SOCIAL DYNAMITE:

A STUDY OF EARLY SCHOOL-LEAVERS

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"If you have the grace of God, keep out of the place. If you think that you are going to do what John the Baptist couldn't do, there's a place for you. Did you ever hear of the Bowery in New York. Well, the Bowery would be something like the Riviera compared to the place you are talking about. Do you think that you can help a man who doesn't want to help himself. Well the problems that these people have are the problems they create for themselves. Sure, they might work but it's not what you earn, it's how you waste it that matters. It's all the same what they get from the State or you or anyone else, they would still be in the same position because to rectify the people in that area you would have to rectify their grandparents, and that's not possible".

In this rather dramatic fashion one public official summed up for me the neighbourhood and home environment, the problems and prospects of a group of early school-leavers. I had asked his opinion of the people in a large modern housing-estate in one of our Irish cities, and was greeted with this far from flattering description. The area in question is generally known as "a tough spot" and has acquired what is doubiously referred to as a "reputation". Very few of its children receive any education beyond primary level; some do not even succeed in completing the full primary course. The attitude of the official towards them—one of amused hostility—is typical of the better-educated classes who identify the area and its people with all kinds of deceit, shiftiness, and immorality; they are careful to segregate themselves and their offspring from these "undesirable and under-educated children". These

children and the home environment from which they come are the subjects of this study. In many ways completing the research was difficult; presenting it in written form is even more difficult. There is always the danger that any published analysis of this social class may hurt the feelings of people and damage their chances of bettering themselves. To publish any information, even in a sympathetic spirit, could underline the distinction between these people and the better-educated classes, and so become a source of discrimination and segregation. I have no desire to add to the "amused hostility". In many cases these children are far more mature and compassionate than those attending secondary schools. They may not have been educated formally in school, but they are educated by the experience of meeting adult problems at an early age.

The research was completed in the latter part of 1965 and early 1966. The respondents, who were aged 14-16, had all either left school or were attending the one-day-a-week schools. These latter schools, which operate in Cork, Limerick and Waterford, provide a continuation course for children who would otherwise finish their formal education at primary level. The children are required to attend one day per week up to the age of sixteen. For purposes of this research one hundred children—fifty boys and fifty girls—were randomly selected from school lists. The primary research instrument used in the collection of data was an interview schedule. Many of the interviews were tape recorded. In practically every case, good rapport was established and there is no substantive reason to question the truthfulness of the responses. A random selection of the children's homes were visited and the children's parents interviewed. To complete the picture of the area the local clergy, teachers, police, two social workers, and one or two shopkeepers in the area were also interviewed. These interviews were also tape recorded. For the most part, however, the bulk of the research is concerned with the world of youth as reported and seen by themselves. It is a study of a people, a place, and a way of life—a way of living that socially, at least, is perhaps not all that it might be.

Every country in the western world has its proportion of children who leave school once the minimum school-leaving age is reached. In America they are called the "Dropouts"; in 1965 alone they were the subject of no less than fifteen books and numberless articles; their elimination was one of the chief targets of President Johnson's anti-illiteracy and anti-poverty campaign. In Britain they are called "Early Leavers", and have been the subject of at least three government reports and countless books. In Ireland we have yet to coin a word for them because, for the most part, we have ignored their existence and the problems that follow in their wake. American Secretary of Labour, Willard Wirtz, describes them as "the outlaw pack who are unemployed today and will be for the rest of their lives at a cost to us of $1,000 a head a year".[1] In a recent report on the outbreak of violence in nine United States cities, FBI chief, J. Edgar Hoover, pointed his finger at the dropout, rather than racists or Communists, as *public enemy number one*. Automation is steadily wiping out the jobs done by low-skilled men and in the labour market of the future, the unskilled worker will be almost as obsolete as the pick and shovel. In America the high-school diploma, which was once a dispensable luxury enjoyed by the privileged few, has suddenly become an indispensable requirement for full citizenship. The future holds not few jobs but no jobs for those who did not finish high school.

It is perhaps true to say that there is no place in the world where a well-educated population is really poor. We are becoming increasingly aware of this in Ireland; indeed, at the moment Irish society is characterised by a belief in education approaching almost a religious fervour. However, each year some forty per cent of our children leave the primary schools and receive no further education. They enter the occupational

1. Quoted by Lucius F. Cervantes in *The Dropout* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1965), p. 197.

world at the bottom of the ladder, and in an age when there is less and less room at the bottom they are destined to remain there. There is plenty of room at the top but, unfortunately for the school-leavers, the rungs of the ladder now consist of degrees in education and no longer of degrees in consanguineal relationship. In an age which values independence, the school-leavers become increasingly dependent. The Irish situation is well described by Mr. O'Malley, the Minister for Education, in outlining his recent plan for free education. He said: "Every year, some 17,000 of our children finishing their primary school course do not receive any further education. This means that almost one in three of our future citizens are cut off at this stage from the opportunities of learning a skill, and denied the benefits of cultural development that go with further education. This is a dark stain on the national conscience. For it means that some one-third of our people have been condemned—the great majority through no fault of their own—to be part-educated unskilled labour, always the weaker who go to the wall of unemployment or emigration".[2] The phenomenon is one of "social dynamite".

It would be unwise, however, to think that the provision of free education and the extension of compulsory education to the age of fifteen will automatically solve the problem. Education in America is free to the completion of high school, yet some thirty per cent of the population do not avail of it. Drop-outs continue to appear with the regularity of automobiles rolling off the assembly line. In Britain where education is also free, fifty-eight per cent of the children have left school at the age of fifteen, seventy-eight per cent at the age of sixteen. In Northern Ireland the situation is somewhat similar.[3] There is no simple answer to the problem of why some children continue their education while others, often in somewhat similar circumstances, drop out. Obviously, the answer will be a complex of social, psychological, economic and educational factors.

2. Quoted from *The Irish Times*, 12 September 1966, p. 1.

3. Cf. *Investment in Education* (Report of Survey Team appointed by the Minister of Education, 1962), p. 20.

Some of the English studies on the problem emphasise the far-reaching influence of a child's home background. One, in particular, points to two important considerations, namely "serious overcrowding in the home, which must handicap especially the children of many semi-skilled and unskilled workers, and the different social assumptions which affect not only a child's parents but the whole society in which he is brought up".[4] The importance of the "total situation" of a child's life cannot be too highly emphasised especially as there is a tendency in Ireland not to look beyond the weekly wage or the bank account of the parents.

The area covered by our survey comprised some two hundred families, and scarcely one of these had succeeded in sending a child to secondary school; only a few had children attending a full-time vocational course. The whole atmosphere of the place favoured sending the children out to work at an early age. The child's total situation was such that it was almost impossible for him to break through the accepted educational patterns. Consequently, our presentation of the findings of this study will centre on the basic concept of the importance of the "total situation". Fundamentally, it is an attempt to answer the question why so many of our children quit school on reaching the minimum school-leaving age.

THE TOTAL SITUATION

All the children in our survey were asked why they had not continued on to full-time vocational or secondary school. The following replies were typical:

> *Boy, age 15½*
> I got sick of it and didn't want to go any more. None of my brothers went, so why should I bother. Anyway, I wanted to go to sea but changed my mind when I left school. My mother wouldn't have let me go to the Tech. anyway.

4. *Early Leaving* (Report of the Central Advisory Council for Education —England, 1954), p. 56.

Girl, age 14
Because I think a girl does not need that much education. A girl can look after herself, but most parents don't think their children can mind themselves, mostly girls. I like climbing trees and swimming. I like cooking sometimes, but nearly all my cooking is too done or not done at all. Oh, yes, I don't like school.

Boy, age 14½
I didn't want to and I wanted to help my mother. I would like to see sticks broke, and I liked working and my mother told me to get a job. I was thinking of that too: once I reach fourteen I can stop. All the boys have that in their head and they're right too.

Girl, age 15
I wanted to leave myself and earn money and be independent. My sister had a job in a factory so she got me in there too.

These typical replies are good illustrations of what the American sociologist William I. Thomas called "the definition of the situation", which states in substance that "if men define their situation as real, they are real in their consequences". According to Thomas: "Not only concrete acts are dependent on the definition of the situation but gradually a whole life-policy and the personality of the individual himself follow from a series of such definitions".[5] The definition of the situation is the third element of the "total situation". Behaviour, says Thomas, can be understood only when it is seen within its whole context, namely, the situation not only as it actually exists in verifiable objective form, but also as it seems to exist to the person himself. Consequently, the total situation consists of three interrelated elements:

5. William I. Thomas, *The Unadjusted Girl* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1923), p. 42.

1. The objective conditions under which the individual or society has to act.
2. The pre-existing attitudes of the individual or the group which at the given moment have an actual influence on his behaviour.
3. The definition of the situation by the individual himself, influenced however by the group.

The importance of this concept cannot be overlooked in seeking an explanation of why some children finish their formal education at the age of fourteen. Again, Thomas states that "this defining of the situation is begun by the parents in the form of ordering and forbidding and information, and is continued by the community by means of gossip, with its praise and blame".[6] As Thomas indicates, this definition of the situation may or may not accord with reality, but whether it does or not, it has a very real influence on people's lives and decisions.

Consequently, we take what Thomas considers to be the three major elements involved in any social situation—*the objective conditions*, the *pre-existing attitudes*, and the *definition of the situation*—and in terms of these three factors we attempt to give as complete a picture as possible of the home, neighbourhood, and school environments, the hopes, fears and aspirations (if any) of the "dropouts" of an Irish city.

OBJECTIVE CONDITIONS

Ecological Factors

Ecology is the way living things relate and adjust themselves to their environment. Common observation tells us that people change from country to city, from hot to cold climates, from one country to another, from one county to another. Just as every region of a country differs in some respects from others,

6. William I. Thomas, "The Persistence of Primary Group Norms in Present-day Society", in *Suggestions of Modern Science Concerning Education* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1920), p. 168.

so too do the inhabitants of each region. The same holds true of the different areas within a city. The area from which the children studied in this report came is a large housing estate situated in the suburbs of one of our larger cities. We do not wish to identify the city or the area, but for purposes of convenience we shall refer to the housing estate as Parkland. Fifteen years ago Parkland did not exist; it was open country lying roughly three miles from the city centre. Today it is a sprawling low-class residential suburb with its "roads", "avenues", "squares", and "crescents" of monotonous, unimaginative houses broken only by a church and a shopping-centre. The more industrious and self-reliant people live in the "roads" and "avenues". The standard goes down progressively as you work your way into the inner confines of the "squares" and "crescents". The houses are standard type, three bedrooms, bathroom, kitchen and sittingroom, with a small garden front and rear. Altogether, there are over two hundred families in the locality.

The area is divided by a very wide main road running into the city. One observes immediately that the town-planners made ample provision for the movement of traffic, but unfortunately none at all for the movement of children. There are no playgrounds or playing-fields whatever, despite the fact that over half the population of the area is under fifteen years of age. Pushed out of overcrowded homes by distracted mothers, the children wander around the streets in gangs. They have nothing to do, and children with no form of amusement automatically turn to mischief.

To really understand the people of Parkland one must look at their origin. Parkland is the product of slum-clearance and rehousing. Its people once lived in the old Georgian and Victorian buildings on the quays or in the smaller houses in the back-lanes and alley-ways. In many cases the whole family occupied just a single room and perhaps shared with the neighbours an old broken-down toilet out at the back. It was felt that if you gave each family a house with a little garden they would become clean and respectable. And so they were up-

rooted, and from being ten families in one house, or ten children in one cellar, they moved into beautiful big three-bedroomed houses. But they just could not cope with the new situation. They lost many of their roots. Their friends and neighbours of years and years were lost. They had no choice as to where they would go or when they would go; they had no choice as to what street they would live in or as to who would occupy the house next-door or across the street. The policy was to scatter the better families around in the hope that they would set the standard of the locality. Today, it is not the best family in the street but rather the worst or the rowdiest who sets the standard. One parent summed up the situation when commenting on some imaginary individual whom he felt had been responsible for the whole project:

> He had no conception of what city life was like. He had intelligence; God gave him a bit of brains and he probably got a scholarship and went to school and then came out here and got everyone and anyone and houses were built, and they were all thrown in together, and he said: "The good families will cure the bad families". He was improving on the story of the good apples and the bad apples. I know all about this city. I know all about the riff-raff and the aftermath of the garrisons, but we never had gangs in this city before. Now you have them in all the housing schemes.

The net result was that the standard of life and behaviour in Parkland was the lowest common denominator. Community spirit was dead because nobody knew or trusted their neighbours. The period was the economic crisis of the mid-fifties, and not even a brush would be loaned because there was no money available to replace the head of the brush should one of the children break it. A box-car for bringing turf was one of the most prized possessions. There were roughly two to each street, but nobody was prepared to lend them. A certain community spirit has developed in the past five years—due

especially to the building of a Church—but we shall see more of this later.

The problems created for the people of Parkland by themselves or by their neighbours were as nothing compared to those created by outsiders. Having moved into their new homes, they were suddenly faced with the problem of filling the houses with furniture. And this was where they really walked into trouble with the hire-purchase firms. No one showed them the small print and as a result they started their new life heavily in debt, and many have never got out of it. As well they were at the mercy of unlicensed money-lenders. Two local residents well described the chaotic situation:

> The money-lenders were there in their thousands; well, thousands is a bit too many, but they were nearly there in their hundreds, and many still remain today. It was fierce. You could be short of money—I knew one woman who borrowed £5; until she paid back that £5 in one piece she had to pay £2 a month interest. She was paying it for one and a half years and had paid back £30 before she cleared the debt.
>
> We really hadn't a chance. The H.P. men were sitting on our doorsteps morning, noon and night selling you electric razors, radios, everything. You had men coming down from Dublin in vans with cotton blankets and sheets and everything at outrageous prices. By normal standards, the people who would have a way couldn't pay. So all this we were up against, and we had no way of combatting them. That is where the Credit Union did something about solving the problem, because more and more people are taking advantage of the ready money.

For a young couple starting out today the situation has not changed very much. The setting up of a Credit Union has helped but the mixed blessings of hire purchase still remain. Without H.P. it is impossible for many of them to build up any sort of a home or escape from the misery that is so apparent

in Parkland. But the capability to use H.P. properly depends on education, and quite often a young couple do not realise that they are putting a debt around their necks that they will never be able to pay. The money-lenders still remain. The modern version is the "docket" whereby the householder is given a £10 docket which enables him to buy £10 worth of goods at a particular shop; within a specified time he must repay £15 to the lender. The system is operated by private individuals who go around Parkland from door to door and literally plague householders. As soon as three-quarters of the debt is cleared they will open a new debt.

Another ecological factor of importance is the fact that nobody in Parkland owns his own home. Some of the residents keep the gardens well, but the deeper you go into a housing scheme the worse it gets. There is no interest in keeping the house—they don't own it so why should they bother. One of the local priests summarised the situation:

> The fact that they don't own their own houses means that no child in Parkland can say "I'm going home" with the same sense as a middle-class child—that is a big difference. Home for others—the trees, the lawn, the windows nicely painted—to a child it is my home, but in Parkland they are only numbers 1, 2, 3, 4—numbers, not homes. And you can learn a lot about what kind they are in the houses by walking along the road and looking at their gardens.

The building of a Church in the area some six years ago has made a tremendous difference. It gives Parkland a focal point as well as giving the residents direct contact with someone whom they feel is genuinely interested in them. The priest is living right there with them and he is providing leadership and direction which is so badly needed in the area. This is a tremendous thing which can be used to uplift them. We shall discuss it more fully later in dealing with the attitude of these people to authorities of all sorts.

General Pattern of Family Life

The following case-summaries help to understand some of the more general problems with which families in the Parkland area have to cope; they are accurate pictures of some of the families we encountered in the course of our research:

Case 1

Mother aged about 35, looks much older. Father doesn't work, draws the dole. Seven children ranging in ages from 16 to 3½. Eldest, a boy, works as a petrol pump attendant. Mother had a sixteen year old sister who married; she never worked, neither did her husband. Mother gave them a room in the house, and they have a small baby. General condition of the house is shocking—dirt and rubbish and children's clothes scattered everywhere. Mattresses on the floor, but very little bed clothing. Three of the children are away with tuberculosis; one had gland trouble and appeared very delicate. Father does odd jobs at times like Christmas; he explained that he now finds it hard to get work since he spent a week in jail. He felt that it was a great injustice that he had been sent to jail as he hadn't really stolen anything; he had paid one or two instalments on a suite of furniture and then sold it.

Case 2

Wife aged 30. Very happy couple. Eight children. The husband has a seaman's ticket and is a first-class seaman when he wants to be. At the moment he wants to be, so there is plenty money coming in. But in a week or two he will return home and will not work for another seven or eight months. Wife and children look delicate. Until recently they lived in two rooms. They would have qualified for a house years ago if they had paid up the arrears of rent owed. They knew the situation, but were not prepared to pay the rent, or weren't able or didn't see that far ahead. In the end the St. Vincent de Paul Society had it paid for them because of the serious overcrowding in

the flat. Now they have a nice house, husband has gone to sea, there are curtains on the windows and the home is reasonably tidy. But in a few weeks he will be back on the dole. He is a man of uncertain moods; he doesn't want to accept charity from anyone but if it's done and he doesn't have to take official notice of it he is glad. Recently, a voluntary organisation offered to buy a First Communion suit for one of his children. The father refused and said that he was going to buy it himself. A few days before the event the wife had to come and beg for it. The husband was furious when he discovered this. In general, the children are irregular attenders at school.

The main problem appears to be a general lack of a sense of dignity, of responsibility, of education, especially an education towards life—what life is and what it entails and, above all, an education towards married life. People in the area marry young, and everything seems to go grand for the beginning. If the girl has a job, she keeps it. The husband is likely to be earning £10 a week, the girl's job brings in an extra £5, and they are on top of the world. The house—if they are lucky enough to get one—or the two-roomed flat is soon cluttered up with about £100 worth of H.P. furniture; there is a television set in the corner and a transistor radio on the table. However, there isn't the slightest effort made at saving or preparing for the rainy day. Meanwhile, the family begins to arrive; the girl's job is gone, and instead of having £15 for two, there is now only £10 for three, and they haven't even the price of a pram. If they had initially moved in with either of their parents the matter is even more complicated. As more children arrive, the furniture begins to disappear. By the age of thirty the mother has given up all hope of ever coping with the situation. She is likely to have had a child every year; sometimes she loses as many as she has. In the process, the management of the house is forgotten. She still gets maybe £8 a week from her husband; she has no idea how much he keeps for his own

enjoyment but she is expected to run the house on what she gets. She is home all day with children in various stages of development literally pulling the house apart. The husband can go to work and get away from it all; in the evenings he can go to the local pub and forget the misery and frustration of the home. His consolation is that he can make love to his wife or have a few pints, but both of these only add to the problems. In the end, punch-drunk with misery and children, the wife too turns to drink or sinks into a sort of lifelong lethargy. One mother summed up her situation for me in a sentence I will not easily forget: "Father", she said, "I've been married fifteen years and in that time I have met every misfortune, even twins".

Reared on a combination of tremendous affection, no control or discipline, sometimes completely unpredictable beatings, and a stable diet of bread, butter and tea, the children drift through school, thence to some job, and then drift through life generally. The girls get jobs in the clothing factories at fourteen and earn up to £3 a week. The boys usually begin as messenger boys and after two years on the bicycle they graduate to become helpers on lorries or in the timber yards. By the age of nineteen they feel that they are men but they are still getting a boy's wage. Suddenly they are aware of the contrast with the apprenticeship boys who are now earning up to £15 a week. It is not easy for them to accept the situation and many seek a solution in emigration. Those who remain hang around on the street corners or hold up the doorways of the bookmakers' shops, but nobody is going to employ them. They are not big enough nor brawny enough to work as builders' labourers; the better ones are and they may eventually become a sort of skilled-unskilled labourer. But the majority are practically unemployable from nineteen onwards. Meanwhile there is nothing to do and nowhere to go, and 32/6 dole money a week doesn't even keep them in cigarettes. At the age of nineteen some of them are already married and have two children, and the whole cycle starts all over again. They are not ready for marriage, nor is the girl; they have nothing saved nor have they a house or a room to go to. So they move in with the parents or with a

married brother or sister, and another generation of dropouts is soon on the way.

This is the general picture, but to isolate the causes it is necessary to subdivide the families into various categories:

1. *Physical Handicap:* These are the pathological cases and these you always have. If the husband is suffering from asthma or tuberculosis, etc., he simply cannot remain in constant employment. Lack of warm clothing or warm housing aggravates his problem. A change in the weather can put him out of work for a week. This man's problem is a health problem, and our problem in society is to provide that man with a job that he can do. Like all the others, this man will have no money saved, so that once he does get sick any delay (and there always seems to be a delay) in the arrival of the social welfare allowance is sufficient to reduce the family to starvation.

2. *Mental Problem:* The man with a very low IQ, the man who is not stupid or idiotic but whose mental capabilities are limited. Is there a job that will give this fellow a family living wage for a family of nine children, doing work that demands no intelligence and very little physical effort? In these cases the children should get special attention in school and should be encouraged to join all sorts of clubs and activities whereby the dull atmosphere of the home is counteracted. The child will certainly become dull if it is brought up in a dull atmosphere or situation. In one sense television was a great thing for these people, for people with nothing in the minds. At least it puts some fantasy and pictures into their minds.

3. *The Problem Fellow:* The fellow who should never have got married, who hadn't even a room to bring his wife to. This is the real dropout type, the man who is unemployed now and will be unemployable for the rest of his life. If a man is idle for a certain length, he becomes unemployable; the dole is security as far as he is concerned and he doesn't want to relax his grip on it. He will go through life with £6 dole plus whatever comes from the children's allowances. His attempts —if any—to return to work are often hindered by trade union regulations which refuse to let bankrupt workers accept an

offer of work until they have paid up the arrears of their union subscriptions.

4. *The Hopeless Manager:* There is a great difference between the home where the husband is unemployed and the wife a good manager and the home where the husband is working but the wife is a bad manager. Despite the higher wages the latter home will be a much more appalling condition than the former. Many wives just don't seem to be able to cope with the task of running a home. In a normal household, young children left alone will wreck it in an hour. In some homes in Parkland the children are left alone for years. The result is a dirty, untidy home with unwashed and undisciplined children. They have no proper realisation of their responsibilities as wives or mothers. The houses are nice and new in the beginning but in a year or two the windows are never cleaned, the glass is broken, the gardens are only dumps, and the houses are dirty. The mother is always running to the shop for sixpence worth of tea or a quarter-pound of butter, and this day-to-day living is extremely wasteful and not an economic way to run a household. The constant meal pattern of bread, butter and tea is very expensive and has very little food value. There is usually a great affection for the children together with a feeling that they should be clattered every so often to keep them in order. A mother trying to cope with ten children under these conditions cannot give a reasoned judgment to each child and the settling of rows or coping with individual problems is practically impossible. Something can be done for this type of family provided that the individuals or groups who are capable of helping come together and in confidence and professional secrecy decide to tackle it in a comprehensive manner. Where there is a hopeless manager the family are all the time running to the various voluntary organisations whenever they think that help will be forthcoming. It is up to these organisations to realise that they have a responsibility to come together for the good of the families they help instead of merely considering their own satisfaction and condemning and judging the people they help.

5. *Unemployment:* Everyone in Parkland agrees that the improvement in the area has been near miraculous compared to the period of chronic unemployment in the late 1950s. However, spasmodic unemployment is still not uncommon due to illness, strikes, variations in the market, etc. On these occasions the sudden drop in income often causes acute distress. In some houses the E.S.B. bill had fallen into arrears and the electricity had been cut off. In another, three chairs and a table disappeared overnight when the instalments had not been paid; when I visited this latter family I found them seated on boxes around a bare livingroom watching television. The television was turned down in order to denounce a recent strike where the husband worked.

6. *Drink:* As a social problem in Ireland this is certainly not confined to Parkland nor to the poorer families. It is a form of escapism from the miseries of life and is usually accompanied by quarrelling and domestic strife and cruelty to wife and children. The problem is all the more acute where both parents turn to drink. In some cases the parents run up a bill at the local pub and pay at the end of the month with the family allowances. The following incident related to me by a priest in the area is worth recording:

> I was downtown the other night and I met a fellow from Parkland who was dead drunk. I don't know whether he goes to Mass or not but there is no harm in him; there isn't malice in him, he just drifted away. He was drunk, at any rate, and I tried to get him to come home but he wouldn't come. However, he gave me £2 to give to his wife and told me to tell her that he was all right. Well, I came back and went into that home at 11.30 p.m. Eight children, the eldest about twelve, in that house—seven watching television and the baby in the cradle in the sink. They said that their mother was away for the day and didn't know what time she would return.

Drink, family quarrels, bad management, sickness and unemployment, mental and physical difficulties, each one of these

alone is sufficient to create endless problems for the families that experience them. When they are found in combinations or all together, the resulting misery is unbelievable.

7. *Good Families:* Finally there are the families where the husband has a steady job, where the wife keeps a reasonably clean house, where the children are well dressed and kept under some control, where in short none of the previously-mentioned problems exist. These families are in the majority in Parkland and their influence is very slowly helping to transform the whole community. But there are so many pressures on them that survival is difficult. It is easy to say that one should be impervious to one's neighbours; the parents might possibly succeed, but the children haven't a hope. Children tend to follow the herd; they are impressed by the artificial air of independence of the lad who is earning money at 14½ or by the girl with the new hair-do or pair of nylons paid for out of her first week's wages. Their language, their conduct, their aspirations, and their standards are not those of the home but of the street, and on the street the lowest common denominator prevails. The biggest bully in the place is the hero who sets the standard. This is where a parish organisation or a street organisation can be of tremendous importance, because parents will then feel that they are not fighting alone, that others too aspire to their standards and admire their conduct. In the struggle for existence, the fittest morally and socially may not be able to survive.

Money

It might seem that money—or the lack of it—is the cause of most of the evils in Parkland and that if you gave these people money many of their problems would eventually disappear. Many would make the point that the hundred children in our sample might still be in school if their parents could afford to send them, that they are pushed out of over-crowded homes into the occupational world by sheer economic necessity. Perhaps a glance at the incomes of these children's parents will give us a firmer basis for discussion. These wage figures are

calculated from many sources—from those reported by the children, from parents, from teachers, and in some instances from the place of employment. We feel that they are reasonably accurate. The figures here refer only to the weekly wage or unemployment benefit of the father. In most cases the actual family income would be supplemented by children's allowances wages of children working, etc.

TABLE 1

WEEKLY WAGE OF CHILDREN'S FATHERS

Weekly Wage	Number in Each Wage Bracket
£20 plus	14%
£15–£19	31%
£10–£14	32%
£5– £9	17%
Less than £5	6%

These varied wages come from a great many different forms of employment. The majority could, however, be classed as unskilled or semi-skilled workers. There are dockers, Corporation labourers, factory workers, soldiers, one or two sailors, night-watchmen, van drivers, some tradesmen, and one or two whose attitude to work could be described as a mixture of indolence and happy indifference. Five of the fathers were in England and five were dead.

It will be seen from the income figures that some of these families do not need money—they have plenty of it. In some homes the total family income is close to £50 a week, yet it doesn't appear to make the slightest difference to the educational prospects of the younger members of the family, nor for that matter to the general appearance of the home. The extra money doesn't even give security. If a man gets a £25 a week job, the first thing he does is to fill the house with some

£300 worth of hire purchase, and before long the family is saddled with debt. All the children get new clothes, but within six months the clothes are in the pawn shop. In the case of many families, obviously, money is a big problem. A woman who doesn't know where the next meal is going to come from: certainly lack of money is her problem. But if you give her money, you must also give her the education to spend that money properly. It is not so much lack of money as lack of a proper mentality. A social worker in the area put it as follows:

> Maybe money is the root of all their evils, but giving them money now will not cure these evils. It is like a field that has been neglected for years and years. It needs fertilizer, but it's no use throwing fertilizer on it. You must first plough it and root out the weeds, and you have got to pick out the stones that were in it and you have got to drain it. Fertilizer might be the biggest problem but it won't work on its own.

What is needed above all is an education in the simple art of running a home, but this is not something which you can give people in pre-marriage courses. It must go right back through childhood, and in this sense the question of education is a vicious circle because the chief school of education is the home, and in the Parkland area there are not many homes capable of giving this education. Therefore, the schools must be a substitute. We shall return to this point later.

Overcrowding

Of the children in the one-day-a-week schools, sixty per cent come from families of more than six children, twenty-five per cent come from families of ten or more. Unhappy homes, family quarrels, lack of sound home discipline can be found in all walks of life and all levels of society but bad housing and serious overcrowding seem to be found mainly among the working classes. The subsequently poor physical conditions of the home may have an overwhelming effect on a child's chances

of remaining in school or even of attaining a basic education in the primary school.

The average size of the families of the hundred children interviewed was 7.6 children per family. Table 2 gives a fuller picture of the situation.

TABLE 2

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF CHILDREN IN RESPONDENTS' FAMILIES

Number of Children	Percentage of Families
1– 2	5%
3– 4	9%
5– 6	29%
7– 8	23%
9–10	21%
Over 10	13%

In dealing with the general problems of family life, we have already discussed some of the difficulties created by overcrowding in the home. Here we shall confine our comments to the effect of overcrowding on the education of the child. In practically every large family in Parkland at least one of the older girls was sure to be illiterate. The teachers in the one-day-a-week schools complain that many of the children can't even write their names. The national school teachers complain that they can't get many of the children to school and they can't hold up a whole class to give special attention to the irregular attenders. The school attendance officer explained that all he could do was have the parents fined or jailed, and both possibilities would merely add to the problem. The eldest girl is usually kept at home to care for the younger children while the mother goes shopping; the teacher or the officer complain, and to avoid getting into trouble the mother makes the older children take a day off in turn. Soon the whole

family are irregular attenders and the school-work becomes more and more difficult for them. Inadequate lighting and heating in the home, the absence of suitable space for those who might be inclined to do some home-work, the constant distraction of radio and television and the thousand disturbances of a large family—all add to the problem. One of the better-class mothers in the area, who freely admitted that she was hoping to move soon to another part of the city, revealed an attitude that shows signs of becoming more prevalent in Parkland. She said:

> There is a woman up the road here who has twenty children and she is always being held up as a model—"the woman with the twenty children: how marvellous it is". Misery and filth and squalor if you ask me. I think, and an awful lot of other women think, that she would be better off with four children and keep them off the streets. What is wrong is that we are afraid to talk about these things because it's sort of all hush-hush. We are brought up that way and we fall down under it. Some of the mothers here are only young girls and already they look like old women.

As well, the larger families tend to be poorly dressed. Clothes are handed on from one to another when they are not in pawn. Generally, the mothers in Parkland do not take a job outside the home. Only fifteen per cent of the children had mothers working. Where the mother does work, the family is likely to be small; otherwise the problem of irregular school attendance on the part of the children becomes even more chaotic.

Undernourishment

Such is the situation of poverty in some of the overcrowded homes that children are not capable of responding in school because physically they are at a low ebb. Even where there is plenty of money some of the mothers just haven't the ability to cook a decent meal for the children. Many of them have

no idea how to cook meat. Bread, butter, tea, buns, sometimes chips cooked either at home or bought in the cafes—this is the stable diet. In some cases the children go off to school or to work without any breakfast. The following case was reported by one of the few voluntary social workers in the area:

> A few days ago a girl came into the office looking for a job. Already she had got two factory jobs, not the kind of job I would have chosen for her but she was the type of girl who didn't care what job she got. At any rate, she left both jobs. So she and another girl came looking for jobs. This time she asked for domestic work. I made her promise that this time she would turn up in time for work and that if she left she would give proper notice. So she said: "All right". Finally, I said to her: "Before you go do you mind if I ask why did you leave the other two jobs". She said: "Well, I liked the work, but I was only getting 50/- a week. I went out at 8 in the morning, often without any breakfast. I came back to my dinner and I had no dinner. This time I'm hoping to get something to eat where I'm working". For the first time I really understood the part that food had to play in their lives. Then I began to look back and examine the children as I had found them and even to recall my visits to one or two classrooms, and now I know that many of them had not the physical energy to respond.

In the primary schools a midday meal would be an ideal solution to many of these problems. At the present time, there is a Corporation scheme in operation whereby some children qualify for a bun and a half-pint of milk at lunch hour. Each family is asked to fill in a form but only the unemployed or large families qualify; practically any kind of a job disbars them. In Parkland boys' national school, some 157 boys from a total roll of 435 were on the lunch list. In one class only five out of forty were eligible.

It is quite true that man lives by bread alone—when there

is no bread. In areas like Parkland the provision of a warm midday meal is the first requirement of our educational system. A country which can afford to pay these children £5 a week in unemployment or sickness benefit for the remainder of their lives can surely afford to spend a similar sum of money in the hope of eradicating the disease.

PRE-EXISTING ATTITUDES

We have examined one area of the "total situation" of the children of Parkland, namely the objective conditions with which they have to cope. We now turn to a second area, that of the prevailing attitudes and values of the people in the child's social environment. The actions of individuals are governed to a large extent by his attitudes, and just as a child is likely to inherit the physical characteristics of his parents so too will he inherit their outlook on life, on school, on authority, on religion. No man is an island, and no man can escape being modified and formed by the physical and mental environment in which he lives.

Work or School

The dilemma of whether to send a child to work or to school which often causes agonising decisions in middle-class households does not exist in Parkland. Here the predominant interest is job interest—"when is the money going to start coming in". A child's value is often measured by the size of his wage-packet; the years spent in school are simply regarded as a waste of time, and parents are reluctant to spend any money whatever on education. The local teachers find it almost impossible to get the parents or children to spend money on books, copies or pencils, although there is some evidence that things are beginning to improve. In both the boys' and girls' schools it is not unusual for the principals to pay more for books out of their own pockets than is collected from the children. The government grant for free books is a mere pittance. The following table is some indication of changing attitudes in this matter.

TABLE 3

SALE OF BOOKS IN PARKLAND BOYS' N.S.

Year	Number on Rolls	Books Bought
1959	412	£5 worth
1960	419	£35 worth
1965	435	£78 worth

In 1959, the year in which only £5 was paid for books, the school principal held a spot-check and discovered that in one week alone pupils of the school had spent £12 on going to the pictures. The great French sociologist, Frederic Le Play, once taught that you could tell everything about a man's life by observing the manner in which he spent his money. Le Play would have had an interesting time in Parkland.

Part of the problem is that parents and children live just from day to day. There is no attempt to plan for the future. In many cases this is a good thing. As one parent put it: "If we worried about our future, we would be mental cases long ago". But living from day to day means that the immediate income value of a job is appreciated; the possible future earning capacity of an educated child is not appreciated. A teacher mentioned the case of a very bright boy for whom he had obtained a free place in the Christian Brothers' secondary school. In order to help out the lad he had secured for him a summer job as messenger boy. Unfortunately, when September came the parents would not allow the boy to give up the job. The principal in the girls' school stressed the difficulty in persuading the parents of the value of secondary education:

> Few go to secondary. Next year, maybe seven or eight might go on for first year through pure pressure on my part. They might stay for a year, but they will drop off

then because they get a job and parents want the money ——plenty of money. The trouble is that the more money that comes into a house the more they spend. The younger children don't get a chance. By the time they finish school the pattern has been set. Very few see the benefit of secondary education. Sometimes we have very good children and we bring every pressure to bear to get them to secondary, but the parents come up to you and they say: "What use is it to them". And you try to explain that education will always stand to them, but in the end you have to agree with them—not openly, of course—when they say: "But look at so and so who went as far as Inter. and where is she now". And do you know, it seems to be quite true. Many of the less intelligent have got on better than the few who went to secondary. So you can sympathise wholeheartedly with the feeling.

The teachers do all they can to help the children but they are up against impossible odds. The better parents would like to send their children to secondary school, but the children themselves revolt against it. Going out to work at fourteen is part of the atmosphere of Parkland, part of the air the children breathe. One mother explained the situation:

If you have the way you can send them, and if you haven't they are lost. I would like to send all of mine to secondary, but then when they are not for it themselves I think that it is a waste of time and money. Some are not so keen on going to school; they don't like it, and it's hard to blame them. If Johnny next door is gone off to a job at fourteen, my Tommy in there slogging away at his books wil be dissatisfied. And there is so much of this going out to work; it's not a case of one isolated boy so that parents can say: "Well, he is only one". But eighty per cent are out working, so naturally all the children want to get out. It's hard on them to feel that there they are—no money, no clothes—because that's what most of them do with their first money

is to buy clothes. One of mine went to secondary for a while, but she got fed up and thought she would like to get a job and go out working. I don't know what the reason is.

The average amount given by children to their parents is 30/- to £2. Of the hundred children in our sample, 89 were working. Of these, thirty-two per cent of the boys and twenty-six per cent of the girls reported that they hand over their entire wages to parents. All of them stated that they hand over some. It is doubtful if the contribution to parents increases as the wages increase as more is spent on clothes and enjoyment as the children grow older.

Perhaps a more concrete picture of the situation can be got from Table 4 which gives the numbers, destination and intellectual attainments of children who left Parkland boys' national school over the past five years.

TABLE 4

SCHOOL-LEAVERS FROM PARKLAND BOYS' N.S.

	YEAR					
Destination	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965
Secondary	—	—	1	—	—	—
Technical	—	2	2	6	13	19
Reformatory	4	1	3	3	6	4
England	—	4	4	2	—	—
Job/Idleness	59	66	47	41	48	28
TOTAL	63	73	57	52	67	51
Sat for Primary Certificate ...	28	20	27	27	38	36
Got the Primary Certificate	8	8	10	7	21	24

The gradual improvement especially in educational attainment of school-leavers is clear from the Table. In 1965, sixty-six per cent of those who sat for the Primary Certificate succeeded in passing. At the same time the numbers going on to technical schools shows a great improvement and reflects partly the changing attitude of parents and partly the success of the teachers who spare no effort in trying to uplift their children. The story told by the statistics was told in a more descriptive fashion by the school principal. Since his account contains a good description of the attitudes of parents and children, we give here in full.

A School Principal Reports

"About three years ago I approached Brother W——of the C.B.S. and I arranged with him to take any good boys that we have and give them a chance in the secondary school, they not being in a position to pay for their books or pay the fee. He gladly agreed to do all he could. The following year we had a couple of good lads, and I thought that it would be a pity without giving them a chance, so I arranged with Brother W—— to take them. He agreed to give them every preference, but they never showed up at the college. The following year we had one excellent lad. He was too old to try for a scholarship but he did have a shot at it in fifth standard. Again I arranged with Brother W—— to take him, but the lad just turned down the whole thing. He stayed in school for another year and finally went to the tech. for a year.

"We had one boy who did get a scholarship and he elected to go to the C.B.S. He was a very good lad; in fact, I got a report from Brother W—— at Christmas saying that he was one of the best boys they had in the school. That was a sad case. The father was in England and the mother was living here; they had separated for some years. Unfortunately, if I may say so, that particular year they were brought together, and the mother and boy went over to England, and that finished his secondary course. It was a tragedy really. We were very interested to know how he would get on. He was a genius at

Mathematics—a real student. In England he went to school for a while but then drifted to a job. After a year I had an application from him for a letter of reference to the navy. There was something nice about that boy, but circumstances were not what they might be. Of course that is the tragic part of many of the boys here. Few of the boys or parents appreciate what is being done for their advancement.

"In 1957-58 I remember boys walking into the school with their hands hanging—up to seventh class and no books, no pencils, no thought of schoolwork or homework. In 1960 I decided something drastic would have to be done. I made it clear to boys and parents that they would have to make some effort—to get a school-bag and some few books. So by the end of the year eighty per cent had school-bags and we sold £35 worth of school-books. That improvement has continued ever since. Many pay for their books. We try to subsidise those who cannot afford it. There is a small grant from the Department; it used to be £20 but now it has dwindled to £9—for four hundred boys. Some of the parents are very interested and like to get the results of examinations and are interested in having the boys sit for scholarships. Parents who have had some bit of success seem to be real interested. There is a percentage who don't care whether the children come to school or stay away. It is now a small percentage, but a very annoying percentage. The children would be warmer and better looked after in school than around the quarries and streets. Those who stay away from school are those who finish in court afterwards".

Attitude to School Subjects

The general apathy towards education stems largely from the feeling that the subjects taught in the schools have no relation to real life. There is a general attitude that school subjects are not practical enough especially for children whose education ends at fourteen. In many cases the wrath of the parents was directed against the teaching of Irish—"What's the use of wasting time at Irish when some of them children

will never be able to write their names in English". However, it was not difficult to see that Irish was not the real problem. What has really happened is that most parents instinctively feel that something is seriously wrong with the educational system: due to lack of ability to specify exactly what is wrong, most parents automatically turn to Irish as the scapegoat.

The following statements by parents were typical of the prevalent attitude in Parkland to the content of school courses:

> The amount of education they have in how to manage a house—those poor misfortunates up there in the school—fags, tea, bread, butter, and a couple of bones, that's all most of them have got. You give them clothes—needlework, how to put a patch on a thing—and they'll draw it together. They are up there in the school and they are learning Irish—I've nothing against Irish—well, say they are learning history and geography. What do the poor misfortunates want to know geography for. They are being taught percentages and high up sums, and they couldn't add a shop bill for you. They are below there in the shops and if you only get sixpence worth and tuppence worth they have to write it down and add it for you.

Another parent was more specific as to the new type of education that is needed in areas like Parkland:

> You get little girls up there in the school—you get the same thing in all schools—and they walk out at fourteen and they couldn't boil water for you. And they go down into shops and factories and they have big, long, red nails and their hair all done up, and they marry fellows of the same class, and they can't even boil an egg. And now they're talking about keeping them in school longer. As far as I can see it's all a waste of time. Those men up in Dublin should be brought down here to Parkland for a week and that would open their eyes for them.

These attitudes are, of course, transmitted to the children, and the task of the teacher is made all the more impossible. Many of the teachers would like to see a special programme drawn up to suit places like Parkland; the school is for the child, so why lay down stringent rules as to the content of courses. As in all branches of the Irish educational system, the dilemma of whether to prepare the children for an examination or for life crops up. The teacher has to keep his eye on the Primary Certificate, he has also to keep his eye on the weaker children. By the time sixth standard is reached, the latter group have turned completely against education and they find that their attitude is supported by their friends and their parents.

Attitude to Authority

Fear and gain are the motives which dominate the lives of the people of Parkland. They fear and hate all authority, but their hostility must remain curbed because their lives are too dependent on the goodwill of people in authority. All government officials are enemies. The Gardai, rent-collectors, welfare officers—all have "fine soft jobs". The same attitude sometimes extends to teachers and priests. A recurring cause for complaint is the high scale of rent. Very few appreciate the capital cost of house-building and maintenance that they are being saved and the value they are getting, even at £2 or more per week. While there is little sense of personal responsibility or little knowledge of thrift, there is an uncanny mastery, even among the least intelligent, of all the bewildering ins and outs of the Social Welfare Benefit system. One and all know what they are entitled to in every contingency and they show no lack of personal initiative in demanding it. A man who makes no use of his "stamps" is regarded as a fool. Similarly, Social Welfare officials are held in low esteem, the inequities of the system being ascribed to the personal whims and incivilities of the officials. By and large, the mentality of the residents is that there should always be someone to come to their assistance, and without the slightest delay, when there is question of paying for anything except ordinary normal commitments.

Much of the hostility is due to a sort of " 'agin' the government" mentality, but much of it is due to the treatment which they or their friends have got from public officials. One woman explained:

> There is a fellow now inside in the Dispensary, and we walk in there and we are supposed to get 19/6 or something relief. And he has to find out why. And a woman might come in and say that the husband had gone off, and this fellow will shout out in front of them all: "So he's gone away from you, you couldn't keep him, couldn't you". And he abuses everyone on public. And as well, we are made to stand in a queue in public and let the whole street see that we are beggars. That's no way to treat people, and that's where a lot of the trouble comes from, from that element—tuppence-ha'p'ort looking down on tuppence.

The same attitude exists to the distribution of housing, and again one can well sympathise with the people of Parkland. One mother of ten children who seemed to be relating her own experiences outlined the situation:

> If anyone in this area wants to get a house, they have to be going to this one and that one for letters and introductions—distribution of houses, it's all pull, the whole thing is "pull". At present you must have four children to qualify for a house. But how can they have children. They live with the relatives for a while, but then they get thrown out and move into the City Home. And he is put on one side, and she on another. Where are they supposed to have sex; is it in the street? These are young married people. No country in the world would treat them like that. Some think that by going into the City Home they will get a house quicker, but some of them have been there for two years or more.

It is almost two hundred years since Robert Burns spoke of "man's inhumanity to man", but human nature seems to have changed very little in the interval.

The same hostility is directed at employers. Most of the people in Parkland classify employers with all the other authorities; they all have a chip on the shoulder about the employer being always against the worker. The younger workers are solidly anti-capital in that they do not regard any money as sufficient compensation for the hardships of their work. The older workers admit that there were happier days on the job "when men were men", but they are glad that the slavery is over. Their attitude to trade unions and strikes is: "More power to the young fellows if they can get away with it". The general feeling is that whatever the employers suffer is more than good enough for them.

It was almost impossible to discover their attitudes to religion, to priests or to the Church, at least by direct questioning. Having been assured by the first seven families visited that they always went to Mass and that the parish priest was a grand man, I gave up the task. Of the 50 boys in our sample, 17 reported that the family rosary was recited in the home; 50% of the girls reported likewise and an additional 18% said that they recited the rosary privately each day. The percentage who attended Sunday Mass from the area was very small until the new church was built in Parkland. Now things have improved considerably. I was assured by many residents that the percentage of school missing was very indicative of the percentage of non-attenders at Mass since the same people were generally involved. School attendance runs at about 82%, but more important than this is the attitude of mind itself which links irregular attendance at school and church. It indicates that non-attendance at church is not due to any malice or anti-religious feeling but rather to that general apathy and lethargy which one can almost breathe in Parkland. Gandhi once said that to the millions who have to go without two meals a day the only acceptable form in which God dare appear is food, and in this respect Parkland and India have much in common.

Certainly, a man will not want to thank God unless you give him something to be thankful for, nor is there much point in telling a mother whose husband has left her and whose daughter is in "trouble" that she ought to say her prayers.

The attitude to the clergy is difficult to assess. Until recently, the priest was just another outside authority, just another man with a "soft job". However, since the church was built things have changed. The priest is no longer an outsider "come just to preach" but a genuine resident of the neighbourhood and accepted by others as such. At the same time, everything about the priest emphasises his differences from them, and so it takes a long time for the barriers to be overcome. Yet he is the one "authority" with whom they have day-to-day contact—he visits their homes, speaks to them on Sundays, baptizes their children, and buries their dead. They look to him for leadership and he alone is capable of giving it. Without him the people of Parkland have no means of raising their voices and no one to listen if they do. His first task is to win the confidence of the people. The second is more difficult: how to help people to live more independent lives or to want to live them. Already there are signs of success. The priests of the parish have gathered together a band of dedicated people—two nuns, a teacher, a few socially-minded citizens, and some local residents. The Credit Union, opened in 1965, is a tribute to their work. But much more remains to be done, and if these people do not succeed, who will? Almost everyone else in the city seems to believe that everyone in Parkland is delinquent and that if they weren't delinquent they wouldn't be living in that neighbourhood.

Self-Image and Self-Respect

Despite the miserable physical surroundings, the people of Parkland often have a tremendous pride especially in their children. This is most manifest at times like First Communion when parents make a tremendous effort to have the children well dressed. They will literally do anything to ensure that the child is looking his best, especially the poorer families. When

I mentioned this to one of the more intelligent and observant of the mothers, I received the following explanation:

> I'd say that the people here in Parkland are nearly closer at times, you know, than others. Look, what do they own? One thing they own, they own their own children, and they can be very touchy about them, and they can be very proud about them. When they come to First Communion, you know, they spend more than they should and they go into debt and they hock things so that Mary can have her new dress. And they don't like anyone criticising them or giving out. They have a tremendous pride that way.

This pride carries over to publicly defending the child from all outside attacks—police accusations, neighbours' complaints, or teacher reports. However, after the public defence the parent is likely to give way to a display of unreasoned temper once he or she gets the child alone.

Pride in the general appearance of the child seems to be confined only to attendance at religious functions; it does not extend to school or to work. The same is true of the parents themselves who make every effort to look well at Sunday Mass. Mass is as much a social as a religious event, and it is the one time in the week when the ordinary housewife in Parkland feels that she is on display. Consequently, if she does not feel properly dressed she may miss Mass altogether. Before moving to Parkland, many of these women from the older city neighbourhoods had to walk only a hundred yards or so through the back-lanes to reach a church. Suddenly transferred to Parkland, and faced with the prospect of walking a mile on public roads with people they had never seen to churches they had never visited, many found the psychological barrier too severe, especially as shawls and oft-pawned coats did not seem to fit too easily into the new environment. The children followed the example, and not even the building of the new church in Parkland has completely redeemed the situation.

Apart from these few occasions, however, many of the people of Parkland do not manifest any sense of their own dignity or importance. It is almost impossible to maintain privacy in the area, and everyone is well acquainted with his neighbours' business. Family quarrels are fought in the street rather than in the home and in every street there are one or two families who "keep shouting and roaring till all hours of the night and nobody can sleep". One father of a family who had moved from Parkland "for the sake of the children" described the situation, possibly in an attempt at retrospective rationalisation of his decision to move:

> Up there a man is living next-door to a family and he can't get on with them. I am living next-door to people here and I can't get on with them but we mind our own business. But there, they go out on the roads and they don't give a hoot. They have no inhibitions. And there is a big barney, and they say: "your old wife is going down the docks" or "that old fellow is coming in drunk" and everyone in the street knows about it.

This inability to close the door on their own problems often is sufficient to cause rows and dissensions in the whole neighbourhood. It leads to a complete lack of self-respect and is a continuous cause of embarrassment to the better families. In many families the sense of shame has disappeared; in some even the sense of sin has gone. In this situation one mother complained of the difficulty of rearing children:

> You are up against a stone wall here. It's almost impossible to bring them up properly. We have a nice school and some lovely neighbours, but it's impossible for the children. But there are so many things going on that you don't know where to begin or end. The youngsters now see things and talk freely about things which five years ago would have made a married man blush.

Well aware that with the general population Parkland is "a place with a name" and seeing around him some evidence which seems to justify the "name", the average resident of Parkland feels frustrated and ashamed. They are very sensitive to any criticism of the area and very resentful and critical of the officials who "lumped them all together". As one resident put it: "There are a thousand people in Parkland you never hear about; these are plain good Catholic people who try to do the best they can. It's the few who are always in the Court or the one or two women who are down the docks that give the place a bad name".

There is great resentment that outsiders do not make this distinction between the good and the bad, and the fact that they don't is brought home to the people of Parkland in a thousand ways every day. One man said:

> Two girls here next-door were going for jobs to a place in town and they were ashamed to use the Parkland address for fear that they wouldn't get the jobs. At any rate, they were there a week when the man found out that they were from Parkland and fired them.

Treated with little respect by one and all, the people of Parkland, in the end, lose respect for themselves and their neighbourhood. The people have no power, they are merely pawns who can do nothing for themselves. Community spirit, in the sense of local initiative and co-operative activity, is entirely lacking. In time, perhaps, due to the educational programme of the Credit Union and similar activities, a feeling of local pride and importance might develop. In the meantime, the majority of men, as Daniel Corkery might have said, live lives of quiet desperation. It is a problem of poverty, but the people of Parkland have learned by hard experience that poverty is not a thing having to do with money. Money, of course, is part of it, but real poverty is the killing of the human spirit, such as Parkland does. You kill human dignity by putting a man in prison, just as you do in Parkland. It is difficult to

maintain human dignity where there is little but degrading insults and injuries and where there is no personal involvement in anything a man can call his own.

DEFINITION OF THE SITUATION

We have now seen two aspects of the "total situation". And from looking at the circumstances in which these children live and at the dominant attitudes and values of the people of the area, it should be obvious why so few of these children reach secondary or vocational schools and why so many of them will not merely be unemployed but unemployable for the rest of their lives. We now turn to the third element, namely, the manner in which the child himself sees his situation and the effect that this has on his life. To neglect this third factor is to treat the child as a mere pawn of his environment, as a mere passive participant victimised by a situation over which he has no control, on the one hand by parents and neighbours whose attitudes he must of necessity absorb, and on the other by an economic system which may or may not give him opportunities for self-development. Human beings do not follow a purely mechanistic pattern, and the principle of predestination is as dangerous in sociology as it is in theology. Life is not the dull rattling off of a chain that was forged innumerable ages ago but a place where things are being decided from one moment to another. Consequently, this final section deals with the outlook—if any—of the children themselves: what they think of school, of their homes, their neighbourhood, their friends and companions.

School Experiences: Pride and Prejudice

Altogether, the children were asked fifteen distinct questions relating to their years at school. The series of questions began with "What did you like about going to school?" and "What did you not like?" A representative sample of their replies follows:

Boy, age 15
I liked the subjects, even Irish. I think that catechism should be taught for one hour and a half every day and then the children might not be so stupid. The teachers understand the children all right but the children do not understand the teachers.

Girl, age 15
I didn't mind going to school especially when we got holidays. Some lessons could be more interesting, and some of the teachers were always hitting you when you got things wrong. I liked learning especially about history, but sometimes they gave us too much to do at home. I didn't like some of the teachers. I don't like nuns.

Boy, age 15½
Getting up early in the morning was what I didn't like, and I didn't like Irish grammar and Irish writing. We got too many exercises, and some of the teachers would laugh at you. One day the teacher took me out for doing nothing and he said: "'Tis true what they say, if you have a D—— in your class you might as well hang your hat at it". And they all laughed.

Girl, age 14
You make lots of friends. But I think that the teachers and parents are afraid to educate the children on matters facing them in life. The teachers in the national schools do not teach the rules of the road, and I think that this is important. I always liked school but I don't like the one-day-a-week.

For the most part, likes and dislikes centred around teachers, subjects, games, friends, holidays, homework, punishment. Some twenty-six per cent specifically mentioned Irish among the dislikes; nine per cent said that they liked nothing about school, fourteen per cent that they liked everything. The most

surprising feature of many of the responses was the great maturity displayed especially by the girls. When asked if they were glad to have spent two additional years in the one-day-a-week school, most of the girls said that they were. The majority of the boys considered it a waste of time. Perhaps the greatest difference in the responses of boys and girls concerned the amount of education their parents wished them to have. Over sixty per cent of the girls felt that their parents wished them to have secondary education; only ten per cent of the boys thought so.

TABLE 5

EDUCATIONAL LEVEL DESIRED BY PARENTS

	Boys	Girls	TOTAL
Primary	12	6	18
Vocational	16	9	25
Secondary	5	33	38
"Don't Know"	17	2	19
TOTAL	50	50	100

Of course many parents genuinely wish that their children could get secondary education, they wish it if it didn't entail the cost of five years' extra schooling and the loss of the child's earning ability for a similar period. At times the fine line between desires and dreams is not easy to draw. Desiring secondary education is planning for the future, and in Parkland you don't plan for the future; you live just today. Desires of this type never get beyond the stage of wishful thinking, and it is only in the dance-halls and when they consider their prospects of marrying that Parkland's teenage girls regret the lack of secondary education. In general, the boys are not antagonistic to better educated boys, but the girls have a very hostile attitude to "college girls" by which they mean girls attending a secondary school. They feel inferior to them and

refer to them as "snobs". They consider these girls to be immoral in a sly way. Their attitude to "college boys" is quite the opposite. They look up to these, and at dances they pretend to these boys that they are attending secondary school themselves. They look down on the boys attending the "one-day" school.

Asked what type of boys and girls went to secondary school, opinions varied from "those with money", "those with brains", "snobs and high up people", "stupid", etc. Table 6 summarises the general pattern of the replies.

TABLE 6

DROPOUTS' OPINION OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

	Boys	Girls	TOTAL
"People with money"	18	16	34
"People with brains"	19	10	29
"All types"	5	4	9
"Snobs"	2	14	16
"Trying to better themselves"	6	6	12
TOTAL	50	50	100

Generally, the prevalent opinion was that secondary school students are children who can have what they want in life—money, brains, a good time etc. A sizeable minority tend to see secondary education as productive of undesirable personalities, and seem glad that they are not numbered among their group. This is not surprising since one who is rejected by children at secondary school will very likely in turn reject them and their educational values. Over seventy per cent of our respondents felt that they had been right to leave school at fourteen, and fifty-one per cent said that they would advise their friends to follow their example especially if there was a job readily available. Altogether, forty per cent said that

they wouldn't have gone to secondary school even if they had succeeded in getting a scholarship.

For the children of Parkland, the purpose of education—if it has any at all—is to enable you to get a job. Therefore, once you have a job—any sort of a job—education is no longer necessary. The boys find easy employment as messenger-boys, petrol-pump attendants, plumber's mates, hotel page-boys, apprentice chefs, etc. They find out about vacancies from press advertisements or from friends in such jobs. The girls find employment in factories, hotels, shops, restaurants, etc. Only two out of the fifty in our sample were in domestic employment. A small percentage were out of work; in these cases the children were either helping at home or belonged to a family of traditional idlers. The boys change jobs frequently either because they are fired or think that they are bettering themselves. The girls usually retain the same job until marriage.

In many cases both boys and girls complained that they could not get the type of job they wanted, but this failure was not attributed to lack of education but to "pull" or to the fact that they were from Parkland. It is now an accepted fact in the area, especially among the younger generation, that once you mention Parkland to a prospective employer you are inevitably greeted with: "Ah yes, you're from Parkland; well, we haven't anything suitable for you at the moment, but within a week or so you might hear from us if something comes up". Many people in Parkland spend most of their lives waiting for something to turn up. It no longer matters whether in fact there is discrimination against residents of Parkland; nor does it matter that many people use this excuse as a convenient explanation for their own shortcomings. What really matters is that the residents have long ago decided that this is the situation and the acceptance of it has killed, especially among the youth, any pride or respect for their neighbourhood. They feel that nothing, not even a secondary education, can get you a worthwhile job while the Parkland label is around your neck. One of the boys in our sample when asked about secondary school replied:

> Secondary school! For God's sake, if you are from Parkland you might as well be on a football team for five years as be in a secondary school for five years. You just haven't a hope. A "black" has a better chance of getting a job in this city than a fellow from up here, although my brother says that there are plenty jobs if you go the right way about them.

Apparently, some of the girls have discovered "the right way" of getting jobs, as one of the teachers reports:

> The position is very sad. I have seen lovely girls come to me for a reference, and they say: "If you put Parkland at the top we won't get anything". And they ask me to put down some other address or place where there might not be a house half as good but the name isn't attached to the place. And they might live with an aunt or uncle for a while. It's a terrible pity.

However, being from Parkland is not the only barrier which these children have to overcome. Already branded with a "wrong address", they drift into the one-day-a-week schools and receive another unfavourable tag to carry through life. In fact, these schools are doing a wonderful job in the extraordinary circumstances in which they exist; they are giving the children an ordered, disciplined day at a time when many of them do not know what discipline means; they give a useful educational course and provide influential contact with priests and teachers. These things are important but not as important as the fact that bringing all these children together under one roof emphasises for themselves and for the entire city that they are different and inferior. It is tying a second tag where one was already sufficient. And the increasing contact with other dropouts brings home to the individuals that as a group they are numerically strong and merely reinforces them in their attitudes.

In our introduction we have already seen some of the reasons

given by the children themselves for leaving school at fourteen. Some 38% said that they left because they had got a job, 15% because they wanted money and independence, 31% because they were "fed up with school", 9% because they were fourteen and "school ended automatically", and 7% left to help with work at home. Many of these children are slow learners and would have found school very difficult even from the beginning. But in both work and school the pattern overall is much the same, namely, a lack of sincere interest in what they are doing. The level of aspiration is extremely low, probably because if a youth wishes to aim higher than his friends, he has to accept derision or isolation from those who think it is stupid or disloyal to have ambitions above those common to the group as a whole. Poverty—especially poverty of spirit—and ambitions do not easily blend, and the poor must necessarily hold low levels of aspiration if only to make life tolerable. A girl in a job which involves little skill, a minimum of intelligence, and no personality does not aspire to a better job. She looks forward to the day when Prince Charming will come riding by on his rusty bicycle and carry her off. Meanwhile, her future husband has begun to figure out that his presence in school and his lack of independence come from one source—authority. At the age of fourteen he can achieve freedom from both by getting a job and earning money. By sixteen, he realises that at least one authority still remains, the father or mother who relentlessly demand fifty per cent of his weekly wages. By eighteen, docility has turned to rebellion as increasing financial demands of new clothes, new dance-halls, and new girl-friends crop up. The pressures of the home—overcrowding, undernourishment and over-demanding parents—can all be avoided if he starts a home of his own. And so he marries, and by the age of twenty-one he begins to realise that he has jumped right out of the frying-pan into the fire.

Home and Neighbourhood

One characteristic of these children which impresses all who have contact with them is their complete lack of any middle-

class inhibitions. The teachers were unanimous in their praise that "the children are lovely and open and talk quite freely and would stand on their head to help you". This frankness made our research less exacting than had been expected. It also made one realise the basic goodness of the children and that with a little help in the proper direction their lives could be so much better. This frankness was also displayed in discussing their friends, their homes, their neighbourhood:

Girl, age 15
I think that working girls should have no housework to do because that is what a mother is usually there to do unless she is working. I think the father should be boss in the house; the home is much happier when he is.

Boy, age 14
I wish people would not be all out for class distinction. The people of this city are all out for that sort of thing. This is not human and the quicker it is stopped the better.

Girl, age 15½
What I don't like about Parkland is the nosey women who are always looking at you and trying to find out your business. They want to know what everybody does and they're great for telling tales on everyone.

Boy, age 15
I have many friends to play with me and to back me up. The people are nice to talk to at times, but sometimes there is too much fighting on the roads, and I don't like people coming out fighting over their children.

Girl, age 15
I like my home but I don't like the place it is. There is too much noise and too many Teddyboys and some of the streets and people are dirty. There are too many dogs and cats and too many horses' cars on the road. I don't like bla'guards.

Boy, age 15½

I think that parents should not let the family grow up too fast. For instance, girls of twelve and thirteen wearing make-up, going out with boys and dressing any way they like. I think that this is wrong. Also I think that people have too many children.

Altogether, 74% said that they liked the neighbourhood, 26% that they did not. Most children said that the people were nice but that the area was too noisy, especially at night. We have already seen that most of them felt that coming from Parkland was a disadvantage when looking for jobs.

The vast majority of the respondents considered their homes to be reasonably happy. Only 11% reported unhappiness in the home. Again, the majority—83%—said that their parents had been strict with them, but that nonetheless they get along pretty well with them. The amount of "dialogue" within the home appeared to be limited; only half of our sample said that they ever discuss things or talk things over with their parents. One boy said that he would like to see his home go up in fire, another that he would like to see the whole district blown up. Probably the most accurate assessment of their attitude towards their homes and families can be gleaned from the replies to the question: "*What are the biggest problems facing a family today?*" They were asked to specify two of the following list, and the percentages now given indicate the order of preference. Number 10 was left blank, and a few of the children wrote in some addition problems there:

14% Unemployment
13% Low wages
10% Too many children
17% Price of everything too high
19% Father drinking
7% Parents don't understand children
9% Too much hire purchase
4% Too much money and too little religion

5% Too much religion and too little money
2% Police trouble; father not handing up wages.

The crime rate in the Parkland area is relatively high. The number of persons from the survey area who had been before the courts on criminal charges in 1965 was 71, and of these some 57 were juveniles. Only 7 of the juveniles were girls. The crimes in question were pilfering from shops, malicious damage to cars, telephones and gas-meters, house-breakings, stealing bicycles, and personal assault. Twenty-two boys and six girls in our sample admitted that their friends had been in trouble with the police. Some 44% of the boys and 26% of the girls said that they "hang around" with friends of whom their parents do not approve. Asked what they usually do when parents object to their friends, 67% said that they would usually give up the friends, 10% that they might give them up, 23% that they would do nothing. Many of the children felt that parents, teachers, priests, police, etc., all belong to the "older generation" who can be expected to prevent the youth of today enjoying themselves. Thus for example:

Girl, age 15½
I think that the older generation look down on the younger generation because they got more freedom and opportunity than they did. The dances and films that are shown are only dirt in their eyes.

Boy, age 15
There are not enough places or clubs in the city for teenagers of today. Then parents and everyone else wonder why we spend so much time in pictures and walking up and down the streets. Sometimes teenagers stand at a corner and laugh and joke and sometimes listen to pop songs on a transistor, but when they are seen doing this they are called hooligans.

This latter point brings us on to a recurring theme in the accounts given by both boys and girls—the complete lack of playgrounds or suitable club facilities in Parkland or in the city.

Recreation: Lack of Facilities

We have already mentioned that the town planners made ample arrangements for the movement of traffic but none at all for the movement of children. In the Parkland area there are 1,000-1,500 people, some 50% of whom are under the age of 15, yet not the slightest provision was made for recreational facilities. There isn't even a patch of grass where they can kick a ball, nor a single playground. Indoor facilities are non-existent. The boys roam around the streets in groups kicking a ball or a canister or one another. Rows are frequent and intense but of short duration. These children will fight like anything when they think somebody is trying to take something from them; it might be question of their own or their family's reputation, or of a pencil or sixpence or anything at all. When not holding up the street corners, the boys play pitch-and-toss or hurling or soccer. Many of them are members of G.A.A. and soccer clubs but some of them never go beyond a "kick around" on the street. The girls too ramble around in groups or hang around the cafes or fish-and-chip shops; a particularly precocious girl might be seen propped up against a wall with a crowd of boys around her; she is often the leader of a group and envied by the other girls. Usually the boys and girls congregate apart and guffaw or giggle at one another.

The majority of boys and girls seem to crave the anonimity of the group. They find security within the mob atmosphere where nobody is going to single them out. They can sort of bury themselves and still feel that they are doing something and moving along. For this reason many of the boys dislike organised games of any sort. The "kick around" on the street is great but the organised match puts the spotlight on the individual. They are very sensitive to criticism especially from

their peers, and being singled out merely increases the opportunity for criticism.

Almost every individual interviewed mentioned the lack of playgrounds and clubs. The following comments were typical:

Girl, age 15
I think that clubs are great and we should have more for boys and girls, and I think that boys and girls should be in the one club. It helps the girls and boys to get to know one another, and it helps the boys to get over any shyness they might have when they talk to girls or are alone with them.

Boy, age 14
I just get fed up looking at this place with nothing to do and nothing like Dublin with its indoor swimming pools.

Girl, age 14½
There is nothing for girls of my age, no dances, no nice clubs, no places to go, no nice things to buy. A club would keep boys and girls off the street. There should be more clubs to keep the children off the roads and less drinking places. I have a comment to make on girls and boys of 15 and 16 who drink. I think that it is a downright shame and hope that I never get friendly with them.

Boy, age 15
I would like if a playground were organised, and a club for young boys and girls. It would keep them off the streets and be a great comfort to their fathers and mothers.

These children were asked no direct question on clubs or playgrounds so that the great number who mention them is noteworthy.

Denied the opportunity of outdoor amusements, the youth of Parkland turned to the indoor pastimes that are readily available. Over 90% reported that their homes had television,

and this together with film-going, comic-reading, and dancing seemed to constitute the greater part of the children's free time. Tables 7 and 8 summarise the amount of free time spent at these activities.

TABLE 7

FREQUENCY OF FILM-GOING AND DANCING

Number of Times Per Week	Films		Dances	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
None	10	8	42	18
One	23	26	8	25
Two	7	12	—	5
Three	6	4	—	2
Four	4	—	—	—
TOTAL	50	50	50	50

Girls start going to dances at fourteen; normally, the boys do not start till sixteen. A girl's first wages are usually spent on a pair of nylons, her second on a hair-do. Not until they start going to dances do boys become conscious of the necessity to have a crease in the trousers and a comb in the pocket.

TABLE 8

TIME SPENT WATCHING TELEVISION

Hours Per Day	Boys	Girls	TOTAL
None	19	9	28
One	17	8	25
Two	10	14	24
Three	3	10	13
Four	1	9	10
TOTAL	50	50	100

Consequently, it was not surprising that the girls in our sample were much better dressed than the boys. Elvis Presley was the most popular filmstar with both boys and girls, although all the better-known stars received at least one mention. The Fugitive and the Showband Show were the most popular television shows, though again everything from Murphy agus a Cháirde to the Late Late were mentioned. The most interesting aspect of the responses to the question on the favourite singer was that children who could scarcely spell their own names correctly had not the slightest difficulty in spelling Brendan Bowyer, Beatles, Elvis or Butch Moore. As regards comics—and youths of all ages even up to 19 and 20 read comics in Parkland—among the boys *Beano*, *Dandy* and *Victor* were very popular, while the girls fancied *Bunty*, *Judy* and *True Romance*.

It is not unusual for both boys and girls to roam around the streets in groups up to a very late hour at night. Indeed, the local chip shops do their best trade between 11.30 p.m. and midnight. Young people will stay out all night unless somebody stops them, and in Parkland nobody does. The herd instinct is very strong in Parkland; the individual must always be with the group. From infancy the children are so used to closeness and togetherness even in bed that the individual feels lost if he is not part of the crowd. He cannot sleep on his own, eat on his own, work on his own, learn on his own. There must always be the others if only to give him courage or to have "a bit of gas". And so work and school and religion and situations which children face daily are defined in a *general* way by parents and teachers, but they are defined in a *specific* way by the clique in which the child plays. Therefore, from an early age, and almost unconsciously, the child learns to define his situation in a way that favours a job rather than school, that favours today rather than tomorrow, that sees getting ahead as a combination of money and "pull", that stresses the inequalities of the "fine soft jobs" of the idle rich, and that kills any sense of their own dignity and importance and that kills any respect for their neighbourhood, their city or their country.

Fifteen years ago Parkland was the solution to inadequate housing and city slums. Today it is itself the garget for solution. The problem, as we have said, is how to help people to live more independent lives or to want to live them. All over the world today minorities are on the march demanding an end to discrimination and injustice. Minorities everywhere are finding a solution to their problems in political activity. There is no reason why the minority that is Parkland should not do likewise. Parkland is partly the creation of its residents, but it is also the creation of "officialdom" with its policy that urban populations need only roads and houses. Cities are for people, and people need playgrounds and swimming-pools, halls and community centres, and something to remind them that they are more important than motor cars or traffic lights or office blocks or supermarkets. President Kennedy's favourite quotation from the Bible was "Where there is no vision the people perish". Parkland today is a target for solution because of lack of vision in the past. Its future and that of its people may well depend on men of vision today; or will it depend on how well Parkland organises its voting strength and its pressure groups? If the coming of solutions depend on this latter, then Parkland will surely perish because there the lack of sincere interest in everything extends even to politics.

In the meantime, there is much to be done and many who can do it. Changes must take place in the attitude of the general population of the city. Parkland is a community concern and the resources of the community must be mobilised. A citizens' body with representation from schools, churches, employment agencies, labour and management, central and local government agencies should be established to tackle the problem. Each year, our universities are turning out trained social workers and social scientists, the majority of them for export. Do social problems exist only in England? Or are we content to spend our money on social welfare benefits rather than on real social welfare? Or have we so many voluntary welfare

organisations that we think that the problem is being adequately cared for. The voluntary societies are doing a good job, but the manner of their "charities" hasn't changed for centuries. As well, their benefits are very much on a hit or miss basis and go mainly to those who are able to ask. It is time that these societies co-ordinated in a Christian fashion and tackled a whole area like Parkland together. It is no longer sufficient to have sympathy. The people and children of Parkland are very quick to take advantage of the sympathy that is their due, and if you accept that excuse they will merely play on your sympathies.

If you are going to tackle the problem of Parkland in an empirical fashion, then you must tackle parents and children together. They must be given a sense of well-being, a sense of importance, and a sense of their own dignity. Above all they must be given a living example of justice. If some system could be devised whereby the teachers in the schools could unite with somebody who would undertake the task of educating the parents. An education for life, which these children need above all, cannot be given by many of the parents. Consequently, the schools must be a substitute. Here, smaller classes and classrooms are essential. Classes should be divided according to ability; the gifted student should not be condemned to tedium because of the deficiencies of the less talented, nor should the slower children be condemned to constant discouragement and frustration. Above all, the system of teaching in the primary school should not be confined to one approach. In the present system, the book approach is the only one—a book and a pen. In between the infant room and the technical school a pupil is not given an opportunity of using his hands. Finally, what is probably the biggest barrier to educational aspiration must be removed: the fact that Parkland youth have as little chance to obtain a job with secondary education as without it. This, of course, would involve a change of attitude on the part of the whole community and is not easy to attain.

The physical environment of Parkland can be changed by the addition of a community centre, a swimming pool, ade-

quate clubs and playing grounds for boys and girls. Of course, it is not sufficient just to construct these and leave them to the residents. They require adequate supervision and management. With proper training and proper salaries some of the local residents could take over these functions. Already, the Credit Union has shown that the people of Parkland can work together if somebody points them in the proper direction.

Aldous Huxley once wrote: "Without charity, knowledge is apt to be inhuman; without knowledge, charity is foredoomed, all too often, to impotence. . . . It is only by making the best of both worlds—the world of the head no less than the world of the heart—that the twentieth-century saint can hope to be effective".[7] Knowledge without charity and charity without knowledge have not helped Parkland in the past. Knowledge with charity can probably assure it of a more humanly tolerable future.

7. Aldous Huxley, Introduction to Danilo Dolci's *Poverty in Sicily* (Penguin Books, 1966), p. 9.