

5.3 Curtis Committee Report (1946)⁷⁰

5.3.1 The origins of this post-war report are to be found in official and other pre-war inquiries in the UK into social conditions and social welfare provision, but the focus on childcare was further prompted by the consequences for children of wartime evacuation and separation of children from parents, particularly from mothers.⁷¹ The Curtis Committee was also formed against the background of widely publicised concerns about the impersonal, regimented and punitive conditions of some children's homes raised by the campaigning work of Marjory Allen.⁷²

5.3.2 Miss Myra Curtis was appointed to chair an inquiry into 'existing methods of providing for children who from loss of parents or from any other cause whatever are deprived of a normal home life with their own parents or relatives'. The inquiry was also 'to consider what further measures should be taken to ensure that these children are brought up under conditions best calculated to compensate them for the lack of parental care' (para 1).

5.3.3 Accordingly the report contains a review of the services available from a wide range of providers, including (but not only) Poor Law authorities and voluntary organisations. Adoption, boarding out and fostering, as well as accommodating children in public authority or voluntary sector homes, were among the practices reviewed and about which recommendations were made.

5.3.4 It was in this context that child migration, suspended during the war, was also considered. The Curtis Committee took evidence from, among others, local authorities, Dr Barnardo's Homes, National Children's Homes, the Church of England Waifs and Strays Society, the Catholic Child Welfare Council, and the Ministry of Health.⁷³ The Committee's recommendations are contained in just one paragraph (para 515). It merits quotation in full:

'We understand that organisations for sending deprived children to the Dominions may resume their work in the near future. We have heard evidence as to the arrangements for selecting children for migration, and it is clear to us that their effect is that this opportunity is given only to children of fine physique and good mental equipment. These are precisely the children for whom satisfactory openings could be found in this country, and in present day conditions this particular method of providing for the deprived child is not one that we specially wish to see extended. On the other hand, a fresh start in a new country may, for children with an unfortunate background, be the foundation of a happy life, and the opportunity should therefore in our view remain open to suitable children who express a desire for it. We should

⁷⁰ *Report of the Care of Children Committee, September 1946*, Cmd 1946, 1945-46.

⁷¹ On origins and consequences see Bob Holman, 'Fifty Years Ago: the Curtis and Clyde reports', *Children and Society*, vol 10, 1996, pp197-209; R.A. Parker, 'The gestation of reform: the Children Act 1948', in P.Bean and S. MacPherson (eds), *Approaches to Welfare* (Routledge, Kegan Paul, 1983), pp.196-217; Cretney, 'The state as parent: the Children Act 1948 in retrospect'.

⁷² Marjory Allen & Mary Nicholson, *Memoirs of an Uneducated Lady: Lady Allen of Hurtwood*, (Thames and Hudson, 1975), pp.165-92.

⁷³ Curtis Committee papers are in several files in TNA, especially MH102/1451, MH55/1661, 1662 and 1663.