ICBH Witness Seminar Programme

The Child Poverty Action Group in the 1970s and 1980s: Witness Seminar

Edited by Pat Thane and Ruth Davidson

KING'S College LONDON

Published by
Institute of Contemporary British History
King's College London
Strand
London
WC2R 2LS

ISBN: 978-1-910049-10-5

This Transcript was produced by Ubiqus UK +44 (0) 20 7269 0370
http://www.ubiqus.co.uk / infouk@ubiqus.com

The Child Poverty Action Group in the 1970s and 1980s: Witness Seminar

6th January 2015
King's College London

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

Contents

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:

FRAN BENNETT	Director, CPAG 1988-93.
VIRGINIA BOTTOMLEY	Researcher, CPAG, early 1970s.
DAVID BULL	Member of CPAG Executive Committee 1966-80 and 1981-95, and of publications committee for over 30 years.
RUTH LISTER	Director, CPAG 1979-88.
GARRY RUNCIMAN	CPAG Treasurer, 1972-97.
ADRIAN SINFIELD	Professor Emeritus of Social Policy, University of Edinburgh. Active in CPAG; member of the CPAG executive 1972-78.
JANE STREATHER	Set up the first CPAG branch in Hull, 1969, CPAG Branches Organiser 1972-75.
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
JOHN WARD	Co-founder, Islington Poverty Action Group, 1969, and served on CPAG Executive Committee as a representative of local branches.
STUART WEIR	Set up Hackney Citizens Rights in 1969; became Director of the Citizens Rights Office (CRO) 1971.

Audience Participants

IMRAN HUSSAIN	Head of Policy, Rights & Advocacy, CPAG.
GARETH MILWARD	London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.
PAT THANE	Professor of Contemporary History, Institute of Contemporary British History

The Child Poverty Action Group in the 1970s and 1980s

Held 5 January 2015, King's College London

Edited by
Pat Thane, ICBH, King's College London
and
Ruth Davidson, ICBH, King's College London

JONATHAN BRADSHAW

Hello and welcome. I am Jonathan Bradshaw and I have been asked to chair this session. This is the third Oral History event that has been organised to trace the history of CPAG. This particular event is supposed to take us from 1970 to the end of the 1980s. We do not need to cover the 1970 General Election, which was the focus of the last one, but we will be covering the 1970-74 Conservative government, the 1974-79 Labour government, and the Conservative governments from 1979 to the end of the 1980s. We cover the period of two Directors: Frank Field, who I am afraid cannot be with us today, and Ruth Lister, who succeeded him in 1979.

The purpose of this exercise is to get on the record the memories of people who were players. We must try to focus on CPAG, although we will probably not be able to avoid some reference to the political and social context that CPAG was operating in.

I think I should ask Pat Thane, the distinguished historian who has taken responsibility for this project, to say a bit about the background to the project, if you will, and then I will ask the panel to introduce themselves.

PAT THANE

The reason this is happening is that Alison [Garnham] asked me last year if I would write a history of the first 50 years of CPAG, which I was very happy to do. What we are planning to produce is an accessible, glossy, online history by the end of this year, which is when the 50th anniversary is. We then aim to produce a more detailed account afterwards, dependent on getting some more funding. The British Academy has given us some funding so far, which has been enormous helpful, and we are waiting to hear from the research councils about further funding [the Arts and Humanities Research Council later provided funds], but we are getting on with it and something will certainly appear by the end of this year. We have already the two earlier witness seminars, which

were very helpful, on the origins and on the big crisis of 1970. It seemed a good idea to do one on the later period, so here we are.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW

Thank you very much, Pat. I should have said that this is the first event in the 50th anniversary year of CPAG. We have the chairman, treasurer, director and many of the staff of the CPAG in the audience. You are very welcome and thank you very much for coming to support us.

I will start by asking the panel to introduce themselves and talk about their involvement in CPAG. I thought I would set an example of the kind of thing that I will be asking them to do.

I was the founder, with colleagues like Malcolm Wicks, Molly and Michael Meacher, and Richard Bryant and others in the Department of Social Policy and Social Work at the University of York, of the York branch of CPAG. We started operating a welfare rights stall on York market in 1968, and it became a welfare rights service and still exists as York People's Rights today, running an appeals service, take-up campaigns and a second-tier advice service. I stood down as the chair only last year. The experience of working in a branch of CPAG shaped our careers in social policy. I think we wrote the second Welfare Benefits Handbook; I think Liverpool wrote the first handbook. I am going to be corrected by David Bull on every single fact.

DAVID BULL

Only two so far.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW

We took some of the first appeals case to supplementary benefit appeals tribunals and, with this learning, we wrote columns on welfare rights in New Society and, later, Social Work Today. I went on to write critiques of social security policy from then onwards, always with child poverty at its heart. We were very active in the development of poverty measurement, particularly after the publication of Poverty in the United Kingdom in 1980 and Breadline Britain, I think in the same year.

David Piachaud and I published the first comparative study of child benefits in 1980 and, later, we reinvented the minimum income standards methodology through the Family Budget Unit. Many of us who were active became tutors of the Department of Social Security summer schools, which I think were important in transforming National Assistance staff cultures over a period of years.

Tony Lynes and Frank Field visited York many times. Frank became a godfather to my youngest son, and I think I became a member of the executive in 1968 and served, I think, until 1981. I retired from the executive because I could not cope with the seven-hour round journey from York on Friday evenings to Macklin Street. By then, I had babies and was also running a research unit and living in the deep North Yorkshire countryside. I rejoined the executive three years ago and succeeded John Veit-Wilson as the chair of the policy committee; hence that is why, I think, I have been asked to chair this oral hearing.

That, then, is the kind of opening statement that provides a history of me, and I am going to turn leftwards and then rightwards and just go around the table.

JOHN VEIT-WILSON I am probably the last living founding member of CPAG, so I am hoping to survive until the 50th anniversary on 5 March. The reason why I was at that first meeting is that, in 1964, I was appointed as one of the three research officers on the Peter Townsend/Brian Abel-Smith national survey of poverty at LSE and the University of Essex – the first national survey there had been in this country. The other two research officers at that time were Hilary Land and Dennis Marsden. Adrian Sinfield, who was already at the University of Essex, had already carried out his study of unemployed men and their families, and I was working on the long-term sick and disabled, Hilary Land on large families, and Dennis Marsden on fatherless families.

In that capacity as a research officer, I accompanied Brian Abel-Smith to a meeting he had been asked to address on the preliminary findings of the secondary analysis of Family Expenditure Survey data, which came out later in 1965 as The Poor and the Poorest. The meeting itself had been called by the Social and Economic Affairs Committee of the Religious Society of Friends – the Quakers – to consider the questions of poverty. Brian spoke about that and, at the end of the meeting, which was a dozen or so people – mainly senior managers in the voluntary and statutory social service sectors, and sociologists such as Harriett Wilson – the members said, 'We must do something about this. We must continue to campaign to the new Labour government about the existence of family poverty and, therefore, we should meet again and see what we can do to collect evidence and to submit it to the committee under Douglas Houghton', which was considering the question for Harold Wilson's government. I was asked to put together some material, which I did – the first paper on that subject. Tony Lynes had already written some policy papers which had been published, and that was the first published material that came from CPAG.

I continued on the Executive Committee (EC), as it became, until 1980, came off, and then came back again in 2001 and remained until 2013, when, time expired, I finally had to retire, having been, at that stage, vice chair and, as Jonathan said, chair of the policy committee. I have, then, had a fairly long involvement with CPAG and it has been very close to my interests throughout my working career.

FRAN BENNETT I think something must have gone wrong with my email contact or something, because I was not aware that I was going to be on the panel or have to say a paragraph, so I am very sorry about that. The other people who are here will also know that my memory is appalling. However, just to introduce my participation in CPAG, I became Deputy Director from the General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trade Union, as it was called then, in, I

think, 1983. I knew at that stage that Ruth Lister, who was director, was going to be on sabbatical for six months in 1984, so I was Deputy for a while, then acting Director, and then Deputy again. The government waited until Ruth was out of the country and then announced the biggest review of the social-security system since Beveridge, which, as you might imagine, was rather daunting.
Part of the time when I was first working at CPAG – and I am sure Ruth will talk more about this in a minute in terms of her time as Director – was very much dominated by the social security reviews, which were set up with several review teams and each looked at particular aspects of social security, although a lot of it was revamping the then Supplementary Benefits system. We gave evidence to the review teams – written and oral – and so on. That resulted in the Social Security Act (1986).
I then became Director – again, I have not checked the date, but in the late 1980s. I think I was Director by the end of this period, before 1990. My memories of that time are largely dominated by the campaign against the poll tax. There was also the Save Child Benefit campaign, which I was very much involved with and which changed its name, towards the end of the period, because we decided we had saved child benefit. That was then.
I left CPAG in 1993 and moved to Oxford at the beginning of 1994. I have been involved for the 20 years since then in the local group – Oxford and District CPAG. Of course, when I first started, there were huge numbers of branches. When I left CPAG, somebody from Oxford was on the executive in what was called the Branches Council then. The branches were represented on the executive, and it was the person on the Branches Council who said to me, 'If you are going to Oxford, do you want something to keep your feet on the ground?' It meant that I got involved in the local advice centre at Oxford, but she was also in the CPAG branch, as it was called then. We continue as a local group; indeed, we are meeting next week. I have, then, continued my involvement with CPAG since leaving, and have also, from time to time, written for the Poverty journal. I also wrote something a few years ago, with Paul Dornan, on child benefit.

VIRGINIA BOTTOMLEY

I joined the CPAG in 1971, I think, but all my information is unreliable and I will send my formal paragraph later. [She didn't]. I am a protégée of my aunt, Peggy Jay, and she thought that there was nobody more important in the whole world than Peter Townsend. I duly went to Essex University and worked with Adrian Sinfield and Dennis Marsden etc. Returning to London, I was restless and talked to Peter, who said, 'What you should do is this report on the budgeting behaviour of low-income families', persuading families on the poverty line to keep diaries of their expenditure. We decided to go through a school, which was St Matthias in Bethnal Green, where the head was a friend of CPAG, and later a smaller group around Ashmole Primary School in Kennington, which is the square where Jack Straw lives, interestingly.

I worked in those offices in Macklin Street with Molly Meacher and with Frank – fastidious, clear. My work was really supervised by Peter more than anybody. Then Ruth came along – big, brave Ruth – and did wonderful things, but I was absolutely at the pragmatic or principled end of it. My professional boundaries were appalling. I was enraged by what these people were putting up with. I remember shouting at a judge in court, and all sorts of terribly inappropriate things in my early 20s.

I was then particularly passionate, of course, about the Family Allowance debate. My political career might have been different, but this was a time when the trade unions were not very interested in supporting Family Allowance, because it went to the woman at home, not the man at work. I became really hostile to the T&G [Transport and General Workers' Union] – my husband's union – because they really did not seem interested in anybody. There was nobody there who was black or female – I know I am meandering, sorry – and Molly and I went to shout at them, but all to no avail. I remember speaking at the House of Commons when I was about 22, absolutely too frightened for words, to a committee meeting about the nature of the lifecycle of people in poverty and how everything is unpredictable. This was a time when, if you were poor, it was like a photograph. It is, however, not a photograph but a chaotic cine film, and that is what I was trying to convey.

I wrote articles for *The Guardian* and pamphlets. I was very passionate about this and I used to go around speaking to various people. With hindsight, of course, it was part of Frank's pragmatism that he realised that, if you want to exert influence, you use all political parties. I only subsequently realised the degree to which CPAG had been a think tank for the Labour party. Partly because of my Labour origins, I did not feel at all uncomfortable. I felt I was being used appropriately and did quite a bit of speaking. I remember Keith Joseph was sent my pamphlet and he saw me about it all. He said, 'It is very good, Virginia, but you need to realise that it is much easier to divide the cake up than it is to bake in the first place.' To me, at 22, however, this was particularly inspirational stuff; otherwise, all might have been different.

I earned £600 a year – overpaid since then, says Frank – and it really reinforced my original prejudices, to some extent, but it has hugely informed the way I worked through the years. One other person I must mention is Margaret Wynn. I used to see a lot of her and she was really inspirational and important. I felt I was doing her work too.

DAVID BULL

I went to a meeting in Manchester in 1966, where Tony Lynes was the speaker, and was inspired to join CPAG. I was a newcomer, one year after John was, as he says, the surviving member of that committee. We formed the second branch of CPAG after Liverpool in 1967, and held the first welfare rights stalls in July 1968, shortly before, as Jonathan said, those in York. We were inspired to do this – it was not our idea – by Louis Minster, an American on the committee from the Oxford branch. Louis

Minster was an amazing guy. I always remember how disgusted he was when we co-opted Des Wilson of Shelter on to the committee, and he said dismissively, 'He is just a salesman. It happens to be homelessness but it could be prophylactics.' I pay tribute to Louis Minster as the originator of welfare rights stalls, the idea of which we pinched and York soon followed.

As a branch member, I was co-opted on to the committee until such time as the committee could no longer fit into the room at Macklin Street. A sub-committee was formed, which I think was Malcolm Wicks and myself, to go away and find a solution, and we came up with the Branches Council, which Fran referred to. I came off the EC in 1980 voluntarily for a year, and came back as Vice-Chairman in 1981, when John's mother, Harriett – whom we should pay tribute to – retired. I remained on the publications sub-committee for 30 years. It was an interesting committee, which we do not talk about very much. Two of us – Tony Rees and myself – read everything and edited minutely. I always remember one pamphlet we edited with great help from Stuart Weir: Laurie Elks's pamphlet on the wage stop. I think appointing a young man with a Cambridge law degree was no guarantee of literacy, as Stuart and I rewrote that pamphlet, I recall.

Having become Vice-Chair under Peter Townsend, I became Chair in the late 1980s and did not do very much, except raise £10,000 by editing a couple of books on football, which horrified everybody around the place other than Fran, who was very supportive, because I asked John Major to contribute a chapter, which he did. I remember some of the tribalists on the staff being appalled that we should have a pamphlet with CPAG on the front and a Conservative writing in it. I edited another book on football, with Alastair Campbell editing with me, and we raised over £10,000. Our last legacy to CPAG, then, was to make money out of football.

GARRY RUNCIMAN I did not know what we were going to be asked to do, and I think I probably have less to contribute than anybody else sitting around the table, because my involvement with CPAG was when I was recruited by Peter Townsend and Frank Field as Treasurer. I do not remember the dates, I am afraid, but I do remember it was for 25 years. My view throughout that period was that I was there, broadly speaking, to look after the finances, and not there to try to play any part in the formation of policy, and nor would I have had the skills or experience which other people had in order to make any useful contribution.

It is interesting, however, looking back, and I do recall very clearly that the first item in my in-tray, as it were, was the future of the Citizens Rights Office (CRO) that Rowntree had funded, for an initial period, and made perfectly clear, as they often do and still can, that, 'We will start you off but, after that, you have to go elsewhere for funding.' I do have some quite amusing memories of going around the City of London with Frank, on our hands and knees, as it were, to all sorts of unlikely people, some of whom were more sympathetic than you might expect. I think it was true

to say that the Rights Office had a cross-party appeal, regardless of people's political views.

I can remember two occasions. At a CPAG meeting, among our fully paid-up members was Keith Joseph. There will be some nervous giggles from some around the table, but certainly, as far as Keith Joseph was concerned, whom I knew only slightly, to him there was no contradiction in the fact that he had very different views about how the problem of poverty in this country ought to be dealt with, but that did not mean that he was not just as concerned to find some way to look after the poor better than was the case at the time and – I think he probably would have agreed – for some time since.

As an observer of policymaking, my recollection is that it became increasingly difficult, for obvious reasons, for CPAG to present a clear, coherent and persuasive statement of policy that would really embrace all the issues that were then coming up in forms that could not have been predicted before. There is a world of difference between being a single-issue pressure group, as CPAG started – at least you know where to go for support – and being a national body embracing quite a wide range of people and trying to deal with a very wide range of issues. My recollection would be – and I am talking off the top of my head and, like everybody else, my memory is not what it was and I have kept no personal record of those years – that there was an increasing distinction having to be drawn between the campaigning activities and the research activities – although, of course, they overlap – and between them and the Rights Office and the publications, which performed a purpose which I think everybody who supported CPAG was in favour of. Perhaps Henry Hodge should get a mention here somewhere along the line, for whom I had, as others did, great liking and admiration during those years. That is really all I can contribute.

RUTH LISTER

CPAG gave me my first proper job, as legal research officer. That was in the autumn of 1971. No one had told me when to turn up or anything, so I remember arriving on the doorstep of Macklin Street at nine o'clock, thinking that that was when offices opened. There was nothing there except New Horizon, a centre for young homeless people, run by Jon Snow, and Richard Drabble – now QC – who had started as a volunteer on the very same day. We sat there on the step wondering what the hell was going on, until 9.30, when Frank turned up.

I was Legal Research Officer. At that point, CPAG did not have a lawyer. Someone called David Ardizzone did some legal work for CPAG, but the late Henry Hodge started soon after. To begin with, everyone assumed I was a lawyer, which was a bit difficult because I had no legal training at all. I did not really have any research training either, but my job really was to try to draw on the material of the CRO and use that. I wrote two main pamphlets: one was the first pamphlet on the wage stop, and the second was a report on the cohabitation rule, for which we then got a lot of, again, cross-

party support in parliament. I remember Jo Richardson, Joan Lester and Joan Vickers were all behind us on that.
I also did some research into supplementary benefit appeal tribunals, masquerading as research assistant to Professor John Griffiths at the LSE. In terms of the research ethics of that study, in retrospect it would not have been allowed now. I wrote the first national Welfare Benefits Handbook and, if anything, that is what I am remembered for. If I say to anyone who works in the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) that I wrote the first national version of the Welfare Benefits Handbook, they look at me in awe. It was nothing like what it is now and, in fact, I have used this as an example in the House of Lords. It was just 20 pages to begin with, before gradually becoming bigger and bigger until, now, it is like a great tome.
I was appointed for a year and, again, it was a sign of the times that no one bothered to say anything about it when the year was up. I just carried on, slightly nervously,but I think they just forgot that it was temporary.

VIRGINIA BOTTOMLEY Had they heard of HR or contracts?

RUTH LISTER No, nothing like that. I was so relieved still to be there after a year. Somehow – and I am not quite sure how it happened – at one point I became Assistant Director, which did not really mean very much, and then Deputy Director, which perhaps meant slightly more. I think I probably took over as deputy when Jane left. It meant slightly more but not very much. We did not have any sort of management structure or anything like that. Then, when Frank became an MP, the job of Director was advertised and I applied, and I was very fortunate to get it. It was the same day that, in effect, Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister.
They were hard times. Fran said a bit about the Fowler review of the mid 1980s. At the end of the 1970s, there was something called the Supplementary Benefit Review, and I took responsibility for that in CPAG. Frank was very much doing the work on Child Benefit, and I took main responsibility for more of the social security side of the work. We did a lot of work on that kind of critical analysis of the review.
The first half of the 1980s was very much dominated by a round of social security cuts and working very closely with a number of what were then called Tory wets. The cuts could have been a lot worse without that group of Tory MPs, some of whom are now in the Lords. One – John Major – went on to be Prime Minister, so I would have had no difficulty with a pamphlet that he contributed to. In the 1970s, we were critical because the social security system etc. were not good enough; in the 1980s, it was all about defending what we had. At the same time, however, it was about trying to do a bit more in terms of trying to influence public opinion and recognising that it is not good just working at the parliamentary level without trying to influence public opinion too.

I left in 1987 to go into higher education. I did a pamphlet for the group called Citizenship and the Poor, which brought together my emergent academic interest in citizenship and continuing interest in poverty. I did some articles, like Fran. I have sat on the policy committee for a number of years now but, more recently, was very honoured, following the sad death of Professor Peter Townsend, to be invited to become the group's honorary President, which I currently am.

JANE STREATHER Like others, I have not prepared anything, so this might just be a rambling stream of consciousness, but I will start at the beginning. I first engaged with CPAG in late 1968 or early 1969. I was a research assistant at Hull University at that time and I set up the first CPAG branch in Hull, being deeply impressed as a student between 1964 and 1967 by The Poor and the Poorest and the rediscovery of poverty in the United States. I had been in Africa for a while, came back, and was aware of CPAG, so that was my first engagement. We did what branches did in those days, running Welfare Rights stalls.

I got a phone call one day, from Frank, to see whether I was interested in coming to work for CPAG as Branches Organiser. I came to London, had an interview with Peter and Frank, and started thereafter in 1972. I was at CPAG between 1972 and 1975, and I look back on that period as being the most interesting and exciting three years of my life. They were absolutely fantastic, and I feel that I learned more than I was able to contribute during that phase. I met some fantastic people and was able to be engaged in lots of policy issues and some great campaigns.

My key role when I started was to support the branches. At that time, CPAG was a bit ambivalent about the branches, to put it mildly: were they a waste of time or did they need supporting? My job was really to travel the country, mainly because Frank did not like to be out of London very much – not overnight, anyway. I was touring the country, meeting all these wonderful people who were running welfare rights activities and local campaigns around child poverty, usually in university towns. My job was really both to listen and learn from their experience, but also to be a key link with the national organisation and to keep them informed about what the current campaigns were. I was usually up on the latest press release: what is the hottest news that we have to talk about at these meetings? I was speaking all around the country at these branch meetings, and it was a very interesting time.

It was really about keeping those links, and the Branches Council was subsequently formed and there was representation on the executive. Those branches came to be really significant, particularly in some of the work I did later with Stuart Weir, who was head of the CRO, when we started to do a lot of campaigning work in 1973-74 with the Labour Party and tried to influence policy through the Labour Party conference and, to some extent, with the trade unions too. A lot of branch managers were active Labour Party members, so we had a lot in common and they were keen to

keep poverty on the agenda of the Labour Party. We went and spoke to all party meetings, but, in the Labour Party, we organised, through our members and through the branches, resolutions on child poverty. We were actively involved in the composite resolutions debated at the Labour conference, but I am sure that Stuart can say more about that. With some limited success, we had things debated, but not a great deal.

It was a really important time for me. I was also involved in a whole range of issues: the big issues with child benefit. The success during that period was child benefit for the first child, which I think was one of the few big successes. At the same time, I was working alongside the CRO, which seemed to have a number of different roles. It was providing advice and advocacy for claimants, but it was also designed to gather evidence and testimony about what was happening to poor people, so that we could use that in media campaigns and in parliamentary lobbying. Of course, we were working alongside Henry Hodge, who was also beginning to do the test cases at that time.

I did not see those two as separate entities; they worked closely together. There were tensions, because they were different priorities. Also, at the policy level, the parliamentary level, was the Child Benefit, the Family Income Supplement, the opposition to means testing, because it was, in effect, stigmatising the rest, but there was a lot of policy and campaigning work around Supplementary Benefits, and both the policies and the practices of the Supplementary Benefits Commission (SBC). Stuart was very involved in that and he had some major successes, so the big campaigns were around the cohabitation rule, the use of discretion, the wage stop, and some housing issues too.

In the very early days, Audrey Harvey set up the CRO. Another thing that I was doing at the time, which was probably a bit marginal but I think was important, and I certainly thought it important and engaged with, I worked with the social work profession. I do not quite know how that happened, whether it was through Bob Holman or something I had read, or whether it was just contacts with social workers, but the British Association of Social Workers had set up a Poverty Special Interests group. I always went to the social work conferences, we had fringe meetings, and the social workers were active in campaigning around poverty too.

I think that, at times during the period 1972-74, there were some tensions because, part of the time, it was a Labour government and, part of the time, it was a Conservative government, and there were different tactics around working with both. I think our engagement with the Labour Party and the trade unions experienced a bit of a reaction, feeling that we were losing touch with that base and wanted to keep with them.

The other tension was whether we focus on a very narrow range of issues. At the time, I was critical but, with reflection, I think Frank was right in saying, to be an effective pressure group, you cannot take too wide an agenda; otherwise, you lose focus and effect, with

the wider issues about the state of Britain and inequality. That, then, was a tension. Through our campaigning work with the Labour Party and trade unions, Stuart and I wrote a publication called Unequal Britain, which was picked up by CPAG and developed in another document, in a memorandum to the Chancellor subsequently.

There were lots of interesting issues and campaigns, and some tensions. I remember being, for those three years, both in awe and in terror of Frank Field, but he was a very effective and impressive Director. I also then got particularly interested in single parents, and that work came up through the CRO. Stuart and I wrote a pamphlet based on case studies, called Social Insecurity, which was about single parents on benefits.

ADRIAN SINFIELD I was more of a supporter or, perhaps, hanger-on and collaborator of CPAG. Perhaps I should go back a bit to explain how I got into that position. In 1963-64, I was working for Peter Townsend and Brian Abel-Smith as a research assistant carrying out a study of what it was like to be unemployed in North Shields. The following year, I went over to the States to do the same thing in upstate New York, so I missed the setting up of CPAG. When I came back, I was then working at the University of Essex, in the Department of Sociology with Peter Townsend and Dennis Marsden, working particularly on issues of unemployment.

It is worth saying a word about the 'wage stop', which has been mentioned briefly, because this was a measure more like the 1834 'less eligibility.' People's benefit would be reduced beneath the scale level if it was believed that they could not get a job that paid more. In the northeast of England, it was a very large number. In fact, for statistical reasons, the scale of it was never fully shown. Something like one-third of family men on National Assistance were on wage stop. It was a massive problem. This, of course, got me into looking at low wages, so it was the issue of unemployment and low wages that I got involved with. In 1972, I lobbied the CPAG executive to do more about unemployment in particular, and was co-opted on to the executive, where I stayed for one or possibly two spells, until 1978, when I came off.

The following year, I moved to Scotland and, a couple of years later, Clare Short involved me with some others in setting up a group called the Unemployment Unit, now the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion. I chaired that for the first 10 years, so, during this period, I collaborated very heavily with CPAG, trying to get over joint issues. In Scotland, there was the Strathclyde Poverty Alliance, before Strathclyde was abolished following local government reorganisation, which then became the Poverty Alliance. This was very successful in bringing together a whole range of people dealing with poverty issues. Now, of course, there is quite a separate, strong Scottish office of CPAG, which I am delighted to say is very vigorous indeed.

During the 1970s, somebody completely outside the group of CPAG people who I was aware of – a single mother down in

Chelmsford – decided that there needed to be an Essex branch of CPAG. She called a meeting, which Peter addressed, and I just bitterly regret that we did not get a tape of his text. He talked about why it is that poverty in Britain today is important, when so many people are aware of poverty in the third world through Oxfam and so on. He brought these two issues together in a way that I have never heard anybody else do quite so movingly and convincingly. In terms of intellectual force, Garry, of course, should have mentioned his book *Relative Deprivation and Social Justice*, which was an inspiration to many.

Having got this group set up, however, this woman disappeared, and we never really had a branch in Chelmsford, but there was a very vigorous one in Colchester, which became possibly one of the biggest, although long after the groups that have been mentioned so far. We carried out surveys, and we did a study of a local community. We were on local radio and television and had a weekly column in the Essex County Standard. There were a whole range of issues. In those days, we had the welfare rights stall, which, in the end, was made for us – it was about half the length of this table – by the apprentices of the Army in Colchester. It was a very significant thing, which stocked all the leaflets and so on. We had to push it up and down a hill for every weekly session.

People like Peter Townsend, Tony Atkinson, Alan Walker, Carol Walker, Chris Trinder and a whole range of people were very active publishing for the group. It was a very powerful group during the 1970s but, with Alan and Carol moving up to Sheffield, it started to dwindle off. For a long time, however, we were very effectively chaired by a chartered accountant, who, with his double-breasted suit and cigars, won every social security appeal he went to.

I do want to emphasise the role of a branch in terms of educating many people and getting people involved, including a whole generation of students who then went on to various other social policy related issues.

JOHN WARD

I was involved in the founding of Islington Poverty Action Group in 1969. I remember well the inaugural meeting, where, in fact, people were squeezed into a room, with the risk of some being trampled to death. I never noted the number, but it was alarming. From that emerged a very active and lively Poverty Action Group. The various things that we took on included a welfare rights stall. We had a welfare rights stall, but with an interesting twist: it was a converted, old-fashioned pram, with a great big belly in which we kept all the leaflets. On the top was a fold-out decorator's table. We hustled our way into Chapel Market, which was a very densely used area. If there was a small gap, we would wheel our pram in there and open up. We did remarkably well and quite a lot of people would approach us. We were not pretending to be experts. The welfare rights stall – and everybody seems to have had one when a local branch was formed – was one of our primary activities, and it was thoroughly enjoyable.

We also got involved in preparing handbooks. It seems as though

there is some competition around how did what, when and how, but the Islington People's Rights Handbook was published in 1978, with the first version being published in 1972. I do not know if this was ahead of the game, but it is 60 pages long and was produced by volunteers. It was an amazing accomplishment. It had an explosive effect in the community, inasmuch as a bundle of the handbooks were left at the local Social Security office with a view to them being shared around – we thought that they would be useful. The staff there were so alarmed at this anonymous brown envelope that they called the police, who, in turn, called the bomb disposal unit – it went off with a bang.

I was involved with thinking through a national handbook along with Stuart and Richard Drabble. Apart from the fact that we got an advance from Penguin and never did anything, I do not think it was a very memorable experience, but we were there at the beginning of the notion of handbooks. The scale of the present handbook is absolutely amazing, although this was an indicator. This is 60 pages of very dense text.

We were also very fortunate in having a local authority that was very sympathetic to our work, and we were allowed to use a derelict building for our office, at St Paul's Place. We occupied the ground floor, and pigeons occupied the next floor. We provided from there an information and advice service, which was really first-class. That programme has been maintained in other premises, and it has got rid of the pigeons.

Another activity that we were particularly involved in was the development of welfare rights training. We got the idea that we needed to reach out and involve other organisations in the community to promote welfare rights. In particular, we were very anxious to involve the Claimants and Unemployed Workers Union and various others. We developed a curriculum – in fact, I was working with Stuart Weir at the time – and then hawked it around the adult-education institutes in Islington. I remember the first one we went to, who listened to us patiently. When we had finished, the person suddenly stood up very angrily and said, 'If you think I am going to allow you to use my adult-education institute to help scroungers and layabouts, you have another think coming.' So much for the prejudices of the time.

I served on the CPAG EC as a representative of local branches until it became too large and unwieldy. I am glad to hear how it emerged, because it really was not working very well. There was always a tension, I remember, around whether to support a national movement or to focus on a narrow and defined campaign. I left before that was really resolved and probably it never would be.

I have two observations about my experience. One is that the Welfare Rights movement radicalised a lot of people, which we overlook. Certainly in Islington, several very good councillors emerged from our group. The second is that the issues became widely discussed. The Welfare Rights movement forced local and national authorities to recognize the inadequacy of welfare benefits.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW Thank you very much. I hope that that has got us going. While I do not want to stop anyone talking, I wonder whether we should, at least initially, try to focus on the first period of the story, which is the election of the 1970-74 Heath government; the introduction of the Family Income Supplement (FIS), disappointingly, because they had promised that they would raise Family Allowances; Sir Keith Joseph at the Department of Social Services; the enactment of a lot of new benefits for the civilian disabled – Attendance Allowance, Mobility Allowance and Incapacity Benefit; Mrs Thatcher abolishing free school milk; and the famous Heath U-turn in policy. Frank was Director during that period. Who would like to say anything about that period, from the panel first?

JOHN VEIT-WILSON I think I would like to say something about the underlying tension which has been referred to, because it coloured everything that happened through the decade. It is relevant in the context of the Heath government because of the influence of Sir Keith Joseph, with his what we might call incipient, neoliberal ideas: the beginning of the ideas of the individual and of the family as being the seat of pathology, as opposed to the post-war notion that the structural causes which could be dealt with through Beveridge-type insurance schemes were the way to deal with poverty. There was inadequate income at that level.

Keith Joseph was coming in with ideas about pathological families and the transmission of poverty. These new forms of income maintenance were brought in, which then generated the need for precise information. The whole of the Welfare Rights movement attempted to provide people with knowledge and rights. Behind all that, we have the influence of the European 1960s popular movements: the realisation that the notions of planning and expertise, which had been dominant since the 20s and 30s in left-wing thought, were no longer acceptable to large sections of the younger population.

Those things influenced what went on in the CPAG office, and that tension, which several of the platform can speak for, went on there between, on the one hand – I am going to personalise it slightly – those who saw, as Frank did, CPAG as having been set up to campaign very specifically for particular kinds of income-maintenance provision of a general and universal, not selective, kind – Family Allowances and so on – and those who saw this large movement of discontent with that approach in the country which has been referred to partly as branches but already partly as 'the movement'; lots of people who were not associating with CPAG as branches, but simply had interests in the same direction and who wanted to campaign for a rather better social world than the one that they and other people around them were experiencing and who did not want to see people in poverty talked about as scroungers or as pathological in some way.

That movement played itself out in the office in competition as to whether the next member of staff would be on the policy side or the Welfare Rights side. I am not going into the details – and there

are plenty of them – but it was a continuing tension. It coloured what then happened, because a small organisation cannot do everything, and not everybody who supported CPAG in a general way was a member of a branch or supporting it in very practical ways. It was very good that we were able to do such a lot to support the campaigning activities, but it did mean that, at times, we were not able to do so much on the direct political campaigning on specific policies.

DAVID BULL

Can I come in on Sir Keith Joseph and the FIS? I was looking up last night how, as Jonathan said, instead of getting what the Conservatives had promised Frank – i.e. Family Allowances with claw-back – we got instead the FIS. I was looking at the fact that the FIS Bill was published on 28 October. Unfortunately, I had been told what Joseph was up to about three weeks before that on Granada Television, and I was really the fall guy because I had gone terribly briefed by nobody at CPAG who knew anything about why Sir Keith Joseph was going to say that claw-back was unworkable.

I had just moved to Bristol, but Granada asked me to go back to Manchester and sit in the studio to interview Sir Keith Joseph down the line at the Blackpool conference. His answer might as well as have been in Mandarin: I could not understand a word of what he was saying. Fortunately, I had done enough with Granada by then just to ask him the next question. I went to Tony Lynes, who was rewriting the chapter on claw-back for the first edition of Family Poverty, and asked, 'What was that about?' He said, because of Roy Jenkins's changes to the tax allowances in the 1968 and 1969 Budgets, Sir Keith Joseph was right that claw-back was unworkable in the terms that they had promised.

In Family Poverty, David Barker, in his chapter on the FIS, and Tony Lynes, in his chapter on claw-back, both set out that that was not an adequate argument for reneging on the promise, but it was a technical argument and that was what he was trying to tell me live on television. I did get an apology from those who should have briefed me before I went to face the Mad Monk.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW

The introduction of FIS, of course, emphasised many of the problems of means-testing. It increased the marginal tax rates very substantially, and also raised the profile of non-take-up, which had been a long-term interest of CPAG's. The marginal tax rate – the so-called 'poverty trap' or 'poverty plateau' – became highlighted by the introduction of FIS, and there was a critique of means-testing which continues until today, with Universal Credit coming in.

RUTH LISTER

I remember Frank and David Piachaud wrote this article for the New Statesman on the poverty trap, and that was how the phrase was born. It is misused now sometimes, and does not mean anyone who cannot get out of poverty. That very technical meaning of it, however, came out of that. I cannot remember very much of the

early 1970s, because I was just beavering away being a research officer, but I do think it is worth emphasising how small the group was then. It really was very small. The director did the press work and the parliamentary work. I was research, Jane was ambassador to the branches, and then there was the Rights Office. I think that was it, just about, obviously with secretarial support.

JANE STREATHER Perhaps we should hear from Stuart about the role of the Rights Office.

STUART WEIR If I follow the form so far, I first became interested in child poverty as a journalist on the Oxford Mail, and I wrote several articles about it. I interviewed Tony Lynes and so on, and then I went to Hackney. By then, I had met Frank. I went on to the executive in 1968 or 1969. I set up Hackney Citizens Rights about that time, and then Frank persuaded me to come to be the Director of the Citizens Rights Office (CRO) in 1971. I cannot believe that I was so stupid, really, to give up an exceedingly well-paid job. There was probably only three months' money for the post at that time. In any case, I went. I follow here what Jane had to say and, in a way, what everybody on the platform has said: that this was an exhilarating time to be involved in this cause. The intensity and the intellectual challenge, almost every day, was fantastically good fun. It needs to be said that we had good fun at CPAG in my time there, some of which I could talk about and some of which I had better not. It was amazing.

I went from CPAG to Shelter, and I could not believe what boring people they were. The contrast was absolutely astonishing. I was working with Richard Drabble, Jo Tunnard and Laurie Elks, who, by god, were brainy people and great fun, and they did an immense amount. In a way, it would be good if, somehow, they could bear witness in some way or another. Laurie would certainly be very pleased to do it. The point has been made already that we saw the CRO as a campaigning organisation. We did lots of advice and tribunals, and I think my record was as good as your friend Brian's: I do not think I lost a tribunal, because it was very easy to manipulate the tribunal.

One of the things that I really tried to do there was to make the CRO the people to go to with any enquiries about anything to do with benefits or welfare rights and so on. We were able, really, to build up a fantastic network of support across the country with Welfare Rights Officers like Geoff Fimister, who is here, Paul Burgess in Manchester, and Steve Burkeman in Liverpool. We were able to build up a fantastic network of people who were working with us and were willing for us to say, 'We need cases of the wage stop. Please give us cases.' We just bombarded Lord Collison, who was chief of the SBC, with case after case after case showing how badly everything was working. It was tremendous fun writing letters to him, because you had to write in a distanced kind of way. You could not just say, 'This is intolerable' – you had to show that it was. It was great fun.

There was tremendous integration between the rights people and the policy people, and I do not think that it is right to say that there was any kind of tension between the two things. I think we all worked remarkably well together, although, of course, there were some incredible tensions as well. Basically, it was fairly integrated in its own way. You guys make it sound like it was an amateur night at the opera, but it was a remarkably efficient and integrated process.
I was one of the people in the iteration of the Welfare Benefits Handbook, because I worked with Ruth on doing what I thought at the time was a superior version, although I gather there is a nuclear option around now.
I then wrote to every Director of Social Services in the country, with my own personal signature and their name at the top, saying, 'Look at this book. It is really important. You must make sure that your staff use this. By the way, we are running welfare rights courses.' The point of this was, first of all, to get the social work profession on board as well as we could and to spread the word about how to do cases. Ruth and I had some very interesting discussions, because we often had completely different ways, for example, of explaining the poverty trap, because our minds went in completely different directions. The point of this was partly, of course, to spread the word, but also partly to build up the income from the CRO so that it was not wholly dependent on grants.
I think, possibly, our greatest success was in getting the abolition of the wage stop, which was thought to be impossible. I remember Frank once said to me, 'You will not do this. It will not happen.' I said, 'Lord Collison has asked me to help get rid of it', because he wanted to get rid of it himself. We conceived this idea. I think the SBC had done a case study of the wage stop, and I think there were 60 people in it, so we decided we would get 60 people for our thing, because that meant using this huge network to just get the cases in. We got them all in and we achieved the abolition of the wage stop, which was, at that time, a tremendous success. We also certainly brought about reforms around the cohabitation rule and so on.
If I could quickly say something about the work with the Labour Party, as Jane has said, we did work out a way of exerting major influence on the Labour Party through constituencies and our friends in the Labour Party. In 1973, we completely transformed the agenda of the Labour Party conference, with a huge number of motions on child poverty and on poverty in general. A wonderful woman from Salisbury –

DAVID BULL Joyce Pick?

STUART WEIR Was very keen on Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). I remember it really well because I wanted to give her a present, as it were, and we got EMA through as Labour Party policy before finally becoming a cross-government policy. We also managed to get lots of influential people in the party on our side through this process. I remember, on one occasion, Neil Kinnock volunteering

to go up and speak on our behalf when he was the 'prince of the party', as it were.
There is one bit of fun that I will just chuck in here. Because I had been going to Labour Party conference for years as a journalist on The Times, I knew that loads of delegates were up on the Saturday night and there was nothing happening. Conference started on the Sunday, so I said, 'Why do we not have the conference on the Saturday night?' and I persuaded Tony Benn, Jack Jones, Joan Lester and another person to address a conference rally. We had about 500 people in the Imperial Hotel, and it was a fantastic night. We got absolutely pissed out of our heads afterwards because of the sheer pleasure of it. Tony Benn came up to me afterwards. In his terminology, we were the 'bleeding hearts' of the progressive movement, and he asked, 'Why do you not affiliate to the Labour Party?' I tried to explain to him that we were way ahead of them, actually, and we could not slow down for them to catch up.

VIRGINIA BOTTOMLEY There was a very strong woman called Mary something in the early days.

STUART WEIR Mary Morgan.

VIRGINIA BOTTOMLEY When did she stop? How many remember the three-day-week? This was when the staff wanted to switch on all the electric fires to 'bring the government down' [laughter]. Then I felt a twinge of discomfort. Why CPAG has been so influential is the combination of the intellectual rigour, together with the authoritative advisory element, with practical-based work. It has similarities with CAB because the evidence they bring is trusted, but it has always had a much stronger policy and campaigning component. The respect we got was through the CRO, and the rigour and authority of the information.

STUART WEIR It was also the mood of the time. When I was on the Oxford Mail, I wanted to write about child poverty because it was a very interesting theme for a journalist at that time. We were all caught up in the movement and we were part of it.

GEOFF FIMISTER I have been involved with CPAG in a variety of capacities since 1970, including being on the National Executive Committee for years, and numerous subcommittees, and on the staff briefly as well. I have also been very much involved in the local authority welfare rights movement, which has been touched on a bit. I thought it would be appropriate, in the light of Stuart's contribution, to maybe reinforce that a bit, because it is not generally known that CPAG played quite a significant role in stimulating the local authority welfare rights movement.
I set up the Newcastle service in 1974, which was one of the first. As far as I can make out from the papers I inherited, this had really developed from discussions in the Tyneside branch, which John was involved with. John was very involved in the Tyneside branch,

but he was involved in those discussions, along with Jeremy Beecham, who is now in the Lords. Tony Lynes had what was probably the first local-authority-type welfare rights post in Oxfordshire. It was not called a welfare rights post but that is what it really was. That was from about 1969 to 1971. Stuart mentioned the Manchester service that was set up in 1972.

The organisation which is now the National Association of Welfare Rights Advisers was dreamt up by Stuart Weir and myself, and the late John Murray. We had our inaugural meeting in Macklin Street in 1975. I sometimes have to remind the National Association that that is where their origins lie. Of course, CPAG's information material was always extremely well-used by local authority services. It is all much more computerised now but, in the days when we were thumbing through battered handbooks, it was the CPAG material.

On the policy front as well, the local authority welfare rights people collaborated a lot with CPAG on joint exercises, and the Social Security Consortium has its origins in those relationships. I think that this is something that more should be made of, because it was quite an important role.

Just briefly on the question of the wage stop, that was something that, again, I was very much involved in campaigning against at that time. It has now been reinstated, of course, in the form of the benefit cap, and I am now very much involved in campaigning against that. I use the wage stop, and the reasons why the wage stop was abolished, as part of making the case against the benefit cap, so that is still a very live issue.

ADRIAN SINFIELD I just wanted to go back to the point that was made about the poverty trap, because I think that CPAG has never got the credit that it deserves for educating almost the whole nation about what was meant by the poverty trap. I was looking at Michael McCarthy's book, Campaigning for the Poor, which is about CPAG, and he really presents CPAG as failing to engage with the unions. I think the evidence, however, can be presented rather differently: that CPAG succeeded in making the unions understand what the poverty trap was and why their wage bargaining of getting so much percent did not work in the context of the poverty trap. Given that we were then moving into a crisis in income policies of various types throughout the 1970s, getting the unions and the government to agree on a fixed amount at the bottom, plus a percentage above that, was an important point in relation to the poverty trap. Maybe Ruth or somebody else could comment in more detail on CPAG's work in getting this done, but I think it really was an enormous success.

RUTH LISTER All I remember is that New Statesman article, which had a huge impact.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW We preferred to call it the poverty plateau, but it never worked. Geoff referred to Tony Lynes and Oxford. Of course, while Tony

was in Oxford, he was a key player, in the period 1970-74, in the thalidomide campaign. He used his CPAG skills to organise the Distillers shareholders and force a settlement during that period. I thought that that should be put on record. He also, of course, met his wife Sally then.

STUART WEIR I think that Paul Burgess in Manchester was the first person who showed exactly how the poverty trap worked. I do not know about the article that you mentioned, Ruth, but I think Paul was the first person who I remember coming to me and you, saying, 'This is what is going on.' I think he deserves a lot of credit for that.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW Are there any other points on the period 1970-74? When we come back following a break, we will cover 1974-79, which is a very important period because it was the great Child Benefit/Malcolm Wicks 'Deep Throat' episode. It was the period when the wage stop was abolished. It was the beginning, as someone here reminded us in an earlier contribution, of the Donnison-led review of supplementary benefits.

RUTH LISTER I do not think Donnison led it. It was a civil-servant review.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW We will clarify that.

DAVID BULL Can I just say a bit more about Paul Burgess? I think it was very interesting that the Manchester branch got together with the local CAB and managed to get the local council involved. We, in a way, had to be the volunteers who stepped aside and let Manchester City Council take over, which I think was very important.
The other thing that has been touched upon about proselytising the social workers is that we should mention the 1972 CPAG annual general meeting in Sheffield. Stuart referred to the committee setting up something which we would call the Welfare Benefits Handbook, but it also allowed you and me, Jonathan, to go away and edit a series for Social Work Today called For Your Client's Benefit, getting out to social workers what they could reasonably do. We managed to run that for a very long time, and then Geoff took over, working with Anne Stanyer. We must have done that between the four of us for 12 to 15 years, just churning out article after article, involving all sorts of people writing them, to get to social workers. I think that that was quite an important meeting in Sheffield in terms of what we decided to do about welfare rights.

JOHN VEIT-WILSON Just a footnote to that point: Anne Stanyer was a lecturer at Lanchester Polytechnic and active in the Coventry group. I wanted to make a point about social work, because one of the campaigning activities that many of us were involved in at that time was, in fact, talking to social workers to persuade them that welfare rights had a part to play in the professional casework that they did with clients. This was still a period in which the dominant form of socialization

of social workers was, again, the Freudian model of immaturity of the client, rather than of the conditions in which clients were having to live being unacceptable and some people were not coping with those unacceptable conditions. Just as some were campaigning om welfare rights in their own right, others were trying to change the perception of rather powerful intermediaries in access to services and proper treatment.

VIRGINIA BOTTOMLEY I left CPAG to be a social worker and did a Masters at LSE, partly because of these very poor families that I worked with. Some could manage in spite of everything and some really could scarcely survive at all. There were, then, some personal qualities, family support, intellect and much else; nevertheless, however talented and resilient the family was, those who could cope did so in a way that most of us could not possibly have managed.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW Let us not get into that, because we are trying to focus on CPAG.

JANE STREATHER I do not think it was particularly successful in getting frontline social workers actively engaged in doing anything about the financial situation of families, except to be more aware. What did make a difference was the sort of work that Geoff Fimister, Paul Burgess and John Murray were doing through welfare rights services, where I think CPAG members, through contact with their local Labour parties and Labour councils, set up these services.
To bring this completely up to date, I was talking to Jeremy Beecham on the train today, and he still says 'Welfare rights were my baby' when he was leader of Newcastle. I reminded him today, because I am a city councillor in Newcastle, that it costs about £45,000 – £50,000 at most – for a Welfare Rights Officer. In Newcastle, on average, they each generate £900,000 a year that goes into the pockets of poor families.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW That is a good point at which to stop, thank you very much.

[Break]

JONATHAN BRADSHAW I suppose one could claim that 1974-79 was the high point of CPAG. We certainly achieved the great breakthrough of Child Benefit. I am interested to know whether anybody would like to add anything over the saga of the Cabinet leaks. They have been well covered in the literature now and, in addition to what we had before, we now have Malcolm Wicks' biography, which was a whole chapter in his role in the leaks. I have claimed, in a blog written after that was published, that he can claim to have achieved more for poor families than anybody else in the history of the world and put a number to it. I think it was a fantastically courageous act. I do not think I could have done that.
We ought to record that Tony Lynes felt blamed and that his whole

career suffered, which is rather ironic, as a result of the leaks, because he was door-stepped by the Daily Mail and his private life was ruined. His children were interviewed and he was very upset about it. David Piachaud also said that he thinks he suffered from the leak. That was the price paid by those people who were close to CPAG. The Supplementary Benefit Reviews have been mentioned. Would anybody like to start on other things in the period when CPAG was active?

ADRIAN SINFIELD 'Wasted labour' was the major campaign that Frank and Ruth launched in 1978.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW That was rising unemployment.

RUTH LISTER That was very much in response to Adrian and others at one of our AGMs. It was one of the few examples of membership power. There was a real criticism that we were not doing enough for unemployment, and from that came wasted labour.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW There is a document we will share with you, in which Ruth talks about what she is going to do when she becomes Director. Unemployment plays a big part in that.

RUTH LISTER I am horrified that Jonathan still has my job application!

JOHN VEIT-WILSON It is worse than that; it is in my files in the archives.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW I might have been your referee.

DAVID BULL You were, and I was on the selection committee. I do not think I should say anything more about that. All I would say is that, in retrospect, Frank should not have been on the selection committee. That is not about Frank, but any person going out of the job. One of the malfunctions of that committee was Frank being on it.
What I wanted to discuss was something said earlier about the thinness of the first pamphlet. Remember that, in 1980, as David Donnison and his civil servants, Alice Perkins and others, stomped the country trying to sell the big review, Donnison was saying that he wants to replace the A code – people may not remember the top secret code that Frank exposed in the Guardian, on 5 November 1971 – with something no thicker than the Highway Code. Think of the books that any member of a social security tribunal now has to have, instead of something as thin as the Highway Code.
I remember one of the meetings in Bristol, when the Supplementary Benefits Review team came there. Martin Partington, then a lecturer in the Law Department, subsequently professor all over the place, said that if we moved to a rights-based system, such as was being advocating with the paranoia about

discretion being shown in the Supplementary Benefits Commission and, I have to say, parts of the Citizens Rights Office, a much thicker volume would be required than anything like the highway code or the A code. Of course, Partington was right. We have ended up with huge handbooks produced for Supplementary Benefits Tribunals and the offices.

JANE STREATHER During that time, CPAG focused on some other campaigns. There was a Green Paper, whose name I cannot remember, about population control. It came to the executive committee and it was very much driven by a eugenics argument. At the time, we were concerned that this would be used as the answer to poverty – that families should be small and controlled in size. It was a small thing, but CPAG addressed that and submitted written evidence.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW Imran, is this a cue for you to make a point?

IMRAN HUSSAIN2 I was just saying earlier to Jonathan that any discussion about CPAG's impact on history should not forget its small role in the rise of Margaret Thatcher. Keith Joseph's speech, which knocked him out of his running for leadership and led Margaret Thatcher to put in her candidacy, was partly based on a Poverty article that he misread, about eugenics, by Margaret Wynn.

RUTH LISTER [she is sure this is not her comment] **I would remind all members that that was the period when we produced *Poverty: the Facts* of which there have been a number of editions since. It was 1979 when we published *Cost of a Child*, which David Piachaud wrote. That received huge coverage. It was the first time it had been done. It has been done in different ways since, but that was quite a milestone.**

JANE STREATHER We mentioned Peggy Wynn, but we should pay tribute to her, because she was never on the committee but a lot of us had a lot of contact with her. She was like a mentor to us and she was passionate about families with children, particularly young families. I remember around the 'Cost of a Child', she said, 'Do you know, Jane, it costs more to keep a teenage boy in food than it does a grown man?' Those were the sorts of detailed arguments she made, but she was a really important academic and supporter during those years.

RUTH LISTER Partly because of her, and also Frank had a big interest in this, during the 1970s we did work around maternity, infant mortality and low birth weight. Michael Crawford was and still is an academic in this area. A number of different things were going on that were less prominent, but still part of the tapestry of what we were doing.

JANE STREATHER It was a little later that Helene Hayman, MP for Welwyn and

[2] Head of Policy, Rights & Advocacy, CPAG

Hatfield, and myself, after I had left CPAG, Jean Coussins and others, picked up some of those maternity issues and set up a new campaign group, Maternity Alliance.

RUTH LISTER Was it in the 1970s that the Low Pay Unit was established? That was a sister organisation that took the low pay issue and focused on it separately.

STUART WEIR We were also responsible for the Family Rights Group being set up, because of cases of children being removed from their families from social workers. I want to make a broader point: CPAG has been at the forefront of what we might call family-friendly attitudes, publicity and so on. In all its policy statements, there is a broader theme about attitudes to the family, however large the family may be, good parenting and all of those things. CPAG has undoubtedly been a very benign influence, positively playing a role in fostering the idea that family is something to be protected and enhanced. That is a broader look than this or that policy issue.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW Shall we move on to 1979 and the election of Mrs Thatcher? Child Benefit was frozen on the vine. Benefits were abolished for 16-to-18-year-olds. There was a huge increase in unemployment. There were the social security Fowler reviews and Family Credit was introduced. The Social Fund was introduced.

FRAN BENNETT That was the 1986 Act and 1988 changes.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW Ruth and Fran, you were there.

RUTH LISTER I will start, as I was there in 1980. David Donnison has written very well about the early 1980s period and what he saw as a watershed, when the Government announced that it was going to cut the real value of benefits for the first time since the War, with the 5% abatement of the main National Insurance benefits, the abolition of the earnings-related supplement and the end of the earnings link with long-term benefits and pensions. Short-term benefits were not actually linked to it, although everyone seems to think they were now.

There were two budgets that came very soon after they came to power and it became very clear that it was being approached head-on. I was the new director and, as I remember, Hermione Parker, who worked for Sir Brandon Rhys Williams, who was a Conservative MP, introduced me to or suggested that it was worth talking to some new Conservative MPs who might be sympathetic. I cannot remember exactly how it happened, but I brought them together at a meeting. She may have come to the first one as a way in. There was a big contrast from today, in that this group of MPs were so helpful and would go out and bat for CPAG. We would produce the briefings, I would read Hansard and there they were. They took up social security as their issue. It is quite clear that,

without them, the cuts would have been a lot worse than they were. They were bad enough as it was.

It is coming back to me as I talk: it was not only the backbenchers. There were people like Chris Patten, John Major, Tristan Garel-Jones, Tony Newton and Ian Gilmour. Ian Gilmour was in the Cabinet to begin with, but he was very helpful. There was also a researcher who worked at Tory central office, who was very helpful, but I probably should not name him. He told me a good wheeze about how to get a letter to a Cabinet minister so that they would read it. You put the letter inside an envelope inside an envelope, and actually it reaches some Cabinet members. Francis Pym responded very positively.

Social Services, or whatever the department was called that ran social security in these days, with Lynda Chalker there, turned to CPAG for evidence to use against the Treasury, which wanted to cut the real value of whatever it was called then, Supplementary Benefit, I think, behind the scenes. They were fighting it as well. CPAG played quite a pivotal role in all that. It was helped by a tradition Frank had started, which was to have breakfast meetings at Conservative party conference. You would have the Secretary of State, ministers, people like Kenneth Clarke who was up and coming then and key backbenchers, who would sit around over breakfast. When Fran joined us, we would go together and they were awful. I would not sleep a wink, we were so nervous about them.

FRAN BENNETT We were sharing a room for one thing.

RUTH LISTER We were always very modest in our expenditure at CPAG. You would have quite a frank conversation over breakfast. Of course, other people latched on to that tradition and started doing it, but it was really important as a way of having a relationship with ministers. I remember a classic relationship we managed to build up with Tory backbenchers. A group of them took me to a meeting with Sir Geoffrey Howe, who was then the Chancellor, and asked me to make their case for not cutting Child Benefit. It felt quite surreal.

That paid off eventually in that, when John Major came to power, he restored Child Benefit, because he understood the arguments. I remember him saying at some NCVO reception, 'I understand and it was CPAG that taught me why Child Benefit was so important.' That had long-term effects beyond losing the immediate battle on Child Benefit. I left Fran in the lurch when the Fowler review was first mooted and I went on sabbatical. I think I remember saying, 'Don't worry, nothing much should happen during this period.'

It was mentioned that the Social Security Consortium came out of the Welfare Rights Consortium, but it also came out of the Trade Union Forum. I cannot remember when it was established; it might have been at the beginning of the 1980s. A group of trade union research people who had an interest in social security would come together. With the Bill, we felt we needed to expand it beyond

trade unions, so brought in welfare rights officers and other voluntary organisations. It was a model of lobbying, because we operated as a consortium and agreed we would not argue against each other's client group. We would not allow them to divide us and rule, but different people would take responsibility for different parts of the [Social Security] Bill. Age Concern would do the stuff on older people, etc., and we briefed on that basis. It was a very effective piece of lobbying, not in the sense that we won much in the end, but we won some things [Ruth isn't sure what she actually said here, but thinks this isn't quite right: they were overturned in the Lords.]

The one thing we did win was Family Credit not being paid through the pay packet, but to the caring parent. It was a bit like Stuart saying, 'You're not going to win this.' I said, 'Let's try.' We put together a coalition of the National Farmers Union, small businesses, Tory women, as well as the more traditional child poverty groups. One of the few things I remember clearly was Norman Fowler coming out of the committee room, when there were discussing it at that stage, and saying, 'You've won; I've been caught in a pincer movement.' When it came to the Lords and they added a Government amendment, I was sitting watching then jumped up and exclaimed, and an attendant came up and said, 'If you do that again, madam, you'll be thrown out.' You would not think I would be sitting on the other side one day.

Don't know whether you agree Fran, but it felt like a huge responsibility. It goes back to what we said earlier about the links we made with the welfare rights office because, when something like that happened, everyone looked to us for the lead. Within a very short period of the Green Paper being published, we had a meeting of over 1,000 people at Central Hall, Westminster, to discuss it. Very quickly, we released a rough-and-ready analysis. We did a better one later. There was a sense from everyone of 'What's CPAG going to say about this? What lead are we going to give?' It was an incredible sense of responsibility. The 16- and 17-year-olds came later in the 1980s.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW Were you there for John Moore's 'end of the line for poverty' speech?

FRAN BENNETT I was wondering about John Moore, because I was remembering the breakfast meeting at the Conservative party conference with John Moore, but that may have been later.

RUTH LISTER I was still there when John Moore was doing the taxation of husband and wife. Fran and I wrote something together on that and the married man's tax allowance and transferable allowances. They are now finally introducing that. I think John Moore was involved.

FRAN BENNETT Nigel Lawson was involved more. There was a Green Paper in 1986, and they eventually introduced independent taxation in 1990.

When I was Deputy Director, I was involved more with internal matters in the 1980s, when Ruth was Director, except when she was on sabbatical. I wanted to make a couple of points on that, internal CPAG matters.

We moved from Macklin Street to Bath Street, but I do not know what year it was. We were thinking we ought to move for quite a while partly because of when there was a storm. Angela Wilson was a membership secretary at that time, and it was her first job after school – and she is still at CPAG so needs to be mentioned, as she is fantastic – used to be typing on her old-fashioned typewriter in Macklin Street. When there was a storm or thunder, dust would fall through the ceiling on to her typewriter. We wanted to move, but only got permission from the Treasurer, who has been talked about, Garry Runciman, to move when a young person, who was in the homeless centre downstairs, New Horizon, peed on Garry's foot as he was coming up the stairs to a trustee meeting. He said, 'I think you can move.' I wanted to remember that. I wonder if I have misremembered it; he says I am not entirely mistaken.

I also wanted to remember the help we received from the Greater London Council during that time, which I think provided us with our first proper lot of computers. We applied to them for a grant and they computerised the office, which was still in Macklin Street. That is worth remembering. I remember when I first joined CPAG we used to duplicate. The fumes from that are probably still affecting us.

I wanted to continue the theme about the relationship with social workers, which is worth remembering, and also about the movement of local people and welfare rights. In terms of the 1986 Social Security Act, implemented in 1988, there was a big anti-cuts movement. Although CPAG is not a grassroots movement and had not been in the past, we saw ourselves partly as providing ammunition and knowledge for that kind of movement. There were rallies all over the place and a social worker boycott of the Social Fund. The social workers were sufficiently involved with social rights to be worried about the discretionary and cash-limited aspects of part of the Social Fund, which is also worth remembering.

Ruth said people looked to us, and they absolutely did. With things like the Social Security Consortium and Save Child Benefit, we were trying to de-brand, which is quite hard, because another tension with organisations is to constantly have your brand out there to gain more money and reputation. But that is not necessarily going to be the best way to achieve policy objectives. With Save Child Benefit in particular, the way I saw it was that we wanted to take the poverty out. Save Child Benefit was actually a hugely wide alliance of organisations, including the Women's Institute, the Mothers' Union, trades union, church bodies and so on. We did not only want to identify Child Benefit as something to do with poverty, but actually with the broader family issues that Stuart was discussing.

Can I just tell an anecdote about John Moore? We saw him at a

breakfast meeting, when he was Secretary of State for Social Security, just after people at the University of York had published an analysis of the Social Fund. He was in a very bad mood because of this, but we were not particularly talking about the Social Fund. We were going to talk about Child Benefit, so we started to say how popular it was. He said, 'Yes, and I would be popular if I handed out £5 notes on street corners to everybody.'

RUTH LISTER On your point about the cuts movement, in retrospect, I realised that was a weakness. Although we had provided ammunition, the grassroots cuts movement was doing its thing and the Social Security Consortium was doing its things, but the two were not really integrated. What was not happening was grassroots pressure on MPs dealing with that in Parliament. We did not pay enough attention to that.

JANE STREATHER Can I endorse what Ruth said about the importance of the Social Security Consortium? I had left CPAG by then, but I was involved with the Consortium, as was Geoff Fimister at the time. I was working for an organisation called the Local Government Information Unit and was seconded to the Association of Municipal Authorities to work with the voluntary sector to harness their support against the 1986 Social Security Act. Geoff was working as a Welfare Rights Adviser for local authorities. There was also Chris Davis working on the Social Fund.
It was a very effective team. I was very aware at the time and very impressed by the spirit of cooperation. People decided that they were not going to fight for their own corner. There was an agenda here that we agreed on that Government had to be challenged. You are right it was never a grassroots movement, but we divided responsibilities and CPAG was very much in the lead about who would do what about which parts of the Bill, in terms of lobbying. It was very much a parliamentary campaign by organisations, led by CPAG. That collective collaboration was a very satisfying experience, recognising that people had different roles and skills, but we all had a common agenda.

ADRIAN SINFIELD Going back in time, I wanted to feed this in, because it does not seem to be in Frank's book, *Poverty and Politics*. He managed to persuade the Synod of the Church of England to lobby the Chancellor of the Exchequer on Family Allowance, as it then was, and the Roman Catholic bishops at the same time. Frank always maintained that it was much more effective for these two groups to be writing to the Chancellor. He never heard from them about these sorts of subjects. It meant that they could not use the routine reply to CPAG. This is one of these arguments for collaboration and I was surprised that Frank seems to have left this out. I may have missed it, but it does seem to me to be a good example of how you can put pressure on from different directions.
The broader point that Fran, Ruth and Jane have stressed was about keeping the poverty lobby together through the 1970s and

into the 1980s. That was crucial because, in other countries, you find the older people's lobby, the disabled people's lobby and the children's lobby almost in conflict with each other to keep their own supporters or maintainers. It was a really important factor in the campaigning against the cuts of the early 1980s.

GEOFF FIMISTER I was going to supplement what Jane and Ruth were saying about the Social Security Consortium. It has remained important, not the Consortium itself, although it has recently reconvened, but that sort of method of lobbying. What actually happened on the local government side was we put together a team. At one time, there was only me as national advisor, but we put together a team because there was so much work on and we had five or six local authorities, when Jane was seconded from the Local Government Information Unit, as she said. I knew what was happening on the CPAG side as well, because I was on the national executive committee and knew the Social Security Consortium was coming together. Ruth has reminded us of the trades union' involvement in that as well.

We put all that together and, as people have described, it was an effective lobbying exercise. We won a few things that have lasted, in their way. That method of lobbying carried on over the years because, whenever something happened when you needed a bit of collaboration between agencies, a team would be put together of a few agencies working in that kind of way. I feel that the Consortium was the template for that and that it has had a lasting effect.

Even quite recently in dealings I have had on Housing Benefit, Shelter, Citizens Advice, Crisis and one or two others will come together on an ad hoc basis for a particular lobbying exercise. That has continued to be important methodologically.

FRAN BENNETT I wanted to ensure that we do not miss out the poll tax from the 1980s because, again, it was something that John Major reversed when he came in. We did a lot of work about poll tax in the 1980s. Something I think is so appalling about the council tax benefit changes occurring now is that we were very angry in the 1980s that the average amount of compensation paid to claimants, in order to pay the poll tax, was just an average and therefore was not going to cover the full amount for everybody. The Government are not paying anybody anything now to cover the element of their council tax they have to pay under the new localized system.

The poll tax was a very good example of several different bits of CPAG activity. One was the intellectual analysis, which was partly by Carey Oppenheim, who is not here, but ought to be paid tribute to, and also the Local Government Information Unit. There was a joint analysis by CPAG and the Local Government Information Unit, because obviously it was very much a local authority issue as well. It was also a good example of the way in which we worked with all parties, including the government party. I remember Sir George Young was the person who actually launched our analysis

of the poll tax at the CPAG offices. The other thing is campaigning. We had a petition with about half a million signatures. I was scared stiff; we had to do it with our non-charitable arm. The petition said the poll tax was unfair, unjust and undemocratic. Alan Booth was the campaign officer at the time. It was a good example of CPAG's various different arms of activity at its best and how they were brought together.
Similarly, I remember talking to Sarah Spencer, who was at NCCL (now Liberty) at the time. She said, 'You are flogging a dead horse,' but we went on. John Major came in and did something about it. I thought we needed to pay tribute to the poll tax work.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW We should not be too self-satisfied about the 1980s. Child poverty trebled. Inequality shot up. Were we aware that that was happening at the time?

RUTH LISTER Of course we were, Jonathan. Actually, we became much sharper on issues like inequality. Prior to each election under the Thatcher years, and Alan and Carol Walker did a lot of editing work on this in particular. There was 'Thatcherism and the Poor' and 'Divided Britain'. They detailed growing poverty. Obviously there is always a time lag, because the figures come two or three years after, but they detailed the rise in child poverty, growing inequality and the effect of tax benefit policies, of Robin Hood in reverse. We were very much providing the evidence, particularly through those pre-election pamphlets.

ADRIAN SINFIELD Can I endorse that? I was teaching overseas and found myself very conscious of only using CPAG materials. I was trying to find other sources that produced stuff first but, time and time again, CPAG in its press releases and so on was the source for major increases in poverty inequality. It deserved tremendous credit during the 1980s.

DAVID BULL Coming in on Thatcherism and the poor, I always remember your saying after the 1983 conference in Malet Street, with Tony Newton on the platform, that he said to you afterwards, 'I'll now go home and read your vituperative pamphlet.' He had not even opened it at that point, which I thought was slightly bigoted.
Can I go on to say a bit about liaisons in the 1980s? I am sorry I came in on the Supplementary Benefits Review prematurely; I had misread the order of your brief, Jonathan. I think we should say a bit about the strange role that David Donnison had to play in those years, as an academic friend of many of us and certainly of CPAG, going around the country with some supportive civil servants in Michael Partridge and Alice Perkins, but also having to cope with the local offices and the dislike of his connections. I remember the regional office in Bristol ringing me one day. Donnison had been going to visit the local offices who refused to have him. He said that the reasons they are giving are, 'He wears a polo neck shirt and he's a friend of David Bull.' I do not know which was worse, his lack of a necktie or being a long associate of mine.

He had to do some important work treading that awkward area between the civil service and his friends at CPAG. I liked the fact that he did that exchange of letters with us, within Social Work Today, which I had persuaded him to do. You contributed, Ruth, as did Michael Hill and myself. What he was trying to do was very important, and in a difficult setting. We should recognise that.

STUART WEIR Can I say something about David Donnison? It is important that Pat has a chance to talk to him. I am talking to him now about him coming to London and meeting up in February. I could liaise with Pat to ensure he talks to her, because he adds so much to the discussion.

JOHN VEIT-WILSON I wanted to comment, as a footnote, on the ambivalence that occasionally comes through about whether CPAG has been a child poverty action group or a family poverty action group, quite what those relationships are and indeed what the poverty element is. It started as the Family Poverty Group and it changed its name towards the end of 1965, within a few months of being founded, for publicity expedient reasons. Children are a better brand image for poverty than families are, for reasons that have been mentioned. There is another reason that lies behind that, which also affects how we look at some of those questions of increases in family poverty, which is how poverty was being conceived at the time and how it was later being measured.

At the time, the poverty we were concerned with in 1965 was people who did not have incomes close to what the then National Assistance, shortly to be Supplementary Benefit, levels were. This is far below anything that the sociologists and the research team that Adrian and I were later involved with later found to be necessary. We were taking a target that could be described as poverty – it was officially described as poverty – but it was below what the British population, in their attitudes and behaviours, would have described as poverty.

The developments that came through the 1970s, in the revelations about the findings of the National Survey of Poverty, finally published in 1979 in Poverty in the United Kingdom, written by Peter Townsend, were that what one would actually have to take as a reasonable level of household income to avoid poverty was a great deal larger. Some of the impression about the enormous increases, not all of it – some of it was quite genuine – is simply because we were taking a much higher level of necessary household income as being required to avoid poverty.

That then influences the kinds of public approach that we have been talking and hearing about, which is that this is about many families. It is not about some very low-lying, lonely families at the bottom of the income distribution that you can call poor. It is about all kinds of families, who may or may not be managing, in terms with which the British population itself could identify. That is a very important thing. In recent years, attempts are again being made to suppress this, and we are trying not to allow them.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW To add to that, the early 1980s was the period when we shifted from measuring poverty using the Supplementary Benefit scales to households below average income. CPAG took a leading role in the consultation and debates over that, and influenced such things as whether they carried on producing after- housing- cost measures, and whether the threshold was 50% of the median or 60% of the mean. That continued into the early 1990s as well. It was then that the series we have today was established. We had a part to play in that.

RUTH LISTER I have no memory of that at all, Jonathan. One other thing that happened in the 1980s that was quite important was the test case on Invalid Care Allowance.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW Equal treatment.

RUTH LISTER Equal treatment had started, I think, in the late 1970s, because it was a European directive, but there were some things that they did not move on and invalid care allowance was one of them. That was an example of a combination of the test case work of the Rights Office and very broad campaigning work – there was a lot of publicity for it. That was the European Court of Justice. It was a really important case.

FRAN BENNETT The lollipop lady.

RUTH LISTER Yes.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW The equal treatment victories were one of the reasons why Mrs Thatcher failed to cut social security expenditure, because of the huge expansion of those benefits.

RUTH LISTER The main reason, though, was more and more people having to claim benefits because of unemployment.

GEOFF FIMISTER Could I briefly come in on that? We should not forget the equal rights for disabled women campaign that Ruth was involved in and I was and various other people, which was about the housewives non-contributory invalidity pension. It is hard to remember now, but there used to be a benefit that was payable to women only on condition that they were incapable of their normal household duties. It was 1978 that we ran that campaign, I recall. It is salutary to think how awful things could be at that time.

JOHN WARD Can I ask what happened to the role that Jane was playing within CPAG in liaising with the local branches and with other local organisations? I moved on and worked for the National Consumer Council and, in particular, was given the brief of supporting and developing local information and advice services, not just the

Citizens Advice Bureau but the many other independent advice services that had emerged, quite a few of them out of the local branches of CPAG. However, when I started my work at the National Consumer Council I did not notice much liaison with CPAG. I was conscious of one thing that they did, which was arranging training programmes for advice workers and charging a goodly sum for it as well. I am curious to know what happened to that initiative, because at one point CPAG was really very strongly committed to building liaisons with grassroots organisations and it seemed to fade.

FRAN BENNETT There are probably loads of people here who have been involved in the history of branches and CPAG, but certainly when I was at CPAG we had a lot of discussion about it. People have talked today about the period of prime flowering of that kind of local action and it did not maintain itself at that level of activity, for various political and other reasons which I am sure we could all spend ages analysing, but I think that is the case, so you had a branch network that was shrinking. We certainly used to have a branches officer when I was working at CPAG. I believe it then became half branches and half campaigns and other people can take on the story beyond there, but it may take us into the 1990s. The thing that I remember discussing quite a lot is partly what John Ward is talking about, which is we did not really have a governance structure for branches that would take account of the fact that branches were either making money or running up debts in CPAG's name with us having absolutely no control over the use of that, none whatsoever. That started to get slightly problematic, for example, when one ran up an electricity bill and just did not pay it. Basically, they said, 'What is the legal entity behind this?' and it is the national Child Poverty Action Group. Those were some of the things I was certainly grappling with, leaving aside any other issues, when I was at CPAG.

RUTH LISTER I remember there was one problem when the branches nearly got us into trouble with the Charity Commissioner, Brian Mawhinney MP. I cannot remember what it was about now, but it was difficult. There is one other thing that it is important to put on the record and that is during the 1980s when CPAG really developed as a small publishing company, mainly on the back of the Welfare Benefits Handbook. We had money from the government for the Rights Office and, as I have since discovered, we can thank Tony Newton for that because he was a sort of friend in government really.

FRAN BENNETT Section 64 it was called.

RUTH LISTER Yes. The grants that were there in the early days were seed corn grants. They were not grants that people would carry on paying, so we had to try to become as self-financing as possible and that was partly through publications, partly through training, as has already

been talked about. The publications was a big operation. It still is, but I know it is now under pressure the other way because of cutbacks. The difference between now and the 1980s is that in the 1980s there was that network of welfare rights officers who we were working with, doing take up campaigns and who were buying the Handbook. That network has just been eroded because the cuts in local government are much, much worse than they ever were in the 1980s, so again that is another factor that makes the work of CPAG much harder now than it was in the last Tory government.

DAVID BULL I was saying earlier over lunch that I went out to address two inaugural meetings of the Exeter branch, two inaugural meetings of the Barnstaple branch and two inaugural meetings of the Coventry branch. That was because branches would be set up in great enthusiasm, people would come along who already belonged to 15 different local groups and 12 committees, would form the committee and very soon they would be gone and the word would go out, Jane or whoever would say, 'Can you go to Barnstaple, can you go to Exeter, you are needed again?' This farce was exposed also by John Veit-Wilson, who has not mentioned how costly it was. John said he came off the committee in 1980. There was something of a coup against him for speaking out against phoney branches, because once we had set up the Branches Council it was important that those coming onto the committee for the Branches Council were not coming from some rotten borough but coming from some genuine branch. John spoke out against it. I cannot remember when I spoke out against it, but I know it was put up again then, to my cost, when the committee was debating – Garry was there on my side – whether I should succeed Peter as Chair. There were people who were quite overtly saying that at some point I had questioned whether branches without a sufficient constituency should have a member on the committee and there was a lobby not to let me be Chairman on that ground. It was quite overt and John is nodding his head, for the record. That was that period, which lasted quite a while, of people speaking out against phoney branches and paying for it.

JANE STREATHER I do not have the full answer to John Ward's question and I do not know whether the branches withered on the vine or CPAG killed them off, but I suspect that one of the things that happened was, over time, the original branches were very active, as we have noted, in welfare rights activity and that service became professionalised. I suspect that the need for volunteers running the market stall was not necessary when many local authorities were running a professional service.

GARRY RUNCIMAN I am reminded, by hearing what is being said a propos of the branches, of the concerns I had at the time as Treasurer. It is another example of what is bound to happen and I suppose you could say that it is one of the penalties of success: that the problems in an organisation that has grown and diversified very

considerably from what it started as or even from what it was when I first became Treasurer have to be addressed. Again, I would like to pay tribute to Henry Hodge and his advice on how to deal with this and the potential threat from the Charity Commissioners. Probably not from the Commissioners themselves, but they are answerable to the vulnerability there that could have a serious effect on the financial position of the Group quite apart from anything else. I also remember my concern about the possibility that branches – which in principle everybody thought good: here are these excellent people who want to do something for the cause – and it only takes one or two – could turn out to pose a financial problem that then can start to get out of hand. My recollection, which is perhaps why I had to be reminded of it, is that CPAG did successfully address both those problems during those years.

STUART WEIR I just want to make the point that every pressure group I have been involved with in my life, including Charter 88 and the Equality Trust, all find branches a terrible problem. With Charter 88, for example, there was a time when the enthusiasm – and we are talking about enthusiasm in the 1970s – was sufficiently high that the branches could organise hustings for Charter 88 in a large number of constituencies. That was a great success, but it was a short lived success and there were perennial arguments about why we are not carrying on with branches as though, somehow or other, from the centre you could foster the kind of enthusiasm at local level that you need to make branches worth having. I must say that I have now set up a local branch of the Equality Trust in Cambridge and the first thing their branch's organiser said to me was, 'Please do not call it Cambridge Equality Trust'. We spent about three months deciding what a good title would be and we are now the Cambridge Commons, if that means anything to anyone.

FRAN BENNETT I do remember Stuart being very involved in branches and things as well. I do not think all the argument was one way, put it that way. We were very aware of the value of branches and that kind of network through the country as well as the potential problems and I am sure Stuart is right that every organisation has those kinds of tensions.

What I wanted to recall was another network, which I am not sure is in existence any more, but was the constituency contacts network that we used to create around the time of general elections. Again, that has its vulnerabilities and issues, but at one point we came together with the Citizens Advice Bureau and Low Pay Unit and CPAG in one of the general elections and we set up a network of constituency contacts who would take the concerns of the organisations to MPs and candidates in the run up to the election. I do not know how often we did this and how many general elections, but I certainly remember being involved in it and the kind of thing that MPs and candidates tend to say is, 'We get questioned a lot about international development and poverty issues. We do not get questions on domestic poverty issues'. I have

to say that one of the activities we are involved in, as a local, unofficial CPAG group, is in the run up to any local council election and the parliamentary elections we pose questions to the candidates about what they are going to do about child poverty. Then we go back to them when they have won and say, 'Have you done what you said you were interested in doing?' That was an even looser and less organised network that relied very much on committed individuals in constituencies, but certainly in at least one election we had quite an active network that carried child poverty issues to the constituencies through the country.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW We have five minutes or so to go and I did say that we would give an opportunity for people in the audience to ask any questions, if they have any burning questions that they would like the panel to address. There are quite a lot of historians here who are probably going to go and write theses as a result of this meeting. Is there something missing in your knowledge set that you want filled?

GARETH MILWARD I am going to ask a question, because I am selfish and it affects my work, which is how historians work. I have done some very limited work on the equal rights for disabled women campaign, mainly on the papers that Peter Townsend left behind at Essex. One of the things that comes out of that is quite a long correspondence chain between the Women's Organisation and the Disablement Income Group (DIG), who got into a big fight as to what the correct way to go about things was. People on the panel hinted at it earlier, but I wondered if there was anything more that could be said about the problems that can come from maybe the child poverty wing arguing about child poverty and the disability people arguing about disability and age people arguing about age. Are there any concrete examples that you have of where perhaps butting heads has meant that instead of pulling in the same direction you have ended up pulling in different ways?

JOHN VEIT-WILSON I was co-opted on to the local branch of the Disablement Income Group on Tyneside in the late 1960s to help with these kinds of questions. At that time, DIG, which was fairly new, was very concerned with the additional costs of disability but had a very naïve view of the basic costs of inadequate income for households in any case. It was trying to get those two things in kilter that was the contribution I was trying to make. That may help you to think about distinguishing some of the issues that you are looking at. It is not just the additional costs of disability; it is the basic costs of making out in a decent manner, which they did not have any handle on, because there was not really a handle on it at that time.

RUTH LISTER We have talked about quite a lot of groups that were spun off from CPAG and another was the Disability Alliance. Peter Townsend was chair of that; Alan Walker was very involved in it. That had very much a focus on income issues of disabled people. Leaving aside the invalid care allowance and the non-contributory invalidity

pension and the clear sex discrimination issues there, I do not think we did so much on disability, as we did not do on low pay. It sounds awful, but they were staffed by people like us. They were people who had roots in CPAG and alongside their CPAG contribution made a contribution to Disability Alliance or whatever. Jane, Geoff and I were talking earlier about the Social Security Consortium, which was deliberately trying to prevent organizations competing against one another and divide and rule tactics, because we realised what the potential for it was with such a huge bill as the Social Security Bill 1984.

ADRIAN SINFIELD I just want to make this point very briefly. If we are thinking about the contribution to history of the Child Poverty Action Group, I am very conscious it is history in reaction, very often, to government policies. Looking back at this period has made me very conscious of the extent to which policies were being introduced in the late 1960s, such as the four week rule and being revived again under Heath in the very early days of Heath and so on, and crackdowns on fraud and abuse. CPAG wrote a very good pamphlet on that in 1971 and was, in fact, one of the key groups challenging that particular point in 1976, when it was argued this is the day the nation went mad because benefits went up more than the pay of the lowest paid. CPAG was playing a crucial role then, but it is in reaction to these periods and I hope this can be brought out. There was a lot of Thatcherite work before 1979.

RUTH LISTER It is also worth saying that we did try to do more proactive stuff as well. In the 1970s, for instance, I cannot remember how it happened, but I think Frank asked me to write a new Beveridge, sounds pretentious, but a beyond Beveridge plan for social security. It was not a plan, but anyway, a social security case for reform where we put the beyond Beveridge case. Fran knows what I am going to say next because she was there, the anti-poverty strategy of the 1980s. Geoff is nodding as well. We had this ambitious anti-poverty strategy we were going to develop and because we were all so expert we just ground into the sand, because whatever anyone suggested someone else could see the problem and we ended up never publishing anything.

FRAN BENNETT Two of the first things I remember when I joined, one was the Michael Crawford work on lipids around nutrition; another one I remember very clearly was not publishing the anti-poverty strategy. There had been loads of work done on it by loads of very committed people, some of whom are sitting here. My view of it was slightly different, but they may be both true, I am sure everything is over-determined. I think there is a difficulty with groups like CPAG that you do not become a political party. In other words, to solve poverty we need a whole political strategy for the whole society and we would have ended up being a political party rather than a CPAG. That is how I saw it. I am sure it was partly what Ruth said as well, but I think it was also partly that you

become a political party and we could not be.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW That is probably the right point to end, but Stuart wants to come in.

STUART WEIR I want to develop what Adrian said. There is an idea here we are talking about Thatcherism and presumably even neoliberal economics and so on, but this is an age old problem. The kind of prejudices at the root of all these things date back centuries and it is a really negative take on life amongst I do not know what the proportion of the population is, but that has fantastic resonance. It is like a virus in the body and every now and then it becomes virulent maybe; I do not know how it works. That is an age old problem and that is what we are up against.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW That is probably where we should end. I was reflecting, as we were discussing the Thatcher years, whether CPAG faced a worse situation then than it does today and I think the conclusion is that it was much more benign in the Thatcher years than what we are facing today. Lindsay is, at this present moment, writing a post Beveridge plan for CPAG. Whether it will ever see the light of day we will have to see, but the work of CPAG goes on. We will continue to value your support for this work.
Let me just finish by thanking everybody for coming and particularly the panel for contributing. I hope that for the historians we have produced what you had in mind and the very best wishes to you for the process of writing it up and publishing it; we look forward to reading it. I suppose you will be circulating a transcript for us to comment on; that would be very helpful. We will have a chance to correct some of our mistakes then with dates and so on. Thank you very much.

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-