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WELFARE WORK IN CAROLINA

WHAT THE STATE CAN DO

An effective attack upon the public welfare problems of a state is two fold: (1) By a State Welfare Board and by State Welfare Institutions, and (2) by Town and County Welfare Boards and Institutions. Both attacks must of course be supported by public intelligence sensitively aware of existing conditions and humanely moved to remedy them, else they fail or limp along lamely on one foot. I call attention mainly to the second aspect of the subject because it concerns our critical weakness in dealing with public welfare problems in North Carolina and in most other states.

Public welfare work calls for a State Board of Public Welfare, statewide in authority, supported by sufficient funds, properly functioned, and adequately officered, and for state institutions that are large enough to care for the delinquents, the dependents, the defectives and the neglected who cannot be better cared for by local authority and institutions. We must have state penitentiaries, state prison farms, and state convict camps because convicted criminals are too few in any one county for the proper punishment and effective reformation of social offenders in county jails. We must have state schools for the reformation of wayward boys and girls, state institutions for fallen women, state hospitals for the insane and the epileptic, state schools for the deaf and blind, the crippled and the feeble-minded, because the county cannot afford to establish special institutions to deal fitly with the relatively small number of such unfortunates in each county. It is properly the business of the state to gather them into state institutions of the very best possible type and to deal with them properly under the general oversight of a State Welfare Board.

WHAT THE COUNTY CAN DO

But on the other hand, it calls for County Boards of Public Welfare with county-wide authority and trained executive secretaries. Because (1) many of our social ills bulk up so big that they can be successfully attacked only in details by social interest, local effort, and local institutions. Tuberculosis and poverty are capital instances of social problems that are beyond the possibilities of state institutions, and that necessarily wait upon organized county efforts of effective sort. Because, (2) the state officials in a big state institution or in a big central office at the capital cannot finger certain social problems down to the last detail. For instance, we do not know the deaf, the blind, the feeble-minded, the epileptic, the crippled, and the neglected or wayward boys and girls—their number, their names, and their residences in any county of the state; and so because there is at present no local organization charged with the responsibility of accounting for such unfortunates, and with the duty of urging them in sympathetic ways into proper state institutions. And because (3) a large number of necessary reforms in the State are delayed by the lack of efficient county welfare boards and secretaries. Thus, we cannot now have juvenile courts or special sessions of our circuit courts adequately to consider juvenile offenders in chambers as wards in chancery, and wayward children under 16 years of age cannot now be put on probation under our present law in North Carolina, because there is nobody officially charged in our counties with looking after juvenile probationers, or who is conditioned to do it properly.

For the same reason another progressive movement in prison reform falls to pieces in this State. I refer to the lack of authoritative oversight of prisoners on parole or under indeterminate sentence from the county and district courts, the state reformatories, and the state penitentiary. We lack the same kind of oversight over the families of criminals in prison and over criminals upon their return home after release.

County Welfare Boards

Other matters of importance wait upon the creation and proper functioning of County Welfare Boards. For instance, orphan children cannot now be placed out in homes in this State as a wise and safe policy in general, because at present we cannot properly investigate and appraise the homes that apply for such children nor can we keep such homes under systematic regular supervision to see that the children are properly cared for and humanely provided with school advantages and other opportunities. Bound-out children need the same oversight in North Carolina, but at present they cannot receive it.

Our orphan asylums—and there are no better in any state or country—cannot care for all the bereft and neglected children of North Carolina. They are crowded to overflowing, and the known applicants number many more than can find places in them. A placing-out policy is inevitable, and the social machinery therefor is being created in other states. It ought to be a county machinery; so, because county authority is closest to the problem and can most effectively and inexpensively consider the children that need good homes and the homes that are able to make children good.

Mothers' pensions are another necessity in North Carolina that we cannot undertake until we have county welfare boards and superintendents. We cannot venture into legislation on this matter until it is somebody's stated business in every county to know when it is best to preserve the integrity of fatherless homes by giving widowed mothers of good character financial support sufficient to enable them to rear their children outside of charity institutions. For lack of such pensions the best of homes must oftentimes be broken up; and while the mothers struggle for self-support away from their children, their children become a heavy charge upon the charity of the State or join the swelling multitude of orphans that cannot be cared for in our orphan asylums. The children in orphan asylums need to be placed in good homes as fast as they can be found; the orphans already in good homes need to be kept there by mothers' pensions. Wisdom in determining all these details depends upon painstaking case work, which could be done by county welfare boards and their secretaries. Without such organized agencies the placing-out of orphan children is a mistake.

SOME COMMON MISTAKES

So far, I am roughly distinguishing between what can and ought to be done by State welfare institutions on the one hand, and what can best be done by county welfare institutions on the other. The distinction is important. The State ought not to attempt in futile ways what can be done only by local county effort, nor ought counties to attempt what can be done by the State alone. Here and there in the United States costly mistakes are being made for the lack of this distinction in efforts and institutions.

For instance, a State sanitarium for the tuberculous is necessary as a clinic; as a center of up-to-date learning in the treatment of this disease, and as an agency of state-wide educational effort and emphasis, but it is, of course, impossible as a curing station for all the consumptives of any state. How could an institution with 135 beds undertake to cure the fifteen thousand cases of pronounced tuberculosis in this or any other state? Here is a situation that calls for county interest, county effort, and county hospitals—if not one in each county, then one at least for each group of co-operating counties. So far we have only a few county tuberculosis hospitals; in Wisconsin there are forty-seven.

The Mis-use of Jails

On the other hand, our counties have long undertaken to punish convicted misdemeanants in jails and chain gangs. Jails are places for the detention of persons indicted for crimes and presumed to be innocent until they are proven guilty. As instruments of punishment for convicted criminals, they are a failure and worse, they are an unspeakable reproach in every land and country. The punishment, reformation and social restoration of convicts is the business of the State, and the State with penitentiaries for felony convicts and State farms for misdemeanants (as in Indiana, for instance) has a chance to succeed in these delicate, difficult tasks, the chances for success lying in proper ideals and purposes, facilities, plans, and methods: the county is bound to fail with jails and chain gangs. When prisoners pass out of our courts under sentence, they ought to pass out of our county jails into State penitentiaries and State prison farms for punishment and restitution to useful citizenship.

The State should not attempt to finger in direct ways the details of many social ills. It can never be done for an entire state, in many fields of welfare work, by any possible number of social experts and supervisors in any one central office. There must be a staff of specialists in the office of the State Board to be sure, but it will be small and its efforts will be directed to keeping abreast or well ahead of the times in applied social science, to the education and stimulation of the public, and

to the oversight and guidance of social efforts and enterprises, state and local, public and private. Social diagnosis and social guardianship, case work, supervision and guardianship in detail must at least be the business of local town and county authorities under the guidance of the central office at the capital.

Everything of which I have spoken is possible under our new public welfare law. Our new State Board of Public Welfare has duties, rights and powers that are far beyond those of the old board. The law under which it operates puts us well ahead of all other Southern states in the work of charities and corrections and well alongside the states of the North and East in opportunities and possibilities.

It seems fairly clear that our new State Board will miss its largest chance for effective service unless it can stimulate local interest in public welfare problems and organize welfare machinery by counties, just as our public school and public health officers are doing in their particular fields of effort. The job is entirely too big for any one central office or any set of State institutions. It is county concern, county interest, county activity, and county institutions, that will count most in the end; not state-wide efforts and state-wide institutions, but county-wide efforts and county-wide institutions in a hundred counties.

A QUARTER CENTURY JOB

The counties will be slow to create County Welfare Boards and to support county welfare superintendents because such officials increase the local tax burden and because the people in general see neither rhyme nor reason in the proposition at present. What would a welfare superintendent have to do in our county more than going out to the poorhouse occasionally and looking in at the jail every once in awhile? Is the question put to me the other day. This question will be asked a million times or so in the next quarter century in North Carolina, and it must be answered convincingly if we are to move ahead in a hopeful direction.

Reluctance on the part of taxpayers is natural enough, because the cost of county government is everywhere increasing by leaps and bounds. In North Carolina in 1913 it amounted to nearly seven million dollars, which was more than double the cost of State Government at that time. Largely, this increase is due to waste by honest but inefficient county officials. We must be able to show that the salary system for courthouse officials in at least 58 counties of the State, when protected by the auditing of county accounts by State accountants, would create county fee funds sufficient to pay the salaries of all county officers and leave balances large enough to support county welfare superintendents. Already the salary system of compensating county officers is in vogue in 50 counties of the State. The proper auditing of fees and commissions in all of them would create fee and salary funds sufficient to support a welfare superintendent in addition to other county officers. After paying all county salaries the balances left over in eight counties last year were large enough for this purpose. These balances ranged from \$2,800 in Iredell to \$2,500 in Guilford. Under this plan with good management the balances could easily be large enough to support county welfare superintendents in more than half the counties of the State.

And again, we are spending around \$258,000 a year on county homes and in the support of outside paupers; and this cost is mounting up rapidly year by year, for lack of intelligent local interest, oversight, and management. An effective attack upon our pauper problem alone would not only decrease the volume of pauperism but it could certainly reduce the bill of costs. If so, here is money enough saved in a single detail to pay the salaries and expenses of welfare superintendents in half a hundred counties.

There are other approaches to the financial end of this county problem. They are this year being threshed out by the North Carolina Club at the University. The Club Year Book for 1917-18 will give these studies to the public. Two of them have already appeared in Bulletin No. 25 of the University Extension Bureau.

What Public Welfare Means

But county welfare machinery will be set up slowly even in our best counties unless the public mind gets busy in direct, first-hand ways with its social problems and spies them out to the last detail. Public welfare is a vague phrase. It conveys little meaning or no meaning at all to the mind of most people; and this is particularly true of dwellers in sparsely settled rural counties. Even the older phrase, charities and corrections, meant little

more than (1) the small company of wretched souls in the poor house, (2) the larger number receiving small sums monthly from the county commissioners—how much larger nobody knows as a rule, and (3) the occasional occupants of the county jails—a third of them empty at any one time, and most of them empty a full half of the year. Paupers and prisoners are an inescapable affliction and not a social problem. This and little more is about all that charities and corrections has meant to the civic mind in any county, and this is at present the largest meaning that public welfare has for the public in general today.

Civic consciousness and civic responsibility in county affairs is feeble enough; but social consciousness, social responsibility, and organized social effort by counties can hardly be said to exist at all in the United States. County organization—civic and social—is the very weakest link in American democracy. Our essential weakness in North Carolina lies in the fact that four fifths of all our people live in widely scattered country homes and therefore feel a minimum responsibility for the conditions that result in poor government and that lay heavy economic and social penalties upon the county at large.

The meaning of public welfare needs an immense enlargement in the public mind. The stupidest man among us must be brought to see that it concerns the curse of illiteracy and near-illiteracy, wholesome community recreation and commercial amusements, preventable disease and postponable death, feeble-mindedness and its causes, insanity, poverty and its manifold relationships, orphan children in poor homes whose fathers are dead, and orphan children in unsafe homes whose fathers and mothers are alive, the placing-out of children and their guardianship, wayward children, children maimed and lame in body and brain, the families of convicts in prison, returned convicts, prisoners on parole, men wanting jobs and jobs wanting men; that it concerns jail and chain gang conditions, poorhouse and pauper conditions, juvenile courts and the oversight of juvenile probationers, fallen men and fallen women alike, and the whole subject of social hygiene; that it concerns the conditions, causes, consequences and cure of social ills of every sort; that it sweeps the whole immense field of social science theoretic and applied.

To build a meaning of this adequate and needful sort in the public mind, to stir the consciences and wills of men and women into activity, and to erect suitable institutions in North Carolina county by county is an exceedingly difficult but an exceedingly necessary task. We are confronted by a gigantic educational campaign that challenges our finest purposes and our most devoted efforts the next quarter century; and our women must lead in it because public welfare work is social housekeeping and men lack the house-keeping instincts.

PUBLIC WELFARE DETAILS

For sake of simplicity I itemize the things that a county welfare agent can do under the direction of the State Board, that ought to be done in every county, and that are never likely to be done until it becomes somebody's stated duty to do them.

1. In conjunction with the county school superintendent, he could number name and locate in reliable records the illiterate, the deaf, the blind, the feeble-minded, the crippled and deformed, the wayward and neglected, the orphans needing homes and the homes offering shelter and loving care to orphans, the families of convicts, returned convicts, prisoners on probation or parole, the insane and the epileptic. At present, there are no such records in any county of the State. Such census data must be assembled in order that the people of a county can know and realize what the job of welfare is, how big it is and what the details are.
2. He could take into proper guardianship the dependents, the defectives, the neglected, and the delinquents, resident in a county, and in sympathetic way urge into state institutions those that ought to be under the care of the state; and if state institutions are not large enough, he could create public sentiment in favor of more extended facilities.
3. He could be a parole and probation officer for all classes and ages of wayward people outside of jails and reformatories by order of the various authorities.
4. He could have direct responsible oversight of the county home, the jail, and the chain gang. He could stand as a guarantor to the public that they are serving their proper uses, and no other. He could establish adequate recording, accounting, and reporting systems.
5. He could study the proper use of

county jails and county homes, their mischievous misuse and the consequences that are common almost everywhere.

6. He could make a personal study of every person or family applying for outside aid, and supervise each case to see that the aid extended helps to raise the recipient to his feet wherever such a thing is possible, instead of dropping him into the mire of hopeless dependency.
7. He could forestall fraud and graft on the part of applicants for poor relief on the one hand, and ignorant waste or deliberate misuse of public funds by public authorities on the other.
8. He could get feeble-minded girls and women into state institutions for schooling and training in self-support, and for protection against the immorality that multiplies feeble-minded children. Most of our poverty springs from feeble-mindedness and its causes, as I think we shall come to see.
9. He could study in each county the causes of dependency, delinquency, and defectiveness, and report upon these problems to the grand juries, the county commissioners, the welfare board, and through the newspapers to the public, and thus develop the intelligent sentiment that is so urgently needed in North Carolina in order to attack our various social problems effectively. He could be the local diagnostician and sanitarian in social matters, and the local agency of education, stimulation, and guidance in all organized social effort. He could pack the technical word "social" full of its proper significance. And this is necessary, because I constantly run across people who think that it refers in particular to society as we find it displayed in the newspapers, or to social equality, or to socialism of the sort that offends the normal minded.
10. And—what is fundamentally important—he could develop, organize and direct wholesome recreation in the countryside and give it a proper place in the rural mind. The law indeed charges him with this particular duty. Our country people in America, in marked contrast with the farm folks of the old world countries, are settled in vast areas in widely scattered homes. Life is solitary and tends to be lonely and sombre. Work is a conscious necessity while fun and frolic are essentially wicked—such is the firmly established connection of ideas in the countryside. Rural America needs to be anointed with the oil of gladness that David celebrates in the Psalms. People that do not play together, never learn to work together; and if they can not or will not work together and pull together here on earth, neither shall they dwell together in Heaven—a saying that you will find in Timothy 10:16.

Is there, then, anything for a county welfare officer to do? There is more to do that ought to be done than any ten such officers can do in any county. And fortunately so; it gives a wise officer a chance to call to his side and to involve as volunteers in his purposes all the civic and social minded men and women of the county. He needs them, and they need the work, and in it they are sure to find the more abundant life that the Master came to earth to bring to the sons and daughters of men.

Religion Worth the Name

Suppose we had in every county of North Carolina a body of closely integrated social servants composed of (1) the school board with its superintendent and supervisors, (2) an agricultural board with its home and farm extension agents, (3) a public health board with its whole-time health officer, its public health nurses, its clinics and dispensaries, (4) a public welfare board and its secretary charged with specific social concerns, and (5) a ministerial board composed of all the preachers of all the churches busy stamping every common effort with the ultimate values of life and destiny, time and eternity—suppose I say, the civic and social mind of North Carolina were organized and federated in this way! If only it could be so, and it can, then what an era of democratic wholesomeness and effectiveness we should enter upon, and how rapidly our beloved state would move to the fore in the new social order that is even now breaking upon the world.

Man freely self-surrendered to his fellow kind and whole heartedly given in organized effort to the common good is the dream we dream. Man dedicated to the state is Prussianism; man dedicated to humanity is the soul of democracy; man dedicated to humanity, in His name, is the last word in any kind of religion that is worth calling Christian. The Kingdom of Heaven doubtless means much more than this, but I am sure that it ought never to mean less.—E. C. Branson, an address before the N. C. Social Service Conference.