

Extract from

THE TIMES

LONDON.

Date..... 10 APR 1939

CITIZENS OF THE FUTURE

BURDEN OF A FALLING BIRTH-RATE

THE CASE FOR FAMILY ALLOWANCES

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir,—In your leading article (April 3) on the limitation of numbers at Harrow, you point the moral of “the vital statistics of the class which patronizes their School,” to the effect that “public schools must accustom themselves to the idea of a demand for their services which will shrink, not expand.”

This is one aspect of the problem which leads naturally to a study of the reasons which have led, not this class only, but the entire population of the country, to a reduction, since early in this century, of the annual contingent of births. This study will doubtless lead, after an adequate expenditure of academic caution, to the conclusion that the economic contrast between persons with and without children, in other respects fulfilling the same functions, cannot be absolutely ignored. With tortoise-like deliberation we may then turn our eyes to Continental countries, where some experience has been gained in methods of remedying this economic inequality.

It appears that in every European country (with the possible exception of Russia, where the policy adopted some years ago that parents should bear no more than one-third of the cost of children may not yet be in operation) family allowances are an integral part of Civil Service salaries. In some, as in France, it is obligatory on all employers to join an equalization pool, through which, without cost to the State, family allowances are provided. If this system were applied to the public servants, teachers, and clergy of this country there would be no lack of entrants to the public schools; for not only might more children be born, but many more of those born could afford the cost.

Here we make provision for old age and retirement, but not for reproduction. Fifteen per cent. of the salary of a University teacher is allocated to superannuation benefit. A deduction of about half this amount would suffice to increase all salaries by 10 per cent. for each dependent child during his or her whole period of dependency. This would, approximately, equalize the standard of living of parents and non-parents, and equalize also the educational opportunities of members of large and small families.

I am, &c.,

R. A. FISHER.

Galton Laboratory, University College,
April 6.