

others. We have no idea of the degree parasitic inefficiency is reducing our productive effort: this, I think, can be a source of injustice and discontent. I fear I am on very controversial ground: but I should like to see a detailed account, say, of our National Health Insurance from this point of view.

III. Brotherliness.

The third great moral human value in society is this human *Brotherliness*, camaraderie—sometimes called loving one's neighbour. To my mind, it would be a major disaster if our society lost this spirit of brotherly responsibility and helpfulness, expressing itself in a purely voluntary fashion and degree. "Am I my brother's keeper?" was a vicious question from a malicious soul at the dawn of the world. And I trust the day will never come when citizens of this country will say: "The State is my brother's keeper, not I." Yet the growth of all these semi-State schemes with the inevitable compulsory levies and taxes involved, may easily wither up the roots of all Christian charity of a voluntary kind.

I think we should be foolish to hail any plans or schemes too cordially which involve the destruction of say, the Vincent de Paul work, the Sick and Indigent Roomkeepers' Society, the thousands, literally thousands, of ladies who devote their money, their full time, their cultured kindliness, their trained skill to the work of nursing, visiting the poor, blind asylums, mental homes, orphanages and the rest.

2. PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

By JOHN COLLINS

The Public Assistance Act, 1939, which came into operation last August, is now the legal basis of public assistance. It replaced the Poor Relief Acts so far as they related to the administration of relief and combines central control, exercised by the Minister for Local Government and Public Health, with local administration. The County Management Act, 1940, was put into operation on the same date as the Public Assistance Act and, accordingly, public assistance is now administered on the plan which places responsibility for the exercise of the executive functions of the local authority on a manager, reserving to the elected body ultimate financial control.

The first general poor law in this country was the Poor Relief Act of 1838. That Act was an adaptation to the circumstances of Ireland of the English poor law as amended four years earlier. The country was divided into unions, and union workhouses were erected. For every union a board of guardians was formed. The guardians carried on local administration in accordance with the law and the orders and directions of the poor law commissioners, who from the beginning exercised a strict control over every detail of the administration, with one notable exception: the commissioners were prohibited from interfering in individual cases for the purpose of ordering relief.

Up to 1847 relief could be afforded only in the workhouse. The offer of the workhouse was the test of destitution, the workhouse test, as it was called. Under the pressure of the famine the workhouse test

partially broke down. In 1847 an Act was passed allowing the guardians to afford relief to certain specified classes either in or out of the workhouse. Such was the origin of outdoor relief.

The county hospital system also had its origin in the force of circumstances rather than deliberate design. County infirmaries and county fever hospitals were in existence before 1838 and grand juries were allowed to assist them with grants. But the existing county and district hospitals are not a development of the county infirmaries but of the workhouse infirmaries. In 1862 the guardians were allowed to receive poor persons requiring medical or surgical aid into the workhouse infirmaries and to charge them for their treatment and maintenance according to their ability to pay and to send cases requiring special treatment to hospitals outside. In 1898 the Local Government Act authorised the guardians to convert workhouse hospitals into district hospitals, but this power was not availed of except in a few instances.

The Acts of 1838 and 1847 were supplemented in 1851 by an Act providing for the establishment throughout the country of medical dispensaries. Dispensaries had existed here and there prior to that time but they fell far short of the needs of the poor. The Act of 1851 laid the foundation of the existing dispensary organisation through which poor persons in need of medical assistance can receive it in their homes or at dispensaries according to their need.

The system of sending orphan and deserted children to be reared by foster parents outside the workhouse—the boarding-out system—was adopted in 1862 in order to check the heavy mortality which occurred amongst these children when retained in the workhouse.

The guardians were also given power to send out of the workhouse to approved institutions deaf and dumb, blind and other afflicted classes.

In the first decade of the present century two commissions of inquiry reported adversely on the workhouse system. From the outbreak of the war of 1914-1918 the question of reform remained in abeyance but was revived when that war ended. It fell to the first Dáil to make a beginning in 1920 with the break up of the poor law. The boards of guardians were abolished and outside Dublin the counties superseded the unions as areas of administration. Seventy-four of the workhouses were converted into county homes or hospitals. Fifty of them were not used for any public assistance purpose, some having been wholly or partially destroyed.

County councils drew up county schemes for poor relief which were legalised by a temporary Act passed in 1923. This Act removed the restrictions on outdoor relief in those counties in which schemes were in operation. In Dublin City and County a scheme of amalgamation of administrative areas was not adopted. Until the beginning of 1930 the old restrictions on outdoor relief remained in force in Dublin, where the areas of administration still correspond to the former union areas.

From 1923 until last year relief was administered outside the Dublin area under the old Poor Law as modified by the Act of 1923 and the county schemes. An Act of 1929 authorised the Dublin guardians to give outdoor relief to destitute poor persons who had been resident in the area for two years continuously. The law has now been put on a permanent basis by the Act of 1939 and extended to every area. That Act gives increased powers to the public

assistance authorities. In the Dublin area three boards of assistance were retained, in Cork and Waterford joint bodies called boards of public assistance were formed to administer joint areas that in each case included the county borough and the whole or part of the adjoining county. Elsewhere the county council became the public assistance authority for the county.

A poor person who is unable to provide by his own industry or other lawful means the necessaries of life or the medical treatment, medicines or surgical appliances necessary for himself or any person whom he is liable to maintain is now eligible for assistance, and an obligation is placed on the public assistance authority to provide assistance for him. If he is not granted assistance in an institution he is entitled to home assistance. Assistance may be either medical assistance or general assistance.

The effect on the numbers assisted of the reforms of 1920-23 and the developments since that time is shown in the following table:—

TABLE I.

Number of Persons assisted excluding dependants

	Home Assistance Cases	Children Boarded- out	In Institu- tions	Total	Per 1,000 of Population
October, 1913 .	14,663	2,226	26,791	43,680	13.9
March, 1931 .	33,825	1,934	17,838	53,597	18.0
" 1934 .	51,305	2,141	18,654	72,100	24.2
" 1938 .	34,454	2,329	19,026	55,809	18.8
" 1942 .	40,225	2,325	19,702	62,252	21.0

The numbers on home assistance as shown in this Table represent separate cases. The number of persons is shown in Table II.

After the closing of the workhouses as such the number of persons in institutions fell and the number on home assistance increased. In 1928 the total number relieved was not substantially different from the total number in 1913 but a shift of 10,000 approximately had occurred from institutions to home assistance.

Since 1928 the number in the county homes, hospitals and other institutions under the direct control of the local authority has increased very little. Public assistance authorities have, however, been making greater use of extern institutions, which is mainly responsible for the increase in the number in institutions. These approved institutions comprise the general and special hospitals together with institutions for the deaf and dumb, blind, mentally deficient, cripples, and unmarried mothers.

The numbers on home assistance increased steadily from 1928 to 1934. The increase was accelerated by the removal, in January, 1930, of the prohibitions which up to that time applied in Dublin of relief being given to the able-bodied out of the workhouse. There was a sharp fall in 1934-35 which was due to the working of the Unemployment Assistance Act, 1933, under which unemployed persons could obtain unemployment assistance direct from the State. At the end of 1942 the number on home assistance was lower than at the beginning of the year.

The number of children boarded out has exhibited little variation over the whole period, the 1942 figures being only 99 more than those for 1913. The total number of *persons* in receipt of home assistance and in institutions on 31st March, 1942, was 106,903, representing 36 per 1,000 of the population and consisting of 26,053 men, and 37,351 women, and 43,499 children.

Home Assistance.

TABLE II.

Home Assistance on the 31st March, 1942.

	Men	Women	Children
1. Adult males and their dependent wives and children :			
(a) Permanently disabled by old age or infirmity	9,489	—	—
(b) Temporarily disabled by sickness or accident	2,861	—	—
(c) Able-bodied	5,541	—	—
Wives and children	—	9,714	26,514
2. Adult females and their children :			
(a) Permanently disabled by old age or infirmity	—	11,596	—
(b) Temporarily disabled by sickness or accident	—	3,018	—
(c) Able-bodied	—	4,750	—
Children of women in Category 2	—	—	9,678
3. Orphans and children without either parent	—	—	615
4. Mental cases	537	528	35
	18,428	29,606	36,842
Boarded-out children	—	—	2,325
			39,167

The above Table shows that the total number of *persons* receiving home assistance, excluding children boarded out, was 84,876. These comprised 40,224 separate *cases*. Of the total number of persons there were 28,064 or 33 per cent. returned as suffering from physical or mental disablement or infirmity, and 46,521 or 55 per cent. were dependants or orphans, and only 10,291 or 12 per cent. classed as able-bodied excluding dependants or orphans. The highest proportion of men returned as able-bodied is to be found in Dublin district. These are largely cases in which unemployment assistance is supplemented by grants of home assistance. The number on home assistance and boarded out was 29·4 per 1,000 of the population.

Institutional Assistance.

The number in institutions was 19,702. Of these 16,712 were in institutions established by public assistance authorities, that is, in

county homes, county, district and cottage hospitals and children's homes, and the remaining 2,990 were maintained in approved extern institutions.

TABLE III.

Persons in Institutions on 31st March, 1942.

	IN P. A. AUTHORITIES' INSTITUTIONS			IN EXTERN INSTITUTIONS		
	Men	Women	Children	Men	Women	Children
Persons suffering from sickness, accident or bodily infirmity	4,022	3,902	1,521	357	425	393
Persons suffering from mental disorder or defect	592	812	81	305	121	448
Other persons including persons who do not require regular nursing care or medical treatment	2,323	2,219	1,240	26	266	649
	6,937	6,933	2,842	688	812	1,490

The distribution of the cases in the institutions of the local authorities is as follows: the county, district and fever hospitals, of which there are 85, accommodate 34 per cent. of the total; two children's homes 5 per cent., and the remainder are in the county homes, of which there are 30. The number in institutions was 6.6 per 1,000 of the population.

Medical Dispensaries.

TABLE IV.

Medical Dispensary Statistics.

Medical Officers ...	...	646
Midwives and Nurses ...	...	689
Compounders of Medicine ...	...	46
Dispensaries and dispensary depôts ...	...	1,023

Number of new cases attended in a year (1939-40) was 952,936, of which 795,103 were treated at the dispensaries and 157,833 at the patients' residences. A new case means a case in which a fresh ticket is issued. The same person may be reckoned more than once.

The number of cases dealt with by dispensary medical officers has shown a tendency to rise. This is attributed to a great readiness to resort to free medical treatment and to some extent to better record keeping.

Expenditure.

The annual expenditure of public assistance authorities amounts to £2,379,342. Of this 48 per cent. is on institutional treatment (including treatment in extern institutions) and salaries of officers, 29 per cent. on home assistance, 15 per cent. on the dispensary system and 8 per cent. on other expenses (repayment of loans, superannuation, etc.).

The cost of public assistance expressed as a rate is equal to 3/10 in the £ but there is a wide variation between different counties. In Meath where valuations are high per head of population the rate is 2/3, in Mayo it is 4/9.

There are no fixed rates of assistance. Averages calculated from the gross expenditure and the numbers assisted would be misleading. The circumstances of each case have to be considered, but assistance officers and others charged with the duty of granting assistance must have some standards in order that there will be no great disparity in the treatment of like cases. The following typical cases will give an indication of the standards in Dublin Assistance District which is responsible for about one-third of the total expenditure of the whole country on public assistance.

Husband and wife—15/-.

Husband, wife and one child—17/6.

Husband, wife and five children—30/- (If such a family were in receipt of 23/- unemployment assistance an extra 7/- might be allowed. If one of the children was earning wages half the amount earned might be taken into consideration).

An old age pensioner living alone—2/6.

An old age pensioner living with his wife who was not in receipt of a pension—10/-. (If in addition there was a dependent adult living in the house 5/- more might be allowed).

The amount of rent is taken into consideration and an additional allowance given if it is above the average.

As a rule the amount of assistance is kept lower than the amount that could be earned by the recipient if in casual employment.

Many of the harsher features of poor relief have been removed from public assistance. The workhouse test has gone with the workhouse, which has been replaced by institutions managed on more humane principles and aiming at higher standards. The growth of other social services has made it unnecessary for many who would formerly have had to seek relief to resort to the public assistance authorities but nevertheless the public assistance organisation must continue in existence whilst there are gaps in the specialised services.