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Page Main Section 12

Selection is the schools' solution

Selection: David Blunkett.

BERNARD DINEEN

IF YOU stick around long enough, you may see the truth eventually triumph.

Over the years, I have attacked the comprehensive system as a betrayal of bright working-class youngsters, only to be denounced as an educational vandal.

Well now it's official. Don't expect Tony Blair and David Blunkett to admit it openly, but selection is now officially the order of the day.

What a pity it is coming too late to help millions of pupils whose careers were blighted by a rotten system.

One leading journalist wrote last week of the misery she endured at a Barnsley comprehensive. She says those five years were the worst of her life. Between the ages of 12 and 14, she found herself unable to face the daily battle to avoid bullies who didn't want to learn themselves and didn't want anyone else to learn either. She would feign illness in order to get sent home. In the old days, she would have gone to a grammar school.

At the comprehensive, which took its 400 pupils from a mixture of council estates and streets near the town centre, only children with severe learning difficulties were put into a separate stream.

Not until she escaped to a sixth form college did she blossom, eventually gaining a 2:1 in English at Oxford.

In prosperous middle-class areas, it was different. Tony Benn's daughter recently praised her comprehensive in London.

But when she went home, it was to a book-lined study and highly literate parents to encourage her. It would have been a miracle if she hadn't ended up at Oxbridge.

There were pockets of excellence, like the schools chosen by Tony Blair and Harriet Harman for their children.

"Class traitor" is a familiar term of abuse on the far Left. But the real class traitors were the Labour politicians who owed their success to grammar schools, yet denied others the advantages they had enjoyed.

The Blair Government made matters worse with its spiteful destruction of grant-maintained schools and assisted places scheme, as well as attacking the remaining grammar schools.

Even now the plans for "specialist schools" are a muddle.

I am certain Blunkett knows full well that honest selection is the only road forward. Let us hope he has the courage to act on his instincts. If he does, I shall be the first to shout the Hallelujah.

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Manufactured with 30% recycled fibre

Schools: A tale of two nations

ENGLAND

1992

Tory government introduces grant-maintained schools, resulting in schools opting out of local authority control, with financial incentives. Introduction of pay review body takes heat out of controversy over teachers' pay.

1993

National Curriculum introduced by Education Secretray Kenneth Clarke. The standardisation of subjects for all pupils proved to be controversial, with the unions claiming that children who are not academically-minded had been forced to take the same subjects as brighter pupils.

1995

It is revealed that Tony Blair, then opposition leader, is sending his son, Euan, to the grant-maintained London Oratory School, causing a huge political storm, with Blair accused of abandoning Labour principles. His other son, Nicky, also attends the Oratory. Labour minister Harriet Harman criticised for sending her child to selective school.

1996

Unions made stand against disruptive pupils following number of incidents. Seen as a turning point, with teachers being able to refuse to teach pupils who misbehave badly.

1998

Labour government introduces policy of "inclusivity" with schools facing financial penalty if they exclude pupils for bad behaviour.

1999

Education minister David Blunkett proposes performance-related pay for teachers.

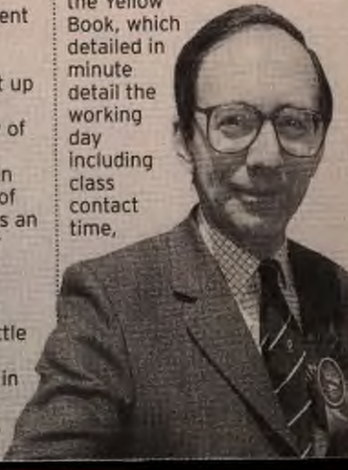
2000-01

English teachers offered pay rise of 3.7 per cent with more for newly-qualified staff and others working in tough schools or areas with high living costs. Unions unhappy at Scotland-England pay gap after Scottish teachers offered more than 20 per cent.

SCOTLAND

1987

The last successful settlement on teachers' pay and conditions following an independent pay review set up in 1986 by Sir Malcolm Rifkind, the then Secretary of State for Scotland, and conducted by Sir Peter Main following the strike action of the 1980s. It gave teachers an average increase of 15 per cent and an additional five days holiday, but failed to address the concerns of employers that they had little control over teachers working week - enshrined in the so-called Yellow Book. Following the Main Report, local authority employers began to press for changes to the Yellow Book, which detailed in minute detail the working day including class contact time,



planned activities and annual leave giving no flexibility to employers.

1987-1991

Refusal to allow any change to the working week by unions led to an extended period of stalling as employers refused to award anything other than inflation-linked pay increases year after year, leading to concern that they were falling behind other professions.

1991-1994

The 1990s Review, set up to tackle the growing intransigence, was set up but ended in stalemate and pay increases continued at levels of inflation.

1997

As Labour took power there was a concerted effort to settle the ongoing dispute and the Millennium Review was set up. Helen Liddell was education minister, but the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities took the lead.

The Millennium Review ran on for three years and, despite concern that a deal should be struck before devolution, no settlement could be reached. Again, the stumbling block was the refusal of the unions to give up the Yellow Book

unless substantial amounts of money were given in return – a demand that the Scottish executive found impossible to meet given Chancellor Gordon Brown's commitment to abide by the previous Conservative government's spending plans.

98 per cent of union members voted against it.

2000

Following the election of a Scottish parliament Sam Galbraith, the first Scottish executive education minister,

decided to set up a truly independent review chaired by Professor Gavin McCrone. This created a new atmosphere in which teachers felt for the first time that concerns that education policies were being imposed from above and that teacher's views were ignored could be aired. In December, negotiations between COSLA, the Scottish executive and the unions began in a new spirit of co-operation partly thanks to additional money from the Scottish executive and the hands-on approach of Jack McConnell, Mr Galbraith's successor as education minister.

January 2001

McCrone negotiating committee agrees on a package that can be put to the members of the Educational Institute for Scotland, the Scottish Secondary Teachers Association and the NAS/UWT. Other unions approve it without ballot.

February 2001

80 per cent of the members of the EIS and the SSTA vote to accept the committee's package.

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Anthony Howard

Tony Blair's promises are not so much a rousing trumpet call as a soothing melody

There was, I thought, a distinct swagger to Tony Blair's demeanour both at Prime Minister's Questions last Wednesday and to the way in which he delivered his "second term" Southgate speech the next day. Each performance suggested to me a man who has overcome whatever doubts he had, made up his mind as to the election date and, consequently, is at peace with himself.

The time limitations had, in fact, already effectively closed in. As a fascinating news story in *The Times* last week made clear, even prime ministers are no longer entirely free agents when it comes to selecting a date for polling day: a simple and necessary act such as the advance booking of hoardings and poster sites severely restricts their freedom of manoeuvre.

I couldn't resist a wry smile at this development as I recalled that at the first election which I covered as a journalist — that of 1959 — the two-year-old Tory poster campaign, focusing on the message "Life's Better with the Conservatives: Don't Let Labour Ruin it", was immediately brought to an abrupt end the moment the dissolution of Parliament took place. In those days political parties were a good deal more wary of possible complications under the law of electoral expenses than they are today.

There was not, as I recall it, even any national newspaper advertising during an actual campaign until Jeremy Thorpe broke with all precedent and initiated it for the Liberals in the miners' election of February 1974.

Does any of this eleventh-hour persuasion matter, though? My hunch is that it doesn't, much. What counts in any election is who succeeds in getting the mood music right — and here Tony Blair has already displayed a sure instinct not just for timing but in the art of reading the public mind as well. The promises he offered last Thursday struck me as tailor-made to meet the current little-by-little aspirations of the British people — not so much a rousing trumpet call as a soothing melody played by some palm court orchestra.

Yet, as those reassuring sounds waft us all towards the polling booths, I still find myself wrestling with one fundamental difficulty. When I used, occasionally, to go to see Blair during the three years that he served as Leader of the Opposition, he never failed to assert to me that people would be astonished at how "radical" a Prime Minister he would turn out to be. Where is that "radicalism" today? Every sign of it seems to have vanished.

Take, first of all, the prize that I was even then half persuaded he wanted most of all: the chance to realign the politics of Britain so that the 21st century would not be a Conservative century, like its predecessor, but rather a progressive one. In his vision then that always meant Labour and the Liberal Democrats no longer fighting each other but standing shoulder to shoulder against the Tories. But that "project" is a great deal more remote today than it was in 1997. It has been effectively killed by the Prime Minister's own failure of nerve in refusing to take a single step in the direction of electoral reform for the Westminster Parliament.

And the same, of course, goes for more practical measures. What has happened to "the big idea" that was going to transform social security? It would seem to have perished the day Frank Field and Harriet Harman were separately evicted from the DSS two-and-a-half years ago. Or, for that matter, what has become of the effort to reform and modernise the National Health Service to make its workings efficient if no longer "free at the point of delivery"?

So the dismal catalogue could go on. This has not been a bad Government in its modest reformist fashion but what it has never been is "radical". It was Aneurin Bevan who famously said: "We know what happens to people who stay in the middle of the road. They get run down." The Prime Minister — and this is the proof of his nimble footwork — has avoided that fate but only at considerable cost to what some of us thought was the summit of his ambition: to go down in history as a leader who was not only bold but resolute as well.

MATTHEW FEARN/PA

The Prime Minister has proved to be a shrewd judge of the national mood, but he is not the bold reformer he claimed to be when Leader of the Opposition

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CROSS BENCHER

Norman conquered by Labour plot

ONLY four years after Radio 4 was forced to axe the Today programme's annual "personality of the year award" after allegations of vote-fixing by Labour and the Tories, it seems that Millbank apparatchiks are up to their old shenanigans again.

Channel 4 and the House magazine's annual parliamentary political awards — broadcast last night — have always been a non-partisan affair.

Since the champagne-drenched bash began in 1998, there has never been even the whiff of vote-rigging by the politicians who nominate their own Westminster favourites.

That, of course, is in stark contrast to Radio 4, which disqualified Tony Blair from nominations in 1996 after Labour's campaign staff sent party members a letter urging them to vote for him and only brought back the award in 2000 on the condition that no politicians would be eligible.

But the choice of the excellent Tory MP David Davis for Channel 4's much-coveted Opposition Politician of the Year Award surprised many.

There could, after all, be no more obvious candidate than Norman Baker, the Liberal Democrat MP for Lewes who exposed the cash-for-passports affair which forced Peter Mandelson from the Northern Ireland Office.

Westminster insiders insist Baker was the victim of a last-minute Millbank campaign to scupper his chance of winning, by banning Labour MPs from voting for him. With the secret ballot left open until the end of last month — well past Mandy's resignation on January 24 — Baker's friends and supporters want an investigation.

As one Lib Dem source confides: "I heard whispers that Millbank officials were desperate to ensure that Norman did not win on any account. It was bad enough that he got the scalp of a Cabinet Minister and they didn't want to add insult to injury by letting him get an award for it."

Fantasy role for a fairytale prince

AFTER Fantasy Football, this week saw the launch of Fantasy Politics by the New Statesman magazine.

Players made the surprise appointment of Harriet Harman, the ousted Social Security Secretary, as Prime Minister.

Prince William was the favourite to take over at the Culture Department — where his History of Art studies should come in handy — and angry young rapper Eminem leaves the stage for his new post as Chief Secretary to the Treasury. But, as Labour maverick Peter Kilfoyle (given a fast track promotion to Chancellor) remarked: "Don't we already have a fantasy Cabinet?"

CULTURED: William

MORE New Labour merchandise on offer. After the embarrassingly awful hearts-and-minds logo, the party's February brochure sent out to activists last week is offering a set of three mugs adorned with familiar Tory faces and a "witty" one-word comment on the base.

William Hague is, simply, a "mug", Michael Portillo is labelled "smug" while Ann Widdecombe earns the nasty "ugh!".

Glad to see the boys at Millbank have taken to heart Tony Blair's call to end gratuitous political mud-slinging.

■ *HELL hath no fury like a Northern Ireland Secretary scorned — as Jack Straw has found to his cost. A close pal of Peter Mandelson says: "Peter has mixed feelings about Jack at the moment. It's somewhere between hatred and loathing."*

■ **EVIDENCE of yet more discord at the heart of the Government. Health Secretary Alan Milburn is said to be unhappy with his junior minister John Hutton. It's not over a policy dispute, though, but their shared flat. A mole reveals: "John keeps losing his keys and ringing the doorbell late at night."**

■ *SINCE Europe Minister Keith Vaz will not be going to India tomorrow to advise on immigration applications, perhaps the Leicester East MP will now pen an article he promised to the Leicester Mercury. "We offered him a double page spread to put his side of the story," says a Mercury hack. "He agreed but, strangely, he hasn't answered our calls since."*

■ **LABOUR activists will be delighted with their security passes at next weekend's Glasgow conference. Gone are the brash sponsors' logos — to be replaced with simple metal chains. "I don't think it's a policy move by Millbank," a party worker explains. "They probably just couldn't find anyone who wanted to sponsor the shambles."**

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A tale of two murders and the rule of moral cowardice

Damilola Taylor is not another Stephen Lawrence. Why not? Both were victims of the secular rise in violent crime, which is still accelerating, and of a street subculture that condones violence. Both murders have thrown a spotlight on to the desolate landscape of south London, where an unholy alliance of municipal socialism and architectural brutalism has created urban ghettos over which the normal sanctions of civil society appear to have lost their force. Both Damilola and Stephen were bright black boys with good prospects, blighted by the casual callousness of gangs who calculated that they could kill with impunity. In both cases, the murderers are still at large.

The big difference between the two cases is all to do with race. Stephen Lawrence was murdered by white youths; the crime was clearly a racist one. Because the police failed to ensure that justice was seen to be done, they were branded "institutional" racists: first by the lawyers and activists who took control of the case, then by the Left-wing media, and finally by the Macpherson report and the Home Secretary. The Lawrence case has had far-reaching consequences: for the professional anti-racists, who have flourished as never before; for the police, who have cut back on stop-and-search; and for the public, who have paid a heavy price in muggings.

In Damilola Taylor's case, the suspects are all black. Despite prima facie evidence that ethnic tensions between West Indians and West Africans may have been a factor in Damilola's victimisation, the case has not been treated as a racist crime. It has thus been all but ignored by those who led the hue and cry over Stephen Lawrence.

Despite the increasingly desperate appeals from Richard and Gloria Taylor, most recently in this newspaper, their cries for justice are muffled by silence. It is a scandalous silence, an ominous silence, a conspiratorial silence.

There are, however, two kinds of conspiratorial silence. There is, first, the silence on the North Peckham estate which has prevented Damilola's killers being brought to justice. Not only the suspects themselves, but their families and friends, have chosen to "withdraw", as Mrs Taylor puts it: "When you find a parent whose son knows something, they won't say any more." There is no secret about this silence, nor about the reasons for it: habitual fear of the criminals, ingrained prejudice against outsiders, the coarsening effects of squalor. It is no less pernicious for all that.

Less apparent is another conspiracy of silence: that of the smug elite, the media and politicians. This silence is all the more culpable because it is not born of fear, but of indifference. Their example suggests that whereas the appropriate response to a "racist" crime is indignation, the only response to black-on-black violence is resignation. For Stephen Lawrence, they shook their fists; for Damilola Taylor, they shrug their shoulders.

Where now are the radical lawyers who excoriated the entire criminal and civil justice system for its failure to secure convictions for the murder of Stephen Lawrence? What has happened to all those black spokesmen who have condemned British society for its deep-seated racism? White Britons were all made to feel guilty for the murder of Stephen Lawrence. Yet when Tony Sewell, a black columnist for *The Voice*, speaks out against the prevalent black street culture with its anti-intellectualism and aggression, which he blames for Damilola's death, he is accused of betraying his race. Just after Damilola's murder two months ago, Mr Sewell wrote: "Black leaders must shoulder much of the blame. They have simply pursued the question of institutional racism, which is not at the root of this problem." How many of these leaders have accepted any responsibility? It is easier to blame racism than to confront reality.

Worse, even, than these (usually self-appointed) black leaders are their white allies. Edmund Burke wrote: "I do not know the method of drawing up an indictment against a whole people." Jack Straw does. He has condemned the English for their violence and the police for their racism. He has even condemned his own civil servants. But he is far less eager to condemn the failings of black communities or their leaders.

In its differing reactions to the deaths of Damilola Taylor and Stephen Lawrence, the ruling elite has set a deplorable example to those it claims to represent, argues Daniel Johnson

The same is true of the rest of the smug elite. They behave as if the "tragedy" of Damilola had happened on another planet. *The Guardian* has barely mentioned the case over the past month.

When Tony Blair visited the North Peckham estate, he appeared to be appalled as much by the detritus as by the boy's death. It was as if the syringes and broken glass, the used condoms and excrement that disfigure such places were an affront to the Prime Minister's dignity: how dare his New Jerusalem include such dark Satanic estates! Which party, though, did Mr Blair suppose was responsible for North Peckham, and for countless other tower blocks of Babel? It was Mr Blair's party. Labour councils were, at least until recently, still erecting estates that resemble some nightmarish dystopia — the stage set of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, say — with walkways and ramps that are a paradise only for criminals.

Damilola was stabbed only a mile or two from the pleasant square in Kennington where the Home Secretary lives. Mr Straw resides in a large terrace house. Outside, there is a policeman on duty, day and night. Friends of ours, who are his neighbours, allow their children to ride their micro-scooters on the street, safe in the knowledge that they will play under the watchful eye of the law.

It isn't like that on the North Peckham estate. Until Damilola's death, policemen on the beat were as rarely sighted there as Harriet Harman, the local MP. Even now, there is no zero-tolerance policy on the estate. The graffiti and squalor are still there. So are the crack houses. So too are the protection rackets, encouraged by parents who enable their children to pay the gangs. Once the media have lost interest, the police presence will dwindle again to nothing.

Even before the police were paralysed by Macpherson, they had fallen victim to the prevailing culture of moral cowardice. Police who do not dare to show their faces are not trusted by those who could and should be helping them. The reason why witnesses "withdraw" is that the police have already done so. The moral cowardice of the Government, which would do anything to avoid the charge of racism, sets the tone for the moral cowardice of the residents, who are terrified of ostracism or worse.

We are all too familiar with this culture of cowardice. In Ireland, the perpetrators of the Omagh bomb are at large only because witnesses are too frightened to testify. There, the threat comes from hardened terrorists. Now the same spectre is stalking the streets of London — but the threat may come from teenage thugs.

Such moral cowardice is in some ways worse than the crime itself. It is certainly more frightening. Where are the pillars of North Peckham civil society? I do not mean Harriet Harman, who is the very personification of the smug elite that has betrayed those it looks down on as lumpenproletariat. No, I mean the preachers and teachers, the doctors and lawyers, the elders and betters.

There ought to be a demonstration, a march through the streets where Damilola died. The smug elite and the politicians might try to take it over. Maybe, though, the people of Peckham would surprise themselves. Maybe they would come out of hiding. Maybe there would be such a display of solidarity that one of the cowards now skulking in the shadows would be shamed into bearing witness to the truth.

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Child care spending at record levels

By Nicole Martin

THE cost of child care in Britain has reached record levels, with working parents spending up to £7,000 a year for one child, according to a study published today.

The average full-time nursery place for an infant aged two is more than £110 a week or more than £5,700 a year, according to Daycare Trust, which campaigns for more affordable child care places.

The "geographical lottery" means that families in central London fare worst. They sacrifice £135 a week on a nursery place — more than £7,000 a year — or £110 a week for a childminder.

Those living in the North East spend the least on a full-time nursery place — £91 a week — while those in the South East fork out £121, in the West Midlands £101, in the North West £97 and in Yorks and Humberside £102.

Stephen Burke, the charity's director, recognised the importance of the child care tax credit, which helps eligible parents with costs of up to £70 a week for one child and £105 for two or more.

But he said that more needed to be done to inform parents about the credit and increase the current ceilings, because many families found the cost of child care "simply beyond their reach".

"More families need to know about the child care tax credit and how it can help them with child care costs. More than three times as many families are getting help with child care costs than previously but many more could get help," he said.

"It is critical that parents on lower incomes can afford the cost of a typical nursery which clearly now exceeds the child care tax credit."

Harriet Harman, chairman of the Child Care Commission, recommended last week that new mothers receive a state income for the first three years of a child's life to reduce the burden of child care costs.

She also wanted tax relief of up to £2,000 on child care expenses for families, worth around £440 a year.

Stephen Byers, the Trade and Industry Secretary, said yesterday that all child care businesses would be allowed to apply for Government loan guarantees.

Previously, those offering nursery education or a curriculum were barred from the £40 million scheme.

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Childcare is the biggest drain on family's pocket

Bosses urged to help workers with hefty bills

BY LUCY MCDONALD
SOCIAL AFFAIRS CORRESPONDENT

BRITISH parents are paying more than ever before for childcare, according to research published today.

A full-time nursery place for a two-year-old child can be as much as £7,000 a year, more than the average family spends on housing or food, says the report by the Daycare Trust.

The average childcare bill is about £110 a week. With the average weekly wage at £320 it means that more than a third can be spent on paid care for children.

Stephen Burke, director of the charity, said: "This survey shows the sacrifices some parents are making to ensure that their child has access to quality childcare.

"But for many other parents, the cost of childcare is simply beyond their reach.

"More than three times as many families are getting help with childcare costs than previously but many more could benefit."

Parents living in London and the South-east are particularly penalised, often paying up to £135 a week, according to the survey of 120 childcare information services.

But employers still do not recognise helping towards childcare as an important option for employees, said the charity.

According to a MORI poll, fewer than five per cent of parents get help from their firms towards the cost of childcare.

Mr Burke said: "The survey also highlights the fact that employers should do more to help working parents with childcare costs.

"At a time when we are close to full employment in many parts of the country, it is in the best business interests of employers to be competitive in recruiting and retaining the best staff."

The Government says it is committed to improving childcare and campaigners hope the Department of Trade and Industry's Green Paper, published later this year, on parental leave will set a new agenda.

The childcare tax credit, introduced by Labour, already helps 124,000 families, giving them an average £33.48 a week towards childcare. It contributes a maximum of £70 for one child and £105 for two depending on family income.

The Professional Association of Nursery Nurses said high prices would force some parents to cut costs meaning children could suffer.

A spokeswoman said: "For many parents it is extortionate and therefore unavailable. It can encourage people to use unregistered childcare provided by untrained people which could mean danger for the child."

A survey by Policy Network on the work/life balance also published today shows six in 10 people feel the hours they work are too long and 42 per cent think Britain should follow the French example and work a maximum 35-hour week.

More than half believe fathers should have the right to paid leave.

Frederic Michel, director of Policy Network, said: "Across Europe, and Britain is no exception, people are now questioning whether family and home life are being sacrificed for increasing working hours.

"The policy-network.org poll shows that people want improved parental leave to care for their own children.

"Just as importantly, the high level of care provided by the child's own parents will not continue without strong provision for reasonably priced childcare later on in the child's life.

"The alternative is for parents to completely sacrifice their working life, a pity for both the individual and the family."

Last week groundbreaking proposals for the future of childcare were unveiled by Labour MP and former social security secretary Harriet Harman, chair of the Childcare Commission.

She said that looking after children should not be seen as a "fringe benefit" but as vital as education, health and transport.

HOW MUCH PARENTS PAY

AREA	WEEKLY COST
London	**£132.53**
South West	£115.00
South East	**£121.20**
East	£113.00
West Midlands	**£100.66**
East Midlands	£99.71
Yorks and Humber	**£102.36**
North West	£97.35
North East	**£90.62**

Picture: STEVE BELL

LOVE'S LABOUR: Trista Selous pays £100 a week to the minder who cares for 20-month-old Amy

It's expensive but absolutely vital

THE Selous family pay more each month for their childminder than they do for their mortgage. And the expense of looking after 20-month-old Amy has thwarted their hopes of moving to a larger home.

Mother Trista, a freelance interpreter, estimates that over the years she has spent up to £30,000 for childcare for her three children. She said: "Our childminder costs £400 a month. It's a big drain. But it's hard to imagine what else we would have spent it on as we've never had it. Our house is a bit squashed, but we can't even think about moving."

Although Trista, 43, works from home the nature of her job means that she cannot devote her time to looking after Amy. Now her other two children Rachel, nine, and Kathleen, 10, are at school they no longer need looking after.

And because both Trista and her husband David, a film editor, are both freelance their incomes can sometimes be irregular.

She said: "Last year was a very difficult time for us financially as the work is so sporadic. We had to use all our savings. But the last thing that we could afford to cut would have been the childminder, for what she does she is very cheap. She's vital to us."

Urgent plea for organ donors after scandal

BY ADRIAN LEE

EVERY adult in Britain could receive an organ donor card with their pay slip or council tax bill in a new drive to restore public confidence in the transplant programme.

Health Secretary Alan Milburn will hold an emergency summit in the next few weeks amid fears that the Alder Hey scandal will result in a slump in donors.

Health chiefs, unions, business leaders and surgeons will be invited to the summit. Although eight million people carry donor cards, it is estimated that at least 2,000 patients die every year while waiting for transplants.

But donations are feared to have dropped by more than half in the wake of the controversy.

Liver transplant surgeon John Buckels, of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham, said the centre had not had a single donor for 10 days".

He added: "The drop in organ donations could inevitably put people at risk if last week is anything to go by. We already have a shortfall and a situation where some patients deteriorate and die, and inevitably that will get worse." The Government also plans a major drive to explain the differences between agreeing to organ donations and organs being retained for research after a post-mortem.

EVANS: Says there is a lack of awareness

Prof Dick van Velzen, who is at the centre of the body parts scandal, last night blamed the NHS for the controversy.

He insisted he had not stripped out body parts without the permission of parents.

"I worked on behalf of the coroner and if people forget to tell the parents then it is not my fault," he told BBC News in an interview. He also insisted that the pathologists department he took over at Alder Hey was run down and sub standard, and he did not get the support he requested.

Dr Michael Wilks, chairman of the British Medical Association's Medical Ethics Committee, said: "It is essential that the anger and concern over organ retention does not have a lasting and damaging impact on the number of organs available."

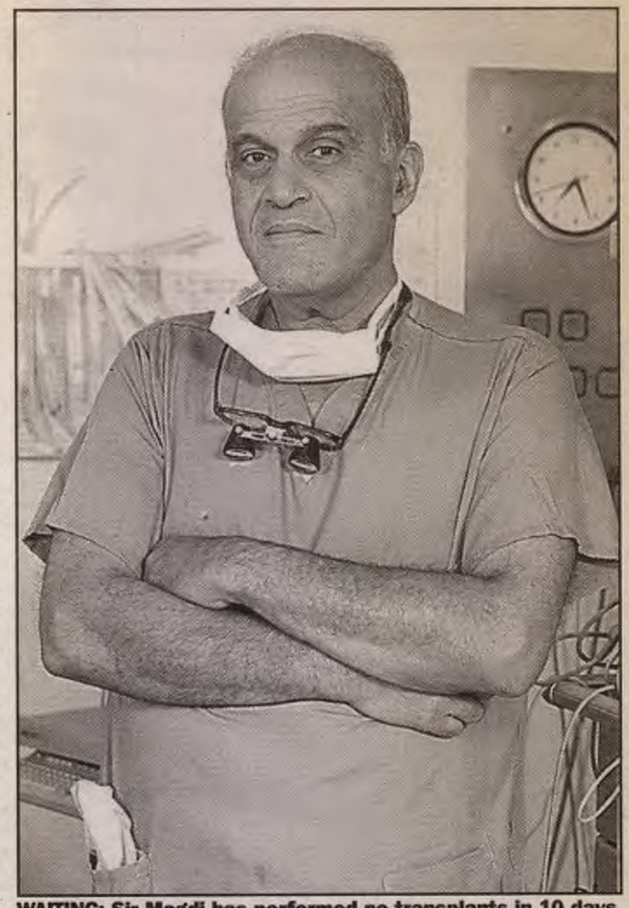
Sir Magdi Yacoub, the country's leading heart surgeon, said no transplants had been carried out at his hospital, the Royal Brompton in London, in the past 10 days.

Health chiefs will monitor other hospitals to discover if there is a downward trend caused by revelations from Alder Hey hospital in Liverpool.

In the past year there has been a five per cent increase in the number of transplants, but there are never enough organs to meet demand. About 6,500 people in Britain are on the waiting list, but such is the shortage that thousands have not even reached the list.

John Evans, chairman of the British Organ Donor Society, said: "The problem is lack of awareness. Donor cards are really only available in doctors' surgeries, hospitals and dentists." He said polls showed that up to 75 per cent of Britons would carry donor cards if they were given information.

Mr Milburn said: "I want to step up our drive to get more donors so that vital medical advances are not halted and people are not left to die unnecessarily."



WAITING: Sir Magdi has performed no transplants in 10 days

Germans want NHS patients

FROM TONY MOLZAHN IN BERLIN

BRITISH patients, forced to wait months for operations, could soon be sent to Germany for surgery.

The efficiency of the health service there ensures 20 per cent of hospital beds are empty. Now doctors in the UK hope to fill some of them with sick Britons.

A special firm, Germedic, has been set up to sell NHS patients the idea of going abroad to avoid waiting lists. It hopes to persuade the NHS to pay part of the costs.

Georg Westphal, head of a government committee in charge of promoting German medicine abroad, explained: "The German health service has too many beds and a wealth of skilled medical staff. To fill empty wards and bring in more money, private hospitals have joined with the German government to attract patients from abroad."

He added: "We have a lot of spare beds because each of the 16 federal states makes its own health care provision and builds up more than it needs because health care is a vote winner."

The German embassy in London has printed a special brochure to advise Britons on the merits of the treatment. But a spokesman for the NHS said they did not think the scheme would be a huge success because "people do not want to go abroad for treatment".

OPINION: PAGE 12

Journalist killed in air crash as husband's stunt goes wrong

BY GARETH CRICKMER

A FORMER BBC journalist died yesterday when a light aircraft piloted by her rock star husband plunged into the sea during a dangerous stunt.

British mother-of-three Lucy Needham, 36, is believed to have survived the impact but drowned after being unable to undo her safety belt.

Her Brazilian husband, Herbert Vianna, singer and songwriter of Os Paralamas do Sucesso, one of the country's top groups, was last night fighting for his life in a

Drivers in Tube strike

MILLIONS of commuters face travel chaos today because of a one-day strike by Tube drivers involved in a safety row.

Union Aslef said it expected solid support from its 2,200 members on London Underground and warned

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Blair loses appeal to women

Focus groups show female voters falling out of love with New Labour

by Gaby Hinsliff
Chief Political Correspondent

FEMALE voters are falling out of love with Labour. A new report, which will shock Tony Blair's strategists, reveals that fewer than a third of women are happy with the way the country is run.

The Prime Minister's personal 'satisfaction rating' among women fell from 50 per cent in January 2000 to 38 per cent by November, with women slower than men to forgive mistakes such as the fuel protests and pensions fiasco.

The analysis by the influential Fawcett Society think-tank reveals a sharp rise in the 'dissatisfaction gap' – the difference between the number of men and women who say they are unhappy with the Government – which is used to measure hidden female disillusionment. This rose from zero last summer to nine points by December. Fawcett director Mary Ann Stephenson says Blair could woo women back by championing working mothers' causes in the run-up to the election, and suggests the backlash now could be because women are impatient for results on Labour's family-friendly agenda.

Voters warmed to Blair as an 'honorary woman' who understood their problems because of his own children, focus groups run by Fawcett found.

But they were scornful of attempts to manipulate his image. 'When he appears in his jeans he looks so false,' was one typical response.

However, there is no evidence women are turning to the Tories: the focus groups were almost uniformly rude about William Hague.

The analysis, published tomorrow, comes amid a crucial fight for the favours of Worcester Woman, the mythical Middle England mother who swung the 1997 election and will heavily influence the next. Entitled *Where is Worcester Woman?*, the report says turnout could be badly hit if disillusioned women do not vote, making keeping them on board 'the hardest and most crucial challenge' for Labour. 'None of the political parties can afford to take the votes of women for granted,' the report says. Winning these votes will require policies that women are able to see will bring real benefits to them and their families.'

Tony Blair's awkward casual look does not convince women voters.

Labour is already trying to 'feminise' its election campaign, planning to feature fewer statistics and more 'real people telling real stories' – a favourite women's magazine tactic – such as single mothers who have turned their lives around.

MPs want more high-profile female faces in the campaign: polling shows women's favourites are Blair, Gordon Brown and David Blunkett, while the best-known female MPs are Mo Mowlam – not even standing this time – and Harriet Harman.

Fawcett's focus groups found that women sympathised with Blair when his teenage son Euan was found drunk, and his ratings peaked just before baby Leo's birth. But he was criticised for sending his children to a top grant-maintained school and for attempts to look down to earth. 'Politicians used to be smart with a suit and tie and then Blair decided he was going to be in touch with the common people and wear jeans.'

Hague was derided for a lack of gravitas. 'They'll need another woman to run the Tories,' said one.

Nearly two-thirds of women over 55 – usually Tory leaders' strongest supporters – are not satisfied with Hague, while his gender 'dissatisfaction gap' is an alarming 23 points among core Tory voters.

The report shows that fears of a backlash among men if Labour pushes too many 'women's issues' are unfounded, with issues like better childcare overwhelmingly popular with both sexes. Nearly three-quarters of men rated paid parental leave as important, and among the 35-54 age group – most likely to have children – an overwhelming 91 per cent of both sexes considered good affordable childcare a priority.

Health, education and pensions all mattered more to female than male voters. The single currency was a female turn-off: only 20 per cent thought it important compared to 29 per cent of men.

The 'dissatisfaction gap' is calculated from MORI poll results for the *Times*, showing only 31 per cent of women polled in December were satisifed with the Government's performance, against 40 per cent of men.

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How working mums can tot up

As the price of nannies and nurseries soars, Sarah Toyne explains how to keep costs down

MORE than half of mothers with children under five are in paid employment, compared with one in three a decade ago. British parents pay the highest childcare bills in Europe and most receive little or no help from either their employers or the government.

The increase in the number of working families and shortage of s[illegible]es has pushed up the cost of childcare. A family with a full-time nanny in London can expect to pay on average £22,000 a year, plus perks, such as a mobile phone, car or even gym membership — a rise of 30% over the past three years.

The cost of other types of childcare, such as nurseries and childminders, has also reached record levels, according to a report from Daycare Trust, a childcare charity.

A full-time nursery place for a two-year-old now costs about £477 a month, or £5,724 a year — more than the average family bill for housing and food. In some parts of the country, especially London and the southeast, the cost has risen to £585 a month, or more than £7,000 a year.

Even a part-time childminder is ex[illegible]ve, typically costing more than £4,500 a year.

Stephen Burke, director of Daycare Trust, says: "The government has led an unprecedented investment in childcare. But for many parents, the cost is simply beyond their reach."

Some parents can reduce the cost through the childcare tax credit, part of the working families tax credit. Eligible families can get up to £70 a week towards childcare costs for one child and £105 for two. The Daycare Trust's website (www.daycaretrust.org.uk) has a calculator to work out how much you can get. Or call the Inland Revenue helpline on 0845 6095000.

But the tax credit is given only to parents on lower incomes. You do not qualify if you earn more than £22,000 if you have one child or £30,000 if you have two.

So far 124,000 families have claimed the credit, which is worth on average £33.48 a week. No other tax relief is given to parents and pressure is mounting on the government to offer incentives to more families.

Last week, the Childcare Commission, whose chairman is Harriet Harman, proposed that working parents should receive tax relief on up to £2,000 a year spent on childcare.

The only other form of help for most parents is through their employer. Family-friendly companies often give childcare perks, such as a free creche or vouchers that can be used to offset the cost of care. But only

COUNTING COSTS

SUE RYDER, 32, from Tockwith, near Wetherby, North Yorkshire, has an 18-month-old baby girl, Charlotte.

Sue and her husband, Jon, pay a childminder between £400 and £500 a month to look after Charlotte – a major part of Sue's monthly salary. They also pay transport costs, because the childminder lives seven miles away.

The Ryders get no help from the government through the childcare tax credit scheme, because their joint salaries take them over the threshold. Sue says: 'I would love the situation to be changed. It would be great either if my employer could set up a creche, or if the tax credit could be extended. I don't think the government knows what it wants.'

The Ryders would like another child, but they are not sure if they could afford childcare for two children. 'We might have to wait until Charlotte goes to school before we can afford to have another child. I could not give up work, because we would need the money to raise the two children,' says Sue.

Can you get child's tax break?

THE government will launch a multi-million-pound advertising campaign this month to persuade families to sign up to the new children's tax credit — worth £442 a year, *writes Sarah Toyne.*

Out of the 5m claim forms sent out last summer only 2.8m have been returned. The low take-up rate reflects the complexity of the credit and is an embarrassment to the Treasury, which is trying to drum up support.

The tax credit replaces the married couple's allowance, a universal tax relief paid to all married couples, which was abolished last April except for older people.

The children's credit is neither a benefit nor a tax allowance. Instead, it reduces your tax bill by an amount that is reflected in your tax code.

To qualify, you do not need to be married. But you must have at least one child, stepchild, adopted child, or a child you look after at your own expense, who lives with you for at least part of the tax year and is under 16 at the start of the tax year on April 6. You can claim only once, even if you have more than one child living with you.

If your child lives with someone else for part of the year and that person also claims the credit for that child, you will have to decide between you how you are going to share it. You should also seek advice from the Inland Revenue.

How much you get depends on the highest income in your household. But if your income is about £41,000, you are unlikely to receive any credit.

The credit is paid at the full rate of £442, unless the person claiming is a higher-rate taxpayer, or has an income of more than £32,785.

The credit is then reduced at the rate of £1 for every £15 of income taxed at the higher rate. For example, for someone earning £35,000, the credit is calculated on £2,215 (£35,000 minus £32,785) at the rate of £1 for every £15 — giving a credit of £294.34.

The credit is given to the higher-rate taxpayer. But if neither parent pays higher-rate tax, it can be shared, or given to the person on the lower income. If the person who receives the credit does not pay enough tax to use all of it, they can transfer the unused credit to the other after the end of the tax year.

The problem with the new system is that a household with two incomes can get more tax credit than a couple where only one person works.

For example, if a couple both earn £30,000, which is just below the higher-rate tax threshold, they would be entitled to receive full credit — even though their joint income is £60,000.

However, households where one person works and earns just above the higher-rate tax band of £32,785 would have the credit gradually withdrawn. The Revenue could face a legal challenge under the human rights act.

If you are paid through the pay as you earn system, you must complete a form, available by calling 0845 3001036, by February 28. If you are self-employed you will claim in arrears at the end of the next tax year.

the cost of childcare

Growing pains: the cost of employing a nanny has soared by almost a third in three years

'One way of saving money would be to encourage your nanny to register as a private company'

10% of companies offer any childcare scheme.

HSBC subsidises the cost of childcare by as much as half and Royal Bank of Scotland staff get £10 childcare vouchers for £9.

If you hire a nanny, you must register as an employer and, if you pay her more than £76 a week, take on the responsibilities of tax and national insurance contributions (Nics).

You must also keep payroll records, issue a P45 when a nanny enters or leaves your employment, and complete an annual employer's return at the end of each tax year.

It is now a criminal offence to pay a worker cash to avoid tax. Offenders can be jailed for up to seven years and fined up to £5,000.

Pay for nannies is usually advertised net. It would cost £328.47 to pay a nanny £250 net a week. The extras would be £49.23 tax and £29.24 employer's Nics.

Nannies cannot be self-employed because they do not meet the Inland Revenue's criteria; but maternity nurses can register as self-employed. It is up to you to check your nanny's employment status. If she does not declare tax to the Revenue, you — not your nanny — will be pursued for the payment.

COST OF CHILDCARE

Type	Per month
Nursery school	£477[1]
Childminder	£390[1]
Live-in nanny	£745-£1,036[2]
Daily nanny	£927-£1,374[2]
Au pair	£195[1]

[1] Average across the country
[2] Net cost

Source: DayCare Trust and Nannytax

You must pay at least the minimum wage of up to £3.70 an hour. The European working time directive means nannies are also entitled to four weeks' paid holiday a year.

Stephen Vahrman of Nannytax, which runs a payroll service for parents, says the most common problem is that parents get confused over net and gross rates of pay. He says: "Many parents are unaware of the total cost once it is grossed up and includes employer's Nics."

One way of saving money would be to encourage your nanny to register as a private limited company.

The taxman has clamped down on most personal-service companies, but it would be legitimate if the company supplied services to someone who is not in business, such as parents. Setting up a company could save an employer who pays a nanny £250 net per week, £3,290.44 over one year.

You would have to pay corporation tax, charged at 10% for a "profit" of £10,000, but not Nics or income tax. Instead, your nanny would be paid in dividends. The company would have to prepare and file accounts.

Mike Warburton, an accountant at Grant Thornton, believes setting up a company would be a good way of saving money, but it would not be without risks.

He says: "Although parents are exempt, the chancellor could close the loophole if too many people catch on. Another problem is that it could affect any claim your nanny could make under the working families tax credit if she had her own children."

A simpler way to save money would be through a nanny share. You can cut your bill in half, or even by a third, depending on how many families are involved.

However, there are still important tax considerations. If you are part of a nanny share or employ a part-time nanny who works for another family or families, you must ensure you are not paying more tax than her other employers.

Your nanny can earn up to £4,385 a year tax free, but her allowance would have to be divided between employers.

You would need to establish how much tax the other employers were paying, and then agree how the tax code should be split. "You could easily find that you are topping up a large amount of tax without realising it," says Vahrman.

If you shared a nanny, it would be cheaper to run two separate PAYE schemes, because your Nics would be smaller.

For example, for a nanny who got £300 net a week it would cost £435.32 if you were classed as one employer, but £22.78 less if you paid under two separate payrolls.

If you cannot face working out your tax liabilities or Nics, Nannytax (www.nannytax.co.uk). can calculate your bill and issue payslips for you. It charges £164.50 a year for the service.

Employing an au pair is cheaper, but there are also guidelines to follow. For example, they must not work more than 20 hours a week.

If they work longer, you would be forced to pay the minimum wage and take on all other employer responsibilities, including Nics and tax, if the au pair was paid more than £76 a week.

Gilts look good when a recession strikes

AMERICAN interest rates were cut again last week as fears of a harsh global recession grow. They have fallen by one percentage point in the past month — the biggest and deepest cut since the last slump in 1991.

If recession bites, one of the safest types of investment is government gilts.

Gilts, often called government securities, are loans to the British government that are used to fund the national debt. The name comes from the fact that they were originally issued on gilt-edged paper. In return for lending the government money, you receive an income from interest, paid at a fixed rate set out when the gilt is issued.

Low inflation and uncertain stock markets make government securities a safe bet, writes Clare Gascoigne

The principle is exactly the same as for other forms of fixed-interest security, such as corporate bonds issued by companies — bond is simply another term for loan.

Most gilts are dated, which means they have a fixed maturity — at the end of the period, you get your original capital back. There are three categories: short (up to seven years left to run), medium (seven to 15 years) or long (more than 15 years).

So far, so simple. But there is an extra layer of complexity, because gilts can be bought and sold before their redemption date. And the price an investor is prepared to pay for them will vary according to the interest-rate cycle.

If interest rates are expected to go down, the value of a fixed-interest payment will go up. So the price of a gilt paying 10% will rise if interest rates are expected to fall to 5%. And it will fall if rates are expected to rise to 15%. The price of gilts therefore reflects the market's view of how interest rates will move over the next few years.

Buying gilts is reasonably straightforward. As with equities, you have to buy through a broker — either an ordinary stockbroker, or through the brokerage service offered by the Bank of England. You can pick up application forms for the bank's service at a post office. The forms are also available by calling 0800 818614 or visiting www.bankofengland.co.uk.

Choosing which gilts to buy is a little more tricky, because you have to decide whether you are happy to buy at more than the redemption value (above par). Justin Urquhart Stewart of Barclays Stockbrokers warns investors not to be swayed simply by the interest rate. "The total return is a combination of the percentage return and the price," he says. "Some will be too expensive."

There are also a variety of unit trusts that invest in gilts alongside other fixed-interest securities, such as corporate bonds. Roddy Kohn of Kohn Cougar, an independent financial adviser, says: "You gain exposure to the fixed-interest market without the complexity of buying direct. But watch out for the charges. If they are too high, it will have a knock-on effect on the yield."

If you buy gilts through a fund, its charges will effectively add to the price, so cutting the return. Charges will vary, but can be as high as 6% initially and 1¼% annually. You can find a complete list of gilt funds at the Association of Unit Trusts and Investment Funds' website (www.investmentfunds.org.uk), which will also give you price, yield and performance data.

Gilts are traditionally bought by older investors looking for income. But the fact that the price changes means gilts can also be useful for people looking for growth. Any capital growth is also tax-free, although income, which is paid gross, is taxable.

Urquhart Stewart believes investors should use gilts more. "They are often regarded as boring, which is a shame. After all, girders might be considered boring — but if they hold the house up they do a pretty important job. Gilts have a part to play in a balanced portfolio."

They are also perhaps the safest investment you can buy. But there are alternatives. Kohn says: "You can get yields of 7% on deposit accounts without having to worry about timing or maturity dates. But you might have to chase the best rates, so be ready to move your money."

Most experts believe that money invested in the stock market will outperform an investment in government gilts over the long term. And statistics seem to prove their point.

According to a study by Barclays Capital, £100 invested in equities in 1899 would now be worth £24,962, taking account of inflation. The same amount invested in gilts would be worth a mere £273.

The stock market even beats gilts over the short term. Over two-year periods, equities outperform gilts 71% of the time and 86% of the time over 10years.

But such studies may be of only historical interest. David Kauders, an investment manager, says: "Post-war inflation largely explains the outperformance of equities over gilts."

During periods of high inflation, all fixed-interest products, such as gilts, perform badly. As prices rise, the value of the interest payment — which does not change — becomes less, because you cannot buy the same amount of goods with the money.

Conversely, when interest rates are falling, the value of a fixed-interest payment rises.

According to Kauders, shares are now overpriced Britain and America are sliding into a recession and we are entering a deflationary cycle that will last at least 15 years. He says: "Gilts have performed very strongly in the past 10 years and I am not recommending stock-market investments to my clients at the moment."

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SUE CRAWFORD

SHE'S SHARP, SHE'S SMART AND SHE'S NOT SCARED TO HAVE A GO

Listen to students who rap Eminem

JUST days before Eminem arrives in this country, students at Sheffield University have banned their own disco and radio station from playing his records.

There'll no doubt be many middle-aged people who think they are overreacting. The previous generation had the Sex Pistols, the one before that the Rolling Stones and it never did them any harm.

But these people have clearly never heard the latest Eminem album

And yet they are the very people who should listen to it, because it is their teenage children who are buying it and playing it.

Shocked

Not convinced? Ask YOUR child if they have heard it. You'll be shocked at their answer.

Then sit down and listen to it too. I did.

When I criticised the foul-mouthed rapper a few weeks ago a fan wrote and said I would change my mind once I had heard it.

I didn't. The songs are littered with so many violent references to women and fantasies about rape that after one depressing play I took it back.

Of course students now are the same as students always were – anxious to nail their colours to the latest cause.

But if a bunch of 18-year-olds, of all people, think this man is dangerous, then maybe we should be listening to the students and not Eminem.

Chicken in a basket-case

KFC are in a flap after a couple claimed to have found Colonel Sanders' secret recipe for fried chicken in the basement of their home.

The company are apparently terrified they will reveal the mystery ingredient that makes KFC different to any other fast food.

Now that wouldn't be chicken, would it?

Why we can't pay for a mum's love

FAR too many bright and talented women quit work because they find the demands of juggling the office and babies just too much to manage.

And far too many others who would rather devote themselves totally to their children as full-time mums, reluctantly stay at work simply because their mortgage depends on it.

Clearly, Britain hasn't got its childcare quite right and something has to be done. So praise this week for former Social Security Secretary Harriet Harman for at least trying to come up with a solution.

IDEA: Harman

Her idea: to pay parents a wage to stay at home and look after their children until they are three and extend tax relief to help working mums pay for nannies and child-minders.

It sounds like a great deal. It is a great deal. But it's just too good to be true. So good, in fact, that mums and dads would sign up in their millions the second it was introduced.

Don't believe me? In a survey last week it was revealed that six out of 10 women would quit work if they could. Eight out of 10 would like a year off "to do their own thing".

And that was before they'd even heard of the Children's Commission offering them £150 a week to do it.

The problem is that the proposals are just too generous. Paying parents and offering tax relief on child-care doesn't come cheap.

Somebody has to stump up the money and that somebody is the taxpayer, who may well end up feeling bitter about working hard to reward someone else for staying at home.

Just look at the resentment mums already face in offices when they take time off to look after sick children.

And what about those who could then reasonably expect similar help for the equally demanding, but much less rewarding job of staying at home to look after an elderly relative?

Even worse, Harriet's proposals feed the myth to working parents that they can have it all and that the Nanny State will provide.

And that is downright dangerous, because it sends the message out to the thoughtless, the feckless and the selfish that they can go ahead and have kids, without a thought to how they will pay for them, because they know someone else will.

In the real world life is about choices and sacrifices. Want a new car? Then forget the foreign holiday this year.

Want to stay at home and have a baby? Then forget the car AND the holiday.

Want to work and have a baby? Then forget about having time to buy a car or holiday as you rush from job to home and back again.

Most mums and dads accept this. They know it's a trade off. They know that more employers should offer flexible working to those who do choose to go back to work after having a family.

But, until that happens, they feel so blessed and so damn lucky to have children that they don't resent juggling their lives.

Being a parent is a very special privilege. By offering to pay people to do it we make it sound like drudgery and a chore.

THAT'S WIFE: Amanda's influence tells

NOT BAD, LES

NICE-GUY TV presenter Les Dennis has jumped at the chance to play a "slimy" baddie in Brookside. Somehow he must have got the impression that his wife Amanda Holden prefers men like that...

THE WHISPERS ARE ABOUT YOU, TRACY

HOLLYWOOD is going wild over a British nanny who claims to be able to calm the crankiest of babies.

Tracy Hogg calls herself the Baby Whisperer. And, for £700 a day, she will reveal the secrets she claims to have learned at the knee of her 85-year-old Yorkshire granny Florence.

The Americans – Arnie Schwarzenegger, Cindy Crawford, Jodie Foster and Michael J Fox included – are lapping it up.

But over here a few doubtful eyebrows are being raised about this self-styled super nanny.

Because Tracy left behind her own children to pursue her career of looking after other people's.

Her two daughters, Sara, now 18 and Sophie, 15, have spent most of the past eight years being raised by Tracy's mother and grandmother back here in Britain.

Tracy, as you might expect, defends her behaviour. She says: "When I left there were a lot of tears, especially as children pick up on your emotions.

"But I feel I'm an excellent mum. We've kept in contact by phone, by visiting and the Internet has been a big help."

She is clearly a wise woman. Wise enough to know that only in Tinseltown would anyone be gullible enough to take a lecture on motherhood from someone whose idea of child-care is a nightly chat on the Internet.

Back in Yorkshire there's a severe danger folk might interpret it another way – as a classic case of "Don't do as I do, do as I say".

...And finally

A FEMALE soldier, chosen as the official image of women in the Army, has run off with a married sergeant.

Still, at least it answers critics who said women wouldn't make good soldiers. After all, what better way of proving them wrong than capturing one of the enemy?

HAT'S A NEW ONE

GIRLS today grow up knowing every which way possible to catch a fella.

Looking interested while he speaks, catching his eye across a room, praising his bowling/football/joke-telling /kissing techniques – all have been tried and tested by several generations of women raised on a diet of teenage magazines.

But cleaner Bernadette Quinn ignored them all when she set about trying to seduce her local parish priest Father Jonathan Hart.

Bernadette, who appeared in court on harassment charges this week, tried hiding bunches of flowers under his car and in his dog kennel.

When that failed she knitted him a woolly jumper and bobble hat.

A bobble hat? Hmmm, must have missed that particular issue of Just 17.

Heads, they lose

MEN are so desperate to look cool. It's what's behind much of their posturing, aggression and macho posing.

And there's no doubt that a desire to look tough and cool passed through the shaven-heads of Manchester United and Sunderland footballers Andy Cole and Alex Rae on Wednesday night.

The pair had a fall-out, then next thing their foreheads are super-glued together and they're pushing each other around, eyeballs bulging, like a pair of rutting stags.

Male Match of the Day viewers no doubt saw it as a symbolic clash in the heat of the battle, two proud men each unwilling to give way.

My view as a mere female? Two big girls blouses and handbags at dawn.

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IF YOU HAVE ANY COMMENTS YOU CAN E-MAIL ME ON s.crawford@mgn.co.uk

BABY BUTCHER GETS A £115,000 PAY-OFF

PARENTS of children butchered by body parts doc Dick van Velzen were stunned last night after hearing he is getting a massive pay-off.

The rogue pathologist who kept the internal organs of at least 800 babies is set to scoop a total of £115,000.

The Dutchman got a £15,000 lump sum when he quit Liverpool's Alder Hey hospital in 1995 at the age of 45.

But he is also picking up a further £100,000 from his former employers, the University of Liverpool, – paid in £5,000-a-year instalments until he reaches retirement age at 65.

Paula O'Leary, whose 11-month-old son Andrew was butchered by van Velzen after his death, said: "He should be in jail for what he has done – not enjoying these sorts of pay-outs.

Dr van Velzen is believed to be holed up in his native Holland.

SHAME: Van Velzen

Queen firm in tests row

THE Queen was at the centre of a row last night after it was revealed she has £200,000 invested in a company that experiments on aborted babies.

Pro-life activists slammed Guildford-based ReNeuron Holdings, which injects cells from foetuses into animals for research into diseases like Altzheimer's.

The Queen's investment made her £13,000 profit in just two months.

Gran slam...

GRANS Josie Armstrong, 71, and Hilda Dilworth, 80, locked an intruder in a loo at a sheltered home on Tyneside until cops arrived.

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BLOOD ON THE SOFA AT GMTFEE

SOFAGATE

Greedy Fiona grilled as stars face charity cash crackdown

FURIOUS GMTV bosses have cracked down on stars charging for charity work after the Sunday People's investigation into the Fiona Phillips cash-for-plugs scandal.

EXCLUSIVE
By DAVID BROWN

Greedy presenter Fiona was carpeted within hours of our revelations appearing last week.

She was quizzed after her agent's boast that Fiona "tries to sneak in a mention" from the breakfast show sofa for charities that pay her thousands to turn out for them.

And last week Fiona's fellow presenter Lorraine Kelly was drawn into the row as it emerged she was paid £4,000 for a charity appearance.

Now the channel's chief executive Christopher Stoddart has fired off a stern letter to **ALL** his presenters.

One star's agent said last night: "He was absolutely appalled that anyone should want paying for charitable work.

"He has put his foot down and told his stars in no uncertain terms that they should not take cash for helping good causes. Fiona earns a fortune working for GMTV. Why she should need extra cash from charities is beyond belief."

Fiona, 40, was ordered to appear before Mr Stoddart and director of programmes Peter McHugh as GMTV was swamped with calls and e-mails from viewers outraged at the Sofagate scandal.

We revealed how her agent Nicola Ibison said for £10,000 a charity appearance would also include Fiona mentioning the charity on her show and plugging it on GMTV's million-hits-a-day website.

Commercial television watchdog the ITC has strict rules against presenters

£15,000 FOR THREE-HOUR JOB

PHILLIPS' agent said the star would want up to £15,000 for three-hours' work fronting a staff training film.

She told a Sunday People investigator posing as a PR man for chain store Mothercare that it would be against GMTV policy to accept the deal, but went on to suggest: "Yeah. We would certainly be interested. We have to be so careful that Fiona can't be seen to endorse a product. It might be difficult to use her anyway for this one. They wouldn't be interested in Emma Forbes?

"That's not to say I couldn't get it through but it's much more hassle with Fiona than it would be with Emma.

"That one I would try and do without seeking their permission and pray we weren't caught out."

EASIER: Emma

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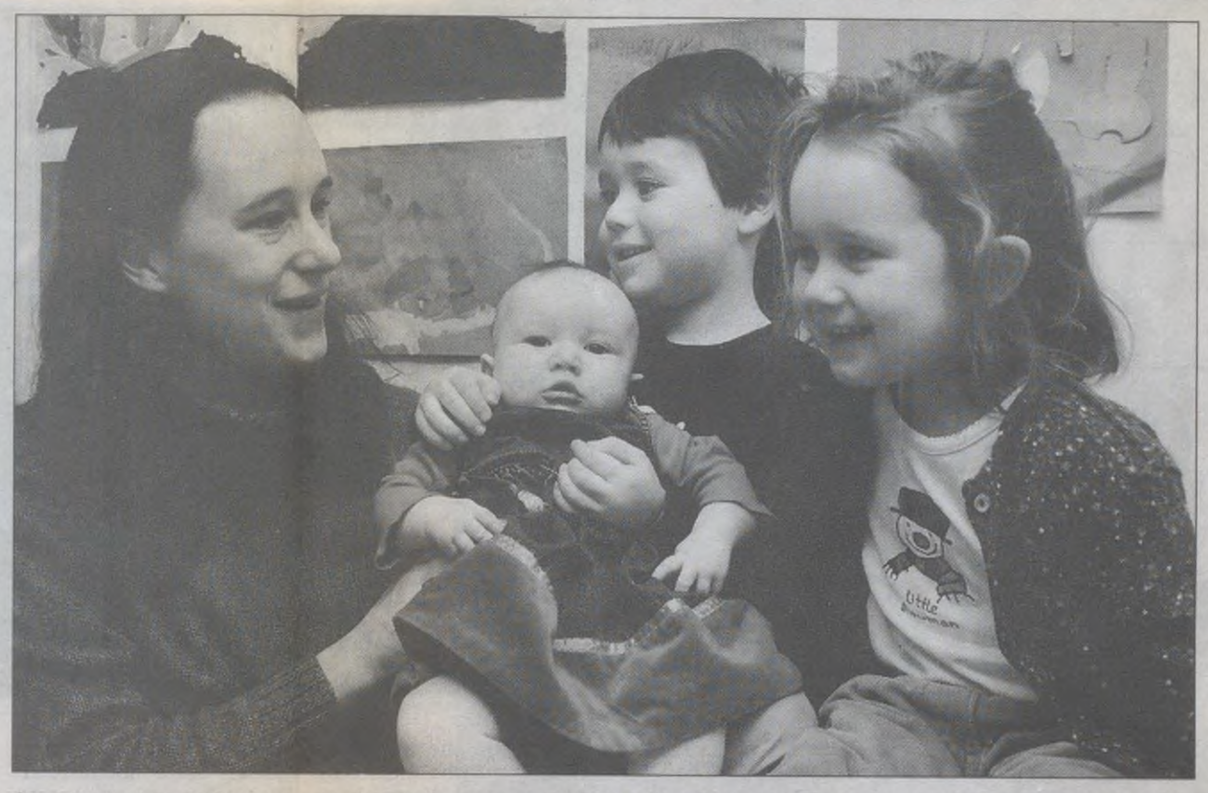
Soaring cost of childcare hits families

Working mothers can spend £6,000 per child on nursery or opt for unregistered minders, reports **Tracy McVeigh**



'If I didn't return straight to work, not only would I fall behind in my career but I'd miss out on my pension'
Charlotte Morgan, lawyer, 33

Charlotte Morgan with children Isobel, aged three months, Benedict, four and Eleanor, three.
Photograph by Charlie Gray

by Tracy McVeigh

THE COST OF childcare in Britain has rocketed, with working parents now spending an average of £6,000 a year for each child, according to a new report. It comes as latest Government figures show that an unprecedented percentage of children are now being raised by hired help – the numbers of under-fives in full-time nurseries has trebled to almost 300,000 in the past decade.

A survey by the charity Daycare Trust, due to be published tomorrow, has found that working parents are spending more on childcare for one pre school-age offspring alone than the average family of four spends on food or housing.

The national average for a full-time nursery place for a two-year-old now costs more than £110 a week – but a postcode lottery means the price can lurch from the £200 a week paid by a mother in inner London to £90.62 paid by parents in the North East.

Childminding costs also vary widely: in the West Midlands a registered minder will cost £80.62 a week while in the London the figure rises to £110. 'British childcare bills have now reached record heights,' Stephen Burke, Daycare Trust director, said.

'This survey shows the sacrifices some parents are making to ensure that their child has access to quality childcare. But for many other parents, the cost of childcare is simply beyond their reach.'

Government figures show there are now nearly a million places with England's daycare nurseries, registered childminders and pre-school groups – a threefold increase on 10 years ago. The figures do not include nannies or *au pairs*.

The number of daycare nurseries has increased from 2,900 in 1990 to 7,500 in the year 2000 and while the number of registered childminders has seen a slight fall as regulations tightened up and more part-time work became available to women, the National Childminding Association said it expected the numbers to begin to rise this year, thanks to a new Government start-up package.

There are 82,000 registered childminders who each look after a maximum of three under-fives. Estimates put the numbers of unregistered minders at twice that as many parents are forced to turn to them as often the only option they can afford.

Last week the former Minister and now chair of the Childcare Commission, Harriet Harman, created controversy in unveiling a new report advising the Government that working parents should get a 'toddler tax credit' to fund childcare or to enable them to stay at home should they wish. The commission did not come up with a figure but the Daycare Trust survey highlights the woeful inadequacy of the help currently available, the childcare tax credit. Those on lower incomes – up to £22,000 for one child – can get childcare tax credit, a maximum of £70 per week for one child and £105 for two. The average award among the 124,000 families qualifying is £33.48.

'The ceilings in childcare tax credit need to be reviewed,' said Burke.

'It is critical that parents on lower incomes can afford the cost of a nursery which clearly now exceeds the ceiling. More help is needed to enable all parents and children to share in the benefits of childcare.

'The geographical lottery means parents in London and the South East benefit least from childcare tax credit.'

Parents in higher earning brackets are also struggling. Charlotte Morgan, 33, is a lawyer at home in Suffolk after the birth of her third child, three-month-old Isobel. She has had to sack the nanny for Ben, four, and Eleanor, three, because she could not afford her while on maternity pay. She will get a replacement for when she goes back to work in two months' time.

'There is a shortage of lawyers in this country so the Government is urging women like me to come back to work and if I didn't, not only would I fall behind in my career, I would also miss out on a pension,' she said.

Morgan needs to earn £20,860 just to pay for her family's childcare. The two eldest go to nurseries so that they can mix with other children and prepare for a school environment. That costs £4,500 a year. A nanny costs a total of £14,900 – £11,940 wages including tax, £2,000 in expenses, and £960 employer's national insurance.

Parents already guilt-stricken about leaving their child don't need the added burden of being unable to afford the best, said childcare guru Dr Penelope Leach.

She is conducting a comprehensive seven year study into the effect of modern childcare on families.

'I hate the idea that the cost of childcare may be a real issue in people's decision how many children they have. Society ought not to allow that,' she said.

'But it would be very foolish to jump to the conclusion that we have a generation of children who will be somehow damaged by being brought up by someone else. It's important that we remember that at no point in history have children all been brought up in the 24-hour care of a parent. The only difference today is that childcare is so varied,' she said.

'Continuity of care is crucial and I have a hunch that the best childcare, whether a nanny, nursery or childminder, is when the parents are able to practically achieve the type of childcare they would ideally have if money were not involved.'

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Charge for nursery place rises to £6,000 a year

Sarah Hall
Political correspondent

The cost of childcare has risen to an average of almost £6,000 a year per child, according to the most comprehensive survey to date, published today.

A typical nursery place for a two-year-old costs more than £110 a week. It was £80 a week in 1997, the last time the cost was reviewed.

In London the cost is £135 a week. The national research, collated for the Daycare Trust, the national childcare charity, was obtained by questioning 120 children's information services on weekly prices for a full-time place, typically 8am-6pm, for a two-year-old.

A childminder, often seen as a more affordable option, was £89 on average, or £110 in London.

A year-long study by the childcare commission, set up to advise the government, last week recommended parents should be offered "generous financial assistance" to enable them to stay at home for the first three years of a child's life.

Although the commission, whose recommendations are being scrutinised by the Treasury, failed to come up with a figure, family groups believe it should be at least £150, nearly half the average £337 weekly income for women, to enable them to have the choice of giving up work.

Last night Harriet Harman, the former social security secretary and chairwoman of the commission, said the research gave weight to its recommendations — which include tax relief on the first £2,000 of childcare expenses, worth £440 a year.

"Childcare is a huge expense," said Ms Harman.

"We're saying, give people extra support in the early years because this is just so expensive and they can pay it back through tax once they return to work."

Parents on lower incomes, up to £22,000 for one child and £30,000 for two children, do have the opportunity of help for childcare costs through the working families tax credit. But critics argue those on incomes just above are penalised, and that the ceiling of a maximum of £70 a week for one child, or £105 for two, should be reviewed.

Stephen Burke, director of the Daycare Trust, said: "This survey shows the sacrifices some parents are making to ensure that their child has access to quality childcare. But for many other parents the cost of childcare is simply beyond their reach."

He added: "It is critical that parents on lower incomes can afford the cost of a typical nursery which clearly now exceeds the childcare tax credit ceiling.

● More than a quarter of new fathers have wanted to escape to the pub as they struggle through the first few months of parenthood, according to a survey out today.

Nearly one in five new mothers has contemplated running back to their parents. And 10% of all parents have wanted to escape for ever, the poll of 300 parents for the National Childbirth Trust found.

Cost of childcare

Costs per week in England 2001
(full-time place, typically 8am-6pm)

Source: The Daycare Trust

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State-funded nannies

●●● The independent childcare commission published a report this week calling for 'generous financial support' for parents who stay at home to look after their children

The commission, led by former social security secretary Harriet Harman, suggested there should be a childcare centre in every area, as well as "generous" support for working and non-working parents for the first three years of a child's life. The year-long study also said a "toddler tax credit" would help those parents who are unable to return to work because of the cost of childcare.

The findings had not been costed, but Harman asked for childcare to be recognised as an important area for public funding. The **Guardian**'s Polly Toynbee added strength to the report's arm. "Childcare," she said, "is the gaping hole in the cradle to the grave welfare state. Like health and education it cannot be provided privately ... There is no other solution but public provision."

CHRISTOPHER THOMOND

Child's play: toddlers in kindercare

The **Sun**, predictably, took a different view. "Paying mums to stay at home with their kids may seem like a good idea ... [but] the bill would be footed by the taxpayers. So you would work hard to reward someone else for staying at home. As ever, political correctness comes with a high price."

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Tripped up twice by Hague, the PM is detached from reality

THE SKETCH

SIMON CARR

WHAT DOGS politicians are, really. Not that that's meant as a criticism. The Sketch likes dogs; the Sketch likes politicians, too. But what dogs they are.

How sensitive are their whiskers to fear, or failure; how they hate the wounded.

Yesterday, Tony Blair's front bench sat behind him as impassive as a politburo. His efforts to stir up support – nudging, laughing, doing that crank-handle thing with his hand – met with stony faces from his Cabinet and a collective 1,000-yard stare.

The prime ministerial merriment was particularly poignant. He was chuckling, braying, rocking, slapping his thigh, rattling his folder (the folder's back), hooting and pointing. That was brave because smiling was the last thing he felt like doing. His face was open and his mouth was drawn back across his teeth as though someone had twisted his ears through 360 degrees.

First things first. Harriet Harman's title for the Most Odious Use of Grief for Political Purposes (won on the occasion of the Damilola murder) has been ceded to Labour's Stephen Ladyman. His first question went: "Yesterday we had to confront the pain that must have been felt by the parents whose children were involved in the organ-stripping scandal. Does that not put into perspective some of the trivia that we politicians sometimes get bogged down in?" (A low Tory cry of "Oh!".)

That's code for: "Only vile, low, point-scoring, election-losing Tories would use this solemn occasion of dead babies, babies with their brains in bottles, to ask about Peter Mandelson."

As it happened William Hague didn't ask about Mr Mandelson; he asked about the numbers of applications from asylum-seekers. Mr Blair said that latest figures applying for asylum showed "a sharp reduction". Mr Hague stood up and said: "Figures released last Thursday show applications at an all-time record high!"

"What I said to him was," the Prime Minister extemporised, "that the last month's figures showed the sharpest fall which they do." But that wasn't what he'd said. It was what he should have said. It was what he'd meant to say. It's a Mandelson defence.

This wasn't the only time the Prime Minister let himself down. Even a Lib Dem tripped him up. There's no room for that, because at last Mr Hague asked about Mr Mandelson. "Was the Prime Minister's press secretary speaking for the Prime Minister when he gave his extraordinary briefing against [Peter Mandelson]?"

Mr Hague had come up with a killer question, a forensic question, a question that demanded an answer. Mr Blair found himself having to say: "Of course, he always speaks for me."

"He must be losing his grip on reality," Mr Hague came back. "He praised the former Northern Ireland secretary in this house on Wednesday and then sent out his press secretary on Friday to rubbish [him]!" Yes, he climaxed with, and compared the ex-minister's state of mind with gay, high-risk-sex-seeking Ron Davies, who had had to resign himself.

"He didn't. He didn't say that last point at all," the Prime Minister said with a certain fatal finality. The transcripts of Alastair Campbell's briefing say exactly the opposite. Is that misleading the House? Is that a lie of the Prime Minister? Or did he believe it when he said it?

It is the same question that the Hammond inquiry into Mr Mandelson's conduct will have to resolve.

Is the man a liar? Is he able to tell the difference between truth and falsehood? Or is he innocent but insane? And has the Prime Minister caught the disease himself? Are all the dogs mad dogs? And what is to become of us if they are?

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Revolution in childcare urged on Government

PROPOSALS for thousands of new childcare centres along with big cash boosts for working and non-working parents were unveiled in a major new study yesterday.

Between 8,000 and 10,000 new children's centres – one to every two or three schools – would be created in the UK under plans put forward by the Childcare Commission.

The centres, catering for children up to 16-years-old, would offer nurseries, playgroups, out-of-school clubs and childminder networks as well as childcare information to parents.

Parents would also be offered "generous financial support" in the first three years of their child's life to spend on childcare by parents or other relatives or more formal arrangements such as nurseries.

The Government said it welcomed the report but that it was already implementing many of the proposals. Education and Employment Minister Margaret Hodge added that some of the tax proposals put forward were "extremely expensive".

Options outlined in the year-long study include an increase in child benefit for children up to three, a new "toddler tax credit" for the first three years and a transferable tax allowance during the same period.

The report, which drew upon research with parents, children and employers across the country, puts forwards proposals including tax relief for childcare on the basic rate of up to £2,000 for childcare expenses and tax breaks to encourage employers to help their employees with childcare.

By Martha Linden
Daily Post Correspondent

But the commission – which calls for a new Government department to oversee the "integrated childcare system" – has stopped short of urging changes in the law to make employers responsible for the provision or payment of childcare.

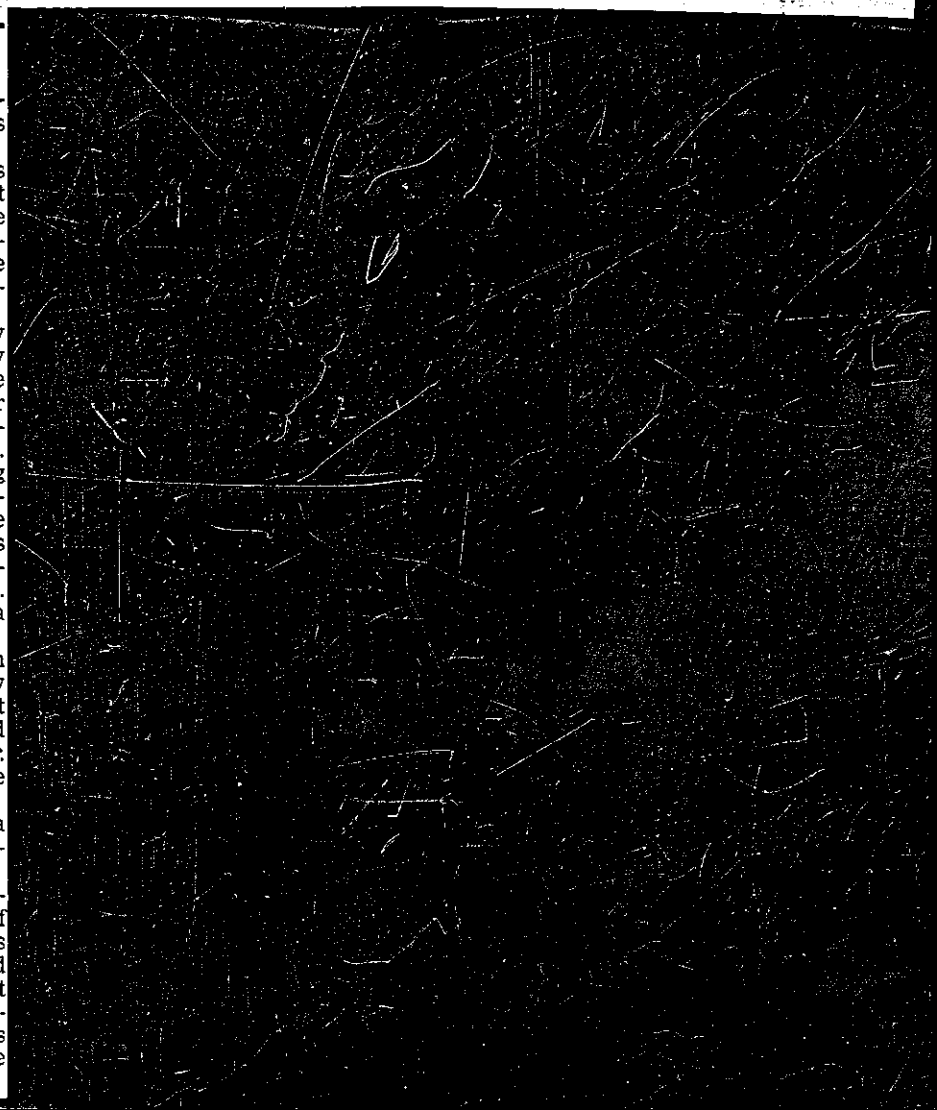
Unveiling the report yesterday former Social Security Secretary Harriet Harman, chairman of the Childcare Commission, called for childcare to be put on the same footing as investment in public services.

"We are quite up front in saying that this needs to move up the agenda of public policy priorities," she said. "This area needs to take its place as a recognised priority alongside transport, hospitals and schools. It will require new investment and a new focus for public policy."

She added: "Parents have to be in the driving seat in the very early years. The job of government is not to make decisions as to how a child aged one or two has to be cared for. The job of public policy is to make sure that parents have a choice."

Mrs Hodge said the report was "a serious contribution to the development of childcare in this country".

She added: "We have already created the largest-ever expansion of childcare, we have created places for over half-a-million children and the Working Families Tax Credit offers generous support with childcare costs for lower-income families and more than 120,000 families are benefiting from that."



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STRATEGY ■ Tax breaks, childcare cash and kids' havens sought by commission

Happy families the aim in new action plan

Proposals for thousands of new childcare centres, along with big cash boosts for working and non-working parents, were unveiled yesterday.

Between 8000 and 10,000 new children's centres – one to every two or three schools – would be created in the UK under plans put forward by the Childcare Commission.

The centres, catering for children up to 16, would offer nurseries, playgroups, out-of-school clubs and childminder networks as well as childcare information to parents.

Parents would also be offered "generous financial support" in the first three years of their child's life to spend on childcare.

This could be used as payment for the parents, other relatives or outside minders.

The Government said it welcomed the report but that it was already implementing many of the proposals.

Education and employment minister

By MARTHA LINDEN
PA News

Margaret Hodge added that some of the tax proposals put forward were "extremely expensive".

Options outlined in the year-long study include an increase in child benefit for children up to three, a new "toddler tax credit" for the first three years, and a transferable tax allowance during the same period.

The report puts forward proposals including tax relief for childcare, and tax breaks to encourage employers to help their employees with childcare.

But the commission – which calls for a new government department to oversee the "integrated childcare system" – stopped short of urging changes in the law to make employers responsible for provision of childcare.

Unveiling the report, former social security secretary Harriet Harman, chairman of the Childcare Commission, said: "This needs to take its place as a priority alongside transport, hospitals and schools.

"Parents have to be in the driving seat in the very early years. The job of public policy is to make sure that parents have a choice."

Ms Harman admitted that the proposals had not been costed but said it represented "the direction in which we think policy should go".

Mrs Hodge was more cautious on the financial implications. She said: "It is important not to rule anything out but clearly some of these proposals would be extremely expensive."

■ Sure Start, a flagship government programme combining health, early education and parenting advice, is to be expanded to cover 66 new areas in England, it was announced yesterday. The scheme will take in 400,000 children under the age of four, and be operating within three years.

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Page Main 10

In a series of meetings at 11 Downing Street the chancellor has been listening to controversial ideas from a surprising variety of speakers

Brown holds court with the moralists

As the dust settles around the door which slammed behind the exiting Peter Mandelson, Tony Blair may find himself feeling slightly lonely — his friend and adviser departed. But next door to the prime minister, interesting developments are afoot with his chancellor holding court with some surprising guests. The Guardian's David Walker was present at an eclectic gathering.

It felt like a government in exile — except the heir apparent's distance from the throne is measured in feet rather than miles. The chancellor's guests yesterday morning passed by the front door of No 10 Downing Street. On arriving at No 11 they were not handed a government statement, nor anything by the next door neighbour. Instead they were given the thoughts of Gordon, a printout of a speech he made last year.

The message was clear. The Blair government's effective second-in-command thinks for himself and thinks big: on yesterday's evidence Mr Brown is not afraid to sample some very controversial ideas, which would make even William Hague blench.

Mr Brown is also keen on covering the political bases. Extravagant praise of his political honesty and integrity — which was heaped on him yesterday by the chief rabbi, Dr Jonathan Sacks — is unlikely to do an aspirant prime minister any harm.

Mr Brown has been busy lately. He has just made common cause with deputy prime minister John Prescott on boosting English regional government and smiled benignly on the ambitious plans for child care and support launched this week by former social security secretary, Harriet Harman. Yesterday was an occasion for intellectual refreshment.

The event was a breakfast seminar on the subject of the "moral sense". Edmund Burke, Immanuel Kant and, of course, the Scottish philosophers David Hume and Adam Smith were generously cited. It was convened in the name of the Smith Institute — John rather than Adam — the thinktank whose main job so far has been to prime the chancellor with ideas generated at similar early morning events over coffee and croissants at No 11.

The thinktank seeks to "look at issues which flow from the changing relationship between social values and economic imperatives", a theme said to be of particular interest to the former leader of the Labour party — and mentor to Mr Brown — who died suddenly in 1994. John Smith, in his own day considered to be on Labour's right, is nowadays hailed as a repository of unBlairite old Labour values. Yet this seminar had a distinctly rightwing or at least conservative whiff about it.

The main speaker was the American sociologist James Q Wilson, whose studies of crime and single motherhood made him something of a hero in the Reagan years. The respondent was Mr Sacks, a stern moralist. Both are accomplished preachers and the meeting seemed at times more like a prayer breakfast than a policy seminar. Their audience included David Young, the former minister brought in by Margaret Thatcher to impart business values to government and now a Tory peer, Gary McDowell, director of the Institute of United States Studies and avowed Clinton hater, and Irwin Stelzer, the American consultant close to media mogul Rupert Murdoch.

The audience also included a handful of Labour MPs together with leading lights of the liberal establishment, including several representatives of the Guardian. No 10 was not entirely excluded. It was personified by David Miliband, head of the prime minister's policy unit. The event's theme chimed with recent speeches made by the chancellor extolling the voluntary sector — a fortnight ago he urged the public to do more work for non-profit bodies in their spare time.

Still, it was surprising to hear such ardent advocacy of religious groups getting public money in the same week as this became the policy of the new Republican administration in Washington led by George Bush. Moral revival, the chancellor was told, may involve locking up single mothers in institutions to ensure their offspring are taught virtue. Prof Wilson made repeated references to the way moral decline is related to the growth of single parenthood — a direct cause of crime, he said.

The California based academic told the chancellor — whose own father was a minister of religion — that religious reawakening was needed to strengthen people's innate disposition to distinguish right from wrong.

For his part Rabbi Sacks said markets and governments could not by themselves attend to people's needs. Improving spiritual health was the job of the "third sector", encompassing families, small groups and of course churches and synagogues.

Previous Smith Institute events at No 11 have considered welfare reform, education and training and equality. Blair government policy is one thing; the chancellor's view, thrashed out in high powered policy debates at No 11, may turn out to be something else.

Hugo Young, page 20

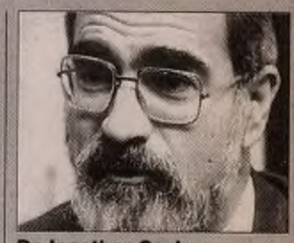
The No 11 guest list

The main speaker was Gordon Brown's latest policy seminar was the American sociologist **James Q Wilson**, who told the chancellor that moral revival may involve locking up single mothers in institutions to ensure their offspring are taught virtue. Prof Wilson also made repeated references to the way moral decline is related to the growth of single parenthood.

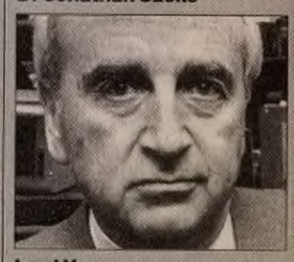
The California based academic told the chancellor that society's capacity to make moral judgments had been eroded.

Another speaker was the chief rabbi, **Jonathan Sacks**, a stern moralist who heaped praise on the chancellor for his political honesty and integrity.

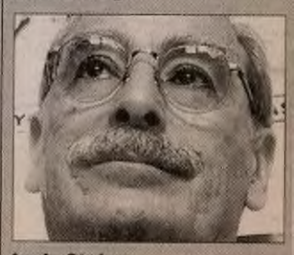
Also at the seminar were the former Conservative minister, now **Lord Young,** the director of the Institute of United States Studies and avowed Clinton hater, **Gary McDowell**, and **Irwin Stelzer**, the US consultant close to media mogul Rupert Murdoch.



Dr Jonathan Sacks



Lord Young



Irwin Stelzer

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Mother of bad ideas

■ In another strand in the money-for-nothing culture, the Childcare Commission, headed by Harriet Harman, has called for stay-at-home mothers to receive a wage (Metro, Tue).

Presumably the logic behind this preposterous call is that these mums would like a bit more money. A revolutionary thought!

The fact couples decide to bear both the children and the responsibility for their upbringing; that the Government can scarcely afford to maintain the NHS let alone voluntary opt-outs; and that this measure would encourage young girls into motherhood seems not to matter to the profligate Ms Harman (pictured) who has designs on our tax contributions.

I suspect most right-thinking mothers would agree that, although the money would be nice, it is not the State's role to maintain them further than it already does through benefit and welfare payments.

It is naive and imbecilic to believe the State has a bottomless pit of funds which it can freely throw to whatever interest group has some form of plight to publicise.

A further thought: can I have £150 a week as I have no children? In keeping with the agricultural 'set-aside' policy which pays farmers to not use their fields, I promise not to bear children, place any new burdens on the NHS, education system and welfare state in return for a small financial thank-you from the Government.

Peter Philip, London NW1

■ At last, someone is speaking up for the bedrock of our society – the family and more particularly, childcare. Harriet Harman's proposals answer a real need in this country. While we dole out millions to asylum seekers, or bring in workers from abroad to compensate for a skills shortfall, an army of potential workers – young mums – is stymied from returning to work by lack of affordable childcare provision. This should be addressed.

Sarah Lavender, London SW1

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Page Main Section 15

Report suggests payment for parents who stay home

by **Martha Linden**
and **Paul Gallagher**

PLANS were unveiled yesterday to pay parents of children aged up to three to stay at home and look after them.

Up to 10,000 children's centres would be created under the proposals by the Childcare Commission. They would contain nurseries, playgroups, out-of-school clubs and childminder networks as well as childcare information to parents.

Parents would also be offered generous financial support in the first three years of their children's lives – regardless of whether they were going out to work.

Options put forward in the year-long study include an increase in child benefit for children up to three, a toddler tax credit for the first three years and a transferable tax allowance during the same period.

The report, which drew upon research with parents, children and employers across the country, proposes that, under all the options, parents would be free to use the money to pay for childcare or to look after their children themselves.

Further proposals put forward include tax relief for childcare on the basic rate of up to £2,000 for childcare expenses and tax breaks to encourage employers to help their employees with childcare.

Unveiling the report yesterday at a press conference in central London, Harriet Harman, who chairs the Childcare Commission, called for childcare to be put on the same footing as investment in public services.

"We are quite up front in saying that this needs to move up the agenda of public policy priorities," she said.

"This area needs to take its place as a recognised priority alongside transport, hospitals and schools. It will require new investment and a new focus for public policy."

She said the report sought to stress the need for choice for parents, in the early years of their children's lives, whether to go out to work.

"Public debate had been dogged by the same old arguments and the same false divisions. We have sought to throw out the old arguments and look at what the reality is for children today and for families in the future.

"Parents have to be in the driving seat in the very early years. The job of government is not to make decisions about how a child aged one or two has to be cared for. The job of public policy is to make sure that parents have a choice."

The commission, an independent body set up by the national charity Kids Club Network, included representatives from business and other campaigning groups such as the Day Care Trust.

Former Conservative minister and father-of-six Edward Leigh was also a member. He told the press conference that he believed the proposals would help strengthen marriage.

"The best security for a strong marriage is strong support for parents to be able to look after children in the way that they choose," he said.

Ms Harman said the options put forward had not been costed but represented "the direction in which we (the commission) thought policy should go".

Scottish National Party children's spokeswoman Irene McGugan said children's interests would have to come first in any proposals.

She said: "I have always felt that any form of childcare ought to be driven by the needs of children and what's of most benefit to their welfare, rather than how important it is to the economy or the business sector.

Provision

"We have to make sure these are quality services, staffed by appropriately trained and qualified people.

"Some of the provision and the tax benefits ought to be as available to families where mothers choose not to go back to work. There ought not to be what could almost be a penalty if they choose not to go back."

Aberdeen South Labour MP Anne Begg said: "These proposals look to be on the right lines and merit serious consideration.

"We have to make sure that parents who want to work can go out to work, and still afford to do so while making sure their children are well looked after."

Gordon Liberal Democrat MP Malcolm Bruce, said: "The general availability of support for childcare in this country is low.

"If you have a climate in which people are actively encouraged to work part-time, the provision of such care is absolutely crucial and this Government have moved against single mothers and cut payments to new claimants."

Mr Bruce said there had to be a contribution towards childcare costs to enable people to work and reduce dependency on welfare, and suggested that the proposals might not go far enough.

A Conservative Party spokeswoman said: "We need a fair system for all working parents.

"Harriet Harman seems to be favouring one part of society that is probably more likely to vote Labour and to be doing a bit of selective targeting as to who gets the financial support.

"What we want in the long term is to provide parents with tax breaks across the board, with the focus on family pressures."

■ *Judith Steel and baby Joe.* Picture: Les Parker

It's back to work regardless

by **Andrea Elderfield**

HIGHLAND mum Judith Steel, 26, of Conon Bridge, has a six-month-old son, Joe.

She is planning to return to her seven-year career as a physiotherapist in the near future.

Judith feels the proposed childcare benefits, including up to £150 a week to families with children up to the age of three, would offer parents a choice.

She said: "I think a lot of mums would say, when they get to a certain stage, they want to have adult company again.

"So I'm really looking forward to going back to work and doing a couple of days work a week, but I have a lot of friends who would like stay at home with their children.

"It would be lovely to have the option. "However, personally I am not prepared to give up my career for £150 a week."

"As well as the personal issues, going back to work is also financially very important.

"If I was to stay at home the statutory state benefit would not equate with what we need," she said.

Ms Steel could earn about £150 a week part-time working as an NHS physiotherapist.

Childcare was costing herself and her husband £45 a month.

Extra money is also needed for nappies, new clothes and feed for the baby, which is their first.

She said that the money was not enough to keep her at home.

However, any extra money offered by the Government was needed by all parents.

It would help pay for all the extra financial burdens which parenting brings.

■ **Allison Thomson with six-month-old Heather and Charlotte, 6.**

Mum raises doubts over proposals

by **Melissa Watson**

ONE mother-of-two yesterday expressed her reservations about the radical new plan for childcare in the UK.

Allison Thomson, 32, of Overton Circle, Dyce, Aberdeen, was doubtful of some of the proposals set out by the Pearl Assurance sponsored commission.

Mrs Thomson has two daughters, Charlotte, 6, and baby Heather, who was born nine weeks ago.

She is planning to make the most of her nine-month maternity leave but looks forward to returning in June to her 10-year career at Conoco, where she works as a business analyst.

She said she did not think being paid to stay off work for three years to look after baby was a good idea.

"I really enjoy my job and am looking forward to going back," she said.

"The current regulations allow a mother to be off work 11 weeks before the birth and 29 weeks after baby is born.

"At Conoco I get a full salary for the first eight weeks and then a half salary for the next 10.

"I also get a returners' bonus every three months for a year when I go back.

"By the time I return to work, Heather will be six months old and I think that is old enough to be able to cope without a mother full-time.

"Conoco provides a childcare room which will allow me to express milk to give to the childminder. So Heather will not miss out there.

"So long as your employer is flexible about the hours you work then there is not a problem. It would not be fair to take advantage."

She said she did not think a job would be kept open for three years.

"With a job like mine, I would be completely lost after three years out because technology changes so quickly."

The young mother also expressed concern for the effect that generously paid leave might have.

She said: "People who do not follow a career might be tempted to have children simply to reap the profits of such financial benefits.

"If people had three or four children they would end up being off work for years."

However, Mrs Thomson was more enthusiastic about the other areas of the proposal.

One area of the proposal suggested there should be a children's centre in every area of Britain.

Mrs Thomson said she thought purpose built children's centres would be a good idea, so long as they provided breakfast clubs and after-school care.

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Revolution in childcare urged on Government

PROPOSALS for thousands of new childcare centres along with big cash boosts for working and non-working parents were unveiled in a major new study yesterday.

Between 8,000 and 10,000 new children's centres – one to every two or three schools – would be created in the UK under plans put forward by the Childcare Commission.

The centres, catering for children up to 16-years-old, would offer nurseries, playgroups, out-of-school clubs and childminder networks as well as childcare information to parents.

Parents would also be offered "generous financial support" in the first three years of their child's life to spend on childcare by parents or other relatives or more formal arrangements such as nurseries.

The Government said it welcomed the report but that it was already implementing many of the proposals. Education and Employment Minister Margaret Hodge added that some of the tax proposals put forward were "extremely expensive".

Options outlined in the year-long study include an increase in child benefit for children up to three, a new "toddler tax credit" for the first three years and a transferable tax allowance during the same period.

The report, which drew upon research with parents, children and employers across the country, puts forwards proposals including tax relief for childcare on the basic rate of up to £2,000 for childcare expenses and tax breaks to encourage

By Martha Linden
Daily Post Correspondent

employers to help their employees with childcare.

But the commission – which calls for a new Government department to oversee the "integrated childcare system" – has stopped short of urging changes in the law to make employers responsible for the provision or payment of childcare.

Unveiling the report yesterday former Social Security Secretary Harriet Harman, chairman of the Childcare Commission, called for childcare to be put on the same footing as investment in public services.

"We are quite up front in saying that this needs to move up the agenda of public policy priorities," she said. "This area needs to take its place as a recognised priority alongside transport, hospitals and schools. It will require new investment and a new focus for public policy."

She added: "Parents have to be in the driving seat in the very early years. The job of government is not to make decisions as to how a child aged one or two has to be cared for. The job of public policy is to make sure that parents have a choice."

Mrs Hodge said the report was "a serious contribution to the development of childcare in this country".

She added: "We have already created the largest-ever expansion of childcare, we have created places for over half-a-million children and the Working Families Tax Credit offers generous support with childcare costs for lower-income families and more than 120,000 families are benefiting from that."

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Harman's think-tank wants huge state support for families

'Pay parents to stay at home for the first three years'

By **Steve Doughty**
Social Affairs Correspondent

Above: Harriet Harman. Left: David Blunkett is said to be 'concerned' by the recommendations

PARENTS of young children should get massive financial support from the state, a Labour-dominated think-tank declared yesterday.

The money – possibly in the form of weekly handouts – would be paid for the first three years of a child's life and cover much of the costs involved.

This would give parents the choice of staying at home or working, allowing two parents to work part-time or a couple to survive when only one partner worked, the Childcare Commission said.

The group also called for the introduction of a state-run network of 10,000 'children's centres' to look after youngsters while their parents work.

The proposals were derided by the Tories as an attempt to 'nationalise childcare'. The party's social security spokesman David Willetts added: 'There are some batty ideas here.'

Senior ministers, too, were thought to have serious misgivings.

Education and Employment Secretary David Blunkett was said to be 'very concerned', not only about the potential cost involved but also over the possibility that the payments might entice young girls into single parenthood.

He was understood to be deeply worried, too, over the implication that parents should rely on state support to bring up their children.

The commission – headed by former social security secretary Harriet Harman – declined to say how much the handouts should be. But a figure of £150 a week was being suggested in some quarters yesterday.

Such an amount – later described by Miss Harman as 'unrealistic' – could cost the taxpayer over £10billion a year, the equivalent of around 5p on income tax.

The commission said the handouts could be paid in the form of increased child benefit across the board.

Setting up the children's centres could cost another £10billion over three years.

In its report – entitled Looking to the Future for Children and Families – the commission called for an 'integrated childcare system' to link nursery and childminding provision with taxes and benefits.

'This is pie in the sky'

Children's centres – one at every two or three schools in the country – would run nurseries and provide parents with details on how to get further childcare, state benefits or jobs.

They would cater for youngsters up to 16 by offering out-of-school clubs. The commission also called for £2,000-a-year tax relief on childcare payments, more leave from work for parents and a Department of Work and Family Services to administer family policy.

Miss Harman – who was dumped from Tony Blair's Cabinet in 1998 – claimed the package was about giving mothers and fathers more choice in bringing up their children.

'Parents in the family home behind closed doors are trying to make these decisions all the time,' she said. 'It is about time public policy pitched in.'

Huge spending on childcare was a 'national imperative', she added.

'Our proposals imply major new investment and a major new focus for public policy.

'There is always competition for public resources. When you set up the NHS you have to find funds for it, and when you decide that every child should have an education, you have to find money for that.'

Despite Mr Blunkett's concerns about the report, his junior minister Margaret Hodge – a figure associated with the anti-marriage lobby in the Government – described it as a 'serious contribution to the development of childcare'.

Mary Macleod, head of the National Family and Parenting Institute, said: 'Like health, education and defence, families deserve committed advocacy within government.'

Family commentator Robert Whelan, of the Civitas think tank, said, however: 'This is pie in the sky in financial terms and the fact that they don't mention marriage shows how ridiculous it is – if you really want to help children you promote marriage as the safest environment for them.

'I think the plan is to post this on the agenda so that in a few years the unthinkable becomes thinkable.'

Figures on the commission include Camden Council leader Jane Roberts, Transport Union deputy leader Margaret Prosser, former Communist journalist Charles Leadbeater and Helen Wilkinson, a former leading figure in Demos, once Tony Blair's favourite think-tank.

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Only needy mothers should get stay-at-home benefits

HOW wonderful it would be if we could pay £150 a week to every woman who wanted to stay at home with her baby for the first three years of its life. This is exactly what Harriet Harman's Childcare Commission is trying to persuade the Government to do. Of course, it is a commendable idea. Unfortunately, it is also an extremely costly one. And when the Government is being pressed from all sides for extra funding, the Treasury has to assess its priorities. Would money be better spent providing free nursing care to the elderly as is being proposed in Scotland, for example?

Agreeing to every well-intentioned idea like the Childcare Commission's demand would place an intolerable burden on the taxpayer. Many hard-working families have already struggled through the early years of bringing up their own children. They cannot be expected also to foot the bill through higher taxes for all other new mothers-to-be.

Without doubt Britain has lagged behind the rest of Europe over maternity provisions. But to make such radical changes possible they must target only those who need help most badly, rather than extend subsidies across the board.

On top of this the Government must provide incentives for employers to offer more flexible working patterns to those women who *do* choose to go back to work after having a family. Only then will women avoid the horrors of juggling family finances and a baby — and it will be achieved at a cost the country can afford.

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Tax relief plan to bring revolution in our childcare

BY LUCY McDONALD
SOCIAL AFFAIRS CORRESPONDENT

RADICAL proposals which would revolutionise childcare in Britain were unveiled in a major study yesterday.

The report said that childcare should be put on an equal footing with health, education and transport and no longer considered a fringe benefit.

The proposals, by the Childcare Commission, suggest tax relief for parents, thousands of new childcare centres and big cash boosts for working and non-working parents.

Harriet Harman, MP and chairwoman of the commission, said: "We are quite up front in saying that this needs to move up the agenda of public policy priorities.

"This area needs to take its place as a recognised priority alongside transport, hospitals and schools. It will require new investment and a new focus for public policy."

The recommendations would entitle parents to tax relief on £2,000, giving a family £440 extra each year.

Parents would also be offered "generous financial support" in the first three years of their child's life, regardless of whether they were going out to work.

Ms Harman said it was important that parents were not forced back to work straight after the birth of a child for financial reasons.

She added that informal childcare such as infants being looked after by friends or relatives is as valuable as formal childcare.

The year-long study, which drew upon research with parents, children and employers, proposes that under all the options parents would be free to use the money to pay for childcare or to look after their children themselves.

Ms Harman said: "Parents have to be in the driving seat in the very early years. The job of government is not to make decision as to how a child aged one or two has to be cared for. The job of public policy is to make sure that parents have a choice."

HARMAN: Call for investment

Up to 10,000 new children's centres would be created under the proposals offering nurseries, playgroups, out-of-school clubs and childminder networks as well as childcare information to parents.

Other options put forward include an increase in child benefit for children up to three, a toddler tax credit for the first three years and a transferable tax allowance between partners during the same period.

Employers should also be given incentives with tax breaks to help their employees with childcare.

Mrs Harman declined to comment on how the proposals would be funded.

The report also recommended the launch of a government department specifically to look after children.

The commission, an independent body set up by the national charity Kids Club Network, included representatives from business and other charities.

Former Conservative minister and father of six Edward Leigh was also a member. He told the press conference that he believed the proposals would help strengthen marriage.

"The best security for a strong marriage is strong support for parents to be able to look after children in the way that they choose," he said.

Margaret Hodge, Education and Employment Minister, said the Government welcomed the report.

She added: "We are doing a lot of what the report is recommending. We have already created the largest-ever expansion of childcare, we have created places for more than half a million children and the Working Families Tax Credit offers generous support with childcare costs for lower-income families and more than 120,000 families are benefiting from that."

Kate Green, director of the National Council For One Parent Families said: "These proposals could finally offer proper support to lone parents who are prevented from working by the dearth and cost of childcare and to those who in their best judgement feel they must be at home with an infant for a while."

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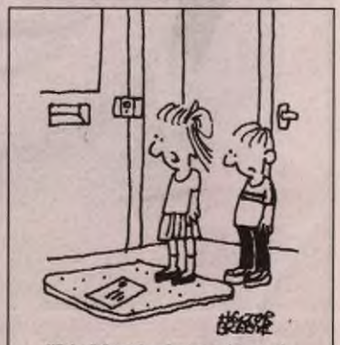

"It's Mum's cheque from the Childcare Commission, and this time, don't overdo the ingratiating behaviour."

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Tuesday 30th January 2001
Page 2

'Pay mum to stay home'

MUMS should be paid to stay at home and get free childcare when back at work, a major new study urged yesterday.

Ex-social security supremo Harriet Harman wants up to 10,000 day-care centres and three-year tax breaks for new mums.

The Government promised to study the Childcare Commission's plans but warned some were "extremely expensive."

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Commission wants cash boost for parents amid sweeping reforms

Report calls for 10,000 new childcare centres

PROPOSALS for thousands of new childcare centres along with big cash boosts for working and non-working parents have been unveiled in a major new study.

Between 8,000 and 10,000 new children's centres – one to every two or three schools – would be created under plans put forward by the Childcare Commission.

The centres, catering for children up to 16, would offer nurseries, playgroups, out-of-school clubs and childminder networks as well as childcare information to parents.

Parents would also be offered "generous financial support" in the first three years of their child's life to spend on childcare by parents or other relatives or more formal arrangements such as nurseries.

The Government said it welcomed the report but that it was already implementing many of the proposals. Education and Employment Minister Margaret Hodge added that some of the tax proposals put forward were "extremely expensive".

Options outlined in the year-long study include an increase in child benefit for children up to three, a new "toddler tax credit" for the first three years and a transferable tax allowance during the same period.

The report, which drew upon research with parents, children and employers across the country, puts forwards proposals including tax relief for childcare on the basic rate of up to £2,000 for childcare expenses and tax breaks to encourage employers to help employees with childcare.

But the Commission – which calls for a new Government department to oversee the "integrated childcare system" – has stopped short of urging changes in the law to make employers responsible for the provision or payment of child care.

Unveiling the report, former Social Security Secretary Harriet Harman, chair of the Childcare Commission, called for childcare to be put on the same footing as investment in public services.

"We are quite up front in saying that this needs to move up the agenda of public policy priorities," she said.

"This area needs to take its place as a recognised priority alongside transport, hospitals and schools. It will require new investment and a new focus for public policy."

She added: "Parents have to be in the driving seat in the very early years. The job of government is not to make decisions as to how a child aged one or two has to be cared for. The job of public policy is to make sure that parents have a choice."

The Commission, an independent body set up by the national charity Kids' Club Network, included representatives from business and other campaigning groups such as the Day Care Trust. Former Conservative minister and father-of-six Edward Leigh MP was a member.

He told the press conference that he believed the proposals would help strengthen marriage.

"The best security for a strong marriage is strong support for parents to be able to look after children in the way that they choose," he said.

"What we are talking about is a very humane solution. The fact is that in the modern world people want to mix and match."

Ms Harman said the options put forward had not been costed but represented "the direction in which we (the Commission) thought policy should go".

Mrs Hodge said the report was "a serious contribution to the development of childcare in this country".

She added: "We are doing a lot of what the report is recommending.

"We have already created the largest-ever expansion of childcare. We have created places for over half a million children and the Working Families Tax Credit offers generous support with childcare costs for lower-income families and more than 120,000 families are benefiting from that."

She said £155m of lottery funding was being allocated to pay for 900 neighbourhood nursery centres and out-of-school child care similar to those outlined in the report.

"It is important not to rule anything out prior to a Budget but clearly some of these proposals would be extremely expensive," she warned.

Badly-fitted car safety seats putting children in danger

FOUR out of five child safety seats in cars are incorrectly fitted, putting thousands of youngsters at risk, a new survey reveals.

Half of all parents did not even know if their child seat was the right one for their car, the survey found.

As many as 55 per cent of parents had used second-hand car seats which were "probably completely useless", said *Mother & Baby Magazine* which conducted the survey.

And 90 per cent of parents said they had problems fitting seats. Fewer than six per cent were offered fitting advice by the vendors.

The magazine identified four main car seat problems:

- **Buckle crunching, where the adult seatbelt buckle rests against the frame of the child's car seat and could shatter in an accident**
- **Incorrect routing of the adult seatbelt around the car seat**
- **Loose adult seatbelts allowing the child's car seat to move around too much**
- **Child harnesses within the car seat that are too slack.**

Dani Zur, the magazine's editor, said: "A badly-fitted car seat is as useless as no car seat at all and we are now calling for all shops which sell car seats to offer a proper fitting service."

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Tuesday 30th January 2001
Page Main 4

New blitz on child poverty

By Jonathan Walker
Education Correspondent
jon_walker@mrn.co.uk

A Government campaign to help children born into poverty was expanded across the Midlands yesterday .

Ministers announced they were developing new Sure Start programmes –designed to ensure all children enjoy a good start in life – across the region.

Projects will be set up in Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Newcastle under Lyme, Redditch, Sandwell, Walsall and the Staffordshire Moorlands as part of a £20 million scheme.

They will cover areas not included in existing schemes.

Sure Start schemes bring together social services, education authorities and health trusts to provide a single source of help and advice for mothers and fathers.

They might also run drop-in centres and training programmes on how to be a good parent, and counselling for mothers with post-natal depression.

Sure Start was first unveiled in 1998 and one of the first projects in the country was at Billesley.

Bahvna Sonanki, programme development manager, said: "We have created new services here which never existed before, such as a drop-in centre for parents, and a lot of work supporting teenage mothers-to-be."

Education and Employment Secretary David Blunkett said: "Poverty for the very young can have a lifelong impact – Sure Start is about tackling that head on.

"Without the help Sure Start is providing, the health of many children will suffer and they stand less chance of developing the emotional and social skills needed to reach their full potential."

The announcement came on the day a leading think-tank called for 10,000 new children's centres offering nurseries, playgroups and childminding services across the UK.

The Childcare Commission also said parents should be offered "generous financial support" in the first three years of their child's life, regardless of whether they were going out to work.

This could be done by increasing child benefit for children up to three, a toddler tax credit for the first three years, or a transferable tax allowance.

The commission was set up by children's charity Kids Club Network and chaired by former social security minister Harriet Harman.

Further proposals include tax relief for childcare on the basic rate of up to £2,000 for childcare expenses and tax breaks to encourage employers to help their employees with childcare.

Unveiling the report yesterday, Ms Harman called for childcare to be put on the same footing as investment in public services.

She said parents must be free to stay at home with young children if they chose and should not be pressured into working.

Conservative Edward Leigh, a member of the commission, said the proposals would help strengthen marriage. "The best security for a strong marriage is strong support for parents to be able to look after children in the way that they choose."

> **Without the help Sure Start is providing, the health of many children will suffer**
>
> David Blunkett

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Recent proposals may lead to the Government paying mothers to stay at home and look after their children

Left holding the baby

Proposals by the Childcare Commission look very generous, says **Ros Dodd**

Since her children were born, Margaret Cannon has struggled to make ends meet.

The single mother-of-two firmly believes her place is at home, caring for four-year-old Keller and Harley, who's seven, rather than out at work.

But eschewing a full-time career has meant eking out a meagre living on £100 a month family allowance payments.

Had Margaret been able to collect up to £150 a week for the first three years of her children's lives – one of the proposals included in a major new study unveiled yesterday – life would have been far less difficult.

"I think this is an excellent idea, although I'd like to know why the cut-off point is three years," comments Margaret, from Newtown in Birmingham. "This assumes children are going to go to nursery at that age, which isn't necessarily the case.

"But if this money had been available for me it would have made my life so much easier. Being paid to stay at home would also have taken the pressure off in terms of what other people think of single parents who don't work: it would have made it socially acceptable to stay at home. At the moment we're considered scroungers."

Lucy Thomson, a married mother of 4½-year-old twins Jack and Harry, certainly resents the fact people like Margaret get more financial support from the State than women who choose to stay at home with their youngsters while their husbands go out to work.

"It seems unfair that people like me who want to have a family are penalised for doing so," said Lucy.

"I gave up my job in customer services when I had the twins because it wouldn't have been financially viable for me to pay for childcare. But single parents can get their childcare paid for.

"Now my children are at school I have gone back to work part-time, but the way things stand it's not a feasible option for us to extend our family."

While Lucy welcomes the plans put forward by the Childcare Commission – which also include providing "generous" financial support to parents who *do* choose to work and the setting up thousands of new childcare centres throughout the UK – she doubts whether they will come to fruition.

"I think the workings of the proposals are going to be impossible because they involve so much money."

Dr Ian Procter, a senior lecturer in sociology at Warwick University, is also sceptical.

"Paying mothers to stay at home is actually an old feminist objective from the 1930s and 40s which eventually led to the introduction by the 1945 Government of family allowance, now child benefit.

"But child benefit is hardly a wage for motherhood, whereas £150 a week is enough to deter many women from entering or re-entering the labour market.

"I am absolutely sure that the Treasury will not allow this, not only because of the expense but also because there's a question of quality control. No one checks on whether mothers are looking after their children or not."

> **"I am absolutely sure that the Treasury will not allow this**
>
> Dr Ian Procter

Dr Procter is also doubtful the Government would be keen to see the part-time labour market decimated, which would surely happen if women currently in low-paid jobs decided to switch to being full-time mothers instead.

"I would think £150 a week would be a disincentive to join the labour market and the Treasury wouldn't like that either."

But Norma Maynard, former president of the of Business and Professional Women, Birmingham Club, thinks the Childcare Commission's proposals are "definitely a step in the right direction".

What the plans provide, she stresses, are more choices for mothers – something women have been crying out for all along.

"There are women who would love to stay at home with their children and I'm certain they would go for this.

"But for those mothers who choose to carry on working, giving them more financial support and extending childcare facilities would give them more options. So it's all about choices."

However, Julia Allely, treasurer of the West Midlands Association of Women Solicitors, says women who take a career break may suffer in the long-term.

"It's not just a question of money, it's also a question of your career and how it will affect your long-term promotion."

Up to 10,000 new children's centres, in every area of the UK, would be created under plans put forward by the Childcare Commission, an independent body set up by the national charity Kids Club Network.

The centres would offer nurseries, playgroups, out-of-school clubs and childminder networks as well as childcare information to parents.

Parents would also be offered "generous financial support" in the first three years of their child's life – regardless of whether they were going out to work. Although the report does not recommend an amount to be paid to families, it has has widely been reported as being up to £150 a week.

Options put forward in the year-long study include an increase in child benefit for children up to three, a toddler tax credit for the first three years and a transferable tax allowance during the same period.

The report, which drew upon research with parents, children and employers across the country, proposes that under all the options parents would be free to use the money to pay for childcare or to look after their children themselves.

Further proposals put forward include tax relief for childcare on the basic rate of up to £2,000 for childcare expenses and tax breaks to encourage employers to help their employees with childcare.

Unveiling the report at a press conference in central London, Harriet Harman, chair of the Childcare Commission, called for childcare to be put on the same footing as investment in public services.

"We are quite up front in saying that this needs to move up the agenda of public policy priorities," she said.

"This area needs to take its place as a recognised priority alongside transport, hospitals and schools. It will require new investment and a new focus for public policy."

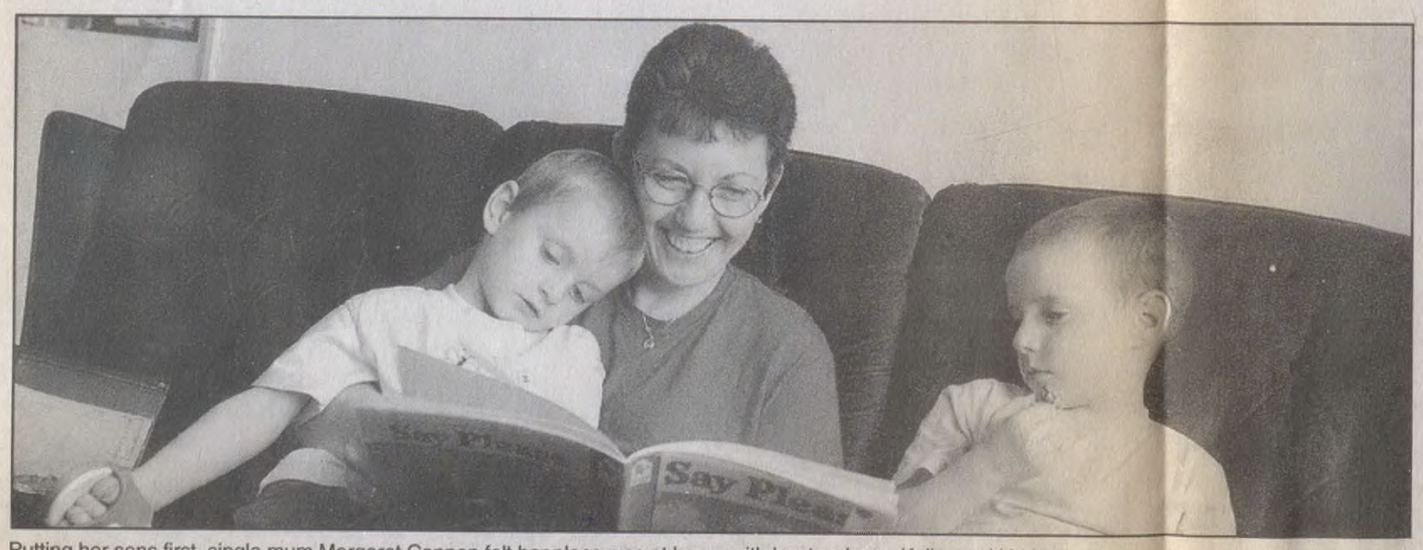
She said the report sought to stress the need for choice for parents in the early years of their children's lives as to whether they chose to go out to work.

"Public debate had been dogged by the same old arguments and the same false divisions. We have sought to throw out the old arguments and look at what the reality is for children today and for families in the future.

"Parents have to be in the driving seat in the very early years. The job of Government is not to make decisions as to how a child aged one or two has to be cared for. The job of public policy is to make sure that parents have a choice."

Margaret Cannon – who worked for 22 years before having children – is determined to remain a non-working mother while her youngsters need her around, whether or not she gets any more state assistance.

"What a lot of people forget is that I am raising the next generation – the generation which will be the doctors and nurses looking after our generation when we're in our bath-chairs."



Putting her sons first, single mum Margaret Cannon felt her place was at home with her two boys, Keller and Harley

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Proposals for thousands of new childcare centres along with cash boosts for working and non-working parents have been unveiled.

Up to 10,000 new children's centres in every area of the UK would be created under plans put forward by the Childcare Commission.

The centres would offer nurseries, playgroups, out-of-school clubs and childminder networks as well as childcare information to parents.

Parents would also be offered "generous financial support" in the first three years of their child's life, regardless of whether they were going out to work.

Options put forward in the year-long study include an increase in child benefit for children up to three, a toddler tax credit for the first three years and a transferable tax allowance during the same period.

The report, which drew upon research with parents, children and employers across the country, proposes that, under all the options, parents would be free to use the money to pay for childcare or to look after their children themselves.

Further proposals put forward include tax relief for childcare on the basic rate of up to £2,000 for childcare expenses and tax breaks to encourage employers to help their employees with childcare.

Unveiling the report at a press conference in central London, Harriet Harman, chair of the Childcare Commission, called for childcare to be put on the same footing as investment in public services.

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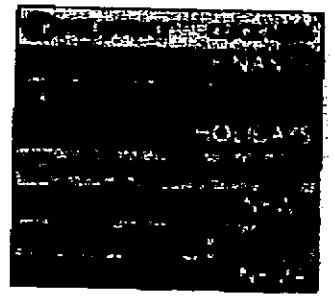

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UK

Childcare Centres And Cash Help Proposed For Parents

From Ananova
Monday January 29, 2001 1:37 pm

Proposals for thousands of new childcare centres along with cash boosts for working and non-working parents have been unveiled.

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Unveiling the report at a press conference in central London, Harriet

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Childcare Centres And Cash Help Proposed For Parents

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Childcare Centres And Cash Help Proposed For Parents

Last updated: 1:37 pm

From Ananova

Harman, chair of the Childcare Commission, called for childcare to be put on the same footing as investment in public services.

She said: "We are quite up front in saying that this needs to move up the agenda of public policy priorities.

"This area needs to take its place as a recognised priority alongside transport, hospitals and schools. It will require new investment and a new focus for public policy."

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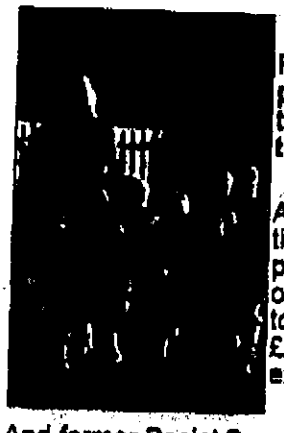
SUPPORT FOR MUMS' STAY AT HOME PAYMENTS

January 29th



Proposals thought to support payments of up to £150 a week to mothers who stay at home are to be unveiled on Monday.

A year-long study into childcare in the UK is likely to back "generous" payments for the first three years of a child's life. It is also expected to propose tax relief on up to £2,000 worth of childcare expenses a year.

And former Social Security Harriet Harman, who heads the Childcare Commission, will argue for a children's centre in every area of the country, after school clubs and childminders' networks.

The Mothers' Union welcomed the reccomendations as "a good start", but warned there was much to be done to bring childcare in Britain up to scratch.

'Choice'

A commission spokeswoman said the report had drawn on surveys of parents, employers and children.

She said: "As well as excellent nurseries and childminders, many parents want more choice to care for their own children in their early years.

"Providing financial support for this is the only way to extend this choice to many parents."

She said that the report - which backs up the National Childcare Strategy - did not recommend an amount to be paid to families.

'Difficulties'

The commission is likely to stop short of demanding that employers are made responsible for providing childcare or paying for it.

But it is thought they will call for the creation of a new Government department of Work and Family Services.

Ms Harman said: "We have identified the difficulties that real families face and provided the solutions.

"We have looked across the issues of caring for children at home or in formal childcare and, for the first time, brought them together in a whole radical new union."

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The commission's findings will be made public the day after the Child Poverty Action Group revealed that more than a million families are eligible for Children's Tax Credit, but have failed to apply for it.

The credit comes into effect in April and will be worth £442 to families with children under 16.

'Poverty trap'

A spokeswoman for the Mothers' Union said it welcomed the idea of pay for parents to stay at home with children.

She said: "We are committed to a genuine choice for parents about whether they stay at home or whether they go back to work."

"We see it as providing a route out of the poverty trap for children in the poorest families. Ideally it would mean one parent could stay at home to give them the support they need in their early stages."

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Monday, 29 January, 2001, 08:52 GMT

Maternity pay scheme outlined

Mothers will be offered better maternity rights

Stay-at-home mothers should be paid up to £150 a week, a report suggests.

The Childcare Commission's report, to be published on Monday morning, will suggest that the money should be paid to women with children up to three years old.

The independent commission, chaired by former social security secretary, Harriet Harman, will say the money should allow young mothers to stay at home or pay for

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proper childcare provision.

It also wants to see childrens' centres in every community offering childcare and support for young families.

The commission is also likely to ask for tax relief to offset the cost of childcare, the so-called 'toddler tax'.

The report has been immediately criticised by the government which says many of its provisions are expensive and unrealistic.

Harriet Harman: Chair of the commission

The government estimates the proposals to pay mothers up to £150 a week could cost between £500m and £7bn a year.

Tax relief for childcare would also add hundreds of millions of pounds to the bill, treasury sources have told the BBC.

However, the report has been welcomed by Maternity Alliance, the pressure group which campaigns for more rights for young parents.

Its director, Christine Gowdridge, told BBC Radio 4's Today programme that implementing the

This ought to be the happiest times of a young couple's life; the reality is that it

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implementing the report would cost "peanuts" in comparison with the present financial costs borne by the 700,000 couples who become new parents every year.

is a real struggle

Christine Gowdridge Director, Maternity Alliance

"At present women are returning to work before they want to because they can't afford to stay off work.

"They are not even using the maternity leave that they got because their income plummets to such a low level.

"This ought to be the happiest times of a young couple's life; the reality is that it is a real struggle.

"It is a completely mad system of maternity leave we have at the moment."

She said the Maternity Alliance would also support statutory provisions that would allow women to go back to work part-time after having a child.

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Sunday 28th January 2001
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Hinduja face in crowd at Vaz wedding

EXCLUSIVE

LOOK who came to the wedding... yet another close link between Europe Minister Keith Vaz and the Hinduja brothers is revealed in this wedding-day picture taken in the House of Commons.

It shows Gopichand Hinduja (ringed) among guests at the 1993 ceremony when Mr Vaz married wife Maria.

With Mr Vaz in the front row are Labour MPs Harriet Harman and Diane Abbott, and the former Tory MP Steven Norris.

Mr Vaz, who has refused to answer questions about his role in the passport controversy until after the official inquiry, was last night forced to admit that he had written a job reference for the son of an influential Asian – after initially claiming he had never met him.

The MP used Commons notepaper for the letter which suggested that he had known Varun Shingari well for five years. Last night a spokesman for Mr Vaz said that he had not initially remembered Mr Shingari. But he later admitted writing a reference for him in glowing terms.

FRIENDS INDEED: Keith Vaz beams happily alongside new bride Maria as (second left to right) MPs Steven Norris, Diane Abbott and Harriet Harman join in the celebrations

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FIRST PERSON

NIGEL FARNDALE

It irks me to see people on the Underground reading fashionable books. The other day I saw a woman engrossed in a new edition of *2001: A Space Odyssey*. What a goody-goody, I thought. What a conformist. I bet she read *1984* in 1984, too, stuck to the set books for A-level English, and bought a copy of *Pride and Prejudice* when the BBC screened its adaptation of it.

There's something indecent about buying a book while it's still in the bestseller list. It's like buying a record that's in the charts. When a song I like gets to Number One I feel mortified. 'That's it,' I think, 'I share the same taste as the cave-dwellers who go in for floral tributes, appear on *Jim Davidson's Generation Game* and think a paediatrician is a paedophile. I might as well kill myself now.' I still feel sick at the memory of Ravel – until then my favourite composer – reaching Number One with 'Bolero'.

'Imagine how entertaining it would be if the tradition of duelling were reintroduced to British politics'

I suppose the book thing could be envy on my part. If I were as well-organised as that woman on the Tube, I'd probably be reading Arthur C Clarke as well. Instead, I've just started *Servants of the People: the Inside Story of New Labour* by Andrew Rawnsley, five months after everyone else read it. I'm finding it a page-turner so far, a feud a minute: Gordon Brown versus Tony Blair; Peter Mandelson versus John Prescott; Charlie Whelan versus, well, Blair, Mandelson and Prescott. But the clash of egos between Harriet Harman ('... she was being embalmed prior to burial') and Frank Field ('... always going to be the casualty in a full-frontal war') is the most gripping. Children in playgrounds conduct themselves with more maturity. If you have ever wondered why politicians are held in contempt, read this book.

FEW POLITICAL SKETCHWRITERS CAN RESIST THE CLICHÉ THAT politics is war by other means. Politicians do not disagree, they 'do battle' or are 'at daggers drawn'. They do not say, 'Don't question my leadership,' they say, 'Get your tanks off my lawn.' Rawnsley is no exception. 'Blair would rather take a prisoner,' he writes. 'Brown would leave a corpse.' My favourite is: 'Brown told a pole-axed Eddie George.' Poor Eddie George, naughty Gordon Brown with his pole-axe. This manly language merely reminds the reader how soft politicians today really are. In the 19th century when two statesmen disagreed they would challenge each other to a duel. In 1809, for instance, Viscount Castlereagh, the Secretary for War, asked George Canning, the Foreign Secretary, to 'step outside and say that'. They met at dawn on Putney Heath and shot at each other with pistols. Each missed his first shot, but at the second Canning was wounded in the thigh, while Castlereagh was winded by a bullet that ricocheted off one of his coat-buttons. Honour served, they shook hands and limped away.

Years later, Castlereagh was blackmailed, following a financial scandal, and slit his own throat with a penknife. Not only did 'the people' not bother with floral tributes, they booed his coffin as it was borne on a gun carriage to Westminster Abbey. Canning, it is said, was among them. How hard is that?

What makes the Canning-Castlereagh feud even more impressive is that no one is sure how it started. One theory is that Canning was enraged to discover that troops he had dispatched to Portugal had been diverted to Holland by Castlereagh. A furious Canning told the Prime Minister that either Castlereagh must be sacked or he would resign. But, unknown to Canning, the PM lacked the moral courage to have a quiet word with Castlereagh, so for five months Canning and Castlereagh continued spinning and counter-spinning against each other. Eventually there was a leak, Castlereagh found out about Canning's ultimatum, and a challenge was issued. It can only be a matter of time before modern historians come up with a more convincing theory: Castlereagh spilt Canning's pint, at which point Canning called Castlereagh's girlfriend a slag. Something like that.

THE ONLY PERSON I'VE MET WHO FOUGHT A DUEL IS LORD Weidenfeld, the 81-year-old publisher. It was in 1938, while he was a student in Vienna, just before the *Anschluss*. As was the protocol in the Zionist fraternity of which he was a member, he approached a Nazi student and told him his shoelaces were undone. The Nazi, whose shoelaces were not undone, accused Weidenfeld of impertinence but refused to give satisfaction to a non-Aryan. Weidenfeld later sought out the Nazi while he was dining in public and called him a coward. The duel took place, Weidenfeld sustained a few minor cuts, and, more importantly, he established his credentials as a gentleman.

As Weidenfeld told me this story, I found myself wishing that the tradition of duelling could be reintroduced to British politics. Imagine how entertaining it would be if, instead of having a televised debate before the next election, William Hague and Tony Blair had a televised fist fight. All the members of the cabinet and shadow cabinet could form a circle and chant, 'Scrap! Scrap!' Hague would have the advantage with his judo moves, but Blair would be good at ducking and diving, and it would soon descend into a free-for-all. Ann Weirdicombe would be useful with her bare knuckles. Mandelson and Portillo would pull each other's hair. Prescott would roll with the punches. But if Alastair Campbell, the real deputy prime minister, piled in, it would all be over in seconds. He once decked a man for making mock of Robert Maxwell. Think what reserves of aggression he could call upon in defence of Tony Blair. ■

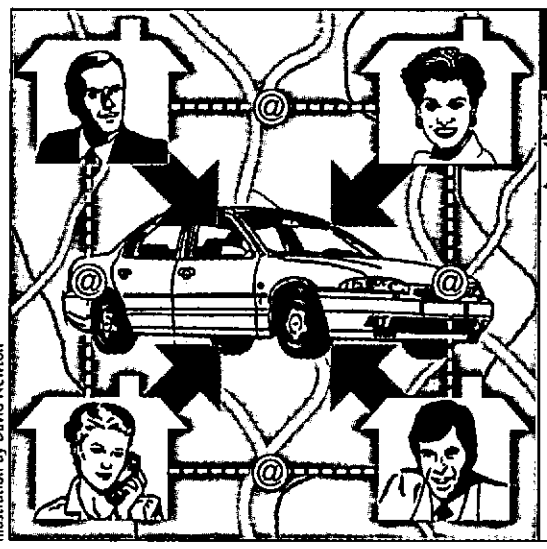

Illustration by David Newton

PATENT PLACE

CAR-SHARING BY INTERNET
PATENT NO GB2341708

There was a time when the slogan 'let the train take the strain' was not a bad joke. But now the rail network is in crisis and the car is a more reliable option. It's an environmentalist's nightmare, though: queues of cars pouring out fumes, each car carrying just one person. The time has come for journey-sharing. IBM has developed internet software which enables a company to put up a map of its surrounding area on its server. Employees can click on the route they wish to take. If the route matches that of other employees, they can agree on a driving rota. It's like going back to school. TA

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Parents 'should be paid to look after children'

By Elizabeth Judge

WORKING parents should receive up to £2,000 tax relief for the cost of childcare, according to an independent report on the future of family life.

Those who choose not to work could be paid by the State to stay at home and look after a child for its first three years. The measures were included in a report published by the Childcare Commission yesterday. The report, *Looking to the Future for Children and Families*, calls for policymakers to recognise the validity of all family lifestyles and to give parents the freedom to decide how their child is cared for by offering them more generous financial support.

Harriet Harman, chairman of the commission and a former Social Security Secretary, said: "Parents have to be in the driving seat in the very early years. The job of government is not to make decisions as about how a child aged one or two has to be cared for. The job of public policy is to make sure that parents have a choice."

The report says that tax relief would help middle-income parents who earned too much to be eligible for the working families tax credit but spent large amounts on childcare.

The document calls for more generous financial support for parents during a child's first three years, whether parents are working or not. Measures include paying mothers to stay at home and look after their children by means of a "toddler tax credit". The credit could also be used to pay grandparents or other relatives to look after children.

Another option would be a transferable tax allowance available to those families where one partner worked and paid tax and the other stayed at home. The commission also proposed the creation of children's centres in every community. The centres, funded by local authority and local businesses, would house nurseries and playgroups.

A new government department responsible for all work and family policies is also recommended in the report.

David Willetts, the Shadow Social Security Secretary, criticised the report and compared it to a "menu without prices".

The commission admitted that there would be a "call on the public purse" but said that it was a consequence of placing more importance on the family and childcare.

Parent groups welcomed the plans. Kate Green, director of One Parent Family, said: "These proposals could finally offer proper support to lone parents who are prevented from working by the dearth and cost of childcare and to those who in their best judgment feel they must be at home with an infant."

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Commission calls for children's centres for every area ● Family campaigners welcome proposals ● Employers fear costs

Pay new parents to stay at home — Harman

Sarah Hall
Political correspondent

Pressure for parents to be paid to stay at home with their young children intensified last night after a new report called for "generous financial support" to be offered to those who do for the first three years of their child's life.

The independent childcare commission — set up to advise the government — suggested that increased child benefit or a "toddler tax credit" should be offered to all but the highest earners to enable them to pay for childcare, or to ensure they could afford to stay at home. The report is being scrutinised by the Treasury.

While the commission — chaired by the former social security secretary, Harriet Harman — failed to come up with a recommended figure, family groups believe it should be at least £150, nearly half women's average weekly income of £337. The move would cost the Treasury around £3bn a year, but advocates argue that the cost is justified if childcare is recognised as a crucial area of public funding, alongside transport, hospitals and schools.

The proposals were welcomed by the government, but described by the employment minister, Margaret Hodge, and Treasury officials as "extremely expensive".

The report also called for a children's centre, providing high quality nursery and after-school care, to be set up in every area. Only 2,000 such centres exist and increasing the number to the required 10,000 would cost up to £8bn, says the Treasury.

Parents, who on average spend £5,000 a year on childcare, should also be helped by being granted tax relief to the basic rate on up to £2,000 of childcare expenses per year, it says — a move that would cost an extra £1bn a year.

Employers should be offered tax breaks to encourage, rather than deter, them from improving childcare provision. They should also do more to improve flexibility for parents.

But the commission stopped short of calling for legislation to make employers responsible for the provision or payment of childcare, and failed to suggest parents who remain at home for three years should have their jobs kept open.

The commission, whose 12-month research covered parents, children and employers across the country, also proposes a government department of work and family services to drive through childcare policy. The move, which would ensure childcare was no longer handled in a piecemeal way by different departments, would signal the government's commitment to solving a problem affecting at least 6m mothers.

Last night Ms Harman stressed: "This needs to move up the agenda of public policy and needs to be recognised as a priority alongside transport and schools. Children are not a lifestyle choice — they are the future of this country. We depend on them."

Family groups also welcomed the study. The Maternity Alliance, which campaigns for young parents' rights, said that implementing the report would cost peanuts in comparison with the costs borne by 700,000 couples who become new parents each year. "At present, women are returning to work before they want to because they can't afford not to," said its director, Christine Gowdridge.

The Tories also backed the recommendations, with the shadow social security secretary, David Willetts, claiming they revealed a welcome shift away from penalising mothers who stay at home.

"No one's saying women must stay at home, but this shows a neutrality," he said. "This government has constructed a set of pressures in the tax and benefits system to favour parents to go out to work, but if you're at home you need assistance and support as well and this recognises that."

But the report drew criticism from some employers, who feared its recommendations would be too costly.

"This will fall on taxpayers whether they are individuals or businesses," said Ruth Lea, of the Institute of Directors. "I think there could be some resentment because they will be saying to themselves, 'I will be financing someone else's lifestyle choice'."

Margaret Hodge described the report as "a serious contribution to the development of childcare in this country".

She said: "We are doing a lot of what the report is recommending. We have already created the largest ever expansion of childcare, we have created places for over half a million children and the working families tax credit offers generous support with childcare costs for lower income families.

"It is important not to rule anything out prior to a budget, but clearly some of these proposals would be extremely expensive."

Harriet Harman announcing the commission's recommendations yesterday. She wants childcare to be treated as a public priority alongside education and transport Photograph: Martin Argles

New deal for young: the main points

- A children's centre should be set up in every area to provide high-quality nursery and after school care. With one centre catering for two to three schools, up to 10,000 should be built. Would be funded by a combination of state and parental support
- Parents and other relatives should be offered "generous financial support for family care" for the first three years of the child's life. The money would be spent on childcare — either formal care, a nursery or childminder; or family care — parents or other relatives.

  Different options are mooted: an increase in child benefit for children up to three; a toddler tax credit for the first three years — available to all but those on the top rate of tax; or transferable tax allowance — available when one parent works and pays tax and the other stays at home — for the first three years
- Tax relief for childcare on the basic rate of up to £2,000 of childcare expenses per year
- Increased flexibility and a change in the tax system to encourage family friendly employment patterns at work
- A new government department of work and family services, which would be responsible for policy on childcare

Parents should be offered 'generous support' for family care

A man prays at a funeral pyre in Ahmedabad after his family was killed in the earthquake that has devastated Gujarat state in India. The death toll so far is estimated at 20,000 Photograph: Sebastian D'Souza

After the devastation, the miracle of a baby saved from a concrete tomb

Luke Harding in Ahmedabad

Rescuers pulled an eight-month-old baby from the lap of his dead mother yesterday, more than 72 hours after they were buried alive under rubble by the earthquake which has devastated Gujarat state.

With estimates of the death toll now exceeding 20,000, the fear of more earthquakes has intensified and spread across India. In Bangalore, the hi-tech capital of the southern state of Karnataka, an aftershock of 4.4 on the Richter scale shortly after 8am yesterday sent office workers spilling out into the streets in panic; they stayed out all day.

The rescue of the baby boy was one of warmth of the mother's body and the protection it offered that helped the baby survive during nights when temperatures dropped to 6C (44F)

In Bhachau, a town east of Bhuj, a seven-month-old girl was rescued from the rubble of her home, and hours later was being passed around the arms of her joyous mother and relatives.

But such rescues were the exception as time ran out for those pinioned under collapsed concrete walls and tangled girders.

Even in Ahmedabad, which fared much better than Bhuj and Kutch, the district flattened by the earthquake, the rescue operation has been erratic and slow.

Across the city where 40 buildings collapsed last Friday, killing 500, more bodies were still being dug out.

impact only to die entombed on Friday and Saturday, while the authorities dawdled.

The living, meanwhile, are already making the best of things. Looting has begun. In Bhachau, the town worst affected by the earthquake, survivors have started combing through the market, removing — among other things — odd shoes. Since almost everyone died here, there is no one around to complain.

Shattered

In Bhuj, 188 prisoners have escaped from the shattered jail. And in Ahmedabad, householders were yesterday busy retrieving jewellery and other valuables from teeteringly unsafe buildings.

"There is a psychological panic," MH Hakwana, director of VS Hospital, said,

hampering search efforts. Rescuers lacked cranes, bulldozers and generators for lights. Soldiers were beginning searches at first light and stopping at sunset.

"They work from 10am to 6pm only. This is emergency duty. They should work round the clock," said Pradeep Sheth, 46, who was rescued from under the rubble after seven hours.

Mr Sheth, whose wife, mother and two daughters were still trapped in the debris, wondered how soldiers would clear the rubble. "There are live people trapped inside. We can hear their sounds," he said.

Jayesh Shah, a teacher, arrived at the hospital in Ahmedabad with his badly injured wife Deepti after a 10-hour bus journey from Bhuj. "My son and I managed to get out of the house. But my wife was next door. She jumped out of the first floor. She was OK — but then a big stone hit her on the head. Blood keeps coming from her ears," he said.

As dusk fell yesterday, members of the Ashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, a rightwing Hindu group, were doling out puris and potato curry to the injured who were camped outside the hospital.

Nearby, a group of Muslims were praying to Mecca on a white sheet. Others were rolling out bedsheets. This part of India is still not yet ready to go indoors.

Latest on the earthquake on the Guardian network at www.guardianunlimited.co.uk/naturaldisasters

Tragedy of UK doctor who died

In the early hours of yesterday, Ashok Nathwani (above) should have been getting on a flight back to the UK. A senior paediatrician from Hampshire, he had decided to pop in on relatives in Ahmedabad on his way back from a lecture tour through India. He was only going to stay one night.

But after breakfast the following morning, as he sat on a bed in the third floor of Akshardeep apartments, the ground started to heave. Dr Nathwani rushed to the door. He did not make it. "A beam fell on his head. It was an instant death," his brother-in-law Narendra Mirani said yesterday.

And yet the earthquake that ripped through the four-storey apartment block last Friday spared everyone else in the flat. Its haphazard impact flung Hardik, a 15-year-old relative who had been sitting next to Dr Nathwani, through the window and into a tree. Another relative, Pallavi, was having a bath when the tremors began. She plunged three storeys, but was rescued.

Dr Nathwani's host, Kishor, also survived. "He was in the lobby talking to neighbours. He ran towards the staircase. The staircase with everyone on it totally collapsed. Though the debris fell on him, he was visible so they pulled him out," Mr Mirani said.

Not everyone in the building was so fortunate. Four people, including Dr Nathwani, died. Yesterday rescuers were still trying to dig one 16-year-old boy out from what used to be the parking bay. They know he is in there because one of his friends bumped into him as they fled in different directions.

A Swiss rescue team that arrived over the weekend spent the morning combing the rubble with labrador sniffer dogs but found no sign of life.

Last night Dr Nathwani's widow, Chhaya, flew to India with their two children, Ketul, 16, and Vivek, seven, from their home in Fareham.

Luke Harding

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Mothers at home 'need £150 wage'

BY WENDY VUKOSA

MOTHERS should be paid to stay at home and look after their children for the first three years of their lives, a childcare group urged yesterday.

The Childcare Commission called for 'generous financial support' for new parents and up to 10,000 children's centres to be built throughout the UK.

The commission, chaired by former Social Security Secretary Harriet Harman, did not put a figure on how much mothers should be paid to stay at home but other children's groups hope it could be as much as £150 a week.

The money would be used to cover childcare costs if mothers wanted to work or to help those who wanted to give up their jobs and stay at home to look after children. Other options put forward by the commission in its report include a 'toddler tax credit' for parents of children under three, an increase in child benefit, tax relief for childcare and tax breaks for employers to help staff look after their children.

Ms Harman admitted the proposals had not been costed but said childcare should be recognised as an essential area for public funding.

Although the Government welcomed the study, there are fears its provisions are too expensive and unrealistic. Whitehall estimates that paying out £150 a week could cost £7billion a year, while tax relief on childcare would add hundreds of millions to the bill.

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Pay new mothers for three years, urges Harman

BY NICOLE MARTIN

NEW mothers could be entitled to a state income for three years and tax relief on child-care costs under proposals in a document on family life published yesterday.

Harriet Harman, the former social security secretary, said the Child Care Commission's report recommending large cash boosts for working and non-working parents was designed to push the needs of families up the political agenda.

She wanted to extend the choice for new parents torn between having to return to work for financial reasons and wanting to care for their children.

Among the proposals is tax relief on the basic rate of up to £2,000 of child-care expenses for families on all incomes, worth around £440 a year.

However, some experts attacked the report as "too expensive and unrealistic" and said the proposals would create resentment among childless workers.

Miss Harman, the commission's chairman, refused to discuss how the proposals would be funded or to estimate the cost. But she said the child-care package was designed to "put parents in the driving seat".

"This area needs to take its place as a recognised priority alongside transport, hospitals and schools. It will require new investment and a new focus for public policy," she said.

Other proposals in the year-long independent study were plans to create up to 10,000 children's centres responsible for child-care provision, after-school clubs and child minders' networks.

A new government department of Work and Family Services should also be set up to create an integrated child-care system.

Under the plans, parents would also be given "generous financial support" in the first three years of their children's lives, including an increase in child benefit, a transferable tax allowance and an infant's tax credit.

The report received a cautious welcome from David Willetts, the shadow social security secretary, who praised Miss Harman for recognising that many parents wanted to stay at home. But he added: "This is one of those menus without prices. The total cost is simply unaffordable."

Mary MacLeod, the chief executive of the National Family and Parenting Institute, urged the Government and businesses to take action to improve the help for parents with children.

"Investment in child care affects every aspect of society — the economy, health, education, culture and relationships," she said. "The report underlines that action is needed now if we are to make things better for parents."

A Treasury spokesman said the Government would consider the report's proposals.

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Sir Hugh Park

High Court judge who jailed Britain's biggest LSD ring

SIR HUGH PARK, who has died aged 90, was a Judge of the Family Division of the High Court from 1965 until 1973, and of the Queen's Bench Division from 1973 until 1985; he was scrupulously fair and sympathetic, but did not shrink from passing long sentences.

During his 20 years on the bench, Park's most widely reported case was the LSD trial at Bristol Crown Court in 1978 following "Operation Julie".

The 15 defendants included two highly qualified chemists, two doctors of medicine, a teacher, and the American author David Solomon — a friend of the drugs guru Timothy Leary and himself a walking encyclopaedia of drugs culture. Park jailed them for a total of 120 years for their part in one of the biggest LSD rings ever uncovered in the world.

The defendants had been caught after a lengthy operation that involved police officers — one of them named Julie — posing as hippies in the Welsh hills and London council estates. They eventually located two large "acid" factories, in the cellar of a mansion in North Wales and in a house in Hampton Wick.

Several of the conspirators were reputed to have made more than £1 million each — they jested to detectives that their acumen merited a Queen's Award for Exports — but not all were motivated by profit. One, a research chemist, had become convinced that LSD could "liberate" people's minds and assist harmonious social relationships.

He told detectives: "I have turned on a lot of people and got a lot of people high. I'd do it all over again." Park sentenced the man to 15 years in prison.

He commended the police for their detective work, and for their intelligent handling of those they apprehended. "If we had to be busted," one member of the gang had said, "we could not have been busted by nicer people."

Hugh Eames Park was born on April 24 1910 near Exeter, where his father worked as a shipping agent. He went to Blundell's and Sidney Sussex, Cambridge, where he read Law. An athletic young man, he excelled at hockey, rugby and rowing.

After Cambridge, Park taught at St Dunstan's prep school in Burnham-on-Sea, Somerset, before reading for the Bar. He was called by Middle Temple in 1936, and began practising in general common law on the Western Circuit from chambers in the Temple.

During the Second World War, Park served in the RAF. In 1942 he was seconded to SOE, serving under Colonel John Senter at its headquarters in Baker Street, London. His duties included debriefing agents after they returned from France. Among these was Odette Hallowes GC, then Odette Sansom. After the war, Park acted for her in her divorce so that she could marry Peter Churchill, a fellow SOE agent.

On demobilisation, Park joined a new set of chambers at 4 Pump Court, and built a busy and varied practice. He was a persuasive jury advocate, and a fine and incisive cross-examiner. Before long he was being instructed in almost all of the big cases in Devon and Cornwall.

These included the Giffard trial in the early 1950s, which concerned a man who had murdered his wealthy parents in their kitchen, placed their bodies in a wheelbarrow, wheeled them to the cliff edge, and tipped them down into the sea. The man was sentenced to hang, despite a plea by the defence that he was insane.

Park took Silk in 1960. He served as Recorder of Penzance, 1959-1960; of Exeter, 1960-64; and of Southampton, 1964-65, before being appointed to the High Court bench. In addition, he was a Judge of the Courts of Appeal, Channel Islands, 1964-65; chairman of Devon Quarter Sessions, 1964-71; and Presiding Judge on the Western Circuit from 1970 until 1975.

Three years after the Operation Julie case, Park presided at the trial of Fowzi Nejad, the sole terrorist survivor of the Iranian Embassy siege. The man had tricked his way out of the building when the SAS stormed it by pretending to be a hostage. Park told the man that he had taken part in an "outrageous criminal enterprise" causing "unspeakable terror, anguish and distress".

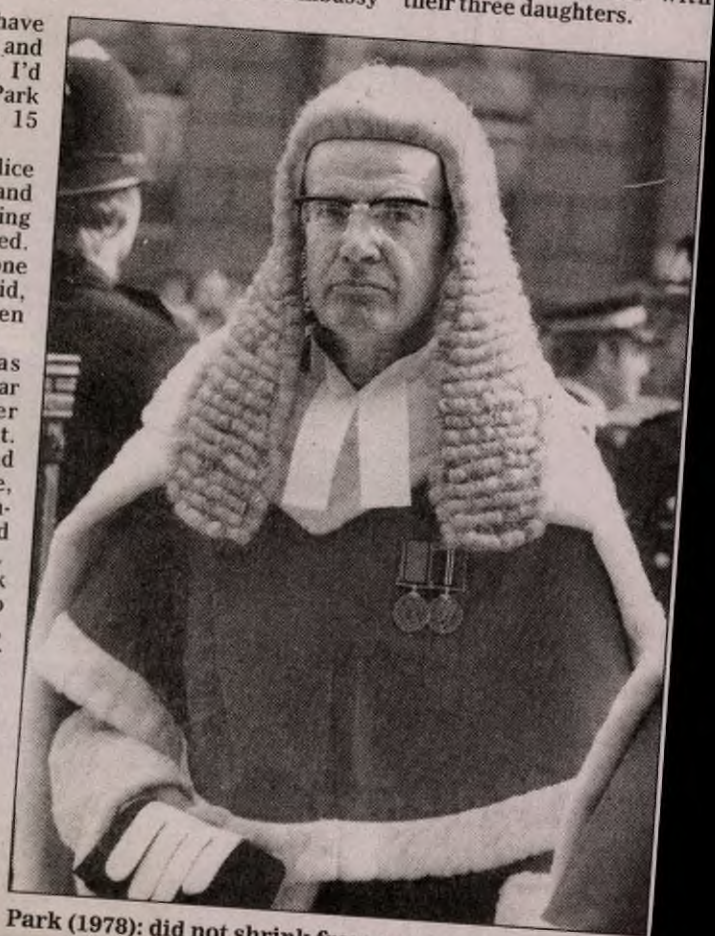
In 1981 in the High Court, Park found Harriet Harman, then legal officer at the National Council for Civil Liberties, guilty of contempt of court. Miss Harman had let a journalist see documents which had been disclosed to her for use in a court action, and Park held that she was under an obligation not to let them be used for any other purpose. His decision was upheld by the Court of Appeal.

On circuit, Park presided in cases involving a wide spectrum of violent crime. In 1977 at Nottingham he jailed a 52-year-old man for eight years for a "Dracula-like" sexual attack on a housewife. The man was identified by the teeth marks he left on his victim's bottom.

Hugh Park was a charming, tremendously kind man, who tended to address all men as "Boy", whatever their age. He divided his time between Hampstead and his cottage in Cornwall, where he would spend his days fishing for mackerel and lobster in his small boat. This he continued well into his eighties.

He was knighted in 1965.

He married, in 1938, Beryl Josephine Coombe; she survives him, together with their three daughters.



Park (1978): did not shrink from passing long sentences

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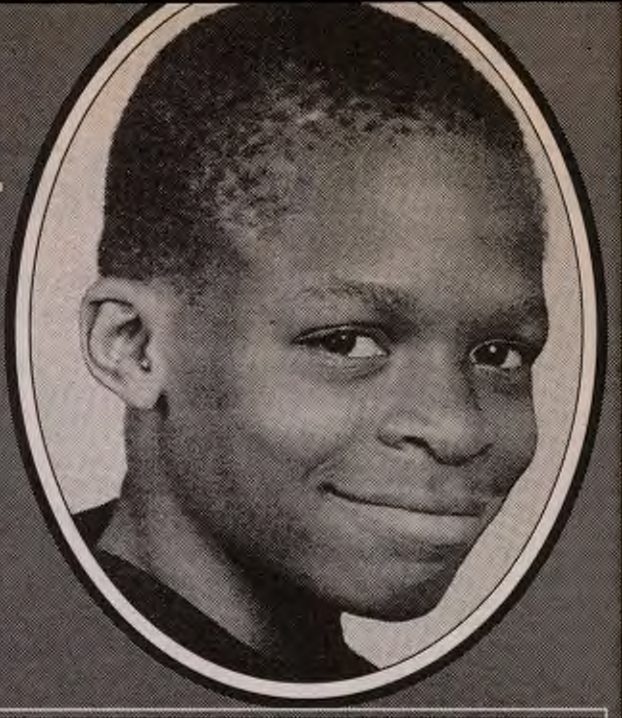
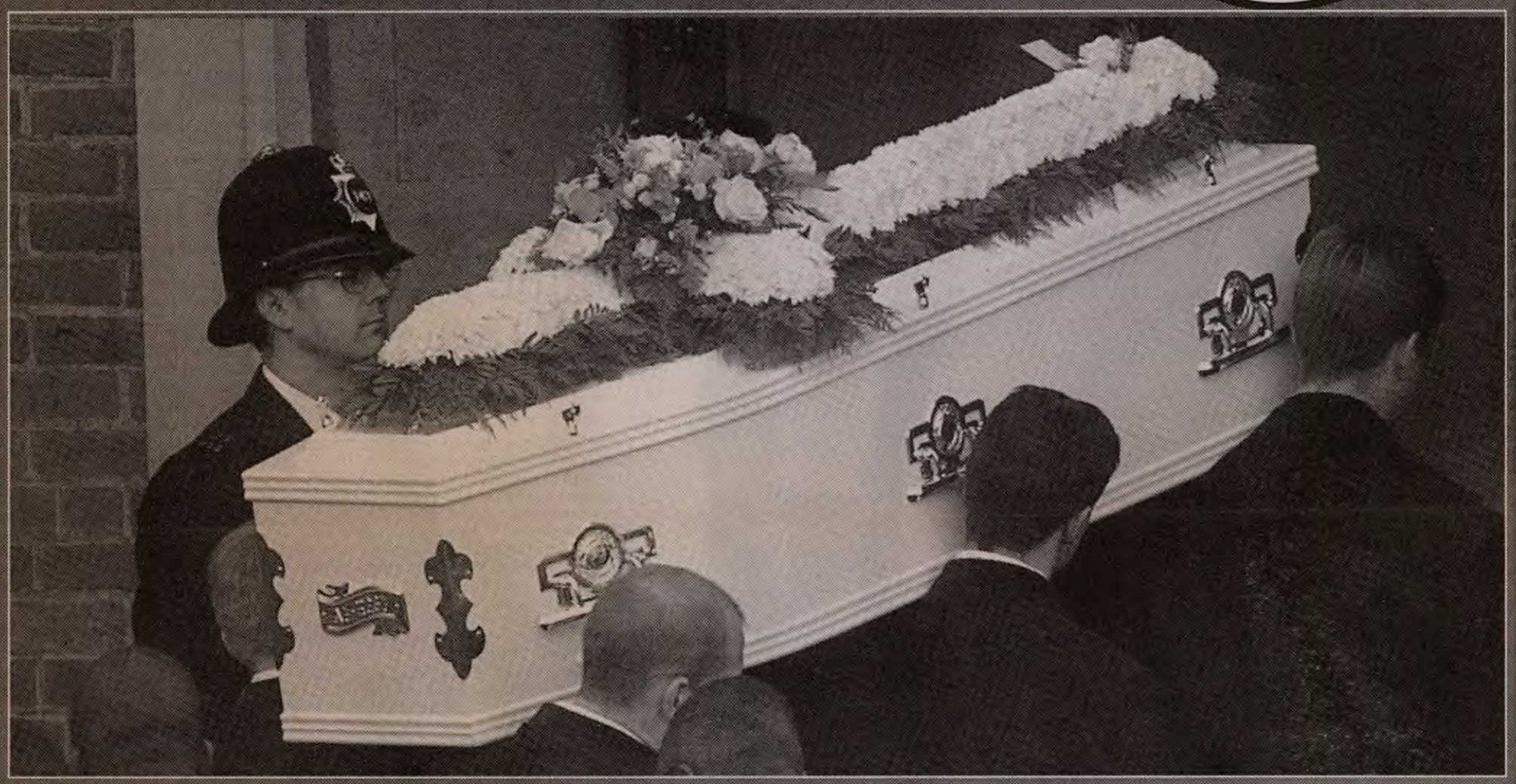
White coffin and cross of flowers for Damilola





Few sadder sights: the small coffin of 10-year-old Damilola Taylor, above, is carried into All Saints Church, Plumstead for his service Picture: CAVAN PAWSON

by VALENTINE LOW

THERE are few sadder sights than a small, child-sized coffin. It was a small, white coffin that bore Damilola Taylor's body today, topped with a cross of white flowers and carried by six pallbearers.

They probably didn't need six of them to carry Damilola, just a slip of a 10-year-old lad, but that is the way these things are done properly, and however short his life Damilola always deserved a proper funeral.

Indeed, few boys get to be accorded such a send-off. The Nigerian High Commissioner, Prince Bola Ajibola, was there to give a message, as was the Home Office Minister Paul Boateng, local MP Harriet Harman and footballer John Fashanu.

The turnout at All Saints Church in Plumstead underlined how Damilola — who was stabbed to death on a North Peckham estate on his way home after an after-school computer class — has now become a national symbol representing for many so much of what has gone wrong with society.

As former Wimbledon player Fashanu explained, it was important for Damilola's parents, Richard and Gloria, that as many of their fellow Nigerians turned out for the service as possible.

He said: "It is very sad. I don't think any parents expect to see their children buried before them. It's even harder under these circumstances. The father, Richard Taylor, has asked that as many Nigerian people as possible come here today to mourn with the family."

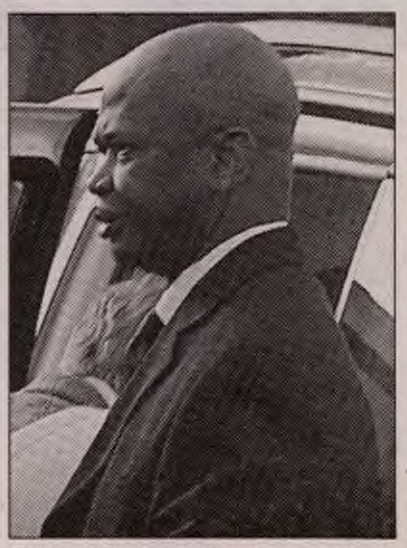
Parent's grief: Damilola's mother Gloria follows the cortege today

> 'I don't think any parents expect to see their child buried before them, and it's even harder under these circumstances'
>
> — *John Fashanu*

Even with the press outside, it was a very public funeral. The burial itself was in contrast a poignantly private affair with not even Damilola's parents present. Pastor Matthew Ashimolowo, of Kingsway International Christian Centre, who conducted the service with the Taylor family's own pastor Olukayode Owalabi, said it was because the Yoruba tribe placed a strong emphasis on the parents dying naturally for their children.

He said: "The early and unnatural death of a child is the worst thing that can happen to a Yoruba parent and it's considered a taboo in Yoruba culture for a parent to be at the graveside.

"Normally funeral services celebrate a person's life but when it is a young person who has died that is not possible. We believe that it is not good for parents to ever see the body of their dead child or even to get too close at the time of the burial."



Richard Taylor today: he and his wife were not at their son's burial

The Taylors decided that Damilola should be buried in Britain as a reminder of the tragedy.

"They did not want what happened to be forgotten," a family spokesman said. "They want his death to remain a constant reminder of what is happening not only within the black community but in Britain as a whole.

"It is a crime which has affected so many people — they do not want to see it swept under the carpet. They hope others in the community will take steps to ensure something like this does not happen again."

Few people, it seems, would ever want to forget Damilola. Outside the church there was a growing pile of floral tributes, including one from singer Patti Boulaye and another one which read "Rest in peace little angel — you will be sadly missed".

Not forgotten then, but neither has his murder been solved — a fact which must have been at the back of the minds of all the dozens of police officers around the church and, above all, Deputy Assistant Commissioner Bill Griffiths of the Metropolitan Police, who attended the service.

So far 15 people have been arrested in connection with Damilola's death last November, including one 39-year-old woman, but no one has been charged.

Ministers look for hunting ban escape

HUNTING supporters began the fightback today after the Commons last night voted overwhelmingly in favour of an outright ban.

The Government is braced for a bitter battle in the Lords against a background of protests. An increasing number of ministers, scenting politically costly trouble in the run-up to the election and beyond, were looking for a way out.

Labour MPs, however, were revelling in their success. In a series of free votes, the toughest of three options on offer, a total ban on hunting and hare coursing in England and Wales, was approved by 387 to 174, a majority of 213.

That was a cut in the majority in the last vote in 1997 soon after Labour came to power, which then stood at 260, but was nonetheless massive.

by CHARLES REISS
Political Editor

The so-called Middle Way compromise proposal to allow hunting to continue under licence and subject to tight new legal controls was rejected by 382 to 182, a majority of 200. The third option, favoured by hunt supporters, calling for self-regulation and effectively maintaining the status quo was rejected by an even bigger margin of 399 to 155, a majority of 244.

Thirty six Scottish MPs voted in favour of the ban in England and Wales although seven voted against it. This could fuel the growing questions over the right of Scots MPs to determine English law now that there is a parliament in Edinburgh.

The issue of the vote of Scots MPs was raised in the Commons today by the Tories. Shadow leader of the House, Angela Browning, said it showed the Government's devolution changes had created a situation "which quite clearly is not favourable to England and needs to be sorted out".

Editorial Comment: Page 13
Mood of defiance: Page 24

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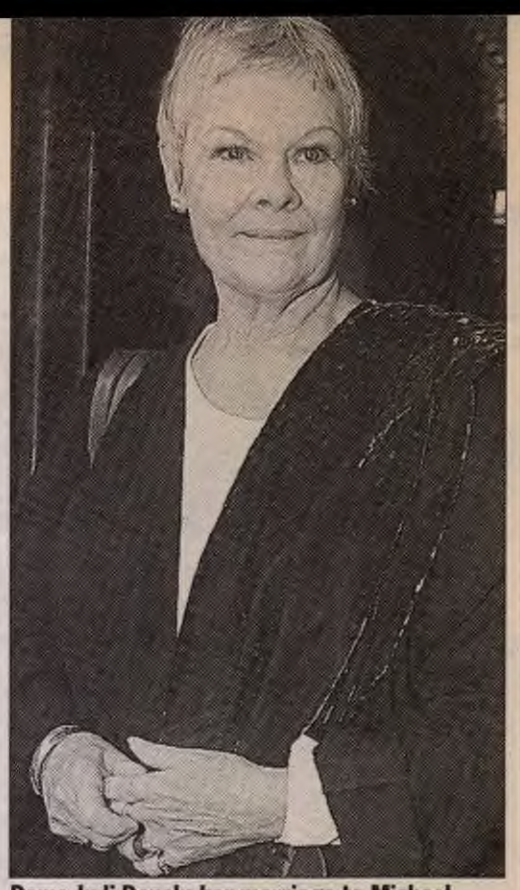

Dame Judi Dench: her marriage to Michael Williams gave him "feelings beyond happiness"

Sad farewell to Dame Judi's greatest fan

by SAM WALLACE

FRIENDS from theatre and film joined family today in a moving farewell to actor Michael Williams, Dame Judi Dench's husband of nearly 30 years, who died from lung cancer last week.

The 300 mourners packed St John the Baptist Church in the village of Outwood in Surrey. Sir John Mills was among those who walked in a procession from the couple's home to the church for the simple "closed service" the family had decided on.

They heard Trevor Nunn, artistic director of the Royal National Theatre, describe Mr Williams, 65, as "delightful, mercurial, compassionate, argumentative, outgoing and introspective". Dame Judi, wearing a bright red jacket, listened as Mr Nunn, his voice breaking with emotion, describe her husband as a "Manchester boy" who had — metaphorically — "climbed over the wall of the castle and was enjoying it.

Michael Williams: "delightful"

"He was afraid someone would see he had ripped his trousers in the process. He was a total actor, lived for his work and he lived his work. All this, and he sang." Marriage to Dame Judi had left Mr Williams in the grip of "feelings beyond all happiness", added Mr Nunn, a delight equalled only by the birth of the couple's daughter Finty, now 28. The actor, he added, had also seen "a great deal of himself" in Sam, his three-year-old grandson.

Russ Abbott, with whom Mr Williams starred in the acclaimed TV drama September Song, Donald Sinden and many of the Royal Shakespeare Company's young performers joined villagers to hear the Rev David Watson describe Michael Williams and Dame Judi as a couple "dearly loved" by the local community, and who "wore their great fame lightly".

There were readings from The Merchant of Venice and Shakespeare's Sonnet 125. Although Michael Williams never achieved the recognition of his Oscar-winning wife, he was regarded as an accomplished classical actor. A committed Roman Catholic, he was awarded a Papal Knighthood the day before he died.

A classic and a comic: Page 37

Net couple hide as mother asks for babies back

by MOLLY WATSON and JOHN STURGIS

THE COUPLE at the centre of the internet babies scandal went to ground today as the furore over their purchase of American twins intensified.

Alan and Judith Kilshaw, who have been widely condemned for apparently putting media appearances before the wellbeing of the babies and for the dubious ethical background to the adoption, abruptly cancelled appearances on GMTV and ITV's This Morning.

Their silence comes as the children's natural mother, Tanda Wecker, 28, revealed she does not now think the pair are fit parents and wants her babies returned.

It also came to light that the BBC has obtained a video showing the Kilshaws — who have denied suggestions that they are eccentric — with so-called paranormal investigators, whom they called in recently to their "haunted" farmhouse in north Wales.

Mrs Kilshaw, a 47-year-old animal rights campaigner with four children — two sons by Mr Kilshaw and two daughters by her ex-husband — stormed out of a TV interview yesterday and has physically thrown reporters out of her hotel suite. The couple's whereabouts are now unknown. Mrs Kilshaw's daughter, Caley, 18, said: "I can't understand why we are receiving this stigma and hostility ... we are a very happy family and my two stepbrothers are already very attached to the twins. They would be devastated if they were taken away."

Children for sale: Pages 10 and 11

Under Californian law Ms Wecker was entitled to change her mind up to 90 days after letting Californians Richard and Vickie Allen adopt the girls but the Kilshaws claim that the "cooling off period" in Arkansas, where they adopted, had expired.

However, the legality of the adoption is now in doubt after Ms Wecker claimed she had lied, with the Kilshaws' knowledge and approval, about residence in Arkansas. The Kilshaws deny this, yet it undermines their claim that they were morally correct because they had the approval of their natural mother.

Even so, the Allens' prospects of success in the courts appeared to diminish today as it emerged that they are facing bankruptcy and that Mrs Allen is being sued for $1 million and could face jail over fraud allegations.

Earlier, the Kilshaws claimed to be negotiating with a Hollywood studio over film rights. Mr Kilshaw, 45, a lawyer and prominent member of a fringe Right-wing political group, also told the Evening Standard he is considering recruiting publicity agent Max Clifford.

It has emerged, meanwhile, that New Yorkers Eddie and Amy White agreed to buy the girls in October but were too slow to transfer the £5,800 fee to agent Tina Johnson.

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Page Main Section 26

STH1

As survey reveals poor performance of New Labour women ...

ONE-MAN BAND: Our computer wizardry shows Tony Blair with his 'backing group' of women MPs such as, from left, Helen Brinton, Margaret Beckett, Ann Taylor and Harriet Harman

Blair Babes? They're just his backing singers

By **GERMAINE GREER**

FOR 30 years now, pressure groups with the single aim of 'getting more women into parliament' have clamoured for my support, which they don't get.

I am not one of the people who thinks that just having more female bums on the seats in the House of Commons would bring about a change for the better. I am not surprised that it is associated with changes for the worse.

In May 1997, 539 male British MPs were joined by 120 women, 101 of them New Labour. The media went to town on the idea of Blair's Babes. But they have been a backing group singing 'woo woo' while Blair plays the teen idol. It's crapulous.

Most of the babes were not babes at all, but women in their 40s and 50s and unlikely, by the by, to need to breast-feed in the chamber.

The dismissive label made it easier for the media to ignore the career politicians among the new women MPs, and to concentrate on the one woman who turned them on, the chief executive's totty, Cherie Blair whom in an interview last week I called a concubine.

There was never the remotest hope that the spin doctors would give Cherie the chance of opting out of the demeaning role of 'First Lady'; if I am harsh with her for smiling open-mouthed when a lens is pointed at her it's because I think she should concentrate on making history on her own account.

After two years of the new regime I asked a researcher to find out what the 120 women were doing; after two weeks of searching through Hansard he said that 'they ask a lot of little questions about education'.

Many Blair Babes never had any ambitions to become politicians, but were swept into the Commons by a landslide victory. Many were even duller than the men, having been loyal workhorses in local government and constituency parties.

NEW Labour's first priority was to ensure none ended up in a position of prominence; New Labour's image was young thrusting male, not old biddy. The ablest female debater in the Commons is an Old Labour female, Gwyneth Dunwoody, first elected in 1966. She is the person who as long ago as 1997 warned of the dangers of an unsafe rail system.

To read Hansard is not to find a tenth of the proceedings representing women's contribution. Even on hunting, only Eileen Gordon spoke – briefly. A couple of women begged the speakers to give way but caved in when they were refused. Tony Banks told a nonsensical story of his cat bringing a rat into his house. This is the cabaret that women are failing to shine in.

No wonder Diane Abbott, the first black woman MP, who was removed from the Treasury Committee to be replaced by new arrivals with no experience, wants to serve her constituents and write a novel.

There is no way women MPs can develop their own agenda or influence the party executive. Their inexperience has made it easy for the apparatchiks to control them.

They are glad to be on-message, happy to ask stooge questions in debates, so Ministers can laud their departments to the skies. New Labour has persecuted single mothers, harassed teachers and mocked nurses, and no woman MP has called it to account It would have been possible to single out a couple of women MPs and make them stars; instead, the media made Cherie Blair a star. This would have been what the executive wanted; the mystery is why the media concurred.

Whatever Cherie does is news; photographers follow her as she displays the lineaments of gratified desire, and verifies her husband's virility and heterosexuality.

Having a baby was taking it a bit further than usual – Nancy Reagan and Norma Major would have baulked at that.

The media treated other New Labour women in a manner so contradictory as to be schizophrenic. Clare Short was a heroine when she turned out to have had an illegitimate child, but thereafter, even though she is Secretary for Overseas Development, she is all but invisible, partly because she contradicted the official line on Third World debt. In Opposition she was a thorn in the executive's side, coming out against the Gulf War, but now she works hard to explain policies of which she can hardly approve.

Mo Mowlam worked hard day and night on Northern Ireland, only to allow Clinton and Blair to take the limelight when accords she negotiated were signed. Mandelson has done an incomparably worse job, but no one is asking why Mowlam cannot come back. Instead, she is Minister for the Cabinet Office with the flunkey's job of justifying the ways of the PM to parliamentary sceptics.

The most visible New Labour female politico used to be Harriet Harman, Secretary of State for Social Security. She was the image of New Labour, bright and stylish, but was dumped in Blair's first reshuffle. With exemplary cunning, he made her spokesperson for cutting single-parent benefit; when backbenchers revolted, she took the fall and her party and the media dumped her. She has established no constituency of her own and cannot keep her face before the public.

ONE woman who can keep her face before the public is Ann Widdecombe. This High Tory virgin is an exhibitionist who intensifies her eccentricities when they attract attention. She believes what she says and therefore the dazed public trusts her.

She has accumulated a good deal of personal charisma, and could and probably will unbalance any self-serving scenario that lesser Tory males will decide upon. Her innocence is explosive; she could send Hague to Hell in the handbasket of principle. Unlike Blair's Babes she is uncontrollable.

The class of '97 has no idea how the game is played, and no nerve for playing it. The name of the game in male debating chambers has never been arguing passionately for something you believe in, but showing off.

You are meant to score points, to discomfit, to raise a laugh at your opponents' expense. As New Labour had no intention of being roughed up in debate, important business is transacted without consultation, power is centralised in the executive, and backbenchers are left with little or no opportunity to contribute to policy formation.

The new women MPs may have let down women, but they themselves were seriously let down. They had been led to understand the incompatibility of the Commons set-up with family life would be addressed, but it never happened.

The male majority may like parliamentary life because it keeps them away from home but women are, for a little while longer at least, different.

They see little point in their careers if they cannot spend time with the ones they love – their children. After less than a year in the Commons the neophytes were reporting unbearable levels of stress and dissatisfaction.

The truth is that women and children are admitted to the preserves of male power only when that power has moved into a new field of operation.

The arrival of 120 women in the Commons has coincided with erosion of parliamentary power from within and without. It will be interesting to see who of the new female arrivals actively seek re-election in May

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Page Main Section 8

Damilola makes his final journey

Parents follow Nigerian custom but choose to bury boy in UK

JAMES McKILLOP

THE grieving parents of Damilola Taylor, the murdered schoolboy, wept yesterday at their son's funeral service as his white coffin, bearing a cross of white flowers, was carried into church.

However, following Nigerian custom, Richard and Gloria Taylor were absent from the graveside when their 10-year-old son was finally laid to rest. According to their culture, the early and unnatural death of a child is the worst thing that can happen and it is considered taboo for parents to attend the burial.

In a cold, biting wind, mourners gathered at All Saints church in Plumstead, south-east London, for the funeral of a fun-loving little boy who bled to death on November 27 after being stabbed in the leg near his home in Peckham.

Fifteen people have been arrested following the killing but no-one has yet been charged with any offence.

The boy's father broke down during yesterday's service as pictures drawn by Damilola depicting himself as David slaying Goliath were shown to the congregation.

On one of the pictures, Damilola had written: "I will travel far and wide to choose my destiny and remould the world."

The Rev Harry Owen told the 300 mourners inside the church: "Some people here today may have lost a young child as Mr and Mrs Taylor have done but few will have lost a child in such tragic circumstances.

"Most, though not all of us, cannot begin to imagine what it must be like to lose a young son full of life with an infectious smile, interested in football and computers, a young boy who as he prepared to celebrate his 11th birthday asked his family for a Bible."

He added: "The events of November 27, 2000, are evidence if evidence were needed that we live in a fallen and imperfect world."

Among the mourners were Prince Bola Ajibola, Nigerian high commissioner, Paul Boateng, foreign office minister, Ann Widdecombe, shadow home secretary, and Harriet Harman, the local MP.

Damilola's parents were met on arrival at the church by Deputy Assistant Commissioner Bill Griffiths, the Scotland Yard officer heading the murder inquiry. The service was broadcast on loudspeakers to people gathered outside.

FAREWELL: The coffin of 10-year-old Damilola Taylor is carried from All Saints Church in Plumstead after the service Picture: IAN WALDIE/Reuters

Prince Ajibola told the congregation: "For all of us, this day shall remain an unforgettable one because in our culture it is the prayer of everyone that our children bury us and not the other way around."

He was sure Damilola's killers would be brought to justice eventually. The people of Nigeria remained confident in the time-tested traditions of the effectiveness of the British justice system, he said.

As well as being a computer buff, Damilola was also a football fanatic and John Fashanu, the former Wimbledon player, was among the mourners yesterday. He said after the service that the grief the family was suffering was unbelievable.

He urged anyone who might have any information concerning Damilola's murder to get in touch with the police.

"Somewhere out there, somebody is harbouring the killer or killers," he said.

After considerable thought, the family decided that Damilola's body should not be returned to Nigeria. They felt he should be buried in London as a permanent reminder not only to the black community but Britain as a whole.

"They don't want what has happened to be forgotten," said a family friend.

GRIEF FOR DAMILOLA: Ann Widdecombe, shadow home secretary, was among those who joined Gloria and Richard Taylor for the funeral of the son who was denied the chance to 'choose his destiny'