# CAN WE DEFEAT HIGH COST LIVING ON A QUARTER A DAY?

TYPICAL TENEMENT DINNER, SCALE OF DINNER ON SIMPLEST TERMS.

TEACHERS COLLEGE LABORATORY

This FAMILY ON A SCALE OF ABOUT $1.40 A DAY.

## Science Hopes to Provide a Diet Both Cheap and Wholesome and to Show That Present Difficulty of Making Earnings Meet Expenses Is Due to Fancy Prices Paid for Luxuries

By JOHN WALKER HARRINGTON

TWENTY-FOUR cents a person for three meals a day may sound like starvation to some persons in these days of high living costs and food dictatorships, yet science is insisting that it can be done at retail prices.

It should, however, be borne in mind that in the Chicago tests a quarter a day is not a fixed maximum. It is only an ideal toward which those in charge of the tests are striving. As a matter of fact the average cost of the meals served last week was about 40 cents a person a day.

The experiments which began last Monday morning in Chicago under the auspices of the Department of Health are being watched with keen interest by all sorts and conditions of inhabitants of the United States. Six men and six women, all employees of the department, had their Thanksgiving dinner on Sunday and on the following day began their two weeks engagement with a diet prescribed by a public economy commission. They are expected to substantiate the theory that by scientific study a diet can be devised both cheap and wholesome and that the present lofty scale of the cost of living is due mainly to the willingness of people to pay fancy prices for luxuries.

The test comes at a time when the whole world is wrestling with the problem of provender. Right here in New York there is plenty of material to show how near the scientific diet will come to agreeing with actual conditions. The New York Board of Health, the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, Teachers College through its department of household arts, and various other agencies are all working on this same equation. The consensus is that Chicago has very little leeway with respect to the standard of a quarter a day a person.

Beth Israel Hospital in this city, with some assistance of social workers connected with the Board of Health, has been looking after the wants of families on the East Side. The actual minimum cost of living has been calculated to a nicety by visitors who purchased supplies from stores near the homes of the families succored.

Take, for instance, the case of a typical family of five, consisting of a father, mother and three children ranging in age from the baby up to 12 years. It has been found that the minimum cost of furnishing their food under the present conditions is $7.88 a week, which would be twenty-three cents a person each day.

The dietitians have a system under which the man of the family is counted as the unit. The wife is supposed to eat only eight-tenths as much as he does; a growing boy of 16 nine-tenths; a boy of from 12 to 15 eight-tenths; and one from 10 to 11 years of age six-tenths of the rations of a man. The girl of from 14 to 15 years is credited seven-tenths of the amount needed by the head of the family, while the girl of from 10 to 13 years is supposed to have six-tenths. A child of from 6 to 9 is entitled to five-tenths; one from 2 to 5 years to four-tenths and children under 2 years to three-tenths.

The statistical family is commonly referred to in such calculations as this as consisting of 3½ units. This would mean that even under severe conditions of economy, under this scale the actual cost for the man, the unit, would be 34 cents a day. The actual unit in the Chicago experiment would be consuming nearly 27 cents a day on this basis.

The ration of the New York National Guard at the border is costing 28 cents a day. This cost is based on contracts which were made before the present rise in the prices of commodities. The soldiers' fare at present prices would require the spending of at least 30 cents a day. This cost is based on the lowest prices obtainable under a bidding system.

The East Side families under observation have two pounds of meat a day of stewing quality, the allowance including both bone and fat, and they have no butter, but oleomargarine.

The New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor made public last week its study of the cost of living, which shows that since November, 1915, there has been an increase of 29.6 per cent. in the prices of food.

Even while this information was being compiled there were so many instances of distress reported by the district visitors in making their rounds that the association put into immediate effect its new schedule for relief allowances for food. The organization since 1913 had regarded 27 cents a day as the amount necessary for the food of the male of 17 years or older, with eight-tenths of that allowance for the wife and smaller fractions for the children in proportion to their ages as already given.

The new basis which went into effect last Monday allows 34 cents instead of 27 cents a day for the unit in all families. The allowance of 30 cents in tuberculous families was raised to 38 cents, for the prices of milk and eggs and supplies needed for those in poor health had considerably increased.

These figures are based upon purchases of goods at retail and in the neighborhood of the homes of the persons aided. In some cases the association is able to get supplies from stores with the direction of which it has something to do, but as a general thing it may be said that the prices on which these estimates are given are the ordinary retail prices.

"As to the exact effect of the increased prices among the poor families," said Bailey B. Burritt, general director of the association, "it is estimated that the average wage earner's family has to spend fully 45 per cent. of its income for food.

"This means that the unskilled laborer who earns $12 a week and has been paying $5.40 for food each week is now obliged to pay $7.02 for the same food. If there has been no increase in his wages it will readily be seen he cannot spend an additional amount for food. The result is that his family is beginning to do without it."

Those who would have further illumination on the present standards of living will find much food for thought in the new book "Feeding the Family," by Dr. Mary Swartz Rose, assistant professor in the department of nutrition, Teachers College of Columbia University. Dr. Rose has a family of her own and the studies which she has made represent the most careful investigation. The book came from the press only a few days ago and the revision of statistics makes it well in touch with present conditions.

Dr. Rose said yesterday that she was much interested in watching the progress of the Chicago experiment.

"Undoubtedly," said she, "it will be possible for the employees of the Board of Health out there to live for two weeks on fare costing 25 cents a day, but what about living for, say, two years at that rate? Such experiments should be carried over long periods, for the routine of the table becomes deadly.

"Theoretically it is so easy to feed the human species on almost nothing! When I began the study of dietetics the slogan was 'A Dime a Day.' It is possible for man to sustain life for a period on even 10 cents a day. The inmates of institutions might be fed for 15 or 20 cents a day; but about the time when the dietitian finds that the codfish cakes are dumped in the halls it becomes evident that some other factor besides mere cost must be considered.

"An allowance of 24 or 25 cents a day for each person is paring things very closely, but for such a period as two weeks it can undoubtedly be done. The larger question as to the value of these observations for guiding the housekeeper all the year around is quite another matter."

Dr. Rose devotes several chapters of the book to food for the family. "We have to cope to-day with many new conditions upon which tradition throws no light," she writes. "Package goods, ready to eat foods, hothouse products, strange wares from the ends of the earth—we must learn in these to recognize the old familiar foodstuffs or to note their absence and adapt ourselves to the new order.

"Then when we find that a new food product at $4 a pound contains the same nutritive substances as milk at 4 cents a pound we shall be able to choose intelligently between them. Knowing that milk and egg yolk, which are no trouble to prepare, are better for little children than beef juice, shall we not save ourselves labor and often expense? Realizing that the energy value of food is the same whether served simply or elaborately, shall we not be able to decide how much elaboration is worth while?

"For most people cost is a large factor in the feeding problem. From one-fourth to one-half of the family income has to be devoted to the buying of food and the smaller the income the larger the percentage which must be so spent.

"Nutritious and expensive are not synonymous; in fact, some of the most nutritious foods are the cheapest. Cost is therefore a poor guide for the housewife in determining what she will feed her family. She needs only to know some of the factors which influence the cost of food in order to make wise selection, especially if she has to try continually to make one dollar do the work of two.

"The discrepancy between nutritive value and the cost is nowhere better seen than in comparison of milk with other high protein foods. A quart of milk, yielding 675 calories and costing, let us say, 8 or 10 cents, is the equivalent in fuel value of about one pound of lean round steak costing 20 cents or of nine eggs which would be cheap at 18 cents. A quart of solid oysters is equivalent in fuel value to one quart of milk, but will cost from seven to eight times as much as milk."

Dr. Rose in planning a dietary has arranged it for a typical family of eight persons, consisting of a professional man, a wife who is doing all but the heaviest household tasks, a baby 1 year old, a boy 3 years old, two girls of 6 and 9, a boy of 12 and a grandmother of 90. For this group she estimates that the total requirement of heat units or calories would be 14,400 a day. The cost is given at from 1¾ to 2 cents a hundred calories, which would be from 32 to 36 cents apiece a day, or, applying the unit rule, nearer 40 cents a day for the adults of the family.

The breakfast bill of fare for such a family, considering its varied individuals, would consist of oranges and orange juice, wheatena, an omelet for six, eggs, bacon, toast, butter, milk, coffee for the adults and sugar.

A typical family luncheon would be creamed chicken on toast, baked bananas, Boston brown bread, butter, rice pudding, milk for the children, tea for adults and sugar. Here is a sample dinner for this family:

Bouillon for Five.
Baked Halibut for Five, Egg Sauce.
Potatoes. Buttered String Beans.
Salad of Tomatoes and Lettuce with French Dressing.
Bread and Butter. Milk.
Apple Snow for Five.
Lady Fingers for Four (two each).

There are also allowances of cereals and milk for afternoon or night meals for the children. There is, in fact, about six quarts of milk daily on this schedule. Milk is counted at 9 cents the quart, eggs at no more than 30 cents a dozen and fruits and vegetables are correspondingly cheap. At present prices this daily allowance would run to $3 a day or more.

"It must be remembered," writes Dr. Rose, "that in these estimates nothing is allowed for kitchen or table waste beyond the unavoidable losses in paring vegetables, discarding meat bones, &c. If the cook spills the food in the kitchen or leaves it in the cooking utensils through careless heating or bad scraping, if she is not careful to save every bit of edible food which comes from the dining room the food bills will go up even though the family has no more to eat."

Taking the food budget of this family fed by Dr. Rose at a theoretical cost of $2.50 a day there is an expenditure of $900 a year on this score alone. To justify such an outlay there should be an income of at least three times this amount, according to her view, if the family is to maintain a standard of living commensurate with the ideals of a professional man. This is a large family of course, for the typical family of the economists contains only two adults and three children, the children being under 14 years of age.

Mrs. Rose suggests economies which will bring the cost of feeding the large family mentioned down to from $1.75 to $2.10 a day, or from 22 to 26 cents apiece, counting the members as the latty would individuals. For statistical purposes and in order to make a close comaprison with the economy squad of twelve adults in Chicago we should have to consider the Rose family as consisting really of five and a half units as compared with the approximately eleven units of the Chicago group. The cost would then be from 32 to 35 cents a day each.

The economies under which the family of eight will have to live do not seem so very cheerful as Dr. Rose proceeds to revise the menus with frugal hand.

"In our first dietary," she continues, "We have used a liberal supply of fresh fruit and vegetables, and as these are expensive items we may cut down the amount somewhat, using only one kind of fresh fruit and one fresh vegetable in a single day, and we may substitute canned or dried fruit for the fresh.

"While the milk seems to occupy a large place, its value and economy have already been demonstrated and as long as the average cost of the dietary is over 1 cent a hundred calories ($1.44 a day) it can be freely used to advantage. Eggs are usually expensive and can be omitted from breakfast and in the sauce for the fish and the dessert, and cookies can be substituted for lady fingers.

"Chicken is an expensive meat, and while it is not much used here the cost could be lowered by substituting dried beef and without changing the form of the menu. The fish used in the dinner is usually not very dear and may be retained. Consomme adds little food value and unless made of material not valuable for other purposes can be omitted."

Dr. Rose, still going down the scale, brings us now to a dietary for her typical family. This scheme provides for a fuel value of 14,300 calories, its estimated cost being from $1.08 to $1.43 a day, or from 20 to 26 cents a day on the adult unit basis.

On a typical menu for breakfast we find prune pulp, cereal, bananas, toast, butter, milk and sugar. The family luncheon consists of macaroni and cheese, Boston brown bread, butter, stewed apricots, oatmeal cookies, milk and tea.

A sample family dinner, according to this plan, consists of creamed salt cod for five, baked potatoes for five, boiled onions for four, bread, butter and rice pudding with milk and sugar. Lunches are also provided for the children.

The last menu is ample for all bodily needs. It is the lowest point to which the cost of a dietary can be brought in New York city. At this point it is increasingly difficult also to provide a variety of diet.

"Cereal products," writes Dr. Rose, "dried beans and peas, a few staple fresh vegetables such as potatoes, onions and cabbage and tomatoes in limited quantities, dried fruits and one or two fresh ones such as apples and bananas, very fat meats and fat salt pork and a limited amount of milk must be the chief reliance of the housewife."

The final forms of the economy menu include oatmeal mush with cream and sugar for breakfast, corn bread, oleomargarine, coffee for adults and cereal coffee for children. For luncheon or supper may be had corn chowder with croutons, rye bread, stewed prunes and tea. Dinner consists of split pea soup with bacon, cabbage and potato salad, molasses cake and cocoa.

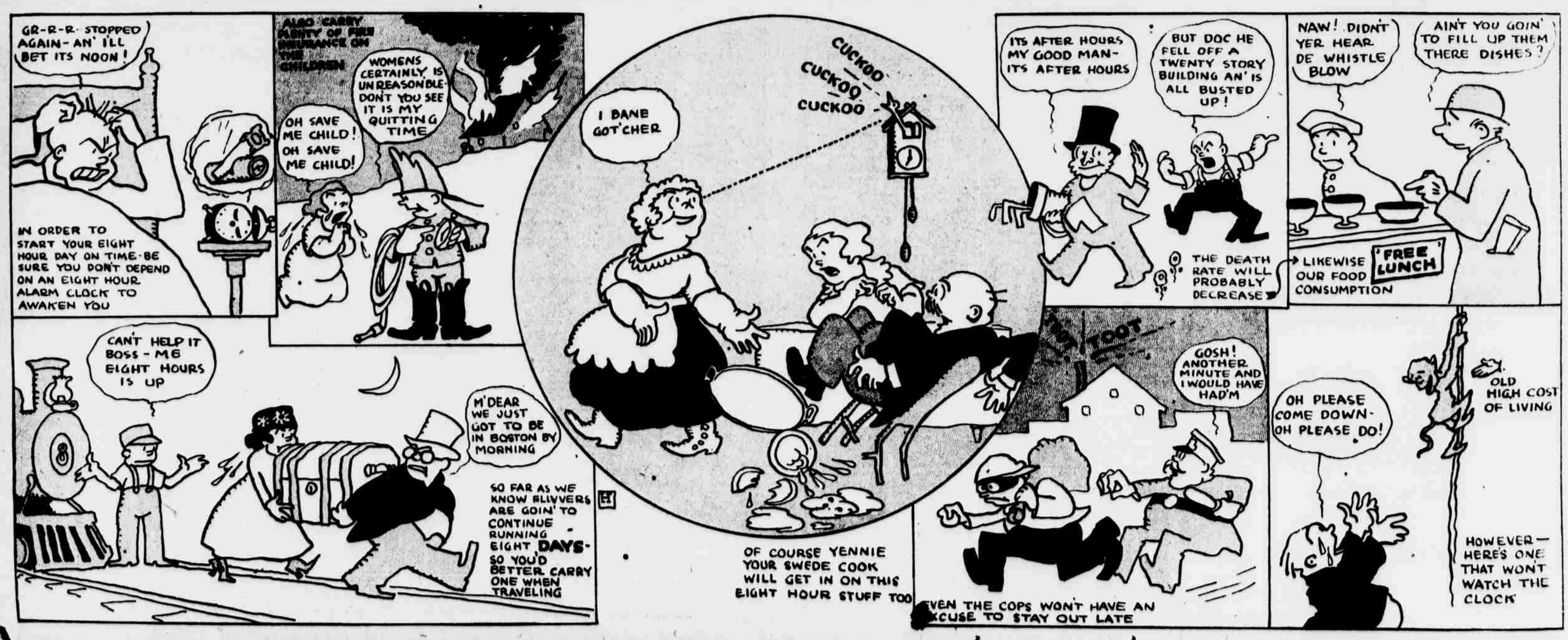
The experts in Chicago are to go forward to keeping up their economy squad with the aid of music and corn bread, and the New England boiled dinner is mentioned among the plats de resistance.

Outside of the large cities the cost of living, especially where corn meal and johnny cake abound, can be brought to a minimum which will startle the experts of both the city and the Cook county metropolis.

### FOOD COSTS ONE-THIRD MORE.

The New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor has just completed the following table of actual retail prices of food in quantities such as are commonly bought. The table shows the prices of a year ago and of this month and the percentages of increase:

| Food. | Quantity. | Nov., 1915. | Nov., 1916. | Per Cent. Increase. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Codfish | 1 pound | $0.10 | $0.15 | 50 |
| Eggs | 2 dozen | .62 | .98 | 58 |
| Butter | 2 pounds | .66 | .86 | 30 |
| Cheese | 1 pound | .20 | .23 | 15 |
| Bread | 17 pounds | 1.12 | 1.36 | 20 |
| Barley | ½ pound | .03 | .03 | 00 |
| Oatmeal | 4 pounds | .16 | .20 | 25 |
| Macaroni | 1 pound | .06 | .08 | 33 |
| Rice | 1 pound | .05 | .06 | 20 |
| Molasses | 1 pint | .10 | .10 | 00 |
| Sugar | 5 pounds | .33 | .40 | 21 |
| Beans | 2 pounds | .18 | .30 | 67 |
| Cabbage | 1 head | .11 | .15 | 36 |
| Carrots | 6 pounds | .15 | .24 | 60 |
| Onions | 6 pounds | .24 | .30 | 25 |
| Potatoes | 18 pounds | .42 | .60 | 114 |
| Tomatoes | 1 pound | .10 | .10 | 00 |
| Apples | 12 pounds | .30 | .60 | 100 |
| Raisins | 1 pound | .18 | .23 | 28 |
| Coffee | ½ pound | .10 | .10 | 00 |
| Tea | ¼ pound | .07 | .07 | 00 |
| Cocoa | ½ pound | .13 | .13 | 00 |
| Chuck steak | 2 pounds | .44 | .44 | 00 |
| Bacon | 1 pound | .22 | .22 | 00 |
| Milk | 21 quarts | 1.89 | 2.10 | 11 |
| Totals | | $7.97 | $10.33 | 29.6 |

The increases thus average from 11 per cent. in cost of milk to 114 per cent. in potatoes. There is no item in which there was a decrease.

## WHEN THE EIGHT HOUR DAY BECOMES UNIVERSAL - - - - By Howell