

THE STORY OF THE CITIZENS' ADVICE BUREAUX

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Foreword

This year the Citizens' Advice Bureaux Service celebrates its Silver jubilee and to mark the occasion this brief history has been written by Miss Margaret Brasnett, formerly Information Officer of the National Council of Social Service. I have been asked to contribute a brief foreword to her story in view of my close association with the movement since its earliest days.

It is a story most lucidly told. It recalls the circumstances in which the plan for a national service took shape twenty-five years ago, and the widespread co-operation which made its launching possible. It clearly records the methods of work, its scope and purpose, how the service has adapted itself to the changing difficulties of war and peace, and sets out a very convincing case for the role of the bureaux as a permanent instrument of service in our complex society. This perceptive study defines many of the challenges which faced the leaders of the movement in its early days. It was the first time that a nation-wide voluntary service of this kind had been initiated. Would it be possible to achieve a: general standard of performance adequate to the great variety of needs which would confront the bureaux? Could the essential information be assembled in a reliable form and be made speedily available? Could the necessary funds and accommodation be found? Above all, would the workers - advisers at the bureaux - be forthcoming in sufficient numbers and with adequate experience and knowledge for their tasks? These and many other questions are answered in this study.

The plan succeeded beyond the best hopes of its sponsors and within a comparatively short space of time there were 1,000 centres distributed throughout the country, linked by a central advisory service and staffed mainly by volunteers who spared no efforts to equip themselves for the work. It was their skill and devotion which made the bureaux a household name in war-time and laid the foundation for the present peace-time service.

A detailed account of the activities of the host of individuals who have continued and sustained this work is beyond the scope of this brief story, but the friends of the movement would wish me in this foreword to mention some of the leaders.

I recall Sir Wyndham Deedes, who was the Chairman of the group which came together during the winter of 1938-39 to draw up a general plan for the new service. His leadership and that of Mr. R. C. Norman, who became the first Chairman of the Central Citizens' Advice Bureaux Committee, inspired the bureaux in their early days. There are many bureau workers who will retain vivid memories of

the leadership of Miss Dorothy Keeling, who was the Secretary of the Central Committee during the war and whose great experience and dynamic leadership, especially at times of greatest difficulty, breathed a spirit of confidence in the service. When the war was over the bureaux had to face new situations and new problems and they inevitably passed through a stage of uncertainty .For a period of sixteen years, first Mr. A. A. Garrard and then Mr. L. Farrer-Brown, as successive Chairmen of the Committee, guided its policies and rendered invaluable service in establishing the movement on a permanent basis.

Finally there is one name which more than any other is identified with the CAB. The untimely death of Kathleen Oswald, but a few weeks before the Jubilee celebrations, robbed the movement of an outstanding leader who will be remembered with gratitude and affection by all who knew and worked with her. She became the Secretary of the Central Committee in 1945 and from then until her death served the cause with rare devotion and skill. Tireless in her activity, a source of constant inspiration, she never flagged in her efforts to raise the standard of work and spread its influence. She enshrined in herself the qualities of the best bureau worker. To be able to interpret the weak to the strong and the strong to the weak is a priceless quality for any social worker or administrator to possess. Kathleen Oswald had it and expressed it superbly in all she did. Her example will long remain as a challenge and inspiration.

George Haynes
Director, The National Council of Social Service

CHAPTER ONE

Beginnings

One of the catch-phrases of the last war's early days might be taken as the original, and the continuing, motto of the Citizens' Advice Bureaux: 'We're all in it together'. They were planned, well before the beginning of the war, as an emergency service of free and unbiased information and advice for citizens and by citizens. No two worlds here. No 'we' and 'they'. Anyone - poor or rich, educated or illiterate, young or old, native or foreigner - was welcome at the 200 bureaux which opened on the day war was declared, and whose numbers were to grow to 1,000 in the next few years. Many people, if ready to accept training and some discipline, could find a use for their experience, knowledge, common sense, or expertise on the other side of the counter; except that there never was, or is, a counter, only a table where papers that need explaining can be spread or, in the time of air-raids, floods, and the like, perhaps a piece of wall for the enquirer and the answerer to lean on as they talk.

The conviction that we should all be in it together if war came was the reason for the central discussions which, in the autumn of 1938, the National Council of Social Service initiated between some national and local voluntary organisations to discuss how they could best help the ordinary citizen in the transformation of social life which would inevitably follow the outbreak of world conflict. If, as seemed certain, civilians would be as much involved as members of the armed forces, they would need guidance through the labyrinth of restrictions, provisions and personal problems which no one authority would be responsible for giving them.

Out of these consultations a national plan took shape for the establishment of local centres of advice and information to which any citizen could turn in his perplexities, and as far as was humanly possible be provided with reliable answers or guided to the places where he could get them. Already in the autumn of 1938 there was ample evidence to indicate how great this need would be in the event of war. The crisis of Munich and the first emergency evacuations of children, particularly in London, had demonstrated the kind of personal and social problems which would arise and the pressures which would descend on the civilian population.

The dimensions of the national emergency could only be guessed at but there was much experience available which had a decisive

influence on the main features of the plan. Casework and personal service societies in London and other cities were familiar with the problems of providing skilled advisory services to people in many forms of want and distress. A number of national organisations were experienced in the work of advising their members on social and personal problems. Some councils of social service had experimented with information centres freely available to the public. With this experience, and the readiness to share in the responsibilities of an emergency service on a national scale, the way forward became clear.

The greatest need would be in the more densely populated parts of the country. The centres would have to be available to all sections of the community; should be linked together by advisory services so that reliable information could be supplied from the centre, help and guidance provided in their management, and the co-operation of government departments and authorities secured. The workers at the centres would usually need careful preparation for their tasks, to gain some skill in interviewing, and a sensitive awareness of local conditions and services. So what emerged was a plan for a national service of information and advice through local centres conducted by local organisations and committees.

Naturally there was much debate about the name. It was agreed that the centres should have a common title which would indicate clearly their common purpose. Finally, the name 'citizens' advice bureau' was selected, and was soon to become one of the best known appellations of war-time organisation. The familiar owl, designed by the creator of Mr. Therm, became the popular emblem of the bureaux throughout the country.

The co-operation and initiative of many societies experienced in personal service was largely responsible for the fact that at the outbreak of war 200 citizens' advice bureaux at once began work. These were mainly offshoots of established organisations in London and the large provincial cities and towns: for example, the Charity Organisation Society (now the Family Welfare Association) and the London Council of Social Service, the Liverpool Personal Service Society, the City of Glasgow Society of Social Service, the Birmingham Citizens' Society (now the Birmingham Council of Social Service).

This was the usual pattern of responsibility in the main centres, but there were of course smaller places where there was no experienced casework organisation or council of social service, and here opportunities were taken by a variety of organisations. For example, in one small Yorkshire town it was the local branch of **Toc H** which started the bureau and professional men who formed the

rota of part-time workers. In a Midlands spa the Rotary Club took the initiative and planned to staff the CAB entirely from its own members, but soon found the need for a few people who could give more time and continuity to the work. In another place the Soroptomist Club made itself responsible for the bureau and male workers were a rarity; whereas in one coastal town the schoolmaster and his friends ran the bureau and refused for some time to admit a woman to the staff. The personal service society in one great city, seeing that several centres were needed, housed the main one in its own offices and the others in the welfare department of a multiple tailors' business, a youth centre, a room lent by the United Hebrew Congregation, a YWCA club, and a public library. Later, when air-raids destroyed premises or created new needs in obscure places, the haunts of CABx became even more varied. One worked for long in Chislehurst Caves serving the shelterers; and in Sheffield, when one of the original offices was bombed, the bureau set up in the cloisters of the cathedral.

When war broke out the National Council of Social Service was ready through its regional officers to guide the establishment of CABx in those towns and areas where no existing organisation had been able to accept responsibility for a bureau. In many cases it was necessary to create a special organisation for the purpose, usually through the medium of a town meeting, presided over by the mayor or chairman of the council, and representative of all the societies, clubs and groups in the place; of employers, workers, councillors; of the churches, and of individual people who were interested. From among them was chosen a small committee to organise the bureau and to find staff and premises. The premises were often provided by the local authority, perhaps in an annexe of the town hall or council offices. The staff for these bureaux were usually part-time volunteers, sometimes with social work training or experience, or members of some profession; people drawn from every walk of life and having a wide range of knowledge and experience, as well as the ability to relate this to the problems with which they were confronted. One of the most important responsibilities of the National Council of Social Service was to provide a headquarters for this rapidly developing service, to maintain a steady flow of reliable information on essential matters and through its regional officers to maintain close and often daily contact with the bureaux as they came into action.

The information might be hard to collect in the first few weeks of the war; with difficulty extracted from a harassed government; quickly assembled and duplicated in Bedford Square. This was the bureaux' main link with government plans, laws, regulations, and with the social policies that were quickly evolving. Soon the National

Council was able to organise a regular, detailed, and nation-wide service of information and guidance to the bureaux.

So the CAB service took shape. It was a flexible plan which distributed responsibility and which proved capable of adjusting itself to the rapid and often far reaching changes of social life in war. The confidence of the public which it so quickly won was a tribute both to the the excellent service of the many voluntary societies who co-operated and to the devotion and skill of the thousands of workers who manned the bureaux.

CHAPTER TWO

Asking

1 THE WAR 1939-45

There can have been few periods in history when changing conditions affected so many people so rapidly as in the first few months of the last war. Families were suddenly broken up or grotesquely expanded as the children from 'evacuation areas' were herded anxiously off to the 'reception areas', leaving a half-empty house at one end and a crowded dormitory at the other; lonely and worried mums here and distracted foster-mothers there. Households, offices and businesses were threatened with breakdown as fathers, sons, owners, staff, were called up for military service, for the fire service, for civil defence. Every other person had a question to which it was difficult to find the answer, often because at that stage there was none.

This was what CABx were for: somehow they must find out what could be done, what ought to be done. Already in those early days their organisation stood them in good stead. Headquarters was in close touch with government departments and sent details of the latest regulations and concessions to the bureaux at top speed. (Typical of the confidence this engendered in capable local officials was the appeal of a town clerk to the CAB he had helped to set up for information about deferment of military service for local government officers, if the bureau should receive it before he did.) The local bureau for its part was in close touch with the local offices of central departments - Ministry of Health, Unemployment Assistance Board (as it then was), Ministry of Labour and National Service; with the departments of its local authority - housing, health, education, and the rest; and with all the voluntary social service organisations in the area - Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Families Association, Red Cross, British Legion, Moral Welfare, Provident Dispensary, Association for the Blind, or whatever societies there were nearby. Represented on its committee, or less formally associated with it, would be trade unions, chambers of commerce, a friendly firm of solicitors, of estate agents, and many others. So the workers, most of them part-time and new to this kind of service, faced the questions with hope and some degree of confidence.

The young wife, the elderly father, the widowed mother, came to ask anxiously if their Tommy - newly-married, backbone of the

business, or only support of the family - was in a 'reserved occupation' or whether he could get his military service at least postponed. The bureaux quickly learned the ropes and helped their enquirers to handle them: Labour Exchange, Hardship Committee, the essential forms of application; and some got their respite. Others, who did not, left another set of difficulties behind. He had been called up three weeks ago and still his wife had not received her service allowance. He and his wife were buying a house through a building society - she could not keep up the payments out of the allowance; or the rent was high and she could find no other rooms; or they had taken out good insurances and joined various thrift clubs and the arrears were mounting and the insurances would lapse. The bureau could show them how to apply for a 'special allowance', could tell them of possible help from the Assistance Board or from SSAFA.

More than that: the CAB was in a position to see just where the shoe pinched so many feet, long before the harassed officials who had to try to follow their complicated instructions had time to lift their eyes from the flood of applications that poured into their offices all day long. For example, the Assistance Board had to investigate the means of applicants for special allowances before the service authorities could look at the applications; but the Board had offices only in the larger towns and applicants in the smaller towns and villages around might lose days in getting forms to complete and sending them back. Bureaux were quick to point out to the Board the distress which these delays caused and to negotiate schemes for speeding up the procedure, sometimes by helping to persuade the Board of the urgent need for part-time offices in many more places. In this sort of way even the tyro bureaux, not attached to experienced social work organisations, found themselves from the start doing the kind of constructive work in partnership with the authorities which today is as much a feature of the service as the giving of information and advice. Indeed, the records show that only a few months after war began, headquarters were already collecting from CABx details about serious problems created by the war, as seen from their vantage-point - adequacy or otherwise of allowances, delays in granting special financial assistance, housing difficulties, dismaying rumours, and the like - to help authorities at the centre, as well as in the localities. to adapt their policies to demonstrated needs.

Another characteristic of the service. which is perhaps its chief hallmark, also declared itself (as the originators had meant it to do) in the very early days: it was called upon to serve every kind of citizen and so learnt by clear demonstration that there are two sides to every question. Mrs. Smith. for instance, was the tenant of a nice

little grocery business with two cheap rooms over the shop, but since the outbreak of war her trade had gone, blighted by customers' debts and suppliers' demands for cash payment, and she was in arrears with her rent. Her landlord was threatening to turn her out. What could she do? Mrs. Jones was the owner of a house which she let for a rent that, added to her widow's pension, was just enough to live on. Owing to the war her tenant had lost his good hotel job and had had to take unskilled factory work at a low wage. He was far behind with his rent but the law wouldn't allow her to give him notice. How was she to live? Little Mrs. Tom who had left a coastal town with her five young children well before the official evacuation, did not know how to pay the fantastic rent she was being asked in a reception area for a room with two beds for the six of them; and kind Mrs. Dick, having let her three nice rooms on generous terms to another evacuated family, found that they made a pig-sty of them and scared away her other lodgers. so that she was in almost as bad a plight as Mrs. Tom.

Most bureaux found at this period that, though the majority of problems which they met were caused by the war, these were not an overwhelming majority. There were any amount of difficulties, aggravated probably by uncertainty, rising prices and so on, that were as likely to arise in peace-time as in war: the widow without a widow's pension, getting on in years but not old enough for an old age pension, who had spent all her savings; the young man who had lost a leg in a motor-cycle accident and needed an artificial limb to fit him for work; the childless couple wanting to adopt a baby; problems about workmen's compensation, liability for house repairs, sickness benefit. Early in the war came new legislation lowering the qualifying age for women for the old age pension, and introducing supplementary pensions, and many enquirers came to CABx to ask how they stood, even before the Bills were through Parliament. In those days many of the volunteers manning the new bureaux had little detailed knowledge about the normal social services and thought it was their general duty to refer such enquirers to the local office of the appropriate government department, at that time the Ministry of Health or the Board of Customs and Excise. 'But often,' the organiser of a typical CAB in a small provincial town recorded, 'especially during the weeks when the Pensions Bill was being discussed in the House of Commons, and the local office naturally would hazard no opinion about its ultimate form, we could be of some help in talking over the possibilities with anxious enquirers and letting them know what their position would probably be if the Act came into force in its present form.' In this way the CABx began to realise at an early stage that they were not likely to be merely an emergency service for the war but a part of the fabric of normal

community life; not only a sign-post and a clearing house, but a centre of advice and interpretation.

It was none the less the war which mainly in those days determined the trends of community life, and very soon the 'Blitzkrieg' succeeding the 'Sitzkrieg' (or the 'Phoney War') put every other trouble in the background. In the early summer of 1940 the Germans swept across Europe to the Channel ports; and into the CABx all over the country came women asking how to try to trace husbands, sons and brothers lost in the battles of France and Flanders; what were the proper allowances for wives of men posted as 'missing', or pensions for the dependent families of those known to have been killed; and then, after anxious weeks, another sudden rush to find out how to send letters and parcels to prisoners of war. This was the first severe test of the bureaux' links with the services, statutory and voluntary, designed for such emergencies - with the Foreign Relations Department of the British Red Cross Society, with the War Office, the Foreign Office, with SSAFA; and the links held well. Public confidence in many a bureau dated from that time. 'The lady at the bureau found our Bert. Didn't I tell you she would, Dad?' Unfair perhaps to the real searcher services, but it was the CAB office in the High Street that was the tangible, comprehensible embodiment of those remote record offices in London or Geneva through which slowly filtered news of hundreds of Berts. At the same time, with the advance of the enemy forces up to the opposite shore, many bureaux were faced with a new set of problems brought by a new set of people: evacuees from the coast who wanted to know how to get their furniture removed from their abandoned houses; what were their liabilities for rent and rates; how to get help to tide them over while they found some new means of livelihood to take the place of the neat lodging house in Ramsgate or the thriving cafe in Dover which they had had to leave. But even those problems began to seem manageable by comparison, when, a few weeks later, the great air-raids on London, and soon on other cities, started to disrupt nearly everyone's life. The authorities had long ago made plans for evacuation, protection against gas attacks, deep shelters, treatment for casualties, rescue and welfare, compensation for damage and injury; but no one had been able to visualise fully the need which hundreds of people would have for a guide to all these services; for someone to sort out their individual problems; to tell them, indeed, dazed and bomb-shocked as they were, exactly what problems they had.

This again was what CABx were for. In every raided place they quickly improvised a point of information and advice where it was most needed - in rest centres, shelters, civil defence centres, and of course in their own offices if such remained. Often these, and the

homes of many of the bureau workers, had been destroyed too, but they struggled on with their job, like everyone else. In Coventry for instance, the bureau functioned in the street outside the city hall, without even a table or chair, for the first day or two after the great raid, dealing with hundreds of questions. Very soon, learning as always by experience from day to day, headquarters worked out special short training courses in post-raid welfare for bureau workers all over the country, so that wherever the bombs fell, or the homeless from a nearby raided area took refuge, there would be people on the spot who could sort out their troubles, tell them where to apply for shelter, clothes, money for food; how to trace missing relatives, to get the fare to travel to friends who could give them a room, to ask for compassionate leave for husband or son.

This was certainly an emergency service but it had two features which bore the hallmark of permanent CAB work: it soon became an accepted partner in the authorities' post-raid welfare plans, which it had helped to shape (the Ministry of Health's recommendations to local authorities on setting up information centres after raids, followed, and did not precede, CAB experiments); and it maintained a continuity of advice and help for people with long-lasting problems, because there were permanent CABx for them to turn to, or to be referred to if they moved, in every part of the country. *

This wide coverage grew with the war, and grew in value. But over a thousand bureaux, and CAB volunteers at reception desks in every information centre after air-raids, were still not enough to meet all emergencies. Mobile teams were organised, at first to reinforce bureau workers in the worst-hit places in their own neighbourhood, and later, at the time of the flying bomb and rocket raids on London, to come in relays from all over the country to help. Fixed centres of information, however, would not always meet the need. Transport broke down, people were too bomb-shocked to find their way to a centre, or too ill or old, or too busy clearing up the wreckage of their homes. Advisers had to go to them. Starting with a van provided by the Friends' Ambulance Unit, the CAB service experimented with mobile advice units which could go anywhere at any time, taking the answers to the people in their own streets or villages. In the end there were one or two units in each civil defence region: a motor horse-box here, a two-decker bus there; a converted caravan; a car with tents and camp beds for the staff. It is a pity that one of the few surviving photographs of these vehicles gives a somewhat false impression of this dedicated work: the legend on the back of the van, partly obscured by the head of someone sitting on the step, reads 'Citizens' vice Bureau',

This piece of war-time work illustrates two more characteristics of the CAB service: swift adaptability to current needs; and the sense that, though each bureau is independent and local, its staff is part of a national team. By this stage in the war the government had acquired a lively appreciation of the usefulness of these points. From the beginning the Ministry of Health had given grant-aid to the service; the Ministry of Information had helped to make it widely known and had used it as a sounding-board of public reactions to war-time policies; and many departments had been glad to keep the headquarters posted with up-to-date information. But now the government began deliberately to use the bureaux as their mouthpiece and interpreter to the citizen of new provisions and restrictions. Clothes rationing, introduced in July 1941, was the first of these. The Board of Trade had no local offices; the CAB service had both a national headquarters to which the Board could confide the details of the new scheme (and later of the Utility Furniture Scheme) in the necessary secrecy well before the public announcement, and local bureaux that could be briefed just in time to cope with the torrent of questions and problems which were bound to come as soon as the news broke. (Incidentally, clothes rationing queries continued to outnumber every other type of question at nearly every bureau right through the war and after. For everyone - mothers of growing families, traders, people who had lost their belongings in air-raids, expectant mothers, workers needing special clothing, couples setting up home for the first time - the rationing of clothes and material was the last straw in the burden of worries, puzzles and frustrations that weighed on them through those years.)

Other straws that the bureaux were able to sort and ease a little off Everyman's pack were a mixed lot of varying weight: the difficulties of sending letters and parcels to prisoners of war and civilian internees in Europe, and later in the Far East also (the Foreign Office, the Red Cross, and MI5 were the CABx' mentors here); explaining income tax demands to wage-earners suddenly required for the first time to pay tax (the Board of Inland Revenue arranged lectures for groups of bureaux and instructed its Inspectors to co-operate closely with them); compensation claims for property or goods damaged by bombs (the War Damage Commission asked that bureaux, suitably instructed, should explain to applicants the basic points such as the difference between 'cost of works' and 'value' payments); the difficulties of workers transferred to essential work in factories far from home, of middle-aged women called up for war-work, of foreign refugees or the wives of Allied servicemen struggling to keep going in poverty and loneliness in a strange country. Changing conditions as the war went on continued to

dictate the kind of problems brought to the bureaux, but perhaps the most significant change was in the complexity of the problems.

There had always been a great many questions to which there was no simple answer, but for most of them a solution could be found by using a knowledge of various relevant provisions, statutory or voluntary. There were others, however, whose number grew as people became familiar with CABx, which that kind of answer did not fit. As early as the spring of 1940 a very new bureau organiser had suggested that another heading would soon have to be added to the categories under which enquiries were listed, called perhaps 'domestic difficulties'. Two years later the 120 or so CABx in the North Western Region recorded a monthly total of nearly 2,000 'family problems' as they were by then termed. Two years after that these had increased by a monthly total of 32 per cent.

At a CAB conference in the same region and the same year the national secretary of the service, speaking about the immediate future of the CAB movement, warned the bureaux that when the war ended people would have not fewer problems but more, and more complex, because settling down to normal work, to home and to community after these years of exciting effort for a common purpose would involve subtler strains and stresses than there had been in the change-over from peace to war.

2 RESETTLEMENT

The government also had been considering the sort of problems which millions of men and women coming back from the armed services or from civilian war-work would be facing when the war ended, and the responsibility of the authorities for helping them in their return to peacetime life.

'Owing to the obvious and pronounced success of citizens' advice bureaux in helping over the difficulties inseparable from war-time emergencies', said the government spokesman at the first national CAB conference in May 1945, 'the government felt that some service of this sort would be needed to deal with resettlement.' Because of the government's direct responsibility in the matter it must be a government service but 'imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, and we are endeavouring to build on the good work you have done.' This was one of the most important and practical of the 'glowing tributes', as the Minister of Health put it at the same conference, which the government had paid to CABx. But on the face of it, or on the face put upon it by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Labour and National Service, which was the department responsible, it might have been taken to restrict rigorously the place of CABx in the post-war society. For the

Ministry had arranged to set up a series of 'Resettlement Advice Offices' throughout the country to which those returning from war service would be invited to come, by every means of publicity, 'if they have any problems, any worries, or any need of advice about their re-entry into civilian life', not only concerned with their jobs.

Where an enquirer needed specialised technical or legal advice which no government department could give, he would be referred direct to experts in the localities who, through an arrangement with The Law Society and other professional and business organisations, would be ready to help him. Ex-servicemen and women needing 'active assistance' of a kind which no statutory authority could provide would be referred direct to local branches of the services welfare societies; and those with personal problems who had not served in the armed forces would be referred to the local casework agency. Citizens' advice bureaux were exhorted to co-operate with the resettlement advice offices, but on the face of such an explanation of their working it might look as if, in the words of one bureau organiser at the conference, 'the CAB service was to be excluded entirely except in instances where there was no answer to be found.'

In fact the leaders of the movement, who had had opportunities to discuss with the Ministry's officers how the two services would fit one with the other, took a quite different view; and most of the 10,000 bureau workers had little time to contemplate any view other than the hundreds of citizens who continued to ask for their help, often now on questions related to the coming post-war period when they hoped to get back their bombed, evacuated or requisitioned houses; to emigrate; to send help to distressed relatives in the liberated countries; to find out about scores of other new problems. For people had grown accustomed to CABx through the catastrophic changes and tragic or comic chances of five war years, and would go on getting information and advice from them so long as they were there, and tell their husbands and sons and daughters and friends coming back from war service or war work to do the same. Most people, with a democracy's customary ingratitude for the excellent official services which its elected representatives have laboured to provide, were tired and wary of government offices and regulations and restrictions; and, however friendly and informal, as well as efficient, the resettlement advice officers might be (and those were the qualities which the Ministry intended them all to show), many enquirers would prefer to take their questions in the first place to an unofficial bureau, or even in the second place in order to check the exact meaning or impartiality of what 'They' had said.

Moreover the resettlement problems were likely to be so numerous and varied that there must be room for all the qualified help which could be mustered. In point of numbers of offices alone the government service would obviously fall short of what was needed - in one of the great Scottish cities, for example, where there were nine CABx, one RAO was planned. In point of means proposed for dealing with the more complex personal problems, which showed every sign of predominating, the provision was even less adequate. The Minister himself acknowledged that there were many localities where the 'local casework agency' to which RAOS were instructed to refer these cases did not exist. Citizens' advice bureaux themselves were not specialised social work agencies and never pretended to casework skills and techniques; but many of them were linked with the casework body in their neighbourhood and, where there was none, most already had some 'consultant' service of experts in this and other fields of work. Their declared function of acting as a focus for all the local services made this obvious and comparatively easy. From the beginning they had worked closely with the Poor Man's Lawyers who, in the day before statutory legal aid, helped people with legal problems who were unable to pay solicitor's fees; and they had had much to do with the setting up in 1941 of a similar professional advice service by valuers and surveyors - the Poor Man's Valuer Service - to assist with war-damaged property claims. Some bureaux had consultants on housing, income tax questions, factory legislation, moral welfare, domestic and matrimonial problems; and in 1944, with the end of the war and of some of the more straightforward questions in sight, headquarters sent a circular to all CABx, urging them to develop wide consultant services. Bureau workers certainly needed all the help they could get when peace came. Practical problems like shortage of housing, shortage of food and materials, the difficulty of finding suitable work when many war-time factories shut down or turned to other work - all these and more increased rather than diminished, and were intensified by attitudes of mind or circumstances even harder to cope with than the bomb-shock or bereavement of the war years. A returning soldier might find not only that his house had been destroyed and that he had to live with his family in a cramped and dingy flat, but that his wife expected to keep her role as head of the household and that his teenage children were strangers to him. Another might have his home intact but might meet the problem of a grandparent who had found a niche there while he was away and was one too many now that all the young family were back from evacuation or service overseas. Many men and women who had had responsible, interesting war jobs could not settle down to the dull manual or office work which was all they could find; whereas others who had had all their thinking done for them in the services found difficulties when they had suddenly to plan their own lives. Some

member of the family probably came to the bureau with an apparently straightforward question about permits, housing lists, or assisted passages to Australia; but often the core of it was a family or personal problem which someone had to try to help them to recognise and disentangle.

Not that the so-called 'straightforward' questions, un-complicated by such problems, grew easier to answer. Everyone now had the chance, and the need, to rebuild his or her life broken by the war, and knew that everywhere they turned there were regulations that hindered and, they hoped, regulations that helped; but they often did not understand what or why, or how to avoid or to use them. There were resettlement grants paid by the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Agriculture to help with getting back to normal work; but there was also a Control of Engagement Order that restricted the employment of men in certain categories and certain industries. The Location of Retail Business Order was withdrawn at the end of 1945, but to get a grant of coupon floats to start a trade in rationed goods was a problem. There were fine prospects for the holiday trades after years when no one could take anything more than a 'rest-break', but how to get the materials to re-equip hotels and camps in time for the first post-war season? Hundreds of girls had married, or not married, American soldiers who had now been sent back to the States, and they needed to know about nationality questions, about arrangements for rejoining their husbands, or how to try to claim maintenance. Hundreds of foreign refugees or ex-servicemen wanted, on the other hand, to stay here and be naturalised; and thousands of British civilians returning from internment in the Far East needed help with complicated claims for compensation for their belongings taken by the Japanese, and with other, more difficult, problems of resettlement.

But housing was one of the key difficulties for nearly everyone, and often the cause of other problems. As the shortage of housing became more acute, because of bomb damage, cessation of new building and normal repairs during the war, and the return of men and women from the Forces, legislation and regulations multiplied in an attempt to make the best of what accommodation there was and to hold a fair balance between the rights of landlord and tenant. Questions about requisitioned houses, war-damaged property and other war-time problems went on for years, but already before the end of the war the experience of CABx had provided useful evidence for the Government Committee on Rent Control, and the consequent Furnished Houses (Rent Control) Act of 1946, establishing rent tribunals to decide on fair rents for furnished accommodation, was the beginning of a long new series of

complicated measures which put housing at the top of the bureaux' list of queries for several years.

3 THE WELFARE SOCIETY

Housing was taking its place as one of the social services, but what everyone thought of primarily as social services in the years just after the war were the series of social security measures which resulted from the recommendations of the Beveridge Report on Social Insurance and Allied Services, presented to Parliament in 1942. The report was based on a survey of existing relief and insurance schemes - the Poor Law, National Health Insurance, Contributory Pensions Insurances, Unemployment Insurance and Assistance - which were a collection of measures devised at different times to help with certain needs of certain groups of citizens. The revolutionary - or perhaps evolutionary-idea that inspired Lord Beveridge's proposals was that there should be a single system of national insurance aiming to cover all classes and all family needs, with a supporting national health service and education on a higher level for all, and the maintenance of a good general standard of living through full employment. This would provide every citizen with a secure, minimal foundation on which, free from want, fear and ignorance, he could build a full individual life.

It was the comprehensive character of this idea and of its practical application which gave CABx in the early post-war years a new spate of problems to solve but also a new understanding of their part in social developments. At the first national CAB conference in 1945, Sir Wyndham Deedes then vice-chairman of the National Council of Social Service, had said that he supposed the type of job hitherto dealt with by CABx had on the whole been 'negative in character - the giving of information and advice to get out of difficulties', and suggested that tomorrow they should turn to the positive and set out to let people know what the government was offering to the advantage of the citizen. At a rather earlier conference a NCSS regional officer had already put the broader conception of CAB work in another way when he said that bureau workers, with their knowledge of men and women and of true social relationships, would have in the future a great opportunity 'to work for a decent state of society' ; not only to advise and inform but 'to use the knowledge they gained to influence changes that would have to be made'. Now, with this great new system of social welfare, they had indeed the opportunity not only to inform and advise the puzzled citizen how the regulations applied to his particular case, but also to show him how one service dovetailed with another to cover his needs, to point out the long-term

consequences of a decision on alternative courses of action and, in the light of all these individual problems, to assess the impact of each piece of new legislation in itself and in its relation to the other provisions of the 'welfare state'.

This was a tall order and CABx grew to it gradually and some, of course, more fully than others. But the chance was there, and almost thrust upon them by the character of the new schemes. The Family Allowances Act, 1945; the National Insurance Act, 1946; the National Insurance (Industrial Injuries) Act, 1946; the Education Act, 1944; the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act, 1944; the National Health Service Act, 1946; the National Assistance Act, 1948; the Children Act, 1948 - which all came into operation in the three or four years just after the war - were designed to take care of the basic needs of every citizen from the cradle to the grave. But because their provisions were so all-embracing they were bound to be intricate and their relations with one another sometimes confusing. For instance, the married woman going out to work needed to realise that choosing not to pay National Insurance on her own account and to depend on her husband's insurance record for her pension in old age meant certainly that she would save money now but that she would have to wait for a pension till she was 65, instead of 60, if her husband was the same age as herself and longer if he were younger. A man suffering from epilepsy might know that he could register as a disabled person with the Ministry of Labour so that he would have a chance of getting a job reserved for the handicapped, or possibly training for more suitable work at a government industrial rehabilitation centre; but he might find it very useful to discuss with someone 'unofficial' whether these advantages outweighed the disadvantages, as he saw them, of being branded publicly as disabled and probably losing the chance of work he preferred and felt capable of doing. A mother, overwhelmed with child-bearing and housekeeping, with small means and health and smaller talents, might ask the CAB how to get 'them' to take some of the children away and look after them, but the bureau worker might see that here the National Health Service Act, under which the local authority could contribute to the cost of sending her and her small children to a recuperative and training centre for a few months, might be a better proposition all round than the Children Act under which the authority could probably take the children 'into care' at the cost of a great deal more money and of breaking up the family.

Bad or unsuitable housing, or none, was often an ingredient in a problem like this, and in many another in which the apparent difficulty was the husband's inability to pay his way, the wife's bad housekeeping, the children's poor showing at school, the teenager's

delinquency - all probably stemming from having to pay too high a rent for the only house they could get, or having no hot water or decent kitchen, or room enough for the family to live their different lives within their own home. Many of the housing enquiries which came, and still come, to the bureaux, are requests for help in finding accommodation, difficult or impossible to respond to, yet simple. But as the government devised more and more schemes for speeding slum clearance, controlling rents, and later starting a gradual decontrol in an endeavour to make more property available for letting, providing improvement grants to encourage landlords to modernise old houses, and so on, the complications involved in letting, renting, maintaining, buying or selling house property brought a multitude of questions from both tenant and landlord which highly taxed the bureau workers' knowledge and understanding. Before each new Act came into operation, CAB headquarters provided advance information for every bureau and the Ministries concerned (sometimes the Lord Chancellor's Department as well as the Ministry of Housing) sent officials to address training schools for the workers all over the country, as well as benefiting by the bureaux' experience in preparing their own publicity for the new measures.

Fortified by this accurate and detailed information, CAB workers struggled to explain the implications of the law for each individual enquirer, or at least to distinguish when the problem was too difficult for them and legal or other professional help was needed. They might, for example, at one period spend much time explaining the kind of way in which a tribunal had to determine the standard rent of a controlled house, or the rights of a tenant whose landlord had accepted an improvement grant and failed to provide the amenities agreed. At a later stage, they found need to warn many people, accustomed to rent control and security of tenure, who were offered new accommodation by their landlord, that there would be no such security in the new letting; or to warn some anxious small landlords, who wanted to arrive at a compromise on rent increase that would be fair to their tenants, that they ought to have more regard to their own financial position. When some houses at last became available for sale, the snags of house purchase for people with no experience of property but desperate to have a home brought hundreds more problems; fairly simple ones like how to raise a mortgage or what help the local authority could give, but many more difficult or even tragic because the over-hasty buyer did not know what precautions to take or was ignorant of the possible effects of planning, compulsory purchase or slum clearance - the family, for instance, who had mustered every available penny to buy a house which was later found to be riddled with dry rot; or the widow who had invested her small savings in a cottage in which

she planned to live, only to find that it had already been scheduled for demolition. So obvious was the need for information and advice on such matters that CAB headquarters eventually found a way of spreading it to an even wider public than came with their questions to the bureaux, by producing two booklets: first *Buying a House - Do's and Don'ts* published in 1956, and later, in 1962, *Renting a Home: a Guide for Landlord and Tenant*. These were not meant to take the place of the appropriate professional services, but rather to point out to less experienced people how essential these services often were in such transactions and how many legal, financial and other considerations had to be taken into account; and though the booklets were based on the bureaux' direct experience they drew largely on the help readily given by the experts - The Law Society, the professional bodies of surveyors and estate agents, the Ministry of Housing, the Building Societies' Association and others.

Such problems might start in the bureau records under the category of 'housing' but more and more often as time went on they had to be transferred to 'family and personal problems' - that group which had been growing fast ever since the war and took top place in the bureaux' statistical returns for the first time in 1954. A great number of them were matrimonial difficulties, and though it was obvious to the CABx that some were problems which must be referred to a skilled caseworker, a marriage guidance counsellor, a doctor, a lawyer, or whatever other expert was appropriate and available, very often the distressed or angry enquirer needed only someone attentive and 'neutral' to listen to her, or his, story of unkindness, quarrels, neglect or whatever it might be and, that found, would go away relieved and even grateful. Or it might be that she just needed someone with a less clouded judgment to ask if she had thought about all the consequences of the divorce she had been determined to 'see the lawyer about' - the custody of the children, for instance, or the ability of the husband to keep two homes - and had considered any alternative to her drastic solution. Or someone with common sense to suggest, when she had heard the jumbled story, that perhaps the discord in the new home was due not so much to incompatibility of temperament as to failure of both husband and wife to plan in advance for quarterly rates, electricity and gas bills, and hire purchase instalments.

Hire purchase indeed soon began to figure in the minds of bureau workers as the Wicked Fairy, as well as the Fairy Godmother, in the house. They saw - and no doubt often found in their own homes - that this method of buying, if properly used, was a godsend to thousands of people, especially to young couples setting up their first home and families moved from old houses or furnished rooms to new estates and towns. But in the hands of people who could not

add two and two together, or calculate that the weekly instalments on the dining-room suite, the washing machine, the television set, the refrigerator, came to most of the whole weekly income, with little over for rent, food, clothes, and every other necessity, it was practically the root of all evil from which could grow debts, family quarrels, rent arrears, eviction, and even worse disaster. As early as 1955 a CAB sub-committee was set up by the national committee to consider hire purchase problems as seen by bureaux all over the country and by other voluntary organisations with experience of families in difficulty; and in addition to recommendations about trade practices, about possible action by local authorities, and other things, which were sent to the appropriate associations or government departments, the deliberations of the committee produced results which were to have an influence on the trend and standing of much CAB work in the future.

First their report was published as a booklet, Hire Purchase and Credit Buying, which gave factual information about the various methods and the legislation controlling them, their advantages and disadvantages and the dangers they hold for thoughtless or inexperienced people; and also a leaflet setting out some of the points to be taken into account when undertaking hire purchase. These both had a large circulation far beyond CAB circles: 1,500 copies of the report, for example, went to the Army Education Department; 21,000 copies of the leaflet were bought by a Scottish county council; and many copies of both were taken by youth organisations and clubs and societies of many kinds as a basis for informal discussion. And this had a bearing on the second feature of the report: its strong recommendation about the need for more advice and education in home-making and home-budgeting.

Back in 1951 the CABx had held a joint conference with the councils of social service largely because they wanted to discuss this subject on a broader basis and to consider whether, together with other organisations, they could do something more constructive than trying to sort out such family problems when they were full grown. Bureau workers were disturbed by the difficulties which many people faced in keeping an adequate standard home life in face of the rising cost of living, the continuing problem of overcrowding, and the increasing need for young wives to go out to work. A little later, when prosperity began to return, the generally higher standard of living and high-pressure advertising tempted a large number of people to go beyond their means, especially in the new communities where householders needed so many new things to equip their nice new homes. 'There are never less than five or six representatives of hire purchase firms on the doorstep', said a

housing manager in a new town, 'when we give out the keys of new houses on Thursdays.' Some bureaux equipped themselves to give simple, practical advice, such as how and where to buy essential furniture and household goods without taking on expensive commitments; and others discussed with organisations in the neighbourhood and local education authorities how they could together provide more elaborate home-making advice services. Over-spending on hire purchase was of course only one of the problems they met. Even in this particular field there were many others, ranging from the difficulties of a private person buying a car from another without means of finding out whether there was a hire purchase commitment attached to it, to the difficulties of a trader asked to fetch back a television set because, as the purchaser's son had now given her one, she did not want to keep it and saw no reason to pay the instalments owing. Bad trading like this, on the part of either consumer or trader, accounted for many of the problems; but trading questions as a whole grow more complex as goods and services proliferate with the expansion of the economy and the ingenuity of inventors and manufacturers. There is great difficulty in assessing the relative merits of all kinds of new materials and new processes, and in knowing how to treat them in use. Guarantees and warranties raise many questions, particularly those which cover different parts of a piece of equipment for varying lengths of time. Some purchasers are misled by a fine modern finish to an inexpensive article into expecting it to be as good as something much dearer; others are not sure whom to hold responsible when, for instance, a dress with 'permanent' pleating comes back from the cleaners with the pleating spoilt. Even by 1960 the number of such questions coming to the bureaux was comparatively small - 50,000 out of a total of a million - but it is significant that this was more than double the figure for 1958. (The number for 1962 was 76,000, compared with 317,000 dealing with family and personal problems in general.) At any rate the questions provided CAB headquarters with more than sufficient material to exchange information and suggestions with the trading associations, local chambers of trade, The Law Society, the Board of Trade, the British Standards Institution, and the various consumer organisations which have been formed in recent years, as well as with such voluntary organisations interested in family life as the Women's Institutes, the Red Cross and the YWCA; and when the Board of Trade Committee on Consumer Protection (the Molony Committee) was set up in 1959, they were in a position to submit evidence of such value that the Committee eventually recommended to the government that CABx should be invited to provide a country-wide advisory service on these questions for the individual, while a central Consumer Council looked after consumer interests in general.

It is of course not only young couples and families that have such problems. Old people have similar difficulties with a different slant; and more and more of the elderly, often living alone, far from their grown-up children or old friends, come to the bureaux for advice. There is the elderly deaf man, for example, who has been persuaded by a hire purchase salesman on the doorstep to sign what purports to be a receipt for a hearing aid on trial and which turns out to be a legally binding agreement; or the old lady in a newly declared smokeless zone who, at the instance of a high pressure salesman, buys some expensive heating equipment without knowing whether it is suitable for her fireplace or getting the approval of the local authority so that she could have a grant towards its cost. Or the elderly couple in a state of near panic because the superintendent of a mental hospital where their cousin, whom they have scarcely ever seen, has been a patient for many years, has written to say that he is considering discharging her and asking what arrangements they can make to take her into their home.

This last trouble is typical of many that the new mental health provisions are bringing to the bureaux. As the then Home Secretary, Mr. R. A. Butler, said at the 1959 CAB conference, just before the Mental Health Act was actually passed, the 'splendid advance in the field of mental health, which it made possible was bound to bring very great personal responsibility to bureau workers because, tending as it does to use the community in preference to the institution to care for the mentally ill wherever possible, it imposes heavy anxieties and burdens on the home and the family, so that they need not only informed explanation of their obligations or choices but understanding support and a marshalling of all kinds of resources, statutory and voluntary, to help them.

Not least among these resources in the long run is the growing ability, and duty, of the CAB service 'to use the knowledge they gain to influence changes that will have to be made' - in the words of a NCSS regional officer at a CAB conference nearly twenty years ago, quoted already at the beginning of this section. Sometimes the 'knowledge they gain' is about a seemingly small point, which may yet turn out to have a quite important bearing on policy or administration. An example is the case of that elderly couple quoted earlier, which gave the CAB worker a clear hint of the kind of way in which some of the best-intentioned mental health plans may go awry, or at least give more distress than they ameliorate, simply because the expert often does not think of putting himself in the layman's shoes. The medical superintendent, in the natural course of doing what seemed best for his patient in the new conditions, was exploring the possibilities of a home for her, but it probably did

not occur to him when he wrote his very 'official' letter to her relatives that they would not know that his request to them was not a command and that he had no powers to oblige them to take her in and would not wish to do so. The bureau worker was able not only to relieve their minds by explaining this to them but also to note the point in one of the reports which many CABx were sending to headquarters about their experience in this new field; and all these significant points, sifted and compared, would form the basis of a reasoned (and felt) 'social survey' of the working of the mental health provisions as seen from the bureaux, for the guidance of the Ministry of Health when next preparing advice for hospital boards, executive councils, or local health authorities, or considering possible amendments to procedure.

The knowledge gained from some other questions may apply to a more limited field, but one of real concern to a good many individuals. A few bureau workers, for instance, have noted that some disabled people with a disability and advancing age that make it most unlikely that they will get employment again, find it a real hardship to carry out the condition for unemployment benefit which requires them to call twice a week at the employment exchange to register. Citizens' advice bureau headquarters, in an informal discussion with the Ministry of Pensions and National Insurance following the severe winter of 1963, were told that any extension of the privilege of postal registration would cause certain difficulties but would be considered if the bureaux showed that the problem was widespread.

Very often, however, a multitude of problems bearing on one large sector of policy practically compose of themselves an unsolicited survey. Questions arising from the Rent Acts over the years illustrate this; but here the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, realising the help which CABx can give them in explaining the various measures and the regulations, procedures, forms and so on connected with them and in 'feeding back' information about their effects and the public reactions, have several times made definite requests for reports. The CAB evidence submitted in 1953 to the Royal Commission on Marriage and Divorce drew upon an even wider field of problems for its facts and conclusions, worked out in partnership with personal service societies; and their suggestions for building up family life as against attempts to deal with the situation when family life has broken down showed the sort of constructive use they were making of their experience to meet changing social needs.

At an early conference of the CAB service, the late Lord Beveridge said that it was 'a window through which social workers and

legislators could see the man in the street'. The window opens to his questions, small and large, so that they can hear the very tone of his voice and see him plain.

4 EMERGENCIES

Citizens' advice bureaux were set up to give an emergency service in time of war. Long ago they took their place as a permanent part of modern society; but in these later years they have had several chances to prove that they have not forgotten their origins and that they can still rise to a sudden occasion with the vigour of their young days and the wisdom of experience. One such emergency was the Lynmouth flood disaster of 1952.

The far more extensive East Coast floods of the following year was another. As at the height of the air-raids, relays of experienced CAB workers, helped by other volunteers from councils of social service and casework agencies, went at once to strengthen the existing advice services or to set up emergency bureaux in the place where the evacuees had taken refuge and the town that normally served the area; and as in war-time, the workers often had to make do for an office with the end of a trestle table from which tins of food or cleaning materials were being given out, or go around looking for people in need of advice and help who were too dazed and anxious to leave their half ruined homes. As in those days too the local authorities in the affected towns were glad to have advice from experienced CAB workers who could forewarn them of the problems they might expect and help them to draft notices and brief information clerks, and to take the first brunt of the questions.

Once again first-aid information met the need in the early days - how to trace a missing relative, how to get houses dried, where to apply for clothing, for lodging allowances, for free meals. But very soon more personal advice and help were needed about, for example, how large an emergency grant to ask for and if they claimed too little, whether they could ask for more later, and whether it would be better not to clear up so that the valuers could see the full extent of the damage when they came to inspect. Then the long-term problems began to emerge just as they had done in the war, proving the value of a continuing advice service (some even of the emergency bureaux stayed open for many months) ; and of a headquarters which could, with the help of the workers on the spot, act as adviser to the central source of help, in this case the Lord Mayor's Flood Relief Fund, and to well-wishers all over the country who wanted to know about the continuing needs for gifts of clothing, furniture or voluntary labour. By these means, ways were slowly found to solve or at least ameliorate the tragic problems which the floods had brought to so many people: to the elderly

couple who had just put all their savings into a seaside caravan for letting now, and later to be a home for their retirement, which had been washed out to sea; to the old man whose wife and the grandson they had brought up had been drowned and who must be helped to plan the remaining years of his life in a different setting. But, most important of all, the CAB workers were able, by the very nature of their experience and training, to act all through as interpreter to the authorities of the needs and wishes of the victims. and to the victims of the intentions and difficulties of the authorities - to explain. for instance. to the one the reasons for changes in the compensation policy as more and more money was subscribed to the Fund, and to the other why those tumbledown shacks by the sea had really been an important source of income from summer lettings. As a journalist put it in writing a brief account of 'Citizens. Advice Bureaux in an Emergency', the flood disaster proved again that 'governmental efficiency and private benevolence are in danger of being wasted unless they are understood and appreciated by the man they are meant for - the man in the street.'

This was to prove a yet more difficult task in the next big emergencies with which the CAB service was concerned: the influx of refugees from Hungary after the uprising in October 1956 and of British subjects expelled from Egypt after the Suez crisis a few weeks later. For these were people who had not only lost their homes and belongings and often their families; but who had had to take refuge in a strange country whose ways were unknown to them and whose language many of them could not speak or understand. This was no less true of many of the British from Egypt than of the Hungarians; for most of them had lived there much or all of their lives and in conditions more alien to England's than were those of central Europe. Once again CAB workers helped the volunteers from many other organisations and the officers of the government departments most concerned with 'first-aid' work in the early days; settled down at the next stage as advice and liaison officers in the hostels provided by the government and by voluntary bodies, explaining special grants policy, or ordinary health and security provisions, arranging language classes, trying to re-unite separated families. Then, for many months, at the hostels and in the CABx in places all over the country to which refugees eventually dispersed, they worked for their permanent resettlement, helping to find houses, jobs, education, training, and to solve personal problems of a complexity which was new even to such seasoned bureau workers, and which ranged from the perplexities of the duke's daughter who had made Egypt her home many years ago to the difficulties of the father of a large family who found the opportunities for a beggar in London very poor compared with those he had enjoyed in Cairo.

All this experience was garnered and sifted and added to the stock which the CAB service was able to draw upon to meet the next emergency. The increase in the number of immigrants from the West Indies, India, Pakistan, Cyprus and West Africa, which began in 1948, was not an emergency in quite the same sense as the others, but it has brought many of the same kind of problems as the arrival of the refugees and the British expelled from Egypt. In the early days of migration after the war special provisions were made by the CAB in Lambeth to help the immigrants to settle into their new surroundings; and a West Indian social worker has been employed at the Kensington bureau for some years. In other places too CAB workers have been able to take a full share in helping them and their sometimes unwilling hosts because this was not the first time that they had seen the strains and misunderstanding which a different culture, different standards, and a lack of knowledge of the other man's way of life are bound to make for both parties to the contract. Nor is it likely to be the last time, though each new crisis has its own characteristics which it is one of the skills of the CAB service to recognise quickly and respond to with flexibility and understanding.

5 OVERSEAS

Citizens' advice bureaux seem destined more and more to have their scope extended and their horizons widened by the results of happenings overseas. The decision of South Africa to leave the Commonwealth in 1961, for instance, brought not only a crop of enquiries about the nationality position of South African residents in this country but a number of requests from British residents in the Union for information about housing, financial and other conditions that would face them should they decide to return to Britain. Similar questions are beginning to come now from several of the other African countries in the Commonwealth which have become, or are about to become, independent.

This is not to say that the CAB service was ever in danger of being insular. Many a bureau from earliest days at the beginning of the war was the friend and confidant of an Austrian or German refugee, fresh from life as a successful lawyer in Munich or as a fine lady in Vienna and now struggling to get work as a labourer, a waiter, or a domestic help. When the Germans overran Europe, remnants of the armed forces of several of the Allied countries managed to escape to Britain, and a few families; and some CAB workers had their first experience of helping to ease the way of newcomers into a community that was strange to them, when they helped, for example, to organise a club for the wives of Czech servicemen, or explained to a Polish soldier why he must not give the slightest clue

to his movements in a Red Cross Postal Message to his family at home.

The Red Cross Postal Message Scheme provided throughout the war the farthest-reaching contact of the CAB service which has since touched nearly every corner of the world. Organised by the War Organisation of the British Red Cross and Order of St. John, it was the only way in which people could communicate with their relatives and friends in enemy or enemy-occupied countries, and in the end it reached from the Channel Islands to Japan. (Prisoners of war and alien internees here could use the special prisoner of war post.) Citizens' advice bureaux were asked to operate the scheme so that it would be easy for people all over the country to use it and because, with their experience of explaining war-time regulations, bureau workers were obviously well qualified to help senders to comply with the rigid security regulations governing the sending of messages. A few Red Cross offices and individuals were also registered as Postal Message Bureaux, but about 350 CABx carried the main responsibility, and opportunities, of the service.

It was not an easy task. As well as the care, the precision, the discretion, the knowledge of languages (a dozen different ones could be used) required in transcribing, recording, forwarding, receiving returned messages from the Censorship Department for correction or alteration, and handling the replies, bureau workers often needed as much sympathy and common sense in dealing with the senders as they were accustomed to use in apparently much more complicated personal problems. The aim was simply to give news of personal welfare without letting slip a word about service matters, air-raids, location, political events, which might give the enemy a clue to anything he might conceivably want to know or the smallest handle against the recipient of the message. Senders might be ready to accept that their message must be limited in length and frequency, not written with their own hand, or perhaps in their own language, so as to simplify censorship and speed despatch; but they were naturally so anxious to get news through to relatives from whom they had long been parted that some seemed incapable of understanding restrictions which were in fact for their own protection, and with others it appeared to be a point of honour to try to cheat the regulations by all kinds of dodges - cryptic phrases, passages from the Bible, initials, family catch-words - all of which the censor would laboriously reject. But by the middle of the war about 25,000 messages a month were going out through CABx alone and at times even larger batches of replies were coming in, putting commonplace, tragic, or romantic stories into the briefest of cold words, which yet to the recipient were like the crumpled petals of those Japanese flowers which, put into the

right element, blossom as the rose. 'They may be a frail and artificial growth', said the organiser of the scheme at CAB headquarters, 'but they seem to me a promise of the flowering not only of normal relations once again between families and friends of the same race, but of closer relations between us and many other nations. For the thousands of foreigners, as well as our own people, who are using the service, will never forget the help and friendship which the Red Cross Message Bureau workers gave them in these hard years; and will carry that leaven of sympathy and understanding with them when they return from exile.'

And not only sympathy and understanding: some of the exiles took back with them also a body of knowledge and experience of the whole CAB service as a basis for post-war relief work in their own liberated countries, and perhaps for a more lasting service in the years to come. Representatives of Allied Governments in exile here had been so much impressed by the value of CAB work throughout the war, and by the way in which it was done, that early in 1944 they asked the National Council of Social Service to arrange a training course for their own senior welfare officers designed to equip them to establish national information and advice services, operated by local people for the local community, when they were able to return to their liberated countries. Later in the year one of the National Council's senior officers, who was largely responsible for the papers which formed the basis of the course and which were published in 1944 as a handbook, *Citizens' Advice Bureaux in Britain and Advice Centres in Liberated Europe*, was seconded to the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration to help to plan courses in America for relief workers training for emergency welfare services abroad.

So began that interest in the application of CAB principles and practice to situations far away in space and character from those of the home field, which in the next twenty years was to result in the establishment of citizens' advice bureaux in places as unlike Britain and one another as African townships and Australian cities; new countries like Israel and old countries like India. The partnership in this country between voluntary organisations and the state which we now tend to take for granted is always a focus of interest to visitors from abroad who are concerned with social policy; and increasingly the particular illustration of this which the CAB service shows has captured their attention. A paragraph in the annual report of the National CAB Committee in 1959 gives an indication of the wide spread of this interest: 'Information has been sought by the Central Office of Information for transmission to India and the Sudan; and by the BBC for broadcasts to Persia, Russia and the Middle East. Officials from Japan, Canada, India, Egypt, Burma and

Israel have been interviewed in the department and visits to bureaux arranged. Earlier contacts have resulted in the formation of bureaux in India, in Kingston, Jamaica, and in Adelaide, Australia.'

Since then hardly a month has gone by without some enquiry or a visit from someone from an overseas country which wishes to consider the relevance of CAB principles and practices to its community. Bureaux have been established in Georgetown, British Guiana, in Perth, Australia, and in Haifa, Israel, where there are also, in Tel Aviv, seven municipal information offices which undertake a good deal of advisory work. (A CAB set up in Nairobi, Kenya, by the retired organiser of the Gorleston, Great Yarmouth, bureau, ran successfully for a short time and unfortunately had to close for lack of adequate financial support.) Coming nearer home, Holland had a careful study made of the CAB service and its possible relevance to the situation there; and Denmark, in spite of already having an Ombudsman, appointed a commission to consider the need for CABx also.

Even more interesting perhaps is the adoption of the idea by several African countries with problems and policies so unlike, on the face of them, both one another's and those of Britain. In Southern Rhodesia a representative group of people considering the provision of some sort of information and advice service were helped by a visit from the national CAB secretary in 1959 and one year later from an experienced CAB advisory officer to promote a full CAB service, with bureaux manned by trained voluntary workers of all races, not only in Salisbury and Bulawayo but also in two African townships on the outskirts of Salisbury where the European workers are assistants to the African worker in charge.

In South Africa a visit from the CAB organiser from Salisbury helped with the setting up of fully representative committees in both Cape Town and Johannesburg in 1961, and the **Cape Town bureau** was able to begin work almost at once with premises in the centre of the shopping area, a full-time secretary, a part-time assistant, and a panel of voluntary workers.

The national secretary also paid a flying visit to Ghana in 1961, at the invitation of the Ghanaian Minister of Information, to discuss a government-promoted information and advice service for individuals. It was evident that, in a country of such rapid growth and change, a service of this kind would be of great value, different though it would inevitably be from the CAB service at home; and in fact the Deputy Minister of Information, in opening later one of the eight information centres planned, said that it was hoped that they would 'in time develop into citizens' advisory bureaux to help people with their personal problems'.

The remarks of a London CAB organiser returning from a visit to Southern Rhodesia sum up the general experience on citizens' advice bureaux overseas: 'It is a revelation to see a CAB at work in another continent, not because it is different from ones at home but because it is so much the same. It seems to prove that the citizens' advice bureau is fundamentally sound, yet flexible and versatile - that this practical, down-to-earth service of information, advice, help and support meets as great a need in Salisbury as in Southwark.'

* The National Council of Social Service produced a booklet for citizens' advice bureaux local advisers, *Information after Air Raids*, covering such subjects as billeting and evacuation, casualties and missing, funeral and mortuary arrangements, replacements of lost or damaged documents, and immediate needs.

CHAPTER THREE

Answering

Answering

'A service of free and unbiased information and advice for citizens and by citizens.' Every sort of citizen asks the questions. What kinds of citizen answer them?

The very first bureaux, being offshoots of established personal welfare societies, were staffed or at least organised by trained social workers. But it was not possible, and it was never intended, that this should be the pattern for the whole new service. Of the 10,000 men and women who worked in CABx at the height of the war, 90 per cent were part-time volunteers from the most varied occupations and none; and twenty years later, in spite of the growing complexity of the work, the proportion is still nearly 70 per cent. Most of the larger bureaux have some full-time professional staff: but all have the help of unpaid, part-time workers; and many of the small bureaux, open only on certain days and times, are entirely run by these - the retired civil servant, the active businessman, the schoolmaster, trade unionist, bank manager, housewife, social worker, accountant, clergyman, music teacher. It is a form of community service that attracts many kinds of people, and which keeps the loyalty and enthusiasm of a remarkably large number of them over the years.

There is of course scope for a wide variety of talents and capabilities. Membership of the committee which is responsible for each CAB gives opportunities to people with varied interests, affiliations and backgrounds to help to organise the service locally. The office needs people who are good at keeping papers in order and seeing that information material is filed and kept up-to-date; for the headquarters service of information which is supplied to every bureau and which is unique in its range of subject matter, regularity and accuracy, provides the tools of the trade and, with other material collected locally and books, must be indexed and arranged for easy reference. There is also statistical work and scope for planning publicity. But at the core of the bureaux are the interviewers, and simple, even boring, though many a question may appear to be (and sometimes is), they need in fact special qualities of personality and experience if they are to give consistently a service of the quality which is the hallmark of the citizens' advice bureaux. So often a question, taken at its face value, seems to ask

merely for a straight, factual answer such as the new clerk behind any information office counter could hand out. 'Can you tell me who is responsible for dustbins?' Yes, of course; but does she just want to know whether she should go to the town hall or to her landlord? Or is she determined to complain, and why? Or is she anxious and diffident about something which to her is a vexatious new problem? Or is the simple question put to test the bureau worker and has she a real problem which will come out once she is satisfied that here is someone in whom she can confide? If she proves to have a real problem that she wants to tell someone about, how much should she be encouraged to talk, what details is it essential to learn, how capable is she of understanding any information given and of making use of it, how far should the interviewer go in offering advice or suggesting alternative courses of action?

Patience, observation, discretion, sympathy but a certain detachment, an ability to see another person's point of view and to accept standards other than one's own - those are some of the most important attributes for bureau workers. They must be impartial too, with no bias towards the authority or the individual, the employer or the employee, the wife or the husband, the landlord or the tenant; ready to look at both sides, to explain one to the other, to try to reconcile differences where it seems possible and just. In addition they must of course have knowledge: knowledge of statutory and voluntary provisions concerning everything from rent control to emigration, and of all the resources of the neighbourhood from the local authority's home help scheme to a club for pigeon fanciers. And they need the wisdom to judge when a problem is outside their own scope and should be referred to someone with wider or different experience; when the enquirer is capable of solving his own problem with a little guidance, and when to take some action on his behalf; to weigh the good of the Individual against that of his family or the community as a whole; to balance the general need to support authority against a readiness to challenge it when it is seen to be at fault.

These are counsels of perfection; but CAB work has never been offered as an easy option. The bashful young woman whose friend brought her to a new bureau early in the war to enrol as a CAB worker because, being lame and rather delicate, she could not be a civil defence warden or a nurse but would be able just to sit at a desk and answer questions, had to think again - if she was capable of thinking for herself at all. From the beginning, selection of bureau workers was carefully done, aided by regional officers and headquarters travelling officers of the National Council of Social Service whose guidance was always available to the local CAB committees. Through these officers arrangements were made for

new workers to visit neighbouring bureaux to gain some experience of the way others were handling this emergency work; and at each stage of the war brief training sessions and practices were devised - on post-raid welfare, evacuation problems, clothes rationing, war damage claims - which gave CAB staff not only the essential information needed to answer the plain questions that each emergency brought, but some insight into methods of coping with the tangled problems of harassed and often inarticulate people, the grievances of difficult and sometimes over-articulate customers.

Already, in 1944, headquarters were looking beyond this. At a regional conference that year the director of the service said: 'If CAB workers can train for post-raid work, can they not also be persuaded to train for more constructive work in the post-war world? The work which we do in the next five years will be limited not by opportunities but by the efficiency of the service we are able to provide.' A few months later, at the first national conference, the organising secretary of the inner London CABx was able to describe a six months' course for intending leaders which had recently begun in London and a shorter course for other CAB workers. A variety of one-day schools, short residential courses, and group discussions were being developed in other areas; and the 1946 conference passed a resolution asking that there should be a standard basic training scheme for all new workers, to be used locally as conditions allowed. A national syllabus was eventually worked out as a guide for CAB organisers when arranging, in consultation with regional officers, preliminary training for workers at a new bureau, or a refresher course for experienced workers and one or two new workers at an established bureau: a course of twelve lectures covering the aims, methods and techniques of the CAB service, and an outline of the principal social services - health, national insurance, pensions, welfare, employment and training, housing and town planning, child care, probation, legal aid, and so on. Alternatively, where only two or three people need training, arrangements can be made for them to visit the local offices of these services and learn about the work in informal discussions with the officers. Everyone is expected to supplement this with background reading, as well as continuing study of the information sent out regularly from headquarters in circulars, Citizens' Advice Notes, and special memoranda; and to take opportunities to make visits of observation to hospitals, courts, old people's homes, workshops for the disabled and the like, so as to get first-hand knowledge of procedures and conditions in various institutions which would be of help when giving advice on, for example, defending a court action or helping someone to make up her mind about going into a home.

But the training of bureau workers is seen as a continuous process. The basic preparatory course without which no team of workers in a new bureau starts work is only a beginning, designed to introduce the interviewers to the local officers and professional advisers who will be their colleagues and to guide them to the sources of help for their first enquiries. Invariably only a few weeks pass after the new bureau opens before the workers are asking for more training lectures. They hold regular workers' meetings, too, at which they can discuss anonymously the enquiries with which they have dealt, often with the help of a local social worker or professional consultant. For training covers not only the principles of CAB work and the technique of running a bureau, and basic information on new legislation and new services (often given at regional training courses by the senior civil servants or administrators most closely concerned) but also tries to provide them with an understanding of the social conditions and the changing approaches to social problems which are the background of their work. This does not mean that they are encouraged to regard themselves as specialists in any type of social work, unless their skill in acting as a link between the ordinary citizen and the expert can be so called. It has always been emphasised that recognition of his limitations and those of the bureau is one of the characteristics of a good CAB worker, and that close personal acquaintance with the specialists in the neighbourhood, including of course officers of local authorities and central government departments, is of the first importance if the bureau is to ensure that enquirers get the best help the community can give them. Well before the end of the war, headquarters were advising bureaux how to develop a consultant service, more especially to help with the increasing number of people who came with difficult personal problems, many needing long-term casework which was only to be had in a few places. A probation officer, moral welfare worker, almoner, mental health worker were among those suggested as often willing to advise from their professional skill and experience even on problems not actually within their direct field of responsibility. Other enquirers have problems which may be less complicated but which concern business or professional affairs with which none of the regular staff of the bureau may be competent to deal; so bureaux try to gain the interest of, say, an accountant, a bank manager, a doctor, a builder, an income tax expert, a surveyor, and so on, who would be ready to advise people who cannot afford professional fees or who need only a friendly discussion with someone knowledgeable.

The most important and frequent of all such problems are those with a legal aspect. Few of these are straightforward. Many people who seek the advice of a bureau are vague about the exact nature of their trouble but feel sure that there must be some law that will

help them. Others come determined to demand their 'rights' and want only to know how to get their 'case' started. The CAB worker may know that for both there is indeed some legal remedy but may doubt whether taking it would really be the best way out of the difficulty. Quarrels between neighbours, or landlord and tenant disputes, for instance, may often have a legal remedy, but whether this should be sought when neighbours may live next door for twenty years, or when landlord and tenant share the same kitchen or the same staircase, may be open to question. On the other hand it may be a case in which it would be disastrous for a CAB adviser to neglect or misunderstand the law, or to overlook the legal consequences of some course he is recommending which appears good from the purely social angle. What is needed is a close working partnership between the bureau worker and a friendly lawyer prepared to help in cases where the enquirer's limited means or inexperience hinder him from consulting a solicitor in the ordinary way.

This was recognized by social workers years before the CAB service began, and in many towns the local Law Society set up Poor Man's Lawyer schemes whereby one or two solicitors or barristers volunteered to give free consultations on neutral premises once or twice a week, or in larger cities a rota of lawyers staffed a part-time centre. Many of the questions which came to CAB even in their early days showed that the number of legal problems was going to grow as quickly as the other types of question; and looking for experts to help them many CAB organisers were able to arrange with a Poor Man's Lawyer to hold a regular session at the bureau for their enquirers or, if there was no PML scheme in the area, for some local solicitor to see people at his office or at the bureau.

The partnership grew so effective as the war progressed that CAB advice was asked when the government's Services Legal Aid Scheme was being drawn up. But makeshift voluntary schemes could not solve the whole problem, and the CAB service warmly welcomed the setting up of the government's Departmental Committee on Legal Aid and Legal Advice under Lord Rushcliffe in 1943; and from their wide experience they were able to submit evidence which obviously influenced considerably the recommendations that the Committee made for a state service of free or assisted legal aid and advice, administered by The Law Society and available to all who needed it.

Though the government approved these recommendations in principle, owing to economic and other difficulties it was some years before any of them were put into effect, and in the meantime bureaux had the task of trying to maintain and improve their

informal services with the voluntary help of many barristers and solicitors, in the face of increased demands from a public which had now been led to expect a full statutory scheme. These efforts had the advantages of bringing the CAB service into even closer partnership with The Law Society, who issued Notes for the Guidance of Solicitors working in Legal Advice Centres and sent a letter to provincial Law Societies pointing the way to more effective liaison between them and CABx. The same useful partnership has been continued as the Legal Aid and Advice Act at last came into operation piece by piece between 1949 and the present day. Bureaux were able to explain to thousands of enquirers the main points of the somewhat complicated schemes; to tell them how income was reckoned for the purpose of free legal aid and how the amount of their contribution to costs would be arrived at if they did not qualify for free aid; to make appointments for them with the local secretary of The Law Society administering the scheme; to help them to complete their application forms. But some bureaux still find that they need to continue their voluntary legal advice sessions as well. Only a small proportion of the population falls within the financial limits of the statutory schemes; many people have other difficulties besides their legal problem and need the concerted help which can best be given by the lawyer and the bureau staff working in close touch.

And all this while the CAB service has also been in direct communication with the Lord Chancellor's department as the department of state responsible for the administration of the law, giving first-hand examples of the effect of deficiencies and anomalies in this new legal service; pressing the urgent need for a comprehensive system of advice as well as aid, which was long delayed; playing their part in the two-way 'traffic' between the law and the social services which, as the Lord Chancellor told them at one of their national conferences, is essential to the proper administration of society.

Society, however, does not live by law and the social services alone. Many of the people who come to CABx are not troubled primarily by a legal problem; or the deficiencies of the National Health Service; or difficulties about pension rights, hire purchase, rent arrears, or the housing shortage. Their point of contact with the bureau may be a question of this kind, but at bottom their real trouble may well be some unhappy personal relationship, loneliness, social inadequacy, or some such intangible thing which information about rates of benefit or the housing list 'points' system will not touch. This is where the CAB worker's close knowledge of the neighbourhood's resources and what has been called 'the vast network of Organisations that cater for human and social needs' again shows

its value, helping him to think imaginatively about all the community services and not just about those which have come to be known as 'social services'. A personal introduction to the organiser of a language or painting class at the community centre, to an old people's club, a local history society, a young wives' club, a dramatic society, a group dedicated to amateur radio or motor cycles, a band of young people who spend their spare time helping the elderly with their chores or clearing waste sites or redecorating a children's home; a suggestion that there is an urgent need for foster mothers or for someone to give a holiday to a handicapped young man - fitted to the right person at the right moment, something of this sort may turn out to be the most fruitful piece of information and advice that could be given, and no one has a better chance to see this and act on it than one of that team of workers whose 'range of qualifications and depth of experience' make the chief value of the CAB service.

But the last word on the people who answer the questions must be about what they themselves receive as well as what they give. 'Working in the CAB', said a volunteer in a new bureau, 'has given us new horizons'; and another who, during her career, had been at one time on the editorial staff of a famous weekly journal and later personal assistant to a Cabinet Minister, wrote that running a CAB in a small provincial town was the most interesting and challenging job she had ever done. That is chiefly what fills the list of applicants anxious to take intensive training and to give regular hours to bureau work whenever the need for new staff is made known; and what keeps so many people faithful to this demanding service year after year.

CHAPTER FOUR

Organising

Organising

The bureau workers are the heart of the CAB service, but a heart needs a body to function in if it is to be effective. The local body is normally a local self-governing unit - the bureau management committee, which gives practical expression to the principle that a CAB is organised by the community, for the community. A service working in so many different types of place, from large industrial centres to small country towns and rural areas, with varied resources and greater or less opportunities, needs to be so organised that each bureau is free to serve its own locality in its own way. At the same time, each bureau works within the general framework of the policies and principles of a national service. One of the first of these is that the CAB should serve the community as a whole; giving information and advice that is disinterested, well-balanced and divorced from propaganda of any kind. The best guarantee of this independence and impartiality is a management committee made up of citizens of diverse interests representing the voluntary and statutory services in the area, together with a few concerned individuals. These ensure also the full understanding and support of the neighbourhood for the bureau's work, and are able to help in practical ways with finding premises and equipment for the office, recruiting workers and making the service widely known.

For example, a typical bureau set up in the early days, through the initiative of a small town's Rotary Club, had as committee chairman the editor of a respected county paper, as treasurer a local bank manager; and among the members the manager of the employment exchange, an estate agent who was able to lend part of a house for offices, and the proprietor of a retail store who gave some furniture; a Congregational minister in good relations with all the churches around; a lawyer, a borough councillor, a trade unionist, and representatives of voluntary organisations - the Red Cross, British Legion, Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Families Association, diocesan Moral Welfare Association.

That kind of pattern still holds good a quarter of a century later, ensuring stability and continuity for its bureau, and making a focus for the community's welfare resources and development. It is the normal pattern, although it has never been universal. In some larger towns the bureau began, and usually continues, as a function of the local council of social service or casework agency which is

then responsible for its organisation and administration, usually through a special CAB committee of similarly representative composition. In the war, when it was important to have very wide coverage for unforeseeable emergencies, a few bureaux were almost 'one-man shows', kept going by two or three devoted people who resigned themselves to having little to do there unless some new phase of the war should send a new wave of troubles in their direction. And from the first some bureaux were an integral part of the local authority services.

In a few places the service has suffered from the fact that it had to be set up in a hurry to meet an emergency without enough time for laying solid foundations. Today it takes several months to get a bureau established. Leading citizens are consulted before any decision is made and the opportunity is given at a representative promotional meeting, called usually by the chief citizen, for a thorough appraisal of the need and the best ways of meeting it, before a resolution is passed to set up a bureau. Then a steering committee goes into all the practical details such as premises, finance and the selection and basic training of the first team of workers and their organiser.

This steering committee has before it from the beginning the conditions laid down by the national committee for the registration of individual bureaux, so that in spite of local variations certain minimum standards may be achieved, such as the fully representative nature of the committee, the frequency of its meetings, the impartiality of the service, the quality and training of the workers, the adequacy of the hours of opening, and premises which will be acceptable to and inspire confidence in every member of the community.

Relations with local authorities have always been one of the most important factors in the CAB service. A great many of the questions and problems concern services or regulations administered by the local authority, brought to the bureau rather than (or in addition to) the council officers because the enquirers do not know who is responsible or because they misunderstand or mistrust 'those people at the town hall'; and the local authority officers are usually glad to have their work explained to the citizen without trouble to themselves or to have the individual's point of view explained to them. The large majority of local authorities warmly welcomed the CABx quickly set up in their areas in the war, and gave them help in kind - premises, lighting, heating, etc., or in money by way of grant under their Civil Defence powers, or both. Some also provided information centres entirely concerned with their own services, side by side with a CAB which they were aiding. Some preferred to run a

general information and advice centre of their own. As a matter of principle there has always been some doubt whether a wholly free and unbiased service could be given in this way but in fact there have been some bureaux maintained by local authorities as part of their administration which have had freedom to do excellent work in accordance with CAB policy and have taken their full part as units in the national service, sharing in training, in collecting information for headquarters on special problems, in making regular returns on numbers and kinds of questions, and in generally developing the service.

At the end of the war the government appeared to give impetus to local authority provision of advice centres by deciding that arrangements for giving information about the services available within the area of an authority, 'provided either by the authority or by other authorities or by government departments', were not only of great importance but were clearly the responsibility of the local authority to provide. Throughout the war the government had recognised the support of the CAB service as largely a national responsibility and had made to the National Council of Social Service annually through the Ministry of Health a dual purpose grant: to help in setting up and maintaining local bureaux, and to meet a major part of the costs of the central and regional services which the National Council provided for CABx. In 1945 the former grant was entirely discontinued, though the Ministry of Health circular 197/45 urging local authorities to provide information centres gave them at the same time provisional powers to do so through a voluntary agency which they could grant-aid for the purpose, and the Local Government Act, 1948, confirmed this power. Certainly as a result of the circular some authorities chose to provide their own service, but many of them were so much convinced of the value of an independent bureau that in the year 1947-48 the CAB central committee was able to report that the 567 bureaux then in the field were receiving more help from local authorities in money and kind, and in general co-operation, than the 639 bureaux had had in 1946; and a year later to say that, apart from the considerable number of authorities taking full financial responsibility for bureaux, something like £35,000 a year in cash grants alone were being made to CABx. This was obviously a very tangible tribute to the service as a whole, and a result not only of the good work of the bureaux but also of the good relations which, through their committees and their staff, they were at pains to cultivate with their local authorities.

In this way the sense of responsibility of local bureaux for the organisation as well as for the day-to-day work was growing all the time. It was more severely tested by the next government move.

Certain grant-aid for central and regional services had been continued year by year in the early post-war period, but at the beginning of 1950, at the time of severe economy cuts in all government services, this grant was withdrawn completely, on the ground that local authorities could now contribute to headquarters as well as local bureau funds if they so wished. Somehow CAB headquarters contrived to keep up the regular supply of information to the bureaux; to maintain their good, though financially unfruitful, contacts with government departments; to improve still more their close relations with the associations of local authorities and with an informed group of members of parliament; and generally to keep the central services alive and in touch with the widely scattered local bureaux.

But both these central services and the field services had to be drastically cut. Most of the CAB travelling officers, who had been the support and guide of the committees and staff of bureaux in their regions from the beginning, had to go. The staff at headquarters was reduced to a minimum; and a great deal of the time of those who remained was spent on devising plans to keep the service not only alive but in touch with the needs of society which, like the CAB movement, was at a difficult period of its history. At the conference in 1950, held just after the notification of the withdrawal of all government grant-aid, two questions vital to the organisation of the service in those present conditions were chiefly discussed; what financial contribution could the bureaux themselves make towards their central services; and to what extent could the bureaux, in co-operation with, for example, rural community councils or local councils of social service, or by county or regional groupings, make good the gaps in training, general guidance, and promotion which the loss of the field officers would leave?

The answers which CAB workers gave to these questions over the next three or four difficult years proved how fully they felt themselves committed to a national service, with a shared responsibility for its maintenance and development. So far as money was concerned, some small bureaux were never able to find even the modest annual sum agreed upon, but most bureaux managed to raise their quota, and several gave generous contributions well in excess of this, often as the result of much personal effort added to their normal CAB work. As to the standard of work, the local bureaux showed remarkable initiative and tenacity. In one or two areas a single experienced CAB undertook to act as a central bureau for the county, to which the smaller ones and those dealing with a lesser volume of work could look for help over problems of special difficulty. In other areas the bureaux themselves serviced a county or regional CAB committee which

could discuss local or national policy questions, arrange training days or conferences, and partly replace that important link with headquarters which the field officers had formerly provided.

These county and regional committees - advisory not executive groups - which include representatives of the CABx in the area and other organisations, and individuals with a contribution to make to the local service, indeed grew in importance with the curtailment for a time of central services. The idea of them had come early in the war when CAB workers in a locality had asked for some machinery for relating their experience with that of workers in other districts. The central committee had long consisted largely of people appointed by the regional advisory committees; and in 1950 it adopted a new name - the National Citizens' Advice Bureaux Committee - and a new constitution giving greater predominance to members representing local CABx, in order to mark recognition of the fact that the CAB service had taken its place as a permanent national service but that, to use the words already spoken as long ago as 1945 by the then national secretary of the movement: 'It is upon you and not upon us in London that the movement stands or falls.'

None the less, the importance of the headquarters organisation also increased with the development of the service, and with its difficulties. That speech in 1945 had put 'ensuring unity of purpose' as the first function of headquarters; and as the opportunities open to CABx grew and the machinery for their guidance and support diminished, this became even more essential. Setting a standard to be aimed at by the very great variety of bureaux working in different kinds of places is an equally important responsibility of the national committee, and from the early days a system of 'approval', later changed to 'registration', has been in force, with increasingly exacting conditions. It took longer to achieve a model constitution which could be used by every bureau from the smallest to the largest, but this was a necessary objective when it became obvious that CABx were to be a permanent feature of the country's social structure. The adoption of the approved constitution confirms the charitable status of the bureau and ensures its inclusion in the registers of the Charity Commission - those registers which, since the passing of the Charities Act in 1960, are expected when complete to provide a comprehensive guide to all the charitable organisations in this country.

But headquarters have always recognised that the CAB service must be flexibly organised if it is to be brought within reach of everyone who might need it, and perhaps the achievement of flexibility should be regarded as their second function. For example, they

realised that the needs of country people for information and advice are as great as those of townspeople and that their problems require as much skill and experience to handle; but that the small number of enquiries in anyone place, the shortage of suitable staff, and the countryman's general distaste for letting his neighbour see that he has a problem on which he is seeking advice, produce special difficulties of organisation. The help of rural community councils, of bureaux in market towns, and of 'traditional advisers' in the villages - clergy, doctors, teachers, nurses - has been useful in providing various kinds of advisory services in such places. But little could have been done without the policies worked out by headquarters over the years, and more especially their series of experiments with 'local CAB links' in close touch with experienced bureaux in nearby towns; with regular bulletins giving a brief guide to new information available at such bureaux; with mobile caravan bureaux; imaginative publicity; travelling advisers, and so on, made possible by grant-aid for five years (1957-62) from the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust.

The unanimous conclusion reached as a result of all these experiments was that if the countryman was not to be palmed off with a second class service there was no short cut, and the only way to serve him adequately was to ensure that there was a fully-fledged CAB either within his reach or with facilities for visiting him, and that he should be made aware of this. So now when new bureaux are being established, representatives of the rural communities surrounding the town are brought into consultation from the beginning to ensure that the new service is geared as much to the needs of the countryman as to those of the town dweller, and that there is enough money in the budget to pay the travelling expenses of bureau workers visiting house-bound enquirers.

Relations of confidence with national trusts such as the Carnegie grant for rural experiments shows; with central government departments, with the headquarters of professional organisations and of voluntary societies, represent a third aspect of headquarters' work which for importance should perhaps take first place though in fact it would not exist without the other two. For it is because the national committee have been able to ensure unity of purpose in a diversity of independent bodies and to set a standard of excellence for a wide variety of practice that the citizens' advice bureaux have become a national organisation which can speak on equal terms with those other national institutions: which can, for example, discuss policy with the Ministry of Housing or the Ministry of Health; cooperate with The Law Society in the administration of the state legal aid scheme; work with the National Association for Mental

Health on helping the public to understand the new attitudes to mental disorder; win the assistance of a university social science department to plan training for voluntary workers and of a great charitable trust to finance the experiment.

By this date the standing of the CAB service is obviously such that it has no need of the sign of public approval that government grant can give, but the renewal in 1960 of grant for the central services after a lapse of ten years, though in token form, was welcome not only as much needed financial aid. In the same way the government decision in 1963, following the recommendation of the Molony Committee, to invite CABx to play a large part in the new programme of consumer education and advice, with the help of a grant from the Board of Trade, was accepted both as another duty and as another recognition of the partnership between the state and the citizens' advice bureaux service which has become an essential feature of the welfare society.

CHAPTER FIVE

Partnership

Partnership

Many people have tried to define the rôle of the citizens' advice bureau in its partnership with the state. Guides to the ignorant - said the Lord Chancellor at the 1959 conference - through the complicated paths of the law, who influence the law itself by their experience. Mr. Evangelist who told Christian plainly on his Pilgrim's Progress, said Lord Denning, that Mr. Legality 'never had any power to remove burdens such as thine art and never will have', and, who took his burdens from him and set him again on the right way. Ambassadors between the ordinary citizen and the Whitehall and local authority experts, said Mr. Butler when he was Home Secretary. These are all different facets of the same piece of work, which should have shown through this brief history from its beginning.

First comes the guide to the ignorant through the complicated paths of the law; and who is not ignorant nowadays about some at least of the patchwork of distinct but interrelated rules and regulations that govern our welfare from the cradle to the grave? And if he knows the rule, how can he be sure whether it applies in his case, which seems to him to be a little different from the common run; and, if not, why should it not be stretched for his benefit; and what is the sense of it all anyway? The guide has not only the responsibility of knowing the rules, how they overlap and interplay and may occasionally be modified or adapted, but also of explaining the sense of them to the disgruntled and sometimes of reminding him that there are two sides to a bargain, and that the obligations do not all lie on the other side, whether it is the pensions office, the hire purchase trader, the local housing office, or whatever it may be.

Look at the guide from a slightly different angle, as provider of advice as well as information, and there is Bunyan's Mr. Evangelist who set Christian again on the right way or, in the official CAB wording: 'helps the citizen to benefit from and to use wisely the services provided for him by the state'. Perhaps Evangelist's task was the easier of the two for he could see at a glance the size and shape of the burdens that kept Christian back, but the CAB worker often has no such clear view of the modern citizen's burden. Someone once said that he thought an essential part of CAB training should be a study of the poem about King John when he

threatened the Abbot of Canterbury with death unless he could answer three questions, the third of which was: 'you must tell me quite clearly what I do think.' Often the bureau worker has to try to interpret the enquirer's own real thoughts to him before beginning to find the answer.

Then there is the CAB worker as ambassador between the ordinary citizen and the Whitehall and local government experts. The first task is to give information to the citizen and to explain what that means to him in terms of his own position; but it may be equally important to give information about him (if he agrees) to the expert, who may not have all the facts of his case or may have misunderstood them; or who may, with the intervention of a responsible third party, see that something can properly be done to help him after all. And not only in the individual case; bureau workers may 'influence the law itself by their experience'. As the then Home Secretary frankly said at the 1959 CAB conference: 'Whilst all of us in public work are there because we are interested in the social improvement of our people, we differ from you in that we have so little intimate knowledge of these subjects.' The bureau workers have that intimate knowledge. Whenever a new scheme for 'the social improvement of our people' starts to work, or a long established one begins to show wear and tear, scores of bureaux all over the country tell headquarters where they find that the new shoe pinches or the old one is losing its good fit. From the early war days when the government asked CABx to tell them of 'rumours calculated to create alarm and despondency' or of hardships for special categories of people under clothes rationing, until today when they need to know about the detailed results of housing policies or the effect on individual patients of the divisions in the health service, the authorities central and local have come to rely a great deal on the bureaux' intimate knowledge of the needs of the citizen and the shortcomings of the law, so that they may know what things have to be put right.

Such are the major roles of the citizens' advice bureaux. What are the characteristics which help them to carry these through?

The first is no doubt the independence and impartiality of the CAB service as a whole and of each bureau in its own place and circumstances. The CAB is the Third Party, the Mutual Friend, on equally good terms with the citizen and those who govern or serve him and having the confidence of both. It is, as Lord Denning once said, 'supported indeed by the state but not controlled by it; supported by local authorities but not controlled by them, and I hope, like the law, never to be controlled by any public authority.' The bureau has also another freedom: the freedom from those

restrictions inevitably imposed on actions for which the community as a whole is fully responsible. Bureau workers are rational, cautious, fully aware of their public duty, but CAB work springs from a private initiative and is free to experiment, to battle for the border-line hard cases, to find ways of helping the exceptional and the odd-man-out.

That care and sympathy for the individual is another characteristic quality of CAB work. 'The Bureau', wrote Lord Beveridge long ago in *Voluntary Action*, 'makes the world appear to many citizens in distress to contain some element of reason and friendship.'

But the bureau worker does not do this at the expense of the authorities. He has the understanding and respect for the 'powers-that-be' which comes from close acquaintance with their representatives on the spot and with the principles that direct them, and he helps his enquirer, if he can, to see the 'element of reason and friendship' there as well as in the bureau.

For the CAB aims to integrate, combining the parts into a whole, not to divide. It does not as a rule take one side or another, because it sees the sides as different parts of a single pattern. This is often a complicated pattern made up, perhaps, of two people's different rights or wishes, and not only of related statutory provisions or restrictions but of the contribution of other local voluntary societies or people with special skills or gifts which may help. This ability, through knowledge and experience, to draw all these people and things into play to resolve a particular dilemma is one of the characteristics of the CAB service which may bring to mind again, in a different context, the suggested war-time motto: 'We're all in it together.'

Citizens' Advice Bureaux and the Social Revolution

Citizens' Advice Bureaux and the Social Revolution

'It is a commonplace to say we have seen in our time a social revolution', said Lord Denning to a CAB conference in 1957. 'We have seen the relations between the state and the individual entirely transformed. In this revolution the CABx have played an important part.' Not only a useful part, as guide, interpreter and friend to the individual citizen caught up in this revolution; but an important part, as a factor in the revolution, developing in line with its development and having an influence upon its growth.

As long ago as 1946, speaking to the first meeting of the newly created Standing Conference of Citizens' Advice Bureaux just after the end of the war, the Prime Minister's Adviser on Public Relations, Mr. Francis Williams, defined the nature of these social changes when he said that the main problem which faced the world was how to reconcile a greater degree of economic and social planning with that essential of democracy - the widest measure of individual freedom and individual responsibility. At that time the planning was largely for survival and for reconstruction after the devastation of the war; but within less than two years the welfare state was launched as an all-inclusive plan for every citizen's welfare throughout his life. Then Mr. Williams' forecast of the bureaux' part in this revolution became fact. 'Citizens' advice bureaux have before them a period when they can render to the nation even greater service than during the war. It is essential that there should be built up and developed a wider interest by the ordinary citizen in the public affairs which concern him so directly. For if a government is to be a good one it depends on the widespread understanding by the ordinary citizen of what it is doing. ...There can be no greater threat to the successful development of democracy than a feeling by the ordinary citizen of being baffled and puzzled and of not knowing the meaning and the personal application of legislation passed centrally or of acts and administration carried out locally.' Lord Beveridge, writing of the CABx two years later, took this a stage further when, having put first among their services the skill to explain the working of public authority to the citizen, he said: 'In so far as the citizen comes to understand public authority he comes to regard it as something not alien and hostile to himself but something for which he may be responsible.' To encourage the citizen to have a wider interest in public affairs and some sense of responsibility for them, growing out of better knowledge and understanding: that was to be one of the bureaux' most significant

contributions to the 'development of democracy which is taking place in this country.'

Clearly there are two sides to this: the individual's rights in a complex society, and his responsibilities in it.

First his rights: in our modern society there is far more about which the citizen needs to know and understand than there was in the simpler society of the fairly recent past. The government then was concerned with a few things that touched his life closely at certain points; taxation, criminal law, public order, and the like. But these, though important, were comparatively few and simple. Now the state, through an elaborate system of social services and planning in every department of life, 'undertakes the regulation of much of the daily business of mankind'. Family allowances, education, sickness, unemployment, pensions, national assistance, allocation of local authority housing, transport, town planning - in whatever direction one's needs or wishes lie, there is likely to be some government provision or regulation standing in the path to forward or prevent them. Three things are necessary in this situation : that the ordinary citizen should know what rules apply to his case; that he should know what ways are open to him for disputing the particular application of the rule and how to use them; and that the authorities should know how suited to their purpose are both the rules and the machinery for reviewing individual grievances.

These are things which, from the beginning, the citizens' advice bureaux have been trying to ensure; and because of that long experience, reaching back to simpler days, they have been able in these last few years to take a constructive part not only in helping the individual with his own difficulties and grievances but in some measure in helping the authorities in their more and more difficult task of reconciling the conflicting demands of administration which must look first to the community's well-being, and of the citizen who wants justice, fair play, and respect for his rights and feelings. Particularly have they done this through their association with the Legal Aid and Advice Schemes, which are concerned with decisions that can be contested in the courts; and with the Council on Tribunals which exercises supervision over the administrative tribunals and statutory enquiries that handle an increasing volume and variety of other disputes between the citizen and the administration. The secretary of the National Citizens' Advice Bureaux Committee was one of the few lay members of the Franks Committee, set up in 1955 to consider how these newly developing tribunals and enquiries could best provide fair play for the citizen. In this way the CAB service had a hand in the Committee's Report which has been called one of the great constitutional documents of

our time; and the Council on Tribunals continues to have close liaison with the CABx, relying much on them to make the machinery known to and understood by the citizen and to relay criticisms of it and suggestions for its improvement.

This growing care for the individual - his wishes, rights, and grievances - within a society dedicated to the care of the community as a whole or in large groups is another aspect of changing social thought with which the CAB service is intimately concerned. The Ministry of Health Command Paper on 'Community Care', discussing in 1963 the local authorities' ten-year plans for their health and welfare services, says: 'In the past the emphasis was on the provision of a range of services; now it is on ascertaining and meeting particular needs.' It was as far back as 1945 that a speaker at the first CAB conference said: 'If all the knowledge which resides in a movement of this kind could be made available for the purposes of men who make legislation we have a force for the well-being and welfare of mankind that is equal to none.' In the years between, the CABx' knowledge has inevitably grown very much wider and deeper and more useful because 'the men who make legislation', with a greater concern for the 'particular needs' which such knowledge reveals, are seeking it out and trying to apply it.

But there are also the individual's privileges and responsibilities in this complex society: something more positive and vital than his needs and rights. The emphasis on this is in line with that trend which characterises much social policy today - the transition from the negative to the positive, from the piecemeal to the planned, from the remedial to the preventive; the progress 'from the saving of life to the achievement and maintenance of the highest standards of health', as the 'Community Care' Command Paper puts it in relation to the health service. In its early days much of the bureaux' work may have been 'on the whole negative in character. ..the giving of information and advice to get out of difficulties.' In recent years a large part of it has been concerned with showing people the ways there are of helping themselves and one another to better things; the way to use all the state and voluntary services that are there for them; the opportunities for the young to learn about home-making or to use some of their energy in helping the elderly or the disabled; for the housewife to find out more about the new articles and materials offered to her, their uses and shortcomings and the standards she ought to expect; for the family to get the support they need to keep their handicapped member with them, living as normal a life as possible instead of shut up in an institution, or to make a home for someone else's child whose family cannot care for him.

This is work for which a voluntary organisation like the CAB is peculiarly apt, with its freedom of action and its workers who have so many different interests and contacts. Indeed, not the least of the CAB contributions to the social development of the last twenty-five years has been to give a lively example of the place of voluntary organisations and of voluntary workers in the modern state. Many people thought at one time that the expansion of the statutory services would make voluntary effort unnecessary. The survival and the development of the CAB service after the war, in spite of the government's resettlement advice bureaux and the encouragement to local authorities to set up information centres of their own, was one convincing answer. Other people conceded that there might still be a place for voluntary organisations to fill the gaps left by the statutory provisions: to do some odd jobs at the behest of the authorities. The bureaux have shown that voluntary effort can certainly fill a gap, but in the sense of pioneering a new, independent piece of work, not merely making up deficiencies in an inadequate state service. Many such pioneer efforts of voluntary organisations in the past have become part of the state's machinery. The CABx have provided an example, now generally accepted as valid, of a service that can be given more effectively if it remains a voluntary service: independent of the state but in cooperation with it, not in competition. A recent Minister of Pensions and National Insurance said: 'Surely we have come to recognise that human needs can be met in full only by a partnership between the statutory and voluntary social services. Each needs the other if the highest standards are to be achieved; they will not be achieved if we work in isolation.'

The final word must be for the CAB voluntary workers: the thousands of part-time volunteers whose work makes the achievement of those 'highest standards' in this field a bright promise. Very many other voluntary bodies depend largely on volunteers to carry out the great variety of their services: jobs skilled or modestly homely, imaginative or routine. The particular contribution of the citizens' advice bureaux to the history of voluntary workers in the modern state lies in their power to attract so many people who have between them a range of qualifications and depth of experience that could not be made available for the benefit of the ordinary citizen in any other way; to offer a piece of work that engages the whole man in service to everyman.

**OFFICERS OF THE CITIZENS' ADVICE
BUREAUX
HEADQUARTERS ORGANISATION
1939 - 1964**

Central Citizens' Advice Bureau Committee
(Later: National Citizens' Advice Bureau Committee)

Chairman	R.C. Norman	1939 - 1945
	A.A. Garrard, OBE	1946 - 1954
	L. Farrer-Brown, CBE	1954 - 1961
	Sir Harold Banwell	1961 -
Secretary	Miss D.C. Keeling, OBE	1939 - 1945
	Miss K.M. Oswald, OBE	1945 - 1964