NOTE

This pamphlet, like all publications of the Fabian Society, represents not the collective view of the Society but only the view of the individual who prepared it. The responsibility of the Fabian Society is limited to approving the publications which it issues as embodying facts and opinions worthy of consideration within the Labour Movement. It is the aim of the Society to encourage among socialists a high standard of free and independent research.

The pamphlet has been prepared by a group drawn from the Children's Nutrition Council, the Committee against Malnutrition and the Association of Architects, Surveyors and Technical Assistants. The first two of these bodies are now collaborating in the issue of bulletins dealing with the diverse problems of the maintenance of health and nutrition in time of war; the last is responsible for the publication of two reports on the practical working of the evacuation schemes. The present survey of the problem is devoted mainly to a certain range of constructive proposals. The writers assumed that it would be more useful to concentrate on the broad principles of solution than attempt a detailed analysis of every aspect, educational, medical and social, of the whole experiment.

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EVACUATION
Failure or Reform

By
F. LE GROS CLARK
and
RICHARD W. TOMS

LONDON
THE FABIAN SOCIETY
11 Dartmouth Street SW1
EVACUATION
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In so complex a subject as this a brief study must be selective. We are naturally assuming that evacuation is a social necessity and should be made to work; we shall therefore concentrate our whole attention on the problems of the receiving areas.

Blitzkrieg

It was obvious after a few weeks of war that the character of these problems had changed. Evacuation had been primarily conceived as an emergency measure; it has now become a social question of some magnitude and of uncertain duration. Whether the Minister of Health would have planned his evacuation differently had he foreseen the actual course of the war one cannot surmise. It is a fact that public affairs can sometimes be more easily handled at a moment of crisis; and for this and other reasons the Minister was no doubt tempted to believe that the war would open with a phase of intensive air raids. There would then, of course, have been considerable wastage of enemy bombers; and after a period of some weeks or months the raids would gradually diminish in violence, whereupon civilian life would begin to flow back to the cities and try to resume its normal pattern.

In the meantime a crisis atmosphere would have prevailed; and since the main object was to save the lives of women and children there would have been little argument about the temporary splitting up of families, the patchwork schemes of education and the loss of rural amenities.

It is now fairly evident why all this did not happen. The German high command was engaged with the Polish campaign; it was unwilling to invite a war of retaliation; and finally it possessed no bases from which it could launch a combined attack of fighters and light bombers. It is possible that none of these factors could have been weighed with certainty by our own Government in the days immediately preceding the war. The result in any case was the same. The great migration would have done credit to a small or impoverished nation; judged in relation to the resources of the wealthiest country in Europe it was merely a piece of elaborate improvisation.

The plans of the evacuating authorities for the exodus were of course extremely efficient; but this aspect of the vast experiment is not the one that will impress future historians. While evacuation had in it several features that were novel and that required
careful judgment, it was certainly not beyond the powers of an average competent administrator. The fact is that it is relatively simple to empty an area, given adequate staff and transport. The difficulties start when the population has to be absorbed into new regions with their settled habits and settled pattern of life. To billeting officers, who had to deal with the intensely human side of the problem, the whole scheme often seemed to have been contrived by minds cast in a rigid bureaucratic mould.

**Strange Interlude**

The situation is now broadly this. If the war continues, we shall probably reach and pass through some such phase of bombing as we described above; but, for all we know, it might be delayed a year or even two years. It follows that the early stage of improvisation must merge into the stage where evacuation can be made a complete success; in other words, the social pattern of the countryside has to be refashioned in a relatively stable direction.

With the drift back to the cities there are now—at the beginning of 1940—at least two-thirds of all the evacuable children in danger areas. They should obviously be all in the safety zones; if not, the principle of evacuation loses its meaning. The problem is thus that of stemming the drift homewards and of attracting the flow of the child population back to the countryside; this, of course, is only possible in so far as we are prepared to carry out an inquest on the original scheme.

**Town and Country**

Formally, the scheme worked. It broke down mainly on the human and domestic side. The shores of Britain were disconcertingly immune from attack; and as a consequence two distinct social types—urban and rural—found themselves confronting one another at close quarters and with time to think about it. In the first few days the impact was overwhelming. The plan for evacuating mothers with their young children had peculiar weaknesses of its own. In some counties an attempt had been made to prepare the households for their guests; rarely, as far as we can judge, were the city women warned in any respect of the conditions under which they were to be billeted. Many of them left their homes at a moment’s notice; they were often ill-provided with clothing and footwear; and the whole scheme seems frequently in their minds to have taken on the colour of a summer trip to the seaside. After a day or so in billets, they were in most cases unmistakably homesick, resentful, bored and ill at ease. It is evident that their hosts were equally resentful. The miseries of life in a modern industrial city were here and there
revealed in all their crudity to the startled countryside; and the shock was almost unendurable.

The unaccompanied children were more easily absorbed, though here again the first shock was on both sides not inconsiderable. By the end of a month or two the reception areas had relapsed into a kind of inertia, not by any means unmingled with a generous spirit of hospitality towards the children but obviously concealing a deep mood of discomfort and unrest. For them the problem is too complex, too intimate, too utterly unrelieved.

Meanwhile, if city parents, after the first experience, again let their children go, they will have first to be satisfied with any revised scheme which the Ministry may evolve. Family ties in the working class are exceedingly strong; and working class streets are readily influenced by a common and infectious idea. The belief that it is better for a family to meet danger together, that many reception areas are no less vulnerable than the cities, that children should be under the care of their own parents, that the economic strains of a dismembered family are too great for an average working class income—these and many other beliefs are quickly assimilated by a large neighbourhood; most of them have some basis in reality; and they must be recognised as facts in the situation.

Less Than Fifty Per Cent.

It is instructive at this stage to examine the actual drifts of the population. About three million persons in all were entitled to use the Government's original scheme; and of these the large majority were either school children organised under the care of their teachers, or mothers accompanying their infants or toddlers. But when evacuation took place in the first four days of September less than half this number availed themselves of the opportunity. There were, of course, not a few who left privately, making their own arrangements for transport and accommodation.

London had a comparatively high proportion of evacuees, though only 45% (675,000 persons) of those entitled to take part in the scheme actually left the metropolis. There were, to be precise, about 50% of the school children and about 40% of the children with mothers concerned in the exodus. Experience in the provincial cities varied considerably. Some 60% of Manchester school children migrated; but several other centres—Birmingham, for example, Middlesbrough and Leeds—lost only 25% of their school population; from Sheffield the proportion was as low as 15%.

It is not easy to determine the significance of these percentages. The results were presumably due to such contributory factors as the extent of preparation made by the local evacuating authority,
the publicity the scheme received and the popular estimate of the city's vulnerability. It was in any case inevitable that very few of the reception areas found themselves allotted their full quota. Some seaside resorts on the South Coast received no more than a third or a half of their expectation; and in several instances no evacuees arrived at the villages or small towns that were awaiting them.

Not only was the distribution of evacuees as a whole often very uneven; far more frequently the proportions of the various categories, when they arrived, turned out to be quite other than the harassed billeting officers had been led to expect. The original intention had been that the two main categories should be more or less evenly dispersed; the real trouble arose when an area found itself burdened with the disposal of a vastly disproportionate number of urban women; for there were but few households that willingly agreed to the accommodation of adults.

The Drift Back

No sooner was the evacuation complete than the drift homeward began. After the first week of war only an infinitesimal number of areas retained their full complement of urban mothers; at the close of the third month many areas had lost more than 80%. In its present form the evacuation of this category has been a failure. The majority of those young children who left the cities with their mothers have accompanied them home.

The drift from reception areas of children of school age has been far slower; and at present about 65% of those who took part in the original migration are still scattered through the countryside. The Minister's report in mid-October suggested no more than a 7% return to London—probably a low estimate; but there are some indications that the demand for contributions from the parents accelerated the flow homeward. Thus in the week after the scheme of payment was announced twice as many Salford children were brought back from the country as had returned throughout the whole of the previous period.

Safety Zones

Before any scheme of re-evacuation is launched, however, it should be necessary to survey the Government's geographical zoning of the country. The first definition of areas was issued by the Ministry in January 1939. It aroused some criticism and caused many misgivings. Officially it has been acknowledged that the zoning is unsatisfactory; but it has been argued that little can be done because the definition of the reception zones is determined by the extent of the available accommodation. Minor adjustments were, however, made in the course of the following months, mainly as a result of strong representations from the
local authorities concerned. Thus Middlesbrough was shifted from
the neutral to the evacuation category; and the area scheduled
for evacuation in Greater London was considerably widened. A
few areas, such as Dover and Scunthorpe, were moved from the
reception into the neutral category.

For all that, there are still a number of very questionable
cases. There are at least two towns with a normal population
of over a hundred thousand that have received evacuees; and
the East Coast has several bad examples of the same lack of judg-
ment. Three towns in East Anglia, each with a population near
on fifty thousand, have been classified as reception areas, though
they lie on the direct route of bombers aiming at London. There
is even one town in the South Midlands that is classified as vulner-
able for the purpose of the provision of shelters and yet has been
since the outbreak of war carrying a fair number of evacuees.

In our opinion no further evacuation to these towns should
take place; and one of the features of any constructive plan should
be the scheduling of alternative accommodation in less vulnerable
parts of the country. The drift away from the reception towns
we have instanced has been considerable; one of them in Suffolk
has had more air raid warnings than has London; and it is
scarcely surprising that the evacuees saw little reason for remaining
there.

**Economics of Billeting**

The human aspects of the billeting problems have been partly
economic and partly domestic. In the early weeks there was a
considerable amount of re-billeting; and in some areas the move-
ment still continues after intervals of time. On the whole the
trend has been away from the middle class homes and from the
indubitable 'slums' of the villages and small towns, and towards
the more comfortably situated working class families. Beyond
question these homes have been more suitable and hospitable
for the evacuated children; and in many cases the housewife
seems to have been fairly successful in fitting the 8/6 or 10/6
allowance into her weekly budget. It would not be easy to esti-
mate how much of this sum is usually expended on food and the
obvious sundries which a child might need. The Ministry of
Health seems never to have revealed on what basis the sum was
originally fixed; but it is evident from a Parliamentary answer
to a question regarding the mixed billeting of mothers and children
of varying ages that 3/- of the 8/6 was designed as payment for
lodging; leaving probably 5/- for food and 6d for unspecified
sundries. It was, however, common, at least in the early days,
for fosterparents to declare that the 8/6 was insufficient for the
purchase of food. Be that as it may, this question of scales of
payment clearly calls for closer analysis. Fosterparents are
naturally entitled to some payment in respect to lodging; and
it is questionable whether, with the present rise in the cost of food, 5/- is still a sufficient sum for the nourishment of an average healthy child. The Minister has already agreed that his 8/6 was inadequate for the maintenance of an older child and has raised the allowance to 10/6 for all children over the age of sixteen. The age fixed is an arbitrary one; most nutritional authorities now propose that children of fourteen and over should receive at least as much total food as do their parents, with a larger proportionate allowance of proteins; and in our opinion the Ministry's scales of payment should be adjusted accordingly.

The whole principle of the recovery of some part of this payment from the parents needs separate treatment. The scales laid down by the Ministry were not illiberal when contrasted with certain other scales, though they were comparable with the estimate for recovery of costs used by many local authorities. But there are numerous intermediate cases where the method of assessment involves definite hardship. For example, outgoings on clothing clubs and hire purchase—frequently amounting in a modern working-class budget to 8/- or 12/- a week—have not been admitted; and no reckoning has been made of the expense involved in visits to the children (still considerable in spite of the reduction in fares), of the purchase of winter clothing and footwear suitable for the country and of the present rise in the cost of living.

The problem of clothing and footwear would be less serious were the authorities given wider powers for the purchase of them in necessitous cases. The problem is only temporarily relieved in some measure through the action of voluntary bodies; and it is a difficulty that is going to remain with us while evacuation lasts. If the children are to have the benefit of good country air, it will be hard on the boots; and it will be as hard in a year's time as it is now. But we can be no less certain that increased taxation and a rising cost of living will effectively dry up the springs of private philanthropy; and the sooner the State shoulders its due responsibilities the better for its schemes of evacuation.

The Problem of Work and Play

Domestically there is far too little privacy for the foster-parents. A Ministry circular implies that every endeavour should be made to reduce the time and labour which the householder is required to devote to her new charges; the general objective should be to ensure that the householder is relieved of responsibility between breakfast time and tea time.

This is true enough; but the problem is entangled with that of education and further complicated by the extreme difficulty of dealing with dark evenings, especially in the countryside. There
are instances where a hall has been thrown open for recreation after tea; but the fact that younger children had to be accompanied to and from the hall made the scheme almost impracticable. Meanwhile, where the shift system in education still obtains, it implies that in inclement weather the children may often be thrown back for half the day upon the fostermother. The problems merge of course into the single vast problem of accommodation. So far as the billeting system remains good for schoolchildren, the provision of premises would mean that their education could in all cases be safely extended to a full-time curriculum; and that in some measure the children could be decanted for odd periods into their school halls for play or entertainment. At present, while the ingenuity of local education authorities has often improvised some method of ensuring a full curriculum, the arrangements may frequently be unstable; and in many cases the premises are not, as they should be, available for all times and purposes.

We may add here that we should welcome a survey that could inform the Board of Education how far the supply of voluntary helpers in the villages is actually equal to the need. In most instances the teachers have given devoted service to the children; and it seems to us that they could often be supplemented by a salaried 'games leader', whose business it would be to contrive spare-time activities for the children; in the winter months he should be attached to a central recreation hall of some description; and it would be an excellent move if escorts could be organised to bring a number of the children to such a hall between their tea and their bed-time.

**Toddlers**

Even more urgent is the need of premises if the evacuation of pre-school children is to be made a success. In our opinion the removal of mothers from their homes has not been and is not likely to be a feasible proposition. In rare instances it has worked. But in most cases the call of the husband and of the familiar home surroundings has been too strong.

It is possible, however, that a fair number of women could be persuaded to part with their young children, if they were completely satisfied with the conditions under which they were to live. Here some care is needed; a few counties report that an occasional household would be prepared to undertake the charge of a young child; and it is a fact that some thousands of such children are already comfortably billeted without their mothers.

But there is an obvious limit to the method. The responsibility is a heavy one; and many village women, who have themselves no toddler to look after, find work either in the fields or in neighbouring towns. On the other hand, there are many objections to the establishment of large residential nursery schools. Unless the conditions are more or less ideal, as far as space, premises
and staffing are concerned, children of this age rarely seem to prosper. The lack of individual care and 'mothering' usually makes them fretful and sickly; and there is always the risk of mass infection, that might at times be serious.

It is clear that where in a small urban or village area a number of young children are billeted on fosterparents some kind of day nurseries are indispensable; and they would have to be adequately staffed with trained supervisors. It would be necessary too for transport to be provided each day, so that the children could be collected from and returned to their billets. The only alternative is the provision of very small residential nurseries for twenty or so children a piece; in some instances these have already worked well. The system may not recommend itself to the administrative mind, that would probably prefer to have a few hundred children safely housed beneath a single roof. But it is the only one likely to satisfy the medical requirements; and the sole arguments against it are its complexity and its cost.

No doubt the best procedure would be to group the unevacuated pre-school children into provisional day nurseries and above all to familiarise their mothers with the whole conception. A few of the mothers could be selected to assist in staffing the new nursery schools in the regions of reception; and as soon as the premises were ready the group could be transported thither as an existing unit.

Lebensraum

It is obvious from the foregoing that the scheme must have roomspace—Lebensraum, if you will—if it is to succeed at all. We must recognise that it is impossible to transport a population adapted to town environment and expect it to be absorbed by some chemical process into the life of the countryside. The human contact between town and country must be patiently fostered, not only by the authorities concerned but above all through those voluntary organisations that are so intimately affected by the migration; the few examples of the establishment of parents’ committees, of popular reception committees and of schemes for the organised visits of parents to a reception area show how much can be achieved by such efforts.

The receiving authorities possess certain powers in regard to premises; in the first ten weeks of the war most of these powers were mainly concerned with billeting. A householder may of course be compelled to take in evacuees or to make rooms available for this purpose. But should the authority wish to acquire further billeting premises, it can do little more than requisition empty dwellings for the housing of the misfits, for the provision of sick bays and for the accommodation of young children, whose mothers are confined or have returned to their homes. It is true that in
such cases no expense is to fall on the receiving authorities; there are, nevertheless, several instances where the councils have not made full use of their powers; and it is certainly very doubtful whether any expenditure that exceeds the official regulations would be recognised for grant by the Minister.

Measures such as these could only alleviate the situation. It was clear that if the difficulties were to be seriously tackled, the councils would have to be armed with wider powers over the existing accommodation in their areas. Until the close of November they were more or less helpless; it had been a common experience for them to see premises on which they had their eye snapped up by a government department, a business firm, a charitable institution or a private citizen. The system of military priorities appeared never to have been harmonised with local requirements; and the broad result was that in the scheme of values the needs of the country’s children usually came at the bottom of the scale.

The question of priorities has not yet been settled. But in the last days of November the authorities had fresh powers conferred upon them. They may now, for example, receive grants from the Board for the hiring of premises to supplement ordinary school accommodation and for out-of-school activities. They may further rely on similar assistance from the Ministry in their arrangements for communal feeding. We have still to see how much this means in practice. Even where premises are available in a village or small town, they will usually require some structural adaptation; and it is not clear that sufficient provision has been made for this.

**Improvised Accommodation**

It is possible that a general survey of existing premises would yield us much of the accommodation we require for all purposes. But such a survey is urgent. A preliminary examination of some of the reception areas shows that premises are certainly to hand and could be used in many instances without drastic alteration. Undoubtedly many large houses would require structural adaptation and augmented sanitary arrangements before they could be used; but these could be classified according to the probable costs involved.

In a few cases the occupiers of mansions or vicarages have vacated all but a small suite of rooms and turned over the main apartments to the use of the billeting authorities; with a little public encouragement the custom would probably spread. Premises of this kind should be particularly suitable for the housing of small nursery schools to which we made reference above.

A curious investigator, moving up and down the country, will discover sporadic attempts to fit up an odd assortment of disused or condemned schools, private halls, chapels and so
forth as premises where education may be carried on. The build-
ings themselves are often adequate, though it has usually needed
the initiative of a head teacher to scrape together the desks, equip-
ment and books; but the significant point is that this initiative
has taken the school in question some stages towards return to
a full-time programme of work. In passing it should be added
that the sanitation in these premises often needs to be adapted;
and that few if any of them are suitable for communal feeding.

New Building

The moment we emerge from this phase of inspired improvisa-
tion we have to face the problem of new building construction.
Here we reach a fresh element. It is our belief that the changes
necessary should develop from stage to stage; and that above
all they should at each stage develop from the needs of the people
most affected by the whole fantastic process.

New buildings are permanent and change the face of the
villages and small towns; they must therefore be designed to
meet the future needs of the people in these villages and small
towns. School buildings in many of the rural areas are hopelessly
out of date; and there is nothing unreasonable in the suggestion
that the policy of building senior schools in the countryside should
not be left in cold storage for the duration of war but should on
the contrary be revived and implemented. We must get the
children back to school. If premises are lacking in a neighbour-
hood and no fresh school building has already been projected,
then some kind of hall or village centre will have to be constructed,
that can serve for teaching purposes while the war lasts and subse-
quently be an asset to the neighbourhood.

We are, doubtful without a survey how much fresh accom-
modation would be needed for nursery centres; but there would
be many advantages to be gained from the construction of halls
that could in the day-time be used for this purpose. It is quite
evident by this time that the war has drawn upon the halls and
similar places of local recreation in the countryside beyond their
capacity; and they must be supplemented.

There has been a fair amount of speculation about the more
ambitious scheme for camp schools. At the moment the plans
do not go far. Even if the Government built all the camps
promised they could not accommodate more than 1% to 2% of
the school population normally in the vulnerable areas. The
project is in a sense the subject for a separate campaign of social
advancement, springing as it happens out of the needs of war
but serving also the needs of peace. While the necessary adjust-
ments, the survey of premises and the smaller building programmes
are being carried forward as speedily as possible, the sooner we have
camps available the better. If any effort is made to reclassify
the zones of safety and at the same time to attract fresh children out of the cities, we shall be in some danger of saturating the countryside; and in that case further living space would be indispensable.

Priorities

What we have to envisage, in fact, is social reform patiently finding its way forward through the interstices of a war economy; and this is no easy matter. There may, for example, be a struggle of priorities, particularly when it comes to the problem of labour and of building materials. It has been estimated that the provision of camp schools for children at present billeted in towns, of educational premises for such children as are at present billeted in safety and of nursery schools and hostels for the mothers and children who could not be accommodated in existing buildings would be of the order of £70,000,000. This, it may be said, represents only about a seventh of the cost of general building work normally carried out in a single year. But once again it must be stressed that we are moving in the interstices of a war economy. Pre-fabricated timber construction would doubtless be the most speedy as well as the cheapest method one could employ. But we are here up against the demands of the War Office, the demands of the Home Office for air raid shelters, the arguments of the Ministry of Shipping and the needs of the Mines Department. It is possible that even these could be convinced that the child life of the nation was worth preserving and nurturing to maturity; in the meantime we should have to use all the available local material and local labour, as and when chance threw them in our way. It may be noted that in rural areas the building industry is by no means being used to capacity on such emergency work, as is absorbing for the moment the attention of many of the towns; indeed, there appears to be a growing unemployment in several of the building trades and there are idle brick kilns scattered through the countryside.

Infection

We must touch finally upon the important subject of child health. There are two main dangers that face a belligerent country—outbreaks of infectious illness and a deterioration in dietetic standards such as may undermine the stamina and resistance of the children. We may pass rapidly over the reports of scabies, impetigo and infestation with lice, that were a feature of the early evacuation days. A number of these reports turned out on examination to have been grossly exaggerated; but the incident was a revealing one. Here and there a school had been inspected before its members left the evacuation area; and in such cases the number of children infected by the time they reached their
billets was far lower than in the groups who were huddled into exile uncleaned; in a certain selected instance the proportion was apparently in the neighbourhood of one sufferer in the inspected schools to six in those who had escaped attention. Even then the figures were surprising. There were of course instances where a large group of children had been in close contact during their journey for a day and night; and the infestation could spread quickly from a single child. There were occasions where the evacuees certainly took the contagion from their hosts.

Allowing for all this, we have to admit that the evacuation showed up a social evil of which we know the remedy. County medical officers have been expressing themselves as surprised at the number of cases of uncleanness they were called upon to handle over the first few weeks; and it is a fact that the recent annual reports of the evacuating areas would have led us to expect a far smaller percentage of such cases. There is an evident gap in our school medical services that will have to be filled as soon as peace returns.

The danger of an outbreak of measles, scarlet fever, whooping cough or diphtheria is always present, when two child populations of possibly varying immunity are intermingled for a long period. Against this danger we can take certain precautions. We can, for example, make wider use of immunisation; and in some areas the medical authorities seem to have done so. If we are faced with an epidemic of measles and the children are being kept under observation as contacts, convalescent serum can no doubt be administered in a number of cases; and there are signs that the Ministry is making some preparation for this.

**Health Services**

Meanwhile, we must be assured that the staffing of the health services in reception areas is sufficient to meet any serious contingency. The children should be kept under close observation. During the first weeks of the war there were instances of understaffing that added to the severity of the few outbreaks that occurred; thus an epidemic of measles in one of the evacuated day nurseries affected 90% of the children and could not be adequately dealt with until a trained nurse had been secured after some delay from the area of evacuation. If any attempt is made to establish residential nursery centres, as we suggested above, they should be supplied from the outset with at least one trained nurse to 100 children; the proportion of nurses will depend on the distribution of small nursery centres; and there should be a mobile medical service, consisting of a doctor and a health visitor with transport, available for each 500 children.

So far the health of the schoolchildren has been satisfactory enough. Fresh air and the sunlight of the late autumn have developed their appetites; they appear more alert and lively than
they had formerly been; and in several cases at least school attendances have been more regular. The question is how far this improvement must be looked upon as a relatively superficial and passing phase. There is no doubt that many of the evacuees are getting longer hours of sleep and a more varied diet than they had been accusomed to enjoy. But, as the Board now seems to be aware, there is an urgent need for the supplementing of the medical and dental services in the receiving areas and there is every argument in favour of the provision of communal meals.

**Communal Feeding**

Fostermothers with children of their own are finding the problem of preparing meals a very trying one; and, where the shift system in education still prevails, several hours of the day may have to be devoted to feeding the enlarged family. Their difficulties have been further complicated by the settled food habits of many of the urban children. The dietetic shortcomings of these established tastes and habits are neither here nor there. We did not need a war to tell us about them; and there is no real reason to suppose that country children fare on the average much better nutritionally, even if their tastes differ somewhat from those of their urban contemporaries.

The fact of the matter is that we cannot afford to expose the children in war time—whether these children be evacuees or not—to a calcium, iron or vitamin shortage. Organised communal meals are the obvious way to forestall such a shortage, simply because it is possible thus to ensure as balanced a diet as available foodstuffs will permit. If they help in addition to relieve the fostermother of some of her cares, so much the better.

In the last fortnight of November the Board agreed to defray the expense of local authorities for the hiring and equipping of premises suitable for communal mid-day meals. Only the cost of the food was to fall upon the fosterparents; and it was suggested by the Board’s spokesman in the House of Commons that this cost might be in the neighbourhood of 2d to 2½d a meal. Wisely the service was to be extended to local children as well as to evacuees; and the authorities were to report by the close of the year what steps they had taken to implement these powers.

The authorities and voluntary organisations had already in several cases anticipated the Board’s circular. Considerable ingenuity had often been shown in adapting premises and securing loans of equipment. But a study of such schemes suggests that the cost of each meal must more usually be reckoned at 3½d or 4d; and the quality of the meals provided varied from place to place. Some of the menus had been drawn up by competent dieticians; others followed the lines of custom and paid little attention to the protective foods. Now that the principle of
communal meals has been officially recognised, steps must be taken to supervise the menus and give them a standard of excellence. When parents assume that the children are being correctly fed at their mid-day meal, they will in some cases take it for granted that they can safely devote breakfasts and teas to the basic task of satisfying the children's craving for bulk fare. It is a point that cannot be ignored. When the State takes some measure of responsibility for the diet or health of the children, it thereby communalises the responsibility of the parents; and it must consequently do its work well; or it will leave the children to be the victims of divided responsibilities, at a time when occasional scarcity and a rising cost of living are tempting parents to rely more than ordinarily upon the public services provided to meet such an emergency.

It is our opinion that the whole problem of communal meals should be under the control of a dietetic committee established by the Board. This committee should examine all menus arranged by local authorities, fix a standard of sufficiency and adjust minimum prices charged for the meals in accordance with changes in the cost of food. All menus should include a sufficiency of milk, fruit and vegetables; and it would be desirable that some of the teachers or the voluntary staff should take meals with the children, in order to encourage them by example to try types of food to which they had not been accustomed.

There is much to be said for increasing the supply of cheap milk under the Milk in Schools Scheme from one-third to two-thirds of a pint daily per child, if possible without increase of price. For several weeks the whole scheme had been working very unsatisfactorily, where it had been working at all; and even now there is some doubt whether consumption of milk in the receiving areas has returned to its normal level for the increased number of children. There is need to ensure the level of milk consumption as a whole; and in a period when many families may be led to economise on milk, the State might well intervene to guarantee our child population against even a remote risk of rickets and lowered resistance to respiratory infections.

Failure or Reform?

It amounts, in conclusion, to this. Between 60% and 70% of the children of all ages normally in the vulnerable areas are still in those areas at the moment of writing; possibly the numbers are even higher. A slowly decreasing residue of between 30% and 40% of them at the best are dispersed through the countryside. Are we to make an effort to disperse the whole of the child population of the cities for a matter of two years or more, weave them without undue strain into the texture of the countryside, nurture them, educate them and make some attempt in the meantime to preserve the continuity of family life? If we are, it will
probably cost the nation a few million pounds more than it bargained for. But what is the alternative? The only alternative, as far as we can see, is to suffer the drift homeward to the cities to continue at its own pace, until failure is mathematically too obvious for further concealment.

But a well-designed experiment in social reform would leave the country a heritage of camp schools, village halls and clubs, nursery hostels and the like, such as it had never before enjoyed. Permanent links could be established between urban and rural communities; a sense of the values of right feeding, of air and sunshine, of child nurture and of social enterprise could be carried to half the homes of Britain. There is only one obvious way to secure these results. Problems vary much from area to area and even from village to village; and councils must be encouraged to use to the best advantage all their local resources in accommodation, labour and material. They will only respond to this encouragement if they are satisfied that any reasonable expense will be borne by the Exchequer. What we need is a large and wholesome display of local initiative, exploring and discovering its own solutions for the manifold difficulties that have arisen and will continue to arise. This does not imply that the Ministries concerned will forego any right they possess to check local expenditure; but it does imply a fresh conception of the relations between these Ministries and the rural authorities that have to make the schemes work. By reasonable expenditure we mean any outlay on the hiring, adaptation or construction of premises and the hiring of paid helpers that may in the aggregate prevent parents from taking their children back to the vulnerable areas; for is not this, as we understand it, the main object of evacuation? Where conditions vary so much, it is impossible to lay down any rigid principles of application; and it may well be that, when the public awakens to the anomalies implicit in the scheme, and finds that no steps are being taken to remedy them, 'evacuation from Whitehall' will be as much a byword in the countryside as 'farming from Whitehall' has been these many years past.
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