

## Poverty and Social Exclusion 1: The 'New Right'

It might be argued that England [and later, Britain] has had a fixation with distinguishing between the deserving and undeserving poor that goes back to the Elizabethan Poor Law of 1601. This exhibits itself as a fear of giving charity to the undeserving, since it might be seen as an encouragement to idleness and waste.

An example of this approach is that of **Charles Murray**. Murray is an American New Right theorist who identified the emergence of an 'underclass' [a group outside the mainstream class system, and with attitudes and values separate from it]:

*"When I use the term underclass I am indeed focusing on a certain type of poor person defined not by his condition, e.g. long term unemployed, but by his deplorable behaviour in response to that condition, e.g. unwilling to take the jobs that are available to him."*

[Murray, 'Underclass', Sunday Times 1989]

Only a minority will act in this way, but ultimately their behaviour will influence others. His evidence is based on:

- **Illegitimacy rates** [illegitimate children will run wild.]
- **Rising crime** – leading to fear and fragmentation
- **Unemployment:** *"When large numbers of young men don't work, the communities around them break down"*

By 1993, Murray's vision was even bleaker; he considered two scenarios for family life in Britain:

1. Increasing breakdown of family life, and greater dysfunctionality.
2. A distinction between '**New Victorian**' attitudes, particularly amongst the more affluent: monogamy, respectability etc, and those of '**The New Rabble**', with increasing segregation between the two. "New Victorian" attitudes [for which he could find no actual evidence] would only percolate down with a change in social policy:

- End the tax disincentives to marriage; married couples in need should get at least as much benefit as couples living apart.
- Return the benefits system to the *status quo ante* of 1960, by "eliminating benefits to single unmarried women altogether", and forcing women to marry, avoid pregnancies outside marriage, or face drastic economic consequences:

*"... the welfare of society requires that women actively avoid getting pregnant if they have no husband, and that women once again demand marriage from a man who would have them bear a child ... It is horribly sexist, I know. It also happens to be true."*