of whom have abandoned

traditional allegiances to the Labour Party, whilst a growing section of the working-class is becoming marginalised in terms of employment opportunities, though remaining loyal to the Labour Party. Another important change referred to is the sharp decline in the number of people employed in manual work with the concomitant growth of the non-manual sector, though this is an issue beyond the scope of this study.

I propose first to examine what the households in this study perceive to be causes of unemployment and then proceed to assess how these perceptions influence attitudes towards policies for job creation and the economy in general of the main political parties. I will then assess perceptions of current state provisions for the unemployed, assessing what reforms if any respondents would advocate. After relating my findings to those of other research I intend to identify the main features of the current government's policies for un/employment, seeking particularly to evaluate the way it endeavours to achieve hegemony, and working-class responses to these efforts.



Table 20 Perceived causes of unemployment(a)

<u>perceived causes of unemployment</u>	<u>currently unemployed</u>		<u>currently employed</u>	
	<u>m</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>m</u>	<u>f</u>
lack of gov't spending	10	8	4	4
too much gov't spending	1	0	2	0
new technology	8	5	8	4
world recession	4	2	3	4
failure of management	4	1	2	2
failure of trade-unions	9	8	8	7
cheaper imports	5	3	6	3
immigration	4	3	3	2
women working	4	2	2	1
lack of training	3	0	4	2
benefit levels	1	0	4	3

(a) respondents were asked to list possible causes of unemployment

As table 20 (above) and table 21 (below) indicate, 3 reasons commonly cited as causes of unemployment were new technology, lack of government spending, and trade-unions although as we shall see, perceived causes are usually much more complex than any single indicator might suggest. Westergaard et al (1988) and Marshall et al (1988) report similar trends in working-class perceptions of unemployment, noting explanations of unemployment are usually expressed in terms of inter-related issues not easily separated. Allowing for this caveat, I shall treat each of these variables separately, though raising related issues where appropriate.

Table 21 Perceived main cause of unemployment

<u>main cause of unemployment</u>	<u>currently unemployed</u>		<u>currently employed</u>	
	<u>m</u>	<u>f</u>	<u>m</u>	<u>f</u>
lack of gov't spending	5	4	3	3
new technology	5	3	3	2
world recession	0	1	0	0
trade-unions	1	3	2	4
cheaper imports	0	0	1	0
total =	11	11	9	9

New technology:- A strong sense of technological determinism was evident with many respondents. The view was frequently expressed that "the days of full employment" were over due to new technology displacing labour in the process of production. It was widely felt production requirements could now be satisfied with fewer workers and that this situation would deteriorate further due to the rapidity of technological progress. Only 6 of the 40 respondents believed unemployment could be reduced below 1 million in the next 10 years, the majority believing this was not possible as industry and commerce would require less labour as a consequence of technological advances.

It was also widely believed Britain was suffering economic decline due to a long period of lack of investment in technology. Reference was often made to the success of Japan, offered as evidence of the crucial

importance of continually expanding new technology. In comparison, Britain was seen to have failed for several reasons in maintaining a competitive position. In this context the 2 main reasons offered were lack of government investment in research and development (here all governments were indicted) and inflexibility of trade-unions (i.e. were accused of insisting on out-moded work practices). A third reason, though indicated less often than the above, was lack of private investment. This was usually attributed to either low profit margins or firms investing abroad. The political implications of this technological determinism will be considered in a later section of this chapter. There was considerable similarity between respondents in the significance attributed to new technology as a cause of unemployment, with it being given slightly higher explanatory value by men than women and by respondents from households with current male employment (cf. Marshall et al, 1988).

Government spending:- One significant fact to have emerged, to be discussed in more detail below, is that lack of government spending featured far more strongly as an imputed cause of unemployment amongst respondents who did not support (in voting terms) the Conservative government than those who did. Lack of government spending was cited 26 times as a possible cause of unemployment whereas too much government spending was only cited 3

times. However, as we shall see, these figures are slightly misleading as several respondents argued the case for cuts in certain areas of public expenditure in order to improve the performance of the economy.

Of respondents stating lack of government spending as one possible cause of unemployment, the most common areas identified for increased expenditure were, in order of frequency:- financial assistance to enable employers to expand their workforce; increase in public sector projects; financial assistance to invest in advanced technology (cf Mann,1987). A point to which I shall return is that these, and indeed a wide range of attitudes to political issues, were usually couched in extremely general terms and related to values broadly perceived to be associated with types of policies rather than with specific details of policy. When referring to party political programmes respondents were far more likely to invoke what might be regarded as totem imagery rather than specific policy details, though there was usually some awareness of the general features of main policies ( cf Heath et al, 1985). The view that extra government spending would/not create more employment was usually predicated on what were considered common-sense assumptions rather than a detailed familiarity with any party programme.

The respondents stating too much government expenditure as a cause of unemployment again tended to borrow from party slogans rather than detailed policy issues. Here, for instance, respondents typically opined "governments have been spending too much...you can't spend what you haven't got", observations often expressed as articles of faith with little reference to concrete evidence. It is clear the imagery a person holds of a political party will be crucial in determining the way they identify what that party stands for. Political imageries are derived from complex processes, to be discussed later. I would simply point out here my observations are not intended to be pejorative. The intensity of responses from households in this study to many issues attested to a strong interest and firm political convictions. Yet the way each of us 'marshals facts' to interpret events will be the outcome of complex mediations which warrant serious sociological analysis.

Trade-unions:- Nearly all respondents cited trade-unions as a contributory cause of unemployment, though usually not the main reason and with qualification. There was very little difference in the kinds of responses from the households in this study in terms of employment status, although the women attributed more importance to unions as a cause of unemployment than men. Of the currently unemployed men, 8 had belonged at one time or another to a

trade-union, with the figure for the currently employed men the same. The first point to note is that whilst there was considerable criticism of certain aspects of trade-union activity, union membership was widely perceived by both men and women as necessary when in employment to defend and enhance wage levels and protect working conditions. Most respondents from both groups nevertheless described trade-unions as having become too powerful, sometimes "greedy" and "inflexible", behaving irresponsibly and contributing to Britain's deteriorating economic performance and present levels of unemployment. It is interesting that even the majority of Labour Party supporters expressed the following kind of sentiments:- "Trade-unions had it too good, too long...have their heads in the clouds...are too willing to strike...have got out of control". The studies by Marshall et al (1988) and Westergaard (1988) reached similar conclusions, noting general support for collectivist solutions for advancement of working-class employment conditions, with employees and employers widely perceived as 'us' and 'them'. Yet somewhat contradictorily, specific forms of trade-union action such as strikes were often criticised, as were unions for having too much power. We shall address the political implications of such attitudes shortly.

As suggested, attitudes to unions were not always consistent (cf. Marshall et al, 1988). So whilst, for

instance, a vital role for unions was identified as wage negotiation to achieve a reasonable standard of living, unions were often blamed by respondents for "pricing themselves out of the market", that is seeking levels of wages employers cannot afford. Yet only 3 respondents regarded their own union as irresponsible in this respect. The majority, with few exceptions, shared economic definitions of the role of trade-unions. A typical comment was that unions had become too political, and reference was made to the miners' strike in this context, which is interesting as the strike was not about wage levels but about the protection of jobs.

Views on the need to belong to a trade-union reflected the attitude described in Goldthorpe and Lockwood's (1968) classic study as instrumental collectivism. Significantly this attitude was pervasive amongst the majority of both skilled and unskilled workers in my sample. Given that most of the latter had worked in low waged employment, it would be a serious mistake to impute such an attitude exclusively to 'affluent workers'. As Westergaard and Resler (1976) have pointed out, this is indicative of the fact that for many workers their relation to their employer is limited to the cash-nexus. The responses from my own study would seem to confirm this, with unions perceived primarily as a vehicle for promoting factional interests within the labour market.

Only one respondent currently unemployed has maintained his union membership. Unemployed men in this study saw little point in remaining in their union, despite the fact that many unions are now offering free membership to the unemployed. Unions were widely perceived as work based, primarily concerned with the interest of members in work rather than out. 6 men who were long-term unemployed felt unions could do more to help people in their position. Their recommendations included proscribing over-time, the exercise of wage restraint, the abolition of unfairly restrictive work practices.

Immigration:- Although no respondent offered immigration as the main cause of unemployment, it was specified by 12 as a contributory cause. No clear pattern emerged in terms of employment status and attitudes to immigration. This is an important issue, which unfortunately because of the scope of this research I have not been able to explore in any depth. A recent study by Noble (1987) has suggested racist explanations of unemployment are more pronounced amongst the long-term unemployed. Such attitudes were clearly evident amongst both the employed and unemployed in my study, though not prominent as the reasons cited as the main causes of unemployment. There is a great need for large scale research on whether unemployment exacerbates racial prejudice.



Women working:- In Chapter 6 I explored in considerable detail the processes by which unemployment might reinforce traditional gender roles and consequently inequality. Attitudes to women working in paid employment strongly reflected perceptions of the male as 'breadwinner'. However, only a minority of respondents cited women in paid employment as a cause of unemployment, the majority like the respondents in the survey by Marshall et al (1988) still gave far greater prominence to structural factors such as new technology and/or government spending. Nevertheless many respondents, both men and women, expressed the view that men should be given priority in terms of employment opportunity. This was particularly the case in households where there was long-term male unemployment, a view usually expressed by both partners. This was less likely to occur in households where both partners were working. The majority of men and women in this study saw paid employment as an essential and integral part of male identity, crucial for their self-esteem, whereas for women it was seen as secondary to their role as 'home-maker'. There were 2 views particularly more pronounced amongst households with current long-term male unemployment. First, that employment opportunities ought to be more evenly spread between households. This reflects a variety of distributional issues deriving from both class and gender. Second, as indicated above, it was believed men should be

given priority in the labour market. Thus, unemployment would appear to re-inforce and crystallise gender divisions rather than obviate them.

Other reasons:- Several other causes of unemployment were indicated, though less often and with less emphasis. In sections below I propose to focus more broadly on attitudes to the respective issues of social security benefits and government special training and employment measures, which were sometimes blamed for unemployment. Here I shall say a few words about 2 other cited causes, world recession and cheaper imports.

Several respondents referred to world recession as a cause of unemployment, though this term tended to be perceived as self-explanatory rather than needing to be explained. Indeed, a crucial point I shall return to is that economic issues were often perceived by many respondents in fetishized terms, with economic phenomena regarded as occurring 'out there', as events determined by external laws beyond human authorship.

A significant number of respondents, 17 in all, believed cheaper imports to be a cause of unemployment. A variety of reasons were offered to account for Britain's inability to compete with less expensive foreign goods, and as we shall see below this is reflected in the kind of

policies supported by respondents to reduce unemployment in this country. The main reasons offered, though not mutually exclusive were:- foreign goods often being produced by exploited labour; foreign goods are produced more efficiently due to superior technology; the productivity of foreign workers was generally superior to that of the British due to too many strikes and restrictive practices in this country.

### Party Political Support

Darlington can quite reasonably be regarded a marginal constituency. Between 1964 and 1983 the parliamentary seat was held by Labour. In 1983, when media speculation was rife about when the government would call a general election, Ossie O'Brien narrowly won a by-election for Labour. This was not though, a harbinger of things to come, only a month later a Conservative government was returned to power with a massive majority, and Michael Fallon entered parliament as the M.P. for Darlington. He subsequently held onto his seat in 1987 with a reduced majority of about 2,000. This marginality is reflected in the current composition of the local district council, with Labour and the Conservatives having 24 seats each, with the S.L.D. Party and Independents holding the balance of power.

It is significant, therefore, having considered the causes of unemployment attributed by households in this study, to identify the consequences of these perceptions for party political support. We need to know what priority is given to unemployment as a political issue and also how the different solutions of the main political parties are regarded. And we need also to address the extent to which responses differ between households in this study according to male employment status to establish whether there is any correlation between the experience of male unemployment and political attitudes. Finally, these findings will be related to those of other research to consider their significance.

#### Unemployment As A Political Issue

The first point to make was that every respondent without exception was aware that the number of officially unemployed at the time of interview was approximately 3 million. Nearly half the respondents qualified their response by stating a higher unofficial figure, and this included respondents of all political persuasion. So there was a very clear awareness of levels of unemployment.

Moreover, when asked the reasons for their voting intentions every respondent, regardless of political persuasion, listed unemployment as an important issue. So for respondents in this study unemployment was a key

political issue though as we shall see, not necessarily always the most significant.

Without exception respondents thought the party they intended to vote for as the one most likely to reduce unemployment. However it is significant that only 6 of the 40 respondents believed unemployment could be reduced below 1 million within the next 10 years. This merits discussion and should be considered in the context of perceived causes of unemployment.

25 respondents considered technology as a contributory cause of unemployment, 13 regarded it the most important. There was widespread belief amongst respondents of all political persuasion that the basis of the economy both nationally and globally was undergoing fundamental change, a prominent feature of this process being the substitution of labour by machinery. As such, it was felt by the majority of respondents that expectations of full employment are no longer realistic, that never again would there be enough jobs for everyone willing to work. It should be noted though that some thought this problem could be alleviated by such measures as reducing the working week or the age of retirement. These respondents typically advocated increased public expenditure to support such measures. They were less clear

about how to maintain wage levels with a reduced working week.

Unemployment And Party Allegiance

Table 22 Party political support (a)

	currently unemployed		currently employed	
	m	f	m	f
Conservatives	1	1	3	3
Labour	5	3	3	4
S.D.P	1	2	3	2
Don't know	4	5	0	0
Total=	11	11	9	9

(a) Greenmoor households were interviewed at least 6 months prior to the general elections and were asked about their voting intentions. This may partly account for the high number of don't knows amongst households with current male unemployment in this study. Whiteside households were interviewed after the general election and were asked which party they voted for.

If there was considerable consensus about the unlikelihood of unemployment being significantly reduced in the next 10 years, respondents were far more divided about which party they regarded as having the best policies for reducing unemployment. Several trends can be discerned here. Of the 22 respondents from households with current male unemployment only 2 (both from the same household) thought the Conservatives had the best policies

to reduce unemployment. This can be contrasted with the figure of 6:20 for households with current male employment. Of the 32 respondents not to express support for the Conservatives, 26 believed lack of government spending to be one of the main causes of unemployment. These were particularly critical of the Conservative government for failing to increase expenditure in order to expand the economy and increase employment. And as we shall see below in the section on attitudes to social security, the long-term unemployed were especially critical of the hardship experienced as a consequence of inadequate SB provisions.

The 8 respondents believing the Conservative Party to have the best policies for reducing unemployment all expressed satisfaction with the government's present economic record. Aspects of economic policy often referred to with approval were:- reduced taxation in order to promote incentives to work harder and increase investment; reductions in public expenditure in an effort to promote efficiency and reduce inflation; de-regulation and privatisation, seen as improving productive efficiency; tighter controls of trade-unions. Other issues were also important in determining party support such as defence.

In terms of electoral support the following trends were apparent in this study :- a) the majority of

respondents from households experiencing long-term unemployment supported either the Labour Party or Alliance, with Labour enjoying most support, the Conservatives by far the least. b) All the 'don't knows' intended to vote for either the Labour Party or the Alliance. c) Whilst there was more support for the Conservatives amongst households with current male employment than households with current male unemployment, amongst both the former and latter households support for Labour was similar and more than for the other parties. d) There was little variation in voting behaviour according to gender - the economic circumstances of a household seemed a stronger indicator of political support for these households. e) Support for the Alliance came primarily from former Labour Party voters, with only 2 former Conservative supporters changing their allegiance. How these observations compare with other research will be considered later in this chapter.

Whilst respondents generally regarded unemployment an important issue, experience of unemployment would appear to be only part of a much wider process informing political attitudes. We should avoid apocalyptic prognoses of unemployment; attitudes and opinions forged in a long period of full employment will often be, as we have seen in relation to gender roles, deeply held, even entrenched and exercise a considerable influence on the way the



experience of unemployment is mediated. This is an important issue to which I shall return shortly.

A few further points about party political allegiance can be made briefly. As we have seen, for the majority of respondents voting intentions was based on generalised and what might be regarded totem imagery. Parties were perceived in terms of a small cluster of broad general values; respondents were seldom conversant with specific details of party programmes. So for instance, supporters of either the Labour Party or the Alliance were usually unable to differentiate between the economic policies of these two, though aware that each was willing to increase public expenditure to stimulate the economy and help the unemployed. Moreover, whilst I have concentrated mainly on perceptions of economic policy, other areas of policy, notably defence, were significant in determining party support. Political support was predicated on a complex variety of attitudes irreducible to any single variable. As Hirst (1979) and Jessop (1984) have cogently argued, an individual's attitudes to a wide range of political issues will not necessarily be consistent or belong to a unitary perspective or world-outlook. In the context of unemployment, the implications of such an observation will be considered below.

## Attitudes To Existing Government Provision For The Unemployed

### a) Social Security Provision

We have seen in Chapter 5 how 25 respondents regarded SB provision for the unemployed as inadequate, whilst 15 respondents did not. We noted how households with current long-term unemployment were much more likely than other households in this study to be critical of SB provision. Yet these simple observations do not adequately cover the complexity of views expressed. When considering present levels of SB most respondents qualified their answers with what amounted to a deserving/undeserving poor distinction, so evident in other studies (Golding and Middleton, 1982; Mack and Lansley, 1985).

This distinction contrasts the position of those unemployed "genuinely looking for work...not wanting state handouts...not fiddling...willing to work hard", with those who embrace the reverse of these attitudes. These views were widespread amongst most of the respondents and not just confined to those in secure employment. In many respects they echoed attitudes which have a long history and have been institutionalised by various Poor Laws (Jordan, 1973; Golding and Middleton, 1982; Novak, 1988). Images of the 'sturdy beggar' abound in respondents' perceptions of the unemployed, and whilst there was broad acknowledgement of 'genuine' cases of unemployment, the

majority believed there was a significant number of people "scrounging off the state". All respondents made some criticism of the SB system for allegedly failing to fairly discriminate in favour of 'genuine cases' and being far too open to abuse. Consequently, the majority of respondents were in favour of "toughening up" monitoring procedures for claims. I consider the implications of such attitudes below.

The vast majority of respondents in receipt of SB a year or more regarded SB levels too low (18:20, 10 households). Yet even households experiencing male unemployment of 5 years or more still made the deserving/undeserving distinction and argued the case for benefits to be targeted more carefully to those "genuinely worse off". One respondent, unemployed for 9 years, observed, "We have to do with next to nowt, and if you ask the Nash for help they don't want to know...it doesn't pay to be honest, next door are always on the fiddle yet they've had their whole house re-fitted on the dole. If there was less fiddling there would be more money to go round for genuine cases like us."

These qualifications notwithstanding all the above respondents felt SB levels ought to be increased. Moreover, Single Payment provisions were generally regarded as insufficient to meet 'exceptional need'.

Access to Single Payment grants was considered too complex and prohibitive, and the fact that the majority of awards were for second-hand goods was seen as extremely invidious. It was widely believed by this group that the consequence of long-term unemployment was an unacceptably low standard of living. It was not uncommon for these respondents to complain the Conservative government "...was out for the rich...and to hammer the poor".

Of the other 10 households only 3 had ever needed to claim SB, the longest claim lasting 8 months. 13 of these respondents thought current levels of SB adequate, 7 inadequate, though again qualifying their views with the deserving/undeserving poor distinction. This kind of qualification was usually made regardless of whether respondents thought SB levels to be adequate or not. So Mr. Donaldson, who has experienced unemployment for over 2 of the last 5 years, was able to state that SB levels were hopelessly inadequate, yet affirming, "...the system's spoilt by too many born and bred on the Labour Exchange." In contrast, Mr. Stevens, who had previously experienced one year of continuous unemployment believed SB rates to be "...adequate provided you do not want to throw ale all day," but was able to admit to "many genuine people not claiming what they should." The theme of poor management of finances or even fecklessness was common amongst those regarding SB levels to be adequate. Mr. Severs, who had

previously been unemployed for 18 months, stated it was to possible to cope on SB with prudent budgeting, expressing little patience with "some on the dole who are out dancing all night moaning about not having enough to get by on." Another theme common amongst this group, which fits in with the above imagery of many of the unemployed having a good time at society's expense, was that many unemployed claimants were better off than those in employment as a consequence of a too generous benefits system. As we noted, the imagery of the unemployed, or at least a section of the unemployed as work-shy, feckless and dishonest has a long history and has served to legitimate what can only be seen as punitive provisions of our Poor Laws, still evident today.

Those regarding SB levels as adequate typically argued that increases in benefit levels would reduce incentives to work. This may be contrasted with the position of most of the current long-term unemployed respondents who considered benefit levels to be inadequate but admitted to not applying for certain jobs because of low wages. This is known as the unemployment trap to which unemployed unskilled male manual workers with children are particularly vulnerable (cf. Parker, 1989). We have indicated the extreme hardship experienced the long-term unemployed, which was not always recognised by Whiteside respondents. As a consequence a section of the unemployed

was perceived as preferring to be on SB and in this context it was not uncommon for the view to be expressed that such a group "ought to be made to work." These responses were based on a lack of awareness of the extent of poverty amongst the unemployed as well, of course, on historically conditioned images of the poor.

### The Stigma Of Unemployment And Claiming Benefit

In Chapter 5 I indicated the sense of failure frequently expressed by respondents who as a result of persistently living on a low income were denied access to goods and services enjoyed by the majority of society. In a society placing considerable emphasis on conspicuous consumption as a measure of personal success, this is hardly surprising. Even when respondents were very aware it wasn't their fault for being unemployed, a strong sense of guilt was nevertheless often conveyed, of "letting the family down", which has also been reported in other research (Fagin and Little, 1984). This feeling of guilt was often compounded by the way respondents were treated by the social security system. The following type of comment was not uncommon:- "You can't cope with what they give you, so out of desperation you go to the Nash wanting help. Usually you're seen by a young clerk who doesn't have a clue about your case or what you're going through...You're treated as if you don't count for anything. You're made to wait for ages in a noisy, over-

crowded room and when they see you, the answer is usually no without being told why. You're a no-body as far as they're concerned."

As we noted, difficulties frequently arose in claims for Single Payments. The processing of claims often took 3-6 months and possibly a year or more if involving an appeal. This drew a lot of criticism from Greenmoor respondents but significantly not Whiteside who had never needed to claim such a payment. SB in general, however, was regarded by respondents from both estates as far too complex and often degrading in the way claims are processed. All respondents who had claimed a social security benefit for 6 months or more, be this SB or UB, expressed to a varying degree a sense of receiving "state-handouts". However, such a feeling was far more pronounced amongst recipients of means-tested benefits than contributory benefits, the former frequently complaining of being made to feel as if they're applying for charity.

### Advocated Reforms

There were a number of reforms generally proposed by most respondents. There was common agreement about social security provision being too complicated and needing simplification. This view was usually made as a general assertion, without any accompanying suggestion as to how this might be achieved, though there seemed universal

agreement about the need to reduce bureaucracy. So in terms of policy issues it is not easy to evaluate the possible implications of such an attitude. The desire for simplification may have a variety of political consequences, as I indicate below.

I have noted on several occasions the deserving/undeserving poor distinction held by the majority of respondents. Whilst this provided a potent influence on the way the unemployed were perceived, it was nevertheless somewhat vague in terms of quantifying who belonged to each of these categories. Respondents from households with current male employment were more pre-occupied with social security abuse, with 11 suggesting some policy measure was needed to reduce fraud, as opposed to 5 respondents from households with current male unemployment. Again, the detail of policy reform wasn't specified and suggestions ranged from increased activities of fraud squads to the tightening up of conditions of eligibility for benefits. Advocates of such measures tended to argue that the money thus 'recovered' could then be targeted to 'genuine cases'.

The most pronounced difference between households according to the current male employment status was in relation to SB levels. I indicated earlier 18 of the 20 respondents in receipt of SB a year or more (all from



households with current male unemployment) regarded SB levels as inadequate, compared to 7 respondents from households with current male employment. All of the former group argued for an increase in weekly benefit rate, with specific targeting of the long-term unemployed. It was generally felt by this group the long-term unemployed deserved to receive higher rates of benefit because of the hardship they would otherwise experience. The 7 respondents from households with current male employment expressing SB levels to be inadequate did so with considerable qualification, typically distinguishing between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor, advocating the "weeding out the fiddlers", followed by the distribution of funds thereby released to "genuine" cases. Indeed, as I have indicated, several respondents from households with current male unemployment advocated this measure as a means of 're-distribution', though only 2 of these felt this would be adequate without any accompanying increase in government spending on benefits, whereas 4 of the 7 respondents referred to above who considered SB levels inadequate thought this an appropriate remedy alone. Only 3 respondents, all from households with current male employment, believed benefits should be reduced, though in each case a deserving/undeserving poor qualification was made. 2 of these 3 lived in households never to have experienced unemployment, the other was currently employed having experienced 2 months

unemployment several years ago. I examine below possible political implications of these extremely complex attitudes to social security.

#### Government Special Employment And Training Measures<sup>(1)</sup>

In Chapter 4 I indicated 4 respondents had experience of some government scheme, 2 a T.O.P.s course and 2 a Community Programme project. Respondents with experience of T.O.P.s courses were more satisfied with their scheme than those who had done the Community Programme, even if the former were critical of the lack of opportunity to engage their skills in paid employment. Criticism of the Community Programme tended to be in terms of its poor remuneration, lack of training, and lack of meaningful work. Similar criticism was made by respondents who had not experienced these schemes, and there was a broad suspicion such schemes often existed to reduce official unemployment figures. Unemployed respondents seemed anxious to differentiate between a 'real' job and special employment and training measures.

In terms of other schemes for adults, few knew anything at all except about the Enterprise Allowance Scheme, with only 7 able to give any details about this, albeit sketchy. Without exception the unemployed men in this study rejected self-employment as an option, mainly because of lack of starter capital, but also because most

felt they did not have the necessary training or experience to undertake a business. One employed respondent knew about Enterprise Allowance through a friend who had received assistance for a year in his attempt to establish a wedding car service. According to this respondent the business failed abysmally and was doomed to do so from the start due to lack of business training and little market research. M.S.C. were criticised for failing to provide adequate help in this respect.

In discussion of government help available for the unemployed, frequent reference was made to the Youth Training Scheme. Briefly, 3 perspectives on this scheme could be identified:- a) It is a good scheme encouraging young people to acquire employment skills and become familiar with the world of work. b) Some schemes are good, others bad. The good schemes embody the features outlined in (a), the bad schemes the features in (c). c) Y.T.S. provides poor training, inadequate safety standards, exploits the young and is merely a measure to reduce official unemployment figures.

The views of respondents in relation to the above, could be broadly categorised as:- (respondents from households with current male employment expressed first) for (a) 4, 1; for (b) 10, 14; for (c) 4, 7. There appeared to be

widespread acceptance that the opportunity of apprenticeship for young people was extremely limited and as such, the government had an important responsibility to intervene and provide appropriate training. Youth unemployment was highlighted by the majority of respondents as a major problem and it is interesting that over two-thirds felt the government could be doing more to help. One problem frequently referred to was the exploitation of Y.T.S. trainees by unscrupulous employers. Tighter monitoring of schemes was widely advocated. Another recurring criticism was that Y.T.S. usually does not provide the same level of training as apprenticeships and as a consequence of the fall in apprenticeships this country now faces a serious threat of skill shortages in the future.

### The Politics Of Unemployment

So far in this chapter I have outlined the different responses in this study to a variety of issues arising out of employment, as well as indicating the significance attributed to unemployment in relation to voting intentions. I now wish to assess these responses in the context of 3 successive electoral victories nationally for the Conservatives, and address the question of the relevance of unemployment to working-class political attitudes. I wish to identify key aspects of Conservative

government policy and the extent of support from this study.

Various current government policy measures directed at the unemployed must be seen in the wider context of attempts to re-structure social and economic relations in a period of crisis for capital. A number of policy measures have been introduced to restore profitability and provide fresh opportunities to exploit new conditions of production and consumption. Privatisation and deregulation, anti-trade-union legislation, erosion of wage council powers, changes in social security benefits and adult training, are all measures calculated to produce a disciplined labour force and low wage economy. If we accept the government needs to mobilise consent for its policies within strategic sections of the working-class, we might consider the extent to which this exists in this study. An important feature of the government's policies to promote market discipline has been attempts to reduce public expenditure and I address this issue first, though with specific reference to unemployment. I then consider the implications of unemployment more broadly in influencing levels of working-class support for the Conservatives. A key component of this analysis is the contradictory nature of the functions the state must try to fulfil in capitalist society. Put simply, though noting the need to avoid reductive functionalist and

instrumentalist analyses of the state (O'Connor, 1973; Jessop, 1984; Offe, 1984), we can say the state must seek to secure favourable conditions for capitalist accumulation but also create the conditions for social harmony. I shall consider the possible contradictions in the context of unemployment below.

### The Fiscal Crisis And The Welfare State

The tendency for government expenditures to outrun revenues has been termed the 'fiscal crisis of the state' (O'Connor, 1973). This will cause concern for the capitalist state for a number of reasons. It is regarded as inflationary - the government has to 'print money' to finance budgetary deficits; it is said to 'crowd out' private investment - public investment is considered less efficient; it results in high taxation alleged to reduce incentives to create wealth; the market is considered the most efficient and equitable mechanism of production, distribution and exchange and too much state intervention will undermine this.

Moreover, as Gough points out (1983, p.160):-

'...the growing level of state expenditure and intervention interferes with the production of surplus value and profit. The growth of the 'social wage' and 'collective consumption' means that the operation of the labour market and the reserve army of labour is impaired, and the bargaining strength of the working-class increased. Unemployment benefits, family benefits, public assistance, state health and social services, housing subsidies, etc., all remove part of the real living standards of the working-class from the wage system, and

allocate this part according to some criteria of social need and citizenship.'

The present government has committed itself to the discipline of a balanced budget for the future (Financial Times, 1988), and this indeed has been its purported aim since achieving office in 1979, though paradoxically it has found it difficult to reduce public expenditure as a percentage of national income. As Hills (1987) has pointed out, this must be seen as a consequence of increased pressures on the welfare state, particularly in the areas of social security and health. Certainly there have been cuts in services but because of increased demand (i.e. high unemployment, growing number of senior citizens) public expenditure has remained at a similar level of the national income.

As several commentators have observed (O'Connor, 1973; Gough, 1979; Offe, 1984), the state embodies contradictory tendencies and while it may seek to secure favourable conditions of accumulation it is also expected to enhance social welfare. As such, it will seek to legitimate any changes in welfare expenditure. As Hall (1983, pp 21-22) has observed, 'The ideology of the radical right is less an 'expression' of recession than the recession's condition of existence. Ideological factors have effects on and for the social formation as a

whole - including effects on the economic crisis itself and how it is likely to be resolved politically.' It is beyond the scope of this study to explore the very fruitful debate provoked by Hall's views on ideological struggle, especially his concept of 'authoritarian populism', (3) but the issue of 'struggle for hegemony' (Hall, 1983, p.25) is important when we consider how the government has sought to legitimate a variety of policy measures directed at the unemployed.

### Social Security Changes

The 1986 Social Security Act introduced far reaching changes to the social security system . The government's justifications for these reforms can be summarised as:- a) the social security system is too complex; b) social security is failing to give effective support to many of those in greatest need (i.e. low income working families; c) social security too often results in the poverty trap; d) social security rules can stand in the way of the individual making their own provisions - especially in the area of pensions; the present structure of social security, particularly in the area of state pensions, fails to take account of the very substantial financial debt that we are handing down to future generations (H.M.S.O., 1985, p.1). The government claims its new reforms will simplify social security provision; target those client groups in greatest need; increase incentives



to work; reduce public expenditure and the consequent 'burden' of taxation.

These reforms have been heavily criticised and whilst it is beyond the scope of this study to analyse the diverse issues raised by opposition, it is worth noting briefly how some of these changes will affect unemployed families. The government's own figures estimate 390,000 families with male unemployment will gain from the changes, whereas 110,000 will lose. Critics of the reforms argue that increases given to some families will be at the expense of other families also in poverty. It is claimed such 'targeting' re-distributes income from one section of the poor to another but does nothing to reduce inequality in society. Moreover, the government's figures fail to take into account the money lost to unemployed families because of the abolition of single payments and additional requirements payments. As we have seen, the long-term unemployed will be hardest hit by these changes. Novak (1988) has argued that these reforms are divisive and seek to fragment working-class opposition by allocating resources on the basis of the deserving/undeserving poor distinction we have discerned in some detail earlier

The new Social Fund offers a good example of the way the above distinction continues to inform state provision for the poor. Under this new scheme the majority of

claimants qualifying for help will only do so in the form of a loan and not as before as a grant. Who will receive help will be prioritised, with healthy individuals without children unlikely to qualify. Claimants with a bad record of re-settlement of debts are also unlikely to qualify. Loans are intended to assist in budgeting for specific items and will not necessarily cover the costs of those items. We have seen in Chapter 5 the probable difficulties many unemployed families will face as a consequence of these changes. Potent throughout these provisions are images of the poor as 'feckless', 'dishonest', of the 'work-shy sturdy beggar'.

#### Adult Training Changes

A new adult training programme, detailed in the recent White Paper 'Training For Employment', (HMSO, 1988) was introduced in September 1988 integrating existing adult training schemes into a more comprehensive, unified scheme. £1.4 billion will be provided and it is expected the scheme will offer training to some 600,000 people a year. It proposes a 3 part solution to unemployment: firstly to equip the out of work with the skills to fill newly emerging jobs; secondly to re-motivate those who have lost touch with the jobs market; and thirdly the sanctions against "the significant numbers of benefit claimants" who are "not genuinely available for work" (Unemployment Unit Bulletin, 1988, p.1). The scheme

emerged particularly in response to criticisms of the Community Programme scheme, which has been condemned for failing to reach large sections of the long-term unemployed because of its part-time nature, and also for failing to provide adequate training. The new scheme is directed at 18-24 year old people who have been unemployed for 6 months or more, and also 25-50 year olds unemployed 2 years or more. All trainees will be full-time and paid between £10-12 on top of benefit.

The T.U.C. has been particularly critical of the principle of payment of allowances not being based on 'the going rate for the job', as was previous. There is considerable concern these proposals pre-figure the introduction of a system similar to 'Work-fare' operating in the U.S.A. where claimants are forced to work for their state benefits (Unemployment Unit, 1987, 1988). The tightening up of availability regulations over the past few years has compounded doubts about the government's motives. The burden of proof as to whether a claimant is genuinely available for work has shifted from the D.H.S.S. to the the claimant, a question of being guilty until proven innocent. The increasing threat of withdrawal of benefit makes claiming more difficult and stigmatising, and this has occurred against the background of benefit cuts for many claimants. This would appear to provide the

government with effective leverage to force people into low waged employment.

### Working-Class Responses To Unemployment

Hall's concept of 'authoritarian-populism' in a number of important respects over-estimates the extent of working-class support for 'Thatcherism'. The responses of working-class families in this sample to various issues raised by unemployment demonstrates this concept's fruitfulness and weaknesses. In his discussion of the government's attempts to secure hegemonic dominance he rightly focuses on its efforts to appeal to existing features of working-class ideologies to gain support for policy measures which increase the power of the state and of capital. Hall has provided valuable insights into the way this government exploits popular discontents and is able, with the help of the media, to ignite 'moral panics' as a means of justifying repressive welfare measures.

The present social security changes, for instance, appeal to the prejudice quite widespread in this study of the need to distinguish between the deserving and undeserving poor. Similar sentiments are reported in the surveys of Golding and Middleton (1982) and Mack and Lansley (1985). In the context of the present study they appeared to re-inforce prejudices held by certain respondents that current levels of SB are adequate and

that the main problem is that of budgeting. Tighter availability regulations were welcomed by some as "weeding-out" claimants not genuinely seeking work (cf Taylor-Gooby, 1985). In another sphere of policy, the new government training measures seemed to satisfy some that all is being done to equip the unemployed with relevant skills for the labour market. Certainly the attitudes of a significant number of respondents would probably suggest varying degrees of consent for such measures, though this was one issue upon which respondents tended to differ according to experience of unemployment.

Yet we also saw concern for the "genuine unemployed" amongst all sections of our respondents, and this may equally be harnessed by opposition to government measures to highlight their failure to help people living in poverty through no fault of their own. It may be possible for effective campaigns to explode the myth of the undeserving poor, to increase public awareness of the number of people living in poverty needing assistance but not receiving it. This is highly speculative but suggests the contradictory nature of the state which Hall on occasions underplays. The majority of respondents were equally concerned about the quality of training given to unemployed people as might be attested by the government's frequent changes to its training programmes in an attempt to win public support for them. Criticism of such schemes

was by no means confined to the unemployed in this study, though these were by far the most vociferous.

Hall not only devotes insufficient attention to the contradictory nature of the capitalist state (see Jessop et al, 1985), but exaggerates the decline in popularity of the traditional Keynesian welfare state. Several surveys (Mack and Lansley, 1985; Taylor-Gooby, 1985) have suggested that many areas of welfare state expenditure receive widespread support. The study by Marshall et al (1985) indicated considerable popularity for increased public expenditure to stimulate the economy. Though they also noted contradictory positions with certain advocates of such policies opposed to increased taxation. Yet the manifold possible outcomes of such contradictions are never really developed by Hall. 26 respondents in this study advocated increased public expenditure as a means of reducing unemployment and there was considerable dissatisfaction with Conservative economic policies. However, opposition did appear to be split on specific issues, and electorally. There was significant difference, for instance, in attitudes to the adequacy of current social security provisions, especially between the unemployed and those currently in employment, an attitude evident in a national social attitude survey of 1986 (Curtice, 1986). Moreover, as Jessop (1987) has elsewhere pointed out, it is evident there is a section of the

working-class who consider themselves materially better off as a consequence of Conservative policies (cf Crewe, 1987). So for instance, the Child Poverty Action Group (1988) in criticising the government's recent tax reductions for increasing inequality, recognised that reducing base rates for those in employment exacerbated inequalities between those with employment and those without. Of course, the same policies also increased inequalities between the majority of working-people and those in the upper tax bracket, and hence the possibility though not necessarily probability of increased opposition.

Electorally, opposition to the government seemed divided, with Labour enjoying a slightly superior majority to the Alliance. This is an important feature of the success of the Conservative government which may be overlooked because of undue emphasis on ideological factors (see Jessop, 1985,86,87). Crewe (1987) has pointed out that nationally more skilled manual workers voted for the Conservative Party than for the Labour Party in the 1987 general election, although the latter retained greater support amongst the unskilled and the unemployed, with Johnston et al (1988) noting regional variations in these trends. The studies by Marshall et al (1988) and Westergaard et al (1988) found that party allegiance did not change significantly amongst the unemployed, that

longer term influences such as career histories, political environment in which socialised, etc., were more likely to shape political outlook than experience of unemployment.

All respondents in this study expressed considerable concern at current levels of unemployment in this country. As we have seen, there was some variation in perceptions of causes and remedies, although there was common agreement that traditional expectations of full employment were no longer realistic, explained mainly in terms of the substitution of labour by advanced technology. There was also evidence to suggest that unemployment has re-inforced and perhaps compounded existing racist and sexist prejudices. Trade-unions on some issues came under considerable criticism, and the government's employment legislation appeared to enjoy significant support. Traditional Keynesian remedies to unemployment remained popular amongst a significant proportion of respondents, who appeared divided in terms of electoral support because of other issues, especially defence. Criticism of Conservative policies, particularly in relation to unemployment, were most pronounced amongst the long-term unemployed, though positions on specific political issues could not be simply 'read off' from employment or economic status (cf Marshall et al, 1988). Those households enjoying relatively advantaged male manual employment were divided as far as attitudes were concerned towards the



government's economic policies, but were more uniform in their views towards present social security provision, that is much less critical than the households experiencing long-term unemployment. These varied responses illustrate some of the conclusions of the much more extensive studies by Marshall et al (1988) and Westergaard et al (1988) as well as earlier work by Mack and Lansley (1985) and Taylor-Gooby (1985). working-class attitudes to unemployment are complex, should not be seen as unitary or reducible to a specific economic position, and contain numerous contradictions. The 3 successive electoral victories of the Conservative Party cannot be explained in terms of widespread working-class support for their economic policies or lack of concern for unemployment. The issues, as we have seen, are numerous and warrant judicious analysis.

## CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSIONS

### Introduction

This study has analysed working-class experiences of unemployment in a number of contexts. It has considered the implications of economic change for the structure of employment opportunities for male manual workers, being particularly concerned to identify factors determining vulnerability to unemployment. For it has been suggested (Leadbitter, 1987; Pahl, 1988) that certain sections of the workforce may be becoming marginalised or excluded from the labour market. The consequences of unemployment for the lifestyles of households was another important issue this study wanted to address. Several dimensions were explored here. Because of the material hardship often associated with unemployment (Townsend, 1979; Mack and Lansley, 1985) the circumstances of households participating in this study with experience of unemployment were elaborated to illustrate the nature of poverty amongst the unemployed. Growing concern has been expressed (C.P.A.G., 1988) about the divergence in standards of living between the employed and the unemployed, and this study was anxious to evaluate the way changes in the labour market interact with changes in social policy to influence the material conditions of the unemployed. As well as affecting a household's standard of living unemployment may also have consequences for

domestic and social relations which may be modified to varying degrees, but which in return may also mediate the experience of unemployment. The households in this study offered an excellent opportunity to explore these issues. Finally, in the context of the political success of the Conservatives over the past decade this study was concerned to consider the significance of unemployment as a political issue to different sections of the working-class and whether employment status was a good indicator of political outlook. The main conclusions are presented below.

#### Changing Patterns Of Employment

The early 1980s saw an unprecedented increase in unemployment for the post-war era. Deindustrialisation contributed to a sharp increase in unemployment of nearly 2 million at the beginning of this decade. Yet the pattern of unemployment has been uneven, certain sections of the workforce suffering disproportionately, as we have seen. As Ashton (1986) has observed, labour market segmentation assumes a multiplicity of forms, differentiating workers according to skill, industry, age, gender, ethnicity, and geographical location. This study concentrated on the implications of such change for the incidence of unemployment and structure of employment opportunities more generally for male manual workers, utilising interviews with two groups of households resident in

Darlington characterised by contrasting male career histories to illustrate some of the salient issues.

The concept of career history, as Harris et al (1987) have noted, is preferable to current employment status for several reasons when appraising unemployment. It first of all locates labour market position as a process. An important consideration in any analysis of unemployment because for the majority of the unemployed unemployment will be a temporary experience. Past labour market experience may be a significant factor determining not only how unemployment is experienced but also prospects of finding a job. Skilled workers, for instance, are more advantaged in this respect than unskilled workers. Though as the experiences of the men in this study have indicated return to employment may result in worse working conditions than previously. Unskilled workers seem particularly disadvantaged in a 'tight' labour market where there is considerable competition for jobs. Whilst the situation in Darlington was not as acute as other areas in the North-East, as the experiences of the men in this study suggest in a town dependent on traditional manufacturing industries as a staple source of employment manual workers made unemployed are likely to have difficulties finding employment immediately and even if successful will probably experience a decline in wages and working conditions. Similar results were indicated in a

recent study of a nearby town, Middlesbrough (Thames Television).

This brings us to another important advantage of the concept of career history. It allows us to understand class as a dynamic entity, subject to change and transformation. Many of the men in this study, for example, find themselves as a consequence of social and economic restructuring in a worse position in terms of labour market rewards compared to their earlier career history. A historical context to any analysis of class is therefore commended.

There is a third advantage, particularly evident not only in the conclusions of this present study but also in much larger research ventures (Marshall et al, 1988; Westergaard et al, 1988). These suggest that the responses of the unemployed to their experience will be very much shaped by attitudes forged over a period of usually regular employment, though for younger workers this may not be the case. Not only in terms of abilities to cope (or not) materially will this be relevant, but also in patterns of domestic and social relations, and in political outlook, as we shall see below.

Few of the long-term unemployed interviewed in this study thought they would secure paid employment in the

immediate future. These were typically unskilled, though not all, and had usually been employed in either the manufacturing sector or the building and construction sector. The national trends for long-term unemployment would seem to confirm this pessimistic outlook for the future, with the number of people unemployed for 5 years or more actually increasing in both relative and absolute terms in 1988.

Even the section of male manual workers who have enjoyed traditionally secure employment and high wages find themselves increasingly vulnerable to unemployment, or less secure employment conditions and poorer wages. Few men in my study regarded their employment as safe and most expressed some dissatisfaction with their present working-conditions. As Harris (1987) et al have observed, the most disadvantaged section of workers are the unskilled, though a growing number of the working-class will experience unemployment, perhaps long-term. My own study has shown how men who previously might have been described as 'affluent workers' have found themselves unemployed, sometimes for more than a year, and if subsequently securing work, this was often low paid with precarious tenure. As Clarke et al (1983) have cautioned, the term 'affluent worker' needs to be used with extreme circumspection and should be contextualised according to its historical specificity. Moreover, the men in this

study are all located within a specific labour market which, as Massey (1984) reminds us, will be differentiated from other labour markets to varying degrees according to the complex interaction of its economic, social, and political history. The concept of place, therefore, will be significant in understanding variations in class formation, which will manifest not only in different regional rates of unemployment and standards of living but also in political behaviour, a 'North-South' divide being apparent in voting patterns (Johnston, 1988).

So far I have concentrated on employment opportunities in the formal sector as this will provide the principal source of income for most households. But the informal sector may also provide access to resources to enhance standards of living in certain circumstances. My data suggests that for households in this study the loss of paid employment in the formal sector of the economy has not been compensated for by employment in the informal economy. This is a point made by Pahl (1984), who rightly refers to such factors as lack of capital equipment, reduced access to 'cheap' materials, the present structure of social security provision, etc., as explaining why the unemployed often engage in less activity in the informal sector than the employed. However, in making this point we need to be careful to realise that in certain areas of the informal economy,

especially the domestic sphere, there will probably be an intensification of work as a consequence of unemployment, an issue to which I shall shortly return.

We have noted differences in employment opportunities for male manual workers in both the formal and informal sectors of the economy. Yet we must also take into account employment opportunities for women if we are to reach an adequate understanding of the standards of living of households with male unemployment. As we have seen, because of limited opportunities for employment for women in the formal economy, together with gender constraints and restrictive social security provisions, women are often not in a position to take on the kind of employment that might compensate for the loss of male employment in a household. SB earnings rules, now Income Support, are prohibitive and often prevent households with male unemployment from supplementing their income. Women are more likely to be in paid employment when their partners are currently employed for reasons we have outlined in some detail, thus accentuating disparities in household income between the employed and the unemployed (see Pahl, 1988).

#### Unemployment And Poverty

This study suggests there are a number of factors determining a household's ability to cope with loss of



income as a result of male unemployment, significantly:- duration of unemployment; past employment experience; accumulated wealth (savings, consumer durables, etc.); size of family and stage of domestic cycle; nature and extent of family support from the wider family network and friends. It was not uncommon for the long-term unemployed in this study to have experienced considerable hardship. At the on-set of unemployment they usually had little savings, which were soon used as households found difficulty in coping on SB. Similar results are suggested by the study by Moylan et al (1984), who note that the very group most susceptible to long-term unemployment, the semi-skilled and unskilled, usually have least resources to draw upon because of a career history characterised by low wages. They also found that three quarters of the unemployed men in their study had previous experience of unemployment in the last five years. This underlines a point made earlier, that many of the unemployed who are successful in finding employment are nevertheless located in a weaker labour market position than prior to unemployment.

Many of the long-term unemployed in the present study had to cut back in basic areas of household expenditure such as food, clothing, fuel consumption. My findings illustrate the value of MacGregor's warning (1981) that in advancing the concept of relative poverty

we must be careful not to assume the disappearance of absolute poverty in this country. A number of respondents complained of the difficulties of maintaining an adequate diet, of lacking basic items of clothing, and of being unable to provide adequate levels of heating in their homes, having to cut back on an already frugal lifestyle. The long-term unemployed often had few basic consumer durables and were without basic amenities usually enjoyed by those in employment, a conclusion demonstrated clearly in a major survey on poverty in Britain in the 1980s by Mack and Lansley (1985). Townsend's (1979) concept of relative poverty is extremely important here, requiring as it does a comparison of the various standards of living of different sections of society and raising the issue of the social justice of present levels of inequality.

We noted in some detail the difficulties the long-term unemployed had coping with SB as the only source of income. When consumer durables wore out they were often not replaced, or substituted by a second-hand item paid for with a Single Payment grant. The conditions of eligibility for a Single Payment were extremely restrictive and households often did not qualify. Even when they did payments were usually inadequate to meet the cost of the items for which they were required and there was often considerable disparity between how the D.H.S.S. and claimants defined 'reasonable quality'.

The new Income Support scheme does not intend to provide any additional expenditure to meet criticisms of lack of resourcing. Indeed, the government has been accused of exacerbating deeply embedded distinctions of deserving/undeserving poor pervasive in our welfare provision, by targeting what it claims are the most needy client groups through transferring resources from one section of claimants to another. We have seen the difficulties faced by families with long-term male unemployment and how the replacement of the Single Payment system by the Social Fund will remove a vital source of help. The recent Social Security reforms go little way to resolving the poverty experienced by many unemployed.

#### Unemployment And Domestic Relations

It is important to consider not only the implications of unemployment for the standards of living for households, but also for household members individually. Unemployment potentially challenges traditional gender roles in a number of ways. Definitions of the male's role as 'breadwinner' and the female's as 'home-maker' remained potent for the majority of respondents, even if modified by the experience of male unemployment. Male unemployment usually meant the need to resort to a 'whole-wage' system of allocation of household finances, a potential source of conflict. In these circumstances women often had to budget on an extremely low income, forcing them to make economies

in a variety of ways that intensified their role as domestic manager. When men had been used to reserving part of their wages as "pocket-money" for themselves, even when the 'whole-wage' system was in operation there was usually some arrangement for part of the household income to be put aside for their personal expenditure. Conflict arose when the male's demands for personal expenditure compromised the collective needs of the household. Pahl's (1983) distinction between orchestration power and implementation power is important in this context. For though the women in this study were frequently expected to have principal responsibility for day-to-day budgeting, we should not therefore infer they enjoyed control of household finances. We have seen how women often had less money for personal expenditure than their partners and how even the definition of collective needs was sometimes subject to fraught negotiations. This illustrates issues raised by Glendenning and Millar (1988), who argue, like Pahl (1983) that analyses of poverty should go beyond the household to consider the repercussions for its constituent members. Women are not only more likely to suffer material hardship, they suggest, but greater impoverishment in terms of loss of autonomy consequent on the intensification of their role as domestic managers, commented on below.

Unemployment therefore will not only affect the way domestic finances are organised but also domestic relations. Though as Morris (1984) and McKee and Bell (1986) have observed, domestic roles are usually modified rather than dramatically changed, a process carefully circumscribed to prevent any threat to existing gender identities. Whilst there was evidence of unemployed men in my study doing more housework than when employed, the organisation of domestic tasks was often gender specific, with men doing significantly less housework than women. Unemployment often meant women having to do more work, such as shopping around for bargains, repairing clothes, washing by hand. And the presence of their partner potentially threatened their usual patterns of social contact as friends and family were sometimes reluctant to make their customary visits. However, as in the studies cited above, households experiencing male unemployment made considerable efforts to maintain similar patterns of social and domestic relations that existed when the male was employed.

### Political Responses To Unemployment

Several commentators (Hobsbawm, 1981; Gorz, 1982; Crewe, 1987; Hall, 1988) have imputed Labour's electoral defeats over the last decade to fundamental changes in the labour market and labour process, which have not only

reduced the size of the working-class because of further shifts from manual to non-manual employment, but have also created significant variation in wage levels and employment conditions within it. A section of the working-class, notably skilled workers, have gained from these changes, it is asserted, whose traditional allegiance to the Labour Party has been eroded. In contrast there has been a growing periphery of unemployed, temporary and low paid workers, the majority of whom retain their traditional loyalties to the Labour Party. Implicit in much of this debate is the assumption of increased political division within the working-class as a consequence of divergent employment opportunities.

Before considering whether there exists any relationship between unemployment and political outlook, it is salutary to re-iterate an observation made in earlier chapters. The unemployed do not constitute an homogeneous group and we should not expect a uniform response to unemployment as a political issue. Unemployment is one, albeit possibly very significant, experience in an individual's life - prior to unemployment an individual will have been immersed in a wide range of social processes which will invariably mediate the way unemployment is experienced. So analytically it would be committing a great error to impute a simplistic correlation between unemployment and political outlook.

Indeed, even if we were to specify a correlation more broadly between labour market experience and political outlook, we would be in danger of crude economism. Marshall et al (1988, p.222) make a similar observation when contrasting political attitudes of the unemployed and employed:-

'... deprivation and strain do not induce among the unemployed a distinct and common set of preferences for policies designed to ease their lot... the unemployed show preference for policies designed to ameliorate their immediate situation, but there is no general disaffiliation from the world views of the majority, no obvious wholesale change in ideology to accompany the loss of occupation'.

Having made these basic qualifications, there does appear to be some relation between the nature of unemployment experienced and attitudes to specific political issues, as suggested by Marshall et al above. So for example, respondents dependent on SB for more than a year were far more likely to consider current social security provision inadequate than respondents who have never needed to claim SB or only for a short period. This is consistent with research findings elsewhere (Golding and Middleton, 1982; Mack and Lansley, 1985; Taylor-Gooby, 1985), which suggest that because of their experience of dependency on social security benefits the unemployed are more likely to express dissatisfaction than the employed with existing provision. And in this study they were usually far more critical of government special employment

and training measures. There was more opposition to the present government amongst respondents from households with experience of long-term male unemployment, and clearly the experience of pronounced social and economic disadvantage was a significant influence. Yet, there was similar support for the Labour Party between households with and without current male employment and on a wide range of issues there was a similar pattern of responses though not uniform. Westergaard et al (1988) suggest that it is not so much unemployment which differentiates the working-class in terms of party political support but skill, and even then the non-manual/ manual divide will be far more significant in producing differences in opinion profiles than the skilled/ unskilled manual worker divide. And as Johnston et al (1988) have pointed out, class cleavages will vary spatially. The present study has been concerned to explore the attitudes of a group of working-class households resident in a town that traditionally has been a Labour/Conservative marginal constituency, with Labour enjoying slightly more success at district council level. The views of working-class households in a town of high employment in the South of England may well differ. There is certainly a need for more comparative research as a great deal of current work on employment issues has concentrated on areas of high unemployment.



There was broad agreement amongst all the households in this study that current levels of unemployment were likely to remain high for the immediate future. Marshall et al (1988) found similarly, with less than 20 per cent of their respondents believing that unemployment would ever fall below one million. There was a general feeling that full employment as understood in the immediate post-war era was no longer a realistic expectation. It was felt new developments in technology have in certain areas of production resulted in the displacement of labour by machinery and that this was a trend that would continue (see also Mann,1986).

Other causes of unemployment most commonly cited were trade-unions, and lack of public expenditure. Attitudes to trade-unions were often mixed, so though unions were often blamed for contributing to present levels of unemployment, there was also a broad consensus they were important in order to protect wage levels and working conditions. We might describe such attitudes as economistic but as Westergaard and Resler argue (1976), the distinction between economism and 'politicism' is not necessarily straight forward, a wage dispute for example might easily take on a political dimension in a number of contexts.

What was clearly apparent in this study was that the majority of respondents believed lack of government

spending to be a significant cause of present levels of unemployment. As indicated in the last chapter, a significant number of respondents in surveys by Mann (1986) and Marshall et al (1988) were similarly critical, advocating increased government expenditure in a number of areas of the economy as a solution to unemployment. Though attitudes were sometimes contradictory, with opposition expressed by supporters of such expenditure to increases in taxation. This nevertheless would suggest that reports of the death of the post-war 'Keynesian consensus' have been somewhat over-stated, though as I have indicated respondents often related to political programmes in terms of 'totem imagery' (c.f. Heath et al, 1985) rather than detailed policy analysis, identifying with what they believed to be the basic principles a party stood for. The continued support for traditional Keynesian measures evident in various surveys cited above would suggest that both right-wing and left-wing commentators have exaggerated the extent of their so-called break-down.

Nevertheless, the present government can reasonably be seen to be seeking to re-define the nature of consensus politics and establish hegemony for ideas that legitimate the market as the main arbiter of production, distribution and exchange. A process that can only be properly understood in the framework of economic re-structuration nationally and internationally. In the context of

unemployment, I have argued the government has attempted to seize upon populist prejudice (i.e. deserving/undeserving poor distinction) to justify changes in social security provision for reasons outlined in Chapter 7. These legislative changes must be viewed against the backcloth of broader attempts to re-organise the state and secure favourable conditions for capital accumulation by weakening labour. Yet high unemployment is a serious symptom of this re-structuration showing little sign of disappearing. Responses to the issue will remain complex and varied and cannot be reduced to any single explanatory variable. This alone could warrant our interest as social scientists. But far more important is the hardship caused to many families by unemployment. This should be carefully documented, the issues it raises fully debated, and not forgotten.

## FOOTNOTES

### INTRODUCTION

- (1) Department of Employment Gazette, October 1986. For a critical assessment of the way these figures underestimate the true extent of unemployment, see 'The Jobs Gap: Measuring Hidden Unemployment' (Unemployment Unit, 1986)
- (2) For a useful analysis of the economic and social costs of unemployment, see Sinfield and Frazer (1985).
- (3) The main issues of this approach are summarised in Friedman, M. and Friedman, R. (1962; 1980).

### CHAPTER ONE

- (1) Much of what follows is based upon analysis appearing in the Unemployment Unit Briefing, March 1986 and Winter 1986. For the opposite argument that official figures exaggerate the extent of unemployment, see D. Lipsey, Sunday Times, 6. 11. 83. In reaching his conclusions Lipsey ignores many of the categories discussed by the Unemployment Unit, and somewhat arbitrarily excludes groups from his calculation such as school leavers,

or the temporary unemployed (unemployed less than a month).

## CHAPTER TWO

- (1) These figures do not correspond with the Department of Employment's official unemployment figures which in 1981 were based on unemployed people registered with careers offices and job centres.
- (2) This figure does not include Community Programme Places.
- (3) This represents a very crude estimation based on basic rates advertised at Darlington Job Centre. In addition to basic rates, of course, bonuses, enhanced rates and over-time are sometimes paid, which were usually not specified in detail. Also, for a significant number of jobs advertised the wage rate was not specified but negotiable.

## CHAPTER FOUR

- (1) Figures are only available for the electoral wards of which Greenmoor is part, though the two are almost coterminous.
- (2) For a discussion of the use of short-term contracts different industries see Atkinson and Menger (1986).
- (3) An example of how unemployment may affect the domestic cycle.

- (4) In 1986 the D.H.S.S. tightened its interpretation of its availability rules. These provide that to qualify for benefit a claimant must be able to demonstrate that s/he is actively seeking full-time employment. As part of the D.H.S.S.'s 'revised' interpretation, claimants may be required to indicate in more detail what they are doing to secure work, how far they are prepared to travel, what wage are they prepared to accept, are they in an immediate position to accept employment. Whereas previously claimants would usually only be questioned if they had refused a suitable job, they can now be questioned regardless if there has been a job offer or not.
- (5) I use the term informal economy broadly here to refer to the production and possibly, though not necessarily, exchange of goods and services outside the sphere of formal employment. Formal employment is distinguished by legally constituted contractual agreements between employer and employee, buyer and seller, as well as adherence to the responsibilities imposed on such transactions by law (i.e. payment of taxes). The black economy is distinguished by economic activities which technically are subject to the aforementioned legal constraints but which avoid them, usually through non-payment of taxes.
- (6) Harris et al (1987) suggest this contrast should be

extended to include the 'non-continuous' unemployed as otherwise the extent of polarisation will be exaggerated.

#### CHAPTER FIVE

- (1) As Kincaid (1973) has observed the Earnings-Related scheme by its very nature discriminated against low paid workers as it was based on contribution levels (and hence amount of earnings) paid in a previous year.

#### CHAPTER SIX

- (1) Respondents were asked a general question about how much income each partner was allocated for personal expenditure.

#### CHAPTER SEVEN

- (1) From September 1988 the Government's new adult training scheme has been in operation - see later section.
- (2) For a consideration of Hall's development of this concept see Hall (1983; 1985) and Jessop et al (1984; 1985; 1987).

- (3) For a useful critique see Walker A. and Walker C. (eds, 1987).

## APPENDIX 2

- (1) Berthoud estimated for 1985 the average family received the equivalent of £3.20 a week in Single Payments (The Social Security White Paper: A Plain Person's guide, Lister R. and Oppenheim C., C.P.A.G.). Because of the size of the Fulton family we might reasonably to have expected them to have claimed more.



APPENDIX 1A INTERVIEW SCHEDULE (first)

INTRODUCTION

- a) family composition all those living at home  
name age employment status comments

2 EMPLOYMENT RECORD OF MALE PARTNER

- a) List the jobs you have had in the last 10 years and the length of employment in each. Provide a brief description of your responsibilities. Also reasons for changing employment.
- b) How were each of these jobs acquired? i.e. through a friend, relative, job centre, newspaper, calling on employer, etc.
- c) (if presently employed) Do you consider your present job secure? (i.e. unlikely to be made redundant in next 5 years)
- d) List any periods of unemployment, indicating their duration.
- e) (if presently unemployed) Why did you leave your last job? i.e. redundancy, dismissed, left voluntarily, etc.
- f) (if presently unemployed) Would you be prepared to leave the area to find employment?
- g) (if presently unemployed) Have you applied for any jobs in the last year? If yes, what was the outcome?

h) (if presently unemployed) How do you look for employment? i.e. by asking friends or relatives; visiting the job centre; newspaper advertisements; contacting employers direct, etc.

i) How far would you be prepared to travel to work each day?

j) Have you any experience of government special employment and training measures? i.e. T.O.P.s, Community Programme scheme, etc.

### 3 EDUCATION AND TRAINING

a) At what age did you leave school?

b) Did you leave with any qualifications?

c) Have you had any training or gained any qualifications since leaving school?

d) Is there any training you feel you would like to do that might help your job prospects?

### 4 EMPLOYMENT RECORD OF FEMALE PARTNER

a) List any jobs you have had during the last 10 years, including their duration and a brief description of responsibilities.

b) If not presently in employment, are you seeking paid work? If no, why not? (i.e. domestic responsibilities; SB regulations)

## 5 DOMESTIC AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

a) (if presently unemployed) How would you describe a typical day?

b) (this question is devised to see whether male unemployment has/did affect the way household tasks are divided) For each of the following indicate how often the task is performed and by whom?

:- house-cleaning, washing and ironing, child-minding, shopping (general provisions), shopping (general household items), cooking, washing-up, house decoration (internal), house decoration (external) household repairs (internal and external), repairs (clothes) gardening.

c) To what extent has/did unemployment influenced who does household tasks?

d) (this question relates to leisure activities)

Has/did unemployment in any way affected the following: how often you (together or separately) visit a pub, club, cinema, restaurant, etc. (get each partner to describe leisure patterns).

e) Are any members of your (wider)family or friends unemployed? If so, for how long? What kind of work did they do?

f) What kinds of problems has/did unemployment cause you. Are there any positive ways unemployment has affected your lives?

## 6 POLITICAL ATTITUDES

- a) How many people do you think are unemployed today?
- b) What do you think are the main causes of unemployment?
- c) Do you feel any political party can significantly reduce the level of unemployment in the next 10 years?
- d) Which party, if any, has the best policies to create more employment?
- e) What kinds of policies do you think are needed to reduce unemployment?
- f) Are employers doing enough to help the unemployed?
- g) Are trade-unions doing enough to help the unemployed?
- h) There are a variety of state benefits to help the unemployed i.e. SB, UB. Do you think these are adequate?
- i) Is there anything you feel could be done to improve the present social security system?
- j) There now exists a number of government special training and job creation schemes such as T.O.P.s, Y.T.S., Community Programme, Enterprise Allowance. What do you think of such schemes?
- k) What kind of help do you think should be offered to the unemployed?
- l) Which party will you vote for in the next general election (or last election)? Why? Have you always supported this party?

7 FINANCE (optional, stress confidentiality)

- a) What is your present total weekly income?  
(list all sources of income)
- b) What level of wages have you earned in previous employment?
- c) Do you have any other sources of income i.e. occasional work?
- d) (addressed to male partner) What would be the minimum wage you would be prepared to work for? (if employed ask to speculate as if unemployed)
- e) This series of questions is addressed to households to have experienced some form of male employment:-
- i) what was your level of savings on last becoming unemployed?
- ii) what were the main financial problems you experienced when unemployed?
- iii) are (were) there any items you are spending less on as a result of unemployment? (list the following: clothing, food, household furniture, household equipment, household fixtures, bedding, fuel, leisure, holidays, other)
- iv) Have you ever applied to the D.H.S.S. for any kind of help in addition to your weekly payment? (i.e. Single Payment) If yes, were you satisfied with the help you received?
- v) Have you ever received help form family, friends, some

other source as a consequence of unemployment?

vi) Ask general question to establish proportion of household income devoted to personal expenditure and collective needs. Establish whether unemployment in any way influenced the pattern of household finance.

APPENDIX 1B INTERVIEW SCHEDULE (second interview)

1 GENERAL

- a) Establish whether any change in family composition since last interview.
- b) (addressed to each partner) Has your employment situation changed since we last met?
- c) Have there been any significant change in your circumstances since we last talked?

2 POLITICAL ATTITUDES

- a) Since we last met, do you think the unemployment situation has changed in any significant way?
- b) For whom, if anyone, did you vote in the general elections. Why?
- c) What do you think of the present government?
- d) Do you think unemployment figures will continue to fall?
- e) What are your views on recent changes to the social security system?

### 3 FINANCE

- a) Since we last met would you say your standard of living has improved, remained the same, or got worse?
- b) What is the current level of your household income? (state all sources)
- c) (addressed to household with male unemployment) In what ways has the introduction of Income Support affected the level of your weekly benefit?
- d) Which of the following items do you possess?  
:- car, colour television, video, music centre, electric washer, cooker, Hoover, refrigerator (specify condition of each)
- e) Have there been any improvements to your home since we last met? (i.e. decoration, alterations, repairs, new carpets, new furniture, etc.)
- f) Are there any improvements you would wish to make to your present home?
- g) Approximately how much do you spend each week on:- food, leisure, housing costs, savings, other.



## APPENDIX 2 A CONTRAST OF WORKING-CLASS LIFESTYLES:-

### 2 CASE STUDIES

#### Mr. And Mrs. Fulton

Mr. and Mrs. Fulton have 4 children aged 16, 14, 10. and 7 years of age. Mr. Fulton, aged 38 years, has now been unemployed for 10 years and holds out no hope of finding full time employment in the immediate future. Living for so many years on SB has left the family "living from day to day...always worrying about the next bill...never having enough for even the basics."

Mr. Fulton is unskilled and has had 4 jobs in the past, 2.5 years as a trainee baker (training unfinished), 6 years as an infantryman in the army, 1 year as general help with Butlins, 3 years as a pipe-bender. He lost his last job because of redundancy and has been unemployed since. Previously he had had no problems changing jobs or finding "work on the side". Apart from casual work in a bakery several years ago, the only source of income for the Fultons has been SB. Since last interviewed Mr. Fulton has attended a one week Re-Start course and subsequently commenced a Job Training Scheme with a small engineering firm, which he is due to finish in 3 months time. He regards the scheme "a complete waste of time" and feels he has been used by the firm as a "skivvy" being given very little opportunity of developing new skills. Mrs. Fulton

was employed as a shop assistant prior to marriage, but subsequently has had no paid employment.

The Fultons receive £115 Income Support and £22 Housing Benefit. This compares with £105 SB and £24 HB they received prior to the changes of April 1988. They spend approximately £70 per week on food, which for a family of 6 which includes 2 teenagers allows for a very meagre diet. They can afford a "decent cut" of meat only once a week and usually depend on what Mrs. Fulton describes as "butcher's scraps" (cheap cuts of meats) for the main part of their diet. They are currently repaying a £140 fuel debt and can only afford to heat part of the house during the winter. This, Mr. Fulton believes, has contributed to the dampness within the home which he feels makes his family more prone to illness in cold weather. The family is seldom able to afford new clothes and when they can brand names are usually avoided in preference to much more inexpensive (though often of much cheaper quality) merchandise usually purchased at the local outdoor market or "tat shops". Though the Fultons admit to often clothing themselves with items acquired at jumble sales, whenever possible they try to purchase new clothes for their children. This is often difficult and seeing their children "having to do with second-best" is a cause of great distress and anger. Mr. and Mrs. Fulton go out together one night per week, with usually about £10 to

spend. The family has not had a holiday for 12 years. Given their struggle to secure even basic necessities this is hardly surprising.

The Fulton's home has little furniture, which is mainly second-hand acquired through Single Payment grants. They have few basic amenities, for instance their gas cooker is more than 10 years old and because of a fault loses a great deal of heat (thereby increasing fuel costs), as well as accumulating irremovable unsightly stains over the years. They have no refrigerator or electric washer and only an old "cheap" electric Hoover which "picks up little dirt". As a consequence Mrs. Fulton, who does most of the housework, finds she has to work extremely hard to maintain even minimal standards and often gets depressed because her home "always looks shabby" despite her efforts. The carpets in the house are ill-fitting, frayed and need badly to be replaced. Areas in the kitchen and the hallway as well as 2 bedrooms have no floor covering, again contributing to loss of heat and therefore increased fuel bills. It is easy to understand why Mr. and Mrs. Fulton do not consider their home fit to live in and feel aggrieved by the lack of assistance from the D.H.S.S..

The Fultons do not regard the £10 a week increase in income support enough to sufficiently alleviate their

position, lacking as they do even basic amenities. They were sharply critical of the 'old' Single Payment system for not providing adequate assistance, yet felt the new Social Fund was "farcical" for expecting people on low incomes to take out loans for items previously available through a grant.<sup>(1)</sup> They do not foresee their situation improving in the immediate future, and are extremely critical of the government, supporting the Labour Party if objecting to its defence policies and perceived extremism.

Mr. And Mrs. Thomas

The Thomases, both aged 38 years, have 3 children aged 2, 7 and 10 years. Mr. Thomas, a television engineer, has been with the firm since leaving school. His weekly wages are on average between £160-200, depending on overtime which is usually quite available. When first interviewed Mrs. Thomas was working 12-18 hours a week in an off-licence. She has recently secured employment as a part-time wages clerk (24 hours a week) with the local authority, with a net wage of £60 a week. When she works her mother looks after her children. Because of his trade Mr. Thomas has easy access to "jobs on the side", there are always "family or friends or someone who knows family or friends who wants a job doing". Taking into account child benefit, though not "fringe benefits" associated with employment, the combined net income per week of the Thomases is £260. Mr. Thomas also has access to a company

car and is able to purchase a range of electrical equipment at discount prices.

Their home is well furnished and carefully planned to suite their personal tastes. They have lived there for 5 years and have made considerable changes to its structure and appearance (e.g. the kitchen area has been extended to include a large breakfast bar; a central wall has been removed downstairs to combine 2 rooms which now may be utilised either as a single or double living area; a new stone fire-place has been built; and they plan to build an extension to create an additional bedroom and playroom for the children). They possess a wide range of capital equipment as well as leisure amenities. Because of the level and security of their income they have good access to varied credit facilities which they readily admit to using. So for instance, their home has been re-mortgaged to build an extension; a bank loan was secured to purchase a new car; their washing machine was bought through a credit sales agreement; Mrs. Thomas regularly uses her mother's catalogue to buy clothing for herself and family. Needless to say, clothes are bought new and present no problem. They are able to maintain a diet they wish. Mr. Thomas has £30 a week pocket money and Mrs. Thomas £20. They enjoy a foreign holiday each year and are about to go to Rhodes for 3 weeks.

Neither partner knew anything about the recent Social Security changes, apart from the very general fact "that some would be better off and some worse". They believed current levels of Social Security benefits were adequate, though suggesting the elderly and disabled could be helped more. Whilst welcoming the government's "tough stance on unions" and recent tax reductions "for working people" both Mr. and Mrs Thomas condemned the government for being "...too much out for the rich... attacking the health services...ignoring the problems of the North and places like it." They felt the Labour Party had "not kept up with the times..was too much in the pockets of the unions...would put the country's defences at risk." Both Mr. and Mrs. Thomas had voted for the Alliance in the 1987 general election.

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