

*will*

**YOUR  
CHILD**

*be safe?*



**1d.**

"KODAK  
SNAPS"

# Will Your Child Be Safe ?

By MAGDA GELLAN



Women's Committee for Peace and  
Democracy,

26 Grays Inn Road, W.C.1

REFERENCE  
ONLY

THE English people do not want war, but they do want to see a policy pursued that does not encourage war. And most people now see that the policy of the present government is not helping peace at all—quite the reverse. Therefore, no one can ignore the danger of war. The government is carrying out an enormous armaments programme, spending millions on millions. So it cannot be said that the country cannot afford to give proper protection against air attack for the civilian population. Furthermore, the providing of protection against air raids is a real defence and cannot be interpreted by anyone as a warlike measure, because it does not threaten anyone.

Yet every proposal that is made by the government in connection with Air Raid Precautions, immediately it is examined is seen to be either more or less useless, or else only a fraction of what people ought to have.

First of all, the government concentrated all attention on the danger of poison gas. The proposals they made were ridiculous from the point of view of the majority of the people who could not possibly carry out the instructions to set aside a room and make it "gas-proof." Further, everyone knows that the biggest danger of all would be from high explosive bombs.

There was such a storm of criticism and protest that the government was forced to make some more proposals. There have been trenches dug in the parks and other open spaces. Who would feel any confidence in these as protection against bombs? Some of them even collapsed when children played in them.

Now there are Sir John Anderson's famous steel shelters. These can be used only by people who have gardens to their houses. This rules out a large part of the population immediately. And there are other criticisms against these shelters. They would not give complete protection against splinters. They would be no good at all, except when people are at home. They have to be sunk three feet in the ground, but under many gardens there is water, so the shelter would become water-logged. And, above all, they would give no protection whatsoever from a hit by even a light-weight bomb. In short, they are not a substitute for the protection which it is obvious to most people is the best—that is, deep underground shelters, distributed in such a way as to be handy for everyone.

The idea of evacuating children, old people and invalids has been raised from many quarters. On this question, too, the government was forced by popular feeling to give way and make certain proposals for evacuation. But their proposals are not nearly good enough. The demand for evacuation does not in any way contradict the demand for bomb-proof shelters. These should certainly be provided and the refusal of the government to endorse the scheme of the Finsbury

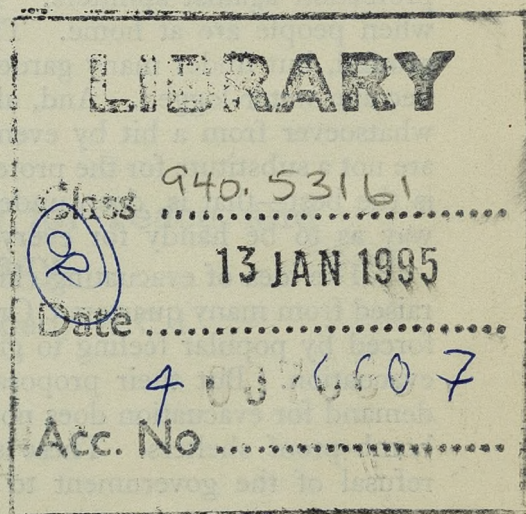


Borough Council for such deep shelters, which could have been used as car parks in peace time, is a most serious thing. The government did not bring forward any real arguments against these shelters, and their refusal shows an appalling indifference to the welfare and safety of the people of this country.

But even supposing bomb-proof shelters were available for everyone (and not only for the wealthy who can afford their private shelters), there is still a strong case for evacuation, especially of children. Bomb-proof shelters would protect them against death and mutilation, but the effect on a child of having to endure an air raid, of continually being rushed off to a shelter, would be terrible.

The children of our country are its most valuable possession. We do not think there is a decent-minded man or woman in the country who would not support and work for anything that is for their benefit. This pamphlet goes into the whole question of evacuation. We hope that it will be useful to the many parents who want to see something done to protect their children. We hope also that it will help people all over the country in making their voices heard by a government that does practically nothing to protect our children—and also nothing to stop the profiteering in armaments which would more than pay for this protection.

MAGDA GELLAN.



## SEPTEMBER CRISIS

WHAT does that bring to the minds of thousands of mothers all over Britain? To the few, a hasty exodus in car or train to country houses well removed from the unprotected crowded towns, out of the range of alarms and rumours. But for the many, for the millions of ordinary women, the thought of those days recalls hours of horror and worry, of hardship and pain, that they are not anxious to remember. However courageous you may have been at the thought of being threatened by the most fiendish of modern war weapons, if you were a mother you could feel only an intense exasperation and almost intolerable anxiety.

Perhaps you were one of the mothers who decided that to hand over your child to be evacuated to a destination you did not know, where he might perhaps not be properly looked after and fed, entailed a greater risk than the alternative of keeping him with you.

Or you may have been one of those mothers who sat up all night, washing, ironing and mending—for that ill-prepared exodus, which in most cases never took place. If your child was under school age, perhaps a child in arms, you had the horror of knowing that for your little one there was no gas mask, no organisation for his evacuation, no bomb-proof shelter available. If you were an expectant mother, you were equally without a refuge to fly to.

Here is a case typical of thousands. A young mother with a child of two undergoing hospital treatment and expecting another baby in a couple of months, searched in vain for any provision made by the government for her little family. Carrying her small boy with great difficulty (he was in plaster of paris) she decided to try to find a refuge herself. She struggled on train and bus from her home in a crowded part of London to the house of a relative a few miles outside the suburbs. It was the best she could do under the circumstances. When she arrived she realised that there was an aerodrome close to her relative's house, and that she could not find safety there. She struggled back to her home—the only alternative—exhausted, ill and having spent her scanty savings. She was a victim of official incompetence and lack of provision. But only one of thousands of mothers of young children who, because they had no connection with the schools, were absolutely unprovided for, and had to endure in consequence an agony of anxiety which must never be repeated.

All these things happened in the autumn of 1938. It is now the spring of 1939 and there has been little real change in the arrangements for the safety and care of children. The war clouds still loom over

them. The confusion, the lack of adequate preparation and safeguard for the civil population, for you and your children, persists.

### **Your Children Can and Must be Protected**

What the harassed city of Barcelona did for its little ones, the beleaguered city of Madrid did for its children, the richest country in the world can afford to do for *its* children.

We must use the experience of the last evacuation attempts, small though they were, in considering our future plans and in remedying the many scandalous mistakes that occurred.

### **Where Shall The Children Go ?**

The government has divided up the country into three kinds of areas, or what they call "zones." These zones are "safe," "neutral" and "dangerous." But the government considers many places as "safe" which a really serious evacuation plan would regard as "dangerous."

No one can say that there is safety in the Eastern counties, in the direct line of bombers crossing, nor in coastal towns, nor in towns with a population of more than 20,000 that are in themselves targets. One of the first things to do is for the people in every area, which in fact is dangerous but which the government does not think so, to agitate for an alteration in the "zoning" plan. Some of the expensive schools are advertising that arrangements have been made for the evacuation of the school to a place of safety in a time of war danger. *All* children are precious and need protection.

### **Billets or Camps ?**

One of the main facts we can learn from the last crisis is that billeting is not the right method of securing the full welfare of the children. During the crisis a number of nursery and special schools were evacuated and children between the ages of two and five were taken away. The experience of the teachers who carried this out is particularly valuable.

Their experience was that everybody was very willing and anxious to help and very ready to take children. But many homes were quite unaccustomed to children and there was little or no knowledge as to how to feed or handle them.

There was no provision for the teachers who were responsible and the helpers to meet together and discuss their plans, while the difficult position of the teacher with regard to the child quickly became clear. Officially the teachers were responsible for the care of the children, but the teachers could, of course, exert no authority nor even supervise the actual care of the children for a great part of the time.

Every mother would want at least three things for her children. First of all, that their physical well-being is assured, that they have

**Sir John Anderson's shelters would be no use here !**



**Arrangements must be made NOW for these children to be evacuated in case of war to properly constructed camps. The camps must be used for holidays during peace time.**

good and suitable food and live under sanitary conditions. Secondly, that they will be treated with affection and patience that would in some degree make up for their separation from their parents and homes. And, thirdly, that if children are to be separated from their families for a lengthy period and at a formative time of their lives, they should live with people of similar standards and ideas.

Is it possible for these conditions to be fulfilled in private homes under the billeting system? Even if we could avoid such mistakes as sending children to houses with no proper sanitary arrangements or allocating five well-grown active children to the care of two ladies over 70, there would still remain grave objections to the proposal of billeting.

Let us take, for instance, the health aspect. The Headmistress of a Nursery School that was evacuated writes in an account of their experiences, the following:

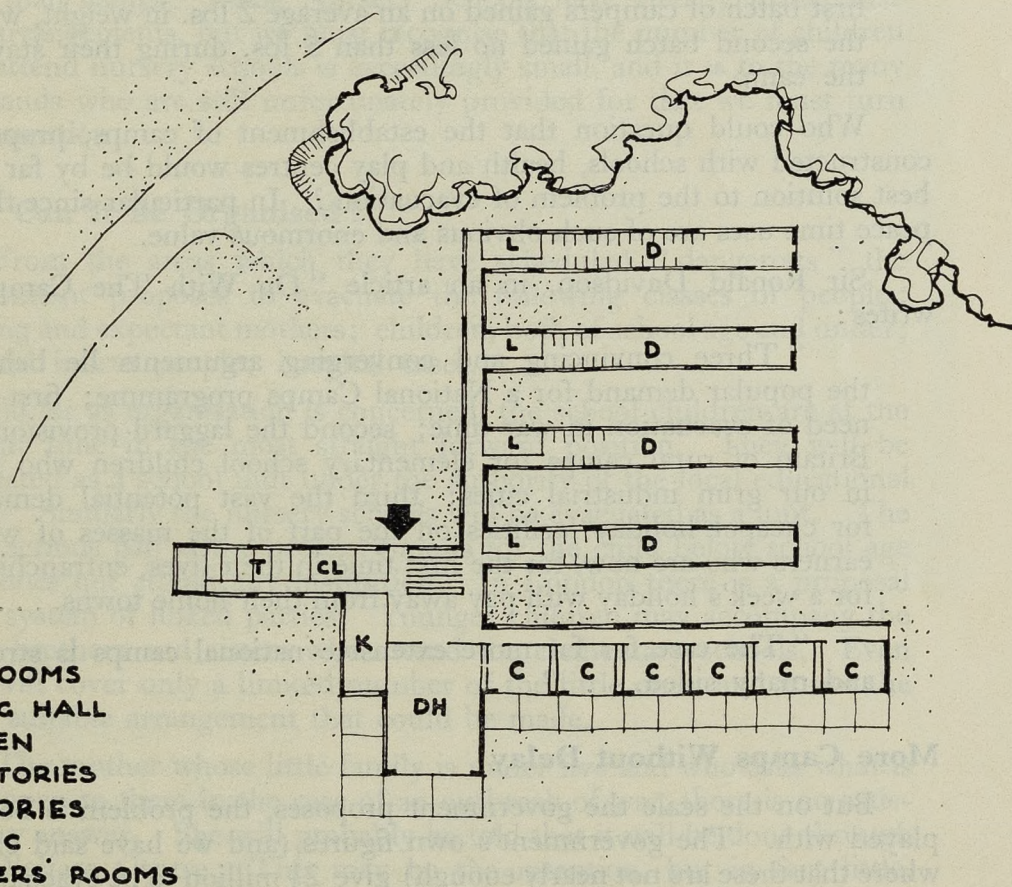
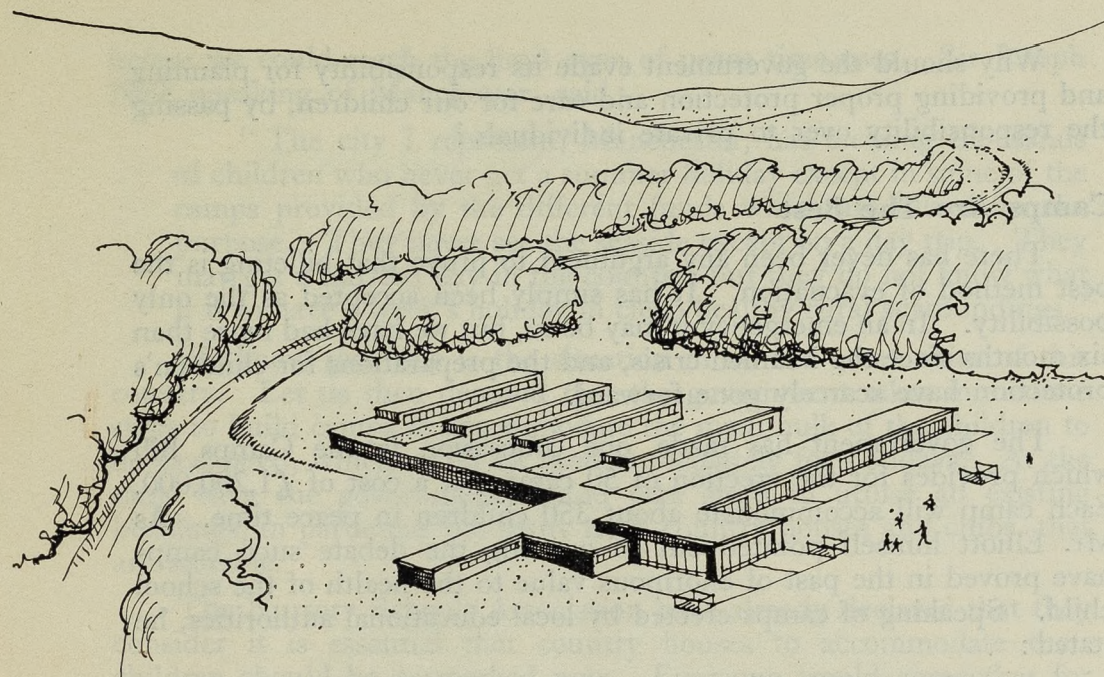
“The staff made various visits to every home and notes were made on children’s health and urgent needs. Coughs, colds and sore throats were prevalent, spots and sores appeared. The clinic, with a very helpful nurse, was put at our disposal, but the clinic was closed on Saturdays and Sundays. Foster mothers were nervous of anything happening to their charges so we had always to be near at hand for these visits. Sometimes these visits started at 8 a.m. and seldom finished before 9 p.m.

“On the Sunday and Monday some little ones with suspicious coughs and severe colds were sent home by private cars. On Saturday, four with skin rashes were placed in the private ward of a hospital.”

This is an example of what can happen during the course of a few days with a limited number of children. Multiply this ten-fold or more and you will be getting near to the conditions which would reign if war were to break out. Remember at the same time that cases from hospitals in the large towns will be evacuated to the rural hospitals. Then remembering also the poor social services in so many of our rural areas, ask yourself what conditions would ensue if there were an epidemic among the children evacuated to some of the villages you may know.

For example, people living in villages where every dry summer there is a terrible shortage of water, are being asked to take in children. How could these people, however willing, look after and care for an extra fifty or so children in their village? Where would the children go to school? To the already crowded and old-fashioned village school? When the lists of houses to receive children have been made up, little consideration is given as to whether the people could in fact look after the children.

Further, is it possible to believe that there are anything like enough private houses in really safe areas to accommodate all the children who should be removed to safety? Certainly not, if overcrowding is to be avoided.



Suggested plan of camp for evacuation of school children.

Why should the government evade its responsibility for planning and providing proper protection and care for our children, by passing the responsibility over to private individuals?

### Camps Are The Best

There has never been any argument to prove that billeting is the best method of evacuation. It has simply been accepted as the only possibility. In an emergency it may be so, but we have had more than six months since the Munich crisis, and the preparations for children's protection have scarcely gone forward.

The government has made one concession in the Camps Bill which provides for the erection of 50 camps, at a cost of £1,200,000. Each camp will accommodate about 350 children in peace time. As Mr. Elliott himself pointed out in opening the debate such camps have proved in the past of enormous value to the health of the school child. Speaking of camps erected by local educational authorities, he stated:

"Over 9,000 children passed through these camps, the health value of which has indeed been remarkable. In one case the first batch of campers gained on an average 2 lbs. in weight, while the second batch gained no less than 5 lbs. during their stay in the camp."

Who could question that the establishment of camps, properly constructed with schools, health and play centres would be by far the best solution to the problem of evacuation? In particular since their peace time uses are of such obvious and enormous value.

Sir Ronald Davidson, in an article "On With The Camps," writes:

"Three convincing and converging arguments lie behind the popular demand for a National Camps programme; first the need of evacuation in war time; second the laggard provision in Britain of rural camps for elementary school children who live in our grim industrial cities; third the vast potential demand for cheaper holiday facilities on the part of the masses of wage earners who are now, for the first time in their lives, enfranchised for a week's holiday with pay away from their home towns. . . .

"The case for far more extensive national camps is strong and many sided. . . ."

### More Camps Without Delay

But on the scale the government proposes, the problem is being played with. The government's own figures (and we have said elsewhere that these are not nearly enough) give 2½ million to be evacuated. The camps provided for will give only 17,500 places in peace time, or 35,000 in war time. These figures could be trebled and trebled again

before we could reach the limit even of peace time uses. Sir Joseph Nall, speaking of Manchester, said:

"The city I represent, Manchester, has teeming thousands of children who never get a summer holiday except in some of the camps provided by the different funds which are raised for the purpose. They never see the seaside except on a day trip. They may get a hurried day in the country, but they do not know what it is to have a week's holiday in clean healthy rural surroundings."

We know that this is the situation in all the great cities of this country. Let us then demand that the government takes immediate steps to build camps to accommodate the main bulk of the children to be evacuated, which could be used immediately for holidays. At the same time the government should take steps to utilise all existing buildings, in particular the many large country houses and clubs, that are suitable.

The Nursery Schools Association have already declared that they consider it is essential that country houses to accommodate their children should be earmarked now. Everyone would agree that for the very young children, country houses and clubs are more suitable even than camps. Some Nursery Schools have already made their own arrangements, but we must recognise that the number of children who attend nursery schools is exceedingly small, and it is to the many thousands who are still unfortunately provided for that we must turn our attention.

### How Can It Be Organised?

From the areas which they have scheduled "dangerous" the government proposes to evacuate the following classes of people: nursing and expectant mothers; children, both of school age and under; old and infirm people; hospital cases.

So far as organisation is concerned, the school children are at the present time in the most straight forward position. They will be evacuated as a school unit under the authority of the local educational body. Similarly the nursery schools will be evacuated as a unit. The most serious gap at the present time is for the child below school age who does not attend any institution. In London there is a proposal for a system of linked parties. Younger children may accompany the older brothers and sisters who attend the elementary schools. Even that will cover only a limited number of the little ones, and is not the most suitable arrangement that could be made.

The mother whose little family is under five and who asks what is to happen to them in the case of an outbreak of war, there is no satisfactory answer. She will probably be told that it will be done through the Welfare Centre. This may be the intention, but in fact little, if any, of the preliminary work of classifying and organising this group of mothers and children has been done. As far as can be found out,

the same is true of the arrangements for expectant mothers and for old people. The London County Council, however, have started to register these children through the schools.

It is true to say in general that one of the greatest difficulties facing anyone who is interested in the question of evacuation plans is the vagueness of whatever plans it is that the government has in mind. Teachers, for instance, have no idea where their school will be going. To the many questions of the parents, they have to reply "We do not know." There is a growing suspicion in the minds of many parents and teachers that this vagueness is not an accident, but is useful to screen the complete inadequacy of the government's plans.

### **The Care of the Children**

Whatever may be the state in which we find ourselves in a crisis, whether billeting or camps is the method, one problem must certainly be tackled now. That is the training of the extra helpers who will be needed to care for the evacuated children. Obviously, the teachers cannot be responsible for both teaching the children and looking after them. Nor have they been trained to do this. The extra number of helpers needed is estimated to be one to every ten school children who would be evacuated, and one for every five children under school age.

During the last crisis it was left with the head teachers to decide whether the extra helpers taken on should be the parents or not. Some were in favour of including mothers where they were available; others were opposed to it. The decision as to which helpers they shall take still rests in their hands, and mothers may or may not be considered as suitable. In many parts, Women's Voluntary Service is classifying all the women volunteers for this work, and there is still room, it seems, for a number more mothers to accompany the children.

But at present no form of training for this work is provided. There was some excuse, during the crisis, for taking on more or less the most suitable people who came to hand. To-day this is not so. While First Aid Classes are being arranged in many areas, so far no steps have been taken to organise training in child welfare, child care or children's diets. Whatever may be the outcome of the present international situation such knowledge would be welcomed by hundreds of women and would never be wasted. In particular if we think of the certainty of food rationing, will it be necessary to make certain that every care is taken to give children the greatest amount of nourishment possible by a well-planned and well-balanced diet.

In our opinion, therefore, it is necessary that immediate steps should be taken to give the necessary training to all those who have volunteered to go with schools in the event of evacuation. Tests should be made as to the suitability of those selected. Why not train some of the young women who are now unemployed? They would be wanted to help in peace time while the camps are being used for holidays.

**The teachers cannot be asked, in addition to their other work, to take on entire charge of the evacuated children. There must be specially trained helpers for this work.**



**Why not train some of the young women who are unemployed? They could work at the holiday camps during peace time.**

### Who is to Provide the Children's Equipment?

During the crisis great hardship was inflicted on thousands of working-class mothers who had to provide extra clothing, blankets, etc., in addition to the provision of food for their children. The government's new Act provides a sum of money for such things as blankets, but we have as yet no assurance that they will be available to all children. Even if these are provided, the question of clothing still remains.

Perhaps the government, which never seems very interested in the daily welfare of the millions, does not realise as most of us do, that there are hundreds of thousands of families in this country who cannot provide changes of underclothes for the children. In fact they have not even one decent set of clothing. In a recent pamphlet, the Dean of Canterbury writes of unemployed families:

"Somehow it is the pitiful lack of utensils and clothing in these families that strikes me even more dramatically than food. . . . In one family the wife's clothing consists of one petticoat, one pair of stockings, one working skirt, one skirt for outdoors, no night-dress and only one pair of shoes. The daughter has little under-clothing, no nightdresses and only one pair of shoes."

Many families, in order to provide the children with the clothes necessary to go away in were obliged to go short on food, pawn what little valuables they had, or at best expend what little money they had been able to save. This is an impossible situation. The government should undertake the financial responsibility for providing all the necessary equipment for children being evacuated. The nursery school children were fortunate in this respect. The clothes into which they are changed daily and the nightclothes used on school holidays were available, as well as the blankets normally in use. We ask for as good a standard of preparation and equipment for every child.

### The Mothers Must Have Confidence

If evacuation is to be successful it must have the willing co-operation and understanding of all those concerned. But this will only exist if mothers are confident that really careful preparations have been made. In London, the very high proportion (between 80 and 90 out of every hundred) of mothers willing for their children to be evacuated in the September crisis shows that parents are willing for their children to be evacuated. It is true that in the provinces the numbers were lower, but generally women showed that they were willing to do what is best for their children.

Full confidence will only be there, however, if mothers know in advance all details of the plans and destinations. This was stressed in the House of Commons by Sir Joseph Nall.

"It would be a tremendous advantage against an emergency if definite camps were allotted to definite areas. In that way,

not only the youngsters who may have to go to these places in a hurry in an emergency, but the elder people as well, will know the places to which they are going and will be acquainted with them when a time of emergency arises; and that fact would be of enormous advantage in avoiding panic."

What would weigh very heavily with a mother would be the thought of being separated for an indefinite period from her children without the possibility of visiting them. Free passes on the railway and the assurance that she will be able to visit her children from time to time are essential for the peace of mind of any woman.

### An End to Mystery and Uncertainty!

The lack of publicity and discussion between official circles, both central and local, and the general public does a great deal to create a lack of trust in the government's Air Raid Precautions plans. Many people cannot help concluding that this silence conceals muddle and lack of preparation.

The meetings of parents and teachers which took place last September, and in some cases since, did a great deal to establish co-operation between parents and teachers. This, however, is not permanent, except in the few schools where there are "Parents' Associations." Much good would be done if these were extended.

But far more than this is necessary. Local educational authorities should be able to say where the children would be sent and what transport facilities would be available. Borough Councils should publish their plans for the child not linked with a school unit and for expectant and nursing mothers. Parents should know what is the position with regard to helpers and what training there is available.

We want democracy in this country. And "democracy" translated into terms of real life for the average woman means for her the right to voice her opinion and to make her demands effective in the things which touch her own health and happiness and the welfare of her children.

Democratic Air Raid Precautions mean full knowledge—full participation—and the greatest amount of local control. Insofar as evacuation is concerned it means the right of women and women's organisations, on the basis of their knowledge and experience, to ask from the government and from the local authorities those things they know are necessary for the benefit of the children—and to get them.

Every town and every borough needs its Women's Air Raid Precautions Advisory Committee, to look into the questions raised in this pamphlet and to see that steps are taken to secure the following demands:

1. A drastic alteration in the classification of "Safe," "Neutral" and "Dangerous" areas so far put forward by the government.
2. The rapid extension of well-planned and properly built camps for the evacuation of school children.



3. The immediate earmarking and, where possible, acquisition of country houses and clubs for the children below school age.
4. Immediate information to be given as to the proposed destination of the children.
5. The setting up of machinery for the evacuation of the young child not linked with a school unit, the expectant mothers and the old people.
6. All equipment necessary for the children's evacuation to be provided by the government.
7. All volunteers for assistance to be classified and immediate steps to be taken for their training.
8. Assurance of facilities for visiting children and the provision of free passes on railways.

Already some of these Women's Advisory Committees have started, consisting of all the women's organisations in the locality, together with women doctors, health visitors, teachers, welfare workers and so on. They are drawing up their plans of what should be done in their areas and finding a ready response amongst the women. The women are supporting, too, the extension of Parents' Associations in connection with the schools. They believe that this friendly relation and co-operation between themselves and the teachers of their children is absolutely essential for evacuation, and of great benefit at all times.

We are convinced that this is a matter in which women can and should take the lead. It is said that the politicians tremble when women get together to organise for what they want. Let the National Government tremble if it is not prepared to listen to the voice of the mothers demanding protection for their children!

For up-to-date articles and information on  
all questions of interest to women read

## WOMAN TO-DAY

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