

BEHIND THE NEWS 1

‘Happy Families?’: Single Mothers, the Press and the Politicians

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FOR THOSE OF US who have been following how lone parents are represented in media and political debates over the last few years, the shift was all too apparent. By Spring 1997, the political scapegoating of single mothers as being responsible for tearing apart the moral fabric of society had become less frequent; tabloid headlines which screamed ‘family breakdown’, ‘scroungers’ and ‘welfare benefit crisis’ appeared less often; and many politicians had started to project themselves as, at the least, concerned about the welfare of lone parents and their children. Surprising really, that is, until we remember the backdrop—the UK General Election and 1.3 million UK lone parent voters. By April 1997, a growing backlash against the more extreme and pathologising accusations against single mothers had rendered explicit vilification unacceptable. To pull votes a different sort of language had to come into play—one which didn’t risk turning off the electorate but would still allow a freezing or cutting of welfare spending on lone parent families. Since it was now politically inexpedient to engage in vitriolic attack, there emerged a new discourse—one which reappropriated and redefined lone parents as chief targets of government aid. Close scrutiny of the texts circulating from 1992 to the time of the General Election offers insights of how policy agendas, political rhetoric and news interweave to construct a definition of lone parents which bears little resemblance to how they may see themselves.

Discourses of Vilification—The Early 1990’s

1993 was the year in which the pathologising of single mothers reached its peak, strategically exploited to initially usher in the freezing of one-parent benefit by the Tories. It also paved the way for a proposal to scrap lone parent premium two years later (Conservative Party Budget, November

1996). To some extent the ground had been laid much earlier. Rhodes Boyson MP, way back in 1986, had condemned single parents as ‘evil’ in having made ‘their case so well they have expanded their subsidies from the public purse from some £15 million in 1960 to £1 billion in 1983’.¹ By the early

1990s, a frenzy of newspaper reports spread and heightened moral panic over the supposed splitting of our societal seams, and as press headlines asserted 'Single Parents Cripple Lives',² it was women bringing up children on their own who were seen as culpable. When two ten year old boys were charged with the murder of the toddler James Bulgar, the issue frequently forefronted in the media was that each came from a 'broken home'. Their mothers were smeared in the press:

Mrs Thompson worked as an office cleaner until two years ago when she got pregnant again by another man, who also left her... When the children would be left sitting on the red wall outside the house too long, one of the neighbours would call the police to go and get her out of the 'Top House' [pub].³

The breakdown of nuclear family life, single mothers and juvenile crime became inextricably interwoven into a text of convenient cause-and-effect:

Following the brutal murder of two-year old James Bulgar, we have been gripped by a rare mood of moral introspection, and we must not let the moment pass without answering the questions we have begun to ask. The narrow question concerns juvenile crime. But it belongs within the wider context of childhood and the family in Britain today. The facts are grim. Three out of ten children are born outside marriage. One in five is brought up in a one-parent family.⁴

The reporting of the Bulgar incident thus materialised into yet another attack on single mothers for undercutting family life. The voice of moral outrage characterised lone parenthood as swamping Britain

by a tide of social irresponsibility and fecklessness. Riding high on this wave of scare-mongering, the then Home Secretary Michael Howard warned that the rise in single parents threatened the ideal of the traditional family,⁵ this, despite the fact that in 1993 only 17% of British families with children under 18 were one-parent families.⁶ As New Right ideologies of the family started to dominate public discourse, the plan to pave the way for dramatic cuts in welfare benefit meant that more strategic attacks were needed to home in on those lone parents who were receiving most state support. And so, at the Conservative Party Conference in 1993 Peter Lilley attacked young never-married mothers as 'benefits-driven' and 'undeserving' compared to those who had experienced a more traditional relationship:

A year ago I told you my goal to close down the something-for-nothing society ...the third main area of rising spending is on lone parents... there are now 1.3 million lone parents... many find themselves lone parents against their will—widows, divorced and separated people struggle alone but often successfully to bring their children up well... they deserve not blame but support... however the fastest growing group are those who never married... since the sixties their numbers have risen seven-fold because throughout that period it has been 'politically incorrect' to uphold the traditional family as an ideal... earlier this year I decided that it was time to break that taboo.

In fact, in 1991 although 30.2% of all births in England and Wales were out of wedlock compared to 11.8% in 1980, the proportion of such births registered by both parents rose from 50% to 74% in 1991. Moreover, more than half of these 'out-of-

wedlock' births were registered by both parents living at the same address.⁷ Even when this *was* recognised, it was argued that co-habiting couples shouldn't expect to be treated as 'single' recipients of state aid. Furthermore, lone parents were blamed for not only increasing the welfare burden ('Wedded to Welfare?'; 'Do they want to marry a man or the state?')⁸ but for additionally cultivating welfare dependency in their children, and hence a new 'under-class' who would drain the public purse. As moral indignation rampaged, disturbing strategies of shaming, ostracism, and more stringent state control were called for to force women into traditional modes of motherhood:

you can have as many babies as you want—if you don't ask the Government to take care of them. But when you start asking the Government to take care of them, the Government ought to have some control over you'.⁹

Nor did the stigmatising of lone parents stop with accusations of criminalising children and increasing the welfare debt. As Britain, in the early 1990s, faced a severe shortage of council houses, resulting largely from the disastrous 'right-to-buy' Housing Act in 1980, blame was deflected on to young single mothers whom, it was said, became pregnant deliberately in order to selfishly jump the council accommodation queue. Taking up where Peter Lilley's condemnatory remarks left off a year earlier ('They never would be missed, young ladies who get pregnant just to jump the housing list'), the former minister George Young informed the 1993 Tory Party Conference of new curbs to limit single mothers' access to decent council accommodation so priority could be given to those in traditional relationships ('How do we

explain to the young couple who want to wait for a home before they start a family that they cannot be rehoused ahead of the unmarried teenager expecting her first, probably unplanned child?').

Needless to say, rhetoric like this also contradicted survey statistics. The Department of Employment's own figures for 1991 explode the myth of young single mothers monopolising what little available council accommodation there was at that time. Just 0.3% of heads of council homes were women under 20. Moreover, a review of local authorities carried out by the Chartered Institute of Housing showed no evidence that lone parents were treated any more favourably than two-parent families. If anything, the figures showed that lone mothers in local authority accommodation tended to be older women who had separated from their partners and not young never-married teenage girls.¹⁰

Like the statistics of registered births, such surveys flew in the face of plans to cut welfare spending and so remained out of political rhetoric. The media eagerly grabbed hold of the debates around illegitimacy and championed the moral crusade with tales of the supposed sexual promiscuity of single mothers, peppered with accounts of 14 year-old girls becoming pregnant.¹¹ When the story of a young 'unmarried mother' jailed for leaving her two year-old child home alone while she went to work hit the news,¹² press space wasn't given over to seek answers to why adequate and inexpensive child-care wasn't available. Rather, the tabloids chose to sink into a wave of derogatory condemnation. The questions that were raised focused on who is fit to parent, and Michael Howard, in his own 'back-to-basics',¹³ way, seized his moment to argue that it would be a good thing if more unmarried mothers gave up their children for adoption.

'There's not many fathers around here'—The 1993 Debacle

Rather ironically, it was the then Secretary of State for Wales' visit to the St Mellons estate in Cardiff in June 1993 that was key in partially halting the more extreme vitriolic language directed against never-married mothers. John Redwood's intention of course had been quite the opposite. Having only held office for a couple of weeks, and anxious to make his mark, he jumped enthusiastically on to the New Right bandwagon of slandering never-married mothers. A couple of hours on the estate speaking to a few women and a figure of '64% of lone parents' heard bandied about provided him with enough speech fodder to put together an address to the Conservative Political Summer School two days later.¹⁴

One of the biggest social problems of our day is the surge in single parent families. Everyone would wish to help the young family that has suddenly lost the father through death, or if the mother has been abused or badly treated by the father and the relationship has broken down. What is more worrying is the trend in some places for young women to have babies with no apparent intention of even trying a marriage or stable relationship with the father of the child... On a recent visit to a housing estate where I was told that more than half the families were single parent families, I asked what action if any was being taken to involve the menfolk of the community rather more in helping bring up the children they had fathered. The reply was interesting. I was told 'there aren't many fathers around here'. In that community people had begun to accept that babies just happened and there was no presumption in favour of two adults creating a loving family background for

their children. It is that which we have to change... The natural state should be the 2-adult family caring for their children.

Such a controversial attack from the newest member of the Cabinet was exactly the kind of lift the media needed to enliven the flagging 'family values' debate, and Redwood's comments made prime-time headlines, especially since they went on to imply that some mothers and children should be denied benefit. St Mellons became a symbol of the collapse of the nuclear family, the erosion of moral and responsible values in Britain and 'scrounging' single mothers who exhausted public money. Redwood himself was even heralded in some quarters as being brave enough to lay the issue bare.¹⁵ Current affairs programmes on radio and television also took hold of the controversy, and the debate ran and ran, so much so that even a couple of months later, BBC1's 'Panorama' could still open with the provocative line of 'Should the taxpayer foot the bill for women who have babies on benefit?' In the wake of Redwood's remarks, the programme's researchers had visited St Mellons, seized on one man who had apparently fathered four children in as many years and held him up as evidence to substantiate the MP's assault.

This time around however, as the residents were catapulted into the public arena to be vilified all over again, more sympathetic voices could be heard condemning what was suspiciously beginning to sound like a government witch-hunt. The South Wales local newspapers had already placed their support behind the families of St Mellons, giving space to single mothers on the estate who argued that any social problems that existed had their roots in the deplorable lack of resources and inadequate infrastructure which allowed communities to

exist without a secondary school, leisure centre or bank.¹⁶ The *South Wales Echo*¹⁷ ran an article by the rector of a Cardiff church which sought to explode the myths on which Tory lecturing on child-rearing were premised:

My own dad left home for work at 6am each day and returned at 7pm... I rarely saw him... The upper classes never could stand the sight of kids and shoved them over to nanny as soon as possible. The fathers were certainly never on the scene. The middle classes packed off their over grown babies to prep and public school and left them both motherless and fatherless for most of their childhood... For a man like John Redwood totally divorced from poverty and pressures, to isolate [one parent] families for attack is the worst form of cynicism that the party of the the rich can propagate... both Fergie and Diana are showing what single parent motherhood can be with the proper resources.

The national papers also began to project more sympathetic attention to single mothers, and the backlash stayed highly visible as George Carey, the Archbishop of Canterbury stepped into the debate to argue against 'beat[ing] these single mothers with big sticks'.¹⁸ Hitting the headlines too was the National Council for One Parent Families who brought a complaint against 'Panorama' for the unfair treatment and misrepresentation of lone mothers.¹⁹ The Institute of Housing also announced it would be making an official complaint to the Broadcasting Standards Council about the alleged misuse of statistics in the programme. With a surprising twist, some press media even became critical of news sensationalism which had grabbed hold of 'dodgy' figures and misrepresented the

extent of lone parenting on the South Wales estate to be 64%:

If it [the percentage] was true, St Mellons probably would be the single-mum capital of Europe. It is not. According to Cardiff City Council, the figure originally came from one of the housing associations on the estate. A survey showed that 64% of their tenants were single parents. The number got into the public domain and either because of sloppiness or sensationalism began to be applied to the estate as a whole... The council estimates the true figure is about 17%, about the same as in... hundreds of other places.²⁰

The tide had definitely turned and the newsworthiness of the debate remained high as well-timed disclosures about the private lives of Tory MPs came under public scrutiny. Effectively, both tabloid and broadsheets cross-cut their reports of leaked Cabinet documents proposing punitive measures against lone parents with sensationalist revelations about Tim Yeo, the junior environment minister who had fathered an 'illegitimate' child born just six days after Redwood's tirade against single mothers in Cardiff. As the backlash against hypocrisy grew, John Redwood was forced to come out with a U-turn statement, arguing now that he'd never 'suggested we watch every bedroom door and have views on how every relationship should be conducted'.²¹

Palatable Policies?: The May 1997 General Election

Although discourses of pathologisation against lone parents hadn't been completely eradicated by the time of the May 1997 General Election, it had become fairly obvious that the type of vilifying attacks

characteristic of much of the earlier rhetoric risked losing crucial votes. In the month before the election, the views of single mothers were being given copy space to assert 'I'm afraid the parties are just going to have to fit new policies to suit new family structures', and 'I really resent all that stuff about scrounging single mothers—especially in the light of cash-for-questions'.²² In broadening out the issue, the Guardian concluded that 'the entire family values debate seems to have struck a sour chord with women voters'.²³ As it turned out, the few politicians who did persist in employing the language of contempt didn't fare too well. The Labour candidate, Melanie Johnson, for instance, won the Welwyn Hatfield seat from Conservative opponent Nigel Evans after he had derided her single mother status.

All political parties were now in no doubt about how discourses of vilification could backfire, being aware that any policies proposing public spending cuts had to be repackaged for sale. In other words, a new mantle had to be found with which to clothe New Right ideologies of the family. In an attempt to deflect heat away from the earlier lone parent fiasco, key Conservative politicians judiciously distanced themselves from the explicit slurring of single mothers, and tactically thrust educational policy into the debating arena as an alternative focus for public attention. October 1996 saw the circulation of a consultation document by a group of Government curriculum advisers which proposed that a moral code be taught in schools. This being a relatively less contentious vehicle for the denigration of single motherhood, it was at once hijacked by traditionalists in the Tory party demanding that children should be taught that the nuclear family structure is morally superior. However, careful of repeating past mistakes, the Conservative Secretary of

State for Education, Gillian Shepherd, refused to comment on whether she thought the document should uphold marriage. More euphemistically, she ventured to advocate a stronger emphasis in the report on 'family values', and promised consideration of the traditionalist view.²⁴

While some press still backed the more hard-line Tory demands, the fact that other perspectives were being voiced at this time is perhaps indicative of how much the ground had shifted towards recognising family diversity. In contrast to their pejorative slant the year before where teenage mothers found 'the free-and-easy life of a state handout preferable to a low-paid job... They were willing to have a baby because they knew they could cash in on it',²⁵ the *Daily Express* now commented: 'There are some schools where six out of 10 pupils live with single or cohabiting parents. Should we really tell them that they're living in second-class relationships? And if we do, isn't there a danger that they will resent our whole moral message?'.²⁶ The following day it ran a three page article poignantly picturing a smiling 13 year old schoolgirl with her new-born baby underscored with the comment, 'Purity, innocence and protectiveness shine from the photograph... Given the beauty of the image, just how can society condemn Sarah and her feckless young partner-of-the-moment?'

Evidently, it had become important to project more caring attitudes towards single mothers, and in the run-up to the General Election, the parties almost fell over each other to articulate their concerns to purportedly 'help' women re-access the labour market through 'Parent Plus' (Conservative) and 'Welfare-to-work' (Labour) schemes. Lurking behind the rhetoric however the same old fiscal policies held the reins even more tightly than ever over how lone parents ought to be defined

and circumscribed.²⁷ For instance, both Labour and Conservative Party Manifestos for Wales, awash with glossy photographs of mum, dad and two kids paraded the nuclear family structure as 'ideal'. Both exploited the residual discourses that linked single mothers with benefit fraud and crime. And both parties embedded proposals for stricter state control over lone parents within ideologies of 'common-sense' (Fowler, 1991). In a pre-election document on parenting,²⁸ Labour's plans to bring in parental responsibility orders which would force parents of offending children to 'attend counselling and guidance sessions' were very clearly articulated. In this report, representations of single mothers were still being pathologically tainted as could be seen from a section entitled 'Children living with lone parents'. This was textually organised as one of the 'Parenting Problem Areas' alongside 'Children in Public Care' and 'Children with "attention-deficit" disorders.'

Defining Themselves

What was markedly missing from this more easily digestible rhetoric, were the voices of single mothers themselves. Rarely offered a consistent public platform on which to articulate their own views, prioritise their concerns and set social policy agendas, they have been persistently disenfranchised from participating in political discourse. Of course, this is not surprising since when given license to talk, lone parents' representations of themselves often appeared significantly at odds with the prevailing politically convenient images. In an ongoing project²⁹ conducted by ourselves to explore how single mothers see their own identities, the following comments were made by Joy (aged 35), one of the women interviewed:

I got a circle of friends that are all strong independent females several of them lone parents but none of them conform to the assumptions...most of them far prefer being on their own... given the space and a chance to redefine as not part of a couple... most of them far prefer being on their own... I'm enjoying this space to discover who I am and there is not room for a man in it... for the most part they are women getting on with their lives and saying "right this is where I am"... and enjoying the space the energy that was devoted into a relationship you've now got for yourself and that is such a luxury as a woman when you're giving out all the time to other people you know you are other people's property and at other people's disposal all the time... to then find you've got some of that to turn back on yourself why the hell should you give it up'. (p.20)

Joy wasn't deluded by the electioneering veneer strategically employed by many politicians. Pathologising might well have gone underground during the election but she knew that it hadn't disappeared. Refusing to see herself as either 'victim' or 'problem' parent, her comments sit rather uneasily with how the vote-pulling rhetoric positioned her:

if you decide to lead an autonomous life without a partner of any sort you're seen as abnormal deviant [but] ... I like being on my own I relish having the responsibility for the decisions... I like deciding where my life course is going... I enjoy the autonomy and for me it [single motherhood] is more positive than it has ever been negative

Society decides what is right for you and whether you are being responsible to your children or not... if you're on your own

you are not being responsible because all kids need two parents that is the assumption isn't it... you still are identified as a problem you are seen as a problem first... the assumption is your kids are going to go off the rails or they are going not to do well educationally at school

Yet like many lone mothers, Joy is also necessarily sensitive to the politics of representation. She is in no doubt that, at least in the past, her economic survival was contingent upon whether she fitted existing prescribed categories which rendered her eligible for income support or other means-tested benefits. Certainly under the former Conservative government, single mothers reliant on state aid had no 'rights to privacy'. What's more, in the prevailing climate of suspicion about benefit fraud, demands were made on them to disclose intimate information about their personal relationships. Refusing to turn their lives into 'open books for bureaucratic gaze' (Sarangi and Slembrouk, 1996:130) meant that their access to income was jeopardized. Additionally, the Child Support Agency (CSA)—the structure set up to operationalise the 1991 Child Support Act³⁰—had the power to levy financial penalties on those claimants who withheld information about their child's father. Welfare benefit reduction was used as a weapon to threaten further poverty if single mothers chose not to conform to the traditionalist prescription of dependency within a heterosexual relationship. Joy comments that she has 'known some women who choose to be totally independent of their ex-partners but of course you are not given that choice any more you know with the CSA you don't have that choice'. Moreover, because absentee fathers were required to fill in financially where Government aid stopped, many lone

mothers experienced a withdrawal of informal support (such as fathers' contributions towards clothes, school expenses, and their children's Christmas and birthday presents). As it stood, the Child Support Act not only paid insufficient attention to the complexity of interpersonal relationships negotiated between mothers, fathers and their children, but in reality, 'brought little financial benefit to parents with care whilst causing real financial problems to many absent parents'.³¹

But it's not just the obvious discriminatory practices and procedures which impair single mothers' quality of life, but more broader policies impinge too. For instance, with less local authority housing available together with the previous government's policy of prioritising married couples, it's become increasingly difficult for lone parents to access decent accommodation for themselves and their children. There is a tendency for one-parent families to be offered smaller-sized properties, and nearly one fifth of local authorities require a lone mother and child to share a bedroom. The 1996 Housing Act advocated that lone parents were only to be given help to find temporary accommodation with most being encouraged to take on private tenancies with little security. Compared to 24% of other families in the UK, 65% of lone parents live in rented accommodation which is often of the oldest property type in the poorest state of repair. Such housing typically has the poorest standards of energy efficiency, which makes the impact of VAT costs on fuel even more severe. The numbers of lone parents without central heating has reached 22%, nearly twice the figure for other families.³² Furthermore, often without access to a family car, an unaffordable and deteriorating public transport system restricts single mothers'

mobility and curtails spontaneity with children, as Joy points out:

transport is so bloody expensive that's a very big issue for me if I go anywhere with four kids I have to first think can I afford the bus fare... I've realised I don't miss my husband as much as I've missed the car ... anything I do now has to be planned you know you can't spontaneously say to the kids lets have a day out because you have to plan it in terms of the timetables of transport which is a nightmare.

Conclusion

It remains to be seen whether things will change for the better under the current Labour government. Indisputably, women have become more visible in politics. Their numbers in both Parliament and the Cabinet have dramatically increased: a fifth of MPs are women and there are now 19 female government ministers. A Women's Unit has been established and a Women's Minister, Harriet Harman, with a deputy, Joan Ruddock, have been appointed. In an attempt to consult more, 'juries' are to be set up consisting of women randomly selected from the electorate who will evaluate government proposals. This could sound promising. Yet closer inspection reveals that being Women's Minister is one of two jobs managed by Harriet Harman, that Joan Ruddock's position is unpaid, and that the Women's Unit lacks a spending budget.³³ There is also ongoing concern about New Labour's capacities to deliver bold and innovative family policies. Despite fighting against Conservative proposals to phase out Lone Parent Benefit, and considerable Labour backbench disagreement, the Cabinet plan to continue with the same strategy. While the present government

argue that the setting up of homework clubs and 'encouraging' lone mothers to visit job centres constitute a Welfare-to-work policy which will help find routes out of poverty, Karin Pappenheim, director of the National Council for One Parent Families is waiting to see how such plans will materialise before judging them as solutions, noting that 'it's not possible to achieve a national childcare strategy overnight'.³⁴

If Labour's purported commitment to lone parenthood is to be realised as something more than tokenistic, it is essential that all discriminatory practices which systematically inhibit single mothers' independence are tackled more effectively than in the past. Moreover, there is a need to move away from political rhetoric which still stigmatises as it links 'the welfare debt' with what is referred to as the 'lone parent culture of welfare dependency'. Any consultative process must include lone mothers' own voices, not only to set the agenda and prioritise their needs, but crucially, to define how they should be seen:

I love being a single parent I do I love it I love having autonomous self... I love being part of what is to me a female space you know I don't have to have anything to do with men I don't wish to... I don't see it as being problematic lone parenting you know' (Joy).

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Notes

1. Reported in *The Guardian* 10/11/96.
2. *Daily Telegraph* 2/8/91.
3. *The Guardian* 25/11/93 David Sharrock, Maggie O'Kane, Edward Pilkington, 'Two Youngsters who found a new rule to break'.
4. 'Save the family to save our children' Jonathon Sacks, *The Times* 6/3/93.
5. Quoted in the *Daily Express* 7/10/93.
6. *The Economist*, Oct 16-22 1993 'Single Parents: the facts of life'.
7. 'Young Single Mothers...' National Council for One-Parent Families, 255 Kentish Town Road, London NW5 2LX.
8. *Sunday Times* 11 July 1993 quoted in K Mann & S Roseneil 'Some Mothers do 'ave 'em': backlash and the gender politics of the underclass debate in *Journal of Gender Studies*, Vol 3, no. 3 1994.
9. *Daily Mail* 11/5/93.
10. 'Young Single Mothers...' National Council for One-Parent Families, 255 Kentish Town Road, London NW5 2LX.
11. *Daily Express* 21/7/93.
12. *Daily Express* 3/8/93.
13. John Major launched his 'back-to-basics' agenda in 1993. Cross-cutting a number of social policy areas, it was premised on a harking back to an idealised 'golden age' of economic self-reliance, prescriptivist morality and traditional family values. Following 1993, it particularly emerged as a recurrent theme during educational debates where Conservative Party policy demanded a narrow returning to the 'three 'r's' of reading, writing and arithmetic.
14. John Redwood MP. Speech to the Conservative Political Summer School, Trevithick Building, The Parade, Cardiff 2/7/93.
15. *The Sun* 3/7/93; *The Times* 3/7/93.
16. *Western Mail* 5/7/93.
17. *South Wales Echo* 8/7/97.
18. *Western Mail* 12/10/93.
19. Report of the Broadcasting Complaints Commission 1995, HMSO: London.
20. *Western Mail* 7/10/93.
21. *The Guardian* 27/12/93.
22. *The Guardian* 24/4/97.
23. op.cit.
24. Gillian Shepherd 'We owe it to our children to teach morals at school'. *The Sun*, 29/12/96.
25. *Daily Express* 24/8/95.
26. *Daily Express* 28/10/96.
27. By way of contrast, the Liberal Democrat Manifesto 1997 proved to be progressively critical of the prevailing trend to pathologise lone parents, commenting that 'individual families in all shapes and sizes have come under a sustained attack from the Government in the last sixteen years. Unemployment, the housing crisis, the implementation of Care in the Community and the work of the Child Support Agency are just four of the many ways in which Government policies have undermined family life in recent years... The Government launched a "back-to-basics" campaign in an attempt to reassert its view of "traditional" family values. This has led to an almost unrelenting attack on lone parents and on people in non-traditional relationships. An attack which senior members of the Labour Party have not been reluctant to join... The state should not dictate what families should be like'.
28. Straw, J & Anderson, J (November 1996) 'Parenting'. Labour Party publication.
29. Lone Parents and Identity: Young Women and the South Wales Valleys. Karen Atkinson, Sarah Oerton & Diane Burns. 1996-ongoing.
30. The Child Support Act 1991 was brought in to reduce Treasury expenditure by effectively making 'absent parents' financially responsible for their children until they are 18. The Act set up the Child Support Agency (CSA) designed to chase 'recalcitrant fathers' (largely post-divorce) in order to shift the 'burden of debt'.
31. 'Child Support One Year On'. Report of the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, 26/4/94.
32. National Council for One-Parent Families, 255 Kentish Town Road, London NW5 2LX.
33. Yvonne Roberts 'Has women's ship come in'. *The Guardian* 4/8/97.
34. Quoted in *The Guardian* 4/8/97.
35. op.cit.

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