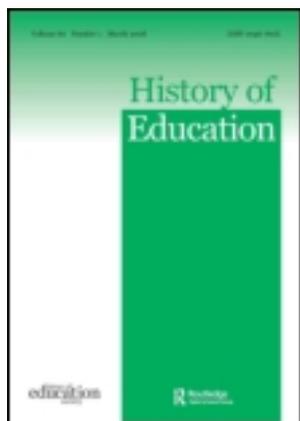


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### The milk in schools scheme, 1934--45: 'nationalization' and resistance

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## **The Milk in Schools Scheme, 1934–45: 'nationalization' and resistance**

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In October 1934 the National Government took over what had previously been a commercial initiative to encourage milk-drinking in schools. By the outbreak of war the Milk in Schools Scheme had reached 87 per cent of elementary schools in England and Wales and 56 per cent of pupils were drinking one-third of a pint daily. This paper investigates the motivations behind this scheme and the problems associated with its implementation. There was resistance from within government and a number of objections were raised around the country, particularly to the strategy of the Board of Education. The conclusions are, first, that the economic necessity of providing a market for liquid milk was more important in the mind of policy-makers than nutritional supplements for undernourished children and, second, that the evolution of the policy itself was highly contingent upon the network of power and influence within which it operated. In 1933 it would have been difficult to predict with any degree of certainty how a Milk in Schools Scheme would have operated, but in time it was to become one of the government's most robust and universally supported food policies.

### **Introduction**

On 1 October 1934, Walter Elliot, the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, visited Addison Gardens School, West Kensington, accompanied by Viscount Astor as Chairman of the Advisory Committee of the Milk Marketing Board. With them went five officers of the Milk Board, the President and Organizer of the National Milk Publicity Council, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture (MAF), the Secretary of the National Farmers' Union (NFU), the General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers, and various education officials. This was more than a courtesy visit. The occasion was the launch of the British government's Milk in Schools Scheme (MISS) and the descent of so many officials on one small elementary school in West London was a symbolic gesture to show the government's commitment to the initiative and also a chance for Elliot, a media-aware politician, to be pictured with photogenic, milk-drinking children.

This paper looks at the origins, implementation and impact of this new MISS in the period 1934–40, a major departure in national food policy. It picks up the threads of a previous piece on private school milk initiatives between 1900 and 1934 and seeks to understand why the National Government took over and expanded a scheme previously organized by the National Milk Publicity Council (NMPC).<sup>1</sup> As a background, a number of themes will be explored, mainly economic and political, in order to illuminate a narrative of the policy-forming process and the struggle in Whitehall and Westminster to bring about the optimum legislative and administrative outcome. The provision of school milk may sound uncontroversial but Margaret Thatcher was by no means the first to question its financial and ideological basis. Items for discussion will therefore be persuasion, resistance and compromise.

1 See P. Atkins, 'Early Experiments with School Milk in Britain, 1900–34' (forthcoming 2005).

The literature on policy networks provides a convenient point of departure. Although it has its centre of gravity in empirical and theoretical studies of the post-1945 period, there are insights that can be drawn on for the present research. In particular, the dialectic between structure and agency presented by Marsh and Smith is helpful because it suggests a mechanism for understanding the complex and contingent evolution of school milk policies.<sup>2</sup> These authors, in their own study, explain the continuity of agricultural policy in terms of the close relationship forged between the MAF and the NFU during the Second World War, an association that was maintained in peacetime and that influenced the structures of negotiation even when the exigencies of food shortages were long forgotten. As a starting hypothesis, we might similarly see the system of school milk provision between 1934 and 1945 as sitting neatly within the new framework of agricultural corporatism that was emerging at the beginning of the 1930s. Later in the 1930s and 1940s these negotiated structures remained essentially unchanged even when a welfare ethos came increasingly to the fore and lobbyists struggled to have the constituency of state-sponsored milk-provision extended.

### The prehistory

Milk played only a small part in early experiments with school feeding.<sup>3</sup> The 1906 and 1914 Education (Provision of Meals) Acts and the Education Act (1921) provided a springboard but through to the mid-1920s milk continued to be thought of as a medicinal supplement, along with foods such as cod-liver oil, rather than as an alternative to the solid foods in school dinners.<sup>4</sup>

What changed in the 1920s was fundamental. First, there was an increasing conviction that milk was a nutritionally rich and well-balanced food that would help the growth of all children, not just the poor and hungry. This was based on Harold Corry Mann's milk-feeding of children in controlled conditions in a Dr Barnardo's home in London, along with the work of John Boyd Orr and others in Scotland. Another consideration here was the contemporary worry about national fitness, which at the time assumed so great a significance that it seemed to demand novel solutions such as the provision of school milk and welfare milk.

Second, the dairy industry, through the vehicle of the NMPC, began providing milk in the school setting on a much larger scale than had hitherto been possible. This started in Birmingham in 1927, soon followed by Liverpool. Voluntary milk clubs did exist before this, especially in London, but now the organizational and persuasive powers of the Milk Council facilitated a major expansion, with a nationwide promotion of the first Milk in Schools Scheme. The milk was served in one-third of a pint bottles at the standard retail price and therefore was more a matter of convenience for the consumer than a loss-leader by distributors. By 1934 over one million children in England and Wales were involved, a new market of about nine million gallons per annum.

2 D. Marsh and M. Smith, 'Understanding policy networks: towards a dialectical approach', *Political Studies*, 48 (2000), 4–21.

3 A fuller account of the period before 1934 is given in Atkins, 'Early experiments'.

4 For further, general comments on school feeding, see: J. Hurt, 'Feeding the hungry schoolchild in the first half of the twentieth century', in *Diet and Health in Modern Britain*, edited by D. Oddy and D. Miller (London: Croom Helm, 1985), 178–206; J. Burnett, 'The rise and decline of school meals in Britain, 1860–1990', in *The Origins and Development of Food Policies in Europe*, edited by J. Burnett and D. Oddy (London: Leicester University Press, 1994), 55–69; B. Harris, *The Health of the Schoolchild: a History of the School Medical Service in England and Wales* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1995), ch. 7; and J. Welshman, 'School meals and milk in England and Wales, 1906–45', *Medical History*, 41 (1997), 6–29.

### The Milk in Schools Scheme

In 1933 the government began debating the possibility of providing funds to extend the MISS to as many children as possible. The arguments deployed were mostly economic. The minutes of a Cabinet Committee in December noted, for instance, that 'if all 5.5 million [elementary school children] in England and Wales had one third of a pint per day for 200 school days, then the [total] consumption would be 45 million gallons. This would be the equivalent of excluding all foreign cheese.'<sup>5</sup> Imported cheese was under scrutiny because of the government's embarrassment at the continued inflow of Canadian, Australian and New Zealand dairy produce at a time when the British dairy industry was in severe difficulties. School milk was therefore seen as a possible political windfall, a rare opportunity to keep both producers and consumers happy, subject of course to convincing the Treasury that government expenditure was justified.

Various options were discussed in late 1933.<sup>6</sup> The first was to allow the NMPC to continue expanding its scheme, but that was thought to be impracticable for the reasons outlined above. A second was to put Local Education Authorities (LEAs) under a statutory obligation to provide milk at the same price as the NMPC, but political opposition to that was likely to be strong from ratepayers. The third and, from the outset, the most favoured policy was for the government itself to initiate a voluntary scheme at the low price of a halfpenny per one-third of a pint bottle, half of the NMPC's current charge. The vehicles for this would be the newly created Milk Marketing Boards.<sup>7</sup> There was a drawback, however, because the milk industry would not benefit in a half-price scheme above and beyond their present situation until twice the number of children became involved. A substantial government subsidy therefore seemed to be inevitable in the short term.

In November 1933 Sir Horace Wilson was asked to chair an Inter-Departmental Committee on 'the milk and milk products situation'.<sup>8</sup> His report in December favoured the familiar Treasury formula of matching funding.<sup>9</sup> In other words, the cost of the school milk subsidy would be borne equally by the MMB and the public purse, with payments to farmers being lower than the full wholesale price.<sup>10</sup> The MMB was essentially a farmers' organization and therefore profit orientated. It might not have been expected to accept such a deal but from the outset there was political pressure to cooperate. Its Chairman in February of 1934 persuaded his colleagues that, 'not only would the Board ... obtain a better price than if the milk went into butter or cheese, but this gesture would make many friends for the Board'.<sup>11</sup>

Walter Elliot, the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, made a statement on milk policy to the House of Commons on 22 February 1934.<sup>12</sup> He announced a potential crisis in the milk industry and predicted a 20% surplus in the current winter contract period, due to end in March, and a 40% surplus in the summer of 1934, unless appropriate policies could be implemented.<sup>13</sup> He proposed a Milk Act with three major measures. First, there

5 National Archives [NA], MH 79/327, Cabinet, Product Market Supply Committee, 'The Milk and Dairy Produce Situation'.

6 NA, ED 24/1367, 'Milk in Schools'.

7 The Milk Marketing Scheme of England and Wales began in October 1933, with later starts in Scotland.

8 He was the government's Chief Industrial Adviser.

9 NA, CAB/24/247, C.P. 47 (34).

10 NA, T/161/830, S39098/03/1, 'Memorandum on the Question of the Contribution from Public Funds in Respect of Milk Supplied to Schools under an Approved Publicity programme', A.W. Street, 22 March 1934.

11 NA, JV 7/190.

12 'Surplus milk', *The Times*, 23 February 1934, 14g.

13 Elliot was Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries 1932–36, Secretary of State for Scotland 1936–38, and Minister of Health 1938–40.

was to be £3–3.5 million of government money over two years to subsidize the manufacture of butter and cheese from milk. This was seen to be vital in order to mop up some of the likely surplus. Second, £750,000 over four years would be dedicated to encouraging ‘a pure milk supply’, because diseases spread by milk, especially tuberculosis, were on the political agenda at this time. Third, £1 million over two years was to be allocated to a milk publicity fund.<sup>14</sup> This was mainly to pay for the provision of milk in schools, offices and factories, and also in time the MMB initiated a publicity campaign that included press advertising, posters, films, milk bars and shop-window displays.<sup>15</sup>

In the months before the publication of a draft of the Milk Bill on 1 June 1934, the MAF sought a strong committee to draw up a detailed plan for the publicity monies in the Milk Act and to oversee its implementation.<sup>16</sup> There were problems in finding people who were not in some way tainted by previous advocacy of school milk.<sup>17</sup> As an interim measure, in April, advice on the way forward was taken jointly from John Boyd Orr, the well-known Director of the Rowett Research Institute and a frequent adviser to government on food and agricultural issues, and Frank Pick of the London Passenger Transport Board, an administrator of repute.<sup>18</sup>

The results of this consultation were disappointing, in the view of civil servants.<sup>19</sup> In his report, Orr was in favour, controversially, of making milk free for all children in all schools, not a strategy that was contemplated at this time in Whitehall.<sup>20</sup> He also suggested a programme of propaganda in mines and factories but wanted the majority of the money spent on school milk. At two pages of typescript, his report was thin and lacked any fresh ideas. Frank Pick’s contribution was fuller but it lacked gravitas.<sup>21</sup> His suggestion to improve cookery in order to increase the role of milk in the diet was of no interest to the MAF, who then complained that ‘the Pick-Orr report contains no useful recommendations and the Ministry ... are forced back on the scheme for cheap milk for consumption at schools as the only practicable scheme’.<sup>22</sup>

By the end of June the main heads of the MISS had been settled between the MAF, the Board of Education and the MMB. A conference of LEAs and teachers’ representatives was called at which a target was announced of reaching four million children in elementary schools in Britain as a whole, approximately two-thirds of the total.<sup>23</sup> Bottles, it was agreed, were the best way of delivering the milk, for both teachers and the trade, although the National Union of Teachers did speak out about the difficulties generally that they saw in the implementation of the scheme.

14 Anon., ‘Milk policy: new government scheme’, *Lancet*, i (1934), 491.

15 Statement by the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries in the House of Commons on Thursday, 22 February 1934, *Parliamentary Papers*, xxi, 1933–34 [Cmd 4519], 565; Milk Act (1934) 24 & 25 Geo 5, Section 11.

16 This committee had been given clearance in principle by the Cabinet on 21 February 1934, ‘in order to safeguard the position of the Chancellor of the Exchequer and his warnings as to the danger of providing for expenditure by the government on milk for schools’. NA, CAB 23/78, 11 (34) 8. The first, informal draft of the Bill had been produced on 17 March.

17 John Boyd Orr, who was eventually nominated as a member of the Committee, did not fit this description. He was involved in various guises in school milk politics.

18 NA, MH 56/106, copy of letter from H.E. Dale (MAF) to the MMB, 21 April 1934.

19 NA, T/161/830, S39098/03/1, Morris to Phillips, 25 May 1934.

20 NA, ED 50/81, Maudslay, 15 May 1934.

21 NA, T/161/830, S39098/03/1. ‘Notes for a Report Dealing with Surplus Milk’, F. Pick, 16 May 1934.

22 NA, T/161/830, S39098/03/1, Barnes, 25 May 1934.

23 NA, MH 56/104, Maudslay (Board of Education) to Maclachlan (Ministry of Health), 20 June 1934; NA, JV 7/190, ‘Report on Proceedings at a Conference to Discuss the Provision of Milk to School Children at Reduced Rates Held on Tuesday, 17th July, 1934’; NA, MH 56/104, ‘Report on proceedings at a conference to discuss the provision of milk to school children at reduced rates’; NA, ED 50/81, Strong to Maudslay, 19 July 1934, ‘Summary of Conference about Milk in Schools Scheme at Milk Marketing Board’.

After the embarrassment of the informal Pick–Orr consultation, a more solid Advisory Committee on Milk Publicity was eventually appointed in August 1934, at the time when the Act came into force.<sup>24</sup> This was an MMB committee, and was made up entirely of independent members. Lord Astor was in the chair, supported by Sir Harold Hartley (London Midland Scottish Railway Company), Alderman Arthur Jenkins (Monmouthshire County Council), Frederick Mander (General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers), John Boyd Orr (Rowett Research Institute), and Ethel Wood (Food Council).<sup>25</sup> They approved the outline of the MISS that was presented to them and the imprimatur of the MAF came a matter of days later for the programme to go ahead.<sup>26</sup>

Since the lead in the MISS was taken by the MAF, subsidiary roles were assigned to the Board of Education and the Ministry of Health. The Board reacted slowly because of a dispute with the Treasury over the funding of its separate free milk scheme, and it waited until August to decide on whether to encourage LEAs to adopt the Milk in Schools scheme.<sup>27</sup> After some debate, its Circular, issued in September, took a positive line on the Board's own area of responsibility, milk for necessitous children, and expressed the 'hope that Local Education Authorities will be prepared, in appropriate cases ... to provide milk free to children who are found to need it and be unable to pay for it'.<sup>28</sup>

The launch in October was not an unqualified success. Advance press statements from the MMB 'were ignored by practically the whole of the press'.<sup>29</sup> Elliot's visit to a school on the first day of the scheme was, however, planned as a 'photo opportunity', and this caught the attention of the public, as did radio broadcasts by Lord Astor and Walter Elliot.

The MISS, which rolled out in October 1934, immediately reached 2.6 million children in England and Wales, and 300,000 in Scotland, significantly more than the combined total of the former NMPC scheme and free milk provision by LEAs under the Education Acts but less than the planned target.<sup>30</sup> In state elementary schools, 48.7% of pupils were involved from the outset, rising to 55.6% in 1938 (table 1). Since over 90% of LEAs and 80% of schools were participating throughout the period, it seems that it was the choices made by the children and their parents that explain the low take-up and not issues on the supply side.

By 1939 154 LEAs were providing both meals and milk for their children, while three gave meals only and 121 milk only.<sup>31</sup> This is symptomatic of a drift in the second half of the 1930s away from solid school meals towards liquid milk. Whereas 36.6% of free and paying school meals in 1927–28 had been milk, that proportion grew to approximately 80% by 1938–39, with the number of solid meals stagnating.<sup>32</sup> The growing faith in the

24 Royal Assent for the Act was received on 31 July.

25 They coopted W.P. Hildred (MAF), E.A. Hitchman (Ministry of Labour), Mr Maudslay and Dr Glover (Board of Education), Dr Magee (Ministry of Health), Professor H.D. Kay (National Institute for Research in Dairying), Ben Hinds (Vice-Chairman of the MMB), and three observers for Scotland: J.A. Langford, P.L. Kinlay and H. Crowe. NA, MH 56/105.

26 NA, JV 7/190, 'Scheme for the Supply of Milk in Schools in England and Wales at Reduced Rates', 10 August 1934. No objections were lodged by the Treasury. See NA, T/161/830, S39098/03/1.

27 NA, ED 50/81, Maudslay to Secretary and Chief Medical Officer (CMO) of the Board of Education, 23 July 1934.

28 NA, ED 50/81; Board of Education, 'Provision of Milk for School Children', Circular 1437 (London, 1934).

29 NA, JV 7/190.

30 In the spring of 1935 there were 2.4 million state elementary pupils participating, including 260,000 receiving their milk free of charge, and a further 15,000 from voluntary funds. In nursery schools, special schools and secondary schools 153,000 children were also in the MISS, with a further 23,000 who were supplied with free milk. In addition, there were 113,000 children overall who paid for milk outside the MISS.

31 CMO of the Board of Education, *The Health of the School Child, 1938* (London: HMSO, 1939).

32 Harris, *Health of the Schoolchild*, 123.

Table 1. The Milk in Schools Scheme: participating schools and pupils at the elementary level

	England and Wales		Scotland		
	Schools (%)	Pupils (%)	Milk (million gallons)	Pupils (%)	Milk (million gallons)
1935		48.7	23		3
1936	81.7	45.6	23	42.2	3
1937	83.3	49.2	25	45.6	4
1938	85.2	53.8	26	47.2	4
1939	86.9	55.6	22	24.4	2
1940		50.1	27	49.0	4
1941		77.9	38	61.1	5
1942		76.5	42	67.4	5
1943		76.4	43	67.2	5
1944		76.0	41	67.5	5
1945		95.3	43	64.1	5

Source: Central Statistical Office, *Monthly Digest of Statistics* and *Annual Abstract of Statistics*.

nutritional and health-giving qualities of milk is part of the explanation for this shift, coupled with lower overheads for the authorities.<sup>33</sup>

### The Extension Acts

The 1934 Milk Act was a temporary measure that was due to run out after 18 months. It seems that Walter Elliot was initially confident that he would be able to replace it within that period of time by comprehensive legislation that would provide a long-term solution to many of the economic and health-related problems that faced the milk industry. It was with some discomfiture, therefore, that the government was forced to return to Parliament for further extensions in 1936, 1937, 1938 and 1939.<sup>34</sup> It was not until the 1944 Education Act that a satisfactory permanent framework for school milk was found.<sup>35</sup>

The first postponement was caused by Elliot's appointment of a Reorganization Commission for Milk in February 1935 to review the Milk Marketing Scheme and make suggestions for improvements. Until this group reported, eventually, in November 1936, plans for amended legislation had to be deferred. In the meantime Elliot asked for, and won, Cabinet approval for an extension of the Milk Act, for 18 months until September 1937.<sup>36</sup> He acceded to a request from the Board of Education to add a clause in the Bill to allow free school milk for poor children, not just those in a bad physical condition. The Board had also wanted to allow special schemes such as milk for the under-fives and nursing and expectant mothers but the Treasury refused to underwrite this policy, the Chancellor, Neville Chamberlain, articulating a 'slippery slope' argument:

<sup>33</sup> The cost of the provision of school meals did increase in the second half of the 1930s but the increment would have been greater if solid meals had become as widespread as milk. Harris, *Health of the Schoolchild*, 93.

<sup>34</sup> Milk (Extension of Temporary Provisions) Act 1936; Milk (Amendment) Act 1937; Milk (Extension and Amendment) Act 1938; Milk Industry Act 1939.

<sup>35</sup> Section 49 provided the power for regulations.

<sup>36</sup> NA, MH 79/328, Elliot to Kingsley Wood, 19 December 1935.

There are ideas about now on the subject of nutrition which give rise to serious misgivings in my mind and unless we are careful the development of these ideas may involve serious political risks and possibly unlimited expenditure. The ideas and their exponents are such, moreover, as to make me apprehensive lest a moderate Government Scheme should rather whet their appetite for more than satisfying the present demands.<sup>37</sup>

Despite such negative internal messages in Whitehall, the Milk Reorganization Commission recommended an increase in the amount of welfare milk, and the White Paper that followed in 1937 did at least give some hope of implementation but it was again blocked in the argument about the next extension measure, the Milk (Amendment) Bill, and again in 1938 after the failure in parliament of the Milk Industry Bill.<sup>38</sup>

Getting the Extension Acts passed was relatively straightforward, despite opposition from the Labour Party on the grounds that the government was ducking the need for a radical reform to the milk industry.<sup>39</sup> The sharper challenge came from beyond Westminster. The MMB was angered, for instance, by the 1937 Act because 'it is unfair to expect the dairy farmers of the country to undertake a social service'.<sup>40</sup> Its point was that there was now less surplus milk chasing a market, as evidenced by a 20% increase in the manufacturing price since 1934, and therefore the MISS was relying on the goodwill of farmers rather than a sound economic argument. The following year, 1938, they did win an increase in the annual government subsidy to the MISS from £500,000 to £750,000.<sup>41</sup> This concession was wrung from Elliot's successor as Minister of Agriculture, William Morrison, who had been surprised by the widespread hostility to his compendium Milk Industry Bill.<sup>42</sup> Its passage in Parliament had been threatened by MPs and peers supporting special interest groups such as the distributors and producer-retailers. Welfare milk in the Special Areas of high unemployment and school milk were among the targets of this guerrilla action.<sup>43</sup>

### Lobbying and political debate

In the 1930s *The Times* newspaper played a prominent role in the debate on school and welfare milk. It generally supported the line taken by the National Government but occasionally argued for greater expenditure. In February 1934 an article gave backing to the idea of a state-sponsored school milk programme, one week before Elliot's announcement to the House of Commons. The newspaper preferred this to either of the alternatives: subsidizing the general retail price or mounting an expensive publicity campaign.<sup>44</sup> In October of the same year an editorial praised Elliot's policy and excoriated the 'socialist

37 NA, MH 79/347, 360, 361.

38 'Milk: report of the Reorganization Commission for Milk' [Chairman: Arthur E. Cutforth], *Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Economic Series*, 44 (1936), 281; Milk Policy, *Parliamentary Papers*, xxi, 1936-7 [Cmd 5533], 699-706; Milk (Amendment) Bill, Memorandum on Financial Resolution, *Parliamentary Papers*, xxi, 1936-7 [Cmd 5506], 695-97; A Bill to Make Provision for the Better Organization of the Milk Industry, *Parliamentary Papers*, iv, 1938-9 [33], 93; NA, MH 79/365.

39 'Milk Subsidy. Case for Extension', *The Times*, 18 February 1936, 7g-8c; 'The milk scheme. Twelve months extension', *The Times*, 6 July 1937, 9d.

40 NA, JV 7/192.

41 *Ibid.*

42 The Milk Industry Bill (1938) was based on a White Paper from the year before. It was a complex measure that would have fundamentally restructured the dairy industry, including the replacement of the MMB, a farmers' organization, by a government-sponsored Milk Commission. Other items that concern us here related to the permanent status of the MISS, the extension of welfare milk and the pasteurization of milk. As one of the largest items on his agenda, defeat on this Bill was an embarrassment for Morrison.

43 NA, JV 7/192, Morrison to Baxter, 12 September 1938.

44 'Surplus milk and under consumption', *The Times*, 15 February 1934, 15c.

critics of the Milk Act, who complained that a great opportunity for constructive humanitarianism had been lost'.<sup>45</sup> The writer saw school milk in a broader context of national fitness and was certain that 'no effort should be spared to link agricultural policy with efforts to create the necessary changes in public taste'. This theme of state-inspired bodily efficiency was taken up again in 1936. A pair of editorials in February and March of that year argued for a permanent nutrition policy that would include the wider provision of reduced-price milk for mothers and children under five, and school children from poor families: 'everything ... goes to show that the opportunities for beginning a well considered food policy are very numerous and not very expensive'.<sup>46</sup> Interestingly, this editorial line of *The Times* had something in common with views of the Labour Party, which wanted extended powers for local authorities to provide a full service of school dinners and milk.<sup>47</sup>

The lobbying of ministers by non-governmental organizations began as soon as information about the Milk Bill started circulating in early 1934 (table 2). The Children's Minimum Committee (CMC), which was formed specifically for this purpose by the National Council for Equal Citizenship and the Family Endowment Society, had as its main objective the supply of milk to schoolchildren in one-third of a pint portions.<sup>48</sup> Led by Eleanor Rathbone, an Independent MP, the CMC was said to represent 'every shade of political opinion in Parliament' and to be 'supported by nearly every great nationally organised society concerned with the welfare of children'.<sup>49</sup> This diversity proved to be a weakness. At a meeting in the House of Commons on 15 February 'to press upon the government certain measures for improving the health of children' it was admitted from the chair that 'they were not unanimous at present on the question of payment by the children's parents for the milk. They were urging that the milk should be available for all children and the question of payment by those who could afford it could be left over'.<sup>50</sup>

Similar, ineffective tactics were evident when a CMC deputation was received in March 1934 by the Prime Minister (Ramsay MacDonald), the Minister of Health, the Minister of Labour, the Secretary of State for Scotland, and the Parliamentary Secretaries to the Board of Education and the MAF.<sup>51</sup> Early in the meeting there came the candid admission from the CMC side that 'many of us in our time have had very considerable experience of different sorts of campaigns and we know how easy it is to give an appearance of a considerable amount of public opinion when really there is not a great deal behind it. We are many of us old hands at that particular game.' But they went on to assure the ministers that 'in this case the campaign has not been artificially stimulated. It has not

45 'Cheap milk', *The Times*, 27 September 1934, 13b.

46 'Diet and maintenance', *The Times*, 13 February 1936, 13b; 'A food policy', *The Times*, 31 March 1936, 17b-c; 'Children's milk', *The Times*, 8 March 1937, 20e.

47 'Equality in education. Policy of Labour Party', *The Times*, 16 July 1934, 19f. For a range of views, see the Second Reading debate of the Milk Bill in Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*. 290 (1933-34) cols 1124-1223. MPs were principally concerned about the issue of whether school milk should be free or at what level the subsidy should be fixed. Other issues raised included the uneven regional profile of the NMPC scheme and the quality of the milk used.

48 'Milk and health', *The Times*, 27 April 1934, 9c. Other aims included making it compulsory for Local Authorities rather than voluntary as at present to provide school meals; increased allowances for children of the unemployed; and the building of more council housing estates and provision of better rent rebates.

49 'The national physique. More milk for children', *The Times*, 13 November 1936, 12b. Rathbone was also a campaigner on family allowances.

50 The meeting was on 15 February 1934. NA, JV 7/190; Anon, 'Surplus milk for school children', *Lancet*, i (1934), 405; Anon, 'Safe milk for school children', *Lancet*, i (1934), 526; 'A milk ration for children', *The Times*, 16 February 1934, 19e.

51 NA, MH 56/106. 'Notes of a Deputation Received by the Prime Minister from the Children's Minimum Council on Monday, 12th March, 1934'.

Table 2. Formal lobbies in the 1930s concerning school and welfare milk

Lobbying group	Date	Lobbied	Comments
Children's Minimum Committee	February/March 1934	Prime Minister, Education, Labour	Deputations, free milk
People's League of Health	April 1934	Health	Deputation, need for pasteurization
Joint Tuberculosis Council	April 1934	MMB	Letter, health risks
Royal College of Physicians	April 1934	Education	Letter, health risks
National Union of Teachers	June 1934	Education	Deputation, worries about role of teachers
Society of Medical Officers of Health	June/July 1934	Health, Education, MAF	Letter then deputation. Must secure safe supplies of milk
Society of Medical Officers of Health	June 1935	Education	Deputation, more free milk
Children's Minimum Committee	December 1935	Prime Minister	Deputation, cheap milk for mothers and under-fives
Children's Minimum Council	July 1936	Health	Deputation
National Birthday Trust	May/June 1936	Health	Letters
Standing Joint Committee of Industrial Women's Organizations	March 1936	Health	Deputation, more free milk for nursing mothers and one pint daily for schoolchildren
People's League of Health	July 1936	Health	Deputation
National Federation of Women's Institutes	January, March 1937	Health	Deputations, price of milk
Children's Minimum Council	July 1937	Health	Deputation, milk for under-fives
National Federation of Women's Institutes	October 1938	Health	Deputation
Children's Minimum Council	March 1939	Education	Deputation, more free school milk

Sources: National Archives, ED 50/81; JV/7/190; MH 55/639; MH 55/642; MH 55/649; MH 55/688; MH 56/104; MH 56/106; MH 56/214; Wellcome Contemporary Medical Archives Centre, SA/BMA/F105; *The Times*, various dates.

been required to be kept going by propaganda and the only function of our Committee has been, so to speak, to canalise and focus a demand which was already there.' Such honesty did not have the immediate effect intended.

The CMC also separately lobbied the Board of Education, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Labour.<sup>52</sup> Among the strongest of their voices was that of Sir Edward Grigg. As the Chairman of the first Milk Reorganization Commission in 1933, his opinions carried some weight but on this occasion his demand for school milk to be free, universal and compulsory for local authorities, including holidays, seemed impracticable to the listening politicians. Grigg's plan had earlier been costed at £8 million and this prompted Sir Henry Pelham, Permanent Secretary to the Board of Education, to complain to the Parliamentary Secretary that 'the deputation which you received in March from the Children's Minimum Committee was not an impressive affair'.<sup>53</sup>

Further deputations on the subject of welfare milk from the CMC, now renamed the Children's Minimum Council after a relaunch with funds from an anonymous donor, were

<sup>52</sup> *The Times*, 24 March 1934, 14b; *The Times*, 27 March 1934, 16d.

<sup>53</sup> *The Times*, 11 July 1933, 9c; NA, ED 24/1367, EHP to Parliamentary Secretary, 8 December 1934.

more favourably received by the Ministry of Health in 1937 and again in 1939.<sup>54</sup> It seems that lobbying made little impact in Whitehall in 1934 but messages about welfare milk were increasingly heard from 1935 onwards by the second National Government, if not immediately acted on.

The People's League of Health, a rather different campaigning organization, also lobbied hard on school milk in the 1930s.<sup>55</sup> Its emphasis was on the disease-spreading potential of the milk, especially the risks posed by bovine tuberculosis, and its members would no doubt have been conscious of the irony that new consumers were being exposed for the first time to such a risk.<sup>56</sup> Their first tactic was to send a deputation of 25 senior medical and public health experts to visit the Ministry of Health in April 1934, 'for the purpose of urging upon the government the need for efficient protection of children from dangers of TB and other milk-borne diseases'.<sup>57</sup> Second, they published a series of reports, in which they stressed the need for the milk to be pasteurized or, if not, then at least Certified or Grade A (Tuberculin Tested).<sup>58</sup> Their 1936 report was especially telling because it was based on survey data. We shall discuss it further below.

There were other lobbying groups, for instance the National Federation of Women's Institutes and the National Conference of Labour Women, also campaigning for cheap milk for children under school age.<sup>59</sup> As a whole, lobbying did pay dividends. In 1936, for instance, Cutforth commented that there had been a 're-orientation of public opinion' and that school and welfare milk had 'come to be regarded by the public mainly as a step towards a healthier nation'. The existence of the MISS had helped but there is little doubt that political campaigning had been instrumental in building the 'steady pressure for the extension of the plan to other groups, such as nursing and expectant mothers and children under school age ... as a desirable social service'.<sup>60</sup>

### **Resistance and compromise: the Treasury, the Board of Education and the Milk Marketing Board**

The MAF's principal purpose in initiating the MISS was to defuse the distress and anger of farmers over cheap imports of butter and cheese by providing new markets for their liquid milk. Neither the Treasury nor the Board of Education was enthusiastic, and the MMB, which had to administer the scheme, was also cool.

In essence, the Treasury was less sympathetic to the problem of surplus milk than the MAF: 'if ... farmers insist on producing more milk, then on their head be it: the state

54 'Milk for necessitous children. New campaign started', *The Times*, 15 July 1936, 13b; The Children's Minimum Council (1937); 'Milk for young children', *The Times*, 29 July 1937, 9c; 'Under-nourished children', *The Times*, 28 March 1939, 16a.

55 M. Barnett, 'The People's League of Health and the campaign against bovine tuberculosis in the 1930s', in *Food, Science, Policy and Regulation in the Twentieth Century: International and Comparative Perspectives*, edited by D. Smith and J. Phillips (London: Routledge, 2000), 69–82.

56 *The Times*, 10 April 1934, 11c.

57 Wellcome Contemporary Medical Archives Centre, SA/BMA/F105; NA, ED 50/81.

58 People's League of Health, *Milk for School Children: Report of a Special Committee of the Medical, Science and Veterinary Councils of the People's League of Health (Inc)* (London, 1934).

59 'Power of Women's Institutes', *The Times*, 3 June 1937, 11f; 'A children's charter', *The Times*, 10 April 1937, 9a. For more on the context of women's politics, see: P. Thane, 'Women in the British Labour Party and the construction of state welfare, 1906–1939', in *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States*, edited by S. Koven and S. Michel (New York: Routledge, 1993), 343–377; P.M. Graves, *Labour Women: Women in British Working-Class Politics, 1918–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

60 [Cutforth], 'Milk', 204.

cannot pay towards any resulting “loss”.<sup>61</sup> They also foresaw a danger that in two years, at the end of the period allowed for in the Milk Bill, ‘public opinion will clamour for continued supplies to children at manufactured rates for ever, and the [Milk] Boards will say “as you force this on us, you must share it forever”’.

In addition, the Treasury’s opening bid was to insist that all 5.7 million elementary pupils in England and Wales should be supplied because, in its view, the MMB could not have sold its surplus milk at the full retail price and so was not incurring any loss in the MISS above the manufacturing price.<sup>62</sup> There was some dispute about this, with A.W. Street of the Markets Division of the MAF claiming that, on the contrary, the Wilson Committee’s insistence on matching funding meant that, under prevailing market conditions, the MMB would make less by supplying school milk than it would have done by making butter and cheese.<sup>63</sup> The size of this gap in the balance sheet was unknown because it was impossible to say how much of the milk sold in schools might have been disposed of otherwise. There may have been some substitution at home but this was not measurable, and so could not be included in the equation.<sup>64</sup> To support his argument, Street tried to persuade Sir Horace Wilson that the farmers would be out of pocket but this was quickly overridden when C.L. Stocks, Assistant Secretary to the Treasury, wrote to Sir Frederick Phillips, Under-Secretary, that he had spoken ‘to Sir Horace Wilson ... and he showed signs of wanting to concede all Mr Street’s claim! I therefore arranged that Sir Horace should be regarded as not having been consulted....’<sup>65</sup>

Even the Treasury was not immune to practical politics, however. The government needed the cooperation of the MMB to create an exemplar of the new systems arising from the Agricultural Marketing Act, but it was reliably informed ‘that the scheme is not popular with the Milk Board and that there would be unfortunate reactions if it broke down through lack of co-operation between the Milk Board and the government’.<sup>66</sup> Therefore, eventually compromises were proposed for the way that the Treasury would recompense the MMB, based on either reduced flat rates of payment or so-called ‘tapered rates’.<sup>67</sup> The latter sought to take into account both the unknown proportion of children who might wish to take school milk and also a discount that the public could reasonably expect on the purchase of milk if the scheme was especially successful. The tapered payment finally agreed was that, on the first 18 million gallons in the scheme, the MMB and the Treasury shared equally half of the loss incurred by selling the milk at half price. After that the Treasury paid 25%, up to a maximum of 36 million gallons, and its overall liability was capped at £430,000.<sup>68</sup>

The other major player, the Board of Education, was hostile to the compulsory participation of children in any scheme for which they had to pay: ‘many parents would object, and we should either have to establish a milk “means test” or else give the milk away to the children whether their parents would pay or not rather than pour it down the drain’.<sup>69</sup> Until a change of policy in 1934, the Board also had misgivings about any extension of the free milk given to schoolchildren under the Education Acts: ‘if milk free for all, why not

61 NA, T/161/830, S/39098/03/1, ‘Milk Publicity’, C.L. Stocks, 15 March 1934.

62 NA, MH 56/106, Maclachlan to CMO and to Permanent Secretary of Ministry of Health, 15 March 1934.

63 NA, T/161/830, S39098/03/1, C.L. Stocks to Sir F Phillips, 14 March 1934.

64 NA, T/161/830, S39098/03/1, ‘Milk Publicity’, C.L. Stocks, 15 March 1934.

65 NA, T/161/830, S39098/03/1, Stocks to Phillips, 19 March 1934.

66 NA, T/161/830, S39098/03/1, Phillips to Fergusson, 27 March 1934.

67 NA, JV 7/190, MMB Report Number 21, ‘Suggested Schemes of the Ministry of Agriculture Regarding Milk for School Children’, 11 June 1934.

68 NA, T/161/830, S39098/03/1, Barnes to Morris, 25 May 1934; Phillips to Hopkins, 12 June 1934.

69 NA, ED 24/1367, ‘Milk in Schools Proposal’, 13 December 1933.

boots and clothes free-for-all?'.<sup>70</sup> In this they were supported by the MAF, who warned against likely pressure to provide cheap milk for expectant mothers and children under three years of age. In the MAF's opinion a 'scheme of this sort would give rise to greater administrative difficulties and would trench on the social services and the Ministry suggest that it may be expedient to allocate the greater part of the £380,000 per annum to the cheap school milk proposals so as to avoid greater evils'.<sup>71</sup> The evils referred to here were the administrative and political problems associated with welfare milk, and not the evils of child poverty.

### Criticisms, problems of implementation and foci of resistance

During the formulation and implementation of the MISS there were a number of problems, and criticisms were plentiful, sometimes so fundamental that they constituted sites of resistance to the scheme. First among these was the reluctance of the retail milk trade to be involved. In September 1934 a headline in the *Daily Herald* declared that 'They want more for children's milk. Distributors say grant of £500,000 is not enough.' This was a report that the distributors were holding up the expansion of the MISS because their payments were inadequate.<sup>72</sup> Part of the problem had been that the Central Milk Distributive Committee claimed that it had not been given an opportunity to comment on the scheme by either the MAF or the MMB.<sup>73</sup> The trade eventually settled for the price offered in 1934, although their greater militancy later, in 1938, did force the MAF and MMB to offer an increased margin. This particular bargain was struck by William Morrison, who was desperate to save his Milk Industry Bill from oblivion and also his own political credibility. Its passage in Parliament had been threatened by MPs and peers supporting special interest groups such as the distributors and producer-retailers. School milk and welfare milk in the Special Development Areas of high unemployment were the principal targets of this guerrilla action.<sup>74</sup>

Irrespective of politics and deals in London, distributors at the local level were not obliged to supply school milk. The indifference of many is one reason for the geographically very uneven adoption of the scheme. Schools in rural areas were the slowest to join. Sometimes this was due to the available sources not being appropriate, for instance where the local dairymen could not afford to invest in the machinery for bottling at the one-third of a pint size or they were unable to supply milk of high enough quality.<sup>75</sup> Sometimes the distribution allowance to retailers was said not to be worth their while where distances were great.<sup>76</sup> Most rural suppliers were small producer-retailers and this group as a whole had a tense relationship with the MMB over a range of issues such as record keeping and the payment of levies. From time to time supplies were withheld in protest and in 1937–38

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> NA, T/161/830, S39098/03/1, Barnes, 25 May 1934.

<sup>72</sup> 7 September 1934.

<sup>73</sup> NA, JV 7/190, MMB Board Report No. 28, 12 September 1934.

<sup>74</sup> NA, JV 7/192, Morrison to Baxter, 12 September 1938.

<sup>75</sup> Hurt, 'Feeding the Hungry Schoolchild', 190.

<sup>76</sup> CMO of the Board of Education, *The Health of the School Child, 1936* (London: HMSO, 1937). Comment by Dr W. Taylor, Shropshire School Medical Officer. In 1936 the Leicestershire Agricultural Education Department observed that: 'There are now 74 elementary schools in Leicestershire in which it has been found impossible to find a suitable supplier. It is difficult to persuade farmers in rural areas to install the necessary equipment for so small a financial return, and, as in most of these schools children over 11 years have been transferred to central schools, the numbers remaining are so small as to render the scheme unprofitable to the supplier.' NA, MH 79/347, C. Maudslay, 'Report of Investigation of the MISS, 9th to 21st March, 1936', 17 April 1936.

the political issue came to a head as rural distributors campaigned for a larger distribution allowance.<sup>77</sup>

A second and telling criticism of the MISS was that it did not address the real issues of poverty and malnutrition. This was because the milk was still relatively expensive for poor families, even at the subsidized rate of a halfpenny per bottle. The government subsidy was therefore said to be benefiting the higher income groups. Dr T.D. Llewellyn, School Medical Officer of Port Talbot, explained the situation:

The greatest variation in consumption is amongst those children who have to pay for their milk. The twopence-halfpenny is not always available on the Monday morning when the child sets off for school; and one must remember that many of these are children of parents whose family income is such that they fall just outside the scale of income which decides whether the milk is to be given free or not.<sup>78</sup>

Related to this was the claim that school milk was subject to the substitution effect. That happened where children were given less milk and other foods at home because they had access to a cheap source at school, with the saving being spent on other members of the family and on non-food items.<sup>79</sup>

Another point was that the one-third of a pint a day simply was not enough to make a difference in the nutritional status of the very poorest children.<sup>80</sup> Dr Rolleston of Rutland, for instance, commented in 1936 that ‘personally I have not observed any benefit from the limited scheme in force in this county. The amount of milk is too small.’<sup>81</sup> His colleague, Dr C.B. Moss-Blundell of Huntingdonshire, agreed:

Much has been talked about the supply of a third of a pint of milk to school children as though it were going to solve the question of malnutrition. It is a start and it is something, and that is all that can be said of it. One pint a day might make an appreciable difference, but it is the general standard of living which must be raised if one wishes to raise the standard of nutrition.<sup>82</sup>

It is worth noting that some parents and teachers in wealthy areas did not think that the scheme would benefit their children. Cecil Maudslay in 1936 found this to be true of Peterborough, and he complained that ‘it does not seem to be universally recognised that the Scheme is designed for all children in grant-earning schools, and not only for poor children’.<sup>83</sup>

Third, there was a series of criticisms of the structure of the MISS. Its limitation to elementary school pupils was one such, the critics wanting an extension of the cheap (or free) milk principle to children under school age and also to pregnant and nursing mothers. Apart from the additional milk required, this was ruled out because home delivery would have been necessary, adding greatly to the costs.<sup>84</sup>

Another comment was that school holidays and weekends were blank periods. The long summer break was thought to be especially problematic for malnourished children, whose health might be adversely affected. The solution adopted by the NMPC during the

77 In 1938 the government did eventually agree to increase the allowance from 6d to 8d per gallon. *The Times*, 25 October 1937, 22a; *The Times*, 14 January 1938, 7b; *The Times*, 28 March 1938, 20b.

78 CMO of the Board of Education, *The Health of the School Child, 1936* (London: HMSO, 1937).

79 J.J. Paterson, ‘A candid criticism of the school children’s milk scheme’, *Medical Officer*, 52 (1934), 183–84.

80 It has been argued that school milk made a negative contribution to the overall nutrition of children because its introduction gave many LEAs an excuse to reduce their provision of school dinners. See Peter Atkins, ‘Fattening children or fattening farmers? School milk in Britain, 1921–41’ (forthcoming 2005).

81 CMO of the Board of Education, *Health of the School Child, 1936*.

82 *Ibid.*

83 NA, MH 79/347, C. Maudslay, ‘Report of Investigation of the MISS, 9th to 21st March, 1936’, 17 April 1936.

84 NA, MH 56/106, Maclachlan to Newman and Robinson, 9 March 1934.

operation of its scheme was every July to send a printed reminder to parents asking them to order extra milk during the holidays.<sup>85</sup> There is no record of how this message was received but, even if parents had accepted it at face value and acted, there was of course no guarantee that children would drink the milk and no monitoring procedure to check their nutritional status before and after the vacation.

Later in the 1930s some boroughs did provide milk during the holidays, either in schools or in other public places such as parks.<sup>86</sup> This was usually only for children receiving it free on doctor's orders but in towns such as Rotherham and Middlesbrough the take-up by children was good.<sup>87</sup> In Glasgow the local authority rented four shops as children's 'milk bars' and sold milk in the holidays at the same price as in school. Some 110,000 handbills were circulated and over 300,000 bottles sold.<sup>88</sup>

The additional burden placed on the teacher by the scheme does not seem to have been a major issue, possibly because many had voluntarily run milk clubs under the NMPC scheme that had operated up to 1934. The National Union of Teachers was concerned initially but its fears were based on a misconception that teachers might be expected to boil the milk before giving it out to the children.<sup>89</sup> The delivery of the milk in bottled form with straws seems to have overcome worries about spillages, leaving only the added responsibility of collecting the children's halfpennies.

A fourth problem was that many children did not like milk and preferred not to join the scheme. A 1934 survey (table 3) asked why children in London did not take school milk. The answers were interesting, although they are only indicative since there is no way of checking the quality of the data and no details have survived on how they were collected. There is evidence that the novelty of school milk wore off quickly and could not be restored, even by trials in 1936 of flavoured milks.<sup>90</sup>

Table 3. Principal reasons (percentages of respondents) given for why children in London did not participate in the Milk in Schools Scheme

Distaste for milk	33.5
Poverty of parents	25.2
Children have enough nourishment at home	24.4
Milk spoils appetite	4.2
Indifference of parents or children, or money spent on sweets	4.0
Parents object on principle	2.5
Children object to cold milk	2.1
Cod liver oil or school dinner instead	1.8
Children consider themselves too old	1.7
Milk causes sickness, or against doctor's orders	0.5

Source: LCC, 'Report for the Year 1934 of the School Medical Officer', in *Annual Report of the Council, 1934. Volume III (Part II): Public Health* (London, 1935).

85 NA, MAF 52/7, TD/428B, Minutes of NMPC Advertising and Milk in Schools Committee, 21 July 1931.

86 The LCC experimented in 1937–38 with providing milk for children in public parks. *The Times*, 23 June 1937, 13a; *The Times*, 26 November 1937, 13d; *The Times*, 9 March 1938, 12d.

87 CMO of the Board of Education, *The Health of the School Child, 1937* (London: HMSO, 1938).

88 NA, T/161/831, S/39098/03/5, 'Milk Acts, 1934 and 1936. Extension of Milk in Schools Scheme. Children's Milk Bars'.

89 This may have been based on reading a letter in *The Times*, 21 March 1934, 10e, where Dr Esther Carling suggested milk should be delivered to schools in churns rather than in bottles so that the milk could be boiled to make it safe.

90 NA, JV 7/191, 'The Hannah Dairy Research Institute. Milk in Schools Scheme. Flavoured Milk Experiment', 3 July 1936; JV 7/192, MMB Advisory Committee, 29 June 1937.

Fifth, some schools refused to join the MISS because they had become accustomed to using dried milk or patent products such as Cow and Gate Chocolate Milk, and Colact. One estimate in 1935 had as many as 5% of children provided in this way rather than by a daily bottle delivery.<sup>91</sup> Horlick's Malted Milk was especially popular in rural areas, where the company had conducted 'vigorous propaganda'. Heating apparatus was provided by Horlick's, and many children were said to appreciate the warm drink and also to find the flavour more palatable than that of ordinary milk. For every four tins ordered, one extra was provided free of charge, and this could be used by teachers in any way they wished, such as giving free milk to poor children.<sup>92</sup> Such products were banned by some LEAs when laboratory analyses showed them to be low in milk content.

These criticisms of the MISS and reluctance of some actors to implement it in its original form illustrate the value of the dialectical model mentioned in the introduction. While the availability and consumption of school milk undoubtedly changed views about the practicality and desirability of macro-scale social welfare policies, at the same time the problems of implementation, and particularly the resistance coming from economic and political sites, influenced both the evolution of policy and the nature of the relationship between the policy-makers and the nascent policy network.

The government-sponsored corporatism of the dairy food system in the 1930s empowered farmers and traders to such an extent that they were able in effect to strangle any restructuring that they perceived to be to their detriment. School milk as a policy did change in detail between 1934 and 1940 but its structure owed a great deal to the NMPC scheme that went before, and the post-1940 period also demonstrates continuity.

#### **'Provision of milk for school children': Circular 1437 and free milk**

It seems that civil servants were well aware of these five groups of criticisms and the many others that were articulated in one forum or another. Yet, despite the anticipation of the flak that it would have to endure, the Board of Education proceeded with its Circular 1437, 'Provision of milk for school children'. This rather dull-sounding piece of Whitehall bureaucracy, issued to Local Authorities on 5 September 1934, generated more comment than many such documents.<sup>93</sup> Two of its provisions were especially contentious: the encouragement of free milk and the heat treatment of school milk.<sup>94</sup>

Let us deal first with the issue of free milk. This was not a new policy. The Maternity and Child Welfare Act (1918) and the Education Acts, especially that passed in 1921, had provided in this way for malnourished children in order to enable them to benefit fully from their schooling. Numbers were not large (table 4) and, in a 1934 review of its policy, the Board of Education concluded that maintaining a strict definition based on malnutrition was no longer tenable.<sup>95</sup> 'In the circumstances Lord Halifax has reached the conclusion that the best course is to amend the Act so as to enable local authorities to provide milk, but not other meals, for any poor child, without regard to any question of malnutrition.' On this occasion Whitehall could not be accused of sloth because within days the

91 CMO of the Board of Education, *The Health of the School Child, 1935* (London: HMSO, 1936).

92 NA, MH 79/347, C. Maudslay, 'Report of Investigation of the MISS, 9th to 21st March, 1936', 17 April 1936.

93 Circular 1438 of the same date dealt with grant-aided schools.

94 NA, ED 50/81, Maudslay to Turnbull, 17 August 1934.

95 NA, ED 24/1367, 'Note by the Board of Education in Regard to the Government's Milk Policy', 22 February 1934.

Table 4. Free school milk in England and Wales under the Education Act (1921)

	Children ('000s)	Milk (million gallons)
1934–35	191.8	1.8
1935–36	289.5	2.7
1936–37	454.5	3.3
1937–38	444.1	4.1
1938–39	522.7	4.8
1939–40		2.1
1940–41		2.1

Sources: Estimated from *Annual Reports of the CMO of the Board of Education*, assuming 220 school days a year; [Maude, E.J.], *Milk consumption*.

Board ran into difficulties when the Chancellor of the Exchequer refused to concede that LEAs should be given any new powers that would impact upon Treasury coffers.<sup>96</sup>

What the Chancellor had not reckoned with was that the Board was able to fall back on the existing wording of Section 84 of the Education Act (1921), which stated that free milk was available for children who are unable by reason of lack of food to take full advantage of education provided. The Board encouraged LEA Medical Officers to select children for any symptoms, 'however slight, of subnormal nutrition'.<sup>97</sup> They even argued that undernourished children might be given two-thirds of a pint, one small bottle at each of the morning and afternoon breaks. The Parliamentary Secretary (H. Ramsbotham) of the Board had already stated in the House of Commons that medical selection did not only require clinical malnutrition but could include 'any symptoms of sub-normal nutrition', so this was a very visible reinterpretation of the Act.<sup>98</sup>

There were difficulties. On the one hand, LEAs were irritated that the children still had to be certified medically, and this added time and cost to the process of identifying the recipients of the free milk. For this reason, one local politician colourfully called the Circular 'the most stupid piece of departmental policy that has been perpetrated for many years'.<sup>99</sup> On the other hand, the Board of Education was short of vocal political support and felt somewhat isolated in the policy-making community. It admitted in private that:

... there is so far no evidence of any very strong body of opinion, either in the House of Commons or outside, that free milk should be available for poor children.... Rather contrary to our expectations, the debates in Parliament on the Milk Bill did not produce any attempt to press for powers for local authorities to provide free milk for all children or even for the poor on an economic basis.<sup>100</sup>

The President and Parliamentary Secretary decided to 'stand pat' on their position. The standard response given to complaints was that Circular 1437 simply restated the existing policy that free milk should be granted only if a child was medically certified.<sup>101</sup> In reality this was not a regulation that was enforced enthusiastically at the local level. In November 1934 the British Medical Association noted that not all children receiving free

96 NA, ED 50/81. Stocks (Treasury) to Howar (Board of Education), 1 March 1934.

97 *Ibid.*

98 *Parliamentary Debates*, 30 May 1934, col. 195; 'Milk cheap for children', *The Times*, 6 September 1934, 9c.

99 NA, ED 24/1367, Alderman W.G. Wilkins of Derby to J.H. Thomas MP, 5 December 1934.

100 NA, ED 50/81, Maudslay to Secretary and CMO of the Board of Education, 23 July 1934.

101 NA, ED 24/1367, for instance Lord Halifax to J. Thomas MP, 12 December 1934.

milk were seen by a Medical Officer of Health (MOH).<sup>102</sup> It seems that some LEAs used physical education tests, and others employed means tests, with a variety of qualification thresholds.<sup>103</sup>

### Circular 1437 and pasteurization

The second issue that was raised by Circular 1437 was the Board of Education's stress on pasteurized milk:

The Board desire to urge that in areas where a supply of efficiently pasteurised milk is available, such milk in all cases be provided. In other areas, all possible precautions should be taken to ensure as far as practicable the safety of the supply.<sup>104</sup>

This innocent-sounding statement, innocent that is to the modern ear, was interpreted by many in 1934 as a discursively loaded salvo in one of the longest-running battles on food safety. Pasteurization was an anathema to many.<sup>105</sup> Heat treatment generally was seen as an excessive interference with one of the most precious and delicate of natural products, the risk being that it might lose its beneficial qualities.<sup>106</sup>

This row had its roots in 1929 when the authorities in Leeds had requested advice from the Board on the standards they should require from the suppliers of their school milk. The reply given was that they should use only pasteurized or Grade A (TT) milk, and this was significant because it amounted in effect to a policy statement.<sup>107</sup> Within weeks, however, the Board had had to qualify this, somewhat defensively:

It is not our practice to insist on any particular quality; we assume that steps will be taken by the Authority concerned to satisfy themselves that it is of good quality. In a recent case, however, in which the Board's advice was asked by the Leeds LEA, the Board, after consultation with the Ministry of Health, suggested that the milk should be either pasteurized or, if raw, should be of the quality of Grade A (TT). The Authority, however, did not see their way to accept our advice and we were not able to press the matter.<sup>108</sup>

Tuberculosis was one of the major health concerns of the interwar period and, given the proven capability of milk to spread the bovine version of the disease to humans, it is not surprising that the greater availability of milk at schools was regarded with suspicion by some.<sup>109</sup> Although the NMPC claimed that it took great care to avoid tuberculous milk under its scheme, in 1930 it emerged in a Parliamentary answer that no information was available on the grades of milk used.<sup>110</sup>

102 Wellcome Contemporary Medical Archives Centre, SA/BMA/F105.

103 By January 1936 211 out of 316 LEAs were implementing Section 84 of the Education Act (1921). Some used physical education tests, others means tests with varying thresholds. The take-up for the MISS at this date was 306 LEAs plus six that provided milk outside the scheme. [Maude, E.J.], 'Milk Consumption: Report Dated 30 January, 1936, of an Informal Inter-Departmental Committee Comprising Representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Board of Education, Market Supply Committee, Ministry of Health, Department of Health for Scotland, Scottish Office and Treasury' (1936), 7–8.

104 NA, ED 50/81.

105 CMO of the Board of Education, *The Health of the School Child, 1934* (London: HMSO, 1935).

106 P. Atkins, 'The pasteurization of England: the science, culture and health implications of milk processing, 1900–1950', in *Food, Science, Policy and Regulation*, edited by Smith and Phillips, 37–51.

107 NA, ED 50/79.

108 NA, ED 50/79, Eaton (Board of Education) to Dale (MAF), 8 January 1930.

109 Peter Atkins, 'Milk consumption and tuberculosis in Britain, 1850–1950', in *Order and Disorder: the Health Implications of Eating and Drinking in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, edited by A. Fenton (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000), 83–95.

110 *Parliamentary Debates*, 245 (1930) col. 628.

The sensitivity of the Ministry of Health to this issue is well illustrated in the policy-development phase for the 1934 Milk Act. Civil servants were wary of the danger of sending Ministry representatives to meetings where they might be exposed to questioning about the health implications of the proposals concerning school milk. Note, for instance, this comment about a forum organized by the MMB: 'If we send a medical officer, he will probably be asked awkward questions about "safe milk" by the representatives of the College of Physicians and the British Medical Association.'<sup>111</sup>

The following summary of the situation in July 1934 from the Ministry's point of view is worth reproducing for its pragmatism.

- (1) No milk can be guaranteed to be 'safe' unless it is efficiently pasteurized or boiled.
- (2) To insist on pasteurization or boiling would kill the scheme, at any rate in the rural districts.
- (3) The present arrangements for the supply of milk to school children by Local Authorities and the Milk Publicity Council do not require pasteurisation or boiling.
- (4) If there is to be any large extension of the present supply, it will be necessary to do without any universal guarantee of safety and to leave it to the local MOH to see that only the best available milk is supplied.<sup>112</sup>

Under the NMPC's scheme, some head teachers and local MOHs insisted on approving the source of milk but most of them lacked the time and resources to check for disease or contamination.<sup>113</sup> From 1934 this was made a formal duty, although there was confusion in the Board of Education about who should take the responsibility. At first they identified the School Medical Officer, but this was later changed to the Medical Officer of the local Sanitary District.<sup>114</sup> The arrangement was enforceable because the MMB refused to pay rebates unless the source was approved.<sup>115</sup>

In some rural areas the relevant certification authority was the County MOH, who may have had little previous contact with certain schools and who was often based in a town physically remote from both the school and the source of supply. Friction was occasionally caused where the County Medical Officer refused to approve the supply proposed by the head teacher.<sup>116</sup> Cecil Maudslay, who prepared a report on school milk in 1936, found evidence of this in the East and North Ridings of Yorkshire. As a result, children had no milk because suitable pasteurized supplies were not available either. In Cumberland, where the County Medical Officer did not believe in pasteurized milk and considered the danger of tuberculosis from raw milk to be much exaggerated, there were no refusals to approve a supply.<sup>117</sup>

Following the issue of Circular 1437, the editor of the *Lancet* opened the debate out by speculating on the possible legal liability of local authorities that failed to supply safe milk to schools.

111 NA, MH 56/104, Maclachlan to Newman and Robinson, 11 July 1934.

112 *Ibid.*

113 *Parliamentary Debates*. 261 (1932) col. 668; CMO of the Board of Education, *Health of the School Child, 1931* (London: HMSO, 1932); CMO of the Board of Education, *Health of the School Child, 1932* (London: HMSO, 1933).

114 NA, ED 50/81, Maudslay to Maclachlan, 20 June and 26 June 1934.

115 Board of Education, *Scheme for the Supply of Milk in Schools in England and Wales at Reduced Rates* (London: Board of Education, 1934).

116 'Milk in Village Schools', *The Times*, 15 October 1934, 20b; 'Drinking of Milk in Schools', *The Times*, 5 November 1934, 20c.

117 NA, MH 79/347, C. Maudslay, 'Report of Investigation of the MISS, 9th to 21st March, 1936', 17 April 1936.

Parents ... will naturally expect the authorities to satisfy themselves that [school milk] will not convey disease. Unless the supply is Certified, Grade A (TT), or efficiently pasteurized, no education authority will be able to give such a guarantee. The responsibility of an authority providing milk is indeed no light one; for should it become possible to prove illness in any child from the taking of that milk, the authority would probably be held liable unless it had taken every reasonable precaution to provide a safe supply.<sup>118</sup>

In 1935 it transpired, however, that the MMB had no power to impose upon MOHs the duty of approving the source and quality of milk supplied to schools. This was the advice given to the government by its legal officers.<sup>119</sup>

The MMB itself refused to insist on pasteurized milk even where it was readily available, because, drawing its identity and authority from the farming community, the Board was well aware of the strong opposition that would come from the legions of small producer-retailers to any requirement to invest in expensive equipment.<sup>120</sup> There is evidence of pressure from the NFU on the MMB to maintain this position.<sup>121</sup> In November of 1934 the Milk Board complained to its sponsors at the MAF about Circular 1437 and drafted a letter to MOHs correcting the impression given by Board of Education that pasteurized milk should be preferred: 'it was never contemplated ... that supplies of raw milk approved should be debarred from the schools...'.<sup>122</sup> At the other extreme, the London County Council (LCC) was one of the authorities that did use only heat-treated milk in its schools.<sup>123</sup>

In May 1936 the People's League of Health conducted a postal survey.<sup>124</sup> Replies were received from the MOHs of 243 areas in England and Wales, amounting to a total school population of 1,760,241, and from 22 in Scotland (a population of 330,422).<sup>125</sup> Table 5 shows a marked difference between England and Scotland, with the latter having less pasteurized milk but more Certified and Grade A (TT). This was a direct result of feelings north of the border, both in the Scottish Office and amongst the general population, that graded milk was preferable to milk that had been heat treated. A second survey in 1944, this time by the Ministry of Health for England and Wales only, indicates a small increase in heat-treated milk in state schools but lower proportions in direct grant and private schools.

### The war

The Ministry of Food took over the operation of the MISS in 1940. Along with the Board of Education, it sought to increase participation levels after a period of disruption caused by bombing and the evacuation of many children from the cities. By 1943 it had achieved 76%, rising to 89% in 1947.<sup>126</sup> The attitude of the War Cabinet was altogether more positive to milk as a foundation to a revised food policy, and the expansion of school milk provision was accompanied by the approval of an extraordinary tenfold increase in the

118 Anon, 'Surplus milk for school children', *Lancet*, i (1934), 405.

119 NA, JV 7/191, 'Milk Marketing Board. Milk in Schools Scheme. Opinion', L.C. Graham-Dixon, 4 June 1935.

120 NA, JV 7/190, Report on Proceedings at MMB Board Meeting, 28 March 1934.

121 NA, JV 7/191, Letter from the NFU, 21 June 1935.

122 NA, JV 7/190, Board Report Number 32, 13 November 1934; NA, MH 56/104, Draft circular from MMB to County MOHs, 21 December 1934.

123 NA, ED 50/81, LCC Circular to head teachers, 23 July 1934.

124 People's League of Health, *What is the Quality of the Milk Supplied to School Children? Report of a Survey by the People's League of Health (Inc)* (London, 1936).

125 There is a possible bias in the results because rural schools were especially under-represented in the replies.

126 CMO of the Board of Education, *The Health of the School Child, 1939-45* (London: HMSO, 1946).

Table 5. School milk: percentage of types supplied

	PLH Survey 1936		Ministry of Health census, England & Wales, 1944		
	England & Wales	Scotland	State schools	Direct grant	Private schools
Pasteurized	75.8	53.1			
Sterilized	0.8				
Boiled	0.4	0.2			
Total heat treated	77.0	53.3	84.6	60.7	58.8
Certified and Grade A (TT)	2.8	45.9	3.4		
Grade A	5.0	0.1	7.4		
Ordinary raw milk	15.1	0.8	4.5		

Source: People's League of Health, *What is the Quality*; Anon, 'The Progress of Heat Treatment for School Milk', *Monthly Bulletin of the Ministry of Health and the Emergency Public Health Laboratory Service*, 3 (1944), 133–34.

provision of welfare milk. The collapse in resistance during the war from the milk trade and the Treasury requires further research. It is difficult to believe that appeals to patriotism would have been sufficient on their own to overcome the powerful forces that had held back milk legislation in the 1930s.

Section 49 of the 1944 (Butler) Education Act required LEAs to provide school milk as a statutory duty and in August 1946 charges to parents were abolished. Interestingly, the Conservatives, returning to power under Churchill in 1951, continued Labour's policy. Webster suggests that part of the reason for this was the old Tory notion that the working classes were 'feckless social incompetents' who needed to be supported by this extension of the soup kitchen philosophy.<sup>127</sup>

### Conclusion

By way of conclusion, let us first remind ourselves that school milk was not unique to Britain. The adequate nutrition of children and the provision of meals and milk in schools were widely debated in Europe. The 'Oslo breakfast' was a Norwegian solution, providing a nutritious meal before lessons started, and in the Netherlands school milk programmes were started in 1937.<sup>128</sup> The British MISS, although not a programme reaching all elementary school children by 1940, was nevertheless relatively well organized. After the war it was expanded and became a cornerstone of the welfare state, until challenged by governments from 1968 onwards.<sup>129</sup>

This paper has shown that the motivation for the central state to become involved with school milk in 1934 was mainly economic. It is true that the Minister, Walter Elliot, had a background in nutritional research and that this certainly fuelled his enthusiasm, but it was

127 C. Webster, 'Government policy on school meals and welfare foods 1939–1970', in *Nutrition in Britain: Science, Scientists and Politics in the Twentieth Century*, edited by D.F. Smith (London, 1997), 197.

128 Inger Johanne Lyngø, 'The Oslo breakfast: an optimal diet in one meal: on the scientification of everyday life as exemplified by food', *Emologia Scandinavica*, 28 (1998), 62–76; A. den Hartog, 'Feeding school-children in the Netherlands: conflict between state and family responsibilities', in *The Origins and Development of Food Policies*, edited by Burnett and Oddy, 70–89.

129 The first blow was struck by a Labour government in 1968, when free milk was withdrawn from secondary pupils.

the need to assist the dairy industry through a number of subsidies that largely drove the formulation of the Milk Act (1934) and the later extension Acts. The new corporate milk marketing structure established in 1933 provided the means to implement a standardized scheme throughout the country, and the MISS that unfolded was in effect a public–private partnership. The previous scheme of the NMPC was informally nationalized, although there were no shares to purchase and no compensation to pay. From 1934, Whitehall was the prime mover and the MMB replaced the NMPC as the organizer.

Returning to the theory of policy networks, the Marsh and Smith dialectical model is helpful.<sup>130</sup> It shows that structure and agency cannot be conceptualized separately because there are interactive relationships between the structure of the network and the agents operating within them; the network and the context within which it operates; and the network and the policy outcome. Our discussion of the economic background, the robust debates within Whitehall, the lobbying from outside bodies, and the many criticisms that were levelled at school milk, all suggest a policy that was far from being predetermined in its outcome but, once the structural features of school milk provision were established, they were resilient. The Government initiated the scheme of 1934 but later found it difficult to change, as the collapse of Morrison's Milk Industry Bill (1938) showed. In a sense, then, the policy had come to influence the Government. It was only under wartime conditions that this stalemate was broken.

130 Marsh and Smith, 'Understanding Policy Networks'.