

The Child Poverty Action Group in the 1990s and 2000s: Witness Seminar

Edited by Pat Thane and
Ruth Davidson

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The Child Poverty Action Group in the 1990s and 2000s: Witness Seminar

1st June 2015
King's College London

ICBH Witness Seminar Programme
Programme Director:
Dr Michael Kandiah, King's College London

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What is a Witness Seminar?

Michael D Kandiah

- It is an exercise in oral history that may be best described as a group interview or a guided discussion.
- Key participants meet around the seminar table to discuss and debate the issues relating to the chosen topic as they remember them. As a group interview, the discussion:
 - is guided and, where necessary, limited by the Chair, who is usually but not always an academic; and
 - will be shaped the ‘group dynamic’: individual speakers will respond to each other, to the Chair and the presence of the audience.
- Some academics are keen on observing and analysing this group effect, which has been identified as ‘a kind of “chaining” or “cascading” effect; talk links to, or tumbles out of, the topics and expressions preceding it’.¹
- It shares certain similarities with a focus group, insofar as they are both considered group discussions or interviews. However, this is where the similarity ends. Participants in witness seminars are chosen for their role in, or ability to comment about, the subject of the witness seminar and they are not anonymous—indeed it is essential to know who they are to properly understand and analyse their testimony. Additionally, individuals in the group generally know each other, which makes the ‘group dynamic’ effect particularly interesting and important. Furthermore, this allows the testimony of participants to be checked, challenged and defended.
- A witness seminar is taped and transcribed. Participants are allowed to redact the transcript principally to improve readability and to clarify meaning. An agreed version is published and archived for the use of researchers.
- The aim of a witness seminar is to bring together participants or ‘witnesses’—to re-examine and reassess key aspects of, and events in, recent history; to comment, examine and assess developments in the recent past.
- A further aim of a witness seminar is to capture nuances of individual and group experiences that cannot be found in, or are absent from, documents or written material.

Since its founding in 1986, the Institute of Contemporary British History (ICBH) has been uniquely associated with the production of witness seminars on events or developments that have taken place within the bounds of living memory. The ICBH Witness Seminar Programme has been copied by other institutions, both in Britain and abroad, and the ICBH regularly collaborates with scholars from other institutions in planning and hosting witness seminars of particular relevance to their work.

¹ TR Lindlof and BC Taylor, *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*, 2nd edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2002), p.182.

Participants

Chair

JONATHAN BRADSHAW

Professor of Social Policy at the University of York (Emeritus) and Durham University. Helped to establish the York Branch of CPAG in 1968 which he chaired for over 40 years. Served on CPAG national executive late 1960s and 1970s. Chair of CPAG's Policy Committee from 2013.

Witnesses:

MARTIN BARNES

CEO, CPAG 1998-2004.

FRAN BENNETT

Director, CPAG 1988-93.

DAVID BULL

Member of CPAG Executive Committee 1966-80 and 1981-95, and of publications committee for over 30 years.

PAUL DORNAN

Head of Policy and Research, CPAG, 2000s

ALISON GARNHAM

CEO, CPAG, 2009 to present

KATE GREEN

CEO, CPAG, 2004-9.

CAREY OPPENHEIM

Worked at CPAG from mid-1980s to mid-1990s as head of research and deputy director. Later Special Adviser to Tony Blair in the No. 10 Policy Unit.

JOHN VEIT-WILSON

Founding member, 1965; Executive Committee member 1965-80; Founding member Tyneside branch 1968; Chair, Branches Council 1971-3; Board Member 2001-3, 2004-13; CPAG Vice-Chair 2010-13

SALLY WITCHER

Director of CPAG, 1993-8.

Audience Participants

GEOFF FIMISTER

Former Welfare Rights Officer, CPAG, and member of the CPAG executive committee. Social Security Consortium

IMRAN HUSSAIN

Head of Policy, Rights & Advocacy, CPAG.

JILL MANTHORPE

Director, Social Care Workforce Research Unit, King's College London.

TONY ORHNIAL

Inland Revenue 1988-2004, Director of Personal Tax and Welfare Reform at HM Treasury 2004-8. Now a trustee of CPAG.

ADRIAN SINFIELD

Professor Emeritus of Social Policy, University of Edinburgh. Active in CPAG; member of the CPAG executive 1972-78.

PAT THANE

Professor of Contemporary History, Institute of Contemporary British History, King's College London.

Seminar Transcript:

The Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) in the 1990s and 2000s

1 June 2015, 2pm, Council Room, King's College London.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW Welcome, everybody. This is the fourth CPAG Oral History event. This one is going to be covering the 1990s and 2000s. I have been asked to chair it. I am Jonathan Bradshaw. I was only a member of CPAG during this period, so I shall be keeping very quiet. I was not an actor. The programme is that we will start with some brief statements by the members of the panel, recalling their roles and whatever they would like to say about their time with CPAG. We will then open it up for exchange between the panel members, and between the panel members and the audience, and people from the audience can give evidence as well as ask questions. It is a very open event. We will start with Fran Bennett, who was director in 1990.

FRAN BENNETT Thank you very much, Jonathan. Last time, I did not prepare, so, this time, I hope that I have not overcompensated, given that you said 'brief statements'. I left in 1989 to go on maternity leave, leaving the organisation in complete financial crisis, to be rescued by Carey Oppenheim and Peter Wiles between them, and, of course, the rest of the staff and executive. I came back in January 1990 and then left for good in spring 1993. I stayed in touch, however, to 2000 and beyond. What I remember most clearly about these years – and my memory is hopeless, so I did look up a few *Poverty* journals, which still grace my shelves, before coming – is partly the Poll

Tax. CPAG was one of the key organisations campaigning against the Poll Tax, by which I mean campaigning. It scared me stiff. We had signatures from half a million people against the Poll Tax, saying it was ‘unfair, unjust and undemocratic’, and we used our non-charitable arm (CPAG Ltd.) at the time to do that. We also produced the definitive publications about the Poll Tax, and Sir George Young (then a Conservative MP) helped us to launch one of those.

We also saved Child Benefit, or I should say that Child Benefit was saved during that time. We changed the name of the coalition from Save Child Benefit to the Child Benefit Coalition, in recognition of that. (Now, of course, we would have to change the name again.) We used celebrities – rather different from the usual CPAG style – to deliver things to 10 Downing Street and to do photo-shoots etc., I remember. We also, with the coalition to Save Child Benefit, brought Child Benefit out of just the poverty lobby and into a much broader group of organisations like the Women’s Institute (WI) and the Salvation Army etc. I want to pay tribute to Joan Brown, who did an enormous amount of work on child benefit, and is one of the best social-policy writers I know.

Child support (i.e. the Child Support Act 1991) also happened during this time. I did not have as much to do with that; Alison (Garnham) and other people in the organisation did. Again, we were a leading organisation on child support.

Those things, then, are the things that I particularly remember. Of course, King and Crewe, in 2013, have put several of those amongst the government ‘blunders’ that they talk about, which was during that time.

1992 was the shadow Budget – just looking at the Opposition for a minute – which I think was quite fundamental for subsequent years for Labour. 1994 was the Commission on Social Justice report. Both of those were important. My overwhelming feeling, when I left in 1993, was that we had had to focus on the Conservatives so much during the time that we had neglected our relationships with Labour, and that that showed in terms of

their social policies in 1992. (I am not going to comment on those now.)

I just wanted to say what fond memories I have of Tony Newton, who Ruth Lister wrote about recently, and also of John Major. I thought, when I met him, that he had this unique remark for me. I would say, 'Hello, it is Fran Bennett', and he said, 'Yes, I remember, and I have the scars to prove it.' Then I heard him saying it to about six other people.

Just in terms of institutional things and CPAG history, there were still vibrant branches then. The local CPAG group to which I still belong – Oxford (and district) – spearheaded a movement for democracy within CPAG for the local branches by having a conference in 1990. We also had what we called Poverty Watch, which was constituency contacts lobbying local MPs to make good the lack of lobbying that they got about UK poverty as opposed to international-development poverty issues. We formed the Freedom from Poverty Coalition in the run-up to the 1992 election with Church Action on Poverty, the Low Pay Unit and the Citizens Advice Bureaux as a coalition for poverty issues in the run-up to the election.

Of course, the other thing, just briefly, was that, in 1990, we had our 25th anniversary, which we might want to talk about too.

Those, then, were just a few things that I remember – well, that I had to remind myself about.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW

Thank you very much. Carey Oppenheim, you did the maternity leave. Would you like to speak next?

CAREY OPPENHEIM

Yes, I am happy to speak next. I have not prepared because I did not think I was going to be on the panel, so this will just be reflections on what Fran said. I started at CPAG in 1986, I think, so I straddled the 1980s and 1990s, and later went into government from 2000. I hope I took some of my nine years' experience at CPAG, which was hugely formative for me, into some aspects of the government from 2000 to 2005.

Just thinking about the Poll Tax, it was a very important phase for the organisation. I remember being involved in writing *A Tax on all the People*, which was the little green pamphlet that we had, with the very nice woodcut design by Cliff Harper on the front. I cannot remember the name of a second one, with Peter Esam, but it was called *Community Charge* or something. It looked particularly at the relationship with the 20% cut in Housing Benefit, so people had to pay a contribution for the first time. You are right, Fran, that there was a sense in which we were really part of a wider campaign, partly because there was a campaign right the way through the country at that point. Also, just thinking about the principle of a Poll Tax – one that did not take account of people's ability to pay – it was, I think, a very important catalyst to people understanding the nature of the taxation system and what an unjust one looked like. The Save Child Benefit Coalition, as renamed, was very important, with very important support from across the political divide and from some, particularly women, members of the Conservative party as the opposition.

I have just two lighter reflections. One was going with Fran to Number 10 to then see Brian Griffiths, who was head of the policy unit. We arrived to ask for the CPAG's key priorities. He was sat on a hard chair, and Fran and I were sat on a very comfy, voluminous sofa, the result being that, particularly Fran, being of smaller stature than me, vanished into thin air. It just felt like it

did not really matter what we were going to see; we were at a physical disadvantage because we were on the sofa. I rethought the sociology of power in those situations.

Second, I remember doing an interview for Radio Essex with Tony Newton about Child Benefit. It was one of those do-it-yourself radio stations, where you just go in and link yourself up. We had to sit virtually on each other's laps, but were not entirely in agreement, even though he was very good on Child Benefit. It was a rather funny process but he was a hugely humane and thoughtful Social Security Secretary and then campaigner from the backbenches.

I am not going to comment, but it would be useful to reflect – and I cannot remember well enough – on the arrival of Peter Lilley and his little list. I know that I was involved in writing a pamphlet about social security expenditure, which, of course, continues to be an ongoing theme, and trying to make the case for social security expenditure. Pat Thane and team might want to look for what we were saying –

ALISON GARNHAM

It was called *Putting the Record Straight*.

CAREY OPPENHEIM

Thank you very much. When did John Moore come and go?

PARTICIPANT

He came in 1987.

CAREY OPPENHEIM

That was before, and he was a flash in the pan and then faded a bit. There was then the issue that we were not able to talk about poverty at all, so the language was couched in terms of low income. Defining the terms in our own way, then, was hugely important.

In terms of CPAG, those six months when Fran was away were, I do remember, very tough financially, and I think the board rejected our budget. Garry Runciman, then Treasurer, who did not speak up about policy issues, felt that we were trying to be too Keynesian about our approach to the budget. Mainly, I

remember a lot of discussion about Child Benefit and still trying to keep it on the agenda.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW

Thanks so much, Carey. We will skip Sally Witcher, who is not here until four o'clock, and go to Martin Barnes.

MARTIN BARNES

Thank you, Jonathan, and thank you also to Alison for the invitation to contribute. It is 11 years since I worked at CPAG, and it is remarkable how well, fit and young everybody is looking. There must be a lot of paintings in attics. I was thinking about Carey's pamphlet but I could not remember the name of it. I will say a bit more about my involvement with CPAG but, having been involved with CPAG, it does give you a perspective. Why I remember the pamphlet is because of that regular cycle of every new government blaming the previous one for alleged faults and flaws in social security and wanting to try to reduce the cost, which even happened with Labour in 1997, and we will probably come on to that later.

I think my very first engagement with CPAG, as it probably was for a lot of people, was the handbooks. After university, I became a welfare rights advisor with what was then called the Community Programme. It was one of the government's responses to very high levels of unemployment. I got involved with the local Welfare Rights Group, which I think was affiliated with CPAG. I then joined a CAB in Cambridge, where there was a CPAG branch. It was quite small but very active, and it was an opportunity to really learn about and get involved with the policy issues as well as the more technical welfare rights aspect of the role.

I remember the Poll Tax, and I am not sure if I ever paid, but do not tell anybody. I remember the Child Benefit Campaign and I remember the Social Fund. Somewhere, I have a cutting from a Cambridge newspaper where we got permission to set up a white van outside the benefits office with an 8 ft cardboard shark to try to represent the loan shark. It was not subtle at all, but we had a petition too. That was a fantastic experience and learning.

I then had the privilege, I would say, to join CPAG as a welfare rights worker in 1992. I joined the Citizens Rights Office team. I not only did welfare rights work but also had the opportunity to be involved with parliamentary lobbying and policy work too. I remember the child support work and the fantastic work that Alison and Emma did, not just in monitoring and capturing data, but also in producing the child support handbooks. Fran is right: CPAG was probably a lone voice saying that there were fundamental flaws not just in the administration but in the principle of this, and it went through Parliament like a dose of salts. We all know how well that then turned out: a good exercise in lack of parliamentary scrutiny and not really listening to the evidence base.

In addition, there were changes in Incapacity Benefit and Jobseeker's Allowance. There were 35 changes in the definitions of unemployment to try to keep the figures as low as possible and to transfer people across to Invalidity Benefit. The government then felt that there were too many people claiming that and wanted to clamp down etc. One of the changes that happened internally was the trustees introducing a new team structure and the roles of key coordinators. I applied and was appointed a team coordinator and then I took over from Sally in 1998. About a year and a half into Labour's first two years, after the Lone Parent Benefit cut and coming towards the end of the two-year inherited Conservative party spending envelope, which Ken Clark always said he probably would not have stuck to himself, because it was eye-wateringly tight.

About four or five months after I became Director, Tony Blair said he was going to abolish child poverty. I could not take the credit, obviously, but I think it was perhaps one of the most historic developments in the charity's history and, whatever we might feel about the delivery and some of the issues, it was a sea change. It was a fantastic opportunity for CPAG but also a bit of a threat of as well, because we did need to look at engaging constructively as a critical friend around Child Tax Credit, which was means-tested. We did not abandon the commitment to Child

Benefit but it did require discussions internally about that positioning. For a couple of years, we had Budgets when, literally, billions of pounds of additional money were going to support families with children, and it was an incredible time. I can remember the 2002 or 2003 Budget when, at the same time that National Insurance was increased to provide more funding for the NHS, £2.5 billion of additional funding in Child Credits was introduced, which is equivalent to £3.6 billion today. It was a political risk.

I will conclude by saying that, despite that stick to beat the government with, I do not think that the government got the political brownie points, credibility and win that that pledge deserved, which is partly why the End Child Poverty coalition was set up, given that we were being asked to put pressure on government to try to force their hand to deliver on the pledge. I can remember debates in Parliament where there would literally be three, four or, at most, five MPs talking about child poverty. It was a privilege in my 12 years to be involved at CPAG, and a fantastic learning time, and I will say that, in terms of CPAG's history, it is as much needed today, if not more so, than at any time in the last 50 years.

KATE GREEN

I do not have to be objective now at all – I am allowed political bias these days. There was a brief interregnum after Martin left, when we had an interim Director, but I was Director from the middle of 2004 until the end of 2009. In many ways, especially when I was first there, it was a really golden period. As Martin has said, the Labour government was really putting money in, not just through the Tax Credits and benefits system but also through a much broader range of anti-poverty, employment and childcare strategies, as well as through investment in schools, education and healthcare, and the Healthy Start strategies. We were really seeing a very positive and very pro-poor agenda. Especially in the first period that I was there, that was filtering through very obviously to a reduction in relative child poverty, which we were seeing from the published statistics.

I should say, Carey, that, having you in 10 Downing Street, there was clearly a real understanding within the heart of government about the approach that CPAG had been advocating, and that was being applied to the public policymaking of the then government. Ruth Lister, of course, who is not here today, was similarly influential inside government, not least because of her close relationship with Gordon Brown.

Things, then, were going well, and we were always pushing for more. I think I inherited from Martin a campaign on Tax Credits called Give Us a Fiver Gordon, and we got £3. I had to go around and explain why this was a success, which it was. I never totally thanked Martin for that, but, after a period when things were going well, a couple of things happened which, while they were nothing like the sea change that people had lived with through the 1980s, nonetheless were of concern.

The first were Tax Credits, which were, without question, the single most effective instrument that the Labour government used to reduce poverty in terms of outcome. It became very problematic operationally, and CPAG initiated legal action against the Labour government, which was not well-received by Labour ministers at the time, and there was a lot of pressure on us as an organisation to halt that legal action. The pressure suggested that we were undermining the whole credibility of the Tax Credit system.

The other thing was that, after early years of progress against the child-poverty target – and I really agree with Martin how important that was as a means of driving policy forward and keeping attention live – I remember having a meeting with Carey at Number 10, in which she said, ‘We are a bit worried about the next set of figures. We think that we may be beginning to see that the progress is flat-lining or perhaps even going into reverse.’

In one sense, that was undoubtedly quite useful to us, because it enabled us to say very clearly to government, ‘You do not reduce poverty by accident; it comes down when you take the necessary measures.’ That has been a narrative that CPAG has been able to

keep returning to through subsequent years. You have a very clear evidence line now, looking right back to the very beginning of the organisation, in terms of how much of a difference government policy makes, for good or ill. It was, then, in one sense, a silver lining to what was otherwise a cloud. We clearly had an argument then that government could make the difference and, when government took its foot off the pedal, we very quickly saw the progress stall.

In response to that, the sector – and Martin has referred to the End Child Poverty Coalition – tried quite hard to come together to create the space for government to continue to put in the investment and policy attention to get progress back on track. We saw some really good, positive responses from government, in recognition that things were beginning to go awry.

Institutionally, the creation of the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCFS) and the Child Poverty Unit within that department, and the way in which that led pretty directly to our ability to create cross-party support for strategies to end child poverty, which, ultimately, led to the passage of the Child Poverty Act, were really good responses to the sense that things had gone off track and that they could be pulled back again. We saw a real sense that the Labour government had seen that things were going wrong and began to take action again to put them right.

We also saw particularly the government responding very proactively to the problems that were arising in the operation of Tax Credits, and putting a lot of money in to underpin that system. By the time we were getting to the end of the first decade of the 20th century, although they are still pretty complicated, they were running pretty smoothly for most families, compared to what we had seen five or six years before. I remember, just as I was leaving CPAG, saying to the people I was leaving behind, ‘Do not let us knock Tax Credits.’ We had spent years and years rubbishing them, and I began to say, ‘They are effective and we might not want to open up the opportunity for an incoming and more malicious government to question their efficacy.’

All of this was going on swimmingly well, and then we were hit by the massive international financial crash. CPAG's response to that in terms of our thought processes was twofold: first of all, that the immediate response to that crash from the point of view of poor families and poor children had to be to protect them through exactly the form of fiscal stimulus that the Brown-Darling leadership of the government put in place. We had been keen to see that and were pleased to see it, and I continued to make the case that that was very effective not only for low income families but also for the economy as a whole.

Longer-term, we began an internal debate about whether this was going to be an opportunity or a threat for the whole pro-poor, pro-equality agenda. The more optimistic among us thought it was a real opportunity to change the whole game, to bring on board public support for a much more equal society, and to make the case that it was gross income inequality that had been a major driver of that crash. The more pessimistic of us – any of us who had lived through the 1980s and might have hoped for a similar experience then – were a little more concerned that that might not happen, and that, indeed, far from leading to a more egalitarian public mood, it could lead to quite a protective, defensive and hostile mood to children and families in poverty. Indeed, very shortly after I left the organisation, we began to see exactly that, with the arrival of a new government and a much more hostile rhetoric and public policy agenda.

The only other thing that I wanted to pick up on was, as Martin mentioned, the creation of CPAG in Scotland, which was a hugely successful initiative for the organisation. Often, what we could see was that it was much more successful in effecting policy change, and we used to question why that was the case. Some of it was undoubtedly that it was a smaller and more compact community in which to work, and that enabled much more effective cross-sector working than I think we were able to achieve in England and Wales.

It was also, I think, really interesting to see, again, the support that the Scottish government gave to CPAG in Scotland, and the

conclusion that I draw, therefore, from all of the time I spent in the organisation, on both sides of the border, is that it was an organisation where persuading government to take action or to desist from action was probably the most effective thing that the organisation did.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW

Thank you so much. I am now in a bit of a dilemma about whom I choose to go next, but I think I am going to turn to David Bull, who was chairman of CPAG until when he will tell us.

DAVID BULL

I was hoping to rely on your memory, Jonathan. I do not know. I think I probably finished as chair in 1993. I was on the executive from 1967 and became vice chair in 1981. I succeeded Peter Townsend as chair in 1989, I think. At some point in the 1990s, I stepped down and sat on the backbenches, as it were, with rather better grace, I hope, than Ted Heath. I lasted in that capacity with Linda Bransbury in the chair until sometime in the late 1990s, but then continued on the Publications Committee, which I had been on non-stop since 1969, until its demise. I do not know when its demise was, because there seemed to be a conspiracy, with the acting Director unwilling to tell us just when we would not be needed anymore – Peter Golding and I – and it sort of disappeared. It never really ended but it was a strange experience in those final years.

I have no thoughts to offer, Jonathan, on your agenda. Like John, I do not see that as something I need to comment on, for two reasons: first, because Pat and her researchers are, I know, reading not only the pertinent CPAG publications but all of the press releases and lots of correspondence as well; and second, I look forward to hearing the sort of anecdotes that we heard in January from Fran and Ruth, topped up today by Fran and Carey, about meeting ministers over breakfast and all that stuff. I am afraid I do not even have a Tony Newton story to tell, which seemed obligatory from our first two contributors, except losing him at York station at the CAB conference, driving poor Robin Simpson mad. We were all entertained for many years by

Robin Simpson. I think his laugh, when I reported back that I had lost Tony Newton by taking him to the museum instead of the station, could have been heard at least far south as Nottingham or something like that.

FRAN BENNETT

We once found Robin Simpson on a Eurostar train because of his laugh.

DAVID BULL

I cannot imagine contributing many more anecdotes today, but this is prompted by something that John said in response to Jonathan on email recently. I would like to say something – not at this minute – looking more inwardly about the changing relationships – as I saw them, from working through the 1980s and continuing as chair and then a member – between the members – especially those on the executive – and the staff. I do not want to say anything major because I know that the stories I have heard from John Veit-Wilson and Geoff Fimister contribute to much more dramatic changes.

CPAG's first two chairs are, alas, dead, so my long period as vice chair followed by chair was a prelude, I think, in some ways – although I did not notice at the time – to more major shifts that I never witnessed because I was no longer around. The three things that sum that up for me are the experience of chairing the joint negotiating committee – what did I learn about CPAG's unusual flat pay structure and the function of trade union politics in an organisation so small that you could not imagine such an active trade union; second, to say something about the changing nature of the AGM and, in particular, I say with the feeling the sidelining of the chair; and third, to say a bit more about the publications subcommittee, which was an unusual committee with the executive power it had, until, as I said, it was suddenly hinted that we had no power at all and we had better go away. If the opportunity arises, I would like to talk on at least one or two – or all three – of those three matters.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW

Very good, David. We will certainly come back to those.

JOHN VEIT WILSON

I am sure there will be matters like that which, if not taken up today, can be fed to Pat Thane appropriately at some other point. My involvement with CPAG during this period did not really start until co-option onto the Publications Subcommittee sometime towards the end of the 1990s. For anybody here who has not heard me say so many times before, I had been on the Executive from the beginning, as I am the last living founder of CPAG. I had been elected off the Executive in 1980, so, in the first part of this period, I was not playing an active role in any part of the central organisation, although we had an active branch in Tyneside in those days, and various things went on there.

In the late 1990s, I was still reading the publications and, as a result of engagement with a couple of them, Martin invited me to come back as a co-opted member of the Publications Subcommittee and make a contribution there. That is where I continued, until, as David has pointed out, it somehow disappeared. Before that happened, however, something else happened, which perhaps does reflect some of those other issues about what was going on in the office while the political events that we have been hearing about were taking place on the front stage, so to speak.

There was a feeling among some in the office and some elsewhere that perhaps CPAG had lost the focus it once had on policy research and policymaking as an important part of the staff activities to put beside the welfare rights and publications work which it was doing. That is a discussion, of course, one can have at great length – there has always been a tension there – but, originally, the welfare rights work had started not as an end in itself but in order to provide evidence for the policy research and policymaking work – test cases and so on. There was a question, which was an explicit question, in the air as to whether that balance between the two activities, given that it was a small organisation, with very limited resources, was being appropriately found towards the end of the 1990s.

In that context, Adrian Sinfield and I were invited to stand for election to the board of trustees, as, by that time, the Executive Committee had become known, and we were elected to join the board at the end of 2001. Once we were there, we started to try to make this point and to have it recognised and implemented by a board whose other members were also changing quite rapidly from the situation which David Bull has recounted and which Carey and one or two others have mentioned.

I think it was Adrian – it may have been somebody else – who proposed that we should not just have a subcommittee for publications, wherever that had got to, but that we should very positively have not only staff whose primary role was research but also a committee of the board to advise the board and the staff on policy issues, both by acting as a sounding board for what was being brought up by the staff within the organisation, but also for bringing together our knowledge. Most of us were academics; some of us on the policy committee were acting in roles in the field, in the non-governmental sector or politics – or otherwise – and bringing up to the staff issues which we felt should receive attention within the organisation.

It was, then, a dual fold responsibility and one that we felt would strengthen the capacity of the staff not just to respond to the government activities but to take the initiative in promoting the kinds of things that CPAG should do. That has continued throughout that first decade – the noughties – which is on today's agenda and, of course, it continues to the present day.

Adrian Sinfield was the first chair of the policy committee and a very powerful exponent of that approach. When his term of office on the board came to an end, I took over from him as the chair of the policy committee. When my term came to an end, I passed it on to Jonathan Bradshaw here.

Welcome, Paul Dornan. You are being invited to come and sit behind me here.

The point I wanted to make is that my involvement has been on the policy side and on the governance side. We have not talked about governance and, at this point, it is not part of the agenda.

My longer term interest, however, as many of you will know, is less on the detail of the government activities than on the underlying conception, measurement and policy, for what poverty represents in this country.

I will finish just by referring to a couple of points that have come up. This is anecdotal and highly peripheral. One is: do I have a Tony Newton story? I do but only to the extent of saying that one of the reasons for the stance taken by Tony Newton, who has been praised around this table, is not accidentally that he spent his childhood in a Quaker boarding school. It happened to be the one where I went. Like the Bullingdon Club, I can say I was at school with Tony Newton. That is where I know Tony Newton from: as a little boy two classes below me.

I am sorry that Ruth Lister is not here to say something about John Smith's Commission on Social Justice, but it is not irrelevant to the background to what we are talking about. There are a number of reasons for raising issues of social justice before a certain Tory minister hijacked that term and turned it into something quite different from what we and, I hope, all well-meaning people, would recognise by it. Ruth invited me to write a piece on my research on income standards for the Commission, and I wrote a booklet, which the IPPR published, called *Dignity Not Poverty: A Minimum Income Standard for the UK*. I think it is the first time it got used in that context, and what the Joseph Rowntree Foundation later took up, and financed, used that term to adopt some work that Robert Walker and I had written about in the 1980s to establish what are now the foundations of the Living Wage movement. It is, then, part of that general movement, which CPAG is concerned with, to try to achieve a more just material situation as well as moral situation for people in poverty and deprivation in this country.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW

Thanks so much, John. Paul, we have been going around in historical order, but we missed you. I think you worked mainly with Kate. Would you like to say something about your time at CPAG?

PAUL DORNAN

Thank you for inviting me, and apologies for arriving part way through. I suppose I arrived in the early 2000s, a period of time after the initial pledge had been made and when a lot of the policy that had begun as a result of the pledge to eradicate child poverty was being unrolled. Throughout that period, my time – and, indeed, a lot of Kate’s and Martin’s time – was marked by the fact that the government was very committed, ostensibly, to the pledge that it had made and trying to make progress, but the questions were how much progress it would make, whether the types of instruments that were being introduced were going to achieve and sustain that progress and, indeed, what was necessary to try to, in a sense, hold their feet to that particular fire. I guess it would be quite interesting if we got into a discussion about how effectively we were able to do that and what lessons are to be learned for the future.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW

Thank you very much indeed. Sian Nicholas was director for a time after Kate Green, but she is not here, and then Alison took over in 2010, which is where we end. Alison was also in CPAG at the beginning of this period. I think you should be on this platform; could you contribute?

ALISON GARNHAM

I had a very similar background to Martin. I was also a welfare-rights worker on a community programme in Leeds and ended up at Peterborough CAB, not far away from Martin, and did very similar work in a local CPAG branch. I have not told many people about it but we did lots of press work at the time, and I ended up at CPAG, as the training officer, to begin with. I was at CPAG from 1989 to 1995, and then again as Chief Executive from September 2010. In total, then, I have been at CPAG for 11 years, in one way or another. As others have said, what I learned at CPAG at the time is what I took with me to all future jobs. Certainly, at the University of North London, where I had to learn very quickly the academic version of events, I moved on to One Parent Families and took very strongly with me the

importance of Child Benefit and ideas about non-means-tested benefits, bringing the idea of child poverty into the lone parent debate much more strongly than it had been before. That was quite a conscious thing.

In terms of my time at CPAG, the initial thing was the financial crisis. Everybody's efforts were all geared towards trying to raise money to try to drag the organisation out of its structural deficit. It seems that we have had several structural deficits over the years! We were trying to pull out of one at that time through the sales of publications and training, which I was responsible for, and we had some success in that. As Fran said I then got involved in 1990 when they produced a White Paper on the proposed child support legislation, ironically titled *Putting Children First*. We did a lot of work then on, as Fran said, leading the campaign in the country to argue that it was a fundamentally flawed piece of legislation and that, rather than putting children first, it put the Treasury first. It was all about making benefits savings and recovering money, in fact. There was a good argument for a decent child maintenance system but it was not the one that was on the table. We did a good deal of work around that, which, again, I took with me to future jobs, particularly at One Parent Families, where I met Kate, before she came to CPAG. Those, then, were the main highlights for me. The other thing that I was involved in while I was at CPAG was, as a member of staff, being concerned about support that staff needed, and the need for more management support. That was a theme that continued throughout the future years in CPAG.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW

Thank you. That was tremendously interesting, and it is now really an open forum for anybody to contribute. I suggest we concentrate on the first period – the 1990s – first, although not in too structured a way. Would anybody like to contribute?

ADRIAN SINFIELD

I was very impressed by the fact that, in 1991, Norman Lamont's budget included an increase in Child Benefit, which he funded by freezing the tax allowance for married couples. To the best of my

knowledge, it was the first time ever that the unmentioned cost of tax relief was used to increase public spending. I wondered to what extent CPAG played any part in influencing something that ran so clearly against Treasury tradition.

FRAN BENNETT

I do not know how closely Norman Lamont was listening to us, but that was precisely our policy. We had always argued that the married couple's tax allowance – the married man's tax allowance as it was at the time – should wither away and the money be put into child benefit. As I said, I do not know how influential we were, and I would not necessarily claim that we were, but that had been a consistent line for some time – which now, of course, is being reversed.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW

Why was it picked up then?

FRAN BENNETT

I do not know about the married couple's allowance. You know this more than I do, Adrian, but I think the move was against tax reliefs at that time: mortgage interest tax relief, for example, as well as the married couple's tax allowance. The Conservatives reduced the married couple's allowance until Labour abolished it, so, as you say, it was not just a Labour move. I cannot remember the history behind mortgage interest tax relief but, similarly, I do not think it was just Labour who phased it out. There was that going on at the time.

Of course, at the time there was also Save Child Benefits, and the 1991 Budget was where I think it is right to say that the movement was made. The way in which they increased Child Benefit to begin with – and then they said they would inflation-proof it – was an increase for the first or eldest eligible child rather than, initially, for all children. We commissioned John Ditch from York, and I can't remember who he was working with, to look at the rationale for that, which they discovered made no sense whatsoever. That was the way in which they 'saved child benefit', if you like. Now, of course, we are going in the opposite direction.

We often comment now that, unlike the 2010 response to recession, where we had austerity and deficit reduction implemented through 85% cuts and only 15% tax rises, we often reference the fact that John Major did 50/50 in the 1990s and that it is historically unprecedented today to have such a high level of cost reduction compared to tax rises. I just wondered whether you –

FRAN BENNETT

No, I do not remember that at all. That is interesting.

IMRAN HUSSAIN

As a lead-up to the Blair speech in 1999, how far did you see that coming, that kind of speech, that kind of commitment?

MARTIN BARNES

We did not.

FRAN BENNETT

I do not think anybody did. The academic community has always said that it was out of the blue.

MARTIN BARNES

I will, however, share an anecdote with you because, at the time, it was quite profound. It was fairly soon after I became Director and read the biography of Gordon Brown that Paul Routledge had written. We were still in the two years of spending commitment and still getting over the lone parent cuts, and some of the tone of the debate was not helpful.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW

What do you mean by ‘not helpful’?

MARTIN BARNES

It certainly is not as bad as it has become and was before. There was a lot of talking tough, and sometimes it was quite difficult not to take the bait, because it was not always helpful in terms of public attitudes towards poverty.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW

New Deals etc.

MARTIN BARNES

Yes. We will come on to the issue of doing good by stealth,

which was interesting, but what was interesting about reading this biography was that there were several references to when Gordon Brown was a backbencher, and Ruth was mentioned. It jumped out and I thought, 'I was not aware that he was that interested in child poverty.' We wrote a letter asking for a meeting with him, thinking that we would not get one, but we did get one – a one-to-one meeting – and I can remember Ed Miliband sitting to one side with the officials. Djuna Thurley went with me, and this was just a few weeks before the 1999 budget and several months before the child poverty pledge. At that time, Ruth Lister was doing a lot of work around making a case for new, different structures for children's benefits. We went in with our wish list, one of which was to up-rate children's benefits in line with inflation or earnings, whichever was highest. We thought that that was quite radical at the time, and I cannot remember the exact words but Gordon Brown's response was, effectively, 'That does not sound very ambitious.' It took us aback a bit.

With hindsight, there was probably work already going on. Whether or not the reports that Tony Blair hijacked this pledge because of all the stuff that was going on between Numbers 10 and 11, I do not know, but I also, again with hindsight, remember there was stuff going on from Treasury around the early days of Sure Start. They were very committed about that, so some of the signs were there, but it was difficult to be optimistic in light of the spending pledges and so on.

What was interesting about the child poverty pledge is that Peter Golding did some media monitoring on that. Other than the front page on the *Daily Mirror*, there was hardly any media coverage. It was item three or four, perhaps, on broadcast news, with little bits here and there in other newspapers, which, of itself, shows the ambition and the challenge as well. What I do remember – and I am quite embarrassed about this – is that, because we had to find something to say as well as welcoming it, we issued a press release to say, 'if you are going to do it in 20 years, why not do it in 10?' I remember having a meeting with

Maeve Sherlock, who was special adviser to Gordon Brown, a few months after that, and they appeared to have taken it seriously. They said, 'Is this CPAG's position?' I said, 'No.'

CAREY OPPENHEIM

I was not at Number 10 when Tony Blair made that speech, but my understanding is that it was a last minute addition from Peter Hyman, who was then one of his advisors. He was very passionate about education but, as with these things, in the writing of the speech, which I think was around the future of the welfare state and he had solicited contributions from people, it crystallised in the last stages of writing that speech. I would also reiterate what you said, Martin: the Treasury had already started to introduce some measures in terms of childcare strategies, Income Support and Sure Start etc, which made it clear that Gordon Brown was very interested in moving quite dramatically in that territory.

Then I came in January 2000, after the pledge had been made. Interestingly, there was no clarity at all about what that would mean in terms of trying to measure progress. I did quite a lot of work with the then Department for Social Security and Treasury about trying to think about how you turn that into something that you are accountable for and that you measure. There were lots of discussions subsequently – and still are – about how you do that. I remember going to a meeting at Treasury where Ed Miliband and the special advisers were talking to other special advisers, and saying, 'It is amazing that you are using a relative measure of child poverty that CPAG has been arguing for forever as your measure.' That felt very radical.

On reflection, it is partly a stealth argument but partly deeper than a stealth argument: how do you embed that strategy in something that people want and which secures a legacy? Despite Labour's very strong intensity in terms of resources and the Child Poverty Act, and trying to make it more cross-cutting, not just an income strategy and employment strategy, if it is not embedded, connected and woven through in terms of public demand and understanding, it is very difficult for it to sustain

through different administrations and colder climates and recessions. I suppose a reflection for thinking about the next child poverty strategy is: how do you grow that upwards from the grassroots? Of course, CPAG does that in many ways through the local branches, but it is very difficult to do when the climate is so hostile.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW

We have got into the noughties. We did not spend long on the nineties. Would anybody else like to make a contribution?

GEOFF FIMISTER

This spans the nineties and the noughties. I have been involved with CPAG in various capacities since 1971 to the present day. I was on the national executive committee from 1979 to 1995, when I stood down. I was then on the staff for a couple of years between 1999 and 2002, and then back on the board of trustees, so I was probably in the unusual situation of having been both staff and a trustee for many years. I wanted to talk about what John Veit Wilson said about the policy/welfare rights balance, because I think it is quite an important issue that I always feel ought to be a false dichotomy: policy people ought to be interested in welfare rights, and welfare rights people ought to be interested in policy.

When I was first on the executive committee from 1979 until the eighties, the staff used to attend the executive committee meetings *en masse*. We used to have them on Friday nights, which was a bit of a pain. They often used to go on too long because the discussion was so interesting, and quite a few of us used to then go to the Freemasons pub on Long Acre and then on to a restaurant. There was an awful lot of debate going on throughout the Friday night but the interesting thing was that, if you were an outside observer, you would not have been able to tell the difference between the welfare rights people, the policy people, the staff and the executive committee members. They were all participating knowledgeably and across the board.

That changed. I know there was a difference of opinion about what role staff should play in a trustees' meeting, but that

changed. By the time I was on the staff, staff members did not go to the executive committee or the board of trustees, as it then was, unless they had an agenda item, and they did not really know each other very much. The trustees did not know who the staff were, and *vice versa*. Some people might argue that that is more business-like, but I felt it helped to explain the drift apart between the welfare rights and the policy side of things.

I should also say that, during that period, the balance between management and policy changed. As somebody who was a manager in local government, I was a bit taken aback by the way the executive committee in the eighties never seemed to discuss management very much; it was almost entirely policy. That completely reversed by the time I was on the board of trustees again from 2002, in that we just seemed to discuss entirely management issues and not policy, which is why we set up the policy committee to address that balance.

The language also changed. Back in the eighties, the discussions on the executive committee were a mixture of academic social policy speak and welfare rights jargon. By the noughties, it had become much more influenced by charity sector management speak, so you had three of the most impenetrable languages ever invented. I think those things are important in understanding the way things changed over the years, sometimes for the better and sometimes not for the better.

The other thing I think we have not touched on is resources. It started off as a very small organisation and grew into quite a big one, and the financial situation has fluctuated. Some of our directors and chief executives have had to deal with a relatively okay – not rich, but relatively okay financial background, but others have had to deal with enormous financial problems. I remember when I was on the staff – and I think Martin would agree with this – we were suffering financially and we were short of resources. Certainly, if I rang Martin to leave him a voice mail at weekends or Bank Holidays, I wouldn't get voicemail, I would get Martin, he was always there, grappling with the administration and policy. We have a history of workaholic

Directors going way back to Tony Lynes and onwards but I think the background resources and how much pressure that put on the organisation is important to mention.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW

Alison, did you want to come in? You were going to come in earlier.

ALISON GARNHAM

I was on a completely different train of thought. I was thinking about the period just prior to the one that Martin was talking about, in the 1990s. I think it is worth putting on the record that that was an era that was characterised by the same kind of claimant blaming that we are hearing today, only it was mostly coming from *The Sun*, not *The Mail*, in those days, and it was very feminised. There was the demonization of lone parents. We heard about nothing else but women on benefits having children, so it was that environment that the child support legislation fell in the middle of. It did not really end until 1997, after JK Rowling appeared on the scene through One Parent Families. All kinds of things happened to change the climate but it was not until 1997 when that language just stopped. We forget about that period but it was a very strong, powerful sense at the time.

MARTIN BARNES

I think it is important and helpful that you have mentioned that, because there was some 'talking tough' by the New Labour government, albeit it was of a different tone and purpose. I do not think you can accuse, with one exception, from my experience with a drugs charity, the previous Labour government of stigmatising. That was an issue that was around when I was at CPAG. We did not really talk about it a great deal but, it responds to the negative press coverage of Peter Lilley's 'little list' speech at party conference etc.

I do remember when one of the big children's charities did a publicity campaign around child poverty, and I think they were doing it for the right reasons but there were images of a baby and a syringe and that sort of thing, and we were genuinely concerned that it could have the opposite effect of reinforcing

stereotypes and stigma, as well as the issue about who was driving this: was it their policy department or their marketing department? That does happen and I think it is still a relevant issue sometimes in terms of how bigger charities campaign. Precisely to your point, Alison, the tone did change, and you felt it in the room when you were talking to them. Post 2010, I was working at a drugs charity and it was just a matter of weeks before press releases or placed stories were coming out of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) about the number of people with drug and alcohol problems on benefits. What I will mention, just in case I forget it, is that one of the last pieces of legislation that the Labour government introduced was the Welfare Reform Act. That introduced, in primary legislation, the power for Jobcentres to ask, on a suspicion, whether or not people had drug or alcohol problems. A refusal to answer could lead to a sanction. On a suspicion, somebody could undergo a compulsory assessment to find out whether or not they had a drug or alcohol problem, and also drug-testing. That was introduced at the tail-end of the last Labour government, and there were also plans, right up until the House of Lords, to make it compulsory for people identified as having a drug and alcohol problem to undergo treatment as a condition of getting benefit, which is now back on the agenda.

It was only very late on – and I think because they realised it was in breach of the NHS constitution – that that was dropped. The Home Office did not want it and the Department of Health did not want it. It felt like it came from Downing Street, because there was a panic going on about the need to be appearing to be tough around welfare reform. What more stigmatised group can you have than people with a drug and alcohol problem? It really was shocking and disappointing, to put it mildly.

CAREY OPPENHEIM

This is not a wider policy or political point but just reflecting on Geoff's earlier comment about the feel of CPAG. When I was there in 1985, when I first started, I think CPAG had quite a feeling of being an insurgent organisation. It was not that new,

but it was still relatively new. It is right that it felt like the trustees and the staff were all from the same pot. Some of what was described – and I do not know because I have not been closely involved – is just the evolution of an organisation that is there for longer and that needs certain kinds of structures and ways of working.

I do not know about the intricacies but it just strikes me that that probably had started to change during the latter period that I was there. It did feel that it was part of an earlier era and probably part of wider politics too. I do remember, the second day I arrived at CPAG, the union meeting took most of the day, and I was a bit shocked, but just because I had not been in working life for that long. Probably, later on, I would have found that quite frustrating in some ways, if I had been trying to run the organisation.

On the Publications Subcommittee, it was a very special group. As somebody who was quite young, I think Peter Golding was initially chairing it. It was a hothouse for ideas, as well as generating a lot of income for the organisation through the rights publications. It did have a special role in the organisation that I and others learnt a lot from and got a lot from. It does not mean that things are set in aspic forever, but it did have a very important role.

FRAN BENNETT

Including a partner.

CAREY OPPENHEIM

Yes, I was also going to say that I also got my partner and two children from the Publications Subcommittee.

PAUL DORNAN

One thing that I would add is that it is clearly a difficult balance in the evolution of an organisation. My time at CPAG was certainly a point of change in that relationship, and often a point of challenge. Coming back to what Geoff was saying, an amount of the credibility that we brought into external policy-type discussions was because we either knew or could call on people who knew the detail, and the detail was often where officials

were perhaps concerned about being caught out. In terms of trying to build that synergy, we did make use of that, and it is a real strength to the policy and influencing side of the organisation. Separating that is not very helpful; getting them to work together is clearly a challenge.

DAVID BULL

I want to integrate at least two of them, because one of the interesting things I have heard, first from Alison and then Geoff commented on it, with 'hear, hears' from Carey and Fran, was about the lack of management in the 1980s, when I was responsible for being in an executive position which might have been offering more in that regard. It occurred to me, probably long after, that we were very compliant. We were increasingly told what was happening and I had no problem with that personally.

Perhaps I can give just three examples of raising issues with Fran – and I should say that I came in as chairman with Ruth and then Fran, and what a great experience that was working with them. I think that should be on the record – at a time when there were mutterings about why on earth the previous chairman had fallen out with the second Director, that issue about whatever happened between Peter and Frank. I do not know, although I do know of a particular version from a particular gossip, but Jane is not here.

That was an interesting experience about what the role of the chair should be, and I will give three examples. One was an issue that I lost with Fran, and I still do not know why. One day, Peter Wiles, who had come in as Director asked whether he could have lunch with me and whether I could give him the history of CPAG over lunch. He obviously chose me instead of you, Jonathan. I did; I thought, 'This is great.' On the way back in, Sue Brighouse came out and said, 'Where have you two been?' so we told her. She said, 'Can you have lunch with me?' I have now had to do two inductions, and I thought this was quite important, that CPAG was not doing inductions, and said so to Fran, who did not want to do them, and that was the end of it. It

was the end of it because it seems to me that, if the Director says we are not doing it, we are not doing it, and that was fine.

The two examples where I felt I had to put my foot down and say something were, first of all, about the nature of the AGM. If Stuart (Weir) were here, this would be another invitation for one of his diatribes against branches, but other people have been saying nice things about branches. The original AGMs were hosted by a branch, some people may remember, and everybody came and the branch found bedrooms and goodness knows what. I remember Roger Smith telling me, with some disdain, I think in Bristol AGM 1982, probably, that this was not appropriate; that these local members would keep them up half the night talking. This was grassroots democracy. We had the executive here and the staff here, and we had a chance to talk to them, but Roger said that this could not happen. They were kept up half the night and were not fit for Saturday, and it would not happen again.

Of course, it did not, and it was another example, for me, of where the staff decided what was going to happen and if we should have had a management view. I do not think we did. Nobody objected to this. I objected only when we reached the situation that the AGM had been turned too much away from an AGM and into a conference, and people were being invited in not only to speak but to chair. Eventually, I said – almost certainly to Fran – that it seemed to me a bit daft that the members' AGM is not chaired by the chair of the organisation, and I did get back into the chair. That was one example of where something had evolved totally by staff, unchecked, until I had a comment.

The second example was over something quite bizarre and which I did get my way on again, and that was the chair's report. Fran was very encouraging of me writing a whimsical chair's report. I remember when you got me to go and speak at the Liberal conference with Paul Goggins and Archie Kirkwood, and my annual report was called *Postcard from the Fringe*. You liked that corny title and I got published almost unaltered.

FRAN BENNETT

You were always brilliant at titles: *Families Rent Apart* was my favourite, for the publication we wrote about non-dependent deductions from Housing Benefit.

DAVID BULL

The Publications Committee, which Carey has been speaking about, was, in many ways, I think, a model example of an officer coming to report to the committee very diligently, and I refer to Peter Redpath. It would have been good if, just once in the 10 years or more that it happened, he had got the papers out in the advance, rather than distributing them in a crazy manner at the meeting. Peter was, however, otherwise a wonderful example of reporting to the committee very diligently. We gradually had one or two officers, however – and one in particular who made it personal – who wanted to play with the chairman's report, messing up the English and doing goodness knows what. That was another example of where I eventually said to Peter Golding, 'Can this really be, that you have an elected chair and you have an officer unilaterally playing with what the chair has written by way of an annual report?' Fortunately, that was another example of where Fran agreed with me.

It was, however, an interesting few years of working and deciding when to say anything. People have been talking about why we did not manage. I thought that, by and large, CPAG was an excellent example of appointing good staff and letting them get on with it. There were occasional discussions with Fran, the chair, which I found very satisfactory. I forget why Ruth and I fell out once but I took her to the Middle Temple for dinner and all was well.

KATE GREEN

Jonathan, could I just wrap up on the Publications Committee, because I know we are getting to the tea break and it might be quite a useful thing to do. When I arrived, as David has mentioned, the interim Director immediately between Martin and I was really seeking to change or end the role of the committee. At the same time, however, we got the policy group,

which then became the Policy Committee, up and running and I thought very effectively. It was a very good group and very thoughtful. It took us a while, I think, to make the most of the idea that both the welfare rights side and the policy side of the organisation could come together in that forum, but it was a really good group, with a lot of potential.

The issue with the Publications Committee was that it was spending a lot of time on editorial detail by the time I got there – often editorial detail on the rights side, which was really important to get absolutely accurate, so it was vital that we had the right people to do that – but also we had an independent, UDI, publishing programme on the policy side, with no campaigning or communications strategy to support some of the books that were being published. Someone would come and pitch a really interesting idea to the Publications Committee on child health and poverty or something, and they would say, ‘That is really good. We will commission that and we’ll publish it’ and the rest of the organisation would have absolutely no plan for work or campaigning around it.

It seemed to me that what we were trying to do was to have a very policy-led organisation, that the policy group – subsequently the Policy Committee – was a very powerful group to start to do that. And that there still remained a really important need for a committee to manage or have oversight of our commercial publishing business and, in particular, to assure its accuracy, because that was hugely important for the organisation’s reputation. That was what I thought we were trying to work towards in the first couple of years that I was there, and I still think that that was the right model for the organisation by the middle of the noughties, as we’re calling them.

[BREAK]

JONATHAN BRADSHAW

I was hoping that Tony Orhnia was going to put his hand up in the first half, but he has agreed to say something. He is a very important informant for this exercise because he was in the

Inland Revenue when the announcement was made that child poverty was going to be eradicated, and then he was in the Treasury afterwards. I think it would be jolly good to hear how he responded to this sudden speech.

TONY ORHNIAL

I was wondering, throughout the earlier session, whether I was allowed to speak, because I am not an old CPAG lag like everyone at the table. For the relevant period, I was at the Revenue and then at the Treasury, essentially charged with introducing Working Families Tax Credits, and then with the system of Tax Credits that exists now, so I had a little bit to do with the things that you were discussing in the latter period. There are three or four things that I would like to say. One is relatively minor: the question of constraining the married couple's allowance in order to increase Child Benefit at the time of the last Conservative government. I think actually that that strand of thinking goes back to Nigel Lawson, who introduced independent taxation and, essentially, had to bring in the married couple's allowance in order to buy off the losers, as it were. It was always a bit of a barnacle that was ready to be chopped away gradually, but we have seen them reappear.

The second thing I was going to say was partly about my dealings as an official with CPAG, which have some bearing on your discussion about the balance between welfare rights and policy. It was not in the long tradition of the Inland Revenue to speak to anybody, let alone consult with them. We were not into consultation in the early nineties, when we were designing the system for self-assessment, which most of us now suffer from. It was on the back of the experience of consulting a whole load of people at the time, but when we were faced with the task of taking Family Credit and converting it into Working Families Tax Credit, we – I and others – thought, 'Christ, we know nothing about poor people, still less about children, so we had better go out and talk to people.'

We got together a group of people, including Martin and his team at the time. I will not go on about others in the group, but

one of the things that was most striking to us, and particularly useful, was that, in contrast to the high-level think-tanks that were in the sphere that we could quite easily inhabit, that were just analysts basically, or other groups that were so down into the detail that you started by discussing the third footnote to the third footnote, as it were, you were able to give us balanced advice and contributions both about how to design things and how to implement them. That particular mix, from our point of view, was tremendously useful, and that kept the relationship going for many years, never mind what happened with the judicial review. That was painful all round.

Then there is the issue of the Toynbee Hall speech, in which the commitment was made to a then not properly defined child poverty target. I would probably echo what Carey said, which is that, certainly as a reasonably senior official, but at the Revenue rather than the Treasury at the time, it did come as a surprise. Once we understood how we were supposed to implement this, my first reaction was, ‘Oh, fuck, how are we going to do this? Have these people understood what a relative income target is?’ You sort of scratch your head and go, ‘Yes, right. This is going to be a commitment that is going to be around for a very long time and will constrain budget decisions if you take it seriously.’ That was certainly my reaction.

I think to understand it – I don’t know if it was just written at the last moment or whether there was quite a period of gestation, but if you think about how the government worked in the early years of Labour, it was very much across the Brown-Blair axis, with mainly special advisers discussing this, and officials would come in at a somewhat later stage. That is mainly what happened. But hey, I was really surprised, not least because, some years later, that target was in my performance review.

That brings me to the last point, which is this: we were talking earlier about the commitment of the then government, and particularly of Gordon Brown, to the child poverty target, and I think that there are two things that we need to bear in mind. One is just how committed Gordon was personally to this. I am not

sure that Tony Blair was quite as committed, but Gordon took this to himself and it was a part of every Budget. The other thing that is probably not appreciated is that the target, certainly until I left the Treasury, was owned by the Treasury. The Treasury has control of the Budget. We cared a little bit about what happens to other people's targets, but we cared most about what happened to our targets. You had advocates within the Treasury, at every Budget, saying, 'Do not forget you have to find some money', not because you particularly needed reminding. Because we owned the target, we had a particular incentive to pursue it, albeit that we understood, more and more painfully each year, the nature of the commitment that we had made.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW Thank you so much.

TONY ORHNIAL I do not know whether that helps, but that is certainly the view from the other side.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW Imran, would you like to take us back to the nineties and your question?

IMRAN HUSSAIN It would be interesting to hear a bit more about CPAG's relationship with the Tories in opposition: the Hague years, the Iain Duncan Smith (IDS) years and the Howard years.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW The noughties, then, not the nineties.

MARTIN BARNES I think it is fair to say that it was probably fairly low-key, and for pragmatic reasons, not for any partial reasons. First, from memory, I do not think they were particularly keen to talk to us. It just was not a big issue for them, at least at the time that I was Director. It did change, as Kate said, with the cross-party shift, which, again, was very important and significant, albeit it was part of the re-launch of the Conservative party. There were,

however, people in the party who were passionate about child poverty.

Second, given the political context, Labour had a stonking great big majority, and the Conservatives were struggling, really, to find their key policy voice. Also, there was so much to influence in government at the officials' level as well as the political aspect. There were the usual things, like going to party conferences and trying to raise the profile and gauge at that level. From memory, however, there was very little proactively to engage with from the opposition.

IMRAN HUSSAIN

That recognition that the party was on the wrong side of the debate only really came in 2005 with David Cameron – is that right?

KATE GREEN

No. I think some Conservative politicians had been aware that, for whatever reason, they needed to be part of the debate earlier than that. Indeed, even before I was at CPAG, when Alison and I were at One Parent Families, people like David Willetts and, in fact, Iain Duncan Smith were right on the front foot in terms of trying to seize the territory inside their party and to put a Conservative spin on their approach to child poverty. They had a philosophical view which wanted to go well beyond the concept of poverty as just a measure of relative income and to broaden out into a wider social justice, social policy, child wellbeing, family wellbeing agenda, and they had particular values-based views of what good childhood, good family life and the nature of child and family poverty in a broader sense than just income poverty meant.

I think we targeted certain Conservative politicians, because we felt it was important to have a relationship with them, not least because CPAG is and was a registered charity, with political neutrality. One of the tasks of the trustees and the Director was always to defend that and to be seen to be defending it. The relationships were good. They were nothing like as close,

complex and detailed as they were with Gordon Brown and his team, but they were good, constructive and positive relationships.

I just wanted to say something about relative poverty, if I may. Shortly after I was elected to Parliament in 2010, I had a conversation with Donald Hirsch, who is not here today but has been a very influential academic in some of the thinking that CPAG has done. I said, 'I am beginning to worry a bit about absolute poverty. If you look at what is going on in terms of the shape of the economy and the way in which the Coalition and now the Conservative governments were approaching their public spending cuts agenda, I am beginning to think maybe we should worry about this.' What is more, the relative income poverty target has become easier to achieve, as everybody has begun to see their income reducing or flat-lining.

I think we were at first not really realising how important an achievement it had been of people like Martin and Alison, and Lisa Harker, who had been very much the thinkers and who had done the thinking that said we needed a multifaceted measure of poverty: income poverty, absolute poverty, relative poverty, material deprivation and persistent poverty. I think we have allowed ourselves to lose the richness and complexity of the way in which we manage to persuade government to look at the measurement of poverty, to the point where I think it is very difficult to get that into the political debate now. In fact, however, it was really important. CPAG did not have a one-track mind on what we meant by income poverty; it had a very rich understanding. The big challenge, however, all through the noughties was the relevant income poverty target, and that was the one we concentrated on.

FRAN BENNETT

I was going to go back to what you thought the question was about, which was the nineties earlier on. To modify what I said before, I said it was my view that we had neglected the Labour MPs during the Conservative years, certainly up to when I left in 1993, particularly around the shadow Budget and so on. Maybe I

ought to adopt Martin's rather more measured way of speaking than mine and say that it was a low-key relationship, partly because Carey says that she and I went to see John Smith and his adviser in the run-up to the 1992 shadow Budget to put those kinds of policies to them that they then put forward, but I cannot remember this at all. In addition, during the tea break, Ruth Lister did not agree, in terms of the period 1993-97, with that interpretation of what was going on. She is seeing it then from a different and non-CPAG-staff perspective at least, but I just thought it was introducing that modification to what I was saying earlier.

CAREY OPPENHEIM

CPAG has had a relationship with Conservative MPs, whether ministers or in opposition, throughout its history, of various kinds. Gillian Shephard, who is now on the Commission for Social Mobility and Child Poverty, was a longstanding attendee of CPAG fringe meetings. We talked about Linda Chalker in CPAG's *Poverty*. She was quoted until she became old hat and we had to find others. Fran, you mentioned George Young, who was a very strong opponent of the Poll Tax. I do think, then, that it is really important to remember that there were those key figures, and they were on different issues, such as Child Benefit and women and families. Part of the Conservative party was very supportive, so I do think that is very important.

On the three measures, Fran, although I was not at CPAG then, the discussion inside government was that we had a small group with somebody from the Treasury, whose name I cannot remember, and with people from the then DSS/DWP. We talked about and tried to embed the child poverty commitment but in a way that we then ended up with those three measures. There was lots of debate about whether we went for something more multifaceted.

As you said, Kate, they show and tell us different things, and they were a way of talking about poverty that was also embedded in people's understanding of poverty in terms of the deprivation measure too, so I do think it definitely added value at the time.

[SALLY WITCHER IS CONTACTED VIA SKYPE]

JONATHAN BRADSHAW Sally, it is Jonathan Bradshaw. We are very delighted that you have joined us. I cannot summarise where we have got to but I think you should be given an opportunity to make your contribution. We have heard from all the other Directors, so you are the last, but do please have a go. Could you contribute your memories as Director from your period? Everybody else has done that already.

SALLY WITCHER Do you want my memories of what was happening policy-wise? Is that what you are looking for?

JONATHAN BRADSHAW Yes, just a small contribution about your memories of that period.

SALLY WITCHER These were very tough times. I was in post from 1993 to 1998. I came in in the relatively early part of the Major government. With the Conservatives, it was going to be very hard work to get any concessions. When New Labour came in, there were very high expectations which were very quickly dashed. It was, then, not really a time when you were going to be making a huge amount of progress, whatever your skills, and no matter how brilliant and dedicated the staff team were. That, then, if you like, was a bit of an overview.

If I were to talk about what achievements there were, I would probably say that one of the achievements was to fend off all-comers when it came to Child Benefit. There were repeated attempts to means test it or cut it in one way or another. With the Coalition on Child Benefit, we had managed to stop that from happening, which may not seem like much of an achievement but perhaps, looking back on it today, it does seem more than it did at the time. That was going on.

When I came into post, Child Support was the big story. The act had recently been passed. There were a lot of things that I know

CPAG had predicted just before I came into post, when the legislation was going through, and lots of problems, which, surprise, surprise, then came to pass. There was a lot of very good action around the Child Support Act. We were certainly having meetings with Ros Hepplewhite, head of the Child Support Agency, and regular meetings with Alistair Burt, who, I seem to recall, was the minister at the time, about what progress had been made in terms of getting concessions. I honestly cannot remember there being a huge amount, although what we did manage to do was to keep the profile of the issues pretty high. We also highlighted the detrimental impact that it was having on lone parents and their children.

There was also the Commission for Social Justice, which was happening pretty much about the time I came into post. I dimly remember them coming to meet with us, and a very young David Miliband taking notes. I think Jim McCormick was also involved, as well as Gordon Borrie; I cannot remember who else. I cannot remember a huge amount about that, other than that they came up with some proposal around removing Child Benefit for higher earners, which we were not very happy about. Then there was a load of stuff about ‘investors’ and ‘levellers’, which I suspect, looking back with hindsight, might have just been the beginning of a very embryonic New Labour, but I am not sure that we realised that at the time – I am certainly sure that I did not.

That was happening as well. What else can I say? Later on whilst I was there, the Social Exclusion Unit was set up, although what that appeared to be was a means for working across government as opposed to anything specifically to do with social exclusion.

They seemed to think that social exclusion was caused by government departments not working together, which may be one factor, but I think there are other ones in there as well. It kind of signalled a bit of a change of discourse, which I suppose is something else that I could track throughout my time at CPAG.

Certainly, when I came into post, you could not talk about poverty if you were trying to get the Conservatives to listen to

you at all, because they did not accept that poverty existed, so we always had to call it 'financial hardship', which, for some reason, they were a lot happier about. When it came to New Labour, they were not wild about 'poverty' either, so we had to call it 'social exclusion.' It tells you quite a bit in itself.

The other thing to say, just as an observation, is that the nature of the relationship with the Conservative party and with New Labour was, in many ways, very different. In some ways, I think the Conservatives understood it better than New Labour did, inasmuch as I think it was our role to complain as loudly as we possibly could when things were happening that we did not like, but that it was also entirely consistent that we would work behind the scenes to get the least worst ill that we could for children living in poverty. New Labour did not really understand that relationship. It was either you were one of us or you were not and, if you were not, you were cast out. If you were one of them, you would probably get invited onto a taskforce of some description and find yourself horribly incorporated into something that, ultimately, you would end up not agreeing with but by which point you would be far too implicated to object.

I can remember, quite early on, a breakfast meeting just as I was leaving, and I had given them a bit of a roasting about lone parent benefits. I am pretty sure it was John Denham MP who, as I went out the door, said rather forlornly, 'But Sally, I thought you were our friend', and I think I replied saying something to the effect of it not mattering whether or not I was their friend; I would be their friend whilst they were doing things that were positive for children in poverty and their families, but that was really what we were there to do. It was not about being friends or not friends with anybody; it was about working constructively to get the best possible outcomes for children living in poverty.

They somehow did not really get that. I think they really struggled with that sort of relationship, and that posed quite a number of challenges when it came to how to interact with them effectively.

Finally, in terms of the attack on the poorest children when

Labour came into office, the first thing they did was to cut lone parent benefits and thereby introduce even greater work disincentives into the equation whilst increasing the risk of poverty for lone parents and their children. At the time, I had the impression that quite a few of the lone parent organisations were holding back a little. It was really difficult because you wanted to build good relations with the new government but, at the same time, I did not see how you could possibly just roll over when this is what they were choosing to do.

We were certainly out there making a very big fuss about it, and I can remember speaking whilst the second reading was going on. There was a big meeting in the House of Commons, during which time, when I was halfway through my speech, there was suddenly a cry that a minister had resigned. Malcolm Chisholm had decided to leave the government because he could not support this move to cut lone parent benefits. I think we were hugely helped by Harriet Harman doing what was probably the worst interview on the *Today* programme I have ever heard. It really was absolutely shockingly bad and she did herself and the government no favours, which, on this occasion, pleased us hugely.

Of course, ultimately, however, the lone parent benefits cuts went through. I would like to think, though, that it did change the way they approached the introduction of Tax Credits. Of course, it is really difficult with campaigning, pretty much always, to draw a neat line between cause and effect, but I do think the message got through. I do not know that they had really understood what they were doing when they set out down this path. I think they worked it out, once they had been told very loudly and clearly several times, that this was not helpful and not what they should be doing, and I would like to think that that had a bearing on what they subsequently did to at least make good some of those losses through Tax Credits.

That is about it, I think, in terms of what I can remember and the kinds of things that were going on at the time.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW

Sally, thank you very much indeed. We have been sitting in transfixed silence listening to you. It was really very good. Thanks very much indeed. I do not know whether you can stay with us, but we will carry on with the discussions we were having. If you can stay with us, I suspect some people might want you to contribute again.

SALLY WITCHER

Certainly. I can stay on for a little longer.

JOHN VEIT WILSON

I wanted to comment on an aspect of different and divergent mentalities about the question of what poverty is and how one measures it, which was provoked by Kate's remark that runs right through this discussion. I come from the perspective of a sociological approach to the question, and also an academic and somewhat pedantic one- which wants terms to mean what they are meant to mean- and are conventionally taken to mean, which is not at all what they are in politics. That is the important point, because CPAG never tied itself to one particular pedantic, scholarly, academic definition of poverty – 'That is it and all the others are wrong.' It always addressed the question of what poverty is in terms of what the currently, conventionally taken meanings associated with it are.

We have had that particularly in this discussion of what led up to the 2010 Act and its statutory measures, but also the loose usage of terms like 'absolute' and 'relative' poverty. I am not going to start wittering on about this because some people know that I have a hobbyhorse rant on the subject and this is not the place for it. The point, however, is that there are many meanings attached to the word 'absolute', or the idea of 'absolute poverty'. They vary from culture to culture. Similarly, relative poverty is not only a point on an income distribution; it is the essence of all poverty.

Therefore, for people like me to say, 'It is all relative poverty', does not help in the least in the kinds of discussions that many of the people in this room had to hold with politicians who did not

have the first idea. The politicians could not – just as the current ones cannot, nor some of their predecessors – even tell the difference between a cause and a consequence, so that some of their approaches to what poverty is are described in terms of the consequences for families, which, of course, require policies to deal with, support or- indeed-oppress families, as some of the current ones do. They are not at all about the causes of how people come to be there.

My only point in the context of this seminar is really to say: never assume that, when anybody has been talking about poverty, they are talking about the same thing as somebody else who is using the same term for it. Interestingly, it has not been mentioned that, at one point during the period we are looking at, there was a continued attempt, over several years, by CPAG to engage the wider social policy community through attendance at the Social Policy Association's annual conferences. I remember Carey, Fran and Lisa Harker, whose name has been mentioned, attending and trying to encourage – and, indeed, sometimes having a short programme of encouraging – seminars. This was before the Policy Committee came into being, so it performed some of that function. That was partly in my mind in saying that talking to academics does not always mean that you are talking about the same thing as what is preoccupying you in the functions of a lobby organisation.

PAUL DORNAN

In terms of what Sally was saying, I note that there was a lot of nodding and murmuring of 'yes' when there was a discussion about the different approach under the last Labour government in terms of the extent to which there was almost a degree of incorporation in relation to the sector. That certainly resonated with me that, because the Labour government had made the pledge, the sector automatically ought to be somewhat uncritical in terms of the level of policy. It has been rightly said that that was not the position that the organisation was going to take, because it was keen that its ultimate aim related to children, and also because it was pursuing a bipartisan agenda.

A couple of broad points have been touched on in this discussion which feel important in terms of what a campaigning organisation learns and needs to think about. You asked the question about whether the sector saw that pledge coming, and I guess that must be a relevant question for the organisation now in terms of trying to look into the tea leaves and be ready. Given that the Labour government had somewhat taken the sector off guard, certainly a lot of my experience was us chasing to keep up. We were within the confines of the agenda that had been set and trying to push for as redistributive an agenda for children as possible. To some extent, however, that means it is hard to challenge the fundamentals of it, so I think that is quite an important learning point for an organisation.

Carey very helpfully made the point about what it means to sustain these sorts of things, and I think that has a political aspect and a policy aspect to it in terms of the mechanisms that you use. It is a really important point for us to reflect on in this kind of environment, and I am not sure if End Child Poverty has been mentioned in the starting comments, but that was one mechanism that was set up to try to bring together the campaigning potential of large children's organisations, and children's organisations that, naturally, were perhaps a bit more adept at that than CPAG necessarily was at the time.

One thing that I remember being perpetually said in political meetings that we were having with officials, special advisers and others was them essentially saying, 'Your role is to bring the public support'. That was interesting because our response was, 'Yes, but, at the same time, we want to make analytical comments in relation to what you are doing. We are not uncritical in terms of the agenda that you are pursuing.' That was one clear demand coming from the government, and it is interesting to know how we would respond in the future to that dynamic again.

Martin talked about some of the victim-blaming language that was there in the 1990s and is clearly there at the moment, and I wanted to nuance slightly what you were saying, because I think

there was a level of language building up around employment and unemployment in the latter stages of the Labour government, which has followed through quite clearly into the current situation. I think that the narrative around victim-blaming was shifting, and I almost got the sense – although I do not have a huge amount of evidence to back it up – that the government felt it had tried and invested, but it was not yielding the results that it wanted and expected. Therefore, what was the reason? Quite quickly, you then get into a victim-blaming narrative.

The final point I wanted to make was on something that Martin said about taking the bait, and we have returned to that question several times around how you balance support for an objective which is in line with what an organisation feels is in the best interests of children, a more redistributive policy and the sorts of things around Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit all being pursued through parts of the 2000s, whilst also maintaining the space to criticise when things are not going in that direction. I think that that is a really complicated question but a really important one for an organisation like CPAG.

MARTIN BARNES

I think those are all very important points. It is fair to say that it has to be informed by the context. It has to be fluid and adaptable. There were times when we were critical of the Labour government. We took test cases against them, and I remember one that we brought because asylum-seeker women- including some who were HIV positive- were being denied milk tokens. I felt that that was a very symbolic and important success for the charity in quite a challenging and potentially complex area of policy. We deliberately did not make too much fuss about the victory, because we did not want the right wing press backlash. Also, we took firm positions when government was thinking out loud about linking Child Benefit with sanctions: antisocial behaviour and so on. There probably were times when the responses to the latest announcement of an extra billion on tax credits were a bit gushing, but it was precisely because there was

a vacuum in terms of the media's interest and engagement. If you were not seen to be positively supporting that level of political and financial investment, tactically it would have been a mistake. I was involved in the early stages of setting up End Child Poverty. It was encouraged by the Treasury because of this Jubilee 2000 model and the effect that that had in terms of influencing delivery around international debt. Other have a better perspective in terms of latest developments and so on, but it was a real challenge to get credible buy-in from the much bigger children's charities, which had teams in their fundraising departments or their press units which were probably as big as CPAG as a whole. CPAG could have killed it at birth, but we saw the bigger picture, supported it and worked hard. There were some tensions. There were bits of work happening with End Child Poverty that we thought, 'This is cutting across what we are doing or planning to do', but we took the decision strategically that it was important to support it. It was disappointing that there was not, at that early stage, or at a stage where I could experience it, a greater investment and obvious support by the children's charities. Coming back to the question of working with the opposition, as Carey mentioned earlier, I do remember having a meeting with George Osborne when he was a backbencher. It was about the Child Trust Fund. Again, we were taking a balanced view because, on the one hand, any extra money was to be supported, but some advocates of the Child Trust Fund were saying that the poor could afford to save and that all you needed to do was to provide incentives and so on, which was a completely untrue and unhelpful message. If the poor could afford to save, that probably suggests that they have enough income. Having a conversation with a member of the opposition and trying to have the nuanced, 'Yes, but...' was a bit of a challenge. In terms of the point that Paul made about the incorporation of the charities, at times we might have been perceived as doing that, but I think there were good, legitimate reasons for calling Gordon Brown the children's champion when he spent an extra

£2 billion on Tax Credits.

DAVID BULL

There have been two recent points made which raised for me the issue of, if I can bring them together, the party line. John was very tactful in saying that it was possible for people to hold different views about what poverty meant, but we in CPAG had the supreme irony that, having as our chair the greatest thinker on poverty, there was only one that could be possibly followed, which was his. Two people fell foul of that within CPAG: one, of course, was John, over the definitional issue. If people think I am talking behind Peter's back, I have stood in his office in Bristol and argued this line with him.

The other, of course, was David Piachaud, when he dared to challenge the breakfast index, some may remember, on whether you had had a cooked breakfast. David wrote to *New Society* on it perhaps being a matter of taste and not of poverty. Peter was so personally offended by this, and it was such an irony that this man who thought so globally and published so well on the subject could take it so personally when people within CPAG departed from the line.

The second issue about the party line is that people – and latterly Kate – have raised this issue of the need to keep some political neutrality as a charity. During Frank's period as Director, I ran twice into this issue, where it almost seemed as if there was a small group – and I never knew who they were; you would, but I do not want you to name names – there was a small group within CPAG that saw the Group as being a branch of the Labour party. I ran into it twice: once, as I mentioned last time, editing a book on football, including a chapter by John Major, which Fran thought was greatly amusing but told me that some people thought I should not be publishing a book with a chapter by a Conservative prime minister, even though this was to be a fundraiser for CPAG. Eventually, we raised £10,000 out of these books, but this was beside the point because we were talking to a Tory.

The second time, I remember you telling me, Fran, that, after I

had gone to that Liberal conference in Bournemouth for the group, somebody said to you, 'Good gracious, is he a Liberal?' as if that was also breaking the party line. I do not know how big this group was within the Group, but they were obviously members of staff who just did not see anything that was not Labour as being appropriate in the behaviour of the chair at least.

FRAN BENNETT

David remembers lots of things that I do not remember.

DAVID BULL

They all say that, don't they?

GEOFF FIMISTER

We talked a bit about the relationship that the Group's had with MPs of different parties in government and opposition. One dimension to it that we haven't really mentioned and which I think is important is the way that parliament's changed, because that changes some of the relationships. Parliament, most of us would say, has changed for the better in the sense that we have family-friendly hours now. Back in the eighties and early nineties, however, we used to have parliamentary business going on way into the early hours of the morning, and of course that meant that all the pressure groups were around then as well.

Most of the parliamentary stuff that I did was representing the Association of Metropolitan Authorities in those days, now part of the Local Government Association (LGA). If you were in corridors and bars of the House of Commons and the House of Lords late at night when the Fowler Bill was going through, for instance, you would bump into Ruth Lister and the late Judy Foy, who was the parliamentary officer with Citizens Advice. There were very good personal relationships with MPs of all parties and you would be debating the issues with them into the early hours. That might not be very good from a family-friendly point of view but it certainly changes the dynamics, and that just does not happen in the same kind of way. I think that background is quite important in terms of looking at those relationships.

ADRIAN SINFIELD

Before I follow that point up, I would like to make a couple of

comments. Given what has been said about the surprise with End Child Poverty in 1999 wreaked by Blair, what is worth putting in as well, which is perhaps very much to the credit of the Child Poverty Action Group, is that, in 1997, Blair, Mandelson and others had dealt with child poverty via the Social Exclusion Unit, which was very much more seeing the problems of the poor in terms of their own behaviour, truanting, rough sleeping and issues like this, and it was felt at the time that they had taken poverty off the agenda and would rather use the words 'social exclusion' because they did not need any money to tackle the problem. Perhaps it is worth saying how poverty came back in. Gordon Brown paid a compliment to CPAG in a 2005 reception at 11 Downing Street, and it really was an important issue.

Second, to add to what John Veit Wilson said about engagement with the academic community, Martin, Kate, Paul and Alison all subsequently had meetings with groups like the Social Policy Association, and it was very evident that groups like this needed to be nurtured and fed because people were not aware of the role that was being played.

Finally, to ask my question, which relates to Geoff's point, my impression is that, in recent years, CPAG has been able to get the message over using Select Committees much more, and their ability to then question ministers and officials. We have talked so far about contact with ministers and departments, but it seems that there has been an important role that CPAG has played in constantly not just presenting evidence but lobbying and communicating with Select Committees. In particular, Archie Kirkwood's name was mentioned, but there are others, and I would like the reaction of people – Directors and others – in terms of whether that is true.

PAUL DORNAN

I certainly went before different Select Committees on quite a few different occasions: the Treasury Select Committee and the Work & Pensions Select Committee. We were trying to use those fora, and we would write evidence to quite a lot of Select

Committees in my time, with the balance commented on by Tony about attempting a big picture but also trying to focus on some specific details. In a sense, that was our value-added and why they might call us for evidence. We did go before a number of those committees, and I think that was a useful space. Just going back to this issue about the different relationships between different parties, I do remember one time, very specifically before the Treasury Select Committee, being very much put on the spot in quite a partisan way by a Conservative member of the committee, who was trying to extract a quote condemning some aspect of a recent Budget. I was not doing that, for reasons that Martin specified, because, on the whole, it had been in the interests of children, so it was not an appropriate thing to do, but it was also a political space and, therefore, we had to be quite careful in terms of how we were using that. I also wanted to make one other comment in relation to this academic point, which is slightly forward-looking. One of my experiences in terms of talking to the social policy fraternity is that they were very interested in and attuned to social policy debates, naturally – it is inherent in the study of that area – but particularly more junior academics and researchers did not always know the best channels to try to engage to get their messages across, and that is a space that an organisation like CPAG can fulfil. Looking to the future and the way in which some of the research money is allocated within the universities sector, the Research Excellence Framework has been shifting towards a greater focus on impact. That is a following wind for an organisation like CPAG in terms of the incentives that are put on academics for involving themselves with organisations that are closer to the policy process. Looking to the future, that is something to play with.

GEOFF FIMISTER

I think the Select Committees are very useful, especially if you get some decent material that you can then use for campaigning purposes as well. We have done that going back quite a long way, and certainly back into the eighties. I do not know whether

Martin remembers a time when he and I were giving evidence to the Work & Pensions Committee when Archie Kirkwood was chair- it would have been the Social Security Committee then. One of the issues we were discussing was this whole question about the difference between the mean and the median, and the distribution around the middle. Martin and I continued this discussion on the Tube on the way back, and there was a particularly filthy window on the Circle Line where we drew this diagram, with boxes and dots, with our fingers on the window. I do not know whether Martin remembers that, but I often wonder what the cleaners made of it.

JILL MANTHORPE

It has been a rather domestically focused debate. I wondered what influence and interest there was in Europe during the time period we are talking about.

FRAN BENNETT

That is a really interesting point.

KATE GREEN

Jonathan, of course, was responsible for one of the most important pieces of work that we looked at in the period that I was Director through the Innocenti institute, when he produced the comparison of child poverty across not just European countries but about 20 OECD countries.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW

Yes, it was on child wellbeing.

KATE GREEN

It was over a broad range of indicators of child wellbeing. There are two things that I would say about that. One is that it was very interesting, informative and useful and, from an intellectual point of view, we found it very stimulating in the organisation. It gave us a lot of food for thought in terms of policy development. There was, however, a bit of a political challenge for us in that it was backward-looking. It was looking at quite a lot of relatively old data and, because you were drawing on a lot of different data sources in different countries, Jonathan, some of the data in some of the countries was very old indeed. At a time when we

were to trying to welcome and encourage the positive steps that the Labour government had been taking, Jonathan was producing a whole lot of stuff that suggested the UK was doing very badly, but some of this was quite dated and progress had been and could be made. That was quite a political challenge for us.

For us, however, the validity that we felt we had in making the case for eradicating child poverty – and, eventually, a definition of what that meant was arrived at, which was to be among the best in Europe – gave it a reality. It stopped it being a completely fanciful ambition and we were able to say, ‘Look, other European countries can do this. We can too.’ That was immensely important.

FRAN BENNETT

I would say we did not engage much with Europe, certain in a policy and political sense. I have to say, however, that, when I was looking back at *Poverty* journals just before coming here, there were certainly at least a couple of things on the European Union context that I had forgotten. We did produce a publication on Europe as well but I cannot remember the exact date. I would say we had a marginal relationship with the whole debate about poverty in Europe, certainly during the time I was there, but we did do some interventions into the European-level debate, or at least the European debate brought into the UK, more accurately.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW

I was a very keen supporter of the Opportunities for All series, which the Labour government started publishing to monitor the anti-poverty strategy. It was eventually abandoned because DWP found that it was having to report the same data to the National Action Plan (NAP) for Social Inclusion – the European programme – and it decided it was just a waste of time doing it twice. Then Europe dropped the NAP for Social Inclusion and the series of publications, so we lost both Opportunities for All and the NAP, which was a lesson about the problems of relating with Europe.

ALISON GARNHAM

In Fran's era as Director, we did a number of legal test cases based on European legislation. The Equal Treatment Directive led to some really pioneering cases around sex discrimination, like the Drake case which allowed married women to claim Invalid Care Allowance for the first time. And cases around the non-contributory invalidity pension (NCIP), which meant that women had to show that they were both incapable of work and could not also do household duties. It was a benefit that was introduced in the 1970s, which is incredible. We then did a series of childcare-cost cases using the European legislation to push through the idea that there should be childcare costs allowed when parents, particularly mothers, were working and receiving means-tested benefits because, up until that point, they were not taken into account for in-work benefits.

PAUL DORNAN

I agree with what has been said. Clearly, in relation to the legal work, Europe loomed and was actively used. We had one or two engagements. I remember going to speak but it was pretty limited.

One point I would like to make reflects on what Kate just said about the best in Europe. Earlier, Geoff gave us the anecdote about the dots on the window trying to explain the median, and I recall having a number of statistical conversations and trying to explain that in more or less unconvincing ways. It was much easier to be able to say, 'No, the best in Europe, and they can do it', so you have a substantive, real-world example and did not have to go through the maps and try to talk about it. That was much more helpful.

When we are talking about international relations, Europe is one; there is also CPAG in New Zealand, and there have been various links and study tours etc. There has been interest in the organisation from a variety of places. I remember visitors from Japan, China and various places. There has also been interest in relation to organisations or individuals in the US trying to pursue the same. It is not just Europe that there were links with,

although it is a slightly scattergun picture possibly.

This is still on the international side, but I just wanted to slightly go back, if I may, very briefly. I work in an academic department in a university looking at international development. There is a great deal of interest in what are called cash-conditional transfers in developing countries. Often, relatively modest sums of money, these cash transfers are conditional on compliance with various criteria that are particularly education and health-related. They are often sold on a political basis, with a something-for-something relationship. The family is provided with that payment because they have somehow complied or done their bit.

I see some resonance of that in the UK debate, where we have increasingly had this something-for-something political narrative, and it always worries me, because I think it sells a message about poverty which is that it is about the individual's actions rather than the structural problem of inadequate incomes. There are, however, other learnings from the CPAG experience externally.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW

Before we finish, I do not think we have really got on top of the Child Poverty Act and how that came about. It came out of nothing but there must have been someone doing a lot of work on it. Can we hear a bit more about that?

KATE GREEN

It was a suggestion initially from Fiona Weir, who was and is chief executive of Gingerbread. She was copying a model that I think she had seen in the international development context. Indeed, her background was in international development, and I think climate change may have also been another model that we were looking at. She suggested that that model could be replicated as a means of embedding the child poverty ambition into successive governments.

I think we were cautious to start with in CPAG, because we were concerned that it would not achieve cross party buy in, and that the child poverty target had been seen very much as Gordon Brown's baby and the other parties would be reluctant to come on board. In fact, it was one of the successes of the End Child

Poverty movement that, because so many different voices were advocating for it through so many different government relations, and some of the big children's charities, for example, had very good relationships with parts of the child-wellbeing policy sphere that CPAG did not really know at all, government was hearing this message from a lot of places.

MPs in other parties were hearing it through relationships they had and had had over many years with some of these organisations, so the notion about a Child Poverty Act very much reflected the fact that the sector had begun to work collectively through the medium of the End Child Poverty campaign.

We also benefited massively by having at that point the Child Poverty Unit in the DCSF. We had officials whose job it was and whose enthusiasm it was to get their heads around framing this legislation, and they did a very good and thorough job, I think. There was a lot of engagement out to the sector and out to children and families themselves. They were really good at trying to define poverty in a way that made sense to people's lived experience of it. It was a good, engaging piece of work.

I think what has been very regrettable since is how little any of us have made of the fact that that legislation is still on the statute book. We have not used it to hold subsequent governments to account. We have not used it to keep the issue as politically salient. The Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, which Carey mentioned earlier and which was one of the institutional initiatives that sat alongside the Act, has really been quite muted, even with very influential chairing in the shape of Alan Milburn. We have, therefore, rather let a potential prize slip through our fingers and, while I would be very surprised to see the present government bother to unwind the legislation, I think we might need to start to think about how and whether we could reinvigorate it.

ALISON GARNHAM

One of the things I wanted to say was how little work Labour did itself to talk about its child poverty strategy and its own

achievements. It was this ‘talking *Daily Mail* and acting *Guardian*’ thing. End Child Poverty was expected somehow to magically summon up public support. Quite how we were supposed to do that, I am not quite sure. I know that Gordon Brown’s idea that was communicated to us was the idea that the big children’s charities, with their massive departments, as Martin said, would have the wherewithal to do public campaigning and to have adverts on TV, so that everyone would understand there was this shared mission to end child poverty. Of course, they did not put that kind of resource into it. They put a lot of resource into it but not enough to do that.

Carey is absolutely right that the lack of continuing life of the child poverty legislation is partly to do with that, and that there still lacks public support out there for what is quite a technical thing. There is both very little understanding, because it was never explained and advocated by Labour what they were doing and why they were doing it and, at the same time, very little public understanding and advocacy for it. And silence since they have been in opposition. We went to being a sector defending our own precious thing, rather than it being a public movement or something that the whole public was worried about.

Holding the Coalition to account about it has been very difficult, mainly because they have been waving two fingers at it. Quite frankly, they have said tacitly that they supported it. All the work that Kate and her colleagues did at the time got all party support. There was all party sign up to the Child Poverty Act but, in reality, since 2010, they put in place a series of policies that were clearly going to drive up child poverty.

Even though we have pointed at that and said, ‘Look, this is what you are doing’, there has been little pick-up in the press and little public support or interest in it. We are, then, in a very difficult position now with the Child Poverty Act, as a result of that position. Carey is absolutely right that, without that continuing support, it is very hard to hold them to account now and into the future, although we will continue to try to do that.

DAVID BULL

I was very privileged in the 1980s to hear Peter Townsend in Bristol developing ideas about globalisation before the word was very much in use, and the power of multinationals, but I suspect we heard an awful lot of that on a Friday night, when Fran was trying to take the minutes of it, at CPAG. You would be discussing quite a domestic issue and, suddenly, Peter in the chair would go off on this wonderful peroration through all those sub-clauses that only Peter could master, in his elegant way for about ten minutes. Fran is sitting there trying to take notes. I just wonder, Pat, when you come to read the minutes, whether you will be able to tell that Peter had made a great speech ten years ahead of his time on international poverty and globalisation. Look for it.

MARTIN BARNES

I just wanted to say a little more about CPAG in Scotland, because it has become a real success. I was involved from the very beginning and was able to secure some initial big Lottery funding. We were very fortunate in being able to appoint Danny Phillips, who is a trustee. He was the first worker and, for a long time, was the only worker, and it literally did start from scratch. We had to enter the debate around whether we based it on the east coast or the west coast: the political influence is in Edinburgh but most of the welfare rights work is in Glasgow. It was not a given that it would have succeeded, and there was a big need to build trust and for people to see you etc. I think all tribute to the fact that it is going and that it is effective and strong.

I want to say a little about the relationship with Labour and the lack of political buy-in. Even some MPs were not bought into it. I remember we had a meeting with a Labour Party MP, who, at the beginning of the meeting, said, 'This child poverty pledge, abolish it, it's bullshit.' I remember thinking, 'Bloody hell, that is a member of the government prepared to say that at a public meeting.' It was absolutely extraordinary and I will never forget it.

I also remember on one occasion being called at the ungodly

hour of 5.30 in the morning to do an interview on Tax Credits on Radio 4. I happened to use the phrase 'doing good by stealth' and, at about 6.15, the phone rang again and it was one of Gordon Brown's special advisers: "Thank you very much for what you said but we really do not like you using the term "by stealth"', which I thought was fair enough, but then I put the phone down and thought, 'How the hell did he find out my home phone number?'

JONATHAN BRADSHAW

One issue that we have not covered during this period is that the importance of branches waned in the 1990s, probably. They were at the beginning and they were not really there at the end. Was this a deliberate policy? Was it just that things changed?

ADRIAN SINFIELD

I think Geoff Fimister could comment on this because, in part, the branches were doing a lot of welfare rights work. For example, when I was on the welfare rights stall in Colchester in the mid-1970s, CAB was referring people to the CPAG welfare rights stall, which consisted of a number of academics, including Tony Atkinson, Peter Townsend, Alan Walker and others. There was no specialist group but, by the 1990s, there were very active welfare rights trained people who were doing that work at a very much higher level.

GEOFF FIMISTER

That varied a lot around the country. The Tyneside branch fluctuated, partly because there was so much activity going on, with different campaigning groups who worked quite closely together. Sometimes, there was more of a role than there was at other times for the branch as such. The branch would be sometimes the same faces as the local welfare rights organisations, so it led more to a small group partly for that reason. Also, I think there has been a general tendency for membership groups to wane, for a variety of reasons, and we could spend the whole seminar on that.

FRAN BENNETT

To be fair, we did talk about some of the issues at the last Oral History seminar, and I just mentioned the 1990 conference on branches and democracy in CPAG, which I think was an indicator that branches were not necessarily happy with what was going on. I cannot remember very much about what happened but it set up a working party to have a look at democracy in branches within CPAG. It also persuaded CPAG to provide balloons, posters and things for branch activity, and to finance that, so that branches could be identified with CPAG on the ground. Some of the issues that we raised last time were to do with the constitutional relationships of a national organisation with branches that it lends its name to. I think Geoff is also right in that the kinds of groups that grew up in the sixties and seventies were just not around so much. People did not necessarily work in the same ways in the nineties.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW

I am going to wind up now, unless someone is absolutely bursting to say something really important. Thank you very much indeed, everyone. Thank you, panel, for a very interesting few hours. Thank you for your contributions from the floor as well. Pat, do you want to say anything?

PAT THANE

It is all very fascinating. Thank you very much, and thank you for chairing.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW

Not at all.

Child Poverty Action Group Directors

Secretary: Tony Lynes 1965-9

Director: Frank Field 1969-79

Ruth Lister 1979- 88

Fran Bennett 1988-93

Sally Witcher 1993-8

CEO: Martin Barnes 1998-2004

Kate Green 2004-9

Alison Garnham 2009-