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More thoughts on unemployment

The idea of mould-breaking was missing from Dr Owen's Social Democratic Party conference speeches. A mould very much in need of breaking he went out of his way to preserve intact. This is the one that constrains politicians to pretend there is a cure for 'unemployment'. The recent *Times* correspondence demonstrated that there is not. Dr Owen was unjust when he charged the Conservative Party with fostering the attitude that unemployment does not matter. The Conservatives have come nearest of all parties to what is needed, namely an open recognition of the truth.

It is time the now pejorative term 'unemployment' was dropped. Instead we need a recognition that those without paid jobs should receive a redistribution payment. Hitherto this has been called unemployment benefit. In future it might be called the voluntary worker's allowance. This would mark society's expectation that its recipients will serve the community in some way of their own choosing. By this they would both self-esteem and public respect. It is a pity that the SDP, the new party, have rejected the opportunity of an enlightened treatment of the question of 'unemployment'. Will the Liberals do any better at their conference?¹

¹ *The Times*, 21 September 1983.