

Mothers and children without bread. Hunger in the *Auxilio Social Cocinas de Hermandad* and *Comedores Infantiles* during post-war Francoism (1939-1940)

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ABSTRACT: This article analyses one of the main social policies in post-war Spain: the welfare policies of *Auxilio Social*. In particular, it explores the conditions and daily operation of the *Comedores Infantiles* and *Cocinas de Hermandad* run by that Falangist institution in Madrid in the immediate postwar period (1939 and 1940). This work sustains that the rations served in these charitable-assistance institutions were fewer, smaller, and of worse quality than officially recognised. Therefore, the food given to the needy mothers and children at these *Auxilio Social* premises was insufficient to quell their hunger. Moreover, since the facilities did not meet the minimum conditions of size, cleanliness, ventilation, and kitchen utensils, the attendees were exposed to infectious diseases. It is also argued that, beyond the food supply problems of those famine years, the ineffectiveness of the *Comedores* and *Cocinas* was often due to the staff who worked in them, as they often used to steal food for their own consumption or to sell on the black market. Finally, it is argued that, given its failure to feed the needy, *Auxilio Social's* aim of extending support to the dictatorship through the guise of charity was tarnished.

KEYWORDS: Franco's dictatorship; post-war period; hunger; children; social policies; corruption; Auxilio Social.

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Título traducido: Madres y niños sin pan. El hambre en las Cocinas de Hermandad y los Comedores Infantiles de Auxilio Social durante la posguerra franquista (1939-1940).

RESUMEN: Este artículo analiza una de las principales políticas sociales de posguerra: el asistencialismo de Auxilio Social. En particular, explora las condiciones y el funcionamiento cotidiano de los Comedores Infantiles y las Cocinas de Hermandad de esta institución falangista en el Madrid de la inmediata posguerra (1939 y 1940). Se sostiene la tesis de que las raciones servidas en estas instituciones benéfico-asistenciales eran menos, más pequeñas y de peor calidad que las reconocidas oficialmente. Y que, por tanto, las madres y los niños asistidos no lograban apagar su hambre tras su paso por estos locales de Auxilio Social. Al contrario, al no reunir las instalaciones unas condiciones mínimas de tamaño, limpieza, ventilación o menaje los asistidos se exponían a contagios infecciosos. Asimismo, se defiende que, más allá de los problemas de suministros en aquellos años de hambre, la responsabilidad de la inoperancia de Comedores y Cocinas recayó a menudo en el personal que trabajaba en ellos, que acostumbraba a sustraer alimentos para su consumo particular o para su desvío al mercado negro. Por último, se sostiene que, dado su fracaso a la hora de dar de comer a los necesitados, el objetivo de Auxilio Social de extender el consentimiento hacia la dictadura mediante el reclamo de la caridad se vio empañado.

PALABRAS CLAVE: franquismo; posguerra; hambre; niños; políticas sociales; corrupción; Auxilio Social.

En Madrid (...) solo se podían apreciar inmensas colas para adquirir los periódicos que arrebataban de manos de los vendedores. El reflejo de la vida en la capital es el gran aumento de la población, muy considerable. Un gran número de ella vive de milagro, valga la frase. Nubes de vendedores por todos lados. Cigarrillos, pan y otros artículos de estraperlo. Quien ha vivido en Madrid nota un gran cambio. El nivel de vida es más bajo que en Barcelona. En el conjunto de la población puede apreciarse que su indumentaria es vieja y ajada. Más pobreza que en la ciudad condal. Un gran número de inmigrantes de todas las regiones de España, donde no pueden vivir por falta de lo más elemental, se encuentra allí, empleándose en los trabajos más variados.

In Madrid (...) you could only see huge queues to buy the newspapers that were snatched from the vendors' hands. The reflection of life in the capital is the large increase in the population, very considerable. That many are alive is a miracle, for want of a better expression. Crowds of vendors are everywhere. Cigarettes, bread and other black-market items. Anyone who has lived in Madrid notices a great change. The standard of living is lower than in Barcelona. In the population as a whole, it can be seen that their clothing is old and worn. More poverty than in Barcelona. There is a large number of immigrants from all the regions of Spain, where they are unable to live due to a lack of the most basic needs, are found there; they are employed in the most varied tasks.¹

This article analyses the day-to-day operation of *Auxilio Social* (AS – Social Aid), the charitable-assistance institution of the Franco regime founded in 1936 by Mercedes Sanz Bachiller, widow of Onesimo Redondo, and the former *Jonsista* Javier Martínez de Bedoya. They aimed to emulate the Nazi *Winterhilfe* they had seen on a trip to Germany. Inspired by Falangist principles of “social justice,” AS was destined to become one of the star social policies of the Franco dictatorship showcasing, as Ángela Cenarro expressed it very graphically, “the smile of the Falange,” the friendliest institution of the regime (Orduña, 1996, pp. 24-26; Molinero, 2005, pp. 26-34; Cenarro, 2005, p. 16). In particular, this text focuses on two of the main AS institutions: the *Comedores Infantiles* (Children’s Dining Halls), for children and nursing mothers, and the *Cocinas de Hermandad* (Brotherhood Kitchens), to which those receiving assistance went to collect a porcelain lunch box with a meal, which they later ate at home. It specifically explores the conditions and facilities of the premises in which they were located, as well as their daily operation.

The study concentrates on the *Comedores Infantiles* and *Cocinas de Hermandad* in Madrid, one of the cities with the highest levels of poverty and hunger during the immediate postwar period, as shown in the report that opens these pages, written by an anarchist who visited it at that time. It looks at 1939 and 1940, the two years with the largest number of active *AS Comedores Infan-*

tiles and *Cocinas de Hermandad*, together with 1941. From that year on, the number of people assisted was drastically reduced throughout Spain. The reasons had nothing to do with the eradication of hunger but with the inability to cope with the *Obra* (“the Work,” i.e. *Auxilio Social*), which had become overwhelmed. Thus, paradoxically, in one of the worst years of the famine, 1946, *Auxilio Social* was already much less active (Jiménez, 2020, pp. 200-202).

The article focuses on mothers and, above all, on needy children, many of them orphaned or abandoned after the Civil War, whom Ángela Cenarro referred to as the “children of poverty” (Cenarro, 2009). This sector of society, despite being one of the most vulnerable and most affected by the famine of the 1940s, has received little historiographic attention (Cenarro, 2013; González de Tena, 2010; Pérez, 2009). However, it is no coincidence that the first premises opened by *Auxilio Social* – at that time known as *Auxilio de Invierno* (Winter Aid) – was a *Comedor Infantil* for children under twelve. It took place on 30 October 1936 on Calle Angustias in Valladolid, in the rebel rearguard. As was the case in contemporary states in contexts of food crisis (De Zwarte, 2016, p. 63), the Francoist regime prioritised feeding children during the years of hunger (1939-1952), as they were considered the future of the “New Spain.”

The main objective of the study is to assess to what extent these charitable aid institutions failed in their objective to feed the hungry, as well as to explore the reasons for that ineffectiveness. Secondly, the article questions the impact of the malfunctioning of the *Auxilio Social Comedores* and *Cocinas* on the popular perception of the Falangist institution.

To achieve its objectives this article uses hitherto unexplored sources: the inspection reports for *Auxilio Social Comedores Infantiles* and *Cocinas de Hermandad* that are available in the *Archivo General de la Administración*. This internal documentation offers an interesting and innovative view of the daily operation of falangist *AS Comedores* and *Cocinas*. The reports were written by the various national inspectors (such as Pablo Pérez Velázquez, Juan José Ramírez Fernández-Blanco, Juan Martí, and María Luisa Manterola) and addressed to the comrade chief inspector of the Central Department of *Auxilio de Invierno*, from whom they had received the order and instructions to proceed with the inspection visits. They all ended their letters with the Falangist slogan: “For God, for Spain and its national-syndicalist revolution.” This type of inspection visit was common in other Falangist organisations, such as the provincial delegations of *Sección Femenina* and FET de las JONS. The Provincial Inspection reports of the single party were aimed at renewing local positions (Ginés, 2016). However, the internal inspections in the *AS Comedores* and *Cocinas* can be interpreted as a novel feature of modernity in the concept of Falangist welfare concerning traditional Catholic socio-charitable assistance (Blasco, 2005). We do not know whether the inspections were systematic, whether they existed in other regions, or how long they were maintained over time.

1 International Institute of Social History (IISG), Col. Antonio Téllez Solá Papers, ARCH02915, 755, “Informe del delegado que fue a España,” Madrid, mayo de 1945.

Like other authoritarian regimes, such as Mussolini's (Corner, 2022), Francoism promoted a series of social policies that in recent decades have gone from being ignored to being increasingly addressed by historiography (Molinero, 2003; Lanero, 2013). More recent research on the subject has begun to interrogate how these policies were received among the population, assessing their potential to improve popular perceptions of the regime (González and Ortiz, 2017; Fuertes, 2017). In the post-war years, one of the most important social policies of the dictatorship was the welfare policies channelled through *Auxilio Social*. This research is based on pioneering studies of that Falangist institution, such as those of Pedro Carasa (1997), who spoke of a true "national-welfare revolution." It follows in the footsteps of previous social history studies interested in popular perceptions of *AS*, such as those by Ángela Cenarro (2008), who focused her work on the testimonies and individual subjectivities of those who had passed through *AS*, which allowed her to explore issues such as "narratives of resistance."² Or those of Óscar Rodríguez (2014), who focused on the sociopolitical attitudes around this institution of the regime. In recent years, local research focusing on regions such as Andalusia or Galicia has been added to these studies. They include those by Julio Prada (2002), María del Carmen Giménez-Muñoz (2011) or Lucio Martínez (2017), who focused on the social control practiced by *AS* and the signs of disapproval on the part of those who received assistance. However, unlike this article, they barely paid any attention to the daily operation of the *Comedores Infantiles* and the *Cocinas de Hermandad* beyond the propaganda.

In the first section, the article focuses on the terrible condition of the premises in which the *Comedores Infantiles* and the *Cocinas de Hermandad* were located, while the second looks at the mismanagement of these *Auxilio Social* institutions. The conclusion is reached that possession of the card that gave access to these charitable assistance premises did not guarantee a plate of hot food, nor did it protect those assisted from exposure to cold and illness. Likewise, the idea is defended that, given the terrible conditions and poor management of the *AS Comedores* and *Cocinas*—together with the equally poor state of the rationing system—the mothers and children of the lower classes were forced to engage in economic crime (Agustí, 2010; Rodríguez, 2011). This was especially true after 1941, when many *Comedores* and *Cocinas* began to be dismantled, at a time when some of the worst years of the famine were still to come (Del Arco and Anderson, 2021). Moreover, inspection reports reveal that, like other organisations of the regime in the post-war years, *AS* was affected by serious corruption problems that harmed its functioning. Although the staff of these *AS* institutions blamed their ineffectiveness on food shortages, the truth is that this problem was considerably exacerbated by the mismanagement of the

meagre supplies that were received, much of which were diverted and/or stolen by the employees. Finally, it is concluded that the reality of the *Comedores* and *Cocinas* was far from that spread by the regime: the premises were neither like those designed by the architects, nor did they serve all the food announced on the official menus. For all these reasons, it is argued that the popular perception of this social policy of the dictatorship was negatively affected.

"A TRULY SAD PICTURE." THE HARSH REALITY OF THE *AUXILIO SOCIAL COCINAS DE HERMANDAD* AND *COMEDORES INFANTILES*

Va como todas las mañanas con la tartera a la cola del Auxilio Social. Y como todas las mañanas la sube a casa y, sin esperar a la hora de la comida, come con ansia su parte. El pan se lo guarda en el bolsillo (...) Sale a la calle que bulle como siempre con mujeres de negro que suben y bajan cargadas tras comprar y vender cachivaches en los puestos del Rastro.

As every morning he goes with his lunch box to the *Auxilio Social* queue. And, as every morning, he takes it home and, without waiting for lunch, he eagerly eats his part. He puts the bread in her pocket (...) He goes out into the street, which is bustling as always with women in black who go up and down laden after buying and selling knickknacks at the Rastro stalls.

(Lindo, 2020, p. 373).

Auxilio Social aimed to feed the needy but also to indoctrinate them (Cenarro, 2005), while at the same time seeking to improve the dictatorship's image among the population. The first of these aims failed disastrously, to the detriment of the other two. The reality of the *Auxilio Social Comedores Infantiles* and *Cocinas de Hermandad* in Madrid was far from the idyllic image of this charitable welfare institution the regime tried to project through its propaganda (Giménez-Muñoz, 2009).³ Unlike the pictures of large, round loaves of white bread, cheerful, well-dressed young ladies and happy children (Fig. 1), the reality was that many *Comedores* were located in poorly fitted out, cold, dirty, unhealthy premises, with no ventilation or light, where rats ran at will. In addition, there was a pressing lack of both material and human resources in most of them. In some, they had to cook in rusty or broken pots and in others, the children had to bring their own plates and spoons from home. As evidenced by the inspection reports, the operation of the *AS*

² On the popular memory of *Auxilio Social* see also the work of Del Olmo Rodríguez, 2006.

³ Similar conclusions have been reached in other regions such as Catalonia and Andalusia: Jarne, 2004; Román, 2020b, p. 112. In the film *Canciones para después de una guerra* (Martín Patino, 1976), which satirises Francoist propaganda, there are newspaper reports of the post-war food distributions by *Auxilio Social*, such as the one that reads: "Nineteen million meals have been distributed in one month in Madrid. Fifty thousand children assisted daily. Thirteen hundred thousand rations are distributed every day in the *Cocinas de Hermandad*."



FIGURE 1. *Auxilio Social* propaganda poster on the occasion of its first anniversary in 1938. Source: International Institute of Social History (IISG). Spanish Resistance Collection, arch01371, 1.

food centres in the capital left a lot to be desired. It was not only due to the food supply problems but also because of the constant irregularities and corruption among the staff. To this, it must be added that the food was clearly insufficient of poor quality, and far from suitable for minors.

AS' failure to feed those it was set up to help limited its potential to indoctrinate and socially control them (Cenarro, 2005, pp. 67-68). This post-war social policy was set up by the regime in the hope of attracting children, the "future supports of the country." However, as the testimonies of those who spent their childhoods eating at its feeding centres reveal, it would have reaped little success (Cenarro, 2009; Giménez, 2012). The limits of AS' proselytising efforts can also be deduced from the reports of the inspectors of *Comedores* and *Cocinas*. Some were concerned about staff who had not been purged and therefore might not be ideologically sympathetic. Others insisted on remedying the lack of regime symbols on AS premises, such as the *Comedor Infantil* in Tabernillas, which lacked "decoration with items that recall the atmosphere of our Work;"⁴ or that of Ramón y Cajal Street, where the photographs of the Caudillo and José Antonio were missing.⁵ It is true that inspectors occasionally echoed favourable responses from minors. This was the case in one of the children's canteens in the centre of Madrid, where even the smallest of those attended to had become accustomed to greeting with one arm raised when entering and leaving the premises, which was attributed to the good work of the Comrade-in-Chief.⁶ However, it is difficult to believe that this type of supposedly ideological gesture could have permeated the consciousness of the children, especially given the hunger they suffered in those places.

Given that the *Obra* did not manage to feed all the needy and had to close many of the *Comedores* and *Cocinas* from 1941 onwards, it would hardly have achieved its third objective, that of convincing the population of the regime's magnanimity. Despite the propaganda efforts, its actions - corrupt and insufficient - did not serve to build loyalty outside its usual target group or to generate an "active consensus" (Saz, 1999). In fact, they even caused small daily acts of resistance, such as the refusal to wear the institution's emblem on their lapels on collection days (Román, 2020b, pp.115-117). It is true that, although the inspectors of the canteens and kitchens in Madrid in 1939 and 1940 conveyed an eminently negative image of the functioning of these institutions, they also received some signs of sympathy towards *Auxilio Social*. For example, on such a symbolic date as Christmas Day 1939—the first after the Civil War—during one of the food distributions at the *Cocina de Cervantes*, "the people in the queue cheered the

Caudillo and *Auxilio Social*." However, this apparently spontaneous and enthusiastic expression does not seem to have been one of sincere gratitude. Considering that the food was being served without oil that day, it seems more likely to have been a strategy aimed at capturing the benevolence of those who controlled the food in this Falangist institution.⁷

"SO MANY RATS WALKING ALL OVER THE BREAD." THE TERRIBLE CONDITIONS OF THE PREMISES

La impresión sacada de este comedor es que dista mucho de ser lo que anhelamos.

The impression taken from this *Comedor* is that it is far from what we hope for.⁸

In 1941, several architects from the *Auxilio Social* technical office designed a *Comedor Infantil* and a *Cocina de Hermandad* in El Pardo, very close to the Palace in which Francisco Franco lived. The project included a dining room for sixty children of both sexes, a pantry and grocery store, and a room for the distribution of food rations with a "bread drawer," a "waiting area for those waiting for assistance" and a "bench" for them to sit on. The kitchen included a fireplace, a coal cellar, a woodshed, a preparation table, a "double sink for washing vegetables and fish," a "double sink for kitchenware and crockery" and a "cabinet-table for crockery and table linen." Among other issues, the provision of ventilation and sufficient light to all these spaces was taken into account, "given the hygienic and, at the same time, pleasant nature corresponding to the institution" (Arquitectos de la Oficina Técnica de *Auxilio Social*, 1941).

However, the reality of the premises eventually used for the *Auxilio Social Comedores Infantiles* (Children's Dining Halls) and *Cocinas de Hermandad* (Brotherhood Kitchens) in Madrid in the immediate postwar period bore little resemblance to this architectural plan. Neither did they resemble the idyllic image disseminated by the Francoist propaganda. The premises rarely met the minimum conditions required to host a charitable aid type of institution. Some inspectors considered some of them to be downright "disreputable" or to have a "repellent" appearance. The facilities were completely unfit for the purpose they were intended to serve. Some were in basements or in "garages with a central courtyard and covered sheds," as was the case of the *Cocina de Hermandad* at 40 Marqués de Zafra Street. At Number 10 the situation was even worse: the kitchen was so small that the food had to be prepared in the

4 AGA, *Auxilio Social*, Partes de inspección: CI, Tabernillas, 10, La Latina, 21/12/39.

5 AGA, *Auxilio Social*, Partes de inspección: CI, Ramón y Cajal, 18, distrito congreso, 26/08/39

6 AGA, *Auxilio Social*, Partes de inspección: CI, n.º 4, distrito centro, 27/11/39.

7 AGA, *Auxilio Social*, Partes de inspección: CH, Cervantes, 36, distrito congreso, 25/12/39.

8 AGA, *Auxilio Social*, 33/11172, Partes de inspección: CI, Concepción Arenal, 1, distrito centro, 21/10/39.

garden, where there was not even “a shed to protect either the staff who worked there or those being served from inclement weather.”⁹

Others were clearly unsuitable for those they were trying to help, as in the case of one that could only be reached by an “endless staircase” and entailed, according to one inspector’s report, a serious risk of falling for the smallest children. Furthermore, most of the premises were ‘unsightly’. Many of the *Comedores* did not even have tablecloths, which, in the opinion of the inspectors gave them a “very ugly” and neglected appearance. One such inspector said the *Comedor* reminded her of “an asylum,” something that in her opinion did not favour the purposes of *Auxilio Social* at all, probably about the poor image it projected.¹⁰

All these challenges were in addition to the fact that many premises were too small for the number of people they had to attend to, given the sharp fall in the population’s purchasing power after the Civil War, which was further aggravated by the autarky (Ortega and Cobo, 2004). In the one on Ramón y Cajal Street, for example, the children were “truly crowded to the point of eating nine at each table.” In others, the cold was “so intense” that most of the children fell ill and had to stay at home with bronchitis or colds, which led to the closure of the *Comedores*. Or they were “unhealthy” due to the total lack of ventilation and sunlight, as well as dampness, which led to terrible conditions for storing food that would subsequently go bad. This was what happened in the central warehouse of the Congress District in December 1939 with 50 kg of powdered milk, which ended up being used as sawdust, and more than 1,500 tins of condensed milk that had spoiled due to the damp and the heat.¹¹ Many other premises were grossly unhygienic or “utterly filthy.” Their kitchens had “dirt everywhere.” In the Cervantes *Cocina de Hermandad* there was “bread thrown on the floor that was absolutely filthy.”¹² And in the central warehouse of the Congress District food such as chickpeas, oatmeal flour and tinned goods was “scattered all over the floor” of the premises, which was “utterly filthy.”¹³

This shocking lack of hygiene meant rodents were abundant, with the consequent danger to the health of the assisted persons, who were exposed to animal-borne diseases. Many inspectors denounced the large number of rats that could be seen, even in broad daylight, in the *Cocinas de Hermandad* and *Comedores Infantiles* of Ma-

drid. At 1 Concepción Arenal Street, where breastfeeding mothers were also given food, there was said to be a “tremendous invasion” of these rodents, which was evident given the conditions in which the bread was found. In *Cocina de Hermandad* No. 4 in the Congress district, which was located on a plot, “the rats walk through the loaves of bread, bread that is eaten, and when there are legumes in the warehouse, they also devour them.” According to the inspector who denounced this situation in her report, “the profusion of rats that surrounds it [the premises] causes true anguish.” The problem was difficult to solve since, as they were *Comedores* and *Cocinas*, poisons could not be used due to the high risk of contaminating the food.¹⁴

Another important problem faced by the *AS Cocinas de Hermandad* and *Comedores Infantiles* was the lack of furniture. Many of the premises, like the one in Marqués de Zafra Street, did not even have tables and chairs for the children. And, worse still, they lacked the basic utensils for preparing and serving the meals, as well as eating them. For example, in the *Comedor Infantil* in Ramón y Cajal Street, also located on a plot, there was no “furniture of any kind or utensils, only the cauldrons.” Many chefs complained about the lack of saucepans in good condition and about being forced to cook in pots that had lost their tin coating or were covered in verdigris, which were hazardous due to the risk of poisoning they supposed. Part of the kitchenware was unusable because it was outdated or rusty, as in the case of the *Comedor Infantil* on Abada Street, in the basement of the Palacio de la Música, or the *Cocina de Hermandad* on Cervantes Street.¹⁵ The cook at that premises complained about having damaged cooking pots and “the lack of kitchen utensils such as saucepans, buckets and skimmers.” Another big problem was the lack of dishes for children to eat from. In some premises, the vessels, plates, and aluminium cutlery were “old.” In others, they did not have any at all and the children had to bring their own from home. This was the case of the *Comedor Infantil* on Ramón y Cajal Street, where they also had no jugs from which to serve the drinking water, so the ladies who attended them had to fill the glasses from the tap one by one.¹⁶ This alarming lack of dishes forced the children to share the spoons and bowls between two or three, which was dangerous at a time when infectious diseases were resurgent, precisely as a result of increasing poverty and poor hygiene (Santiago, 2020). This risk was warned about by the person in charge of inspecting the *Comedor Infantil* on Ramón y Cajal Street in Madrid, where “several children had to drink from the same cup”

9 AGA, Auxilio Social, 33/11172, Partes de inspección: CI n.º 4, distrito centro, 27/11/39; 33/11198, Partes de inspección: CH n.º 4, distrito congreso, Agosto; CH Marqués de Zafra, 40, 13/12/39; CH Marqués de Zafra, 10, 26/07/39.

10 AGA, Auxilio Social, 33/11172, Partes de inspección: CI n.º 1, Abada, 20; 33/11198, Partes de inspección: CI Marqués de Zafra, 12, Agosto.

11 AGA, Auxilio Social, 33/11198, Partes de inspección: Almacén central, distrito congreso, 12/12/39.

12 AGA, Auxilio Social, 33/11198, Partes de inspección: CH Cervantes, 36, 26/08/39.

13 AGA, Auxilio Social, 33/11198, Partes de inspección: Almacén central, distrito congreso, 31/10/39.

14 AGA, Auxilio Social, 33/11172, Partes de inspección: CI Concepción Arenal, 1, distrito centro, 22/11/39; 33/11198, Partes de inspección: CH n.º 4, distrito congreso, agosto.

15 AGA, Auxilio Social, 33/11172, Partes de inspección: CI Abada, 20, 14/09/39; y 33/11198, Partes de inspección: CH Cervantes, 36, 14/11/39.

16 AGA, Auxilio Social, 33/11198, Partes de inspección: CI Ramón y Cajal, 18, 12/12/39.

and, consequently, were exposed to constant contagions. The inspector was moved by the scene she saw:

Me fue dolorosísimo ver que un niño que padecía conjuntivitis ofrecía su taza, después de haber bebido él en ella, al niño próximo para que saciara su sed en el mismo cacharro.

It was very painful for me to see how a child suffering from conjunctivitis offered their cup, after having drunk from it, to the next child to satisfy their thirst from the same vessel.¹⁷

The lack of material means we can add that of human resources. This shortage of staff translated into an exasperating slowness when preparing and serving meals, which in turn limited the total number of potential attendees. This is what happened in O'Donnell Street *Cocina de Hermandad*, especially when they had to carry out such time-consuming tasks as selecting chickpeas or peeling potatoes. The problem also affected controlling access to the premises. In the Concepción Arenal *Comedor Infantil* it took the children more than an hour to get in because there was only one person at the entrance in charge of perforating the punch cards. According to the inspector, the ideal number for organising and accelerating access would have been at least four performing the task, one per line. Some delegates from the *Cocinas* and *Comedores* complained that so few comrades were sent to carry out their *Servicio Social* (SS-Social Service) at these institutions, as they constituted essentially free labour for the functioning of *AS* (Rebollo, 1999; Sánchez, 2013). It is possible that behind this lack of women “managers of misery” (Rodríguez, 2005, p. 39) was the struggle between *AS* and *Sección Femenina* for control of the SS.

“CAN THIS BE CALLED FEEDING THE NEEDY?” THE ABYSMAL FUNCTIONING OF THE *AUXILIO SOCIAL*, *COCINAS* AND *COMEDORES*

La comida que reciben los menesterosos es (el día que la tienen) insuficiente y malísima.

The food that the needy receive (when they actually get it) is insufficient and of very poor quality.¹⁸

The few people employed in the *Comedores* and *Cocinas* were not always the most suitable for carrying out the work entrusted to them, as many came to *Auxilio Social* for instrumental, not ideological, purposes. At times, those in charge were intransigent and despotic, an attitude that did not fit in with the spirit of the *Obra (Auxilio Social)*, which had a special interest in assisting

the “defeated” to attract them to their cause (Molinero, 2005, p. 29; Cenarro, 2005, pp. 131-132). A good example of this was the head of the Cervantes *Cocina*, who was described as being “quite violent” with both employees and those they were assisting. Apparently, one day at the beginning of November 1939, he addressed the door attendant who was trying to organise access to the *Comedor* in the following terms: “Be firm with those in the queues, they’re all reds.”¹⁹ At other times the problem had to do with indiscipline or apathy. As several inspectors denounced in their reports, most of the employees were only there “for the food” and lacked “training in the true spirit” of the *Obra*. One of them, who tried to test the workers of the Abada Street *Comedor Infantil* by asking them questions about *AS*, was able to verify how these questions produced in them “an effect of something new never heard of”²⁰. Many of the carers neglected the children, “doing only what was strictly necessary to be able to go home as soon as possible.” We find an example of this attitude in the Cervantes *Cocina de Hermandad*, where on 14 November 1939 the woman in charge of handing out the bread was reprimanded by the manager “because she was eating and not attending to the distribution”²¹. There were also complaints in this respect about the Ramón y Cajal *Comedor Infantil*, because, of the thirty-four young ladies who were fulfilling their *Servicio Social* there, “the majority paid no attention to their mission at all.” Only those in *Comedor Infantil* Number 4 of the central district were said to peel potatoes “with enthusiasm,” something that caught the attention of the inspector herself, who admitted that they were the first women she had seen working with that attitude. In the *Comedor Infantil* on Concepción Arenal Street, for example, the manager was only able to count on seven of the seventeen young ladies who were undertaking their *Servicio Social* there, as the rest were “undisciplined and laugh at everything.” It had been of little use to threaten them with an extension of their *Servicio Social* that, under normal conditions, was for six months, given that they had already said that “it didn’t matter to them whether it was for half a year or a year.” The inspector ruled on this situation in the following terms:

Estas niñas deben ser expulsadas de nuestros Comedores por no venir más que a estropear nuestra labor. Adjunto envío relación de las que se portan bien y de las que se portan mal. Mi visita por la noche resulta provechosísima pues nunca esperan que a esta hora vaya nadie y se ven sorprendidas en muchas cosas que podré exponer verbalmente algún día.

These girls should be expelled from our *Comedores* as they only come to spoil our work. I am enclosing a list of

17 AGA, *Auxilio Social*, 33/11198, Partes de inspección: CI, Ramón y Cajal, 18.

18 AGA, *Auxilio Social*, 33/11198, Partes de inspección: CH, n.º 4, distrito congreso, agosto.

19 AGA, *Auxilio Social*, 33/11198, Partes de inspección: CH Cervantes, 36, 14/11/39.

20 AGA, *Auxilio Social*, 33/11172, Partes de inspección: CI n.º 1, Abada, 20.

21 AGA, *Auxilio Social*, 33/11198, Partes de inspección: CH Cervantes, 36, 14/11/39.

those who behave well and those who behave badly. My visit at night is extremely useful because they never expect anyone to come at that time and they are surprised while doing many things that I will be able to explain verbally one day.²²

This widespread staff apathy was often blamed on their “political status,” given that many *Comedores* and *Cocinas* had not yet been purged. Moreover, many women worked in *AS* in order to atone for the sins of their left-wing family members (Prada, 2002, p. 207). This is what happened in the one located at 40 Marqués de Zafra Street, where the manager expressed his doubts about the “condition” of the employees because they gave the attendees more food than stipulated, as a result of which he had to keep them under constant surveillance. In the *Comedor* on Ramón y Cajal Street, the situation appeared to be even more serious. According to the delegate, some of the comrades who were undertaking their *Social Service* there did not treat the children with due cordiality because they were “red,” like V.H., who had worked for International Red Aid.²³ On a subsequent visit in December, the inspector insisted on this idea, blaming the “little interest” shown by these women and how little “solicitous” they were with the children, since almost none of them belonged to the Falange.²⁴ The case of the *Comedor* at 12 Marqués de Zafra Street was different: the head of the *Comedor* said she was happy “with all the staff since they all seem to have nationalist ideas.”²⁵ This question obsessed managers, supervisors, and inspectors, even when the employees performed their tasks well. This was the case of the chef at the Cervantes *Cocina de Hermandad*, who said he had the impression that most of the employees were “red” or not “sympathetic,” “although they fulfil their duties.”²⁶ Specifically, it was known that at least three kitchen helpers with CNT and UGT (left-wing trade union) backgrounds had, for various reasons, ended up working there, although no complaints were received regarding their work.²⁷ All this evidence was behind rumours such as the one that *AS* was a “nest of reds,” which began to circulate around Miguelturra (Ciudad Real) in September 1939, as described by Rodríguez (2011, p. 136).

One of the main problems that burdened the operation of the *AS Cocinas* and *Comedores* was the difficulty in supplying food, due both to the general shortages of the postwar years and the Falangist institution’s lack of financing. It was financed basically from fortnightly

collections, private monthly donations such as the *Fi-cha Azul* (Blue Card), and voluntary “taxes” such as the “Day of Only One Course” or the “Day Without Desert.” However, all the *AS* delegations encountered resistance when collecting these fees and many did not pay (Prada, 2002, pp. 195-196; Guerra, 2006, p. 947). Mainly due to this lack of funds, the food that arrived was less than that needed and, furthermore, it often came late and in poor condition. The inspectors insisted in their reports that the food received by these institutions was “nowhere near sufficient” and in “extremely small” quantities, considering the number of portions they had to serve. For example, *Cocina de Hermandad* No. 2 in the centre of Madrid faced this obstacle, despite having a “duty-conscious” chef. In October 1939, the O’Donnell Street *Cocina de Hermandad* went for “several days without salt” and that of Marqués de Zafra Street was also unable to obtain any.²⁸ The same thing happened in January 1940 with the bread in the Cervantes *Cocina*.²⁹ These problems were often due to a lack of transport for delivery. For example, *Cocina* No. 3 of the Central district was short of cooking oil, salt, paprika, onions, garlic, and laurel for that reason.³⁰ Moreover, since the supplies arrived late, the staff found it extremely difficult to prepare the planned menus in the allotted time. This was what happened on 28 October 1939 in the Marqués de Zafra Street *Cocina*, where they were unable to distribute the food until 3 pm, because the potatoes they had to cook that day arrived late.³¹ They also had to deal with this inconvenience at the Cuesta de Santo Domingo facilities, where they received the provisions for the daily menu between 12 and 1 in the afternoon.³²

In addition, when it finally arrived, much of the food was in poor condition. The bread used to arrive underweight and of “infernal quality,” as was the case with the bread served by the bakery on Madera Street, which sent it hard, full of pieces of charcoal and gnawed by rats.³³ Potatoes often arrived covered in dirt and mud, forcing employees to spend a great deal of time cleaning them before they could start the peeling and cooking. In the Cervantes *Cocina*, for example, of the 56 kg of potatoes delivered on 8 November 1939, it was calculated that only 40 kg would remain once cleaned and peeled.³⁴ In the case of chickpeas, there were often “large amounts of stones” among them.³⁵ For example, on 20 October 1939

22 AGA, Auxilio Social, 33/11172, Partes de inspección: CI Concepción Arenal, 1, distrito centro, 21/10/39.

23 AGA, Auxilio Social, 33/11198, Partes de inspección: CI, Ramón y Cajal, 18, 26/08/39.

24 AGA, Auxilio Social, 33/11198, Partes de inspección: CI, Ramón y Cajal, 18, 12/12/39.

25 AGA, Auxilio Social, 33/11198, Partes de inspección: CI, Marqués de Zafra, 12, Agosto.

26 AGA, Auxilio Social, 33/11198, Partes de inspección: CH, Cervantes, 36, 02/10/39.

27 AGA, Auxilio Social, 33/11198, Partes de inspección: CH, Cervantes, 38, 14/11/39.

28 AGA, Auxilio Social, 33/11198, Partes de inspección: CI, Marqués de Zafra, 10, 18/09/39 y 28/10/39.

29 AGA, Auxilio Social, 33/11198, Partes de inspección: CH, Cervantes, 36, 16/01/40.

30 AGA, Auxilio Social, 33/11172, Partes de inspección: Cocina Hermandad, n.º 3, 23/10/39.

31 AGA, Auxilio Social, 33/11198, Partes de inspección: CH Marqués de Zafra, 28/10/39.

32 AGA, Auxilio Social, 33/11172, Partes de inspección: Almacén central distrito centro, Cuesta Santo Domingo, 7, 07/10/39.

33 AGA, Auxilio Social, 33/11198, Partes de inspección: CH Marqués de Zafra, 40, 13/12/39.

34 AGA, Auxilio Social, 33/11198, Partes de inspección: CH Cervantes, 36, distrito congreso, 8/11/39.

35 AGA, Auxilio Social, 33/11172, Partes de inspección: Cocina Hermandad, n.º 3, 23/10/39.

thirteen kilos of stones were detected among the chickpeas in the *Cocina de Hermandad* on Cervantes Street, “for which reason the ration provided to the children was extremely deficient.”³⁶ The same thing happened around the same time at the Concepción Arenal *Comedor Infantil*, where the chickpeas “contained a large amount of earth and stones.”³⁷

However, in addition to the difficulties involved in the supply of food, there was an even more serious problem: widespread corruption in the feeding centres. The string of malpractices in the *Auxilio Social* canteens reinforces the idea that the severity of the post-war famine was not so much due to the lack of foodstuffs as to the appalling management of what was available. As various authors have argued, during the early Franco regime, institutional corruption became a structural problem during the dictatorship, even though it presented itself as a tireless persecutor of fraud (Barciela, 1998; Cazorla, 2009, p. 35; Muñoz, 2016, pp. 69-77; Del Arco, 2018; Román, 2020a). *AS* was no exception in this regard. Despite internal inspections, corruption affected practically all the delegations, not only Madrid.³⁸ Corruption in the *AS* feeding centres, as well as negatively affecting their day-to-day running, undermined the image of this Falangist institution, which claimed to be the most friendly and popular of the regime.

Irregularities were favoured by the climate of corruption that characterised the post-war period, shortages, and the expansion of the black market. The workers themselves could indeed have had family needs to cover in the years marked by the population’s loss of purchasing power and the generalisation of poverty. Very few received a salary since most of the workforce was based on unpaid social service. Furthermore, there were “big differences” between some *Comedores Infantiles* and others.³⁹ However, it is also possible to believe that many people stole food from *AS* premises to unscrupulously sell it on the black market, where it would fetch a high price. However, when they were discovered, they alleged pretexts such as that they were unaware that these practices were prohibited or that they had reserved the food to be used in case of unforeseen events. Other excuses included that they were leftovers from the meals served, that they had been supplied with heavier boxes of food than indicated, or that they did not have any scales to weigh it. Although they promised not to commit their offense again, judging by the inspection reports, this was not adhered to by many. All this malpractice was a reflection of

the asymmetric power relationship that existed in these *AS* premises between the employees, who had access to the food, and the hungry mothers and children (Ibáñez, 2014, p. 306).

The inspections revealed discrepancies between the quantities of food reflected in the record books and those available in the warehouse. This was because everything that escaped official control could be used by the staff, who either consumed it in the kitchen or took it to eat at home or sell on the black market. Hence, the heads of *Comedores* and *Cocinas* stopped registering the most succulent items or recorded them in lower amounts, which is what the central warehouse in the Congress district did with milk flour. That is why many refused to show the inventory when required to do so. Another of their strategies to divert food was to not give certain items with the first cards but to begin with the higher numbers, as the O’Donnell Street *Cocina* delegate did with the tins of tuna. Although they claimed to have distributed the five hundred they received, the truth is that only the holders of cards 74 to 500 received a tin, thus allowing the staff to syphon off 73 tins.⁴⁰

The worst thing of all, given that they were obliged to use everything they were supplied with daily, the staff often used to divert the best food supplied to the *Comedor* and reserve it for themselves, thus depriving the children for whom it was intended. This was the case with meat that, in the post-war years, became a luxury item absent from the diet of the working classes (Gracia Arnáiz, 2002) and therefore a particularly coveted item for those who worked in *Auxilio Social*. In the Cervantes *Cocina de Hermandad*, for example, the tins of meat in the sauce were shared between the cook, the delegate, and the accountant. And in that of Mariana Pineda, an open 500-gram tin of clams was found that, instead of being added to the pot, had been reserved for the consumption of the staff. The same happened in *Cocina* No. 3, where the meat and tuna sent for nursing mothers, for whom the highest protein food was destined, was insufficient because part of it had been diverted to the kitchen employees.⁴¹ Thus, it is not surprising that large stocks of articles were found in the stores. In the *Comedor Infantil* on Ramón y Cajal Street, for example, “lentils, tinned vegetables, clams, canned fish, and pasta for soup” had been fraudulently accumulated. And in *Cocina de Hermandad* No. 5 the staff had even stored “four sacks of chickpeas, quite a few potatoes, some boxes of tuna and tins of English beef.” To evade these inspections, the employees hid the groceries in places where the inspectors might not think of looking, such as the toilets, as did those of the Marqués de Zafra *Cocina de Hermandad*.⁴²

36 AGA, Auxilio Social, 33/11172, Partes de inspección: Silva, 6, distrito centro, 30/1/40.

37 AGA, Auxilio Social, 33/11172, Partes de inspección: CI Concepción Arenal, 1, 23/10/39.

38 Pérez Olivares (2020: 128-129) has pointed out some of these corrupt practices for other Madrid delegations of *Auxilio Social*, such as the one in Puente de Vallecas. For some examples from Ciudad Real, Logroño, Vallecas, Álava, Guipúzcoa, Albacete, Alicante, Cádiz and Huelva, see: Rodríguez Barreira, 2011, pp. 135-138 and 142.

39 AGA, Auxilio Social, 33/11172, Partes de inspección: CI n.º 4, distrito centro, 27/11/39.

40 AGA, Auxilio Social, 33/11198, Partes de inspección: CH, O’Donnell, 57, agosto.

41 AGA, Auxilio Social, 33/11172, Partes de inspección: CH, n.º 3, 28/09/39.

42 AGA, Auxilio Social, 33/11198, Partes de inspección: CI, Ramón y Cajal, 18, 16/01/40; 33/11172, Partes de inspección: CH, n.º 5, 23/10/39; y 33/11198, Partes de inspección: CH, Marqués de Zafra, 12.

Although the *Comedor* and *Cocina* employees were not allowed to prepare food separately for themselves, the inspectors constantly surprised them by doing so. On 13 December 1939, for example, “a pot of very well-cooked potatoes” for the staff was found in the oven of the O’Donnell Street *Cocina de Hermandad*. In another of the *Cocinas* on the same street, the delegate acknowledged giving food and bread to the staff because he did not have the “heart” to deny it to them.⁴³ Often those responsible for the *Comedores* took advantage of their privileged position of power to prepare extraordinary meals for themselves and their relatives. This was repeatedly denounced in the fall of 1939 by an inspector who discovered that in the Jardines Street *Cocina de Hermandad*, the kitchen staff, as well as the head of the dining room, his wife and their children “made extraordinary meals” with the groceries intended for the people they were supposed to be helping.⁴⁴ The same happened at the Cervantes Street facility, where the district head of postulations and other staff from the central warehouse were caught eating in the kitchen.⁴⁵

On other occasions, the *Comedor* staff took the food home, either for their own families to eat or to sell on the black market. This was verified by the inspector in charge of visiting *Cocina* No. 4 in the Congress district, where she saw several employees stealing “a large amount of bread.”⁴⁶ Nor were they strangers to this practice in the O’Donnell Street *Cocina*, where the girls who were carrying out their *Servicio Social* took home “a bag with four bread rolls” every day. Not even in that of Marqués de Zafra, in whose office closet inspectors found, along with the workers’ shoes, bags, and gloves, two sacks containing five kilos of flour that two “comrades” had hidden there to take away at the end of the working day. The manager of the Cervantes facility had been forced to fire the cook because “he took whatever he wanted.”⁴⁷ However, this did not prevent him from taking food from the *Comedor* for his acquaintances, as he did on 14 November 1939 with twenty rations that he gave to “needy friends” who were neither from the district nor had the corresponding *AS* cards.⁴⁸

The mismanagement of the *AS* institutions and the incompetence of their staff bordered on the grotesque. In *Cocinas de Hermandad* like the one on Cervantes Street, food was wasted because they did not decide to “use it.” This happened with 396 kilos of tomato in jars that rotted in the warehouse as they were not used quickly enough, at the same time as there were daily shortages of

food for the attendees in need.⁴⁹ All these poor practices had a direct impact on the quality of the service provided to the children, who received smaller quantities of food in a poorer state than officially reported.

The problems in the supplies of food to the *Comedores Infantiles* and *Cocinas de Hermandad*, together with their shockingly poor management by those in charge, translated into a manifest inability to prepare and serve all the necessary meals. On most days these *AS* institutions were unable to attend to all the needy assigned to them. Many of the children who queued for hours at the entrances to the *Comedores* in the hope of being given a plate of food had to leave with empty stomachs. At the O’Donnell Street *Cocina*, the food distributed in August 1939 did not reach even half of those with an *AS* card.⁵⁰ On 5 October of that year, 1,647 hot meals were served but they were short another 684. Those children were only given “a piece of bread.”⁵¹ Around the same time, the Marqués de Zafra *Cocina* was supposed to serve 6,000 portions a day, “but they never give everyone food. Only 4,000 are served, the rest go without eating every day.”⁵² At Cervantes Street, there was a shortage of food every day. On October 31, for example, 400 children “were only given bread.” Some days they were given two extra rolls to make up for having run out of hot food.⁵³

The poor operation of the *Comedores Infantiles* and *Cocinas de Hermandad* not only affected the number of portions served but also their size. Therefore, even the children who managed to get into the *Comedores* were not able to leave with relatively full stomachs, as what they were served was nowhere near enough to appease their hunger. In the Marqués de Zafra *Cocina*, for instance, the staff ended up serving “one ladle for every two children.”⁵⁴ The case of bread was symptomatic. This was the central food in the diet of the lower classes, not only from the nutritional point of view but also culturally and symbolically (Conde, 2021; Román, 2022). As a general rule, the *Comedores* and *Cocinas* handed out 250 grams per person, although at some, such as Cervantes, only half of that was given.⁵⁵ The children also left the Abada *Comedor* “without having been given enough bread to eat.”⁵⁶ The same happened with other food items, such as tins of tuna. In August 1939, the O’Donnell *Cocina* only had 500 for the 3,819 servings it

43 AGA, Auxilio Social, 33/11198, Partes de inspección: CH, O’Donnell, 57, agosto.

44 AGA, Auxilio Social, 33/11172, Partes de inspección: CH, n.º 5, Jardines, 21, distrito centro, 28/9/39 y 7/10/39.

45 AGA, Auxilio Social, 33/11198, Partes de inspección: CH, Cervantes, 36, 4/12/39.

46 AGA, Auxilio Social, 33/11198, Partes de inspección: CH, n.º 4, distrito congreso, agosto.

47 AGA, Auxilio Social, Partes de inspección: CH, Cervantes, 36, distrito congreso, 27/11/39.

48 AGA, Auxilio Social, Partes de inspección: CH, Cervantes, 36, 14/11/39.

49 AGA, Auxilio Social, Partes de inspección: CH, Cervantes, 36, 30/08/39.

50 AGA, Auxilio Social, Partes de inspección: CH, O’Donnell, 57, agosto.

51 AGA, Auxilio Social, Partes de inspección: CH, O’Donnell, 57, distrito congreso, 05/10/39.

52 AGA, Auxilio Social, Partes de inspección: CH, Marqués de Zafra, 12, agosto.

53 AGA, Auxilio Social, Partes de inspección: CH, Cervantes, 36, 02/10/39 y 31/10/39.

54 AGA, Auxilio Social, Partes de inspección: CH, Marqués de Zafra, 40, 13/12/39.

55 AGA, Auxilio Social, Partes de inspección: CH, Cervantes, 36, 26/08/39.

56 AGA, Auxilio Social, Partes de inspección: CI, Abada, 20, distrito centro, 31/08/39.

had been assigned, so it had to give “one small tin” per card instead of per serving. Some cards were valid for eight or even more servings. The inspectors continually drew attention to how meagre the portions served to the children were and the effects this poor diet could have on their health. The person who prepared the report on the Abada Street *Comedor Infantil* wrote: “The food is nowhere near sufficient. Two sardines and 250 grams of bread to feed a child for 24 hours is to expose them to all the consequences of complete malnutrition.”⁵⁷ For her part, the woman in charge of inspecting the *Cocina de Hermandad* installed in the basement of the Bristol Hotel revealed in her comments a veiled criticism of the operation of this *AS* institution:

Una sardina y 250 gramos de pan por persona en la segunda tanda, y en la primera se les ha dado un cacillo pequeñísimo de lentejas en lugar de la sardina (...) Una sardina cruda y un pedazo de pan para alimentarse durante 24 horas es algo que se comenta solo. ¿Puede llamarse esto dar de comer al menesteroso?

A sardine and 250 grams of bread per person in the second batch, and in the first they were given a tiny scoop of lentils instead of the sardine (...). A raw sardine and a piece of bread to eat for 24 hours speaks for itself. Can this be called feeding the needy?⁵⁸

But not only were the quantities ridiculously small but also the quality of the food served to the children in these institutions cried out to heaven. A common denominator among the *AS Cocinas* and *Comedores* of Madrid in the immediate post-war period was that they prepared meals without cooking oil or any other type of fat. Many of these facilities went for days or even weeks without receiving any olive oil, one of the star products of the postwar black market and one of those that saw the greatest increase in price due to its scarcity (Christiansen, 2002). In their reports, the inspectors repeatedly insisted on how “very badly seasoned” the meals served were. The chickpeas, potatoes, lentils, chard, and meat that made up the daily menus were prepared without a drop of oil.⁵⁹ In the Marqués de Zafra *Cocina* the cooks seasoned a pot for 120 servings with only half a litre of olive oil, a proportion that, in the inspector’s opinion, was equivalent to “not adding anything at all.”⁶⁰ During one of the visits to *Cocina* No. 5 it was found that all that had been served to the children was “a very small ladle of lentils seasoned very badly because they had no cooking oil.” Although the manager assured her that they had been seasoned, the visitor insisted that “my palate when eating them assures that they have not.”⁶¹ In

some cases, the kitchens even stopped serving hot food for several days “due to the lack of cooking oil to season it.”⁶² This type of drastic measure was justified by claiming that those assisted preferred cold food to meals cooked without oil.⁶³ Perhaps this was the reason why, in the O’Donnell Street *Comedor*, “the little food” that was given was “based on preserves.” But the truth is that it was not possible to “nourish anyone” in that way,⁶⁴ and less so in the winter months. A similar solution was found to resolve the situation in the Ramón y Cajal *Comedor Infantil* on the day they had received neither olive oil nor salt: they only handed out “uncooked macaroni and bread.” This situation worried some inspectors, who considered that it could discredit the *Obra* “because the people who go for the meals protest that things are in this state.”⁶⁵

In addition to meals cooked without oil or served cold, the children attended to by *Auxilio Social* had to eat all kinds of preparations that were unappetising, if not despicable. Some bore little or no resemblance to the officially distributed menu, such as the small amount of “dirty liquid” served in Congress district *Cocina* No. 4 in August 1939, instead of the beans and beef announced for that day. Meals were often served “with an excess of broth,” as happened on 28 October 1939 with the stewed potatoes and pickled tuna in the Marqués de Zafra *Comedor*.⁶⁶ Or on 14 November of that same year with the chickpeas and chard from the Cervantes *Cocina*, where they used “as much water as possible” in the meals.⁶⁷ The chickpeas with potatoes and vegetables served on 7 December at the Silva Street *Cocina* also contained “an exaggerated amount of broth.”⁶⁸ The reason for these watered-down meals was that the *Comedores* and *Cocinas* were trying to “make up for the lack of food with water,” as the Congress District *AS* delegation decided to do.⁶⁹ On other occasions, in addition to lacking seasoning and being watered down, the legumes were served hard. This is what often happened when preparing chickpeas, because when mixing different kinds, the best quality ones ended up being well cooked, while those of poorer quality were not.

Many of these indescribable preparations compromised the already diminished health of those being assisted. This was the case of the sardines served in the *Comedor Infantil* on Abada Street, which contained “such a

57 AGA, Auxilio Social, Partes de inspección: CI, n.º 1, Abada, 20.

58 AGA, Auxilio Social, Partes de inspección: CH, n.º 2.

59 AGA, Auxilio Social, Partes de inspección: CH, Cervantes, 36, 26/08/39.

60 AGA, Auxilio Social, Partes de inspección: CH, Marqués de Zafra, 12, agosto.

61 AGA, Auxilio Social, Partes de inspección: CH, n.º 5.

62 AGA, Auxilio Social, Partes de inspección: CH y CI, Marqués de Zafra, 12, distrito congreso, 05/10/39.

63 AGA, Auxilio Social, Partes de inspección: CH, Cervantes, 36, 02/10/39.

64 AGA, Auxilio Social, Partes de inspección: 33/11198, CH, O’Donnell, 57, agosto.

65 AGA, Auxilio Social, Partes de inspección: CI, Ramón y Cajal, 18.

66 AGA, Auxilio Social, Partes de inspección: CI Marqués de Zafra, 28/10/39.

67 AGA, Auxilio Social, Partes de inspección: CH Cervantes, 36, 14/11/39 y 30/08/39.

68 AGA, Auxilio Social, Partes de inspección: Silva, 6, distrito centro, 7/12/39.

69 AGA, Auxilio Social, Partes de inspección: CH, n.º 4, distrito congreso, agosto; y CH, Cervantes, 36, 30/08/39.

high amount of salt [perhaps to hide their poor quality or condition] that it is frightening to think of the effect this will have on the developing stomach of a child.⁷⁰ The broad bean puree that was served in many *Comedores Infantiles* was suspected of being harmful to children since they did not eat it “with pleasure” in any of them.⁷¹ Much more serious was what happened in *Comedor Infantil* No. 4 of the Central district on 27 November 1939. That day the children were served bread “impregnated with gasoline.” Some were so hungry that they ate it and subsequently became ill. Fortunately, others “couldn’t eat it and that saved them.”⁷²

Despite the insufficiency and atrocious quality of the meals served, many children were so hungry that they resorted to trickery to obtain food from the *Auxilio Social Comedores* and *Cocinas*. Some altered the number of portions shown on their *AS* cards, especially in cases where, due to the lack of tickets, they were given “a small piece of paper” with the stamp of the district on which it was very easy to modify this number.⁷³ Others tried to use the cards of children who, because they were ill, were unable to go to the *Comedor* on a particular day.⁷⁴ There were also those who claimed to have forgotten their cards at home. Others who tried to sneak into the *Comedor* by taking advantage of the lack of staff to monitor access, the confusion at opening time, the distraction of the person at the door, or the passivity of the ladies, since many turned a blind eye.⁷⁵

CONCLUSIONS. NEITHER FED NOR INDOCTRINATED NOR SEDUCED

In the light of the terrible daily reality of the *Comedores Infantiles* and *Cocinas de Hermandad* revealed by the inspection reports from Madrid during the immediate post-war period, *Auxilio Social* failed in its triple objective of feeding hungry mothers and children, indoctrinating them and improving the image of the regime. As the inspection visits show, the limitations of this Francoist social policy were largely due to the corrupt practices of the people who operated it.

Firstly, *AS* failed to feed the needy. The daily reality of the *Comedores* and *Cocinas* belies the official figures on the number of people attended to daily, as well as the quantity and quality of food distributed. On most days neither the *Comedores Infantiles* nor the *Cocinas de Hermandad* were able to attend to all the needy who had

cards issued by *AS*. And those who were lucky enough to be served meals were given ridiculously small, poor-quality rations that included food served without oil, watered down, cold, or even spoiled. All this placed the already poor health of the assisted mothers and children at even greater risk; not only were they unable to stave off their hunger but they were also exposed to contagion and food poisoning. The premises that housed these institutions did not meet the minimum conditions of space, hygiene, or health. Many were in basements; most were infested with rats; and others were so cold that the children became ill. They all shared the problem of a lack of personnel, furniture, and, above all, kitchen implements and utensils with which to prepare and serve the meals. To this can be added the disastrous functioning of these institutions, which fell far short of providing adequate food for those they were set up to help. Many of the difficulties were indeed due to problems in receiving supplies of basic provisions. However, these circumstances do not by themselves explain the poor performance of these *AS* institutions. To understand this, we also have to take into account the apathetic attitude of many of the staff, who rarely had any real motivation to be there, beyond easy access to food. And, above all, their terrible management of the scarce resources available, since irregularities and corruption were daily occurrences in these institutions. In years of hunger and the black market, the *Comedores* and *Cocinas* staff constantly stole or diverted food by different methods for their personal consumption or to sell on the black market. Likewise, although it was strictly forbidden, the employees prepared separate meals for themselves, reserving the best food for this. This in turn reveals that, despite the inspectors’ concern about these corrupt practices, inspections were not effective in preventing or eradicating them.

Secondly, *AS*’ failure to adequately nourish those assisted would have undermined the second of its objectives, that of indoctrinating them. On the one hand, this was because the number of children attended did not reach the expected numbers due to the lack of capacity of the canteens and kitchens to absorb them. On the other hand, as these feeding centres were forced to close sooner than expected, the time available to inculcate the children with Francoist ideology was drastically reduced. And, above all, because it would have been difficult to convince those in need of help of the beneficence of the new regime if it were not even capable of providing them with a hot meal.

Finally, *AS* would not have succeeded in reinforcing the acquiescent attitudes of the Madrid population (neither assisted nor non-assisted) or in reducing hostility towards the dictatorship. Judging by its abysmal day-to-day functioning, the Falangist welfare system in the capital would not have served to attract new loyalties to the cause of the “New Spain,” self-represented as charitable and magnanimous. Despite propaganda attempts to present it as a tool to alleviate the poverty of the *menesterosos* (needy), Franco’s social policy did not

70 AGA, Auxilio Social, Partes de inspección: CI, n.º 1, Abada, 20.

71 AGA, Auxilio Social, Partes de inspección: CI, Ramón y Cajal, 18, 16/01/40.

72 AGA, Auxilio Social, Partes de inspección: CI, n.º 4, distrito centro, 27/11/39.

73 AGA, Auxilio Social, Partes de inspección: Silva, 6, distrito centro, 7/12/39.

74 AGA, Auxilio Social, Partes de inspección: Concepción Arenal, 1, distrito centro, 7/12/1939.

75 AGA, Auxilio Social, Partes de inspección: Concepción Arenal, 1, distrito centro, 17/11/39 y 23/11/39.

achieve the expected success, either in the charitable or political sphere.

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The author of this article declares that they have no financial, professional or personal conflicts of interest that could have inappropriately influenced this work.

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Gloria Román Ruiz: conceptualization, investigation, methodology, project administration, validation, visualization, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing.

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