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# Future Citizens: Cultural and Political Conceptions of Children in Britain, 1930s-1950s

## *Abstract*

This article explores how children were positioned within political debates before, during and after the Second World War. It does thorough analysis of the ways in which children were conceptualized as future citizens, future workers, future leaders and future adults in mid-twentieth-century Britain, through research into newspapers and parliamentary debates. It argues that this thinking was important in debates about the state's role and the construction of the welfare state. By focusing on children as the future, and conceptualizing them as an economic investment for a future return, greater spending on their welfare could be justified. This language was used by politicians from a variety of political parties and backgrounds, and this article charts the effects such a way of thinking about children had in policy debates about children's physical health, education, the birth rate and family allowances. Overall, it argues that during this period, this language of children as the future helped provide political space for spending on measures to improve children's welfare, and focusing on the future rather than the present facilitated consensus on this issue across political boundaries. Yet, behind this apparent consensus were clear ideological faultlines; understanding how children were positioned as the future helps us better understand the divisions and inequalities present from the welfare state's formation.

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In 1946, as Britain was reckoning with the end of the Second World War and the prospects of peace, Humphrey Jennings's *A Diary for Timothy* was released. This documentary was completed in 1945 for the Crown Film Unit, set up during the war as part of the Ministry of Information. It spoke to baby Timothy, said to represent Britain's future. With words written by novelist E. M. Forster, narrator Michael Redgrave told the boy, 'you are one of the lucky ones, you're alive, you're healthy'. He described how farmers, miners, engine drivers and servicemen were all fighting on his behalf. It concluded, 'are you going to make the world a different place?'<sup>1</sup> Timothy represented a different future for Britain, one at peace and prospering, in contrast to conditions after the First World War. Using a baby to represent the future was an obvious move: just a few months old, Timothy did not know about the war, was not tainted by its associations, and was a future adult who would create a different Britain. Through their innocence and potential, children could function as important symbols of future hope. The family was positioned as a crucial means for moving beyond wartime, a key institution for a future society and to bring up future citizens.<sup>2</sup>

This article considers how children were conceptualized in politics and culture c.1935–55. It considers how and why the language of children as future citizens, leaders, and workers was used by politicians and journalists. Ludmilla Jordanova highlighted in 1989 'the prevalent use by politicians of phrases like "our children's future," which raise questions about the present and the future in deliberately emotive terms'.<sup>3</sup> As Harry Hendrick notes, 'Children are usually viewed from the perspective of *becoming* (growing to adult maturity), rather than *being* (children as their own persons)'. He suggests that a Foucauldian analysis of childhood in modern Britain shows how 'through welfare, health, education and legal provisions, children are "monitored," "surveyed," "calculated"—nearly always in relation to their families—and that their health and welfare is fused with the broader political health of the

<sup>1</sup> *A Diary for Timothy*, dir. Humphrey Jennings (Crown Film Unit, 1945), <<https://archive.org/details/DiaryForTimothy>> accessed 25 August 2015.

<sup>2</sup> In the British context, see Harry Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society, 1880–1990* (Cambridge, 1997), 54–5; Laura King, *Family Men: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Britain, 1914–60* (Oxford, 2015), 194; Pat Thane, 'Family Life and "Normality" in Postwar British Culture', in Richard Bessel and Dirk Schumann, eds, *Life After Death: Approaches to a Cultural and Social History of Europe during the 1940s and 1950s* (Cambridge, 2003), 193–210; Mathew Thomson, *Lost Freedom: The Landscape of the Child and the British Post-War Settlement* (Oxford, 2013), 2; in a European context, see Tara Zahra, 'Lost Children: Displacement, Family, and Nation in Postwar Europe', *Journal of Modern History*, 81 (2009), 56–7.

<sup>3</sup> Ludmilla Jordanova, 'Children in History: Concepts of Nature and Society', in G. Scarre, ed., *Children, Parents and Politics* (Cambridge, 1989), 4.

nation'.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Cathy Urwin and Elaine Sharland argue that the growing focus of childcare advice literature on emotional stability was consistent with greater social regulation of the family, as described by Nikolas Rose.<sup>5</sup> A greater interest in the future of children was interlinked with not only increased protection and welfare provision, but also increased surveying and monitoring, often through the same means.

There has been little analysis of how this rhetoric of futurity functioned and its consequences.<sup>6</sup> This article uses the future as a lens through which to understand the work 'children' as a symbol performed, as well as evaluating the place children had in political debates.<sup>7</sup> Ultimately, this analysis can enhance understandings of the thinking that underpinned the welfare state, a long-term future project which positioned the family as central to British society and the state's relationship with individuals. Historians have rigorously critiqued the gendered underpinnings of the welfare state and their consequences for women,<sup>8</sup> but there is less on children in the thinking around the welfare state.<sup>9</sup> As Denise Riley notes, the focus during and after the war on the family meant greater attention on mothers, though more about their function as reproducers rather than their needs.<sup>10</sup> Yet children were crucial, not only as a third group alongside men and women, but also as

<sup>4</sup> Hendrick, *Children, Childhood*, 3–5. On measurement, also see James Vernon, 'The Ethics of Hunger and the Assembly of Society: The Techno-Politics of the School Meal in Modern Britain', *American Historical Review*, 110 (2005), 701.

<sup>5</sup> Cathy Urwin and Elaine Sharland, 'From Bodies to Minds in Childcare Literature: Advice to Parents in Inter-War Britain', in R. Cooter, ed., *In the Name of the Child: Health and Welfare, 1880–1940* (London and New York, 1992), 188.

<sup>6</sup> Social policy researchers have examined this: Ruth Lister, 'Investing in Children and Childhood: A New Welfare Policy Paradigm and its Implications', *Comparative Social Research*, 25 (2008), 383–408.

<sup>7</sup> On the future as a category of analysis, see Roxanne Panchasi, *Future Tense: The Culture of Anticipation in France Between the Wars* (Ithaca, NY, 2009), 1–9.

<sup>8</sup> A few of many: Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, eds, *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of the Welfare States* (New York and London, 1993); Jane Lewis, *The Politics of Motherhood: Child and Maternal Welfare in England, 1900–1939* (London, 1980); Jane Lewis, *Women in Britain Since 1945: Women, Family, Work and the State in the Post-war Years* (Oxford, 1992); Jane Lewis, 'Gender, the Family and Women's Agency in the Building of "Welfare States": The British Case', *Journal of Social History*, 19 (1994), 37–55; Susan Pedersen, *Family, Dependence, and the Origins of the Welfare State, Britain and France 1914–1945* (New York and Cambridge, 1993); Sonya O. Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Britain 1939–45* (Oxford, 2003); Theda Skocpol and Gretchen Ritter, 'Gender and the Origins of Modern Social Policies in Britain and the United States', *Studies in American Political Development*, 5 (1991), 36–93.

<sup>9</sup> Some examples: Harry Hendrick, *Child Welfare: England 1872–1989* (London, 1994), 194–213; Jane Lewis, ed., *Children, Changing Families and Welfare States* (Cheltenham, 2006); John Macnicol, 'The Effect of Evacuation of Schoolchildren on Attitudes to State Intervention', in H. L. Smith, ed., *War and Social Change: British Society in the Second World War* (Manchester, 1998), 3–31; Thomson, *Lost Freedom*; John Welshman, 'Evacuation and Social Policy during the Second World War: Myth and Reality', *Twentieth Century British History*, 9 (1998), 28–53.

<sup>10</sup> Denise Riley, *War in the Nursery: Theories of the Child and Mother* (London, 1983), esp. 151–5, 167–70.

those who would engage with the welfare state beyond the immediate post-war period. Examining the way children were considered as a future generation of citizens and beneficiaries of a welfare state shows us that the politics of the mid-century were driven as much with visions of a longer-term future as reacting to the past.

As Jordanova argued, the analysis of language relating to children is a 'valuable exercise'.<sup>11</sup> As Jane Lewis highlights, it is important to distinguish between the rhetoric, aims, rationale and means behind welfare policy.<sup>12</sup> By analysing the temporal positioning of children in mid-twentieth-century Britain, this article explores the rhetoric and rationale used to argue for intervention in children's lives, and to act for the future. To assess the way this language, of children as the future, has been used in politics and culture, I have used the digital archives of Hansard and national newspapers (*The Times*, *Manchester Guardian*, *The Observer*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Mirror*).<sup>13</sup> There are of course endless sources one could use to investigate such conceptions of childhood—all public and political discussion is relevant. These two source types have been chosen for prominence, public nature and regularity.<sup>14</sup> The digitization of such sources allows for a new scale of analysis; this research would not be possible using printed records.<sup>15</sup> Using keyword searches of sample periods allows large-scale identification of relevant content, through reading adjacent material in newspapers and looking through the whole of parliamentary debates (beyond the immediate speech which mentioned both children and the future).<sup>16</sup> Due to the sheer volume of material, selected months were sampled and analysed.<sup>17</sup> Finally, material aimed at children was also used—sample content from *Beano*, *Dandy* and *Daily Mirror* children's

<sup>11</sup> Jordanova, 'Children', 21.

<sup>12</sup> Lewis, 'Gender', 41. On rhetoric and policy, also see Riley, *War*, 151–3.

<sup>13</sup> Newspapers are highly valuable yet underused. Adrian Bingham, 'Reading Newspapers: Cultural Histories of the Popular Press in Modern Britain', *History Compass*, 10 (2012), 140–50.

<sup>14</sup> *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Mirror* were read by millions; in 1951, the *Mirror* and *Express* sold over 4 mil. copies daily, with the *Mail* at around 2.2 mil. daily. The other papers had circulations of under a million but included more political content, and *The Times* known as the paper of record. On newspapers' reach, see Adrian Bingham, *Tabloid Century: The Popular Press in Britain, 1896 to the present* (Oxford, 2015); Colin Seymour-Ure, *The British Press and Broadcasting Since 1945* (2nd edn, Oxford, 1996), esp. 26–31.

<sup>15</sup> On the potential and challenges of digitisation, see Adrian Bingham, 'The Digitization of Newspaper Archives: Opportunities and Challenges for Historians', *Twentieth Century British History*, 21 (2010), 225–31.

<sup>16</sup> On keyword searching, see Bingham, 'The Digitization', 229–30. The presence/absence of words does not necessarily signify relevant content. As such, no quantitative analysis has proved valuable.

<sup>17</sup> Four months per year of Hansard were searched (every third month in each year, covering different months each year). One month per year was searched in the newspaper archives, different in each year for each publication. Keyword searching was also used around important dates such as elections.

pages. Very little was found; though children were the subjects of such language, publications for them focused on fantasy and escapist content with little reference to their futures. As Mathew Thomson notes, children's and adults' understanding of the future were different.<sup>18</sup>

As Thomson argues, children's landscapes shifted substantially during and after the war; their exposure to danger was limited, specific spaces designed for children emerged, and the family was highlighted as the ideal place for their development.<sup>19</sup> This article argues that the idea of children as future citizens, vessels in which to invest, intensified in the conditions of wartime, and provided a language of apparent consensus across ideological boundaries as the welfare state was established. Underlying this illusion of consensus on promoting children's interests remained ideological division about the role of the state and its relationship with citizens. There were at least three distinct and competing political ideologies at work in mid-century Britain: free-market individualism which positioned children in economic terms, as investments; a social-democratic approach to welfare which created conditions for all citizens to flourish; a conservative concern for national (and less so imperial) efficiency, in which children would carry forward particular British values. Ultimately, whilst politicians and public figures often drew on this language, of children as the future, to instigate consensus or to evidence apparently worthwhile motives, this thinking did not necessarily benefit children, or at least all children. The child envisaged was almost always white, often male (as Wendy Webster notes, *A Diary for Timothy* focused on male citizenship),<sup>20</sup> and the values to be instilled in such children were middle-class. As social policy theorists such as Ruth Lister have noted, focusing on children as the future, or 'becomings', can create a hierarchy in which some children are more worthwhile 'investments' than others.<sup>21</sup>

### Children as the Future

The identification of children as the future, by historical actors and historians, is not new—and is perhaps timeless.<sup>22</sup> As James Schmidt suggests, 'children, in the language of liberalism, were always citizens

<sup>18</sup> Thomson, *Lost Freedom*, 59. The only examples: *Daily Mirror*, 30 November 1946, 11; *Daily Mirror*, 7 December 1946, 11; *Daily Mirror*, 22 December 1950, 9, with nothing of note in *Beano* and *Dandy*.

<sup>19</sup> Thomson, *Lost Freedom*, 2.

<sup>20</sup> Wendy Webster, *Imagining Home: Gender, "Race" and National Identity, 1945-64* (London, 1998), 1-3.

<sup>21</sup> Lister, 'Investing'.

<sup>22</sup> Paula S. Fass, 'Is there a Story in the History of Childhood?', in Paula S. Fass, ed., *Routledge History of Childhood in the Western World* (Abingdon and New York, 2013), 2.

in waiting'.<sup>23</sup> Yet from the late-nineteenth century, a new understanding of children, their protection, and the state's relationship with them emerged alongside a desire to improve the health of the nation and empire as a whole, as its vitality was questioned.<sup>24</sup> Nineteenth-century reformers argued for improvements to children's working conditions and legislation limiting working hours.<sup>25</sup> The 1906 Education (Provision of Meals) Act marked a new level of intervention in children's welfare and role for the state as investing in future national and imperial strength.<sup>26</sup> Hugh Cunningham describes the increasing motivation to improve all children's welfare by the end of the First World War, due to 'a concern for the future of the nation and of the race, and children were seen as holding the key to both'.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, as the franchise was extended, with the nineteenth-century Reform Acts and subsequently the 1918 and 1928 Representation of the Peoples Acts, the case for shaping *all* children as future citizens became more compelling.<sup>28</sup>

The lead up to the Second World War, its duration and aftermath present a distinctive period in the development of this thinking, as children were potentially endangered alongside adults during the war on a substantial scale in Britain—more so in other countries<sup>29</sup>—and the state developed a necessarily more direct relationship with children through evacuation.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, as James Cronin argues, the preconditions necessary for state expansion were in place by the Second World War, and the expansion of the state's role was crucial to national survival.<sup>31</sup> Though state intervention in shaping healthy minds and bodies of future citizens was decades old, this article argues that the disruption, dangers and economic climate of war arguably crystallized and made powerful this mode of understanding children, as a way of focusing more on the future than the past in political

<sup>23</sup> James Schmidt, 'Children and the State', in Fass, ed., *Routledge History*, 174–5.

<sup>24</sup> Hendrick, *Children, Childhood*, 39; Ulla Gustafsson, 'School Meals Policy: The Problem with Governing Children', *Social Policy and Administration*, 36 (2002), 692; Ivan Jablonka, 'Social Welfare in the Western World and the Rights of Children', in Fass, ed., *Routledge History*, 380.

<sup>25</sup> Fass, 'Is there', 7.

<sup>26</sup> Peter Atkins, 'School Milk in Britain, 1900–34', *Journal of Policy History*, 19 (2007), 395–6; Gustafsson, 'School Meals', 693.

<sup>27</sup> Hugh Cunningham, *The Children of the Poor: Representations of Childhood Since the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford, 1991), 190–1.

<sup>28</sup> On this language in international charity campaigns: Emily Baughan, 'Every Citizen of Empire Implored to Save the Children!' Empire, Internationalism and the Save the Children Fund in Inter-war Britain', *Historical Research*, 86 (2013), 130–1, 137.

<sup>29</sup> Tara Zahra, *The Lost Children: Reconstructing Europe's Families after World War II* (Cambridge, MA, and London, 2011), 2–3.

<sup>30</sup> Thomson, *Lost Freedom*, 1–2. On the impact of evacuation on policy, see Macnicol, 'The Effect'; Welshman, 'Evacuation'.

<sup>31</sup> James Cronin, *The Politics of State Expansion: War, State and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain* (London and New York, 1991), 131. Also José Harris, 'Political Ideas and the Debate on State Welfare 1940–45', in Smith, ed., *War*.

debate. The difficult aftermath of the First World War and mass unemployment of the interwar period fuelled an appetite for a more radical change in the future, and children could answer this call for a fresh start. Both the conception of children as the future and its consequences shifted. This period saw a shift from concerns about eugenic health and training young people to a focus on much younger children. As illustrated in *A Diary for Timothy*, the 1940s saw the very youngest children come to represent Britain's future. This was partly because of specific wartime conditions, in which young children's lives were deeply affected through evacuation and their care in state childcare institutions.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, children could represent a positive future, in contrast to a focus on 'youth', which could generate fear and represent particular social problems. Young children were innocent and malleable, and as yet untainted. This focus on very young children also reflected psychological thought, which, partly in response studies of children's responses to war, emphasized the influence of children's earliest years on their later development.<sup>33</sup> Developing the well-being, education and values of the youngest children was crucial.

The circumstances of war and related debates about social reform brought this rhetoric to prominence and made it meaningful in policy debates and popular culture, as the future was in the balance and as politicians saw an opportunity for reshaping the country. The press enthusiastically covered such language throughout the war and after, though the frequency and intensity of such thinking decreased by the late 1940s.<sup>34</sup> This idea was part of the thinking that laid out the welfare state, which codified the state's responsibilities to children and in which children were prioritized in legislative terms as never before. New modes of investigation developed in the war and the post-war era saw a proliferation of surveys of children and the family, making possible greater governmental knowledge of the population and family life.<sup>35</sup> By 1950, sociologist T. H. Marshall suggested children could claim a form of social citizenship, grounded in 'their status as *future* adults rather than as

<sup>32</sup> See Angela Davis, *Pre-School Childcare in England, 1939-2010: Theory, Practice and Experience* (Manchester, 2015); Riley, *War*.

<sup>33</sup> Hendrick, *Child Welfare*, 221. Also Thomson, *Lost Freedom*, 59–66, 79–87.

<sup>34</sup> *Daily Mail*, 3 May 1935, 11; *Daily Mail*, 7 May 1935, 13; *Daily Mail*, 13 May 1935, 12; *Daily Express*, 16 July 1938, 1; *The Times*, 6 October 1939, 9; *The Times*, 7 October 1939, 3; *Manchester Guardian*, 1 December 1939, 2; *Daily Mail*, 18 January 1941, 1; *Daily Mail*, 27 January 1941, 1, 4; *Daily Mail*, 31 December 1941, 1, 4; *Daily Mirror*, 8 April 1942, 3; *Daily Express*, 9 August 1942, 7; *Manchester Guardian*, 9 May 1945, 5.

<sup>35</sup> See Martin Bulmer, Kevin Bales, and Kathryn Kish Sklar, 'The Social Survey in Historical Perspective', in Bulmer, Bales, and Sklar, eds, *The Social Survey in Historical Perspective, 1880–1940* (Cambridge, 1991), 1–48; Angela Davis, 'A Critical Perspective on British Social Surveys and Community Studies and their Accounts of Married Life c.1945–1970', *Cultural and Social History*, 6 (2009), 47–64; King, *Family Men*, 12.

persons in the here-and-now'.<sup>36</sup> Children were by the Second World War seen to have claim on the state's resources, due to their future contribution, as workers were seen as entitled to support because of current service and retired individuals in respect of past contribution. An editorial in *The Times* in 1943 praised William Beveridge's report for redressing 'an anomaly'. It reminded readers 'No nation careful of its future can afford to neglect its children' and concluded 'were it necessary to choose between giving additional comfort and help to age or to childhood the priority would surely have to go to those to whom the future belongs'.<sup>37</sup>

There were various strands of this thinking in political and press debates, each with a different purpose and conceptualization of children. First, this was a consensual rhetorical device, to encourage unity. Journalists utilized this generalized rhetoric to reach particular readers, and politicians and other public figures sought to create a sense of consensus, across political divides when debating in parliament, but also amongst a wider public audience. In this case children were often painted as a passive mass, of 'future generations', 'future citizens' or 'our young people'. This symbolic potential of children was particularly helpful in attempts to unite the public behind the war effort. Winston Churchill argued in 1941 that Britain was fighting for its children's futures, and 'to hand on to those in this island who come after us, to our children and grandchildren, a record of duty done which will not have been surpassed in all the rugged annals of our island home'.<sup>38</sup> In 1943, he claimed 'nothing will repay this country better than putting milk into babies'.<sup>39</sup> Should they forget it, journalists were keen to remind politicians of the need to secure not only peace but a prosperous, safe future that would last for generations.<sup>40</sup> Newspapers attributed this idea to leaders of other countries too.<sup>41</sup> Such rhetoric was useful in elections; in 1945, the *Daily Mirror* linked the future of children and nation with Labour. It urged women to vote not only 'for him'—their husbands—but for their children and children's children.<sup>42</sup> This was common, if rather

<sup>36</sup> Kate Bacon and Sam Frankel, 'Rethinking Children's Citizenship: Negotiating Structure, Shaping Meanings', *International Journal of Children's Rights*, 22 (2014), 23–4 (Bacon and Frankel's emphasis)

<sup>37</sup> *The Times*, 6 March 1943, 5.

<sup>38</sup> *Daily Mail*, 18 January 1941, 1. Also *Daily Mail*, 31 December 1941, 1, 4.

<sup>39</sup> *Daily Mail*, 6 April 1943, 2.

<sup>40</sup> Some prime examples: *Daily Express*, 5 September 1939, 6; *The Times*, 7 September 1939, 11; *Manchester Guardian*, 6 December 1939, 4; *Daily Mirror*, 29 February 1940, 8; *Daily Mail*, 12 July 1940, 2; *Daily Mail*, 2 April 1943, 1.

<sup>41</sup> Again, this peaked in the war, but remained a powerful rhetorical device as international relations became difficult in the Cold War. See *Daily Mirror*, 18 November 1939, 9; *Manchester Guardian*, 31 December 1939, 6; *Daily Mail*, 4 January 1940, 1, 12; *Daily Mail*, 13 May 1940, 2; *Daily Mail*, 21 April 1942, 1, 4; *Manchester Guardian*, 9 May 1945, 8; *The Times*, 9 May 1945, 2; *The Times*, 2 August 1948, 4; *The Times*, 13 October 1950, 10; *The Times*, 11 February 1954, 7.

<sup>42</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 3 July 1945, 2, 7; *Daily Mirror*, 4 July 1945, 5; *Daily Mirror*, 5 July 1945, 1, 2.



trite, rhetoric, used to garner support and reinforce the morality of a particular argument.

### Children in Advertising: Changing Individual Behaviour

Secondly, this idea of children as the future was useful to instigate individual action, used notably for commercial or fund-raising reasons, to encourage individuals to buy products, give to charity or change their behaviour. The position of children as the future in advertising demonstrates this was not just empty rhetoric—it related, in concrete ways, to practice. Advertisers seized on the war context to reinforce their message and incite action. Adverts attempted to appeal to parents in their offers of bettering individual children's futures—usually through milk and food, such as a 1940 Rowntree's cocoa advert, entitled 'No peaky, underweight children *this* war!' This reminded parents to keep children healthy; by letting 'your children enjoy it at least once a day', parents would be 'protecting them against illness and making them strong for the future'. The article included an image of two healthy boys, with their white, middle-class mother; these adverts almost always focused on male, white, middle-class children as ideal future citizens.<sup>43</sup> Parents were encouraged to ensure not just their children's health today, but to lay foundations for their future. Yet, adverts also drew on the idea of children as the collective future of the nation. A 1943 Virol tonic advert in *The Times* in 1943, entitled 'Children's Health and the Nation's Future', reminded readers 'The children of today must be fitted *now* for the part they will play in the difficult period of reconstruction'.<sup>44</sup>

Alongside images of white, middle-class, male children, the language used usually gendered children as male. A 1944 Norwich Union advert claimed 'Tomorrow's World for Today's Child!', and asked, 'The leaders of tomorrow are amongst the children of today—will YOUR child get his proper chance in life?' Naturally, a Norwich Union policy would help parents to ensure their child's good start in life and that he would become a leader of tomorrow.<sup>45</sup> For male, middle-class children at least, they could become not just future citizens but future leaders. Parents were, as Deborah Thom argues, unlikely to think of their role as

<sup>43</sup> *Daily Mail*, 16 November 1940, 4. Original emphasis. Also *Daily Mail*, 31 October 1940, 4; *Daily Mail*, 3 January 1941, 4; *Daily Mail*, 11 March 1943, 4; *Daily Express*, 5 October 1944, 3; *Daily Mail*, 13 March 1945, 3; *Daily Express*, 22 February 1950, 3; *Daily Mirror*, 14 February 1952, 2. Only one explicitly focused on a girl: *Daily Mail*, 21 October 1941, 4.

<sup>44</sup> *The Times*, 5 March 1943, 3. Also *Daily Mirror*, 23 April 1942, 2; *Daily Mail*, 24 April 1941, 3.

<sup>45</sup> *Daily Mail*, 22 February 1944, 3. Original emphasis.

focused on developing future citizens or workers.<sup>46</sup> Yet, in this period many parents, from all backgrounds, discussed the need to secure a better 'start in life' than perhaps they had had, for their sons, but also daughters in some families. Whilst working-class parents hoped for a secure job, middle-class parents wanted academic success and a profession for their children.<sup>47</sup> In a wartime context, advertisers were keen to fuse this desire with a grander purpose of securing the nation's future, and to connect their products with individual children's prospects, collective sacrifice during the war and universal provision afterwards.<sup>48</sup>

This technique was widespread in charity appeals. Often on behalf of orphaned or displaced children who did not have parents to care for their individual futures, charities such as Barnardo's and the Waifs and Strays Society appealed to readers on altruistic grounds, but also to secure a better national future. In contrast to commercial advertising, these children were more passive, to be saved rather than active agents who would shape the country's future. Relatedly, unlike commercial adverts, charity appeals were less explicitly gendered. One exception was adverts which positioned boys as future soldiers, such as for the Royal British Orphan School and British Sailors' Society.<sup>49</sup> Positioning children as 'future citizens' was common and presumably successful, used also by National Children's Homes, The Children's Aid Society, and the NSPCC.<sup>50</sup> Often care for the nation was cited directly; a 1941 advert reminded readers that 'An Annual Gift to the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children is a gift to the future of Britain because the N.S.P.C.C. works for the welfare of the children'.<sup>51</sup> Waifs and Strays Society advertising rested on this concept, simply stating 'Remember! Children are the Nation's Greatest Asset for the Future'.<sup>52</sup> These children were positioned differently;

<sup>46</sup> Deborah Thom, "'Beating Children Is Wrong": Domestic Life, Psychological Thinking and the Permissive Turn', in L. Delap, B. Griffin, and A. Wills, eds, *The Politics of Domestic Authority in Britain since 1800* (Basingstoke, 2009), 273–4.

<sup>47</sup> Brian Jackson and Dennis Marsden, *Education and the Working Class* (Harmondsworth, 1966); King, *Family Men*, 35–42, 198; Michael Young and Peter Willmott [1957], *Family and Kinship in East London* (Harmondsworth, 1967), 28–9; Ferdynand Zweig, *The Worker in Affluent Society: Family Life and Industry* (London, 1961), 20–2.

<sup>48</sup> The idea of collective sacrifice and an equal post-war society was often more myth than reality, but remained a powerful trope for advertisers to exploit. Angus Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz* (London, 1991); Rose, *Which People's*; Selina Todd, *The People: The Rise and Fall of the Working Class, 1910–2010* (London, 2014), 119–48.

<sup>49</sup> *The Times*, 5 April 1944, 7; *The Times*, 18 February 1954, 10.

<sup>50</sup> *The Times*, 3 June 1935, 29, 32; *The Times*, 16 September 1938, 17; *The Times*, 1 September 1939, 6; *The Times*, 11 December 1940, 2; *Daily Mail*, 20 December 1940, 4.

<sup>51</sup> *Daily Mail*, 10 January 1941, 2. Also *Manchester Guardian*, 8 May 1941, 1.

<sup>52</sup> *Daily Mail*, 7 January 1943, 4; *Manchester Guardian*, 2 July 1943, 6. Other charities applied similar tactics, including Barnardo's, St Mary's Hospital and British Sailors' Society: *Manchester Guardian*, 29 May 1941, 3; *Manchester Guardian*, 28 July 1943, 6; *Daily Mail*, 14 August 1943, 4; *Daily Mail*, 11 September 1943, 4; *The Times*, 18 February 1954, 10.

less likely to shape Britain's future, charities sought funding to ensure these children would be useful in some capacity.

However, it was government advertising that was most extreme in using this language. During the war, appeals for the War Savings scheme were forceful in their message. An advert on the front page of the *Daily Mail* in 1942 featured a large image of a very young girl smiling broadly. The reader was asked to choose her future—'Is she to bloom gently and sweetly into lovely English womanhood, or is she to become just another pinched, frightened little scrap in a slave State[?]'—and urged to contribute 'Literally, every penny you can scrape together'. Doing so would contribute to 'the best, *the most urgent* insurance that non-combatants can take out for children's future'.<sup>53</sup> The use of a girl was notable, indicating passivity, a child to be saved rather than a future leader. Another, in 1944, gave children more agency, suggesting war savings could encourage children to help in 'winning the peace', therefore giving them 'the right idea' about the future.<sup>54</sup> After the war, adverts for National Savings Week continued the theme.<sup>55</sup> Government road safety adverts used similar language, reminding readers that children's deaths were 'carving into Britain's hopes for the future'.<sup>56</sup> This rhetoric could, through advertising campaigns, influence the practices of parents. The widespread nature of such techniques in commercial, charity and government advertising demonstrates it was judged successful, particularly as children's safety and well-being was threatened. According to the appeal or product advertised, children were afforded different degrees of agency, and the gender of the child often reflected this.

### Children's Physical Health

This conception of children, therefore, was used in the most general way, to unify listeners or readers behind a particular cause or as a sign of moral purpose, and was also used to encourage particular behaviour at an individual level. The latter half of this article focuses on policy debates. As well as using this conception of children as 'becomings' in the two modes identified above, there were three important and overlapping strands to political thinking about children. First, politicians used an economic language of investment to argue for legislation and

<sup>53</sup> Original emphasis. *Daily Mail*, 18 March 1942, 1. Other adverts referred to securing 'your future and the future of your children'. *Daily Mail*, 27 October 1942, 1; *Daily Mail*, 28 December 1943, 4.

<sup>54</sup> *Daily Express*, 24 October 1944, 2.

<sup>55</sup> *The Times*, 20 September 1949, 8.

<sup>56</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 26 July 1943, 2; *Daily Mail*, 29 July 1943, 2. Also see *The Times*, 1 June 1946, 3; *The Observer*, 26 February 1950, 2.

spending on children; if children were the future, they should be invested in now for a solid future return. Secondly, some politicians used this language to argue children were entitled to a share of national resources through their status as citizens-to-be; this reasoning focused on improving children's health and well-being in itself to ensure the next generation could build a better future. Finally, and in contrast, some politicians highlighted the need to directly shape that future through not only securing healthy citizens but moulding them with certain 'British' values. Each strand of thinking about children rested on different ideologies of childhood and the role of the state. The first, an economic language of investment, rested on, and appealed to those who supported, an idea of the state as supporter of the free market. The second, usually used by politicians keen to improve children's welfare, represented a more interventionist state which provided, ideally on a universalist basis, for men, women and children, and not just its workers. This mode of thinking fitted with the development of the welfare state. Finally, the latter strand, in which shaping children and therefore the future was important, linked to a conservative political ideology of maintaining the status quo, and saw the state as there to ensure this. Each also varied in understandings of children as a blank slate, inherently innocent, or naturally 'bad'.<sup>57</sup>

First, and as highlighted above in advertising, nutrition and physical health remained significant in this period. For some time, the appetite for legislation prioritizing children had been growing. Measures to improve children's health were introduced in the early twentieth century, in part to promote good health as future adults and citizens.<sup>58</sup> As James Vernon highlights, it was not just the provision of food for hungry children, but the material environment surrounding this that 'was considered critical to the aim of turning out civil and sociable citizens'.<sup>59</sup> In 1934, the National Government introduced the School Milk Scheme. Though Atkins argues there was a clear economic motivation behind this, the language of building up the health of future citizens was important in creating political space for these measures.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, in 1937, Captain William Sanders, Labour MP, spoke of the political interest in children:

<sup>57</sup> Such views had their roots in nineteenth-century educational thinking, with competing ideas about original sin versus children as 'tabula rasa' in Lockean thinking. J. H. Dekker, 'The Century of the Child Revisited', *International Journal of Children's Rights*, 8 (2000), 139.

<sup>58</sup> Atkins, 'School Milk', 399; Gustafsson, 'School Meals', 692; Tom Hulme, "'A Nation Depends on Its Children": School Buildings and Citizenship in England and Wales, 1900-1939', *Journal of British Studies*, 54 (2015), 406; Vernon, 'The Ethics', 693-725.

<sup>59</sup> James Vernon, *Hunger: A Modern History* (Cambridge, MA, and London, 2007), 169. Also Vernon, 'The Ethics', 711-19.

<sup>60</sup> Atkins, 'School Milk'.

I am glad to know, as everybody is glad to know, that more interest is being taken in the welfare of children and young persons now than ever before in the history of this country. The subject is being approached from various points of view. There is the militarist who is wondering where the Army is coming from in the near future. As far as my party is concerned, we are willing to leave that worry to the other side of the House. We are worried as to what is going to be the physical condition of the future working-class citizen.<sup>61</sup>

Here was explicit recognition that concern for children's health could come from different places. Yet, though differentiating between the motivations of different parties, Sanders's comments illustrate a unified understanding across political boundaries. Though his own Labour Party professed interest in the health of working-class people, as opposed to the production of strong soldiers, these people were positioned as 'future citizens' too. Both ways of thinking rested on the idea that securing children's health was important because they were future adults whose fitness and strength would benefit wider society and the nation.

The specific conditions of wartime intensified this thinking. The need for rationing meant deciding who needed resources most, and as John Macnicol describes, children and nursing mothers were targeted 'on grounds of both humanity and of racial preservation'.<sup>62</sup> Evacuation schemes emerged from an uncontroversial presumption that children deserved special protection, something that was not a given just a century previous as children laboured alongside adults.<sup>63</sup> The 1944 Education Act compelled Local Education Authorities to provide school meals for all children, though a means test still distinguished between those who paid half the cost of the meal and those who ate for free.<sup>64</sup> In March 1939, in a debate about nutrition in the House of Commons, MPs spoke about spending on children's health. Nancy Astor compared national spending on alcohol and gambling with that on milk and education, and argued all politicians should be horrified that 'we neglect our children who are the citizens of the future'. Labour MP Thomas Sexton used similar language and linked this to the 'national interest', citing a League of Nations report which suggested that 'only by adequate nutrition in the earliest years of life can the health and the full development of the future citizens be attained'. Labour MP, and future Minister for Food, George Tomlinson, directly linked children's nutrition with success in war when he said, 'the armies of the future are

<sup>61</sup> *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 320, 15 February 1937, 897. Also *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 319, 3 February 1937, 1657–8.

<sup>62</sup> Macnicol, 'The Effect', 23.

<sup>63</sup> Fass, 'Is there', 7.

<sup>64</sup> Gustafsson, 'School Meals', 687; Vernon, *Hunger*, 163–4.

going to require well-nourished individuals for their maintenance, and nutrition is going to play an important part'. Kenneth Lindsay, another Labour MP, ended the debate on this note, and connected it with the current 'democratic age'. Though he was careful to differentiate between British democratic society and European dictatorships, he argued for a strong role for the state in child welfare, as 'the most important thing in a democracy [is] equality of physical opportunity', and 'the brightest sign of the future, a more healthy child population'.<sup>65</sup>

Such language continued in strength throughout the war: Clement Davies, Liberal MP, spoke in a debate about evacuation in September 1939 of how 'We are bearing a tremendous expenditure at the moment, but the State could not bear a better expenditure than that which will protect the health of these children who are the future generation'.<sup>66</sup> Here was stark economic justification for spending on children. In 1941, Gwilym Lloyd George, recently appointed as Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Food, positioned children's needs as future citizens alongside those of workers and women's prioritization because of their status as mothers, highlighting 'I do not need to remind the House that the children of to-day are the ones who will have to reconstruct the country, and we must see to it that they do not suffer as a result of the war'.<sup>67</sup> In a lengthy debate on the Ministry of Health in 1942, children featured prominently. Labour's James Griffiths, fierce supporter of Beveridge's proposals, spoke of the role of social services in improving the health of the population before the war, 'the dividend on which the nation is now receiving'. He used this recent history to argue against cuts to state provision after the war, suggesting that such public services should be recognized as 'one of the greatest assets of this nation'.<sup>68</sup> Numerous MPs employed this repeatedly, in arguing for prioritizing children's nutrition and health to invest in the future.<sup>69</sup> Likewise in the press, children's status as future citizens, workers, and leaders was continually highlighted to underline their status as a priority in food resources.<sup>70</sup> Some MPs, such as Clement Davies, used

<sup>65</sup> *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 345, 23 March 1939, 1506, 1547, 1567, 1593–4.

<sup>66</sup> *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 351, 14 September 1939, 844.

<sup>67</sup> *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 374, 2 October 1941, 775–6.

<sup>68</sup> *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 381, 30 June 1942, 87. Also 122–3.

<sup>69</sup> For example, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 317, 4 November 1936, 150–1, 177–8; *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 319, 3 February 1937, 1627; *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 320, 24 February 1937, 145, 146; *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 24 November 1937, 329, 1258; *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 345, 23 March 1939, 1547, 1567, 1573–4, 1593–4; *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 355, 14 December 1939, 1368; *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 356, 1 February 1940, 1355; *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 374, 2 October 1941, 775–6; *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 381, 30 June 1942, 122–3; *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 389, 13 May 1943, 843; *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 411, 12 June 1945, 1516.

<sup>70</sup> For example, *Manchester Guardian*, 16 April 1940, 4.

economic terminology to argue for resources for children; others, such as Gwilym Lloyd George, focused on children's right to those resources; still others spoke in more general terms of the need to ensure the health of (male) workers and soldiers on behalf of the nation.

Determining the influence of this language is difficult. Yet, when discussing child nutrition and health, politicians frequently used the idea of children as future citizens to justify the need to protect and prioritize children in rationing. Labour MPs drew upon this language particularly heavily, arguing for more spending and measures to protect child health; though the two other key ideologies of the market and the nation were invoked in these debates, focusing on feeding children well often sprang more readily out of the social welfarist vision common in the Labour Party in this period.<sup>71</sup>

### Educating Future Citizens

In contrast to debates about child health, the language of children as the future was used as much by Conservative and right-wing politicians as Labour and left-wing MPs in debates about education. Conservative MPs focused on economic investment in the future and moulding children into a particular notion of good citizenship. As Schmidt notes, the case for education became more compelling, as by 1918, all children were future citizens—boys and girls (even if voting equality was only achieved in 1928). Such citizenship, and its inherent responsibilities, was thought to require 'training'.<sup>72</sup> Alexander Erskine-Hill, Scottish Unionist MP, described services to secure children's physical and mental well-being through education 'as a debt which this generation owes to the future' in the 1936 Debate on the Address. Yet, tellingly, this was not a debt to be fulfilled on altruistic terms, but to mould a certain kind of citizen: 'This House can give to the youth of this country a lead which will help them to make themselves the citizens we want them to be'. Here can be seen a key motivation of government in introducing measures for children: as a means to shape the future. Conservative Lord Burghley placed such a mission at the heart of the Government's aims, noting that while 'the chief aim is the physical one—that of turning C3 people into A1 people [...] There is another side which is as important, if not more important, and that is the mental side'. He recommended 'physical training' to 'bring out those characteristics of good citizenship which we all wish to see developed'.<sup>73</sup> Whilst Labour

<sup>71</sup> The need to invest in the future through children's health was infrequently referred to by Conservative politicians; Henry Willink, Conservative Minister for Health, is a rare example. *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 411, 12 June 1945, 1516.

<sup>72</sup> Schmidt, 'Children', 175.

<sup>73</sup> *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 317, 4 November 1936, 150–1, 178.

politicians argued for measures to improve child health and therefore the nation's future well-being and productivity, Conservative politicians, when discussing physical health, were more likely to use eugenic terms, drawing on ideas such as 'C3/A1' people. Furthermore, those on the political right usually focused more on physical training to shape citizens into a particular mould, rather than good health in its own right.

If children's education shaped them into 'good' citizens, the disruptions of war were troublesome. In a 1940 Lords debate about education in wartime, the Archbishop of Canterbury criticized past neglect of education provision, because education 'determine[s] mainly the quality of manhood and womanhood and of the future citizenship of the country'. Furthermore, whilst denouncing a Nazi approach to drilling children into obedience, he argued that 'if the German method is wrong the German principle is right. It is a matter of vital importance to the community that it should be concerned with the training of its future citizens'.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, there was a frequent othering of practices of state training in the nations with whom Britain was at war. Though the state's role in developing citizens was accepted, it had to be limited and softened in relation to youth movements of enemy nations, such as the Hitler Youth.<sup>75</sup> As with debates about children's health and nutrition, economic terminology was common. Earl de la Warr described children whose education had been interrupted by the war: 'I think it is clear that we have been paying a heavy insurance premium in the form of children who are out of school, and that we cannot continue to pay'.<sup>76</sup>

The disruption of education reasserted its importance to political debate, and post-war education was central to debates about reconstruction. Arthur Greenwood, Labour MP, outlined its importance in 1942:

We have, I fear, been slow to appreciate that the greatest asset of a nation is its growing generation, for they are its future parents, its future workers, and its future citizens, and on that rests the future quality of the nation. I hope, therefore, that the President of the Board of Education will present before long a Bill worthy of the

<sup>74</sup> *Parliamentary Debates* (Lords), 115, 7 February 1940, 473–4, 476–7.

<sup>75</sup> On youth movements in France and Germany, see Michael H. Kater, *Hitler Youth* (Cambridge, MA, 2004); Daniel Lee, *Pétain's Jewish Children: French Jewish Youth and the Vichy Regime, 1940–42* (Oxford, 2014). This was often explicit in press/political debates; see, for example, an article reporting Kenneth Lindsay's broadcast. *Manchester Guardian*, 9 December 1939, 4.

<sup>76</sup> *Parliamentary Debates* (Lords), 115, 7 February 1940, 498. Also *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 357, 27 February 1940, 2027; *The Times*, 6 October 1939, 9. This was a significant fear early in the war, and many writers used the language of protecting future generations to make their point. See *The Times*, 10 October 1939, 10; *The Times*, 14 October 1939, 6; *The Times*, 16 October 1939, 6; *Manchester Guardian*, 8 December 1939, 6.



opportunity to give the country the finest educational system in the world.<sup>77</sup>

In 1943, Lord Southwood outlined problems facing 'our young men and women of to-morrow'. The Earl of Huntingdon (Francis Hastings) suggested that because of children's position as the future of the nation, there was substantial consensus around education across political boundaries. However, he suggested that he, unlike others, thought a greater proportion of national income should be spent on children's education, as 'upon the training during those years must rest the responsibility for the future of this country and the future of our generation. Considering that very great responsibility I do not think I can agree that enough is done for this very important class of person'. Children were painted slightly differently according to different politicians; the focus here on 'the responsibility for the future' hinted at a (upper/middle-class) child who would lead and shape the nation, in contrast to those politicians who focused on a healthy, well-trained (working-class) population to enact the vision or plans of others. The Minister for Economic Warfare, Earl of Selborne, suggested that the Ministry of Education was tackling such problems, to which Southwood replied, ending the debate,

this country has been knocked about a bit in the last few years. It has to be rebuilt and we have to depend on our young people to rebuild it. If the programme that has been stated by the noble Earl can be carried out, or if even three-quarters of it can be carried out, I have no doubt about the future of the nation.<sup>78</sup>

Here we can see the different strands to this thinking; children had a right to claim on the nation's resources, as citizens in waiting. Yet there was a tension here; children represented a different future, in one way, as they were untainted by present problems and securing their well-being was a way of securing a better future. But in educating them within that same system of the present, children could never in reality be detached from that present.

The debates on educational reforms proposed by Butler in his White Paper of July 1943 were peppered with this thinking. Butler himself, when commending his proposals to the Commons, underlined their importance in his opening words:

While we may all desire to put our own points of view, and while the procedure is calculated to help hon. Members to do so, let us also remember that we are engaged in no less a task than that of

<sup>77</sup> *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 385, 1 December 1942, 1052.

<sup>78</sup> *Parliamentary Debates* (Lords), 126, 17 February 1943, 62, 83–4, 102.

moulding the future of the young generation when fresh responsibilities, and heavy ones, are being laid upon our people.

The focus on the future and enabling 'the young generation' to cope with responsibilities laid on them was used to encourage consensus over his proposals. Here was the powerful rhetoric of promoting the interests of children of the future, as unifying tool and moral underpinning of his argument. He returned to this theme, emphasizing the responsibility of the government across generations: 'Parliament has a double responsibility; first, to the generation which is winning this victory to assure them that a plan for the future world will go through, and, second, to the children to provide them with a chance to live in that future world. Thus Parliament may become a link between two generations'. Yet, this was more than just rhetoric; it provided a focus point for consensus on the education proposals, and a language of investment to enable action and spending. By setting the tone, Butler arguably translated this rhetoric into a way of enabling policy. Labour and Conservative MPs sought to position themselves as the party of the future. Conservative Cyril Lakin criticized Labour members for dwelling on the past, noting 'My hon. Friends on this side of the House are more concerned with the future. We think this scheme is bold and progressive, and for that reason we welcome it'. Fellow Conservatives spoke in favour of Butler's proposals, such as William Nunn, who underlined the profound impact educational reform could have: 'His work will make an impact not only upon our own civilisation but in all probability upon the future of the civilisation of the world'.<sup>79</sup>

In January 1944, the bill came before parliament for its second reading. With the words, 'We to-day have the responsibility for laying the foundation for the nation's future and we dare not fail', Butler again emphasized the importance of its implications through the use of the language of future citizenship. Again, MPs emphasized the need to take a long-term future view. Conservative MP Patrick Hannon reminded colleagues 'We are living at a time when the State must play a great part in the adjustment of the future world', demonstrating a conservative principle of shaping directly that world rather than simply enhancing children's welfare and education. Others emphasized the link between education, and national strength and prosperity, such as Conservative Henry Brooke who suggested all would agree the bill would improve the 'quality of the future population', and 'it is one of the first duties of this Parliament to raise the quality of that population

<sup>79</sup> *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 391, 29 July 1943, 1825, 1845, 1865, 1896–7. Also *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 391, 29 July 1943, 1879, 1882, 1894, 1901, 1914, 1924; *Parliamentary Debates* (Lords), 128, 4 August 1943, 1006–7; *Parliamentary Debates* (Lords), 128, 5 August 1943, 1074.

to the highest'.<sup>80</sup> As the debate continued the following day, MPs from various backgrounds both sought to praise the bill and utilize the language of future citizenship to underline the point they made.<sup>81</sup>

Butler's bill was not without controversy; the role of religion in education, for example, was one point of much debate. Indeed, Conservative Walter Liddall suggested that 'those who have the future welfare of the nation at heart and who are anxious to preserve the Christian religion in this country are to be penalised and saddled with an intolerable financial burden', as the bill involved conversion of some Christian schools to non-denominational status.<sup>82</sup> There were disagreements in what exactly shaping the future through children should look like, and which were the most important 'British' values to promote. Yet the need for improved, universal education became widely accepted, and was frequently justified through the language of investment in the future, as this mode of thinking provided a sense of consensus across political boundaries. In practice, education following the Act was much more hierarchical than these debates suggested.<sup>83</sup> Indeed this relates to Lister's point that the practical consequences of focusing on children's futures can lead to a hierarchical view of which types of children would be most useful in the future.<sup>84</sup> Unpicking the differences in emphasis in politicians' language between children who would shape the future and children who would carry out such a vision betrayed how class remained crucial within ideas about education. It seemed that politicians envisaged either 'future workers' who needed to be part of a strong, healthy population to build the future, or future leaders who would direct that future, a hierarchy reflected in the tripartite educational system. The white, middle-class male child who was the default future citizen as envisaged in this rhetoric did indeed frequently benefit more readily from the post-war education system; as Selina Todd has argued, the system focused on generating national prosperity rather than equality for all children.<sup>85</sup> The enthusiasm with which right-wing MPs linked children, education and the future, in contrast to measures to improve child health is notable. Positioning children as the future could provide an economic rationale for action, but the combination of this with the chance to shape that future through training future citizens explains the difference in the use of this language by such MPs across different areas of debate. Healthy citizens were important, but those trained to embody the right values were potentially even more useful.

<sup>80</sup> *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 396, 19 January 1944, 232, 266, 271. Also 208, 265, 286.

<sup>81</sup> *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 396, 20 January 1944, 413, 478–9, 484.

<sup>82</sup> *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 396, 19 January 1944, 286.

<sup>83</sup> Deborah Thom, 'The 1944 Education Act: the "Art of the Possible"?', in Smith, ed., *War*, 101–28.

<sup>84</sup> Lister, 'Investing'.

<sup>85</sup> Todd, *The People*, 216.

### Supporting Future Families

Finally, a third key issue in this period was the declining birth rate, how to encourage families to have more children, and how to pay for them. Such concerns were not new but remained prominent during the war, with the publication of Richard and Kathleen Titmuss's *Parents Revolt* in 1942 and the establishment of the Royal Commission on Population, which reported in 1949. Since the First World War, feminist campaigners, most notably independent MP Eleanor Rathbone, had pushed for the endowment of motherhood, and had success in policy terms in the Second World War.<sup>86</sup> Family allowances were finally introduced in 1945, largely to stabilize wage levels and avoid inflation.<sup>87</sup> Press coverage of this issue had shifted significantly; though even the liberal *Manchester Guardian* had argued against such measures after the First World War, voices in the press largely supported family allowances by the 1940s, with a *Times* editorial reproducing the arguments of Rathbone herself almost verbatim.<sup>88</sup>

Parallel to this shift in public debate and political thinking around family allowances was growing emphasis on children as the future.<sup>89</sup> Rathbone spoke in a Commons debate about 'Woman Power' in 1942. She asked,

Have mothers and parenthood been sufficiently recognised in their contribution towards the community? More attention should be paid to this question of the future generation as well as under what conditions children are to be brought into the world and reared. Otherwise, in a few years' time the part which the British race will be taking in the future will be a dwindling part because we shall be a dwindling race.<sup>90</sup>

In June that year, Conservative MP John Cecil-Wright introduced a motion to the Commons, that the government introduce 'a national scheme of allowances for dependent children' in recognition of 'the supreme importance of further safeguarding the health and well-being

<sup>86</sup> See Eleanor Rathbone, *The Disinherited Family: A Plea for the Endowment of the Family* (London, 1924).

<sup>87</sup> José Harris, 'Social Planning in War-time: Some Aspects of the Beveridge Report', in J. M. Winter, ed., *War and Economic Development* (Cambridge, 1975), 239–56; John Macnicol, *The Movement for Family Allowances, 1918–45: A Study in Social Policy Development* (London, 1980), 169–70, 199–202; Lewis, *The Politics*, 214; Pat Thane, *Foundations of the Welfare State* (2nd edn, Harlow, 1996), 225–9.

<sup>88</sup> King, *Family Men*, 26–8; *Manchester Guardian*, 26 October 1918, 5; *The Times*, 8 March 1945, 5.

<sup>89</sup> For example, *Parliamentary Debates* (Lords), 110, 7 July 1938, 633, 641, 652; *Parliamentary Debates* (Lords), 113, 21 June 1939, 613, 639–40; *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 357, 8 February 1940, 514–15; *Parliamentary Debates* (Lords), 123, 8 June 1942, 264; *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 380, 23 June 1942, 1856, 1914, 1928.

<sup>90</sup> *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 378, 5 March 1942, 891.

of the rising generation'. Rathbone seconded this motion, providing four arguments in support, including that 'children should receive a little share, of the national income, given to them not in respect of their father's service in industry but in respect of their own value to the community as its future citizens and workers'.

Here, her argument had developed, to a focus on the future value of children specifically, in recognition of children as separate beings with whom the state should have a relationship. This focus on children as future adults arguably had more influence in political debate than feminist calls for acknowledging women's work. When challenged by right-wing Conservative Maurice Hely-Hutchinson, who disagreed that the state should pay for children, she successfully countered, 'Does the hon. Gentleman deny the fact that children have a value to the nation as future citizens and workers and not only to their parents?' Other Conservatives sought the economic language of future citizenship to support the motion: Alexander Spearman, for example, asked 'is it not an economical way of replenishing our capital to make sure that the children who will form our future man-power are brought up as healthy as possible?'<sup>91</sup> Indeed, payments for the support of children could appear poor value in relation to other policies to improve the welfare of those contributing to the nation in some more direct way, such as military service or manual labour. Yet, in March 1945, the Family Allowances Bill was read for the second time in the Commons, and passed in June. Throughout these debates, politicians from various political perspectives used the language of future citizenship to make their case. Children were consistently positioned as an economic investment, and as such, securing their future well-being was said to be a post-war benefit for parents, but also connected to the well-being of Britain as a whole.<sup>92</sup> As Riley argues in relation to women, children were reduced to their functionalist value rather than their needs.<sup>93</sup>

## Conclusion

This article argues that, at a key moment in the history of social policy in Britain, the positioning of children as the future was a dominant rhetoric with significant effects. This language provided seeming consensus in developing initiatives to improve the health, education and well-being of children, as even if for different reasons, politicians agreed that 'investing' in children was important. Focusing on children

<sup>91</sup> *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 380, 23 June 1942, 1853–4, 1866, 1898, 1916. Also 1942.

<sup>92</sup> *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 408, 8 March 1945, 2285, 2294, 2298, 2368; *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 411, 11 June 1945, 1419–20.

<sup>93</sup> Riley, *War*, 175.

as the future rather than their present appears to have been a more effective driver for change, shown not least by children's charities' use of such an idea. This language was a key rationale within changing notions of the state's responsibilities to individuals and families. By focusing on how children were positioned in political debates, we can better understand the way past, present and future were aligned in the establishment of the welfare state; this article argues that the focus on children as future citizens was a keystone in the apparent consensus of the post-war welfare settlement. Focusing on measures that would benefit innocent, young children became largely uncontroversial across political boundaries. As Michel Freeden argues in relation to early twentieth-century debates about deprivation, focusing on children removed the idea that those in poverty were culpable for their circumstances, and provided a means of political consensus across ideological boundaries.<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, a focus on future visions of British politics and society provided an easier means to political consensus than a fraught historicizing of past political failures. If the future became central to political debates, agreement between competing parties was easier. Focusing on children meant looking to the future, and focusing on the future meant thinking about children: together, these provided a mutually reinforcing space for apparent political consensus.

Yet, as this article demonstrates, it was not that straightforward. By unpacking the language around children as future citizens we see at least three competing visions: free-market individualism which focused on children as economic investments; a social-democratic, universal approach to welfare which promoted measures to secure all children's health and well-being; and a conservative concern for national efficiency and the maintenance of British values. By unpicking the debates about children, seemingly one of the most consensual areas of policy debates, we see that the post-war consensus was by no means 'real' but was instead an illusion based on a shift in the temporal horizons of social policy and politics. Moreover, whilst this was perhaps the first time in which children's and mothers' interests were being positioned as equally important to those of the male worker, it was their functionalist role to the nation that remained paramount, not their interests alone.<sup>95</sup> And the child who would be most useful in the future was envisaged as usually white, male, and embodying middle-class values. Not only was political division along definite ideological faultlines present in the welfare state's foundation, but so too were the roots of inequalities along the lines of class, race and gender. It is clear

<sup>94</sup> Michael Freeden, *Liberal Languages: Ideological Imaginations and Twentieth-Century Progressive Thought* (Princeton, NJ, 2009), 71–2.

<sup>95</sup> Riley, *War*, 175; Todd, *The People*, 216.

that different kinds of children were envisaged within political debate; some of whom may be able to act as 'leaders' of tomorrow, others who might be trained to be useful, and yet others who perhaps would not be able to live up to this standard. The class, gender and race of children affected to what extent they could be seen as valuable 'future citizens'.

Whilst recent years have seen the growth in emphasis on 'investing' in children as part of a 'social investment state' in Britain and beyond,<sup>96</sup> government intervention in children's lives to promote national efficiency and/or a sound future for the race can be found not least in eugenic thought at the turn of the twentieth century and in the rationale for welfare provision since.<sup>97</sup> In the Second World War, both the nature of this language and its influence changed. Younger children came to represent 'the future' as their innocence and untainted potential proved valuable in highlighting a different future for Britain. In a wartime economy, this language of economic investment in children became much more prominent. The turning inwards towards the nation over the empire that Alison Light has highlighted in the interwar period continued in British politics even during the war; as David Edgerton notes, across the political spectrum could be found a focus on national over imperial matters during and after the war.<sup>98</sup> This can be seen in debates about children, positioned as young national citizens-to-be rather than future imperialists. Though the trends discussed here were by no means unique to Britain, and indeed were part of a more international movement towards the protection of children's rights and citizenship, not least through the 1924 League of Nations Declaration of Children's Rights,<sup>99</sup> it was a specific sense of national, British values that were dominant in these debates. Children were not only central to thinking about Britain's place as a nation and empire, but also to the changing nature of the state in the mid-twentieth century.

<sup>96</sup> Jane Lewis, 'Introduction: Children in the Context of Changing Families and Welfare States', in Lewis, ed., *Children*, 3. Also see the following essays in the same collection: Jane Jenson, 'The LEGO™ Paradigm and New Social Risks: Consequences for Children', 27–50, and Ruth Lister, 'An Agenda for Children: Investing in the Future or Promoting Well-being in the Present?', 51–68.

<sup>97</sup> See for example, Atkins, 'School Milk', 395–6, 399; Hulme, 'A Nation', 410; Welshman, 'Evacuation', 53.

<sup>98</sup> Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, literature and Conservatism between the Wars* (London, 1991); David Edgerton, *Britain's War Machine: Weapons, Resources, and Experts in the Second World War* (Oxford, 2011), 153–4, 272.

<sup>99</sup> See Dominique Marshall, 'The Construction of Children as an Object of International Relations: The Declaration of Children's Rights and the Child Welfare Committee of League of Nations, 1900–24', *International Journal of Children's Rights*, 7 (1999), 103–48.