A Living Library Project

History of Children’s Services

“Bread and Treacle Diet”
Extracts from Documents of the 1930's
The Bread and Treacle Diet

A Collection of Documents from the 1930s
and some talk notes by Ruth Crow

Published by the Crow Collection Association as part of the 1992 Living Library Project on the History of Children's Services.

Booklet Number 5.

Illustration by Simon Kneebone from "Do It Yourself Social Research" by Yoland Wadsworth.
The Bread and Treacle Diet

Introduction

In April 1992 Ruth Crow was one of the speakers at a Brunswick Historical Society discussion group on reminiscences of life in Brunswick in the 1930s and 1940s. Her talk was mainly anecdotal about her two attempts at tackling the nutrition problem by meals at factories and schools.

Here are her introductory remarks, some facts published in the booklet "Food and Health" and some photostats of documents she used to illustrate her talk.
Bread and Treacle Diet

Index to Documents


2. A definition of an adequate diet (extract from "Food and Health in Australia", published 1941)


4. The basic wage and other charges on income (extract from Food and Health in Australia)

5. High cost of protective foods (extract from "Food and Health in Australia")


7. Bibliography of Food and Health in Australia.

Preparing for this discussion helped me to realise that the first time I began to "think globally and act locally" was in the mid 1930s when I was caught in three contradiction:

1. Between what I was being taught as a student of nutrition and real living conditions.

2. On how nutritional knowledge was being used in hospitals to try to cure diseases which could have been prevented if people could have afforded adequate food.

3. The popular support of Nazism despite the starvation in central Europe.

In the midst of the depression of the thirties the prevailing attitude was that malnutrition was caused by ignorance. It could be cured, therefore, through education. There was a preoccupation with government reports working out how people could live on a minimum diet. Imagine my excitement when I read a British report by John Boyd Orr in which estimated that 25% of the children were in families which could not afford an adequate diet! He gave this basic definition of malnutrition:

Optimum dietary requirements are based on the physiological ideal which we define as a state of well-being such that no improvement can be affected by a change in diet.

As regard the second contradiction, I was really inspired with new ideas when the City Health Officer for Melbourne, Dr John Dale, pointed out that children suffered the most from poverty:

"Modern hospitals had been called the monuments to malnutrition. Not more hospital beds but right feeding, especially of little children, and right education was the thing to concentrate on". (Exhibit 2)

Studies of the history of dietetics showed that as a result of the blockade of Europe, during the First World War, Central Europe, in the post-war years, became a "laboratory for the study of nutritional diseases". Despite the years of starvation the Nazis raised the slogan:

"Guns before butter".
My convictions lead to two types of action. Firstly, using Boyd Orr's definition I began to collect material on the causes of malnutrition in Victoria. Eventually in 1939 some of this material was used by Marjorie Coppel in the booklet "Food and Health - A Study of nutrition in Australia" which was published by the Left Book Club in 1941.

Secondly I began to help popularise the idea that the practice of dietetics should not be confined to hospital but should be used to provide meals at schools, kindergartens and work places. In those days we talked about "Scientific social feeding".

My advocacy of "scientific social feeding" resulted in me being appointed in 1937, to manage a canteen at a Holeproof in Brunswick where over one thousand textile workers were employed.

During the war the Federal Government through the Department of Labour and National Service established canteens at the munitions factories and on the wharf where dietetically planned meals were available at a reasonable cost. Due to family responsibilities I was not able to directly participate in this expansion of "scientific social feeding". However, in 1943, I was appointed the Secretary Organiser of the Brunswick Children's Centre which was subsidised by the Federal Government. The Centre provided nourishing midday meals for over 100 school children and about 80 children under school age (babies, toddlers and preschoolers).

As regards the third contradiction, my concern about the rise of Nazism lead to me belonging to the movement against war and facsimism. The Nazi slogan helped me to clearly see the connection between war preparations, the position of women in society and living standards in our own country.

In the Crow Collection at Victoria University of Technology, Footscray Campus, there is a fairly comprehensive set of labour movement pamphlets from the 1930s and 1940s, a set of Left Book Club publications, documents from the Brunswick Children's Centre and a family budget from the 1930s.
A 1936 definition of an adequate diet.

(Extract from "Food, Health and Income", published 1941)

...
These clippings are from the end of the 1930s when the Depression was beginning to pass, but, as can be seen from these samples, many children suffered from malnutrition.

### MANY UNDERNOURISHED IN STATE SCHOOLS

Aid By Government Urged

Seventeen per cent of the children at 80 metropolitan State schools, mainly in industrial areas, which replied to a questionnaire sent out by the State Schools’ Relief Committee, are undernourished.

This “plain and unpleasant fact” revealed by the chairman of the committee (Mr. H. C. Evans) today when he emphasised the need for the State Government to give free milk and food to all undernourished children.

Mr. Evans said that the headmasters of schools to which questionnaires were sent were giving the following information:

- Undernourished children are usually pale, limp, and tired in appearance, unresponsive in classroom activities and generally lacking the zest and vigor of healthy children.

### WORST CASES

Among the worst cases revealed by the returns:

- School A (inner industrial) 169 underfed.
- School B (inner industrial) 216 underfed.
- School C (inner industrial) 156 underfed.
- School D (inner industrial) 156 underfed.
- School E (inner industrial) 196 underfed.
- School F (inner industrial) 146 underfed.

- In one small school in a by-pass suburb where the poverty, 23 out of 40 children were considered to be undernourished.

- Evans said that one school in an inner industrial suburb where milk supplies had improved the position considerably. Last year 194 out of 400 children were considered undernourished. This year figures today were 90 out of 400.

### DIET DEFICIENCIES

The committee had observed that the real trouble was lack of milk, fruit, and vegetables in the diet of many children of parents in the lower-income classes.

- Some children had told teachers that their meals at home were of this type: Breakfast: Bread, jam and tea; or tea. Lunch: Bread, jam and tea; or tea. Supper: Meat, potatoes, bread, jam and tea.

- It had been found that families five or six were able to buy only a pint of milk daily.

- Mr. Evans said that the committee was able to provide some milk and bread, jam and tea in the diet of many children. Underfed children had been handed over to the social service department attached to the schools. The social service department is watching the work and had provided part-time organiser (Mr. P. S. Howard), who is a grandson of the founder, and a full-time assistant secretary (Miss M. Crooke).

### CHILDREN TREATED FOR MALNUTRITION

The chairman of the Committee of the Charities Board (Mrs. G. G. Henderson) said that the Children’s Department of the Dr. Singleton Dispensary and Welfare Centre this evening was giving a report of the clinic (Mr. P. S. Howard), who is a grandson of the founder, and the new director of the clinic (Mr. T. M. Burke), and the assistant secretary (Mr. T. M. Burke), who is a grandson of the founder.

### MANY CHILDREN UNDERWEIGHT

Primary Schools

Many children at primary schools in Melbourne, particularly in the inner industrial areas, are underfed or improperly fed, according to a report made by Dr. John Dale, city health officer, to the City Council health committee yesterday.
OTHER CHARGES ON INCOME

The basic wage and other charges on income.

If would seem that the principle of different ages.

The basic wage and other charges on income.

[Extract from "Food, Health and Income", published 1941]
The high cost of protective foods

While every country is emphasizing the need for protective foods, it is well to recognize that the cost of these foods is still relatively high. In many cases, the cost of protective foods is greater than the cost of the food they replace. In many cases, the cost of protective foods is greater than the cost of the food they replace. In many cases, the cost of protective foods is greater than the cost of the food they replace. In many cases, the cost of protective foods is greater than the cost of the food they replace. In many cases, the cost of protective foods is greater than the cost of the food they replace.

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Diet for Family of Five

"£1/19/6 a Week"

An adequate weekly diet for a family of five, including two boys 14 and 8, and a girl 12, would cost £1/19/6, according to evidence given by Miss Elizabeth Wilmot, former dietitian of the Commonwealth Department of Health, at the basic wage inquiry yesterday.

Miss Wilmot said that in compiling her estimate she had selected the most economical foods with due regard to variety. The prices used were collected from numerous inexpensive shopping centres in Melbourne and Sydney over a period of two years.

The details of the budget are:

**BREAKFAST**
- 2 cups porridge (1 cup)
- Milk (1 cup)
- Treacle (1 teaspoon)
- Fried bread (1 slice)
- Butter (1/2 spoon)
- Cocoa (1/4 spoon)
- Milk (1 cup)

**LUNCH**
- Sandwich (1 slice)
- Corned beef (1 slice)
- Cheese (1 slice)
- Banana (1)
- Oranges (1)
- Milk (1 cup)
- Sugar (1/4 spoon)

**SUPPER**
- 1/2 lb. rice (1 cup)
- 1/2 lb. potatoes (1
  - 1/2 lb. carrots (1)
- 1/2 lb. green peas (1)
- 1/2 lb. runner beans (1
- 1/2 lb. apricots (1
- 1/2 lb. prunes (1
- 1/2 lb. raisins (1
- 1/2 lb. sago (1
- 1/2 lb. barley (1
- 1/2 lb. flaxseed (1
- 1/2 lb. baking powder)
- 1/2 cup molasses
- 1/2 cupTreacle
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1/2 cup butter
- 1/2 cup milk

The actual cost would be much higher, as it could be assumed that the average housewife would not have the time or knowledge to work out what was the cheapest diet on scientific standards.

Income permitted, much larger amounts of protective food (dairy products, vegetables, fruit, etc.), were desirable. In the figure of £1/19/6, for example, the cost of an adequate diet for the family would be £1/19/6 a week, whereas the optimal, or ideal, diet cost would be £2/6 and 8/6 a week.

Details of a typical week-day diet for the family specified are:

**BREAKFAST**
- 2 cups porridge (1 cup)
- Milk (1 cup)
- Treacle (1 teaspoon)
- Fried bread (1 slice)
- Butter (1/2 spoon)
- Cocoa (1/4 spoon)
- Milk (1 cup)

**LUNCH**
- Sandwich (1 slice)
- Corned beef (1 slice)
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- 1/2 lb. sago (1
- 1/2 lb. barley (1
- 1/2 lb. flaxseed (1
- 1/2 lb. baking powder)
- 1/2 cup molasses
- 1/2 cupTreacle
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1/2 cup butter
- 1/2 cup milk

A week's food costs for a family of five—a man, his wife, who does housework, and boys (14 and 8), and a girl of 12—could be reduced to £1/19/6, according to investigations made by Miss Betty Wilmot, dietitian. Miss Wilmot, who has carried out research for the Commonwealth Health Department and the Victorian Railways Department, gave figures yesterday amplifying her recent evidence in the Australian Court on family food costs. She emphasised that the figure of £1/19/6 was an estimate of the minimum amount, at which an adequate diet could be provided, using the most economical foods.

The figure should not be taken as the standard. The actual cost would be much higher, as it could be assumed that the average housewife would not have the knowledge or time to work out such a cheap diet on scientific standards.
Bread and Treacle Diet

History of the Basic Wage to the end of the 1930s

How wages were determined

1907 the Harvester Award when Mr Justice Higgins determined the basic wage on "the normal needs of the average employee as a human being living in a civilised community". He examined the expenditure of the average employee to see whether his wage provided "food, and water and shelter and clothing and a condition of frugal comfort estimated by current standards."

In 1919 a Royal Commission, called the Basic Wage Commission, was chaired by A. B. Piddington. This resulted in 1922 in indexing wages according to the cost of living.

In 1931 the Arbitration Court cut wages by 10%. This was based on the principle that industry could not afford to pay any more, "although no serious attempt was made by the Court to investigate industry's returns".

In 1934 the Basic Wage was restored. The Court declared that the 10% special reduction ceased to operate and the wages were once again indexed, with some slight alterations. Unemployment was still very high.

In 1937 a further increase in wages was sought. Evidence was given of the food requirements based on the new scientific outlook on diet. This evidence was ignored.

In 1940 Child Endowment of 5/- a week was paid for dependent children after the first child. This did not represent the cost of a proper diet for a child.
NOTE

This is the fourth of a series of pamphlets to be published by the Research Group of the Left Book Club of Victoria.

Victor Gollancz wrote in the “Left News” of February, 1939:—

“Of all the gains that, outside the economic sphere, men have won, perhaps the greatest is the free, enquiring, independent and sceptical mind. To have access to all the facts: to examine them with ruthless honesty: to form a judgment uncoloured by any desire except that of reaching the truth, and to proclaim the result fearlessly to the world—that is the great heritage, at present very partial and very imperfect, into which men have entered.”

The members of the Research Group share this belief. Their object is to learn the facts of matters of immediate importance, and to make these facts as widely known as possible.

The following pamphlet has been prepared by Mrs. Marjorie Coppel from a great many published reports and books and from material gained from interviews with various experts.

Miss Wilmot, besides giving access to her own extensive work on nutrition, gave particularly valuable help in suggesting lines of enquiry and discussing difficulties which arose.

Reference has been made to the following sources:—

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BASIC WAGE INQUIRY, 37 Commonwealth Arbitration Report 691.

In addition, the Editor was assisted by material collected in the course of their own special work and freely supplied by the following:—

MISS BETTY WILMOT, B.Sc., Dip.Diet.
DR. DALE, Health Officer to the City of Melbourne.
MR. G. LEEPER, Lecturer in Agricultural Chemistry.
MISS HOBAN, of the Victorian Housing Commission.
SECRETARY of the Australian Council of Trade Unions.
MR. G. LEEPER, Lecturer in Agricultural Chemistry.

“While expressing thanks to all the above persons for their great assistance, no responsibility attaches to them for any of the statements made or views expressed.
Crow Collection Association
Victoria University of Technology

Living Library Project on History of Children's Services
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Booklets Published as Background Material.

1. The History of the Carlton Refuge from 1850s to 1920
   First published 1920

2. Two Articles about Health of Women and Children:
   "The Neglected Children's Aid Society"
   First published 1911
   and
   "The After Care Home and the District Nurses".
   First published 1925

3. Two Documents about Attitudes to Slums
   "Slum Babies and Slum Mothers"
   First published about 1914
   and
   "You can't lift every baby out of the slums
   The Slum Abolition Movement in the 1930s

4. History of Children's Services in Melbourne Municipality
   1910 to 1980

5. "Bread and Treacle Diet"
   Extracts from documents of the 1930s.

6. "Mothers must Work To Win"
   Photos and leaflets from the Brunswick Children's Centre, 1943.

7. "The Deprived West/ The Determined West" an extract from a
   report by Ruth and Maurie Crow, first published 1972.

8. Creating Community in the Neighbourhood - Neighbourhood
   Houses in the Western Region", transcript of a tape by
   Meredith Sussex, 1978.

9. History of the Tweddle Baby Hospital, by Kathleen
   Codogonotto
   First published 1992

10. The past, present and future - Community Development in
    the Western Region, a report by Louise Gianville, 1992

11. "Magic in the Lives of Children, Participation in the
    Lives of their Parents" report prepared by Christine

12. Kit on Federal Funding of Children's Services.
About the Project

The Lance Reichstein Charitable Foundation funded the Crow Collection for a Living Library Project on children's services in the Western Region.

A Project Steering Committee has assisted the project worker (Christine Carolan) who has worked with providers of children's services teachers and students in the Region.

The project resulted in the production of a video which includes information on the history of child care, a kit about the way children's services are funded, a series of booklets describing community movements which resulted in initiating some of the present children's services and a display of photos of some of the people who have helped to establish these services in Melbourne's Western Region.

A seminar on May 22nd 1992 marked the end of this project but the video and publications can be used well into the future.

About the Collection

Ruth Crow and her late husband, Maurie were involved in movements on urban issues from the mid 1930s. Over the years they built up an extensive collection of documents: books, pamphlets, posters, photos and working papers.

In 1990 the Victoria University of Technology (Footscray Campus) invited Ruth to donate the collection to the VUT Library.

The Crow Collection includes documents written and/or used by groups and individuals committed to social change. This store of information from the past is being used to generate ideas about the future.

A Crow Collection Association has been formed and incorporated. One of its aims is to enhance the comprehensiveness and accessibility of the Collection through Living library Projects.

For more information, contact
Crow Collection Association
Urban Studies Unit
Victoria University of Technology (Footscray)
PO Box 14428 MMC,
Melbourne 3000
Phone: (03) 688 4754, Fax: (03) 688 4805

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