

The English Movement for Family Allowances, 1917-1945

by Jane LEWIS*

The family allowances movement built up strong and diverse support during the years immediately following World War I. Feminists, socialists, eugenicists (who tended to be politically conservative and often imperialist), and humanists in the liberal tradition all found reasons to support the principle of allowances. Their different motives were reflected in the variety of family allowance schemes proposed in the early 1920s. All were more far-reaching in aim and scope than the 1945 Family Allowance Act.

Two claims made on behalf of the family allowances gained general support for the measure during the interwar years. These were that allowances would alleviate child poverty and that they could lead to an increase in the birth rate, commonly considered to be desirable throughout the interwar period. The outbreak of war increased the force of these arguments and made family allowances additionally attractive as a means of establishing a new social order after the war. The 1945 Act represented a victory in principle, but all-party support for the measure meant that family allowances turned into an ameliorative reform rather than the radical social change originally envisaged.

Eleanor Rathbone¹ was the originator of the proposal for family allowances. As President of the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship (NUSEC), the largest organised feminist group in Britain during the inter-war period, she and other feminists were the first to pioneer the idea at the close of World War I. Thus the inspiration behind the early writings on family allowances was feminist.

By 1917 it seemed inevitable that the government would give the vote to women² and many feminists began to consider the broader question of women's socio-economic status. As early as 1913, Barbara Huchins had noted that women and children failed to fit neatly into a society based on exchange values.³ It was difficult to see what direct effect the winning of the vote could have on this. Feminist perception of the problem deepened during the war. Women who took over men's jobs were praised

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¹ Eleanor F. RATHBONE (1872-1946) was born into an eminent Liverpool family. Her father sat as a Liberal MP for Liverpool. She was elected to the Liverpool City Council in 1909; President of the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship, 1919-29; Independent MP for the Combined English Universities, 1929-46.

² The Representation of the People Act, 1918, gave women the vote.

³ Barbara L. HUTCHINS, *Conflicting Ideals: Two Sides of the Woman Question* (London, 1913), p. 69.

by the Northcliffe press until "the praise became an insult".⁴ Feminists felt the need to point out that women had been working for years, both outside and inside the home. In the context of the war-time adulation of the woman industrial and service worker, it seemed doubly important to stress the value to the nation of the part played by the housewife and mother. Maude Royden (a member of the NUSEC executive) commented that a woman who bore children and ran a household was still only regarded as "an arrested man and a perpetual minor," but a woman who could clip tickets on a tramcar "was recognised as a superwoman — in other words a man".⁵

Under Rathbone's leadership the NUSEC moved towards claiming a real equality for women, meaning that "the whole structure and movement of society [should] reflect in proportionate degree their experiences, their needs and their aspirations".⁶ It was argued that feminists should work for reforms which reflected the reality of women's interests, rather than those which aimed to make them equal to men on men's terms. Women should be able to choose the mode of employment which suited them best, whether in the home or outside it, and should receive fair recompense for it. Family allowances or endowment⁷ were the key to the policy which evolved out of the new feminist goal of a real equality. Women might thereby be paid a wage for their valuable work in the home as well as receiving a cash allowance for each child. No "taint of pauperism"⁸ would attach to this payment. It would merely involve the long overdue recognition of women's role as mothers and allocate to them "resources adequate for the proper performance of their function".⁹ Family allowances embodied the mother's claim to a dignified and secure economic status. The economic dependence of women and children on men reduced them to the status of "male luxuries,"¹⁰ to be ranked in the view of one Liverpool schoolmaster with the costs of running a car.¹¹

Moreover, if women and children were made economically independent of men, the chief impediment to equal pay for women working outside the home would be removed. As soon as children became the economic responsibility of someone other than the father, wages could be paid on a bachelor/spinster basis (whether feminists envisaged a drop in wages to the level necessary for the maintenance of a single person was not initially made clear). Men would no longer be able to claim extra pay for the

⁴ Ellen ASKWITH, *The Times*, 26 Apr. 1921, p. 13.

⁵ A. MAUDE ROYDEN, "The Woman's Movement of the Future," in *Oxford Essays on Feminism*, ed. Victor Gollancz (London, 1917), p. 130.

⁶ *Women's Leader*, 17 July 1925, p. 195.

⁷ H.G. Wells first popularized the term "family endowment" in *The New Machiavelli*, 2nd ed. (London, 1946), pp. 305-11.

⁸ A. MAUDE ROYDEN, *The National Endowment of Motherhood* (London, 1919), p. 5.

⁹ Mary STOCKS, *The Case for Family Endowment* (London, 1927), p. 10.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

¹¹ Eleanor F. RATHBONE, *The Ethics and Economics of Family Endowment* (London, 1927), p. 52.

same job on the grounds that they had wives and children to support.¹² This idea received public recognition in Beatrice Webb's *Minority Report to the War Cabinet on Women in Industry*, published in 1918. She was the first socialist to support equal pay and also to suggest that the only way of achieving it was by implementing a system of family allowances. Dependants had to be provided for, but it was understood that wages were determined by the rate for the job. Consideration of family obligations would destroy "the standard rates of remuneration for effort on which collective bargaining depends".¹³ It was a fiction that wages provided adequately for dependants, and Mrs. Webb made an emotional appeal for family allowances as the "bairns part".¹⁴

Family allowances would thus make the choice between working in the home or working outside it a viable one for women. Feminists anticipated that large numbers of women would leave the labour force if they could receive pay for their work at home.¹⁵ In the wake of the First World War, this was an attractive argument to authorities expecting large-scale unemployment. It also appealed to Labour women, who felt strongly that working-class women should not be driven to work by economic necessity, and thus bear the strain of doing two jobs.¹⁶ Unlike middle- and upper-class women, working women could not afford domestic help.

Women trade unionists were also concerned about the effects of poverty on maternity. In 1916 the Women's Co-operative Guild had published letters from working women regarding their child-bearing experiences.¹⁷ These revealed the miserable lot of poor women, miscarrying as a result of ill health and struggling to raise large numbers of surviving children in cramped and unhygienic conditions. Because of the interest in the physical condition of the population during wartime, the book attracted comment from *The Times*¹⁸ and was referred to during the hearings of the National Birth Rate Commission.¹⁹ During the inter-war period, the incidence of maternal mortality was such that maternity was a more dangerous occupation than mining.²⁰ As early as 1912, women in the

¹² Eleanor F. RATHBONE, "The Remuneration of Women's Services," in *Oxford Essays*, ed. Gollancz, pp. 100-27; and Eleanor F. RATHBONE, *The Disinherited Family* (London, 1924), p. 48.

¹³ Mrs. Sidney WEBB, *The Wages of Men and Women* (London, 1918), p. 63. This was the published version of the *Minority Report to the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry*.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

¹⁵ ROYDEN, *National Endowment of Motherhood*, p. 7; and *Problems of Population and Parenthood. Being the 2nd Report of the Chief Evidence taken by the National Birth Rate Commission, 1919-20* (London, 1920), p. 30, evidence of Maude Royden.

¹⁶ Mary MACARTHUR, "The Woman Trade Unionist's Point of View," in *Women in the Labour Party*, ed. Marion Phillips (London, 1917), p. 18.

¹⁷ Women's Co-operative Guild, *Maternity: Letters of Working Women* (London, 1916).

¹⁸ *The Times*, 24 March 1917, p. 5.

¹⁹ *Problems of Population*, p. 67, evidence of Sidney Webb.

²⁰ C.M. BURNS, *Infant and Maternal Mortality in Relation to the Size of Family and Rapidity of Breeding. A Study in Human Responsibility* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1942), p. 6.

Fabian Society had recommended the endowment of motherhood as a solution to the problem of child poverty with the secondary aim of raising the economic status of women.²¹ An experimental scheme of endowment undertaken by the Fabian Society involved the payment of five shillings a week to poor mothers in one area of London for one year after the birth of a child.²² The health of mothers and children had shown substantial improvement. Medical Officers of Health reported similar improvement in the health of school children resulting from the payment of separation allowances to wives and children of service men during the war.²³ No data were available on the physical well-being of mothers, but there was every reason to suppose that better food and freedom from pecuniary worry had favourable effects on body and mind. Rathbone experienced the administration and results of separation allowances firsthand in Liverpool, and felt that here was proof of the workability of her proposal for family allowances. She and other feminists also welcomed the opportunity to embrace a policy important to the interests of working as well as middle-class women.²⁴

In 1917, Rathbone founded the Family Endowment Committee. It attracted proponents of family allowances from the ranks of feminists and socialists. There were seven members: Rathbone, Kathleen Courtney, Maude Royden, and Mary Stocks, who were all members of the NUSEC, H. N. Brailsford and Mr. and Mrs. Emile Burns, who were socialists.²⁵ Politically, the feminists were also socialists, except Rathbone, who leaned more to liberalism and eventually sat in Parliament as an Independent. The NUSEC as an organization did not adopt family allowances as part of its official platform until 1925, and then in the face of severe opposition from feminists who favoured an individual rather than a collective solution to the problem of inequality. They believed that feminists should work for an end to all legal disabilities; it would then be up to each woman to make use of the equal opportunities available.²⁶ Proponents of family allowances saw in the measure a means of radically changing the socio-economic status of women.

Early socialist support for the proposal came from women and from the Independent Labour Party (ILP). The ILP was the first socialist party formally to adopt the principle of family allowances in 1926, for although Labour Party women raised the issue at their conference in 1922, the male dominated Party bureaucracy forced a formal motion of support to be abandoned.²⁷ Socialist support was based on the belief that family allow-

²¹ Fabian Tract No. 162: Mrs. Pember REEVES, *Family Life on a Pound a Week* (London, 1912), p. 1.

²² *Problems of Population*, p. 298, evidence of Mrs. Pember Reeves.

²³ Emma MAHLER, *The Social Effects of Separation Allowances* (Liverpool, n.d.); and RATHBONE, *Disinherited Family*, pp. 58-61.

²⁴ Eleanor F. RATHBONE, *Milestones: Presidential Addresses at the Annual Council Meetings of the NUSEC* (London, 1929), p. 28.

²⁵ Mary STOCKS, *Eleanor Rathbone* (London, 1949), p. 84.

²⁶ Cf. *Women's Leader*, 11 Feb. 1927, p. 3.

²⁷ STOCKS, *Eleanor Rathbone*, p. 101.

ances would further the vertical redistribution of wealth. H. N. Brailsford envisaged a family allowance programme which applied only to workers and which would be funded out of taxes levied on the rich.²⁸

The case for family allowances presented by the FEC to the public rested primarily on the need to eradicate child poverty, something few could criticize. The logic of the arguments presented was impeccable. Every sociological survey since Rowntree's study of York in 1899 had pointed to the impossibility of a poorly paid worker with a large family building up a sufficient surplus to see him and his family through sickness, unemployment, and eventually old age. In 1901 Rowntree defined the state of "primary poverty" as being one in which "total earnings are insufficient to obtain the minimum necessities for the maintenance of merely physical efficiency".²⁹ Using this as his criterion, he assessed the needs of an average family of five, two adults and three children, and compared the results with the average wages received by various occupational groups. His survey showed one-third of the population of York to be living in poverty.³⁰

Rathbone's first step in her major work on family allowances, published in 1924, was to explode the myth of the average family of five. Only 8.8% of families fell into this category. Unmarried workers accounted for 27%, 24.7% consisted of a married couple with no children below the age of 14 years, 16.6% had one child, 13% two children, and 9.9% more than three children.³¹ Nor of course did the number of children within each family unit remain constant. Thus each family experienced a "cycle of prosperity".³² The bachelor enjoyed a surplus and often learned to live up to his income. The newly married couple were usually comfortably off, especially if the wife worked, but each additional child strained the family budget. Children were one of the chief causes of poverty in a wage system that made no allowance for them. In the context of the family unit the socialist ideal of "the living wage" was impossible to achieve. In order to provide a living wage for the 9.9% of workers with large families, employers would have to make a huge addition to the wage bill. This would do nothing to further the equally important socialist ideal of "each according to his needs". The 52% of workers who were either unmarried or who had no dependent children would still be much better off than their fellows.

Rathbone's conclusions acquired greater significance in view of the high correlation between low wages and large families. This meant that the percentage of children living in poverty was greater than the

²⁸ H.N. BRAILSFORD, *Families and Income* (London, 1926), p. 9.

²⁹ A.B. ATKINSON, *Poverty in Britain and the Reform of Social Security* (Cambridge, 1969), p. 15.

³⁰ M. BRUCE, *The Coming of the Welfare State* (New York, 1966), p. 240.

³¹ RATHBONE, *Disinherited Family*, p. 16, quotes A.L. Bowley's figures. Eleanor F. RATHBONE, *The Case for Family Allowances* (London, 1940), p. 42, gives revised statistics based on the 1921 Census: the number of families with more than three children accounted for 6.7%.

³² RATHBONE, *Disinherited Family*, p. 40.

percentage of adults. As much as 40% of the child population was to be found in the 9.9% of families with more than three children;³³ these were also shown to be families in which the worker was drawing a low wage. According to Sir John Orr's study carried out in 1934, 14% of the entire population, including 25% of the child population, were living on wages of less than fifty shillings a week,³⁴ when the pre-war minimum wage was considered to be 53 shillings.³⁵ Children figured largely as the victims as well as the cause of poverty.

Both the social injustice of poverty as it affected children and its dangerous effect on the health of the next generation provoked concern on all sides in the immediate post war period. When launching National Baby Week (instituted in 1917 to promote child welfare), Dr. Mary Scharlieb commented that 10% of children entering school were medically unfit, and advocated family allowances as a partial solution to the health problems of the nation.³⁶ Socialist women expressed fears for "the progress of the race"³⁷ if child welfare were not improved, and *The Times* called for greater care of children on the part of parents and the state.³⁸

It was a short step from concern regarding the welfare of children already living in poverty to concern about the quantity and quality of children yet to be born. The birth rate had been declining steadily since the 1870s. After World War I there was very real fear on the part of government that the decline in population would prejudice Britain's position as an imperial power, and during the 1930s it was thought that the decline would lead to a decrease in demand and thus cause a further increase in unemployment.³⁹ It was commonly agreed that an increase in the birth rate was desirable, especially amongst skilled workers and the middle and upper classes. Rathbone's statistics gave new impetus to the concern over what eugenicists called "the differential birth rate". It appeared that the middle and upper classes were practicing birth control and the working class was not. In 1926 Lord Buckmaster reported that the birth rate amongst unskilled workers was 247 per 1000 births, amongst skilled workers, 153 per 1000, while amongst professional groups it averaged only 100 per 1000.⁴⁰ Eugenists claimed that such a differential increase would result

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

³⁴ RATHBONE, *Case for Family Allowances*, p. 35.

³⁵ This is the figure arrived at by both Rowntree and Beveridge. BRUCE, *Coming of the Welfare State*, p. 241.

³⁶ Dr. Mary SCHARLIEB, "National Baby Week," *Fortnightly Review* 102 (July 1917): 90-100.

³⁷ Margaret Llewellyn DAVIS, "The Claims of Mothers and Children," in *Women and the Labour Party*, ed. Phillips, p. 31.

³⁸ *The Times*, 24 Feb. 1919, p. 10.

³⁹ R. M. TITMUS, *Poverty and Population* (London, 1938), p. 29, refers to a lecture by J.M. Keynes to the Eugenics Society on 16 February 1937, in which he expressed concern that the economy would not be able to adjust to the rapid decline in population. *Monthly Notes* (of the Family Endowment Society) 70 (Sept. 1930): two reports on an address given by J.A. Hobson to the Council of the Family Endowment Society on the role family allowances might play in increasing working-class buying power and fighting the evil of under-consumption.

⁴⁰ RATHBONE, *Case for Family Allowances*, p. 44.

in a 'C3' (racially poor) population, detrimental to the national interest. They held that heredity was a more important factor than environment in the formation of personal character.⁴¹ The tendency to equate desirable characteristics with socio-economic status was widely accepted. During the first quarter of the twentieth century eugenicists had achieved the distinction accorded scientists; their influence was correspondingly great. Fabians were strongly attracted to the science of eugenics, but were careful to maintain that the decline in the birth rate was "differential in its incidence in all classes".⁴² The thrifty and prudent members of society were limiting their families, the rest were not.

Eugenicists had long advocated policies which they believed would reverse the decline in the birth rate by promoting births amongst the fit and able members of society. Practical eugenics advocated the sterilization of the mentally unfit, and the promotion of births amongst the able by means either of tax reductions consequent on the birth of children or the endowment of motherhood.⁴³ In 1921 C. W. Armstrong declared family allowances to be the only solution to the population question. He argued that if allowances were given to the able it would be possible to create a "true aristocracy".⁴⁴ Eugenicists and members of the Family Endowment Committee promoted allowances on the grounds that they would encourage parenthood amongst skilled workers and the middle classes, and referred to evidence showing that these classes were limiting their families for economic reasons.⁴⁵ They argued that successive Factory and Education Acts had rendered it impossible for the child to contribute to the family income, thus making children an economic liability to the thrifty working class. The middle class laboured under the additional burden of providing an appropriate education for their offspring. It was therefore essential that new incentives to parenthood be offered.⁴⁶ Rathbone also suggested that educated women were "in revolt against the conditions of their maternity," and that as soon as they received due recognition and recompense for their work the birth rate would increase.⁴⁷

While feminists and socialists sympathised with the eugenicists' aim in promoting family allowances, they could not countenance their idea that allowances should only be paid to certain groups in order to avoid dysgenic effects. William McDougall (a prominent member of the Eugenics Society)

⁴¹ See Francis GALTON, *Hereditary Genius* (London 1914); and Karl PEARSON, *Problems of Practical Eugenics* (London, 1912).

⁴² Mrs. Sidney WEBB, *The Wages of Men and Women*, p. 69.

⁴³ Cf. PEARSON, *Problems of Practical Eugenics*, pp. 31-35; C.W. SALLEBY, *The Methods of Race Regeneration* (London, 1911), pp. 27 and 46; and C.D. and W.C. DAMPIER-WHETHAM, *The Family and the Nation* (London, 1909), p. 198.

⁴⁴ C.W. ARMSTRONG, *The Only Way. A Suggestion to the True Solution of the Problems of Population* (London, 1921), p. 11.

⁴⁵ *Problems of Population*, p. 43, evidence of Mr. N.F. Harrison, Member of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers.

⁴⁶ Sidney WEBB, *Eugenics and the Poor Law* (London, 1909), p. 7; PEARSON, *Problems of Practical Eugenics*, pp. 30-31; and RATHBONE, *Disinherited Family*, p. 7. L. Amery, MP, voiced a similar opinion as late as 1938 in *The Times*, 6 May 1938, p. 10.

⁴⁷ RATHBONE, *Ethics and Economics of Family Endowment*, p. 114.

put forward an extreme proposal advocating payment to families which had risen above "the mean social level," defined as those with an income of 500 pounds a year or above.⁴⁸ Socialists stood in direct opposition to this, advocating allowances for the poor; feminists wanted allowances for all mothers, the service of maternity being the same whoever performed it.⁴⁹ Feminists did not look favourably on the eugenic desire to make motherhood the exclusive occupation of middle and upper class women. A pamphlet published under the auspices of the FEC in 1918, but written by Rathbone and Courtney, recommended rates of 12/6d per week for the mother during the eight weeks prior to confinement, and for as long as she had a child under five years, plus five shillings a week for the first child and 3/6d for subsequent children.⁵⁰ For a family of five living on a subsistence wage of 53 shillings a week, this represented a substantial addition. Feminists responded to eugenic fears by arguing that family allowances would give no incentive to the poorest members of society to have more children. It was hardly likely that a worker would deliberately have another child for the sake of a few extra shillings a week,⁵¹ and besides it was more or less physically impossible for "the idle and racially poor" classes to have more children than they were already.⁵² However, Rathbone fully acknowledged the importance of the eugenic fear of increasing population "of the wrong kind" and in a paper written in 1924 agreed that it would be possible to grade allowances so that they would bear "a reasonable relation to the standard of life of the parents".⁵³ She argued further that if the state were to take responsibility for allowances, it would have its hand "on the tiller of maternity," and by varying the amounts payable in respect to each child in the family, could manipulate the birth rate.⁵⁴ While no agreement was reached on who should receive allowances, feminists, socialists, and eugenicists all assumed that the amount paid in allowances would be large enough to achieve the objects they desired.

The FEC provided an umbrella organisation for those "committed to the principle of direct provision for the family,"⁵⁵ no matter what their motive. From the first the FEC sought to mobilize support from all quarters. In 1918 it changed its name to the Family Endowment Council. Mr. Ramsey Muir MP, Lord Askwith, Mrs. Barbara Drake (a trade unionist), and Mr. M.C.D. Whetham (a member of the Eugenics Society) were among the new recruits.⁵⁶ In 1925 further expansion occasioned another

⁴⁸ William McDougall, *National Welfare and National Decay* (London, 1921), pp. 196-97. Also see Leonard Darwin, *The Need for Eugenic Reform* (London, 1926), pp. 416-35.

⁴⁹ *Problems of Population and Parenthood*, p. 27, evidence of A. Maude Royden.

⁵⁰ K.D. Courtney, et al., *Equal Pay and the Family* (London, 1918), pp. 40-41.

⁵¹ Rathbone, *Disinherited Family*, p. 243.

⁵² *Problems of Population and Parenthood*, p. 235, evidence of Mary Stocks.

⁵³ LSE, Beveridge Papers, Misc./9, folio 96, Eleanor Rathbone, "Family Endowment in its bearing on the Question of Population," TS (12 Nov. 1924).

⁵⁴ Rathbone, *Disinherited Family*, p. 247.

⁵⁵ Stocks, *Eleanor Rathbone*, p. 99.

⁵⁶ Rathbone, *Disinherited Family*, p. 164.

change of name; the Council became the Family Endowment Society (FES). William Beveridge was elected President, and Rathbone, Vice-President. As a Liberal, Beveridge's involvement in the family allowance movement was motivated more by human concern for child poverty than by any other factor, although he was in broad sympathy with the aims of eugenists in particular. Although the total number of subscribers to the Society was only 85,⁵⁷ its membership was influential, and the amount of publicity it generated immense. Particular attention was paid to convincing MPs of the merit of family allowances. As early as 1921, Rathbone addressed an all-party group of MPs, including Lord Robert Cecil and J. K. Clynes, on the subject,⁵⁸ and in 1929 she formed an all-party committee of MPs favourable to the family allowance cause.⁵⁹ The FES, and Rathbone especially, were tireless in the number of books and pamphlets they produced. Between 1924 and 1926 a number of works were published articulating the aims of various groups and proposing schemes for their implementation.⁶⁰

The FES was not officially committed to any one scheme. Socialists and feminists favoured cash allowances paid for out of taxation. For feminists, payment of the mother involved recognition of her services to the state. Payment by the state was therefore appropriate. For socialists, a state-financed scheme was the only method of achieving a vertical redistribution of wealth. If allowances were included in the existing insurance scheme, the worker would help pay for them himself, if money came from the employer, allowances could impinge upon wage rates. These two groups also agreed on a flat rate of payment, feminists because the service of motherhood was the same for all, and socialists because any attempt to proportion allowances to income would perpetuate inequalities. Eugenists on the other hand favoured an insurance scheme,⁶¹ with, of course, benefits scaled to match incomes. The aim of the eugenics movement was to improve the physical and moral fibre of the race. Self-reliance and individualism were encouraged, and prewar collectivist legislation creating a minimum level of security for the sick and unemployed ("the unfit" in eugenic terms) was distrusted. J. L. Cohen, a member of the FES, put forward a proposal for an insurance scheme, promoting coverage for children as the next logical step after insurance in case of sickness, unemployment and old age.⁶² However, this additional coverage would have made the premiums for employer and employee unrealistically high. Despite her preference for a state scheme, Rathbone wrote the preface to Cohen's book, believing that attachment to the principle of family allowances was more important than the mechanics of any particular scheme. The more people who supported the idea in principle, the more

⁵⁷ *Report of the Family Endowment Society* (London, 1927), p. 1.

⁵⁸ STOCKS, *Eleanor Rathbone*, p. 95.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

⁶⁰ Of particular importance were RATHBONE, *Disinherited Family*; J.L. COHEN, *Family Income Insurance* (London, 1926); and Dorothy JEWSON, *Socialists and the Family* (London, 1926).

⁶¹ DARWIN, *Need for Eugenic Reform*, p. 430.

⁶² COHEN, *Family Income Insurance*, pp. 3-4.

chance the movement had of success; it was possible that insurance might be accepted by some as a middle way.⁶³

Rathbone's attitudes towards schemes involving the employer were similar. These schemes involved employers in one industry or region paying into an occupational pool which was then re-distributed amongst the workers in the form of allowances. Industrial pools had been instituted in France, Belgium, and Holland at the end of World War I to mitigate the effects of falling wages and rising prices. In 1924, Rathbone recommended that this type of system be tried for the teaching profession, where female teachers were demanding equal pay;⁶⁴ the state as employer would pay the allowances. The FES also recommended the system to the Royal Commission on the Civil Service in 1930,⁶⁵ and to the Royal Commission on the Coal Industry in 1925.⁶⁶ Eugenic support was given to a pool scheme for teachers and civil servants.⁶⁷ Rathbone believed that if one occupational pool proved successful, then the example would lead to further experiments and eventually to a state scheme. Her hopes were raised by the Coal Commission's 1926 recommendation in favour of family allowances for that industry.

Miners struck in 1925 for more wages. Employers claimed that the industry could not bear any addition to the wage bill. In her evidence presented on behalf of the FES to the Royal Commission appointed in 1925, Rathbone pointed out that 47% of miners had more than three children, and the 32.9% falling below the subsistence level established by Rowntree in 1918 were fathers of no less than 66.5% of all miners' children. Again children were shown to be the cause and victims of poverty.⁶⁸ In addition she pointed out that the 1924 Ministry of Health's Report of Maternal Mortality had shown the health of miners' wives to be particularly poor relative to other occupational groups.⁶⁹ But in her enthusiastic appreciation of the ease with which a scheme of family allowances might be implemented among a specialized workforce, where the danger of workers with dependants flocking in and single men leaving would be minimized,⁷⁰ Rathbone failed to stress the importance of keeping the issue of allowances separate from wage negotiations. The Royal Commission accepted the logic of the arguments put forward in the Society's Memo, but justified their recommendation on the grounds that the allowances could be used as part of, or as a substitute for, wages:

...we regard the introduction of a system of children's allowances — to be paid for out of a single pool, either for the whole industry or for each district

⁶³ Eleanor F. Rathbone's preface to COHEN, *Family Income Insurance*, p. vi.

⁶⁴ RATHBONE, *Disinherited Family*, p. 278.

⁶⁵ *Report by the Family Endowment Society to the Royal Commission on the Civil Service* (London, 1930).

⁶⁶ Eleanor F. RATHBONE, *Memo of Evidence on behalf of the Family Endowment Society to the Royal Commission on the Coal Industry* (London, 1925).

⁶⁷ R.A. FISHER (member of the Eugenics Society), *The Times*, 10 Apr. 1939, p. 11.

⁶⁸ RATHBONE, *Memo of Evidence*, p. 4.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁷⁰ RATHBONE, *Disinherited Family*, p. 279.

that adopts it — as one of the most favourable measures that can be adopted for adding to the well-being and contentment of the mining population. If the total sum available for workers' remuneration can be kept at the present level, the allocation of a small part of this to children's allowances will raise materially the general level of comfort, if the full remuneration cannot be maintained, the harmful effects of any reasonable reduction can largely be mitigated.⁷¹

Recognition by the Commission took the question of family allowances out of the theoretical stage. The FES publicized the Commission's adoption of allowances as a solution to the problems of the coal industry by distributing 30,000 pamphlets on the subject.⁷² *The Times* also paid close attention to the Report's recommendation and began to report the activities of the FES on a regular basis.⁷³

However, the nature of the Commission's recommendation aroused fears in the trade union movement as to the threat such a system posed to employer/employee relations, especially in regard to wage negotiations. If the employer were responsible for paying allowances, he could either discriminate against married men, or use the threat of cutting off allowances altogether to intimidate workers. He could also take the Commission's comments as his guide and use allowances as his justification for holding down or for actually reducing wages, thus creating a lateral rather than a vertical redistribution of wealth: the bachelor's surplus being used to supplement the income of the married workers. The 1926 ILP Conference condemned the Commission for advocating family allowances "at the expense of workers without children,"⁷⁴ and declared its support only for a system paid for and administered by the state. The Miners' Federation passed a similar resolution.

The Miners' Federation was one of the few unions to go even this far. As a result of the impression left by the Commission, the majority of the trade union movement rejected allowances because of the threat they posed to wage negotiations, refusing to accept Rathbone's argument that negotiations would be easier without the responsibility of providing for wives and children should a strike ensue.⁷⁵ They feared that family allowances would prove to be another form of poor relief, akin to the Speenhamland system, whereby relief given in cases of destitution had effectively held down wages.⁷⁶ The Trade Union Congress (TUC) preferred increased services to cash allowances; this amounted to advocating allowances in kind. A Joint Committee of the Labour Party and the TUC, appointed in 1927, reported in 1930 on the question of family allowances.

⁷¹ GREAT BRITAIN, PARLIAMENT, *Parliamentary Papers* (Commons), 1926, Vol. XIV, Cmd. 2600 (1926), "Report of the Royal Commission on the Coal Industry," Vol. I, p. 164 (of the Report).

⁷² *Report of the Family Endowment Society* (London, 1927), p. 1.

⁷³ *The Times*, 8 Feb. 1926, p. 18; 29 March 1926, p. 10; 5 Apr. 1926, p. 5; 8 Sept 1926, p. 7; 1 Oct. 1926, p. 9; 16 Oct. 1926, p. 17; 6 Nov. 1926, p. 9.

⁷⁴ Alexander GRAY, *Family Endowment: A Critical Analysis* (London, 1927), p. 74.

⁷⁵ RATHBONE, *Disinherited Family*, p. 257.

⁷⁶ LABOUR PARTY, *Report of the 26th Conference* (Labour Party, 1926), p. 274.

The majority favoured cash allowances, the minority preferred an extension of social services.⁷⁷ The TUC decided to adopt the Minority Report.⁷⁸ In the face of union opposition, the Labour Party could not endorse the principle. At the Annual Conference of the Labour Party in 1930, Dorothy Jewson spoke in favour of a state-financed scheme, but faced strong opposition from Ernest Bevin, General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Unions, on the grounds that allowances would endanger "the intricate wage system," and from other union leaders such as Mr. Rhys J. Davies of the Distributive and Allied Workers Union.⁷⁹ The suggestion that family allowances be introduced in an industry where employers were attempting to reduce wages, alienated the whole of the labour movement except the ILP.

The Commission accepted family allowances as a means of ameliorating rather than changing social conditions and focused attention on allowances as a means of alleviating poverty. After 1926, the radical changes envisaged by feminists at the end of World War I faded from view. Many supporters of allowances felt that the movement's case was not improved by its association with feminism, a movement which had never been respectable, and which was now in decline. In 1927, Gilbert Murray, Principal of the London School of Economics and President of the FES commented on the "taint of feminism" which pervaded the family allowance movement.⁸⁰ A FES member was quick to deny such an idea, pointing out that Sir William Beveridge was in favour of allowances, and that he was not a feminist.⁸¹ In fact, by 1927, only five of the fifteen executive members of the FES were feminists.⁸² The feminist motives in supporting family allowances were difficult grounds on which to rally popular support. At the 1927 FES Conference, Beveridge, in his opening address, declared that he would confine his comments to the economic argument for allowances, because all could agree on the desire to improve the standard of living without damaging industrial efficiency.⁸³

During the 1920s feminist arguments for family allowances gave way to those centring on the issue of child poverty. Rathbone continued to stress that allowances were the only means of achieving equal pay and received a measure of support from *The Times*.⁸⁴ But many supporters felt equal pay to be at best a secondary issue and at worst a totally separate concern.⁸⁵ Many socialist women had felt from the first that the

⁷⁷ TUC, *Family Allowances. Text of the Minority and Majority Reports issued by the TUC and Labour Party Joint Committee* (London, 1930), pp. 3-7.

⁷⁸ LABOUR PARTY, *Report of the 30th Conference* (Labour Party, 1930), p. 51.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 175-76.

⁸⁰ *The Times*, 17 Oct. 1927, p. 16.

⁸¹ LORD BALFOUR OF BURLEIGH, *The Times*, 20 Oct. 1927, p. 10.

⁸² *Report of the Family Endowment Society* (London, 1927), p. 11.

⁸³ Sir William H. BEVERIDGE, "The Case for Family Allowances," in *Six Aspects of Family Allowances. The Report of the Family Allowances Conference, 1927* (London, 1927), p. 4.

⁸⁴ *The Times*, 17 Apr. 1944, p. 5.

⁸⁵ Emmeline Pethwick LAWRENCE, *The Times*, 10 Apr. 1944, p. 5.

position of the child, not the mother, was crucial.⁸⁶ Mrs Webb argued that the living wage should be sufficient for two people, not one, because the single man had to pay for the services usually performed by a wife.⁸⁷ Rathbone made an emotional appeal to NUSEC in 1925 for allowances as a means of alleviating child poverty, suggesting that even at this date poverty was as large a concern as the status of the mother.⁸⁸

In 1934, when the nutrition controversy which arose from the publication of nutrition studies by the BMA and the Ministry of Health on the one hand, and the plight of the special areas on the other was at its height, Rathbone founded the Children's Minimum Council (CMC). The Council wanted a "plimsoll line" for children and included in its programme rent rebates and family allowances, extension of school milk and meals, and the raising of unemployment benefits.⁸⁹ The FEC worked closely with the CMC, the personalities involved being virtually the same.⁹⁰ Thus during the 1930s poverty alone became the rallying point, until the outbreak of war also revived the effect of allowances on the birth rate as an issue.

During the 1930s the wages of the employed worker became a more general issue than it had been in 1926. The 1937 Report of the Unemployment Assistance Board showed that 6% of male wage earners were better off drawing unemployment benefits than they were working. Generally, these cases were ones "in which the applicant has a low wage rate and a large family".⁹¹ Both Rathbone and Cohen had pointed out that unemployment benefits, unlike wages, were scaled according to family needs, paying five shillings a week for the wife and one shilling a week for each child.⁹² The Report shocked contemporaries; Violet Markham, for example, remarked that she had never realized how low wage rates were.⁹³ The most constant and strongest conservative argument against family allowances had been that workers would lose all incentive to work if they no longer had the responsibility of a wife and children to support, and that production would suffer accordingly. Loss of incentive had formed the basis of argument against every measure of welfare legislation since the 1911 National Insurance Act. In the case of family allowances, feelings were particularly vehement because the measure directly threatened the integrity of the family unit. Millicent Fawcett, past President of the NUSEC and *laissez-faire* liberal, appealed against allowances on the following grounds: "let us not destroy the fabric of family life by wiping out the responsibility of parents for the maintenance of their

⁸⁶ *Problems of Population*, p. 301, evidence of Mrs. Pember Reeves.

⁸⁷ Mrs. Sidney WEBB, *The Wages of Men and Women*, p. 68.

⁸⁸ STOCKS, *Eleanor Rathbone*, p. 118.

⁸⁹ PRO., PREM. 1/165, Children's Minimum Council Deputation to the Prime Minister, (12 March 1934).

⁹⁰ *Family Endowment Chronicle*, (Aug. 1934), p. 9.

⁹¹ GREAT BRITAIN, PARLIAMENT, *Parliamentary Papers* (Commons), 1937-38, Vol. XIII (June 1938), Cmd. 5752, "The Report of the Unemployment Assistance Board for the Year Ending 31 December, 1937," p. 82 (of the Report).

⁹² RATHBONE, *Disinherited Family*, p. 63; and COHEN, *Family Income Insurance*, pp. 3-4.

⁹³ PRO., AST. 7/390, Markham to L.T. Cadbury, 5 July 1939.

children".⁹⁴ The threat to the family posed a threat to the moral fibre of the nation.⁹⁵ Prior to the publication of the 1937 Report, proponents of family allowances had had to content themselves with references to the payment of separation allowances during the First World War; these, it was claimed, had not adversely affected the family. Rathbone had also pointed out that predictions as to the destruction of family responsibilities and the incentive to work were facile judgments passed by the middle class on the working class.⁹⁶ After 1937, it was the FES's turn to talk of incentive.

Conservative opinion now led the call for family allowances as the solution to the problem of low wages and large families. Allowances would give large families a living wage without entailing a general rise in wages and would put an end to the overlap between wages and unemployment benefits, which posed a threat to workers' incentive. Lady Rhys Williams' reaction was typical. In 1938 she declared that while she had opposed allowances three years previously, she now realized their value in "upholding the dignity of the home". For the overlap between unemployment benefits and wages meant that necessities were more likely to be provided by the state, a system that could only meet with the approval of socialists.⁹⁷ In the House of Lords, the Bishop of Winchester called for a committee on family allowances to be appointed in view of the Unemployment Assistance Board's Report.⁹⁸ Leopold Amery, Conservative MP, wrote a major article for *The Times* drawing attention to the Report, and to family allowances as the solution to the needs of the employed worker.⁹⁹ He received strong support from Graham White and Harold MacMillan.¹⁰⁰ Group Captain Wright, Mr. Pethwick-Lawrence, Lord Astor, Lord Balfour, and Lord Temple also supported the measure. However, in the Commons, Chamberlain refused Boothby's request to set up a Royal Commission on family allowances.¹⁰¹

The new wave of social surveys carried out during the 1930s showed that the victims of poverty caused by low wages and large families were still chiefly the children. Of particular note was the Bristol Survey carried out in 1937, which reported 11.9% of all families and 21.4% of all children to be living in poverty.¹⁰² With the onset of war, Conservatives also began to express fears about the quantity and quality of population. Speakers in the House of Lords feared that such large numbers of children living in poverty would create a "C3" population, and called for a state-controlled scheme of family allowance as the necessary first step towards

⁹⁴ *The Vote*, 12 June 1925, p. 12.

⁹⁵ GRAY, *Family Endowment*, pp. 91 and 127.

⁹⁶ RATHBONE, *Disinherited Family*, p. 99.

⁹⁷ Rhys Williams Papers, Speech to the Lloyds Debating Society, 16 Dec. 1938, TS.

⁹⁸ GREAT BRITAIN, PARLIAMENT, *Parliamentary Debates* (Lords), 5th Series, 110 (1938) p. 629.

⁹⁹ *The Times*, 14 June 1938, p. 17.

¹⁰⁰ STOCKS, *Eleanor Rathbone*, p. 308.

¹⁰¹ *The Times*, 30 June 1938, p. 8.

¹⁰² RATHBONE, *Case for Family Allowances*, p. 34.

a population policy.¹⁰³ The first speech by the new Minister of Health, Walter Elliot, stressed the need to protect the well-being and efficiency of the next generation by establishing a system of family allowances¹⁰⁴ and Leopold Amery (also a member of the Eugenics Society) supported a scheme of family income insurance as a means to raising the birth rate and improving the quality of the race.¹⁰⁵

Outside Parliament, firms and institutions had begun to implement schemes of family allowances. The London School of Economics paid £ 30 a year for each child under 13 years of age, and £ 60 for each child between 13 and 23 years in full time education. Prior to 1938 four firms introduced allowances. Between 1938 and 1939 sixteen more applied the principle, usually paying five shillings a week on behalf of all children, or all except the first one or two. Pilkington's, Tootal's, and Cadbury's were the most important industries to adopt a system of allowances as a means of giving workers with large families a living wage without raising wage rate as a whole. Management reported that the cost of family allowances rarely exceeded 1.5% of the total wage bill.¹⁰⁶ L.J. Cadbury categorically stated that family allowances were a "method of wage payment," and as a member of the Eugenics Society, he also regarded them as vital to the improvement of the quality of the race.¹⁰⁷

The outbreak of war strengthened the arguments for allowances current since 1926 and also provided new justification for their implementation. A memo presented to the Chancellor of the Exchequer by a group of MPs led by Amery shows this clearly. It called for a scheme of family allowances "which will operate rapidly enough to effect the main war-time purposes we have in mind".¹⁰⁸ The arguments for the introduction of allowances were related strictly to the war-time emergency and all but one were familiar: the prevention of malnutrition due to poverty and aggravated by rising prices, the elimination of the overlap between unemployment benefits and wages, an increase in the birth rate, and a new, forceful war-time appeal for the prevention of discontent arising from the unequal distribution of income, when great sacrifices were being demanded of rich and poor alike. Only a broadly based state-financed scheme could be implemented quickly enough to affect the war effort.

Initially the need to check inflation by keeping wages down and the cost of production as low as possible was held to be more immediately important than the desire to improve the lot of the worker. Lord Stamp's memo on wages and the cost of living, which he submitted to the Treasury in 1938, assumed that it would be impossible to maintain wage rates at their pre-war level of purchasing power. He thus recommended that

¹⁰³ GREAT BRITAIN, PARLIAMENT, *Parliamentary Debates* (Lords), 5th Series, 110 (1938) p. 633; and 113 (1939) p. 613.

¹⁰⁴ "Value for Money," *New Statesman* 16 (6 Aug. 1938) p. 208.

¹⁰⁵ *The Times*, 25 June 1938, p. 8.

¹⁰⁶ RATHBONE, *Case for Family Allowances*, pp. 115-18.

¹⁰⁷ *The Times*, 6 Jan. 1940, p. 4.

¹⁰⁸ RATHBONE, *Case for Family Allowances*, p. 105.

with the outbreak of war, workers should be paid more in accordance with need than with the economic value of the work done so that hardship might be avoided.¹⁰⁹ Before the instigation of government controls in 1940, wages rose 12% and prices 40%. The *New Statesman* commented that "family allowances present powerful attractions as a way of meeting the admitted hardships of the family man without conceding any general wage advances".¹¹⁰ Even Rowntree argued for family allowances in this manner.¹¹¹ The House of Lords eagerly seized on allowances as a means of breaking "the vicious spiral of wages and prices,"¹¹² and introduced two motions in 1941 and 1942 in support of a state system of family allowances. All this served only to enhance the fears of the trade union movement.

Anxiety that the numbers of Anglo-Saxons were not going to be sufficient in the face of the German menace also ran high.¹¹³ Conservatives found it easy to justify family allowances on the grounds that they would increase the quantity and improve the quality of the population. Even Churchill, who opposed other measures of welfare legislation, was eager to provide milk for expectant mothers and schoolchildren in 1941 and later supported allowances because "we must encourage by every means the number of births".¹¹⁴ A memo issued by the Conservative Research Department in 1941 anticipated that allowances would enable the working class to purchase more nutritious foods and would thus also improve the quality of population.¹¹⁵ These arguments were strongly patriotic. Allowances were justified because the state needed children; they need not therefore be feared as a socialist measure.¹¹⁶

Most powerful of all was the idea of family allowances as a part of the new social order. After the emotions aroused by the evacuation of Dunkirk, and the sacrifices made during the Battle of Britain, the nature of the new society expected to emerge after the war was eagerly discussed. The creation of a new society became an integral part of Britain's war aims. Working people had a right to expect some returns for their sufferings in the way of a better standard of living after the war was over. The condition of children evacuated in 1939 had shown the miserable conditions experienced by many urban dwellers. *The Times* declared that "an enlightened national conscience demands certain minimum standards".¹¹⁷ The idea of a national minimum level of maintenance, first proposed by the Fabians in the 1905 Minority Report on the Poor Law, finally

¹⁰⁹ PRO., T 161/1116, "Memo on Wages and the Cost of Living," (30 Nov. 1939).

¹¹⁰ "Family Allowances," *New Statesman* 23 (23 May 1942) p. 333.

¹¹¹ *The Times*, 4 Jan. 1941, p. 5.

¹¹² GREAT BRITAIN, PARLIAMENT, *Parliamentary Debates* (Lords), 5th Series, 115 (1940) p. 648-49.

¹¹³ Eleanor F. RATHBONE, *The Times*, 24 June 1942, p. 8.

¹¹⁴ Robert RHODE-JAMES, ed., *Winston S. Churchill. His Complete Speeches, 1897-1963*, Vol. VII (London, 1974), p. 7186.

¹¹⁵ PRO., T 161/1116, "Memo of Family Allowances," (April, 1941).

¹¹⁶ W.M. WHITAKER, *The Times*, 30 May 1942, p. 2.

¹¹⁷ *The Times*, 9 Sept. 1941, p. 5.

found acceptance. Social conscience and national interest required that the worker receive a greater share of the nation's wealth. *The Lancet* (organ of the British Medical Association) summed up the feelings of most conservatives: "wartime gives us an opportunity to redistribute wealth whether we like it or not," and went on to urge in banner headlines that the "Children must be Fed!"¹¹⁸ More urgency was felt about family allowances than about any other social welfare measure, and strong pressure was exerted on the government by MPs from all parties to introduce a family allowances bill. The plight of the worker drawing a low wage and keeping a large family seemed to be the most glaring instance of social injustice.

The worker himself was still not convinced that family allowances would prove beneficial. The TUC continued to oppose allowances. In 1939 the Bishop of Winchester urged that everything possible be done to win workers over to the idea.¹¹⁹ The unions were accused of "making the children suffer" because of groundless fears about their own wages.¹²⁰ Feminists accused trade union men of liking the economic power they had over their wives,¹²¹ and the TUC was accused of fearing to lose power over its members if it permitted the state to implement a scheme of family allowances.¹²² TUC support for allowances was eventually given on May 18, 1942, in recognition of a virtual *fait accompli*, for a few days before the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Kingsley Wood, had issued a White Paper on the subject. This provided a factual statement of costs, estimated at £ 132,000,000 a year if all children under fifteen were included, and allowances were paid at the rate of five shillings a week. Costs dropped to £ 58,000,000 if the first child was excluded.¹²³ Only a flat rate was considered workable. If allowances were graded according to income, then assessment might be made on the basis of need and allowances paid to bring wages up to subsistence levels, as in the case with the Speenhamland system feared by trade unionists. The Memo recognised that wages and allowances had to be kept separate, but made no recommendations as to the way in which a family allowance scheme might be implemented.

Following the publication of the Memo, there were immediate complaints that the flat rate on which the calculations were based was insufficient. Five shillings per child showed a "soup kitchen mentality".¹²⁴ Suggestions were made that the allowances be supplemented by grants in kind, particularly by increased school meals services. But the original

¹¹⁸ Harry ROBERTS, "What Does a Man Need?" *New Statesman* 20 (17 Aug. 1949): 156-57.

¹¹⁹ *The Times*, 13 July 1939, p. 7.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 29 May 1942, p. 5.

¹²¹ RATHBONE, *Case for Family Allowances*, pp. 102-04.

¹²² "Five Shillings a Child," *New Statesman* 21 (31 May 1941) p. 550.

¹²³ GREAT BRITAIN, PARLIAMENT, *Parliamentary Papers* (Commons), 1941-42, Vol. IX, Cmd. 6354 (May 1942), "Family Allowances Memo by the Chancellor of Exchequer," p. 8 (of the Report).

¹²⁴ J.A. Cecil WRIGHT, *The Times*, 15 May 1942, p. 5.

feminist desire for cash paid to the mother was strongly supported. Many felt it was an insult to suggest that mothers would not spend wisely in the interests of their children; cash would prove a more efficient form of giving allowances than kind and would provide direct encouragement to parenthood.¹²⁵ When the Beveridge Report on Social Insurance and Allied Services was published in December 1942, it recommended an eight shillings a week cash allowance;¹²⁶ one shilling a week was already being given in the form of school milk and meals.

The public saw in the Beveridge Report the embodiment of their hopes for a new society. The Report set out to complete the "circle of security for the worker" from "the cradle to the grave".¹²⁷ The main part of the Report was devoted to proposals for a rationalized scheme of social insurance in case of sickness and unemployment, rounding off the work begun in 1911 by Lloyd George. Beveridge believed that by a relatively small redistribution of income, through social insurance and children's allowances, acute poverty would disappear. Allowances were thus made a part of a scheme to create a national minimum level of maintenance, which was neither a new nor radical idea. However, allowances did not rely on the insurance principle, and therefore represented a departure from previous social welfare legislation. The same was true of the National Health Service proposed in the Report. Both these were designed to provide an optimum level of well-being for the worker before any misfortune such as unemployment overtook him. Both recommendations were made with the national interest, rather than the needs of the poor alone, in mind. The quality and quantity of the next generation was important to the country as a whole. The Report's adherence to a scheme of cash allowances paid for by the state therefore owed its acceptance to the strength of the double argument that family allowances would increase the birth rate and alleviate poverty, both problems accentuated by war.

The Report recommended that allowances be paid to all but also be subject to taxation. Beveridge argued that if the poor alone were to be recipients a means test would have to be instituted and the allowances would come with a stigma attached, much like nineteenth-century poor relief. The feminist idea that the service of motherhood was the same for all played no part in the decision. Allowances were to be paid on behalf of all children except the first. This caused criticism in view of the fact that allowances were supposed to encourage parenthood.¹²⁸ But as a Liberal, Beveridge was concerned to strike some balance between state and parental responsibilities.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ B. Seebohm ROWNTREE, *The Times*, 26 May 1942, p. 2; and Eleanor F. RATHBONE, "Cash of Kind," *New Statesman* 23 (13 June 1942) p. 380.

¹²⁶ GREAT BRITAIN, PARLIAMENT, *Parliamentary Papers* (Commons), 1942-43, Vol. VI, Cmd. 6404 (Nov. 1942), "Report on Social Insurance and Allied Services," p. 155 (of the Report).

¹²⁷ *The Times*, 26 Sept. 1943, p. 5.

¹²⁸ *The Times*, 9 March 1945, p. 5.

¹²⁹ "Report on Social Insurance and Allied Services," p. 155.

The 1945 Act, passed before the Labour government took office, adhered to the Beveridge Report in all areas but one. The Family Allowances Bill proposed to pay only five shillings per child a week. This amount had been suggested as early as 1918 by the Family Endowment Committee. In 1945 it was condemned on all sides as inadequate; it did not mean the economic independence of the mother, it did not provide sufficient incentive to parenthood, nor did it fulfill Labour's desire to redistribute wealth on a large scale. However, the Chancellor's Memo of 1942 had shown the huge cost of even this limited payment. The Government's stated aims in presenting the Bill made it clear that the allowances were designed only to ease the financial burden children imposed on parents, not to take it over completely, and to provide but a small measure of encouragement to parents to have more children.¹³⁰ The Bill also proposed to give the allowance to the father rather than the mother (Beveridge had made no precise recommendation on this). Rathbone warned that "sex grievance" would play a large part in the next election if this clause was not changed.¹³¹ A free vote was allowed and the decision made to pay the mother. One small part of the original feminist proposal for family allowances was thus achieved.

Feminists, socialists, eugenists, and eventually MPs from all political parties agreed on the principle of family allowances when they agreed on nothing else. The details of the schemes desired by the early supporters of the movement depended on their motives. The aims of all were such that only if the state administered the scheme and paid large allowances in cash would it be effective. There was no consensus on either who should receive the benefits from a scheme of allowances, or whether the money for allowances should be raised from the employer, insurance, or taxation. These issues were decided by the events of the late 1920s and 1930s, which also broadened the base of support for allowances particularly amongst the Conservative Party. The war was especially important for the new strength it gave to arguments in favour of allowances, and it was as a result of the increased concern about social injustice that family allowances became part of a larger scheme of post-war reconstruction. It was inevitable that if proposals for allowances were to be transformed into legislation the early schemes would be compromised. However, the system of direct, cash allowances financed out of taxation favoured by feminists and socialists was the one eventually adopted, and despite the small allowances granted by the 1945 Act, the principle involved made it one of the most radical pieces of social legislation enacted in the wake of World War II.

¹³⁰ GREAT BRITAIN, PARLIAMENT, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) 5th Series, 408 (1944-45) p. 2260.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, col. 2282.