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FAMILY NETWORKS

Why They Matter and How to Help Them

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PREFACE

There is growing concern about the family in the United Kingdom. The high rate of divorce - over 175,000 a year - has consequences not just for the partners caught up in the severance of their relationship, but also for the children who are the innocent victims of its trauma. The implications of each divorce spread far and wide through the wider family like the ripples from a pebble thrown into a pond. At the same time the number of the elderly, the mentally ill and other vulnerable groups are growing in proportion to the number of people available to help them. Millions of people, many of whom live alone, are now caught in a web of loneliness and despair.

The long term stability of our society depends on our ability to resolve the crisis within the family. The consequences of family disintegration for the next generation can be seen already in the bitterness and alienation of those brought up with little care from parents and relatives. Violence and human misery escalate.

This booklet does not just lay out reasons for the gradual disintegration of family relationships in Britain, but lays out practical proposals to help to rebuild 'family networks'; to provide us all with a firmer base of personal support. Stronger family ties are surely the key to the future welfare and happiness of millions of people. So I warmly commend that you read and think about this booklet - and then start to act on it yourself by giving more time and attention to your own family network, and by giving your support to the Family Charter.

Viscount Brentford
Chairman, Familybase
London, April 1987

1. INTRODUCTION

Many people recognise the central importance of the family as the foundation for building a more caring and concerned Britain. However, few have identified the vital role of the 'family network' - that wider group of relatives who interact with us and also with one another. The cornflakes packet family, of two parents and two children around the breakfast table, is the core of many family units, but it is only part of the full picture. Grandparents and grandchildren, uncles, aunts, in-laws, and cousins all play an important role in our lives. Almost everyone has relatives they can identify, but we seldom if ever hear about them in discussion of social and economic policy. Why are our relatives so neglected in public life?

Familybase has been set up as a national movement to bring the family network back into the centre of our thinking. It starts at the grass-roots, with each one of us, by asking us to examine our own relationships with our relatives. The movement wants to encourage people in their often hectic lives to squeeze out more time for these relationships, although they are sometimes difficult and demanding.

Some of you reading this may immediately ask 'Why Should I?' We can offer just two reasons. The first is because there is no-one else to care. Neighbours, friends and even government-provided services generally do no more than scratch the surface. Only the family can provide the care and support on the scale needed for the sick, the elderly and the unemployed (see chapter 2). In other words, if we do not reactivate family networks, many people will be isolated and miserable. Indeed it is already happening. And in ten or twenty years time it could be happening to you.

The second reason for taking time and trouble with the wider family is based on our appeal to Christian morality, with which other religions are often also in sympathy. If we say relationships with God and other people are the key to human fulfilment and happiness, rather than wealth, then it is time to begin to live our lives as if this was true. That means giving greater priority to people, especially those people God has given us to get on with, rather than those we have chosen for ourselves! This theme is explored in chapter 3.

Working to restore family relationships at the grass-roots is not enough on its own to reactivate the wider family. It is also essential to understand, and then do something about, the massive economic and social forces which are putting so much pressure on family relationships. Whether it is the enforced mobility of big business and government personnel policies, or the trap of easy credit which leads so quickly to debt, economic pressures are a major factor in the breakdown of marriages and the weakening of family networks. Some of these underlying trends in the economy and the environment are discussed in chapter 4.

If we want to strengthen family networks in our own families, how can we set about doing it? Chapter 5 gives a step by step guide of how a concerned individual can gradually restore and then build up his or her own family network. The main goal is to recreate within the family a network of 'loving relationships'. This may seem strange as 'love' is something intangible, which cannot be manipulated into being. And yet all of us understand and respond to love at a deep personal level, and probably most of us are prepared to admit it is what we want more than anything else in the world. On a more formal basis, the goal is to set up eventually a Family Council, or Family Association, in each extended family group, to make decisions about the distribution of welfare help to needy family members, the development of the family's human resources and other issues of long-term significance to the family.

In chapter 6, the focus shifts from our personal circumstances to the need for action at a national and political level. Many of the problems arise from the way that companies and individuals behave in a modern economy. Political action is the only means by which the overall framework within which decisions are taken can be changed. So in chapter 6 there is an attempt to outline the basis for a political agenda to relieve the economic pressures on the family network.

There is still the question of how we are all expected to find *time* and money to meet these additional responsibilities and commitments which arise when we strengthen wider family links. There are the growing pressures on our time from work commitments, time needed for shopping, for school events, for church meetings and a thousand other worthy causes. There seems to be no time left to deal with the needs and demands of relatives. Is it really possible to turn back the tide? There are no easy answers,

but nobody except the most committed Marxist believes the flow of history is totally predetermined and inevitable. We *can* and *must* decide for ourselves the direction we want our lives to take. So Familybase calls for active involvement of every individual, to work for family solidarity and family responsibility - both at home and in the centres of power where public policy is hammered out.

2. WHY DO WE NEED THE WIDER FAMILY?

The facts suggest that a gradual breakdown is occurring among families in Britain. People do not seem to see their parents as often as they used to. More and more people now live alone; indeed, the percentage of people living alone in a household in Great Britain has increased from four percent in 1961 to ten percent in 1985¹. Steadily rising divorce rates since the early 1970s also have not helped. As society becomes more mobile, and people move more often, into better jobs or better homes, links with members of the family network are steadily eroded.

Fortunately, the picture is not quite as bleak as all that. Middle class families still derive tremendous help and support from their relatives². This help is not just for the elderly, but in the first two stages of the family cycle - the home-making and child-rearing stages. Sometimes the help is given on 'socially approved' occasions like weddings, birthdays and Christmas. Sometimes it is given in response to a specific need of some kind. For example, a study of 2,400 mothers who had recently given birth, found that over half had someone to help during the first month after the birth, and the great majority of those who helped were relatives, principally mothers and mothers-in-law³.

A recent study has shown just how dependent we are on our relatives. Peter Wilmott comes to this conclusion after reviewing a large number of detailed studies about care provided by neighbours, friends and relatives. He writes,

'at the central stages [of life], such as old age or infirmity or when babies are born, relatives outnumber friends as sources of support in the ratio of about ten to one'⁴

This is not to say that friends and neighbours are unimportant. Friends are especially important in providing emotional support, and giving day to day help with young children and shopping. Neighbours help with 'keeping an eye' on elderly people, and giving help when there is a sudden emergency such as a fire or an illness. But for long-term support, in old age, sickness or other adversity, it is overwhelmingly relatives who provide the help. This is because most of us still hesitate to ask favours of friends and neighbours, but we feel more able to ask for, and accept, help from the family.

If families already do so much, why is a new emphasis on family networks necessary? The first reason is that although families do a lot, it is nowhere near enough, and they give only a fraction of the help they *could* give. Several factors point towards an escalating crisis in help to the elderly, for example. The number of over 65s is gradually rising for demographic reasons. In 1983 there were already almost ten million people of 65 and over, and there will be 700,000 more by the year 2001⁵. Perhaps of even greater significance, the number of those over 85 years old will increase by nearly a third to almost a million people by the year 2001⁶. At the same time there are less carers available to help. As people have less children today than they used to, there are fewer people to provide the help. With 60 per cent of married women now going out to work⁷, as well as more and more single people, less women have the time to provide help and support to those who cannot cope on their own.

A second reason why family networks are so vital is the growing number of people who are isolated and lonely. The percentage of people living on their own has increased from 12 per cent in 1961 to 24 per cent in 1985⁸. Living on your own is often, although not always, a recipe for loneliness. The number of elderly people living alone has doubled in the last 20 years⁹, the proportion has increased to 36 per cent of old people in 1985¹⁰, which is just over 3 million people. Although there is nothing ostensibly wrong with old people living alone, it should give rise to some concern. Many old people, due to no fault of their own, are not in a position to look after themselves. Research has shown that often a female relative will help in looking after the elderly, usually a daughter of the elderly person. However, sometimes there is no relative at home to help, so that social services are the only source of support available. This is likely to become an even more serious problem in the future; the trend to have smaller families inevitably means that there is

a smaller pool of relatives who are in a position to care for the elderly.

The problem of isolation is also most acute for the elderly. In 1980 the General Household Survey found five per cent of elderly people did not speak to relatives, friends or neighbours as often as even once a week¹¹. To this can be added the example of a geriatric ward in Cambridge where it was found that 42 of the 72 people never ever received a visitor¹². Isolation can be as devastating and destructive to an individual as malnutrition, for it represents starvation for the human spirit.

If there is evidence of the growing needs among individuals, there is even greater evidence of help needed for the 'nuclear' family. The nuclear family refers to man, wife and children, or one-parent families; today these small family units all too often receive inadequate help and support from the wider family. We have much to learn from Third World countries, where the family helps the married couple in countless ways, especially when the children are small and very demanding. Grandparents, uncles and aunts share the load with young mothers. Financial help among relatives is given and received with far less embarrassment than in Western societies. But in Britain all too often the nuclear family has to fend for itself, and young adults have no one to turn to for advice and support. Often relatives are not close enough to provide help for individuals at the times when they urgently need help and encouragement.

The results of this neglect are easy to see. Problems between man and wife are not resolved or brought into perspective through discussion with relatives and neighbours. There is no-one outside the home to share them with, so the tension in the marriage grows, all too often ending in the divorce court. Sexual relationships outside marriage may be the result of individuals looking for excitement or support because their family network provides little encouragement and help. Growing divorce rates and sexual unions outside marriage has swelled the number of children in one-parent families to over one and a half million. The psychologists warn us that the majority of these children will suffer emotionally to some extent as a result of having only one parent to relate to, in terms of an absence of role models as well as lack of close support from a second adult¹³.

Many people feel that the solution to the growing needs of the isolated and lonely, and for the elderly, is simply to provide more Government help - whether from the Local Authority or from central government departments like the DHSS. If this were possible, perhaps we would not have to be too concerned, but unfortunately there is no way the Government can possibly fill the gap. Present levels of staff time available are pathetically small. One social worker or home help typically is responsible to care for 40 people, so they can give a maximum of about 40 minutes a week to each person. For a district nurse, the caseload is typically about 120¹⁴. There is every possibility that the level of Government services per person in need will go down rather than up over the next decade in response to rising numbers needing support, especially among the elderly, and general pressure on Government resources from all quarters. The Government is the first to recognise that the social services can complement family and neighbourhood care in a limited way, but cannot possibly be a substitute for it.

Somebody needs to support all these adults and children facing immense hardship and stress, and help them in all their day-to-day problems. The most likely candidates for the job, those who know the individuals involved most intimately and love them most deeply, are generally relatives. They need to be encouraged to help, and they need a framework in which to provide that help.

3. THE MORAL FOUNDATIONS

It is inadequate to discuss the family or the wider family without reference to morality. Inevitably our view of the family finds its roots in our whole outlook on what life is all about, which is our religion. Because almost two thirds of people in Britain are of Christian belief¹⁵, however nominal that may be in some cases, and because Familybase grew out of a Christian analysis of what is wrong in society, it seems appropriate to discuss here the moral basis for the family from a Christian perspective.

Christianity lays its central emphasis on the importance and quality of human relationships. In this it differs fundamentally from contemporary ideologies which define their goals in materialistic terms, whether by the growth of income or by its distribution. People are of value not just because they are able to produce for the economy, or because they are units in some universal equation of justice, because they are made in

the image of God. Every individual is of immeasurable importance to God. For some incomprehensible reason, God loves all of us beyond measure.

It is the love that God has for us which is the reason why we should love God and love each other. Jesus taught that to love God and love your neighbour sums up the law and the prophets. The Christian concept of love centres on doing to others what you would like them to do to you. It also encompasses an emphasis on loyalty, which is expressed in relationships with wife and husband, children, other relatives, friends and neighbours. At its limit, it is a matter of caring for those who cannot do anything in return, even when there is nothing which deserves love.

This total orientation towards relationships inevitably leads Christians towards a central emphasis on the family. For almost all of us, the longest and closest relationships we have in our lives are within our families. As children we spend years in close contact with parents, brothers and sisters, and often have frequent contact with grandparents, aunts and uncles. As adults, for many the closest relationship is with a spouse within the framework of marriage and hence as part of the on-going family saga. For many, the next closest relationships are those with children, and later with grandchildren.

Christians believe that the concept of the family comes from the very nature of God. When Paul describes God as Father, and says that all Fatherhood or all families derive their character from God¹⁵, he is not saying God is like a human family. Rather he is making the astonishing proposition that God is a family in the Trinity. Our human relationships in the family are patterned on God's own family in heaven. A bit 'mind-blowing', but that is what Paul says. God wants our human relationships to be patterned on His relationships.

Of course, people do not have to be Christians to show great love and warmth in their families. This caring in all families has been superbly summarised in a book by Young and Wilmott as follows:

'A person has a role ascribed to him by reason of his birth into a particular family, and almost unlimited obligations towards him are accepted as soon as that happens, not arising from his achievements, which in endless competition with others depend upon his talents, his industry or his luck, but from his being of the same 'flesh' and 'blood'. A spouse is chosen in a way that children or parents are not but, once chosen, the roles and the consequent obligations are much the same as if they had been ascribed. A child is not discarded because he stutters or has mouse-coloured hair or cannot pass any exams; a parent because he has committed a crime; a spouse because he or she has failed to get promotion.¹⁶

While humanists believe such love is a result of social conditioning, or evolutionary group survival instincts, Christians see it as evidence that all people are made in a way which continues to reflect something of the character of God Himself.

Although it is not readily appreciated today, families were created by God as something more than a caring agency. The primary purpose of the family is not to ensure children get their meals on time. When a divorce occurs, the primary issue from the child's point of view is not who will make the breakfast or wash the clothes! Families are about love, emotional security, belonging and identity. And it is in the experience of that love and security that children grow in the ability to give love to others and provide security for others, especially in the context of the home that they eventually come to set up. In other words, what we receive as children we are able to pass on as parents. Secure family foundations are the key to the future as well as the present.

Family background and relationships are so often the way to understanding our own behaviour - the way we respond to different situations. And to know why you behave the way you do is part of the substance of self confidence, and emotional stability. Christians in particular believe that their identity, and sense of worth, are most fully experienced in the context of the Christian family network.

Two other emphases in Christianity are of central relevance to the idea of family networks. The first is the rather unpopular notion of obligation. The way the Ten Commandments are written, for example, is not as a Bill of Rights for the poor and deprived in society, but as a Bill of Obligations for those in positions where they have the opportunity to do something for others. Thus, for example, the obligation towards

faithfulness in marriage, expressed in marriage vows, is the great guarantee for all those who depend, in one way or another, on that marriage. A further example in the family context is the fourth commandment, which spells out the obligation to 'honour father and mother'. This is not addressed to children primarily, but to adults. Jesus makes it clear that this includes a financial obligation, even where it is contrary to prevailing culture¹⁷, and Paul extends this responsibility to provide for relatives right, across the extended family¹⁸.

The other Christian principle which is fundamental to the idea of family networks is the theme of forgiveness. We all know that relationships in the family are not always easy or straight-forward. The family, indeed, is often the hardest place to love. Hurts and resentments between family members often run deep, and are rooted far in the past; there seems to be no way to break the impasse they create, no mechanism by which the broken relationship can be healed and restored. This is where the central message of Christianity - the Cross - becomes supremely relevant. We find a God of love, reaching down to men and women who for no just cause have despised and rejected him. God was willing to sacrifice his own son, the person he loved most, and encounter all the hurt and pain that involved, in order that relationships with us could be opened up and healed. If God is prepared to forgive us at such a cost, we should be willing to forgive those who have wronged us. This is the basis on which Christians appeal for unilateral forgiveness and disarmament in family relationships.

All the above provides a Christian framework for family networks. However, two caveats on the Christian view of the family needs to be added. There is the danger of giving priority to family concerns over and above loyalty to God himself. Jesus warns against this extreme, and showed in his life that loyalty to God and what God wants must take precedence over the family where the two are in conflict¹⁹. Secondly, in the broader framework of the neighbourhoods and communities where families live, it is essential that families do not become inward-looking and self-centred, but look outwards to draw in those who lack strong family networks for whatever reason. Familybase wants to encourage family networks, but the kind of family networks which look out and show a real concern for society around about them.

4. IDENTIFYING THE EXTERNAL PRESSURES

As already indicated in chapter 2, there are indications that wider families are not coping effectively with the responsibilities they have for the welfare of the needy and weak in Britain today. A few key statistics are worth repeating to highlight that there is a frightening disintegration of the fundamental family structure. The proportion of live births outside marriage rose from 9% in 1979 to 19% in 1985²⁰. The number of couples divorcing in 1985 rose to 175,000 cases, which is more than double the number divorcing in 1971²¹. The number of elderly people who do not see a relative, friend or neighbour even once a week is close to half a million²². As family relationships are the responsibility not just of individuals, but of the family group to which those individuals belong, then something is wrong.

Although there are these clear signs of breakdown in the smaller nuclear family, it is hard to conclude definitely that the *wider* family is in the process of gradual disintegration. The main problem in discerning the overall long-term trend is the paucity of information on what family relationships were like in the past. There was probably no 'golden age' for the family in the past. Problems of poverty, loneliness, marriage breakdown and plain neglect of children and other vulnerable groups are nothing new. However, perhaps what is new is that there is a small section of society which no longer feels any shame about these realities, but even applauds them in the name of personal freedom.

It is by looking at low income countries, especially in Africa and Asia, that it is possible to discover the potential which extended families have as a caring network and community. The Third World has much to teach the West about caring for the needy, and about how it is possible to sustain relationships within the wider family. This is not to say all families in the Third World are models of virtue. But it is difficult not to be impressed by the sheer magnitude of financial transfers within families, and the time and attention devoted to the relational aspects of life, in African countries for example. They demonstrate that other patterns of family life are possible, so that it is virtually impossible to find a lonely or isolated individual. So what is it in Western societies which militates against the cohesion of the wider family? Here we examine just three of the pressures - occupational mobility, loss of the family business sector and erosion of the family's role in welfare.

(i) Government Policy and Mobility

Mobility is at the heart of much economic policy today²³. Government statements that workers in Wales should be prepared to move elsewhere for jobs indicate that the solution to high regional unemployment is being sought in a higher level of mobility. The long coal strike of 1984 arose in part because the Coal Board's offer of alternative employment elsewhere in the industry, or a large redundancy payment, left miners with an unacceptable choice between mobility and long-term unemployment. The 'Plan for Coal' did not include a 'Plan for Coal Communities'²⁴. One of the goals of housing policy is quite explicit, as 'the minimum disincentives to mobility between dwellings which may or may not be in the same geographical area'²⁵. Considerable mobility is anticipated over the next fifteen years? Population projections for 1981-2001 indicate that a 15 per cent growth is expected in East Anglia and around London, with declining numbers in the North and North West²⁶. Rootedness is not a goal of contemporary economic policy.

The chief argument for minimizing labour mobility is that it takes a high toll in terms of reduced physical contact between members of the extended family, and between neighbours. It can be argued that these social costs are essential to maintain the present structure and growth of the economy. However, the social costs involve increased government expenditure on health and social services, as well as additional expenditure on infrastructure such as roads and schools. By increasing taxation, this in turn reduces company profits available for reinvestment, and thus reduces productivity and employment.

Clearly, there is a case for some mobility for those in commerce and industry to achieve job satisfaction and career advancement. Often hard choices must be made between the benefits of rootedness for the family as against the opportunities of career advancement for the breadwinner. Not all mobility is undesirable, but neither is all mobility strictly necessary for job goal attainment. The case argued here is to reduce mobility, not to eliminate it. However, it is primarily the more able and better educated who benefit from mobility. Those less strong - the elderly, children, the less educated, and those unable to cope with psychological stress - are harmed rather than helped by policies which encourage mobility.

A major aspect of industrial policy, which leads to unnecessary mobility, is the approach to personnel training and management adopted by business as well as by government. Companies and government departments often seem to treat lightly the human costs involved in moving when they require their personnel to relocate from one city to another in the pursuit of management training and efficiency. This has been well documented for doctors in the period after they qualify²⁷, but has not been studied, as far as we are aware, for the families of military or industrial personnel in Britain. Awareness of the problem is greater in the U.S., as there have been decisions recently to limit mobility of military officers in the interests of their immediate families. In Britain, soldiers in many regiments have to move every two years. Equally, in the Foreign Office, placements are generally no more than four years in any country. Costs of mobility for the family need to be taken into consideration more explicitly when personnel departments make decisions on placement and training.

A further major factor resulting in mobility in Britain is the extent of regional differences in levels of income and employment. In particular, as discussed above, high levels of unemployment in depressed areas are resulting in substantial out-migration, especially of younger and better qualified adults with their immediate families. As pointed out above, projections of population to the year 2000 point towards continuation of earlier trends away from the North and West Midlands and into the South and East Anglia.

A fundamental cause of these regional population movements, we believe, is the preceding movements of capital. In simple terms, capital availability leads to investment, and investment creates jobs. When new jobs are being created primarily in a small number of regions, it is not surprising to observe people moving into these areas. If population mobility is to be resisted and reduced, it will be vital to tackle mobility of capital.

The amount of capital leaving depressed regions has been difficult to estimate because banks, pension funds and other financial institutions are not obliged to give a regional breakdown of the sources and uses for their funds. However, a study of the regional investment pattern for 1981-82 suggests that there may well be an outflow of capital from depressed regions²⁸. The outflow from Britain to overseas countries is also indicative of money flowing to areas offering the highest immediate return, with no thought for the

longer-term or social implications of the policy.

There is little doubt that geographic dispersal limits the ability of the wider family to provide care and welfare for the needy individual, and also probably limits willingness to provide the degree of financial support required for adequate welfare provision. This is brought out in a study of a wider family group in Wales in the 1960s.

'Prominent among the other basic themes running through this case are the importance of physical proximity in the effective maintenance of relationship...(one that) is based fundamentally on the close clustering of kin in a limited locality, with a limited locality, with a high degree of social and economic homogeneity and with close and complexities of mutual co-operation between kin and neighbours.'²⁹

In the U.K., Hart found mobility was a 'recurring feature of (marriage) breakdown'³⁰. A study by Robertson of hospital doctors and their families has documented the kind of stress that mobility brings about for family life³¹. She had interviews with 38 junior hospital doctors and their wives. Thirty-one per cent of the wives found the physical upheaval stressful. They described it as a 'nightmare', 'ghastly' and 'a nuisance'. In 14% of these mobile families, children experienced emotional disturbance or schooling difficulties. But the problem most commonly reported was loneliness as a result of some, if not all, their moves. This stress from mobility did not prevent doctors moving, however. Only gradually are people beginning to question whether the breadwinner's career benefits should be weighed up against the whole family's needs for stable social relationships with relatives and in the community.

(ii) Opportunities to Work Together

A major factor weakening family ties today is the way work is organised. It may seem strange to link company structure with divorce and neglect of the elderly, but the two are more closely related than we often realise. In fact, they are so closely related that it may be difficult to do something about one without doing something about the other.

In the past people worked together in family groups far more than they do today. On a family farm, in a small shop or in any other kind of small business, family members were dependent on each other's activities, and there was also dependence between generations. This meant there were common interests, points for discussion and debate, common relationships with people outside the family. Frequently it was the wider family, not just the nuclear family, who worked together for their daily bread. All of these things helped to bind families together and make the family a small community.

Today, in contrast, for families to work together is relatively rare. In most families man and wife work for different employers, and children when they grow up, go to work for yet other employers. Wages are paid with no account being taken of the family situation. The wage received is the personal property of the individual, is dependent on the individual's level of personal achievement, and is paid in private, leaving the individual to negotiate with the rest of the family as to how the money is to be distributed³².

The effect on the wider family of taking away any common interest in production or consumption is profound. For a major part of people's lives, they work and focus attention on issues which have no direct bearing at all on the interests and work of other family members. To communicate about the day's events to other family members who do not share the background information requires a significant effort of will at the end of a long working day. It is so much easier simply to turn on the television! However, the result of not sharing such important areas of life is all too often that emotional attachments develop with others outside the home who do have work or other interests in common.

It is certainly still possible for families to share together in work and business activity, even in a modern technological society. It is a matter mainly of public policy. In Italy, for example, which has just passed Britain to become the fifth largest industrial power, and also in Japan, self-employment outside agriculture is three times higher than in Britain³³. Similarly, the number of small and family businesses in both manufacturing and retailing is substantially higher in France and Germany than in Britain. In fact, there has been a long-term decline in the numbers of small and family businesses over the last fifty years in Britain. Why has this occurred? The main reasons have been weak restraints on monopolies and

mergers, so that huge companies have developed with far greater market power than their small competitors, and a system of financial incentives which have made it advantageous for big companies just to grow bigger rather than spin off new small companies. Of course, this process is not inevitable, and can even be reversed, but discussion of how to do it must wait until chapter 6.

(iii) Loss of Role in Welfare

Perhaps the greatest single change in the external environment which has changed family relationships since 1945 is the coming of the welfare state. The Beveridge Report, which laid the foundations of modern state welfare, saw the nuclear family unit as the primary provider of welfare. As this unit is too small to cope with situations involving old age, unemployment and sickness, the solution was not to strengthen local government initiatives, and mobilise wider family support, but rather to make the central Government responsible to provide an alternative source of support. Rather than questioning the whole direction and structure of British society in the light of welfare deficiencies. Beveridge argued implicitly that economic forces should take their course and that the Government should step in wherever local and family support was inadequate. Hence the huge apparatus of central government interventions was born. In its pursuit of artificial standards of equity, the system takes no account of either local community or family initiatives, and thus ends up undermining them in a most fundamental way.

There is clear evidence of the impact state welfare schemes have had on family relationships overseas. For example, in the Netherlands, an unanticipated consequence of state housing policy which proliferated availability of institutional accommodation for old people, has been to weaken ties within the family³⁴. The fact that changes in living arrangements for old people would affect all aspects of their lives was neither anticipated nor planned by the government. Even in Britain it is often asserted by social workers that low-income teenage girls opt for one-parent status in order to increase Supplementary Benefit, gain access to Council housing and find a reason for avoiding the depressing and often hopeless task of seeking a job.

A far harder question to answer is what psychological effect the state guarantee of financial support has on the cohesion of the family unit as a whole. Specifically, does the freedom from financial dependence on family members at every stage of life increase the probability of behaviour which hurts the more vulnerable members of society, such as the old, children and, in some instances, adult women? For example, would parents show greater concern about their teenage daughters' relationships if the family had to pay for the upkeep of the 17 year old who has a baby outside marriage? Would parents take more trouble with their children if they knew they would have to depend on those children in their old age, rather than on a government pension arrangement? No conclusive proof is possible. However, a new sub-discipline in economics has demonstrated that economic cost weighs heavily in family decisions, from the relatively obvious, such as investment in children's education, to the less obvious, such as the number and timing of children, and even to the marriage decision itself³⁵. However undesirable the motives of those trying to explain family decisions simply on economic criteria, it cannot be denied that financial considerations do affect the way family relationships develop.

One unforeseen side-effect of the Beveridge plan to extend state welfare so hugely has been to lower the economic cost of pursuing extra-marital relations which ultimately lead to divorce. This has removed what must have been a major obstacle to divorce which existed in the past. Divorcees may still pay a high price in the long term, as the incidence of loneliness in old age is higher among divorcees who do not remarry than among married couples³⁶. However, that is often not anticipated at the period when divorce occurs. This is not to argue that the rising divorce rate is entirely due to changes in the economic costs of divorce; it merely suggests that the change could be one important factor in this trend.

The same argument can be used with respect to the rise in births outside marriage. In the past, parents had strong economic incentives to prevent the situation occurring. Economic concern for old age may have provided an inducement to develop healthy relationships with children on whom the parent knew he or she would have to depend in old age, as well as being an inducement to have a larger number of children. In addition, the economic cost of supporting a child born outside wedlock may have contributed to ensuring family pressure was exerted against its occurrence.

There can be no dispute that low-income people need help from somewhere. Given the current state of many family relationships, there may often be little alternative to providing that help through Government

intervention. However, how exactly that help is given, and also the nature of the help given, can all too easily weaken support networks and leave the family even worse off in the long-term. The methods of state welfare provision urgently require re-evaluation.

2. BUILDING FAMILY NETWORKS

Familybase is proposing two ways in which to tackle the problem of the weakening of the family. The first way is to actively encourage individuals within their families to take time to build up relationships with their wider kin. The development of closer relationships between family members is one of the primary goals of the movement. Secondly Familybase will be campaigning against the type of external economic and environmental pressure which has already been mentioned. Details of the political agenda are contained in chapter 6.

It may take many months or even years of campaigning to change a government policy. However, the level of help a particular family is providing for its members can be changed in a matter of days or weeks. Anyone who has relatives can start to strengthen the wider family by doing something within their own family. Many of the problems which face individuals at life's crisis points could be more easily handled if only closer links with relations were maintained, so that relatives could be called upon to help when the need arose.

Links between family members are created automatically at birth. However, it does not directly follow that support from relatives can be expected throughout life. When people ignore their family for most of their lives they cannot then expect help when they have a time of need. To benefit from all that the wider family has to offer, individuals have to be prepared to work at family relationships - to give as well as to take. Family links need to be looked after, worked at and built up over a period of time if the family is to operate effectively to provide love and care for its members.

Family relations are often demanding. The extended family includes that most difficult of groups - the 'in-laws', who are perceived by most to be more like outlaws! Relationships with parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters can also sometimes be difficult. Disagreements and quarrels within the family have to be overcome if relationships are to grow and develop. This points to the need for forgiveness (see chapter 3), and also to the importance of leadership in families to help work towards reconciliation between warring members. The lack of such leadership is probably the greatest single factor in family disintegration today.

Familybase is encouraging people to concentrate on building friendships with all members of their wider family. Familybase calls this strengthening of wider family ties 'building family networks'. The term 'network' is used because it conveys the idea of a group of people forming reciprocal lines of communication between each other; it also conveys the idea of the group acting as a safety net to catch its members from going under in difficult circumstances. For the individual, building the family network starts when he or she works out who is in the wider family and then renews contact. This generally involves making a phone call, writing a letter or paying someone a visit. In simple terms, it involves people spending time with each of one's relatives.

In Britain today, 'time' is often what we feel we lack most. But whether there is time for something or not in fact is a matter of priorities. It is generally possible to make time for something we really want to do! In order to have time to spend with an old or ill family member, we may have to re-arrange our lives to some degree. For example, time will have to be found in the evening or at weekends for those crucial telephone calls which maintain links with relatives who cannot be visited regularly. Alternatively, in some cases it may be possible to visit a relative living at some distance by planning to spend a weekend or even a holiday in the vicinity. The key decision is that it matters to take the time and trouble to maintain the links. Where there is a will, there is usually a way.

Once people have re-opened lines of communication with relatives, the next step in consolidating the family network may well be to bring everyone together for a family party. Among many families there is a gathering of the clan already at a particular time of the year such as Christmas or Easter. These family gatherings are often opportunities for family friendships to be renewed in an atmosphere of celebration and goodwill. Where an annual family gathering does not already exist, it is often still possible to organise a

family party in order to celebrate some occasion, such as a birthday or anniversary. In some cases people find there does not have to be any particular excuse for bringing the family all together. However, it is crucial that somebody decides to take the initiative to make it happen.

At family gatherings, there is the opportunity to assess the needs of various family members and to discuss what can be done to best meet those needs. To ensure that problems are handled effectively before they reach crisis proportions, there is a case for holding regular meetings to monitor the state of the family. These meetings could eventually be formally organised by someone in the family such as an old aunt or eldest son. Family members could perhaps contribute to a common fund to pay for the parties, with contributions related to the individual circumstances and needs. The family could call itself a Family Association, and could go on to develop a joint saving scheme or some other fund with more ambitious goals, such as helping members to buy a house, or funding a joint enterprise of some kind.

Obviously forming a Family Association is a long way from where most people are with their families at present. Individuals need to assess the state of their families first, and then build up their family networks from there. Familybase is preparing materials to help people to work at family relationships and to encourage them to form Family Associations, so that a greater degree of help can be given to the needy by those from whom they will receive help most readily - their relatives.

3. THE POLITICAL AGENDA

The Familybase political agenda grows directly out of the goals of the movement which are to relieve economic and environmental pressures on the family. Any economic or environmental pressure on the family which is susceptible to treatment through political action is a candidate for the future Familybase political agenda. As the Familybase emphasis is on the wider family, rather than just on traditional nuclear family, there is special concern for issues like mobility that have an impact on family networks.

The first six issues to be addressed by Familybase are all contained in the Family Charter, and are listed below. The reasons for choosing these particular issues was first that all of them are defined and achievable. There is little point in asking the Government to ensure adequate housing for all, for this is neither defined nor readily achievable. Secondly, research on them is already in progress so information is available to support the case being made. All of the issues are presented here only in summary form. Detailed discussion of each of them is available in other publications³⁷. One or more of these issues is likely to form the basis of the first Familybase campaign for specific changes in the law.

Six Issues in the Family Charter

1) Debt trap action

Many families are being lured into a downward spiral of indebtedness, through the runaway promotion of credit facilities (credit and store cards, 'pay later' deals, quick loans), without thought for present creditworthiness or future consequences. Nearly half a million cases of unpaid debt come to court each year in England and Wales alone. In 1986, personal debt increased by 13%. The repercussions for family life, and for marital stress in particular, have been devastating.

Freedom in the market place must be complemented by responsibility. Of course, borrowers have responsibility for their own actions. But lenders must act responsibly towards customers.

The possible answers include: minimum down-payments (no more 100% credit) on large purchases; obliging lenders to check more fully on customer creditworthiness; clearer advertising about the real cost of credit and the meaning of the small print (e.g. 'APR', 'secured loan'). Action must be taken to alleviate the serious problem of debt

2) Regions revitalised

As a matter of urgency, more economic resources need to be channelled into areas of high unemployment to enable families to stay where their roots are. Many extended families and communities are being

steadily broken up because of the decline of local economies. The aim of the new policy is not to freeze the United Kingdom's economic structure, nor to prevent growth in the South, but to enable the regions to become self-sustaining.

The cost of letting family networks disintegrate is, in social security terms, considerable; caring that could have occurred in a family context becomes the responsibility of the state. The decline of local communities also means that part of the nation's housing stock goes to waste, increasing the shortage of housing elsewhere. As for the human cost, the hardship associated with the creation of divided, isolated families, is incalculable.

The solution could involve the creation of Regional Banks; Pension Funds earmarking a minimum proportion of their investment for depressed regions; establishing Regional Development Agencies along the lines of the existing one for Scotland; and further easing of company taxation in depressed areas. The policies chosen need to be carefully targetted. Finally, the Government also has a direct role to play in the allocation of government contracts and expenditure to regions most in need of work.

3) Enforced mobility checked - to protect family roots

Enforced job relocation is commonplace in the personnel policies of private and public enterprise, and of major government departments. Of course, not all mobility can be avoided. But it is not at all obvious that such an emphasis on mobility is necessary for the organisations concerned. In many cases, moving around forces the spouse to lose friendships and employment, disrupts children's schooling, and creates tension in the marriage. It also means separation from the extended family and losing hold of one's roots. As families become scattered, patterns of familiarity, friendship and support are fractured. The family is weakened.

A new awareness of the importance of family ties is needed, and enforced mobility should be greatly reduced. Personnel policies must be changed to recognise family responsibilities. The Government, as the nation's largest employer, must take a positive lead.

4) Allowance for family carers

Tax help for most families who look after dependent relatives - the elderly and the sick - now amounts to a mere £29 per year! That compares with a cost of more than £5,000 per year for keeping the same elderly or sick person in a state residential home.

Allowances for family carers must be improved. One idea is to introduce an allowance payable where someone looks after an elderly or sick person in their own home, simply to cover the additional costs of food, heating etc. Alternatively, a 'General Care Allowance' - £23.25 per week - could be broadened in this way. In either case, the net cost would be low, since it would be offset by zero payments of housing benefit to those who would then live with relatives or friends and by reduced numbers of elderly people going into residential care. In addition, where the allowance encouraged fewer elderly people to live alone, more homes would be released to help meet the nation's housing crisis.

5) Mergers restricted - to protect small and family businesses

The merger and take-over mentality that has come to pervade British business carries with it serious dangers for the future of small and family businesses. Large conglomerates already use their market power to keep small companies at bay. Some of the ways in which they do this are well documented by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. The recent trend towards mergers and conglomerates cannot but ultimately force out small enterprises from their present position in our economic life.

Small businesses have a particularly important contribution to make. They are frequently innovative, flexible and, because of their small size, able to provide a working environment that stimulates co-operation and teamwork. Many small businesses also have a strong family component which can help to cement family relationships.

To defend and encourage small enterprise, tougher rules to govern take-overs and mergers are essential.

The burden of proof regarding mergers must be reversed; the onus should lie with the company wanting to merge to show that the merger will result in a genuine increase in efficiency and a benefit to the national interest. Otherwise it should not be allowed to proceed.

6) *Sundays safeguarded for the whole family*

Commercial pressures should not be allowed to force people out of their family circle on Sundays - the one shared day for most families. Sunday, the day of rest, when all members of the family can spend time together, is one of the foundations of family life. Every other day of the week, parents and other relatives may be working, or busy with shopping, while on weekdays the children are out at school. A day off on some other day is no compensation for the shared day of leisure and for the elderly and single people, Sunday is often the only day on which they can be included in family activities.

Sunday working must be kept to a minimum, especially for the sake of 2 million shopworkers and their families. Existing legislation which protects Sunday as a different day should be fully supported and updated. There should be one day in the week which is free for family, worship and recreation.

CONCLUSION

In political terms, our vision is for the welfare of the family to be a conscious reference point for all Government decisions, recognising the impact that social and economic policy can have on the family structure. In particular we hold out the six points of the Family Charter as a positive statement of what can be achieved for families in these policy areas. 'Family Impact Statements' will also be used by Familybase to pinpoint the effects of proposed Government legislation and policies on the family.

For the individuals who make up the families of the United Kingdom, our goal is to re-awaken a set of priorities in life that encompass something more than the fleeting satisfaction derived from success and 'independence'. It is indeed our very real *dependence* on one-another - especially within the unique circle of the family - that we wish to emphasise. Our task is to encourage people both in personal decisions and in public policy to be 'family-minded'. No matter how great the financial gain of certain economic policies which disregard family needs, the real costs to individuals in terms of relationships are uncalculable. It is time to stop putting economic policy priorities ahead of family considerations. It is time to put our families first.

¹ HMSO, *Social Trends*, 17, 1987 Edition, p. 44.

² C. Bell, 'Kinship and the Middle Classes in England', in ed. Michael Anderson, *Sociology of the Family*, Penguin, London, 1982, pp.229-236.

³ W. W. Daniel, (1980) *Maternity Rights: the Experience of Women* Policy Studies Institute Report Number 588, London.

⁴ Wilmott, *Social Networks Informal Care and Public Policy*, Policy Studies, Institute Report No. 655, London p. 47.

⁵ Family Policy Studies Centre, Fact Sheet 2, *An Ageing Population*, London, 1984.

⁶ Malcolm Wicks, 'The Changes in Family Structure', *Social Work Today*, June 2 1986, p. 10.

⁷ Anderson and Dawson, *Family Portraits*, The Social Affairs Unit, London 1986, p. 22.

⁸ HMSO, *Social Trends*, 17, 1987 Edition, Table 2.2, p. 42.

⁹ New Society Database, *New Society* 24 October 1986, p. 44.

¹⁰ HMSO, *Social Trends*, 17, 1987 Edition, Table 2.8, p. 44.

¹¹ Wilmott, *ibid.*, p. 75.

¹² *Personal Communication*, Jennifer Black, Jubilee Centre, 1985.

¹³ Patricia Morgan, 'Feminist Attempts to Sack Fathers: A Case of Unfair Dismissal' in Ed. Digby Anderson and Graham Dawson, *ibid.*, p. 38.

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- ¹⁴ Personal Communication, Principle Research Officer, Norfolk County Social Services Department, October 1986.
- ¹⁵ Marc Monograph No. 5, *Where is the Church Going?*, Marc Europe, January 1986.
- ¹⁶ Ephesians 3:14-15.
- ¹⁷ Michael Young and Peter Wilmott, *The Symmetrical Family*, Penguin Books, London, 1973, p. 268.
- ¹⁸ Mark 7: 9-13.
- ¹⁹ 1 Timothy 5:3-8.
- ²⁰ Matthew 10:34-37.
- ²¹ HMSO, *Social Trends* 17, 1987 Edition, Table 2.20, p. 52.
- ²² *Ibid.*, p. 49.
- ²³ Wilmott *ibid.*, p. 75.
- ²⁴ Michael Schluter, *Family Roots or Mobility?*, Jubilee Centre Paper No. 2, 1986.
- ²⁵ National Coal Board, *Plan for Coal*, London, 1974.
- ²⁶ David Donnison and Clare Ungerson, *Housing Policy*, Penguin, 1982, p. 227.
- ²⁷ *The Times*, 15 June 1984, Citing Population Projections by Area 1981-2001, Series PP3, No.5 HMSO, 1984.
- ²⁸ Robertson, *ibid.*
- ²⁹ J. Short and D. J. Nicholas *Money flows in the UK Regions*, Gower, 1981.
- ³⁰ Colin Rosser and Christopher Harris, *The Family and Social Change A study of family and kinship in a South Wales town*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, abridged end., 1983, p. 11ff.
- ³¹ N. Hart, *When Marriage Ends: Study in Status Passage*, Tavistock Publications, London, 1976.
- ³² Faith Elliot Robertson, 'Mobility and the Family in Hospital Medicine', *Health Trends*, Vol. 13, 1981, pp. 15-16.
- ³³ M. Anderson, Insights from the 'History of the Family', in Ed. Michael Anderson, *Sociology of the Family*, 1971, Penguin Edition, 1980, p. 51.
- ³⁴ *British Business*, 19-25 Nov. 1982, p. 5.
- ³⁵ Joep M. A. Munnichs, 'Linkages of Old People with the Families and Bureaucracy in a Welfare State, the Netherlands', in ed. Ethel Shands and Marvin B. Sussman, 1977, p. 46.
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