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# **The Family and the Social Services**

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*ONE SHILLING AND SIXPENCE*

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## I. The Family Today

**T**HE family is the basic biological and social unit in the community. What in essence makes it irreplaceable and hence vital for child rearing, for mental health and for social well-being? Ten years after John Bowlby's pioneer work on the significance of a child's early relationship with its mother, it becomes possible to re-assess many social policies. The family group when functioning well, alone provides the basic needs for a satisfactory childhood. The need for a close maternal relationship is met in a family setting because the mother, who is freed by the father's support from the need to earn a living, has time for the child and his care. The need for continuity in his life is met by the continuing relationship between his parents on which his home is based. His need for companionship, and learning to share the loved adult with others is met by the existence of brothers and sisters. It is no idle platitude to say that the family unit may best provide these basic needs of loving and being loved, of continuity and security and finally of companionship and competition.

Frequently, however, this ideal is not fulfilled. Marital strife and breakdown, constant home moving, lack of security and even homelessness, the absence of brothers, sisters and grandparents, and even the absence of one parent, or a combination of one or all these situations can deprive a child of his birthright, sowing the seeds of a lifetime's unhappiness, to be repeated yet again in the next generation. It is the pattern of damaged and deprived personalities that social workers recognise as tending to repeat themselves, rather than the more soluble evils of physical impoverishment.

It is here that the social services must concentrate on their basic job of preserving and protecting the family unit. An effective service of help to the family sees itself as preventive rather than curative, as a fence at the top of the precipice rather than an ambulance at the bottom. The

service must be easily and readily available to ordinary families in temporary trouble as well as to those whose problems are deeper seated and more intractable. The move must be on a broad front away from the rigidities and unrealities arising from a concentration on symptoms rather than causes. This system only too often ended in some form of institutional care following the collapse of the family. The need is toward a concept of personal needs met through a strengthening of family ties, which in their turn derive strength from the community on which they are based and from which they grow.

## 2. The Social Services

IT IS worthwhile, if depressing, to assess the personal Social Services, provided by both Local Authorities, and Central Government, by the measuring rod of the individual child's need for development within a family setting of his own. In the fields of Health, Housing, Education and Welfare, the last twenty years have seen advances which it would be ungrateful and unreal to overlook. Nevertheless on this standard of protecting the family and preserving the personal relationships on which it is based a tragic tale of failure is revealed. These failures at their least are minor, at their worst cause permanently damaged lives and quite unnecessary unhappiness.

### Health

In the Health Service perhaps the most immediate example is the failure to make arrangements for parents to visit their children in hospital. In 1958 the Platt Committee recommended that all children's wards should have free visiting by parents, and that some accommodation should be available for mothers to live in the hospital if desired. Despite valiant work by a voluntary organisation, *Mother Care for Children in Hospital*, many hospitals still limit visiting to half an hour a day, and some new hospitals are actually being designed and built with no accommodation for mothers to live in. Recent Parliamentary Questions revealed a sad confusion as to what free visiting really meant. The ideal of mothers helping with the non-medical aspects of their children's care, and being present at the giving and recovering from anaesthetics, is still a far off goal in many districts. Those who have seen James Robertson's (of the Tavistock Clinic) film *A Two Year Old Goes to Hospital*, will not feel there is anything left to argue about. What remains is for the Hospital Management Committees to assure themselves that the needs of the child come before convenience of administration. Another failure in hospital administration is shown in the totally unnecessary fear and loneliness suffered by mothers in labour whose need is for comfort and companionship which an overworked professional staff are too busy to give. Here, as with children in hospital, the community can help if allowed to do so. A panel of calm and sympathetic women could be called upon, where the husband was not available, to help pass the tedious hours of waiting. No mother should be left alone with a bell she fears to ring.

### Housing

In the housing field perhaps one of the most immediate needs is the re-creation of all age communities. Many Councils are now building for the elderly, but great damage has been done to family security

by the upheavals, some unavoidable, of the post-war phase. This disruption of neighbourhoods and communities must take time to re-build, but re-building will be greatly hampered where the grandparent generation have been 'left-behind' and the young parents moved away. New Town neurosis, in which young couples need baby sitters and there is no one to baby sit, is reflected in the loneliness of elderly people living for the weekly visit. A problem more critical still has arisen on the older housing estates where the inter-war babies have now become young married couples themselves seeking a home near their parents, and yet again being obliged to move elsewhere. So the cycle of disruption continues.

It is now generally accepted that the three generation family with grandparents and parents in a mutually supportive role is a more natural, more healthy and above all more viable group than the only too common two generation unit, with parents and children living in an isolation which is often anxiety ridden. Housing policies in the last twenty-five years have frequently lost sight of grandparents as an integral part of successful family living. The secret here is the grandparent as neighbour rather than co-resident. Policies of housing and re-development which disperse united families cause lonely and prematurely aged and institutionalised old people, with their counterpart in lonely, overworked and bewildered young mothers. The re-discovery of the grandparent pre-supposes, however, not only new policies in housing planning and management, but new thinking and new attitudes in professional workers who help families in a wide range of different capacities. Grandmothers sometimes detect an echo of amused patronage towards themselves in the approach of some doctors, teachers or nurses who are coping with their grandchildren. Granny is not a tired music hall joke, but a skilled and essential part of the young family's life.

Some local Housing Authorities are now building one-bedroomed flats as an integral part of their estate developments. In this way older couples whose families have grown up will avoid the unhappy choice of remaining in an over-large home (and thus depriving younger families in urgent housing need), or moving away from their friends and familiar neighbourhood. This cruel alternative is one a Labour Authority should never impose. Small flats not only promote family unity, but avoid under-occupation of precious council accommodation.

### **Education**

In the education service the spotlight of failure is on the unmet needs of a small but significant minority of children. The evil of the overlarge class is commonly thought of in terms of teaching difficulties. The child's need for an adequate share in the time, interest and attention of the teacher is frequently forgotten. Children from adequate homes and with average ability can usually get by, even when sharing 1/40th of a teacher's time. But when one, or both of these factors are missing the signal flashes red for danger. Children who fall behind in reading do so for a variety of causes. But the effect is fairly common. Here is the seed bed of anti-social attitudes, and sometimes of delinquency. Just

as nothing succeeds like success, so nothing fails like failure, especially failure amongst contemporaries with all the cruelty and competition of childhood.

Attempts to meet this need vary with Local Education Authorities. Some provide virtually no special help, others a network of remedial and tutorial classes. Nevertheless there remains a group of children whose home or school experience has been so damaging that they have virtually withdrawn from any form of group activity. Their basic pre-requisite of any willingness or capacity to read is the formation of a relationship with one constant and friendly adult. The setting in which a teacher's undivided time and attention can be the child's for at least a period, should be in the teacher's own home. Experience has shown that children who associate school buildings with failure, will return to school after this learning experience outside school, full of confidence and co-operation.

The existence of growing numbers of trained married women teachers (housebound by family responsibilities, and exceeding in numbers those teachers actually in the schools) gives an opportunity to do this individual work with individual children. Here is a way in which the community can take some responsibility for social problems outside the institutional setting. The reluctance of official education circles to accept such a scheme, on an experimental basis, is a comment on our dedication to institutions rather than homes, and to children as pupils rather than persons. This failure is also reflected in official insistence on full time attendance in Infant Schools, and the lack of enthusiasm for the double shift Nursery School or Nursery Class. The needs of mothers for part time teaching work could be met in such schemes, as could their young children's need not to be forced into the alternatives of no school or the exhausting experience of all-day school — even for those aged five to seven.

The essential element of such a scheme for infants should be its voluntary character. Where a mother is in full time work, or where living conditions are cramped and brothers and sisters non-existent clearly a well run Infant Class room provides the best environment. Where, however, the mother is taking younger members of the family out to play in the park, it is only common sense to allow the very young school child to be free in the afternoon, rather than for him to increase the numbers in an already overcrowded classroom.

Recognising as we do the precious skills of the teacher surely the time has now come for the profession to accept the help in non-teaching matters, of auxiliary helpers with training. If a doctor would not use his skills and time in preparing treatments, nor a ward sister in serving meals, nor a barrister in typing out his brief, a teacher should not have to undertake cloakroom and dinner duties. The collecting of pennies, tying of shoe laces and soothing of grazed knees are all important jobs affecting the children, but not ones which require a three year teacher training. Three advantages would follow from such a scheme. First the individual child would get a little more share of an adult's time, interest and attention. Secondly teachers would be released to undertake the

vitally skilled tasks for which they were trained. Finally in the years of desperate women teacher shortage which lie ahead some auxiliary helpers might feel inspired to take the full teacher training, if their age and qualifications permitted, and so another source of supply could be tapped. The Primary School world awaits with interest the report of the Central Advisory Council for Education now being prepared under the Chairmanship of Lady Plowden. There is urgent need for a fresh and flexible look. There are those who believe they will not be disappointed.

### **Welfare**

The Local Authority world recognises Welfare as caring for the elderly, the unmarried mother and her baby, and the homeless. In all three spheres on the measuring rod of protecting and strengthening the family, there tends to be failure. Homelessness is a growing problem in large urban areas, but even semi-rural counties like Kent are beginning to feel the backwash of population pressures in the South East of England. A recent report said the numbers of children in public care in Kent because of homelessness had increased by 100 per cent during 1963. Whereas in the L.C.C. area the number of children in care because of homelessness fell (as a result of the Council's Family Reception Policy) from 1100 to 700 in the last 18 months. It is not often realised that many Local Authorities consider homelessness as a form of social failure and visit the 'sins' of the parents on the children by immediately taking the children into care and forcing the parents to fend for themselves. Other Welfare Authorities accept mothers and children for a limited period, requiring the father to make separate arrangements. Only one local authority—the L.C.C.—has opened Family Reception Centres for the homeless. All the evidence of prevention of suffering, care of children, avoidance of family disintegration and even payment of charges, have shown this is a wise as well as a humane policy. It is a frightening thought that outside London many united families, homeless through economic circumstances beyond their control, are still being torn apart by so-called Welfare departments operating a Poor Law administration.



### 3. Two Children's Acts

IT IS in the history of the Children's Service over the last twenty years that this story is most vividly told. The realisation that causes rather than symptoms are important in family trouble, that homes rather than Homes are essential, that good child care must be good family care is burnt on the mind in a study of the years 1948-65.

The outburst of public feeling following the death of a foster child in 1945 is still remembered. A growing realisation that all was not well with the care of children living away from their own homes, for whom duplication of responsibility resulted in absence of responsibility, led to the appointment of the Curtis Committee. Despite protests, its terms of reference were limited to 'the care of the child deprived of a normal home life'. Two great advantages followed on this report and its resultant 1948 Children's Act. As a result of concentrating responsibility in one Local Authority Department, instead of spreading it over the Health, Education and Welfare Departments, the care of children actually in care improved dramatically. For many local Children's Authorities the fifties saw a steady improvement in the physical conditions of Children's Homes and those more go-ahead an improvement in the training and recruitment of staff. Above all this phase was marked by the earnest attempt to cut down the large single sex groupings of children and substitute them for small mixed all age (including a baby) substitute family groups. Improvements in boarding out and adoption were other features of child-care after this Act.

But the root causes of child deprivation — family disintegration — remained untouched. From 1948 onwards the actual numbers of children in public care, the applications for their reception into care, the numbers sent by the Juvenile Courts to the Local Authority on Fit Persons Orders (both offenders and non-offenders) all increased steadily. By the middle of the 1950's a tragic pattern was emerging, and one which has continued until the present time.

The number of children in care, in England and Wales, in 1964 was the highest recorded since November 1953. The 64,807 children in care represented a rise of over 2,000 since 1961.

Roughly ninety seven per cent of the children had living parents. The small minority of real orphans, whose Victorian image is still so often printed on the public mind, were the easy cases to deal with. Their future in adoption or long term fostering was secure. The real core of the child care problem today lies in the child whose parents are temporarily, or more rarely permanently, unable to care for him.

#### The Position Now

The most serious indictment of our present Social Service set up lies in the failure to help those parents with their problems at a much earlier stage. The steady and alarming rise in requests to the Local

Authority to take children into care is a reflection of failure. Between 1961 and 1963 there was a rise of nearly 9,000 in these applications, which stood in March of last year at 102,601 for the previous twelve months. The real danger signal in these figures lies in the fact that these applications have been rising at a rate which is nearly four times as fast (8.3 per cent), as the rate at which the child population has been rising (2.6 per cent), over the last two years. Admittedly the great majority of these requests come from parents who are temporarily ill (particularly confinement cases). Children in care for these reasons usually only stay a short time, but the question is being increasingly asked as to whether the removal from home of 24,837 young children in 1962/63 for this reason alone was really the best form of help to offer.

Other reasons, however, for children coming into care reflect family difficulties of a far more long term and intractable nature. In the country as a whole the number of children committed to the care of the Local Authority by the Juvenile Courts under Fit Persons Orders, has risen steadily over recent years; the numbers of children committed because of unsatisfactory home conditions (i.e. the non-offenders) remaining at three times those committed for an actual offence against the law (i.e. the offenders). Many experienced Juvenile Court Magistrates find this an increasingly artificial distinction, most particularly in truancy cases where the child's behaviour is almost always a direct reflection of his family problems. Nevertheless growing public anxiety is felt at the steady rise in the number of children who come to the Courts on indictable offences. In London the 1957 figure of 7,000 appearances had reached 12,000 by 1963. Also twice as many boys and three times as many girls, between 14 and 18, appeared in court as before the war. This is a rate of rise far in excess of the rate of growth of the child population, and one which reflects family problems unrecognised and undealt with.

### **The Ingleby Committee**

In 1956, after continued pressure, the Departmental Committee of Enquiry under Lord Ingleby's chairmanship was appointed. Its terms of reference asked for recommendations on the prevention of child neglect and family breakdown. These were the very terms for which, ten years before, the Curtis Committee had begged in vain. After four long years (a period four times as long as the Beveridge enquiry, and three times as long as the Curtis Committee) the Ingleby Report was at last forthcoming. And how bitterly disappointed were those who sought to find in it the outline of a new statutory Family Service. Nowhere, in Barbara Wootton's inimitable words, 'did the image of a real live child shine through its chilly legalistic pages'.

### **1963 Children's Act**

It was however, from this arid soil that grew the sturdy sapling which resulted in the 1963 Children's Act. Many will recognise Section I in particular as reflecting the evidence which the Fabian Society, the

London County Council, the Council for Children's Welfare and the Fisher Group submitted to the Ingleby Committee. This evidence begged for Statutory powers for Local Children's Authorities to help families in cash and in kind, as well as with a scheme of personal advice and help. This principle of prevention being better than cure was accepted in the words of the Act: 'It shall be the duty of every local authority to make available such advice, guidance and assistance as may promote the welfare of children by diminishing the need to receive children into and keep them in care under the Children's Act 1948, or to bring them before a Juvenile Court'. The heart of the matter lies in the words 'advise, guide and assist'. Some Local Children's Authorities are already getting ahead with use of these new powers. In one area of London upwards of 42 families, involving 168 children have been considered for help since the new Children's Act became law in October 1963. Of these 8 families involving 27 children have been prevented from coming into care. In 20 families involving 95 children the need for reception had been diminished; and 36 children (already in care) had been reunited with their families as a result of the new powers to help in cash and kind. In one case two children were prevented coming into care when the mother's earnings stopped on her going into hospital. The Council were able to pay a housekeeper and thus keep the home together. In another case a grandmother (on paid holiday for her daughter's confinement) was faced with enforced return to work in Ireland or loss of income. When the daughter's delayed confinement eventually took place the L.C.C. Children's Department was able to make good the Grandmother's lost wages and for £4.10.0 a week two babies were prevented from being taken into care. In another case 3 children were cared for in their own home (their mother in hospital for confinement and father on shift work) by an aunt on unpaid leave from work in return for payment of her rent by the L.C.C.

### **A Preventive Service**

Apart from all the recognised arguments about mental health and human happiness, the saving to the public purse of these arrangements has been quite dramatic. Had say 150 of these children, whose families had problems, been taken into care, the cost would have been in the order of £1,050 a week — over a period of six months £25,000 could well have been spent. In actual fact the costs of helping these children to remain at home was one-tenth of that amount. For once in public affairs the better policy is the cheaper policy.

It remains to be seen how Children's Departments will interpret their new powers. Some will clearly be more go-ahead than others. It is to be hoped that the Voluntary Societies will work in co-operation with, but not in substitute for the statutory services. Their traditional role of pioneering is needed more than ever today. The phrase 'advise' in the new Act gives authorities a chance to experiment with Family Advice Centres. The door on which to knock — a known door and a friendly door — could be the key to real preventive work. Here could be born the concept of families taking responsibility for their own well-being

by seeking help and advice at an early stage, rather than waiting at home for problems, and social workers, finally to overwhelm them. The pre-requisites of a Family Advice Centre are availability (pram pushing distance), a friendly reception by qualified staff and a cheerful domestic setting. The white tiled public lavatory decor of too many local authority offices is not conducive to confidential comfort. A further development could be an appointments system for meeting experts in a variety of fields such as Education psychologists, Probation Officers and Marriage Guidance Counsellors.

### Financial Aid

It is sometimes forgotten that the Beveridge concept of subsistence for all (a minimal enough principle in itself) has not in fact been fulfilled. Half those in employment today earn less than £10 a week. There are 2½ million people on National Assistance. In fact the voiceless minority of the poor in an affluent society suffer as much if not more than in former times as their sense of deprivation, is more keenly, if less recognisably felt. As the average standard of income and amenity rises so the gap widens for those outside the escalator of advancement. It is recognised that poverty presses hardest both absolutely and relatively on families with children. Of school children having school meals, 7 per cent have free dinners. This means their families are on the subsistence level. But more acute still is the poverty of those families without a male breadwinner. A quarter million such families are on National Assistance. Observation of homeless families suggests that they have only been able to meet rents, which often demand 50 per cent of their means, by cutting down on food. The mothers in particular suffer in these circumstances. One family arriving in a centre for the homeless revealed that they never ate on Thursdays. Funds simply ran out.

Apart from the urgent need to raise Family Allowances and include the first child, Margaret Wynn's suggestion of a fatherless child allowance paid to the mother should be adopted. This allowance would concentrate on the child's need rather than on how his father disappeared — by death, desertion, divorce or failure to marry the mother. Much humiliation and distress would be avoided if this allowance (related to current fostering rates) was paid through the Post Office. The judiciary should enforce the father's obligations by some method other than through the suffering of the mother.

The need for sheer hard cash in the solution of family problems is sometimes overlooked in an excessive concentration on what are described as 'problems of relationship'. The filling of an empty purse can greatly improve family relations.

## 4. A Family Service

**T**HE time has come for a new look at the possibility of a Family Service both at Central Government and at Local Authority level. Although many arguments are heard against the creation of yet another Government Department, the matters to be dealt with are so crucial for the well being of society that a case can be made for such a Department. This Family Department could consist of the existing Children's Service extracted from the Home Office, domiciliary and environmental services for the under fives (other than medical care) the care of the unmarried mother and her child, and the immediate reception of homeless families now with the Ministry of Health. Ultimately the Ministry of National Insurance functions in relation to Family Allowances, and widows pensions should be incorporated and there should be new and special machinery for linking the National Assistance Board with the new Department. Finally the Family Department should take responsibility for all training of social workers other than that done in Universities. It would be hoped that high up in the administrative hierarchy of the new Ministry would be professional social workers, whose status would be recognised in the same way as are Medical Officers in the Ministry of Health.

### An Immediate Remedy

Should it not be possible to create a new Government Department, a temporary solution could be found in the expansion of the present Children's Department of the Home Office. This would include those functions already mentioned, except the M.N.I. work. One advantage of expanding the present Children's Department would be the enhanced status given to the civil servant in charge of the work who now ranks as an Assistant Secretary. Many feel that both in rank and in the traditionally short length of his term of office the acute social problems in this field gain insufficient recognition.

At Local Authority level the Family Service would be represented by a Family Committee and Department. Their functions would include those of the present Children's Department and the projected Family Advice Centres, environmental and domiciliary care of under fives including Day Nurseries, Child Minders and home helps. From the Welfare Department would come care for the unmarried mother and her child and the immediate reception of homeless families.

The Labour Government will find a blue print for establishing a Family Service in the constructive and imaginative report of the Longford Committee. Its bleak title *Crime—a challenge to us all* conceals abundant material for a Home Secretary seeking to legislate for a genuine preventive service of comprehensive help for the family.

A forerunner of this comprehensive service may well be the growing

realisation that specialised services should be run on a regional basis, while day to day needs can best be met on a local basis. It is this concept of regional services such as the training of staff, Approved Schools and Remand Homes, and research work running in support of local Children's Services, which many feel will be the pattern for the future development of the Social Services. It is to be hoped that such specialised services as Mental Health, care of the Homeless and Further Education may come to be included in this regional concept. The effective provision of such services can only strengthen, and in no way weaken, the local services run by Local Councils.

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