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JUSTICE

for the

DEPENDANTS

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PAMPHLET

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The National Council for Defence of Women and Children has as its object the protection of the welfare and interests of women and children under all conditions. Any individual or organisation wishing to assist in this work is invited to get in touch with the Council at 26, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

The Council is anxious to help Dependants of Servicemen in their applications and appeals. If you want this help, please write to the Secretary at the above address, and give all particulars.

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JUSTICE FOR THE DEPENDANTS

TEN shillings and sixpence to feed and clothe the wife and child of a man on active service for a whole week. Not enough to pay for an evening's entertainment for many who sleep comfortably in their beds whilst he risks his life, and his family lie wide-eyed, fearful for his safety and worried as to where the next meal is to come from.

There are many women who would not consider this sum sufficient to buy a hat to adorn their heads. But Nell Smith, wife of Private Smith, serving his King and Country, is not a woman of that type or class. Ten shillings and sixpence represents the limit of her expenditure on food, clothing, light and fuel, for herself and small daughter for one whole week. It must cover the cost of at least 42 meals during the week and must allow for some milk and fruit for the child, even if Nell herself goes short of food. To spend more than 2d. per person for each meal would be for her an extravagance.

Nell Smith has always indulged an innocent vanity in being able to cater well for her family and keep out of debt. For she has not always been quite as hard put to it as she is at present. Before Bill went into the army they used to have his wage of 60/- a week to live on. She was clever at getting the best out of it, and would walk down the street, with her baby in the pram, to do her shopping very cheerfully in those days. If she never had much to spare, she had the pride of a clear rent book, insurances and hire purchases paid up to date, and no fear of eviction or of furniture snatched back.

Rent, 10/6; insurance, 1/11½d.; hire purchase, 7/- left her with £2 0s. 6½d. to provide food, clothing, light and fuel for two adults and the youngster. It worked out at 13/6d. per head. Not a lot of money it is true, and occasionally Nell and Bill would go a little short of something they liked in order to get something extra for the child. They did not mind—they liked the thought of giving her a good start in life and felt very proud of their healthy little girl.

Bill is Mobilised

Then Bill, along with thousands like him, was called to the Army. He didn't like leaving Nell and the child, but he did not grumble. Again like thousands of others he thought it was his duty and naturally believed that while he was away, his wife and child would be looked after.

But down came Nell's housekeeping money with a bump. She received the 17/- allowance for a wife, the 7/- allotment money from Bill's pay of 14/- a week, and 6/- for her child: 30/- in all. Half the amount that Bill earned. Even though there was one mouth less to feed, one person less to clothe, the rent, the insurance and the hire purchase remained the same. After she had paid these, there was 10/6d. left, which works out at 5/3d. per head, for herself and the child.

But that was not all. Prices started to go up. Butter, bacon, eggs and meat became rare luxuries. The child's milk and fruit had to be cut. Nell started to fall behind with her payments. No use to turn to Bill, for he was always short himself. 7/- every week stopped out of his pay as allotment money, occasional meals in the N.A.A.F.I., a few cigarettes, replacing parts of his kit lost in the wash and other incidental stoppages. He had nothing over to send to Nell (in fact all the time, she was struggling to send him little presents).

Nell applied to the War Service Grants Advisory Committee (more often known as the Hardship Committee), but her case was not considered one of special hardship and so she could not get anything extra. She was only one of thousands to have her case rejected. Who can say to what depths of poverty such families must sink before they are considered to have suffered such "substantial hardship" through their breadwinner being conscripted for war service that they are given a few extra shillings?

An "Improvement"

The child began to look more and more ill, so Nell applied to the Public Assistance Committee for help. The investigator reported: "Mrs. Smith is without food, money or coal." A food ticket was granted. A subsequent visit from the investigator brought the report: "The position has now improved

as her child is in hospital and so she has been able to start work."

Just imagine what this means—note the words of the investigator: "*The position is now improved.*"

Improved! Because the child had become so ill that she had been taken to hospital. Her husband in the Army, and now, her child ill in hospital, and she herself working in a factory. Working all day long in the hot factory, her thoughts turning anxiously from husband to child. Longing for the release of the hooter, to dash off to the hospital to enquire after her baby. Longing to pour out her feelings to Bill, but hesitating to worry him. And beneath it all a deeper anxiety—what does the future hold for her little family?

This story of Nell Smith is not an invention. Nell exists, and so do her case papers. Nor is Nell the only one. Every Unemployment Assistance Board, Public Assistance Committee, Charity Organisation has filed hundreds of such cases. Sometimes they give them food tickets, or lend them a few shillings to tide them over the worst. Because not only is the granting of Special Allowances most stringently controlled, especially for the poorest of the applicants, but even when they are granted, there can be weeks and weeks of delay. So great is the suffering amongst the dependants of the Servicemen that the Liverpool Central Clothing Committee actually issued this leaflet:

"Could you find among unwanted things an old blanket (or two), a coat, a skirt, underclothes, any children's clothing?"

"There are so many people in Liverpool, among them the wives and children of men serving in the Forces, who would be so grateful for some of these."

What mockery it is to talk of "sacrifice" to these people, who have already sacrificed practically all.

What sort of a future generation are we building with the children going short of food every day? Even a roof over their head is denied to many of them.

Homes Must Go

Take the case of Mrs. Ellis of Hendon, summoned before Mr. Registrar Friend at the Clerkenwell County Court on February 14th for arrears of rent. According to the report

published in the *Star* of that date, Mrs. Ellis stated that she could not afford to pay the rent, 13/6d., out of her army allowance. The 5/- a week allowance for her ten-weeks'-old baby, who had to have special food, had not then come through. Mrs. Ellis said: "I have tried to get other accommodation, but landlords will not take soldiers' wives as tenants, as they think they cannot afford to pay the rent."

Then there is the case of Private Webb, of the Pioneer Corps, who recently pleaded for more time to pay rent arrears when he appeared before the Wandsworth County Court. His case not only exposes the desperate condition of dependants of Servicemen, but also the failure, in spite of all the talk and hullabaloo, of the Hardship Committee to relieve distress. The L.C.C. had made an application to distrain on a flat occupied by his family. The rent was 15/6d. per week. He said: "They are existing solely on Army pay and I have applied for an extra allowance to the Hardship Committee."

The Judge replied: "Yes, I know, but they never get it so far as I can see. I have heard of many applications but not one has succeeded yet."

Granting leave to distrain, the Judge remarked: "I am afraid you must go. I am sorry for you."

Expressions of sorrow, however, do not pay the landlord. So Private Webb has gone back to "do his bit" whilst his family try to solve the problem of paying off the arrears, or finding another home.

Members of Parliament under pressure from their constituents raise questions on the subject from time to time in the House of Commons. Public Assistance Committees faced with the necessity of helping some of the worst cases are protesting at having to shoulder what should be a national responsibility. But as yet no real organised effort has been made to secure justice for the Servicemen's wives, mothers and children.

What of the Health of the Nation?

This question is the concern of us all, because these starvation allowances must finally mean the complete breakdown of the health of millions of our people. The welfare of our nation, especially of the young generation, is at stake. Evidence of this abounds.

Some while ago the British Medical Association, the highest authority in the country on this subject, laid down a minimum standard. Its calculations are based on the lowest possible expenditure on foods which experience has proved are necessary to maintain health. It is reckoned on the prices charged in the cheapest markets, catering for the working people.

9/4d. for a male above the age of 14 is reckoned as the very lowest expenditure for one week on food alone.

8/2d. is the figure given for a female over 14.

4/5d. is necessary to provide food for a year old baby.

Compare these figures with the standard allowance to the families of Servicemen. A wife gets 17/- plus 7/- from her husband; for one child she gets 6/-. For two children, 10/-. For three children, 12/-. For four children, 15/-. These allowances have to cover rent, clothing, fuel and everything else. Set against these figures the Medical Authorities' estimate of an average of 7/4d. a week per head as necessary to provide food alone.

This is just what the Ipswich Committee against Malnutrition did in their investigation recently. They examined the weekly budgets of soldiers' families in three groups—privates; privates receiving efficiency pay; and non-commissioned officers.

They took the weekly income from all sources and deducted all fixed charges, such as rent, insurance, hire purchase, gas, coal, electricity, etc. What was left had to provide food, clothing and anything else needed in the household. For 27 families of private soldiers, it worked out as follows:

2/7d. per head per week ..	1 family
Less than 4/-	9 families
Less than 5/-	6 „
Less than 7/-	6 „
Between 7/- and 7/4d. ..	3 „

Two families had more than the 7/4d. per week figure—although not all of this by a long way could be spent on food, according to the estimate regarded as necessary by the British Medical Association.

19 out of 23 families of privates drawing efficiency pay were below the stated scale. Five out of 15 families of Non-Commissioned Officers were below the poverty line.

What the Serviceman Pays

The families of N.C.O's and privates with efficiency pay are a little better off, because the soldier himself makes a bigger allotment from his pay. The Government allowance is the same for all ranks, except for commissioned officers.

In fact this sometimes works out in rather peculiar ways. Out of 14/- a week, he has to allot 7/-. If he gets between 17/6d. and 21/- he allots 10/-. If he gets more than 21/- he has to allot 14/-. So the man himself is not much better off for being promoted. But supposing while the man was still a Private, his wife was getting a Special Allowance. When his allotment increases on promotion, the Special Allowance may quite likely be stopped, because the financial position of his family would have improved. So the better soldier he becomes the more he has to relieve the Government of its responsibility for his family!

More than this, efforts are often made to induce a man to make a bigger allotment from his pay than the obligatory one. For example a circular letter from one of the Philanthropic Societies looking after the families of servicemen to their local secretaries says that before entering an appeal against a Decision on Special Allowance applications it should be remembered that "it is often possible for a man to send a larger sum to his wife or parents than the normal qualifying allotment from his pay." Of course, he has to make at least this "normal qualifying allotment," otherwise his family would get nothing. But what happens more often than not, seeing how low is the pay of a soldier, especially after the various deductions have taken place, is that his wife struggles to send him some small pleasures out of *her* allowance, rather than ask *him* for more.

Is it any wonder then that thousands of soldiers' wives are applying to the War Service Grants Advisory Committee for the Special Allowance for some extra money to help them out? And, indeed, like Nell Smith, also to the P.A.C. But the Means Test is applied and in practice very little additional

help is obtained. In the Ipswich investigation it was found that both these sources had been tried but little relief obtained.

"Hardship Allowances"

The Special Allowance is dealt with through the Unemployment Assistance Board—an institution dreaded already by thousands of working-class families. So it can be taken for granted that real need drives the women to make application. What happens? Already about one-third (numbering 50,000) applications have been turned down. Here is what was said in a letter to *The Times* on this question by Madge Bell, the Honorary Secretary of the Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen's Families Association, North-West Riding of Yorkshire:

"... I find the War Service Grants Advisory Committee constantly refusing extra allowances to women, who cannot possibly live on their pay. We have been helping these cases, until their claims were looked into, but cannot go on doing so indefinitely.

"I am constantly told, when appealing for funds, that the serving man's dependants are well looked after, and their rents and hire purchases paid by the Government. This is due to the fact that it was definitely stated they would make up their pay by £2 if necessary, *but their idea of necessity does not seem quite adequate.* They consider 3/- enough entirely to keep the serving man's child. . . We find rents up to 17/- and 18/- a week in many towns. The women in rural areas at a pinch can manage, but those in towns just cannot feed their children properly, let alone clothe them."

In theory there is a right of appeal if an application for a Special Allowance is turned down. But women are not encouraged by many of the Societies and officials concerned to make these appeals. In fact some of these bodies whose job it is to assist with advice do not even know themselves that there is a right of appeal; others who know, do not tell them. An appeal should be made against every refusal, and the facts made known to the public. The mass of the people of this country would be outraged if they knew what was going on.

Servicemen's wives and children are not the only ones to suffer. Mothers, whose mainstay has been the son; mothers,

who through the unemployment of their husbands, relied on help from their sons, all are treated in the same callous way. The struggle to get a Dependants' Allowance wrung out of the authorities—once again the Means Test, and once again the contribution from the small pay of the man on service. These are women, many of them past the age when it is easy for them to go out to work. Many of them are worn out through having reared a family under very trying conditions. This is the reward of devoted motherhood!

Almost in Despair

This is the story this pamphlet has to tell. Privation, ill-health and underfeeding. Applications for eviction orders and pawnshops being filled with family treasures and household goods. Floods of applications to the P.A.C. The menace of the relieving officer, suggesting that homes should be broken up and the families should seek shelter with relatives. Or that the problem can be solved by accepting work, at no matter what rates of pay or conditions.

Small wonder that women write to their husbands telling them of the deplorable conditions they live under. Here is one such letter:

“I could not reply to your letter straight away as I had to wait until I got my money on Monday to buy a stamp. After I have paid the rent and the club, coal and gas, I have 15/- left for myself and the two kids. Mother told me to get a cheaper house but that is impossible.

“I've tried to, but with you being in the Army, they say I haven't sufficient money to carry a house on.

“Anyway, if things go on as they are doing, you won't have Alice to worry about much longer, as I will end things somehow. I can't sleep at nights through worrying. I am short of grub and did without on Saturday and Sunday to let the kids have a little something to eat. I'm not enjoying myself, far from it. . . .”

Remember that as well as this struggle against poverty, there is the constant dread of a telegram giving fatal news from the Front. If this happens to a woman with a family of four children she will receive a pension at the rate of

42/6d. per week or equal to the sum paid by a Public Assistance Committee if the family were destitute. Even this, however, is a trifle more than she receives while her husband is alive; in that case her allowance is 39s. But contrast these figures with some pensions which it has been possible to allot. Lord Nelson's descendant gets £5,000 a year; Lord Ullswater, who was speaker in the House of Commons, gets £4,000, while Princess Henry of Battenberg gets £6,000.

This is happening in one of the richest countries in the world. Last year over a hundred new millionaires were made. Many concerns have doubled their profits. Yet the rich people and the Government talk of “equality of sacrifice.”

The serviceman's wife is faced with two alternatives—either impose on the generosity of relations or accept a job on whatever conditions are imposed. Hundreds of thousands are in that position now. Moreover, by the end of 1940 two and a half million will be added to those already serving. This will more and more include the older married men, with families. It will mean that every other household in Britain is directly affected. The existence of millions under such starvation conditions is a question affecting the whole nation and its future. Every true patriot will be indignant and moved to action. It means that the whole standard of life and health of the mass of the people will go below even that of the unemployed before the war. Unless this is challenged it will mean the setting of a new low standard, and an attempt will be made to drive everyone down to this standard. Advantage will be taken of the need which drives women into all sorts of employment to break wages and conditions of work—to smash the achievements of the Trade Unions, while the best Trade Unionists are on military service.

Justice for the Dependants

That is why it is a life and death matter for the Trade Union movement of Britain and the entire working class to see that the standards set for the Servicemen's Dependants are raised. Every organisation and individual should play an energetic part in a nation-wide campaign to raise the scales of allowances. Many local Associations of Servicemen's Wives and Dependants have been formed in defence of their

conditions and are putting forward the following proposals:

1. All-round increases of allowances to the following:
 - (a) 30/- a week for wives.
 - (b) 6/- a week for each child.
 - (c) 30/- a week for widowed mothers and others who have been wholly dependent on the Serviceman.
 - (d) 10/- a week for those partially dependent.
2. Special rent, hire purchase and insurance grants.
3. Higher rates of pensions.
4. A speed-up of the machinery for making allowances.
5. No Means Tests.
6. No allotments from the Servicemen themselves.

This is a programme worthy of the support of all organisations and people having the real interests of the British nation at heart.

In the Co-operative Guilds there are about 70,000 women and at their Congress recently they supported the demand for higher allowances for dependants, and have urged Co-op and Labour M.P.s to press for this.

While we are working for this programme, however, we must at the same time try to get the very best conditions for the women who are entering industry. This can be done by the workers, both men and women, in the trade unions, trades councils, shop and factory committees, running campaigns for the recruitment of women workers into unions which will protect their interests; by opening the doors of the unions to the women workers, and by unity in action to secure that women on the same work as men shall be paid on the same basis.

In this way it will be possible to maintain the standards reached after a century of organisation. And it will also be possible for us to say to the men in the Forces: "We have not betrayed our trust. We have fought for justice for your Dependants whilst you were away. We have fought to maintain your standard of life and work, so that you do not come back to find everything that you have believed in and worked for in ruins."