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Schools and emergency feeding in a national crisis in the United Kingdom: subterranean class strategies

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ABSTRACT

The role of 'class strategies' in policy formation is sometimes unseen as plans are unrealised in practice over long periods of historical time. 'Subterranean class strategies' are an extension of existing work on class to consider 'class work' on policy in the 'long unenacted'. Using the example of emergency feeding in a national crisis, the stark difference in school meal planning for post-World War 2 emergencies when compared to the COVID-19 crisis is discussed. Through an analysis of archival records, it is shown that 'subterranean class strategies' - the devaluation of school catering expertise by the army and the private sector, the lack of co-operation of independent schools, and localisation and privatisation - diminished the role of schools in emergency feeding. The paper concludes by considering how the concept of 'subterranean class strategies' could inform work on educational think tanks, privatisation and subsumption, and intersectional areas such as race.

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Introduction: class strategies and the 'long unenacted'

Although much of the sociology of education is informed by historical perspectives, like all sociology there is often an emphasis on contemporary concerns rather than a sociology that can 'enable us to properly recognise that the things, values, and events that make up our present experience "have been constituted historically, discursively, practically" (Mahon 1992)' (Ball 2020). Additionally, there are aspects of educational policy and inequalities that are unobserved until manifested and enacted. It is the contention of this paper that class strategies in education (Ball 1993, 2002) operate not only in enacted fields of policy (such as educational choice and marketisation) but also in unenacted areas of policy (in this case emergency feeding through school meals) over decades. Class strategies in these fields can be conceived of as *subterranean* – acting over long periods of time on plans and procedures that only come to be enacted in exceptional circumstances (such as a national crisis).

Work on class strategies generally adopts a broadly Bourdieuan (Bourdieu 1984, 1986) view of class in terms of how (usually) middle class actors use their professional, social, and cultural resources to maintain advantage in a field. This occurs through the deployment of

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various symbolic capitals (economic social, cultural and other forms – in this paper, science capital is also important) which are of value only if they are recognised as legitimate (Bourdieu 1984, 16). Bourdieu does not use strategy in a rational, objectivist sense, but rather in terms of an agent's 'sense of the game' (Lamaison and Bourdieu 1986, pg. 112) in a particular field which is influenced (but not determined) by habitus (Grenfell 2010), and this orientation also informs work on class strategies. Class strategies are attentive not only to the economic materiality of class (indeed, although they may appear cultural, they are wedded to economic concerns – Bourdieu 1986) but also to issues of wider class struggle and composition (Kehily & Pattman, 2006; Crozier, Reay, and James 2011). This strategic perspective on class means that class position is not completely fluid (in that class strata remain – including the actions of the ruling class through the state and market) but that the re-composition of class factions is ongoing. Implicit in research on class strategies are the extended, inter-generational histories of class. For example, the motivation for middle class strategies in education is the desire to achieve generational class stability, and upward mobility, given uncertainty concerning the future (Ball 2002). The middle classes are themselves subject to activities (strategies) of the ruling class, particularly in terms of marketisation, legislation and state control (Ainley 2004). Class strategies of various middle class interest groups respond to education policy but are also part of the formation of education policy, particularly in terms of support for markets and choice, and these strategies manifest themselves as not only a response to enacted education policy, but they themselves form and enact policy (Ball 2002).

In some policy areas, for example in the nexus between education and speculative scenarios, there is a 'hidden history' not only of policy formation but also of class (and related inter-sectional characteristics such as gender and ethnicity). Emergency feeding, for example, was part of policy and practice but, unlike other areas of education, was *unenacted in practice* so the 'policy cycle' and the creation of a 'policy regime' were largely obscured from the public (partly due to secrecy but there is often public apathy and fatalism concerning such arrangements) in terms of a physical enactment (Ball 2002, 3–4) and encoded only in symbolic plans. The 'path through space and time' (Ball 2002, 6) through which emergency feeding policy was developed before being put into national operation was *lengthy* (seventy years), across many electoral cycles. This form of 'class strategy', *the 'long unenacted' class strategy, which impacts on potential policies and practices that are unrealised across long periods of historical time* I define as a *subterranean class strategy.* In this context, subterranean does not relate to the subtle interplay of habitus and capitals in a field as described by Bourdieu (1984). Subterranean class strategies are not 'latent' in a social field in that sense. Rather, they are subterranean as they are not enacted in actual policy for an extended period but they remain part of state planning, often conducted in secrecy. They are largely unnoticed class strategies. In this case, emergency feeding was only part of paper plans but these were still contested by class interests. Ironically, the 'path through space and time' (Ball 2002, 6) in which these policies were formed *did* eventually have real world consequences in the COVID-19 pandemic. When coupled with decades of privatisation and marketisation, emergency feeding through school meals was found to be wanting. Through subterranean class strategies over decades, distinctions and exclusions of class, and privatisation, localisation and marketisation which influenced the formation of paper plans ultimately had a visceral manifestation in the real world.

In this paper I employ this concept of 'subterranean class strategies' to explain changes in the emergency plans for school meal provision. I begin by describing the stark difference between plans for using schools, and school property, for emergency feeding following the Second World War and the actual experience of emergency feeding in the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of this comparison is to show the disjuncture between post-war plans and contemporary implementation and not to provide an extended account of the contemporary class strategies and discourses involved in the COVID-19 pandemic (for the legal context on this, see Shields 2021), rather it is used illustratively to show the stark difference between plans over seventy years. Obviously, there were powerful class interests that opposed the COVID-19 measures, for example, working class footballer Marcus Rashford's powerful intervention (Khalisa and Widyastuti, 2022) in recommending high quality free school meals for children (Sinah et al, 2020) but these contemporary class strategies are not the focus of this paper. Following a discussion of methodology, I then analyse how subterranean class strategies impacted the trajectory of school meals and emergency feeding through three critical 'moments' in that trajectory. Firstly, the deployment of social and 'science capital' (Archer et al. 2015) by middle class professional men in extracting the handling of emergency feeding from (largely female and from a lower middle/working class background) school meals supervisors. Secondly, the social closure of independent schools and the deployment of their social and cultural capital in creating distinctions between their own emergency feeding needs and those of the state sector. Thirdly, the fragmentation and disintegration of plans for school meals in emergency feeding through an emphasis on individual and localised choice. In the conclusion I reflect upon the utility of the concept of 'subterranean class strategies' for the sociology of education more generally.

Contextualising the research: comparing plans for school meals for emergency feeding post WW2 and practices in the COVID-19 pandemic

The inspiration for this research is the recent history of emergency feeding through schools in the COVID-19 pandemic. The poor performance of the UK in providing school meals, and using schools in emergency feeding, might be considered to be a function of the need for quick provision in an emergency or because of marketisation. These factors were, of course, important, but as I will argue, it is only through a sociologically informed analysis of the history of schools and emergency feeding that we can understand why this was the case. Quite simply, the UK experience of school meals and emergency feeding in the COVID-19 pandemic did not match the scale of what was planned for emergencies in the austerity years following WW2. This was surprising as the function of UK schools in supplying food during a truly national emergency such as nuclear war or a pandemic had historically been a major part of UK state policy. School meals had been one of the ways that the UK state conceptualised social cohesion (Le Gros Clarke, 1948) or the wider 'social good' (Andrews 1972; Earl and Lalli, 2020; Garner 1985) and this was also the case in the USA (Rutledge 2015). Over time, though, the emphasis placed on school meals in an emergency became less of a 'necessity' and more of a 'luxury good' (to use Goldthorpe's 1986 characterisation of school meal policy).

Post-WW2 the collective provision of emergency feeding for all, with the school meals service providing a significant role, was a universal value. In the early Cold War, the preparation of schools for a national emergency, which was primarily considered to be an atomic

attack, was essentially informed by the legacy of WW2 arrangements (Le Gros Clarke, 1948). School meal provision was strongly influenced by war time conditions which persisted legally as well as socially (TNA ED147/374374, 1948). For an extensive part of the early Cold War period schools were still under quasi-wartime conditions. Indeed, the legacy of WW2 and the 1944 Education Act were largely responsible for the plans for the school meals service after nuclear attack. For much of the early Cold War period, in the UK. schools were perceived to be functioning, societal, institutions in the event of an emergency, in terms of collective support and welfare, and supportive of social (national) cohesion (which was similar to the United States experience of schools as sites of emergency welfare, Brown 1988).

The principle of schools, through the school meals service, being used as a place for the feeding of the general public in the early Cold War was known as 'messing for the masses' where groups of one hundred people would sit down in shifts in schools to eat under a system of 'crash feeding' (TNA ED50/463 n.d.a). The willingness of the school meals service to assist was stressed by the Ministry of Education throughout this period. The school meals service even constructed a seven-day menu which would, the very next day, be provided to citizens after a nuclear attack. This series of meals would have included breakfast (Porridge, biscuits, margarine, jam and tea), dinner (Including meals such as Corned Beef Shepherd's Pie with potatoes and cabbage and steamed fruit pudding to follow) and supper (Tomato soup with bread) (TNA, ED50/463, 1948a). Plans were more pragmatic for the immediate twenty-four hours after the attack which were to include: '…something hot to drink e.g. a cup of hot, sweet tea or a bowl of good soup and (b) something to eat' (TNA ED50/463, 1948a). Individuals were to be issued with free tickets for school meals by the Civil Defence Corps if they did not have access to food which would allow them to eat at any emergency feeding centre. In retrospect, these plans might seem to be hopelessly naïve given the power of the atomic bomb and Campbell (1983) considers such menus to be indicative of the wider absurdities of cold war contingency planning. However, contextually WW2 had shown the credibility of the collective provision of meals and the Soviet atomic bomb programme (although with devastating power) was still in development until the early 1950s. If these were 'paper plans', or 'fantasy documents' then this was a fantasy that was widely believed given recent wartime memory. For staff in schools, WW2 had given them a sense of the collective importance of their work for national transformation and survival (Cunningham and Gardner, 1999). Furthermore, this was not just a belief, but a well-resourced activity. The material foundation for the school meals service as a key provider of communal feeding arose from the effective demobilisation of depots and canteens from their WW2 function to be used by local authorities (TNA ED50/461, 1946a). Local authorities were issued refunds for rents and rates of these depots which had been paid to the Ministry of Food. Under this scheme, Emergency Cooking Depots were transferred to local authorities (Some were Counties and County Boroughs, and others were excepted districts). In some cases, this also included the sale of British Restaurants to local authorities (TNA ED50/461, 1946b). This collective 'war dividend' for schools and LEAs came with an understanding that there would be future use of these facilities as communal feeding arrangements in the event of an evacuation of target areas, or as post-attack communal kitchens. In a national emergency the equipment could be taken back under the control of the Ministry of Food or placed under dual control (TNA ED50/463463, 1948b). The Ministry of Education, working with the Ministry of Food, made active efforts to prepare

their facilities for wartime use and throughout this period considered adaptations to cooking facilities, menus, and processes, which would be necessary to provide communal meals. This included dual use facilities in school kitchens to allow cooking with both gas and fuel oil (TNA ED50/463 n.d.b) and testing aluminium food containers which could transport food in a crisis (TNA ED50/463, n.d.c). These post-war conditions produced an integrated system whereby collective feeding, following redeployment of fixed assets, canteens, and facilities, was intended to supply meals, via schools, for the whole population in the event of a national crisis of the magnitude of a nuclear attack.

The Government took concrete planning steps to make sure that emergency feeding could occur. Initially, the Civil Defence Act of 1948 introduced the structure of the Civil Defence Corps, but did not actually provide detailed plans for evacuation, shelter, medical services, or food supplies in an emergency (Grant 2009, 34). The lack of a substantive civil defence plan for food would certainly have tested the ability of the school meals service to supply the full scale of planned emergency feeding as the plans were based on unfeasible levels of food imports (Grant 2009, 38). Moreover, the prospect of a devastating atomic war had finally entered the realm of political possibility as the Soviet Union tested their first atomic weapon in August 1949. To make sure that collective emergency feeding could occur, in 1950 the Cabinet agreed to a more detailed civil defence plan, including the national stockpiling of food to avoid a reliance on imports in a crisis but despite budgeting for civil defence planning only around half of the planned civil defence budget was spent. The lack of actual civil defence expenditure made it difficult to deal with 'imponderables' such as how early 1950s plans for dispersal (evacuation) could operate with plans for emergency feeding (as people would be outside of their local areas). The need for pragmatism was also hastened by the Civil Defence (Designation of the Minister of Food) Order, 1950 and the Civil Defence (Emergency Feeding) Order) 1951 which made it a function of every local authority to make additional plans for feeding members of the population. By the beginning of the 1950s the plans for a full fourteen-day feeding plan had been scaled back and the idea of mobile kitchens to support school facilities was being considered by the Ministry of Food (TNA ED50/464, 1951h). What were once detailed and ambitious plans became pragmatic, but still involved free hot drinks, sandwiches and stews (TNA ED50/461, 1951a) but even these pragmatic plans, devised in 1951, were far superior to those deployed in the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK (2020–2022). COVID-19, a respiratory virus, was virulent with a high incapacity and death rate. Cases in the UK increased at an exponential rate, overwhelming the National Health Service (NHS) and other public services and the country was placed on 'lockdowns' to allow only travel outside the home, or main dwelling, for essential medical supplies, foodstuffs or exercise (once a day) and for limited exceptions (Willan et al. 2020). The absence of collective food provision in the COVID-19 pandemic, continuing trends in historical contingency planning, meant that access to funds, transport and home delivery became the only guarantor of nutrition and protection from health risks. Many households who were already suffering from 'food poverty' and 'food deserts' (Moore and Evans 2020) (due to a lack of cheap, locally available, quality food) found it difficult to obtain adequate food supplies coinciding with price rises, shortages, stockpiling, and panic buying. Food banks reported a fall in donations and a limited supply of food parcels were provided by the government (using the logistics of the army as well as the supermarkets) to people with underlying medical conditions who were asked to 'self-isolate' for twelve weeks. Under the emergency arrangements for school meals, schools were given the choice

of providing free meals to those groups who required them (removing the need for primary schools to provide universal free school meals) through an in-house catering team, a local authority food provider, or a private food supplier. Most schools and local authorities were unable to utilise in-house or local authority suppliers due to the isolation rules. This led to many schools making use of the private sector in the provision of meals often issuing 'supermarket vouchers' under a national scheme. The emergency feeding arrangements enabled a marketized form of emergency feeding in terms of a private voucher offering consumer choice. This system was widely criticised as some supermarkets refused to accept vouchers and families of those few children who could get school meals through local authority provision complained about their low quality (Shields 2021). The voucher scheme was administered by private companies who were criticised for poor quality, not fulfilling orders and the use of a premium rate number for customer complaints and enquiries (Shields 2021). Although it is perhaps too early to consider the full impact of COVID-19 on school meals and emergency feeding it seems as though these trends increased inequality, even in a dire emergency. It took the actions of a working-class footballer, Marcus Rashford, to shame the Government into adopting adequate emergency feeding for children in a pandemic in the absence of effective, collectivised, schemes (Shields 2021).

To analyse the remarkable difference between plans for emergency feeding in schools post WW2 and actual practices in the COVID-19 pandemic involves a sociological approach to that historical context. Although contemporary concerns of class (and also race and gender) are important, it is only through tracing the interplay of class strategies over time that we can understand this disjuncture.

Methodology

Skarpelis (2020) argues that archival approaches use not only official documents, but they reveal the social life of subjects, and the method employed here is to use archives to foreground the role of class strategies in policy formation. Archival methods are a key approach whereby the 'long unenacted' can be empirically analysed and I concentrate primarily on the period 1945 – 1990, supplementing the period 1990 – 2022 with documentary sources. This is partly for pragmatic reasons as, from archival resources, we know how the school meals service was shaped to face a potential existential national crisis (nuclear war) and narratively, as by the end of the 1980s there was little significant role for the school meals service in a national crisis where all that remained from 1990 - 2020 was patchy localised and privatised emergency provision.

The analysis is based on three sources of archival data. Firstly, government files in The National Archives (TNA) from the Ministry of Education (1944–1964), Ministry of Food (1939 – 1958) and (from 1955) MAFF (Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries & Food), and Home Office records. Secondly, local authority records from the London Boroughs for the 1970s, where emergency feeding plans were most detailed sourced from archives held in the Imperial War Museum (IWM). Thirdly, secondary literature on emergency feeding in the 1980s and 1990s and more recent media and government reports of feeding in the 2020 pandemic.

The research is at the intersection of two fields of study: national emergencies and school meals: which are, in themselves, not well mapped out in terms of policy sociology, or the sociology of education. Intersecting these areas of education history and policy means that

there is not only a thin secondary literature, but also primary sources are sometimes limited. Ministry of Education records on emergency feeding lacked continuity when they were transferred to the Department for Education (DFE). Following reductions in civil defence funding in 1968 it seems that the DFE took no interest in school meals for emergency feeding leaving the matter in the hands of local authorities. To address problems of absence and to increase the validity of the analysis I used mainly MAFF and local authority primary for the later part of the Cold War (1964 – 1984) triangulating these with secondary sources.

It is acknowledged that such a history can only be partial and could be told at various levels of analysis. In addition, the emphasis here is on national levels of analysis and national emergencies and unavoidably might miss the potential aggregation of local services but there is no evidence that there was any local planning or co-ordination of this kind (and the COVID-19 experience showed that marketized provision was the norm). However, although elements of fine-grained detail might be missing, the tendencies are clear in terms of revealing class strategies as motivations behind the scaling back of school meals in terms of emergency feeding for a national emergency and a tendency towards individualism, privatisation and fragmentation.

Subterranean class strategies: three moments of the 'long unenacted'

The stark distinction in how school meals were to be used in an emergency between the plans constructed post-WW2 in the early Cold War and the enactment of a fragmentary voucher policy in the COVID-19 pandemic is an example of the 'long unenacted' in education policy. During this time, class strategies were employed by various class fractions that facilitated this move from state, school meals based, to private, locally based, provision. These were *subterranean class strategies* in three 'moments' of policy formation:-

Class and gender in relations between school meal organisers (SMOs) and emergency planners: the deployment of cultural, social and science capital

In terms of the organisation of emergency feeding, there was often conflict between the higher echelons of supporters of collective provision by the school meals service within the Ministry of Education as opposed to the interests of emergency feeding planers in the Ministry of Food in addition to disagreements between emergency planners and School Meal Organisers (SMOs). These disagreements often concerned the deployment of science in the form and preparation of school meals in an emergency. The distinctions that were created are an example not only of the deployment of social and cultural capital (where SMOs who were often lower middle class or working class women were not perceived to have legitimate social and cultural capital when compared to, mostly male, middle class emergency planners) but also of science capital (Archer, Dewitt, and Willis 2014). Science capital is an extension of Bourdieu's largely cultural and social forms of capital to include the supposedly objective domain of science, going beyond scientific literacy to include science related social and cultural capital (Archer et al. 2015, 928). Although the concept of science capital was developed in relation to school students, Archer et al. (2015) consider that science capital, alongside other forms of capital, may be mobilised in fields where claims to authority are contested (pg. 941). In the field of school meals in emergencies, the existing

science capital. autonomy, resources, and the professional status of the newly created SMOs, who would be central to collective feeding, were points of contention between the ministries. The habitus of Emergency Feeding Officers and the Ministry was that the particularistic nature of their laboratory science could be valorised as 'science capital', as opposed to the practical knowledge of those in school kitchens. These concerns were exacerbated by disagreements as to the nature of food science between those in the Ministry of Education and Emergency Feeding Officers in the Ministry of Food (TNA ED50/441, 1951h). For example, there were some early disagreements concerning the best ways in which food could be stored and prepared in an emergency. As early as 1946, the Ministry of Food proposed that frozen foods could be pre-prepared for use in emergencies. At that time, frozen food was a luxury, but the Ministry of Food believed that the newly created frozen airline meals (prepared by The British Overseas Airways Corporation) could be adapted and stored in freezers for emergency feeding purposes (TNA ED50/461, 1946c). This would remove the necessity for preparation of full meals in school kitchens. However, the Ministry of Education considered that this method was too expensive (TNA ED50/461, 1948).

Another disagreement arose over the status of science in emergency planning. The Ministry of Food believed that there was insufficient application of science by the school meals service – that they lacked *legitimate* science capital. In 1947 the Scientific Advisor's division of the Ministry of Food ordered a survey of school kitchens to consider the wastage of food, particularly in terms of how potatoes and other vegetables were peeled in order to prevent waste in emergency feeding (TNA ED50/461, 1947). Throughout the early Cold War, the Ministry of Food considered that it possessed a monopoly on scientific expertise (science capital) regarding emergency feeding and attempted to impose innovations on the school meals service such as training courses for school meals organisers, the commandeering of school cutlery for emergency purposes (TNA ED50/464, 1951b) and the decision that hard fuel cooking equipment should be installed in all schools and hospitals (TNA ED50/464, 1951c). Local Authorities and the Ministry of Food were particularly concerned about the autonomy that the school meals service might have in a national emergency and the extent to which collectively prepared school meals could be adapted for emergency purposes. The Ministry of Education defended collective, school-based provision, and considered that in an emergency the school meals service: would be taken over by the emergency feeding officer (TNA ED50/461, 1951b).

The school meals service was considered to represent the fundamental interests of children and schools as '…the second line of defence and the first call upon them must always be to meet the needs of school children for whom the kitchens and canteens were built…' (TNA ED50/464, 1951d) The Ministry of Education predicted that the resources of the school meals service, particularly in terms of food stocks, would be insufficient to cope with the privatised emergency feeding arrangements of the type proposed by the Ministry of Food and wished to downplay the role of individually prepared meals in a crisis. They wanted to keep their autonomy and even in peacetime, there was opposition to the idea that schools should allow their school kitchens and equipment to be used for emergency planning rehearsals in civil defence (TNA ED50/464 1951e) and that school inspectors should be involved in military training for emergencies (TNA ED50/464 1951f). The National Union of Teachers (NUT) also opposed the military co-option of school premises in the event of a national evacuation (TNA ED50/464, n.d.a) and LEAs were also keen to stress that food and milk would not be available for children who were evacuated from

outside of reception areas (TNA ED50/464, 1951h). The collective, free, provision of meals for children (and potentially their families) by the school meals service was still thought possible in the 1950s by the Ministry of Education and SMOs, but they wished to keep the provision autonomous from other types of individualised feeding efforts.

Mirroring the divide between ministries, the distinction between emergency planners and school meals workers was most apparent with respect to SMOs and illustrative of the way that science capital reflects not only class relations, but also relations of gender. SMOs were created by Statutory Rule and Order 698 of the 1944 Act as the senior administrative staff in the school meals service. These officers were also known by a variety of other titles such as Catering Officer and School Meals Advisor (Berger 1990, 27). SMOs were former domestic science teachers from primarily lower middle-class (and sometimes working class) backgrounds with specialist knowledge in dietary science (Berger 1990) who had been trained at institutions such as the progressive Gloucestershire College of Domestic Science where it was considered that, for reasons of equality, children should be provided with free food by the state at an early age. This social activism in terms of school meals was also promoted by the Association of Teachers of Domestic Subjects (ATDS) (Berger 1990, 29).

In terms of collective feeding, from the early days of the Cold War, SMOs were having to defend their expertise (science capital) over that of emergency planners (usually male and from the 'officer class', being upper middle-class members of the British Army) and conflicts between the two groups often arose. There was, for example, opposition to giving SMOs a dual role as emergency feeding officers:-

> LEAs were appointing school meals officers as emergency feeding officers, but Miss Goodfellow of the school meals service pointed out that this will be detrimental to the school meals service at this current time and involved a risk of a breakdown under emergency conditions because the burden was much too great for the organisers who would be fully employed looking after the needs of the school children. The Army stated that while the school meals service would naturally be expected to play an important part in the national plan its primary function to feed school children must be preserved and, therefore school kitchens should be regarded as the second line of defence; the first line being the commercial catering establishments and the like in the locality (and the) Ministry of Food (through) stockpiling tined food
>
> (TNA ED50/464 n.d.d).

In most cases, the SMO and the EFO (Emergency Feeding Officer) were designated as separate roles (TNA ED50/464, 1951g) and the Ministry of Food agreed that they should be discrete roles with the position of EFO conditional on training and attendance at national courses run largely by the army (TNA ED50/464, 1951h). This was a divide not only of professionalism but also of class and gender. By the later years of the Cold War, and in the early 1970s, rather than domestic science teachers, SMOs (then trained as EFOs) were increasingly appointed from the commercial sector, being primarily those who held qualifications from the Hotel Catering and Institutional Management Association (HCIMA) (Berger 1990, 30). Hence there was a de-professionalisation of SMOs and an emphasis on military, male, control and private sector involvement from restaurant and hotel chains so that SMO and Ministry of Education expertise as a locus for collective, emergency, feeding expertise was undermined.

Independent school social closure and social capital in opposing emergency collective feeding arrangements

It was not only the Ministry of Food and the Army who had concerns about the collective provision of meals in schools. Independent schools, which were private institutions, independent of government control (sometimes known as 'public schools' in the UK), were incensed that they might have to adopt a communal responsibility for feeding other than their own pupils after a nuclear attack. They were concerned that their 'field' of private educational provision would be encroached on by the state. The Ministry of Education was keen to reassure them that the general public would not be their concern:-

> Schools have been approached by local education authorities about their catering arrangements in connection with emergency feeding plans…This need not necessitate any alarm…It is unlikely that local authorities will wish to use independent schools to any great extent for emergency feeding centres for the general public. The Ministry of Food recognise that boarding schools, like other residential institutions, would not be suitable since their main responsibility is to their boarders, and boarding schools in reception areas are likely to have additional children to feed if they are acting as hosts to independent schools from evacuation areas.
>
> (TNA ED50/463, n.d.d)

Despite this reassurance, the Ministry of Education were obviously keen to know the possible location of kitchens that could be used in an emergency, even if they were in independent schools (TNA ED50/463, 1950) and in some (limited) cases these were included in evacuation plans (TNA ED50/464, 1951i). However, independent schools suspected that involvement in emergency feeding were part of plans for LEAs to '…get their hands on the independent schools'. (TNA ED50/464, 1950b) making an economic and cultural distinction. Hence emergency feeding was politicised by the independent schools themselves who subsequently absented themselves from wider, collective, arrangements using their mutual social capital connections to concentrate on their own pupils. This foreshadowed the fragmentation of schools into academies, and academy trusts, which became divorced from LEA collective feeding arrangements. With internal budgetary freedom many state schools made their own private arrangements for school meal provision (Rose and Falconer 1992) and considered that budgetary autonomy brought them closer to the private sector.

Abandoning school meals in a national emergency: markets, localisation, fragmentation and disintegration

In line with other policies associated with school meals, risk in emergencies has effectively been privatised in moving from the state to individual provision through the market (Gustafsson 2004). Local authorities, and ultimately individuals and families were interpellated as 'active choosers' of their emergency feeding plans. This marketisation, localisation and fragmentation led to the eventual disintegration of the policy and this can be tracked through several decades of 'unenacted plans'.

The thermonuclear age and particularly the detonation of the first Soviet thermonuclear weapon in 1953 led to more emphasis on the survival of the machinery of government rather than saving lives, as detailed in the 1955 Strath Report. The Strath Report raised the possibility that hard choices would need to be made concerning the ways in which services

were to be rationed for those people who had a possibility of future survival. In addition:- 'Food and water would be in short supply, and at least half of Britain's industrial capacity would have been destroyed. Food stockpiling would be an absolute priority in order for recovery to be achievable' (Grant 2009, 96). Grant (2009) refers to the two years following the Strath report as 'years of decision' and there were fundamental policy changes necessary in civil defence. However rather than leading to increased funding the decision was that civil defence was '…too expensive in relation to the chance of war and its efficacy in saving lives' (Grant 2009, 99). The result was a move away from the expensive and logistically problematic defence of the population towards the protection of the machinery of the state. Feeding the whole population though collective measures became politically unimaginable. The 1960 Home Defence Review found that even if a policy of shelter protected a substantial proportion of the population from death that it would not be logistically possible to feed all of the survivors. Indeed, by this point in civil defence planning the government was prepared to countenance the 'execution of food rioters' (Grant 2009, 173) preferring authoritarianism to societal collapse. In 1968 civil defence and national emergency planning was placed 'in cold storage' (Grant 2009, 193). This led to a new strategy on emergency feeding which downplayed the role of the school meals service as a provider. The school meals service was also subject to more general cuts in expenditure throughout the 1950s and 1960s with the Treasury moving away from collective provision towards charging, and from that point increasing prices, for school meals.

This 'thermonuclear moment', the shift from atomic to hydrogen bombs, was the point at which cold war civil defence and British nuclear strategy is often seen as becoming significantly different from that of WW2. This period marked a shift from a civil defence policy that aimed to save many lives, to one that prioritised the continuity of government and a changed role for civil defence towards more limited, and privatised, conceptions of provision and survival. Budget cuts in 1956 meant that civil defence was a low priority for government in favour of expenditure on nuclear weapons (Grant 2009, 7). In the late 1950s we see real signs of civil defence being split into two 'spheres': one concerned with secretive plans for the survival of the machinery of government where the majority of expenditure was located and the other, much smaller, for protecting the lives of the general public (Grant 2009, 7). This brought about a move to a more privatised form of civil defence that prioritised individual and family resources and neglected communal organisations such as the school meals service.

Budget cuts to the 'second sphere' quickly led to problems in terms of plans for emergency feeding, and the role of schools. In an early form of 'disaster capitalism' MAFF considered in the early 1960s that it may be the case that people would have to pay for their own meals in the case of a national emergency: -

> In any future war there may well be thousands of people who will not have the means to pay for emergency meals and in the circumstances which prevail it will not be practicable to lay down any initial period in which free meals will be available. The only practicable answer will probably be to instruct emergency feeding authorities to make charges for meals sufficient to cover the cost wherever possible but to give them the authority to waive charges at their own discretion.
>
> (TNA MAF357/2121, 1961, my italics)

Government plans for any collective feeding became rather absurd during this period, with ad hoc suggestions for feeding such as plans for a 'Food Flying Squad' a plan for a fleet of vans that could be dispatched to bombed areas with a small stock of tea, sugar and tinned milk (TNA MAF357/21, 1963a).

In 1965 emergency feeding became a responsibility of local boroughs but the expectation that school meals staff would be locally responsible for emergency feeding in some form remained (TNA MAF357/21, 1963b). With respect to the role of the school meals service in the later cold war, the late 1970s war emergency plans of London Boroughs considered the roles of schools and emergency feeding as largely separate activities. The London Borough of Haringey War Emergency Plan (IWM CD365, 1978) considered Greater London to be one of the regional seats of government in the event of a national emergency but that it would be unlikely that regional government would be established quickly and that sub-regional government (in the case of London this would comprise six or seven London boroughs) would be the highest level of administrative authority. Plans were made for planning and communication down to the level of local communities. Health and feeding in this shattered administrative structure would be the responsibilities of 'Community Care Centres', rather than schools (although some feeding would take place in school buildings), who would have to cope with reception and care of the homeless, public information and medical treatment as well as emergency feeding. A 'Main Community Care Centre' would also be responsible for radiological monitoring as well as becoming a makeshift shelter for those who were caught in the open at the time of the bombing. In Haringey, St. Thomas More High school and Noel Park School (as well as Woodside House, a council building) would be Main Community Care Centres, while Belmont School, Lordship Lane School and William Forester Lower School were to be subsidiary Community Care Centres. This represents a move from the national school meals service's role in nuclear attack in the early cold war to local, minimal, provision where school meals staff would receive what was called 'crash training' mere days before an expected nuclear strike. References to 'crash training' in the Haringey, and also in the Westminster and Richmond emergency plans of 1978 (IWM CD369 1978; IWM CD367, 1978) implied that little, or no, training for nuclear attack for school meals employees would have taken place in advance.

The Civil Defence (Local Authority Functions) Regulations 1983 imposed a duty on local authorities to conserve and control food, moving far from the principle of collective provision. Few local authorities had actual workable emergency feeding plans and the ability of the school meals service to provide nutritious meals even under non-crisis conditions in the 1980s, was in question (Murcott 1987). An audit of local authority civil defence plans conducted in 1986 (TNA HO322/111, 1986) showed that only one county (Leicestershire) had a barely acceptable civil defence plan in terms of the provision of emergency feeding. Of the remainder, 11 counties had flawed plans, 25 had major defects and 17 had no significant activity in this area.

By the 1980s the government was largely opposed to collective emergency feeding arrangements. According to Duncan Campbell, drawing on material from government nuclear war planning exercises in the 1980s, entitled 'Hard Rock', 'Square Leg' and 'Scrum Half', food ('…the final criterion of survival' Campbell 1983, 279) would not be collectively provided and would be used as a form of social control. Evidence from these exercises points towards multiple conflicts between survivors and the state over food supplies. It was thought to be unlikely that households would have adequate food supplies to cope with fourteen

days of the post-strike period and even a bare bones emergency feeding service could not be implemented (Campbell 1983, 281–283). Modelling of the impact of a nuclear attack on Greater London (GLAWRS, 1986) considered that food stocks, including those in schools, were not guaranteed and even if available may not be useable due to pests. School meal stocks would be seized by the army and police (Campbell 1983, 285). To stop looting of food supplies the deployment of the army would be necessary and armed guards would be deployed where stocks were seized (Campbell 1983, 35–36). A stark choice would be necessary as the British government faced the possibility that a nuclear attack '…will not kill enough' (Campbell 1983, 280) and the choice will be '…between the feeding of the many, at declining, sub-standard levels, or the feeding of a chosen few'. (Campbell 1983, 278). The nutrition of children would depend on the ability to work of their parents and most of the food would be allocated to 'obedient workers, police and the military' (Campbell 1983, 179). Through local authority plans the school meals service would be co-opted to partly staff this stratified emergency feeding (Campbell 1983, 283) drawing on school equipment (TNA HO322/1143, 1983) although there were no concrete plans as to how this might be achieved. Although there was widespread pessimism regarding emergency feeding in the 1980s, some optimistic pro-civil defence commentators considered that food rationing and storage techniques from the experience of WW2 could be used (Laurie 1983) but by 1984 even the Home Office considered that stockpiles were completely insufficient to allow for any mass feeding (TNA HO322/1144, 1984).

By the 1990s, pessimism, individualism and a survival of the fittest mentality was the dominant note in government with no evidence remaining of the post-war collective optimism of full meals for the masses or collective, free, provision. At this time, civil defence moved towards 'dual use' for a variety of emergencies including chemical, biological and radiological attack as well as pandemics. Policy from this point tacitly prioritised middle-class families who could stockpile and rely on their own private resources (Preston 2008, 2015). The end of the Cold War was effectively the end of any collectivised plans for emergency feeding using school meals in a national emergency in the UK. The 'strategic food stockpile' which held supplies of basic foods for collective provision was decommissioned in the mid-1990s (Clarke 2012) marking the end of national emergency food planning in a crisis. The end of local authority provision of meals with privatisation, academisation and further marketisation fragmented even local provision (Lalli 2021). In 2019, Zac Goldsmith (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment) confirmed that there were no plans for national feeding in a crisis (as confirmed by Lang 2019) and that Government would rely on private sector plans in future national emergencies: -

> *DEFRA* is not responsible for the supply of food and drink to the population in an emergency, and the expertise, capability and levers to plan for and respond to food supply disruption lie within the industry. However, we have well established relationships with the food and drink sectors, and we work collaboratively with the food industry and across Government to support coherent and robust industry contingency planning…The food industry is experienced in dealing with scenarios that can affect food supply.
>
> (Hansard 2019)

Alongside the growth of disaster capitalism, the centrality of the private sector in supplying food in local emergencies (including COVID-19: Preston and Firth 2021) further buried any vestiges of schools being the provider of mass feeding in a national crisis.

Conclusion: subterranean class strategies and school meals in emergencies

The early promise of the school meals service as being a major part of the provision of emergency feeding was short-lived in part as it was opposed by the interests of a faction of the middle classes (Ball 1993, 2002) and mechanisms of privatisation and localisation. Class strategies have been shown here to be a powerful motivation acting behind what would be considered by many to be 'fantasy', paper, plans. Of course, geopolitical and strategic reasons played a part, but even after the Cold War collective feeding arrangements were not reinstated. These oppositional forces to school meals have been influenced by 'subterranean class strategies' where unenacted policy (for an emergency or in scenario planning) over decades is subject to the same forces as enacted policy. In this case, class strategies contested an area which was 'unthinkable' in education – a fully national crisis – in the absence of an existent crisis.

Although the case of school meal provision in a national crisis might seem to be an idiosyncratic area for contestation it acts as an example of other, subterranean, areas of education policy where class, markets and privatisation play out. Historically, even when state power has been seemingly unquestionable, these subterranean class strategies have been used to undermine state provision most notably through the activities of organisations such as pro-market think tanks in education (Ball 2007) in thinking about future scenarios for marketisation and profit. Work on subterranean class strategies can further inform how class work is conceived historically. In particular, in theorising the 'subterranean' nature of this class work, there is a homology between subterranean class strategies and the expansion of capital into previously uncapitalised areas as they facilitate 'ideal subsumption' (Szadkowski 2016), Ideal subsumption is where speculative activities, which would never otherwise be considered to be marketized and privatised, can be imagined and reified as such. This lies beyond the familiar category of hybrid subsumption, in which quasi-market activities are used to open up activities for capitalisation. This form of subsumption is one in which *any non-economic category* can be imagined as a commodity. In terms of collective emergency feeding in a national emergency, decades of 'class work' and reimagining emergency food as a private good brought this ideal into being, but there may be many more potential examples where 'imagined' educational plans are made over decades but not yet enacted.

Finally, this paper has focussed on class and, to a lesser extent, gender but future work could pay attention to the racialised nature of UK Government school meal provision in emergencies (and other constructions around nation or ableism). The origins of (limited) national school meal provision, for example, were definitively eugenic in nature. Prior to 1906, when the Education (Provision of Meals) Act was passed by parliament, over three hundred philanthropic organisations were involved in provision. However, rather than equity or charity, the need for some state provision of school meals was motivated by eugenic concerns regarding the physical deterioration of the nation which was supposedly responsible for defeat in the South African War– the second Boer war - hence the motivation for the Bill was not only educational but primarily imperial (Le Gros Clark 1948). It would be instructive to trace the continuity of these eugenic narratives in terms of the racialisation of the 'deserving poor' in terms of school meals as part of a future research agenda in this area but this is beyond the scope of this paper – and would require wider archival research in the personal archives of eugenicists and their organisations.

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