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By Michael Morris

BLACKBURN children are being served school dinners worse than those provided 50 years ago for workhouse vagrants, Mr Jack Straw, Labour MP for Blackburn, claimed yesterday.

But Conservative leaders responsible for school meals policy have angrily rejected his allegations. Under the Lancashire Education Authority, which covers Blackburn, school dinners have changed over the past year to light lunches or snacks.

Mr Straw is to protest in the Commons and to the Education Secretary. Mr Mark Carlisle, over the

menus, one of which last week comprised:

One sausage;

Two slices of bread;

Cornflake Cake;

One glass of water.

He compares this with a menu 50 years ago at the local workhouse, comprising:

8 ozs bread;

2 ozs of cooked or tinned meat;

2 ozs cheese;

4 ozs of hot potatoes;

A "sufficiency" of fruit

Councillor Louise Ellman, leader of the minority Labour group on Lancashire County Council, said that in the past year the number of children taking meals in the

primary schools had dropped by half.

But the education committee chairman, Councillor Michael FitzHerbert-Brockholes, said: "This is a politically motivated exercise by the Left wing of the Labour Party. I am not saying there might not be problems in some schools, but generally the primary school meals are extremely well balanced, and we will campaign to get parents to come and see what their children are eating."

Since traditional school dinners could not be served under the budget allowed Lancashire has been trying to provide over the past year a nutritionally balanced

snack lunch, in a rotating menu covering a fortnight.

The primary school children paid 40p a day for a "nutritionally balanced snack of two light courses." The scheme replaced the traditional meat, two veg and pudding meals last April to help to reduce subsidies.

"We are still producing a good, nutritional, light meal, worked out by our school meals service with the help of the health authorities, we are still pumping enormous amounts of money into school meals."

Mr FitzHerbert-Brockholes said that primary responsibility for feeding the children

rested with parents. Children could get a good breakfast at home and a square meal when they returned. Although school dinners might have appeared to contain more substance generally the waste of green vegetables amongst young children had been enormous.

Last night a Blackburn headmaster, Mr Frank Shuttleworth, who is also county secretary of the National Union of Teachers, said that on one day Mr Straw had mentioned a school lunch menu comprised one sausage with dried onions, Manchester tart instead of cornflake cake, a roll instead of bread slices, and a glass of water.