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# WOMEN AND THE MINERS' LOCK-OUT

The Story of the Women's  
Committee for the Relief  
of the Miners' Wives and  
Children

By

MARION PHILLIPS

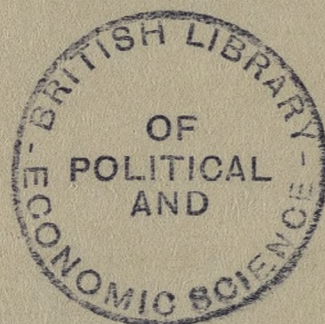
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## FOREWORD

BY

THE SECRETARY OF THE MINERS'  
FEDERATION OF GREAT BRITAIN

IN writing a foreword to this valuable little book recording the greatest effort ever known by the Women's Sections of the Labour Movement, I feel at a loss to find words to express my thanks for this wonderful effort. The collection of money, clothes and boots, and their distribution to the worst areas, the arranging for choirs, bands, concerts, sales, meetings, etc., was a colossal task.

The Miners' Lamp has become an historic emblem. A new army of trained women workers was born out of the crisis. Their work in our communal kitchens will ever be remembered. When it is known that the sum of over £310,000 was collected, in addition to clothes, under conditions when so many workers were unemployed or working short time and all on low wages, the results are almost miraculous.

It is the women who made the great sacrifice. Therefore, we shall never forget how, led by Dr. Marion Phillips, the Labour women all over the country with energy and devotion set themselves the task of feeding the miners' wives and children.

This little book will be treasured as an historic souvenir of the Miners' Lock-out of 1926.

A. J. COOK.

28. I. 27.



## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

**T**HIS is the first and probably the only book dealing with the Miners' Lock-out of 1926 which will ever be written containing no controversial matter.

Those of us who devoted ourselves to the Committee's work were occupied entirely in the task of succour and in combating the cruel effects of an industrial war of attrition carried on against women and children. We have thought it worth while to give an account of this seven months' effort to show how far we were able to relieve the miseries of want and starvation, and to place on record the magnificent co-operation of all who helped us, whether in the collection of funds or in their distribution.

This was the first occasion on which Labour women used their organization to carry out the work of an industrial Red Cross, and in spite of the ever present tragedy of destitution in the coal-fields, the sense of effective co-operation between those who helped and those who received help, the devotion, sacrifice and gratitude that were shown and the solidarity amongst working women which developed, made the task a pleasure and gave promise of yet greater development for the women's movement in the future.

In this short account of the Committee's work, few names are mentioned. To give all would be impossible, but the Committee want to offer their warmest thanks to those who gave such ready assistance throughout a period of continuous difficulty.

The author has to thank Mrs. Usher, Ellen Wilkinson, M.P., Mrs. Malone, Miss Champness and Reginald Stamp for notes on special parts of the work here described.



The figures given of expenditure have always been put in round numbers. The exact figures will appear in the balance sheet which will be published as soon as our accounts are completely closed and audited. The balance sheet will be published in full in the *Daily Herald*, and anyone desiring copies of it will be able to obtain them. Our Hon. Auditor, Mr. W. G. Hall, has this task in hand and we have to thank him for continuous help and advice all through our work.

All royalties from the sale of this book will be used for the benefit of miners' wives and children.

## CHAPTER I

## THE TASK OF THE WOMEN'S COMMITTEE

"We are fighting, not the fear of starvation, but the actual presence of hunger."—*Daily Herald*, May 24th, 1926.

THE days which followed the calling off of the National Strike were full of miserable anxiety. We knew the terrible distress which the miners' wives were facing, but were at first without any power to deal with it. In my work at the Labour Party I had always had a very close connection with the women of the mining areas, who form a very great part of our women's membership. I had seen the growing poverty of the past five years and was wretched at the thought of my powerlessness to help them. As soon as the Strike ended I had offered my services for week-ends to the Miners' Federation to help in any way I could, but it was not until Wednesday, May 19th, that they were called upon. Late that afternoon, Mr. Cook asked me if I thought that a Women's Committee could be formed to organize Flag Days to gather funds. I was doubtful about the Flag Days, but I was quite sure that I could bring together a Women's Committee that would assist in collecting money, and during the evening I sent out various letters, telephone messages and a notice to the *Herald*, calling a meeting at the Parliamentary Labour Club for the following afternoon to discuss the project. I have since heard that the suggestion was made to Mr. Cook by our old Labour friend, Barratt, the Press photographer. Before the meeting took place I had seen Mr. Cook, and he was not only present at its opening, but gave us general consent on behalf of the Federation to go ahead with the work of collection. Considering the shortness of



notice the meeting was extraordinarily successful, and nearly every one of those who attended gave us continuous help throughout the seven months. We had from the beginning the generous assistance of the Parliamentary Labour Club, who lent rent free part of their premises, and that a constantly increasing part, as well as the invaluable services of Lilian Dawson, who acted as Joint Secretary with myself.

At this first meeting, with Ellen Wilkinson, M.P., in the chair, we established the Committee, decided upon its name, and formed Sub-Committees to deal with the different parts of the work. We talked over the general principles that we should follow and discussed them with Mr. Cook, who agreed that all funds collected by us should be distributed in food or other necessaries and not in money. The general scheme at that time was that we should act as a collecting agency for the Miners' Federation for the women and children, but we made a special provision that anyone who desired it should earmark their contributions for special relief for nursing and expectant mothers. Here we followed the appeal made with such success by Mary Macarthur during the Bermondsey strikes of 1911, when bread and milk were asked for, and all the stress put upon the need for food in appealing to the public.

Our Sub-Committees were to deal with:—1. General house to house and other collections, with Mrs. Adamson as Chairman and Mrs. Ayrton Gould as Secretary; 2. Flag Days, Miss Crout, Chairman, and Mrs. Usher, Secretary; this Committee also undertook to deal with milk, and afterwards became the Mothers' and Babies' Committee; 3. Entertainments, with Mrs. Malone as Chairman and Mrs. Starr as Secretary. All these met together the next morning and reported to a full meeting of the Committee, held on Friday, May 21st. From that time onwards matters were dealt with by the Sub-Committees and the officers and those responsible for the different groups of work. These

together formed the General Purposes Committee, but formal meetings were only held on two occasions. It was felt that it was more important to get on with the job than anything else and that the time taken in preparing for formal meetings would be of very little value, as matters could best be discussed amongst those directly responsible for carrying them out. All the principles which guided us throughout were settled at these first two meetings, and nearly every important question that had to be decided later was an emergency matter, which could not have brooked delay. We sent out, on May 31st, a full account of all the work being done to those at the original meeting and to all who signified their readiness to form part of the Committee at a later date. We asked them to choose what they would do and come and do it, and that appeal was responded to with great enthusiasm. New departments grew up as time went on, new workers were absorbed. Some who started with us found themselves called by home ties to other tasks, but throughout the period a wonderful spirit of harmony and comradeship reigned at Tufton Street amongst the sixty or seventy women and the dozen or so of men who gave us their services.

By Friday afternoon, May 20th, our first appeal went out to the press. It was signed by Ellen Wilkinson, M.P. (Chairman of the Committee), Susan Lawrence, M.P., Margaret Bondfield, J.P., Margaret Slesser, J.P. (Treasurer), Madeleine J. Symons, J.P., E. Picton-Turberville, Margaret Ll. Davies, Ethel Bentham, J.P., and Eleanor Barton, J.P., with myself and Lilian Dawson as Joint Hon. Secretaries. There was a peculiar appropriateness in Lady Slesser becoming treasurer for she had occupied that office in an organization which she and I were mainly responsible for in the year before the war. This was the League of the Strikers' Children, an endeavour to set up a permanent Labour body which would take on the task of looking



after the children in all industrial disputes. It had not got beyond London and was only in its infancy there, when the war came and it met the fate of many young organizations just struggling into existence; but it did have a small balance at the bank and this formed the first contribution to our Women's Committee. In carrying out the work of treasurer she did not confine herself to the task of receiving and writing cheques, but all through the seven months she was present day after day, supervising the whole work of receiving and acknowledging the funds. Indeed, we were practically without "sleeping" members. All took a share of the work, though some of them had to devote themselves almost entirely to the collection of funds in their own localities.

In the first appeal we said:—

"May we appeal to your readers for the miners' wives and children who are now in desperate straits? Long periods of short time and low wages have exhausted their resources and the lock-out finds them facing actual starvation. Some of the mining valleys, owing to the bad trade of the last few years, are now practically famine areas.

"A committee of women has been formed to raise funds to feed the women and children. All money contributed will be distributed in the form of food.

"The generous British public have in recent years often responded to the call of the needy in other parts of the world. We therefore confidently appeal to them to save the children of our own country from the terrible consequences of under-feeding while this great industrial battle is being fought over their heads.

" . . . . Money may be ear-marked for the special purpose of providing for nursing mothers and children."

This appeared widely in the press and within 24 hours money began to come in. Collecting sheets were printed and the first went out on Saturday, and

all through the Whitsun holiday we kept open and the work steadily increased. For seven months we were on duty every day, at first from 10 to 10 and later until 9. On the first Saturday we issued to every Labour Party, Women's Section, and Women's Co-operative Guild, throughout the country, a special appeal for assistance. We proposed to them that in every area outside the coalfields, the local Labour Parties and Trades' Councils, the Women's Sections and Women's Co-operative Guilds should appoint a "special relief committee for miners' wives and children."

"In addition to the Labour and Co-operative representatives mentioned above we think that the following organizations might be ready to give assistance:—

"Adult Schools, Brotherhoods and Sisterhoods, League of Nations Union, Peace Societies, Women's International League, Meetings of Societies of Friends, Plebs Leagues and W.E.A. Branches.

"This Committee should divide into sub-committees to undertake each of the jobs suggested below, and we should be glad to have as soon as possible information as to whether you have such a Committee, the name and address of the secretary, and the name and address of the secretary of each sub-committee with whom correspondence can be conducted. The work we suggest is the following:—

"(1) House to house and street collections. These should be instituted as soon as possible and should go on as a regular weekly collection. Collections should also be made at Works, Factories, Offices, &c. Full particulars with regard to such collections are enclosed on a separate sheet.

"(2) Special fund to provide milk for nursing mothers and babies. Those who may not desire to send help for the families may be ready to give money for milk or presents of tinned milk, Glaxo, &c., for this urgent need. If you think this scheme practicable



in your district, please let us know at once and we shall send further suggestions.

- "(3) Entertainments, Concerts, and Dances, &c., to raise funds. It is suggested (a) that theatre and cinema proprietors sympathetic to our Cause might give the proceeds of a night's performance; and (b) that *all* theatre and cinema proprietors be asked to permit collections to be taken inside or outside their theatre. We could arrange for men and women from the coalfields to give a short address. Local bodies should also make every possible use of their local dramatic and choral organizations. Dances and garden-parties might also be organized. Our Entertainments Committee will give every possible advice and help. A panel is being prepared of theatrical and concert artistes, who will be willing to give their services in any part of the country where it can be arranged.
- "(4) Visits from Welsh miners' choirs. If you are prepared to undertake the local arrangements we will be able to arrange for the visit of a choir . . . full particulars of the necessary organization will be sent to you.
- "(5) To 'get into touch with the Churches, Brotherhoods, &c. With a view to getting help in the way of collections from their members we are endeavouring to get the Churches to undertake to give their collections on one Sunday to this fund."

The account which appeared in the *Herald* of Monday shows how quick a response had been made to our first letter. We quote the following:—

"Sending a cheque for £50, Lady Byles writes:—

'Here is my answer to the mineowners. I only wish it were louder.'

"Mr. Hamilton Fyfe has also sent £50.

"These contributions help the average, says the Committee. They equal in goodwill the two shilling stamps folded in a scrap of paper, inscribed 'From Two Working Lads' which we received yesterday.

"Another young worker brought in a rough wooden box full of pennies, half-pennies and sixpences. He had fastened it up on the wall of an engineering works as the men passed out with their pay envelopes and brought in £1. 11s. 6d.

"The manager of a music publisher's sends £1 as a weekly contribution for 'the miners' wives and children' adding 'Good luck to their husbands.'

"An engineer, sending a contribution of 10s. wrote:—

'It comes from us both, for my wife is as much a trade unionist as I am. Good luck and good cheer to the gallant men and women in the coal industry.'

"A working woman brought in £1 from her wages and took a collecting sheet for her fellow-workers. The employees of one of the most fashionable of drapers brought in a contribution yesterday, and by every post we have received anonymous postal orders, large and small.

"The children, as well as the grownups, are helping. We received yesterday 10s. from Romford Children's Co-operative Circle.

"In addition about 400 collecting sheets went out yesterday, but the real demand will come when the Labour organizations get their Relief Committees in working order."

The Trade Unionists were already beginning to organize their assistance, the London District of the Amalgamated Trade Union of Building Trade Workers being right to the front in arranging for collecting sheets to be sent to every card steward throughout London and they maintained their help right to the end. In these early days the main contributions were from



individuals, and they were not always friendly to the miners. One contributor sent £5 and wrote:—

“The miners are fools. Their leaders are damned fools and worse besides. . . . Still, it is about time I gave something to a charitable cause, and I am concerned more for hungry English children than to provide flannel waistcoats and moral pocket-handkerchiefs for use abroad.”

Meanwhile, we were preparing to press our appeal over as wide an area as possible. A keen American Labour woman, Miss Evelyn Preston, was just returning home and undertook to do her best to help us there. Miss Enfield, the Secretary of the International Women's Co-operative Committee, helped us with an appeal to their affiliated Co-operative Societies, and we sent out appeals to the Labour and Socialist International for publication in their reports. We were also busy in getting publicity throughout the press in our own country. Miss Champness took charge of special appeals to the churches and Lady Slesser approached friendly bishops. Miss Sybil Thorndike, who was a warm friend throughout, issued a letter to the press, and contributions were sent to her at our office for many weeks. Mr. and Mrs. John Beckett undertook to look after a Speakers' Campaign and were arranging for meetings and securing speakers and motor cars for several tours. Later on this work was undertaken by Mr. Reginald Stamp, the Secretary of the London Division of the I.L.P., who also became our general supervisor of choirs.

The first Welsh Choir arrived in London during this week. This was brought up from Wales by Mr. Stevenson, the President of the Hyndman Club, and we made an agreement with them that they should organize the work of miners' choirs collecting funds for us in London and this onerous task they carried out for many months.

The problem of a Flag Day was especially difficult

With Mr. Henderson's help we finally got permission from the Police Authorities to hold one, but the earliest day we could secure was June 10th. The London Labour Party came to our help and organized the whole of this work for London and Greater London—an immense task carried out in eight days.

It must be remembered that all this time we had no idea whether we were preparing for a campaign of a few weeks or of months. Nobody for a moment thought that summer would pass and winter would be well upon us before the struggle had ended, and in these early days all our organization was planned to meet an emergency which might at any moment come to an end. We had to hurry everything on as much as possible, and we knew that in order to keep the women and children in bare necessities we needed an enormous sum. For this reason we wanted our Flag Day—which was afterwards known as Lamp Day—as quickly as we could, and we decided on the lamp as the best symbol for the miners' cause. There was a great difficulty in getting the emblems in time and actually the brass lamps were, on the first Lamp Day, very few in number and from their rarity sold at wonderful fancy prices.

Altogether in our first week all these pieces of work had started and were beginning to grow. We had considered the problem of collecting clothes, and at that time we hoped that we could get these sent direct from their donors to distributors in the mining areas. We decided definitely not to start one big national centre, though we hoped that local organizations would take on this task of collection in their own districts. As will be seen later, we became a centre ourselves as time went on. The bulk of our clothing, however, always went direct without our having to handle it and without double carriage being therefore paid upon it—a much more economical proceeding both in regard to workers and money. We issued an appeal to the makers of baby food and planned similar appeals



for other foodstuffs and for baby clothes before the week had ended, but the development of our mothers' and babies' schemes which became the most important work of the Committee began in June. On Sunday, May 30th *Lansbury's Weekly* organized a great Demonstration in the Albert Hall, and a collection of over £1,000 was made. Three-fourths of this came to us and the remainder went to the I.C.W.P.A. for the families and the defence of those who had been arrested during the time of the National Strike. Ellen Wilkinson and I made the special appeal for the collection. It was the most generous gathering ever held. Two collections were taken, sovereigns were offered for sale and sold over and over again. One specially mounted for a watch-chain was bought for £30 by the audience and given to Mr. Cook. A little boy sent up his money box, and little girls their bracelets. Young men gave their fountain pens and their watches, girls their necklaces and their heart-shaped lockets, and a blind man gave his Braille watch. Mr. Lansbury was left at the end with still many treasures to sell, including diamond engagement rings, wedding rings and jewels of all sorts, and when Mr. Cook rose to speak at the end of the meeting the enthusiasm was unbounded. From this time on the auctioning of gifts became a regular feature at meetings held to raise funds. Miners' lamps many times brought in more than £10, and a small miniature lamp on one occasion was bought for £15.

The end of the week was notable for one very remarkable fact. The Prince of Wales sent £10 to the Somerset Miners' Distress Fund. Sir Walter Peacock, Secretary to the Duchy of Cornwall, in forwarding it, said:—

“H.R.H. necessarily cannot take sides in any dispute; but we all owe a debt to the miners in the past, and everyone feels sympathy for their wives and children in their hour of distress.

“Besides, it would be an unsatisfactory end to any

dispute that one side should have to give in on account of the sufferings of their dependents.

“H.R.H. is confident that with goodwill on both sides there will be a happy issue out of the present difficulties.”

The size of collections at meetings at this time can be judged by the following. At Letchworth village hall a meeting of about 600 people gave a collection of £70; a Welsh Miners' Choir sang at the Central Hall, Bow, and collected over £35; at the Ecclestone Guildhouse, Miss Maude Royden's appeal produced £59; while from an audience of very poor people at St. George's Hall, Old Kent Road, Miss Ellen Wilkinson brought back £10. Indeed, during that week-end the Miners' Choirs in London raised over £250.

It is impossible to give any adequate description of the extraordinary energy with which the Labour Party and other organizations threw themselves into the task. Headquarters were not behindhand in giving their help, as the whole of the staff of the Women's Department were placed at the services of the Committee and several other workers were allowed to give their time at Tufton Street. The women organizers (especially those in the mining areas) were also working their hardest, and they acted throughout the period as general supervisors of the distribution of relief.

This is a very short account of the beginning of our work. We were in need of constant reports from the coalfields, for we wanted personal stories to drive home to the public the urgent needs we knew to exist. Ellen Wilkinson helped in this by tours in Somerset and Notts, and from the news which began to come from the Women's Sections in the mining districts, we realized the immediate needs of the mothers and babies. At the beginning of June, we developed our scheme for helping pregnant and nursing mothers, began an urgent appeal for clothes and boots and set



on foot a special inquiry as to school feeding and Poor Law relief. From then on we became both a collecting and distributing centre and our work developed to meet both needs. We had to maintain a constant pressure on public opinion and seek out new sources of contributions; to assist the Labour organizations and keep up a flow of new methods of collecting to enable them to combat the efforts of coal-owners, the Government and the Tory press, who kept repeating that the needs were not urgent; to organize distribution for mothers, babies, and the sick women and children; to deal with supplies of clothes and boots; to step in with emergency relief where the Poor Law withdrew its help; and to maintain our own supply of capable workers without drawing unduly upon the best workers of the local areas.

And at the same time we had to face a steadily increasing volume of appeals for help—appeals which were genuine, but either too great for us to meet or outside our special task, namely that of helping the women and children by relief in kind.

At first the bulk of our money went to the Miners' Federation of Great Britain and was sent by them to the associations to be distributed in the form of food for the wives and children of the miners. We sent them £112,000 in the earlier weeks, but received back again the last £5,000 at a later date because it had been given as a temporary accommodation against an overdraft. The needs of our Mothers' and Babies' scheme, boots, emergency grants, had by then grown so much that we used our funds directly with the full knowledge and agreement of their officials. Throughout we worked in the closest co-operation and we were in many emergencies able to give special help to districts referred to us by Mr. Cook. When finally we decided to close our Fund on January 8th, and communicated with the Treasurer, Mr. Richardson, he said in his reply:—

“ May I again take this opportunity of expressing

not only my personal thanks but the gratitude of the whole of our members and their families for the invaluable and humane work which the Women's Committee, both centrally and locally, have done for our people during the stoppage. No one will ever thoroughly realize the enormous amount of labour involved and the splendid and ungrudging work which has been put in; I can only say that the results achieved are in themselves the highest testimony of the good work done; I can assure you that the Miners and their families will never forget the self-sacrificing and unselfish work of the Women's Committee and its workers.”

The following chapters deal in detail with the tragic tale of privation and the efforts made to meet it, but it is convenient here to deal with the progress of the Fund through the whole period. By January 31st we had collected in all £313,874. The money did not stop then, a few thousands reaching us from other sources, including the final clearing up of accounts for lamps, pencils, etc. and receipt of late collection sheets and cards. A complete record of these had been kept and all not yet received were sent for.

Our total expenses up to this date were £10,260. This, however, included £3,600 for lamps, pencils and pens, which we bought to sell again. The administrative charges proper were just over £6,000, the remainder being such charges as the cost of the Choirs to Germany and similar expenditure.

The first includes the small sum paid to the Parliamentary Labour Club for wear and tear of premises, as well as all the ordinary costs. Nearly all our workers were unpaid; but a small proportion of skilled clerical and other workers were paid very moderate salaries amounting in all to £1,140. They gave a great deal—worked all hours without charging overtime and treated us very generously. A few



received a small sum (included above) for their expenses of fares and meals without which it would have been impossible for them to be regularly away from home. One reason for our low expenditure was the generous treatment we received from the printers who did our work on specially good terms—the Caledonian Press Ltd., the Victoria House Printing Society, and the Co-operative Printing Society; but especially to Mr. S. Lawler, the multigraph worker at the Transport and General Workers' Union, who did our work in his spare time, and when it was too much to do at Transport House, arranged with his father to have an extra machine and worker at his place. Mr. Lawler bought our paper and looked after all our printing needs, and his name ought to have an honoured place in the memory of miners' wives as it has in ours.

The expenditure works out at £2 per £100 for all administrative charges, £3 per £100 for all expenses, including the cost of lamps, pencils, etc., bought to sell at a large—a shamefully large—profit.

The following figures show the course of the Fund. In May we took up to £2,000 a day. During June and July, the figures always ran to more than £2,000 and several times to between £5,000 and £8,000 a day. Members of the clerical staff at Transport House used to come every night for many weeks to count the money ready for next day's banking—a heavy task which their skill greatly lightened.

In August we slumped a little—partly the holidays—but more particularly because the larger individual subscribers and organizations had given and the workers were getting poorer. After the decision to institute the voluntary levy, our workshop collections fell off—though the Miners' Federation fund gained the difference.

For months we kept up to an average of over £6,000 a week, but this became more difficult when the Lock-out ended. Then we issued a special Christmas appeal,

and with a contribution of £13,000 from Russia, we had a special boost during December. Between January 8th and 31st, we received £2,300. Small sums are still coming in now in March. It is gradually being used to assist hard-pressed areas where victimization is rife and many families in dire distress and without public assistance. We are also helping the families in Cwm and Notts, rendered destitute by the two recent mining disasters.

I may best close this chapter by quoting the following message of thanks received from Mr. Cook, after his return from Russia:—

“On behalf of the Miners' Federation I desire to express our deepest gratitude for the noble work of relieving our folk and of bringing a little joy to the miners' homes during the greatest struggle in our history. The miner's wife and child will never forget how the Women's Committee worked night and day to collect funds, to arrange for our choirs and bands, and to dispatch money, clothes and boots. How many a mother dried her eyes when a visit from the local Women's Committee brought clothes or food.

“The Labour women cared for Humanity when the Government led by Baldwin tried to starve our people. We cannot mention names; they are legion. It is this spirit that ultimately must bring victory. Words cannot express our thanks for deeds that will be ever remembered.

(Signed). A. J. COOK.”



## CHAPTER II

### HOW WE COLLECTED £313,000

"Give us oil for the Miner's Lamp."—The Slogan of the Committee.

TO keep constantly before the public the needs of the miners' wives and children when the vast body of the press was against the miners was no easy task. Without the support of the *Daily Herald* (which gave us the special privilege of regular space day by day) it would have been utterly impossible. They not only gave this prominence to the Fund, but from time to time helped us substantially by editorial support in leaders. After this experience it would be very difficult for any of us to imagine the Labour Movement without the *Daily Herald*. The rest of the Labour Press and the Trade Union journals gave us much support and amongst the Liberal papers, the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Daily News* were of great assistance. Some of the provincial journals—even though Tory—published many of the letters and news paragraphs which we circulated to the press, and a few signed articles were written for them. We found that news paragraphs received comparatively little attention, but signed letters from the secretaries nearly always were widely published; probably editors did not mind publishing correspondence for which obviously they could not bear any responsibility, but objected to putting in the body of their paper matter which some of their readers would dislike. Our practice throughout the seven months was to send out a weekly series of notes or a letter and always the letter received better attention.

Our first appeal and our second one headed "Milk and Food" were well published, and so was Sybil

### HOW WE COLLECTED £313,000

Thorndike's, which was made in the early days and received a very good response.

On June 4, a notable appeal was promoted by Mr. Henderson. We publish this with the signatories' names because it is interesting to see how many people of varying kinds backed him up, specially in view of the fact that comparatively little attention was paid to it by the press, and it was published by the *Times* on a far back page. It ran as follows:—

"We beg that you will give the hospitality of your columns to a further appeal for immediate help for the women and children in the coalfields.

"The signatories to this letter are men of many schools of thought, holding varying views upon the mining crisis, but all agreeing that the struggle between the coal owners and the miners should not be fought out at the cost of suffering women and children. We believe that men and women of goodwill will re-echo the opinion of H.R.H. the Prince of Wales, who has contributed to the Somerset Miners' Distress Fund. In forwarding that contribution, Sir Walter Peacock, Secretary to the Duchy of Cornwall, says:—(There followed a quotation from the letter already given).

"We believe that these words will meet with general agreement, and as the need is urgent we beg that your readers will support this effort to provide for the women and children, by forwarding their contributions to Mr. Arthur Henderson, House of Commons, Westminster, S.W.1., who has consented to act as treasurer of the fund and is working in co-operation with the Women's Committee for the Relief of Miners' Wives and Children."

This was signed by:—The Bishop of Birmingham, The Bishop of Lichfield, The Bishop of Manchester, The Bishop of Peterborough, The Bishop of Southwark,



The Bishop of Winchester, The Bishop of Woolwich, Lord Beauchamp, Viscount Chelmsford, Lord Haldane, Marquess of Lincolnshire, Lord Parmoor, Lord Dawson of Penn, Lord Henry Cavendish Bentinck, Sir Martin Conway, M.P., Sir Horace Plunkett, Sir Robert Newman, Bt., M.P., Hon. & Rev. Canon James Adderley, Rev. Dr. A. E. Garvie, Rev. Dr. R. Forman Horton, Rev. H. Elvet Lewis, Rev. Thos. Nightingale, Rev. Dr. F. W. Norwood, R. J. G. Boothby, M.P., Rt. Hon. J. R. Clynes, M.P., Rt. Hon. Arthur Henderson, M.P., Major J. W. Hills, M.P., Rt. Hon. J. R. MacDonald, M.P., Rt. Hon. T. P. O'Connor, M.P., Rt. Hon. Philip Snowden, M.P., Mr. A. St. John Adcock, Mr. Rutland Boughton, Mr. Lewis Casson, Mr. John Galsworthy, The Master of Balliol, Prof. G. Gilbert Murray, LL.D., D.Litt., Mr. B. Seebom Rowntree, Rev. Dr. J. Scott Lidgett.

We distributed a very large number of copies and Mr. Henderson received £10,000 from contributors, including £5,000 from Mr. Bernhard Baron. This whole sum came to the Committee and was used for mothers and babies.

Still worse treatment was meted out to Sir Henry Simson's appeal which was signed by:—The Marchioness of Milford Haven, Earl Beauchamp, Lady Emily Lutyens, Viscountess Ridley, Bishop Wakefield, Baroness Balfour of Burleigh, Grace Dance, John Lavery, Landon Ronald, Florence Barrett, Ian Hamilton, Lena Ashwell, Arnold Bennett, G. K. Chesterton, Fay Compton, John Drinkwater, Jacob Epstein, J. L. Garvin, Augustus John, Lilian McCarthy, A. A. Milne, Maurice Moscovitch, Leon Quartermaine, Ellen Terry and H. G. Wells. The appeal was based largely upon the Prince of Wales' letter, and for some reason was boycotted by a large part of the press. The *Daily Herald*, the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Daily News* were practically the only papers to give it prominence, and as the friendly readers of these were already contributing, very little was ever

sent direct to Sir Henry Simson. Just over £200 came to him.

Professor Baker and Mr. Kenneth Lindsay had a magnificent press for their Sportsman's Appeal, which was signed by men of distinction in all sections of the sporting world. It was very short and very effective:—

"We, the undersigned, desire to make an appeal to British Sportsmen for help to the wives and children of the miners who are the real victims of the great industrial struggle now going on.

"We are convinced that those who take an active part in the sporting life of the nation will desire to help mitigate the suffering which already exists in many places, and which if it continues may disastrously affect the health and strength of many of the rising generation.

"It will be obvious from the signatures below that this appeal is not made in any party spirit. Those who have signed it have done so without regard to their personal opinions on the merits of the present industrial dispute."

The signatures were:—J. B. Hobbs, H. M. Abrahams, C. H. Kingsley, G. M. Butler, A. W. Carr, A. P. F. Chapman, T. C. Fooks, Fred Gaby, E. Patsy Hendren, Roy Kilner, H. Larwood, V. B. V. Powell, H. B. Stallard, R. S. Starr, Herbert Sutcliffe, W. G. Tatham, F. E. Woolley, and P. J. Baker and Kenneth Lindsay (Joint Secretaries).

This gave the Committee's work very great publicity, though actually little money was received by Professor Baker. Mr. A. S. R. Dodd, who for a long time gave his services for clerical work at the Committee, was an enthusiastic cricketer and by his efforts a cricket bat was secured which was signed by the Australian team. This was exhibited for some days in the *Manchester Guardian* offices and sold by newspaper auction for twenty guineas. Later on, another bat was procured



by him from Warsop's, and with the help of Professor Baker and Jack Hobbs received the signatures of both the English and Australian teams. As a result of a prize draw we realized something over £500, so that the help of the sportsmen was a very real thing.

Mr. Arthur Bouchier and several others wrote letters which appeared in the press, all helping us very greatly. Meanwhile, we were able to secure a large number of lists of people of broad interests to whom we sent personal applications for help, while to every subscriber of 10/- or over, a snowball letter containing three appeals for them to send to personal friends was despatched. Towards Christmas time we circularized the whole of these subscribers, numbering over 4,000, asking them to give us help for Christmas fare. We also circularized an enormous number of sport organizations sending the Baker-Lindsay appeal. but to our great surprise the response made was very small. This was our least fruitful expenditure on paper, postage and personal effort. A few cricket clubs allowed collections at some of their meetings, and when the football season started, collections were permitted at some of the grounds. In the main this was due to the efforts of labour parties who approached them through their own members and enthusiastic supporters.

Mrs. Malone thus describes the activities of the Entertainments Section, which were of a very varied nature. "Starting with the object of stimulating and assisting the efforts of local Relief Committees to raise funds by means of every kind of entertainment—Concerts, Whist Drives, Bazaars, or anything that went best in their area—we were soon engaged on a scheme to enlist the help of the general public, outside our own Movement, through the medium of the Music Halls and Cinemas throughout the country. A slide to be thrown on a screen was prepared, appealing in a few very simple, non-controversial words, for help for the women and children in the coalfields. Local Labour

Parties were circularized, urging them to approach Music Hall and Cinema proprietors in their area to show the slide and if possible make an appeal from the stage, while the local Labour Party—for this purpose, as was soon found, better described as 'Relief Committee'—would make all the necessary arrangements for taking up a collection. At the same time, large music hall proprietors, Col. Harry Day, Mr. Gulliver and Sir Oswald Stoll, and the Cinematograph Exhibitors' Association (who we were informed controlled 85 per cent. of the Picture-Houses in the country), the Empire Cinemas Ltd., etc., were approached direct by us. We met with a very varied reception. While some Branch Secretaries of the Cinematograph Exhibitors' Association were quite helpful, the Secretary of one northern area returned our communication, having scrawled across it "Don't you think by these sentimental methods you are prolonging the Strike as much as by Russian gold?"

For several weeks contributions came regularly from Mr. Gulliver's Moss Empires in various parts of the country—from Glasgow, Liverpool, Birmingham. But *bis dat qui cito dat*. Colonel Harry Day was the first to open collections at his houses; and when within a week, St. Pancras sent us nearly £60 collected at the Bedford Music Hall, and Bristol sent us over £70, we were greatly cheered on our way.

A great many areas sent their Cinema and Music Hall collections straight in to the treasurer of the Women's Committee as part of their general contribution, so that it cannot be stated what they made in this way. Of those who sent them separately to the Entertainments Secretary, a record was certainly created by Bradford where, largely through the efforts of the women, £344 was collected at Music Halls and Cinemas in a fortnight.

The slides sent out during the month of June numbered some 250, and a similar number during July. As the weather grew warmer and the attendance at indoor



entertainments slackened, we suggested to local committees that they should approach their local authorities asking for the loan of open-air band-stands and arrange for Concerts there, and take up collections. The number of slides sent out does not by any means represent the total number of slides shown in the country or the number of places where collections were taken in places of entertainment. Some managers preferred to use their own slides, others declined to show a slide but allowed a collection to be taken; and in this case the duties of the Entertainments Section were confined to supplying official labels and sometimes collecting-boxes.

Meanwhile local Relief Committees in various parts of the country were applying for help in the organization of Concerts and Entertainments, which we were able to supply from a panel of artistes which had been got together. It was not always easy, at a few hours' notice, to send, let us say, a baritone to Bromley or a high-class comic entertainer to a town in the south-west, or to provide a place near the Scottish border with a programme, when our nearest troupe of artistes who had offered assistance was at Doncaster. But we did our best. We also received a number of notifications of very successful concerts, whist drives and other entertainments which had been organized independently in various localities; and were sometimes asked to assist in these by providing a speaker or negotiating the return of Entertainment Tax. In London, a number of entertainments—at the Bedford Music Hall, in Battersea, at the Pavilion Theatre, Mile End, at Tottenham, etc. were outstandingly successful. Through the kindness of Miss Hesba Trafford-Taunton of the English Opera Guild, a very good concert was held at the Kingsway Hall; and on three successive Sunday evenings we held Concerts at the Strand Theatre, lent to us by Mr. Arthur Bouchier, at which a number of very distinguished actors and actresses and other artistes gave their services. At many of these entertainments the

Welsh Miners' Choirs provided a very popular part of the programme; and the speakers who made the appeal for funds had also sometimes to hold an auction of articles sent up for sale—at which some became so proficient that it was said that they would experience no difficulty in auctioning a ghost.

We also tried very hard to get help from the West End of London; though it must be said that in general this part of London proved itself more callous and indifferent probably than any other part of England. The appeal to the proprietors of the great West End Music Halls and Cinemas, to which special attention was given, only elicited one consent to allow a collection to be taken. And when this collection was taken, on a Saturday evening, it produced a pitifully insignificant sum.

The Entertainments Section encountered great obstacles and had many ups and downs; but they owe the deepest debt of gratitude to numerous Cinema and Music Hall owners and managers throughout the country who helped in the taking of collections; and also to those in the theatrical and musical profession, many of them very eminent and very busy people, who gave their time and their services to provide excellent entertainment which added so greatly to the fund for the Miners' Wives and Children.

Collections taken at special meetings at which the miners' cause was put forward and the Miners' Choirs were singing were a great source of supply. For the most part these were organized by Local Parties without our assistance, but in the following account from notes of Mr. Stamp, who looked after the work for us, some idea of that part for which we were directly responsible may be gained.

Much interest was roused by the work of Miners' Choirs during the Lock-out. Practically all the Local Relief Committees for raising funds were assisted in their efforts by the Choirs. Concerts, quartets, glee



parties outside railway stations and factory gates, solos and musical programmes as a part of public meetings—these have all been arranged by them. So far as we can ascertain about 65 singing parties and bands were at work. Some of them were old established and well organized choirs—others just scratch teams of songster friends. Unfortunately, though both the Miners' Federation and our Committee did their best, we could not prevent choirs coming out from Wales without having made any arrangements and they were frequently stranded and made it impossible to keep all the choirs employed with good profits to the fund. In London we had an average of 10 choirs stationed at the Hyndman Club, which until late in October not only formed a centre but administered their affairs. Another choir, the Welsh Troubadours, worked from the Central Labour College throughout the period and later on a Pontypool choir which was first at the Hyndman Club worked with the Clapham Labour Party. Greater London and the Home Counties' engagements were planned from London. In the provinces definite tours were arranged for a large number by our Committee, and in addition to that choirs that were outside our management were sometimes sent engagements. We cannot estimate the total sum raised as a great many sent the proceeds in with other funds, but many thousands of pounds were undoubtedly due to their efforts and the publicity and sympathy gained by them was a very definite advantage.

We arranged for three choirs to go abroad; one to Russia and two to Germany. In Russia the Blaina Cymric Choir travelled round singing at works, public meetings and concert halls and had an enthusiastic reception. Their collections went to the general funds and their expenses in Russia were borne by the Russian Trade Unions who acted as their hosts. In Germany the Rhondda Fach and Aberdare Choirs made extensive tours with Walter Read of the Workers'

Travel Association taking charge of them, and we received nearly a thousand pounds from this source after expenses had been paid. Apart from the money raised, the international goodwill that was created was a very definite advantage.

We have already spoken of the arrangement of meetings and speaking tours. Many friends lent their motor cars: M.P.'s and other speakers were sent out on extended tours covering two or three towns a day and collections were taken at these for the Fund. In addition hundreds of meetings were supplied with speakers and they were sent to concerts to make appeals. Never have we had more people ready to give their services in any cause. We had a number of miners' wives from different parts speaking in London, and two of them worked with the choirs making the appeal to the audiences for several months. The women undoubtedly made a profound impression when they spoke of the lives of the people in the coalfields from personal experience, and appreciably increased the collections wherever they went. A magnificent Women's Meeting, when Margaret Bondfield took the chair and Sybil Thorndike was one of the speakers, was held at Kingsway Hall in June at which five miners' wives addressed the audience. This had been organized by the Women's Section of the National Union of General Workers. Miners' wives also led the procession and took part in the demonstration of the London labour women at Hyde Park in July.

Every appeal which we sent out to different organizations, or lists supplied by them, we tried to suit to their particular interests. I think the appeal which went to lawyers and which was signed by Mrs. C. J. Mathew, one of our most faithful workers, is a good example of this. It was specially drawn up by Mrs. Bonhôte and myself to suit the lawyers and we tried to make it as exact and as logical as was possible! In justice to the lawyers I must admit, however, that we found it was



very useful for other purposes as well, and as it gives a detailed account of matters in the coal-fields at that period it may be published here :—

“ We know that there are many people who have not sent us a subscription for the Miners' Families because :—

1. They think all children are wholly fed in the Schools.
2. The miners are getting good Union pay.
3. The expectant and nursing mothers are provided for in the Welfare Centres.
4. The Poor Law Authorities supplement where there is need.

“ But we think that if you knew the real position on these four points, you would help us to the best of your ability, and we feel that it is only fair to you, and to these sufferers, to let you know the truth.

1. All the Local Authorities are not feeding the children in the schools. Others do it only on loan, debiting the parents 3d. to 5d. for each meal. The majority who do feed, give only one meal a day, and seldom on Saturdays and Sundays.
2. The funds of the Miners' Associations were very low when the dispute commenced. Only a few could give any Lock-out pay at all. The large districts of South Wales and Durham had practically nothing, and now after more than five weeks, funds of all districts are exhausted. Some very small allocations have been made by the Miners' Federation from funds contributed to them, but this works out at only a few shillings per member. There are more than one million miners.
3. There is not a Welfare Centre in every area. Not

all of them provide milk for the expectant mother, and by the regulations this is only given for the last three months of pregnancy. Milk is not all the mother and the baby need.

4. Poor Law Relief is usually given on loan, and debts from the Lock-out of 1921 are not yet repaid. In some cases Poor Law Relief is reduced when the Miners' Federation has given any sum, however small, although the relief is given only for the mother and children and not for the men. In no case is it sufficient for the needs of the children.

“ We feel that you will agree that no satisfactory settlement can be secured by the pressure of hunger on the women and children of the coal-fields.”

The children were our helpers from the beginning. We felt that they should have a special place in our work, and prepared collecting cards and made a special appeal for them to use them. The creators of “ Bobby Bear ” and “ Japhet,” with the consent of their journals the *Daily Herald* and the *Daily News* made us special drawings and both papers issued an appeal based on the following :—

“ We are appealing to all the children outside the coal-fields to help the boys and girls whose fathers are now locked out. These mothers and fathers in the coal-fields are suffering greatly because they cannot give enough to eat and clothes and boots to their children, and we are sure that other boys and girls whose parents are able to provide for them will want to do something to help those less fortunate than themselves. We ask these other children to give us what they can and to help by collecting as well.

“ Four little boys last week had a Jumble Sale of their toys and sent us 4/-; one little girl arranged a fête in her mother's garden and trained a group of



children to do dances and songs, and they made the wonderful sum of £5; some little ones in the East End have been collecting their pennies and sending every week a little parcel of sugar, sweets and fruit to the children of one of the colliery villages.

"We have some collecting cards prepared which the children can take round themselves and ask their friends to give them something of their pocket money. A little London girl, when she was given sweets, said: 'but you oughtn't to get them for me when the miners' little children haven't any.'

"If all children would help they would make hundreds of thousands of friends amongst the boys and girls whose parents are now in such trouble."

Altogether we issued 2,400 cards and received over £150. This we distributed in the form of sweets and chocolates to areas where there was special distress amongst the children—those who were sick getting the first choice in distribution. Some was used for Christmas treats.

To help our speakers we issued some speakers' notes in May, but with the constantly changing position we did not issue further copies and had to content ourselves with the issue of special leaflets. It was suggested to us by a subscriber that pictures made these more effective, and we followed this plan as far as possible. One dealt with the miner's life, describing his hours and wages and the life of the women; another was an appeal for help for mothers and babies, and the illustration was based on the mother rocking the cradle which appeared at the head of the *Miner*. Later we published an account from the *Daily News* on the position in Lichfield, and towards the end another giving extracts about the distress in the coal-fields from papers which had published honest reports from the districts themselves. When the Lock-out was over we issued the following appeal for Christmas:—

"LEND US YOUR AID

The Need for Help for the Miners' Wives  
and Families is Not over.

"Some people think the Lock-out is over, and the Miners' families are now provided for. This is not the case, and we beg of those who have given so generously in the past months to continue their assistance as long as they can.

"Even when District settlements have been concluded, it may be weeks and perhaps months before many of the men find work again. There will be tradesmen's debts to be met, landlords to be satisfied and Poor Law loans to be repaid.

"Christmas will, indeed, be a bitter time of misery if we cannot continue to assist the people in the coal-fields. The work of the Red Cross is not over when the Armistice is signed, nor even when Peace Treaties have been ratified.

"The Women's Committee for the Relief of Miners' Wives and Children beg that their helpers will not think of demobilizing their forces for many weeks to come.

"Money for food and clothes, old clothes, boots, sheets and blankets—we beg that all of these will be sent to us as they have been during the past seven months.

"The tragedy of want continues."

We cannot estimate the number of leaflets which we distributed but they certainly ran into a million, and the greater part of them, even with illustrations, were printed by multigraph.

The Women's Sections of the Labour Party played a great part in this work—in many cases the Women's Committees carrying out all the house to house collections and general organization other than that in



the workshops. In the later months we developed quite a large selling organization with specially made and inscribed fountain pens, pencils, calendars, Christmas cards, as well as miniature and real miners' lamps. The sale of these small emblems of the miner's lamp realized many thousands of pounds. Our records show that 240 Lamp Days were held, in addition to the two in London (which brought in more than £14,500). Leeds had two, and realized over £1,600; Bradford made over £500; Bristol £600; and then there were a host of smaller ones. Some of the little villages made great efforts—small places like Blisworth, Histon, Ringstead, Glenfield and Godalming. Even in the coalfields there were many held. Swansea did well with a result of £205. Several Durham villages sent their efforts to the national funds, and the great shipyard town of Sunderland—perhaps the city with the greatest unemployment at the moment—made over £100. Altogether the amount raised by all these was over £22,000, and the expenses were quite inconsiderable, the paper emblems being exceedingly cheap and the profits on the brass ones being very large. In addition to Lamp Days, we started selling brass lamps early in June; silver and gold followed. We sold over 400,000 brass lamps, over 8,000 silver ones and 350 gold.

Real miners' lamps fetched remarkable prices and were very often prizes in raffles, while the work of Mr. Harvey Smith, a colliery winder of Yorkshire, in making very perfect tiny replicas brought us in a good sum. A few of these we have given as mementoes to Messrs. Arthur Henderson, M.P., William Mellor, George Lansbury, M.P., and others who have rendered great help to our work. These special replicas are about three inches high, perfectly fitted examples, even including wicks and gauze.

One of the main parts of our work was to keep the

local organizations well supplied with fresh ideas. We circularized them six times suggesting new avenues and sending new literature. We had small printed envelopes for leaving in house to house collections, and on several occasions we ran Prize Draws through the Parties or Women's Sections. One of our best supporters, Mr. Bill Adams of the Passenger Section of the London Transport Workers, ran a Picture Draw for these members and later a Christmas Draw was organized by his efforts right through the Transport and General Workers' Union. Between them these efforts profited the funds to the extent of about £500. The gift of a sewing machine resulted in a draw amongst the Women's Sections which brought us £190. Some Durham miners' wives made a handsome rug which was dealt with in the same way and brought £80.

A sketch for the picture by Sir John Lavery of the First Labour Prime Minister addressing the House of Commons, which he presented to us, was raffled amongst the Labour Parties for £28 and won by Bromley. A Durham miner offered to make and paint a Women's Section Banner which was raffled amongst the Sections and brought us over £60. I had the pleasure of unfurling this beautiful piece of work for the Hucknall (Notts) Women's Section early in December. Some splendid dolls, a beautiful presentation outfit given by the little girl for whom it had been made, and various other toys and gifts, were used for a Children's Christmas Draw which realized another £299. This little girl had been chosen to present a bouquet to the Duchess of York on the opening of some new works, and she had insisted on giving it for the benefit of the miners' children after she had worn it on this one occasion. That was only one of the many examples of self-sacrifice on the part of children.

At the suggestion of Mr. C. Jackson, we started a special appeal, following the example of the Red Cross, for old jewellery, watches and false teeth, and had



slips printed which were placed in every letter that we sent out, and distributed very widely by our organization. We did not start until October and we commend it as a specially successful method. Mr. Jackson was a great help, as he came every day to deal with supplies which we had received, to break up, weigh and sell all the old stuff and set aside and value everything that was worth reselling as it was. We gained a big stock which was used for prizes for local raffles and for our Christmas Sale and we made a steady £50 a week by this means.

But all through the period we were constantly receiving gifts for sale. Some of these were put into our two exhibitions. The first of these was largely organized by Mrs. Morel and Mrs. Bonhôte. It consisted of a wonderful array of pictures given by the artists, and was a really fine exhibition of modern work. There were also pottery, embroideries and beautiful jewellery. The second was a Christmas Sale, mainly organized by Mrs. Starr, which included a Christmas Tree and toys and all sorts of other goods as well as pictures. Between the two we made over £1,000, and we managed to sell practically all we had then or in other ways. For both of these sales the help of Mr. Spradbery (who gave some of his own work and a great deal of his own time), was invaluable, and it was he who told me of the artist who gave a picture and said, "if artists do not sympathize with those who are hard up, who would?"

It is very hard to tell within the narrow space of this book all that would be just of the work of Labour Parties and Trade Union Branches. We cannot give the work of all, but we feel we must mention some of the most notable. Amongst these Woolwich certainly takes first place. In all, Woolwich contributed to us £6,361 2s. 1d. direct; £384 collections for London's Lamp Days and £111 12s. 6d. to Choirs, which came to us through them.

Another remarkable effort was that of Plymouth far off in the South-west, which sent £1,606. Glasgow,

Bristol, Sheffield, Leeds, Tottenham, Letchworth (which raised 2/- per head of its whole population), Swansea, Enfield, Willesden, St. Pancras, Dartford, are all places which remain in memory as having done magnificent work; but equally admirable were the efforts of some of the most difficult areas, especially the semi-suburban parts of greater London and the little country villages—even the colliery villages. Our records only show those that have contributed nationally. Many were doing an enormous job in raising funds locally either for coalfields just on their borders or near at hand, and some of the towns actually in the mining areas made wonderful efforts. On several occasions we had Lamp Day contributions sent up from villages or small towns in the coalfields who asked in the most modest fashion if they might have some of the money returned for their own canteens or boot funds. This loyal maintenance of the "principle of national agreements"—even in regard to collections—always gave us a very great respect for these folks, and I need hardly say their requests were granted.

All this business of collecting cards, sale of lamps, etc., made the work of the Central Committee very heavy, and what we used to call "The Shop" at the Parliamentary Labour Club had, indeed, a very exacting and tedious task. A good deal was sold over the counter, but more, of course, had to be dealt with by post, and every collecting sheet and card had to be duly entered and registered. These complete accounts have enabled us now to get in the outstanding amounts, and our thanks are certainly due to the many men and women (too many to give their names here) who, day after day, working in relays, carried on this task. Altogether we distributed 65,000 collecting sheets, and 25,000 collecting cards. Our special 5/- Boot Collecting Cards, with the picture of the boots of a miner's child which had actually been taken from her feet, reached the number of 9,000. Very many Parties



had their own local collecting sheets so that these figures do not give a complete account of the total number being dealt with all over the country.

Several Trade Unions sent us weekly or fortnightly contributions from their members. Natsopa, which at first contributed to Mr. Henderson's Fund, transferred to ours when he closed his lists, and we used to look forward to the Thursday cheque which was for a long time always between £500 and £700, though after the Lock-out ended it naturally grew a little smaller. Many of the smaller printing organizations brought us a lot of money, and from many Trade Union branches and workshops we had regular weekly collections brought in. There were some secretaries who came regularly every Friday or Saturday for thirty weeks, and seemed ready to take on another thirty at the end. Many of these sheets are exactly the same week by week, an effective levy of a voluntary kind. Other men and women took collecting boxes regularly and brought them in to be opened and counted, always waiting with great excitement to see whether they would have reached their last week's total. One day's "Visiting List" would give interesting reading. The little stories that were told would make many books of anecdotes, and every class of the community was represented amongst those came with cheques, with pence, with gold and silver and jewels and every conceivable kind of treasure. On Saturday afternoons there were often family parties bringing parcels of clothes, the children's collecting cards, the father's workshop sheet and the mother's collecting box.

Our largest single contributions, going over the four figure mark, came from the Railway Clerks' Association, Great Harwood Weavers, the London and Royal Arsenal Co-operative Societies. The different tailoring trade unions in London were specially energetic and their respective secretaries, Mr. Fine and Mr. Sullivan were always helping in some way.

The religious organizations deserve a special report, and Miss Champness, who took charge of this work, has given me an interesting account from which I take the following:—We began by sending to the whole of the religious press (both Christian and Jewish), letters of appeal, and they gave a very generous response, often backing our letters with editorial commendation. We also appealed to the religious denominations separately, and in a number of cases sent a circular to all sections of these. The response was, on the whole, admirable, though all the contributions did not come to us. Many of them helped local funds and others started funds of their own which were sent to their own people in the coal-fields. A large number of churches, however, took collections at meetings and services, and some made grants from their funds. The children and young people were notably interested, and we had a number of contributions from Sunday Schools, Bands of Hope, Bible Classes, etc. The following list of the number of contributions made by the different religious denominations shows how widespread was the response: Church of England, 171; Congregational, 242; Wesleyan, 140; Adult Schools, 186; Brotherhoods, 126; Theosophical Societies, 65; Spiritualist Societies, 32; Christian Science Societies, 31; Baptist, 45; Roman Catholic, 15. A smaller number of contributions came from Unitarian Churches, Undenominational Missions, Presbyterian, Independent, Free, United Methodist and Primitive Methodist Churches, the Society of Friends, Jewish organizations, Ethical Societies, the Christian Student Movement, Christian Endeavour Societies, Christian Evidence Societies, etc., etc.

At the end of the year the *Christian World* opened a Christmas Fund for the miners' children and sent us £365, which helped to bring a Merry Christmas to the children in thousands of homes. A good supply of clothing came also from religious bodies, and they



organized many concerts and meetings for the Miners' Choirs. Those individuals who helped us included Bishops, Deans, every kind of Free Church minister, Rabbis, Salvation Army officers and Missioners.

This account is necessarily incomplete. There were many other efforts and many other sources of supply. I have only given here the most effective. But it would be true to say that scarcely one suggestion made to us was not tried out—and all were investigated.

### CHAPTER III

#### WHAT PUBLIC AUTHORITIES FAILED TO DO

"Five mothers, having among them 33 children, pooled their resources—and from Friday to Monday, when they would draw their Poor Law pittance, they would have 2 small loaves and  $\frac{1}{4}$  lb. of margarine."—Report from Pontypool in August, 1926.

ON an earlier page we have described the general situation early in the Lock-out. In June we endeavoured to get exact information as to the amount of help being given by public authorities in the coal-fields, so as to judge the needs of the women and children. A circular was sent to Women's Sections, asking for information on the amount of Poor Law Relief, meals given by School Authorities and the position of the lads between 14 and 16. Though our replies were not complete, they give a very fair description of the whole. Susan Lawrence, M.P., made a transcript of this which was used when the situation was raised by the Labour Party in the House. The following quotations describe the situation ;

"The relief given to the families of miners is, generally speaking, 12/- for the women and 4/- each child, the relief suggested by the Minister of Health. In many cases, however, it is lower ; Lydbrook, e.g. in the Forest of Dean, gives 10/- for the wife and 2/6 for each child. This is a fairly common rate. Lichfield gives 5/- for a woman, 2/6 for the first child, with a maximum of 16/6 a family.

"The boys of 14 are almost always excluded from all relief, whether or not they have been employed at the pits. Some Boards of Guardians, however, have correctly interpreted the Merthyr Tydvil judgment, and give relief



up to the age when the boys become voting members of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain. For instance, at Edmondsley (Durham),\* Chester-le-Street,\* and Wrexham, relief is given up to the age of 16, and at Crookhill, Crawcrook (Durham)\* and Marsden Colliery (South Shields),\* relief is given up to 18 years old. But in the vast majority of cases relief stops at 14, whether or not the boys have ever been at work. We are told that at Pelton and Ouston Colliery the pits were closed for two years prior to February, 1926, and that between then and the time of the strike, very few men were employed; so that hardly any of the boys have been employed at all. Nevertheless, they are refused relief. We submit to the Members of Parliament that boys like these are not persons who have refused work or who (in the words of the judgment) have thrown themselves out of work by their own act or consent. They have never found a place in the colliery industry, and the Guardians have no more right to refuse them relief than to refuse it to any other destitute persons. Our correspondents speak continually of the sufferings of these lads. Our correspondent from Lydbrook, Forest of Dean, writes: 'Pit Lads cannot be fed from voluntary funds—there is no money.' From Shotton, Durham, one woman writes: 'All pit boys and men get nothing except from the Union twice 2/6 and once 5/-' 'When our men get a share of ours, it means we have to go short.' 'The men and boys need it more than us, because when they start work again they will feel the pinch.' 'The boys include those who have never started.' Kimblesworth, in answer to a question regarding the boys, answers 'living on mother's allowance of 10/- per week.' Drybrook, in answer to this same questions says: 'single men have received 10/- in one month from the Federation. In other places, one meal a day is managed.'

"For children of school age, meals are often given by

\* This was stopped by the Minister later on.

the Education Authority. In some (but the minority of cases) these may be considered as an addition to Poor Law relief, but in the majority of cases, the cost is deducted from relief—sometimes 1/-, sometimes 1/6, and even up to 2/- a week, or the meals are given on loan at 2d., 3d. and up to 5d. per meal. In a good many cases, this requirement has resulted in the school-feeding being given up, as the parents cannot afford this deduction or risk so heavy a debt. In some places, though in few, milk and food is given to young children, i.e. under 5, from the Child Welfare Centres. This is also sometimes deducted from the poor relief. It is never to our knowledge more than 1/6 per week, or milk, except in Durham, where actual meals are given. It is usually only for babies under 12 months. In the majority of cases, *poor relief is given on loan*. This is an increasingly serious matter, as it means that when work does resume the family will be much slower in recovering. This point is emphasized by nearly all witnesses—one speaks of the numerous privations after the strike of 1921.

"In some cases, the money paid from the Miners' Fund to the man is deducted from the wife's poor relief—though, as has been explained, the man receives no relief. Voluntary effort has been mainly concentrated on giving food to the children; the growing boys get very little indeed, and the woman is left to make the scanty relief given to her cover the pressing needs of those lads and all other household necessaries. We believe that the women are suffering most severely. Clothes, boots and soap are being given by voluntary effort, but even with the National Funds a small part only of the need is met. These funds are mostly directed to meet the deficiency of food for babies, children, young lads and mothers. The mass of misery cannot be adequately met, and the suffering must be laid at the door of the Minister of Health who has openly asserted in the House that it is no part of his duty to see that relief is adequate."



It will be noted that Lichfield had a very bad prominence. The South Staffs. area was suffering very excessive poverty due in a large part to the fact that the Lichfield Board—which covered a considerable part of it—was not carrying out its duties. During July, however, they went further, and we had terrible reports from Mrs. Williams, our South Staffs. Secretary, Councillor Cooper (a Guardian of the neighbouring Board of Cannock), and Mrs. Adamson, who was working at our Committee, and whose husband is M.P. for Cannock, as to the severe distress. The Guardians had decided to reduce their scale to half with the intention of stopping it altogether the week after. It must be remembered that at this time the Eight Hours Act had been passed and the pits had been reopened. It had been openly stated on the Lichfield Board that the men would never go back to the pits unless relief was stopped. Mrs. E. F. Wise visited the area and on her return made the following report:—

“To-day (Friday) the Lichfield Board of Guardians meet to consider whether they will stop all relief given to miners' wives and dependents. The Minister of Health has instructed the Board that it is their duty to relieve destitution. Already it is flouting that instruction. Last week the relief was reduced by half, this week that miserable amount was again halved. All relief is on loan.

“Last week a man, wife, two children of school age, and three girls over—one feeble-minded and another a cripple—tried to exist on 7/6. The woman was so weak she could scarcely stand, and tears poured down her cheeks as she described how they had “lived” for a week on tea and dry bread. But this week they must drop the tea and some of the bread, for they only get 3/9.

“Another woman, with two children, one two years and one 8 months had had 5/- last week. She fainted

when she went to ask for help. That is not surprising for she had had nothing to eat for three days and was nursing the baby as well. But this week she will presumably have nothing for six days as her relief will be reduced.

“The children are only getting one meal a day at school in this area, and if there are several from one family these have to take it in turns, and so only get about three school meals each a week.

“Let anyone who doubts if people are allowed to starve in England to-day, go to the Lichfield side of Brownhills and visit house after house where there is no food at all to be seen at the end of the week and not much beyond dry bread at the beginning.”

As a matter of fact, it was a little worse than this report shows, for there were some parts of the area where the schools were not feeding the children and the only meals for them were at voluntary canteens which they were having a great struggle to keep in existence. Realizing that steps must be taken at once to prevent starvation we decided to send somebody into the district to take relief. Mrs. Oliver, the wife of the Member for the Ilkeston Division of Derbyshire, consented at an hour's notice to go. We wired to Mrs. Williams and they met the following morning, visited the areas, saw the Co-operative Society and arranged for the distribution of food vouchers on the following day. They covered every part of the mining area under the Lichfield Board, and distributed vouchers of 2/6 to 7/6 per family. We sent the following statement to the press:—

“On Thursday, July 29th, the Minister of Health admitted in the House of Commons that the relief scale now being paid by the Lichfield Guardians was 3/6 for a wife and one child; 6/- for a wife and three children and 7/6 for a wife and four children. He did not mention that it is not usual to pay anything for a baby



under twelve months and that there is a general maximum of 8/6—no matter what the size of the family.

“Nor did he mention the fact that the recipients of these sums, which are expected to last a week, have sometimes to walk six miles to the relief station and back. He refused to take any action other than to see that ‘no injury would be inflicted on anybody.’ He allows the Guardians to continue with this scale.

“Last week this Committee was able to step in and save these 1,500 families from being without food for several days. Our investigators found that practically all these people were without food in the house. A nursing mother, e.g., had not had anything for three days. The larders were as clean as though the houses had never been occupied and without our help actual starvation was upon them. Even with such help as we could give no family had really enough to keep it in health.”

In the same week the Bolton Board of Guardians took similar action and we had to step in again to save the women and children in their area. Bolton town looked after their own and we helped the very large mining areas under the Board which lie outside the town boundaries. Week after week our workers in both areas carried on this task. The position in Bolton was further investigated by Mrs. Massingham, who reported about the poverty in an account she wrote for the *Daily Herald*. From that time onwards we had greater and greater demands upon us for assistance in similar cases. With the exception of Bolton the areas in England where relief was stopped were all those in which break-aways commenced and the pressure from the Guardians was undoubtedly part of the cause. This was also largely the case in Scotland outside Fifeshire. In the worst Welsh area, that of Pontypool, and in Bolton in Lancashire, however, the men were solid. The following statement drawn up by me at the

beginning of November shows the situation with which we had had to deal:

“Many weeks ago the Pontypool Board of Guardians reduced their relief, first by half and then by 75 per cent. Protests were made but were unavailing. On October 29th they ceased to pay further relief. A deputation came up to London and waited upon the Minister of Health. They brought with them certain letters and a poster which the Board of Guardians was distributing throughout the area, stating that Relief Stations were closed. An inspector was sent down who went to the Board of Guardians on Wednesday of last week. The Board of Guardians still refused to alter their decision. The Minister of Health apparently made some further communication to them, and on Friday they paid out-relief at a scale of 5/- a woman, and 4/- the first child and less after. It is perfectly clear that when faced with the legal aspect of the case the Minister of Health brought pressure to bear upon the Board.

“His action in this case should be compared with his inaction in Lichfield where an inspector was sent down, but nothing further was done, and the Lichfield Board of Guardians stopped payment early in August.

“Cannock, Tamworth, Nuneaton, Atherstone and Lichfield are giving no relief. All of these are in the South Midland area.

“The Westbury Board of Guardians (Forest of Dean), in Gloucester, stopped payment about six weeks ago, and since then the Monmouth and Chepstow Boards covering the rest of the Forest of Dean have followed suit.

“In October the following Boards stopped:—Belper, Mansfield and Basford in Derby and Notts. In the cases of Belper and Mansfield relieving officers have ceased to take any applications. Whether this is general throughout the districts I am not convinced, but the place from which I have most information is Shirebrook in the Mansfield area.



"I have no information that in any of these cases urgent destitution has been relieved but I do not like to state definitely that it has been refused in *all* individual cases. In both the Westbury and Belper areas a number of men, women and children applied for admission to the workhouse, but after spending a night in the most horrible conditions came out again.

"The position in Scotland is not of course the same as in England and Wales as the law is quite different. The Parish Councils here also cover very small areas.

"It is over two months since some Parish Councils in Fifeshire stopped payment, and since then we have had information of the stoppage of relief in areas of Stirlingshire, Midlothian, Ayrshire, and South Lanark. They are all small areas with the exception of Kilmarnock."

In all the cases mentioned above we had given emergency relief for food for women and children week after week. We had also helped districts where the scale was specially low or where there was for some reason particular emergency. There were for example some districts where new collieries had been opened and the people had not yet got fully established and their poverty was particularly great. There were others again where no meals were given by Education Authorities and where some extra help was necessary for the children's food. Occasionally we assisted where canteens for the single men were on the point of closing, but in these cases we always provided for the boys only, as our fund could not include the older men. From time to time we had requests from hard-pressed areas, and always we did our best to meet these cries for help.

In some cases these grants were distributed through our organizers working with the local people—in others by the secretaries of Women's Advisory Councils, and in others again through the miners' own organizations. Each case had to be dealt with according to its special conditions. It is impossible to exaggerate the gratitude

that was expressed by the people who received this assistance. From the numberless resolutions and letters I only quote one here:—

"We, the undersigned persons, do wish to send along to you and your Committee, and also to Mrs. E. Williams and Mrs. Evetts (Local representatives) our most heartfelt thanks and appreciation for the splendid manner in which you have worked to raise money to send along to us (through the Labour Party Sub-Committee) to relieve us during this terrible coal crisis. We realize the strenuous work which you and your committee must be doing to be able to help us as you have done.

"We also wish you all to accept our best thanks for the prompt manner in which you sent along vouchers for food after the Lichfield Guardians had refused any more relief. We appreciate also the noble work the local representatives, Mrs. E. Williams and Mrs. Evetts, are doing in the district. They are working very hard indeed."

This was a circular letter sent from Burntwood, near the Lichfield area, bearing the signatures of 180 people. I have also a little letter of thanks handed up to me at a meeting of women at Mansfield—to which we had been giving special help in the latter stages when relief was stopped. This woman was evidently too shy to speak at the meeting and so brought this little pencilled note with her. The many beautiful gifts Lady Slesser and I have received since the Lock-out ended when we have been at meetings in some of these areas are lasting memorials for us of the generous gratitude of the mining population. We have been the fortunate recipients of thanks which rightly belong to all who helped.

The total amount expended in grants such as these was £50,100.

After the Lock-out had actually ended there were a



few pits where the employers refused to carry out the district terms agreed upon and the men fought on without Poor Law Relief or other help. We gave assistance under these circumstances in Yorkshire and Durham. In many places we helped those who, because of the prominent part they had taken in the struggle, or because their places had been filled by blacklegs, were not taken on again.

We had also to spend a good deal in helping public representatives who were miners or miners' wives and who, had they accepted Poor Law relief, would have had to give up their seats on Councils or Boards of Guardians where they were doing work of inestimable value in looking after the families of their fellow workers. When we heard of such cases we gave to them a grant for their wives and families equal to that which they would have received from the Poor Law Authorities and in this way we spent about £3,000.

The claim of the Poor Law Authorities that people could come into the workhouses was tested in the Forest of Dean and is thus described by one of the local men:—

“Arrived at Westbury, the women and children were taken charge of by the officials of the House. At the gates of the institution were some of our local police, decent chaps every one of them, under the charge of our inspector. When some of the children saw the police they began to fancy they were being taken to prison, and smiles and laughter were changed to tears, and here and there a little one would cry out ‘Oh, mummy, don't take me to prison.’

“Tenderly and gently the police assisted the children to come from the 'buses, and down many a face the tears stole as a burly form assisted a delicate woman and child to alight. On entering the House the women and children were taken into a dining hall, and were there served with a meal. But what a meal! A square hunk of dry bread, smeared with

margarine. A drink of tea, ‘ditchwater,’ ‘slush,’ ‘pig-wash,’ were some of the words used to describe it, served in any odd utensil. After the meal (excuse the word, it is not my word, but it is the word used in the official report) they were taken to what the officials called sitting rooms, but which the women discovered to be their sleeping quarters, and there locked in.

“Can anyone imagine for a moment the conditions of a crowd of women and children drawn from all manner of homes indiscriminately mixed together for the night. Some were on beds, others on straw bags on the floor. Children were crying, babies wailing, and women weeping.

“We speak of the Black Hole of Calcutta. Westbury Union has black holes which will live in the memory of the women and children of Cinderford for ever.

“During Saturday the women and children drifted back to their homes in Cinderford and the neighbourhood, and it took all the miners' leaders persuasive powers to prevent a violent outbreak on the part of the menfolk when they heard of the outrage the Guardians and the officials at Westbury had offered to their wives and children. Now, what was the Guardians object in this treatment? Was it to give the miner and his dependents such a sickener at the outset that the woman, rather than undergo such treatment, would compel her man to go to work?”

We arranged for Mrs Ayrton Gould to visit Leicestershire from which we had the most pathetic reports. Here also relief was being in the main withdrawn. On her return we issued a report from which I extract the following paragraphs:—

“The conditions of most of the miners' homes in the Leicestershire area is almost beyond description.



The children are obviously suffering from malnutrition; a large proportion of them have sores on their faces. They are nearly all pale and languid, while many of them are going about with heavy chest and bronchial colds.

"No Poor Law Relief is given to families where there is not more than one child, and the highest relief for any family is 12/6 in one area and 9/- in the other.

"I visited one home where there are 14, including the parents, to be fed. Their bread bill each week is 11/8, leaving 10d. for all necessities beyond bread for 14 people! In another home where there is no relief at all because there is only one child, the mother, who is desperately ill, is expecting another baby in three months, if she lives till then. This seems very doubtful, as she has constant fainting fits which last for two or three hours at a time. Another mother, who was so ill she could hardly stagger across the room to open the door to us, told me that she had had two little boys; one died of diphtheria a fortnight ago and the other is desperately ill with it; she is afraid to hear news of him. She went on to say that she had got work in a hosiery factory in the eighth week of the strike, but had been brought home unconscious, in a state of collapse, three days later, and has been ill ever since. She had no relief, since there was only one child living, and they had nothing to eat except a few potatoes from their allotment.

"In the last village I visited I found two heart-broken mothers. One had a baby born on Sunday, for which she had been longing for years, and it had died on Monday. The other had a little boy prematurely about a fortnight ago, which died while I was visiting her. The district nurse who was there said she could suggest no reason for its condition but the mother's weakness through lack of food.

"I found another mother nursing a fourteen months'

old child, which had wasted till it was no heavier than a three months' baby.

"In another town I visited a miner's wife who had six children varying in age from 18 months to 11 years, and she told me that she had a little girl of 4 in the back room with scarlet fever. There were other homes in this town where the children had scarlet fever, and remained in their homes to share the starvation of the rest of the family."

To sum up the work of Poor Law, Education and Public Health Authorities, we may quote from the Labour Party's recent manifesto—built up on full official statistics which were not available to us during the struggle but have been published since. They bear out very fully our conclusions based on more scattered information:—

"During the progress of the dispute relief was progressively reduced; until finally, no out-relief at all was given to the dependents of miners in many areas. No fewer than 24 Boards of Guardians entirely suspended the normal distribution of out-relief. As 78 Boards of Guardians operate in areas covering 80 per cent. of the mining population of the country, it is clear that about one-third of the Boards of Guardians in the coal-fields suspended all out-relief.

"£250,000 per week had been spent on relief to Miners' families; in round numbers about 3d. per head per day. As in some districts relief was on a higher scale than in others; it is clear that these figures mean little short of starvation in some areas. There was also the feeding of school children by local education authorities, but the amount spent on this was only £225,000 during the first twelve weeks of the dispute, which amounts to 2d. per week per child in the coal-fields, and further, the amount so spent was usually deducted from poor relief. Finally, it must be



remembered, as the Parliamentary Secretary of the of the Ministry of Health stated in the House of Commons "relief in the great majority of cases has been granted on loan and will be recovered when the borrowers have returned to work."

The N.S.P.C.C. played an extraordinary part which merits some description. A British Miners' Relief Committee had been formed by Evelyn Preston in New York at the beginning of June, and we had sent to her full information and the leaflets which we were issuing in Great Britain. She wired to us that they proposed to make an appeal to the churches and asked for a cable supporting us from leading churchmen in Great Britain. We immediately wrote enclosing telegraph forms to several who had expressed their friendly support. We received very prompt answers and were able to send the following wire—mainly the wording of the Bishop of Manchester:—

"Women and children need all help possible. Warmly recommend appeal to Christians of America."

The telegram was signed by Bishop Gore, Dr. Temple (The Bishop of Manchester), Dr. F. W. Norwood (Pastor of the City Temple), Dr. A. E. Garvie (Principal of New College, Hampstead), and Dr. Thomas Nightingale (Secretary of the Evangelical Free Church Council). The Committee, in appealing for funds through the religious press of America, stressed the fact that British workers and their families in the coalfields were facing starvation, and that four million miners, their women and children, were in the most desperate straits. *The Times* correspondent immediately wired this to his journal which published the statement with indignant comments. On the 29th June they again dealt with the matter, and they further published a report forwarded to them by Sir Robert Parr, the Director of the N.S.P.C.C., which purported to be a report from his

inspectors, proving that there was no urgent need amongst the children of the miners, whether of school age or under it. He stated that he had asked for these reports on account of this American Appeal. His report was published throughout the press.

The report was an absurd document, but of course impressive to those who desired to find it so. For the most part the inspectors could have known very little of their districts. For example, in the Staffordshire district they declared there was no need, whereas at that very time they were passing through the bitterest period of hunger, which we have already fully dealt with. Indeed, we heard later that the inspector did not visit any of the homes in the worst part of the area and apparently he got all his information secondhand. Mansfield was said to have children better nourished than in normal times, but no mention was made of the fact that the children under school age were being fed at five canteens throughout the town by voluntary effort which was very difficult to maintain. It was extraordinary that of Newcastle the inspector should say that he knew of no children suffering from want. If there were any, he said, it was the neglect of the parents in not having reported it! To those who knew Newcastle, this was one of those statements difficult to refute, because it had no relation whatever to the facts.

The churchmen, under this attack—with one exception—stood firm. They made enquiries from us and kept their ground. The one exception was the Bishop of Manchester, who, without communicating with us, wrote a letter to the *Times*, published on June 30, which showed substantial agreement with the N.S.P.C.C. and was practically a letter of regret. We prepared on June 29th, a report which we sent to the *Times* and other papers. Of course, the *Herald* dealt with it very fully. Their investigator visited the headquarters of the N.S.P.C.C. One of their officials to whom the



point was put that the possible effect would be not only to check financial assistance from abroad but to dry up home sources as well, unhesitatingly answered, "It is intended to." The *Manchester Guardian* had but the day before dealt with Swinton and Pendlebury, one of the very districts in which it was said there was no distress, and had pointed out the difficulties that were being met in getting the children fed. On June 30th, they dealt sympathetically with our statement. The Salvation Army flatly contradicted the N.S.P.C.C., and I may say here that throughout the struggle the Army helped the people well. The *Times* took no notice of our refutation, and on the following day we wrote to them again and offered to place before an accredited representative our records, or to go with him to the coalfields and investigate. This letter was sent early in the afternoon to the *Times* and in the evening was circulated to the Press Association. The next day on requesting again an answer, we received one complaining that they had received our letter after it had been circulated to the rest of the press. They did not accept our offer, nor did the N.S.P.C.C. to whom we sent a similar proposal.

Our collection of money in America roused extraordinary feeling amongst the Tories, and the Prime Minister himself stooped so low as to send a letter on the eve of the Miners' Delegation's arrival in that country in August stating that there was no need for contributions. We endeavoured to counter that by the message from Mr. Ramsay Macdonald to Ellen Wilkinson, who was one of the delegation. I do not think it necessary to deal further with this matter other than to say that we were never able to discover how Mr. MacDonald's first letter—before he decided to send a special message—was abstracted from Lady Slessor's table and given or sold to the *Workers' Weekly*, who published it eight weeks later. We feel very keenly the meanness that had been

at work under cover of helping the miners' wives and children. During that August week Mr. Lloyd George approached the Miners' Federation for information on distress, and at Mr. Cook's request I prepared for him a special statement which he used in one of his articles to the American press. At least one other British journalist followed the same course.

Many times were we informed of areas where grants received from the Miners' Federation were deducted from the Poor Law, and in a few cases the grants of food or baby clothes made by our representatives were dealt with in the same way. In Scotland this happened most frequently and it was there also that the Board of Health stopped all Town and District Councils from giving milk to babies and children up to five years old and threw the whole responsibility upon the Parish Councils, though some of these had actually ceased paying the miners' dependents. We must also call attention to the fact that during the summer holidays some Education Committees ceased to feed the children. In some parts of Scotland this was done although the holidays lasted seven weeks. It is difficult to understand how in view of all these facts, the Government could take part in trying to dry up the subscriptions from humane people.



## CHAPTER IV

### HELPING THE MOTHERS AND BABIES

"In the wretched little houses clustered round the silent pit-head, children are being born in homes which have been stripped of every saleable luxury. The mothers have been ill-nourished and living in continuous anxiety and face childbirth without any of the care and comfort which they need."—Appeal issued May, 1926.

AS the Lock-out proceeded, it became clear that some provision was urgently needed for the mothers and young babies.

After a study of the Census figures, we estimated that 400 babies were born every week in the coal-fields. We underestimated. The number was nearer 1,200. Everywhere there was distress at these times and we had to deal with it as quickly as possible. The Labour Women's Advisory Councils, composed of representatives of Women's Sections of the Labour Party, were clearly the most suitable bodies to take charge of it, as these were Committees already in being, well organized and their officers known to the Committee. It will be appreciated how enormously difficult the Committee's work might have been in giving the responsibility of distributing large sums of money to women whom it was impossible to interview personally, and also in entrusting them with the very delicate task of investigating individual cases and deciding as to their eligibility for help from the funds.

On June 11th a letter was sent to the Secretaries of all Advisory Councils in areas covering the coalfields explaining the plans for what afterwards became known as the Mothers' and Babies' Scheme, and asking for the co-operation of the Councils in administering it. The

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first instructions sent out to the Advisory Councils were as follows:

"1. All money to be distributed in kind and, as far as possible, in food. Blankets, however, may sometimes be as essential as food.

2. Each women's section affiliated to you, which is in a colliery area, to form a small Committee of women, bringing in the Women's Co-operative Guild and any religious organization they like, and Midwives, etc. they may think suitable. This Committee, we hope, would find out about any pregnant women of the mining area who are in need, and see that they get any extra food that is required. When the baby is born we ask this Committee to get definite and certain information as to the birth of the child, and then to look after the mother for the next two weeks, making sure that she has food and warmth.

3. The way in which we propose to deal with it is this: We ask you to see to the formation of these small Committees of women. They should send you a list of the mothers who want help on a special form ("C") which we will supply, and we would allot 10/- to each mother before the birth of a child and 30/- after, to be used for giving food etc., by the small Committee.

4. You would send us a list on a special form of pregnant women and of those whose babies are born. If you now have any mothers with babies that you want to help, let us know at once, giving the name and address, and the work the husband usually does, on this form "C." When you get the money, there will be another form, "D," to be returned."

It was also proposed to make a special grant to invalids and sick women and children, and these local bodies were asked to forward information about these.

The Committee's aim was to get help to the coal areas as quickly as possible, and also that the people should



be assisted with the minimum of regulations and "Red Tape" essential for the smooth working of the scheme and satisfactory auditing of accounts.

A series of forms was devised by which the Committee received reports on every parcel of clothes sent, of every case assisted and a report of all help given, but the Committee saw from the first that the best results would be by choosing responsible and able women on the area Committees and leaving a good deal to their judgment and knowledge of local conditions, and this opinion was amply justified.

The enthusiasm and skill with which the Advisory Councils took up the suggestions contained in this letter astonished even those who thought they could forecast the result. In those areas where the Advisory Councils were strongly functioning, the scheme was put into operation without a hitch, and correspondence with Tufton Street was almost a matter of routine from the very first.

Life in the office was strenuous indeed. At first there were only two people, afterwards increased to four, dealing with the applications under the Mothers' and Babies' Scheme, and they sat surrounded by ever-increasing mountains of parcels of clothes from the morning till ten or eleven at night, and more forms were showered upon them by every post. There was necessarily a little confusion at first before it was decided that all applications must come through the Advisory Councils; and forms were received from local committees and local representatives some of them not yet registered with the Committee, in dozens. The task of deciphering these forms, sometimes very illegible, and of sorting out the cases and seeing that the terms of the scheme had been properly understood, was a heavy one, particularly as it was essential to avoid all delay.

The Committee is very proud to recall that their original circular went out on Saturday, June 12th; they received the first reply by return and the first

cheque was posted on June 15th. Messages and telegrams arrived from anxious committees who expected their grants almost before their forms had arrived in the office, but after a time things settled down and as a general rule cheques were dispatched on the same day that applications were received.

The story of misery and want which the Committee was able to put together from reports from the various areas was heartrending, and the pitiful requests for help which poured in every day made it difficult for them to decide what was the most urgent job to be done.

The following are a few extracts from letters:

"One woman came here to seek a nightdress and chemise to be laid up in. She had been in labour all night and had walked up to my house before 8 o'clock in the morning for the things. It took us all our time to get her home again. She had absolutely nothing for herself and child."

"I went to visit a mother who had only just been confined a few hours. The child had been born in the same room in which they all had to live and eat. Six other small children and no one to look after the woman. Midwife had gone, only her husband."

Notts. Aug. 5th. "May I please ask if your representatives could come and see for themselves how much reduced we are by want and starvation. It would be much better for then you would understand what we are going through. We have 18/6 to keep 7 of us on and I am pregnant. The children have no boots or clothes, and to make things worse we have not had a bite of food in the house and the children are crying for bread. . . . If you visit us you will find things worse than what this letter says we are, but I have no more writing paper to say more—Please believe me."

"We are desperately in need of baby food. Babies



are sickening, losing weight and some have had fits because they can't get usual food and now bread and water sops is their diet. This is an S.O.S. for Babies."

Before we were in a position to make definite grants for Mothers and Babies, our local Secretaries were almost distracted by the many cases of illness and suffering in the mothers and lack of suitable food for the babies which it was totally impossible for them to relieve. Some of the mothers were unable to nurse their babies on account of exhaustion due to lack of nourishment, while others continued to feed them long after they should have been weaned because they could not buy suitable food, and we constantly had news of premature and still births owing to the mothers' weak condition.

"I make myself ill with the thoughts of my coming confinement and having nothing for baby"—says a letter from Notts. "I have one baby two years old who has been ill and to provide him with nourishment my husband and myself have gone without. It is against my wish that I ask you to help me, but—I worry over my coming plight, for everything seems so black that I sometimes wonder if life is worth living."

Later, we received a letter from the husband who said,

"Your representative called yesterday and was an angel sent to help us. . . . I thought my wife would make herself ill with worry, but since the lady came she is a different woman. My wife has had plenty of sympathy, but this is the only help she has had."

Another letter from Scotland, says :

"I am about crazy with worry. We are a young couple and have four young children. We have not a penny of our own in the world, as we are only 26 years each and never had a chance to save as it's been baby after baby. Before the strike, I tried hard to put a little towards the baby coming but it took

us hard to live on thin pay without clothes or anything else. . . . I have only one chemise for myself with an old one to change and it's a thought to bring another helpless infant into the world when you can hardly get an existence for them already here. . . . I would willingly pay back after he is working."

One of our Scottish Secretaries writes :

"One of the places we went to to-day with the baby clothes is a young married woman . . . very poorly, and hadn't a thing for the baby coming and not a penny to buy anything. The parcel was a Godsend to her, poor lassie, and she could not express her thanks. We have a lot of desperate cases and again thank you for what we call Practical Sympathy."

An expectant mother, from Northumberland, writing on Aug. 26th, tells us she has not eaten any piece of butcher's meat since the lock-out, and only had a few pints of milk during that time; and a woman from Lancashire with four tiny children is walking about with "only a skirt and a blouse on, and no shawl to put on."

From Northumberland we hear :

"This is my fifth baby and I am hours awake at night without a wink of sleep waiting for another day so that my mind can be occupied with my housework and kiddies, as I dare hardly think about this little one. I have nothing for it and cannot get anything. I cannot turn to my own people as they are just pit folks in a sorry plight. I hope you will understand what this means to me, for it is not our fault we are as we are to-day. . . . The poverty among the miners is pitiful, and we cannot make ends meet when they are working, so how can we do now?"

These letters are only a few chosen from amongst many received at Tufton Street. We invariably sent the names and addresses to local secretaries for them to investigate before help was given, and as time went on



they covered their districts so completely that appeals very seldom came direct to us for assistance, and those that did were seldom eligible for assistance. This is a proof of the completeness with which they did their work, and as the management of clothes and boot distribution was also in their hands, it will be realized how much they had to accomplish. The majority of these voluntary workers were themselves miners' wives, often as badly off as those they helped. In some districts, however, the Secretary of the Council was not herself involved in the Lock-out, and the same was so of some of her workers. They threw themselves into the struggle with no less enthusiasm and in many cases the husbands of the secretaries, and even the children, took a good share of the work upon their shoulders. Many of them found their houses turned into clothes stores and could never sit down to a meal without being called several times to the door, but they bore it all with wonderful patience. One secretary wrote to us: "This fund is a blessing to our women, as it comes at the right moment, and the good things one hears them say, and the words of thanks, make one rejoice I am sure, though you are overworked in London and there is nothing but work and worry here. But it is well I think to have had an opportunity to help in such a noble work as you have organized."

In the course of their work these women came across confinement cases where there was no food, or only a loaf of bread in the house, houses where the mothers were obliged to feed tiny babies on rice water and meal water, and in one small town we heard that in the course of a fortnight five miners' wives had still-born babies.

Many of the Secretaries worked twelve hours a day for weeks on end, and wore out their strength and their shoe-leather in trying to do what they best could to relieve the distress.

The Advisory Councils brought knowledge and

ability as well as good-will to their work, and it was very interesting to learn of the various plans they adopted to make money go as far as possible. In one area eggs, potatoes, and other provisions were bought cheap in the market, one or two motors were borrowed and a weekly tour was made to the outlying districts to deliver the goods. In another area arrangements were made with the Tramway by which all parcels of food and clothes sent by members of the Relief Committees were carried free of charge.

A word should be said here about gifts of food received by the Committee. Early in June an appeal was sent out to the manufacturers of Cocoa, Baby Food, Condensed Milk, Jam, Biscuits and tinned goods, and amongst those who responded most generously were Messrs. Crosse & Blackwell, Messrs. Wander (Ovaltine), Marmite Co., Messrs. Nestles, and Messrs. King—though several of these firms were, we knew, contributing to other funds. Special mention must be made of Messrs. Neaves, who sent us in all 81 cases of Infants Food, and Messrs. Rowntree, who were very good in forwarding supplies direct to any district for which we sent an emergency appeal.

We soon found that soap was urgently required, as the relief tickets given by the Guardians did not usually include this,\* and we arranged that it might be provided with part of the Mothers' grant, and also sent out appeals to the manufacturers. Only two firms in the whole country, however, responded. Messrs. James Lindsay & Sons Ltd., Nottingham, were good enough to make a free contribution of 1 ton of soap, and distributed this at our request throughout the mining districts, and a small package came from the makers of Palmolive. The C.W.S. let us have £150 worth at cost price.

As weeks went by, the lists of expectant and nursing

\* One family hadn't had a wash with soap for two weeks, we heard, on June 8th.



mothers came in steadily, but the continuous efforts of our collectors and the generous response of the public made it possible for us to make the full grant for every properly authenticated case which reached us until the end of November.

We then wrote as follows to the Secretaries:—

“ We feel that your Committee will want to have some guidance as to the way in which to deal with the Fund, as men begin to go back to work. We are endeavouring to keep up the contributions for as long as we can because we know that the need will continue, but we think it only right to tell you that this week there has been a very definite decrease, and it may be that we shall not succeed. We may be compelled next week to halve the amount of your claims for the Mothers' and Babies' scheme, and so far as we can see we shall not be able to give any boot repairing grants.”

The fears here expressed were realized, and from the following week all the grants made under the Scheme were halved.

We were thankful, however, that sufficient money continued to come in week by week to make it possible for us to extend some help to the worst cases of distress, even after the end of the lock-out, and distribution was not finally ended until February.

Up to the end of January we had distributed £120,955 for expectant and nursing mothers, sick women and children. A few hundred pounds went in expenses of fares, postage, carriage of parcels and stationery. In a few cases local expenses were covered and a balance returned to the fund from Co-operative Society's dividends as they accrued. A few Sections, Councils, and Labour Parties generously met them from their own funds, but some were too poor to do this. We cannot give the figures quite completely, as the

accounts are not yet completely audited. Up to the end of November, when the full grants ceased to be paid, we had spent £109,287. Estimating one-fourth of this for sick women and children, we had spent over £80,000 in grants to pregnant and nursing mothers, which gives a total of 40,000 mothers bearing children during the period May 15th to November 30th. It will therefore be seen that our estimate of 400 births a week should be altered to about 1,200.

There is no doubt that large families and a high birth-rate are common amongst the mining population, and it was, of course, in these families that distress was greatest. The following list taken from our correspondence bears this out and shows something of what the mothers have to endure:—

- Rhondda : Nine children under 16.  
17/- from Guardians sole income.
- Scotland : 15 children.  
Eleven to keep on 26/-. Guardians' Relief.  
Baby 4 months, mother nursing.
- Scotland : 4 children under five.  
Three ill with whooping cough. Baby  
4 days' old. Mother no clothes to get up in.
- Yorks : Four children, eldest 7.  
Baby expected, no clothes whatever.  
“ Only 2 sheets, 2 blankets and 1 quilt to  
cover the six of us.”
- Yorks : Seven children, 10 years to 14 months.  
No clothes and boots. Mother pregnant.
- Wales : Eleven children, seven under 14.
- Yorks : Six children, three under 4.  
Mother pregnant.
- Wales : Nine children, six under 14.
- S. Wales : Four children under 5.  
Pregnant. “ Sinking for want of a good  
meal ! ”



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- Glam. : Nine children, 16 to 1 month, all at home.  
"Children have nothing but rags."
- Wales : Eight children, 12 years to 20 months.
- Yorks. : Eleven children.  
Pregnant. "No clothes for self or baby."
- Derby : Nine children, One girl working for 6/-  
week. Baby 10 days old. "This place  
is at the bottom of an old wood-yard and  
would have been condemned as a pigsty  
years ago."
- Lancs. : Four children under 5. All been ill in bed.  
Have no boots and very little clothing.
- Staffs. : Eight children under 14.  
Baby 3 weeks old. No clothes or boots.
- Staffs. : Nine children.  
Mother (aged only 33) pregnant. No  
clothes for baby and not one change for  
herself. She says, "It is a dreadful  
thought to bring another infant into the  
world when there is not enough for those  
that are here."
- Yorks. : Six children under 10.  
Baby a week old, no resources.
- Durham : Eleven children. Baby 7 weeks; no  
clothes for baby, no boots for children.
- Lancs. : Eight children under 14. No money for  
3 weeks.
- Lancs. : Eight children, Six under 9½ years.  
Mother pregnant; 5/- Union money in 5  
weeks; 25/- Relief for ten people. Has  
had ten children. Not one garment for  
self or baby. Has been a day and a half  
without food of any kind.
- Derbyshire : Five children.  
Mother pregnant. "It's dreadful hard to  
be short of food but harder still to get

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- ready for this event. I've looked at your  
name daily in the *Herald* but could not  
find courage to write."
- Leicester : Eleven children, Eight dependent.  
Baby still-born. Destitute. "Have nothing  
in the house to eat, and not even a cup of  
tea."
- Leicester : Eleven children; twins under 2 years.  
New baby. "Very bad case indeed—just  
had one nightgown given—the only one."
- Glos. : Twelve children.  
Mother pregnant. No clothes, hardly  
enough food and no Guardians' relief  
because their cottage belongs to them.
- Scotland : Six babies. Married 1921.
- Notts. : Five children under 6. Mother pregnant.  
Nothing coming in.

Altogether we had established 48 centres. Some of  
these covered very large districts and dealt with  
sums of £10,000 to £22,000. Others had a small  
mining population and had little more than £100.  
In some cases we had had to break up the Advisory  
Council area for convenience of working. Where there  
was no Advisory Council, as for example in Fifeshire  
in Scotland, we had to press other women into the task,  
and there we had the help of Mrs. Watson, who did  
yeoman service. We cannot give here the names of all  
those magnificent Labour women who gave day and  
night to the work for so many weeks. The women  
organizers of the Labour Party exercised general  
supervision in this branch of distribution and worked  
steadily through, voluntarily foregoing their holidays  
to help those amongst whom they work. There  
were about 5,000 women engaged in this task,  
and they did it all the better because they were almost  
entirely working women who understood without



explanation the conditions of those they visited. There was none of the usual sting of charity in the distribution ; it was the generous help of equals to those in temporary trouble.

The Fund undoubtedly dealt with a very pressing need, and the method of distribution had the advantage that the actual commodities most required in each particular house—food, milk, soap, medical necessities or clothing, were actually given into the woman's own hands. Occasionally baby-clothes and bedding were even got out of pawn, and sometimes pennies were put into the gas meters so as to give light and gas for cooking. In many a house there was no coal. All this could not have been done if we had not had the co-operation of those thousands of Labour women throughout the country who were prepared to spare themselves no anxiety and no fatigue if only they could bring some relief to those who were putting up the fight. We can only repeat the message sent out to them in November :

“ We need not tell you how grateful we are for the magnificent way in which you and your Committees have worked. We congratulate you most heartily upon your successful management of an exacting and difficult task and we know that the thanks of those whom you have helped will be sufficient reward.”

## CHAPTER V

## THIN CLOTHES AND BROKEN BOOTS

“ We had 125 children absent from school because they had no boots to wear.”—Report from Coalfields, November, 1926.

ANYONE who knew the mining districts had seen year by year since 1921 the growing shabbiness of clothing. I remember very well at the great Durham women's procession in the summer of 1925 how poorly-clad many of the women were, and how their worn garments showed in the bright sunlight. By the summer of 1926, their resources of this kind were at an end, and with the complete cessation of all money income at the beginning of May they had no possible means of supplying their needs. “ My baby is coming any time now and I have no clothes for it and nothing for myself,” became the most frequent burden of letters, and all our local secretaries reported the same thing constantly. In the first place we tried to supply the baby clothes, mainly from secondhand supplies. We asked people who had them to let us know and we would send the addresses to which they could go, and in this way we sent to our secretaries throughout the country very substantial supplies which were yet very far from meeting the need. The forms had to be returned to us and we thus kept a special register of them all, and Mrs. Oliver took charge of this part of the work and spent her days struggling with the growing number of packages that came direct to us. Later on these got too heavy for a woman to deal with and Councillor Monk took over the whole business of packing our supplies. As the winter came of course the need was still greater, and letters came to us of children who cried at night with the cold, and women who had no bedding when the time of their



confinement came. We made special appeals for clothing and blankets of all sorts. In many districts sewing parties were started, both in the mining areas and outside them. Many begged for gifts of material from the Co-operative Societies and shops, and funds to buy more. We supplied small quantities and also some wool for knitting. We tried always to buy wholesale supplies, and on the whole were enabled to get these at very cheap rates. On children's clothing—including dresses, knickers, combinations, socks, overcoats and jerseys—we spent £1,574. For infants' clothing we had the money from Sir Henry Simson, which enabled us to buy a good number of infants' gowns, vests and flannel, costing us £224. On wool we spent £120. The secondhand supplies of blankets were naturally small, but we bought several lots of new ones, spending £650, and distributing a total of 3,900 blankets.

Amongst our papers are many reports of women who had cut up their underclothing for their children, and had none themselves. Occasionally a woman was found wearing her husband's coat, and in one case between them they had one pair of boots. At the beginning of the winter a little girl in Derbyshire was attending school in a thin cotton dress without sleeves, as these had been taken out to patch the skirt. We redoubled our appeals for more clothes and they were answered. It was said that the clothes that we received towards the end of the Lock-out were better than at the beginning. At first people had sent those they had finished with, and later on they sent whatever they could spare that they were actually using. The amount of secondhand clothing with which we dealt does not cover the whole ground. We despatched over 1,000 parcels direct, of clothing which had been sent in to us, the greater part of which was repacked in sacks. We sent out addresses of our local centres to individuals and clothing centres to the number of 3,866.

Very often individuals who sent one parcel to an address which we gave sent several more without informing us, and there were some large local collecting centres (of which East Islington was the biggest), of which we have no returns, though their packages went for the most part to our many centres. We always endeavoured to send in rotation and to take into account the size of the area to be covered, and we may safely say that, in addition to the 5,000 packages for which we were responsible, there were many thousands more of which we had no record. At Christmas time a special appeal was made for Christmas puddings, cakes, and similar dainties, and we sent out 256 packages as well as 24 batches of toys.

But the problem of boots dwarfed all these. We have already spoken of the boot collecting cards, and we made many appeals to meet this need. Mr. Poulton, of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives, was of very great assistance to us, and on his advice we appealed to various co-operative boot and shoe societies for gifts or supplies at specially low rates. We also made a similar appeal to the Manufacturers' Association in the trade. Both of these were sympathetically met. Mr. Poulton again helped us in selecting suitable classes of footwear, and we began to make purchases which we distributed through our Women's Committees. Altogether we purchased for children and women about 34,000 pairs, and in a few cases we made grants to local areas where they could get suitable purchases from local traders. We also bought £750 worth of clogs. It was pointed out to us that if we could repair the boots, we would be able to keep a great many more children dry-shod, and in September we started a boot-repairing scheme through our Women's Committees. This was worked in two ways—either centres were set up where colliers gave voluntary assistance by repairing the boots for which we provided the leather and other mending materials or money to buy them, or a grant



was made and rates were agreed upon with local cobblers. The majority followed the first course, and altogether 300 centres of both kinds were established, grants of £2,447 were made and 402 parcels of leather and 3 cwts. of pedite were distributed. In regard to leather we had again Mr. Poulton's skilled advice. By these means more than 40,000 pairs of boots were repaired. Before we started this work, the Society of Friends had been running a similar scheme in the Rhondda and Pontypridd, and some of our grants went to their admirably organized centres where money had become very scarce. A good many Miners' Lodges and Relief Committees had also been doing similar work. It is interesting that a controversy was always raised as to whether this was right from a Trade Union point of view. It was said that the men were thus taking work which local cobblers should have had, and making hard times for them still worse, and that the skilled worker, though he might charge a little more for the repairs would do them better and so pay for his higher price. We left the local women to decide which course they should follow, pointing out that it was a purely emergency matter and the most urgent thing at the moment was to get boots for the children in as many cases as we could. The work was undoubtedly a great joy to the colliers, who felt that they were able thereby to do something substantial to help. The children's bootlessness was particularly serious at this time because unless they could go to school they could not get school meals, and we had reports of parents carrying their children there so that they should not lose this advantage. In one centre a man on a motor-bike took the children's boots in the morning and left them with carpet slippers, returning at night with the repairs done. The teachers always co-operated, and I think in a great many cases were very generous with their gifts. In some places the boots were brought to the centres. We were frequently sent the boots which children were wearing

to show us the needs, and never, save on rubbish heaps, would it be possible to match them. In spite of every appeal, the needs were so great that we never succeeded in meeting them, but during December, the Boot and Shoe Operatives sent very generous gifts, of boots to the coalfields, which greatly helped.

Here are some of the stories that came to us. A girl of 15 was found doing the washing barefoot. She had lent her shoes to her little sister to go to school. A four-year old child came up from South Wales to be adopted in London, wearing such appalling boots that her feet were badly blistered and it would be some time before she could put any on. A mother writing a letter of thanks for the help given to her when her baby was born put in a special appeal that the Labour women bringing round the food to her should have some new boots. "It was so sad to see them with their feet wet." The truth was that most of these women were miners' wives themselves, had worn out their shoes after tramping the rough roads and had no money to buy new ones. We had from time to time tried to supply them, but many of them would not take anything themselves from the Fund that they were so busy distributing to others, and alas, we had not enough to provide all! We have been able to make some provision of boots for these brave women in the last two months.



## CHAPTER VI

### CHILD PILGRIMS

"I do not like always being hungry."—A miner's ten-year-old child to her foster-parent.

**D**URING the London Dock Strike of 1912, the scheme of child adoption had been very successfully carried out. Some of our helpers were anxious to try this scheme again, but there were certain difficulties. In the first place, we had no idea how long the struggle would last. In the second, we had two million children scattered over an enormous area. It seemed that it would be giving a very small number of children a very great deal and that the cost on fares would be out of proportion to the good to be done. This would probably have been true had the struggle lasted for only a few weeks, but when it settled down into a longer contest the matter altered. We also received an offer from Lady Warwick to take 100 children at Easton Lodge and that seemed too good to put aside. We published that, and immediately received offers from many hostesses to take children. When Lady Warwick's offer came to be investigated there were found to be many difficulties and she decided to make us a very substantial donation instead. The other hostesses remained and there appeared strong reasons for bringing children from some of the smaller coalfields which were near London. Kent and Somerset were burdened with peculiar difficulties. They were small isolated mining communities in the middle of rural areas, whose Local Education Committees were extremely hard, and whose Poor Law Authorities were very ungenerous. We therefore decided to make a

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special effort to get children from these two places. At first this department was under the charge of Sime Seruya, but just after the first lot of children came up from Kent it was taken over by Miss Gottsman, under whose skilful hands the organization was soon in apple-pie order. She worked at this scheme day and night until she had to have some time off in August. Mrs. Brown had been her assistant for the past two weeks and took the work over from that time, as I needed Miss Gottsman for other work when she came back. Under her care we had begun to bring the children up in ever increasing numbers. The difficulties of the Nottingham area were great and we made our next efforts there. We began to deal with children from South Wales, and Mrs. Green, of Abertillery, went round several of the districts explaining the scheme and helping Mrs. Andrews, the Labour Party organizer, to make arrangements and to take the children to and fro. Miss Richardson, on a visit to Gloucestershire, found the position of the children so pitiful that she brought some back with her to Devon, and from that time there was always a little settlement of children in the Totnes area. We frequently had 150 children up in the same week and the business of dealing with them was not easy. The total number on our records show that 2,192 came upon this pilgrimage from the mining villages, but this is not complete, for in the North of England, many children were arranged for by Mrs. Anderson and Mrs. Fenn directly without our having to do anything for them. Miss Adams, at Leeds, had a special centre for this purpose and dealt with many children. We estimate the total number at little short of 2,500. In 31 places, Local Committees made all the arrangements with the hostesses—known to the children as a rule as "Aunts" and "Uncles," but the bulk of the homes were scattered and had to be dealt with by us direct. The places in which the Local Committees made the arrangements were:—Bletchley; Bourne



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(Lincs.); Brighton; Chatham; Chelmsford; Cheltenham; Devon; Eastbourne; East Ham; Eastleigh; Edmonton; Erith; Fulham; Hastings; Hoddesdon; Kettering; Kidderminster; Kings Lynn; Leeds; Letchworth; New Bradwell; Parkstone; Plymouth; Portsmouth; Reading; Ryde; Sheerness; Southend; Southsea; Tottenham; Wolverhampton.

The job was a double one. We had to arrange about hospitality, and on the other hand about the selection and bringing up of the children, and keep a complicated card index covering both. Our hostesses came to us in response to appeals, either from local parties or in the press, and each one received a form and a reference was required. The principle upon which our representative went in selecting the children locally was that they should come from the largest families if possible, so as to make no difference to the Poor Law relief—that is, from families already on the maximum. Motherless children and delicate ones were also given a preference, and in general, efforts were made to get those who were most clearly suffering. The Railway Companies gave us specially low rates for parties, and we usually had one or two people with them. In this way many miners' wives and local representatives came up to London and were able to give us very valuable first-hand information on their districts.

It will be readily seen that all sorts of difficulties necessarily arose. Children were changed at the last moment and hostesses sometimes failed to come for them. We tried to allot them as well as possible beforehand, but very often when the children arrived had to make changes. Many had never been in a train before and were badly upset by the journey. A very large number had to be fitted out with clothes, though even then some of them did actually arrive in the most pitiful rags of garments. Sometimes amongst 50 or so children there would be scarcely any with any "parcels" at all. Many of them were very upset at

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this, one little girl telling frequently the tale of how she had lost her parcel on the way to the station, and another was so ashamed of her bad boots that she sat in the train all the way with her feet tucked under her. Occasionally children on arrival in London had still a journey to make, and in the interval we had often to find an overcoat to keep them warm or new boots before they could go on. They were always a great centre of interest at the stations and the kindness of the railway staffs was beyond words.

The following list shows where the children came from:—

Wales .. ..	829	Gloucester ..	109
Notts. .. ..	424	Lancashire ..	49
Somerset .. ..	328	Northumberland	39
Yorkshire .. ..	232	Scotland ..	1
Kent .. ..	161		

The one child from Scotland came to us by accident. Her father was a miner and was on tramp with his wife and five children, and we kept the eldest little girl for a time because she looked so tired out and wretched. The gross cost of dealing with these children was £1,600, but some of this came back to us from the foster parents, many of whom refunded the fares. They took the responsibility of clothing the children as well as mothering them, though occasionally after a child had been some months with the foster parent we helped them out with new boots or garments. Twelve boys from Somerset went to a camp at Storrington during the summer. Some were placed at the Burston Strike School, and five delicate and convalescent children were given a home at the Golden Rule Cottage at Shoeburyness. The Storrington Camp was the scene of a tragedy, one of the little boys there being run over and killed by a motor lorry. The accident was not in any way due to lack of care or supervision, but an inquest had to be held and the whole affair made



such a deep impression on the children's minds that it was decided that it would be better to take them away from the scene and they went to Brighton. This was the only child that we lost though many of them were ill, and one little girl met with a similar accident in Dartford, luckily without fatal effects. One very delicate child returned home at her parents' request and unfortunately died just afterwards, but otherwise, though some had very serious illnesses, they all came through them well—the result of very great care given them and a tribute to the very strong stock of the mining areas. Very few were less than eight weeks away from home. There were, of course, occasional instances when we had to send children back—sometimes because they were homesick and pining, and at other times because they did not get on in their new homes. There were, of course, some difficult children amongst them and equally of course there were some foster parents lacking an understanding of children. We always tried to transfer an unsatisfactory child to another home; sometimes with success but once or twice failure met us there also. The majority of the children did not return until after the Lock-out was over. Many had been away since June and about 400 spent Christmas with their foster parents. A few are permanently adopted. Others reached the age of 14, and were found work near their new homes. Sometimes the foster parents sent for a brother or sister and in many cases they practically adopted the whole family, continually sending them food and money, and in many homes at Christmas time the miners' families would have been without a Christmas dinner had it not been for the "Uncles" and "Aunts". A good many took a great deal of trouble over the children's health and with the parents' consent arranged for the removal of adenoids, visits to the dentist, and other needs. There was a charming story from Birmingham of a little boy who set out on his scooter to his home many miles away in the Black

Country, and while everybody was worrying as to what had become of him, he arrived back with his little sister on the step behind him. He had got so miserable thinking of how she wanted food while he had plenty that he had gone to fetch her. Some of the youngsters had a royal time. In the summer many went with their adopted parents to the seaside or the country. One of them even had a visit to Paris, and all of them saw more of the world than they had ever imagined to exist. Their letters home were full of quaint stories, of descriptions of their new clothes, of what they had to eat and of all the places which they visited. One little girl described what she saw at the South Kensington Museum, and gave a description of "lions, tigers, giraffes, which were all stuffed, and butterflies, fleas and gnats which were not stuffed." When the schools reopened they went with the other children, and some of their comments on the easy work of the London schools were very interesting. On the whole they seemed to think their lessons there were much simpler than at home, which is surely a tribute to the teachers of the L.C.C.!

The hostesses came from every class of society, from those who owned motor cars to working people living in small flats, but the children seemed to fit in very readily with all. Often when they came "aunts" were very troubled about their food. They had become so accustomed to having little, and probably in addition arrived so tired with the journey, that at first they would eat nothing but bread and jam, to the bitter disappointment of the hostess who had been looking forward to seeing them enjoy their first solid meal of weeks. One child who had not only suffered a long period of poverty, but whose home had just been burned down, was in such a neurotic condition that we arranged for her to be treated at the Tavistock Clinic for Nervous Diseases, and she made a very fine recovery. Many of the youngsters when they arrived home and were met by



their mothers at the stations had so improved that they did not recognize them. We have one letter which says: "She looked like a little princess when she came back." Though occasionally, as I have said, the children were difficult, for the most part they were friendly, fearless and grateful, and settled down into their new life in the most charming way. It was often pathetic to find that little girls of 9 and 10 were already accomplished housewives, throwing a pitiful light on the conditions of their homes, where the mothers have so to struggle against overwork that with the trials of poverty and large families even little children must be pressed into the work.

When we come to sum up the advantages of the holiday it does not end with the improved health of 2,500 children. For them it has been of enormous value not only in giving them better conditions for this period and saving them from the poverty at home, but it has also given to people all over the country a far greater knowledge of the conditions of the mining areas. It has created new bonds between the people within and without the coalfields, and established a friendly relation which we know will result in many a visit between the families in the future. A great number have already planned to meet again in the summer holidays this year, and the ties created will endure through the coming years.

Some of the children had never before been in a train. Large numbers had never been in a big town. It took them out of narrow circumstances into a wider life, and this was still more the case with our last adoption scheme which bore fruit just before Christmas. In November a Committee for the Relief of British Miners' Wives and Children was formed in Norway, and they asked us to send them some children to whom they would give a three months' holiday in their country. We thought it was not wise to send small children so far away, and therefore proposed that this offer should

be made for young pit lads who had suffered so greatly during the Lock-out, and for whom very little had been done. When the final arrangements were made we had only three days to collect the boys, so that the first lot of 16 were hurriedly brought together in the Northern Counties. They left for Norway on the 11th December. A further lot of 18 went on the 15th January and again we had to rush the matter through at the last moment, and we were not able to spread the offer over as big an area as we would have liked. One of these lads who came from Warwickshire had not only never travelled in a train but had never even seen a tramcar until he got to Newcastle. We had to give practically complete outfits to some of these lads as they had nothing fit to make the journey in, but we thought that it was well worth it to give such an opportunity even to a small number, and create this bond between the workers of the two countries. Some of the boys lived in Trade Union holiday homes near Oslo and some with private families. One of those who left in the second batch wrote to his mother that he had been sea-sick all the way but now that he was there "it was worth it," and that probably was the opinion of them all. The first group returned on March 7th, and the advantages may be gauged by the fact that they had all increased in weight by 11 lbs. to 16 lbs. One or two were able to talk in Norwegian, and all had learned to ski!



## CHAPTER VII

### OUR APPEAL IN OTHER COUNTRIES

"To repay the kindness I met in England."—From a former "War Famine" child of Vienna, who sent a contribution.

I HAVE spoken in the last chapter of the Committees in America and Norway. The Norwegians sent us magnificent supplies of clothes and cases of Cod Liver Oil. From the Swedish women we had many gifts of clothes, most of them made specially for our people. The babies' garments caused considerable perplexity. There were numbers of little jackets, very large supplies of napkins and a very large stock of what we thought were covers for pram pillows, but there were no gowns or nightdresses. The solution of it was that the Swedish women had prepared for swaddled babies who are placed on pillows, and the little slip pulled over them, and had never realized that though the interests of all workers are the same their ways of dressing sometimes differ. The little jackets were charming, and I sold one of them at an Albert Hall meeting for 52/- as a symbol of international goodwill.

The American Committee collected a good deal of money for us in the early months. The United Ladies' Garment Workers and the Jewish *Forward* were especially generous donors, and the total sum received in dollars was about £10,000, and most of it came before August. The Miners' Federation decided to send a delegation to U.S.A. in August and asked the General Council of the Trades Union Congress and our Committee each to send a representative with it. Under great pressure Ellen Wilkinson consented to go. She was in very great need of a rest, and the advice of our Committee had been that it was not a good time to go

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to America to collect money. In addition to that the heat was very great. The results of the deputation were disappointing. She had, of course, a great advantage in having their Committee already in existence to help her to get into contact with people. She gives the following account of the deputation:—

"Through our American Committee contacts were made with women's organizations and the Churches in particular.

"The delegation as a whole worked under the auspices of the American Federation of Labour, who planned out itineraries for the delegates and placed the organization of the A.F. of L. in the various districts at their disposal.

"On the whole, the mission was not as successful as had been hoped although substantial sums were raised. The reasons had better be frankly faced for the guidance of any future delegations of the kind.

"Raising money for a worthy object in America is not too difficult a job, for the Americans are warm-hearted and generous, but English people are apt to forget the enormous size of U.S.A. A 'drive' for funds needs careful planning, and wide publicity for weeks before the actual meetings are held. The Miners, living as they were bound to do, from one day to the next, were not able to make plans for weeks ahead.

"August, the month the delegation was sent, is simply impossible for indoor meetings, owing to the intense heat, made worse in New York by the humidity of the air. Everyone who can get to the country—officials, executives, and people most able to help, take their holidays during that month, and this increased the difficulties.

"Struggling against all these, the delegation found very valuable friends in the American Trade Union Movement, to whose efforts the large sum that was raised pays eloquent testimony."



So far as our Committee was concerned our representative brought back a great deal more than her very moderate expenses, and the effort was well worth making. The bulk of the money collected went straight to the Miners' Federation. We sent a great many miners' lamps to America and I may add the following story of Mr. G. A. Isaacs who visited the printers' unions during the summer. At the Convention of the International Printing, Press-men and Assistants' Union of North America, he made an appeal for the miners' dependents and he held up the little lamp which he was wearing. Immediately the president of the Congress suggested that they should buy it for 1,000 dollars and this was promptly done. This is the greatest price that any of our lamps ever fetched.

During the later months of the year we received the sum of £13,000 from the Russian Trade Union fund. As everybody knows, the Russian Trade Unionists contributed a very large sum to the Miners' Relief funds. In August they invited the Miners' Federation to send a delegation to visit their country and help in maintaining and increasing the interest of their workers in contributing. They asked that miners' wives should be included, and Mr. Cook approached us asking that we should select some representatives. It had already been arranged that Mrs. Cook should go, and we arranged for five representative women to accompany her. Mr. Stevens, who knew Russia well, consented to go with them as general guide and helper. The arrangements had to be made very quickly and I had to take the responsibility of selection, except in the case of Yorkshire where Mr. Herbert Smith chose the woman representative. The women's delegation in addition to Mrs. Cook consisted of:—Mrs. Johnson, Northumberland; Mrs. Errington, Durham; Mrs. Chester, Yorkshire; Mrs. Eddishaw, Nottingham; Mrs. Green, Wales. They joined the men's delegation in Russia, and just afterwards we also sent a Miners' Choir to help

in the work. The women spent six weeks touring Russia. They addressed a wonderful series of meetings and saw every important industrial area from Leningrad to Tiflis and Baku. They returned not only with a good knowledge of Russia, but having done splendid service for the women and children in the coalfields. This was the first occasion on which a delegation of working-class housewives had made an official visit of this sort, but we hope in the future that there will be such visits to other countries too, though for a less tragic purpose.

We can give many stories of the Russian workers' interest in our struggle told in letters from as far east as the Caucasus which have come to us. There were for example the children of a Blind School at Perm who voluntarily gave up sugar and sent the money it would have cost to us. There was a Co-operative Society in Azerbeizan who wrote that our appeal was read at all their meetings and contributions taken and sent to their central fund. We have a little stock of Flag Day emblems from all sorts of small places, and our miniature miners' lamps have found their way into many remote towns.

We have similar letters from nearly every country in the world. The Socialist women in Europe have nearly all sent some contribution and Labour people going abroad have sometimes come upon little groups of women selling our lamps. After Mr. Cape, M.P. had visited Switzerland he brought us an order for 1,000 which were dispatched there. The Socialist Youth organization of Vienna sent a contribution with the hope that "our heroic British brothers will be able to win their way through in their fight against the insolent tyranny and greed of the mine-owners." Trinidad sent us money. Johannesburg raised £310 by a street collection and Benoni sent over £29. Late in the struggle we sent an appeal to Australia and we received £170 in January. Many contributions have



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come from Canada, from British in China, Japan, Kenya, from people in India, New Zealand and even from officers in the navy at far-off stations. We can truthfully say that there was no country that did not make its contribution. Although many of them were small they were an expression of solidarity that helped to maintain the courage of a hard-pressed people.

As I pass these pages for the printer, I feel I must add a word on the present position. The tragedy of the coalfields is still with us; long hours, increasing the toil of women in the homes as well as of men in the pits, low wages, pressure of debt, unemployment and victimization make life almost intolerable. The terrible disasters at Cwm and Bilsthorpe draw sympathy from all. We tried in 1926 to get sufficient help to bring the happiness of life to the mining population; alas, how much easier it is to get help in memory of those who have died!

The toll of the mines is not only to be counted in the brave and tragic stories of pit disasters. Women and children suffered and some of them died in the struggle of 1926. The Women's Committee ask all who helped then to realize that their work will not be over until the miner's toil and danger is lessened and his family assured of a decent standard of life.