

A GLANCE THROUGH THE REVIEWS

be attributed to mere chance? It is difficult to believe; they rather illustrate the close links that exist between social action and social work, which assume different forms.

Social work is constantly up against economic and social problems. It supplies social action with factual data and documents of certain value. Its rôle is to make known individual forms of distress that affect a large number of people and which general and collective measures could remedy. It can thus co-operate in establishing suitable programmes of action to this end.

Social work furnishes the indispensable executive agents for the practical implementation of the conquest of social action.

Social work softens and humanises the application of general measures resulting from these conquests. It serves as an intermediary between the bodies established in the interests of the community and the individuals who are to benefit therefrom.

Social work helps individuals, groups and communities to become conscious of their responsibilities in the treatment and solution of their problems and difficulties. It thus prepares the ground for social action.

Furthermore, social work derives powerful support from social action, which provides collective solutions that could not be reached by other means.

In conclusion, it can be said that social work is complementary to social action. They are perhaps carried out on different levels, but they pursue the same aim: to assure the material and moral wellbeing of man, to release the latent powers of the individual, the group or the community, and to develop human dignity to the utmost."

Food and Health, by Dr. M. Autret, *FAO News, Rome, April 1962.*

Today, perhaps more than at any time in man's history, people throughout the world are conscious that famine is a disgrace to humanity, that it is an offence to the dignity of all men, not merely the victims of it.

But, apart from the extreme cases of famine, there are relationships between food and health which are of far-reaching importance and are too often ignored by the majority of people. We know now that much ill health and disease is caused not only by the lack of sufficient food but also by the lack of the right sort of food. Put in another way, satisfactory health and physical development are impossible without a diet that supplies all the nutrients now known to be essential for the human organism. This has been shown by nutritional research. We also know that in many countries the usual diet of the mass of the people falls far short of such requirements, with disastrous consequences. Large numbers

of children become ill and may die because they do not get enough protein. Lack of certain vitamins and minerals also leads to ill health and diseases in various forms. The vitality and working capacity of the people, in turn, are impaired and their efforts to improve their living conditions and achieve greater prosperity are handicapped. Solving this problem is one of the testing challenges faced by the modern world. Although such problems of nutrition are the most serious in the underdeveloped countries, they also exist in prosperous countries. Research is still bringing to light unexpected relationships between diet and disease, such as the suspicion that the amount and kind of fat we eat may have a bearing on the incidence of certain illnesses such as coronary heart disease.

Today, relatively high standards of living prevail in about twenty countries with a total population of around 400,000,000. In these twenty countries, during the past century, the average length of life has increased from 35 to between 60 and 70 years, and thus a full generation has been added to the span of human existence. One thing which has helped to make this possible is that the people in these countries eat more and better food than did their forebears—more animal protein, more fruits and vegetables, food that promotes growth and builds healthy bodies. The privileged men who live in these countries consume more than 2,700 calories a day and over 30 grams of animal protein per day—much higher intakes than those of the people in underdeveloped countries.

They tend to grow taller and stronger, and fewer of them die in childhood. Most of the people in this fortunate, but comparatively small, group are to be found in North America, in limited areas of South America, in the United Kingdom and much of western Europe, and in Australia and New Zealand. Indeed, these people are today so well fed that it has become a common saying that some of them "eat themselves to death", largely because they consume more calories than they need for maintaining good health. This leads to obesity, which is often associated with various forms of ill health.

It is a tragic paradox to have one part of humanity struggling with the effects of overeating while more than half their fellow human beings continue to suffer from malnutrition and undernourishment. Such people never have enough good food for health and growth and vigor. The people in this undernourished group eat mainly cereals—wheat, rice, maize, barley and other grains—and starchy roots, such as potatoes, yams, cassava, etc. They live in Asia, where more than half the world's population is concentrated, and in some parts of Africa, Europe, and South and Central America. Even in the most prosperous countries there are to be found some people who do not have enough to eat. Undernourishment and malnutrition lower the physical resistance of people and they are ready victims of diseases, such as for example, tuberculosis, and their capacity to work, to help themselves, to learn and progress, is reduced.

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In the past few years the world's nutrition experts have become aware of the extent of a malnutrition illness among children. It is the illness with many names. In Central Africa it is called "Kwashiorkor". In South Africa "Infantile Pellagra", in Jamaica it is called "Fatty Liver Disease or Sugar Baby". The French once called it "Dystrophie des Farineux" and the Germans "Mehlnährschaden". In the Congo it is sometimes called "M'buaki", in India "Nutrition Distrophy" or "Nutritional edema syndrome", and Latin America "Distrofia Pluricarencial Infantil". These names, and dozens of others, all mean the same kind of sickness in young children. It is protein malnutrition. Whatever name is given to the condition, its signs and symptoms are, to a certain degree, similar and the same curative treatment usually produces good results. Among the symptoms are serious digestive upsets. Many mothers, especially in underdeveloped parts of the world, react to these upsets by putting children on a near-starvation diet in the hope of a cure. Instead, the children become more ill. The seriousness of the condition is indicated by the fact that among the relatively few cases admitted to African hospitals the mortality rate was, until recently, as high as 50 percent. The most effective treatment is to put the child on a protein-rich diet. Skim milk has proved most effective for this purpose. Even a seriously ill child can often be restored to health in a short time.

The reasons for the prevalence of protein malnutrition among children are relatively simple. Infants and young people need a diet rich in protein in order to grow. The infant obtains sufficient protein from its mother's milk as long as the mother can provide enough milk, but as the child grows, its protein must come also from other sources. In some parts of the world this creates no difficulty. The growing child is given cow's milk in various forms and is gradually weaned to a good diet of which milk continues to be an important part. But in many countries there is very little, if indeed any, milk for children other than that of their mothers. Children pass directly to the ordinary diet of the family, which is usually poor in protein. Even when foods rich in protein, such as meat, fish, or eggs, appear in the family meals, they are often reserved for adults.

In some countries—and, unfortunately, mainly in those countries where food is already scarce—certain foods are believed to possess magic properties for good or evil. Eating them, it is thought, may influence the weather or the crops, or sexual potency. Such deeply rooted superstitions are hard to alter and complicate even more the problems of under-nourishment and malnutrition. Some useful foods are disdained as being more fit for animals than for human beings, even though they may have formerly served as human nourishment. For example, northern Europeans in general have little taste for maize, which is largely regarded as chicken feed. In some parts of the United Kingdom, certain green vegetables, which used to be eaten by people, are now considered suitable only for cattle. In many countries people will not eat the flesh of certain

animals, sometimes because of religious or health taboos, or perhaps, because the animals are looked upon as friends of man. This is the case with the horse and the dog in a number of countries, although both are used for food in some parts of the world. Some animal foods, such as locusts, mice, frogs, snakes, worms, shellfish, which are considered delicacies by some people, are repugnant to others.

A good example of the fact that attitudes toward a food may vary greatly from culture to culture is provided by milk. In many parts of the world, milk is considered of primary importance for its health-giving qualities, especially for children, invalids and old people. Liquid milk is often believed to be more beneficial than powdered milk or other forms of milk, such as butter and cheese. But certain American Indian tribes, for instance, consider milk disgusting. In some countries, milk is popular among all groups of the population, whereas in other countries it is considered undesirable for adults.

Dietary restrictions of religious origin play an important part in the food habits of many peoples. Thus Mohammedans may not eat pork, most Hindus will not eat beef, and some Hindu communities consume no food from animal sources except milk and milk products because their faith forbids the taking of life. Some Christian sects are also vegetarian and others observe weekly fast days on which no meat is eaten. The Jewish religion forbids pork, shellfish and various other foods and also prohibits the consumption of meat and dairy products at the same meal. Feeling upon such subjects may run very deep.

Through many generations of observance, such restrictions, many possibly based on early public health practices, have thus eliminated certain foods from the diet of some peoples. On the other hand, religious feasts make an important contribution to normally poor diets in many regions of the world. In many cultures the preparation of food follows traditional methods prescribed by religious belief and these beliefs and practices must be understood in order to introduce new foods and methods. For instance the slaughter of animals is regulated and ritualized in some faiths. In others, only food which has been prepared by members of the sect may be eaten.

Foods available, habits, religious practices, prejudices, superstitions and attitudes, have created a situation in which every nation, every group, community cast or family tends to assume that its own eating habits and food represent the normal. But there is no "normal" food just as there are no normal times for eating. It is not enough to say that a people will eat the food that the soil grows most easily. Trade in different foods between one part of the world and another, the capacity of the people to buy them, personal tastes, mass food production and modern techniques such as refrigeration, are affecting food supply and consumption more than ever before.

The question "Why do we eat what we do in the way we do?" seems to be a simple one, but a moment's thought shows that there is no simple

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answer. In fact, human food habits depend upon a variety of factors, historical, geographic, cultural, economic, and so forth. There are, of course, a number of basic main foods in all human diets—cereals, starchy roots or both. The protective foods, such as pulses, sugar, fats and oils, fruits, vegetables, meat, eggs, fish and milk are more or less the same everywhere. Man may, and has, cultivated hybrid and improved cereals, and has bred improved species of domestic animals and birds, but this has only introduced differences within the food groups, not entirely different sources of food. Science has, of course, enabled other sources to be tapped or created but it is “food technology” that has been the important factor in the development of food sources. A large-scale food industry is not new. For example, sugar has been a factory product for centuries and in ancient Rome there were great bakeries which made the bread for the proletariat. But within the last century or so, the food industry has extended to such a degree that it now exercises a profound and, on the whole, beneficial influence on human food patterns. The transformation of oil seeds into the widely consumed, cheap, palatable, easily stored and transported product we call margarine is among the remarkable achievements of food technology. Margarine, as such, is inferior in nutritive value to butter only because it lacks fat-soluble vitamins, but another development in food technology has made enrichment with the missing vitamins possible and qualified it to compete with butter—all too successfully from the standpoint of the dairy industry—not only in price but also in nutrient content.

An emulsion of soybean, often erroneously called “soybean milk”, is a partial substitute for animal milk. It has been known and used by the Chinese for many centuries. In other parts of Asia, particularly in Indonesia, Thailand, India and the Philippines, experiments with soy and peanut preparations are being carried on with satisfactory results. For example, a “milk substitute” called saridele, made from soybeans, is being used very successfully in Indonesia. It is an extract of soybeans with sesame seed extract, vitamins and minerals added. It is marketed in powder form, and, when reconstituted, resembles milk, although its actual nutritive value is less than that of cow’s milk. Increasing attention is also being given to the possibilities of promoting the production and use of fish flour, a cheap, protein-rich food, and also to press-cake flour, the nutritious product obtained when the oil is extracted from oil seeds and nuts. All these products can be incorporated in many local dishes, making them more nutritious and no less appetizing than before. Very promising results have also been obtained with seaweeds and algae, from which valuable foodstuffs can be extracted. These are only a few examples of the vast possibilities that are still available to increase food production in the world, apart from the considerable improvements that could be achieved in agricultural and animal husbandry all over the world.
