

What Is Starvation?

By HELEN CODY BAKER

THE City of Chicago numbers three and a half million people. Within that great city lies a smaller one about the size of Memphis—the city on relief. Its population is 245,000 souls. Telling the truth about the smaller city to the larger one, getting the facts across to Chicago's vast, indifferent, radio-listening, newspaper-reading public, is a colossal and difficult task that has grown steadily more difficult, year after year, with each recurring "crisis."

In the early depression years interest was keen and there was an immediate response to stories of human suffering. But as "emergency" followed "emergency" the public gradually acquired immunity. The very size of the problem, the continuous reiteration of case loads that ran into hundreds of thousands and the sight of millions on millions of dollars being poured into a seemingly bottomless pit resulted, by and large, in a hardening of the sympathetic arteries or a positive allergy to the whole question.

In the past few months, hopelessness has been replaced among many responsible people by an irritable scepticism. They wanted facts, and the facts we had were not enough. It wasn't enough to tell that the Illinois Emergency Relief Commission had carefully worked out a standard budget for a dependent family; that the "minimum adequate" budget of the Chicago Relief Administration, even when the clients got all of it, was considerably lower than the IERC budget; that in the late summer and early fall of 1939, citizens of our city on relief were only receiving 65 percent of the CRA "minimum," which was just about 44 percent of what the IERC thought a dependent family needed.

"How much is that," they asked, "for a family of four?" And when we told them, "It's \$36.50 a month for a father, mother, fifteen-year-old boy and thirteen-year-old girl," the answer was often, "Well, they won't starve on \$36.50 a month."

So it was up to us to prove that people really were starving. Starvation seems to be the one thing that Chicago can't accept for the people in its city on relief. A newspaper editor put one of his best reporters on the relief beat and wrote me, after a number of visits had been made, that he doubted if there was actual starvation. "There is some evidence of undernourishment," he said, "but even of this we cannot be quite certain."

IN THE EFFORT TO BE "QUITE CERTAIN" WE MADE A study. Up to this point the "we" in this story has referred to Chicago's social workers. Here it narrows down to the health division of the Council of Social Agencies, which appointed a subcommittee to get the facts about what was actually happening, last September, to families in our city on relief. The study was made by the Elizabeth McCormick Memorial Fund, with the cooperation of twenty-four public and private agencies whose daily work brought them closely in touch with the CRA relief rolls. Hospitals, clinics, settlements, and the Infant Welfare Society of Chicago did the bulk of the fact finding. Staff members of these agencies, equipped with simple questionnaires, in-

terviewed responsible members of 744 CRA families, asking such questions as these:

When did you receive your last relief check?

How much do you pay for rent?

What do you owe for rent, fuel, electricity, clothing?

How much of these foods did you buy during the past week: fresh milk, vegetables, lean meat, eggs, fruit?

The cooperating agencies jumped at the chance to get these facts, and most of them were gathered in less than two weeks. Complete information was secured from 512 CRA families. The tabulating and assembling was done swiftly, and here are our answers to the sceptics:

61 percent of these families spent less than half as much money for food as is needed for an adequate diet at minimum cost.

82 percent had to pay more rent than the amount allowed in the CRA budget.

54 percent exceeded the CRA allowance for fuel.

43 percent found it necessary to buy clothing, in addition to the CRA clothing allowance and to some clothing distributed from the WPA workshop.

77 percent of the families interviewed were in debt.

And other facts equally pertinent and poignant.

Very simply and reasonably, in the body of the study, these facts are interpreted. If you must pay more rent than your budgeted relief allowance, and if your relief allowance includes no other items than rent, food and fuel, how do you pay your rent? Obviously, you tighten your belt and use the food money. If you need soap, or think you need it, and your budget includes nothing for cleaning supplies, with what do you buy soap? The food money, again. If you must have shoes and stockings, where do you get them? Of course, from the food money. And what do you do when you have done your best with your \$36.50 a month? You go in debt. Or you starve.

Even the "minimum adequate" budget of the CRA (we are calling it the "skeleton budget" now in Chicago) is 38 percent lower than public relief in New York City, 44 percent lower than St. Louis, 47 percent lower than Detroit. The study makes this quite plain.

We have sent it to the metropolitan and neighborhood newspapers, to our city, county and state officials, to all member agencies of the Council of Social Agencies, to many of our leading physicians, to the presidents of our business, civic and social clubs, to anyone else who can use it. We believe that it answers the question, "Is anybody really starving in Chicago?"

WHAT IS STARVATION? WEBSTER'S DICTIONARY TELLS us: "To starve: to perish with hunger. . . . Hence, to suffer from any want. To be in need."

Things are a bit better now. We have 80 percent instead of 65 percent, of the CRA "skeleton" budget. Free milk is being distributed to families on relief. But there still seems no reasonable doubt that, according to the Webster definition, clients of the Chicago Relief Administration are really starving. And the worst of the winter ahead.

"When Old People Won't Stay Put"

By GERTRUDE SPRINGER

FOR an hour Miss Bailey had felt the red tape rising around her. Now it began to get down her neck and in her ears. And she couldn't say a word, not even "Oh, for heaven's sake!" For she was a guest, invited to listen in at this meeting of welfare officials as they discussed the grave interstate problem of old people who won't stay put. No one asked Miss Bailey for her opinion and she didn't offer it, although she had several, along with a stock of stories about her gay old Uncle Al whose wandering foot had created a family saga.

In spite of her slightly ribald memories of Uncle Al, Miss Bailey realized that this was serious business, an effort to find an administrative procedure by which common sense and "old folks as people" would not be lost in a labyrinth of complicated, often conflicting laws. Again and again, as the discussion went on, Miss Bailey felt the weight of the old poor laws pressing down on the new concept of security. She well knew how these old laws bore down on "paupers," how they colored the whole fabric of relief, but she had hoped that the old folks, in the slender security that the new laws gave them, had escaped from some of the old rigors. Well, she was wrong as usual. Tradition did not yield so quickly to new philosophy, not when "the poor" were concerned. Old people had their "security" as long as they stayed put, but let them for any reason, good or bad, venture to cross state or even town lines and it became entangled in a maze of laws, practices and policies that differed with every state in the union. Security, contrary to the hopes of at least some of its sponsors in baptism, does not follow the individual but stays in the place where the law and his sixty-fifth birthday found him.

As the meeting went on and experience followed experience, Miss Bailey began to feel a certain crooked admiration for the ingenuity with which wandering old feet had been shackled. Uncle Al, she decided, had died none too soon. Old individualist that he was, he'd have roared the roof off at some of the practices abroad in the land of the free.

"Why, in my state," said a man from a proud commonwealth with traditions as stern as its rockbound coast, "the old folks can't even move across a town line, let alone a state line. We have a case—three cases really—three old sisters who live in three different towns but not more than twelve miles apart. They want to live together, and by pooling their allowances they could get along quite comfortably. But the law won't let them. Each has her settlement in the town where old age overtook her and she must stick to it or lose her allowance. If she moved across a town line it would take her five years to gain settlement there and be eligible for assistance. It doesn't make much sense but that's our law, and there isn't anything we can do about it."

There was general agreement that it didn't make sense but not that nothing could be done about it, for at least one state, as its representative was quick to point out, had done something—simply by bookkeeping. Its old folks were free to move anywhere they chose within the state. The county of residence paid their allowance and reported that fact to the state department which charged it up to the county of settlement until such time as the oldster had lived a year in

the place of his choice and thereby gained a new settlement. In short, the state welfare department maintained a sort of clearing house—all done by bookkeeping—by which the old person retained his settlement and the "county of origin" fulfilled its responsibility to him until his new settlement was legally established.

"Now why," Miss Bailey asked the man beside her, "wouldn't that system work on the federal level, with the Social Security Board doing the bookkeeping and charging the old people to their state of legal settlement until they fulfilled the requirements of the state where they chose to live? After all, most of the old people prefer to stay put. The few who want to move usually have a good reason."

The neighbor admitted that the idea sounded good. But there were forty-eight practical reasons why it wouldn't work, he said, forty-eight states with panoplies of laws that buttressed all their fears and jealousies and ironclad traditions. In the honeymoon days of the social security program it was hoped that the states all would fall in line with a uniform settlement law with a time requirement of perhaps a year, thus ironing out many points of conflict among them. That hope was short lived. To be sure, many states that had required long residence, even up to ten years, reduced the time to five years, the maximum set by the Social Security Act, but on the other hand certain of the relatively "liberal" states took the opportunity to tighten up their requirements. In the end, confusion and conflict remained unchanged.

Since it seemed hopeless to get forty-eight states to change their cherished laws, went on Miss Bailey's neighbor, the effort now among people who saw beyond their noses in such matters was to effect agreements between states on administrative practices within their respective laws. "You can be tough and consistent or liberal and consistent under the same law. It's all in the way you do it."

A few firm shushes discouraged further offside conversation and Miss Bailey turned her ears back to the meeting.

NOT even the most liberal states, it seemed, were willing to let their old folks keep their "security" if they stayed out of the state longer than the time originally required for settlement.

"Our people can go off for a year," said a man from a small eastern state, "and we'll send their checks after them every month. But at the end of that time they must come back. It isn't always desirable that they should, either from their standpoint or ours. But it's the law. Right now we have a case like that. This old lady lived with a big family of improvident kin and got along well enough on considerably less than the maximum allowance. But the grass in the other field was greener and the one thing on earth she wanted to do was to go to Chicago to live with a daughter who, it happened, was on relief. We discouraged the move but one fine day the family passed the hat and got enough money to put her on the train. The first we knew of it was when the Chicago relief people asked us how come. Given the accomplished fact we agreed to continue the monthly check, with Chicago doing a certain amount of supervising of the case. The mother and daughter were apparently very