

From The Rt. Hon. Baroness Elles



House of Lords

31st August, 1982

*Dear Prime Minister*

The attached article was written for the Portuguese C.D.S. (Christian Democrat), hence a rather strong emphasis on the Christian approach. However, there may be one or two ideas which could contribute to the discussion you have initiated on the family.

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*House of Lords · Westminster*

FAMILY POLICY

Political developments in the years following the second world war have been marked by two, among many other, significant phenomena: first, at international level, by a number of Declarations and Conventions signed and ratified by many governments across the globe and more especially by western European governments, setting out their belief in the family as the basic unit of society; and secondly at national or governmental level, by a succession of policies and legislative measures which either deliberately or inadvertently, have contributed to weakening the economic and social importance of the family as the recognised base on which to build social structures.

Without any attempt to understand why these developments have occurred, no political party can formulate policies for the future, nor is it possible to propose policies for one country absolutely identical with those of another, having regard to the differences in the existing economic and social situation and also the composition of the political parties themselves. The British Conservative Party, for instance, having a membership which, while the majority would probably agree with the tenets of Christianity, is a secular party. It is idle to pretend, for instance, that a global family policy can be put forward without at least some indication as to views on divorce, abortion, drugs, etc., modern symptoms of disruption. In the Conservative Party, supported as it is by people of many faiths, these issues are left to the conscience of each individual, so any views on these matters expressed here are the personal view of the writer.

There have been perhaps three movements or major policies in the last thirty years which have contributed to the undermining of the family: the concept of the welfare state, deliberate attempts through the so-called liberalisation on moral issues such as those mentioned above and an exploitation of human rights instruments, designed to protect the individual from state

interference



interference but used by emphasis on equality and what might be termed non-discriminatory discrimination, to isolate the individual and make him, through a false appeal to freedom, become the victim of society and of the state.

In the formulation of a policy to strengthen and enhance the family structure within society, it is therefore necessary to see whether these attempts have succeeded, how far the mass of the people have accepted and take for granted the present effects and whether, and by what means, these trends can and should be reversed. It then must be considered what specific measures can be recommended in the light of the current economic and social situation and the political realities.

Indeed, it must be asked whether it is possible to have a family policy as such? Would it entail a government department? Is there a need for some formal governmental or para-state authority to propose and implement measures designed to protect the family?

The concept of the family is of course not new. Quite the reverse. Aristotle, in his 'Politics' defined the family as being the association established by nature for the supply of man's daily needs. No definition could be more opposed to or more contrary to the concept of the welfare state with its claim to look after its citizens from the cradle to the grave. The responsibility, the autosufficiency, the mutual support within and by the members of the family is thus removed and destroyed and replaced by an ever-caring but totally interfering state and its agents and administrative authorities.

The welfare state has also provided the means whereby families have been disrupted and divided and physically separated. Babies, small children, and the elderly, formerly the sole responsibility of the family are more and more becoming institutionalised. Immediate physical needs may be met, according to the efficiency and personal abilities of the municipal or regional authorities and their employees, but with no concern for the important spiritual and affective needs of every human being.

In the name of welfare and the 'caring state', government has spread its tentacles into the daily lives of everyone in areas of life which previously were considered to be private, health, education, housing, employment, certain aspects of the economy. A basis of equality, providing the excuse to intervene in hitherto private and individual matters of personal choice, instead of maximum standards being attained for a minimum number of people who for one reason or another may be socially or physically disadvantaged, the state generally achieves the minimum



standard for the maximum number, so that the disadvantaged remain so, and those who were able to exert their own freedom of choice have that choice more and more restricted until it gradually disappears.

The provision of a national health service to the exclusion of any other service, the politicisation of the administrative side of the service in fact means control over the natural feelings and ethics of our citizens, which dictate standards of relationships between people. To take three very simple examples, the administration of a hospital may operate in such a way that men and women are forceably put in the same ward; or that girls having abortions have been placed in maternity wards; or the provision of free family planning services and equipment, for all, regardless of age. These examples show the de-humanising, de-personalising effects of such policies, as well as the practical effects of a health service run by a people determined to destroy the basis of family life.

The basic concept of the overall welfare state seeks to destroy the mutual responsibility and affection on which relationships within a family are based. The setting up of institutions in which to put the elderly no longer wanted in their own home or with no one willing to care for them - and, furthermore, without the essential element of public opinion pressurising them so to do, removes from successive generations the task and obligation to serve others and to learn from others. Western society perhaps alone among the world's peoples has failed to retain the respect for their elders which is an inherent part of cultures and traditions of other civilisations.

The second factor, the systematic erosion of moral standards previously supported by protective legislation has been the hall-mark of socialist or 'coalition with socialist' governments in the last twenty years. This evolution has been achieved by politically-motivated social engineering, by the chloroform of the mass media, by the deceptive use of well worn political terminology - democracy, freedom - to take two obvious terms - or the attainment of social justice - but which are used to achieve totally diametrically opposed and divergent objectives.

The difference in our objectives is fundamental to our political concepts. In our democratic parties - Christian Democrat, Conservative, we all share a profound belief in the Christian values of the dignity of the human being, the respect due to him as an individual and only by ensuring observance by states of this respect, can we guarantee the freedom of the individual. The permissive legislation in relation to easier divorce, free

abortions,



abortions, homosexuality, distribution of pornographic literature, availability of drugs, sex education encouraging promiscuity among the young - all these have been introduced in western states, regrettably often with the tacit, if not vocal, approval of members of our parties. What has been termed the acquiring of freedom has in fact been erosion of standards by license with all the disruptive consequences to family life.

The third element has been the growth of what might be termed the 'human rights industry', a devaluation of the high principles expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the binding articles of the United Nations Charter. The demand for equality, regardless of justice, and the removal of discrimination, even where the competing factors are totally different have served once again to reduce people to the lowest common factor. As, again, Aristotle put it, equality among the unequal is as unjust as inequality among the equal. So many of us have been foolishly led into accepting that discrimination is a fundamental evil, whereas it is evil only in the context of certain aspects of civic, cultural economic and social measures. To take an obvious example, no one considers it discrimination if minors or lunatics do not have the right to vote in elections. The writer should add that the same discrimination applies to members of the British House of Lords, but there has been no vocal protest.

The fundamental issue depends on our concept of the role of the state which in our view is to protect and guarantee the rights of the individual and we can only ensure that the state does not impinge on our freedoms by taking measures which protect the family. From this belief flow all the political consequences which we have to consider in relation to the family.

In the last decades, there has been increasing interference by the state in the economic, social and cultural activities of individuals and increasing encroachment by the public authorities in the day-to-day lives of the people, to the extent that local and municipal authorities, set up originally to serve the local needs of the people, become mere agencies of the central authority. The effects of this encroachment are to deny to the people the opportunity to develop their full potential under the law.

The spearhead of attack has been to the heart of the family. This is not surprising for the greatest enemy of state collectivism is the family. The family, being recognised for centuries as the most close knit and most enduring of social groups, based on private relations between man and wife, parents and children, is the negation of state control. The family thus becomes the greatest obstacle to socialism.

It is for this



It is for this reason that the writer does not see the elaboration of a family policy as such to be implemented by one ministerial authority, but there is an urgent need for a multifaceted approach to all the areas of governmental responsibility which impinge on the decisions of individuals in the economic, social, cultural, civil, political sectors, so ruthlessly affecting family life.

Our belief in the dignity and respect for the worth of the human being provides the basis for our policies, which must give opportunities to all for the development to the maximum of their full potential and their ability, in contrast to the egalitarian society reduced to minimum terms.

In the field of education, parents must be able to have the maximum choice in the kind of school suitable for their child, according to his ability and aptitude. The concept of large schools with large, impersonal classes should be replaced, wherever possible, with the smaller, local school, where personal contact between parents and teachers can be more easily maintained. Parents should have more say in the education of their children than they have in recent years, in regard to choice of curriculum.

To have a home of one's own is a prerequisite for all families. Pope Leo XIII in his encyclical Rerum Novarum has said that 'every man has by nature the right to possess property as his own. This is one of the chief points of distinction between man and the animal creation..' What was true in 1890 is still true in 1980. The desirable objective of home ownership needs practical measures to support its attainment, not only in the provision of houses and encouragement to the building industry, but also mortgage schemes to enable, particularly young newly married couples to set up their home. Urban planning must also take into account the need to provide homes for families, not just units of accommodation, such as many of the high-rise blocks with their monolithical and uniform structures. Too little notice has been paid to the soul-destroying effects of unimaginative and depressing architectural form of recent years, frequently the indirect cause of poverty and ill-health, which contribute to the destruction of the family in modern society. We must therefore take special care to see that living conditions and accommodation are designed to contribute to sustaining healthy family life.

Health and welfare



Health and welfare can be considerably improved by information, by co-operation between families and the health authorities. For example, there are a great number of accidents in the home which disable and cause suffering to children, a recent survey showing that 25% of all accidents at home are suffered by children aged 0-4 years old, and 19% to children of 5-14 years old. These statistics would imply that investigation is needed into the particular causes and measures proposed to reduce these accidents.

In fiscal policies, there should be schemes enabling automatic support to families within lower income groups, with a minimum of bureaucratic control. Sophisticated tax provisions make it extremely difficult to make sensible recommendations without dismantling the whole tax system. Raising the threshold at which payment of tax begins to a level where no state social benefits would be necessary is unlikely to be implemented as long as public expenditure and inflation make incessant demands on the taxpayer. The objective must be to ensure economic security for the family.

Attention must be paid to the financial protection of the wife who stays at home to look after her children. Pressures which forced many married women to go out to work should be resisted. A woman must be able to be free to stay at home to look after her children. This task needs to be enhanced in the eyes of society. It never has had great consideration, politically, maybe because it could not be estimated in financial terms. The question of employment for married women is a major subject on its own, but it is worth suggesting here that when a woman returns to work or enters employment for the first time after staying at home to look after a young family, employers should be made aware that those five or six years are not 'wasted' years in the life of the individual concerned. On the contrary, years of psychological and practical development may well outweigh the experience acquired by a man sitting at the same desk doing the same work over the same period of years. What a woman learns in patience, tolerance and understanding as well as practical matters such as health, home economics etc., can be of great use and value in any organisation. Similarly the time a woman spends at home to look after her child or children should be taken into account when calculating her pension rights.

If the role of



If the role of the family is to be strengthened the position of women needs correspondingly to be enhanced. The maintenance and support of family life depends on the real progress made by women in society. Much has been done in recent years to improve the position of women in relation to matrimonial property, but in tax law, the wife's income (except in certain circumstances in the case of earned income) is still taxed with that of her husband and he is in law responsible for payment of the tax. This should be changed. Further, if there is a real desire to keep the members of the family together it should be made easier for families to keep their dependents with them at home by tax remissions more in line with the cost of living. In many countries, it would be inconceivable to send elderly relations to homes or institutions, but unfortunately this happens only too frequently where high taxation and the development of what might be termed 'convenience' politics are evident.

These are only indications of areas which directly affect the family as a whole and which also impinge upon the individual.

The vast majority of young people in Britain still want to marry and have a family, despite the strident voices of a vociferous minority. It is for politicians to create and ensure conditions which make it possible for the realisation of policies which strengthen family life and which contribute to the happiness and security of family life.

Government should interfere as little as possible in the lives of the citizen, but where they do have to intervene by legislation or administrative act, there must be a means to assess the effects of such measures on family life. No satisfactory way of handling this assessment has been found. A Ministry for family affairs acting on its own cannot have the necessary authority to intervene in the decisions of other government departments. It may be that a high-ranking minister is given the authority to supervise and consider any draft measures as they may affect family life. Removal or repeal of some existing legislation would be a hopeful initial step. In supporting the role of the family, we are strengthening the whole fabric of our western society. If we fail to do this, society as a whole will suffer.

1st October, 1979

Diana Elles