

PROGRAMME FOUR Part 1COMM

These seven families represent the poor in Britain today.

On the basis of a major survey, the first of its kind, this series has revealed that there are 7½ million people in Britain today who are too poor to maintain the minimum standard of living to which everyone should be entitled in the view of society as a whole.

In previous programmes we've looked at the kinds of people who are very likely to be unable to make ends meet.

First those who are unable to work: the elderly and many of the disabled.

Secondly, those with wages too low to keep a family. And lastly those who can not find work, the unemployed and many single parents.

In this, the final programme, we ask whether anything can be done to help those on the bottom rung

ROY WESTON V/O/SYNC

Three years ago, when I used to drive this area, this place used to be a hive of activity. Cars parked both sides of the road, lorries trying to get in and out of the factory. That factory you can see behind me used to employ 2-3000 people. The waste ground you can see used to be little businesses. It is now desolate, nothing left at all.

COMM

Roy Weston lives in Birmingham and has been unemployed for the last 3½ years. The recession of the eighties has created poverty. To Birmingham it's brought devastation. A city prosperous throughout the 70s finds industry now decaying.

V/O ROY

I've tried all over the place, I've gone knocking on factory doors, sort of begging for a job. Any job, any sort what'll have me.

We've just got to accept until I get a job we will be poor.

COMM

Our survey found that three out of every four of the poor live in the Midlands and the North - areas of Britain in sharp decline. What's come as a shock to Birmingham has compounded the long standing problems of the older industrial cities of the North such as Liverpool

V/O KEVIN

There's been sites along the roads, you know, really good sites, firms and good businesses and now when you look at them they're all getting knocked down you know like Tate and Lyle. There, Central Oil, all closed down. It just makes me you know, feel that well, you know, will I get a job. Will I get a proper job.

COMM

Kevin Cain lives in Vauxhall, Liverpool. At the age of 22, having left school five or so years ago, he's yet to find a lasting job. The current recession has added a very sharp final twist to Liverpool's years of steady decline. Even factories opened up in the 70s are now being knocked down. Kevin's father Harry and his cousin Jimmy Disley knew a Liverpool that was very different.

ACTUALITY

"Harry, remember years ago ...
What's happened to Liverpool now it's definitely finished ..."

COMM

Nationally, one in four of the young is unemployed. Here in Vauxhall, it's over three in four.

ACTUALITY

"The recession ... young kids leaving school, nothing."

"Look at your kid? He's finished"

COMM

It is the poor who have born the brunt of the recession. Most people's living standards have continued to improve. The poor not only live in the areas most hit by decline but within those areas they are the most vulnerable people.

Kevin Cain is unskilled, partially disabled from an accident as a child, and unexperienced. The recession has left him with few prospects.

V/O KEVIN

I'd like to settle down, but you know, now er, have a steady job, good money, you know it's just like at the time now like I couldn't get married now cos you know I just couldn't cos I'm, I haven't got a job, and you know, no I couldn't survive, on, on at all - social security.

COMM

John Hughes of Oxford University

SYNC HUGHES

Well I think that we've got to recognise that the problem has become very much worse in recent years, precisely because the main engine of post-war growth which was the substantial advance of our manufacturing industries, has broken down. We've got a crisis of development in manufacturing, it's displaced more than 2½ million people from work in recent years, and that has led to a

widening pool of unemployment, of casualised employment of part time labour instead of full-time jobs and of course, of low wages in that kind of labour market

COMM

There is no disagreement about the importance of economic growth for reducing the extent of poverty. There is, however, considerable disagreement over what is the best strategy for creating that growth. What's clear is that at present there is very little growth and that even if the government achieved its target of 2% growth, there would still be very little reduction in unemployment.

Moreover what's most depressing for those who have been left by the recession out of work and poor is that even if there is a reduction in unemployment they will be the last in line to be helped.

For Kevin's prospects to improve not only must there be growth but also training opportunities to give him some skills. Further, there must be money directed at improving the fabric and economy of the inner cities on a much greater scale than in the past.

V/O KEVIN

I honestly think that you know if we had a better government that we might, you know we might stand a chance of er you know getting having a chance of getting jobs or jobs getting brought back into the area.

COMM

And growth alone is not the answer for others of the unemployed. Tricia Olivers was divorced last year, and brings up her two children Tony and Sandra on her own.

She hates relying on the State for a living.

SYNC TRICIA

I'd sooner be out working, I'd sooner go and take the kids to school, then go to work. I'd sooner work than anything, but there just isn't the jobs around for you to do. I don't like staying at home all day, if I had the chance I would go out to work.

COMM

In a recession people who have to collect their children from school, and its overwhelmingly women, are well down the queue for jobs. Like the young, the unskilled and the disabled, mothers with family responsibilities are the most vulnerable people in the labour market. It means, like Tricia, they are the first to be hit by the recession and the last to be helped by growth. To help many single parents - there must be other changes in the job market.

ACTUALITY

"Mum, I'll switch telly on"

COMM

Hilary Land, Bristol University

SYNC LAND

Well I think improving access to the labour market and not just access to the labour market, but access to decent wages, of course is absolutely fundamental to improving the situation of lone mothers and indeed many two parent families as well. And if wages for women were higher, and if women could more easily take paid employment because there were adequate child care facilities not just for small children but also in terms of school children after school care facilities and things like this. And then I think their economic situation would be much improved.

COMM

For the poor in work, the post-war years have consistently shown that growth does not provide the answer to the problems of low pay.

Roy Bragg does have a job; he works nights in a Manchester factory. He takes home about £80 a week after tax.

V/O ROY BRAGG

Hm, after I've brought the wage home if you can call it a wage. It's not much when the rent's paid out, gas and electricity, it leaves about £15 for food. Which to me I don't think is enough.

COMM

The standard of living of low paid workers has of course risen with economic growth. But the gap between the wages of the low paid like Roy and those of others has not changed since the turn of the century.

In good times and in bad, there have always been low paid workers at the bottom of the pile, with inadequate wages for the standards of the day. But there's a problem in tackling low pay itself at the workplace unless there is prior agreement from better paid workers for a narrowing of differentials

SYNC HUGHES

So that we've got a problem that if we try and push up low wages the whole floor very radically, we may find that we are pushing up the whole structure of wages right through the system and this would create a whole series of problems of inflation, of competitive position and so on.

COMM

Clearly, the low paid workers would improve their living standards if pay differentials narrowed. At present, this is most unlikely. But even if it

COMM

happened, the redistribution of money and resources by government through the welfare state would remain critical. For those like Mavis Gold excluded permanently from the labour market, the post war years have also shown that it's redistribution that is vital to their position in society and that growth alone will not improve their position relative to others.

Mavis is blind, partially deaf and diabetic.

Her weekly income is a giro from the DHSS which she cashes at her local post office.

V/O MAVIS

I'm wondering whether it's worthwhile going on living quite honestly. It's not living, it's existing.

COMM

Our survey found that by the standards set by people in Britain today the gap between the poor and the rest is too great. This gap did not narrow even during the thirty years of growth after the war.

To narrow the gap and improve the living standards of the poor requires further redistribution.

ACTUALITY

"Show me with your finger where to sign will you dearie"

COMM

Professor A.H. Halsey of Oxford University.

SYNC HALSEY

I think myself, that the process of redistributing through the state has not gone as far as it needs to go in order to have a truly harmonious society. I don't think that on the basis of the survey which we've been looking at it would be true to say that the actual distribution of purchasing power is in accordance with the social consensus about how it ought to be distributed. There's a gap still between what we do and what we would really like to do, according to our survey opinions..

COMM

Pamela Benn lacks many of the necessities identified by society as a whole but of these necessities her greatest problems stem from her housing conditions.

Her tiny attic flat is damp, infested by mice and bugs and has no hot water. For necessities such as housing, the way in which governments try to ensure that everyone has access to adequate living conditions by providing these directly. Pamela has been trying to get rehoused by her local council from this privately-rented accommodation.

SYNC PAMELA

I've been up to the council so many times. The last time I went up they tell, they said to me they wouldn't be able to give me a place until after a year, a year and a half. Cos they don't have the places available.

COMM

Poor housing has persisted for many reasons but a key one is that the state gives more help with housing to the better off than the poor as tax benefits for home owners are greater than subsidies for council tenants. Home ownership is way out of Pamela's reach.

To improve her chances of decent housing, state spending on housing needs to be redistributed in favour of those most in need. But this remains most unlikely. The main way, however, that governments act to help the poor is through the benefits system.

Lord Ralph Harris, Director of the Institute of Economic Affairs, a research body influential with the present government, argues that the state's role should be minimal - only providing a safety-net income for the very poorest.

SYNC HARRIS

Not to have benefits scattered among everybody because they are old or because they've got children. The great majority of people with children, or the great majority of people who are old do not actually need state pensions. They have their own pensions, arrangements increasingly more than half the population have their own pension, occupational pension arrangements. It's much better for them in the long run to have lower taxes and to rely on pensions from these sources. So it's topping up low incomes to get some minimum income that will fill in the valley, so to speak, of poverty, without showering benefits on the peaks and the high ground of those who can look after themselves.

COMM

But there's a major drawback to this idea of concentrating help on just the very poor through means-tested benefits. As Roy Bragg has already found, it results in a trap whereby the poor cannot lift themselves above this minimum income by their own efforts. Already over the years, governments have turned to means-tested benefits to top up the incomes of the poor.

It's because this is the cheapest way of helping them.

Roy receives several of these benefits. So if he earned more he'd end up very little better off. On top of the tax deductions that everyone would face, he would also lose benefit.

SYNC ROY BRAGG

Er, well it makes me feel trapped cos it's not worth doing any overtime at all. It's disheartening, any way you turn, you do the overtime, you lose most of it with tax and insurance but you also lose your benefits as well for rebates and other small things.

COMM

Professor Jonathan Bradshaw

SYNC BRADSHAW

We have developed a system whereby the interaction of taxes and benefits, means tested benefits, means that a low paid worker with a family, is very unlikely to gain very much as a result of an increase in earnings over a wide range of incomes, about 70 - 100 pounds a family with 3 children at £70 a week can be receiving exactly the same net income after paying tax and receiving benefits, as a similar sized family at a £130 a week, this situation is palpably absurd.

COMM

All the families in our series are affected by the poverty trap that catches Roy Bragg. For those out of work as well as those in work are often dependent on means-tested benefits - and the more these benefits are concentrated on just the poor the more by definition they trap them.

It destroys the very incentives which the present government is so keen to foster and creates the very reliance on the state which they want to reduce.

COMM

But to overcome the poverty trap requires spreading benefits so that they are also paid to people who are not among the very poorest.

Samuel Brittan of the Financial Times

SYNC BRITTAN

Well if we wanted to improve the generosity of benefits and we also wanted to reduce the poverty trap, that must mean, as a matter of arithmetic that the benefits would spill over to people that are not quite so poor. That is the only way of reducing the poverty and the unemployment traps. The result is that it would be fairly costly for the people in the middle and at the top. And that's quite inevitable.

COMM

To improve the lot of the poor and at the same time lessen the poverty trap, the benefits paid to people as of right without means-testing must be adequate in amount to maintain a minimum standard of living.

For the disabled, like Mavis Gold, there is a benefit paid as of right - the national insurance invalidity benefit. But its level is very low.

V/O MAVIS

Now when you get a gas bill of the winter for £80 that's for heating only. Your electricity, I'm cooking by electricity, I'm heating hot water by electricity, that bill came to £60, £60 and £80 make £140 - that strikes me as being about £14, £15 a week ... then you've got to buy food, then you've got to keep yourself clean. You can't do it, you're below the breadline.

COMM

So how much would it cost to help the poor in this way?

We asked David Piaucaud, of LSE, to devise a package to help the poor.

We looked at how it would affect the 7½ million people who our survey found fell below the minimum standard of living set by society.

Estimating its full impact is difficult, because the package is designed to enable people to help themselves.

But it seems that up to a half could be lifted above the minimum standard.

To achieve more would also require improved provision in areas such as housing and improved access to work for women.

SYNC PIAUCHAUD

A package of this sort would be basically getting back to the Beveridge idea of the post-war era, a new Beveridge type of scheme and the major effect would be to get about half or more of those now dependent on claiming means-tested supplementary benefit, off that means-tested benefit and it would improve the incomes of all the groups who were currently out of the workforce, the old, the sick, the disabled, the unemployed and large families with children, so it would be a major redistribution within society which would tackle poverty at its roots.

COMM

After the break we'll look at how this package would help all the groups of the poor, people like Ernie Pegman.

We'll find out whether people are prepared to pay the price; whether Britain in the 1980s is ready to tackle poverty.

V/O ERNIE

Oh well, the point is, it should've improved now, well I mean, we're into 1983 and if we don't move now...

PROGRAMME FOUR Part 2

COMM

It's Monday morning and Ernie Pegman's first installment of this week's meals-on-wheels is arriving. Like many pensioners, he benefits from a range of subsidised services.

ACTUALITY

You want some money

COMM

But even at 40p a meal, Ernie finds it expensive. So he cuts back to just three meals a week.

V/O ERNIE

It's an economic idea, to have as much as you can afford and that is economics in practise. You can't go beyond your means.

ACTUALITY

"Oh looks like rabbit oh it's chicken, chicken."

COMM

He'll just eat half the meal and save the rest for tomorrow.

ACTUALITY

"Three times. Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays"

COMM

Under our new package, Ernie's state pension would go up by a third - that's £11 a week. After tax he'd be £8 better off.
Not only would Ernie find it easier to make ends meet but he'd also be taken out of the poverty trap.
He has a small private pension for which he saved during his working life. At the moment all it does it take his income up

to a level that stops him qualifying for means-tested benefit. He might as well not have saved at all. If, instead, his private pension were added to a state pension higher than the means-tested benefit level, his savings would at last be of some value to him.

SYNC ERNIE

Because I've got my civil service pension, I'm penalized and they turned round and had the cheek to say I've got enough ..

COMM

The cost of raising the state pension by a third for the nine million pensioners that receive it would be: £3500 million requiring an increase of 3½p in the £ in the standard rate of income tax to pay for it.

COMM

Under the package, Mavis Gold's non-means-tested invalidity benefit would be increased by £10 a week. It would mean she'd no longer be on means-tested supplementary benefit. After allowing for the loss of some supplementary benefit, she would be about £5.00 a week better off. But, she would no longer have money deducted as at present to pay off the debts she has incurred on her heating bills: The DHSS cannot deduct money direct from the national insurance based benefits.

Mavis's new weekly income would be £44 a week, just short of her modest demands.

V/O MAVIS GOLD

I think they could bring it up to about £47 a week that would be more like it that would get you somewhere. I mean most people are earning quite a bit more than £40.00 odd pounds a week when they're working, not only that but they've got freedom to buy what they want when they want it we haven't, we have to say please

may I.

COMM

The cost of raising invalidity benefit by a third for the 700,000 disabled people who currently receive it would be:

£500 million requiring an increase of $\frac{1}{2}$ p in the £ in the standard rate of income tax to pay for it.

The next group are the unemployed. It's the long term unemployed like Roy Weston that face the severest problems.

People who have been unemployed for over a year do not qualify for unemployment benefit. But at the lowest rate.

Extending the higher rate of supplementary benefit to the long-term unemployed would make Roy and his family £L2 a week better off.

But they'd still be on the means-test. In the past this meant that a job his wife Ann had didn't result in much financial gain for the family.

V/O WESTON

She, she could earn a set amount, if she went over that then they started to take it off me. Off my dole money. So if she earned over what they allowed to earn they come, taking my money.

COMM

To take the Westons off means-tested supplementary benefit would require extending unemployment benefit to those who have been unemployed for over a year and raising unemployment benefit by a third. This would cost more.

To put the long term unemployed on to the higher rate of supplementary benefit would cost £400 million, requiring a rise in the standard rate of income tax of 0.4 p in the £. To extend unemployment benefit and increase it by a third would cost an additional £1200 million

a further rise of 1.2p in the £ in the standard rate of income tax.

If the financial position of the unemployed is improved in this way, the incomes of the low-paid, like Roy Bragg, must also be improved by at least as much, and preferably more, so as to ensure that there is an incentive for the unemployed to find work.

There are two ways governments could help

SYNC HUGHES

They've got the problem of very high rates of taxation imposed on people who are earning quite low incomes. Our income tax system starts off at a much higher tax rate than most of the major countries in the world. Certainly a much higher tax rate than the Germans or the American. So that, and it reaches right down to a very low level of income so that people who are really very poor are at the same time, being taxed very heavily.

SYNC BRAGG

The differences really are a bit on the tax side, it most probably would help out, er, if I paid less tax, that money would help us out, but there again there most probably take it off with something else that they might bring out. You could never tell with the Government nowadays.

COMM

Making simple changes to the taxation system, such as raising the tax threshold is not, however, the most effective way of helping low-paid families as much of the gain goes to the better off.

To shift the tax burden away from the low paid requires a radical overhaul of the system - but this seems a long way off.

So we've looked at what improvements to benefits could help Roy and his family.

SYNC HUGHES

If we start with the benefit problem, my own feeling here is that we should try to move away from elaborate means tested benefits, because I think they create unfairness and in many cases they create irrational barriers to people trying to, er, look after themselves and to strengthen their own ability to own a car. I think we should be in particular trying to raise child benefit and help the low waged families and households in this country, to improve their living standard.

COMM

At present, Elaine Bragg receives £5.85 a week in child benefit for each of her three children.

This new package nearly doubles child benefit. This is the most cost effective way of helping low-paid families. It also takes many off means-tested benefits

The extra £15 a week for Elaine wouldn't be all gain in the family's pocket for they would no longer receive the means-tested rent benefit. They'd end up about £8 a week better off but they would also be lifted out of the poverty trap. Any extra money Roy earned would result in money in his pocket. There'd be an incentive to do overtime and Roy could improve the family's financial position by more than the £8 gained immediately.

The increase in child benefit of £5 would help low paid families - as well as others. It would cost £2,750 million, requiring an increase of 2.75p in the £ on the standard rate of income tax. Alternatively it could be paid for by abolishing the married man's tax allowance which would move money away from childless couples to families with children.

more of the financial responsibility.

SYNC LAND

Since 1979, anything over and above what the children would be eligible for, is now deducted from the mother's own benefit, and it seems to me that it also means that there is very little incentive for a former husband, or the father of the children, to pay generous maintenance to his children. Because for any woman on SB unless he's exceptionally generous she's going to be no better off at all. And that seems to me to be a system that needs thinking about a bit more.

COMM

This, however, wouldn't help Pamela Benn - for she's unmarried and would have to surmount a number of legal barriers to gain proper maintenance from baby Emma's father. The main item she's ever had from him is useless to her dire needs: he's left a video recorder in her flat. On a practical level she receives very little help.

V/O PAMELA

Say, like if I had no food for the baby, he would give me money to buy food for her but otherwise I don't get much help from him.

COMM

Pamela is just left with supplementary benefit. Up to recently, she received £36.35 a week for her and her baby. This has now risen by £7 to the higher rate for those on benefit for more than a year. The unhygienic conditions in her attic flat push up her whole cost of living. She can't keep food there because of the mice and so often comes to her local cafe to eat.

V/O PAMELA

Well that's ridiculous, that money to live on. I don't know what they expect me to, to manage to buy my clothes, the child's clothes, food and necessities for the baby, what she needs and what I need.

COMM

To improve the position of single mothers requires better access to jobs and financial independence. Under the new package, single parents are left on supplementary benefit.

SYNC LAND

I think the only way in the very short run of improving the situation of single parents, and remember there are well over a million children involved, is to make sure that SB rates keep up with increased prices and so on and are made more generous.

COMM

The last of the people we've been following in this series, Kevin Cain, one of the young jobless, is also left on supplementary benefit by this package. Kevin lives with his widowed father. Kevin has never worked for any length of time and so has never paid enough national insurance stamps to qualify for unemployment benefit. The package allows for an increase in supplementary benefit of 10%. This is deliberately less than the national insurance benefits because otherwise the package would not lift the people entitled to these benefits off the means-test. So those left on supplementary benefit gain only a few pounds a week.

SYNC KEVIN CAIN

Well I'm, I've gotta survive, on the little money I get. Like, say, I give, say, I give, the money I get, I give so much to the rent, and I've only got

about three pounds to spend something like that, I can't, I can't be going out every night, but I know there's people worse off than me. Like, really, I think I'm lucky, than other people, know what I mean?

COMM

The final groups of the poor are the young jobless, the unmarried mother, and the divorced family.

The increase in supplementary benefit of 10% would cost £900 million which would require an increase of 0.9p in the £ on the standard rate of income tax.

Overall, looking at all the poor in Britain today, this new plan would cost £8,500 million which would require an increase of 8.5p in the £ in the standard rate of income tax. But that in itself would take some money away again from some of those helped.

SYNC ERNIE

Oh income tax. Do you know I get my civil service pension and of that I get £9 off. A month. £9. I mean you see the point is, that's another thing that I have, the point is you get your retirement pension, that shouldn't be taxed but it is. They tax your retirement pension and that's wrong because this is my logical way of thinking, you pay in that for years, it's your entitlement, therefore it should be no deduction, should there. That's the way they get away with it.

COMM

To ensure that this new plan to help the poor is not paid for by the poor themselves it would be necessary to introduce higher taxation for those on average, and above average, incomes. This would then mean an increase for these groups of not 8½p in the £ but more like 10p. Whatever the precise details of plans to help the poor - the scale of redistribution needed to make an impact is great. The

better-off simply have to accept they'd be significantly worse off.

SYNC BRITTAN

Basically, if you want a reasonable anti-poverty cushion at the bottom and you want to avoid poverty trap effects you would have to have quite high tax rates for those of us in the middle which is most of us, 40-50-or 60%.

COMM

So what are the constraints? Some would argue that a redistribution on this scale would ultimately reduce the living standards of the poor as it would damage economic growth.

SYNC HARRIS

No one has invented a way of imposing taxes that are beneficial to incentive, to wealth creation, to vigour, to innovation.

All taxes in some measure depress incentives, clog the processes of change, block out the possibilities of development innovation investment, so the taxes are a major burden upon our wealth creating capability and the larger part of taxes, the heart of all the taxes that we collect go to the welfare state, including all of these services, so that I've no doubt that the economy would be much more efficient, would generate much higher incomes, would leave people with much better take-home pay, if you had less government spending and less taxes placed upon the population.

SYNC HALSEY

Of course there is some point at which a rigorous egalitarian policy would have an effect on the motivation to work. Er, if it was entirely a society in which whatever you did you would get exactly the same income as the next person, it would probably end up as a society which was slack, or inefficient, and did not

get richer as a society. But in practise, the actual reality of life in industrialised countries known to us today, including our own country we're nowhere near that.

SYNC HARRIS

The provision by government for its own party political vote-getting purposes has corrupted a large party of the population and has made people increasingly dependent upon government and benefits and less dependent upon their own efforts, their own resources. I don't think there is firm evidence for the belief that inequality leads to greater riches for the country as a whole. If anything the record is the other way. Because inequality always disguises the waste of human potential which comes from lack of opportunity and poverty. The more society invests in the potential of all of its citizens the more er public energy becomes available.

COMM

Whether people favour greater or less inequality depends on their political ideals. When it comes to practical economics - the world known to Samuel Brittan - there is no hard evidence that somewhat higher taxes for the better-off would create a disincentive for them to work hard.

SYNC BRITTAN

Within present resources the scope for making the poor better off is limited only by the generosity of the rest of us until we get to a point where there would be so much redistribution that the total national income would shrink and the poor would be worse off and we are not there yet.

COMM

So what do the public think? We asked people whether the gap between the rich and the poor is too wide?

74% thought that it was, while 21% disagreed.

On all the measures used there was substantial support for redistribution and greater sympathy for the poor than found in the seventies.

But are people prepared to pay to help the poor. We asked whether they'd support an increase in income tax of 1p in the £ to help the poor. 74% would pay up while 23% would not.

That's a clear and unusually high level of support for increasing income tax. Even among conservative voters support was equally high.

But there is a limit to people's generosity. We asked about an increase in income tax of 5p in the £ to help the poor. 35% would pay even this amount but 58% would not.

Though a majority are against, it shows a surprising degree of support for such a high increase in taxation. The plan designed by David Piauclud to make sizeable inroads into abolishing poverty in Britain, could not, however, be financed by the level of support for increased tax shown by the survey.

So what would a package involving a 1½p tax increase buy?

SYNC PIAUCHAUD

There's a choice about how it could be used, it could be used selectively concentrated on means-tested benefits or it could be used to increase benefits for all those receiving social security. If the billion and a half were put into selective benefits it could be used to put up basic rates of supplementary benefit by about 1/10th and to extend the long term rate of supplementary benefit to the unemployed and give some increases in the other means-tested

benefits such as rent and rate rebates and the family income supplement.

COMM

Even in today's economic climate, these modest improvements to the poor's living standards could be financed. Yet improvements in benefits are not part of the plans of the present government. Indeed in the last four years, benefit levels have been cut. The poor are becoming poorer compared to others. In the long term Britain may benefit, but in the short term the future for the poor looks bleak.

SYNC HALSEY

I fear for the poor in the next few years because we do have for the moment at any rate a Conservative party which is controlled by its economic liberal wing, and although there are exaggerated reports in the press about the winding down of the welfare state and the increases in inequality on which they're bent, there is enough in the trends in the direction of allowing the rich to get richer and the poor to get poorer for anyone who cares about the poor to be fearful that they will in fact be relatively worse off in the middle of the 1980s than they were in the middle of the 1970s.

COMM

Since the interest taken by London Weekend Television, Pamela Benn is now high on the waiting list for council accommodation in Hackney. But even this is only likely to result in accommodation on one of their worst estates.

V/O PAMELA

I don't know what the future holds for her. I hope she gets a decent future. But for me, all I want is a nice place to live to bring up my kids the way I want to bring them up. For them to have everything they want.

COMM

Roy Weston has found a job. The family is somewhat better off financially but most importantly for Roy it ends the years of frustration from having nothing to do.

V/O ROY

Regarding the kids, its very hard to say, you know, it could be the same in five years or it could be entirely different in five years time.

COMM

But there are still over three million people in Britain unemployed. Kevin Cain hasn't been so lucky, for more than five years now he's been waiting for his first proper job, waiting to get a foot on even the bottom rung, waiting to start his adult life.

V/O KEVIN

You know, three million people on the dole, I can't see, I can see it getting worse, I can't see it getting better.

COMM

Tricia Olivers struggles on trying to provide for Tony and Sandra the kind of things she could afford in the past.

V/O TRICIA

Well the way it is now there is not much future, eventually when I get back to work, then they'll have everything they want. But until then, if I have got to depend on supplementary benefit, they'll never change, they'll never have nothing.

COMM

For Ernie Pegman, there's been a major set back. He's been mugged: a fear he'd always had. He ended up in hospital but he's now recovering. It's left him however frailer than ever, even more worried about how he'll manage into his eighties.

V/O ERNIE

Well I'm right pessimistic about that. There doesn't seem to be no way out for people. It's a grim prospect for the future that's my, I know it sounds rather severe but you can't help but see the way things are going.

COMM

Roy Bragg too has faced a set back. He's had appendicitis resulting in hospital operations. He's now off sick which in turn worsens the financial problems of the family.

ROY BRAGG V/O

Well the future to me doesn't seem much for me or my family. I feel as though I've brought me children into a world that's dying. The unemployment, there's nothing for them to look forward to.

COMM

For Mavis Gold it's still a life of just existing.

For the seven families in this series, as for everyone, life has its ups and downs. But for all of them, as for all the poor, Britain in the 80s holds out poor prospects.

V/O MAVIS

You can't look into the future in, in my state. Er, there is no future.

END CREDITS