

The Field of Public Welfare

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ORGANIZED social work in the United States recently turned the half century. The National Conference of Social Work, originally known as the Conference of Charities and Correction, celebrated its semi-centennial at the meeting held in Washington in 1923. The attendance at the first conference numbered about twenty recruited from four states, whereas at the fifty-third gathering in Cleveland in 1926 there was a registration on a nation-wide basis of 4,080 delegates with representatives from Canada and overseas, and a paid membership on July 1 of the same year numbering 3,904.¹ The first Charity Organization Society was established in Buffalo in 1877. When the fiftieth anniversary of its foundation was commemorated in the fall of 1927 by means of a conference on family life of today, there were listed in the current directory of family social work societies no less than three hundred and twenty-four agencies throughout the United States which were following in the footsteps of this venture.²

The first probation officer was appointed under authorization of a statute passed by the General Court (legislature) of Massachusetts in 1878. At the time of the fiftieth centennial in Boston, all of the states except one had juvenile probation and thirty-six had extended the system into the adult field, with the sole probation officer of

fifty years ago multiplied until paid officers throughout the United States now number 3,191.³ Rapid expansion differing only in degree may be noted if we consider social settlements, agencies engaged in child welfare, and those formed to promote recreation and leisure time activities.

The juvenile court and medical and psychiatric social work are of comparatively recent origin when measured by the older social movements begun shortly after the Civil War. Their spread has, nevertheless, been even more rapid than has the growth of some of the older forms. The first Juvenile Court was established in Chicago in 1899. Accenting child study as this court did, it naturally followed that there should have been established in conjunction with it a Psychopathic Institute, the first of its kind, designed to be rapidly followed by others promoting constantly widening horizons in the study of children. It was eminently fitting that the twenty-fifth anniversary of the foundation of the first Juvenile Court should have been commemorated jointly with the fifteenth anniversary of the first Psychopathic Institute.⁴ Other children's courts which organized clinics for child study during the next decade, privately or publicly financed, included Boston, Detroit, New York, Los Angeles, Philadelphia and Westchester County. A notable group of child

¹ From an unpublished report prepared by Howard H. Knight, General Secretary of the National Conference of Social Work.

² See directory of societies engaged in family social work issued by the American Association for Organizing Family Social Work.

³ From an article by Charles L. Chute, General Secretary of the National Probation Association, in the *Probation Bulletin* for December, 1928.

⁴ Addresses at the anniversary are published in book form, "The Child, the Clinic and the Court," New York, 1925.

guidance clinics has recently been created through the encouragement of a foundation.

The aid of psychiatry was extended into the adult field when a psychiatrist was appointed on the staff of the probation department of the Municipal Court of Boston in 1913. Others followed in a number of criminal courts throughout the country. A well-equipped psychopathic clinic, financed by taxation, became a part of the Recorder's Court of Detroit in 1921.

Medical social work, the extension of the influence of the hospital and the clinic into the home, has witnessed rapid growth since first originated by Dr. Richard Cabot in 1905. It is now an adjunct of hospitals, both public and private, that lay claim to a rounded service for their patients.

CAUSES PROMOTING GROWTH

The causes which have promoted this growth of social work, public and private, have been various. Chief among them may be named the urbanization of our population, hastened by the great waves of immigration, especially during the two decades preceding the Great War; the change from an attitude of *laissez-faire* to an emphasis upon social responsibility for poverty which reached a high tide in American politics in the campaign of 1912; the development of higher standards of living side by side with economic distress; and the growth of newer forms of service financed by increasing resources devoted to human welfare. In the recent stages of this growth we note the organization of community funds which make more adequate the financing of social work, the development of foundations, both local and general, and the increasing amount assessed upon our tax rolls in behalf of the public welfare.

When Amos Warner wrote his classic *American Charities* in 1894,

public relief of the poor in their homes was in disfavor. Based both upon English and American experience, most students of social work of that day accepted the dictum that such relief was demoralizing and should be abolished. The philosophy of Thomas Chalmers still met with general approval. There followed an awakened public conscience as to the social causation of poverty, and popular agitation in favor of a specialized form of relief, pensions or allowances to mothers. Beginning with Kansas City in 1911 this new form swept the country until we now find it accepted even in centers where the traditional distrust of general public outdoor relief persists.

There is today less partisanship between advocates of voluntary activities and those sponsoring public development than there was thirty years ago. This is undoubtedly in part due to the interchange of workers between the two forms of service. Men and women with experience in private societies have been recruited for public work and public officials have occasionally been secured to direct private effort. The present tendency is not to consider the two fields mutually exclusive nor to follow the philosophy of "either," "or," but rather to grant that the burden of social work may properly be borne both through voluntary subscription and through the tax rate. The questions determining the rate of progress in the assumption of public responsibility in a given community are frequently the lack of response to private appeals for funds and the increasing resistance to a mounting tax rate.

DEVELOPMENT IN A LARGE CITY

Public development may be illustrated by the experience of Detroit. Spurred by the growth of the automobile industry, its population increased

from 465,000 in 1910 to 993,000 in 1920. The old ward system of municipal government was abolished through a new charter which provided for a mayor with a small council elected at large, with all candidates chosen on a non-partisan ticket, and in years which alternated with state and national elections. Education, health, and public welfare were placed in the hands of unpaid boards. The civil service was given wide application. In the provision setting up a department of public welfare there was created a bureau of social service with an effort made to define the standards which should govern social case work written into the charter itself.

Contemporaneous with this modernization of the city government itself and with new emphasis upon public welfare, voluntary social agencies were reorganized. Under the spur of war needs the Detroit Patriotic Fund was established in 1918. It not only financed activities which were an incident of the war, but also the social agencies which were concerned with the continuing needs of the city. After the war the Patriotic Fund became the Detroit Community Fund, mainly concerned with financing activities of the latter sort.

Public services comparable to the causes financed by the Community Fund include the following: the Juvenile Division of the Probate Court of Wayne County; the Department of Public Welfare and the Recreation Commission of the City of Detroit; the Psychopathic Clinic and the Probation Department of the Recorder's Court, a criminal court dealing with adults; the nursing services and clinics of the Board of Health; the attendance department and the psychological clinic of the Board of Education; the Woman's Division of the Police Department; the nursing service of the School Com-

mission of Wayne County; and the Wayne County Training School devoted to the care and education of a selected group of the higher grade of those ordinarily classified as feeble-minded.

The Detroit Community Fund in its campaign of 1927 raised \$3,420,000, of which \$3,002,000 was required to finance the deficits of 79 allied voluntary agencies engaged in social work. It is significant that of the public agencies cited, two of them alone, the Department of Public Welfare and the Juvenile Court, expended \$4,257,000 for social welfare assessed upon the tax roll during the last fiscal year for which figures are available, or 42 per cent in excess of the needs of 79 private agencies.⁵

STATE ORGANIZATION FOR PUBLIC WELFARE

Antedating by ten years any of the other social movements hitherto considered, there was established in Massachusetts in 1863 a Board of State Charities, concerned with education and supervision in the field of public charity. Its duties included responsibility for the care of state paupers, those without a local settlement, and removal of them when deemed necessary and proper; securing reports concerning care taken of public charges in the 334 cities and towns of the state; and supervision and inspection of state institutions which included three so-called lunatic hospitals, four almshouses, three reformatories, a state prison, institutions for the care of blind and deaf mutes, and local prisons. It was also the responsibility of this board to bring to the attention of the

⁵ The Department of Public Welfare is financed by the City of Detroit, the Juvenile Court by the County of Wayne. The figures cited cover the calendar year of 1927 for the former, and the fiscal year ending December 1, 1928, for the latter.

legislature the needs of the state with respect to matters relating to charities and corrections. During the next decade boards somewhat similar in character were established in New York, Ohio, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Michigan and Kansas, with beginnings in North Carolina, Rhode Island and Connecticut.⁶

First established with supervision and advisory powers accented, administrative responsibilities were added, and in some states boards of control were created. The emphasis upon efficiency, and the desirability of vesting direct responsibility in the current administration, resulted in the creation of State Departments of Public Welfare as branches of state administration, with a state director of welfare responsible to the governor. Such a reorganization of public welfare work was brought about in Illinois through a civil administrative code in 1917. The old board in Massachusetts was reorganized on a state department basis in 1919. A reorganization which was influenced by the example of Illinois and in character somewhat similar took place in Ohio in 1921 when a State Department of Public Welfare was created with a director who is appointed by the governor, becomes a member of the state cabinet, and holds office concurrently with the governor.

THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WELFARE OF OHIO

The far-flung character of state interests in the field of social work may be illustrated by an outline of the organization in the State of Ohio.⁷

⁶ For historical material, consult *Supervision and Education in Charity*, by Jeffrey Brackett, New York, 1903; for statutes creating state boards of charities and kindred bodies, see *Public Welfare Administration in the United States*, by Sophonisba P. Breckinridge, Chicago, 1927.

⁷ See p. 10, Sixth Annual Report of the Depart-

As described in a recent annual report, there are six divisions of the Department of Public Welfare, as follows:

1. An institutional division with responsibility for state institutions.
2. A division of charities, with three bureaus devoted to child care, support from relatives of patients sent to certain state institutions, and institutional inspection.
3. The Ohio Board of Clemency concerned with the execution of laws governing pardon and parole.
4. A bureau of criminal identification and investigation.
5. The Ohio Commission for the Blind.
6. A manufacturing and sales department in charge of employment and industrial training for inmates of penal institutions.

No two states are entirely alike in their administrative organization for public welfare. In Massachusetts all questions concerned with state penal institutions and parole are administered by a Department of Correction of equal standing with the Department of Public Welfare. In Illinois the Department of Public Welfare is more adequately staffed with a director assisted by seven associates as follows: assistant director, alienist, criminologist, fiscal supervisor, superintendent of charities, superintendent of prisons and superintendent of pardons and paroles.

If we examine the functions of the two bureaus devoted to institutions and charities, we get further evidence of the importance of the interest of a state such as Ohio in the public welfare.

There were twenty-three institutions under the control of the Bureau of Institutions. Eight of these were devoted to mental disease, seven to corrections and two to the care of the

ment of Public Welfare of Ohio for the fiscal year which ended June 30, 1927.

feeble-minded. On June 30, 1927, the population of these institutions numbered 28,973, of whom 13,974 were patients in hospitals for mental diseases. The property valuation was \$39,965,000, and officers and employees numbered 3,400. The annual budget of the entire department was \$9,274,000.

The Division of Charities succeeded to the functions formerly discharged by the Ohio Board of State Charities, similar in many respects to the duties exercised by the time-honored supervisory bodies of which the Massachusetts board was the first. The bureau devoted to institutional inspection is charged with the visitation of all benevolent and correctional institutions for adults such as private homes for the aged, workhouses and jails. It licenses child-caring institutions and agencies and private families which board children. It also reviews and approves plans for buildings and has charge of the incorporation of proposed institutions and agencies for the care of children. The Bureau of Child Care has responsibility for the guardianship of dependent, neglected and delinquent children, and also provides for the care and treatment of crippled children. The bureau employs foster homes rather than institutions for these children. There are 3,700 dependent and crippled children under care and guardianship.

SOME PROBLEMS OF PUBLIC WELFARE

The rapid increase in responsibilities for social welfare borne by taxation should not be permitted to obscure the difficulties which inhere in public administration. It is essential that friends of public development should understand and assist in overcoming these handicaps.

An initial obstacle is encountered in the lack of continuity of policy. Ad-

ministrations come and go. Mayor Hunt of Cincinnati, Mayor Mitchell of New York City and former Governor Pinchot of Pennsylvania were deeply interested in the development of humanitarian services, and notable advances were made in their administrations. When their successors were inaugurated there were changes both in heads of departments and in policies to be pursued. Instances could readily be multiplied where progress was arrested as a result of such changes. Nor is it possible to indefinitely safeguard public development by means of an unpaid board serving as a buffer between changing administrations, although such organization is of help. Witness the experience of the Board of Public Welfare of Kansas City, first of its kind in the United States. There was continuity of policy for a period of years, but finally a swing of the political pendulum dislodged the forces of progress.

Added to this lack of continuity which makes it difficult to attract men and women of ability and almost impossible to retain them in the public service, there is the additional problem of inadequate compensation. Michigan furnishes an illustration in point. The salary of the Director of the State Department of Public Welfare is limited by statute to \$4,000 per year. And yet he has responsibilities and opportunities for service far greater than those which come to the agents of private societies throughout the State, many of whom receive more adequate compensation.

Added to lack of continuity and inadequate compensation there is frequently the liability of political pressure in making appointments. Nor should it be inferred that such pressure always comes from political sources as popularly understood. Men in positions of public responsibility quickly

discover that reputable business men, professional men of standing, even ministers of the gospel, will frequently urge the obviously unfitted for public position. The beneficiary of such support may be an unfortunate widow, an elderly gentlewoman or a superannuated minister, but the result is the same. Civil service is a corrective when intelligently administered.

A further serious handicap may be mentioned in the difficulty of interpreting to the general public the need of trained service for public social work. We recognize the need of the expert in the fields of education and public health. The functions of the teacher, of the doctor, and of the nurse are readily understood, and specialized training is accepted as a matter of course. But for positions of responsibility in public social work there is as yet no considerable body of public opinion which recognizes and supports the demand for expert service.

The difficulties enumerated have seriously interfered with the develop-

ment of adequate and effective standards. This is found to be true whenever areas of public social work are subjected to the analysis of social research, whether it be probation in juvenile or adult courts, child placing, allowances to mothers of dependent children, general relief to the poor in their own homes, or other forms of welfare activities.

The student of public versus private development in the field of social welfare should no longer be dogmatic as to the relative function of the two. He should recognize that public responsibility is likely to continue where once it has been accepted. On the other hand, he must appreciate that new responsibilities as reflected in taxation for the social welfare have increased in such rapid fashion during the last twenty years that the need of the hour is not for the addition of new burdens, but rather a compelling demand for the improvement of standards within the sphere where public responsibility has already been assumed.