

Tekst 4

Welcome to the Fat Slob Way of Life

1 **T**here are many reasons to take with an unhealthy pinch of salt the warning from Yvette Cooper, the minister for public health, that the life expectancy of today's children will be years lower than that of their parents.

2 With a few exceptions – sub-Saharan Africa as a result of the Aids epidemic, and Russia which has its own reasons – there has not been a significant decline in life expectancy anywhere. Rather, the great majority of countries have seen a continuous increase in the lifespans of their populations for several decades.

3 So what was the reasoning behind the health minister's statement?

4 National surveys have established beyond reasonable doubt that children's diets are far from optimal: kids do not eat enough fruit or vegetables, and eat too much salty, sugary and fatty food, usually pre-packaged. Many children take little or no exercise, and an increasing percentage of them are very fat.

5 Inactivity, obesity and high-fat diets are all associated with the fatal degenerative diseases of civilisation, such as cardiovascular disease and non-insulin-dependent diabetes. It stands to reason, does it not, that the life expectancy of children who are fat and lazy must be reduced in comparison to that of their lean and active forebears?

6 What might be called the Fat Slob Way of Life (FSWL) has been prevalent for much longer in the United States than in Britain, but life expectancy there has not decreased; on the contrary. Even in Britain, the rate of heart attacks has fallen, and the whole pattern of the rise and decline of such attacks during the 20th century was, some epidemiologists have suggested, more characteristic of an infectious disease than one brought about by the wrong diet.

7 Cooper discounts the possibility that advances in medicine will be able to save people from the consequences of the



Never mind the length,
Theodore Dalrymple
is more concerned about the
quality of our lives

FSWL. She is almost certainly wrong to do so. Nevertheless, she has pointed to an alarming cultural phenomenon.

8 The FSWL is gaining ground. However, it is not the alleged health consequences that should alarm us so much as what it tells us about the soul of modern man. But the health minister is a member of a government with an ideological belief that one way of life is as good as another; that to make no judgement is the highest moral quality; and

that what the common man does cannot be wrong. Everyone, however, is in favour of health, so it is safe to warn about the health consequences of the FSWL.

9 What is the characteristic smell of modern Britain? It is that of stale fat in which fast food has been fried too many times. Travel on an evening train, and the carriages will smell of the fat of greasy hamburgers; high streets up and down the land smell of it.

10 The eating habits of a large proportion of the British population are appalling, from almost every conceivable angle. But what is worrying indeed is how they eat it. For millions of people, meals are solitary, poor, nasty, British and short.

11 A sociologist told me recently that fewer than half of British households have a dining table. When I go on house visits to patients, I see little sign of cooking ever having gone on, or of meals taken as social occasions (unless the family is of Indian origin).

12 Wherever I walk, the litter in the streets reveals that an Englishman's street is his dining room. Gutters and gardens contain the remains of scores of hastily consumed snacks, with tins, bottles, paper wrappers and polystyrene containers dropped where the last morsel was eaten.

13 This is an extraordinary change in my (not very long) lifetime. Eating in the street was once regarded as uncouth and anti-social. Is it that modern man suffers

stronger, more insistent pangs of hunger than his immediate ancestors?

14 Certainly not. What has changed is his willingness to exercise self-control. I feel a twinge of hunger, and so I must, here and now, assuage it (and it is my right to do so). I have no duty to control myself for the sake of my fellow citizens: if they don't like it, the problem is theirs and they should see a psychiatrist. As for the litter I leave, do I not pay taxes so that it might be cleared up?

15 It is not a question of poverty (except of spirit, imagination, emotion, culture and education). Fast food is not cheap nourishment. Eating properly is almost entirely dependent upon social structure. My wife and I make considerable efforts to eat freshly cooked meals. But if one of us is away, the quality of what we eat declines immediately. The unutterable vileness of the FSWL diet derives, therefore, from two social trends: the

break-up of the family and the spread of radical, indeed solipsistic, individualism, according to which the only guide to a person's actions should be his whim of the moment. And the two trends strongly reinforce each other.

16 It is scarcely any wonder that the public health minister confined herself to spurious concerns about the health consequences of the FSWL. To have addressed the real cultural problems that have resulted in the FSWL would have required great courage: it would have been to question the assumptions upon which the government bases its policies.

17 The most important thing about the FSWL is not that it shortens life by a month, a year or a decade. The Fat Slob Way of Life is symptomatic of a world in which, increasingly, we are solitary when we should be social, and collectivist when we should be individualist.

New Statesman

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- 1p **4 ■** Which of the following is/are right, judging from paragraphs 1-2?
1 Yvette Cooper's warning on children's health deserves serious attention.
2 Yvette Cooper is concerned that Britain's public health will drop below third-world levels.
- A Both are right.
 - B Only 1 is right.
 - C Only 2 is right.
 - D Both are wrong.
- “So what ... statement?” (aline 3)
- 1p **5 □** Waar eindigt de beschrijving van de redenering van Yvette Cooper?
Noteer de laatste twee woorden van de beschrijving.
- 1p **6 ■** Which of the following can be concluded from paragraph 6?
- A Heart attacks need not be deadly anymore.
 - B Heart patients are usually well aware of the dangers of the FSWL.
 - C The FSWL does not necessarily lead to heart disease.
- “She is almost certainly wrong to do so.” (aline 7)
- 1p **7 □** Waar gaat Yvette Cooper aan voorbij volgens Theodore Dalrymple?
- 1p **8 ■** What is the point made about the government in paragraph 8?
- A It encourages the general public to be more critical about what constitutes a healthy life.
 - B It fails to go further than just addressing the symptoms of a serious issue.
 - C It should give the man in the street better information about the health risks of some types of food.
 - D It should refrain from interfering in private matters of citizens.
- 1p **9 ■** What is the main point made in paragraphs 10-12?
- A A great many British people spend their money on eating out.
 - B For a great many British people eating is no longer a communal activity.
 - C The British will eat anything at any time of the day.
- “This is an extraordinary change” (aline 13).
- 1p **10 □** Aan welke oorzaak schrijft Theodore Dalrymple deze verandering toe?
- 1p **11 ■** What is the point made in paragraph 15?
Bad eating habits
- A are characteristic of the socially deprived groups in society.
 - B originate in the pressure of present-day working conditions.
 - C prevail among the young, and among single people.
 - D reflect changes in society as well as in personal attitudes.
- 1p **12 ■** Which of the following has been mentioned in the text as one of “the assumptions upon which the government bases its policies” (last sentence paragraph 16)?
- A A government is negligent when it does not tackle diseases affecting large population groups.
 - B A healthy society is one that is based on family values.
 - C Eating habits are not the only factor to determine the quality of life.
 - D It is not up to the government to take a moral stance on the way people choose to live.
- 1p **13 ■** What function is paragraph 17 meant to serve?
- A To add a last new argument to the writer's reasoning.
 - B To illustrate the FSWL.
 - C To summarise the writer's point about the FSWL.
 - D To warn against the FSWL.