

**Child Poverty  
Action Group**

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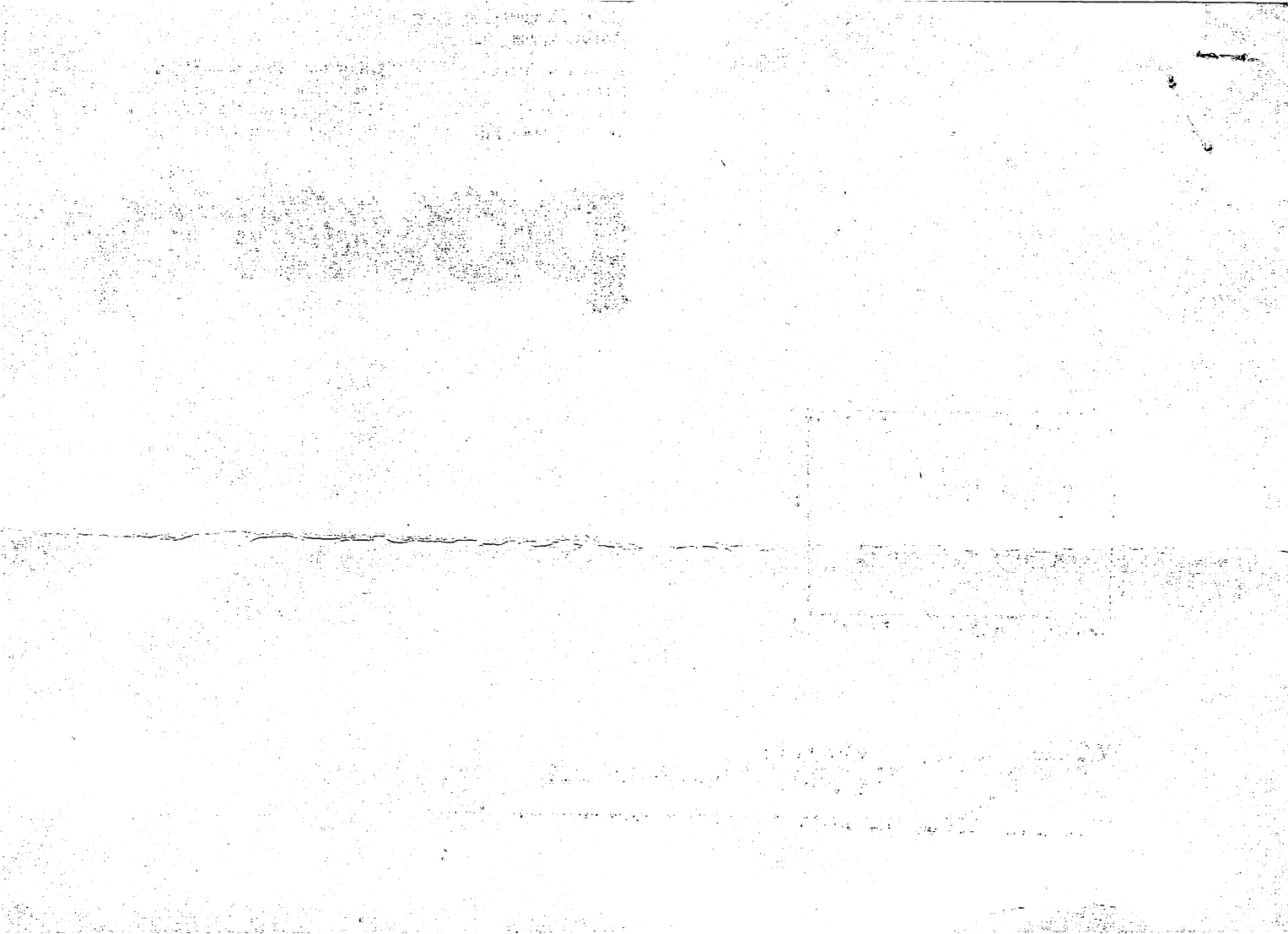
# poverty

P R E S S

R E L E A S E

FOR RELEASE: Midnight  
TUESDAY, 10th FEBRUARY, 1970.

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LARGE FAMILIES IN LONDON (a study of 86 families) by  
Hilary Land, Dept. of Social Administration, London School of  
Economics and Political Science.

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Published by G. Bell & Sons Limited, York House, Portugal Street  
London, W.C.2.

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Occasional Papers on Social Administration Number 32.  
Price 35s.

Large Families in London (a study of 38 families) by  
Missy Lane, Dept. of Social Administration, London School of  
Economics and Political Science.

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Published by G. Bell & Sons Limited, York House, Portico Street  
London, W.C.2.

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Occasional Papers on Social Administration Number 32.  
Price 35s.

In a joint letter to the Prime Minister, Hilary Land, the author of the most detailed study yet published on large families in Britain, and the Director of the Child Poverty Action Group, Frank Field, draw attention to the widespread poverty to be found among this group, and call for action to help them in this year's Budget.

The letter draws extensively on the research findings in Hilary Land's book, Large Families in London, which is published today.

The book's main finding - that the crucial elements in a family's standard of living are the father's basic wage or salary and family allowances - reinforces the present campaign to get family allowances substantially increased in this year's Budget.

The book shows that one in four of the families interviewed had incomes below the official poverty line. Well over half of these were totally dependent on state benefits but their incomes were kept below the subsistence level by the operation of the wage-stop. This is a rule which prevents people being financially better off on supplementary benefit than when they were at work. The remaining families below the poverty line had father in work.

Hilary Land's research shows that the health of the father was a major determinant of whether a family lived below subsistence level. 4 out of 5 families in the sample had fathers at work but over a third of these had a basic wage which was below the level laid down by the Supplementary Benefits Commission as the official poverty line. Whether these families' incomes were raised above this level depended on whether the father could work overtime or the mother find a part- or even full-time job. Nearly a third of the fathers worked over 50 hours a week and a sixth over 60 hours a week. Overtime amounted to between a quarter and a half of total household income for nearly 1 in 8 of the families and over half in the case of two families.

Almost a quarter of the mothers had jobs and nearly half of these were full-time. And one family was so poor that the mother worked on a night shift and looked after her husband and the children during the day.

Hilary Land's study also provides a moving picture of what poverty means to many families in today's welfare state.

In the first place, the family has a very restricted diet; a number of them existed almost exclusively on bread and potatoes. Two families ate each week 100 pounds of potatoes together with more than twenty

large loaves. Nearly half the sampled families seldom purchased fruit and it was found that milk consumption fell as income declined. And for the very poor, a third of their milk consumption came from welfare and school milk. It is therefore disturbing that the Government has seen fit to withdraw free school milk from secondary school children.

Another effect of low income was a heavy reliance on second-hand clothing from jumble sales, gifts from friends and the welfare organisations. Nearly 1 in 8 of the mothers had not had a new coat or dress since their marriage.

During the winter, many families could not properly heat their homes and Hilary Land found examples where the whole household went to bed in the early evening in order to keep warm. Others did not have adequate bedding and the use of coats was mentioned as one way of trying to keep the children warm in bed. One enterprising mum had unpicked old coats and sewed them into blankets.

Contrary to popular myths about the poor, Hilary Land's research showed that the poor spent less than the average household on cigarettes and tobacco. Fewer gambled and those that did were dependent upon their winnings to pay electricity bills and buy new shoes for the children.

As one would expect, most of the families had substandard housing. Not only did many families end up in deficient council or private housing, but three quarters of all council tenants, all but two private tenants and a quarter of the owner-occupiers were overcrowded.

For most families, the asking for assistance involved them in a considerable loss of pride and self-respect, and consequently many refused to claim free school dinners or the host of other means-tested welfare benefits. But others did not know of their existence and Frank Field, in a statement issued today, called for a huge publicity drive which would dispel much of the secrecy surrounding these benefits and thereby ensure help reached those who need it.

One of the most critical sections of Hilary Land's book concerned the family planning advice these families had received. Two-thirds of the parents in the study had attempted to limit their families. However, the family planning advice and assistance some of them had received had not been sufficient or of the right kind to enable half of those who attempted to limit their fertility to do so successfully. Most of those who had failed had attempted birth control before having a large family.