

STOMACHS ON THE HOME FRONT:

Effect of Budgets on Bodies

Living is costing more, and New Zealanders have less income with which to pay for it. Every man who goes into the army is another man taken away from productive work, and another mouth for those left behind to feed. We must have more food for the nation with less men and women to produce it. We must have more food for the family with less money to buy it.

How can these difficulties be resolved? Mr. Nash's Budget takes from the family to give to the nation. It is a statement of an impersonal problem. But the family budget remains a personal problem to which the family must attend unaided. Smaller family incomes must be made to go farther. Every ounce of food must make its contribution to the national health. How is it possible to reduce the cost of meals and yet maintain or increase their nutritive value? How is it possible in war-time to keep the health of the nation at a pitch which will avoid the danger of after-war epidemics?

On this page we discuss the situation in the light of recent findings by the New Zealand Women's Food Value League.

IN peace time, New Zealand has made poor use of her natural riches in home-grown foods. The people of an island with sea coast seldom more than forty or fifty miles from centres of population, have developed endemic goitre, while the antidote, sea-foods, has been within easy reach. The people of a country growing itself heavy fruit crops, and situated close to the richest fruit-growing islands in the world, find fruit too expensive to buy plentifully, and suffer accordingly from nutritional deficiencies.

Every nutrition survey made of the country, has illustrated these paradoxes. The most recent survey, conducted in Auckland by the New Zealand Women's Food Value League, illustrates the unpleasant truth that war-time needs are likely to intensify them, unless the whole population is wakened to the situation.

Mainly Sugar and Flour

"New Zealand entered the war on an unsound foundation as far as nutrition is concerned," states an editorial comment on the publication in their 'Bulletin' of the League's most recent analysis of a survey conducted in February and March.

"She has it in her power to produce nearly all of the most valuable foods, and yet it is well known about us abroad that the protective foods are so expensive that we live mainly on sugar and flour, which are cheap."

Considering that the New Zealand public is not questionnaire-minded, the League secured a good reply to its first questionnaire. Mrs. W. G. Kite, secretary of the League's Housewives' Committee, which arranged the questionnaire, claims that the results represent a fair cross-section of the public. Its aim was to

provide some guide on how to spend less money on food to better advantage, and so do something to avoid the danger of anticipated post-war epidemics. Nutrition, Mrs. Kite admitted to a representative of *The Listener*, was not the only factor in the epidemic danger, but it was an important one.

"Food-Conscious" Group

The League, which is centred in Auckland, states that the replies came from a food-conscious group, and that allow-



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ance has to be made for the fact that this "eating public" would probably look after itself better than the average.

Smaller incomes—under £300 per annum—were in the majority. The average size of a family was four or five.

Not Enough Wholemeal

Special interest was taken in the result of questions relating to the use of wholemeal flour and wholemeal bread.

It was found, even in this food-conscious group, that the consumption figures were substantially below 50 per cent. of the families. The figures were: 36.6 per cent. of the families surveyed used only wholemeal flour; 34.4 per cent. used partly wholemeal partly white; 36.8 per cent. were eating only wholemeal bread; and 18.6 per cent. partly wholemeal partly white.

Surprise is registered by the League's report that the use of wholemeal flour should be more widespread than the use of wholemeal bread.

Milk consumption, again taken only from this food-conscious group, was below par—in a rich dairying country!

Insufficient Milk

The expenditure of 1/4d per week on milk represented, during February of this year, three-quarters of a pint per person daily; compared with the League of Nations specification of one pint daily for adults and one and three-quarter pints for children. In the group surveyed 124 families out of 213 were getting insufficient milk, and it must be remembered that the survey was undertaken before the price rose. The average of three-quarters of a pint meant, of course, that in many cases children as well as adults were getting as little as one-fifth of a pint per day apart from their school ration, while there were cases of children receiving no school ration at all, presumably because of the remoteness of the school attended.

The Price of Eggs

On eggs 6d was spent. (That amount in terms of eggs is by this time worth only about fifty per cent. of what it was in February). Butter for the week cost 1/3d on the average, meat 1/3d, fish 3/4d, bread 8d, fruit 11d, vegetables 7d.

In February the sixpence worth of eggs represented three. At present it would be about one and a-half. The League of Nations standard for eggs, compared with this frugality in a farming district, is one egg per day for children, and half an egg per day for adults, or more than twice as much as a comparatively well fed class of New Zealanders has been getting.

Butter consumption was about right, but the virtues of this, the League's report suggested, were offset by the fact that the nutrition value of butter was less than that of milk, and the consumption of milk was less than it should be.

Fruit, Vegetables, Meat, Fish

The 11d spent on fruit, and 7d on vegetables were considered fairly satisfactory, but it was pointed out that the replies came from sources which secured supplies from home gardens and fruit trees and that, in any case, there was evidence to show that even with this consideration the money spent on these necessary foods was above the New Zealand average.

The meat consumption from this group was satisfactory, and well below the New Zealand average. But the small amount paid for fish give rise to serious



Alan Blakey photograph

MISS M. MAINDONALD, matron of Mt. Albert Grammar School Boys' Hostel and chairman of the Housewives' Committee, has had a life-long interest in reforming food habits and in her hostel work has pioneered in institution food reforms.

thought. "Fish is an important item in a healthy diet," says the report. "The explanation of this very low figure lies partly in the high price of fish and partly in the fact that for many people living in country districts it is unobtainable, or, if obtainable, is never fresh. Among the many letters accompanying replies to the questionnaire were frequent complaints of the high price of fish and of its scarcity in a country where the export trade in fish is on the increase."

The comparatively small rising tendency in the cost of living noticeable in February was found by the Auckland investigators to be persuading housewives to cut down on supplies of food in the following order: Meat and fish tied for first place, then came fruit, eggs, groceries, and milk.

"Less meat," was the comment, "is all to the good, but it must be remembered once again that this is a food-conscious group and that meat would probably not come first for sacrifice in an average cross-section. Eggs would probably come higher up the list if they were not already on the minimum; to cut them down further would probably eliminate them altogether. Milk, it is fairly safe to say, would have been nearer the top, too, if the questionnaire had been put out after the increase in price."

Cost Per Head

The League found that the total amounts spent on food per head per week by the group under review ranged from 5/4d to 22/-. The first figure applied to a family of five receiving bread free and the second to a couple that ate only two meals a day!

Of the total families reviewed, 47.7 per cent. spent between 10/- and 14/- per head per week on food; 27.4 per cent. between 6/- and 10/-; and 16.6 per cent. between 14/- and 18/- At present

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