Mildred Gordon MP

Speeches to Parliament

1987 to 1997

Collated and edited by David and Helen Gordon

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Preface

In 1987, at the age of 63, Mildred Gordon was elected to represent the Constituency of Bow and Poplar. From the outset, she was a very unusual and atypical MP. Previously, there had only ever been 60 women who had represented their constituents in Parliament. Mildred was also 63 when she was elected. Only 11 other MPs have been older when they first entered Parliament. Most importantly, however, she was a working class socialist, born and raised in the East End of London. She did not go into politics in search of a career, hoping one day to secure a Government job. She wanted solely to represent her constituents in Bow and Poplar and the interests of the working classes wherever they lived.

Bow and Poplar was part of the Borough of Tower Hamlets which has the poorest and most ethnically diverse population in the UK. The Constituency – and its forerunners - had previously been represented by George Lansbury (Bow & Bromley in 1910), Clement Atlee (Limehouse in 1922) and Ian Mikardo (Poplar in 1964). The high levels of deprivation mean that all Tower Hamlets MPs have a very heavy caseload trying to help solve their constituents' problems. The 1987 to 1997 period was also a difficult one for a left-wing Labour MP to make an impact as the Conservatives were in power and the Labour Party was moving increasingly to the right. Given this atmosphere, it is remarkable how much Mildred achieved in the House of Commons.

In addition to the speeches reproduced here, Mildred often made interventions in the Commons and held the Government to account by asking many Parliamentary Questions. This book is just a record of her longer speeches to the House between 1987 and 1997.

Mildred retired from Parliament in 1997, having achieved a very great deal. In the years that followed, the new Labour Government brought about many of the changes she had tirelessly campaigned for.

David Gordon
December 2007

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Tower Hamlets

Mildred Gordon's Constituency of Bow and Poplar was one of the poorest and most deprived in the UK. It was – and still is – one of the most ethnically diverse.

During the period covered by these speeches, this part of London saw enormous changes: the construction of the office complex at Canary Wharf and adjacent expensive flats in Docklands, the Light Railway and the destruction for profit of older buildings and the culture of that part of the East End by the unaccountable and undemocratic London Docklands Development Corporation.

Maiden Speech on the LDDC (15 July 1987)

(11.06pm) **Ms Mildred Gordon** (Bow and Poplar): As this is my Maiden Speech, I take great pleasure in paying tribute to my predecessor, Ian Mikardo. He represented constituencies in Bow and Poplar for 23 years and he first entered the House in 1950. He was much loved and respected both here and throughout the country for his wit and wisdom. I wish him a happy retirement. I hope that he will write his memoirs so that we can all read the many wonderful stories that he has to tell. My predecessor loved this place and I hope that I shall find it as attractive as he did. When I arrived here I was greeted with cries of, *"When are you going to start the book?"* I have to inform Hon. Members that I shall disappoint them as I have no talents in that direction.

At first, I found that many things here were strange. It is strange to be debating a serious subject at this time of night. Perhaps this accounts for the fact that out of 633 Members of Parliament only 41 are women. What young woman with children could be attracted to a place in which one has to spend half the night and work such unsocial hours?

At one time I taught in Holloway prison — I hasten to add as a visiting teacher. It shares many similarities with this place, which is dark and gloomy. We lose our name and we are referred to by the name of our constituencies. We hardly see our families, unless they come to visit us in the family room. That is another reason why women are not attracted to stand for Parliament.

The sentence that the result of the election has given to my constituents is very serious. It means that many of them are imprisoned for another four years in crumbling flats and in the despair of poverty and unemployment.

I am very honoured to represent Bow and Poplar. I ask for the indulgence of the House while I speak about the East End. I was born and bred there; I went to school there; my father was a Stepney councillor; I taught

for many years in East End schools.

I feel that I know what is needed by the people in the East End and how they feel and think because I have suffered from many of the same problems. There is widespread unemployment, 28 per cent among men and 15 per cent among women. There is a serious problem of homelessness and higher than average mortality and perinatal mortality rates. There are long hospital waiting lists, fewer cars than average and bad transport, particularly from north to south.

Lest anybody should think that all is bleak and gloomy in the East End, I must point out that there is much there that we treasure. There is a rich cultural life; enriched by people from many parts of the world. We have the river. The area in which I was born, once known as Red Cliff, was a salubrious area centuries ago, where people from the City went to take the air and to convalesce. So there is a natural beauty in the area, which has been destroyed by man.

There is also warmth and compassion and the companionship that enables poor people to survive harsh conditions. There is great courage and close family life, which is under threat because the children of people living in the East End can no longer afford to live there. When they move out, their parents will be left alone to fend for themselves, which is not as it should be.

I lived in the East End during the War when we were under serious threat but we fought back. I was an air raid warden. My first ideals of Socialism were strengthened when I saw ordinary working men and women, who had never been given the chance to do anything but menial jobs, take command during air raids when the area was cut off. They sent for the fire and rescue services and saw about people being clothed and fed. They did all that and I realised the talent that is wasted among working people because this society has no use for it and does not allow them to get out into the light and to use it.

Maiden Speech on the LDDC (15 July 1987)

We are under attack once again. We are under attack from the reforms that are proposed in the Gracious Speech. We cringe when we hear the word 'reform'. I am reminded of Humpty Dumpty in *Alice Through the Looking Glass*, who explained his strange use of words.

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, *"it means just what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less." "The question is,"* said Alice, *"whether you can make words mean so many different things."*

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, *"which is to be master, that's all."*

In this Government's looking-glass world, the word 'reform' is used to mean the opposite of reform. It is used when the Prime Minister means that she is going into the attack. To people in Tower Hamlets, the 'reform' of education means that the prices of school meals will increase and that the children whose parents cannot afford the extra fees for woodwork or home economics will be excluded from those extra subjects. Where are we to find the extra teachers to look after the children who will be excluded from those subjects because their parents do not have the money to pay for the materials? 'Reform' in education will also mean the introduction of something like the 11-plus. As a former teacher in the East End, I shall have a great deal more to say, when the time comes, about the obscenity of the 11-plus and the loss of confidence that system brought about in 90 per cent of the children whom I taught.

The 'reform' of the Health Service means that we already have a private hospital that is drawing staff from the London Hospital and increasing the waiting lists for people who cannot afford to do other than use the Health Service, which is no longer serving their needs as it should. I have dozens and dozens of letters that are cries of pain from people who cannot get the treatment that they need and, indeed, the treatment for which they have paid when they paid their national insurance

contributions.

The 'reform' of social security will be an attack on young people who are unemployed. It will make them work for a pittance and undercut other people's wages. It will cut the maternity grant and various other benefits.

The Community Charge will increase costs for everybody in Tower Hamlets. The average rate per household is £548 and the estimated Community Charge per adult will be £639. Therefore, even a pensioner or any single person living on his own will have to pay £91 more per year under the Community Charge. So much for reform.

Now the Government's reforming zeal has been turned to the inner city. The London Docklands Development Corporation is put forward as the jewel in the Government's crown — a blueprint for urban development corporations in other major cities. But we who live with the problems created by the LDDC can tell Hon. Members that the jewel is paste and the crown is tarnished. A historic opportunity to solve the housing problems of the East End once and for all is being frittered away.

In Tower Hamlets we need an improved environment, homes and jobs. Let us examine the record of the LDDC. As a child I grew up within the sound of the river but not the sight of it. I could hear the ships' horns but in front of me was a grey dock wall. There was a little park some distance away where a small area of the river bank was open and we played. I hoped when those docks closed and the jobs were lost that there would at least be some community gain and at last we could have a riverside walk.

Some £300 million to £400 million has been spent. When I visit the East End and the Isle of Dogs today I get the feeling that it is as the Wild West must have been. There is plunder in the air. The biggest growth industries are wine bars and real estate agents. The area should be developed for the benefit of the people. I do not believe that anyone should be allowed to build

right onto the river bank. It should be for the use of the whole population, not for the pleasure of the privileged few.

The proposals for Canary Wharf are architecturally and otherwise obscene. It will obscure the view of Greenwich which East Enders have enjoyed for many generations. Land prices are rocketing and house prices are spiralling. I have a cutting from a local newspaper about a new development which has just come on the market in Wapping and it states:

"Under LDDC rules the homes were offered to Tower Hamlets residents for the first month but there was not a single offer from local people for the flats which cost £90,000 plus."

What a mockery! On paper, the residents have the first offer of the houses but they cannot afford to pay for them. Instead, the houses go to outsiders and local people have no chance to live in the area where their families have always lived.

Has the money used by the LDDC been well spent? It claims that 8,000 additional jobs have been created but more than 5,000 of them were transfers from the outside, from Billingsgate and the printing industry. Only 2,800 of those new jobs were real new jobs. Some 3,355 jobs have been lost through firms being squeezed out by compulsory purchase orders and rising land prices. Despite all that money being spent, there has been a net loss of 517 jobs. So much for the benefits that the LDDC has brought to the unemployed in the East End.

Canary Wharf is in my Constituency on the Isle of Dogs. This huge development was given planning permission in two weeks — less time than it takes to get planning permission for a fish and chip shop. After 18 months the master building agreement is still not signed. Two of the developers have pulled out and now a new developer from Canada is said to be moving in. It is all secret. We do not know what is happening. We are not consulted. The development

is simply being imposed on us. The land was offered to the Canary Wharf consortium at a price well below its market value. We do not know how the price was arrived at. Was it based on a certificate from an independent valuer or did the Department of the Environment give its specific consent to dispose of the land at a price lower than its market value? We have not been told.

The local community groups do not want Canary Wharf. They do not want the Docklands Highway that is to go with it, which will make life a misery for many local people and they do not want to have anything to do with the obscene idea of a £30 million memorial statue in an area where so much else is needed. These disgraceful ideas have nothing to do with the needs of the people in Bow and Poplar.

Peat, Marwick, Mitchell and Co., the accountants of the LDDC, reported that the number of jobs that we had been told that Canary wharf would produce had been vastly overestimated, that most of the jobs would be for people brought in from the outside once again and that only about 1,800 jobs would be provided for local people. Most of those jobs would be part-time and many of them would be cleaning jobs. The developers, on the other hand, were to get very great gains. They would get tax relief which could be written off against of any of their developments anywhere in the country and the Exchequer would pay about £80 million in lieu of rates. Tower Hamlets council will not gain because it will lose the block grant. It will lose £1.3 million for every £1 million of rateable value of Canary Wharf and there will be a net loss to the community.

Canary Wharf will change the face of the East End and of London. It will extend the City into the East End. Aldgate already looks dehumanised. It is already part of the City and that change will go further. Local people are considered to be in the way. This is not the first time that people have been pushed out because

they are considered to be in the way. It happened in the 18th Century to the peasants, with the enclosure of the land. Today some councils are selling off council estates, moving the tenants out and handing those estates over to private developers.

The LDDC commissioned a report by Sandra Wallman of University College. She started with recommended points for the consortium of Canary Wharf. She talks about dockland traditions and this is very significant. She said:

"This issue is more diffuse, covering the need for some parcel(s) of land to be held in trust so that the continuity of the traditional community is assured, the matter of local place names and the environment. Commitment to local identity in all its forms is a serious need at this initial stage."

What does that mean? Does it mean that the East Enders are to be pushed into some parcel of land that has been set aside, just as the red Indians were pushed into reservations? At least the Dutch bought the island of Manhattan for beads; the LDDC is getting the Isle of Dogs for a song. Is it considering allowing a small group of East Enders to stay on the Isle of Dogs to be a sort of living museum — a 'chirpy, cheeky, Cockney, chappy' living museum? Would we be walking around wearing cloth caps and mufflers and saying, *"Gor blimey, Guv. How's your trouble and strife? She's up the apples and pears."* What kind of nonsense is this? Is this what the LDDC has in store for us? Is the City to move in and take over while a few of us will be allowed to stay on some parcel of land, squeezed into a corner of the Isle of Dogs? East Enders are not going to stand for that. We refuse to be treated like this.

East Enders are proud people; they are fighters. They fought Moseley in Cable Street. They knew how to unite — community side by side with community — against the people who were attacking them. They stood

firm during the War and they will stand firm against attacks on their way of life today.

We are not backward looking. We want to keep the best of the old traditions and we want to take advantage of new technology. We want the training that is needed to go with that new technology. We want homes with gardens for our people and for the children. We want jobs and a better environment. We do not want decisions that affect our lives to be taken in secret. We want democratic control of the land to be returned to the community.

As we have resisted before, we shall resist the LDDC plans that are against our interests now. I shall be proud to be part of that resistance. (11.25pm)

Mr Hughes (the Hon. Member for Harrow, West) was saying, *"This is a vendetta against the City Corporation. It is a knee-jerk....."*, when Ms Gordon *rose.*

Mr Hughes: I shall give way, but I should like to finish one point.

Ms Gordon: Six years of the London Docklands Development Corporation have resulted in a net loss of jobs. Most of the jobs were transferred from Billingsgate and Fleet Street. Some jobs were created but so many local firms were squeezed out by compulsory purchase orders that the final result was net loss of jobs. The Hon. Gentleman's figures are not correct.

Mr Hughes: The Hon. Lady really must keep up. I had moved on to the next point, having dealt satisfactorily with that matter. If she would like to try to keep up with the game, we shall try to answer her points. This is a knee-jerk reaction by the Labour Party..... *(Contrary to his earlier remark about finishing one point, he continues in the same vein for some considerable time. Finally,...)*

(8.32pm) **Ms Mildred Gordon** (Bow and Poplar): The Hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr Hughes) keeps referring to negative attitudes. The real negative attitude is the naked greed of pinstriped men who lust for profits and once again propose to blight the East End of London.

Mine is the neighbouring Constituency to that of my Right Hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr Shore). I was born in his Constituency and I have a special interest in Spitalfields. My father was a councillor for Spitalfields East; many of my school friends lived in Spitalfields and I would go there to visit them and play. My sister went to Central Foundation school, which was in Spital Square. I therefore know the area well and have always considered it very special.

Even when very young, we knew of the Huguenots who had sought refuge there. We saw their buildings, with the

large windows to let in light for silk weaving, and the mulberry trees in the yards where the silkworms grew. Spitalfields market was also a large part of our lives. The market received its charter in the 17th Century. It is very successful, with trade totalling over £180 million in 1987, and it is fully occupied. In 1984-85, 42 of the traders had a turnover of over £1 million each, and 78 per cent reported that their trade was improving. It is not a dying market but a flourishing market.

There are many new dealers in ethnic food, such as vegetables imported from Kenya, and that side of trading is thriving and growing. The market supplies Bengali shops, for instance. No account has been taken of the fact that trade has arisen because of the needs of the local community. It supplies the majority of the vegetables that form a large part of their diet, food that is not readily available elsewhere.

Mr Michael Jack (Fylde): Does the Hon. Lady agree that the existing Spitalfields market does not contain the necessary facilities — cold storage or ethylene ripening facilities, for example — to accommodate the further development of the trade to which she has referred?

Ms Gordon: I do not have the details but I see no reason why the existing market cannot be improved. There are problems. Improvement is needed in cleaning and the removal of waste and in the access roads. But there is no reason why the Local Authority cannot deal with improved cleaning facilities, for instance.

The traders have been faced with a *fait accompli*. The initiative has come wholly from big business. The proposal that the market should be relocated at Temple Mills, and that the site should be redeveloped, is prompted by the value of the site. The Bill has nothing to do with the condition of the market and whether it can be improved. Behind the proposal is the value of the site to the City of London Corporation and the hundreds of millions of

pounds that will be made out of it by the developers.

Mr Hugo Summerson (Walthamstow): Will the Hon. Lady contrast the 'lust for profit of the pinstriped men in the City' with the doubtless large profits that the market traders of Spitalfields are making?

Ms Gordon: The profit that the traders in Spitalfields market are making is a mere fleabite compared with those of big business. They are not damaging the lives of local people, as the proposed developments will harm the community.

There is no knowing how the move to Temple Mills will affect the Spitalfields traders. There is no knowing how it will affect the fruit and vegetable dealers in the many smaller retail markets in the East End — and there are many such markets dotted all over the East End. People travel from miles around, not just from the East End, to get cheap fruit and vegetables. The development will be detrimental to those in the East End, Hackney and the surrounding areas. We also do not know how the move will affect traders in Stratford, but no doubt my Hon. Friends who represent the other areas that will be affected by the move will deal with that.

One of the reasons given for pulling down the market is the problem of traffic. If the proposed developments are built, traffic problems in the small medieval streets round Spitalfields will be immense. That is a false argument. Spitalfields is a unique and historic area, with a high degree of social and communal cohesion. There has always been racial tolerance. It must be the only area where a building can be found, that was a place of worship for the Huguenots, became a place of worship for Jewish refugees and is now a mosque. It is also an area of industry and enterprise. The majority of residents live within 10 minutes of their place of work but that will be changed if the new development is allowed to go ahead. I have unfortunately seen the results of the beginning of a development

in my Constituency, where the land is being regenerated and the community is being destroyed. That will be the pattern in Spitalfields if we allow the market to be pulled down and redevelopment to go ahead.

The local community live, work, go to school, shop and have their cultural and religious needs met within the small area of Spitalfields. The area will be changed out of all recognition by the new proposals. The proposed relocation of the market development will pose a serious threat to the continued existence of the present community.

The developers claim to be concerned about Spitalfields' heritage and its historic character. This is not just a matter of individual buildings, some of which are beautiful and date from the 18th Century; it is a matter of the unique mixture of work, home, market and trades. The area's inheritance is under threat.

My Right Hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney has already mentioned the high unemployment rate of over 24 per cent within Spitalfields. The Home Affairs Select Committee report on Bengalis in Britain said that this figure is likely to conceal a higher rate. As my Right Hon. Friend has said, the jobs that exist centre around the clothing and leather industry, and work in the market, in the shops and the cafes around it. Jobs will not be created by the new development; they will be squeezed out.

I have received case after case concerning small firms on the Isle of Dogs that employ local labour in the type of jobs for which the local people have been trained being squeezed out. Only today I received a letter from Limehouse Studios. In 1985 that company signed a new lease with the LDDC for 200 years. Now it has been informed by the LDDC that it is to be compulsorily purchased. That is a typical example of what has happened in that area and that is what will happen to artisan workshops and small businesses in Spitalfields if the Bill goes ahead.

Mr Spearing: That example

of the juggernaut of the LDDC must be compared with the fact that the Canary Wharf development was not called in for consideration. The Prime Minister was in the area yesterday. Was my Hon. Friend able to tell her about Limehouse Studios? Was she able to point out that the sort of things that are happening in Spitalfields, Canary Wharf and on the Isle of Dogs are not welcome?

Ms Gordon: I knew about the Prime Minister's visit to Canary Wharf and the earlier visit by Lord Young only from the newspapers. I was neither invited nor informed. Indeed, the Mayor and the leader of the council were not informed. I believe that they walked out of a banquet in Whitehall to which they had been invited when they found out what had happened at Canary Wharf. We can expect more such behaviour in the future.

Mr Tony Banks: My Kon. Friend has just revealed that the Prime Minister acted most discourteously by not informing the Constituency Member of her visit. I assume that my Hon. Friend will accept that the Prime Minister must be rather careful. She is so unpopular that she is a positive incitement to violence on the streets. Therefore, she must keep her visits quiet until they have taken place.

Ms Gordon: I take my Hon. Friend's point. I must also inform my Hon. Friends that Lord Young's visit was not disclosed....

Mr Banks: He is even more unpopular!

Ms Gordon: We must also take into account that the Canary Wharf development is unpopular with the community and that everything to do with it is shrouded in secrecy. The local people are not told what is happening in case they express their opinions in the usual East End manner.

The shops that will be built in the new development will not be those that are needed. The regulations have already been changed and the class of use has been changed to enable banks, building societies, travel agents and

estate agents to be included. Sadly, a beautiful old place that used to make scales — I believe that was in Paxton Street — has gone out of business. It has been replaced by a new faceless computer office.

Workshops will be undermined by the rapid rise in land values that will ensue. The one thing that the people of Spitalfields and of the East End do not need is more office space. My Right Hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney has already said that 27 million sq ft of office space is in the pipeline for London. Within 30 yards of the boundary of Spitalfields we can see the towering mass of the Broadgate development, which is currently under construction. That will provide about 4 million sq ft of office space. Canary Wharf will give us a further 6 million sq ft. I do not know who will occupy all those offices. Perhaps they will stay empty as their values rise, as we saw with the Centre Point development in London.

The area needs developing. There is need, not for offices, but for economically priced rented accommodation, for improved workshops and for environmental improvements that will benefit the community. There has been talk about the Liberal council negotiating a community gain. The community gain that it negotiated with the billionaire company Olympia and York on Canary Wharf was pathetic — £50,000 a year for training. The community gain for training that is attached to the Spitalfields package, should it be put into effect — I hope that it never will be — will be £250,000 over five years. It has already been pointed out that that will be less than the cost of a small house. What type of training will be provided for that? It is derisory and despicable.

Part of the community gain is the contemptible proposal for only 118 residential units on this 12 to 14 acre site. Such provision is derisory when one considers local need. Indeed, most of those units will be one or two-bedroomed units. The families in that area are large and they need four or five-bedroomed houses. The

residential units will not be for them. The Corporation has also told Tower Hamlets council that it wishes to have nomination rights for some of the housing. How much will that benefit local people? Not more than would go in the corner of a tooth.

The area will be turned into a ghost town. There will be a park provided and no doubt it will be full of office workers at lunch time but it will be empty after dark and people will be afraid to go into it. If the Bill is agreed, the sky will be the limit for land values. In Wapping, less than half a mile from Spitalfields, the price is currently £20 million an acre. That is almost unbelievable. The professional gentrifiers have already moved into Spitalfields with the yuppies in their wake.

A few weeks ago, when I was doing a television programme, one of the executives introduced himself to me and said that he lived in the neighbourhood next to my Constituency. He told me that he had bought a house in Woodseer Street. I expressed surprise and he told me that he had bought his house three years ago and that he had paid £52,000 for it. He said, *"Islington is finished."* I think that sums it up: Spitalfields is the next place for the takeover.

What will happen to the local people after the takeover? They will be priced out of the area. A very vulnerable local community will be forced out. It is worth noting that the £52,000 house is now worth nearly £200,000. My Right Hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney read out some house prices and they are soaring. If the Bill goes ahead, the same things will happen to the people of Spitalfields as have happened to the people on the Isle of Dogs. All this is even before the development begins. Flats on rundown housing estates are selling for £60,000 when the average wage of local people in the area is £100 or less. What chance do they have in this melee?

Mr Spearing: Is not the silence of the Prime Minister and her activities possibly related to her inner city policy? Is not what my Hon.

Friend is describing the real inner city policy of the Prime Minister, which is col-onisation by the people she likes whom she described on election night as *"our sort of people"*? Is that not the hidden agenda of her inner city policy for London?

Ms Gordon: I agree entirely with my Hon. Friend. The Right Hon Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) was reported in *The Daily Telegraph* — or perhaps it was in an article that he wrote for *The Daily Telegraph* — as suggesting that we need more charitable donations to solve the problems of the inner cities. He said that we must honour the men who built the workhouses. Is that supposed to be the future for the unfortunate people of East London? Do we want to bring the workhouse syndrome back to the area? The Government honour the people who built the workhouses, not those who achieved the biggest slum clearance in Europe. A Labour council built 84,000 housing units but the Government honour those who built the workhouses.

Most of the community gains do not meet the needs of the people in Spitalfields and the adjoining areas. We need a strategy that begins to address the problem of inner city deprivation and regeneration, with social and economic responsibility. The social effect of regeneration in the American cities, the model on which this type of development is based, has been to increase poverty, to displace the local population and to create more deprivation and despair among the ethnic groups, but it has created no jobs and very little housing or other benefits for working people or for ethnic minorities.

For those reasons, the House should be examining alternative developments which will reflect the interests and needs of the people of Spitalfields and not those of the business men in the City of London. For those reasons, I support the instruction. (8.52pm)

(7.24pm) **Ms Mildred Gordon** (Bow and Poplar): A number of concessions were made in Committee and people in the local community welcome the extra money for community gain and the covenant ensuring that two pieces of land, Elder gardens and Horner square, will remain open spaces. However, they are dismayed that no concession was made about Allen Gardens which is the largest park in Spitalfields, which is a heavily populated area with insufficient open space. The local people believe Allen gardens will be developed by Tower Hamlets council.

The Committee Chairman said that he recognised the impact that the development will have on the community. If the Bill is allowed to proceed, it will indeed have a massive impact. The monetary concessions that have been made will not compensate for the devastation that will take place. In addition, Holland Estate, which is nearby, is to be taken over by a Housing Action Trust unless the tenants are allowed to vote against it. That means that the whole area will be heavily developed.

My Right Hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr Shore) referred to the article in the *Estates Times* from which it seems that important changes will be made. There will have to be substantial amendments to the plans because the demand for office space is falling and the amount of office space will be surplus to requirements. The article says that about a quarter of the space will be used for a shopping mall and that the new plan is that the shopping centre will have 300,000 sq ft and that the design will be based on the *"Galeria in the centre of Milan."* The Local Authority already has a plan for a big shopping centre in White-chapel, which is not far away. That plan would be destroyed and that shopping centre would no longer be viable if the Bill is allowed to proceed.

The plans are confused and the Bill should be returned and rethought.

There are also plans for Whitechapel Library, which is near the site. It is to be closed down and a compulsory purchase order will be imposed on the land behind it. That will be used for even more office space.

If the Bill is allowed to proceed there will be office space development gone mad. There will be two types of enterprise culture opposing each other. The Government purport to support small-scale firms in Spitalfields but they will be opposed by international high finance, with computer screens linking the City of London to the money markets of the world. That will change the nature of the area. The lives and livelihood of thousands of people, as well as the nature of the community and character of the area, are under threat. The Bill should not be allowed to proceed when there is such confusion and it seems that there will have to be a major change of plan.

(7.48pm) **Ms Mildred Gordon** (Bow and Poplar): No evidence has been produced since Second Reading to show that there is anything wrong with this market that it is not fairly simple to put right. One thousand people are employed in this flourishing market, which is developing new areas of wholesale food sales, so the market is expanding. There are 32 flats above the market and 50 people live there in low-cost dwellings. It will be very hard to find housing for them, as the housing waiting list in Tower Hamlets has 20,000 people on it, and there are many homeless people.

Several groups who have petitioned against the market, as my Right Hon. Friend says, have been given sweeteners enabling them to withdraw their petitions, but for the ordinary residents of Spitalfields, the contrary is true. There is no benefit whatsoever and if the market is demolished they will lose a source of ethnic food of the kind that they need, and they will have to travel a long way to buy their supplies.

The development that will take its place will produce very great disadvantages. There is nothing in the Committee stage of the Bill to show any guarantees for the protection of local industries, which employ local people. Local industries, such as the leather and garment manufacturers, will be put at risk. Increased land and property prices will result in local tenants suffering, as is clear from other areas where similar developments have occurred.

Open space is at threat. I welcome the verbal undertaking by Tower Hamlets that a substantial portion of Allen Gardens will be retained, but who will decide what is 'substantial' in an area where there is need for at least double the amount of open space that exists at present? Losing some of it is regrettable. Even now, a number of pocket handkerchief-sized parks and gardens in Tower Hamlets, previously designated as public open spaces — which are extremely important in an area in which 85 per cent of the population lives in apartments — are under threat

and in the process of being offered to developers.

Their disappearance would turn the whole area into the type of concrete jungle that exists in New York. Flat-dwellers will have nowhere to walk the dog or take their children to play or find a spot in which to sit in the sun and get a breath of fresh air when they have an hour or two to spare. Any loss of parkland and open space is extremely serious in this part of the world.

The future of this multicultural, multiracial community depends on the Bill being defeated. Three Georgian cottages were listed in the area. Two of them were demolished last year. This arouses fears that the special dwellings that were occupied by the Huguenots, houses with large windows designed to let in the light so the silk weavers could work, the mulberry trees and all the traditional and historic ambience of the area will be destroyed if the development goes ahead.

The real reason for doing away with the market is to make room for this development, which will be mostly office space. There will also be shops and a shopping centre which will compete with other shopping centres in the area and which the local community does not need. Clearly, the Bill will provide an opportunity for a lot of profit to be made and to hell with the local community.

Although I oppose the Bill, I would support proposals which put Government money into the area. I accept that much improvement could be made but that improvement must involve the local workshops and the provision of affordable dwellings and training for local people, so upgrading the area and improving the health of the people and their living conditions. The Bill will do none of that. It will blight the local community. (7.53pm)

(5.54pm) **Ms Mildred Gordon** (Bow and Poplar)I must put the Hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr Bennett) right. He talked about Labour Authorities. I lived in Docklands in the East End for most of my life and I remember that the Labour council carried out the biggest slum clearance scheme in Europe at a time when Tories were saying, *"It is no good giving the workers baths; they will only put coal in them."* The Labour council took people out of hovels. Getting a council flat meant a new life and that was everybody's ambition. Many of those council flats are still desirable and beautiful today, especially those that were built by the GLC. Many of them are run down but our Rate Support Grant has been stolen by the Government. We have been rate-capped, and Labour councils, and Tower Hamlets council, are now handicapped by insufficient funds to repair and restore properties. Hon. Members should not deride that slum clearance, it gave new life to thousands of people.

I represent a Docklands Constituency. It is high on the list of indices that measure poverty and deprivation. I have the plans of the Docklands Joint Committee, which knew what the area wanted and needed and it was very different from what the Government have imposed upon it. The Docklands Joint Committee was made up of representatives from the GLC, the Department of the Environment and local Boroughs — a good mix of local and national bodies. Its overall objective was to use the opportunity provided by the availability of parts of Docklands for development to redress housing, social, environmental, employment, economic and communications difficulties. The Boroughs provided freedom for similar improvements throughout east and inner London. We have something very different with the LDDC, a neo-colonial quango answerable to nobody but the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for the Environment. That body was imposed upon us. The LDDC's aims were different. It was to regenerate the land, not the community, as the

Secretary of State for the Environment has said. Its actions have been detrimental to the community. The availability of that large area of vacant land was an historical opportunity to solve the London housing crisis once and for all. That opportunity has been thrown away.

Let us examine council house building figures since the Government have been in office. The number of council new build completions in east London in 1979 was 4,250. The latest figures available for 1986-87 is 430 — a tenth of what it was before. New build completions are grinding to a halt. In 1979, there were 3,613 new build starts. There were 490 in 1986-87.

Conservative Members say that there are too many council houses and that people need to buy their own houses. That is not what local people think. They think that they need more council housing, not less. There are over 10, 000 people on the waiting list. They, those on the transfer list and the homeless think that we in the East End need more council housing but the Government do not listen to what we say, because it does not suit them and their speculator friends to do so. The number of right-to-buy sales in the five years from 1980-81 to 1985-86 were 16, 200. In the last year of that period, the number reduced to 2,716 and it is falling.

Many elderly people and pensioners have told me that they do not want to buy their houses at their time of life. They cannot afford it with the little bit of money that they have left. They would rather enjoy themselves and have some security with a little money in the bank. However, they are afraid that the Government's policy means that their council estates will be sold to private housing organisations. They are afraid that they will lose tenure and eventually be forced out. They have been forced into buying. Many people have told me that they wished that they could return to being council tenants because they had encountered problems with their properties. For example, people have found

asbestos flaking off beneath wallpaper when they have decorated. The Local Authority claims that it cannot help because it has no money. The Government will not give the Local Authority money to help, claiming the council must find the money from its own pool. A hell of a lot of people in east London are in a dreadful mess.

People are also finding that the service and other charges are higher than they had thought they would be. They cannot afford those charges as inflation rises. We must remember that 10 per cent of those who are registered as homeless are mortgage defaulters and that figure should not be taken lightly. Buying a house is not the answer to everyone's dream, although for those who can afford it, it may be desirable.

In 1978 there were 3,601 homeless people in the area. In 1986-87 that figure had risen to 9,037. We should bear in mind that childless couples and single people are not included in that figure. Similarly, it does not include people sleeping in cardboard boxes or on other people's floors. In 1983, in the east London Boroughs, there were 438 people in bed and breakfast accommodation. In 1988, there were 1,550. Those figures are an indictment of the Government's policies. The LDDC has brought in speculators who have built many houses. However, the local population cannot afford them. Very few properties built in my Constituency were ever in the affordable bracket. Only the houses built by Barratts at Glengall Place and by Comben on the Mudshute were relatively affordable. Local residents were supposed to be given priority for lower-priced houses but there was a great deal of fiddling by unwelcome speculators.

Thames Television inquired into the fiddling and found that one group of business men had bought 15 properties. In other cases, properties were bought and resold without being occupied. People bought rent books to show a local address. There were 10 dubious sales at the Caledonian wharf, which

were actually stopped. Some of the Cascades Flats were bought and offered for resale while the scheme was still just a hole in the ground.

We need consider only how the price of those apartments and houses has risen to see that this was not housing for local people but simply an opportunity for the speculators to get rich. In 1985, a two-bedroom flat in London Yard on the Isle of Dogs cost £58,191 — much more than local people could afford. In 1988, it cost £160,000. In 1984 a one-bedroom flat on Clippers Quay, also on the Isle of Dogs, cost £40,000. In 1986, it cost £109,000. A two-bedroom flat which cost £39,495 rose in three years to £199,995. A three-bedroom house, which is what most families want, rose from £60,000 to £175,000. In large part, that housing was bought by speculators and resold, or bought by people from outside the area who had large incomes and large pockets.

Many young people with high salaries took on heavy mortgages. Some of them are now unhappy with what is happening. They find that life under the dictatorship of the LDDC is not so great. Some of the houses are jerry built. I have been told of an estate where the land is subsiding and water has come flooding in. I have heard of cases where a property was purchased for a great deal of money in a quiet court but one flat was turned into a wine bar and residents had to suffer the noise of car doors banging late at night. Similarly, people complain of noise from across the river from the Victoria Deep Water Metal Crushing Depot. I have also heard that some roads are covered in mud when it rains. Bus drivers have told me that some of the roads on the Isle of Dogs are becoming dangerous because of some of the developers' sloppy work.

As the market drops, I believe that Canary Wharf could become a great ghost edifice like some of those in New York. It is meant to be the biggest office development in Europe. It will create huge wind funnels. My area does not need that development.

Housing Action Trusts were another of the Government's policies for inner cities. We are all aware of the East Enders' reactions to HATs. All the apartment houses down the Mile End road had huge banners hanging from them attacking and denouncing HATs. The tenants did not want them and they made that quite clear to the Minister when he met them at mass meetings. The Government had to retreat on HATs. The tenants were ready to blockade themselves in their own homes to stop anyone entering.

The tenants knew that, under HATs, after several years their estates would be sold to speculators, their rents would no longer be affordable and they would lose tenure. I went into places which had water streaming down the walls, yet even those tenants preferred to stick with the Local Authority rather than have a HAT. They did not trust the Government.

The 'pick a landlord' scheme is also causing terror in areas like the East End. People feel secure with the Local Authority. They can vote for it and they can vote it out. They can bring pressure to bear. They can speak their minds to local councillors. However, the Government's schemes will remove their democratic right and control over housing. Tory Members who talk about Government proposals giving tenants' control are talking through their HATs. That is all nonsense.

The East Enders have seen two bodies which they respected and supported destroyed by the Government — the Greater London Council and the Inner London Education Authority. An opinion poll showed that 90 per cent of Londoners did not want ILEA abolished but the Government disregarded them. How can the Government claim that they are a democratic Government?

County Hall, our city hall, which belongs to the community, will be sold off, probably to become hotels and expensive apartment houses so that rich people can enjoy the river. Londoners will lose all rights to that building. That is typical of the Government's

approach to the inner cities. They take away all the best places.

I warn people from other towns who have been told that they are going to have an Urban Development Corporation that the LDDC, which is supposed to be the jewel in the Government's crown and the model UDC, has pinched pieces of land along the river, canals and bridlepaths. It has pinched the most pleasant places which go to rich people and local people do not get a look in. The children of local people are forced to move far away. That is bad for the community, especially for an aging community.

Housing has been for a very long time the most urgent problem in the inner cities and in east London in particular. Jobs are also very important. Before I made my maiden speech in the House two years ago, I carried out investigations and discovered that, despite all the public money which has been poured into the LDDC — money which was never available for the plans of the Joint Docklands Committee and the Local Authorities — there has been a net loss of jobs. A month ago I asked another series of questions and found, rather to my surprise, that there was a slightly bigger net loss of jobs, despite everything that has happened in the past two years.

Health care is important in an area with a rising population. Unlike the rest of the country, in Tower Hamlets there has been an explosion in the birth rate, bringing housing and health problems in its train. Two weeks ago, I held a meeting with General Practitioners from Tower Hamlets in this building and they were unanimously against the Government's proposals for the Health Service. They have been denounced as greedy, as liars, but in fact they are devoted people. One has to be devoted to choose to work in east London.

At that meeting I took 12 pages of notes on why they knew — not felt — that the Government's proposals would damage the doctor-patient relationship, damage the interests of doctors, particularly in the smaller rundown practices that they

are trying to build up, and damage the interests of their patients. They feel that people will have to make long journeys for operations and that there will be no continuity of provision because, whereas a District Health Authority may make a contract with Wolverhampton for hip replacement operations one year, the next year somewhere else may be cheaper. For the first time, there will be a money limitation on drug provision. That is already frightening people who require a lot of drugs.

Everyone is worried about the London Hospital. That has always been a community hospital, deeply integrated with the local community but it is now expressing an interest in opting out. Neither the doctors nor the Community Health Council were consulted. The London Hospital has expressed an interest in opting out without consultation.

Mr Nicholas Bennett: Opting out of what?

Ms Gordon: Opting out of the Health Service in the long term. [*Hon. Members: Rubbish*] — I have met officials who are already talking about providing operations more cheaply than private hospitals. In the long term, that means opting out of the Health Service.

Mr Hind: Disinformation.

Ms Gordon: It is not disinformation. We are destined to have a two-tier Health Service. Hospitals such as the London Hospital will start by changing their policies, providing heart transplants and glamorous medicine rather than serving the local community and will eventually opt out of the Health Service.

Mr Hind: They will not be allowed.

Ms Gordon: Whether they are allowed to or not, in the meantime local people will have to travel far to obtain the services that they need. If the Government's proposals are put into effect, the London Hospital will no longer be a community hospital.

The Inner London Education Authority has been building new schools and extra classrooms but East End schools cannot attract teachers. When there was council house building, there was also a key worker scheme but that no longer exists. Doctors and teachers cannot come to the East End because they cannot afford to buy the houses that are being built there by the speculators whom the LDDC has allowed in. The Hon. Member for Pembroke spoke of teachers being paid by results. Payment by result was abandoned as an uncivilised method of education in the last century. It is rather surprising to hear the last century's ideas being trotted out again as new ones. The Hon. Member suggested that there should be regional agreements on wages. If regional agreements on wages replace national arbitration, teachers will go from areas with poor councils, many problems and deprivation, to the richer areas. Instead of the stability that children need, teachers will be on the move even more than they are now and there will be fewer teachers in Tower Hamlets rather than more. Such policies will damage education in the East End of London.

Again, those policies are designed to create a two-tier system. Just as we shall have a two-tier Health Service with hospitals opting out, so we shall have a two-tier education service, with working-class children given minimum education, as happened before the Education Act 1944. Only a few working-class kids who are more academically able and quicker off the mark will be educated alongside middle-class and rich children. They will have a different kind of education and curriculum. Time will prove me right. That is what the Government's policies are designed to create, when and as they can introduce them. However, they will not be able to do so, because this Government will not last beyond the next election.

In the East End of London, transport is developer-led, which again is not what the East End needs. The Docklands Light Railway was

welcome but it is not safe transport. The doors are not safe, there is nobody at the stations and at the moment it does not even operate at night or during the weekend. I have been told by LDDC officials that the computer system does not work well. The trains still stop at the ghost station of Canary Wharf and no one knows how to prevent them from doing so. Anyone who travels down the A13 will see that transport in the East End is a complete mess. There is a constant snarl-up on that road. There are traffic jams at 9pm and during the weekends.

Just as the inner cities need an integrated health policy with primary, secondary and local community care implementing the Griffiths Report's recommendations, which the Government are so carefully ignoring, so they need an integrated transport policy. The GLC's *Fares Fair* policy was right. That was designed to take people out of their cars and on to public transport. Just as we need more affordable housing, so we need more affordable public transport. I cannot finish without talking about the environment, about which the Prime Minister talks so much. It is proposed to run a road through Victoria Park, the only large park in the East End. Mile End Park will be encroached upon. The Tower Hamlets Environmental Trust has identified 36 small pieces of land, designated as public open space, which are under threat. Such pieces of land are important to those living in flats. They are needed for taking a walk and for walking the dog and the lives of children centre around them. They are under threat because everything is becoming market-led and the developers have their greedy eyes upon them.

We wanted local jobs and workshops so that people could use their skills to work at local trades. We could have had a riverside walk. This is an historic area. There are places of interest that could have been developed. Instead, there are expensive flats along the riverside, and they are built right up to the river's edge so there can be no riverside

walks. No tourist will be able to walk along there from the Tower; nor will the local people. Even part of Island Gardens on the river front is under threat, as is the King Edward Memorial Park. The interests of the local people and the environment come second to the market.

More money has been poured into the police. There are many new inspectors and other high officials in the police force but there are not so many extra men in the lower ranks on the streets to prevent crime. Their number has hardly increased at all.

Local people are the experts. They know what they need and want. They express their wishes, desires and demands through the locally-elected authorities, some of which have been abolished and others of which are being rate-capped so that they have no money to improve their areas.

Local people need affordable rents, affordable transport and local democracy. They do not want the form of dictatorship that is being imposed on them because it is not acting in their interest but in the interest of the profit makers. It has brought no benefits to the local community and it is driving many of them out of the inner cities. (6.20pm)

(6.21pm) **Ms Mildred Gordon** (Bow and Poplar): The mark of a civilised society is that it is one in which people can expect to be decently housed and clothed, to have enough to eat and to have access to health care and to education for their children. Our society fails many people in a number of these respects but nowhere more so than in housing. Every Member of Parliament representing an inner-city area has thousands of cases of human misery, ill health and broken families — all caused by over-crowding and the impossibility of getting somewhere decent to live. Furthermore, it is a cause of racial conflict. The Government put the squeeze on Local Authorities and refused to let them have money for council house building and so communities turn against each other and fight for the meagre resources that are left. The worst part of it is the loss of hope and the depression that come from 10 years of being on the waiting list and seeing no chance of a solution.

Tower Hamlets is fairly typical of inner-city Boroughs. It has over 1,000 families accepted as homeless. Many are in bed and breakfast accommodation. The money that goes on bed-and-breakfast represents millions of pounds down the drain because it provides no permanent solution. I have visited constituents in seedy bed-and-breakfast hotels in Paddington and Earls Court. The conditions are appalling. In a room the size of a boxroom in an average semi-detached house, there are two beds, a mother and father and two children. There is no television or a fridge. There is a coffee table at which one person can eat while the others eat on their beds. The mother comes up a steep flight of stairs from a communal kitchen with one child in her arms and the other hanging off her skirts, carrying pots of boiling food. Not only are they in danger, but, as I know from my experience as a teacher, these children will have no chance of healthy development. A child needs a place to move, to run and to stretch so as to develop mentally and physically, and

there is no room for them to do so. These families in bed and breakfast hotels are condemned to a nightmare.

According to the Community Charge office, Tower Hamlets has 4,000 empty and second homes, most in the private sector. In Docklands 1,500 units — the minimum admitted by the London Docklands Development Corporation — are luxury homes that people cannot afford to buy. We need radical solutions. The right-to-buy money must be released and used to repair empty homes so that they can be used. All unused land in public ownership must be released so that prefabs can be put on it; then we could do something within months to accommodate the vast majority of homeless families. Privately-owned homes that have been empty for years must be requisitioned and let by Local Authorities. The right-to-buy helped many people to purchase their own homes but it has reduced the condition of public sector housing stock. In London, one fifth of the housing stock has been sold, three quarters of it houses with gardens, because they are what everybody wants to live in. That leaves only 15 per cent of council tenants in houses with gardens. Therefore, the worst stock is that left in municipal control.

In Docklands, we had a great opportunity to solve the housing problems because vast areas of land were left unused. When so much land is left empty, it must be zoned so that a fair proportion of it goes for affordable housing. Instead, millions of square feet of office space was built, half of which is empty, and millions more are to come although they are surplus to requirements. That is not the answer that we need, in Tower Hamlets or any other city centre. Most people dream of owning their own homes but for many that dream has turned sour and has become a nightmare in these days of unemployment and rising interest rates. People come to me in desperation. They have bought their homes but they cannot pay service charges or a big repair has to be carried out and they do not have the money for it. Bow County

Court deals with more repossession cases than any other court in London. A single person needs an income of £21,000 and a family needs an income of £26,000 to be a first-time buyer. That is no answer in an area such as Tower Hamlets, one of the poorest in the country.

The sad evidence of the failure of the Government's policy of trying to put an end to council house building can be seen all round us in London — in the people living in the streets, in the crowded rooms of the seedy bed-and-breakfast hotels and in the queues of desperate people in the surgeries of every London Member of Parliament. As I have said many times, for my constituents and those in other urban areas, the only practical answer is more affordable housing built by municipal authorities. The Government can shake their head and proffer other methods but that method took people out of the slums and gave them decent homes and it is the only one that will work in the future. (6.27pm)

London Docklands Railway (Lewisham, etc.) Bill (24 February 1992)

(7.24pm) **Ms Mildred Gordon** (Bow and Poplar): I shall need to speak a little longer than I usually do to put the case for my constituents. I hope that you will bear with me, Madam Deputy Speaker, because I have a raging sore throat and I do not know how long my voice will last. I excuse my anti-social behaviour in spreading germs around the Chamber. My constituents are so concerned about the Bill, which they consider to be the last straw, that I feel that their point of view must be put here.

We feel that the Bill is premature. The present railway does not run properly. When it was introduced, my constituents were told that there would be a light railway which would be quiet and which would give them transport and they welcomed it. Over four years, the railway has deteriorated so considerably that life has become a nightmare for all the people living along the railway — so much so that they have formed an organisation called Residents Against Noise and Pollution. Some 2,000 of them have signed a petition asking that something be done about the noise. The residents say:

"The noise from the DLR is increasingly affecting the lives of residents along the line. Their health, as well as their daytime performance and behaviour, is deeply affected through lack of sleep and constant noise aggression."

When the residents heard that the DLR would be handed over to the London Docklands Development Corporation, they approached Eric Sorensen and expressed their problems and worries. His answer was in part sympathetic but it ended:

"Perhaps I should end with something of a warning. The noise of this railway is partly inherent to its design, construction and the type of vehicle. You will appreciate that it would be extremely expensive to put this right and it would not be easy to find the right balance between the interests of running the railway and local residents."

In other words, if it costs too much, local residents will just have to suffer. Tough luck!

People in Lewisham and Greenwich, who are probably looking forward to improved transport facilities as we did on the Isle of Dogs, should seriously consider what has happened and how the railway has deteriorated. They should also consider whether they want to support this form of transport or some other. We believe that the extension of the Jubilee Line would be one solution. The East London Line, which already goes across the river, could also be extended and the definite problems of south London in not having direct railway access to north London could be solved in a better way.

The Residents Against Noise and Pollution organisation says that the new sections of the railway are very noisy. The tracks are completely open from rail track level with no noise control. The interface of tracks and wheels is steel to steel.

"Being designed as a light railway system, the wheels are not of heavy steel and are much noisier than heavy steel gauge systems."

The system, although designed as a light railway, is now required to function as a major system with longer trains and more frequent services. It was designed for 1,500 passengers a day. It is planned, with the extension and with the two and three-unit trains, to carry 10 times as many passengers as planned — 15,000. Clearly, the railway will deteriorate much further. In four years of operation, the railway has deteriorated from being one that did not disturb people too much to one that is extremely noisy.

What will happen when it has to take a huge extra load? The metal wears out very quickly, consequently increasing noise. At a recent meeting in my Constituency, officials from the Docklands Light Railway told me, *"It is bound to have worn down. After all, it has been in operation for four years."* They have not yet found a quiet way of regrinding and the regrinding will take place

in two years out of every four. It is a nightmare for people living in the area. The brakes are very noisy. Trains stop in between stations very often, so residents are submitted to brake noise not only at stations but elsewhere along the track and at any time. The stations are basic in design and completely open and therefore any noise of trains stopping and starting spreads through the surrounding area. Station announcements are by the tannoy system. Since its opening four years ago, the system has not yet been controlled. Announcements can still be heard in premises up to 200 yards from the station. At night, empty trains are relocated for the next day's service, so residents are subject to noise day and night. Maintenance takes place during the night, with the noise of steel grinding, ballast being shovelled, men shouting and so on. No measures seem to have been adopted to reduce noise from night works.

There is reverberation on surrounding buildings. The DLR travels through densely populated areas and very close to dwellings and high buildings. As the tracks are elevated and completely open, the noise spreads through the populated area and reverberates between the buildings, thus giving one the feeling of being in an echo chamber. The railway passes only a few metres away from many homes. At the DLR's opening, the noise problems were localised but now they have become generalised all along the line.

I shall not continue with the list because I do not want to bore the House, but Hon. Members will no doubt realise from what I have said that noise is a real problem which is getting worse and making life a misery for people all along the line. The answer from the LDDC is that it would cost too much to remedy the problem and that it is inherent in the design of the railway and that nothing can be done. People in Lewisham and Greenwich and their representatives should be very wary about what they are getting: it may not be as welcome in a couple of years' time as it is, in theory, now.

I want to explain — I think it needs explaining — why people in my Constituency feel that everything about the extension is negative. They do not want a railway that goes to Lewisham. All that the extension to Lewisham will mean is that the trains that they now catch to Island Gardens — and on which they can get a seat at present — will come from Lewisham full of people from Greenwich, Lewisham and as far away as Kent en route to the Bank. They will not even get a seat. They will have to suffer all the disruption of extra building and all the noise of an overused railway carrying 10 times as many people as it was originally planned to carry.

In 1971, the Right Hon. Member for Worcester (Mr Walker), then Secretary of State for the Environment, flew over the area in a helicopter, and in 1979 the present Secretary of State did the same. They saw the river and saw disused docks on both sides and considered it one area — Docklands. In fact, the river has always been a divide between north and south London. Any Londoner will tell you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that people north of the river hardly ever go south of the river. They would probably drive round Paris with more equanimity than they would try to negotiate the badly signposted area south of the river. My constituents may use the foot tunnel to cross to Greenwich, which is very beautiful, but if they want to go shopping, they go to the street markets in Roman Road, Crisp Street and Stratford. For their entertainment, they go to the West End — Up West, as East Enders call it. They have nothing to gain from an extension of the railway to Greenwich. It will bring them nothing but hardship.

My constituents are also worried that the railway is to be handed over to the London Docklands Development Corporation. Clearly, London Transport has made a mess of the thing. It is probably well known everywhere that the trains often break down and that one may start a journey with a child or wheelchair only to find on the way back that the lifts are not working. There

are no toilets, so people coming to the arena concerts pee in people's gardens and all over the place. People have lost their contracts and lost days at work because of the malfunctioning of the railway. The more it malfunctions, the more trains are manned by drivers instead of being operated by the computer system; and the more open it is to human error, the less safe it is. The DLR is a four-year-old baby with teething problems and to think of extending it before those teething problems are sorted out — if, indeed, they ever can be — is ludicrous.

The record of the LDDC in responding to local people's problems is pretty bad. Take the question of television. Thousands of people in my Constituency have had no television reception for years because the LDDC, being able to give Planning Permission in the Enterprise Zone and having dictatorial powers, gave Planning Permission for Canary Wharf within about two weeks. It took less time to get Planning Permission for that huge development — the largest in Europe — than it takes to get permission to put a sign outside a fish and chip shop elsewhere. No one went into the ramifications — into the effect that it would have on local people.

It is said that television reception from the BBC's Crystal Palace mast to a swathe of homes in Poplar, Limehouse, Docklands, Lea Bridge Road, Walthamstow, Bow, Chingford, Enfield, Waltham Cross, Greenwich, Catford and Lewisham has been interfered with. I have been working for years now to get the BBC to put a new transmitter and also to get the money for aerials. People who had indoor aerials or aerials on their roofs that functioned very well find that they no longer function. The BBC has said that people must have a good-quality wide band or group E aerial and that set-top aerials are not recommended. Yet when I went to the LDDC — which, after all, is responsible, having given Planning Permission without investigation — all that it would give was £50,000 towards aerials. That is a drop in the bucket. Many people still have no replacement aerials. One

constituent who had the money to spare spent £225 on a new aerial and paid her Licence Fee but her television is still not working very well. Pensioners — the people who need television most — cannot afford it. People are very worried about what will happen if the LDDC takes over the railway system, given that they found it so unresponsive to public concerns over television aerials.

The LDDC is supposed to consult the Dockland Forum — a body made up of a large number of community groups in Docklands. Yet this year it has withdrawn the funding from the Dockland Forum so it will probably go out of existence. So much for the LDDC carrying out its statutory obligation to consult. We do not feel that things will go well if the DLR is transferred to them.

My constituents have put up with the noise, dust and dirt from work on the existing railway for years. Now they are asked to put up with it for another three years. One of the parks that will be affected, Millwall Park, still has debris from the original railway; Mowlams has not yet removed it. The changing rooms, showers and so on have never been put back into action. People are understandably cynical about promises to carry out repairs and restoration given what has happened in the past.

Our opposition is not root-and-branch opposition to the extension of public transport south of the river, but we do not accept that the DLR is the correct means of transport to adopt or that the Bill is the correct vehicle to enable it to be extended. We do not accept that railways should be privatised by private Bills. That has happened too often. Some of my constituents worked in Tilbury and saw the Tilbury Docks privatised by private Bill. I suppose that British Rail could privatise itself in the same way but it does not seem to me a fair or correct system.

The Bill presupposes a tripartite structure. It gives parliamentary authority and outline Planning Permission for the construction of the works specified and the

deposited plans within the lines of deviation. The railway will not be built or run by the promoters. The second part of the structure is the agreement which has not yet been published. That is called the Concession Agreement. It will enable the unnamed purchaser of the railway to design it, build it, operate it and make a profit from it. The third part is the No. 2 Bill to enable the powers of the promoter to be transferred to the concessionary company.

The Concession Agreement will not be laid before Parliament. We do not know what is going to happen. That is one of my main objections to the Bill. All the important details will be covered by the Concession Agreement. We do not know what the design will be and we do not know what the Concession Agreement will say about safety issues. We do not know what it will require in terms of fare structures, and we do not know what service will be required of the operator of the railway. We simply know what London Regional Transport says its position is, or was, in relation to the negotiations on the Concession Agreement.

There is nothing to stop the promoter from conceding points to the concession company and surrendering important points on those issues later. Parliament is being asked to approve a blank cheque. The Bill went through Committee on the understanding that the promoter was London Regional Transport. We now know that the Docklands Light Railway will be operated by the LDDC. However, we do not know what the LDDC will require and what commitments made by London Regional Transport will be picked up by the LDDC. As I have said, the record of the LDDC among my constituents is not good. It is over bureaucratic and unresponsive to the needs of local people. It is not consulting properly.

Mr Cohen: My Hon. Friend is making an important point. The railway is effectively being privatised by a private Bill. Will my Hon. Friend consider the procedure because clearly

that action is an important political step by the Government who are privatising the railway and handing it over to the LDDC? Is that the right method? Will she comment on the process of the Bill being presented by London Regional Transport and then the LDDC taking over the railway? The LDDC will be accountable to no one with regard to its running of the railway. Any future plans that the LDDC may have for the railway might be outside the rest of the rail and tube network.

Ms Gordon: I agree with my Hon. Friend. It is a pernicious and creeping development that things are being privatised by private Bills. It is absurd to hand the railway over to the LDDC, which is supposed to be wound up in a few years' time and which has no knowledge or experience of transport. We have no idea what will happen or what the final result will be. We have no control over what is happening and, as I said before, Parliament is being asked to sign a blank cheque.

Mr Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Before my Hon. Friend proceeds with her speech, in which she is providing invaluable information to the House, will she elaborate on the question of consultation? I had not realised that there was an element of privatisation involved in the issue. Are my Hon. Friend's constituents and other people aware of that?

Ms Gordon: There have been meetings but the question of privatisation has not been raised. People were more worried about the loss of amenities, the noise, dirt and what would happen to the park. They were concerned more about the noise of the existing railway and whether that would be worse. They were also worried about the LDDC controlling the line.

Hon. Members may not be aware that a further 1,000 of my constituents, as with RANAP — Residents Against Noise and Pollution — have organised themselves into SPLASH — the South Poplar and Limehouse Association

for Safe Housing. They are suing LDDC because their lives have been blighted. They are surrounded by dirt, dust, noise and pile driving. They cannot cross the roads and local businesses are failing. I entered a local pub the other night and it was empty. The owners can no longer prepare food because the dust in the kitchen is uncontrollable. There are dust storms in summer and mud in the winter.

I have been told by people at the local medical centre that it treats more than two and a half times the number of asthma cases that it would expect. In addition, the nurse at the centre now devotes all her time to treating asthma patients and, in particular, children. Those cases are extremely difficult to manage. They cannot be managed with the usual inhalers. The nurse has told me that some asthmatic children wear masks in the local school. That is shocking. Our community is expected to put up with all that. The developments have been carried out but the needs of the community have not been considered. Canary Wharf was planned when it was clear that the required infrastructure was not in place. Everything has been piled on at once and people are screaming for help.

A simple amendment to the Bill could impose a stringent requirement but London Regional Transport has refused to concede it. The Bill allows the railway to deviate upwards to whatever extent is found necessary or convenient except where it is constructed in a tunnel. 'Constructed in tunnel' is defined in Clause 2 as excluding any cut-and-cover tunnel. Where the railway line passes through Millwall Park there is a cut-and-cover tunnel. The Bill as drafted will allow the eventual contractor of the works to build the railway line at ground level despite the numerous and voluble statements by London Regional Transport that it intends that the railway should be in a cut-and-cover tunnel. If that is the intention, and if LRT is not going to allow the eventual contractor to construct that part of the line in some other

fashion if it is cheaper, why cannot LRT bind the construction company to build it in a cut-and-cover tunnel through a clause in the Bill?

We are not convinced that the promoters' statements will be adhered to. We do not know the identity of the concession company that will eventually build the railway line.

Mr Cohen: My Hon. Friend is making the serious point on behalf of her constituents that the line should be in a cut-and-cover tunnel rather than on the surface which would cause a lot of problems. Is not the arrangement whereby LRT presents a Bill which is then taken over the LDDC appalling? London Regional Transport will have no responsibility other than to present the first half of the Bill. It will set out the cheapest proposals that it can get away with. It will not accept clauses that care for the environment for which my Hon. Friend and her constituents are arguing. At the end of the day, LRT will have no responsibility. Halfway through, the LDDC will take over. Is that not one reason why the environment is so neglected and why the procedure whereby control will pass from one organisation to another should not be allowed?

Ms Gordon: I thank my Hon. Friend for that contribution. He is absolutely correct.

The company that will build the railway will do so for profit — for private gain — not for public good. That will be the driving motive and that is what we have been suffering from all along since the setting up of the LDDC and the unleashing of market forces.

Mr Cryer: Does my Hon. Friend agree that, if the safeguards that she is seeking were in the Bill as a legal requirement, and that if her constituents did not have to depend on a generalised statement from administrators from time to time, she would be in a much better position to assure her constituents that the problems that they face would be

diminished and removed once the Bill was passed? What my Hon. Friend is seeking is a better Bill with adequate safeguards written on the face of it. General support for railways is shared by my Hon. Friend and myself, but we cannot pass Bills that do not provide proper safeguards.

Ms Gordon: Together with local residents, representatives of community groups and local councils, I have met London Transport representatives, the promoters and the Minister of Transport twice. He kindly viewed the area. I have said that the bottom line is that, if we have a guarantee in the Bill that it would be a cut-and-cover tunnel and that some money will be put up for a Community Trust to compensate the community for the serious loss of facilities and for the noise, dust and tensions and so on that will continue in the area which has had just about enough already, we would then reconsider our attitude to the Bill, but nothing of the sort has been forthcoming. We have not been told to get lost — everybody has been very polite — but the final effect is, *"Get lost."*

We do not know what concession company will eventually build the railway. However, we know that the only limitation on what it can do will be imposed by the LDDC. We have absolutely no faith in the LDDC imposing satisfactory constraints. Its track record on planning decisions such as Canary Wharf, the television issue that I mentioned and many other matters which I do not have time to mention gives little cause for confidence that the interests of local people will be taken into account or regarded in any way. It has been said that the LDDC has concentrated on regenerating the land, but the community has suffered and has not been regenerated — rather the opposite; its quality of life has deteriorated. The former chairman of SPLASH said that he never would have believed that his quality of life could deteriorate so far so fast. That says it all.

If it is cheaper to build the tunnel at ground level, one can fairly anticipate that that

is what the company will do. If it is cheaper to build an ugly railway at a lower price, why not? The concession company is doing it only to make money. The LDDC is only encouraging it to build the railway because it wants to get people on and off the island and to Bank, not because it has the interest of islanders at heart.

We are told that all safety issues will be dealt with in the Concession Agreement. That procedure is wrong. We have not been told what the concession agreement will say about safety — it has not yet been drafted. We are told that the contents of the proposed Concession Agreement are commercially sensitive — that is the answer we always receive when we try to get at the real facts — and cannot be released, anyway.

Mr Cryer: Is my Hon. Friend saying that the safety aspect of the railway is not yet clarified and that, when approaches are made about such safety issues being negotiated in the Concession Agreement, people are fobbed off by the claim that the matter is commercial-in-confidence? I am sure that my Hon. Friend will agree that that is unacceptable because, by and large, railway safety standards are extremely high. One would expect the highest possible safety standards to be put down on paper and made plain for all to see — perhaps as a schedule to the Bill — so that people know perfectly well what standards will be required from the concessionaires on this important subject.

Ms Gordon: We know that the railways inspector places some constraints on the operation of railways, following the King's Cross disaster, but those conditions are more rigorous in the case of underground stations. In particular, underground stations must be manned at all times. The station plan for Island Gardens shows that it will be placed in a deep cutting, with a railway line emerging from the cut-and-cover tunnel on one side and disappearing into a tunnel on the other side. Only the station itself will not be underground.

There was a plan to make the new Island Gardens station the deepest cutting on the line but there was a refusal to roof it over. The reason is that an underground station must be staffed. If the station is not roofed over, staffing costs will be saved. We know that that decision, for instance, is generated not by safety considerations but purely by cost. Safety, particularly in Island Gardens, is a major issue. The station will be in the middle of a park. The railway does not run after 9 o'clock at night but I presume that it eventually will. In winter it gets dark much earlier. That is a potential risk for women and in the present climate, unfortunately, for Asians, particularly late at night.

Although we have asked the promoters to make the station an underground station with staff present, we get nowhere; they absolutely refuse. The present Island Gardens station is used — it is by the road — but the new Island Gardens station, which will be located in the middle of the park, will not be much used after dark. People, especially women and members of ethnic minorities, will be afraid to use it. That is another factor that we are not pleased with.

Mr Cryer: Does my Hon. Friend recall that the very arguments that she is now advancing were raised during the passage of the British Railways (Penalty Fares) Bill and the London Regional Transport (Penalty Fares) Bill? Both bodies seek, and in the case of British Railways, I regret to say, have obtained, authority to substitute ticket machines for people. People can give help and guidance, assist mothers with young children, and assist disabled people rather more effectively than a ticket machine can. When people are in peril late at night, either because of racist attacks or because of attacks on women, the most vulnerable among our community, they will find no help because there are no staff at such stations. My Hon. Friend is right to pursue the matter. I am astounded that any organisation should resist such claims today.

Ms Gordon: I agree with my Hon. Friend. The fact that they are replacing a usable station with what will be an unusable station in the middle of a park after dark is cause for concern and it need not be if the promoters put a roof over it and spend money to have some railway staff present but they will not do that because it is all on the cheap. The interests of the community come last. It is really a business railway to carry people in business hours; it is not to serve the community. That is the whole point.

Construction practice requirements will also be in the Concession Agreement. The Local Authority has limited powers to deal with noise and pollution infringements but the precise standards which are acceptable will be contained in the Concession Agreement. Again, we have London Transport's views on what those levels should be but they will still be subject to negotiation with the company that eventually constructs the railway. London Transport says that it will impose the same requirements on noise pollution that were imposed when the railway was first built. That has led to numerous complaints, with thousands of people demonstrating that the standards were not acceptable and that they are deteriorating very rapidly, even with the present figures relating to use of the railway, let alone the 10-fold increase in usage. The Bill could require acceptable standards out in the open now but the promoters will not write in the standards. Once again, that makes us cynical and we feel that we cannot be certain about what is likely to happen.

Mr Cohen: Does my Hon. Friend think that the line will be for business men and civil servants or a cattle truck for the typists and everyone else? Obviously the Government are into two-tier railway and tube systems. Which will this line turn out to be?

Ms Gordon: I suspect that the business men will still roll up in their Rolls-Royces,

if they can get round the traffic. The railway may well be a cattle truck line. That remains to be seen and depends on the amount of use of the railway and the frequency of the trains. The noise levels generated by the railway in operation will also be the subject of negotiation on the Concession Agreement. The existing railway is noisy and disturbs the residents who live close to the line, so my constituents and I believe that the Bill should specify acceptable noise levels. The fact that the Bill does not deal with all the points that I have raised, which are essential to the community, makes it impossible for us to support it.

My constituents who have complained about the noise have found out that it has been possible to adapt the track so that the trains glide through Canary Wharf silently. Full remedial action has been taken using Koln Eggs and perhaps other equipment about which I do not know too much. One of the petitioners against the Bill, whose house faces a section of the railway which is extremely noisy, has been told that it is technically impossible to install the same equipment at the extension section near his house. Yet, where it is necessary for business in Canary Wharf, the trains glide through. When they go through the residential areas they clatter, bang and screech and people have to live with it.

Enforcement of the construction requirements and noise limits will be up to the promoters — the LDDC. Only they will have the power to enforce the contract which the operator of the railway enters into.

Mr Cohen: My Hon. Friend said that the promoters of the Bill were the LDDC. In fact the promoters are London Regional Transport. So who will enforce the contract? Will it be the LDDC? Or will the LDDC say that it is the responsibility of LRT? Or will LRT say, *"No, it is the responsibility of the LDDC"*? The procedure is a mess. We need to be clear about who will have responsibility for the contractors. The sponsor

should tell us that.

Ms Gordon: The promoters are the LDDC because we are told that the railway will be transferred to the LDDC. The Government were unhappy about the way in which London Transport ran the railway — or failed to run it properly. Their solution is to hand it over to the LDDC. That will be a case of out of the frying pan into the fire. We have no faith that the LDDC will enforce the contract that the operator of the railway enters into.

Mr Cohen: We must clarify this point. Who will issue the contract in the first place? As the Bill is an LRT Bill, will LRT give out the contract in the first place? If so, and if LDDC takes over subsequently, surely LRT will not have powers to enforce the safety arrangements. Is there not a possibility of a muddle in this respect?

Ms Gordon: There is a great possibility of a muddle. It will depend on how quickly the railway is handed over to the LDDC and whether it is handed over. As the Minister has told me that it will be handed over, I assume that that is right. So we have to assume, perhaps wrongly, that the LDDC with the Local Authority will have whatever limited powers are made available for controlling noise pollution.

The position is unclear and obviously unsatisfactory. The stations have not yet been designed. Again, that will be left to the concession company. We are in the dark about so much. Millwall Park, where the works site will be, is valuable to local people. They do not want an ugly station built in the middle of it. I must describe the area to the House. There is little green space for the whole dense area. Some of it is near the Thames. Millwall Park is much beloved and much used. A large part of it — about a third — will be used as a works site. There will be a great wall around the site and noise, dirt and dust will probably fly over the walls. So a good bit of the park that is left will not be usable either.

A small part of the park will be taken away permanently. The piece of land

that has been offered to replace it is not satisfactory to my constituents. They do not feel that it is sufficient compensation. My constituents will lose the use of the park, the football pitches and various other facilities at the park for three whole years. In my opinion, they will also lose the use of Island Gardens. Apart from a little pocket handkerchief further up the Isle of Dogs, Island Gardens is the only nice bit of riverfront that ordinary people can look at. Perhaps people in luxury flats and those with an office in Canary Wharf can see the river but Island Gardens is the only place that ordinary residents can enjoy.

Barges to take away the spoil from the tunnel will start at Island Gardens. An eight-foot fence will have to be put up. The beauty of Island Gardens is that one can see Greenwich from there. One can see the Wren Complex and all the other beautiful buildings of Greenwich. It is a lovely view. Residents will not be able to enjoy that for three years.

The conveyor belt to take away the spoil will be very long. It will be high in the air — high enough for a double decker bus to go under it. It will go right across into the park at Island Gardens to the river bank where the spoil will be taken away. Even if the conveyor belt is covered as promised, it will be noisy, dusty and dirty and it may operate 24 hours a day. It will pass by George Green School and the community sports grounds, with tennis courts and football pitches used by the school and the local community. I consider that they will all be unusable.

Some beautiful plane trees will be lost. The area is a conservation area, so the trees are protected, but they will probably have to come down. I am not even sure what will happen to the entrance to the lifts to the foot tunnel to Greenwich if it is in the way of the works.

My constituents will lose the use of Millwall Park. They will lose some land permanently. They will lose the use of Island Gardens. The football club that plays on the sports ground will have to go miles away to the

north of the Borough. That will involve travelling time and fares and the club will probably dwindle. It was not unreasonable that we asked for money to be put into a Community Trust handled by representatives of the community to replace lost facilities and as compensation. At present, only landowners directly affected by the Bill will receive compensation. Everyone else can whistle. I believe that the community is an entity and that it deserves some compensation. My request for a Community Trust was not unreasonable. The Mudchute will also be affected. It is unique. London Transport seems to regard it as merely a bit of waste ground but it is not. It was made by mud dredged from the Docks. It is perhaps the largest farm in any city.

It has flocks of sheep and one can see horses grazing there. The effect on the Mudchute will be severe, as its western bank, an important part of the area, will be taken up by the development. Horse riding has always been a popular activity on the Mudchute and the income which it generates has become ever more important in the overall budget. In September 1991, new stables were opened. They were built at a cost of £617,000, with funding largely from the LDDC. It was obtained because it would generate more income from the area. It was realised that if the Mudchute could offer hacking it could significantly increase its income and fund other activities. The farm circulated businesses in the area to tell them that it would be able to offer hacking. The plan was to develop a ride around the Mudchute and Millwall Park but that will now be blighted.

The Mudchute contains some buildings — classrooms which local teachers use for science lectures as part of study for the science curriculum. The children use trees for bark rubbings and they count the age rings. The elder trees along the southern and western edges are important because they provide examples of trees which have established themselves naturally, with-

out deliberate planting. They will go.

The trees provide shelter and nesting sites for birds such as starlings, white-throats, swifts and linnets. Further planting at the western edge was expected to attract a greater variety of birds, which are essential to wild animal and bird activities for the children who examine birds through binoculars, learn to identify and observe the different breeds, and make tally sheets and field sketches. I cannot tell Hon. Members how important that is to children who grow up in a densely populated urban area. It is their little piece of the country and it will be encroached upon. The thicket area provides a rich source of food for birds, such as loganberries, blackberries, thistles and dog roses. It is a hiding place for wild animals such as voles, field mice, foxes and hedgehogs. Children follow animals' footprints, track them and make plaster casts of their prints. All sorts of educational activities take place. The Mudchute contains about 21 different species of butterfly — perhaps the greatest number for miles around. Much of the information that I have been given by Mudchute Farm is very technical. The banks of the Mudchute provide an island for rare insects and rare species to live and to develop. The flowers and small beasts which enjoy that south facing bank are important to the children's scientific and nature studies.

The Mudchute has a livestock husbandry system. The stock is allowed occasional access to the area which will be taken away, so that it can benefit from the flora found there. Some highly palatable grasses such as Timothy and Coltsfoot are to be seen in abundance. That makes a rich pasture for sheep and goats. The well-established trees in the area provide cover for live-stock in bad weather. It is a source of great concern that that area will no longer be available to the livestock. In addition, it is felt that a considerable area bordering the site will also be lost to grazing and not merely the part where work is carried

out. The animals will keep far away from the work, shying away from areas of excessive noise and unfamiliar sights. The security of the livestock will be placed in jeopardy while work is taking place. Although existing fencing is adequate to contain stock, new fences and gates will have to be installed immediately work commences to keep animals on the park and the farm. The farm feels that it would be a tragedy if it were to lose that valuable piece of grazing land. The Minister saw the allotments, which are mostly used by old people for growing vegetables to supplement their diet. They will be affected.

I could go on for hours but I do not want to take advantage of the House by going into a nature study tour of the area. However, it provides a good habitat for all sorts of butterflies — the wall, the common blue, the small copper and various other species which are becoming rare in this country. Twenty-one varieties of butterfly are to be found on the Mudchute. It is not merely a piece of wasteland, as London Transport seems to think.

There will be a great loss of amenities. A large part of Millwall Park will be out of action for three years; part of it will go for ever and it will not be properly compensated for. Island Gardens, where one can sit in the summer and look over the river, will be a big mess. The Mudchute will be affected, as will sports facilities attached to the George Green School.

Mr Cohen: I listened to my Hon. Friend's informative passage about the Mudchute. All Hon. Members considering the Bill should bear in mind what she has said. She mentioned that the promoters of the Bill will chop down all the trees.

Ms Gordon: No — some of them.

Mr Cohen: They will chop down some of the trees — a great number of them — in the area. Has there been any offer to replace the trees within the vicinity? We now have much higher standards for the environment or we should have. If trees are

chopped down, they should be replaced. Have the sponsors approached her with any suggestions to replace the trees and the wildlife to which she has so eloquently referred?

Ms Gordon: Many mature trees were planted at Canary Wharf and the sponsors have promised to reinstate the park. However, since debris from the first phase of building the railway is still there and has not been taken away and since the changing facilities have not been repaired and put back into operation we feel cynical about what will happen. We would like written guarantees but we have not received any.

The Planning Authority, which will have to give Planning Permission for construction of the stations at Mudchute and Island Gardens, will be the LDDC. That is an unacceptable conflict of interests. The Bill gives outline Planning Permission for construction of stations, sight unseen. The LDDC will be asking itself for Planning Permission, without any interference, or any responsibility to the local community. Whatever it wants to do, it will be passed automatically, without any investigation or inquiry. That is not right, especially in the light of the planning decisions which the LDDC has made in the past, with its bureaucratic powers, and in view of its insensitivity to the concerns of the local community.

Local people do not have any faith in the Docklands Light Railway system. It was built as a tourist railway on a bus stop principle — frequent trains, at short intervals, operating more like a bus service than a railway. Some people called it a Mickey Mouse railway and, in fact, the original carriages have been sold to Euro Disneyland. The railway has not been working properly and is unreliable.

If the Government are serious about improving north-south connections over the river, we need a proper railway or an underground line. The Jubilee Line will be going through eventually and at least people have faith in that. Only a crazy person

would rely on the DLR as things stand. Extending the railway merely increases the opportunity for things to go wrong.

We suggest that the DLR experiment has been tried for several years and has been found wanting. Further problems will arise during the construction period. As I have said, they propose to use a conveyor to take the spoil out of the tunnel. The spoil will not go to Greenwich; it will all come to our end and our people feel that they always get the rubbish and the worst of the bargain. The conveyor runs next to a school playing field. We do not know how it will be designed but we have fears that the design and noise will make the area unusable.

The construction period is anticipated to last three years, so when we talk about the loss of view and of the effect on our environment and so on it is not a short-term one. We also understand that, when the spoil comes out of the tunnel, it will be wet and will have to be dewatered. A local resident who has worked on the Blackwall Tunnel says that the spoil will be stinking as well. That is something we have not come across yet. We have had dust, noise and dirt-dust storms in the summer, mud in the winter and pile driving. The possibility of stinking spoil fills us with horror.

Mr Cohen: What about rats?

Ms Gordon: Yes, they will also be a problem.

The Thames at this point is salty and saltwater will have to be removed somehow. All that we have been told is that it will be pumped into the sewers. Thames Water says that the sewers are operating at capacity already, so we want to know where the water will go. If it goes on to the park, the salinity will destroy the vegetation. The environmental impact statement prepared in December said that that point had been taken up with Thames Water but all we know is that the matter is being discussed. The volume and the capacity of the sewer system are unknown.

No one on the Isle of Dogs

needs the railway extension. There is a groundswell of opinion that local people do not want to travel to Lewisham or Greenwich. If they want to go to Greenwich, they can use the foot tunnel anyway. It is clear that the railway is being built to enable the population of south-east London to travel on to the Isle of Dogs and many people from Kent will travel through it to the Bank. We have no wish to impede the people of south-east London travelling easily and quickly where they want to go. However, if the object of the exercise is to provide employees needed for businesses that it is anticipated will start up on the Isle of Dogs, the idea is misconceived.

Unemployment on the Isle of Dogs is already higher than it is in south-east London. The people of Lewisham and Greenwich should know that the companies that move into the developments on the Isle of Dogs usually bring their own staff. The London research centre gives Tower Hamlets as a whole an unemployment rate of 16.4 per cent. In Millwall, it is 15.8 per cent and in Blackwall it is 14 per cent. Other organisations put the figure at up to 24 per cent. In Lewisham, unemployment is 16.3 per cent, Greenwich 14.4 per cent, Bromley 6.4 per cent, Bexley 7.6 per cent and Croydon 8.6 per cent.

The LDDC has not created jobs for local people, either in construction or on a permanent basis, as it was meant to do. Local businesses have gone and are going out of business because of the planning blight — I have to call it that. Now the LDDC is making alternative arrangements to assist residents from outside the Borough to bypass local people when it comes to obtaining jobs and my constituents feel that they have had very few jobs out of the developments. Therefore, they resent that proposal, too.

Mr Cohen: My Hon. Friend referred to commuters coming from Kent, passing through her Constituency and not stopping there on their way to Bank. Is she aware that a number of those

living in Kent will benefit, although they will not benefit very much, from the Government's policy on the Channel Tunnel link? The Government changed their policy to assist those people so that their environment was not blighted by the railways which will pass through their area. They have, at least, received some help to defend their environment. However, when it comes to constituencies such as that of my Hon. Friend and mine, where the Department of Transport proposes a road scheme, the Government do not care about the environment. Is that not a double standard? Would my Hon. Friend care to speculate on why the Government care for areas such as Kent but not for constituencies such as mine? Is not that political bias by the Government because they are trying to bribe some voters by protecting their environment to some extent? However, when the population does not support the Conservatives, the Government do not care for their environment and give them the worst of things. Is that not double standards and political bias and no way to run a railway?

Ms Gordon: I agree with my Hon. Friend. It is a matter of political bias. It also depends on how much clout one has. In middle class areas people have money, they can employ barristers to fight their case and they stand a better chance of avoiding planning blight.

The people of the East End feel that others can get away with anything. The whole point is that the Government have trodden roughshod over my constituents. I am talking not just about the railway extension but about everything that has happened since they came to office. Land has been regenerated but the people have been persecuted by noise, dust and dirt. No one takes any notice of their interests and no one cares that the Government are breaking up communities.

My constituents feel that they have no voice but they are learning. One thousand members of SPLASH have got legal aid to sue the LDDC for

what has happened to their lives. We shall watch the outcome of that case with great interest because thousands will be affected by and interested in the outcome.

I am always in favour of improving public transport rather than building more roads that generate more cars. The Docklands Highway will generate more traffic on to the A13, which will become worse than ever. If the railway functioned well, if it was reasonably quiet so that people could live with it, if it could take the extra load and if we had proper guarantees, which should be in the Bill, and proper information rather than being asked to sign a blank cheque, we might have a different attitude towards it. If the community were given proper compensation, they would be prepared to put up with a lot. They are socially conscious people, good people, and if they saw the need for something and felt that their interests had been taken into account and not totally ignored they would have a different attitude. But now they are up in arms.

As well as causing the loss of amenities, the railway will cause an increase in noise, dust and dirt with deleterious effects on health, for example, on asthma sufferers, and the nerves of local people. Apart from that, however, construction of the railway would also require the diversion of the East Ferry road. That busy road is one of the most important residential roads in the area and it would be stopped up during the construction works. Anyone who wants to get around the island will face long detours. I should also mention that people can now walk across the park to the only supermarket on the island, Asda, but they will be unable to do so once the work starts. The local population will receive no compensation for the losses that they will suffer unless the Department of the Environment has a change of heart. I assume that the DOE is the responsible Department, because I am assuming that the railway will be handed over to the LDDC. However, as my Hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr

Cohen) has said, we do not know. Whoever's court the ball is in, be it the DOE or the Department of Transport, if there was a change of heart on their part and if they gave some compensation to the community, that would be welcome. So far, London Transport has said that it will compensate only on the basis of land ownership.

The users of the park will get nothing and the Local Authority, as the operator of the park, is still fighting London Transport for compensation from the building of the last railway. That case will go to the Lands Tribunal. We have no faith that the compensation available will be anything other than derisory. The promoters should compensate all local residents, not just those with property immediately abutting the line, but they offer nothing. The local population has everything to lose and nothing to gain from the railway. I am therefore opposed to the Bill. (8.29pm)

(8.04pm) **Ms Mildred Gordon** (Bow and Poplar): I grew up facing a grim dock wall in The Highway in east London. Although I was lulled to sleep at night by the sound of ships' horns, I had to climb to the third floor of my father's house to see the tops of cranes. If I wanted to look at the water I had to walk to Tower Hill Gardens, which was 15 or 20 minutes away, or to King Edward Memorial Park in Shadwell. When the docks closed and my neighbours lost their jobs with the Port of London Authority and hit hard times, it was sad and bad for people in the district.

As time went on and the dock area became derelict, it was obvious that something needed to be done. The Government decided to take the project out of the hands of democratically elected bodies and set up an appointed quango, the LDDC. If the people of the area were blighted by the closure of the docks, they were blighted a second time by the setting up of the LDDC. It has brought them no good. My Hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Mr Dobson) has pointed out the failure of the LDDC to provide the desperately needed housing in the area. Seventy five per cent of the housing that it built was for sale. The housing for rent was luxury housing that local people could not afford.

The Government and the LDDC bear a direct responsibility not only for the election of the measly British National Party councillor — whom we shall get rid of — but for the racial antagonism and hatred that have developed in the area. Racial violence has grown while desperate people fight for the few resources in the area and the few houses that have been built. The affordable places that the Isle of Dogs neighbourhood built to house local people have not been built with the blessing of the LDDC. It took years before we were able to build Masthouse Terrace because the LDDC caused delays. Then everyone wanted the few houses that were built. Yet it should have been possible to build thousands of homes for affordable rent. That vast area of land

available could have solved the chronic housing problems of the area once and for all. The opportunity was wasted and those whom local people still call yuppies moved in while their own plight was worse than ever and no one seemed to care.

No jobs resulted from the setting up of the LDDC. The LDDC policy of property speculation meant that higher land prices forced out local businesses that employed local people. The unemployment rate in Tower Hamlets in the past few months has gone not down but up again. Jobs for local people were not created, despite all the money that went into the area. It has been estimated that every job that was created cost £45,000 — what chronic mismanagement, what chronic waste of public money.

From 1981 to 1992, the LDDC received £1.6 billion grant in aid in addition to other concessions in the enterprise zone such as capital allowances, rates allowances, tax allowances and so on. There was no trickle-down effect, as the LDDC and the Government had prophesied.

The whole Canary Wharf project was madness. It was madness to build that huge edifice of offices isolated with no adequate public transport to reach it. When the Government sought to remedy the position, there was crazy mismanagement again. The Docklands Highway cost £650 million to construct. The Limehouse Link is the most expensive mile of road that has ever been built. Despite assurances to the contrary, the Docklands Highway is used for commuter traffic to pass through Tower Hamlets. One only has to go to Tower Hamlets on any weekday evening to see that the traffic jams on the A13 are as bad as ever. Come any evening and see how that £650 million has been wasted. The Government held up the building of the Jubilee Line extension for £400 million and insisted that the money had to come from private industry. The Jubilee Line extension is still not started and yet the Government have thrown the money away on roads. The St Vincent Estate

was knocked down to build the Limehouse Link and 500 homes went by the board. Re-housing those people is one of the sore points that caused the trouble that led to the election of the British National Party candidate.

Mr Spearing: As Member of Parliament for a neighbouring Constituency, I pass through my Hon. Friend's Constituency frequently. I noticed that the site that was occupied by the St Vincent Estate is not above the enormous tunnel. Was the Estate originally demolished to provide for that tunnel and if not, why were those flats not refurbished, as those on the other side of the road have been, instead of making the area into a blank site ?

Ms Gordon: That is a good question. Most local people think that the LDDC picked the route that destroyed 500 units of public sector housing because it wanted the land for office developments or to sell off for expensive private housing. It could have built the road along the foreshore or in a tunnel instead of building a cut-and-cover road and then it would not have had to pull down the St Vincent Estate. The bottom fell out of the market, no one wanted office developments or luxury housing and the land remains unused.

Although I wrote to the LDDC on behalf of local people and said that they had discussed plans and wanted affordable housing, council housing and community centres and so forth on the site, the LDDC has no intention of building anything of the kind. It never consults local people and it never does what they want. That is not its way. Let us look at some other aspects — beyond the pantomime of the Jubilee Line extension, which the Government and the LDDC have postponed over and over again — that is irritating local people. Let us consider why the people whom I represent and I do not feel that we ought to give further powers to the LDDC, which has not managed well the powers that it has.

The Docklands Light Railway extension to

Lewisham has been on the cards for a long time. It will cause a lot more disturbance of the type that my Hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras described. Local people have literally been made to eat dirt — dirt and dust seeps into their houses and they suffer from the noise of pile driving. Does the Minister know what pile driving sounds like night and day? It can drive people mad. Local people have put up with that for years and now they are being asked to put up with more of it for the building of the Docklands Light Railway.

Local people wanted that extension of public transport and could see that it had benefits — or some, if not all, did. Members of the Millwall Park Users Group — the park will be taken over for a long time and people will lose that amenity while the railway extension is built — and other petitioners against the Bill spent many months preparing evidence for the House of Commons and House of Lords Select Committee. The Committee assured them and the neighbourhood that Island Gardens station would be built underground. I asked the Minister, in the Chamber, for a community trust fund to be set up with £1 million to compensate people for the loss of amenities during the years that the extension was being built. The residents could have controlled that trust fund and provided other amenities for the community, as a substitute for the football pitch, the park and all the other things that would be out of action.

In its wisdom, the House of Lords Committee decided that the primary purpose was to compensate local people by means of capital investment, which would enhance the area, rather than by handouts — it considered that the trust that I asked for was a handout — through a community trust or exceptional compensation payments. It also decided that the new underground Island Gardens station would be proposed as compensation for people in the area. Some people were satisfied with the proposal that the station would be underground and

that it would be properly staffed and that Millwall Park would be levelled off and reinstated, which would improve the area.

After all their work and all those petitions and discussions, we have suddenly heard that the money is not there and that Island Gardens station might be deleted. Hon. Members might think that the Docklands Light Railway is a great amenity for the community but 25 per cent of islanders do not live within reasonable walking distance of a station. If Island Gardens and Mudchute stations are not included in the Lewisham extension, another 25 per cent of the community will not have the benefit of living within walking distance of a station on the direct line to Lewisham. The DLR primarily serves the business area and not the residential area. Many residents have a long walk to stations and the new proposal to delete Island Gardens and to let the community down, after having what local people considered were serious discussions, will make the position much worse.

A spur line is suggested for Island Gardens and Mudchute but the local community has totally rejected that idea as trains would be infrequent and it is not what was promised or what they want. Everyone is asking when the trains will run in the evening and at weekends. They still stop at 9 o'clock at night and there are no trains on Saturdays and Sundays. People cannot go anywhere by train then. They have to wait in the cold for the infrequent buses. So much for LDDC management and policies. I think that my Hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr Spearing) will agree that it has taken a long time for the Beckton extension to come into use. We are promised it next month.

Mr Spearing: It is a year overdue.

Ms Gordon: Yes, it is a year overdue — so much for the way in which the LDDC manages things.

What about access to the water? I spoke to the Docklands Sailing Club

today. Its members told me that if they want access to the LDDC-owned slipway they have to obtain permission each time that they want to use it and to travel to pick up the permit, which is very inconvenient. When the club holds a big event and its small car park is not big enough, it has to pay £50 a day for parking at Arnhem Wharf. That would be fine if the car park was decent but the site is littered with bollards and large potholes. What will the LDDC charge other local groups for decent parking — the sailing club is a charity — which is essential? We had enough trouble when the arena opened and there were no car parks or toilets. We must ask such questions if the LDDC is to have more powers.

Since I became a Member of Parliament in 1987, I have continually raised the question of access to the waterfront with officers of the LDDC. They once gave me a briefing downstairs with maps and so forth and showed me all the areas where there is supposed to be access to the waterfront. Many buildings were allowed to be built only if public access was provided. My secretary, who lives on the Isle of Dogs, said,

"Just a minute. That long piece of waterfront looks as though you can walk along it but there is a brick wall across it and you can't walk along but have to go round and along the road."

She pointed to another place that looked as though one could walk along but said that one can only go so far before having to scramble through mud and dog mess to get across to the other part of the path.

When the tall ships came along the river there was a great fuss when local people tried to see them. They were stopped by jets of water that shot up from the ground and by guards on land that was marked down as public open space. I have raised the matter over and over again.

In one press release, Michael Pickard was seen doing some bolt-cutting to open some space, but that was symbolic. I asked the LDDC to put up signs on

every piece of public open space to say that the public had access to it. I also asked for street furniture and benches so that in hot weather, in an area with little parkland — it will be worse when Millwall Park and Island Gardens are taken up by the building of the Docklands Light Railway extension — people can sit by the water, get a breath of fresh air and cool off. Did the Corporation do that? No. There are a few signs now but, by and large, nothing has been done. A paltry sum would have been involved. The Corporation has had millions — billions — but it cannot do that little thing for local people.

Local people have little for which to thank the LDDC and have had little joy out of its control over the area. This is the time at which we should be considering documents and Bills in connection with the running down and closing of the LDDC and the handing over of its tasks to the elected Local Authority. It is a strange time at which to be discussing extending its powers, especially given that it has mismanaged everything that it has handled so far. (8.20pm)

Education

Mildred was a Primary School teacher for 40 years so it is no surprise that many of her speeches are about education and the superiority of the comprehensive system over selection. She raised these issues not only in her speeches but also in her work as a member of the Select Committee on Education, Science & the Arts (1991-97).

(6.55pm) **Ms Mildred Gordon** (Bow and Poplar): I congratulate the Hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Amos) on his maiden speech. The wit, confidence and interesting detail with which he described his Constituency and the local customs show that he will add colour and interest to our future debates.

As someone who has taught for over 30 years, I wish to speak about the real world in schools and in the classrooms. Over a long teaching career I have seen fashions come and fashions go. With each swing of the pendulum, zealots tend to throw out the baby with the bathwater, much to the detriment of the children for whom those years may be their sole education.

At the moment, it seems to be fashionable to attack and throw out the concept of child-centred education. That is a concept for which our primary schools are justly famous. Visitors come from all over the world to see what we are doing and how our child-centred education operates. Child-centred education is linked with continuous assessment.

Years ago, I taught 45 children in a class. We tested them with exams and placed them in each subject and in all subjects overall. That was fine for those who came in the first three but disastrous for those who came near the bottom. Hon. Members will remember from their own childhood that those who came in the first three were always the same. That kind of testing did great damage. It is much harder for teachers to carry out continuous assessment.

Today's teachers — I thank the Right Hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) for his kind remarks about teachers — are competent, devoted, and hard-working. They care about the children they teach and they know each child thoroughly. Child-centred education with continuous assessment enables each child to reach his or her full potential. The children are happy and children who are happy learn well, while children who are unhappy with a bad self-image do not.

All civilised people want children with special needs

to be integrated into ordinary schools. Child-centred education enables that to be done, provided the schools are not starved of resources — an important factor.

The Minister talked about parents' right to know how their children are getting on. Parents of children whose teachers engage in continuous assessment are given a good picture on open day of how their children are getting on. In the old Grammar School, the teacher would often sit there with a book full of marks but was not too sure to which child those marks referred. That testing did not do much good when parents asked to know how their child was getting on but got a bit of waffle instead.

Conservative Members have a misplaced faith in testing. Testing is not teaching and time spent in testing and keeping account of it detracts from the available contact time with the children. Therefore, one must be sure that such testing is valid.

Is the testing objective? Multiple choice tests are fairly objective but essay-type tests, such as at 0 and A-level, can only be marked subjectively. I do not want to go into the correlation between A-level results and eventual achievement at university but it is a total failure.

I want to talk about my experience of teaching children in the days of the 11-plus because experience is a good measure. In those days, as a young teacher, I used to ask children — perhaps not very imaginatively — to write an essay entitled *"Myself when* [I] *first came to the school"*. This was a quick way to find out something about them. The essays were always the same or similar — *"I broke my arm; I was in hospital; I had my tonsils out; my nan died; my cat was run over."* There was always a series of disasters which ended with, *"I failed the 11-plus."*

This means that I was faced with a class of depressed children who, at the age of 11, were convinced that they were failures, whose self-image was destroyed and, what is more, many of whose parents were convinced that their children were failures. And that was

even worse because then they had no one but the teacher to try to build up their confidence. Sometimes it took years to restore the self-image of such children and sometimes it could not be done at all. Children whose self-image is bad do not achieve their potential or learn well. The 11-plus was a vicious examination.

I remember once in a restaurant a well-dressed, well-spoken, pleasant young man coming up to me and saying, *"Mrs Gordon, I used to go to the school where you taught but you will not remember me because you taught the 'A' stream and I was a 'C'."* I never felt so guilty as in that moment when that young man, who had made something of his life and had done well, was back there in the C stream as soon as he saw me. The cruelty of that system and the knowledge that I was part of it determined me to fight against it ever being reintroduced.

We are now being asked to extend that cruelty to younger and younger children. Public testing at the age of seven means that the teacher must cast a beady eye on five-year-olds to see whether they will pass the 7-plus. No, that is something that we must fight. That only gives choice to the early starters who are a small minority. At least 75 per cent will be left out of that system and the cruelty that it perpetrates cannot be denied.

I have always believed that the creation of the small outer London Education Authorities was a mistake. I worked for the old London County Council, which was replaced by ILEA. I worked for Brent and I worked for 12 years for Barnet. Hon. Members may be surprised to know that Brent and Barnet were not very different. Those small authorities could not give the facilities, the opportunities or the help to the teachers and the children that a larger authority, which could rationalise its resources, could give. The further fragmentation of education authorities will be disastrous.

Since I have been in Parliament, which is not very long, I have received letters

from constituents for and against every new Bill that is proposed. I have not received a single letter in favour of the opting-out proposal. I have had petitions and letters from governors, parent-teacher associations and individuals, all against that proposal. All feel that it will be a disaster for the children in Tower Hamlets and I feel it, too. I hope that the Tower Hamlets Council will not make the mistake of taking the choice that will be offered to them by this dreadful Bill.

Mr Richard Tracey (Surbiton): Will the Hon. Lady give way?

Ms Gordon: I do not think so. It would not be fair to those 60 Hon. Members who still want to speak and I want to come to a conclusion.

Teachers have been antagonised and maligned by the Government. The idea of adding the equivalent of five working days to their year fails to recognise the fact that almost every teacher I know has given 10 times that amount of extra work voluntarily without being asked and it is a slur on and an insult to the teaching profession.

What is really behind the Bill? The Government have antagonised teachers and now they will antagonise parents and governors. The Bill is not a revolutionary improvement in education but will put the clock back. It is a return to elitism. It will lead inevitably to the creation of sink schools and will undermine the good work that has been done by comprehensive schools in raising standards.

The Bill will create great disappointment in many parents who have been fooled into believing that it will be easier for them to send their children to their preferred school. The majority of parents now get the preferred school but the Bill will mean that, instead of parents choosing schools, schools will choose the parents. Behind the Bill there is the sinister shadow of vouchers. If vouchers are ever introduced, those who have money to add to the vouchers will get a good education for their children; the rest of the

children will get a voucher education which will create sink schools, starved of resources — a low level of education for children who are destined for the dole.

I do not like this Bill. I hope that education authorities will not fall into its trap and I hope that something can be done to save our children from the torments of the examinations it suggests. (7.09pm)

(11.32pm) **Ms Mildred Gordon** (Bow and Poplar): The Inner London Education Authority has been accused of being a high-spending authority. As Hon. Members have already pointed out, London is a special case. The Metropolitan police spends double the amount that other police authorities spend to less effect. The Social Services also spend more. But I want to ask Conservative Members how much per child they pay for their children's education in private schools. The most grubby little private school with unqualified teachers is charging £2,000 per head and public schools charge double that. The other day I telephoned a tutorial college to which people from all over the country — and, indeed, from other countries — send their children for intensive coaching if they fail their 0 and A-levels. That costs £8,000 to £10,000 a year. Therefore, I reckon that we are getting very good value from ILEA.

ILEA has been attacked over its examination results. A recent survey by Sheffield university showed that ILEA's examination results are on a par with those of many other authorities. And examinations are only one side of the picture. We get a high-quality comprehensive service from ILEA. Adult education and education for special needs are used and much appreciated by adults and children living within a wide radius of London. I get letters from constituents who have never had the chance of further education who want to know what is to happen to Morley college. I would like the Minister to answer that, because people are very worried about that centre of excellence.

Mr Walden: Will the Hon. Lady give way?

Ms Gordon: The Hon. Gentleman has had his say.

Mr Walden: Will the Hon. Lady give way?

Hon. Members: *Sit down.*

Mr Deputy Speaker: *Order.* The Hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr Walden) has made his speech. It is clear that the Hon. Lady does

not intend to give way and time is now getting very short.

Ms Gordon: The research and development carried out by ILEA has been used all over the country. Its initiatives include the Hargreaves Report on Secondary Education, the Thomas Report on Primary Education and the Fish Report on Special Needs. Those reports were all valuable additions to educational knowledge and are useful to educationists throughout the country.

When we talk about standards of education we cannot ignore social conditions. The ILEA serves seven out of the 10 most deprived areas in Britain. I was a teacher and I know about children who live in overcrowded conditions and who sleep, sometimes six to a room, head to feet on the floor. They do not get a decent night's sleep and however well money is spent, however good the teachers and the standard of education, it is hard for children to learn when they are tired. Many children have no quiet place in which to do their homework. That is another disadvantage that the Secretary of State is not taking into account.

Many children have no books at home and do not get a head start. [*Interruption*] Conservative Members should listen to this because it is important. Children often come to school in the morning without food having been put in their mouths. Government policies mean that for many families the money runs out halfway through the week. Thousands of teachers in London and in other parts of the country keep a packet of biscuits in the cupboard. When the children come to school in the morning the teachers give them milk and a couple of biscuits because they know that the children are hungry.

ILEA should be given more than the amount of money needed to keep up with inflation. The money should not be cut. More should be provided and school breakfasts should be given to children who need them. That is what we should have

in a civilised society. The Government will please their friends in the City of Westminster by keeping down rates at the expense of London's underprivileged children. They are using the same shameful tactics on ILEA as they are using on the Health Service. They are using the tactic of starving an organisation of resources in order to reduce services with which the public have been more than satisfied. If they reduce those services to a standstill, it will pave the way for the destruction of the Health Service and the abolition of ILEA. (11.38pm)

(11.22pm) **Ms Mildred Gordon** (Bow and Poplar): The Government's refusal to negotiate pay and conditions with the teachers' unions causes great resentment and makes our teachers feel that they are enslaved — in worse conditions than teachers anywhere in Europe.

In Tower Hamlets, the position is critical. Hundreds of children cannot be placed in schools and hundreds more are in the hands of supply teachers — sometimes as many as 15 different teachers a year. That is child-minding, not teaching. When the matter was mentioned in the House the other day, the Prime Minister's reply was, in effect, *"What a pity that they cannot come to my Constituency where they would get the best education."* What a solution. It would be nice if children could all be removed from the East End to a leafy suburb. However, a couple of days later I read in the Hendon Times, which covers the Prime Minister's Constituency, that the London Borough of Barnet was taking on licensed teachers — I nearly said unlicensed teachers, because that is what we used to call unqualified teachers — so the position cannot be so happy there either, although it is probably easier than in Tower Hamlets.

Teachers cannot come to Tower Hamlets because of the housing shortage, the high cost and difficulty of travel and because they cannot afford a place to live. The worse the shortage of staff, the more reluctant teachers are to come. In some areas teachers will not even apply for a post as Head or Deputy Head because the task is impossible. Recently the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers carried out a survey which revealed the degree of stress on teachers. Sixty-six per cent of serving teachers said that they would leave if they had the chance. There is a great increase in mental illness among teachers who are suffering from severe stress. Throughout the country there are people who have left teaching who have no intention of ever returning, whatever is offered. When the Government ask women

who have left teaching to start a family to come back to teaching at the same time as the number of evening meetings is being increased, they are being ridiculous, as such meetings make it quite impossible for mothers to take on a teaching job when, increasingly, they have to stay behind at school when their children have come home.

All teachers worthy of their salt keep good records and know how important good recording is but the Government's new measures have introduced an entirely unbalanced situation of recording, with yearly profiles and formative and summative reports.

Teachers are having to keep their classes quiet while they sit in front of them ticking boxes. They cannot find time to teach or prepare work because of the amount of recording and ticking of boxes that is required. They do not have enough free time to do their recording. Their task is becoming impossible. Teachers bitterly resent the Baker Days. They bitterly resent the fact that, throughout the country, in other professions, people are getting longer holidays, but five days of their holidays have been stolen. That rankles very much.

Mr Nicholas Bennett: They have 12 weeks.

Ms Gordon: They do not do nothing in those 12 weeks. They take children on trips, they prepare their work for the coming year and they need a restorative period because teaching is a profession of great physical and mental stress. If the Hon. Gentleman has never taught, he should come and try it for a day or two in one of our local schools — he will see why teachers need a restorative period.

Hon. Members: He used to be a teacher.

Mr Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): I have been a teacher. Does the Hon. Lady agree that Conservative Members appreciate teachers taking their children away for holidays and educational experiences but that they need a holiday themselves when they come back?

Ms Gordon: Yes, indeed, because they are working a 24-hour day on such holidays.

Another form of stress on teachers is the introduction of the National Curriculum without sufficient teachers and without sufficient money. Teachers have marked the fact that the National Curriculum is not being forced upon private schools. We have the worst working conditions in Europe. I hold my surgery in a sixth form centre. The women's toilet is partitioned off a room where there is a butler sink and a gas ring. It looks like something out of the 1930s, not the 1980s. That is where teachers are expected to prepare their lunch. The conditions in many schools are a crying disgrace. We are scouring the world for teachers. We cannot get our own teachers to come back because of the appalling conditions. Yet when we get teachers from abroad, we treat them in a very uneven fashion. Teachers from New Zealand, for instance, sometimes have to spend years waiting for their qualifications to be recognised. Teachers from Bangladesh with 14 years' experience who speak the mother tongue of the children in the schools are considered unqualified but teachers from European countries, who often cannot understand the children, are considered qualified.

Teachers in our schools are watching the money that is being poured into the city technology colleges while their own schools are being starved of money. This order is just another nail in the coffin of state education. It will increase resentment and the seepage away from the teaching profession of well qualified, experienced, good teachers. (11.28pm)

Ms Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): In Tower Hamlets, we have 21 full-time Local Education Authority inspectors and one part-time inspector. They were drawn together carefully and trained to inspect, advise and help school teachers.

What are those inspectors to do? They do not know what the future holds. If money is to be transferred to the schools, will money be available to keep them in place? Should they go into business and try to set themselves up as leaders of inspection teams? They would probably be deemed over-qualified; they would know too much about schools and education.

What training will those teams of inspectors receive? How long will the training last and what will it cover? What will replace the irreplaceable — experience of teacher training and experience in schools? As I said yesterday, I am very much afraid that people will set themselves up as inspectors in entirely new businesses, with no guidelines on how to price the job. They will not want to overprice it, so they will go for cheap staff — unqualified staff.

Every adult has some opinion, or prejudice, about education, based either on that person's past education or on what he or she wants for their own children. Those opinions and prejudices often do not stand up to what really happens in a classroom. There is nothing to replace teaching experience and teacher training when it comes to learning what is possible and what is not.

I have a dream. I would like to see the Secretary of State in front of one of the ever-larger classes of east London kids — bright, lively kids. I should like to see him trying to put some of his ideas into effect. He would soon learn a bit more about what is and what is not possible in education.

It is important for teachers to have respect for the Inspectorate; otherwise the inspections will be of no value. I do not think that teachers will have respect for the butcher, the baker and the candlestick maker — people who are pig-ignorant

about education and who, after a short training course, will start telling teachers what to do. Often, what they tell teachers to do will be neither practical nor possible.

I am worried about the damage that will be done in schools by inexperienced people with little knowledge of education — especially to the most vulnerable teachers. Older teachers are already nervous because, under local management of schools, they are the most expensive. They feel that they are under threat. Younger teachers also feel vulnerable, because they are inexperienced and have not yet built up their confidence. Allowing people with no real knowledge of education, apart from a short inspectors' training course, into schools to criticise teachers, advise them, tell them what to do and report on them will damage a great many of our precious teachers.

Ms Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): I am particularly concerned about youngsters between the ages of 16 and 19. I have always been a supporter of Sixth Form Centres and Colleges, even when many people were against them and I should like to make sure that nothing in the Bill will limit choice for 16 to 19-year-olds who want to go to Sixth Form Centres. Until now, 16-year-olds who have outgrown school or some who have not done well at school and want a fresh start have had the choice of going on at school or of going to local Sixth Form Centres.

The Secretary of State was evasive about whether education would continue to be free in the new organisations. There may be charges for textbooks and materials, which would be prohibitive for children from poor families, as many families are in Tower Hamlets. I want to be absolutely sure about the question of Child Benefit. The Child Benefit regulations say that the mothers of youngsters from 16 to 19 'still in full-time non-advanced education' are entitled to Child Benefit. I want to be sure that they will still be classified as school pupils entitled to Child Benefit when the changeover takes place. I would not like us to wake up and find that there had been an unfortunate change in this respect. I want Child Benefit payments to be guaranteed.

More in doubt are the means-tested discretionary grants, worth about £300, that many Local Education Authorities give to youngsters from poor families. That is very little but I know of a number of cases where the family is living on the margins and must have some money coming in from the 16 to 19-year-old, and that £300 has made the difference to whether a youngster can stay on in education. Unless the Bill makes some provision to allow them to be replaced in the new organisation, the changeover will mean that those discretionary grants will go to the wall.

I do not want possible charges to mean that higher and further education will be for those of independent

means and that people who have little money will not be able to continue in education after 16. I also wish that in the Bill there had been a move towards what I would call comprehensive education beyond 16. Up to now, youngsters taking vocational or academic courses have been the ones provided for but there should be enrichment courses for any youngster who wishes to stay on. This is particularly important in areas such as mine where the attainment level is lower than in many other parts of the country.

Youngsters should be able to state what they want. If they want to study typewriting, ceramics or a language for three months or do a short one term course in music, they should be able to do so. It might give them a taste for education and lead on to further courses and, even if they just take a short course, it enriches their life and adds to their cultural development. The Bill should cater for (but does not) that kind of development.

Many of the women's organisations such as Women's Institutes and the Fawcett Society are angry at the approach to so-called leisure education and the false division of education between vocational and leisure. Many women come back into education through courses that, under the new classification, might be termed leisure courses, for which they will have to pay quite high fees. As women have less money than men on the whole, because their wages are lower and they have less chance to accumulate money and savings, it will be harder for women to return to education. All the hullabaloo about the Prime Minister's charter for women will seem rather cynical if there are fewer women in higher education by the year 2000. That is a bad development.

I have found in Tower Hamlets that adult education is really being squeezed because Local Education Authorities, now that there has been a change in the business rate, are finding it very hard to secure funds. A community education staff group approached me last week. Their courses were

slashed first by 20 per cent, and this year by another 20 per cent, and they plan to hold a meeting about the decimation of adult education. So-called leisure courses, which are becoming expensive and, in many areas, are being abandoned because of lack of funding, are very important to working-class people. For instance, many women go to car maintenance classes. Without such classes it would be unsafe for them to run a car. Many pensioners get great enjoyment from these classes. They are kept young, active and alert in mind and body, and as a result the State saves a good deal of money in the Health Service and in other ways. If adult education classes become so expensive that people on low incomes cannot afford them, or if they have to close down because Local Education Authorities are squeezed by a reduction in the amount they get from the business rate, a serious blow will be dealt to women and older people.

As I know that at least two other Hon. Members wish to speak, I shall not take up much more of the time of the House. However, I wish to refer to the question of democracy. This too affects women. Women are under-represented on boards and on all political bodies but local government is one area in which they have better representation. If funding of further education is removed from elected local councils we shall be left with a less democratic and less accountable system. Women will have no influence at all on the funding councils to be nominated by the Secretary of State. This too is a retrograde step. (9.11pm)

(7.37pm) **Ms Mildred Gordon** (Bow and Poplar): The Education Act 1944 was an inspiration to teachers who felt that it was an opportunity to raise standards and to increase advantage and possibility for children. It was a real opportunity for educational reform.

The so-called reforms of the Government have the opposite effect. They have demoralised rather than inspired teachers. Local management of schools, based on the average teacher's salary, threatens the most experienced and valuable teachers in schools. Primary school teachers have been forced to put their children through the hoops of standard assessment tests. Classes are getting larger and the lack of money for supply teachers means that classes have to be split up when teachers are away. All those things, coupled with the increased proportion of administrative work to teaching time, are demoralising teachers.

The White Paper fails to recognise that teachers are the linchpin of the education system. It says that parents are the experts — and I am not denigrating the expertise of parents — but I do not like the expertise of teachers to be brushed aside as of no importance. Although the White Paper concentrates on the role of parents, it fails to deal with their concerns. My Advice Surgery, like those of some of my Hon. Friends, has revealed those concerns very clearly. One that arises again and again is the need for parents and children to benefit from the provision of nursery education but the White Paper says nothing about that.

The same applies to discretionary grants for students; to clothing grants for parents on low incomes; to adult education, which is being whittled down to nothing, while LEAs are left short of money and forced to cut all provision except that which is a statutory obligation; and to schools for children with special educational needs. Parents fear that good schools for children in that latter class are closing down and that the money and expertise are not being invested in

mainstream classes.

If anything can be said to be of paramount importance in education, it is the need for stability. Since the Government began to introduce education Bills, however, instability has become chronic in London. First we saw the wanton destruction of the Inner London Education Authority — a much-maligned organisation which provided a good standard of education in the inner city, against dreadful odds. It pioneered research into education and the philosophy of education and it raised the cultural level in many spheres. I remember the last concert that it organised in the Albert Hall: children and adults from every ILEA area gave a brilliant performance and I was reduced to tears by the thought that it would all be destroyed — along with the other advantages provided by a Unitary Authority, in art, drama and other spheres.

The Local Education Authorities then took over in London. They tried to establish new methods, depending very much on the old ILEA divisional offices but trying to build up the schools. They were then faced with the problems posed by local management of schools. Now we have opt-outs and funding agencies. As the Government exert pressure on schools to opt out, the LEAs will be given less money and less control over planning. That is a recipe for turmoil and chaos. I am glad to see the Hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr Marshall) in the Chamber. He intervened to mention Hendon School, which he presented as a shining example of grant-maintained status which has now increased its numbers. The Hon. Gentleman, however, did not tell the whole story. Barnet Borough Council — a Conservative body if there ever was one — tried to do away with its surplus places by amalgamating Hendon School, which was formerly a grammar school in a middle-class area, with Whitefields, formerly a secondary school on a council estate.

Whitefields was on the larger site; it had the more modern building and the better facilities. Hendon

School parents, however, did not want their children to go to Whitefields — not on your nelly. They fought it and they were allowed to opt out. Their grant is at the expense of Whitefields.

Mr John Marshall rose.

Ms Gordon: The Hon. Gentleman has had his chance.

As a result, the disadvantaged children on the council estate have been further disadvantaged. I am very glad that the Hon. Gentleman raised the matter; I might not have thought of it otherwise.

Mr Marshall rose.

Ms Gordon: No, I will not give way. I have waited for two days to speak for 10 minutes and I think that it is unreasonable to expect me to give way now.

All the organisations that have written to me are worried about what the Bill will do for children with special educational needs. Mencap asks this about the funding agency:

"How can a system operate coherently and efficiently if one body retains responsibility for children with special needs [the LEAs, that is] *while another body is responsible for funding the schools which provide the education?"*

That puts it in a nutshell.

So-called reforms — I cannot mention the Government's reforms without putting them, as it were, in quotation marks — such as the publication of league tables — will disadvantage children with special needs who have not been statemented and children who are learning English as a second language. Grant-maintained schools that want a high position on the league tables will be reluctant to take such children, although they may give other reasons.

Many Hon. Members have pointed out that children have only one chance in the education system and that a single experiment can affect their whole lives. The Government should have been more prudent: they should have waited to see how the funding agency

worked in higher education before establishing a similar agency for schools. Given that, if only 10 per cent of schools were to transfer to grant-maintained status, the Government should have devoted much more serious thought to the process. They should have worked out what would happen when a conflict arose over plans.

For instance, an LEA might feel that a sixth form school should be set up rather than a primary school, or vice versa, and the funding agency think the reverse. It would have been more prudent to arrange pilot schemes at an earlier stage of the so-called reforms for SATs and all the other alterations. The Government's chopping and changing has driven teachers to distraction: they have been completely demoralised by the way in which policy has been made on the hoof.

The Secretary of State said a good deal about democracy. He said that helping, forcing or persuading schools to become grant-maintained would give parents more of a say. I think that that diminishes democracy. It takes control from elected bodies on which parents can have some influence — by voting, demonstrating or going to see their councillors — and centralises it, giving the Secretary of State more and more powers. He himself says that the Bill gives him 44 new powers.

If the Secretary of State wants to give more power to parents and the community, why does the Bill not mention the representation of teachers, parents and the local community on the funding agency and the education associations? Real power — control over funds, sackings and other changes — will be in the hands of appointed quangos that are directly responsible to the Secretary of State.

The Bill takes another step towards the introduction of the market in the education system. Teams of inspectors have already been set up, to price the job and establish what profits can be made. Next will come the establishment of education associations. Recently, I spoke to a dedicated teacher whom I have known for some

years. Every year, he takes a group of children over to France on the exchange system and, in the past, he has always been able to discuss the arrangements with an LEA adviser. Now the school at which he works has become grant-maintained and he has realised with a shock that, if he wants advice, the school will have to pay a fee. That has upset him very much and he does not feel too good about the changes in the system. I am not easily shocked but I was shocked by what I was told by an American I met recently. He is a nice man. He told me that, following his retirement, he had become very involved with a residential school for mentally handicapped children. Originally, he had been a volunteer, but he had become so involved that he was now employed by the school. When I asked him what he did, he said that he was an investment agent or broker: he persuaded people to take shares in the school. I was shocked. I asked, *"How can people take shares and profit out of…"*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Michael Morris): *Order*. We may hear further information on another occasion. (7.48pm)

(8.40pm) **Ms Mildred Gordon** (Bow and Poplar): The report of the Select Committee on Education observed that the Government's plans for capital spending on schools appear to favour grant-maintained schools over Local Education Authority schools. The Minister freely admitted that that was indeed the case, reflecting the Government's commitment to the success of grant-maintained schools. It makes me wonder about the Government's commitment to the success of Local Education Authority schools — to the continuing success of the those which are working well and to the improvement of those which have problems. For 1992-93, the difference in capital expenditure breaks down nationally into an average of between £110 and £116 per pupil per annum in the grant-maintained sector compared with £88 per pupil in the Local Education Authority sector. It will fall to £75 per pupil in the LEA sector in 1993-94, to £71 in 1994-95 and to £66 in 1995-96, which is a serious decrease in funding. There is deliberate discrimination in capital funding, which ignores the pressures on Local Education Authorities to replace and renew major elements of post-war education buildings which are predominant in many authorities.

In Tower Hamlets, emergency repairs are necessary to some of the prefabricated and system built units. The delay in the repairs has exacerbated longer term maintenance problems. The estimated backlog of repairs is more than £2 billion nationally. In 1992-93, London Authorities received only 35 per cent of the £86 million that was identified as needed for the basic building work.

The decline in the school environment has a considerable impact on pupils' learning. I know that from personal experience, as I have taught in prefabricated huts which are freezing in winter and boiling in summer. Such conditions are not conducive to getting the best work from teachers or pupils. We hoped to do away with such temporary buildings but the present

capital funding regime means that they will remain until they rot.

The Secretary of State claimed that Local Education Authorities have access to capital receipts as a way of increasing scope for capital expenditure but there has been a steady decline in Local Authority receipts which are deemed to derive from educational assets. They have decreased from £285 million in 1988-89 to a forecast of only £60 million in 1992-93.

That is primarily due to the downturn in the property market, the residue of surplus assets being less straightforward in terms of disposal because of planning consents, location, lack of money and mortgage problems and, above all, the threat of transfer to grant-maintained status when Local Education Authorities want to reorganise and rationalise their schools. They are left with schools with a limited number of pupils and wasted space and they cannot carry out plans which have been worked out in advance for the benefit of the whole education service — schools which are planned to close then opt out and the plans are thrown into chaos.

At the same time, the Government restrict spending by capping controls which are forcing down LEA expenditure. They are limiting the use of capital expenditure which is funded from revenue. As a result, the scope for enhancing future credit approvals has been substantially limited, so the argument that LEAs have free access to capital receipts is false — that access is severely restricted and declining.

Mention has been made of the double funding for grant-maintained schools. An answer to a written question from my Hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mr Griffiths) revealed that more than half of the 492 grant-maintained schools are being double-funded through their annual maintenance grant for activities such as advisory and library services which were previously provided by the LEAs. The higher level of grant which maintained schools receive to cover the costs of services formerly provided by the LEAs has

been maintained. The LEAs still have to provide those services and the duplication is costing them nearly £2 million in London and, I believe, nearly £14 million across the country.

The Government recently released two consultation documents on the common funding formula, in which they state that they intend to continue to allocate additional money for grant-maintained schools' extra responsibilities. The funding agency will be a quango and centrally controlled by the Government. It will increasingly transfer funds from the Local Authority sector to the grant maintained sector, which will put the squeeze on Local Education Authority schools. Schools that need funds for various reasons will be tempted, bribed and pressured to become grant maintained and the Local Education Authority will be starved of funds. They will nevertheless have to maintain services for children with special needs and fund welfare officers and educational psychologists out of the continually decreasing funds. The services are bound to suffer, to the disbenefit of all children.

In many areas, classrooms in Local Authority schools now have more pupils than before. I believe that there are advertisements in New Zealand and Australian newspapers for instructors. Hard-pressed schools have found a loophole — if they employ untrained instructors, they can pay them less than teachers. We have all heard the Prime Minister's advocacy of Mum's Army. Increasingly, unqualified people will be teaching our children in order to spin out the money. Experienced teachers are being given the push; they are being pressured and made to feel that it is time that they took early retirement because older teachers cost more and they are being replaced by new teachers.

It seems strange to me that although a recent School Inspectors' Report said that in the past few years the crop of students who have become teachers are of an extremely high standard, we shall now have licensed teachers — we used to call such people

unlicensed teachers — in our schools, and 'instructors' from New Zealand and Australia. I have nothing against New Zealand or Australia but I have something against the idea of unqualified people teaching our children.

Sir Paul Beresford: Is the Hon. Lady aware that the school system, certainly in New Zealand, and I believe in Australia too, has taken into the primary schools non-university qualified but trained teachers, along the lines that are now being suggested here? It might be relevant to mention that those two countries have a higher standard of literacy than this country, despite having the same sort of difficulties involving non-English speakers, especially from the Pacific.

Ms Gordon: The Hon. Gentleman may be correct. I do not know about the standard of literacy in New Zealand. If the standard there is higher, I should say that that must be despite the fact that there are unqualified teachers in the schools, not because of it. What is the pupil-teacher ratio? Are the unqualified teachers assisting qualified teachers? We need to know the whole picture.

The Government's doctrinaire approach to education clearly plans to set the clock back to before 1945, when we had a two-tier system of education. There were elitist selective schools and a much lower standard of education, with a lower proportion of highly qualified teachers, less money and worse school buildings for the average child. The funding agency and the move towards grant-maintained schools take the system in that direction again towards an elitist education for the minority and low standards of education for the majority.

To that end, the Government are wasting a great deal of badly needed money. Perhaps the Minister will tell us how much it cost to pay external examiners to mark the tests that the teachers would not use — those tests that the teachers so clearly proved were badly designed and ill timed. How

much money was spent on the publicity campaign to denigrate teachers and governors and to try to convince parents that they were wrong? The campaign failed. That money was badly needed for books, buildings and other education purposes, yet the Government used it to bolster their doctrinaire approach and to try to push their policies forward.

Yesterday, with other members of the Select Committee, I visited a city tech. Of the £12 million that had been spent to refurbish the school building, 20 per cent came from business, but 80 per cent of it was taxpayers' money. There were 170 computers for 400 children and as for the pupil-teacher ratio, I saw one class of 13, but most classes consisted of two or three or seven children at the most. That was great. It would be wonderful if we could have those ratios throughout the country but when resources are limited, there must be some quality and some fairness in sharing.

The Government's policies, especially their funding policies, are designed to limit quality and to reduce fairness, to provide a good education and wonderful provision for the elite and very little for the rest. (8.53pm)

Women

Mildred campaigned ceaselessly for women's rights and, particularly, on the issue that would come to be called 'Wages for Housework'. She believed that women's unremunerated labour should be included in the Gross Domestic Product so that their work would be recognised as valuable to the nation.

Other issues that Mildred campaigned about and which have a greater impact on the lives of women are the Child Support Agency, sex discrimination, obscene telephone calls, safety of women on public transport and rape in marriage.

Mildred also helped to successfully defend the rights of women with respect to abortion from periodic attacks by religious groups and right-wing MPs.

(1.44pm) **Ms Mildred Gordon** (Bow and Poplar): Sadly, in the twisted society in which we live, it is often impossible for a woman to say, 'yes to life', to the life of the embryo growing within her, without damaging her own life and the life of her existing family.

The whole question of abortion is closely linked to other campaigns that women have been fighting for many years. Indeed, it has already been said that not only did we have to campaign for legal abortion but we have had to campaign continually against repeated attacks on our abortion rights. The Bill represents the thin edge of the wedge; if it is passed, it will lead to further attacks on women's right to legal abortion.

If we were to win those other campaigns for which we are fighting, we would have a more civilised society, there would be few abortions, and late terminations would all but disappear. To achieve that end, we need improved sex education. We need contraceptives of all kinds, freely available and free. We need better housing and employment and training opportunities. We need safer childbirth — our record is not among the best in the advanced world. We must do away with some of the more recent 'conveyor belt practices' connected with childbirth in hospitals, which have a traumatic effect on the baby during birth. We want nursery provision for young children. We want money for medical research into foetal abnormalities to discover them at an earlier stage. We need money for disabled people and money to provide facilities for them. We need money from the Government, as of right, for women who are carers of children, the disabled, the sick and the old.

If we win those campaigns, women will be able to have their children and we shall have a civilised society in which the rearing of children will be the joy that it should be. Nowadays, all too often the birth of an unwanted child leads to child abuse and that is something we should not forget.

Last week, I sent the Hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr Alton) a

copy of a letter that I had received. I received many sad letters but I was especially struck by this one, perhaps because it came from an old man. Perhaps it was naive of me to send a copy of that letter to the Hon. Member for Mossley Hill, or perhaps it was a reflex action after 40 years of teaching, to try to make people face up to the consequences of their activities. That old man told me that he had for many years been looking after his handicapped son of 35, who is mentally disabled. The father was bitter and told how his wife had died in her fifties; he put that down to the strain of looking after their handicapped child. He was sad, he was tired, he was despairing, and above all he was haunted by the fear of what would happen to his handicapped son when he died. I have met many people with handicapped children who are haunted by that fear. It is another factor that has not been considered in this debate.

But the central issue, the most important question to consider, is whether women should have control over their bodies — the right to decide what happens within their bodies — or whether they should be controlled by others. Earlier in the debate, a Conservative Member raised the question of class. Money gives one a lot of rights. Those women, who have a lot of money and education, have the right to get round the restrictions of any kind of Bill. If this Bill is passed, such women will be able to find abortionists and will find a way to have their damaged foetuses aborted even at a late stage. However, poorer women would lose their rights. I am concerned for the rights of poorer women not only to have abortions but to have children. Those two things are connected.

Some years ago, I was in a women's hospital for a check-up. I was shocked to see the number of women there for sterilisation operations. An unduly large proportion of them were black or Asian women. I went all round the ward asking the women why they were having this operation and most of them had been advised by their doctor to

have it as a form of contraception. It is because of my experiences as a young woman, long before 1967, that I am in favour of abortion on request in an adequate Health Service. It would solve almost all the problems of late terminations.

I do not know whether some Hon. Members understand that no woman approaches abortion lightly. For the first few days after a woman has had a baby, her body trembles when she hears the baby cry. That is nature's way of tying the mother to the baby. This bonding starts from conception, so it is physically impossible for any woman to approach abortion lightly. They approach it after giving serious consideration to the factors involved.

We have all heard about the pre-1967 period and the gin, hot baths, quinine pills, knitting needles and soap suds. We know that the best doctors — those who were caring and kind — were often criminalised and struck off the Register.

However, Hon. Members may not appreciate the constant shadow that was cast over the lives of women, both married and unmarried, by the fear of unwanted pregnancy. Every month, my generation and my mother's generation worried about becoming pregnant, especially if their period was late. They felt caged, trapped and frightened. They wondered what to do and where they would find someone who would give them an abortion if they could not cope with, or afford to have, another child.

The Bill will lead to the criminalisation of women and doctors once again. Hon. Members who are wavering about how to vote should think about their wives, girlfriends, daughters and granddaughters. They should vote for their choice to have control over their bodies; they should vote against this Bill. (1.52pm)

Ms Mildred Gordon (Bow and Popular): The new fourth resource is to be based on shares in the Gross National Product and the method of measuring GNP is likely to be on traditional lines that do not take into account the vast input of work outside the formal monetary economy that is to be found in every country. The traditional system of national income accounting measures GNP as the sum of income that is created by individuals in a particular country. It is largely a measure of activities that result in monetary transactions. That does not take account of unpaid work that is undertaken by women. Relevant examples are home-makers, mothers bearing and bringing up children, women caring for sick and/or aged people and farmers' wives in rural areas. The examples are manifold. All this work would be included in aggregated national accounts if it were performed by paid workers. Thus the income received by paid nannies, au pairs, child minders and agricultural workers would be included as part of the national income.

The United Nations has done a great deal of work to show how inappropriate are such distinctions in measuring GNP. In 1980, at a conference in Nairobi at the end of the United Nations decade for women, a United Nations document *Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2000* was passed by representatives of the assembled Governments and was ratified later that year by the United Nations General Council in New York. Paragraph 120 of the UN document reads:

"The remunerated and, in particular, the unremunerated contributions of women to all aspects and sectors of development should be recognised, and appropriate efforts should be made to measure and reflect these contributions in national accounts and economic statistics and in the gross national product. Concrete steps should be taken to quantify the unremunerated contribution of women to agriculture, food production, reproduction and household

activities."

In Germany, there are many small agricultural holdings whose labour force is confined to unpaid family workers, most of whom are women. Considerable efforts are being made there to quantify their economic contributions. In rural Britain, that unremunerated contribution includes tending the household plot and caring for domestic animals. Unpaid women are small-scale growers, traders, vendors and sellers of handicrafts. They also keep the books. All that time-consuming, back-breaking work is left out of the GNP and thus cannot be covered by economic planning, programming and social welfare services. Women are the forgotten producers and providers of services.

When making comparisons for the purposes of GNP, the unpaid work of women in urban areas has an equally important bearing. Attempts are being made in Holland to assess the effects of including housework and other unwaged activities in the various economic aggregates. That is possible because a comprehensive family budget and time-use survey is carried out in Holland. The United Kingdom has a family expenditure survey, which considers income and expenditure, but does not consider time usage and no attempt is made to quantify unpaid activities. Women's unpaid work is not counted but it is certainly counted upon. The Government's initiatives to de-institutionalise health and welfare services and subsequent cuts in paid employment have increased the unwaged work load enormously.

Jacques Delors will chair a committee which will attempt to work out a uniform formula for calculating GNP. The committee should take steps to quantify and count the work of women in GNP and that can be achieved on a European basis within the Community. It is also important that the United Kingdom Government initiate research into evaluating women's work.

Only when the unpaid work of women is included

will we see what is really happening in the economy in the United Kingdom and in Europe and make the proper assessment of GNP and the changes necessary to pursue justice for women.

On the 3 November 1988, a Bill was presented to Parliament entitled:

COUNTING WOMEN'S UNREMUNERATED WORK

Ms Mildred Gordon, supported by Mr Keith Vaz, Mrs Alice Mahon, Mr Tony Benn, Ms Joyce Quin, Ms Marjorie Mowlam, Mr John Hughes, Mr John Battle, Mr Tony Banks, Ms Dianne Abbott, Mr Doug Hoyle and Mr Bill Michie, presented a Bill to require government departments and other public bodies to include in the production of statistics relating to the gross domestic product and other accounts a calculation of the unremunerated contribution of women and to include this calculation in the Gross National Product: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed [Bill 225].

Safety of Women on Public Transport
(19 December 1988)

(10.51pm) **Ms Mildred Gordon** (Bow and Poplar): I have spoken many times about the lack of overall planning required to improve public transport in my Constituency, particularly in view of the enormous developments in Docklands. The building of the Docklands Highway will encourage cars to come into the area and choke it up if public transport is not massively increased. However, that is not the subject on which I wish to speak tonight.

I wish to speak about a subject which many women in my Constituency and many of their fathers, partners and sons would like me to raise — the safety of women on public transport in London. Only 35 per cent of women in London hold driving licences — half as many as men. *Women's Transport News* researched the matter and found that only 60 per cent of those with driving licences have access to a car and 70 per cent are always dependent on public transport and lifts. *Ask any Woman* — based on a research project in London by an organisation called Women Against Rape — showed that 80 per cent of women in London do not have their own cars. Some have motorbikes, but two-thirds of them have no access to any motorised transport. Another source, Pensioners' Link, showed that only one in 10 women over 65 drives a car. *Transport Today* showed men and women from black and ethnic minorities groups use public transport about 50 per cent more than white people.

It is quite clear that women have much less access to cars and have far greater need than men for public transport and that black women need public transport even more than white women. It is extremely important to all women to be able to travel safely. Unfortunately, on or waiting for public transport is one of the most common places for women to be attacked. Another danger is when women accept lifts from semi-strangers. Possibly young women who have been to a party and who have

missed the last bus or face a long wait at bus stops or a long walk to the tube in the dark feel that accepting a lift is the lesser evil and that decision often leads to an attack. Sometimes young women hitch-hike or accept lifts due to lack of money. That is all too common, given the present level of unemployment.

Ask any Woman found that three quarters of women felt uneasy, frightened or very frightened or never went out after dark. Women of all ages have said to me that they never go out after dark. That affects their social lives and their choice of jobs and job opportunities.

Women fear different categories of London public transport. British Rail closed-compartment trains are feared most by women, followed by the Underground. Women say that if they are attacked on an Underground train they cannot get off until the train stops. After getting off, one is in a maze and cannot see round corners. One has to run up the stairs and there is no one to go to for help. It can be a nightmare. Seventy per cent of all women think that it is unsafe to use British Rail or the Underground or to wait at a bus stop at night.

Winvisible and other disability organisations say that disabled women are particularly vulnerable. If one cannot see, hear or run well and has to ask for physical assistance from people who may take advantage, one is particularly vulnerable and may be singled out for attack. That applies also to older women, pregnant women and women with young children who cannot move fast. Another danger is one-person-operated doors. Again, that is particularly dangerous for older people, pregnant women and women with small children. Last year there were 300 officially recorded incidents involving people trapped in the centre doors of buses in London. At least three people have died. If I had more time, I could supply many quotations from people saying that they fear those doors and one-person-operated buses.

Transport cuts are harming women in particular

since they use public transport most. Eighty per cent of women interviewed by the GLC Women's Committee said that they wanted bus conductors and station staffing. I am disappointed that the Docklands Light Railway in my Constituency has no staff at stations. The cuts in bus routes mean longer waits at dark bus stops and more hitch-hiking. Every cut in services means that more women are attacked. The same applies to rises in fares. Fares for women are disproportionately higher because women do more short journeys. Many factors make women feel unsafe. For example, women are frightened by empty platforms and carriages, standing alone at bus stops, not seeing round corners in subways, being unsure of where to go, knowing that no help is at hand in case of trouble, having to wait a long time and long corridors in subways resulting from the bad design of stations.

Many positive measures can be taken but they all cost money. Money must be spent so that women are not trapped in their homes and can live full and proper lives. Money should be spent on good lighting and visibility. We should reduce the circumstances which result in women having to wait. That means frequent train and bus services. There should be visual display units, radios, alarm systems, good indication of when trains are coming, better positioning of bus stops, improvements in the sign-posting on the Underground, more exits on the Underground to reduce the distance that women have to walk and rationalisation of passageways. There should also be an absence of provocative advertising and the removal of sexist, racist and violent graffiti immediately. Above all, there should be adequate, well-trained staff to observe, advise and assist passengers. (10.58pm)

Counting Women's Unremunerated Work (11 April 1989)

(3.54pm) **Ms Mildred Gordon** (Bow and Poplar): I beg to move, that leave be given to bring in a Bill to require Government Departments and other public bodies to include in the production of statistics relating to the Gross Domestic Product and other accounts a calculation of the unremunerated contribution of women; and to include this calculation in the Gross National Product.

The Bill requires the Government to quantify the unremunerated work of women and to include that quantification in the Gross National Product. In order to explain the need for the Bill and the gross injustices that it will redress, I shall put before the House facts about the economy that women — particularly the poorest women — have been wanting to give Right Hon. and Hon. Members for many a day.

When I was 16, my parents sent me to secretarial college to learn shorthand, typewriting, bookkeeping and business studies. All over the walls of that building, in large letters, was the slogan *"Time is money"*. Although that time is money is an accepted and obvious economic fact, everywhere in society women's time is squandered as if it were worthless. Today, few shops will even say whether goods will be delivered in the morning or the afternoon. The same is true when equipment needs repairing and of meter readings and gas, electric and telephone connections or disconnections. Women's waiting time is expected to be at everyone's disposal.

The daily queues at supermarket checkouts grow on Saturday when women, many of whom have been out to waged work all week, have to plough through their housework on their so-called day off. Of course, those time-wasting queues lower staff costs. Clearly time is money — but it seems that it is women's time that ensures that other people, especially the captains of commerce and industry, make money.

Much of the work that women do is unremunerated and never enters the GNP, as that quantifies only goods

and services exchanged for money. However, that unremunerated work, while it is not counted, is certainly counted on. The Government, in closing hospitals and many institutions that provided health care and other services, claim that they will be replaced by community care. However, it is not the community in general that does the caring but women who shoulder the extra burden of time-consuming, back-breaking and emotionally exhausting work for which the Government are refusing to pay. That shift from waged to unwaged caring is not quantified in official statistics, so no one knows just how much money women are saving the Government by picking up the pieces of the shattered welfare state. Again, women's unpaid work is counted upon but not counted. Most women in waged jobs find themselves at the bottom of the pyramid. They are particularly exploited when they take on part-time work in order to have time for family responsibilities. Even those few women who secure well-paid jobs find that, once they become mothers, their lives too are shaped by the task of bringing up their children — the future labour force — and of caring for others whose work is considered more important than almost everything that women do, whether the women are professionals, cardboard box makers, or are fully occupied at home.

The work of women that is included in the GNP is based on a pedestal of unremunerated, uncounted work. Imagine how much work and responsibility falls on the women in the families of British Rail employees who in a recent accident inquiry revealed that they work a 12-hour day, seven days a week. There is not much chance of those men helping with the housework; all the burden falls on their wives. It is almost always women who care for those who are ill or who have disabilities. As so-called farmers' wives, they tend kitchen gardens and livestock. They are market traders, shop attendants and

bookkeepers in family businesses. They are often secretaries, typists and hostesses, as well as being wives and a status symbol for their professional husbands. It is women who ensure that the flowers are on the church altar and that schools have parent-teacher associations as well as volunteers to make up for education cuts by running jumble sales, mixing paints and coaching young readers.

Women visit ailing relatives and neighbours, especially when meals-on-wheels no longer roll up. Women work overtime to shield families and whole communities from the effects of racism and racist immigration controls, class prejudice, polluted food, water and air, and the economic, physical and emotional devastation of un-employment. None of this skilled, time-consuming life-giving but unwaged work of women is counted in the GNP.

The fact that women are statistically invisible as producers and service providers means that some economists have the cheek to label as marginal these workers without whose vital work society would grind to a halt. The failure to count women's unremunerated work in the Gross National Product results in a distorted picture of the economy and leads to faulty economic planning, which does not meet the needs of working people. The very same work enters national statistics when performed by those who are paid for their work, such as nannies, nurses, bookkeepers, housekeepers, agricultural workers, physiotherapists, chauffeurs, chefs, interior decorators — the list is almost endless. Endless too are the damaging effects of the monetary and statistical invisibility of the work of housewives. The fact that this work is unwaged and uncounted devalues women's waged work, too. The many organisational, technical and other practical skills that women develop as housewives gain them little in the waged labour market. One exception to that involves the National Union of Teachers, which was my union for many years. The

NUT gained one year's increment for every three years that women spent at home with their own children. This was recognition for some of the work of mothers who return to teaching. However, most of the time the housework women do either full or part-time — before they go to work in the morning, after they return home at night and at weekends — is not considered work. Only when this unwaged work of women is officially quantified by widening the compass of the GNP will we even begin to know how much time and skill goes into the economy and the production of specific commodities.

I therefore present this Bill, which requires Government Departments and other public bodies to include in the statistics relating to the Gross Domestic Product and other accounts the quantification of the unremunerated work of women — in both the formal and informal sectors of the economy — and to include that calculation in the Gross National Product.

There is growing international awareness of the need for recognition of the totality of women's contribution to the economy. According to the United Nations, women carry out two-thirds of the world's work for 10 per cent of the income and own only 1 per cent of the assets. In July 1985, the United Kingdom Government were represented at the United Nations world conference in Nairobi, Kenya and agreed *Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women*, the final document of the Decade for Women. Paragraph 120 — amended by delegates from Sierra Leone, Jordan and Uganda, along the lines put forward by the International Wages for Housework Campaign — committed governments to include women's unremunerated work in the GNP. The following November, paragraph 120 was singled out as one of the most important decisions of the Decade for Women and ratified by the United Nations General Assembly. My Bill would implement that

decision.

Despite their enormous contribution, women are undervalued because so much of their work is unvalued and economically invisible. That has enabled the Government to get away with cutting maternity grants and freezing Child Benefit — the only money which many women can call their own. Adding up this work makes the unanswerable case that these benefits are rights for work done, not charities.

Economic invisibility keeps older women dependent on their husband's goodwill because, despite a lifetime of serving family and community, there are no pension contributions for unwaged housework. Many a divorced wife lives to see her ex-husband retire from the position which she helped him to obtain on a good pension, while her income is reduced to a bare minimum. The economic invisibility of most women's work has allowed the Government to inch nearer to workfare — the American version of the workhouse — which forces claimants into dead-end jobs to earn their entitlement to Income Support.

Mr Speaker: *Order.* The Hon. Lady has now been speaking for 10 minutes and should begin to draw her remarks to a close.

Ms Gordon: Counting women's work would prove that every mother is a working mother and that some of them have two or even three jobs. Counting women's work would make women count by making clear that every woman, whether or not she does waged work, is nevertheless a working woman.

Perhaps the most unjust policy that economic invisibility has permitted is the Poll Tax, which is levelled at women who have no income. Despite women's enormous contribution, the Government are demanding more. These women will become institutionalised and further dependent on the goodwill of the wage earner. They will be institutionalised into an inferior, vulnerable and archaic position which

will invite domestic violence. Women on Income Support, including mothers, will have 20 per cent of the Poll Tax deducted from the household's survival money.

When all the work that women do is finally made visible in the GNP and other official statistics, no one will be able to continue to ignore the extent of dependence of the mighty institutions of the state, industry, commerce and every social organisation throughout the United Kingdom on women's voluntary and involuntary unwaged work.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Ms Mildred Gordon, Mr Tony Banks, Mr John Battle, Mr Tony Benn, Mr Jimmy Dunnachie, Mr Eric S Heffer, Mr John Hughes, Mrs Alice Mahon, Ms Marjorie Mowlam, Ms Joyce Quin, Mr Dennis Skinner and Mr Nigel Spearing.

Ms Mildred Gordon accordingly presented a Bill to require Government Departments and other public bodies to include in the production of statistics relating to the Gross Domestic Product and other accounts a calculation of the unremunerated contribution of women; and to include this calculation in the Gross National Product: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 14 April and to be printed. [Bill 114]

Ms Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): It has been difficult to listen with equanimity to some of the speeches today, particularly a speech which cast a slur on women by saying that since the Abortion Act 1967 their concern for the sanctity of life had been lessened. It is poverty which reduces the value of life and those who voted for the freezing of Child Benefit might bear that in mind. Women are pro-life. They bear the children and take the main responsibility for bringing them up. They do the unpaid work of managing the family and they should make the decision on what is best for their family. This has been a phoney debate. We have seen the opportunism of Hon. Members who have made sanctimonious speeches but are prepared to compromise to get their foot in the door. They intend eventually not just to attack all abortion rights but to attack contraceptive rights. They have already attacked the French contraceptive pill. If they really cared about doing away with late abortions and did their best to prevent the few late abortions that there are, they would be in favour of abortion on request. Unfortunately, we are unable to discuss or vote on that tonight. Those Hon. Members would be in favour of improved sex education and of all the points outlined by my Hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr Barron).

Above all, those Hon. Members would want to improve social conditions. Instead of sending round plastic foetuses, why do they not think of the real world, where so many miscarriages take place in the first few months of pregnancy and where still-births take place at seven months because mothers are dragging babies and prams up flights of stairs or have to live on poor diets? Why do those Hon. Members not concern themselves with saving lives by improving the conditions for such people?

Those who have been spearheading the SPUC campaign are concerned not so much with saving life as with control over women's lives. Let us remember that the women of Romania, in

fighting for freedom, want above all the freedom to have legal abortions. That should be a lesson to us.

To reduce the number of weeks within which abortion is legal would be a form of cruelty to women. My generation and that of my mother remember the shadow that was cast over women's lives by the fear of pregnancy, particularly when they were not in a position to have more children and when their health and social conditions, already extremely low, could not tolerate larger families. Every month their relations with their partners were crippled and there were severe burdens on doctors, who either had to break the law or turn away desperate patients, and then deal with the mess of septicaemia and other causes of death resulting from back-street abortions, which a whittling down of the present law would bring back.

Women should have the right to choose. All women are pro-life. Women do not enter abortions lightly because their very nature bonds them to the life that they are carrying. They have the right to decide what is best for their families — and almost all women, given the chance, choose correctly. (10.30pm)

(5.48pm) **Ms Mildred Gordon** (Bow and Poplar): When my Hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs Mahon) raised a point of order about the Secretary of State not giving way because he was in a hurry to catch a plane to the United States, the Secretary of State had nothing to say. He was kind and polite enough to write a letter to me apologising because he may not be able to stay and listen to my speech because he has to get to the United States and must therefore leave the Chamber soon after his speech.

When we are debating such an important issue, which affects more than half the population of this country — it affects not only women but their partners and children — it seems to be the wrong occasion for the Minister to race off. I do not want to take advantage of his courtesy in writing to me but the point must be made that it is the wrong time for him to leave. He should listen to what is said today because it is very important to all women.

Although the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 was a huge advance, it never worked as well as we hoped. It takes nearly three years for the average case to come to a hearing and one case in particular took more than eight years. The Act that runs in tandem, the Equal Pay Act 1970, was followed by a huge re-grading of jobs so that men who were doing the same work were given a new title and paid more than women. A tightening and an alteration is needed to make these two laws more effective.

The Secretary of State twisted the figures. He said that the average wage for women when compared with that for men had increased and that is true. However, the average wage for women is still 30 per cent lower than the average wage for men. For part-time workers — most women now are in part-time employment — the hourly pay for women is half the hourly pay for men in full-time employment. That is a huge gap and a huge difference.

Mr Hunt: First, I thank the Hon. Lady for her graciousness in accepting

that I have to talk to the American Administration at the jobs summit in Detroit. I apologise to the House for having to leave.

Does the Hon. Lady accept that the real growth in the hourly rate for the female working population has been 55.9 per cent since 1979, against 40.4 per cent for the male population? Does she acknowledge that the rate has risen considerably faster?

Ms Gordon: I do not know how the Secretary of State arrived at those figures but we must take into account the lowering of the value of money.

The fact is that the average wage for women is still half that for men. The gap is still enormous. If there has been some increase, that is all to the good. That does not mean that the situation is satisfactory — it means that there has been some improvement but there is still a long way to go.

The vast numbers of women who have young children and who cannot leave their children have not been taken into account. They can neither find nor afford child care and they must do work at home, such as threading beads and painting toys for a pittance. It is disgusting pay and there is no regulation of it and no help for such women. What is happening to them is largely hidden from sight. There are 6 million women in this country who are on poverty wages. Most of the poor people in this country are women — women on low pay, single mothers, women who have been divorced and women pensioners. We must do something about that because we are not content to go on being at the bottom of the pile, regardless of the work we do, the hours we put in and our efforts and abilities.

The Government want women to be low-waged. They see their value as a pool of low-waged workers and they think that that will make the country more competitive. That is false reasoning and other countries do not feel that way. When the Government passed the iniquitous Child Support Act, they said that they would give a £15

disregard of maintenance to women on low wages and Family Credit. This would encourage women to accept work at lower wages than they otherwise would take. What kind of distorted thinking is that? The Government do not want to improve the status, lifestyle and income of women. They want to force women to accept lower wages than they otherwise would do — in other words, a little bit above starvation level.

Women are discriminated against not only in wages but in pensions. It was announced in the Budget that the pensionable age for women would be raised to 65 by 2020. The Government want to equalise pensions but instead of allowing men to retire early if they wish or perhaps having a flexible retirement age, which both men and women might want, women are again penalised.

It is true that women had an advantage but if we look at pensions in total we find that only 15 per cent of women earn the full state pension in their own right. The average occupational pension earned by women is £30 a week, whereas for men it is £61. Again, we see that it is almost half — women get half the hourly wage and half the occupational pension. It seems that women often receive only half of what men get. That does not mean that men should get less — it means that women should get more.

What happens when a woman is divorced by her husband, as often happens? It may be that her husband had a low-paid job when they got married. The woman stayed at home, brought up the children, put meals on the table, washed his clothes and ensured that her husband was well-dressed. She helped him to work well and to improve his position at work. By the time they get divorced — he may be after a younger woman — the husband may be earning a great deal and he would be entitled to a good occupational pension.

If they get divorced, the wife gets nothing at all for the work that she did in their partnership. That needs to be addressed. In cases of divorce, women should be entitled to half the value of

the occupational pension until the time of the divorce. I have had many bitter letters from women about that and the law must address it. The carers of severely disabled people get some pension credits but women get no pension credits for the years that they spend at home rearing children. Those years, apparently, are considered to be of no value to society. If we want older women to have proper pensions and not be the poorest in society, they should be given pension credits for the years of unpaid work in the home. Those years are just as important to society as the years spent in paid work. That brings me to the whole matter of women's unpaid work, which is unrecognised, unvalued and considered to be almost invisible. However, it is the basis of the economy of the country. If one considers the economy of any country as a pyramid, it is based on the great pedestal of unpaid work which is done by women in the home and voluntary work.

Lady Olga Maitland: Will the Hon. Lady give way ?

Ms Gordon: I am not going to give way. The Secretary of State did not give way and Mr Deputy Speaker has asked that we make our speeches short because 22 women — or, at least, 22 people — have asked to speak. I hope that the Hon. Lady will have a chance to speak. The economy of the country is based on the pedestal of the unpaid work that women do. I have introduced a Bill on the matter and I shall continue to press that women's unpaid work be counted in the economic statistics and the GNP of this country. The value of all the work that women do in the home and in the voluntary sector would then become evident to everybody.

Mrs Gillan *rose.*

Ms Gordon: I said that I was not going to give way.

Until women's unpaid work is properly valued, their work outside the home will not be valued and employers will continue to offer them

low wages.

That brings me to the matter of increments. When I was a teacher, the National Union of Teachers negotiated for women the right to one increment for every three years spent raising a family when she returned to work. I always felt that it should have been one increment for every year. I believe that some banking organisations have a similar scheme.

The years that women spend at home bringing up families, the organisational skills which they learn and the value of rearing the new generation should be recognised. Women should not be considered to have wasted those years when they return to work but to have enriched their value to any future employer. They should get incremental increases and not go back to work on lower pay than when they left to raise their families.

In other words, women should be enabled to take a full part in the life of this country, to live decently and to have decent pay. We feel our inequality in every way. A woman has only to want to go to the toilet in a public building; she will see men whizzing by while she is queuing. The women's toilet is always the most inaccessible. Then we know that we are second-class citizens.

We have only to consider ageism in Britain, which is always directed first and foremost at women, to know that we are second-class citizens. Studies have proved that, when children go to school, teachers give more minutes of attention per day to boys than to girls. In training, we get a worse deal. All down the line, women are treated as second-class citizens.

It is time that the debt that this country owes to women was recognised. It is time that the Government were forced to recognise it. Women demand a better deal. History has shown us that we do not get any improvement unless we fight for it — and fight for it we will. We want a better life, we want better recognition, we want equality and we want better pay. (6.00pm)

(7.59pm) **Ms Mildred Gordon** (Bow and Poplar): At the moment, the World Summit for Social Development is meeting in Copenhagen and the United Nations is using the Summit to highlight the problem of poverty and to discuss solutions. In Britain, as in the rest of the world, the poorest section of the population are women and their children. The UN has said that women do two-thirds of the world's work for 5 per cent of the income and only 1 per cent of the assets.

I apologise to the House for missing a good deal of the debate, because I was chairing a meeting on the Child Support Act 1991. Representatives of the Single Parent Action Network and the Child Poverty Action Group came to tell us of their reaction to the latest statement by the Government on alterations to the Child Support Act. They told us a story of the increased poverty of women; that the Act, which was supposed to help children, has in many ways made things worse. They told us of single mothers who at lunchtime went out and bought their children a bag of chips and had nothing to eat themselves. When members of those organisations went to visit those mothers, they found their cupboards and fridges empty of food. Increasing numbers were having water and electricity supplies disconnected and even more were self-disconnecting because they did not have the money to charge the key or card meters which they are now forced to use and through which they pay even more for electricity than those who can afford to pay a quarterly bill. I was shocked to find that 10,000 women have already suffered the Benefit penalty because they were denied the right to refuse authorisation for their husbands to be pursued for maintenance, and that 17,000 more have been denied that right. They will also suffer a Benefit penalty.

That means that their Benefit is cut by nearly £9 a week, so that, although they are already on the poverty line, there will be even less money to feed the children. There will not even be money

for the bag of chips. That is a terrible situation.

There is great pressure on those women to go out to work but the only jobs they can find are low-paid, part-time, insecure jobs. They cannot take insecure jobs. If they do, they go on to Family Credit. The Family Credit system sets the amount that they will receive for six months and then, if the maintenance does not come through or the job is lost, because the jobs are not secure, the women are in serious financial trouble.

It is not a victory for women to be forced to go out to work for low wages, because they then have less time for their children. Child care is very lacking in some areas. There are not enough nursery schools, there are not enough qualified child carers and good child care is usually not affordable. Mothers who work all day have less time to go to schools for parents' day. There are all kinds of problems. It is not all hay when they go out to work, especially when they cannot earn much money.

There is an increasing stigma on single mothers on benefits and on women who stay home to look after their children. They have been attacked by many Ministers, and they are beginning to feel the stigma, because society picks it up. Teachers begin to say, *"That child is a nuisance; no wonder, he comes from a single-parent family"*, and the women themselves are affected by it. I say here and now that there is no disgrace in a woman wanting to stay home to look after her children.

Every mother is a working mother. Every woman works, whether she works for wages or she works in the home and does unpaid work. It is high time that the un-paid work that women do was counted and valued. It is counted on, but not counted by society.

It was recently disclosed that £30 billion had been saved for the State by the work of carers. That is probably an underestimate. If we counted women's work, we would begin to see just how much money has been cut from Social Services, because women have picked up the pieces of the

shattered welfare state.

In addition to looking after their own sick and elderly relatives, women look after neighbours when the meals on wheels fail to roll up. They do a great deal of voluntary work for churches, schools and hospitals. That work is essential for the good of the community and for the happiness of the community but it is not valued by society. Society has very strange values, because it values the work of soldiers as productive but it does not value the work of mothers. The EC Social Charter, which is anathema to Conservative Members, asks that the maximum working week be 48 hours but nothing is said of the maximum working week for women, which can be as much as 80 hours if they go out to full-time work and do the shopping, cooking, cleaning, caring for children and the myriad other tasks that women have to undertake for the family. Women would be rich if they were paid for the importance to society of the work that they do but it is not women who are rich: it is the company directors who get the fabulous salaries and the tax -free share options.

It is not only single mothers who are poor: it is children, their mothers and their grandmothers — especially their grandmothers, because most pensioners, who are mostly women, are very poor. I am sick and tired of seeing in my Constituency elderly women hovering outside the window of a butcher's shop, trying to make up their minds whether to go in, and whether there is anything that they can afford to cook.

After a lifetime of work, after living through the War, after living through the depression and after bringing up their families, women should not have to suffer that. They should not be unable to heat their homes properly, they should not have to stick to one room or sit in the kitchen, by the open gas oven as the cheapest way of heating, after a lifetime of work of value to the community. The Government's statistics distort the reality of women and their pensions. It has been said that men retire but women tire. When women

finish their paid work and finish bringing up their families, they often help to bring up their grandchildren, so that their daughters can go out and earn a bit of money. The Government are worsening the position for older women. The change of pension age from 60 to 65 will mean that women will lose £14,500 each, based on 1992 prices. It will probably be £15,000 if we base that on today's prices and it will be even more when the change comes about.

The Government's statistics also give a false impression of occupational pensions. Only 28 per cent of women over 65 have occupational pensions and 72 per cent do not. Only 12 per cent in a recent survey had their own pensions. When my first husband died, I received half his occupational pension. It is not true that one person can live half as cheaply as two, because the bills come in for telephone, heat and light, and they are the same as those for two people who live in a home. My position was worsened and the position of many women is far worse than mine was.

There is also the inequity of the occupational pension going to the husband when there is a divorce and the wife who helped him to build his career and his pension receiving nothing. I hope that that matter will be addressed and that changes will be enacted to give women a fair deal in receiving a share of the occupational pension when there is a divorce.

Middle-class feminists have a strategy for equality and their strategy is to get more women to the top and to hope that power will trickle down. If women have talent, it is great if they can get to the top — if they can break through the glass ceiling — but that is not the way to help the majority of women. Women in politics were not lifted up by having a woman Prime Minister, despite what some Conservative Members think.

The facts speak for themselves. Having more women at the top will not lift up the majority of women. What will address the needs of women at the bottom of the scale will be to value and to

count their work in the gross domestic product and in satellite accounts. We must stop considering the work of women to be of no value to society and allowing it to be invisible. When women's unwaged work is ignored, their waged work is badly paid. It is a reflection of the value placed upon their unpaid work. The unpaid work of women is like the base of a pyramid on which the whole economy is built and that should be recognised by society.

More women in organisations such as the Women Count network are demanding that women's work be counted. The Counting Women's Unremunerated Work Bill, which I presented to this House in 1989, has been replicated and passed in the European Parliament, and measures based on that Bill are now passing through the United States Congress and through Parliaments in the Philippines, Trinidad, and Germany. People in many countries who have read my Bill and have come to see me are now trying to get similar Bills through their legislatures. I shall end by quoting Juan Somavia, the Chairperson of the World Summit on Social Development which is now taking place. I shall read two quotes. First, talking in February about the unpaid work of women, he said'

"The devaluing of this work runs parallel to the subordinate status of women, since it is women who do most of this 'caring and sustaining'. To link productivity only with paid employment continues to render invisible the enormous amount of unwaged work that women do that undergirds and subsidizes all other kinds of work."

In his opening speech to the Conference on 4 March, he said,

"The contribution made to society by voluntary work, artists, the elderly, and most especially, by women through unpaid household work, together with cost-free use of the environment, are in fact subsidising the economy. The women's movement is rightfully demanding that this

contribution be measured, if not remunerated, to at least factor in the invisible components of an economic system that ignores the actors which indirectly deserve a share of the benefits."

It is time that society changed its values. If we value the work of soldiers more than the work of mothers, it will have an effect on how we spend our resources. Instead of money going to help the welfare of children and future generations, it will be blown up and spent on Trident and more obsolete arms for the military. (8.12pm)

Children

Mildred campaigned tirelessly for children. She led the cross party Parliamentary opposition to the Child Support Agency (CSA), which she correctly predicted would turn out to be an expensive disaster.

The CSA will be abolished in 2008.

Clause 32: EVIDENCE OF PERSONS UNDER 14 IN COMMITTAL PROCEEDINGS

Ms Gordon: I beg to move amendment No. 216, in page 22, line 13, leave out sub-paragraph (a).

Clause 32 deals with assaults, sexual offences and offences against children. It relates to proceedings in the Magistrates Courts and the evidence of children in committal proceedings. It provides that any statement made by or taken from a child should be admissible in testimony of any matter on which the child's oral evidence would be admissible. However, sub-section (3)(a), which my amendment seeks to delete, would allow the defence to object to such an admission, in which case the child would have to come to court.

Last week, the Home Secretary said that he would set up a committee to consider using video links to give evidence. That is to be welcomed and I hope that the remit of the committee will be extended to look into other forms of giving evidence. We all want to make it easier for children who have been attacked to come forward and give evidence against their attackers. The scope of the problem is only beginning to be realised. The first reactions of horror, followed in many cases by denial and by a feeling of impotence — not knowing how to deal with the problem on such a massive scale — is fairly new and something with which we must come to terms.

We all want to stop adults who repeatedly attack one child or many children but who are free to continue because no child can be found who could face a court appearance. Equally, we want a fair trial for defendants. But that does not mean that children and young people should be put through the trauma of facing their attackers. To a person who has never been in one, any court can be intimidating. That is even more true in the case of children.

A child has no status in society. A child's word is often given far less weight than the word of the defendant, who may be a

man of substance. The child or young person knows that and feels that he or she will not be believed — for very good reason. A defence lawyer who is doing his job on behalf of his client must try to discredit the child if that child is in court. Those are all good reasons why we should not allow the defence to force a child to come to court. Often when children come into court they whisper and cannot get the words out. For every child who whispers in a court there are dozens who never come forward. We must try to make it easier for children and young people under the age of 16 to come forward.

In the north of England, there is an organisation called Childwatch run by a woman who was herself assaulted as a child. She receives about 500 calls a week and she says that she knows rapists who have attacked child after child. The police often know the identity of a man who has made repeated attacks but because they cannot find a child who will stand up in court, or whose parents will allow their child to come to court, the police are powerless.

Even when cases come to court, all is not plain sailing. Magistrates have been known to let out on bail rapists who have repeated their attacks. Judges have been known to talk of children's naughty habits. In 1982, a 17-year-old hitch-hiker — a very tender age, even if it is above the age of childhood — was told by a judge that she was guilty of contributory negligence and the rapist, who was a business man, was not gaoled but fined £2,000.

In my local paper this week there is a report of a girl aged eight who was terrorised into silence by a child molester who threatened to kill her mother and sister. But after months of being subjected to sex attacks, the youngster plucked up the courage to tell. If children know that they will not have to face their attacker across a court room, more will have the courage to come forward and abuse will be prevented.

Mothers often face a dilemma. Their natural feeling is that their child's well-being comes first and

that the child has been through enough already but that leads to offenders remaining on the loose and repeat offences are high. Only a tiny percentage of offenders are apprehended, let alone brought to court.

An independent survey was carried out by Women Against Rape in 1985, to which 1,236 women responded, with 62 per cent of 2,000 questionnaires being returned. The women were asked about their childhood. One in five had been raped or had suffered some sexual assault as a child or teenager. Some had told an adult, only to be told that they were imagining things or that they should not talk dirty. Less than one third of those who had been raped or sexually assaulted before they had reached the age of 11 had told anybody about it at the time of the attack. Some had never told anybody before replying to the survey.

To appreciate the difficulties that children face when going to court, we must consider who the defendants are likely to be. Many people assume that the defendant will be a stranger but three quarters of rapists are known to their victims.

The Women Against Rape survey showed that one in five of all children or teenagers had been raped or sexually assaulted and that one out of five of them — one in 25 of all children — had been assaulted by a member of their own family. To make the position more graphic, we should think of a typical classroom in which six of the children have been or soon will be assaulted and, in some cases, have been repeatedly assaulted over a period of years. This often happens as a result of the abuse of power by an adult who has control over a child or young person.

Mr John Patten: The Hon. Lady's speech is extremely interesting but I am finding it hard to relate her remarks to committal proceedings, with which amendment No. 216 is concerned.

Ms Gordon: I am speaking about a child having to go to court. During the committal proceedings the defence can demand that a child comes into court. The purpose of

my argument, which I thought was clear, was to show that if a child knows that he will have to go to court he will be afraid to speak up, or the parent will not allow the child to go to court. Thus, attackers go unpunished and are free to continue attacks. That is the purpose of my argument, and I should like to continue it.

Mr Deputy Speaker: *Order*: I am bound to say that I share the Minister's confusion. Perhaps the Hon. Lady has misdirected her amendment or perhaps she does not appreciate that the argument that she is addressing does not clearly relate to the matter before the House.

Ms Gordon: I thought that it did. I did not think that it was out of order to argue against children having to go to court but in favour of them being able to give evidence in other ways. I am seeking to delete a provision that says that the defence can demand that a child comes to court, which would lead to the child being face to face with the defendant.

The defendant is often a person who is known to or has control over the child, such as the head of a children's home or a stepfather. We should imagine the fear of a 15-year-old facing a stepfather in court, who is often aware that the family is financially dependent on him or is afraid of him.

In other European countries, evidence can be taken without a child coming into court. In some states in the United States, video recordings are used, as has been suggested here. In West Germany, judges usually question children alone in a private room. In Belgium, the judge questions children with two lawyers present, one for the prosecution and one for the defence. In Holland, children are questioned by a woman police officer on a written statement to the judge.

I hope that the committee that is to be set up will consider all those examples for Magistrates and Crown Courts here and that the statements of several children can be taken

together where the written evidence of one child is not enough to commit a defendant for trial if he has attacked several children. I hope that evidence can be taken in that way.

The State has an absolute responsibility to make it possible for children to speak out at all stages of proceedings but without wrongfully convicting anybody. The younger the child, the harder it is to say anything. The only way that we can reduce the terrible suffering of children who have to withstand sexual assaults is by investigating and introducing ways of making it possible for them to speak out without having to face their attackers.

[The amendment was not carried.]

(6.22pm) **Ms Mildred Gordon** (Bow and Poplar): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for giving me this opportunity to speak in favour of increasing Child Benefit in line with other benefits. I welcome the comments of the Hon. Member for Bedfordshire, South-West (Mr Madel) and hope that many Conservative Members will have the courage of their convictions and vote for the motion and against the amendment.

It is an indisputable fact that Child Benefit is being constantly eroded by inflation and that £7.25 does not go very far as an income supplement. In many areas more than half of that £7.25 would be needed just to pay for school meals.

I well remember when I was bringing up only one child the nightmare of paying just for footwear. I was a part-time teacher and my husband was a printer so we had quite a good income but so that my son could take full advantage of his school curriculum, he needed a pair of ordinary shoes, a pair of plimsolls, wellington boots, football boots, tennis shoes and climbing shoes and he grew out of all of them every few months and they had to be replaced.

The other day the Under Secretary of State for Social Security recommended that pensioners buy second-hand clothes at jumble sales. I hope that no one will advocate buying second-hand shoes for children. Unfortunately, parents often have to do so and, as a result, their children's feet are ruined. Even if they have reasonable earnings, parents need a much bigger supplement to their income — much more than £7.25 per week per child.

Women note that, although the Government are so grudging about Child Benefit, they always seem to find the money for military spending, for example, £1 billion for modernising tanks. If one asked most of the women in this country, they would say that they wanted more money for life, not for death.

As has already been said, child poverty is rising. The Child Poverty Action Group has shown that more than one in five children are in families living below the poverty line.

The universality of Child Benefit is important. The Hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr Marshall) said that the benefit should be selective and referred to dustmen and dukes. I remind him that we are talking about women, not about dustmen and dukes, as a few lines from a letter referred to in an article in *The Independent* makes clear. It states,

"As a woman with two children who had a husband earning £250 per week who provided us with nothing, the only way we survived was with our Child Benefit, and that was only because he couldn't get his hands on it."

So much for selective benefit. It is universal benefits that help women and we are talking about women who are trying to take care of their children.

Child Benefit is also important as a form of recognition for women. Another woman wrote to *The Guardian*,

"I am a single parent with three young children and I am dependent on Income Support. As such, I do not benefit financially from Child Benefit because it is deducted at source from the Income Support I am entitled to. However, I feel at least that the Child Benefit is my money, that it is my right to receive it, that I would get it regardless of my financial situation, and it makes me feel less dependent on state means-tested benefit.

Perhaps I am foolish but psychologically it is useful. When my youngest child is at full-time nursery or school, I will do my utmost to return to work although it may have to be part-time employment. Knowing that I will have my Child Benefit to boost my income will be an incentive to return to work."

The woman goes on to say that in the future her taxes will contribute to many kinds of tax relief, including, for example, mortgage interest relief, in which she is not interested. She therefore feels that people without children should in principle have to contribute towards the welfare of people with children because it is the

children who are the future of this country.

Child Benefit is also an insurance for mothers. Often men walk out and leave their families penniless but the mother knows that she has the benefit book and that she can therefore at least provide food for her children until she can get more help. As has already been said, the take-up rate of Child Benefit is good whereas targeted benefits do not always reach their target. Less than half the poor families in this country get all the benefit to which they are entitled either through ignorance, pride, or bureaucratic stumbling blocks. The fact is that targeted benefits do not work as well as universal benefits. I often talk about harmonisation in Europe and I should like to quote the comparable figures. In Great Britain, a mother of three receives approximately £87 a month in Child Benefit, which is very little recognition for her role as a carer. In West Germany, the benefit is £125; in Luxembourg it is £198, which is more than double what mothers in Great Britain receive; and in France the figure is £257.

I ardently support the motion. Child Benefit should be increased in line with other benefits as a start to recognising the value of women's work in bringing up children. (6.29pm)

(7.18pm) **Ms Mildred Gordon** (Bow and Poplar): For many years, I have worked for children's rights, so there are several matters that I would like to see included in this important Bill. However, since time is restricted to 10 minutes, I shall confine my remarks to the question of the responsibilities of Local Education Authorities in the matter of the employment of children of school age.

I first began to be concerned about the employment of school children — in both waged and unwaged work — when I began teaching. Often girls were absent from school because they were caring for younger children, allowing the mother to go out to work when the usual child minding arrangements fell through. Other children's mothers had early morning cleaning jobs or evening jobs, and then my pupils would have the daily responsibility of looking after their younger siblings. Arrangements of this sort had a deleterious effect on their education and their lives. It does not take much imagination to conjure up the pitfalls of such arrangements when emergencies arise.

Most people in this country think that it does children good to do a job to earn a little pocket money but many times I have tried to teach pupils who are half asleep, having been delivering newspapers since the small hours, in the dark and cold. They had regularly started work much earlier than the legally permitted time of 7am. My pupils were often afraid of being attacked by dogs or strangers but they wanted money for their own needs — because it would give them a degree of independence, enable them to buy clothes and to keep up with their friends. In very poor families, children's pay is often important for the family's very survival.

Most people assume that regulations exist for properly protecting children in employment, but one-third of all children in work are subject to accidents. That is a dreadful figure. Sadly, some work is so dangerous that children are killed doing it. Even if children like doing some of the jobs that they do,

far too often they are exploited as cheap labour to the benefit of their employers. In theory, sections from eight different Acts govern child labour but there is no specific legislation, except that relating to entertainment, which says that children aged below five years can work for up to two hours per day, and may attend the place of entertainment for up to five hours. Some of the charming babies who Right Hon. and Hon. Members see in television advertisements may have been kept working for much longer than the public realise.

In 1973 a private Member's Bill, the Employment of Children Bill 1973, was presented by my Right Hon. and Learned Friend the Member for Warley, West (Mr Archer). It passed through all its stages but was never implemented. Its purpose was to introduce a national system giving local education authorities throughout the United Kingdom powers to oversee and control all employment by children in a trade or occupation carried on for profit, whether or not the child received a reward for the work undertaken. Local Authorities would have been given powers to demand details of the type of work, place of work and hours worked. They would have been able to prohibit such employment, even if it were not unlawful but appeared to be unsuitable for the child by reference to his age or state of health, or because it would be prejudicial to his education. That Bill was passed in 1973 — one and one half decades ago. Times have changed and the proposed penalties for which that Act provides are now very out of date. Increased adult unemployment has brought increased exploitation of children as cheap labour. It is even more vital today that the present patchwork of regulations is replaced by comprehensive, uniform national regulations to protect working children and that those regulations are given teeth. I commend to Right Hon. and Hon. Members the booklet *School Age Workers in Britain Today* by Caroline Moorhead, published by the Anti-Slavery

Society, which explodes many of the comfortable assumptions that most people make. The harsh fact is that about two million children work illegally in this country. No really effective mechanism exists to enforce the existing regulations. That is the task of Education Welfare Officers but there is only one for every 1,000 children of secondary school age and so theirs is an impossible job. One authority that has taken the matter seriously is the Inner London Education Authority but it is being abolished. In 1987, the ILEA appointed 10 new Employment Officers and a Principal Child Employment Officer to examine the problem.

Children working illegally are unprotected in every way. There is no insurance for them. There is no legal minimum wage for adults, so children's pay is very much less. A survey of children employed in the Midlands reveals that some boys and girls work for as little as 30p per hour but in central London pay can be very much higher. Outside all the safety nets are the increasing number of children living on the streets of London who have lost contact with their families and who are open to all kinds of exploitation and danger. All Governments have failed to address the problem properly. Clear protective legislation must be put on the statute book to replace the existing mystifying patchwork of regulations that are honoured in the breach and money must be made available to Local Authorities so that they can employ more child welfare officers to monitor and enforce the law. The Bill provides an opportunity to put right a dreadful situation. Our children are our stake in the future and it is our duty to protect them from exploitation of all kinds. (7.24pm)

(4.35pm) **Ms Mildred Gordon** (Bow and Poplar): I beg to move, that leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the Employment of Children Act 1973 in respect of the definition of 'child'; and to make fresh provision for its commencement.

Most people think that if children find a job in which to earn a little pocket money, that is good. Indeed, many children do a few hours' work which they enjoy. It gives them a degree of independence, provides them with some money for extra clothing and helps them to keep up with their friends. The money that children from poor families earn is often important for the family's survival. I agree with the prevailing public opinion that we would not want to prevent children from getting a taste of the world of work but I am sure that Hon. Members agree that that work must be properly regulated. It is our duty to see that children are not allowed to undertake work that involves lifting heavy loads or endangers their physical well-being in any way. We do not want children to work such long hours that they cannot benefit from their education. We do not want children to have accidents because of undertaking unsuitable work and we do not want them exploited as a source of cheap labour in an adult job at a fraction of the adult wage.

The present laws date back to the very different world of the 1920s and 1930s and, in some ways, are inadequate for today's conditions.

The entertainment industry, for example, has been fairly well regulated but modelling, which has expanded enormously since the growth of television, is wide open to abuse. Those old national laws exist in conjunction with a plethora of local government byelaws, some of which look fine on paper but are flouted throughout the country.

In 1970, considerable public anxiety was aroused as a result of research sponsored by the Department of Health and Social Security. It showed a lack of uniformity in the local byelaws and serious problems of enforcement.

Following that, a Private Member's Bill, which was considered uncontroversial, was passed unopposed, becoming the Employment of Children Act 1973. Its primary purpose was to provide a rational, uniform pattern of law-making throughout the country by removing the Local Authorities' powers to enact local byelaws and by giving the Secretary of State regulatory powers so that, after consultation, regulations could be made centrally for the whole country.

The second purpose of the 1973 Act was to enable Local Authorities to appraise the work which boys and girls go into before they actually begin that work. The Act has never been implemented. In answer to questions which Hon. Members have asked from time to time, the Government have said that almost all Local Authorities have byelaws but, in January this year, they said that they would look again at the 1973 Act if evidence should be forthcoming that children are being exploited.

Recent research by the Low Pay Units in Scotland and England and the Anti-Slavery Society for the Protection of Human Rights has shown that there is a need for the 1973 Act to be enforced now. It has proved that need up to the hilt, which is why I am presenting my Bill today. The Bill would bring up to date the Act's definition of a child and would provide for its implementation by January 1992. Recent research shows that 43 per cent of children in Britain between the ages of 10 and 16 have some type of paid work. That is almost 2 million children. They have been called the hidden army. Of those children, 74 per cent are employed illegally, either working illegal hours, employed in work prohibited for children or working without a Local Authority permit under which Education Authorities are supposed to ensure that medical health checks are carried out and that conditions of work are not harmful to the child involved. Only one child out of 65 children interviewed from two schools in Strathclyde

had such a permit.

Children on milk rounds start long before the legally permitted time of 7am. Therefore, all children doing early morning milk rounds are working illegally. If I had the time, I could cite many other examples. Children are lifting heavy loads in street markets and heavy bags of soil in garden centres. Newspaper rounds are considered a suitable form of employment and 30 per cent of children who have jobs do one. Many have benefited financially from such work and have come to no harm but Sunday papers can weigh up to 60lb — far more than a postman is allowed to carry on his round. Children are working illegally in kitchens which have slippery floors and pans of hot oil or boiling water.

Unfortunately, hospital accident and emergency departments are not required to record accidents to children at work but they should be. Hon. Members will be horrified to learn that research shows that one third of working children have accidents at work, such as a sewing machine needle going through a finger, losing the end of a finger in a bacon slicing machine, breaking limbs and spraining backs. Answers that children give about their accidents at work make sad reading. It is not surprising that weary children have accidents at work. If one adds up the number of hours spent at school, the two or three hours' homework a night in the run-up to exams, the number of legally permitted hours of paid work and time helping the family in the house, it often comes to a long week of 50 to 60 hours — more than most adults undertake.

I have taught classes of children, many of whom were too tired to concentrate, and that is when I first became aware and concerned about the problem. It is clear that, although some children just do odd jobs which they enjoy and from which they benefit, many are used as a source of cheap, easily disposable labour, often to replace school leavers and part-time women workers.

On average, children earn about £1.80 per hour. About 500,000 children — 24 per

cent — earn less than £1 an hour and 7 per cent — a significant number when nearly 2 million children are working — earn less than 50p an hour. One hapless 16-year-old boy earned £1.50 after 20 hours of door-to-door selling — 7p an hour.

Parents, children, teachers and employers are all woefully ignorant of the byelaws that are being honoured in the breach throughout Britain, leaving our children without the protection that we would all wish them to have. Children look to us for help and we are failing them. Our inaction is not fair to them.

Many aspects of child employment need to be reviewed but the most immediate requirement is to replace the existing confusing patchwork of local regulations with national statutes which standardise practice and provide protection across the board. We need regulations which everyone will understand and know about and which will be properly publicised, monitored and enforced by the provision of a sufficient number of child employment officers. The few whom we have are trying valiantly to do an impossible task.

My Bill will not require precious parliamentary time. The 1973 Act is already on the statute book. We need to rectify the disgraceful negligence of all Governments who have left the Act unenforced for almost two decades.

I end with the words with which I ended my speech on the Second Reading of the Children Bill two years ago when I first addressed the subject:

"Our children are our stake in the future, and it is our duty to protect them from exploitation of all kinds." [Official Report, 27 April 1989; Vol. 151, c. 1151.]

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Ms Mildred Gordon, Mr Ron Leighton, Mr Greville Janner, Mr Peter Archer, Mr John Hughes, Mrs Alice Mahon, Mrs Audrey Wise, Mr Gerald Bermingham, Ms Dawn Primarolo, Mr Keith Vaz, Mr Tony Benn and Ms Joyce Quin.

Employment of Children Act 1973 (Amendment)

Ms Mildred Gordon accordingly presented a Bill to amend the Employment of Children Act 1973 in respect of the definition of 'child'; and to make fresh provision for its commencement: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on 14 June and to be printed. [Bill 170]

(8.01pm) **Ms Mildred Gordon** (Bow and Poplar): The Secretary of State said that there are 1.3 million lone parents in the country and my Hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr Dewar) said that 70 per cent of those are on Income Support. Of that figure, 53 per cent are women who were married to the fathers of their children and who were separated or divorced and 32 per cent were never married to the father. Considering those lone mothers, the fathers and the children together, one can see that the lives of a large percentage of the population will be affected by the Child Support Agency and by the Act. It was absolutely important that the Government got it right and, tragically, they got it so wrong.

The courts had a lot to answer for when they made maintenance assessments which were often low and which varied in different parts of the country. The system for pursuing defaulters was imperfect to say the least and there could have been a time lag if the father refused to appear in court. The system needed altering but one important aspect that that system had in its favour was that the courts had discretion and they could assess all the valid factors when making a maintenance order.

The CSA has a rigid formula which has caused misery and fear and has wrecked relationships. The more people that it pursues, the more the turbulence, as my Hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mrs Wise) termed it, will increase. Groups throughout the country are mushrooming in opposition to the agency and the Act, which is unusual.

Mr Jonathan Evans (Brecon and Radnor) : Will the Hon. Lady give way?

Ms Gordon : I have only 10 minutes, so I shall not give way. There is a clear divide in the House between Members who are worried about the enhancement of their electoral chances if the Government are not in a position to give another

round of tax cuts and Members who think that the interests of children should come first. I am pleased to say that there are Members on both sides of the House who support the latter. The Act's purpose to facilitate tax cuts is clear because it has been said that only £1 in every £10 will go to the family and that the rest will go to the Treasury. That tax-cutting angle is certainly clear when one takes into account the Benefit penalty. I asked the Minister the other day if he would abolish that penalty. He answered that only 160 cases have been referred to the Benefits Agency for reduced Benefit and that 20,500 cases where good cause was pleaded had been accepted. The Minister said that that was about 57 per cent. Therefore 43 per cent of such cases have not been accepted.

Are they to be directed to suffer a Benefit penalty? What about all the other mothers who have the threat of a Benefit penalty hanging over their heads? No Government who care about children would have a Benefit penalty for people on Income Support who are already below the poverty line so that £8.80 of their income is taken away — leaving less money for food, clothes and all the things that children need. That cannot be right. It is evil.

The collection fee should also be abolished. Mothers who feel that contact with absent fathers is threatening ask the Agency to collect the maintenance. Those very fathers threaten the mothers when they are asked to pay the collection fee. That fee will engender violence and should be abolished.

Another sore point is that of absent parents who are on Income Support and who are being pursued by the Agency for a measly £2.20 a week. A constituent of mine is a father with care. His ex-wife is mentally ill and has been sectioned innumerable times. He has begged the Agency not to force him to sign the form to pursue his wife because he says that it would drive her into hospital from where, drugged up to the hilt, she would phone and upset their child. Even

if she receives the order, she would not be able to manage her affairs properly and would never regularly pay that £2.20, but he and the child would lose it. There are many such cases and the section should be abolished.

The Government will not have an income disregard for parents on Income Support because they think that that would be a disincentive to taking a job. However, they say that a £15 disregard for caring mothers will, *"enable them to take a job with considerably lower take-home pay than if there had been no disregard."*

Those lucky women will be able to take a low-paid job in addition to looking after their family and doing the housework and can claim £15 a week disregard plus Family Credit.

Many, perhaps most, will be worse off, because they will get no help with the mortgage interest payments and no more free school meals — with a number of children that is significant. They will lose other passported benefits such as for glasses and free dental treatment and they may get £28, as the Government have promised, for child care. That may pay for looking after an older child after school until the mother comes home but, in my Constituency, I believe that the standard rate for having a young child looked after all day is £90 to £100 a week. Mothers who need such care will be in trouble. In addition, on Family Credit, it takes six months to review a change in circumstances, whereas on Income Support, changes can be reviewed at once. Many of those mothers will be far worse off.

Fathers who have previously paid the mortgage payments on the home of their first families will have to choose whether to meet their CSA assessments or stop paying the mortgage and repossessions will result. The Labour Party will be monitoring carefully how many mothers and children will be thrown out of their homes because of that dreadful law.

As my Hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr Davies) rightly said,

separated fathers object to being called absent parents. One such father came to my surgery and told me that his former wife had moved to the north of England. Once a month, because he wants to keep close contact with his children, he pays a high fare to travel north. He has to rent a hotel room, pay for looking after the children for the weekend and take them out. It is expensive. After the assessment, he will not be able to afford that. He will become an absent father and he does not want to be one. He, his ex- wife and their children will all suffer. That cannot be right.

Separated fathers need a discretionary body but the Government do not want one. What factors need to be taken into account? What factors require discretion? Travel to work is one. A commuter may pay £2,000 to £3,000 a year and even when the cost is less, it is a significant part of a person's income, as my Hon. Friend the Member for Preston said. No account is taken of the cost of travel to see children, the cost of keeping them, the cost of taking them out and the cost of providing treats and all the extras that children need, such as sports gear. There is no discretion about that. There is no discretion about the cost of looking after elderly parents. There is no discretion about paying the mortgage for the first family. Voluntary payments are ignored.

When an assessment is made, it applies from the date that the maintenance inquiry form has been sent out. That can create huge arrears. The courts used to take past maintenance paid into account and they gave credit for it. All those matters require a discretionary body which could take them into account. This is real life; we cannot use an abstract formula to rule people's lives and drive them to despair.

A constituent who was deeply in debt came to see me. He had been honourably paying off his debts, which he had incurred because of illness. He has now been assessed and he will not be able to continue to pay off his debts. He does not know

what to do. He said, *"Shall I give up my job? What shall I do? I cannot pay my debts and pay the assessments."* He was already making voluntary payments and buying equipment and clothes for his child.

Another factor that has not been taken into account is that of families abroad. There are immigrant fathers in my Constituency who have children abroad and who send money to them. No discretion is allowed there.

The case for a discretionary body is irrefutable. Such a body could take a family's whole situation into account. In our debate last week, my Hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs Dunwoody) said that the Government had got it wrong, that the Agency should be wound up and that they should start again. I fully agree. We need a system that is responsible and workable and which puts the interests of children first. (8.11pm)

(6.14pm) **Ms Mildred Gordon** (Bow and Poplar): One would think, after the fiasco of the Poll Tax which cost the country dear, that the Government would have learnt the lesson that they cannot operate an Act without the support, or at least the acquiescence, of the majority of people in this country if we are to keep our democracy intact.

The Secretary of State has tried to demonise the campaigning groups, implying that they consist of nothing but violent, selfish fathers who do not want to pay maintenance for their children. That is totally untrue. There may be some fathers of that sort but most members of the campaign network are decent men who care about their children and want to maintain them. The networks also contain single mothers with care and second wives — they are a mixture, not just groups of fathers.

The Government are already trying to reduce the democratic rights of these groups. The latter wanted to hold a rally in Trafalgar square on Father's Day but the Heritage Commission banned it on the spurious grounds that large numbers would attend — as, indeed, they would — and that it would be dangerous for the large numbers of children who might be brought across the road. Will that be the pattern for the future when groups who might bring children with them apply to hold rallies in Trafalgar square? I hope not. Will the Government go further, as they did with the Poll Tax, and bring in bailiffs and imprisonment to deal with the men who cannot find the money to pay the huge debts that have accrued owing to retrospective awards?

Not only are the campaigning networks mushrooming all over the country and holding rallies of thousands of people who are against the Child Support Act 1991, but the legal profession has declared itself against the Child Support Agency and in favour of a court-based system. Even groups of lawyers who deal with family matters and divorce are of that opinion. I believe that we should take their expertise and advice

into account.

The voluntary organisations which have thus far supported the idea of a formula are getting more and more worried too. Looking through the voluntary organisations' reports from the end of the first year of the CSA's operation, I find that the Child Poverty Action Group's report lists about 34 changes which should be made to make the formula function more fairly, the National Council for One Parent Families lists about 20 changes, and the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux wants no fewer than 44 changes. Other organisations could add to that number.

It is time the Government realised that the Agency is not going to work and that what is needed is a court-based system with an organisation to enforce the maintenance on which the court-based system decides. That would be much more efficient than the discredited CSA but the Government should attempt it only after widespread consultation with the public. By now, millions of people are aware of the problem of child poverty and are discussing it and thousands of people have been to meetings to suggest what system they would like — how the Government's system can be improved or done away with and replaced. The Government should therefore consult the public and the campaigning organisations about what can be done because it is clear that what the Government have done so far is not working at all.

The central question remains the poverty of children. In 1990, *Breadline Britain* showed the true extent and nature of the poverty of many children in this country; 2.5 million children were living without certain basic necessities, such as three meals a day or being able to take a full part in school activities — despite the fact that many parents went hungry to prevent their children from suffering the stigma of poverty in school.

On Government statistics, 3.9 million, or 30 per cent, of our children were living in households with less than half the average income in 1991. That means that they

were living in poverty or on the margins. We need up-to-date figures so that we can compare what happened before the CSA with what has happened afterwards but the 1992-93 figures have not been published. They have been ready for a long time and the Government have said that they will be released soon. Is it too cynical of me to think that they are being held back until the House rises for the recess? I challenge the Government to publish the figures before the House rises so that we can see what is happening.

The Government must take account of the fact that a man on average wages cannot keep two families. When the Act tries to make him do so, it simply spreads the poverty so that not only the families of single mothers but also the second families will live in poverty. The Government must face the reality that a low average wage will not keep two families decently.

The Act was introduced on the pretext that it would alleviate child poverty but it is doing nothing of the sort. It seems to have become a grubby device to fill the Treasury's coffers. On 2 July, the Evening Standard published figures showing that less that 2p in every £1 went to parents with care for the benefit of the children. Most of the money went to the Treasury. That may be good for the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement but it is not alleviating the poverty of this country's youth.

Many people have come to see me or written to me in distress because of the activities and demands of the CSA. With the 10-minute restriction on speeches, I do not have time to go into these cases and in any event it might bore the House as I am sure that many Hon. Members have had mailbags full of letters too. In many cases, the CSA is acting illegally by not giving women, and especially single mothers, proper information about their rights. It may also give false information about the right to withdraw authorisation if a woman changes her mind.

My Hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, North

(Mr Hughes) spoke of women being forced back into dependence on former partners with whom they wished never to have contact again. Some of them are even forced into financial dependence on their former partners' second wives, whose income is also taken into account. The Act has caused widespread misery and despair. It has disrupted many relationships which had been painfully rebuilt after the bitterness of separation and divorce, where parents had got together and established some kind of modus vivendi for the sake of the children. That has been shattered by the activities of the CSA.

Single mothers have been threatened with benefit penalties and fathers have often been saddled with huge debts because of the retrospection of maintenance demands. As Hon. Members have said, some people have been brought to the point of suicide. The Agency has acted with great insensitivity. I have had reports that wives who have been battered by their husbands or threatened by men have been interviewed by a male officer sent by the CSA. That also causes great distress.

The Child Support Agency has been dilatory and inefficient and it must go. The Child Support Act 1991 must also go. We are all concerned about proper maintenance of children and want to do away with child poverty but this is not the way. The Government must go back to the drawing board. There must be public consultation and a Government rethink. (6.23pm)

(8.13pm) **Ms Mildred Gordon** (Bow and Poplar): The Bill is a skeleton Bill. Many of the details, such as amounts of money, qualifying criteria and procedures to be followed, will be given in the regulations, which are not yet available. Yet there is sufficient in the Bill and there are sufficient omissions of important changes that the public wanted for me to feel confident that, when I opposed the Child Support Bill that became the 1991 Act, I was correct.

I said in 1991 that if the Government really wanted to improve the system of child maintenance, they would set up Family Courts and an agency or service to collect or enforce maintenance. The Hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) was criticised for proposing that we should have Family Courts. It was said that Family Courts had failed, that there was no going back and that that was that — we had this system and we had to stick with it and do the best that we could. I remember everyone saying some years ago that the rating system had failed. People on both sides of the House agreed with that. The Poll Tax was introduced. It was a head tax which everyone, even those on Income Support, was to pay. They would be watchdogs to see that councils did not overspend. People said that there was no going back and the Poll Tax was there to stay.

Yet the public outcry about the Poll Tax was such that it did not stay. The Government were forced to change it and we now have the Council Tax. I predict that the public outcry about the CSA will not only continue but increase and that the agency will have to be changed. If the Government have any sense, they will start to think about introducing a Family Courts system, as outlined in the Children Act 1989.

Any Bill that deals with the maintenance of children should have children's welfare at the heart of it. I attacked the first Child Support Bill because it appeared to me then that the Government's main interest was in clawing back benefit. No one wants to pay unnecessary taxes. No one

likes paying taxes, although most people see the necessity of paying taxes and do so, even if unwillingly. Everyone believes that parents should be responsible for their children, not merely financially but in every other way, and that if they can afford to take financial responsibility, they certainly should do so.

We do not seem to agree that the State in a civilised society also has responsibility for children. The Bill does not recognise that responsibility. There is still a Benefit penalty. The Bill does not remove it. By the end of January, 15,500 parents with care were penalised by reduced Benefit directions. There are 40,000 more in the pipeline and thousands more are intimidated by the Benefit penalty, which forces them to sign the maintenance forms when they feel that it might harm them and their family to make contact with the divorced or separated partner.

Mr Duncan: Why does the Hon. Lady think that the State should continue to pay benefits to a family which happens to be split when, if the family had remained together, the State would not have been obliged to pay any such benefits? Does that not provide through the state an incentive to families to split?

Ms Gordon: I thought I said clearly that, where absent parents can afford to support their children, they have the responsibility to do so; they should have that responsibility. I also said that the State had a responsibility to children and that no one in a civilised society should want to see children go hungry. I set up the all-party Parliamentary Child Support Act Monitoring Group. We have received report after report from respectable voluntary agencies recognised by the Government, saying that mothers go hungry. They say that mothers whom they meet give their children money for chips and have no lunch themselves. They say that when they visit such mothers, they find empty refrigerators.

A Citizens Advice Bureau in Sussex reported a single

parent with five children under seven whose benefit was reduced by £20 per week to repay rent, water rates and Community Charge arrears and a social fund loan to buy furniture. She was finding it difficult to manage on £75 a week. If that woman had been in a relationship in which there was violence and she had been afraid of making contact with the father of her children because she thought that it would be traumatic for the children, that £75 would have been reduced to £65 a week. Those children would go hungry and we surely cannot accept that. The welfare of children must come first.

Mr Burt: The Hon. Lady must concede that if the lady to whom she referred signed the forms and went to see a Child Support Officer to set out her circumstances, she would be allowed good cause not to comply with the Child Support Agency and her family would not need to go hungry.

Ms Gordon: There must be some differences of opinion or there would not be 40,000 women whose reasons have been rejected and 15,000 women who have suffered the Benefit penalty. Those women must have had good reasons to appeal or they would not have put themselves in a position where they could possibly suffer a penalty of a reduction in their already low income by nearly £10.

It is poor families who have their water, gas and electricity disconnected and who get into serious trouble. I see such families all the time, because I represent one of the poorest areas in the country. I know very well the sort of difficulties which those people can get into, through no fault of their own. Those people have often managed miraculously on what they have but the money is just not enough. It should be left to the parent — nearly always a woman — to make the decision whether or not to apply to the Agency. The parent knows why her relationship broke up and the effect that that has had on the children.

Mr Burt: I understand the

point that the Hon. Lady is making but she must see the other side. She is asking for a mother to have unilateral control over whether she asks the father for maintenance or relies on the State. That cannot be the case because she would then be giving carte blanche to a bloke to wander off and abandon her and to let the State pick up the tab. There has to be someone who decides whether there is a proper good cause and that is what the Agency's officers do. The fact that they accept 50 per cent of the reasons which come before them suggests that they exercise a good deal of sensitivity on the matter. To have no rule at all -which is what the Hon. Lady is asking for — would surely do no one any good.

Ms Gordon: I am not saying that there should not be a rule and I never have asked for that. My question is — who are the people who make the decision and how do they do it? Will it be half-trained civil servants, making a decision on the basis of a rigid formula? Or should it be a Family Court, which can listen to the problems of that family and take a rounded view of each case? That is a completely different situation. I am not asking for anarchy and I never would. There is nothing in the Bill to give immediate help to the poorest of parents with care who are on Income Support. All of the voluntary organisations have called for a disregard, which would not only raise the standard of living of those parents with care and their children, many of whom are going hungry — that is not a sob story but a fact — but would give an incentive to the absent fathers to pay the maintenance regularly. The fathers pay if they knew that some of the money was going for the benefit of their children and not to the State. The changes which will benefit absent fathers will be put into effect in four weeks but the only benefit for mothers with care is the bonus that has been deferred for two years. It will take four years before mothers reach the maximum amount specified, but they need help now. What happens to mothers who want to stay at

home to look after small children? It is perfectly legitimate to want to be at home with small children and not leave them to go out to work. What happens to a mother who takes a job, is made redundant from that job, goes on Income Support and then goes back to work later? Will she get the bonus or will it be lost because she lost her job? That is not clear at all. The Bill says that the Agency will save up the money in those circumstances where women take a job but it does not say whether interest will be counted on that money while it is held back. The money will be given to the mother *"only on the occurrence of a prescribed event"* which seems to be when the mother gets a job.

We do not know whether the mother will have to work a certain amount of time before she gets the bonus. That is very unclear but it seems to me that she will not receive much benefit. That is especially relevant when most of the jobs which women can get are part-time, low-paid and insecure jobs. If a mother is going to look after her children properly she wants to make sure that she gets her maintenance, Income Support or whatever her lifeline is. She can take employment only if she has a secure job. I would not advise a mother to take an insecure, part-time low-paid job because that would do her and her children more harm than good.

Mr Duncan: If the Hon. Lady reads the Bill carefully, she will find that it makes provision for a much more simplified and effective review procedure in the event of a change in circumstances. The problem of a mother with care taking a part-time job and then perhaps having to go back on Benefit is very sensibly addressed by the Bill.

Ms Gordon: That is better than the former situation, in which a mother had to wait for six months. We do not know how the system will work and having a part-time insecure job is still a problem. A mother wants security and to be able plan ahead for herself and her children.

The changes in the Bill do not help low-paid absent fathers either. A man on Income Support still has to pay £2.50 a week, which may leave him with a very low amount on which to live. That is punitive and the changes are overwhelmingly in favour of wealthy absent fathers.

Clause 18 states that parents with care who had pre-1993 settlements will not be helped. The big benefit of the system was to be that mothers who had maintenance arranged by the courts which was not being paid would be able to go to the Agency. Some mothers thought that they would not have to go back to the court and that the Agency would sort it all out. All of them have been disappointed, as the Agency has done nothing of the sort. The Bill is saying that the Agency is not even going to look into those cases. It is not interested in them and it is really interested only in parents who are on Income Support. That is quite obvious.

Voluntary agencies have outlined about 40 different changes which they thought would be needed in the Act to make it work and some of those have been taken into account. The grounds for departure from the formula now take account of the cost of travel, the cost of maintaining contact with children, the cost of supporting stepchildren, disability, illness, clean-break settlements, debt from previous relationships and certain other expenses. That is all to the good but the Bill gives no information on the costs that will be allowed and does not give the criteria for deciding whether those are essential costs. It does not specify how much discretion the Child Support Officer will be allowed.

The Bill states that the intention is to limit the number of potential beneficiaries. It stresses that the system of departures will be available only to a *"small minority of cases"* and that the amount by which an assessment can be reduced or increased will be strictly limited. So there is not as big an improvement as has been trumpeted.

Many other changes are necessary, as the voluntary

agencies have outlined. For example, the care and maintenance of older children in tertiary education is very expensive and should be acknowledged. There is also the matter of child care costs. If a second wife goes to work, her child care costs could be £90 to £100 a week for each child.

Again, I can only stress that each case is individual and that only family-based courts can be seen to be just. If we want fathers to pay maintenance and not to try to wriggle out of it — not that the majority of fathers want to, as they want their children to be well looked after — and to pay it regularly, they have to see it as a just decision. If they are able to put their point of view to a Family Court and if all the factors are taken into account, even if they disagree with the decision, they have to see it to be fair and just. The Government would get a better system and fathers would pay more regularly.

If one tries to impose a rigid formula, as has been done, even though some changes might take the edge off some of the worst grievances, many more will be left and it creates bitterness, which is eroding relationships. Couples often manage to find a *modus vivendi* that helps the children after very traumatic divorces. Now much bitterness has been stirred up and children have been upset. It has been happening throughout the country and I am not making it up. The Minister's mailbags undoubtedly show it to be true — those are facts.

A Catch 22 is built into the complaints system, in that the absent parent cannot take up the matter unless his payments are up to date but he is probably complaining because he cannot afford to pay and therefore cannot bring them up to date. If he cannot afford to pay and to cancel out the debt, he cannot take his case to the Tribunal. It seems that fathers will have to go first to the Secretary of State, which means the Child Support Agency officers, who will be flooded with cases.

The system has proved to be inefficient. I have had some most intemperate

letters from Miss Chant, the Head of the Agency, which I intend to send to the Minister. They make me doubt whether she should be there at all. I cannot see that the new system is going to work — there will be a huge backlog and it will be another fiasco. The Secretary of State is making a second attempt to patch up this ill-thought-out Act because he is under pressure from his Back Benchers, who are in turn under pressure from their constituents. Each time that he makes a change, it brings new problems, injustices and unfair situations.

In the end, the Government will have to give up this Act and all the alterations to it. They will have to face facts and move to a system of Family Courts, and the sooner that they do so, the better for the parents and children of this country. (8.32pm)

Ms Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): I support what my Hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr Bradley) has said. Lone parents with care represent the majority of those on Income Support and nothing in the Bill will give immediate help to that group of parents.

All the organisations that support lone parents — those that have attacked the Bill as well as those that feel that the Child Support Agency can do something — are united in asking for a disregard. As has been said, lone parents on Income Support are often deeply in debt, with rent arrears, debts for utilities and debts for the repayment of social fund loans. They need help now to stop them going under. Organisations that support lone parents report that they are unable to give their children adequate diets, and that mothers in particular often go hungry, damaging their health and that of their children. Those parents may never be able to return to work successfully, even when their children are of school age, because they will have got into such difficulties. If they are not helped now, the Bill will postpone long-term solutions, not provide them.

The maintenance bonus, which will take some years to accrue fully, could be paid in addition to a disregard. I see no contradiction. The immediate need to alleviate child poverty remains. The Government argue that the way to get lone parents off Income Support is to make them all go out to work, usually in low-paid jobs — but no paid work is available in many areas.

Employers are often prejudiced against mothers with small children, thinking that their home responsibilities will prevent them from giving full attention to their job. Women often have multiple responsibilities, such as caring for aged or disabled parents, relatives or neighbours. Mothers often do not want to leave children under five years of age. The Government always claim to favour choice, so they should give women the choice whether to leave their children under five to do low-paid jobs or to look after their children themselves.

I have always advocated a

nursery place for every child that can benefit from one but not every child will do so. When I collected my own son from a nursery all day for the first time, I asked him whether he liked it. He said, *"It was very nice, but I don't want to go every day."* I respected the fact that he was not ready, at the age of three, to leave his mother, be dragged out come rain or shine, and be left with strangers all day.

When my son reached school age, I left secondary teaching to teach in a primary school. It always worried me, when the new intake arrived, to hear some children screaming for weeks on end, making themselves sick. When teachers said that such children had settled down, I often felt that they had given up in despair and that really they were not ready to be separated from their mothers if they were to grow up as secure, stable individuals. It is wrong to drive all mothers out to work and not give them the chance to enjoy decent living standards while looking after their young children at home. One third of our children live in households having less than half the average income. If the Child Support Act 1991 and the Bill are to have any effect, they must address, and do something positive to alleviate, child poverty. If the Government ensured that, the public would not think that they were totally uncaring, and huge crowds of angry people would not come to see us, write to us and attend meetings throughout the country because they feel that they are being conned and that the Government do not care about child welfare.

Improving the legislation would have a positive effect on the non-resident fathers, who we want to provide support for their children. Although there may be a few rascals, most fathers care about their children. If they knew that the mothers would enjoy some benefit and be able to raise their income above the level of Income Support, they would be more eager to pay. For all those reasons, I ask the Government to think again, and to include in the Bill a disregard for parents with care on Income Support.

Poverty and Inequality

Successive Conservative administration's policies resulted in trebling of the poverty rate in the 1980s and 1990s (from 8% to 25%) – a fact the Government repeatedly denied. Mildred Gordon raised the issues of increasing poverty and inequality again and again in Parliament, highlighting the Tories' callous and destructive policies.

In 1999, after Mildred had retired from Parliament, the Labour Government made a historic commitment to eradicate child poverty by 2020.

(9.29pm) **Ms Mildred Gordon** (Bow and Poplar): I retired from teaching two years before I became a Member of the House. I had three small pensions besides my state pension but nevertheless I found living on a pension a frightening experience. When something goes wrong with a piece of equipment, one's income bears no relation to the amount of money that one is charged for a repair. Now that the Government have so drastically reduced single payments to pensioners and other claimants who are on supplementary benefit and offer loans that must be repaid out of their meagre income, any failure of equipment becomes a real disaster that frightens pensioners, because they have no way of coping with it.

Perhaps because I have been a pensioner I get many invitations to talk to pensioner groups. I like to speak to pensioners in my Constituency, which is in the Borough of Tower Hamlets. They are mostly very poor and, although some have small pensions from their job, as has already been said, those pensioners are no better off than those who have not. They are people who have worked hard and long hours for little pay and who have had no way of saving money. They lived through the Depression and the Blitz and this country owes them a lot. Throughout their lives they have had to learn how to manage well on a small amount of money.

If one goes to Tower Hamlets, one will discover that however good the women are at managing money — and the majority of pensioners are women — they hover outside the butchers' shops wondering if they can afford to buy anything except liver. Although the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security, the Hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs Currie), would probably say that liver is good for pensioners, one gets fed up with eating liver. They wonder whether they can afford to buy a chop. It is shocking that women who have been proud housewives and who have reared their families, now stand outside

the shops dithering and wondering whether they can afford some meat. If one goes into many of their homes in winter, one finds that they are in the kitchen, with the door of the gas oven open, the oven alight and that they are sitting over it because that is the cheapest way of heating and that is the only room that they can afford to heat. That is the reality.

Two Methodist ministers in the East End recently protested that the DHSS had told pensioners who applied for single payments to go to the churches. Pensioners have been going to the churches for money for food. One minister has been keeping plastic bags of food to give to them. Those ministers have now said, *"We cannot do this anymore. Our funds do not permit it. Please do not keep telling pensioners to come to us."*

The reality is that when pensioners go to doctors for treatment, hard-pressed doctors often say, *"You have to expect some aches and pains at your age."* I do not think that pensioners of any age should expect to be ill, without getting proper treatment in the same way as anyone else.

Pensioners have asked me to say that they are well aware that during the past 10 years many items have been harmonised with those in other countries in the EEC. They want to know when pensions in this country will be harmonised. They say that pensions in Belgium are nearly double those in England. They would like some harmonisation to come their way.

The pensioners say that the cuts in spending weigh heavily on them and that the agencies that help them are losing their funds because Local Authorities have less money to give and are being shut down or cut to the bone. Furthermore, the Poll Tax will penalise the carers of elderly parents and relatives.

Pensioners have also asked me to say that they would like the Government to do away with standing charges on utilities. That is a sore point with pensioners. They try to save money by switching off electric lights and cutting down on heating

but often the standing charges come to more than the rest of the bill. Standing charges take away a huge slice of their incomes. Pensioners feel that they should not have to pay these standing charges at all.

Another issue that pensioners have raised with me many times is that they would like free television licences, because television is so important to them.

Pensioners would like their pensions to be increased in line with incomes. That was something that they had before but the Government have taken that away and pensioners would like that provision restored.

London pensioners fear that, following the abolition of the Greater London Council, 1990 will see the end of their cherished free bus and Underground travel passes. Many pensioners say that the only thing that stops people becoming depressed on reaching the pensionable age of 60 or 65 is that they get their free bus pass. They believe that the free bus pass should be safe-guarded and that that system should spread to the rest of the country. It gives pensioners the chance to travel and see their friends and stops them from being tied to their homes. Dial-a-Ride, which pensioners would like guaranteed to continue, helps those who are not able-bodied to get out of the house and have a better quality of life.

Pensioners live in fear of reaching the age when they can no longer take care of themselves. It is not just a made-up story that often pensioners who cannot walk to the toilet or get out of a chair on their own are dumped in an empty flat by hard-pressed hospital authorities which need their beds. Those pensioners are left to sink or swim and many die before their time. Many pensioners who still have their mental faculties end up in the geriatric wards of mental hospitals because there is no other place for them. We need better provision for people at home and that cannot be done with rate capping and cuts in Local Authority spending. We need more homes for pensioners who cannot cope with living on their own.

There should be more research into the degenerative illnesses of old age and dementia and that requires much more money. Pensioners have asked me to say that they are sick and tired of increasingly being presented as a burden to the country. When they are presented as a burden, it invites violent attacks on them, degrades them, lowers their status and makes it seem as though they are useless. If pensioners are given enough money, correct medical treatment and are properly looked after, they have a great deal to contribute, just as they have always done. Pensioners want to be respected and valued.

(5.57pm) **Ms Mildred Gordon** (Bow and Poplar): The Hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr Greenway) made a speech which seemed to owe more to his imagination than to reality. I grew up in Tower Hamlets and, before the War, most people there lived in the most dreadful hovels. The council housing that he decried was the biggest slum-clearance scheme in Europe. The people who received a council house received a new life. At that time the caring Tories were saying, *"It is no use giving working people a bath; they will only put coal in it."* That way of thinking still exists today.

Tower Hamlets is one of the poorest Boroughs in London and certainly in England and, according to figures published in 1984, 70 per cent of households survive on £6,000 per annum. Conservative Members should think about what that means, if their imaginations will take them that far. The link between poverty and ill health has now been proven. While richer London Boroughs, such as Bromley and Sutton, have death rates comparable with those in Europe and the United States of America — the richer countries in the world — the death rate for men in the poorer parts of Tower Hamlets is comparable with those in Uruguay and Argentina. The standard mortality rate for Tower Hamlets is the highest in London. Professor Peter Townsend, a social scientist of world renown, recently condemned the Government for pursuing policies that promoted poverty and therefore ill health. His words have been illustrated dramatically by the report of the Social Services Select Committee which is published today, the majority on which, as Hon. Members know, are Conservative Members. The Observer says that the report shows:

"The number claiming means-tested state benefits has climbed from 4.4 million, when Mrs. Thatcher first took office, to 82 million."

That is nearly double. The report says:

"another million live below

the level of meagre benefits but do not claim."

The Government's policies have doubled the number of people who live in dire poverty. The result is early and untimely death for many of my constituents. I can justifiably say that, because of that, the Thatcher Government's policies are annihilation policies for many people.

Time after time, the Government utter pious words about the Health Service and how the health of our people is safe in their hands, but a healthy population cannot be achieved just by tinkering with the NHS. That view was expressed most eloquently by the British Medical Association Board of Science and Education Report of 1987, entitled, *Deprivation and Ill Health*, which says:

"No amount of redistribution of resources within the health and social security sector will resolve the health problems caused by deprivation. Increased resources for housing, work creation, income support, education and health and social services are needed although low cost initiatives are possible which will alleviate the health experience of some disadvantaged groups. The problem is so great and so entrenched within these structures of society as to be insoluble without significant diversion of public resources."

It is such a significant diversion of public resources that the Government constantly refuse to make, whether to health and social services or to anything else. As a result, the problems are perpetuated.

Mr Harry Cohen (Leyton): My Hon. Friend is right when she says that the Government refuse to give figures about deprivation. They gave what they called the Z scores index of multiple deprivation on the 1981 Census, which showed that 11 out of 12 areas in London were deprived and that 16 out of the 24 most deprived areas were in London. Those are the Department of the Environment's calculations of deprivation.

Ms Gordon: I am grateful for that information.

The divide is widening. I should like to give the Government's own figures. The Department of Employment Family Expenditure Survey for 1980 to 1986 shows changes in gross household incomes at 1985 prices. Between 1979 — a significant date for poor people — and 1985, the income of the bottom decile — 10 per cent — fell by 10 per cent, and the income of the bottom quartile — 25 per cent — fell by 7 per cent. During the same period, the income of the top decile rose by 10 per cent and the income of the top quartile rose by 12 per cent. It is therefore clear from the Government's figures that the poor are getting poorer and the rich are getting richer.

The figures for Greater London are even worse. The income of the bottom decile fell by 17 per cent and that of the bottom quartile by 8 per cent. The income of the top decile rose by 12 per cent and that of the top quartile by 18 per cent. So much for prosperity! The rich got their share but the incomes of the poor deteriorated. That problem has been exacerbated by the Budget but the Government hide what they do not like. They have now stopped compiling the figures in the form that I have just mentioned, so comparisons can no longer be made.

Yesterday, the Minister for Housing and Planning announced that a Housing Action Trust will be set up in Tower Hamlets. People were shocked to hear that announcement, even before the Housing Bill has gone through Parliament. Council tenants are in ferment and have been since they first heard of the Housing Bill.

It has been asserted today that nobody cared about the Greater London council being abolished. Poor people in Tower Hamlets cared very much. The GLC built excellent houses in the Borough and the Inner London Education Authority has cared about children's education there. People's right to elect whom they please to run their schools and to build council dwellings has been eroded by the Government.

The people of Tower Hamlets feel that the Government have declared war on Londoners — they have abolished the GLC and they propose to abolish ILEA. My mailbag reflects the dreadful fear of old people in Tower Hamlets that they will lose their homes. I receive many letters asking whether the Government will prevent them from living out their old age in the council flats where they have lived for years. They see the safety net being ripped from under them. The outlook is grim. They see ward and hospital closures and the education Authority being destroyed. Benefits are being cut. Their circumstances are getting worse rather than better.

Conservative Members are in cloud-cuckoo-land when it comes to what is happening in poor areas. Those who go to Bethnal Green tube station will see women and small children begging. I have not seen that in the East End since the 1920s. That is the pass that the very poorest people have come to and it is a disgrace for one of the major cities in the world in one of the richest countries in the world.

The Government's game of dividing communities to deflect attention from their policies works for just so long. In my maiden speech a little over one year ago, I said that Londoners in the East End will fight back. They are beginning to rally to do just that. The London Docklands Development Corporation taught those people a sharp lesson. They saw that dictatorship being set up and public money being poured in but there was a net loss of jobs and increased unemployment. They saw houses being built, but for £200,000, which they could never afford. They knew that it was not to benefit them.

They now know a quango when they see one and the Housing Action Trust will be just the sort of dictatorship in housing that the LDDC has been in Docklands.

They are reacting violently against it and they regard the HAT as a con trick. First, the rate support grant was taken away; our taxes were stolen; then Tower Hamlets was rate-capped and it was announced on Thursday that it would be rate-capped

again. So there is no money for repairs. Then the Government say that the estates are in a state of disrepair so they will take away the democratic right of the elected authority to handle them and put them in the hands of an appointed quango.

A few weeks ago, the new rich who have moved into Tower Hamlets on the Isle of Dogs held a charity ball to raise money for the London hospital — at £200 a ticket. Local people were shocked. That is the divide between rich and poor, between people living on less than £6,000 a year and those who have moved in and can afford £200 a night. The local people do not want their hospitals funded in that way. They had enough of charity hospitals before the war and that does not please them one bit.

I am reminded that the right Hon. Member for Henley (Mr Heseltine), writing in the Sunday Telegraph a few weeks ago, said that we must honour the philanthropists of the past century who provided money to build schools, hospitals and workhouses. The people of Tower Hamlets are not going back to the workhouse. The Government have a workhouse mentality and workhouse aspirations for the poor of this country.

There is a ferment in Tower Hamlets. Last week a local tenants' meeting was held on a small estate. We thought it would bring out about 40 people — but they had to shut the doors because 800 people turned up from all around. On Thursday the Tenants' Federation is calling a meeting to discuss what to do. I warn the Government that in Tower Hamlets anyone who lives near the river, or a canal, park or any other desirable natural space feels threatened. They believe that their houses will be grabbed, that they will be squeezed out and that the new HAT will eventually cause rents to go up so that they will not be able to afford to pay them and will have to leave. They will be pushed out by people who now find the area desirable for various reasons that we all know well.

I warn the Government that they have been pushing

people too far. An explosive situation is building up in east London. People are saying that they will fight to defend their homes and that Government policies will not help them. Their lives have become much worse since 1979 and they are in no doubt about that.

Mr Cohen: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. During the excellent speech of my Hon. Friend the Member for Bow and Poplar (Ms Gordon) the Hon. Member for Crawley (Mr Soames) was reading a newspaper — he is still doing it now, or perhaps he is eating his chips off it.

I see that only two Conservative Members representing London constituencies are present. Does that not show a contempt for the problems of London?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): I was working on the assumption that if an Hon. Member was reading a newspaper he was preparing his speech but I remind the House that in other circumstances it is not in order to read newspapers. (6.15pm)

(9.32pm) **Ms Mildred Gordon** (Bow and Poplar): I represent Bow and Poplar in the Borough of Tower Hamlets and unfortunately my Constituency contains many poor people, a number of whom are in the lowest income brackets. The policies of this Government have dramatically increased their problems over the past 10 years and no amount of statistical manipulation or massaging of the figures can disguise that stark fact. Every Friday evening at my surgery, men and women weep when they tell me of the problems they have in managing on very low incomes.

In the current edition of the *Households Below Average Income* Report, published in May 1988, the Government claimed that there had been an increase of 8.4 per cent in real terms in the incomes of the bottom 10 per cent of the population. This was found to be untrue by the research of the Institute of Fiscal Studies, which showed an increase of only 2.6 per cent. Moreover, the noted social scientist, Peter Townsend, using data from the Department of Employment, demonstrated that there had, in fact, been a decrease, rather than an increase, in the incomes of the bottom 10 per cent of the population. That has not been refuted.

The evidence is there for all to see. Young people can be found begging in every major city in the country and the Victorian problems of child prostitution and hunger remain. Hon. Members need only take a short walk down to the South Bank to cardboard city to see for themselves the reality behind the statistics, if they have the will to do so. They would see the human tragedies behind the report that we are considering tonight.

The statistics speak loudly of the injustice and the Government's failure. Between 1979 and 1985, the number of families on low incomes rose from 6 million to more than 9 million — a rise of more than 3 million. According to the fourth Report of the Social Services Select Committee, in 1988 the proportion of families with children on or below the Supplementary Benefit level

increased from 15 per cent to 20 per cent between 1979 and 1985.

The Government's response to that increase in poverty has not been to introduce policies to help poor people but to stop collecting the figures. Furthermore, they have frozen Child Benefit and many mothers with no independent incomes are now having to cut household spending to pay their Poll Tax. One of the little-mentioned effects of the Poll Tax has been to rearrange finances and resources within the family, leaving men with more money in their pockets and women with less. We rarely find poor children with mothers who have money to spare but more often find poor children whose fathers might have money to jingle in their pockets.

The Government argue that people on Income Support levels and below are relatively poor and not absolutely poor. However, relative to what? Perhaps it is relative to freezing or starving. On the other hand, Peter Townsend defines poverty as being a level of income so low that one is excluded in all kinds of ways from the normal activities of the community in which one lives. That is the kind of poverty that requires people to count every teabag they use. It takes a terrible toll in stress, which undermines health and personal relations between people. Insecurity and constant worry about every penny make life a misery for men and women alike and the work burden for women is massively increased.

It is fortunate that members of the Social Service Select Committee were not satisfied with the Government's failure to produce the necessary statistics and commissioned research from the Institute of Fiscal Studies. The Institute's provisional figures show that the number of people in families on low incomes increased to at least 10 million by 1987. The indications are that further research will probably reveal an increase to 12 million — a colossal figure. As we have heard, the official figures are not available because the

Government, who talk so piously about the individual and pay lip service to the family, have decided that individuals and families are not important when counting people who live in poverty. The Government now want to make the household the unit of measure. The Government now appear to believe that every person in the household will share out their income equally. That flies in the face of reality. Does any Hon. Member believe that, on a Friday night, all the members of a household sit round a table, put their money in the middle and divide it up equally and fairly? That does not happen. The Government are preparing the ground for a return to the pre-Beveridge 1930s household means test. That is what is behind the changes and that is what is really happening.

The response of the Department of Social Security to the massive increase in poverty has been to insult poor people. On 11 May 1989, in the St Stephen's Club, the then Secretary of State for Social Security, the Right Hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Mr Moore) delivered a speech entitled *The End of the Line for Poverty* in which he airily claimed that poverty no longer existed. That speech proved to be the end of the line for his ministerial career. Unfortunately, poverty did not disappear so easily.

On 15 June 1988, Mr Hickey, the Assistant Secretary for Policy on Family Benefit and Low Income at the Department of Health and Social Security, told members of the Social Services Select Committee that the word 'poor' was one which the Government actually disputed. The Government seek to eradicate poverty not by helping poor people but by removing the word 'poverty' from their dictionary. That is their response to the huge increase in poverty and human misery over the past decade.

The hollowness of the Government's claim that wealth has trickled down to the poorest people has been clearly exposed. Poor families know exactly what is going on. They know that

their income and standard of living have been the target of Government policy. (9.39pm)

(6.13pm) **Ms Mildred Gordon** (Bow and Poplar): I must say to the Hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) that *Social Trends*, published yesterday, shows that the incomes of the top 5 per cent of the population have increased, whereas the incomes of the bottom 5 per cent have fallen. That is the answer to many of her points. I represent one of the poorest constituencies in the country, a Constituency in Tower Hamlets. I can cite, from experience at my surgery, hundreds of cases of poverty and people living in hardship that would wring the hearts of even Conservative Members. I shall deal with statistics that draw together different sections of the population and show what is happening and how poverty is increasing. I shall mostly use official Government statistics on households with below average incomes.

The Government have tried repeatedly to change the definition of poverty. They accept that, if a person is dying of starvation, he or she is living in poverty. But they will not accept what most people believe, that if one cannot keep up with the community in which one is living, if one cannot send one's children properly clothed and shod to school and give them enough money to take part in extra-curricular activities, if one cannot give them a decent meal and some presents at Christmas — in other words, keep within the society on a decent level — one is poor and living in poverty. The attempt to redefine poverty has gone on for a long time. In May 1989, the Right Hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Mr Moore), the then Secretary of State for Social Security, made a speech under the heading, *The End of the Line for Poverty*, in which he had the cheek to claim that poverty no longer existed in Britain. Other Conservative Members have also tried to make that point. The storm that that speech provoked proved to be the end of the line for the Right Hon. Gentleman. He should have known better, because he told me at one time that he grew up in the East End of London. But he did not

know better — he had forgotten what poverty was.

The Government continually try to fiddle figures. Unfortunately, despite their attempt to appear to abolish poverty, it has continued to increase. They try to abolish the word from their official reports instead of trying to abolish poverty itself.

In 1989, the Government's own manicured figures showed that the number of people at or below Supplementary Benefit level had grown by more than 50 per cent. Their response was merely to abolish the low-income family statistical series and replace it with the households below average income series, which they hoped would disguise the trend of increasing poverty. Unfortunately, the trend was so stark that no amount of statistical manipulation could make it vanish.

The Government's statistics show that the number of people in families earning below 50 per cent of average income did not just double between 1979 and 1988 but increased by more than two and a half times from 4,930,000 to 11,750,000. The figure of 10 million has been quoted but the Government's statistics show that it was 11,750,000. Those statistics have been confirmed by independent researchers, such as the *Breadline Britain* team, who carry out scientific studies of poverty and deprivation in Britain today. The figures also show that more than 11 million people live in direst poverty — that means that 20 per cent of the population and more than 25 per cent of our children live on or below the breadline. That is a dreadful picture but it is true.

Margaret Thatcher repeatedly claimed…

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): *Order*.

Ms Gordon: I am sorry. The previous Prime Minister… [*Interruption*] …repeatedly claimed that everyone had become better off under the Conservatives. What a terrible slip: I am sure that Hon. Gentlemen are very worried that I used the name instead of the Constituency but I doubt that the unemployed will

worry unduly. The Government's statistics state that, in 1979, there were one million unemployed people in Britain but, in 1988, there were more than 2.5 million unemployed people living in poverty. I believe that there are many more than 2.5 million unemployed people living in poverty but let us take that figure, which is awful enough. The families of these unemployed people have not done better under the Conservatives. Then there are the pensioners. In 1979, there were just over one million pensioners living in poverty. By 1988, there were more than 3.5 million. Those people have not done better under the Conservatives. In 1979, there were just over one million low-paid full-time workers living in poverty. In 1988, the number had risen to 2.5 million. Low-paid workers have not done better under the Conservatives either. In 1979, there were 500,000 single parents living in poverty. In 1988, there were 1.5 million.

Miss Emma Nicholson: Will the Hon. Lady give way?

Ms Gordon: No, I will not. The Minister refused to give way to me twice. I have only a short time and I will not give way. I want to finish drawing this picture.

By 1988, 1.5 million single parents, three quarters of all single-parent families, lived in poverty. They have not done better under the Conservatives.

The last group I want to mention was dealt with at length by the Minister — the sick and the disabled. The increases in benefits for the sick and the disabled have not been sufficient to shield even them from the overall effects of Government policies. Yesterday's *Social Trends* showed that, whereas the top 5 per cent of the population spent 12.4 per cent of their income on indirect taxation, indirect taxation took up 24 per cent of the income of those in the bottom 5 per cent, which includes the sick and disabled. That is just one example. By 1988, three quarters of a million sick and disabled people were living on low incomes. Clearly, they are not better off under

the Conservatives.

The increase in poverty has taken a terrible toll. Its effects can be seen by everyone in the number of youngsters begging in the streets. I remember going to Paris with my school the year before the war, when I was 15, and seeing beggars outside Notre Dame. I was shocked because it was the first time that I had ever seen beggars. One did not see beggars even during the Depression but now one can see them everywhere on our streets. While we sit in the warm and dry, thousands of old people sit huddled over one-bar fires in cold, damp houses. Those are the terrible effects of poverty.

Poverty has also had an effect on health. Look at the statistics. For 150 years, the death rate for young males between the ages of one and 44 had been falling — the only interruption in that decline being the slaughter of young men during two world wars. Now doctors save more and more lives but, since 1985, the death rate for males in that age group has started to increase. The Government have managed to achieve what previously only the German armies achieved. Why are young men dying?

Hon. Members: *Oh, come on.*

Ms Gordon: Okay. Of the richer countries in the world, only Britain and America, which pursues the same voodoo economics as we do, have an increasing death rate among young males. The Registrar- General's Report and the Report of the Office of Population, Censuses and Surveys — the House will admit that that is not a biased Labour report — stated that the main causes of the decline were poor diet and suicide. In the past 12 years, the suicide rate of young men has risen dramatically — by 50 per cent.

The desperation caused by poverty is increasing and making more and more young men suicidal but it is women who are bearing the brunt of that increasing poverty. They have to absorb and handle the whole family's emotional turmoil, trauma and despair caused

by unemployment. They also make up the majority in all the disadvantaged groups whom I have mentioned. They are the majority of pensioners and, therefore, of the sick and disabled. They are the majority of low-paid part-time workers. They are the majority of single parents. They are also the widows of those who have died prematurely. Women are certainly not better off under the Conservatives. (6.22pm)

(7.20pm) **Ms Mildred Gordon** (Bow and Poplar): I am glad that, at last, we are getting down to discussing what we mean by 'family' when talking about family policy because stereotype families have changed very much in the past decade. The old stereotype family is now a minority. Only 25 per cent of children are living with parents where both adults are either married or cohabiting.

Since the 1980s, people have begun to change their lives a great deal. Many women with children live on their own out of choice. Increasingly, as the Hon. Member for Havant (Mr Willetts) mentioned, couples reject legal marriage, even when there are children. Four out of 10 marriages — no doubt entered into with high hopes — sadly end in divorce.

There are now many single parent families. In fact, 21 per cent of all families are single-parent families. The vast majority of them are headed by women but, nevertheless, they are families just as much as families where two adults are living with their children. There are also many extended families, with complicated relationships — half-brothers and half-sisters, step-brothers and step-sisters, stepmothers and stepfathers. Where the relationships are harmonious, that can work very well and be a supportive system for the children, but the Child Support Act 1991 has done more to create conflict and discord between such families than anything that has happened in the past decade.

The Child Support Agency shows little regard for the needs of stepchildren and second wives. In some cases, as a result of its rigid formula, violence has been created against the parent with care. In others, faced with impossible financial demands, the absent parent has been in despair — even suicides have taken place. Conflict has been created between the first and second wives and their families and between the second wives and their partners, over such financial arrangements. The children suffer. The insecurity that is brought

about when formerly harmonious relationships are disrupted shows in bed wetting by the children and in other signs of tension and trauma.

Obviously, the old system of maintenance for children did not work too well and there were many defaulters but the rigid formula of the CSA, as was mentioned in the debate on that matter, does not work to the benefit of families. We need Family Courts which can do more than consider access to children where the parents are separated and can decide on the financial arrangements, with a flexible approach that really takes into account all the factors and needs of those families. The more people the CSA reaches out to, the more damage it will do. It has become a very bad feature in disrupting the lives of families in this country.

Government policies are pulling women in two directions. A number of Ministers have attacked women and blamed them for juvenile crime because, they say, they are not spending enough time, care and attention on their families. On the other hand, Ministers are telling women to get off Income Support and go out to work.

The Secretary of State gave some very spurious figures about family income. She did not take into account the changing value of money when mentioning those figures. When I started work, £3 a week was a very good wage, on which one could live well. Now, one needs £300 a week to live at the same level. The bare figures can give a very wrong impression.

What is absolutely certain is that families can no longer live on one salary. Women are having to go out to work to make ends meet — even women with very young children, despite the difficulty and expense that this entails. It costs about £90 a week for a place in a nursery for a child under five.

Women are replacing men in the work force, at lower wages and in part-time jobs. Eight out of nine jobs created recently have gone to women; they are mainly part time and low paid — the kind that

were covered by the Wages Councils which have now been abolished. The protection in those jobs has been removed by the Government. Women are being given one-day and one-week contracts, which are absolutely disgraceful and which take away their rights to holiday pay, their maternity rights, their pension rights and their rights to reasonable notice.

That means that there is no stability for their family. Those women do not know from one week to the next whether they will earn money. That is bad for them, their children and the relationships of the whole family. It is not that women are seeking little jobs for pin money but that only little jobs are available.

One feature of the Government's time in office has been perpetual and rising mass unemployment. As a child, I knew the terrible effect that it had on my sister, my mother and me when my father had a period of unemployment. Now, men, women and youths are experiencing years of unemployment. Some of these youths have never had a job since leaving school.

I do not think that Conservative Members really understand this. If they do, the smirks on their faces during many a speech in the Chamber tonight and on other occasions show that they have no sympathy with what it is like to be unemployed, not to have enough money to last to the end of the week, to be really afraid of the future and to live from hand to mouth.

I know what it is like, from the cases that come to my surgery, from the people who come in and cry on a Friday because they do not have enough money to last them through to the weekend. We have to give them a few pounds, because it is too late on a Friday night to get them help immediately. I know what it is like. I know what they suffer. I know the terrible and frightening effect that it has on their children and on their self-confidence throughout the rest of their lives.

The 1991 Census revealed a dreadful picture of child poverty and lone parent poverty. The situation has

deteriorated dreadfully since the Conservatives have been in power. For millions of families, 'back to basics' is back to nowhere.

In 1990-91, 13.5 million people were living in poverty — 24 per cent of the population. In 1979, the figure was 9 per cent. That was bad enough but the increase is colossal.

Some 9.6 million adults are living in poverty — one in four. More disgracefully, 3.9 million children are living in poverty. That is taking poverty at a level below 50 per cent of the net national average wage. It accounts for 31 per cent of all children in Britain.

The figure is even higher if we take a wider definition of poverty, as a situation in which one cannot keep up with one's peers; for example, when one cannot go on school outings or have the equipment that one needs at school or the same entertainments as one's peers. It is a tragedy that such a large percentage of our children live in poverty. Sixty per cent of lone parents live in poverty and one in five of all families with dependent children are lone-parent families. The difference between the lives of those children and those whose families have a good income and good homes and live in security is enormous — they are different worlds.

Of course it is true that well-housed families are not necessarily happy families. Child abuse has been mentioned and it is a subject on which the curtain is only just being lifted. We need to discuss seriously what society can do about it. It is rife in all classes of society.

In addition, we all need to learn to respect children's rights. That is a whole new chapter that needs to be investigated. We must listen to what children say and learn to treat them as people, rather than as objects which we can order around as we fancy. Overcrowding is another issue to be considered when we debate the family. If any Conservative Members would like to listen in on my surgeries on a Friday night in Tower Hamlets, they are welcome to do so. They might learn something about a slice of the life of families

living in misery because of overcrowding. They might learn that some have been on the housing waiting list for years and that their children are brought into conflict with one another because they are sharing bedrooms when it is clearly unsuitable for them to do so. Family members are breathing down each other's necks because of a lack of space.

Lady Olga Maitland: Will the Hon. Lady give way?

Ms Gordon: No, I shall not give way. The Hon. Lady has already intervened more than once and has tried to interrupt continuously. She should make her own speech.

Bad housing is a source of misery and disruption for families in inner-city areas. The blame for increasingly bad housing lies at the Government's door because, until this year, they refused to allow money earned from the right-to-buy policy to be used for repairs and have deliberately brought council house building to an absolute halt. Families need the affordable rented housing which only councils have been able to provide. The shortage of housing is now creating misery and destroying family life in inner-city areas.

The Government are creating an ever greater divide between families who have a good standard of living and the huge number who are struggling to give their children a decent start in life. All Government social policies — on housing, health and education — are increasingly elitist and poorer families are getting a bad deal. The poorest are suffering the greatest blows from increased indirect taxation and cuts in the money available for nurseries and day centres, for Social Services and for carers. Care in the community is underfunded and people are not receiving the care and help that is needed for the elderly members of their families. The only hope for families in my Constituency and elsewhere across the country is a change of Government. (7.33pm)

(5.57pm) **Ms Mildred Gordon** (Bow and Poplar): I was very surprised to hear the Secretary of State for Social Security trot out that hoary old phrase, *'the politics of envy'*. I think it was indicative of his callous approach to the problems of poor people. Does he condemn poor people as being envious, when they aspire to have good clothing, good diet, good education and a neat warm home for their children? When richer people rightly want to give their children the best of everything, that is described as a laudable ambition. When unfortunate people sleeping in the streets envy those of us in our warm beds, are we to condemn that?

It has been my opinion for a long time that working-class people do not demand enough. They are too easily satisfied. They are not envious enough. They set their sights too low and they allow themselves to be ripped off time and again by this Government. Pensioners whose pensions are no longer linked to wages have been ripped off by the Government. Women pensioners, whose pensions are lower than those of men, will be ripped off by losing five years of their entitlement. That will add to the number of women who are living in poverty and it is women who are the largest proportion of the poor.

When those who have paid National Health Insurance Contributions all their lives are old and need help from the Health Service, they often find that the help that is needed in hospitals and in the community is no longer there. Those who paid their National Insurance Contributions in the expectation that, if they were ever unemployed, they would be taken care of by the safety net of the welfare state will now lose half their entitlement. All those people are being ripped off by the Government.

Conservatives rubbished the *Rowntree Report* as left-wing propaganda but very few noticed that it was in fact in full agreement with a series of reports on deprivation published the previous week by the Department of the Environ-

ment. The Department of the Environment has not exactly been known for left-wing propaganda. Its reports set out the stark facts of poverty at the beginning of the 1990s. They showed that 20 per cent of households, or approximately 20 million people, are living in poverty, and that includes one third of the country's children. They also showed that 10 million people in Britain live in inadequate housing, which means, for example, that their homes are unheated or damp or that older children have to share bedrooms. Seven million people go without essential clothing such as warm waterproof coats or solid shoes because of lack of money, and five million are not properly fed by today's standards. We should be taking those standards into account, something that many Conservative Members have not done.

The *Rowntree Report* argued that, left to themselves, market mechanisms will not deliver levels of education, training and investment in human capital that are optimal for the economy and society as a whole. Similarly, the Department of the Environment's reports stated, on the basis of past trends, that any economic recovery in the 1990s will have very limited impact on the numbers experiencing poverty and deprivation.

Although Government policies have made things bad in the country as a whole, the situation is far, far worse in Tower Hamlets where my Constituency is located. There, 38 per cent of households are forced to live on the breadline, and 46 per cent of children — almost half — live in households without any earners and which are dependent for survival on benefits and the help of their families. They have little future to look forward to.

In the East End of London, for every 100 16 and 17-year-olds with a job, 74 are unemployed and 25 are on a Government scheme. Some of those youngsters have been on a number of training schemes, with no job at the end of the line. Half the young population is unlikely to get work in the foreseeable

future and the situation is no better for many of their parents. Thirty- five per cent of men between 55 and retirement age in the East End have been thrown on the scrap heap and are un-employed and have little prospect of ever working again. The household of the poor child is often also the household of the unemployed older sibling and the redundant father, and there is no role model of anyone in gainful employment. It is no wonder that people become deeply depressed.

However, in the sea of poverty and despair in Tower Hamlets live and work some of the wealthiest people in our society, in what was planned to be 'Manhattan on the Water' on the Isle of Dogs. Billions of pounds of public money were poured into it. The Government's policy of voodoo economics has caused some of the greatest social polarisation and poverty that this country has ever had the misfortune to witness and nowhere is it more glaring than in my Constituency on the Isle of Dogs.

Recent research points to the fact that countries such as Japan, where inequalities are fewer than in Britain, have less ill-health among the lower-paid and a longer expectation of life. The Hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr Nicholls) was incorrect when he tried to point out that absolute poverty was the important factor. Because people in some countries live happily on a handful of olives, bread, oil and some rice and nuts, we cannot expect the same in a European country. Conditions are very different.

Conservative Members should take into account the fact that it is not only the shortage of money but relative poverty and inequality that create the stresses which add to breakdown in health. Poverty is relative — that is the important point that the Minister and most Conservative Members have failed to recognise. If that were not so, how would the Hon. Member for Teignbridge and other Conservative Members explain the fact that, after decades of rising expectation of life, the trend has now gone into reverse for

men in lower-income groups between the ages of 15 and 44? The chances of dying before the age of 65 increased for men in those groups in the 1980s. Even though the average expectation of life is 79 years for women and 73 for men, among the poorest people, men are more unhealthy and dying younger than those at the opposite end of the income scale. Their life expectancy is 10 years less. Poor people are also 75 per cent more at risk after surgery than rich people.

That inequality in health begins at birth, or even before. There is now an increase in the number of babies born with a low birth weight in poorer families and there is higher infant mortality and infant illness in deprived groups. The baby of an unskilled manual worker is one and a half times more likely to die in the first year of life than the baby of a professional worker or manager. That is a dreadful statistic.

Asthma is a major problem in my Constituency. It is partly due to air pollution but also due to other social conditions. The number of children with asthma has almost doubled and two-thirds of them come from poor families living in cold, damp houses. The poorest children are twice as likely to die from respiratory diseases as children from Social Class 1. The *Black Report* showed that material deprivation played a major part in causing ill-health. It is true that poor people have always been less healthy than the rich, for obvious reasons but since the 1980s the gap has grown wider. That is the disgraceful fact. Stress, un-employment, financial worries, the inability to afford normal social activities — small things such as buying birthday and Christmas presents — become very important when one cannot afford them, and repairing broken equipment such as a cooker or fridge is a cause of worry when one has no financial reserves — and the hopelessness of long-term unemployment all bring on depression.

It has been mentioned that the suicide rate has increased by 75 per cent in Scotland. Young

unemployed men are 10 to 15 times more likely to attempt suicide than others and, in some areas, suicide is the third most frequent cause of death in young men after heart disease and cancer. That is not a very good reflection of our society.

When people without hope who are living in poverty and despair are put side by side with those who flaunt their wealth, the former are often seduced into looking for scapegoats and the fascists are only too willing to provide scapegoats, as we saw in Millwall not too long ago. I warn the Government that, if the gap between rich and poor continues to increase, the problem will spread to the rest of the country, just as it has spread in Tower Hamlets. All the police and private security guards will not be enough to prevent the breakdown of society.

Despite the philosophy of the previous Prime Minister and this Government — I believe that the previous Prime Minister said that there was no such thing as society — society is about far more than feeding the greed of the men at the top. The overwhelming majority of my constituents and the British public are appalled that £23 million is being given to the heads of electricity companies, while we have children begging in our streets.

As the eminent sociologist Peter Townsend has said:

"Poverty kills, this is not a political opinion, it is not a social comment, it is a scientific fact." (6.09 pm)

Healthcare

Mildred entered Parliament at a time when Conservative cuts in spending on healthcare were becoming obvious to all. She campaigned for the structure and values of the NHS and opposed any kind of two-tier system.

(6.01pm) **Ms Mildred Gordon** (Bow and Poplar): Before the debate began I was extremely angry both about the Community Charge and about the lack of implementation of care in the community. I did not think that I could be angrier but the laughter of the Secretary of State and of other Conservative Members when the Hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr Winterton) described what was happening to the Health Service in his Constituency has made me angrier than ever. So has the statement that the Secretary of State made today.

One thing that his statement has made clear to us is that one of the purposes of the so-called Community Charge is to destroy all sense of community and to turn the most vulnerable sections of society against one another. The Secretary of State said that people must be protected from having too great a burden of Community Charge laid upon them and that therefore the implementation of the provisions relating to care in the community must be delayed. However, it is the poorest and the most over-crowded families who suffer the most from this unfair tax. They have to pay far more than those who live in big, spacious properties.

It is these same poor people who have to pick up the pieces of the shattered welfare state that is under attack by the Government. They have to do the extra unpaid work of caring for people in the community. They have no assistance. The result of more and more cuts is that they receive less and less help. If he was really concerned about their problems, the Secretary of State could relieve their burden by abolishing the Community Charge.

There is a hospital for the mentally ill in my Constituency. Proposals are afoot to close St Clement's hospital and sell the land and buildings. The Secretary of State says that he never allows such a hospital to be sold off without ensuring that even better provision is made for the mentally ill patients in the community. I hope that he will do that when the closure of St Clement's is considered.

There is no provision for severely mentally ill and severely disabled people in the community. If the Secretary of State's Department always makes sure that there is good provision for these people in the community when hospitals are closed, how does he explain the fact that people are living on the streets in cardboard boxes? Mentally ill patients are being discharged from hospitals every day, their possessions in a plastic bag, and given a list of hostels where they can look for accommodation, even though everybody knows that those hostels are already full. They therefore end up on the streets, and their condition gets worse and worse.

If the Community Charge is cut, due to cuts in public expenditure, that will lead to more money in the pockets of the rich, but public expenditure cuts will lead to misery, uncertainty and suffering for the most disadvantaged people. After a lifetime of work, when they become old, frail, sick or disabled, having been squeezed dry in order to profit others, little provision is to be made for them. They are thrown on the scrap heap. They are told, *"Wait a few years; you can go sling your hook in the meantime."*

I have tried to discover the scale of the problem in Tower Hamlets. In particular, I have tried to find out how many young severely disabled people need care in the community and what it will cost. I have received no answers during the last three months, although I know personally of six cases. Two of them are severely disabled young men, paralysed from the neck down as a result of injuries in rugby matches.

I digress in order to say that something ought to be done about the rules of that dangerous game. Protective clothing should be worn, similar to that which is worn by those who play American football. That might prevent terrible accidents, leading to total paralysis and the ruin of young men's lives. Those injuries are not uncommon. When my son was a young boy, I spent endless time in the accident and emergency department of my local hospital because of injuries

that he and his friends suffered in rugby games.

There are four young disabled people in Charles Key Lodge who would like to live in the community with support. There is a frail elderly lady whose husband can no longer look after her on his own and other people who suffer from multiple sclerosis. All those people, as well as mentally ill and handicapped patients, will be very expensive to look after. Rehabilitation programmes in National Health Service hospitals need to be funded to enable them to prepare for life in the community. However, money for that purpose has not been provided. We need central funding that is ring-fenced so that they can be properly looked after in the community.

From the cases that I have examined, it seems that one of the problems is the demarcation line between the National Health Service and Social Services. That applies to both funding and the work that is done. If someone is paralysed and needs a catheter and help for bowel functions, the question is whether that is to be regarded as medical help or dealt with by a carer who has been trained just for that purpose. That question has not been answered. It has resulted in help for individuals who are waiting for release from hospital being delayed.

I have referred before to the case of Corporal Bill Blackburn but I have been unable to talk about him for more than a few seconds. His case graphically illustrates what is happening but what should not be happening. Corporal Bill Blackburn was injured three years ago in a rugby accident. He is tetraplegic and paralysed from the neck down. That young man, who is not yet 30, was admitted to the Odstock Spinal Injuries Unit near Salisbury three years ago. Two years ago, he was admitted to the Queen Elizabeth Military Hospital on the premise that he would soon be able to live in a specially adapted flat that we had obtained for him in the area where his mother lives, on the Isle of Dogs. We used pressure to obtain that flat for him.

A dispute arose over who would be responsible for funding his care in the community. The Health Authority offered a District Nurse but the service could not guarantee that he would be taken out of bed before 11am. He was also told that he would have to be put back in bed before 7pm. That is no life for a young man. He rejected that proposal and asked whether alternative arrangements could be made, with three carers taking it in turns to look after him. While a number of case conferences took place, Corporal Blackburn got on with his rehabilitation programme. In April 1989 he went to New York, where he won medals in sports for the disabled.

He says that he does not want or need sympathy — that all he wants to do is to get on with his life. He has waited for three years to get into his flat so that he can again live a full life. However, the conflict between the NHS and the Local Authority Social Services continues.

He was given a discharge date of November 1989, but it was not kept because of the disputes over money and who should do which job. After pressure from me, the Director of Social Services went to the military hospital to see Bill Blackburn and promised him that he would definitely be discharged by the end of January 1990. Because it was the Director of Social Services who made that promise, Bill spent money on a washing machine and fitting his flat with blinds. He really believed that this time he would be discharged. It was not to be. I have a letter from the Social Services Department which says that, if the Government cannot be made to understand the problems for Local Authorities of funding these cases, which cost perhaps upwards of £30,000 a year, some even double that, the legislation will be meaningless.

The Local Authority says that it cannot find the money to look after Bill Blackburn without a financial contribution from the Health Authority. The Health Authority said that the Health Service contribution

has to be in relation to the provision of health care skills and that it does not accept that it is a District Health Authority responsibility to contribute directly towards Mr Blackburn's social care needs.

It requires the judgment of Solomon to decide which are social care needs and which are health care needs. It gives the Local Authority an opportunity to yo-yo backwards and forwards and continue arguing, while Bill Blackburn is still in the military hospital. The Secretary of State's statement today just adds to that yo-yo effect. Bill told me recently that he hides his head when the Consultant goes around the hospital because he knows that he will be asked whether there is any news from Tower Hamlets council. There is no news. He knows that the bed has been needed for years to help the rehabilitation of others who have had accidents or who are severely disabled. He does not want to settle for life in an institution and why should he have to do so when he is a young man? It would not be right and proper for him. Surely the proposals for care in the community should be able to be used to help someone like Bill live a full life, yet they are not working. The Secretary of State and his team must suffer either from a lack of imagination or from a lack of conscience when they can come here and blandly make proposals which will postpone help for all such people. Perhaps they do not realise the heart-break involved. I challenge the Secretary of State to go down to the Queen Elizabeth Military Hospital to see Bill Blackburn and explain his policies and tell Bill when he will be able to use his flat on the Isle of Dogs. (6.12pm)

Mr Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): The Hon. Member for Bow and Popular (Ms Gordon) is calling for extra spending but she seems to forget how relatively low the level of spending was when the Labour party was last in power. In 1979 spending on community care services was just over £1 billion. The latest figure is well over £3 billion — an increase of 68

per cent in real terms over eight years. She should bear that in mind.

Ms Gordon: The Hon. Gentleman must realise that many hospital wards and beds have been closed since then and there is far more need for care in the community than there was when the hospital service was more full and efficient.

(7.27pm) **Ms Mildred Gordon** (Bow and Poplar): I listened carefully to the Secretary of State and some of what she said surprised me greatly. She expressed great respect and admiration for workers in the NHS but went on to denounce members of the National Union of Public Employees and other trade unions. Apparently, she respects only those NHS workers who are not members of a trade union.

The Right Hon. Lady talked about the hot line, or the information line, that she is opening today. That will not be much use to the gentleman in my Constituency who wrote to me recently to say that his urological operation had been cancelled three times and to ask whether I could find out when he was likely to have it. In reply to my inquiry, the Royal London Hospital Trust said that the District Health Authority was low on funds and could afford only emergency and urgent operations and my constituent would be considered in April in the new financial year.

The Secretary of State said that people often do not know to what services they are entitled. In the old days, my constituents knew very well how to get their services. They used to go to their GP, wait a few weeks and get an appointment with a consultant who would then put them on his list and they would have an operation within a fairly short time. Now they do not know how to obtain the services that they need because those services are not there. Such services are not free; people have paid National Insurance Contributions throughout their working lives to receive them. Some of those people have hardly used the National Health Service in the past but, when they are older and need an operation, they find that the service is no longer there for them.

I am sure that the Royal London Hospital has not given up all elective surgery; but for whom is it performing that surgery? Is it performing surgery for people who live outside London and whose GPs are budget holders? That is very likely.

An old friend of mine,

whom I have not seen for years, telephoned me today: he said that he had had four heart attacks and was waiting for a bypass operation. He went to Kings College Hospital in south London and was told that he would have to wait for at least 15 months. He said to me, rather naively,

"Strangely enough, the only three people who were admitted came from quite far away: one of them lived in Ramsgate. I could not understand it. All of us local people were sent home. Perhaps they were emergency cases." I thought, "Perhaps their GPs were budget holders or their District Health Authorities had not run out of funds."

The system is becoming totally unfair. As many Hon. Members have pointed out, it is turning into a two-tier system. This callous, inefficient, doctrinaire, bungling Government are destroying the benefits of a service that people have enjoyed for four decades. The Royal London Hospital Trust — the very organisation that wrote to tell me how sorry it was that my constituent's operation had been cancelled three times; that the Trust understood how awful that must be but he still could not have the operation — is in favour of the *Tomlinson Report*. It is closing one of its two Accident and Emergency Departments in February but says that it can deal with some of the specialty work currently handled by Bart's, along with paediatric work currently handled by the Queen Elizabeth Children's Hospital: a merger is proposed between that hospital and the Homerton Hospital. The Trust also says that it can take on the work of the London Chest Hospital and sell its site. It can do all that — it is into empire building — but it cannot operate on a man whose operation has already been cancelled three times.

I recently visited the Queen Elizabeth Children's Hospital and the London Chest Hospital and met the general managers of both hospitals. The London Chest Hospital is in a rather salubrious, unusually green part of the

Borough of Tower Hamlets, near Victoria Park. It has a wonderful reputation: many people have written to me saying how awful it would be if it closed and how it saved their lives, or their mothers' lives. If it becomes part of the Royal London Hospital — separated from the Brompton Chest Hospital — the building will be sold in the medium term: that is the plan. Patients with severe respiratory problems will be treated in the Whitechapel area, in the midst of filth and dust, rather than in the green area that contains the London Chest Hospital, with all its marvellous facilities. That will not benefit the people of London, no matter how the Secretary of State twists the truth and tries to pull the wool over our eyes. It will damage their chances of good treatment and will prevent lives from being saved and improved.

Although *Tomlinson* treats it as a general hospital, the Queen Elizabeth Children's Hospital is more than that. It is a specialist hospital. If it is merged with Homerton, Great Ormond Street Hospital will be affected very badly. I was told by officials at Queens that, without the Queen Elizabeth Children's Hospital, Great Ormond Street would be unable to provide the full range of paediatric care for which it is universally renowned. The research in pathology, radiology and anaesthetics which, for babies and children, represents a very special sphere of practice is done at the Queen Elizabeth Children's Hospital. If the *Tomlinson* proposals are implemented, the Great Ormond Street Hospital will have to compete in the market and is unlikely to be able to do so successfully: a comparatively small volume of the population uses its services and the highly specialised procedures for small children are expensive.

The Carshalton and Westminster Children's Hospitals are closing, so that London will be the only capital city without a specialist children's hospital. Hospitals in Toronto, Boston and Melbourne, for instance, all work on the system used by the Queen Elizabeth and Great Ormond Street Hospitals. We should view

the matter in context: 30 per cent of babies in London attend an Accident and Emergency Department in the first six months of their lives and 15 per cent are kept in — mostly with respiratory and gastroenterinal problems. The child population in Tower Hamlets, on the borders of which the Queen Elizabeth Hospital is situated, will grow by up to 19 per cent in the next few years, and the area has twice the average number of premature births. These recommendations can only lead to the death of babies and children through lack of facilities. In these circumstances, do Hon. Members think it is worthwhile to implement a doctrinaire policy about market forces in order to save money? I certainly do not; nor do my constituents and nor would any right-minded person.

The *Tomlinson* proposals will affect Londoners severely. We want better primary health care in Tower Hamlets; there are many single-person practices there and, although the position has improved, it could improve further. We want better Care in the Community — and we want the funding for it: in the past, Care in the Community has meant increased burdens on carers of both sexes — but especially women — and, often, on the whole family. 'Care in the Community' has meant no real care but the imposition of more burdens on people who are already doing more than their fair share — picking up the pieces of the welfare state that the Government are destroying. As my Hon. Friends have pointed out, 13,000 Londoners are on waiting lists. The Americans are currently demanding and moving towards better health care provision; meanwhile our Government are moving us towards the bad arrangements that have existed in that country hitherto.

A number of Hon. Members on both sides of the House have mentioned dentistry. The Government have offered early retirement to all dentists over the age of 55. My dentist has taken it;

he would have been stupid not to. But it is a way of encouraging large numbers of dentists to leave the Health Service. The other day, my husband had a small filling and his teeth cleaned: it cost £12.60. He was told,

"This is the last time; at the end of January, the dentist will retire and do only private practice. He will not work in the Health Service anymore."

That dentist had spent 20 years in the Health Service. I said, *"What will the same cost privately?"* I was told, *"Between £45 and £50."*

I remember the days before the Health Service. I remember when many people in my Constituency — not necessarily old people; some were not much more than 20 — had no teeth. Their teeth had been pulled out, they could not afford false teeth, their gums had hardened and they had had to eat sops. I recall clearly their gummy faces. Do we want a repetition of that? I fear that, with prices such as this, many people will be unable to afford dental treatment. Meanwhile, competition to get on to the list of a National Health Service dentist is becoming increasingly fierce.

Opposition Members are proud of the Health Service. Labour created it and is justly proud of its creation.

Londoners are proud of their hospitals and do not want them to close. I have had an enormous postbag about Bart's, although it is in an adjacent Constituency. We want to modernise and improve the Health Service but on the basis of the fundamental principles….

Madam Deputy Speaker: *Order.*

Ms Gordon: May I finish my sentence?

Madam Deputy Speaker: No, I am sorry. (7.37pm)

Terrorism, Security and the Law

Mildred's campaign on the harm done by eight million obscene phone calls a year eventually resulted in the regulatory authorities and the police reluctantly being forced to take effective action against this menace which used to blight many people's lives.

She also raised the issue of rape in marriage and rape of men which eventually led to legislation which tightened up many of the gaps in the laws on rape.

As Mildred was MP for one of the most ethnically diverse and most deprived areas of Britain, she had many of immigration and asylum cases to deal with. The two speeches reproduced here detail her commitment to her constituents and outline the humanity she felt was lacking in the process.

(7.19pm) **Ms Mildred Gordon** (Bow and Poplar): Modern food production methods could lead to plentiful cheap food and a higher standard of living if they were properly regulated and controlled. However, with this Government's philosophy, which puts profits before public health, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is inevitably forced into acting first and foremost in the interests of the farmers' lobby.

Even this Government can no longer keep the lid on the fact that things are going dangerously wrong. It is true that in the past most people closed their minds to the hideous concentration camps for animals that modern farms have become but most people had no idea that chickens were being cannibalised and that a great deal of animal feed was made up of excrement. For many years, while feeling somewhat uneasy about what was happening, most people kept silent because they felt that there was no halting the changes that were being made in the name of progress.

However, the Press has now opened up the matter. Indeed, the Government could hardly keep the problem of the increasing incidence of food poisoning out of the papers after the outbreak of food poisoning in this building. People are beginning to realise the dangers to themselves and their families. People who have been campaigning for years in favour of healthy food and who were looked upon as cranks now begin to assume the role of prophets.

Most of the purchasing and preparation of food in this country — as in every other country — is done by women. The work of women who have to manage on a limited budget is made much harder because of the lack of information, conflicting information and insufficient details on labels. The Government are allowing information about manufactured food ingredients to be kept a trade secret when it should be available to housewives. That is shocking and must be stopped. As has been said by Hon. Members of all parties, women need more

information about frozen food. One of my worries is that owners of corner shops, operating on tiny margins, with high rents to pay and who work all hours in the struggle to compete, may be tempted to lower the temperatures in frozen food lockers when they are hit by the coming huge increases in the cost of electricity.

It is the most vulnerable groups in society that are forced to shop at corner shops, such as those who have no transport, or who find it difficult to get about. These vulnerable groups have already been mentioned and include old people, mothers with babies and disabled people. We need an army of inspectors to check frozen food lockers in shops and supermarkets. We need guidelines on temperatures and on the lengths of time for storing frozen products.

The same vulnerable groups are now being forced to eat cook-chill meals in hospitals, day centres for the elderly and disabled and, increasingly, in schools. That dangerous trend is definitely the result of the Government's policy of cuts and enforced privatisation within Local Authorities. It is equally disgraceful that baby food containing aluminium has still not been banned by the Government, in spite of the call by doctors and scientists that it should be banned.

The result of the Government's policies, which put the interests of powerful profit-making lobbies before the interests of the community, is always more work for women. Cases of salmonella and other types of food poisoning have increased enormously since 1986 and the work of looking after the sick members of their families and managing on less money if the wage earner is ill all falls on women's shoulders. They bear the brunt of the policies of this uncaring Government. Intolerable problems are created when older people succumb to senile dementia brought on by aluminium in the water supply. Some chemicals that are suspected of causing cancer are being used by farmers and residues meant for plants above the surface are seeping down and ending up in

drains and watercourses. About 4 million Britons drink water that breaches EEC nitrate levels. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is not invoking the powers that it was granted under the Control of Pollution Act 1974. We in this country can no longer boast about having safe water. People are deeply worried about the future standard and cost of water when the industry is privatised.

A further cause of concern, which has already been mentioned, is the future maintenance of sewers and the increasing problems of rodents, which pose a further health hazard. I have raised that subject many times since becoming a Member of the House.

Chemicals and pesticides used by farmers are now said to penetrate the skins of apples and potatoes, so the earlier recommendation to wash all fruit before eating it will not help. The increasing numbers of allergy eczema cases probably stem from the increased use of herbicides, fungicides and insecticides.

Air and ground pollution from nuclear power is also a problem. The books have not been closed on the effects of Chernobyl but the Government are proposing to build yet more nuclear power stations, although they do not yet know how to dismantle the ones that were built 30 years ago.

There is a marked class gradient affecting one's chances of survival and remaining healthy in old age. The ability to buy good food is a major factor. Several reports have shown that working-class people and the poorer ethnic minority groups have the poorest health. That point is especially relevant to my Constituency. In the case of ethnic minority groups, poorer health does not stem from their type of diet, which is often healthier than the usual diet in the West, but is directly related to poverty.

We need cheap food, but we also need good food. We need a Government policy that considers the interests of the consumers and makes them paramount. We need a Government who are not the puppets of vested interests. We need a new Consumer

Protection Act, which not only requires companies to trade safely, as the Consumer Protection Act 1987 requires them to do, but one that is extended to include agricultural produce. We need a Government policy that is less concerned with cover-ups and allaying public fears, and more concerned with cleaning up the increasingly dangerous mess into which we are drifting.

The public do not want to be assured that healthy people can take a fair gamble in eating food that is infected with listeria and salmonella. The public want proper control to make food safe for everyone. (7.27pm)

(11.25am) **Ms Mildred Gordon** (Bow and Poplar): The Hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr Riddick) has raised an important subject for debate today. When most people think about lawlessness, they are concerned about the lawlessness that makes women feel unsafe to go about after dark and that makes them stay at home from early in the day during the winter. They think of the lawlessness that makes them worried when they go on holiday that they will find their homes broken into when they return. They think of the violence of drunken people hanging around outside their estates at weekends. These things are important to the quality of everyday life. I shall seek to show that it is Government policies that are causing the increase in this sort of lawlessness.

Before doing so, I must point out the large scale lawlessness about which the average person does not think and often does not know. It was only earlier this week in a debate in the House that I realised the involvement of the Mafia in massive fraud in the EEC. Most people do not know about the carousel of lorry-loads of food that are taken from one country to another to obtain grants from the EEC until the food reaches a state of putrefaction. This country loses billions of pounds because of the multi-millionaire firms which sail close to the law with the help of legal advisers. They keep within the letter of the law but not within its spirit. The ordinary working person has tax deducted from his wages but these huge conglomerates get away with paying no tax to the country by registering abroad and other devious devices.

The blame for everyday lawlessness is often not put on its originators. The press conspire in this. There has been much talk about lawlessness on the football terraces. After the Heysel Stadium incident, it was left to the Belgian press to reveal the role of the National Front; only then did our papers mention it — and they soon stopped doing so. We read of crowds of

Germans — the Nazi salute is banned in Germany — standing in amazement while English football fans raised their arms in Nazi salutes in small German towns.

Incitement to racial hatred on the football terraces has been a major cause of violence. The Race Relations Act 1976 should be enforced rigidly. We need a new Act that will deal more severely with people who perpetrate incitement to racial hatred. That would go a long way to clearing up the problems on the football terraces. The Government's proposals for identity cards are not the answer. This is a political problem to which a political solution is needed to tackle the people who encourage this form of violence.

The motion states that the causes of the increase of lawlessness are many and varied and it seeks to blame teachers, church leaders and politicians. It might well blame politicians because it was the Prime Minister who said that society does not exist and this Government spread the idea that everyone must stand on their own feet and that everyone must look after himself and look out for himself. That is surely a continuation of the *"I'm all right, Jack"* attitude of the Macmillan Government that society does not exist and the weakest go to the wall. It is regarded almost as a crime to be unfortunate and unsuccessful. The punishment for being unfortunate, unsuccessful, disabled, having a large number of children or losing the race for jobs is to live in abject misery.

Government policy has caused the increase in lawlessness. The cuts to Local Authorities have led to a deterioration in the provision of street lighting. I spoke in the debate on the safety of women on London Transport and mentioned that the cuts in the number of guards in the Underground system and the lack of frequency of bus services have led to increased attacks upon women. What I said in that debate holds true throughout the country. Lawlessness is made easier when the money for services which improve the environment and social

conditions is cut.

The Hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr Wilshire) spoke about latch-key children. I taught children for many years and I know how awful it is for them to come home to an empty house. Children and mothers do not want that. The Government should be paying for carers to enable men and women to care for the old, the disabled and children in peace without worrying about every penny or being driven to the breadline, yet the Government have frozen Child Benefit, the only money that goes directly to mothers. They have introduced new Social Security provisions whereby women seeking Unemployment Benefit have to fill in a questionnaire to prove that they are ready for work immediately, even if they have to arrange for the care of babies. If they give the wrong answers, they are not eligible for benefit. Those measures are putting the squeeze on family life and increasing lawlessness. The cuts in rate support in my area mean that swimming pools have closed down, there is less money for grants to youth clubs and play centres where children can go after school so that if mothers have to go out to do waged work their children are well taken care of. More children are roaming the streets looking for excitement and getting into trouble. The cuts that the Government have imposed are causing the situation to deteriorate.

The Government's new laws are criminalising many poor people. Ministers say a great deal about the virtue of family life but the horrendous unemployment created by their monetary policy has done more than anything else to cause the break-up of families. The Right Hon. Member for Chingford (Mr Tebbit) told people to get on their bikes and look for jobs. Young people in particular have to move around the country to look for jobs and some of them are getting into trouble. There is nothing wrong with mobility and young people leaving their families and seeking independence, provided that society

provides a safety net so that they do not get into trouble. The Government are tearing away that safety net.

When 16 to 18-year-olds are thrown out of home, they can claim no money and there are often no places on training schemes, so they sleep rough and try to find food. When they sleep rough, they meet rough people and often have no alternative but to break the law or to starve. Not every child between 16 and 18 can go back home. They are not always wanted. They come from homes which may have all sorts of pressures and difficulties. Sometimes they go to big towns to seek work, or simply to seek excitement and adventure. There should be a safety net. They should be able to claim Social Security until they find their feet. Young people seeking jobs should not be forced to move from town to town every few weeks because of the bed-and-breakfast rules. This has led to hardship and trouble and to increased conflict with the law.

The Department of Social Security seems to believe that all people under 25 live at home with their parents. It may pretend that that is the case, but in the real world that is not what happens. In 1986, young people who needed money to enable them to look for jobs received £30 a week but now they receive only £26. At the same time, the law has been changed so that supermarkets can sell beer. That is no small matter. I believe that the sale of spirits and beer in supermarkets has been a major cause of the increase in drunkenness and lawlessness. A licensee would be quite experienced in assessing who is under 18 but everything is done in a hurry at the cash desk in a supermarket and no one cares. Something should be done about that as it is part of the cause of the increase in lawlessness. Will the Government, who work in the interests of profit, do anything about it? Is it more important that supermarkets make huge profits or that we do something to stop teenage drunkenness?

Mr Sheerman: Does my Hon. Friend agree that over the past 10 years there has been almost total neglect of the enforcement of the law relating to young people and alcohol? In the United States, laws have been introduced to prevent young people from drinking until the age of 21.

Mr John Patten: Is that Labour Party policy?

Mr Sheerman: It is not Labour Party policy. The Labour Party policy is that the Government should throw off the shackles of its great friendships in the brewing industry and enforce the law relating to drinking under the age of 18.

Ms Gordon: I agree with my Hon. Friend that the law needs enforcing more rigorously to ensure that people under the age of 18 do not drink alcohol, especially in large quantities. The fact that alcohol is sold in supermarkets makes it impossible to enforce that law, so it should be stopped.

Mrs Wise: Does my Hon. Friend agree that there is an excessive amount of advertising of alcohol which pressurises people?

Ms Gordon: Yes. In the interests of the mighty god profit, lives are ruined by over-consumption of alcohol as it is made to seem glamorous.

Because of rising prices and the lack of facilities because Local Authorities are so hard pressed, there is no cheap way for young people to spend an evening except to go to the pub and have a pint. If there were viable alternatives and if the theatres, groups and concerts that used to be funded by Local Authorities had not dried up because of lack of funds and rate capping, young people would not be turning to pubs as the only way to spend an evening out that they can afford. If more young people had well-paid jobs and were not so poor, they would not be so restricted in their recreational activities. The Hon. Member for Colne Valley suggested more

repression as a solution to increased crime but nothing could be more false.

In the 1960s — I know that it is a long time ago but the principle remains the same — I was a visiting teacher at Holloway Prison. My first surprise was that, because of the regulations in those days, the women I taught preferred to receive a two-year sentence to an 18-month sentence because if they got two years they could spend their last nine months in a hostel in the prison grounds. They could go to work and part of their wages was banked so that they had some money on leaving the prison. They had to be in by 10pm and could go home at weekends. They were happy to be supported on that scheme and preferred it to a shorter sentence. Most of those women were recidivists. On coming out of prison, their furniture would come out of store, they would pay off their debts and their children would come out of care but, because they could not get a decent job or because they had several children and could not work, they could not manage on their small amount of money. Those women could not withstand the pressures of life or manage money as well as most. On the whole, they were inadequate, unfortunate people who needed help. If there had been a safety net or some help available they would not have continually been in trouble, ending up in prison over and over again. Indeed, although they were bad at the crooked things that they did and were always being caught, they had no alternative because they could not manage in any other way and, once they left prison, society did not give them the help that they required.

Child abuse is a form of lawlessness that I fear society will rapidly try to sweep under the carpet. It has become horribly clear in the past few months that that form of lawlessness — the physical and sexual abuse of tiny children — is happening on an enormous scale. When society saw that it was something with which it did not know how to cope, its reaction was to put the

frighteners on the doctors so that they would not reveal the truth. I do not want to go into the dispute about the doctors involved and whether their methods were as good as they might have been — the main point is that the frighteners have been put on doctors so that they will not continue to disclose the extent of that problem. That will not solve anything. Such abuse is a major form of lawlessness that society must face up to and do something about.

Many of the women in Holloway to whom I have referred and, indeed, other offenders — I am not saying *"all"* because there will always be some people who will be in trouble no matter what help they receive — have no alternative but to offend. However, if being poor were not made a crime, if poor people were not criminalised and if many ordinary law-abiding people who had kept within the law all their lives were not forced to do a job on the side while taking Social Security because otherwise they would starve, much of the lawlessness would stop.

In my surgery I see a continual procession of old-age pensioners. Sometimes the men weep, saying,

"I was in the Army and have worked hard all my life, but now my rent has been put up and I cannot manage. What am I going to do?"

I also see a continual procession of women who are now desperate. Those women have brought up their families through hard times and depression and have sometimes gone out to work for wages as well as doing their unpaid work of keeping house. The Government are driving people to desperation and criminalising the poor. They are cutting to the bone the money for Local Authorities and increasing lawlessness through their savage policies. (11.43am)

(9.24pm) **Ms Mildred Gordon** (Bow and Poplar): The Hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr Hughes) has done something to put right the shameful speeches that we have heard from many Hon. Members on the other side of the House. The Home Secretary said tonight that there must be rules and we have been talking about people who have every right to come to this country within the rules that this Government laid down. Nevertheless, they were branded as liars, as cheats, as people who were trying to get in here by fraud and, in addition to the humiliation that they suffered in this way, they suffered long separation from their families.

I do believe that if this had happened to white people there would have been a demand for compensation. Anybody who has been wrongfully branded and their character torn apart in this way, has the right to compensation. Yet, they are not even going to be given considerate treatment, from what we have heard tonight.

My Hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr Vaz) is quite right to raise the question of people from the EC countries. Nobody ever says that we are going to be swamped by white Europeans coming to this country and nobody counts the numbers. But there seems to be a lot of political mileage in appealing to the basest instincts of racists by talking about being swamped and playing the numbers game, when we should be talking about dealing fairly with those families from the Asian sub-continent who have been given a very unfair deal indeed.

It seems that the cases of those who apply for re-entry are not going to be expedited and that those who cannot afford to go through DNA testing will find themselves looked upon askance as though that means that they do not have a valid case and that is a very grave danger. I also feel that the Home Secretary's example was a very shocking one. He talked of an old woman in this country who had three sons who could well afford to keep her although she was living

on Supplementary Benefit — so why should we allow the sons to come here even though they were wrongly kept out? He said that she should go back to her own country. I find echoes in that of the crudest form of racism — one which says, *"Get back to your own country."* Surely it is easier for the sons to come and start a new life here, than for the old lady, who needs the care and attention of her sons and who has been settled here for many years, to be uprooted and to go back to a place where she now has no connections. What kind of compassion and what kind of humanity is that?

I wanted to raise another question but I feel hesitant to raise it in the atmosphere which has been present in this House tonight. That was a question which no one has raised, about men who sponsor a child whom they truly believe to be their own child and are prepared to take responsibility for that child and the DNA tests prove that they are not the father of the child. That happens, I am afraid, in families in every country. I do believe that judgment should be exercised. If the male sponsor truly believes the child to be his and he has taken responsibility for that child, that family should be allowed to be united and the children allowed to come here.

Ms Short: Before the pilot study was launched, we were given firm undertakings by the Foreign Office that in those instances, which happen in villages in the Indian sub-continent and, I am sure, in the families of Hon. Members, there would be honourable behaviour. We were assured that there would be privacy and the whole family would be allowed to come here. I hope that the Minister will reiterate the original assurance that we were given on that point.

Ms Gordon: We have a very short time and I just want to raise one or two points about the changes in the new immigration rules, to get away from DNA testing, and to talk about how harshly the immigration

rules are now being applied and how, strangely, people are often deported on the weekend when they cannot get hold of anybody to help them, and of how sometimes we appear to be cutting off our noses to spite our faces.

I had a frantic appeal from the Headmaster of the Cubitt Town Primary School about a valuable member of staff who was being told that she must leave because her original permit did not allow her to teach. I had to intervene and fortunately I got that teacher permission to stay; otherwise, another 30 children would have been without a teacher. Yesterday, Conservative Members did not seem too worried that there would be 1,000 children without teachers in Tower Hamlets. If the children had been the children of English middle-class parents they might have been concerned but because they were the children of Bangladeshis they were not. Fortunately, that teacher was able to stay. If it had happened on a Friday or a Saturday, as in many other cases, she might have been bundled out of the country and those 30 children would not have had a teacher. I had another case of a Nigerian, a student who had invested a great deal of time, effort and money into studying here. His allowance from Nigeria arrived late so he was late in re-registering. When the money came, he re-registered. Nevertheless, he was told to go and the immigration authorities would not hear any kind of appeal. What is the sense in that? He came here to study and to take back the benefits of his knowledge to his own country. Why should he be forced to leave in the middle of his studies because of a technicality?

The last thing that I want to point out is the harshness meted out to some families who appeal against Deportation Orders hoping to win their case and are suddenly informed that their case is lost and are told they have to leave within a few days. No matter if they have children; they are given no time to inoculate them, no time to find somewhere for the children to live and no time to settle up their affairs in Britain. Nowadays, if one

appeals on their behalf for an extension of time, one is frequently turned down.

I hope that the sort of changes that have taken place will be noted and that something will be done to ameliorate the position of those unfortunate people. Not only is it harmful and damaging to them, it is harmful and damaging to the reputation of this country, which once stood high as a country that had compassion, a country where people could find refuge and asylum. Now it is beginning to get a reputation for harshness, callousness and inhumanity. (9.31pm)

Ms Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): May I call the attention of the Leader of the House to Early Day Motion 153?

[That this House notes with concern the results of a Gallup poll conducted by Channel 4 Television showing that every year over eight million obscene telephone calls are received by women in Britain and that every day more than two thousand of these calls also threaten violence, that a number of women terrorised by such repeated calls move house or have mental break-downs, that nevertheless telephone companies and the police rarely give this matter priority or attempt to trace the offenders, that the penalty for sending obscene letters through the post, Malicious Communications Act 1988, is higher than for making obscene calls, Telecommunications Act 1984, that fifteen per cent of the callers know the woman they call, though the woman may not know them, and that some rapists also make obscene calls which are themselves a form of violence and an invasion of privacy; and therefore asks the Home Secretary to set up an inquiry into the extent of this problem to examine the work of the Special Department of Bell Telephone Incorporated of New Jersey, United States of America which helps victims trap offending callers, to take measures to improve the rate of detection and conviction of offenders and to take steps leading to the amendment of the said Telecommunications Act 1984, section 43 increasing the penalty; and calls upon the Director General of Telecommunications to make a condition of granting licences to British Telecom and Mercury that they each set up a department at their own expense to trace obscene phone calls when requested to do so in writing by victims.]

A similar motion tabled in October was supported by 185 Members from all parties. There are 8 million obscene telephone calls a year, of which 3,000 every day threaten sexual attack, murder or other forms of violence. The crime is committed more frequently than any other in the British

Crime Survey. Effective measures are taken in the United States of America but little is done to track offenders in the United Kingdom.

There is mounting anger and anxiety about this form of violence against women which is socially unacceptable. Will the Leader of the House arrange a debate so that the House may consider the matter thoroughly and see what can be done both for offenders and for victims?

(5.31pm) **Ms Mildred Gordon** (Bow and Poplar): Thank you for allowing me to take part in the debate, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am especially interested in the subject, for two reasons — first, because, sadly, one of my constituents died in the Lockerbie crash, and, secondly, because I have received some disquieting correspondence from an air-line pilot who, although he operates out of Aberdeen, lives in my Constituency.

My constituent who died did not have an opportunity, as did the staff of the American embassy in Moscow, to receive a warning, and had no chance of withdrawing from the flight. He was a very young man and his widow and 18-month-old son are left grieving. The widow went immediately to Lockerbie to find out whether her husband's body had been traced but was not treated very sympathetically; she complains not about the behaviour of the local police but about that of a number of other agencies. She was sent away, and 12 days passed before she was informed that her husband's body had been found. It turned out later that — according to reliable information — the body had not been mutilated and that her husband's face was recognisable. His pocket contained an identity card with a photograph and a thumbprint. I inquired into the matter but have received no explanations that satisfy me or the family of my late constituent.

I shall not pursue the subject of Lockerbie further, as my Hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr Prescott) has taken it up a number of times. Let me instead deal with the questions raised by the airline pilot.

First, the pilot complains that several of the security arrangements that have been made so far are purely cosmetic. He says that he and his colleagues understand the need for some cosmetic arrangements: the public must see that the Government are concerned and are doing something. Nevertheless, he complains that security staff are

spending most of their energies checking on the wrong people. He points out that Members and staff of the House of Commons who are well known enter the building without security checks, but that visitors are all carefully checked: Hon. Members are not treated as potential terrorists. The plane that he flies is small, he says; it carries only 48 bags, only three of which are checked — and they are the three belonging to the crew. He also complains about the pavement searches of the crew's belongings, which are conducted outside the perimeter fence, in full public view. He finds that harassing and offensive.

A letter sent to me by this constituent from the chief pilot, Highlands Division, Glasgow Airport, demonstrates that those complaints are justified. The letter mentions that work is to be done:

"hopefully this weekend, on the floor of the portacabin. It was the vibration in the floor which was causing every single person to trigger the warning on the security arch."

It goes on to say:

"They are providing screens for the girls to be searched behind and I have also requested that the security ladies are given more training in body searching and make their searches less intimate and brusque."

It seems that crew and staff are not being treated respectfully. I do not think that a pilot should have to write to a Member of Parliament to ask for a curtain to be provided behind which intimate body searches can be conducted, yet that pilot has had to do so. He also complains that it has taken the Department of Transport nine months to answer his letters of complaint.

I think that everyone will agree that perhaps the greatest danger at airports is caused by baggage being left surreptitiously in passenger terminals, or baggage in air-craft freight holds that is not reconciled with passengers who have checked in. It seems to me that the airline staff, particularly check-in staff, are in the best position

to spot unusual behaviour on the part of passengers, and to note the time that elapses before bookings, the method of payment — whether the ticket was bought with cash or a credit card, for instance — and people whose nationalities are unusual on a particular airline. All these measures can help to identify a bona fide passenger. It is plainly important for the expertise of staff to be used and respected but my informant says that:

"the measures that the Secretary of State has introduced [have] *demoralised them* [that is, airline staff] *to the extent that they have become very apathetic towards security."*

I hope that that is not true, but I feel that the Secretary of State should look into it. The pilot suggests a number of measures that I think are worth considering. He would, he says:

"like to see a review of the whole issue of Airport Security with proper consultation with all Trade Unions in the industry."

I feel that I must give that proposal my wholehearted support, for I believe that full consultation with those at the sharp end of any industry — those who actually work in it — would greatly benefit society in general and that the knowledge, talent and experience of such people should be used and respected. The pilot would also:

"like to see resources directed towards training of airline personnel, and especially check-in staff to identify potential terrorists."

This should be funded by the Government.

The pilot wants all staff to be issued with valid identity cards; that has been discussed today. He also raises the question of fraud. On 11 December, an ITN news broadcast revealed that a bag had been left for 25 minutes. The pilot feels that *fraud*, especially on the part of the press, should be *"dealt with severely."* I am not wholeheartedly with him on that, however, because I feel

that television did a service by demonstrating the dangerous lack of security that still exists — although I feel that frivolous interventions for the sake of publicity or entertainment should certainly be dealt with severely. The pilot wants:

"far greater resources directed towards making sure that, once baggage has been checked in, it is loaded along with its owner".

It strikes me as dangerous that someone should be able to check in baggage, show a ticket to ride and perhaps never get on the plane. According to my informant, there are:

"new baggage tags which are generated by a baggage tag printer along with a number and its equivalent bar code."

He feels that that may solve the problem. I have not enough technical knowledge to know whether that is true but I hope that the Secretary of State will look into it.

Finally, he asks for more stringent checks on vehicles entering the restricted area. He also says that he would like security personnel to be gainfully employed in surveillance activities inside the passenger terminal areas of airports. Those are all useful suggestions. I hope that the Secretary of State and the Committee that is to consider the Bill will take them on board. (5.39pm)

Ms Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): There are a number of seamen's hostels in my Constituency and many of their residents come from Somalia. They are British citizens and many of them served Britain in the Burma campaign. They spent their lives as seamen and their families, homes and farms were in Somalia, where they intended to return when they retired. They never sought a council flat or housing here; they stayed in their cubicles in the seamen's hostel, where they remain to this day.

In the past two years, many of them have come to see me to try to bring their families here. It was never their intention to do so but their families are dying and have been shot, bombed and slaughtered. Many of those who applied for entry have disappeared and are presumed dead. Others have come here with limbs missing, which could have been avoided if the procedures had moved more quickly.

I approach the Bill with my Somali constituents very much in mind because I have witnessed their distress, suffering and concern for their relatives. Some of the Somalis have been granted refugee status, whereas others have been granted exceptional leave to remain. The Geneva Convention defines refugee status quite narrowly. It excludes ordinary people who are simply caught up between warring factions and are the victims of air and land attacks, such as those in the horn of Africa, where medical facilities are almost non-existent. It also excludes the victims of breakdowns in public and economic order, which in the Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia have been aggravated by many years of drought.

Britain, Germany and the Netherlands have had a second category of exceptional leave to remain on humanitarian grounds. Those who were allowed here on that basis were disadvantaged compared with those who were accepted as refugees because they could not apply for family reunion until they had been here four years. In addition, they had to wait

seven years before applying for settlement, compared with four years for those who had refugee status. At least their lives were saved and they were able to start a new life here.

When the Bill was being reconsidered, a number of organisations approached the Secretary of State to give exceptional leave to remain some statutory recognition. He did not respond to that. I believe that exceptional leave should be given statutory recognition but, failing that, the Minister should at least give a categorical assurance in Committee that exceptional leave to remain will continue as heretofore, because it is important that it should. I should not like to see Britain abolish that right when other European countries which have taken more refugees than us continue to have a more humanitarian approach.

On the question of housing homeless asylum seekers, Clauses 4 and 5 cause considerable concern. Clause 4(1)(b) relieves Local Authorities of their obligation to provide housing to people in priority need if the asylum seeker has, *"any accommodation, however temporary, which it would be reasonable for him to occupy"*, with those living with him. It has been pointed out that that could mean sleeping on a church floor or, as so often happens in my Constituency, on the floor of a house of a distant relative. A homeless asylum seeker would have to spend a period on the streets before being accepted as someone whom the Local Authority must re-house. The present conditions for homeless people are humiliating. Clause 4 will place an additional burden on a small group of people who arrive here traumatised and who have gone through hell only to be put through further hoops, which is quite unacceptable.

The issue of confidentiality arises under the housing provisions. Paragraph 2 of schedule 1 imposes a duty on the Local Housing Authority to satisfy itself that an applicant is truly an asylum seeker, but it does not impose a concurrent duty of confidentiality. Civil servants in the asylum section will have to assist

Local Authorities, which may breach their excellent practice of confidentiality. Asylum staff at Lunar House and Quest House do not allow records to be given to, and have foiled devious attempts by, foreign embassies seeking to gain details on asylum seekers to persecute them or their families abroad. They maintain strict confidentiality, which would be breached by this provision. That is another serious concern.

I should like to deal with the loss of appeal rights under Clauses 9 and 10. Hon. Members have said that if officials at overseas posts know that an applicant has no right of appeal, it will make their attitudes harsher. In 1985, the Commission for Racial Equality, investigating the sub-continent, found in overseas posts widespread racism and contemptuous attitudes to applicants.

Clauses 9 and 10 will deprive unsuccessful applicants of the right of appeal. If the clauses are passed, a further independent inquiry must investigate whether there has been any improvement or fundamental change in those attitudes at overseas posts. If the right of appeal is to be removed, there must be a provision for representations to be made to officials in this country and by Members of Parliament to Ministers. At present, representations against a refusal at an overseas post can be made only to local officials, which obviously leads to widespread unfairness. Clause 9 deals with applications by visitors, of which almost all Labour Members have had experience through their constituents. Black and Asian people make up 4.5 per cent of the population. They are mostly younger people and they have close ties with their relations who wish to visit them. The Immigration and Nationality Department Report for 1990-91, which covered India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Ghana and Nigeria, showed that 272,870 applications for visitors visas were received, of which 42,220 were initially refused and 12,080 were subsequently granted on appeal. That meant that 28 per cent of refusals were

wrongly decided and later overturned. That 28 per cent will now have no opportunity of having their case reconsidered. I have found from my constituents' cases that there seems to be no rhyme or reason to many of the refusals. There is no logic to who is allowed to enter.

Mr Bernie Grant (Tottenham): Does my Hon. Friend agree that immigration officers deal with cases so badly that perhaps we should have an immigration complaints authority, like the Police Complaints Authority, whereby people could take up complaints against immigration officers? There is no procedure by which Members of Parliament and others can take up such matters with the Home Office.

Ms Gordon: I thank my Hon. Friend for that intervention. He has made a good suggestion. There is no quality control. Whether one gets one's permit to come here for a holiday seems to depend on what the official had for breakfast. Grandmothers and parents are humiliated and heartbroken when the grandparents want to come to see a new grandchild and are refused admittance or when they want to travel for similar reasons that would apply to us — to visit relatives, to go to family occasions, and so on. They must go through unpleasant procedures. A constituent...

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): *Order*. I am sorry to interrupt the Hon. Lady. The 10-minute limit is a cruel one.

Ms Gordon: May I have half a minute to wind up?

Madam Deputy Speaker: No. I am so sorry. (7.19pm)

Ms Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): The Minister has said that the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill is not the place to accept new clauses on sexual offences. On the contrary, I believe that it is a good opportunity to amend the law. New Clause 93 concerns the definition of rape. Until now, legislation has excluded many horrific assaults which are technically not rape but which are experienced as rape by the victims. The Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 1976 defines in statute the offence of rape as unlawful sexual intercourse with a woman who did not consent.

The first point of new Clause 93 is about rape in marriage, where legislation is long overdue. Secondly, it would extend the definition of rape to cover rape attacks on men and boys and, thirdly, it includes as rape non-consensual buggery and some of the offences which are now known as indecent assault which carry a lesser penalty.

The effect of the word 'unlawful' in the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act was to make husbands immune from the charge of raping their wives. The implication of it was that some rape, such as that within marriage, was lawful and many husbands took that right. Even those who did not take that right knew that they had it.

As my Hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr Gerrard) said, in March 1991, after years of protest by women and women's organisations, the Appeal Court declared:

"a rapist remains a rapist subject to the criminal law irrespective of any relationship."

In 1991, the Law Lords said:

"in modern times the supposed marital exception in rape forms no part of the law of England."

That decision is being appealed against in the European Court and therefore it is vital that Parliament, which has never taken a stand in supporting the right of wives to say no to

their husbands, takes a stand now.

Parliament has done nothing, despite the fact that a Women Against Rape survey showed that rape in marriage is the most common rape of all and that one in seven married women have been raped by their husbands. In considering what the Law Lords have done, the Law Commission has said that rape in marriage should be made a crime on exactly the same basis as any other rape and that that should be achieved by deleting from the 1976 Act the word 'unlawful'. By adopting new Clause 93, I believe that Parliament should delete that word today.

On the basis of my case work, I feel strongly that Parliament should ensure that immigrant wives are no longer forced to submit to rape as a condition of their right to stay in Britain. I have known of several women who have fled brutal rapist husbands and then been faced with deportation orders because they were no longer living with the rapist. That must be put right. Women should be given legal help to fight their cases and financial help to enable them to escape from rapist husbands.

As it is so late in the day I shall try to be as brief as possible. But I must say that it is absurd that in 1994 British law still does not recognise the rape of men and boys. It is clear that the distinction between buggery that is really consensual anal sex and buggery that is really rape must be clarified in law. That legal distinction is long overdue, both for women and for men. Consensual sex of whatever nature is not the business of the law but it is the law's job to protect women, men and children from anal rape.

Men and boys, like women and girls, are raped by strangers, by members of their families, by their partners in gay relationships, by casual acquaintances or dates and, especially when they are young, by men in positions of power and authority over them. Male rape is especially common in prison. It is time that the law addressed that problem, which could easily be done

by changing the word in the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act from 'she' to 'person'.

My last argument is that the law must cover other forms of rape. The present definition of rape is confined to what is commonly known as 'sexual intercourse'. That definition artificially excludes many assaults that women experience and suffer as rape, such as forced oral or anal intercourse. Unfortunately, many children are sexually abused by means of forced oral intercourse.

Also excluded is the use of objects such as bottles, broom handles, knives and men's hands. There was a famous case involving a Queen's Guardsman, Thomas Holdsworth, who was freed by the court on the grounds that a gaol sentence would ruin his Army career. In legal terms he had not raped the woman involved, although he had used his fist, full of rings, which tore her internally.

The distinction made by the law and by many men between penile penetration and other sexual assault has nothing to do with the trauma that women suffer, or with women's perceptions. As the law stands, extremely violent and serious assaults are categorised only as indecent assault and thus receive a far lesser penalty. The maximum sentence for indecent assault is 10 years, whereas for rape the maximum is life. The new criminal compensation scheme gives compensation of £3,000 for indecent assault but gives £7,500 for rape.

The present legal definition of the offence of rape is outdated and indefensible and creates gross miscarriages of justice. There can be no excuse for Parliament's perpetuating that situation for one more day. (1.19am)

Ms Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): May I say how tragic it is that my Constituency, many of whose residents bore the brunt of bombing during the War and many of whom are of Irish descent, should have been the target of this evil act of terrorism? I had intended to raise only matters connected with my constituents but the Prime Minister's statement has raised two worrying questions in my mind. First, if the leadership of Sinn Fein is undermined, with whom will the Government negotiate? Secondly, has the Prime Minister taken sufficient note of the strong criticism made by the Prime Minister of Ireland of the electoral proposals?

To return to my constituents, I thank the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and all those who have expressed their sympathy with the victims and who sent their congratulations to the emergency services on the speedy and efficient way in which they responded. I must also express my admiration for the council workers who have worked night and day to board up apartments whose windows were blown out, to make them wind and weather-proof. I do not know whether the Prime Minister is aware that, in addition to the devastation in Marsh Wall, about 1,000 windows have been blown out in the Barkantine Estate, which has four tower blocks, which will cost hundreds of thousands of pounds to repair. At this very moment, surveyors are examining the worst-hit tower block — Top Mast Point — to find out whether there is structural damage. If there is, it will cost many millions. Will Government money be forthcoming to help Tower Hamlets council to do the repairs and clearing-up? We want that question answered. We also want to know who will pay for the repairs to the Docklands Light Railway. There was traffic chaos today and the railway must be repaired speedily. I know that the privatisation process has begun.

Finally, is the Prime Minister aware that there

has been some talk today of a fund being set up to help victims and their relatives and householders whose house contents have been damaged by the blast and who are not covered by insurance? If such a fund was set up, would we have Government assistance in publicising it?