

THE HOME FRONT IN BRITAIN

Why did the British Government decide to evacuate children from Britain's major cities in the early years of the Second World War?

Even before the war broke out, it was positive that the prime target for the Germans would be the city of London, because of the amount of people and how urbanized it was. In 1939, Germany declared war on Poland, and Britain and France declared war on Germany. The British government had a safe idea for children living in large, heavily industrial and built-up cities. This was to evacuate them. Cities like London and Birmingham were the main targets for the German Bombers, and because they were very built up in some parts with tall buildings, they would be very easily seen and were very easy targets, for the Germans. If the children stayed in these developed cities, they would be under a great threat. This would have scared children living in London for example, where a great deal of the bombing occurred. The earlier that the government reacted to move the children the better for them, and there would have been more chance that they would have been safer. 830,000 children were evacuated from these urban cities in the first three days, from September 1st to September 3rd.

Another reason for the Government to fear the German bombing tactics was the Blitzkrieg. The British had heard of this happening before in the Spanish Civil War, to the city of Guernica, and had taken a lot of casualties and the Germans gained a lot of land very quickly. The Blitzkrieg or lightning war was fought at a great pace, on land and in the air by the Germans in very large numbers. The first stage of the Blitzkrieg was to bomb the enemy headquarters and communications towers, by the long-range artillery and dive-bombers. Parachutists would then be placed strategically behind the enemy lines, to cause panic. Secondly, the Germans would spearhead of tanks and infantry would make a hole in the weakest part of the enemy frontline, overpowering the attacks. The final stage would be to encircle the strong part of the enemy and following up the attack, and cutting off any reinforcements that might arrive. These were highly successful, until they forced the enemy to surrender. They would use these tactics to devastate cities and the enemy. The British Government also knew that the German bombers had become very advanced, and compared their airplanes and bombers, to try and get a better fighter. The Blitzkrieg would have overwhelmed London, because of the power of the bombings.

The children were of a poor and underprivileged background, living in the slums, and moving to either the countryside, or another country. The people who fostered the city children, were helping with the war effort, and were not entirely sure of the background that the children came from, so some assumed that the children were very poor, and would have been very over-conscious over them touching things around the home.

During the Evacuation of children from a built up city, a German U-Boat struck the boat that was carrying them. This was another thing that would have scared the British Government, because they were not entirely sure of the strength of the German artillery, and if the Germans would use their manpower to endanger the lives of children. If the Germans didn't attack the Boat, the evacuation would have gone almost exactly to plan, saving children from built up areas.

Why do sources A-F differ in their attitudes to the evacuation of children?

Explain answer using all the sources, the interpretation and knowledge from your studies.

All the sources given differ in their attitude towards the evacuation of children.

Source A shows children walking, quite carefree down a street, about to be evacuated. The children are not walking with their parents, but some of the children are on their own, probably because they have already been split up from their parents, and already know where they are going to be staying. Some children in the picture are with an adult that could be a parent or a minder. The children in the photo probably don't know exactly why they are being evacuated, and that is why they don't look too upset. It might have been the first time that the children had been away from their parents, so they would have been quite anxious or nervous, but wouldn't have shown it in the photo. This is a primary source, and was taken as the children were leaving, so it shows us almost exactly what it would have been like for the children.

Source B is a teacher who was evacuated from her school, and has gives us a better idea of what the atmosphere would have been like when the children had to leave their parents. The pupils were very scared to leave, and there was hardly any talking, only a murmur because of how afraid they were. The mothers of the children were not allowed to go with the evacuees, so some younger children would have been very upset; however mothers followed the groups to the stations. The children, mothers and teachers didn't know where they were going so they had to rely on the Government to accommodate them, and were probably bewildered by the whole situation they were in. The mothers must have been heart broken, seeing their children leaving them. This source is a primary source, and is an interview with a teacher 49 years after the evacuation, so it is not as reliable, because the teacher might have forgotten certain details.

Source C is a different extract, because it is from a book published after the War, making it a secondary source. It is from the point of view of an evacuee from a large city, who stays with someone in the countryside. The foster parents are not entirely sure of the evacuee's situation and she makes an assumption that they are too poor to afford a pair of slippers. Although the real reason she doesn't have slippers, is because the amount of items they were allowed to take with them. This is quite an unreliable source, because we are not sure when the author was born, or if she had any part in evacuation. This would be the attitude that some foster parents would have had, that the children they were fostering were poor, because they were from rural areas. It also shows that the children in the novel were understanding of their foster parents, as they didn't answer back about the slippers, but just giggle about it.

Source D is an appeal from the government to ask more people in Scotland to help in the War effort, and consider fostering a child. Some people during the War wouldn't have wanted to foster any children, but this account was very sympathising in its views towards the subject, and was congratulating parents who had already fostered a child for the War. It is trying to boost the confidence and morale of the country, and any respectful free home would give a house to an evacuee. Again, it is a help to the War effort of Great Britain, and making children happier in their new homes. This is a primary

source, as it was made just after the major evacuation of industrial areas, and was also issued by the Government so all the information in the text should be correct and true.

Source E is an interview with a parent about his son being evacuated, and questioning him on his ideas of evacuation. This is a primary source as it is taken in 1940. It shows us the real feelings of the parents during the War crisis. The man in question was not happy to let his child go to be evacuated, but would rather have him stay with him in his house with the family, and be with him during the war. The father feels that the places that the children will be staying are unsafe, and therefore doesn't want his son to go. Also the children will not be used to the area and won't feel at home, and will feel strange in a new town or country.

Source F is a video we watched called *The World at War*, and was the first 5 minutes, about evacuation. The film was a secondary source, but it was made with footage all from the time of evacuation, so would be an accurate secondary source. It was about people's attitude towards evacuation, and if the children stayed then they might be succumb to gas and bombs, but if they go then they might miss their parents and adapt strange habits,

There were children on the video who remembered the experience of being fostered and they compared it to being auctioned off.

Sources B, C, and E are quite similar, in the way they are presented, because they are more realistic sources, as they are from a point of view of one or a few children. Source B is clearly more likely of what the whole ordeal of evacuation was about, but source A gives a completely different picture, with the children looking quite happy. Source C, although it is not a primary source is a other good example of what life would be like when you had been fostered, when the children moved in with the parents, they knew very little about each others way of living, and would have been a strange experience on both parts. Source E is much like the last two, because it is from the time, actually from a parent who would have been feeling very unhappy, and gets the message through about evacuation a lot better, rather than a poster showing children thanking their foster parents. I believe that the sources with knowledge in, and have points of view portray a better depiction of what life really was like.