

Parliament to establish corporations of the poor between 1696 and 1713, they were, in part, Whig devices for circumventing parish control. In London the leading lights were Sir Robert Clayton and Locke's friend Thomas Firmin. See Macfarlane 1982. Similar schemes to Locke's were mooted in Firmin's *Some Proposals for the Employing of the Poor* (1678), Sir Matthew Hale's *Discourse Touching Provision for the Poor* (1683) and John Bellers's *Proposals for Raising a Colledge of Industry* (1695) (see Clarke 1987). Locke refers to Firmin's draft (c. 30, p. 87).

I have added numerations to mark the clauses of Locke's proposals. Clauses 1–8 concern the punishment of vagabonds; 9–10 the provision of work; 11–16 the provision of working schools for children; 17–22 the schools' regulations and their oversight; 23–26 the powers of guardians of the poor; 27–37 the establishment of corporations of the poor in cities and towns; 38–40 are miscellaneous.

Locke refers to several traditional aspects of local government. The least familiar are the 'hundred': a group of parishes, a subdivision of a county; the 'vestry', a parish committee; the 'quarter-sessions': a court held quarterly by justices of the peace; the 'tithing man', a chief officer or constable of a tithing, a district containing a few households (nominally ten). In Locke's time the pound (£) was made up of twenty shillings (s), and a shilling of twelve pence (d).

May it please your excellencies –

His majesty having been pleased, by his commission, to require us particularly to consider of some proper methods for setting on work and employing the poor of this kingdom, and making them useful to the public, and thereby easing others of that burden, and by what ways and means such design may be made most effectual, we humbly beg leave to lay before your excellencies a scheme of such methods as seem unto us most proper for the attainment of those ends.

The multiplying of the poor, and the increase of the tax for their maintenance, is so general an observation and complaint that it cannot be doubted of. Nor has it been only since the last war¹ that this evil has come upon us. It has been a growing burden on the kingdom these many years, and the two last reigns felt the increase of it, as well as the present.

¹ War against France was waged from 1689 to 1697.

If the cause of this evil be well looked into, we humbly conceive it will be found to have proceeded neither from scarcity of provisions, nor from want of employment for the poor, since the goodness of God has blessed these times with plenty, no less than the former, and a long peace during those reigns gave us as plentiful a trade as ever. The growth of the poor must therefore have some other cause, and it can be nothing else but the relaxation of discipline and corruption of manners; virtue and industry being as constant companions on the one side as vice and idleness are on the other.

The first step, therefore, towards the setting of the poor on work, we humbly conceive, ought to be a restraint of their debauchery by a strict execution of the laws provided against it, more particularly by the suppressing of superfluous brandy shops and unnecessary alehouses, especially in country parishes not lying upon great roads.

Could all the able hands in England be brought to work, the greatest part of the burden that lies upon the industrious for maintaining the poor would immediately cease. For, upon a very moderate computation, it may be concluded that above one half of those who receive relief from the parishes are able to get their livelihood. And all of those who receive such relief from the parishes, we conceive, may be divided into these three sorts.

First, those who can do nothing at all towards their own support.

Secondly, those who, though they cannot maintain themselves wholly, yet are able to do something towards it.

Thirdly, those who are able to maintain themselves by their own labour. And these last may be again subdivided into two sorts: viz., either those who have numerous families of children whom they cannot, or pretend they cannot, support by their labour, or those who pretend they cannot get work, and so live only by begging, or worse.

For² the suppression of this last sort of begging drones, who live unnecessarily upon other people's labour, there are already good

² Locke's draft begins here: 'The poor that cannot work, these must be maintained. The poor that can work but will not, these are only wandering beggars which therefore instead of being relieved should be carefully punished. The laws against these I think are such as would suppress that sort of drones. But laws without execution being but waste paper, and the officers being fallen into a general neglect of their duty, it would be convenient that a proclamation . . .'

and wholesome laws, sufficient for the purpose, if duly executed. We therefore humbly propose that the execution thereof may be at present revived by proclamation, till other remedies can be provided; as also that order be taken every year, at the choosing of churchwardens and overseers of the poor, that the statutes of the 39th Eliz. Cap. IV and the 43rd Eliz. Cap. II be read and considered, paragraph by paragraph, and the observation of them, in all their parts, pressed on those who are to be overseers; for we have reason to think that the greatest part of the overseers of the poor, everywhere, are wholly ignorant, and never so much as think that it is the greatest part, or so much as any part, of their duty to set people to work.

But for the more effectual restraining of idle vagabonds, we further humbly propose that a new law may be obtained, by which it be enacted:

[1] That all men sound of limb and mind, above 14 and under 50 years of age, begging in maritime counties out of their own parish without a pass, shall be seized on, either by any officer of the parish where they so beg (which officers, by virtue of their offices, shall be authorised, and under a penalty required to do it), or by the inhabitants of the house themselves where they beg; and be by them, or any of them, brought before the next justice of the peace or guardian of the poor (to be chosen as hereafter mentioned [§23]), who in this case shall have the power of a justice of the peace, and, by such justice of the peace or guardian of the poor (after the due and usual correction in the case), be by a pass sent, not to the house of correction (since those houses are now in most counties complained of to be rather places of ease and preferment to the masters thereof than of correction and reformation to those who are sent thither), nor to their places of habitation (since such idle vagabonds usually name some very remote part, whereby the country is put to great charge; and they usually make their escape from the negligent officers before they come thither and so are at liberty for a new ramble). But, if it be in a maritime county, as aforesaid, that they be sent to the next seaport town, there to be kept at hard labour,³ till some of his majesty's ships, coming in or near there,

³ Locke's draft makes clear that hard labour means 'lump breaking', the breaking of stones for road building.

give an opportunity of putting them on board, where they shall serve three years under strict discipline, at soldier's pay (subsistence money being deducted for their victuals on board),⁴ and be punished as deserters if they go on shore without leave, or, when sent on shore, if they either go further or stay longer than they have leave.

[2] That all men begging in maritime counties without passes, that are maimed, or above 50 years of age, and all of any age so begging without passes in inland counties nowhere bordering on the sea, shall be sent to the next house of correction, there to be kept at hard labour for three years.

[3] And, to the end that the true use of the houses of correction may not be prevented, as of late it has for the most part been, that the master of each such house shall be obliged to allow unto everyone committed to his charge 4d per diem for their maintenance in and about London. But, in remoter counties, where wages and provisions are much cheaper, there the rate to be settled by the grand jury and judge at the assizes; for which the said master shall have no other consideration nor allowance but what their labour shall produce; whom, therefore, he shall have power to employ according to his discretion, consideration being had of their age and strength.

[4] That the justices of the peace shall, each quarter-sessions, make a narrow inquiry into the state and management of the houses of correction within their district, and take a strict account of the carriage of all who are there, and, if they find that anyone is stubborn, and not at all mended by the discipline of the place, that they order him a longer stay there and severer discipline, that so nobody may be dismissed till he has given manifest proof of amendment, the end for which he was sent thither.

[5] That whoever shall counterfeit a pass shall lose his ears for the forgery the first time that he is found guilty thereof, and the second time, that he shall be transported to the plantations, as in the case of felony.

[6] That whatever female above 14 years old shall be found begging out of her own parish without a pass (if she be an inhabitant

⁴ Locke's draft proposes three-quarters pay, one-third deducted for subsistence, payable at the end of three years.

of a parish within five miles distance of that she is found begging in) shall be conducted home to her parish by the constable, tithingman, overseer of the poor, churchwarden, or other sworn officer of the parish wherein she was found begging, who, by his place and office, shall be required to do it, and to deliver her to the overseer of the poor of the parish to which she belongs, from whom he shall receive 12d for his pains; which 12d, if she be one that receives public relief, shall be deducted out of her parish allowance; or, if she be not relieved by the parish, shall be levied on her, or her parents' or her master's goods.

[7] That, whenever any such female above 14 years old, within the same distance, commits the same fault a second time, and whenever the same or any such other female is found begging without a lawful pass, the first time, at a greater distance than five miles from the place of her abode, it shall be lawful for any justice of the peace or guardian of the poor, upon complaint made, to send her to the house of correction, there to be employed in hard work three months, and so much longer as shall be to the next quarter-sessions after the determination of the said three months, and that then, after due correction, she have a pass made her by the sessions to carry her home to the place of her abode.

[8] That, if any boy or girl, under 14 years of age, shall be found begging out of the parish where they dwell (if within five miles distance of the said parish), they shall be sent to the next working school, there to be soundly whipped, and kept at work till evening, so that they may be dismissed time enough to get to their place of abode that night. Or, if they live further than five miles off from the place where they are taken begging, that they be sent to the next house of correction, there to remain at work six weeks, and so much longer as till the next sessions after the end of the said six weeks.

These idle vagabonds being thus suppressed, there will not, we suppose, in most country parishes, be many men who will have the pretence that they want work. However, in order to the taking away of that pretence, whenever it happens, we humbly propose that it may be further enacted:

[9] That the guardian of the poor of the parish where any such pretence is made, shall, the next Sunday after complaint made to him, acquaint the parish that such a person complains he wants

work, and shall then ask whether anyone is willing to employ him at a lower rate than is usually given, which rate it shall then be in the power of the said guardian to set; for it is not to be supposed that anyone should be refused to be employed by his neighbours, whilst others are set to work, but for some defect in his ability or honesty, for which it is reasonable he should suffer; and he that cannot be set on work for 12d per diem, must be content with 9d or 10d rather than live idly. But, if nobody in the parish voluntarily accepts such a person at the rate proposed by the guardians of the poor, that then it shall be in the power of the said guardian, with the rest of the parish, to make a list of days, according to the proportion of everyone's tax in the parish to the poor, and that, according to such list, every inhabitant in the same parish shall be obliged, in their turn, to set such unemployed poor men of the same parish on work, at such under-rates as the guardians of the poor shall appoint; and, if any person refuse to set the poor at work in his turn as thus directed, that such person shall be bound to pay them their appointed wages, whether he employ them or no.

[10] That, if any poor man, otherwise unemployed, refuse to work according to such order (if it be in a maritime county), he shall be sent to the next port, and there put on board some of his majesty's ships, to serve there three years as before proposed; and that what pay shall accrue to him for his service there, above his diet and clothes, be paid to the overseers of the poor of the parish to which he belongs, for the maintenance of his wife and children, if he have any, or else towards the relief of other poor of the same parish; but, if it be not in a maritime county, that every poor man, thus refusing to work, shall be sent to the house of correction.

These methods we humbly propose as proper to be enacted, in order to the employing of the poor who are able, but will not work; which sort, by the punctual execution of such a law, we humbly conceive, may be quickly reduced to a very small number, or quite extirpated.

But the greatest part of the poor maintained by parish rates are not absolutely unable, nor wholly unwilling, to do anything towards the getting of their livelihoods; yet even those, either through want of fit work provided for them, or their unskilfulness in working in what might be a public advantage, do little that turns to any account, but live idly upon the parish allowance, or begging, if not

worse. Their labour, therefore, as far as they are able to work, should be saved to the public, and what their earnings come short of a full maintenance should be supplied out of the labour of others, that is, out of the parish allowance.

These are of two sorts:

(i) Grown people, who, being decayed from their full strength, could yet do something for their living, though, under pretence that they cannot get work, they generally do nothing. In the same case with these are most of the wives of day labourers, when they come to have two or three or more children. The looking after their children gives them not liberty to go abroad to seek for work, and so, having no work at home, in the broken intervals of their time they earn nothing; but the aid of the parish is fain to come in to their support, and their labour is wholly lost; which is much loss to the public.⁵

Everyone must have meat, drink, clothing, and firing. So much goes out of the stock of the kingdom, whether they work or no. Supposing, then, there be 100,000 poor in England, that live upon the parish, that is, who are maintained by other people's labour (for so is everyone who lives upon alms without working), if care were taken that every one of those, by some labour in the woollen or other manufacture, should earn but 1d per diem (which, one with another, they might well do, and more), this would gain to England £130,000 per annum,⁶ which, in eight years, would make England above a million of pounds richer.

This, rightly considered, shows us what is the true and proper relief of the poor. It consists in finding work for them, and taking care they do not live like drones upon the labour of others. And, in order to this end, we find the laws made for the relief of the poor were intended; however, by an ignorance of their intention or a neglect of their due execution, they are turned only to the mainten-

⁵ The draft adds: 'Now no part of any poor body's labour that can work should be lost. Things should be so ordered that everyone should work as much as they can, and what that comes short of maintaining them that the parish should make up.'

⁶ The draft adds: 'Tis therefore worth everybody's care that the poor should have employment, for I may confidently say that of those who are now maintained by parish rates and begging there is not one of ten, I might I think make the number a great deal less, who could not well earn above 2d a day. Nay, take them all together one with another they might earn 3d a day, which would be above £400,000 a year got to England.'

ance of people in idleness, without at all examining into the lives, abilities, or industry, of those who seek for relief.

In order to the suppression of these idle beggars, the corporations in England have beaules authorised and paid to prevent the breach of the law in that particular; yet, nevertheless, the streets everywhere swarm with beggars, to the increase of idleness, poverty, and villainy, and to the shame of Christianity. And, if it should be asked in any town in England, how many of these visible trespassers have been taken up and brought to punishment by those officers this last year, we have reason to think the number would be found to have been very small, because that [number] of beggars swarming in the street is manifestly very great.

But the remedy of this disorder is so well provided by the laws now in force that we can impute the continuance and increase of it to nothing but a general neglect of their execution.

(ii) Besides the grown people above mentioned, the children of labouring people are an ordinary burden to the parish, and are usually maintained in idleness, so that their labour also is generally lost to the public till they are 12 or 14 years old.

[11] The most effectual remedy for this that we are able to conceive, and which we therefore humbly propose, is that in the fore-mentioned new law to be enacted, it be further provided that working schools be set up in each parish, to which the children of all such as demand relief of the parish, above 3 and under 14 years of age, whilst they live at home with their parents, and are not otherwise employed for their livelihood by the allowance of the overseers of the poor, shall be obliged to come.

By this means the mother will be eased of a great part of her trouble in looking after and providing for them at home, and so be at more liberty to work; the children will be kept in much better order, be better provided for, and from infancy be inured to work, which is of no small consequence to the making of them sober and industrious all their lives after; and the parish will be either eased of this burden, or at least of the misuse in the present management of it. For, a great number of children giving a poor man a title to an allowance from the parish, this allowance is given once a week, or once a month, to the father in money, which he not seldom spends on himself at the alehouse, whilst his children, for whose sake he had it, are left to suffer or perish under the want of necessaries, unless the charity of neighbours relieve them.