

New Thinking about Administration

Published by The Association of Social Workers, Denison House, Vauxhall Bridge Road, London S.W.1 (5s 0d.)

SOCIAL WORKERS, ranging from N.S.P.C.C. to prison, met at Oxford to study the inter-relationship of casework and administration and to discuss, in both one-agency and inter-agency groups, ways of thinking about the administrative process. This report on their findings is of considerable interest to staffs of penal establishments because behind the walls there is always a good deal of discussion about administration: recent numbers of this Journal have included articles such as "Managing to Govern" (and there was some correspondence following this) and others describing the administration officers' own views. Nobody yet has written "Just Managing" or "Managing to Manage" but one expects these at any time.

Meanwhile, what do social workers think about their own administrative duties? This is what the conference was really about. They are aware of other people having to "administer" but, on this occasion, it is their own paper work, their own office timetables and so on which

they are examining.

In conferences of this kind much of the hard work is done in discussion but this does not mean that the speakers' work is merely introductory. Unless some challenge is thrown out there is a danger that the ensuing small-group meetings will tend towards self-congratulation rather than self-criticism. One opening speaker on this occasion, Mr. A. D. Newman, Principal of the Glacier Institute of Management, examined the three elements of objective, work and resources to be found in any organisation.

The fundamental objective of all real organisations, says Mr. Newman, is viability, and this leads in some fields to a primary objective plus, usually, secondary objectives. Later, the discussion group comprising workers from prison, borstal and psychiatric hospitals staffs considering their primary task, used a phrase which is described in the report as "ambiguous". They said their primary task was to hold the inmates. Incidentally it is interesting

to note that the date of the conference was 1965, a long time before certain events emphasised that phrase. The group went on to quote the old Rule 6 and to paraphrase it as "to train people in captivity".

Work must be relevant to the objectives, continues Mr. Newman, adding: "When we, as individuals, have objectives which we cannot achieve as individuals alone then we must accept the assistance and constraints (and we note our ambivalence here) of organisation". To do work, resources must be available, converted from money into time and human capacity. Miss S. Watson, Hertfordshire's Children's Officer was tempted to define administration. "It is", she said, "any arrangement which helps an agency to run smoothly, and it is a living process". A good illustration was "The primary task of the Children's Department under the Children Act, 1948, is to provide a home for every child who needs one. To see that before nightfall every child has a roof, warmth and food, could be looked on as an administrative job, but interwoven with this are the tasks of providing a home which will meet the needs of the individual child and of helping the child to adjust to the home provided. These are matters not of administration but of human relationships".

Miss O. Stevenson, Tutor in Social Work at Oxford, summing

up the conference and its implications for social workers, has a couple of paragraphs of particular interest to us in the penal field. After suggesting that the rate of change in society itself, highly mobile and industrialised, is itself accelerating with resultant strain on individuals and families with consequent demand for more social work help, she says that, "linked to this, is the fact that the institution, whether it be hospital, children's home, old people's home or prison, has gone out of favour and 'community care' in the widest sense of that word has become an ideal. Rigid distinctions between the institution in which the problem is encapsulated and the community, the 'outside', are breaking down in innumerable ways and this inevitably affects the primary functions of social work. It is generally felt that if the demand for social work services is stretched beyond any limit of its resources to try and realise this ideal, it may well lead to a discrediting—unfairly—of the whole conception of community care".

Harking back to the discussion groups (whose deliberations are edited by Miss B. Butler, Lecturer in Social Studies at Bristol) Miss Stevenson reports one of them as considering the conflict between the caring function and the controlling or holding function. It is interesting to note that while this

fell more acutely in the penal field, it is regarded with some concern in social work generally.

When we consider relationships between senior and junior staff (says Miss Stevenson) we see that some of these difficulties arise from this conflict between care and control with a fundamental reluctance on the part of the senior staff to acknowledge the importance of the "controlling" side of things. There are many reasons for this, she adds: "it may, in some services, be due in part to the preponderance of women, upon whose shoulders authority does not, by and large, sit so easily". While this does not apply in the majority of our predominantly male-run,

male-manned establishments it has some relevance in the relationships between governors and administration officers, prison welfare officers and chaplains and/or assistant governors, and perhaps between officers and principal officers. Miss Stevenson's opinion that "it may be that social workers' selection and training has in the past emphasised permissiveness excessively and that this has got carried over into the managerial task" could well provide a useful subject for any staff study group.

There is much more, of general interest, in this pamphlet which deserves a place in every institution's staff library.

M. W.

INSTITUTE OF CRIMINOLOGY SHORT-TERM FELLOWSHIP

It is announced that the University of Cambridge's Institute of Criminology, thanks to a benefactor who wishes to remain anonymous, is now in a position to offer occasional short-term Fellowships to persons having responsibility in the field of criminal justice and the treatment of offenders. The object is to enable the Fellows to be attached to the institute for a period of study concentrating on a definite objective. This might involve undertaking a specific piece of research (or completing an enquiry already begun elsewhere) and presenting the results in the form of a short monograph or article; preparing special lectures; or intensive reading on a particular topic of direct practical concern.

Fellowships will normally be tenable for a period of six weeks, three months or six months, their exact duration depending on the scale of work which is proposed. The award will be sufficient to cover living expenses in Cambridge. Fellows will have full use of the institute's extensive library; accommodation for study will be provided. The senior staff of the institute will be available for consultations or guidance.

No formal qualifications for candidates will be laid down, the essential requirement being that of responsibility and experience of work in the field of law enforcement, the administration of justice, or the prevention or treatment of crime and delinquency (prevention will be interpreted widely to include aspects of child-care and youth work). A well conceived plan of study is required as evidence of capacity to take full advantage of the opportunities offered.

Applications should be sent to the secretary/librarian of the institute at 7 West Road, Cambridge, to reach him not later than 15th September 1967.

(It is anticipated that, by the time this announcement is published, a notice to staff on this subject will have been issued.—Ed.)