

Chapter 1: My Career Gone

Footnote: Welfare

Most so-called civilised states provide some form of payment to those who do not have any independent source of income. How much they get, however, depends on the attitude of the many to the few who are denied the opportunities which most are given.

What's In a Name?

The different names given to this payment from time to time reflect the current social attitude to those who receive it.

Welfare: When the whole concept of the welfare state was born out of the mass poverty generated by the industrial revolution, the subsistence paid in money or in kind to those in need took the name: *welfare*. This is still the generic name by which it is universally known. I believe that in other countries this basic survival payment is known by other names. The most universal is, however, still *welfare*, but bearing in mind its miserly magnitude, I cannot imagine anybody ever *far*ing well on it!

The 'Social': When I first became unemployed this payment was commonly known as *Social Security*, or colloquially simply as *the Social*. It was viewed as a safety net against destitution. It reflected an attitude that every human being should be protected from starvation and homelessness. As such, anybody who was deemed to need it received it.

Income Support: Later the name of the state subsistence payment was changed to *Income Support*. The idea was that everybody, no matter who they were or whatever their means, was obliged to try to obtain an income through their own initiative. However, if the *free-market worth* of their labour were not sufficient for them to subsist, then the state would top it up or *support* it with an extra payment. The attitude of society-at-large was that everybody needed - and should by some means receive - an income sufficient for the purpose of sustaining their lives. However, in my case, as I suspect for most, the term 'support' was a misnomer. It did not merely support my income: it was my income.

Job-Seeker's Allowance: Later still, the name was changed again to *Job-Seeker's Allowance*. This reflected a hardening of social attitude. This name implied that everybody had an obligation to find paid work and that the payment was specifically to meet the expenses of seeking that paid work. If any recipient found himself for any reason unable to convince the relevant authority that he was actively seeking work then the payment was stopped. It reflected the hardening attitude that if one were not *seen to be* seeking paid work - for any reason - then one had no right to live.

Whatever name may be placed upon it for political ends, this basic payment made to an individual in need by the state is for the purpose of providing that person with the food, clothing and shelter required to ensure his continued biological existence. It is to enable him to subsist. Future governments will doubtless change the name again and yet again. Throughout this book, I wanted to refer to it using a neutral term like *state subsistence*. Although this term best describes what the

payment actually is, this term would not be widely and immediately recognised. Therefore, reluctantly, I have decided to refer to it by the term by which it is still most widely known throughout the world today: *welfare*.

Additional Payments

This base-level state subsistence payment - whatever politically emotive name it may go under from time to time - is not the only subsistence payment made to individuals by the state. Those who were permanent employees of an employer before becoming unemployed receive an additional payment called *unemployment benefit*. But only for a short time (about 39 weeks at the time of writing in 1999). I never received this because prior to unemployment I was self-employed for 15 years. Other people receive other payments to 'compensate' for disabilities and other circumstances.

The State: Our Great Benefactor

All the different kinds of state subsistence payments are referred to collectively as *benefits*. The implication is that the state is the needy individual's benefactor. It sees itself as the bestower of undeserved gifts upon the poor, who as a result become morally indebted to it - and hence collectively to its employed tax-paying workforce.

Why Does It Provide Subsistence?

Political propaganda apart, what is the real reason why the state provides for the poor within its borders? Why does it court the disapproval of its voting majority by re-directing money contributed by its hard-working tax-payers to sustain the lives of those of us who do not work? The answer is that providing subsistence for the poor is in the majority's economic and physical self-interest.

Governed by the rules of capitalist free-market economics, no *single* employer in this country - be they individual or corporate - has any legal or 'secularly moral' obligation to employ me. As a direct consequence, all the employers of this country - be they individual or corporate - have no *collective* obligation to employ me. And for the past 10 years they have duly exercised that 'right'. In the same way, no single individual or company has any obligation to buy from me any product or service I may be able to offer to sell them. Consequently, the individuals and companies of this country together have no collective obligation to buy anything I may be able to offer them. And for the past 10 years they have duly exercised that 'right'.

Since I have no direct means (such as land or capital) by which to transform my labour directly into my needs of life, I am left solely with the following options:

- lie down with my family and watch them starve to death
- acquire our needs of life through crime and violence
- receive subsistence payments with which to buy our needs

There are bio-social rules built into the human life-form which inhibit the first option. No man is able to sit by and watch his wife and children starve to death. No matter how short-lived the results may be, he is duty-bound by nature to employ *any means* to prolong the lives of his wife and children, no matter by how little.

Governments well realise that, within a land of plenty, 5 million people are not simply going to lie down and die quietly in order not to disturb the peace of an affluent income-receiving majority. Society pays subsistence to its poor to avoid precipitating the inevitable violence which would otherwise result. Providing subsistence to the poor is an act of self-preservation, not charity.

The *amount* of the subsistence payment confirms this motive. It is enough to sustain its recipient's biological existence, but little else. It is certainly not enough to enable him to function adequately within the socio-economic environment within which he is immersed. He has no freedom of movement either economically or legally. He cannot afford to interact and mix socially or otherwise. The resulting poverty in effect grid-locks him into a state of isolation and inaction. He simply cannot move.

How Is The Amount Worked Out?

To keep the peace with its self-interested voting majority, a government's prime objective is to keep their expenditure of the tax-payer's 'hard-earned' money on subsistence payments to the poor as low as possible. On the other hand, it must keep the payments high enough to prevent the number of poor people who become forced to resort to violent [crime](#) in order to acquire their needs from exceeding manageable limits. It is a delicate balance whose precise mechanism is little understood by those who find themselves with the task of maintaining it.

I once wrote to my [Member of Parliament](#) asking how the amount of the payment was calculated. I asked what things were considered as essential to a family's basic survival during unemployment and how much money the Government deemed necessary for each item in order to arrive at the total amount for the subsistence payment.

With his reply he sent me a copy of a rather old and nebulous Government paper which contained various reasonings and proposals about how the amount *ought* to be worked out. The items considered seemed to be out of the 1930's. For example it debated how many candles a family would need for lighting.

He also enclosed a reply to my question which he had raised on my behalf with the relevant Government Minister. The Minister wrote in reply that the Government did not wish to dictate to people how they should spend their 'benefit' and that each recipient was free to divide up his money how he liked and spend it on whatever he wanted.

I somehow think that this is not an answer to my question. I can see only two possible reasons for giving me such a non-answer:

- either the Government has never systematically considered what is necessary for basic survival in this country,
- or the basis on which it calculates the amount is something they do not want people to know about.

I have tried my best [to allocate the amount received](#) to the most pressing needs of my family. But I find it impossible to fit all my family's basic needs into this amount.

Field-Testing of DSS Rules

Before I release computer software, I test it exhaustively with all possible types and ranges of input data. I document my testing thoroughly. Therefore, what I would like to see is the original report by those Civil Service operatives who, on behalf of the Government, personally conducted upon themselves the validation field-testing of the rules according to which my received level of state subsistence was calculated. Somehow I doubt very much whether anybody in so-called authority ever conducted such a test. They simply haven't got what it takes.

In 1991, my 9 year old son worked his way up in a local football team to become centre forward. He was good at it. He came back very upset one Saturday saying that he had been moved to left back. It transpired that the reason his coach had done this was to show the forwards what the game looked like from the point of view of the defence so that they would develop informed expectations of their defenders. I notice in television documentaries on the army that part of the training of young officers involves their being placed under the command of ruthless sergeants under strenuous tests of endurance. Thus they become qualified to command those who will later be under them to do likewise.

Some years ago, the Prime Minister, John Major, claimed that he knew what it was like to be unemployed. He thought this somehow qualified him to govern the unemployed and tell them what to do. As I understood it, he was a teenager at the time he experienced his unemployment. I am his age. When I was 16, I did not have a job, but the idea of signing on never occurred to me. A teenager supporting himself is a world away from a middle aged man supporting an established family and home.

The unemployed, although a minority, are now and will remain a significant sector of those the government governs. I challenge those in government to demonstrate their qualification and fitness to govern the unemployed by voluntarily limiting their family's expenditure throughout the 12 days of next Christmas (which ever year you are reading this) to the [£1.69 per person per day](#) (1994 value) we will be living on.

Sting in The Tail

Having set subsistence to such an indefensible level, one would have thought that the government would guarantee that nobody could ever be forced to live on less. Not so! There are 4 phenomena which have from time to time subjected my family to having to live on *far less* than 'what the law says' we need to live on. These 4 phenomena are:

1. clerical [bloody-mindedness](#) in the application of rules
2. clerical ignorance of benefit rules
3. real [incompatibilities between benefit rules](#)
4. and the ever-lurking administrative cock-up

The second is freely admitted among operatives at the Jobcentre and Benefit Offices. They result in people being denied benefit to which they are legally entitled. Those who are thus deprived have neither the knowledge nor the means to be able to challenge such decisions. They would not even be aware that there was anything to challenge.

Sometimes alone, sometimes [in combination](#), these 4 phenomena can jettison a family into a level of poverty which cannot officially exist. But it does. I am a direct witness to the fact. Not merely as an observer, but as a sufferer.

What 'Welfare' Really Is

Under any true system of moral reasoning, "Welfare" is a politically loaded term. It portrays the State as a philanthropic benefactor, who gives alms to its undeserving poor, paid for by money it has extracted through taxation from its meritorious hard-working tax-payers. As such. the name implies that this payment is something that it is not.

I am able and willing to work. I have significant skills. But I am denied the means to apply them. In other words, I am unwillingly and forcibly excluded from participating in the economy. I am denied

the opportunity to apply my skills to the necessary and sufficient economic resources for turning my efforts into my needs of life.

Consequently, from my position and view-point, the money I receive should more rightly be regarded as an "Exclusion Charge", levied by me upon the State (and thereby upon those whose interests it really serves), in lieu of the opportunity and use of resources that I am denied. And I think that, for this, I should be charging considerably more than I am currently able to do.

[Parent Document](#) | ©Apr 1994 Robert John Morton

© This content is free and may be reproduced unmodified in its entirety or as "fair usage" quotations that are attributed as follows: " - [article name] by Robert John Morton <http://robmorton.20m.com/>"