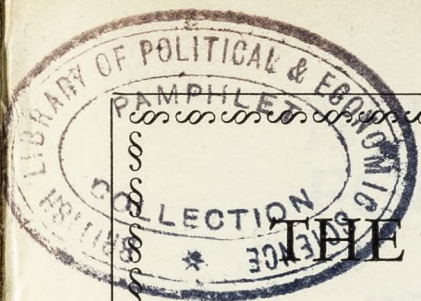


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# THE LABOUR PARTY

*Reports on*  
NUTRITION AND  
FOOD SUPPLIES  
*and*  
WOMEN IN OFFICES

*to be presented by the Standing Joint Committee  
of Industrial Women's Organisations to the*

NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF  
LABOUR WOMEN, SWANSEA

May 19, 20 and 21, 1936

Price 1d.                      Post free 1½d.                      1s. per dozen.

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Published by the Labour Party,  
Transport House, Smith Square, London, S.W.1.



# NUTRITION AND FOOD SUPPLIES

## INTEREST IN NUTRITION

Long before Sir George Newman (until lately the nation's Chief Medical Officer) wrote in an Annual Report that "health is a purchasable commodity," the Labour Movement had been calling attention to the fact that health was denied to large sections of the people because of their poverty. Until recently it had little support outside its own ranks.

Even in 1933 when the report—"Creating a C.3 Nation"—was discussed and adopted by the National Conference of Labour Women, the danger of widespread malnutrition was not regarded seriously, and little notice was taken by the press of the demands made at that conference for adequate maintenance for the unemployed and the feeding of school children; nor of the budgets published to show that the amounts available for food in a number of unemployed families (typical of thousands more) ranged from  $1/8$  to  $3/1\frac{1}{2}$  per head per week.

To-day Nutrition is a fashionable subject. There is widespread concern at the steadily accumulating evidence of the terrible effects of prolonged unemployment on health; but the present interest in Nutrition is partly due to the fact that one section of capitalist producers—farmers in this and other countries—are unable to find a profitable market for their produce. Inspiring calls for the "marriage of health to agriculture" may reflect concern for the farmer who cannot sell rather than for the poor who cannot buy. It is important to emphasise this because if the glut of food could be taken off the market in some other way—if, for example, the new fleets of cruisers could run on milk or the new squadrons of aeroplanes could be oiled with butter—we should undoubtedly find much less concern in certain quarters at the absence of first-class proteins and vitamins from the tables of the unemployed and underpaid workers.

Political parties - U.K.





## DOES MALNUTRITION EXIST?

The great advance in the science of Nutrition in recent years, raises economic and political issues which the scientists hesitate to face—some of them protesting too much that it is impossible to prove a close relation between nutrition or malnutrition and poverty.

### Official Complacency

The official attitude is over-complacent. It is true that for some years the Annual Report of the Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Health has contained warnings about the possible dangers to future health of prolonged unemployment. But the tendency has been to maintain that things are not so bad. For example, the last Report (published in September, 1935), after quoting extensively from the report of a special Inquiry in the County of Durham, adds the comment:—

“The evidence in this report, evidence which is congruent with much other information available to the medical department, shows that even in the most distressed areas of the country the measures taken by public authorities and the generous efforts of individuals have so far as the usual indices of health can be trusted, largely held in check the deleterious influences of unemployment and reduced income.” (page 17).

The particular inquiry to which such authority is given, was undertaken by the Ministry of Health following statements in the press by a doctor in the county that there was “a substantial and progressive deterioration of the public health.”

The investigation was carried out by three doctors who spent sixteen week-days in the area, and examined over 4,700 persons—pre-school children, school children, adolescents, pregnant and nursing mothers. Had they each given eight hours on all the sixteen days to these examinations, they could have spent barely five minutes on each person! It is absurd to use a report based on such an inquiry as evidence of the health conditions of the people in any area.

The latest report (1934) of the Chief Medical Officer to the Board of Education records a slight increase in

the number of children returned as suffering from malnutrition, requiring treatment or observation, but states:

“The massed return for 1934, compiled from figures submitted by 316 Education Authorities, shows that the conditions of nutrition of school children throughout England and Wales remains practically stationary and shows no general deterioration.”

### Lack of Objective Standard

The value of official statistics relating to the nutrition of school children must be questioned. In the first place there is no generally accepted standard for assessing malnutrition, and the Chief Medical Officer has to collate observations which represent the personal views and judgment of a large number of local Medical Officers.

Discrepancies in the standards adopted are revealed by comparisons of figures from various areas: a point which is the subject of frequent comment.

“In England, the diagnosis of malnutrition in schools is based on clinical examination, and the subjective element which enters into the assessment is illustrated by the following: Bootle (which is for all practical purposes an integral part of greater Liverpool) returns a malnutrition rate twelve times as high as Liverpool itself; Leeds and Wigan, containing very similar industrial populations, return rates of 31 and 9 per 1,000 respectively; the relatively prosperous borough of Twickenham returns a rate of 10 per 1,000.” (Report on “Nutrition and Public Health,” League of Nations, June, 1935).

Further, in the absence of a common standard, there is a danger that where the average standard of health is low, the **average** will be regarded as the **normal**, with the result that a lower percentage of malnutrition is reported than would be the case if a high standard were adopted.

### Difficulty of Early Detection

Finally, the difficulty of detecting any but the more obvious signs of malnutrition, particularly in a brief routine examination, must be emphasised. Height and weight tests may reveal no departure from the normal, until long after the damage has set in.

“The effects of malnutrition due to poverty may only become apparent after a long interval; a child whose diet contains too high a proportion of cheap carbo-hydrates may retain a



'normal' weight for a fairly long time, even though a state of anaemia and debility has already set in." (Report on "Nutrition and Public Health," League of Nations, June, 1935).

### Evidence of Malnutrition

The Ministry of Health and the Board of Education give too much weight to the more optimistic local reports which state there is little or no evidence of malnutrition, and they fail to reflect the growing dissatisfaction with the statistical results of routine examinations, nor do they emphasise sufficiently the views of those medical officers who produce evidence of increasing malnutrition.

There is no space to quote from Reports, but many Medical Officers report an increase in malnutrition among mothers and school children; and a number have definitely associated maternal deaths and ill-health, an increase of rickets and tuberculosis, and the prevalence of anaemia, with prolonged poverty. Other significant statements which frequently occur are that the provision of school meals has prevented serious deterioration of the children's health; and that the health of the children has been fairly well maintained in spite of poverty, **but only at the expense of the mothers.**

## FOOD AND HEALTH

While it would be most desirable to have some generally accepted standard for assessing nutrition, it would be still more useful from the point of view of improving the nation's health, if the public medical services would concentrate on finding out the extent of **underfeeding** among those who come under their notice.

### Importance of Right Diet

It is argued by those who do not care to hear words like "underfeeding," that poverty and inadequate diet are not the only causes of malnutrition. We can agree that there are factors not necessarily associated with poverty—e.g., overwork, mental anxiety or previous disease—which affect nutrition; and also that malnutrition may be caused by over-feeding as well as by under-feeding! But most of the "other causes than poverty" which are

frequently cited as the reason for malnutrition, are really symptoms of poverty, bad housing, overcrowding, lack of rest and sleep, lack of fresh air, worry, etc.

The significant fact, however, is that **a proper diet is the most important factor in Nutrition, and the want of it the most important cause of Malnutrition.**

"Nutrition was the process, or series of co-ordinated processes, whereby the nourishment of the body was effected, and the structural integrity and functional efficiency of every cell maintained. . . .

Nutrition was affected adversely by a number of factors such as imperfect oxygenation, insufficient rest and want of sleep, overwork and fatigue, but by far the most important factor was food of improper constitution." (Sir Robert McCarrison on "Nutrition and National Health," British Medical Journal, 29/2/36).

### Essentials of a Right Diet

We have advanced from the time when it was thought enough merely to have sufficient food regularly to satisfy hunger. We know more about why we require food and the importance of quality as well as quantity.

Food is required as **fuel** for the body, to keep it warm, and supply it with energy.

Food is required as **building material**, for the proper construction of the body before birth, throughout childhood and the period of growth, and for the upkeep of the body—tissue repair, etc.

Food is required to **protect** the body against disease and to ensure its healthy functioning.

A right diet is one which has adequate heat and energy value (calories) and which contains a sufficient supply of body-building and protective material. If heat and energy were all we had to think of, a diet of fairly cheap foods would be enough, but the body-building and protective foods require a more varied and expensive dietary.

Apart from oxygen and water all food is made up of **fats** and **carbohydrates**, which are fuel material; **proteins**, which are body-building material (classified as animal or



first-class protein and vegetable or second-class protein); and **mineral salts** and **vitamins**, which keep our bodies in good order and protect us from disease.

Without using scientific terms, a healthy diet may be described as an abundant and varied diet of quite ordinary foodstuffs—the kind of diet the housewife tries to provide **when she can afford it**. She knows that her family require a fair amount of “filling” things—bread, potatoes, cereals, which satisfy hunger, and which, along with fats, are the sources of warmth and energy: that they need a reasonable quantity of body-building food like milk, cheese, eggs, fish and meat. She also knows that fresh natural foods should have an important place in the diet—e.g., milk, eggs, fresh fruit and vegetables and fat fish, in addition to other uses they may have, contain the vitamins which are so essential for health and growth; green vegetables and eggs supply iron which is necessary to make blood; milk and eggs provide calcium and phosphorous, which are needed to build teeth and bones.

Medical investigation has shown very clearly that there is a close connection between diet and the proper development of bones, teeth and tissue, and the proper functioning of the body; that the right diet is a means of preventing rickets, anaemia and other “deficiency” diseases; that a right diet is all-important for expectant and nursing mothers, infants and children, if the health of the adult is to be sound. It has also been shown that where a proper diet is lacking, it is impossible to derive advantage from other factors—e.g., improved housing—which normally make for better health.

### **MINIMUM versus “OPTIMUM” STANDARDS**

While there is general agreement among the experts as to what foods are essential and why, and what is likely to happen to us if we have to go without them, they approach the problem of diet from different angles. Some of the Nutrition inquirers attempt to discover the **minimum diet** on which health can be maintained—the diet below which it would be dangerous to fall—(e.g., The Report of the British Medical Association Committee on

Nutrition, and the Report on “Criticism and Improvement of Diets,” published by the Ministry of Health). Others aim at the **optimum diet**—the diet which will enable us to maintain an ideal standard of nutrition, defined by Sir John Orr as “a state of well-being such that no improvement can be effected by a change in the diet.”

### **Class Distinction in Health?**

We believe that we should be concerned not with the **minimum** diet but with the **best** (optimum); or to put it another way, the only diet which we can regard as satisfactory, in the light of existing knowledge of nutrition, is one that will enable every member of the community to attain a standard of health and growth equal to that enjoyed by the healthiest sections of the community. To aim at a lower general standard is to admit the necessity of class distinction in health.

### **Can We Raise Health Level Above “Minimum”?**

Certain nutrition experiments in recent years have shown the possibility of raising the level of nutrition beyond the standard attainable on a minimum diet. The large-scale experiment in 1930 among Lanarkshire school children to test the value of milk, produced striking results. 20,000 children were under review, 10,000 receiving a ration of  $\frac{3}{4}$  pint of milk per day, the others receiving no ration. At the end of four months, the children receiving milk showed a greater rate of growth and a marked improvement in health. The preface to the report says:

“The results . . . demonstrate that the addition of milk to the diet of children has a striking effect in improving physique, and general health, and increasing mental alertness. They suggest also that, apart from its own food value, milk enables the other constituents of the ordinary diet to be fully utilised as growth factors.”

Both groups of children were mixed—well nourished as well as poorly nourished children being included. But the marked improvement in the milk-ration children was not confined to those who had been ill-nourished.



In 1926 an experiment was carried out by Dr. Corry Mann among schoolboys at an industrial school near London, where all the boys were on the same "basic" diet, which was considered an adequate one. They were divided into groups, one group receiving only the "basic" diet, the other receiving an additional ration of food. The most striking comparison at the end of one year was between the "basic" group and the "milk-ration" group.

	Gain in weight.	Gain in height.
Basic Group ...	3.85-lbs.	1.84-ins.
Milk Group ...	6.98-lbs.	2.63-ins.

Dr. Corry Mann's report points out:

"Apart from the marked gain in weight and height . . . there is also a general improvement in their physical condition. They lose the marked tendency to chilblains. . . . In addition they become far more high spirited and irrepresible being often in trouble on that account, and though it is not possible to measure this change in their mentality by statistical methods yet the change was unmistakable."

An investigation into the Health and Nutrition of children in Newcastle-upon-Tyne revealed the wide gap in health between poor children and well-to-do children. A group of 125 working-class children (103 of them children of unemployed fathers) was compared with 124 children belonging to the professional classes.

	Poor Children Per cent.	Well-to-do Children Per cent.
Below normal weight ...	55	13
Above normal weight ...	11	48
Below normal height ...	47	5
Above normal height ...	2	11
Anaemic ...	23	0

Sir Robert McCarrison, in a recent lecture,

"described comparative studies of rats to demonstrate the freedom of well-fed animals from disease and the proneness to disease of animals fed on such a diet as was commonly used by the poorer classes in England. . . . Rats fed on this sort of diet showed stunted growth and other signs of poor nutrition. They were susceptible to two chief classes of ailments—namely, pulmonary and gastro-intestinal." (British Medical Journal, 29/2/36).

It is not unreasonable to suggest that this diet is producing similar results on the families who are compelled to live on it!

The chief objection to the conception of a **minimum** diet is the danger of its being accepted as a standard; and as there are variations between the needs of individuals there would always be a number for whom the minimum is inadequate. It is safer, therefore, to aim at the "optimum" diet. But a study of some of the minimum standards suggested from time to time is of value in helping to estimate the extent of underfeeding.

### COST OF A RIGHT DIET

Various social and medical investigators have put the **minimum** cost of a diet for an adult man at sums varying from 5/- to 6/8 per week.

The British Medical Association Committee on Nutrition (1933) carefully estimated the minimum food requirements for individuals and families. A diet was worked out in detail. The cost for an adult man was estimated at 5/10, and for a family of husband, wife and three children (of 12, 10 and 6) at 22/6½ per week. An enquiry through the Labour Women's Advisory Councils showed that the B.M.A. Committee had underestimated the cost of this specimen diet. Nowhere could it be bought at the B.M.A. figure of 22/6½, the actual cost in twenty-two areas ranging from 23/6 to 29/5.

The report published by the Ministry of Health on "The Criticism and Improvement of Diets," while adopting a lower calories standard than the British Medical Association, gave advice about body-building and protective foods, which, if followed, would require a more varied, nutritious and expensive diet than that suggested by the British Medical Association.

The Ministry of Health in 1932 published a report on Diet in Poor Law Children's Homes, which considered the question of a properly balanced diet with a careful eye to economy. The conclusion was that in an institution for 200 children, the weekly cost per head per week, **for food alone**, would be about 4/6½, **if all provisions were bought at contract prices.**



Sir John Orr, who is a recognised authority on Nutrition, has stated in his recent book "Food, Health and Income," that a diet sufficient to maintain the fullest health can only be assured where there is an expenditure of 10/- per head per week on food.

### EXPENDITURE ON FOOD

How do these various estimates of the cost of a minimum diet, and Sir John Orr's estimate for the "Optimum," compare with the actual amounts which families can spend on food.

Sir John Orr argues that half the population are living below his ideal standard.

There are, he says, 4½ million people who can spend no more than 4/- a week upon food. Their diet is deficient in every constituent.

There are 9 millions who spend no more than 6/- per week. Their diet is adequate in fuel foods and in tissue-forming foods, but deficient in protective foods.

There are 9 millions who spend no more than 8/- per week. Their diet is deficient in certain protective elements.

The fourth group of 9 millions who spend 10/- per week, have almost completely adequate diet.

In two higher groups of 9 millions and 4½ millions respectively spending 12/- and 14/- per week—there is a surplus of the various constituents.

These figures have provoked a good deal of interest and controversy and have been attacked by those who prefer the complacency of the Ministry of Health Reports. Our view is that Sir John Orr's figures do not exaggerate the evil of underfeeding: that in certain respects they even underestimate it.

#### The Average and the Actual

There is a danger in applying an average to millions of people, of assuming that the average represents the normal actual conditions of the majority. But every

housewife must spend her own income, not an abstract average. If three neighbours have incomes of £5, £2 10s. and £1 10s. respectively, there are two of them who will not find comfort in the statement that the "average" income of the three is £3 a week.

Among the 4½ million whose expenditure on food is estimated as "averaging" 4/- per head per week, **there are tens of thousands who have a good deal less to spend on food.**

### LABOUR WOMEN'S INQUIRY

The Women's Sections of the Labour Party began in February of this year an inquiry **to ascertain how much or how little of the chief body-building and protective foods can be bought by working-class housewives at different income ranges.**

(**Note:** At the moment this report is being written too small a proportion of the forms have been returned to make a detailed analysis possible. This will be issued immediately before the Conference: the inquiry is being continued, and applications for further forms are still being received. 23/3/36).

It is clear, however, from the replies already received, that many unemployed families have no more than from 2/- to 3/6 per head per week for food: that families on low wages very often are on as low a standard as the unemployed: and that there is a close relation between the consumption of the more essential foods and income.

As the amount per person available for food decreases, the purchase of milk, butter, eggs, fresh fruit and vegetables, cheese, fish and meat decreases, until in the lowest ranges of income they are eliminated altogether except for occasional cheap scraps of meat, a bit of the cheaper cheese and perhaps half a pint of milk on Sunday. At the same time there is an increase in the amount of bread and potatoes purchased.

#### Good Nutrition Impossible for Poor

Once again we have the most conclusive evidence that in spite of heroic efforts on the part of mothers, many families are forced down to a bread, potato and margarine



diet, and that too often that diet is shared by the mother during pregnancy with little or no additional nourishment.

Letters which have been sent along with the forms, many of them very detailed and illuminating, express over and over again the bitterness and anxiety of mothers who realise the damage that is being done to their children through the enforced restriction of their diet to cheap "filling" foods, and the lack of more nutritive foods. Replies to the question "What quantities would you buy (that is, of the body-building and protective foods) if you could afford it?"—show that housewives have a very sound idea of dietetics and know the importance, especially for children, of milk, eggs, fresh fruit and vegetables.

We believe that the mothers who have taken part in our inquiry are typical of the great majority of working-class mothers, and we can only describe as impertinent and ignorant, statements by individuals with little or no knowledge of working-class conditions, that malnutrition is caused by ignorance of food values and cookery, and unwise buying on the part of housewives. We have received detailed accounts of incredible effort and planning to turn the most unpromising material into palatable and appetising meals. Many mothers would like to have more cooked meals, but cannot, because of the cost of fuel, or gas, and sometimes because of their inability during a long spell of unemployment, to maintain a proper stock of utensils. The point is frequently made that to buy in small quantities is always more costly, and that cheaper qualities involve more waste and need more time for preparation—so that poverty inevitably means more wasteful buying.

But those who maintain that poor mothers buy unwisely must be reminded that **from the point of view of good health there is no wise way of spending 10/- or 12/- on food if that sum has to provide for five people for a week.** The mother who is compelled to think of how to fill her children's stomachs and appease their hunger, instead of how to build healthy, well-knit bodies, cannot

afford to follow the rules of sound nutrition. This is a privilege reserved for those who are more comfortably off.

### **Rent and other Necessary Expenditure**

In any consideration of Food and Income, it is essential to remember the other claims on Income and their relation to the amounts that can be spent on food. Expenditure on food is largely determined by the amount paid in rent, which generally represents a big slice of the income, and is always a first charge on it. (Investigations in Newcastle and Stockton-on-Tees have shown that unemployed families in old slum houses were better fed than similar families in new houses, because food had to be cut down to pay the rent of the new—and healthier—houses).

However far income is cut, something must be allowed for fuel and light, and most mothers try to maintain insurance payments. But other necessities are severely cut. In many cases nothing is spent on clothes. Some mothers have said that they depend entirely on the help of friends and odd jumble sales for clothes, others that they have had to resort to the "clothing club" system though they know that this means shocking exploitation. The money set aside for childrens' footwear cannot really be well-spent because it is never possible to buy any but inferior shoes. Household replacements as a rule are impossible.

Such facts show the absurdity of complacent official statements to the effect that many mothers appear to be apathetic and homes uncared for, and "parental inefficiency" rather than poverty may therefore be the reason for poor nutrition of the children. Cleanliness is costly—in fuel, materials, utensils, and in human energy, and as household equipment becomes worn, it is more difficult and costly—both in money and energy—to maintain a high standard. The shabbiness which is an inevitable result of prolonged poverty might seem to a casual visitor to be a sign of neglect. Nothing tends to break the health and spirit of the harassed mother more than the knowledge that she cannot replace household gear, that her



home is becoming shabby and her children accustomed to a standard of comfort far below what she had once hoped to provide for them; and when at last mental anxiety and physical toil have almost broken her health, it is adding insult to injury to suggest that it is her carelessness or indifference which is responsible for the deterioration in her children's health.

### **Higher Incomes Necessary**

Our inquiry provides further support for the case that Labour women have been arguing for a long time—that poverty means underfeeding; that for the vast majority of working women lack of income is a much more serious handicap than lack of knowledge; that in countless homes domestic standards have been lowered in order to leave as much as possible for food; that where expenditure on other necessities has been cut to almost nothing, an immediate increase of income could not be spent entirely on extra food; that, therefore, to ensure a proper diet, income should be sufficient to allow an adequate margin for all other needs.

### **IS THERE A GLUT?**

Here, then, is a major social and political problem—to see that those who are going short are provided with food. At present "surplus" stocks of food are destroyed because people are too poor to buy them. World production of the most important foodstuffs had been increasing for some years when the depression set in in 1929; but it was the sudden decline in purchasing power, not increased supplies, which brought the slump in prices and the consequent "gluts." The Report on Nutrition and Public Health published last year by the League of Nations points out that "the existence of surplus stocks and over-production in general, at certain moments, in certain countries, does not in any way prove that the world produces too much food, or even enough to meet the needs of its population." If every family in the country were in a position immediately to demand an **optimum** diet—that is, a diet which cannot be improved in any respect—we should be faced for a time with a problem of **under**-production, rather than **over**-production.

## **GOVERNMENT ACTION AND FOOD CONSUMPTION**

### **Cuts in Wages, etc.**

Government action has aggravated the problem. The effect of the "economy cuts" in 1931 is obvious. While certain of the cuts have been restored—e.g., the cuts in wages and standard benefits—the Means Test remains, taking £15 millions per year from the unemployed. There is no doubt that a considerable proportion of that amount would have been spent on food.

### **Social Services**

Maternity and Child Welfare Authorities have power to provide milk and nourishment for expectant and nursing mothers and young children. While no specific instruction was given during the economy campaign to reduce expenditure on this service, there is no doubt that expenditure was restricted in many areas because of the economy drive. At present out of 421 Maternity and Child Welfare Authorities, 398 supply milk free or below cost price to children, while 11 supply milk at cost price. A considerable number of Authorities provide milk for mothers and some supply meals other than milk. There is wide variation in the methods of determining in what circumstances milk and meals shall be granted.

Section 84 of the Education Act (1921) permits Education Authorities to give free meals to all children who are unable by reason of lack of food to take full advantage of the education provided for them. The clause is permissive, and while it has been adopted by most Authorities it has not really been used. It has been quite common to have a rule that children can be fed only when the doctor reports definite symptoms of malnutrition. In the autumn of 1934 the Government issued instructions (Circular 1437) that this bad rule must become the practice of all Authorities. As a result of widespread protests Circular 1444 was issued in December, 1935, modifying the cruel and stupid policy of "a trial period of starvation" laid down a year earlier.



In March of this year 233 Authorities in England and Wales were providing meals, but this includes the Authorities which give free milk only. There are still 83 Authorities which make no free provision of milk or meals.

It is clear from available figures that in most cases milk only is given. In December last out of a total of 322,878 children in England and Wales who were receiving free meals and milk, 233,257 received milk only, and 89,621 received meals—and of these 42,359 received milk as well as meals. These figures show that the School Meals Clause is being used very inadequately. While the number of Authorities providing meals increased from the year 1933-34 to 1934-35, the number of individual children fed decreased and also the total number of meals provided.

In many areas Public Assistance Committees in assessing the means of applicants for transitional payment took into account the value of meals provided at school, so that mothers had often to choose between school meals and a little extra money. The Government refused to issue any instruction to Local Authorities to ignore school meals. The Regulations issued in December, 1934, by the Unemployment Assistance Board prescribed that all meals beyond a certain number shall be taken into account in assessing an applicant's needs.

### **Tariffs and Import Restrictions**

The Government's Tariff Schemes include food imports. The effect of food taxes on prices has been largely neutralised by the prevailing low world prices of recent years. But in 1934 housewives paid £19 millions more in food taxes than in 1931. Without the taxes imposed by the National Government, this amount would have been available for additional food, and it is certain that in the lowest incomes groups the money would have been spent on food.

The import duty on butter is 15/- per cwt.; on condensed milk 5/- to 6/- per cwt.; on fresh eggs 1/- to 1/9 per 120; on tomatoes 1d. and 2d. per lb.; on various fresh fruits ½d. per lb. to 9/4 per cwt.

Since 1932 agreements have been made with various exporting countries—with a bias in favour of Empire countries—for the restriction of imports, on a quota basis, of a number of foodstuffs—bacon and hams; condensed and powdered milk; chilled and frozen beef, mutton and lamb; eggs, wheat and potatoes. In the case of bacon, the anticipated increase in home production did not materialise, and there has been a sharp increase in price. As a result bacon has disappeared from many tables, while the Danish producer is now receiving much more money for much less bacon.

The price of condensed milk has risen as a result of import restriction, hitting the poor housewife who relies on condensed milk because fresh milk is too dear for her.

### **Wheat Act**

The Wheat Act passed in 1932 guaranteed a price of 10/- per cwt. for home-grown wheat, up to a limit of 27,000,000 cwts. in any year—no matter what price the wheat might fetch in the market. The Wheat Commission puts a levy on every sack of flour, both imported flour, and flour milled in this country from home-grown and imported wheat. The Commission collects the levy from the millers through a Flour Milling Corporation, and distributes the amount among the farmers to cover the difference between the market price and the guaranteed price.

The millers pass the cost of the levy to the bakers and the bakers pass it to the housewife. The Wheat Subsidy represents a tax on bread of over £24 millions in four years which does not appear in the Budget. The 4-lb. loaf has gone up by more than 1d. since 1931, and about half of this increase is due to the levy. There are comparatively few homes where there is a shortage of bread, but an increase in the weekly bread bill cuts down the purchase of other food. On 12 quartern loaves per week the cost of the levy could buy, at present prices, 2 pints milk, 5 eggs, or 10 ozs. New Zealand butter.

### **Potato Marketing Scheme**

This scheme is designed to maintain prices through a manipulation of supplies (a) by limiting the acreage



under production, (b) by regulating the size of marketable potatoes, and (c) by controlling imports. Since the inception of the scheme in 1933, the average retail price of potatoes has risen from 5½d. per 7-lbs. in 1933 to 6¼d. in 1934, and 6¾d. in 1935. While there is probably no serious shortage of potatoes in the homes of the unemployed—indeed, many families have too much bread and potatoes, and far too little food of high nutritive value—an increase in the price of potatoes, as of bread, means less to eat of other things.

The Potato Marketing Board made an experiment for 8 weeks in 1935, in Bishop Auckland, of selling "surplus" potatoes to the unemployed at reduced prices. As a result there was a net increase in the consumption of potatoes in the area of 69 per cent. during the period. This is the basis for suggestions that the consumption of potatoes might be increased to a similar extent over the whole of the lower income groups of the population, but such a conclusion is scarcely warranted by the facts. We do not know, and it would be useful to know, whether the consumption of bread (and flour) was maintained throughout the period, whether potatoes were substituted for bread because of the substantial reduction in price, or whether potatoes were substituted for other foodstuffs because of the urgent need of the amount saved by such substitution for general household requirements.

The official report points out that the experiment did not include any investigation of the influence on the general diet of the additional potatoes consumed, and states

"General enquiries elicited the almost universal reply that no change had occurred except the additional consumption of potatoes, and in no case was mention made of a reduction of protein foods."

This does not carry us far as the lack of protein foods—especially first-class proteins—in the dietary of the unemployed, allows little margin for reduction. It is far more important to know how far one "filling" food took the place of another. But even if there were little substitution of potatoes for bread, it is not desirable from the

point of view of health to increase the consumption of "filling" foods while essential body-building and protective foods are lacking.

The case for stimulating a considerable increase in the consumption of potatoes by the unemployed has not been made; what is proved is that at the lowest income levels, the saving of a few coppers per week in any direction becomes a matter of great urgency.

### **Beef**

The restriction of imports already referred to has not resulted in better prices for the home producer, because home and imported beef compete only to a limited extent. Those who can afford it, buy British beef, but if imports were shut out altogether the market for home beef would not improve while the incomes of the mass of the people remain at the present low level.

Since September, 1934, farmers have received a subsidy from the Exchequer—amounting to £3,674,000 in the first year—for home produced beef. The housewife who cannot afford British beef is compelled to contribute to a subsidy to maintain its price. Actually, in spite of the subsidy, the home producer is receiving no more than before, because prices have fallen by as much as the subsidy on account of falling demand.

The Government intend to shift the cost of the subsidy from the taxpayer to the buyer of imported beef, by means of a levy on imports. Thus the housewife who buys frozen or chilled beef, not from choice but because British beef is beyond her means, will have to pay to keep it beyond her means.

### **Milk.**

Milk Marketing Boards for England and Wales and for Scotland were set up in the autumn of 1933.

All producers must sell their milk to the Board which supplies distributors and manufacturers, and in conjunction with the distributors' organisations, fixes retail prices and distributors' margins.



The Board operates a pooling scheme—on a regional basis—paying a flat rate to producers in each region for every gallon of milk whether it is sold as liquid milk or for manufacture. Previously the individual producer bore the loss on the “surplus” milk which was sold at an uneconomic price for manufacture. Often he was at the mercy of the well-organised distributors who might sell all their milk as “liquid” milk and pay the farmer only a manufacturing price for part of it.

The producer now receives the same price for every gallon whether it ultimately comes on our tables at 3½d. per pint, or goes to a factory at 3½d. per gallon. The loss on manufacturing milk is thus spread over all the producers. In reality it is the consumers of liquid milk who pay. The price to the housewife was fixed at a figure which would enable the pool to pay a remunerative price to the farmer for **every** gallon of milk, and from the beginning was determined by the existence of a 20 per cent. “surplus” sold cheap for manufacture. In other words, the housewife has been compelled not only to provide a return to the farmer and a profit to the middleman; she has in addition to carry the factories which are getting their milk at less than it costs to produce it.

The pool price to the producers was attractive enough to increase the supply of milk, and consequently the “surplus” for manufacture. The factories then offered still lower prices. Instead of trying to encourage an increased consumption of liquid milk by pressing for lower retail prices, the Government in the Milk Act of 1934 provided a subsidy from the Exchequer to make up the difference when the price paid by the factories falls below 5d. in summer or 6d. in winter. This enables the pool to maintain the price to the farmer.

The percentage of milk sold by the Boards for manufacture (England and Wales, and Scotland) was 24.7 per cent. in 1933-4, and 32 per cent. in 1934-35.

A system which compels the consumer to subsidise the manufacture of milk to the extent of over 20 per cent. is clearly unfair, and it hits the poor housewife most.

### **Milk in Schools Scheme**

The Milk Act of 1934 also provided a sum of £1,000,000 to increase the demand for milk, and as a result the milk in schools scheme came into operation in September, 1934. School children are supplied with one-third of a pint per day at a charge of ½d. At the end of March, 1935, 2¾ million children were receiving milk free or for payment (about 300,000 free). In October, 1935, the corresponding figure was 2½ million. But there are still over 2,800,000 receiving no milk, over 50 per cent. of the school population.

The Milk Subsidy has been continued for a further period, but the Government refused to subsidise a more extensive provision of cheap milk for schools, hospitals, etc.

### **Consumers' Interest Neglected**

While some sort of assistance to agriculture was necessary to meet the difficulties of the period of depression, the various measures put into operation during the past few years have ignored the interests of the consumers, and have created vested interests which will clamour for the continuance of Government props instead of trying to improve the efficiency of the industry.

Further, none of the schemes has made any real attempt to deal with the problem of marketing—except perhaps in so far as the Milk Marketing Board has rescued producers from the chaos previously caused by “surplus” milk. In general, however, present schemes are careful not to interfere with existing methods of distribution; they assume the necessity of maintaining the present costly and complicated distributive structure which stands between producer and consumer, exacting at this point and that a profit for handling commodities (in some cases for merely making book entries), which is ultimately paid by the consumer.

The Milk Marketing Board organises producers in self-protection, but accepts the existing distributive machinery. The Government provides a subsidy to beef producers but makes no effort to deal with the needlessly



expensive marketing system in this industry—to cut down the huge transport costs, or to cut out the numerous local livestock markets which provide a field for widespread speculation.

And the Potato Marketing Board embarked on its one small experiment in Bishop Auckland with apologies for daring to injure one part of the population (wholesalers and retailers) to benefit another (the unemployed); and it arranged to compensate the retailers for their losses during the period of the experiment, the compensation it is estimated finally representing an increase in gross profits to the retailers of 23 per cent.! It should be noted that in the area covered, with a population of only 19,000 (it may safely be estimated that such a population has no more than 5,000 households) there were 37 potato retailers.

Briefly it may be said that the object of the various schemes which are being tried—whether by levy, tariff, quota or subsidy, is to maintain producers' prices, and not efficient marketing, nor to serve the housewife.

### REVERSE GOVERNMENT POLICY

Government policy over four years has made it more difficult for large numbers of housewives to provide an adequate diet for their families. The Government has overlooked the fact that the difficulties of agriculture have arisen not because too much has been produced, but because too little has been bought; and that the only sound policy is to raise the housewife's income instead of restricting supplies.

There are measures which we should continue to press upon the Government with a view to counteracting the effects of its past policy:

- (a) The School Meals Clauses of the Education Act should be made compulsory on all Education Authorities; and Authorities should be asked to provide meals freely on a reasonable income scale.

- (b) Inquiry should be made as to the reason why over 50 per cent. of school children do not participate in the Milk in Schools scheme, and where poverty is the cause milk should be given free.
- (c) Meals as well as milk should be provided for boys and girls at Juvenile Instruction Centres.
- (d) Maternity and Child Welfare Authorities should be asked to use as fully as possible their power to provide milk and dinners for expectant and nursing mothers, and for children below school age.
- (e) Meals provided by Education Authorities and Maternity and Child Welfare Committee should not be taken into account by Public Assistance Committees or the Unemployment Assistance Board in assessing the needs of applicants.
- (f) Taxes on food should be abolished.

### A NATIONAL FOOD POLICY

What is still more urgent is to plan a National Food Policy which will ensure an adequate supply of the right kind of food to every household in the country. This means either cheap food or higher income standards.

#### Cheap Food or Higher Wages?

The Potato Board's experiment in Bishop Auckland was an attempt to bring prices down to an uneconomic level to meet the needs of families on low incomes. While mass poverty is prevalent there may be a case for similar experiments in particular areas, but we cannot regard this as a satisfactory way of dealing with the problem of gluts and underfeeding. It is an extension of the principle of "benefits in kind" to the unemployed, and such a principle is not likely to find general acceptance to-day. If low-paid workers were included—and many of them are as badly off as the unemployed—it would be in effect a subsidy to employers who pay low wages.

Further, we have no right merely to clamour for cheap food without regard to the standard of life of those who



produce it. We must be prepared to pay a price for our food which will ensure a decent living to those who work on the land. While more efficient production and marketing will enable us to cut out unnecessary costs, the only sound long-term approach to the problem of raising food consumption to a level consistent with health is to concentrate on raising general standards throughout all sections of workers.

### Planning for Health

A National Food Policy to be successful must therefore be part of a general economic policy directed towards raising wage standards. Its special aim will be a healthier community. Questions as to what and how much we should produce at home and what and how much we should buy abroad should be decided in relation to Nutrition after the food requirements of the nation have been estimated, and an effort made to measure the deficiency in consumption of essential foods.

We should concentrate on developing home production of high-grade foods which are essential to health, and which are more valuable and more palatable in fresh natural condition—milk, dairy products, eggs, fruit, vegetables, meat—and should also import sufficient quantities of foodstuffs to make up deficiencies in home production. There should be no restriction of supplies, so long as supplies are insufficient to meet the nation's food requirements.

Marketing, as well as production, must be planned so as to ensure an efficient and economical distribution of foodstuffs.

Agriculture and the nation as a whole would benefit if home production were deliberately directed towards a greater supply of "health" high-grade foods. Certain proposals which are being considered at present for a great expansion of cereal production in case of war, are not only objectionable in so far as they tend to create a feeling that war is coming, but because such an expan-

sion could only take place at the expense of other, more valuable, commodities, and must inevitably be paid for by the perpetuation of low health standards.

### FREE MILK FOR MOTHERS AND CHILDREN

In view of the special importance of milk for health, it should be considered separately. Milk contains so many of the essential food elements that for children it is an almost perfect food, and it is essential for expectant and nursing mothers.

Inquiry after inquiry—for example, the inquiry last year into milk consumption in the Rhondda—has shown that milk consumption falls from one social class to the next, and that within any working-class group, milk consumption falls, as income **per head** falls—in other words, the more children in the family, the less milk for each. The consumption of milk in this country in all classes is below that of certain other countries—e.g., U.S.A., Sweden, Holland—but consumption in well-to-do homes is far above consumption in poor homes.

A wise nation, realising that milk is as essential as water, would ensure an adequate supply of milk for everyone throughout the period of growth.

Our proposal is that every child should be supplied free of charge throughout the whole of its school life with a pint of milk per day. This should be accepted as part of our educational provision as naturally as books and other school equipment. The machinery would not be difficult—it could be developed from the existing machinery for the milk in schools scheme. Arrangements could be made for the distribution of milk at week-ends and holidays.

But the foundations of a child's health are laid in the pre-natal period, and we must begin with the expectant mother, the nursing mother and the pre-school child. While in many areas the Maternity and Child Welfare Centres could be used to provide milk for mothers and toddlers, these centres do not yet cover the population adequately and a more satisfactory plan would be to issue



a milk card to all expectant mothers, nursing mothers and mothers of young children to enable them to receive milk on presenting the card to a recognised retailer. This free provision should be available to the wives of men who are insured under the National Health Insurance Act, and to insured women, and to mothers who come within the Insurance income limit though they are not insured.

Free provision of milk on this scale would result in a substantial improvement in our health standards: and the cost is not likely to exceed £20 million.

### LABOUR POLICY

The Labour Party has an excellent policy for long-term planning of food production and imports. We would urge the Party to give attention to a further elaboration of its policy in relation to present knowledge of Nutrition, with a view to ensuring adequate consumption by the whole population of **body-building** and **protective** foods. We suggest the following points for consideration:

1. A scheme for the provision of milk for mothers and children on the lines suggested above.
2. The planning of increased home production of essential health foods—milk, eggs, fruit, vegetables, dairy produce, meat, fish.
3. In giving effect to the Party's marketing policy, with its plans for Import Boards and Commodity Boards to regulate supplies, the foodstuffs mentioned above should be dealt with first.
4. Investigation of marketing costs with a view to cutting out unnecessary costs and processes, and securing the most economical distribution of food.
5. While income standards of certain sections are still below a proper level, consideration should be given to the best temporary measures to ensure that those sections have adequate food—e.g., through the social services, or by means of subsidies from exchequer to supply food at cheap prices.

If the foregoing proposals were carried into operation, there would follow a substantial improvement in the health and physique of the people. It is idle to expect an eager and virile race of citizens on a basis of malnutrition and disease. The whole of the social services have been organised with a view to maintaining and improving the native quality of the population. Considerable strides have been made; but it is a sad reflection on our social organisation that there should still be a serious volume of malnutrition in our midst, which is eating at the vitals of the nation. This problem of malnutrition must be vigorously attacked so as to rid the country of a grave menace to its welfare. The financial cost might be regarded by some as large, but the continued drain of malnutrition on the health and vitality of the nation represents not only an enormously heavy financial cost in coping with preventable disease, but an irreparable social loss, which the nation cannot afford.



## WOMEN IN OFFICES

The employment of women in offices dates, in general, from the end of the last century and the beginning of the present century. Though a certain number of women were employed some years before this—in the Post Office in 1871—they did not enter to any extent until the typewriter came into general use. Their entry into offices coincided with the use of machines and to a large extent their work since then has been bound up with the machine.

### INCREASE IN CLERICAL EMPLOYMENT

The past thirty or forty years has seen a great increase in clerical employment of all types for both men and women. Small local businesses have given way to national and even international companies and corporations. Such enterprises require large clerical and administrative staffs to deal with complicated and extensive systems of accounts, costing, correspondence and filing. During recent years, costing, estimating and statistical work in particular has increased and it is the boast of great industrialists that they can assess the cost of any new commodity they propose to place on the market down to a fraction of a penny. Distribution, advertising, printing, insurance, banking and accountancy have all been extended by increased mass production. It will be seen therefore that women entered offices at a time of expansion and though their numbers have increased greatly during the past thirty years, they cannot be said to have taken work away from men; it would be more correct to say that they have taken a share of new work which did not exist previously. A comparison of the numbers of women employed in clerical occupations in 1901, 1911, 1921 and 1931 gives some indication of the extent to which this class of occupation has extended and shows also the growing importance of this section of workers.

In 1901, there were 55,784 commercial women clerks employed; in 1911 this number had risen to 117,057, or nearly double the figure of ten years earlier. Women

clerks in insurance in the same period rose from 931 to 4,031, and law clerks from 367 to 2,159. It is not possible to give an accurate comparison of these early figures with more recent statistical returns but comparative figures for 1921 and 1931 will show that the increase in this class of workers has been continuous and heavy. In the 1921 Census figures 429,921 women were scheduled as Clerks, Draughtsmen and Typists; in 1931 the same classification showed a total of 579,945. The increase in women's employment in the Civil Service is shown in recent figures. In 1928, 72,756 women were employed as non-industrial staff. In 1934 this figure had risen to 77,329.

### GRADES OF CLERICAL WORK

It will be realised that in dealing with women in offices we are dealing not with one type of work but with many, involving different methods of entry and different educational standards. At one end is the elementary school girl who enters an office at the age of 14 as "office girl" and at the other end is the University woman who takes professional examinations and undertakes specialised work. Between these two lie a great variety of occupations and it will not be possible in the scope of this Report to deal in detail with all the finer distinctions. We propose, therefore, to cover only the general field of office work, available to the girl who enters from a Central or Secondary school, and to give only the main divisions.

### GENERAL EDUCATIONAL STANDARD

In general, a Central or Secondary school education is a necessity for the main classes of office work in which women are employed. Reference has been made to the girl who enters at 14 as office girl but it must be emphasised that this method of entry all too frequently leads to blind alley occupation except where strong organisation exists among the workers. In the unregulated sections of the distributive trades, for example, girls are taken on at 14 and dismissed at 18. An elementary education, unless supplemented by other training, will not carry a girl very far in an office.



Many Central and Secondary schools give commercial training during school life. The difference between the two groups is that the secondary school girl receives her specialised training at the end of a secondary education and the central school girl as a part of her general education.

Some mention must be made of the "Commercial Colleges" or "Commercial Training Schools" which exist in large numbers throughout the country. Much of the criticism made against private schools may justly be made against these institutions. They are for the most part private concerns and they are subject to no inspection by the Board of Education or any other authority. Whilst a number are excellent institutions, there are undoubtedly a large majority of them badly-staffed, badly-equipped centres giving a smattering of knowledge in exchange for fees. It is probable that the best commercial schools would welcome Board of Education inspection and recognition.

Brief mention must be made of evening classes for commercial and general education, under Local Education Authorities. The arrangements made are usually good and many thousands of office workers benefit each year by the cheap and efficient provision made. At the same time, we shall surely one day regard as barbarous a system which forces children to continue their education at the end of a hard day's work instead of providing them with a full and adequate education before their working days commence. In some provincial towns, arrangements are made for youngsters in offices to attend afternoon classes, and pending the general adoption of a proper full-time educational standard, this would appear to be a desirable alternative to evening study.

### MAIN DIVISIONS OF WOMEN'S WORK

The work of women in offices falls in general into the following groups: typing (copying, invoice, etc.), dictaphone typing, shorthand-typing, personal and private secretaries, ledger work and minor grades of accountancy, and machine operations of all kinds. There is very

little demand for general clerical workers, except in the Civil Service and a few large undertakings, as the introduction of machines has wiped away much of the work formerly performed by "general clerks."

It is impossible in this section to do more than touch upon some of the main fields of employment and the conditions and salaries attaching to them. It will be realised that a large number of clerical workers, both men and women, are unorganised and their conditions are therefore unregulated. The salaries of the organised groups can be given with some confidence, but elsewhere it is only possible to quote from information received and give a general picture.

### SALARIES

**Civil Service:** Trade Union organisation is good in the Service and conditions are well defined. Women are mainly employed as Writing Assistants, which covers routine clerical duties and machine work; as Clerical Officers, covering more responsible forms of clerical work; and as typists and shorthand-typists. Entry to the permanent staff is by examination. Salaries: Clerical Officer (London), £93, rising to £252. Writing Assistants (London), 28/- at age of 16, rising to 57/-. Shorthand-typists (London), 40/-, rising to 72/-. Copy Typists (London), 30/- (under 17), rising to 57/-. There is very little temporary employment except in Employment Exchanges under the Ministry of Labour. The rates for this work are: Grade III Clerks, 41/1, rising to 53/-; Grade II Clerks, 46/6, rising to 56/6.

Apart from the grades covered above, there are special Post Office grades such as sorting assistants, girl probationers, counter clerks and telephonists, telegraphists, and telephone supervisors. Recruitment to the lower grades is by nomination or examination, usually between the ages of 15 and 18 (14 to 15 in the case of girl probationers). Rates in London are as follows:—

Girl Probationers—11/- to 25/- (age 19).

Sorting Assistants—21/9 to 55/1.

Counter clerks and telegraphists—28/- to 70/-.

Telephonists—28/- to 61/6.



There are in addition a large number of women in sub-Post Offices who are not employed by the Post Office and whose rates are below those of the Post Office staff.

**Local Government:** Conditions and salaries vary according to the Authority. The largest Authority in the country, i.e., the London County Council, employs women mainly as typists and general clerks. Entry to the permanent staff is by examination and the salary scale of the general clerical grade is 24/-, rising to 100/- per week. Unfortunately, all Local Authorities do not pay rates of this type and there is need for strong organisation in this group. A recent advertisement issued by an East Coast town Authority illustrates this point:

Shorthand-typist (female), competent, req. age 19 to 30; single or widow; one month's trial, wages 27/6 per week.

**Banks:** No Trade Union agreements exist for women in banks and the recent introduction of machines by the bigger banks has led to the use of junior labour which makes any estimate of salaries difficult. Women are confined to machine work or shorthand-typing. There is no examination on entry but in general, a secondary school education is required, plus commercial training or machine training.

**Insurance:** Trade Union organisation for women in Insurance Offices is growing, and where organisation exists salary scales have been negotiated. Unfortunately, however, there is still very strong anti-trade union prejudice in the minds of a number of Insurance Managements and in most of these offices no definite salary scales exist, and the salaries paid are very frequently considerably below the average commercial rates paid in the same locality. A typical scale obtained by Trade Union negotiation commences, at age 17, at 15/- a week (plus lunches valued at 4/- a week) rising to £3 15s. Od., and in the case of Supervisors to £5. The recent introduction of machinery on a large scale is tending to bring a new type of junior labour into the offices and is lowering the standard of salaries.

In general, the offices require a secondary school education, and in some cases matriculation or its equivalent is demanded, plus the usual commercial or machine training.

**Railways:** The majority of office workers are under Trade Union agreements. Women are employed as Shorthand-typists, machine workers, telegraphists, telephonists, on accounts, or routine clerical work. The general standard of education is Secondary, and girls pass into the Second Class subject to passing the examinations prescribed by the employing Company. The salary scale is, on joining, or at age 16, 17/6 per week; at 17, 21/6; at 18, 30/- rising to 60/-. Class I, commencing 65/- to 70/-. Special class over 70/-.

A number of women clerks are employed in the ancillary services whose rates are not governed by Trade Union agreements.

**Printing Trades:** Women in printing offices are mainly employed as shorthand-typists and a high degree of Trade Union organisation exists. Negotiated scales are as follows: London Newspapers: Clerks (age 16), 30/-, rising to 80/-. Shorthand-typists (age 18), 60/-, rising to 85/-. In magazine houses, scales range from 25/- (age 16) to 65/-. There is no examination set by employers but matriculation or Secondary education is demanded in some cases.

**Distribution:** Except for the comparatively small section covered by Trade Union agreements, the conditions prevailing in this large and important group can only be described as chaotic. In contrast to other grades of clerical employment, there is no general educational standard for entrants and office workers are employed from age 14 upwards. Organised groups are in receipt of salaries varying from 37/6 to 45/-, according to district. It should be noted that all clerical workers in the Co-operative movement are covered by Trade Union agreements.

In the unorganised sections, rates from 8/- upwards are paid. Examples of such rates may be quoted. A clerk in a drapery stores, age 19, is paid 12/- per week; another,



age 19, is paid 15/-; an adult worker, a cashier aged 23, is paid 25/- per week. These examples could be multiplied but they indicate the salaries prevailing in unorganised sections of distribution.

### COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL ESTABLISHMENTS

This large group must also be classed as mainly unorganised and in consequence conditions vary greatly. In the main a Central or Secondary education is necessary and some large employers set a simple examination for entrants. Work is mainly shorthand-typing and machine operating. There is a great demand by employers for the young, well-educated girl who, after several years' experience, can still be paid as a "junior." In London salaries ranging from 35/- to 45/- are offered for this type of worker because the demand has created an artificial shortage. Adult shorthand-typists in London receive 50/- to £3 per week.

In the smaller towns, rates ranging from 30/- to 45/- are usual for adult workers. 50/- is considered good. In a small south-coast town, rates are quoted as 15/- to 20/- for trained juniors, 30/- for adults. From one of the "distressed areas" towns, on the north-east coast come reports of salaries of 8/- to 15/- per week for juniors, and 25/- to 30/- for adults. The prize specimen from this area is an offer of 3/- per week to a trained junior. Comparatively prosperous undertakings in the Midlands pay 30/- to shorthand-typists and a recent offer is recorded of 37/6 for shorthand-typing and two foreign languages. In the West of England, 25/- to 30/- is usual in small unorganised offices. In contrast to the above, where women workers are organised, agreements have been secured by which ordinary clerks in London rise from 25/- a week at 16 years of age to 65/- per week at 22 years, with higher rates for special qualifications; and in the provinces women general clerks start at 20/- per week at 16 years of age and rise by annual increments to 60/- per week, and 80/- per week for higher positions. Even in the West of England (which is a black

geographical area for clerks) rates have been secured for organised women clerks ranging from 17/- per week at 16 years of age to 46/- per week by annual increments.

### PERSONAL AND PRIVATE SECRETARIES

Women are widely employed for this class of work, as secretaries to Heads and Departmental Heads of commercial undertakings, and to public and professional men and women. The qualifications necessary for such posts vary greatly. The secretary to a politician must necessarily have a good knowledge of current political events, and secretaries to doctors, literary men, etc., need specialised knowledge. In almost every case, however, good speeds in shorthand and typing are a necessity, and a knowledge of accounts is an advantage. Essential qualities for the private secretary are tact and discretion. The educational standard ranges from secondary to University, according to the type of post, and experience of a general nature is desirable. Salaries vary according to the responsibility placed on the secretary. It is sometimes said that secretaries are paid not for what they do but for what they know, and it is certainly true that many personal, business and State secrets pass through the hands of private secretaries.

### HOURS OF WORK

With the glaring exception of the distributive trade, office hours rarely exceed 48 per week, and in many cases are much less than this. In the Civil Service, there is a working day of 6¼ hours in London (with a slight increase for staff outside London): in the railway service, the average working week is 40-42: in the printing trade, there is a 39 hour week, in London Newspaper offices and in other establishments a 41½ hour week: the banks have on average a 7-hour day and in general commercial private undertakings, the average working week is 40-42 hours.

The black spot in this connection is the distributive trade: retail, wholesale undertakings and warehouses. Clerical workers attached to retail shops normally work



the same hours as the shop assistants, which in many cases are excessively long—in some cases 60 hours or more per week, except among Co-operative Societies, where the working week averages from 39 to 44 hours according to agreement. There is no statutory limitation of hours except for workers under the age of 18, who by the Shops Act of 1934 are limited to 52 hours (48 hours after 1936) when they are “employed about the business of a shop.” This is the only legal limitation of hours as far as clerical workers are concerned.

A Convention has been adopted by the International Labour Organisation limiting the hours of salaried employees in general, to 48 per week, but this Convention has not been ratified in this country.

### HOLIDAYS

Paid holidays are the general rule for clerical workers. In comparatively rare cases only one week's holiday is given, but two weeks is the usual period and there is a growing body of clerical workers who secure three weeks. Thus, in the Civil Service holidays for Writing Assistants and Clerical Officers range from 18 working days to 24 working days: in the Banks, three weeks' holiday is usual: in some printing establishments three weeks' is given after two years' service, and in some commercial establishments, three weeks is the rule for senior staffs.

With the exception of the distributive trade, Saturday afternoon is the recognised half day and the five day week is a growing practice. A number of firms maintain a skeleton staff on Saturday mornings and release staff by rotation. The normal Bank Holidays are paid holidays.

### OVERTIME

Except in certain well-organised sections, unpaid overtime is very prevalent for clerical workers. In the Civil Service and on the railways, payment is made, similarly where agreements exist in the distributive trade, provision is made for payment for overtime. The great

mass of unorganised women work overtime as and when required, with “tea-money” as their only recompense, and shorthand-typists in particular are required to be in attendance on an unpunctual employer no matter what the normal working day may be.

A word may be said here about the private secretary and resident secretary. It is recognised that hours must be elastic in such posts but they are frequently made unbearably so by inconsiderate employers and a seven day week for the resident secretary is no unusual thing.

### MODERN TENDENCIES IN OFFICE WORK

Two factors have appeared in offices which are revolutionising clerical work in large scale undertakings. One is the introduction of office machines; and the other the standardising of clerical processes, with sub-division of work and measured output. These two processes are intermingled, since it is the machines which have made sub-division and measured output a possibility to a large extent.

On the accounts side, book-keeping, calculating and adding machines have replaced in large undertakings the old system of ledger entries, costing, calculating and the preparation of wage sheets. The work is so arranged that one girl undertakes one process only; her output and the output of others on the same work can be counted and compared and an average day's work can be assessed.

On the correspondence side, the introduction of the dictaphone has led to similar results. The girls do not in such cases work for one or two individuals taking shorthand notes and typing back their own work. They are attached to a typing pool with twenty, thirty or a hundred other typists. To this pool come all the dictaphone discs from all departments, which are distributed among the typing staff. The girls sit at their machines all day, with headphones over their ears, typing back from the dictaphone discs. At the end of the day, the number of lines, or the number of words they have typed can be counted. The process can be, and is, carried further. An ingenious new machine has been devised, called a tapometer, which



records the number of taps made by the typewriter and in some instances a bonus system is introduced on this device—so much per week and a bonus on the taps above a certain average. The similarity between this and factory systems of work measurement and speeding-up will be readily seen. Subtle methods of speeding-up are employed in some instances. A chart is displayed on the wall, showing various averages over a period. The record of the previous day is written up as an indication of what is expected. Workers with a low average are questioned on their inability to achieve the records of others, and those with a high average receive letters of congratulation from the management.

Leffingwell, the American authority on scientific management, in his book "Office Management," makes no secret of the reasons for these new methods. He says "In the unstandardised office the pace is naturally set by the slowest worker instead of the fastest. But once the quantity of work can be measured and compared with a standard the output immediately begins to increase. Add to this measurement a definite standard of output that is expected and the most surprising increase in output is almost immediately noticeable." He gives examples of how work can be measured. "Let us say that an office works 540 minutes a day for 5 days, and 240 minutes on Saturdays, which would mean 2,940 minutes worked by each clerk per week. If there are 100 clerks, they will work 294,000 minutes, and if 2,000 orders are received in a week, the number of clerical minutes per order will be 147." It may be added that this neat theory does not always work out quite so tidily in practice and employers who have standardised are finding it difficult to overcome the problems of "queries" in clerical work.

In large mechanised offices, speeding-up methods, combined with the incessant noise from many machines, create a nervous tension, the effect of which can as yet only be guessed. Employers justify speeding-up on the grounds that machine work is routine work, requiring little skill or knowledge. It cannot be over-emphasised that all forms of machine work require a high degree of

concentration and attention, and when such work is carried out under conditions of strain, the effect on the health of the worker is likely to be disastrous.

### **BLIND ALLEY WORK IN OFFICES**

As far as women are concerned, it is probable that a great deal of office work should be rightly classed as blind-alley. The problem divides itself into two parts.

Firstly, there is the employment of junior labour for certain classes of work. In the distributive trade, for example, employment figures show that nearly one-half of those employed are under 21 years of age, and the incidence of unemployment rises sharply for the older groups. Unemployment amongst the age group 16-21 is more than three times that of the age group 14-16. Young girls are normally employed in cash desks. In the printing trade also, blind alley work is performed by girls in connection with newspaper insurance, publicity schemes and competitions.

The other aspect is equally important, namely, the employment of large numbers of adult workers on so-called routine processes on machines. It has been pointed out that machine work is mainly undertaken by women and although it is too early to judge the final effect of mechanisation, it is apparent that those who take up machine work will remain on machine work all their working lives, since avenues of promotion to other work are few.

### **OPPORTUNITIES FOR MANAGERIAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE WORK**

Apart from the particular difficulties arising from mechanisation, opportunities for women in offices are still restricted. Old prejudices die hard and the idea that women are capable of accepting responsibility, taking charge of departments (except as supervisors of women staff) or determining policy, is still strange and unwelcome in many quarters. The result is that capable women are compelled to watch responsible posts allotted elsewhere because of the legend that they make excellent



personal secretaries but must not be put in charge of male staff. In the railway service, for example, 95 per cent. of the women employed are in the lowest grade (on the men's side, not more than 50 per cent. of the total male staff may be employed in the lowest grade at any one time). In the banks, women are confined entirely to machine work, and shorthand-typing, with the exception of a few women who secured posts of responsibility during the war and have managed to retain them. There are few, if any, openings for women in the higher fields of insurance.

The Civil Service position shows a welcome contrast. The Royal Commission of 1931 declared that there should be a "fair field and no favour" for women in the Service and although complete equality has not yet been secured, the position is very hopeful for the women.

### EQUAL PAY

Throughout the whole field of clerical employment, unequal payments are the general rule as between men and women. In some cases, the issue is evaded by establishing separate grades of work on which women only are employed. In the railway service, for example, women are not placed in the general grades but in a grade apart. In the Civil Service, the Writing Assistant grade is confined entirely to women. In many cases, however, it is possible to point to men and women, employed on similar duties, entering the employment by similar methods but in receipt of two different scales of salary. The Civil Service Clerical Officer grade is an example.

A welcome contrast is the Union agreement concluded with Russian trading concerns in this country, where payment is made irrespective of the sex of the worker.

There will be no question that unequal payments are unjust to the women but it is not always realised that they are also a danger to the standards of men. Employers are not unwilling to employ cheap labour wherever it is to be found, and there is evidence that the intro-

duction of machines, operated almost entirely by women, is leading to the displacement of men clerks.

### THE HEALTH OF THE OFFICE WORKER

The recent debate in the House of Commons on the Offices Regulation Bill has drawn public attention to the evil conditions under which many clerks are forced to work. Unlike factory workers, clerical workers have no protective legislation to ensure a minimum standard of cleanliness and decency in their working conditions. Many offices are still situated underground, in basement rooms which in some cases are little better than cellars. Eminent doctors have spoken in the strongest terms on the effect on general health of being shut away from daylight and the sight of the sky for many hours each day, but basement offices continue to be used, not only in old buildings but in new modern blocks of offices. Reports received by the clerical organisations show that sanitary arrangements in many offices are deplorable. A mother writes: "My daughter, a perfectly healthy girl, developed a toxic condition due to chronic constipation from which she has not entirely recovered. The room she is working in now is clean, light and airy but the damage the 'slum office' did still remains." It is a tragic fact that the percentage of tuberculosis is high among office workers, and digestive troubles, eye strain and nerve strain are very prevalent.

The Offices Regulation Bill, which would ensure a minimum standard of cleanliness, heating, lighting and ventilation, freedom from overcrowding and adequate sanitary arrangements, has been once more rejected by the House of Commons, on the grounds that such matters can be dealt with under Public Health Acts; this in spite of the fact that it is freely admitted that Local Authorities will not undertake the responsibility of inspecting offices under these Acts. There is the further, and very real, difficulty that inspection under the Public Health Acts only takes place on complaint and as the Under-Secretary for the Home Office admitted in the recent Debate, "If the onus of complaint is put on an individual or a number of individuals, in an office or any other establishment,



there is a definite risk—it is not necessary to put it higher—of victimisation.” He suggested that these difficulties can be obviated by the new Consolidated Public Health Act.

It is evident from the recent Debate that strong pressure will be needed before adequate steps are taken to safeguard the health of the office worker.

### SECURITY OF EMPLOYMENT

The woman clerk shares with other workers a fear of unemployment and a dread of the future. Employment in many cases is precariously based on “a week’s notice on either side” and this week’s notice may be enforced even after many years of faithful service.

The position of the senior women is particularly precarious. During the slump of 1931 many employers took advantage of the situation to dismiss their older women employees—more particularly if they were in receipt of a good salary—and replace them with juniors. The appointment of a young director or manager is sometimes followed by a process known as “clearing out the old fogies.” When clerical workers are dismissed at the age of 45 or 50 after years of service with one firm, whether they be men or women their chances of securing employment are small.

The organisations concerned have promoted a Bill for compensation for non-manual workers who are dismissed through no fault of their own. The Bill provides for payment by the employer in such cases of compensation amounting to one-twelfth of salary, or one month’s salary for each year of service. The need for such provision is very great but whether the Bill will receive the support of Parliament is another matter.

The provision of adequate retiring pensions is another aspect of the same question. Superannuation provision is made by some large firms but the host of clerical workers employed in ones and twos in small undertakings have only the Old Age Pension at 65 to look to in the future. As far as women are concerned, their salaries throughout their working lives are frequently too small to enable them to supplement this Pension with their own savings.

### UNEMPLOYMENT AND THE OFFICE WORKER

The special problem of the office worker when unemployment arises, may be summed up in the phrase “keeping up appearances.” The shorthand-typist or woman Secretary must be smart and well-cared for if she is to make a good impression on a prospective employer, quite irrespective of her merits or qualifications. Unemployment Benefit at the rate of 15/- per week is quite inadequate for this purpose, and prolonged unemployment has special terrors for such workers, who find their chances of employment receding as clothes become shabby and shoes wear out.

Their difficulties are increased by the existence of fee-charging private employment agencies. These agencies have established themselves as intermediaries between the employer and the worker and their purpose, to put it plainly, is to sell employment at so much a time. Employers are accustomed to ring up certain agencies when they require staff, often without appreciating what is involved in the transaction. The agent in turn has a list of unemployed girls, who have probably paid half a crown for the privilege of “registering” and a notification of the vacancy is sent out by the agent. The girl who secures the post is then asked for a sum of money, usually amounting to one week’s salary, but in some cases to as much as 5 per cent. on a year’s salary. The fact that the girl may be unemployed again in a month or two does not concern the agent.

Other aspects of this question are equally unsatisfactory. Girls are sent out by agents to temporary work and are asked for 10 per cent. of their salary each week; or in many cases they are paid by the agent who retains a proportion of the salary earned by the girl. The proportion varies. During the height of the summer season, when temporary workers are scarce in London, the agent will pay a shorthand-typist £3 per week but may be receiving £4 or £4 10s. from the firm. At other times, the firm may pay £3 and the girl receives 35s. It should be noted that the agent takes no risks. The girl is not retained on the staff of the agency and paid a retaining



salary. She is merely picked up when required and dropped again.

The clerical organisations have fought this system for many years and the workers' representatives to the International Labour Organisation secured a Convention in 1933 for the abolition of profit-making Employment Agencies. This Convention has not been ratified in this country. The Government at that time gave it as their opinion that the Fee-Charging Agency is "a legitimate form of private enterprise," and this is still their attitude towards the problem.

### **WOMEN OFFICE WORKERS AND TRADE UNIONISM**

It must be overwhelmingly clear from the Report that the urgent need of the office worker is a strong Trade Union movement. In those sections where powerful Organisations have been established, the workers have been safeguarded against the worst evils of low wages, bad conditions and insecurity. The need for strengthening the movement is obvious. Mechanisation without safeguards for the workers may lower their status, damage their health and increase their insecurity. Unhealthy offices remain. The older woman is threatened with unemployment and poverty. The remedy lies in the Trade Union movement which can do and is doing for this great army of workers what it has done for other sections in the past.

The women of the Labour Party, the Co-operative Movement, and the Trade Unions are urged to draw the attention of the public to those conditions of office work which call urgently for improvement, to secure support for legislation which the Unions are seeking to promote with a view to improving conditions of work and raising the standards of office workers. In particular they are asked to use their influence to persuade women office workers to organise in Trade Unions, as Trade Unionism for the office worker as for the manual worker is the only way to improved status and economic security.



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The Government of that time gave it another name, that the Pay-Charging Agency is "a legitimate form of private enterprise," and this is still their attitude towards the problem.

### WOMEN OFFICE WORKERS AND TRADE UNIONISM

It must be overwhelmingly clear from the Report that the great need of the office workers is a strong trade union movement. In these sections of wage earners of the community have been established the workers must be safeguarded against the worst evils of low wages and conditions and insecurity. The need for strong trade union movement is obvious. Disorganization and the consequent loss of workers may lower their status, damage their health and increase their misery. Unhealthy conditions exist. The office worker is threatened with unemployment and poverty. The women in the office are the backbone of the movement which has done so much for the great army of workers and it has done so much for the nation in the past.

The women of the Labour Party, the Co-operative Movement and the Trade Unions are united to draw the attention of the public to these conditions of office work which call urgently for improvement. In every aspect of legislation which the Unions are working to secure, the aim is to improve conditions of work and raise the standard of office workers. It is because they are united to use their influence to persuade women office workers to organize in Trade Unions, Trade Unions for the office worker as for the manual worker, the only way to improve their conditions.