

## **THE POOR LAWS: A COMPARISON OF THREE ORIGINAL REFORM PROPOSALS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Attitudes towards the problem of the poor and the Poor Laws in England are examined with a reading of three original pamphlets written from the 1700s to the 1900s. Each pamphlet proposes a sincere solution to poverty. While all three of these reformers had great regard for the impoverished and agreed on the need to overhaul the Poor Laws, each had policy preferences. The first two reformers were ultimately trying to coerce the behavior of the able-bodied poor through individual responsibility and industry. The final reformer focused on the prevention of poverty with redistribution of wealth as a major vehicle to this end. Almost three hundred years after the first pamphlet was written, policy makers and advocates of the poor are still debating how to solve the problem of poverty.

## I. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

*“You will always have the poor among you.” —John 12:8*

Prior to the start of mercantilism, most of Great Britain lived under feudalism. This agrarian economic system was based on regional self-containment and overseen by the paternalistic Lords. Traditionally it was the Lord’s obligation to take care of his fief, including his serfs; however, there was considerable variation from Lord to Lord. Despite the occasional fraternities that promised modest aid to participants suffering a calamity, the feudal system kept the majority of the people living at subsistence level with scant, local charity when calamity or illness struck (Richardson, 2005).

Feudalism began to wane during the seventeenth century as Great Britain evolved into an urban, mercantilist economy. Mercantilism shifted the focus from regional agricultural production to intense market production with an emphasis on national output. Consequently, the central government took on a larger role in establishing economic security, which manifested itself in an obsession with a positive foreign trade balance (Mencher, 1967). This fixation stemmed from the mercantilist conviction that international trade was zero-sum. To stay competitive, mercantilists believed in keeping wages low not only to support low export prices but also to dampen domestic consumption leaving more goods to export. Like feudalism, this new mercantilist system kept the majority of the people at a subsistence level.

The evolution from subsistence agriculture to greater market production did not eliminate the poor but merely replaced the medieval serf with a new type of poor, known as the laboring poor. The laboring poor were often divided into three subgroups. Many referred to the first class of poor as the impotent poor, which suffered from chronic illness or old age and needed broad outside care. The second group was the able-bodied poor who were impoverished from unemployment and needed temporary relief. Finally, there were the vagrants or beggars who were perceived as capable of working but refusing to do so. Members of the “undeserving poor” were occasionally sent to houses of correction for punishment (Higginbotham, 2011).

The state of the laboring poor worsened in the increasingly national and disconnected economy. A minor illness or tragedy could ruin a family dependent on a wage earner living paycheck to paycheck. This rising pressure prompted the central government to pass the *Poor Law Act of 1601*, which compelled local governments to collect a property tax to pay for the provision and care of local poor. Unlike modern property taxes, this property tax was largely paid by the tenant and not the owner of the property (Higginbotham, 2011). Contemporary literature refers to this tax as the “poor rate.”

The *Poor Law Act of 1601* represented a marked departure from individual charity to a centralized aid system based on taxation and redistribution (Cowherd, 1960). Over the next three and a half centuries the taxes and expenditures on the Poor Laws surged, causing a series of amendments collectively referred to as the *Poor Laws*. Many scholars divide the *Poor Laws* into two subsets: the “old” that originated with the *1601 Act* and the “new” that began with the *Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834* (Boyer, 2010).

In general, the old *Poor Laws* permitted greater local control and decision making in their application. Each parish overseer could choose a combination of “outdoor relief,” i.e. food and wage subsidies, and “indoor relief,” i.e. parish poor houses (Persky, 1997). In an overall effort to manage the poor’s whereabouts, the law established vagrancy laws with prison sentences and even the possibility of death for “sturdy vagabonds” (Persky, 1997).

Variations between parish relief programs caused a concentration of the impoverished in more generous parishes. An unofficial open and closed parish system developed. In a closed parish, one or two affluent leaders would prevent settlement of the laboring poor in order to avoid the responsibility of aid. Closed parishes could then selectively use the poor from neighboring parishes for necessary labor (Song, 2002). Consequently, legislation such as the *Settlement Act of 1662* attempted to tie relief to residents confirmed through birth, marriage or long-term work in an effort to prevent the disparity created by closed parishes.

Those found in the wrong parish could be forcibly removed (Bloy, 2006). Of course, measures such as these contributed to serious labor mobility problems.

In 1722, *Knatchbull's Act* (aka, The Workhouse Test Act) was passed to establish both public and private workhouses to employ the poor. In an effort to discourage free riding, the act sought to make the workhouse exceedingly unattractive, while simultaneously legislating the ability to deny any assistance to those unwilling to enter a workhouse (Cowherd, 1960). To comply with the act, many smaller parishes consolidated and others used private subcontractors. However, the workhouses proved to be severely inefficient for many reasons, not the least of which was the legal requirement that workhouses take the impotent and children along with the able-bodied poor (Cowherd, 1960).

By the early 1800s, mercantilism was being supplanted by a *laissez-faire* philosophy that proclaimed a new attitude towards the poor. The system described above was at the time aiding 11 percent of the population (Persky, 1997). However, popular opinion highlighted its ineffectiveness with increasing cost and still rising pauperism (Edsall, 1971). Popular opinion increasingly rejected the mercantilist view that many of the poor were victims of circumstances and instead embraced the *laissez-faire* belief that the majority of the poor should be accountable for their actions. As such, state aid only discouraged work. The mainstream no longer saw their Christian duty as relieving the poor through charity. Rather, they felt obligated to foster responsibility and industry through sharp reform of the “generous” system. As a result a Royal Commission was initiated in 1832 to investigate and put forth recommendations for reform (Boyer, 2010).

To characterize the Royal Commission of 1832 as biased is an understatement. The commission's unstated purpose was to prove that the current system did not incentivize the poor to better themselves. Their report repeatedly used words like “idleness” and “profligacy,” highlighting their contempt for the undeserving poor (Edsall, 1971). The commission quickly reported that the current *Poor Laws* encouraged laziness and fraud and promoted immorality when it gave aid to bastard children. One major recommendation of the commission was a time limit for relief, ostensibly in response to employers who took advantage of the system by keeping wages artificially low so that the laboring poor would remain eligible for relief (de Pennington, 2011). The commission also strongly recommended more centralized administration and even less desirable conditions in workhouses. In short, the commission proposed strengthening the tie of relief for able-bodied men to employment in the deplorable workhouses (Edsall, 1971).

While the commission's recommendations were not adopted in entirety, they did help to shape the *Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834*. The most important aspects of this act were the creation of a more centralized system of aid, the grouping of parishes into Poor Law Unions, and the new restriction that relief would solely come from workhouses. The most contentious part was the “bastardy clause,” which freed fathers from an obligation to their illegitimate children, thus placing the whole responsibility on the mother. The intention of the clause was to discourage women from having children out of wedlock. However, the bastardy clause was met with public outrage and shortly overturned (Higginbotham, 2011).

In time, workhouses became even more deplorable and unhygienic. Over the next century, as the mainstream witnessed the cruel stigmatization of the poor and severe injustices done to them, the pendulum swung again towards improving the conditions of the poor. As a result, a new Royal Commission was initiated in 1905 (Higginbotham, 2011). The final report of this Royal Commission was not as cohesive as its predecessor a century earlier. In fact, it produced a majority report, as well as a minority report. While the majority report focused on amending the current system, the minority report called for a complete overhaul from poor relief to poverty prevention. The commission's most lasting legacy was its influence on setting the stage for the coming welfare state in 1948 (Boyer, 2010).

## II. SELECTION OF ORIGINAL PAMPHLETS

Attitudes towards the problem of the poor and the Poor Laws are examined using primary historical sources, specifically three original pamphlets written from the 1700s to the 1900s. These pamphlets are all a part of the library at the London School of Economics (LSE), which holds 90,000 original pamphlets “published and written by pressure groups, political parties, and individual campaigners” (“Pamphlet Collection”). While there is not room to examine every pamphlet written on the Poor Laws, these three pamphlets reflect the sentiment toward the poor from three different time periods by individuals who were compelled enough to move beyond reflective observation and offer a thorough plan.

The first pamphlet, by the famous author Daniel Defoe, is the oldest pamphlets of the trio. It was written in 1713, which is approximately halfway between the birth of the old Poor Laws in 1601 and the *Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834* that signaled the new Poor Law era. Thus, it was written after enough time for the repercussions of the old Poor Laws to be felt and thoroughly inspire an alternative plan. The second pamphlet, by Professor Robert J. Morrison, was written in 1842, ostensibly in response to the *Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834*. Driven by strong religious conviction, Morrison believed he could offer a more utopian workhouse. The final pamphlet, by Beatrice Webb, was written in 1912, which is almost two hundred years after Defoe’s. Its timing is also approximately half way between the start of the new Poor Law era and its replacement, known as the Welfare State. Written by one of the founders of the prestigious London School of Economics, this piece significantly moves from the Poor Law’s strategy of containment to a comprehensive welfare plan.

## III. REVIEW OF ORIGINAL PAMPHLETS

### A. "PROPOSALS FOR EMPLOYING THE POOR IN AND ABOUT THE CITY OF LONDON WITHOUT ANY CHARGE TO THE PUBLICK" BY DANIEL DEFOE, PUBLISHED IN 1713

Daniel Defoe was an English writer at the turn of the eighteenth century most famous for his novel, *Robinson Crusoe*. He also founded one of the first economic and political journals, *Review of the Affairs of France and of All Europe*. Defoe moved beyond mere political and economic commentary on the problem of the poor and devised a plan to solve the problem in his pamphlet entitled "*Proposals for employing the poor in and about the city of London without any charge to the publick.*"

Defoe’s pamphlet was written a little more than a century after the initial *Poor Law Act of 1601*. He begins his pamphlet by reviewing established fact: the poor fill our streets begging and their numbers increase daily. While he believes it is Christian duty to take care of proper objects of charity like the sick and old, it is his contention that the rest of the poor have become a public grievance. He observes that they willingly tell lies about misfortune and feign illness to receive relief. He even argues that many have plenty at home, yet still seek aid, which confirms their lack of fear of God.

Defoe declares that such “injudicious management and indulgence” is costing the nation more and more. He cites as evidence the growth of the annual cost of the poor from £30,000 to £100,000. He argues that such an expense is just a temporary fix and does nothing to alleviate the long-term circumstances of the poor. He questions if it would be smarter to spend this large sum on materials and tools to “set the poor to work.” His conclusion reflects a very mercantilist attitude: set the poor to work and then use Britain’s large shipping industry to sell the fruits of the poor abroad.

Before Defoe meticulously details his proposal, he addresses a few potential objections. First, Defoe recognizes that those currently in trade jobs may be concerned with increased competition for their jobs if the poor are set to work. His solution is to choose an industry presently neglected: fishery manufacturing. According to Defoe, choosing this industry will also help the United Kingdom to compete with the Dutch who dominate fishing.

Next Defoe deals with the objection he fears most likely to hinder his proposal. Defoe realizes that without the help of the gentry his proposal will never be considered. He acknowledges that the gentry and farmers may be concerned with his plan reducing the price of labor and consequently, rents from land. To overcome such an obstacle, Defoe cleverly reasons that the new income of the poor will essentially increase demand for all goods thus raising prices and profits, including land.

Finally, Defoe addresses the objection that workhouses already exist, thus making his proposal redundant. He pacifies this objection by focusing on his plan's future public return and eventual elimination of the poor rate. He reminds the reader that the workhouses cost more and more each year.

With potential opposition effectively dealt with, Defoe begins laying out his comprehensive proposal. He refers to his vision as a "college," presumably because of its resemblance to a college campus. Defoe proposes to have his prototype built on the Thames River with the capability of housing 2,000 poor. He specifies that it should contain gardens, shops (bakers, butchers, brewers, etc.), a hospital, a chapel, magistrate/steward corridors, schools, and ten wards, each bearing the name of a benefactor. He calls on Parliament to appoint professionals for the college, such as stewards and physicians.

Defoe meticulously itemizes the provision of food and the raw materials necessary for manufacturing fishing-related items such as ropes and sails. He details the role of the stewards in assigning the residents tasks according to their ability and the importance of uniforms to distinguish between the jobs. Each resident will be required to take an oath to follow the rules and submit to the internal justice system headed by Parliamentary appointees. Defoe even prescribes punishments such as whipping for a second begging offense. Defoe stresses that the profits should be kept at a bank where they will be audited quarterly to prevent fraud.

Defoe skillfully recognizes the need to honor the benefactors and the Queen and proposes a yearly fish dinner for their honor. A statue of Queen Anne will grace the college entrance and the college itself will be named "Queen Anne's College of Industry." In fact, the whole proposal will add to her honor in that "so many thousands of her poor subjects shall be perpetually provided for and rescued from ignorance, idleness and beggary."

Defoe calculates that his proposal will need an initial sum of £30,000 and henceforth be self-sustaining. He assumes that the queen could easily appoint some wealthy people to raise the money to free the kingdom from the burden of the poor. Since the British are already collecting money for French and Irish refugees, logically they will contribute money for their own people. Defoe concludes with the certainty of God's blessing on such a proposal.

Defoe's proposal demonstrates genuine concern for the problem of the poor while holding contemporaneous attitudes about the difference between deserving poor and undeserving poor. His pamphlet is written less than two decades after the onset of the workhouses. One can assume his firsthand observation of the current system, which provides mere subsistence and results in a perpetual state of poverty, gave rise to his pragmatic plan to change the poor's circumstances. Defoe's plan does embrace progressive tools such as trade and demonstrates keen foresight to respond to objections beforehand. It is riddled with simplistic assumptions. For example, he fails to fully address how the poor will be incentivized to work. According to Defoe, the poor, with their simple minds, will happily go along with his well-reasoned plan. Similarly, he never addresses the innate reasons as to why Great Britain has a neglected fishing industry. Of course, this oversight reflects the mercantilist lack of understanding of comparative advantages. Overall, his attitude is paternalistic toward the poor and borders on patronizing.

**B. "PROPOSALS TO ABOLISH ALL POOR-LAWS EXCEPT FOR THE OLD AND INFIRM: AND TO ESTABLISH ASYLUM FARMS ON WHICH TO LOCATE THE DESTITUTE ABLE-BODIED POOR; WHO MIGHT THEREON MAINTAIN THEMSELVES AND BENEFIT THE COUNTRY £18,600,000 ANNUALLY." BY ROBERT J. MORRISON ESQ. IN 1842.**

Robert J. Morrison was a lecturer on agricultural education at Kent Agricultural College at the time of the pamphlet's publication. According to original letters he wrote that are documented in the *William and Mary Quarterly*, he went on to become a professor of history and political science at William and Mary College (Morrison, 1921). "Pamphlets like [this] were written in [response to] the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act by which poor relief to the able-bodied was given only in the workhouse" (Humphries, 2005). Morrison's was one of many pamphlets written with religious determination to find a more humane alternative to the workhouses. In fact, Morrison opens his pamphlet with deep sorrow that a Christian nation, commissioned by Jesus to preach good news to the poor, has poor in a worse condition than ever before.

Like his predecessor Defoe from a century past, Morrison offers a "common sense" proposal to make producers out of the idle. In his assessment, his proposal will provide the nation with a "swarm of honey bees" that will lead to increasing tax revenue through their new income and a cessation of the poor rates. Morrison further resembles Defoe in his idealistic plan to rescue the poor "from demi-starvation, to be placed in the lap of plenty" through setting the poor to work rather than merely providing them with daily relief.

One noteworthy distinction of Morrison's proposal from Defoe's is his focus on the motivation of his plan. Instead of opening up his pamphlet by answering potential objections, Morrison spends the first seven pages laying a scriptural basis for abolishing laws that oppress the poor. In Morrison's opinion, the United Kingdom is wavering on daring God to punish them for their lack of love and kindness towards the poor. He details many Psalms and Proverbs where God expresses his regards for the poor. For example, Morrison documents how in Isaiah God promises to reward those who show kindness to the poor, how Ezekiel attributes the neglect of the poor as a reason for Sodom's destruction, and how Daniel compares righteousness to showing mercy to the poor. He finishes his examination of the Old Testament with many examples from the minor prophets where God declares He is more interested in His people helping the poor than in traditions such as fasting.

Morrison also documents the New Testament's attitude towards the poor starting with the Gospels. He begins by recounting Jesus' words to the rich young man to sell all he had and give it to the poor in order to be perfect. He also notes that Jesus declared salvation for Zacheus once Zacheus gave half of his possessions to the poor. In Morrison's opinion, giving to the poor was more important to Jesus than any ceremony or tradition. As a result, it is very difficult for Morrison to comprehend how a Christian nation could legally criminalize begging. It is quite clear to Morrison that if Jesus openly condemned those disciples who rebuked the beggars, He must be unhappy with Britain.

Morrison ends his motivational section with a review of the Epistles. Again, he finds that they are filled with the same charge to Christians of giving to the poor. He points out that the book of John radically declares that God's love cannot be in a person if he does not help his brother in need. He reminds his reader that James defines pure religion as visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction. Morrison concludes his rousing demi-sermon by declaring that Christian duty to the poor should flow from the spirit of the Golden Rule.

Morrison then begins the core of his proposal, which hinges on establishing a farming commune. Given his current occupation as a lecturer on agriculture, it is not surprising that Morrison's plan rested on farming. His proposal showcases the calculating expertise that he possesses in the field of agriculture.

Like Defoe, Morrison naively saw the solution of the poor as a mere application of mathematics and accounting. He begins his meticulous detailed proposal by calculating that if there are 1.2 million poor then it will take 6,000 farms of 200 people per farm (families of five) to render the poor independent. He even breaks down the amount of farms per county in England. In Morrison's estimation, 200 people per farm is enough to be profitable and small enough to find the necessary acreage.



Morrison estimates the amount of acreage necessary to execute his scheme by starting with the weekly and annual amounts of food required to feed the farmers. To do so, he estimates that each farm will house forty persons in each of five groups: able-bodied men, able-bodied women, boys from nine to twenty years old, girls from nine to twenty years old, and children under nine. Then he estimates the amount necessary to feed individuals in each category. In calculating the food amounts, he assumes the poor will mainly have a vegetarian diet, as that is what they are accustomed to. He generously includes one pint of good beer a day per man and a half of a pint for each woman. After tedious discussion, Morrison settles on a farm of 162 acres, which includes acres for grazing animals. Worried that some may fear his calculations could fall short of providing for 200 people, he quotes the Farmer's Calendar that shows an average acre produces even more than he estimates.

Morrison includes a careful discourse on the importance of manure in a successful farm. Since manure is often one of the largest expenses, he requires the farm to have the minimal amount of animals necessary to generate enough manure. He laboriously details other expenses such as replacement of worn tools and clothes, as well as flax and hemp for the women to work in winter.

Morrison believes ongoing expenses can easily be covered with the profit that the farms will generate from selling their excess produce. After estimating the expected price for the produce and goods, he confidently predicts an £800 yearly profit per farm. Of course, ten percent will go to the patron of the farm and five percent to the matron. The rest will be divided among the residents with approximately two-thirds going to the adults and a third to the young adults. To encourage industry he will hold back a portion for anyone showing extra talent. He believes that the average family should get £12 a year, while a very talented family may receive double!

Not wanting to leave any factor to chance, Morrison details his expectations for matching skills properly to work. He expects about half of the men and boys to be inclined to farm work and itemizes how many should be needed for subcategories like plowing and spreading manure. The other half will be inclined to what he refers to as mechanics such as tailoring and carpentry. Similarly, the females will be divided into "outwork" such as making milk and butter and tending to poultry and "house work" such as sewing and cooking. Morrison concludes the details of his proposal with specific dimensions for all buildings from houses to sheds and with daily schedules staggered to accommodate all.

After minutely detailing his plan, Morrison incredibly acknowledges the need for flexibility, specifically in keeping workers motivated. In order to keep the work from becoming monotonous, jobs should be altered within reason. Furthermore, residents are to be treated as free and independent and compulsion avoided at all cost. He believes that the workers will just need constant reminding "all are equally interested in the increase of the farm."

Morrison closes his pamphlet noting that the wretchedness of current alternatives will be enough advertisement for his proposal. However to insure its appeal, he restates its ability to increase the national revenue and cease the poor rates.

Morrison's pamphlet is written less than a decade after the *Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834*. The pamphlet was a backlash against the new Poor Laws that departed from the old law's focus on Christian charity and instead stigmatized the poor for their laziness and punished idleness by making relief minimal. Many were outraged at the injustices done to the poor. Morrison's pamphlet is a prime example of such righteous anger and appeal to the Christian consciousness.

While Defoe's plan seeks to capitalize on a neglected industry, Morrison relies on traditional farming trade. It seems that Morrison's proposal is not much different from the conventional operation of peasant farms for hundreds of years. While he gives Christian motivation for establishing the farms, he assumes that the only thing hindering the success of the poor is start-up capital. His plan is even more static than Defoe's, hinging on very particular and capricious details such as weather and internal motivation.

**C. “COMPLETE NATIONAL PROVISION FOR SICKNESS: HOW TO AMEND THE INSURANCE ACT”  
WRITTEN BY BEATRICE WEBB IN 1912**

Beatrice Webb was a British reformer around the turn of the twentieth century. She and her husband Sidney, both leaders of the collectivist Fabian society, are credited as the founders of the prestigious London School of Economics. During the 1920s, the Webbs coauthored a three-volume piece, *English Poor Law History*, a classical work on the matter albeit occasionally tainted with accusations of a hidden agenda in its historical research (Kidd, 1987). Beatrice was one of the key writers of the controversial Minority Report written for the 1905 Commission on the Poor Laws.

As a Fabian who valued cooperative action over individual free-market activity, Beatrice boldly advocated her viewpoint in numerous pamphlets. Webb seems to have written “*Complete National Provision for Sickness: How to Amend the Insurance Act*” for the National Committee for the Prevention of Destitution in an effort to further promote the Minority Report’s recommendations. According to her opening, the Minority Report’s primary recommendation was to repeal the Poor Law’s authority over several classes of poor and redefine laws specific to each class. For example, she believed poor children should be reassigned to the local education authority and the sick and disabled to the local health authority.

However, examination of the pamphlet reveals the main focus to be an amendment to the *Insurance Act*. According to Webb, wage earners living paycheck to paycheck live in constant threat of sickness or injury. A serious illness could easily result in prolonged unemployment and ruin a whole family, no matter how thrifty the family. Webb believes that the recently passed *Insurance Act* does nothing to correct this credible state of terror.

Webb begins her main argument by juxtaposing the healthcare of the wealthy and the poor. The wealthy and middle classes no longer believe sickness comes from acts of God but rather biological and environmental phenomena with random and assignable origins. Thus, they have been able to make substantial strides in sickness prevention via improved drainage, antiseptics and technological advancements in treatments and surgery. Webb contests that in many arenas the upper classes have practically eradicated diseases.

It is Webb’s contention that the poor have a much different state of health. She argues that the poor are living in such ill health that they are in no better condition than that of the Middle Ages. It is here that Webb’s prescription departs significantly from the two pamphlets previously reviewed. Whereas Defoe and Morrison both relied heavily on private donations and charity to help the poor work their way out of poverty, Webb believes it is chiefly the government’s responsibility to take action and elevate the poor, essentially through redistribution of income.

To reinforce her argument, Webb reviews the system created by the *Insurance Act*’s system. The act compels

“[e]very working-man to pay four pence a week out of his wages, and promise that the Society which he joins shall provide him with ten shillings a week sick pay when he is ill, besides a doctor of his own choice, thirty shillings for his wife’s lying-in, admission to a sanatorium if he becomes consumptive and most valuable of all, if the funds hold out so that the promise can be fulfilled a pension of five shillings a week, after two years’ payments, on breakdown at any age.”

In Webb’s opinion, this system falls short in helping the poor in a number of ways. First, Webb takes issue with capitalists being allowed to administer the system for a profit. Specifically, if the contributors lapse in payment the policy is canceled and the previous payments become “pure profits.” Webb applauds historical cooperatives known as Friendly Societies for showing such care and concern from their member-managers, while disparaging the current capitalist insurance companies for being managed by a



small number of profit-seeking wealthy investors with no regard for the poor's circumstances. She labels the current system a "financial octopus," claiming that it destroys the laboring man's Friendly Societies and Trade unions. Webb insists that the government should amend the system to only allow non-profit organizations to administer the plans and transfer all current memberships to local Friendly Societies or establish new ones. However, she never addresses how the Friendly Societies should make assessments for insurability, nor does she tackle the larger political and economic problems the contemporaneous Friendly Societies were battling (Brotten, 2010).

Webb's next objection concerns those who are too ignorant to understand why money is even being taken out of their pay and thus fail to join any group. She concludes that although these poor contribute, they are not insured and thus the government should immediately deem them enrolled. In fact, she contends that no one earning below the poverty level should pay anything for coverage. Again, she does not detail how their premiums will be financed.

Similarly, she believes the casual worker should receive automatic free coverage. She argues that casual workers are harmed as the current system forces the employer to pay the weekly employer's share of insurance coverage on the first day of the week even if the casual worker intends to work less than a week. As a result, employers are reluctant to hire casual workers unless the latter pay both the employer's and employee's share.

Next Webb objects to the lack of a government guarantee of payments. Webb rhetorically wonders how the government can compel workers to pay for coverage that is not guaranteed. To Webb, this fringes on fraud and dishonesty.

Ironically after painstakingly listing those who should not have to pay, she criticizes the inability of the system to be fully funded. She believes that since no medical exams are conducted of the insured, the system fails to calculate the needed payments in an actuarially sound manner. Unlike Defoe and Morrison, she does not give detailed plans for how to accomplish her recommendations.

Webb further criticizes the system for its elevation of tuberculosis and neglect of all other illnesses. For example, the system only covers dependents if they have tuberculosis. She contends that a dependent's health is just as important as the employee's and thus should be fully covered. Similarly, the plan only allows the insured to enter a county sanatorium for tuberculosis. Webb advocates coverage of all serious illness, arguing that proper care and rest will advance a healthy workforce. She also demands that the government compel schools to establish clinics for children.

Webb's final critique demonstrates that her proposals will make Poor Law doctors obsolete. She contends that these doctors' services are untimely and practically pointless, as the law shamefully requires the poor to prove that they are sufficiently ill and destitute to receive care. Webb calls for Parliament to form a unified medical committee, which would appoint both a national minister of health and local county officials to run county clinics. She uses this final demand as an opportunity to call for a complete abolition of Poor Laws now!

In closing, Webb casually mentions the financing of her proposals. She believes the majority will come from abolishing the Poor Laws and optimistically expects to save money from reducing the occurrence of illnesses. Of course, any additional needs would come from the national government's annual surplus.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

While all three of these reformers had great concern for the impoverished and agreed on the need to overhaul the Poor Laws, each had distinct policy preferences. Defoe and Morrison were ultimately trying to coerce the behavior of the able-bodied poor through individual responsibility and industry. They both wanted to set the able-bodied poor to work but fail to prescribe a remedy for dealing with the sick and elderly poor. Ironically, at times their positions were similar to the communist assertion that economic growth is merely an application of simple arithmetic and accounting.

Webb focused on the prevention of poverty with redistribution of wealth as a major vehicle to this end. She passes no judgment on the able-bodied poor but instead centered her attention on how the government can and should aid the sick and elderly poor. Unlike Defoe and Morrison, who sought to remove the Poor Laws and essentially the poor class by making the poor productive, Webb sought a system to supplement the able-bodied poor and thus by default acknowledges the inevitability of the poor class. While Defoe and Morrison embraced traditional modes of private charity, Webb supported a greater role of government responsibility in providing for its citizens.

These pamphlets scratch the surface of the literature written on the problem of the Poor Laws. Writings concerning the Poor Laws were not left to nonfiction approaches alone. Famous authors like Charles Dickens used fiction to advocate the cause of the poor in many of his novels. Dickens' feelings could not be more clearly seen than in the postscript of his novel *Our Mutual Friend*:

That my view of the Poor Law may not be mistaken or misrepresented, I will state it. I believe there has been in England, since the days of the STUARTS, no law so often infamously administered, no law so often openly violated, no law habitually so ill-supervised. In the majority of the shameful cases of disease and death from destitution, that shock the Public and disgrace the country, the illegality is quite equal to the inhumanity—and known language could say no more of their lawlessness.

Although the workhouses were abolished in 1920, the lingering responsibilities of the Poor Laws were not fully dissolved until 1948. Even today, Britain, along with many other nations, wrestles with the question of the poor. Indeed, there are several similarities between the pamphlets and recent political rhetoric in the United States.

The swinging pendulum of public opinion that characterized the legacy of the Poor Laws remains in recent times. Bill Clinton's vow to end welfare as we know it, by imposing work requirements and placing lifetime limits on assistance was precipitated by a country disgusted with the "welfare queens" so famously demonized by Ronald Regan. California further mirrored the controversial "bastard clause" in 1997 by passing reform measures to stop increasing family benefits if a mother had another child while on welfare (Wood, 1997). Modern calls for drug testing of welfare recipients echo the public sentiment of concerns of dependency that ultimately lead to the new Poor Laws (Whitaker, 2012). Recent laws of residency requirements for welfare recipients in select states mimic the open and closed parish systems (Allard et. al., 2000). Conversely, Webb's outcry for an expansion of the Poor Laws to include education and healthcare mirror the recent actions of the Obama administration. From the passage of *The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act* in 2010, to the more recent modifications by Obama's Health and Human Services department relaxing Clinton's work requirements, the national mood seems to suggest that temporary relief is indeed not enough (Good, 2012).

Both Defoe and Morrison found the Poor Laws insufficient to incentivize work. As a result, they each detailed work plans requiring government action targeted towards chronic unemployment. Their intentions parallel the public works programs of the last century. Most recently, *The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009* created over \$100 billion in infrastructure work programs in an effort to stimulate the economy and increase employment ("Breakdown Of Funding By Category," 2012). Controversial signs touting the act's slogan, "Putting America Back to Work," dotted the roadwork, reportedly costing between \$5 and \$20 million (Karl, 2010).

Another enduring theme is the question of private versus public charity and, specifically, religious involvement in both. In one matter or another, all three authors were motivated by an ethical and moral obligation. However, Morrison evokes a religious call more directly than the others with his numerous scriptural references. Today politicians on both sides of the aisle still quote Scripture to justify their positions on welfare. President George W. Bush put it into action when he established the Office of Faith Based and Community Initiatives in 2001 in an effort to promote compassionate conservatism ("Fact

Sheet: Compassionate Conservatism,” 2002). This office attempted to merge the responsibility for the poor into a joint public and private endeavor by having the government subsidize religious charities. The office found support in both parties when President Barack Obama continued the initiative despite anger from his base (Mooney, 2009).

Almost three hundred years after the first pamphlet was written, policy makers and advocates of the poor are still debating how to solve the problem of the poor. It often seems to each generation that the current problems of the poor are unique to their time. History begs to differ. By juxtaposing three pamphlets from distinct historical periods and considering recent national policies, we can see what appears to be a timeless tension between national largesse towards the poor and fears of creating a dependent class.

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