

## SHELVING ADEQUACY

The ' Programme for National Recovery' published last month plots the framework of Government policy for the next three years. On Social Welfare it says: "The Government will maintain the overall value of social welfare benefits and within the resources available will consider special provision for greater increases for those receiving the lowest payments". What this comes down to in practice is shown in the Estimates published by the Government on October 13th. The estimate for Social Welfare shows an increase of only one per cent. Increases in Welfare payments in next years budget are unlikely to exceed the rate of inflation i.e. will not increase in real terms. The Minister has suggested that people on the lowest assistance payments will receive proportionately larger increases. Again it is unlikely that these will be significant though the exact figures will not be known until the budget in the New Year. Even this much is to be mainly paid for by redistribution within the welfare budget, through 'savings' in other areas.

The Programme and the Estimates ignore the fact that existing social welfare payments are grossly inadequate, 'maintaining existing levels' amounts to condemning people to remain in -poverty for the foreseeable future. The Government is sidestepping the issue of adequacy that was at the heart of the Report of the Commission on Social Welfare. The Commission argued that "Social welfare payments should be set at a level that insures a minimally adequate standard of living relative to incomes and living standards in society generally". They estimated a minimally adequate income for a single adult in 1985 at between £51 and £59 per week (£53.55 - £64.26 in 1987 values). The personal rates of most social welfare payments lie below this range and in general social assistance payments are significantly below this.

Last September the Government was challenged again on the issue of adequacy in a submission made by the Combat Poverty Agency. Their submission pointed out that "the position of those on the lowest levels of social welfare payment is critical and unacceptable". They called on the Government to commit itself to reforming the Social Welfare system on the lines outlined in the Report of the Commission on Social Welfare. They also proposed that "There should be an immediate commitment to increase to £48 all adult payments which are at present below that figure; £29 should be the minimum allowance for each dependent adult". Even these modest proposals are being ignored.