

# Exit Photography Group

## SURVIVAL PROGRAMMES



For the first time in Spain, this exhibition presents, in full, *Survival Programmes: In Britain's Inner Cities*, the emblematic work by the Exit Photography Group—Nicholas Battye, Chris Steele-Perkins and Paul Trevor. Carried out between 1974 and 1979, this work documents the impoverishment of the working classes in seven of the United Kingdom's inner cities.

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[LA VIRREINA]  
CENTRE  
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Ajuntament de  
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The exhibition *Survival Programmes: In Britain's Inner Cities* presents in full and for the first time in Spain the project of the same name by the Exit Photography Group, a collective made up of Nicholas Battye, Chris Steele-Perkins and Paul Trevor.

This work, which can be considered a paradigmatic example of the development of the documentary photography culture in Great Britain throughout the seventies, was done between 1974 and 1979, though it was published as a book in 1982, the same year it was shown at the Side Gallery in Newcastle.

It was initially conceived on the basis of two parallel but independent accounts: a series of photographs arranged in four parts—Growth, Promise, Welfare and Reaction—, a series of dialogues with people from the socio-economic contexts being explored and from the different cities under study.

The aim of *Survival Programmes* was to document the impoverishment of the working classes in seven of Britain's inner cities—London, Birmingham, Liverpool, Newcastle, Middlesbrough, Glasgow and Belfast—under the Labour governments of Harold Wilson and James Callaghan, leading up to what would come later, after Margaret Thatcher was made Prime Minister at the head of the Conservative Party.

*Survival Programmes* shows the widely extended view at the end of the seventies that the British political classes had lost control not only of the economy but also of the workplace and even of the streets. This 'ungovernability' of the United Kingdom, accentuated by unemployment, precarisation, the Northern Ireland conflict and racial tension, reached its peak in the so-called 'Winter of Discontent' in 1978-1979. After this, the Tories assumed the need for a government that would direct economic issues and, above all, the whole of public life. Thatcherism, with its liberalisation of business and trade, its privatisation of industry and services, its Victorian values and its defence of patriotism and individualism, then began an unstoppable process of dismantling the Social Contract that had emerged after the post-war years, taking advantage of the fact that the middle classes and the proletariat had never felt at ease with the progressive intellectualism that preceded the Iron Lady.

The work of the Exit Photography Group is also part of a network of self-organised initiatives that drove the development of a politicised documentary photographic culture in Great Britain in the course of the seventies. From the pioneering Photographer's Gallery, opened in 1971, to the Half Moon Gallery, run by Jo Spence and Terry Dennett

from 1975, one year after they founded the Photography Workshop; from the magazine *Camera*work to the Side Gallery, which began its activities in 1977, the outlook in Britain was a very lively one thanks to public funding by the Arts Council Photography Subcommittee from 1972, which favoured the institutionalisation and democratisation of a photographic culture of which *Survival Programmes: In Britain's Inner Cities* is one of its most emblematic projects.

## PREFACE TO 1982 EDITION

Exit Photography Group

Documentary photographers have traditionally been concerned with 'the human condition'. But to document a condition is not to explain it. The condition is a symptom, not a cause; more precisely, it is the outcome of a process. Therefore, in the way we present the material in this book we are as much concerned to indicate processes as to record conditions.

The book is about life in Britain's inner urban areas in the late 1970s. Our work is an attempt to communicate that experience in the form of a photographic and verbal record. The photographs are presented as a picture story in four parts and can be read independently of the text. The text is from tape recordings of people speaking from their own experience and can be understood without reference to the pictures.

The book acts as a meeting place for the personal histories recorded verbally and the social history recorded in the photographs. They develop separately, yet in parallel. This unfolding relationship of image and text is, like the experience we wish to share, complex, uneven and open to different interpretations.

Our treatment of the tape-recordings requires a few comments. We have edited the transcripts, sometimes heavily, so that they deal with the essential substance or facts of a given situation, but at the same time we have tried to retain the particular feeling and spirit of the occasion and the speakers. We do not generally attempt to reproduce people's dialects in the text because this is difficult to render phonetically and awkward to read. Repetitious phrases have largely been edited out; the *you knows* alone would have almost doubled the length of the book. Names and places are altered in a few instances to protect people's identities.

The book was intended to be the product of a six months' photographic project but in the end, with many interruptions, it took over six years to complete. The material was gathered at different times between 1974 and 1979, and edited from many thousands of photographs and over a hundred hours of recorded interviews. From the beginning we felt that the scale of the project was beyond the resources and energy of one person. Our group, which was formed in 1973, had in the course of producing an earlier book established a work method which involved sharing equally in the tasks of gathering, processing, editing and shaping our material. This type of collaboration enabled us to tackle the project and to integrate our contributions and ideas fully. Credits for individual photographs and interviews are not given since our responsibility throughout has been for the work as a whole [...].

## INTRODUCTION TO 1982 EDITION

Paul Trevor

Around four million people live in the inner city areas of the United Kingdom. They are not all poor. Indeed, it is generally forgotten that the majority of our poor and deprived do *not* live in these areas. But because of the visibility and concentration of its problems the 'inner city' became the symbolic focus of the Government's poverty programme from the late 1960s.

In May 1968 Prime Minister Harold Wilson launched the Urban Programme, aimed to direct extra resources to 'areas of serious social deprivation in a number of our cities and towns'.<sup>1</sup> These areas had common symptoms: 'a falling population; an increasing concentration of those who are poor and of low status in society; a predominantly poor housing stock and neglected environment, subjected to large scale physical change; and a virtual abandonment by economic activity and productive investment'.<sup>2</sup>

The timing of the announcement of the Urban Programme was significant. In 1968 widespread social and political disruptions were taking place in major European cities, and in America the black ghettos of Newark and Detroit were erupting in race riots. That year Enoch Powell, then Conservative MP for Wolverhampton, raised the spectre of 'rivers of blood' flowing through the British urban heartlands. Quickly race and the inner city

became major political issues. The Government sensed the need to be seen to be doing something. In response to what was regarded as a grave situation the rhetoric was impressive; but the reality was that the Urban Programme represented only one-twentieth of one per cent of public expenditure. An impression of energetic commitment was created by setting up a series of much publicized action-research programmes in inner city areas throughout Britain.<sup>3</sup> These small-scale projects operated for over ten years, giving considerable support to many self-help community groups in the areas. They assumed that a solution could largely be found in more active participation by local people and better co-ordination of social and welfare services by the local authorities.

Despite these programmes the 1970s witnessed a continuing and remorseless decline in the fortunes of the inner cities and their residents. The widespread rioting in 1981, a violence born out of frustration and neglect, was an unprecedented marker in that decline. The conditions at the time of writing give every reason to anticipate further violent disturbances. It seems fair to conclude that governments are either unwilling or unable to tackle the situation on the scale necessary. Their readiness to finance further investigations and reports increasingly appears to be a strategy to postpone any meaningful action.

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The literature on urban poverty and deprivation is vast. The origins and growth of that literature correspond with the origins and growth of industrial capitalism. In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain the Industrial Revolution revolutionized the nature of private capital. As Professor J.K. Galbraith reminds us:

*It was the wealth of the new entrepreneurs, not that of their workmen, which was everywhere celebrated. Those who owned the new factories, or the raw materials or railways or banks that served them, lived in mansions by which the century is still marked. Their workers lived in dark and noisome hovels, crowded on dirty and unpaved streets along which missionaries and social reformers ventured with a considerable sense of their own courage. And in the factories themselves the old and the very young worked from early to late for a pittance.<sup>4</sup>*

The plight of the industrial urban poor was then a new feature of British society. From that time on the literature on poverty has piled up as a succession of people have come forward with evidence of its

existence, explanations as to its causes, proposals for its elimination and warnings about its neglect.

Journalists and commentators such as Cobbett, Mearns, Engels, London, Masterman and Orwell have provided remarkable descriptive accounts of working-class life. The great economists—Smith, Ricardo, Malthus, Marx and Keynes—have advanced seminal theories and philosophies. Parliament has produced 150 years' worth of painstaking Royal Commissions of enquiry—from the Report of the Poor Law Commission of 1832-4 right up to the current Royal Commission on the Distribution of Income and Wealth (with eight reports so far).

The pioneering studies into poverty by Victorian philanthropists Charles Booth and Seebohm Rowntree spawned a host of disciples. Since then researchers and social scientists have advanced such an overwhelming array of statistical evidence, concepts, definitions, theories, analyses and explanations that the ability of the system to withstand the onslaught of their rationality is itself a subject worthy of investigation.

Photographers, too, such as Thompson, Brandt, Whiffen, Hardy and McCullin have used their talents to document vividly and with compassion the less acceptable faces of capitalism. Novelists, scholars, dramatists and diarists have also proffered their share of insight and passion.<sup>5</sup>

However, despite such persistent efforts, despite a century and a half of social reforms and the creation of the Welfare State, despite the Labour movement, poverty persists. The most recent authoritative study of the subject, *Poverty in the United Kingdom* by Peter Townsend (1979), records that by the State's definition of the poverty line (the supplementary benefit standard) there were between 15 and 17.5 million people in or on the margins of poverty—more than a quarter of the population.<sup>6</sup>

The voluminous information gathered over two hundred years is indispensable in understanding this phenomenon and explaining its persistence. From it four important conclusions can be drawn.

First, despite assumptions to the contrary, we now know that poverty cannot be explained simply in terms of an individual's personal failure or psychological inadequacy.<sup>7</sup> Townsend finds that two-thirds of all poor people are under fifteen or over sixty-five. And it is generally accepted that the current swelling of the ranks of the poor with the unemployed has not occurred because hundreds of thousands of people recently acquired personality problems.

What our poor have most in common is that they are part of the working class which is either poorest paid or inactive—the largest

groups being retired pensioners, the sick and disabled and the low paid and their dependants. Studies show that poor people are not some relatively fixed section of society. More than half the population, predominantly working class, experiences poverty or near poverty some time in their lives. As one writer observes, 'Poverty is thus not merely a problem of special groups, or of other people, but an atmosphere in which large numbers of people live their lives, and which threatens at any time to assume a more concrete presence'.<sup>8</sup>

Second, it is now understood that poverty is an inevitable result of the unequal distribution of the wealth and resources of society. Professor Townsend concludes that poverty 'has to be understood not only as an inevitable feature of severe social inequality but also as a particular consequence of actions by the rich to preserve and enhance their wealth and so deny it to others. Control of wealth and of the institutions created by that wealth [...] is therefore central to any policy designed to abolish or alleviate the condition'.<sup>9</sup>

In Britain over a quarter of all personal wealth is in the hands of the richest one per cent of the adult population and over half belongs to the top five per cent. The lower eighty per cent of the population share one-fifth of the wealth between them.<sup>10</sup> The unequal distribution of wealth is at the core of the wider structure of class inequalities in opportunity, security, income and power. The poor have the least of them all.

Third, contrary to common belief, there is no significant trend in Britain towards greater equality.<sup>11</sup> Although living standards have risen this century, this has occurred as the benefit of long-term economic growth and not through a redistribution of income.<sup>12</sup> Market forces work to distribute most to those who already have the most and least to those who have least, so there is an inherent tendency for the gap to widen. Ameliorative measures and reforms by governments are aimed only to prevent the gap from widening further.

The tax system has failed to significantly redistribute income and wealth. The progressive element in direct taxation is cancelled by the regressive element in indirect taxation.<sup>13</sup> The shifts in wealth that have occurred have not been 'vertical', between classes, but 'horizontal', within classes.<sup>14</sup>

Fourth, it is now seen more clearly that poverty is not simply an unfortunate blemish on the body of an otherwise healthy society but is very much an integral part of it. Poverty is deeply rooted in an institutional and cultural system that legitimizes class inequalities.



*Sunday afternoon, Mozart Street, Granby, Liverpool, 1975*  
© Paul Trevor



*Home-bound pensioner*, Maryhill, Glasgow, Scotland, 1975  
© Nicholas Batty



*Lunch*, Maryhill, Glasgow, Scotland, 1975  
© Chris Steele-Perkins



Garment workers, Aldgate, London, 1979  
© Paul Trevor

To eradicate it would involve altering the key institutions that control resources and values—structural changes. Mere technical and administrative adjustments will leave things much as they are.

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These conclusions are recognized by the reports of the various government-sponsored inner city studies of the 1970s. The reports show that ultimately there is no great pressure on governments to carry out fundamental change because of the political weakness of the poor. Their findings reveal the gulf that exists between the class *for* whom and the class *about* whom these reports have been prepared.

*For many, the inner area is still a place of refuge, the one area in which they might find shelter and a way of life that meets some of their requirements, however inadequately. They include some of the newcomers to the city, transients and others who do not have access immediately to council housing or those who may not wish to, or be able to conform with the more orthodox standards of society.*

*But for many others, perhaps the majority and including many long standing residents, the inner area becomes a trap. They see their housing and environment deteriorating, their choice of easily accessible jobs and economic opportunities narrowing, and the future of their area in decline. They experience social change brought about in part by the consequences of clearance and redevelopment. But they lack the opportunities or, in some cases, the desire and motivation to move away from the district to better homes, greater security, easier access to jobs. And they feel powerless to influence the course of change and the uncertain and deteriorating future of their area.<sup>15</sup>*

These reports reiterate that the deprivations of the people in the inner cities are better explained in terms of lack of opportunities rather than personal failure. By analysing the changing patterns of employment and investment in these areas, they reveal how urban problems are part of wider regional, national and even international economic processes. They conclude that the solution is not primarily to be found in the inner cities. The final report of the Coventry Community Development Project, based on the run-down neighbourhood of Hillfields between 1969 and 1975, states:

*The persistence of areas like Hillfields in a prosperous and progressive city like Coventry is a clear indication that neither economic growth*

*nor enlightened social administration, by themselves, are sufficient to eradicate urban problems [...] The spatial concentration of such problems in a small geographical area is not an isolated phenomenon, to be tackled by special remedies, nor even a small pocket left behind by the tides of industrialization and urbanization. It is the product of the very processes which have brought growth and prosperity to other areas and other interest groups [...] In other words it appears to have been advantageous to the development of other parts of Coventry for Hillfields to be underdeveloped, economically.<sup>16</sup>*

The conditions in the inner cities are not the *cause* of the poverty of its residents, but merely the *setting*, so that attempts to eradicate concentrations of deprivation by slum clearance will fail while the system that created them remains Engels observed this over a hundred years ago:

*In reality the bourgeoisie has only one method of solving the housing question after its fashion—that is to say, of solving it in such a way that the solution continually reproduces the question [...] I mean the practice which has now become general in making breaches in the working-class quarters of our big towns, and particularly in areas which are centrally situated [...] the result is everywhere the same: the scandalous alleys disappear to the accompaniment of lavish self-praise from the bourgeoisie on account of this tremendous success, but they appear again immediately somewhere else and often in the immediate neighbourhood [...] The same economic necessity which produced them in the first place, produces them in the next place also.<sup>17</sup>*

There is no immutable link between poverty and the inner cities. If these areas were to become more attractive places to live in the poor and disadvantaged would be forced to move to other undesirable areas. In some developing countries the urban poor are largely to be found in the peripheral shanty towns and not in the inner areas. This pattern may be accompanying urban renewal in towns like Glasgow and Liverpool where people have been moved from the inner to the outer areas and rehoused on vast sterile housing estates.

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The phrase ‘inner city’ was created by the mass media in the 1960s to describe old working-class urban neighbourhoods. But by focusing on the inner cities public attention has been diverted from the fact that poverty is more prevalent *outside* these places.

It is important, therefore, to see this project in context: it deals with only a small part of a much larger issue. The project is about a specific and significant historical moment. In the same way that these communities first sprang up two hundred years ago in response to the industrialization of our society and marked a new phase in its development, so their demise represents the beginning of a new stage, that of a post-industrial society.

The crisis of our inner cities is linked to changes in the economy as a whole. Within the logic of our current system, the ‘rationalization’ of industry involves hardship and deprivation for many people throughout the country, and particularly for those living in the old urban working-class areas whose industrial bases have vanished. The decay of these communities is a reflection of a widening *national* polarization that is taking place between, on the one hand, an expanding affluent professional and managerial class and, on the other, a growing dependent ‘underclass’ of unemployed, retired and disabled people. The injustice and wastefulness of this process is, today, what the ‘inner city’ symbolizes.

Ideally, the new employment patterns being created by the New Technology will in time challenge the current practice of penalizing those who are least relevant to the needs of production and labelling them ‘poor’ and ‘deprived’. It is possible that concern over democratic social values will come to dominate our post-industrial age and sharpen the conflict over the distribution of resources and power.

Just as the conditions of feudalism forced people to struggle for legal rights, and the conditions of industrial society made them demand political rights, so it appears that a post-industrial society is generating the conditions for the next struggle, for equal social and economic rights.

London, December 1981

## Notes

1. Statement by Home Secretary to the House of Commons, 22 July 1968, *Hansard*, col. 40.
2. Department of the Environment, *Liverpool Inner Area Study: Third Study Review: Issues and Policies*, HMSO, London, 1975, p.3.
3. In the decade from 1968 these programmes included the National Community Development Project; the Neighbourhood Scheme; the Urban Guideline Studies; the Inner Area Studies; the Quality of Life Studies; the Comprehensive Community Programme; the Inner City Partnerships. For an account and evaluation of these programmes see Lawless, Paul, *Urban Deprivation and Government Initiative*, Faber & Faber, London, 1979.
4. Galbraith, J. K., *The Affluent Society*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1962, p. 29.
5. For a selected bibliography see works included in *Further Reading*.
6. Townsend, Peter, *Poverty in the United Kingdom: A Study of Household Resources and Standards of Living*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1979, p. 895. Townsend finds that by the State's standard between 3.3 and 5 million are in poverty and between 11.9 and 12.6 million are on the margins of poverty (i.e. those whose net disposable income is only forty per cent above the State's standard). See Ch.7.

Only those whose weekly income is below the supplementary benefit standard, and so eligible for benefits, are officially regarded as being in poverty. The scale rates (which do not include sums for housing costs) at the beginning and end of the period covered by the interviews in *Survival Programmes* were as follows:

	December 1974		October 1978	
	Ordinary weekly rate	Long-term weekly rate	Ordinary weekly rate	Long-term weekly rate
	£			
Husband and wife	13,65	16,35	23,55	28,35
Person living alone	8,40	10,40	14,50	17,90
Non-householder aged 18 and over	6,70	8,40	11,60	14,35
Children:				
16-17		5,15		8,90
13-15		4,35		7,40
11-12		3,55		6,10
5-10		2,90		4,95
under 5		2,40		4,10

Source: DHSS

For comparison, the national average gross earnings for each worker (man or woman, eighteen and over) in Great Britain was £41.10 per week in

1974 and £78.10 in 1978 (from *New Earnings Survey*). In its evidence to the Royal Commission on the Distribution of Income and Wealth the Supplementary Benefit Commission described its benefits to the poor as 'barely adequate to meet their needs at a level that is consistent with the normal participation in the life of a relatively wealthy society in which they live'. (SBC, *Low Incomes*, HMSO, London, 1977, p.23).

For historical reasons the official poverty line is based on a 'subsistence' standard of poverty. Townsend challenges the adequacy of such a concept on the grounds that it fails to acknowledge major spheres of life in which deprivation arises. He argues that poverty should be defined in terms relative to the prevailing 'style of living' of a society. People's 'relative deprivation' involves 'the absence or inadequacy of those diets, amenities, standards, services and activities which are common or customary in society ... If they lack or are denied resources to obtain access to these conditions of life and so fulfil membership of society, they are in poverty' (p.915). This definition recognizes that new standards place new obligations and expectations on people. As Townsend puts it: 'The necessities of life are not fixed. They are continuously being adapted and augmented as changes take place in a society and its products' (p.915).

The implications of a concept of relative deprivation is that the extent of poverty is greater than officially or commonly acknowledged. Townsend finds that by the relative deprivation standard between 12.5 and 14 million people in the United Kingdom live in poverty (p.895).

7. Explanations for poverty in terms of individual failure have been decisively rejected by research projects of recent years. See, for example, the findings of the government's major research programmes in the 1970s, the Inner Area Studies and the National Community Development Project, in their reports listed in *Further Reading*. In them poverty is explained primarily in terms of the structure of society and its institutions, and the operation of social and economic forces. See also the discussion in Townsend, Peter, op.cit., Ch.2.

8. Williams, Raymond (ed.), *May Day Manifesto*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1968, p.23.

9. Townsend, Peter, op.cit., p.893.

10. Royal Commission on the Distribution of Income and Wealth, *Report No. 1: Initial Report on the Standing Reference*, Cmnd 6171, HMSO, London, 1975, table 34, p.87. See also the comments in Townsend, Peter, op.cit., pp.337-43.

11. See Atkinson, A.B., *Unequal Shares: Wealth in Britain*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1974, pp.21-4; and Westergaard, J. and Resler, H., *Class in a Capitalist Society: A Study of Contemporary Britain*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1976, pp.107-15.

12. See Westergaard, J. and Resler, H., *ibid.*, pp.34-44; and Townsend, Peter, op.cit., pp. 116-42 and 909-12.

13. Royal Commission on the Distribution of Income and Wealth, op.cit.,

para.321, pp.135-36. See also Kincaid, J. C., *Poverty and Equality in Britain: A Study of Social Security and Taxation*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1973, Ch.6; Townsend, Peter, op.cit., pp.147-50; Westergaard, J. and Resler, H., op.cit., pp.58-68.

14. Atkinson, A. B., op.cit., p.24.

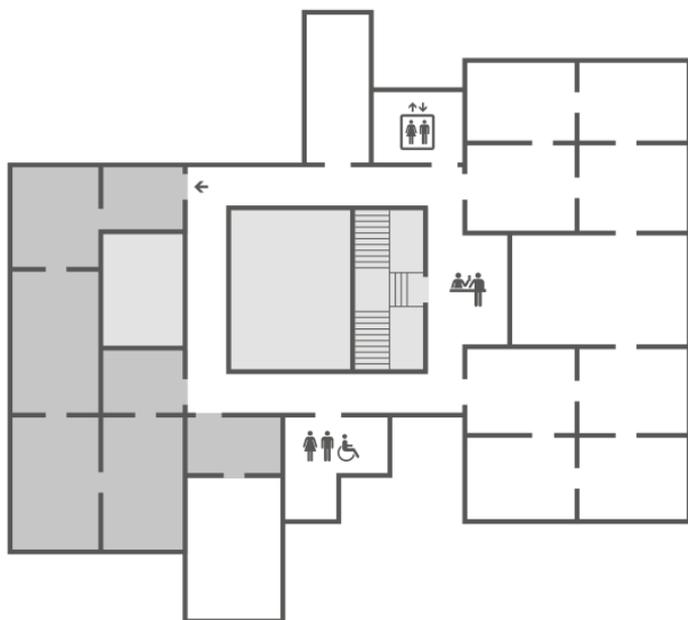
15. Department of the Environment, op.cit., p.3.

16. Coventry Community Development Project, *Final Report, Part 1, Coventry and Hillfields: Prosperity and the Persistence of Inequality*, Home Office, Coventry, 1975, pp.63-4.

17. Engels, Friedrich, *The Housing Question*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1975, pp.71-4. (First published 1872.)

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