

A politician of note, one who stands in grave opposition to plans for public assistance to combat this depression, has said, "I think it would be better if we should suffer a little more now and keep politics away from relief, than let politics in and suffer a great deal more in the future." I do not need to say that the suffering he refers to is not to be done by him, a wealthy man, removed from direct contact with the suffering of others.

This depression demonstrates what we social workers have long known: that the old system of dealing with the poor in this country is cruelly harsh and inadequate and that the whole burden cannot and should not be borne by private charities of the local community. Some communities have a disproportionate burden to bear. In many single industry towns, almost the whole population is unemployed. If reliance is upon local and private relief, there is nothing but starvation ahead of these people.

I approach these problems from years of service in the children's field. To me, higher wages and shorter hours for fathers are essentially child welfare measures because they make for greater security and happiness in the home. Children, we must remember, need security. But I am supposed to speak to you this morning about the challenge in child welfare. I suppose that when a child is born it is always a challenge to its parents and a challenge that must be very seriously considered at many periods in its life.

I have been told that an English father hopes that his son will follow him. I think an American father hopes that his son will go further than he has gone and he lays his plans with that objective. The American mother hopes the same thing for the child, however loyal she may be to what her husband has done or what she has tried to do. Each generation with us is supposed to go ahead of the past generation. Our hope always has been that the America of the future is to be a very different America from the America of the present. All kinds of expansion of public and private undertakings are necessary if we are to meet the challenge of American children.

For the challenge that comes to us is that we should live up to the knowledge and the opportunity that are ours, of putting into practice what we now know can be done for children in the way of preventing disease, delinquency and dependency. That means a large undertaking, for our knowledge greatly transcends our performance. We are being asked whether we will live up to the gospel that we have been preaching of what constitutes an adequate diet for children. It will be very hard to live up to it always, and we may fail sometimes, but we must then, honestly, admit our failure.

The challenge of children is always a challenge of very peculiar immediacy. People often believe that I am impatient, but impatience is necessary where children are concerned. I have stated again and again that the only time we can save the babies who are going to die this year is this year. If we wait until next year, they will be dead. The only time we can care for children in any particular period of life is now. If a school child does not get what he needs, he will permanently bear the effect of that lack. If you postpone assistance until a more convenient time, you postpone it indefinitely as far as that child is concerned, and the result will be a permanent marring of the physical development and of the mental life of the child because of the period of neglect.

You and I can go without a great many things and probably be better off. But in the case of children, this is not so. Yet one finds again and again the feeling that these services for children can be curtailed. I remember just ten years ago when our conference, which President Harding called, was meeting in Washington. We were then also in the midst of an industrial depression. I was feeling very unhappy because, almost every place I went, the agencies for children were threatened with reductions of budgets. I remember saying to one of the distinguished foreign visitors that it was a hard year for us, and children's work would probably be curtailed. I was greeted with so much astonishment that in the midst of such wealth as the United States had, I could be talking like that, that I never ventured to speak of it to foreigners again. I know and you know that we are a tremendously rich people, full of vigor and enthusiasm as to what the future holds for us, and convinced that it rests in the hands of the children of today. What we do to them is going to determine not only the future of the United States, but to a large extent, the future of the world.