The question of how to effect a transition from capitalism to socialism has become all the more urgent in Britain, as the baleful effects of Thatcherism on social and economic relations have become ever more apparent. In the absence of any serious prospect of the emergence of revolutionary movements which have the capacity to destroy the existing state apparatus and replace it overnight with alternative social forms, socialists have come increasingly to give serious attention to the construction of transitional or 'prefigurative' programmes, which have the function of posing socialist answers to the human waste, poverty and insecurity that are now once again, quite clearly, an integral feature of the capitalist form of production and its associated social relations. These prefigurative socialist programmes must clearly encompass the entire field of social policy, in order that they can challenge the right-wing arguments now active in all the social policy areas, and also in order to generate socialist responses to the wide variety of social needs that are experienced across the social structure. I shall deal in a provisional way with the questions of the family and youth later in this chapter.

The construction of a transitional socialist criminology is an urgent necessity for two reasons. First, as we saw quite clearly in Chapter 1, the law and order issue is a major and influential element in the social ideology articulated by the Tory Party under Margaret Thatcher, and it is therefore a means of creating a significant electoral base for what would otherwise be politically impossible economic and social poli-
The law and order question in its broadest sense (including street crime and also terrorism, trade unions and their relation to law, and the question of public order and demonstrations) have been used in such a way as to justify some expansion of the coercive apparatus of the state, while simultaneously allowing for heavy cutting of public expenditure on social security and on social work. These ‘candy floss’ expenditures are now portrayed as being economically luxurious, as well as ineffectively managed and liable to be subject to ‘scrounging’ or to other forms of unintended appropriation. Many of the agencies that have been cut were authoritarian, bureaucratic and a nuisance to working-class people, but many others (such as hospitals, nurseries, day care centres, clinics and battered wives’ refuges) are or were essential to particular working-class groups and areas. Perhaps more consequentially in the long term, the ideological work that has been done by the Right on the question of crime and law and order has been very successful in adding a negative connotation in popular rhetoric to notions of ‘welfare’, ‘care’ and ‘treatment’ and also to ‘collectivist’ state responses to social problems generally. In the absence of a popular transitional socialist criminology, the law and order issue has worked powerfully as an ideological support for Thatcherism.

A second reason for urgency in the creation of a transitional socialist criminology is that crime will be a real social problem the more that Thatcherism is allowed to have its effects on the lived social relations in Britain. Crime is also likely to be a worsening problem, in the sense that street thefts and crimes of violence generally are likely to escalate as unemployed people become more desperate in their quest for economic survival and in their need to establish identity. Some early demonstrations of this have been the heavy increases in crime that were recorded in industrial areas of the North of England during 1980: offences known to the police in South Yorkshire increased by 11.7 per cent in that year (The Star, Sheffield, 30 January 1981), and in the annual report of the Northumberland police force, it was revealed that 49 per cent of all detected crime in the area in 1980 was committed by unemployed people (The Guardian, 15 April 1981). In February 1981, the Assistant Commissioner for Crime for the Metro-