

REPORTS AND ENQUIRIES

Vocational Training of Domestic Servants in Sweden

An analysis was recently given in these pages¹ of the report on an enquiry undertaken by the Swedish Department of Labour and Social Welfare, in accordance with a Royal Order of 29 December 1933, into the conditions of work of domestic servants in that country.

The enquiry was carried out with the help of experts who had been appointed by a decision of 30 June 1933, before the enquiry began, to study the problem of the vocational training of domestic servants. Their report, which comprises a survey of the existing situation and a number of practical proposals, was recently published by the Swedish Social Board.²

As the problem of training servants for domestic employment in agriculture is to be studied separately, the report analysed below deals solely with the vocational training of domestic servants for non-agricultural households.

The experts point out that it is very difficult, as was found already in connection with the enquiry into the conditions of work of domestic servants, to reach any definite conclusions, more especially because such servants tend to change their employment frequently and because the mistresses and the servants have different views with regard to domestic work. Moreover, it is far from easy to obtain an exact idea of the extent to which there is a shortage of domestic servants; many servants obtain employment by personal recommendation, as the employment exchanges cannot do much with applicants who often have no knowledge of the occupation.

THE EXISTING SITUATION

Training for domestic work began in Sweden in 1860, when the first schools of domestic science were set up. Originally these schools were not subsidised by the State; but at present the State grants a subsidy for domestic training, which however is not compulsory, to

¹ Cf. "The Conditions of Work of Domestic Servants in Sweden", in *International Labour Review*, Vol. XXXV, No. 1, January 1937, pp. 83-87.

² SOCIALDEPARTEMENTET : *Hembiträätsutredningens betänkande I. Betänkande och förslag i fråga om utbildning av hembiträden*, Statens offentliga utredningar 1937 : 16. Stockholm, 1937.

elementary, higher elementary, continuation and municipal intermediate schools.

In the elementary and higher elementary schools, cookery lessons are given for four or five hours a day on not less than 34 days a year to groups of not less than eight pupils. In the continuation schools, the curriculum for which makes provision for practical training, a certain amount of domestic training is given. For some years past the State has also paid subsidies for domestic training to the higher popular schools, in accordance with an agreement with the Education Department.

Vocational training for household work is given in municipal institutions, domestic service schools and domestic science schools, all of which are subsidised by the State, as well as in institutions receiving no subsidy.

The municipal institutions, which are governed by an Order of 4 November 1921, include apprenticeship schools and vocational schools.

In the apprenticeship schools, domestic training is one of the branches provided for girls who have attended a continuation school, in order to enable them to supplement their theoretical knowledge by practical experience. Courses are also given in these schools to older persons who have not had an opportunity of attending a continuation school. Domestic training is only sometimes compulsory for girls. The course is for two years and lasts for eight or nine months of the year, with an average of not more than twelve hours weekly. A local authority which sets up an apprenticeship school, either alone or jointly with another local authority, may decide that girls under age, living or employed within its area, may be obliged to follow a course of domestic training for not more than two years; this obligation lapses when they reach the age of 18 years. Candidates for admission to an apprenticeship school for domestic service must have completed their education at a compulsory continuation school and must, in the opinion of the head teacher, have the necessary aptitude to benefit by the training in question. No fees are charged.

The vocational school enables persons engaged in domestic work and having sufficient experience to extend their knowledge acquired in the apprenticeship school. The curriculum includes vocational courses in different subjects, as well as special courses and a preparatory training in household management, which may be given either in evening classes or in full-time day classes. Fees are charged. Candidates for admission must have a certificate from an apprenticeship school, be 17 years of age, have at least two years' practical experience and have the necessary aptitude to benefit by the training.

Vocational domestic training is also given in a variety of courses, the commonest of which is the continuation course, which is quite long and is intended for persons already in employment. There are also more intensive courses held for a longer number of hours each week. It is only in the last few years that such vocational courses of domestic employees have been instituted; those in Göteborg, for example, began in 1932. The pupils must be 17 years of age and have

engaged in domestic service for two years at least. The course extends over 22 weeks, with an average of 40 ½ hours a week, making a total of 891 hours.

Since the educational reform of 1918, schools of domestic service have been set up in rural districts and in the smaller towns, with the same curriculum as the municipal apprenticeship and vocational schools. There is no great difference between the domestic service schools and the domestic science schools. Since 1921, however, the Order mentioned above has assimilated domestic service schools to the municipal vocational schools. Fees are charged, but pupils not possessing sufficient means may be admitted free of charge or at a reduced rate. The course of training covers one year, with from 30 to 40 hours' work weekly; shorter courses are also given.

The vocational training Order applies also to private institutions for vocational training subsidised by the State, that is, to the domestic science schools. The curricula of these schools are not uniform, but the experts found that quite a large number of pupils from these schools enter domestic service.

The private schools not subsidised by the State also train their pupils for domestic work, the training being similar to that given in hotels and restaurants. They usually charge fees and give practical rather than theoretical training.

Mistresses also accept girls as apprentices and train them in exchange for a certain fee. The experts do not favour this system, for mistresses rarely possess the necessary qualifications for teaching. Moreover, if this form of training were recognised by law, the pupil would have to receive a complete systematic course of training and in return would have to remain in her post for a certain period fixed by agreement. In view of the present situation in Sweden, the experts are doubtful whether it would be possible to secure compliance with this obligation and they consider that such a course would meet with serious obstacles. The contracts would certainly have to contain definite detailed provisions concerning the obligations of the two parties. It would also be necessary to have an inspection service to secure compliance and to supervise the value of the training given.

In the opinion of the experts, vocational training in a household, combined with a comparatively long attendance at evening classes, has not given such satisfactory results as might have been expected. As can readily be understood, a domestic servant who is anxious for further training objects to sacrificing from 8 to 12 hours of her restricted leisure time every week. Mistresses themselves do not favour the system, and those who have practical experience of domestic training seem more and more inclined to condemn it.

CONCLUSIONS OF THE ENQUIRY

For all these reasons, the experts definitely favour intensive training in their conclusions. The great majority (over 70 per cent.) of the girls employed in domestic service come from the country and it is, therefore, essential that the rural schools should be in a position to

give the necessary rudimentary training for such employment, after which the pupils can either supplement their vocational training or accept employment without any special training. In this connection, the experts expressed the hope that the decision taken by the Riksdag in 1936, to make domestic training compulsory in the seventh school year, would be accepted when the reform of elementary education comes up for final discussion.

Their investigations lead the experts to the conclusion that the best way of solving the problem of providing an up-to-date system of vocational training for domestic servants is to establish a model institution which could demonstrate these methods with a view to systematically improving the standard of knowledge of domestic servants. This institution should be set up by the State, as distinct from the present schools which have been organised by the local authorities by private initiative with State assistance. In spite of the possible objections to living in, the experts consider that, for the purpose of domestic training, the proposed institution should be a residential one.

This model school would be directly supervised by the Education Department. Its task would be to teach women engaged in domestic work how to work on their own responsibility and, at the same time, to supply households with properly trained servants. The proposed curriculum is outlined below.

1. *Normal training.*

This would include two courses :

(a) A six months' course for girls of 18 years or over with not less than two year's practical experience. No fees would be charged and pupils who had not sufficient means would be provided with free accommodation ; the others would pay 60 crowns a month. The course of training would last for 24 weeks of 48 hours each, of which 42 hours would be devoted to practical training (cooking, preserving, house-keeping, including cleaning, service at table, washing, ironing and mending) and 6 hours of theoretical training (theory of cooking, nutrition, household management, domestic economy and hygiene, and vocational psychology).

(b) A twelve months' course for girls of 17 years or over with not less than one year's practical experience. The conditions of residence would be the same as for the six months' course. The period of training would be 46 weeks of 48 hours each, of which 43½ would be devoted to practical training and 4½ to theory. The curriculum would include the care of children and needlework as well as the subjects included in the six months' course. Pupils attending either of these courses would receive a certificate as skilled domestic servants.

2. *Special training.*

Courses of special training would be open to persons having a certificate as skilled domestic servants and having reached the age of 20 years. Fees would be charged for the training, which would include :

(a) A course for cooks, leading to a certificate as skilled cook. The course would last for 16 weeks of 48 hours, of which 43 would be devoted to practical work and 5 to theory.

(b) A course of 12 weeks for general servants, the hours of training being 48 in the week, of which 43½ would be devoted to practical work. Certificates as skilled general servants would be granted.

(c) A course in the care of children, leading to a certificate as skilled nurse. The course would cover 24 weeks of 48 hours, of which 44 would be devoted to practical work.

(d) A course of vocational training for more highly qualified domestic employees; the duration of the course would be 30½ weeks for those who had followed the normal six months' course and 5 months for those who had followed the normal twelve months' course. Pupils would be trained more particularly in budgeting for the expenditure on food under different incomes, methods of purchasing, accounts, the planning of simple and more elaborate meals, the calculation of their nutritive value, estimating the amount of fuel required, invalid cookery, the care of children, child psychology, the care of the sick, and needlework.

3. *Supplementary courses on special subjects.*

These courses are intended to enable pupils who have attended a domestic service school or the State school and obtained a certificate as skilled domestic servants to follow the curriculum of the vocational courses for experienced domestic employees, with the exception of the subjects mentioned under (d) above. The curriculum would include needlework, the care of children, household economy, the care of the sick, and invalid cookery.

4. *" Examination " courses.*

These courses would enable persons engaged in domestic employment, who have not received school training, to obtain certificates as skilled domestic servants. Admission would be restricted to persons between the ages of 24 and 45 years with not less than five years' practical experience. The course would last for three weeks and a fee would be charged.