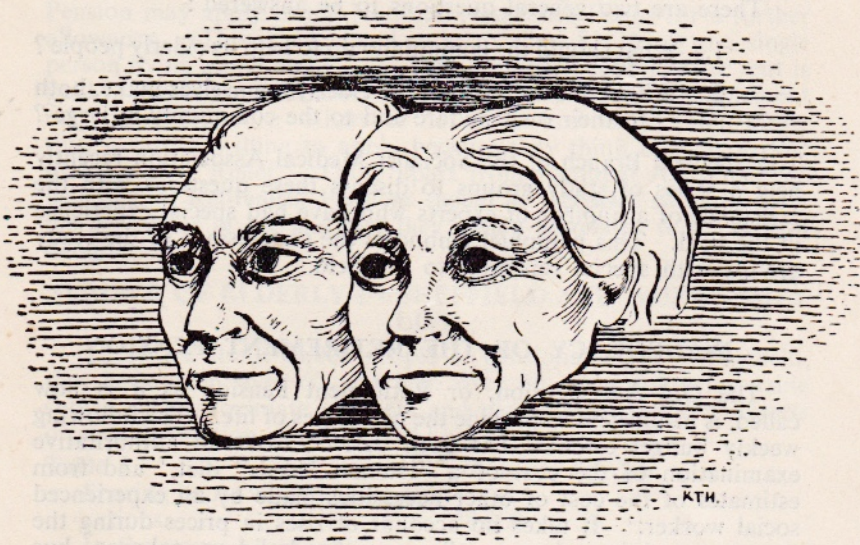


A NEW DEAL
for
SHEFFIELD
OLD FOLK



PUBLISHED BY THE SHEFFIELD BRANCH
OF THE SOCIALIST MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

JANUARY 1951

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A NEW DEAL FOR SHEFFIELD'S OLD FOLK

At the present time, one in every eight of the population are over pensionable age (65 years for men, 60 years for women). By 1980 it is estimated that one in five will be pensioners. For this reason, it is becoming increasingly urgent to develop a practical policy with regard to the elderly.

There are two general questions to be answered :

- 1.—What should the community do to help its elderly people ?
- 2.—What contribution can the elderly themselves make, both to their own welfare and to the community at large ?

The Sheffield Branch of the Socialist Medical Association recently held a series of study groups to discuss these questions with the assistance of a number of experts who have had special experience in the field. This pamphlet embodies the conclusions of the study groups with special reference to Sheffield.

INADEQUACY OF THE RETIREMENT PENSION

The Old Age Pension, or Retirement Pension as it is now called, is insufficient to provide the necessities of life. The following weekly budget estimate has been derived from an authoritative examination of the cost of a "Human Needs" diet,¹ and from estimates of the cost of other necessities made by an experienced social worker.² It takes no account of rises in prices during the last year and it makes no allowance for holidays, tobacco, bus fares, visits to the cinema, etc. The amount shown for food is a minimum. For example, it would not even allow the buying of bananas to which the elderly are entitled periodically. It further assumes skilful and selective shopping which may be beyond the capacity of many old people :

¹Shulz, T., "Bulletin of the Oxford University Institute of Statistics," June, 1949.

²Grout, L. E., "The Almoner," October, 1949.

	<i>One Person</i>		<i>Husband and Wife</i>	
	s.	d.	s.	d.
Rent	10	0	10	0
Food	11	8	21	4
Fuel/Light	4	0	4	0
Clothing	4	0	8	0
Clothing repairs (Shoes, etc.) ..	1	0	2	0
Household replacements ..	2	0	2	6
Cleaning and Toilet articles ..	10		1	2
Extras :				
Radio				
Postage Stamps				
Newspapers, etc. ..	3	0	3	6
	<hr/>		<hr/>	
	£1	16 6	£2	12 6
	<hr/>		<hr/>	

Matched against the Retirement Pension (£1 6 0 for one person, £2 2 0 for a married couple) the discrepancy is obvious. It is difficult to see how anyone could economise further. It is true that an old person who cannot manage on the Retirement Pension may apply to the National Assistance Board for a further allowance. (This is calculated so as to allow £1 6 0 to a single person living alone, and £2 3 6 to a married couple, after rent is paid.) But many pensioners are still unaware that a supplement may be applied for; others do not know how to go about doing this, or are unwilling to apply because they think of it as a dole like the old "Relief." Quite apart from National Assistance we believe that **Retirement Pensions should be increased so as to cover the necessities of life and that they should be related to the cost of living.**

NUMBER OF ELDERLY IN SHEFFIELD AND WHERE THEY LIVE

There are about 64,000 people of pensionable age in Sheffield, that is, women over 60 and men over 65. The following table shows the approximate numbers and percentages in different sorts of accommodation in May, 1950.^a

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Per cent.</i>	
Sharing house with relations	38,000	59	} Independent 96.5%
In their own home (not sharing)	22,000	34	
Furnished or unfurnished rooms	2,000	3	
Common lodging houses ..	300	0.5	

^aSome of these figures and other facts in this report are taken from a very useful report recently published by the Sheffield Council of Social Service, "Old People in Sheffield," by Allison Greenlees and John Adams.

Table I (cont.).	Number	Per cent.	
Almshouses (8)	211	0.4	} Partially dependent 1.2% Wholly dependent
Homes run by voluntary bodies (5)	86	0.1	
Local Authority Hostels (4) ..	140	0.2	
"The Institution"	200	0.3	
Infirmiry or Hospital.. ..	1,500	2.3	
	<u>64,437</u>		

There's no place like home

Most elderly people naturally want to stay in their old home until the end of their lives. A good many, however, find themselves without a suitable home of their own in their declining years. In Sheffield, for example, there are about 900 pensioners without tenancies on the waiting list for houses. There are others who find that the old family house is too much to manage when the younger generation has gone. What sort of houses should be provided for these old people?

New homes for the elderly

We believe that while there is room for experiment, the single-storey dwelling is best. It should, as far as possible, satisfy the following conditions :

1. Groups of not more than 30 built as an integral part of new or existing estates.
2. Situated on a bus or tram route and within easy access of church, shops and cinema.
3. A club room should be provided where the old people could meet for social gatherings and where possibly a dinner could be provided once a week or more often. These facilities would help to prevent the loneliness and under feeding which too often accompany old age.
4. One of the dwellings should be occupied by a younger married couple who would look after the grounds and club house and who would help any old person in need, for example, by sending for a relative or the doctor, if necessary.
5. Special features of the dwellings should include :
 - Coal store and coal bin under cover.
 - Fire grates higher than usual to save stooping.
 - Gas poker.
 - Low ceilings and insulated walls for warmth, and where possible electric wall-bar heating units.
 - Low windows that can be cleaned without steps.
 - Non-slip floors.
 - A sitting bath with hand rails at sides.
 - A porch at the back of house.
 - Electric light switch over the bed.
 - Telephone or emergency bell to the supervisor's house.
 - The housing authority should be responsible for all maintenance, including interior decoration.

An excellent group of bungalows incorporating a good many of these features has already been built at Unity Crescent, with a gift to the City from the Lord Mayor of London's Air Raid Distress Fund. Many more of this type are needed. Altogether, the City has provided 728 dwellings of the one-bedroom type specially designed for persons over 65. In addition, there are 230 flats which have been conveyed by deed or gift to the City Council by the Graves Trustees.

Besides single-storeyed dwellings, we believe that part, at least, of the ground floors of new blocks of flats should be allocated to elderly people. The one and two roomed flats provided should possess the features described above. Each should be quite independent with its own entrance. There should be one or two communal rooms and a supervisor should be appointed to provide the same sort of services as mentioned above. In addition, the provision of a daily mid-day meal in the communal restaurant, and laundry and cleaning services are great advantages which would enable some of the old people to remain independent for much longer than would otherwise be possible. Sick bay accommodation for short term illness not requiring skilled nursing, would also be of great value. Flats of this sort have been provided for old people at Isledon House, Islington.

Rents

It is impossible for an old person trying to live on the Retirement Pension of 26s. a week, to pay an economic rent for a post-war bungalow or flat. Rather than subsidise these rents from the rates (a policy which tends towards local disparities) we believe that the National Assistance Board should, as a general rule, pay the full economic rent on behalf of old people without other means.

The old houses

A good deal more could be done to improve the old and dilapidated houses, grim monuments of the industrial revolution, in which so many elderly people are still living. For example, the provision where necessary of electric light and hand-rails for staircases, would prevent some of those all too frequent falls which are often fatal for old people.

Living with relations

In spite of statements to the contrary, many infirm and sick old people are well cared for by their sons and daughters, or by more distant relatives or even neighbours. The Rowntree Committee⁴ found that between 7 and 18 per cent. of all old people were looked after by members of their families.

Dr. Sheldon, of Wolverhampton,⁵ found in his survey that, in many cases, the younger generation could never get away for a holiday together because of the need for looking after an aged

⁴"Old People," Rowntree, B. Seebohm, London, 1947.

⁵"The Social Medicine of Old Age," Sheldon, J. H., London, 1948.

parent.

The Local Authority could help these families by making provision for temporarily admitting the old person to a hostel or holiday home for two or three weeks. This would give both generations a much needed rest and change and might well postpone or prevent the final admission to hospital or to an Institution. Quite apart from this being a more kindly way of dealing with a difficult problem, it should be remembered that hospital is the most expensive form of accommodation and therefore should not be used unless skilled nursing and medical care is necessary. The approximate weekly cost of maintenance in the three types of accommodation for an old person is :

At home	..	..	..	35s.- 45s.
In hostel	..	..	..	57s.-100s.
In hospital	..	..	..	120s.-340s.

The Local Authority might help relatives to look after their ailing old folk more often, by providing more "Home-Helps." A cheap or free laundry service and the loan of bed linen would also be of great benefit. Many old people suffer from foot troubles which make it difficult for them to get about. The provision of a visiting chiropodist by the Local Authority would give great relief to some of these.

AN ALMONER SERVICE

It has been found that old people living alone often do not know of services and benefits which they need and to which they are entitled or, if they know of them, do not know how to apply for them. **The Local Authority should appoint a suitably trained person to visit old people in distress** to help them to deal with their economic and social difficulties. Housing officers, health visitors and general practitioners come into contact with these problems, and if an Almoner were available, could ask her to visit the old person concerned. She could also help an old person who has to be admitted to hospital by seeing that the rent is paid and that the accommodation is not let to someone else.

HOSPITAL

As Table I shows, a small proportion of old people, about one in fifty at present, can no longer be cared for at home because of illness or infirmity. A good many in this group have been living alone and have no relatives who are willing and able to look after them. Some require hospital treatment and must be admitted to the infirmary.

Old people often dread this possibility, and in view of what they have known in the past, this is not to be wondered at. Too often an old person has been put to bed for some acute illness and,

when this has passed, they have been left to lie in a bare and cheerless ward without being encouraged to get up and without being given anything with which to occupy their minds. In these circumstances many became apathetic, dirty and bedridden, and lingered on in that state, sometimes for years. Modern methods of treating old people which have been tried in other cities have shown that about half of those admitted to the infirmaries can be restored to health and made fit to return home. These methods involve, amongst other things, getting the old people up as soon as possible and giving them exercises to keep their muscles active and occupational therapy to prevent mental apathy. For those who will never get better long-stay annexes are required. These must be provided by the Regional Hospital Board and should be cheerful and homely places, free of irksome restrictions where those with incurable illnesses can spend their last days as comfortably as possible.

It has often been difficult to obtain enough nurses to nurse the elderly and chronic sick. The institution of a special diploma for this important branch of nursing would help to improve its standing and eventually to attract to it more qualified nurses.

Some old people find, unhappily, that although well enough to leave hospital, their old home is no longer available. For these and other frail and homeless old people hostels are required.

FOR THE HOMELESS :

The Institution ? . . .

In the past, most homeless old folk have had to go into "The Institution" now called "Part III Accommodation." In Sheffield, there are still approximately 200 living in this bleak and cheerless place.

. . . Or a small and friendly hostel ?

Under the National Assistance Act of 1948, local authorities can now provide homes with full service for people who, because of age or infirmity, are in need of care and attention.

The Social Welfare Department of the Sheffield Corporation is already using four large houses for this purpose. "Castle Dyke," which accommodates 30 women ; "Park Head House," 35 men ; "Sydnope Hall," 50 women and "Beech Hill," 25 men. This is an excellent start to a difficult problem. The four houses already provided are well equipped and comfortable and, most important, the atmosphere is warm and friendly and free from petty restrictions. If the Retirement Pension of 26s. a week is the only income, the resident pays 21s. a week which covers everything. If he has other means, he may be asked to pay an additional sum up to the full cost which is a little under £3 a week.

There will be an increasing demand by old people for accommodation in this type of hostel in the future as the knowledge of them spreads. We estimate, on the basis of Table 1, that hostels for about 2,500 old persons will be needed in Sheffield within the next ten years.

It is essential that the old institutional atmosphere and all taint of patronage should be completely eradicated from these places, which should, in fact, be administered as comfortable private hostels for the elderly. We believe that they should be run by homely couples who should regard themselves in the same light as do a hotel manager and manageress. This designation is, in fact, employed in at least one northern town. There should be an occupational therapy service for those who want it, in addition to the usual amenities, such as the provision of periodicals, books, wireless and indoor games.

Elderly men and women should be accepted in the same hostel as is being done, for example, in a new corporation hostel for 60 old people in Cardiff. This is particularly important in the case of old married couples. We believe that, in general, the old people of both sexes would prefer to have each other's company. It is as absurd to segregate the sexes in these hostels as it would be for some residential seaside hotel to try and do the same.

The eventual aim should be to provide each old person with a separate bed-sitting room, and they should be allowed to bring their own furniture and personal belongings with them, as is done, for example, in the Church Army Home in Byron Road.

THE DIET OF OLD PEOPLE

Old people, especially those living alone, not infrequently eat an insufficient or unbalanced diet. This may occur because they lack the money necessary to buy an adequate diet, because they are not strong enough to do their own shopping or because they become apathetic and lose interest in the preparation of meals.

The "Meals on Wheels" service organised by the W.V.S. attempts to deal with this problem. A cheap mid-day meal is provided once a week for a certain number of old people either in the old people's clubs or at home. This service needs to be made more widely known and organised on a more extensive basis so that any old person in the City can benefit from it. **The Local Authority should accept full responsibility for the meals on wheels service** which voluntary effort has shown is widely needed and appreciated.

VOLUNTARY EFFORT

Voluntary organisations such as the Council of Social Service, the W.V.S. and the Church Army, to mention only three of many organisations which have helped in this field, have done a lot for old people in Sheffield. They have organised the "Meals on Wheels" service, provided hostels, organised "Darby and Joan"

clubs, supplied wireless sets, and other comforts and necessities. While we believe that the time is overdue for the Authorities to see that the material needs of old people, such as adequate housing, diet and domestic help are satisfied, there remains a large field of service better undertaken by voluntary organisations. Such service should include the organisation of social clubs and the regular friendly visiting of lonely old people.

In the survey of old people carried out by the Sheffield Council of Social Service, it was found that 10 per cent. of the 1,596 old people interviewed had no wireless set. On this basis, there are about 4,500 elderly people in Sheffield without the use of a wireless set. The main reasons for not having a set in use were found to be that their old set had either broken down, or been sold, or that they could not afford the licence. The wireless certainly helps to banish loneliness and voluntary effort could do much to help fill this gap. At the same time, **the Government should be pressed to provide (perhaps through the National Assistance Board) free licences to persons drawing Retirement Pensions without other means.**

Section 31 of the National Assistance Act, 1948, enables local authorities to make grants to voluntary bodies providing certain services such as social clubs for old people. These powers should be used to the utmost as urged in circular 11/50 issued by the Ministry of Health in January, 1950.

WHERE IS THE MONEY COMING FROM ?

It may be asked how can we afford all these services for the elderly when already our social services are costing so much. At present, Retirement Pensions are costing in the region of £250,000,000 a year ; in 1978 it is estimated that they will cost over £500,000,000 a year.

Can the elderly themselves help ?

So far, we have considered the question : What should the community do for the elderly ? We should also ask : What can the elderly do for the community ? There is no doubt that many wish to go on making a contribution to the common good after the usual retiring age, and it is becoming increasingly clear that healthy old people who wish to go on working should be encouraged to do so, in order that they can help to create the wealth required to support themselves. It is not, of course, suggested that Retirement Pensions should not become payable for men at 65 or women at 60 as at present. **Retirement pensions should be paid whether or not the elderly person retires and should not be forfeited as at present if more than a pound a week is earned.** If the old person preferred, it should be possible for the pension of 26s. a week to be deferred as at present and a larger pension paid at a later age. In this case, the addition should be more than the present rate which is two shillings extra for every additional year worked.

"After 60, work is the best medicine"

So said a jobbing gardener of 81 to one of the authors. It is unfortunately true that retirement does not always bring content : to some men it means mental depression and a rapid decline in physical health. Perhaps one reason why women, on the average, live longer than men is because they so seldom retire.

The official attitude on retirement

What is the attitude of the Government, the Local Authorities and the Trade Unions to this question ?

The Ministry of Labour has asked that there should be no hard and fast rule governing the discharge of elderly workers, the Minister pointing out that "Any arrangements which link discharge or retirement to age alone are not in accordance with present day requirements." Both sides of industry were asked to consider the whole problem and ways in which barriers to the continuation of elderly people in employment could be removed. This is being done through the Joint Industrial Councils and other negotiating machinery.

In Sheffield, while the staff side of the Local Authority are compelled to retire at 65 by the Local Government Superannuation Act, 1947, other employees can remain with the Corporation so long as they wish and so long as they continue to render satisfactory service. Several firms also allow their employees to continue working after the age of 65.

Older people, even those who are fit, may be a danger to themselves and others in a rolling mill or a pit, and most workers as they get older, will want to leave such physically exacting work. **But if they cannot do their old jobs, many such workers could do other work more suitable to their years if it were found for them.**

In war-time they worked on

The Rowntree Committee (1947) reported that many employers had found in war-time that old people were well able to continue in highly skilled work to which they were accustomed and were often more conscientious in attendance and performance than the younger workers. They were not generally, however, suited to piece work or to work demanding great physical strength or agility.

Possibilities in Sheffield

The cutlery and precious metal industries in Sheffield should be able to, and usually do, find plenty of scope for their workers over 65. In the steel and mining industry, the problem is more difficult. It is not suggested that anyone should remain in an *executive* position after 65, whether he is a charge hand or managing director. If this happened, promotion for the younger men

would be blocked and new and progressive ideas would stand less chance of adoption. **Some preparation is required for the change in working activity which must take place at about 65.** There should be a gradual easing off and certain jobs should be earmarked and special conditions of work arranged for those over 65. Some Birmingham firms are already tackling this problem and one firm has set up a special workshop for the elderly which, incidentally, is being run at a profit. There is a good deal of evidence that, contrary to general belief, the elderly can if properly taught, acquire new skills.

A separate Labour Exchange ?

A section of the Labour Exchange should deal specifically with jobs for those over 65 who wish to continue working and are unable to find a suitable job with their old firm.

“WE ARE NOT WANTED NOW WE ARE OLD”

We have often heard old people say that. But in the new and more humane society we are building now, they *are* wanted and we believe that they can greatly assist us in our struggle to improve the standard of living of the whole nation.

Not many years ago we allowed millions of our people to decay, mentally and physically, on the dole. It is not to be wondered at in a society which could not even provide work for its able bodied men that the old people were left to struggle for mere existence on an old age pension of ten shillings a week. Many became destitute castaways of society, left, forgotten and unwanted, in the infirmaries and workhouses. Much more has been done for the elderly in the last few years, but much remains to be done as we have indicated in this pamphlet.

It is up to all trade unionists and all who support the Labour and Co-operative parties, indeed it is the responsibility of us all, to improve the conditions of life of our old people and to help more of them to continue to enrich our society with their skill, experience and wisdom.

Further copies of this pamphlet may be obtained from :

The Sheffield Bookshop, Matilda Street, Sheffield, or

The Honorary Secretary, 754, Attercliffe Road, Sheffield 9.

Price 6d. per copy or 10s. for 25.

PRINTED
BY
Johnson & Co. Sheffield Ltd
82, CARVER STREET