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End Pay without Work to help the underclass, says John Bird, *Big Issue* founder in Politeia's Christmas Address

Nothing Condemns the underclass more to the ghetto than the disastrous consequences of social security handouts and the muddled approach of the middle classes and the state's armies of social engineers.

These, says John Bird founder of *The Big Issue* and author of Politeia's forthcoming Christmas Address *I'm on dependency –get me out of here* must be tackled if we are to confront one of the greatest social and political problems of the day – the explosion of the underclass, a class, Bird says 'virtually outside of society' and 'ruinous for us all'. Its maintenance costs big money, filling up as it does prisons, hospitals and medical services and making failing schools unmanageable.

In particular, the payment of benefit without work set off the trend in the 1970s for people living without the dignity of work in return for a paltry handout. Instead of its becoming a means of tiding them over, it became a shackle tying them down For the first time, Bird says

'Legally, people who were able bodied, who could work were allowed to carry on without purpose. With this one gesture we stole their birthright....to struggle and provide for themselves and their offspring. With this one act of support we took from them meaning and purposes...the only chance...of moving up and beyond...their early circumstances'

The middle classes too must bear the blame. By their attitudes they 'celebrate' or ape underclass behaviour – in dress, manner and TV programmes. But whereas they can move on and 'earn big money' the people they imitate can only watch from outside. 'There are few belly laughs down below'. The state too makes things worse Government and civil servants, professional social engineers created the dependency. But the social experiment of the welfare state has gone wrong

'The social engineers' commitment to a false sense of social justice meant people did not have to work for a living...The social engineers' commitment to social justice did not involve real people. It saw people in terms of class....as statistics, not living breathing human being, who needed meaning and purpose, not just relief...'

What must be done? Bird's proposes that.

Benefit should only be given in return for work and the able-bodied under class must return to work. Schooling too should play a part and the public schools, instead of being attacked, should be used to do for the underclass what they do for the middle classes. Above all, says Bird

'We need to re-think the welfare state and its vast social engineering project where the culture of handouts without work is part of the larger problem of policy and attitude'

I'm on dependency –get me out of here is available from Politeia, 22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QP

