

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL LEGISLATION
FOR
BLIND OR DEAF PERSONS IN ENGLAND 1834-1939

A Thesis

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by

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A B S T R A C T

As indicated by the title the purpose of the thesis is to trace the development of social legislation for blind or deaf persons in England between 1834 and 1939. No attempt is made to deal with assistance whether from statutory or voluntary sources for war blinded or deafened persons.

In the first chapter a survey is made of the position of the blind or deaf under the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 and succeeding Poor Law legislation up to 1919.

Chapter two deals with the enquiry into the condition of the blind carried out in 1874-75 by the Charity Organisation Society and the much more comprehensive survey of the state of the blind or deaf made between 1884 and 1888 by the Royal Commission on the Blind, Deaf and Dumb which reported in 1889. The latter enquiry resulted in the passing of the Education (Blind and Deaf Children) Act of 1893 and also provided the essential data on which state action for the two disabilities could be based.

The third chapter gives an account of the campaign to secure legislation for the blind which culminated in the Blind Persons Act of 1920. How the Blind Persons Act was implemented at the local level and the effect on blind welfare of the work of the Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind and the passing of the Local Government Act of 1929, is the concern of chapter four.

Chapter five describes the events leading up to the enactment of legislation relating to the issue of free dog licences in respect of guide dogs for the blind, concessionary postal rates, reduced fees in respect of wireless receiving licences, and the Blind Voters Act of 1933.

In Chapter six the story of the campaign for legislation for the

blind is continued up to the passing of the Blind Persons Act of 1938.

The penultimate chapter relates the attempts made to secure legislation provision for the deaf in the form of a Deaf Persons Act broadly similar in scope to the Acts on behalf of the blind.

The thesis concludes with a consideration of certain conclusions drawn from the subject matter presented in the preceding chapters.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The present thesis could never have been completed without the help and encouragement of many people.

A special debt of gratitude is due to Maurice Kogan, Professor of Government and Social Administration in the University of Brunel who not only gave encouragement to the writer's aspirations but also agreed to undertake the onerous task of supervising the research. Throughout an association extending over four years Professor Kogan has been unfailingly helpful and his kindness has done much to sustain enthusiasm when, due to the multifarious claims on the writer's time, the task of completing the study seemed almost insuperable.

The generous assistance received from Miss Margaret Saunders the Librarian of the Royal National Institute for the Blind cannot be adequately acknowledged in words. In addition to allowing the author the unrestricted use of the Library of the Royal National Institute, Miss Saunders frequently went to considerable trouble to locate obscure material and dealt patiently and efficiently with numerous requests for information. The writer is also heavily indebted to Miss Mary Plackett, the Librarian of the Royal National Institute for the Deaf.

The staff of the Public Record Office never failed to produce any material requested and, on occasion, gave useful advice as to other sources of information that could be explored.

The writer would also place on record his appreciation of the assistance received from the librarians and staffs of the Cohen Library of the University of Liverpool, the Library of Deaf Education of the University of Manchester, the Reading Room of the British Museum, the House of Lords Record Office, the Library of the St. Helens County Borough, and the Prescot Branch of the Lancashire County Library. The Librarians of the Department of Customs and Excise, the Department of Education and Science, the Department of Health and Social Security, the Labour Party and the Trades Union Congress have all rendered

invaluable assistance. A special word of gratitude is, however, due to Barry Layland, the Librarian of the St. Helens College of Technology for his assistance in compiling the bibliography and to David Rodgers, the Reference Librarian of the County Borough of Warrington who also dealt with many enquiries.

Mr. J.C. Colligan, C.B.E., late Director General of the Royal National Institute for the Blind and Mr. R.C. Sydenham the Secretary General of the Royal National Institute for the Deaf gave their support to the study and Messrs. T. Parker and R. Laurie of the National League of the Blind also gave generously of their time in answering numerous queries relating to the work of their organisation.

The major part of the thesis has been typed by Miss E. and Miss L. Leyland who very patiently corrected the writer's mistakes and gave unstinted assistance in converting manuscript to typescript. The remainder of the thesis was typed by Mrs. E. Barr.

The writer's final word of gratitude must be to his wife, who has borne a second period of thesis widowhood with great patience and understanding. Had she not cheerfully coped with the heavy demands of a young family *during the period of research and writing*, the task would never have been completed.

DECLARATION

This thesis has been compiled by the writer from the sources shown in the text, and, apart from pages 494 to 501, the substance of which was included in his M.A. thesis "Some Aspects of the Historical Development and Present Organisation of Voluntary Welfare Societies for Adult Deaf Persons in England 1840 to 1963", none of the material in the thesis has been submitted for a degree in any other University.

Signed *C. K. Hyson*

Date *January 22nd 1973*

I N D E X

	<u>Pages</u>
ABSTRACT	i- ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii- iv
DECLARATION	v
INDEX	vi
INTRODUCTION	vii- xv
LIST OF TABLES	xvi-xvii
CHAPTER I The Blind, the Deaf and the Poor Law 1834-1919.	1- 46
CHAPTER II The Report on the Training of the Blind 1876 and the Royal Commission on the Blind, Deaf and Dumb 1899.	47-101
CHAPTER III The Movement for a Blind Persons Act 1900-1920.	102-204
CHAPTER IV Aspects of Blind Welfare 1920-1939.	205-342
CHAPTER V Miscellaneous Legislation Relating to the Blind.	343-420
CHAPTER VI The Campaign for the Amendment of the Blind Persons Act 1921-1938.	421-492
CHAPTER VII The Eichholz Report of 1932 and the Movement for a Deaf Persons Act.	493-555
CHAPTER VIII Epilogue and Conclusions.	556-599
APPENDIX I Schemes of the County Boroughs of Warrington and Bolton under the Blind Persons Act 1920.	600-606
APPENDIX II Functions of National, Regional and Local Bodies for the Blind.	607-609
APPENDIX III Expenditure on Blind Welfare, 1940-1941.	610-611
LIST OF SOURCES	612-628

I N T R O D U C T I O N

The purpose of this introduction is to indicate the scope of the study, to define some of the terms used and to review some of the published and unpublished literature which relates to blindness or deafness in so far as it is relevant to the present investigation.

(1) The scope of the present study.

As indicated by its title, the study is concerned with the development and implementation of social legislation between 1834 and 1939 relating to blind or deaf persons in England. As such, it attempts to deal in detail with the development of state responsibility for the less fortunate members of the community, firstly, through the Poor Law and later by other means, which has been described in broad outline by such writers on the origins of the Welfare State as Bruce,¹ Gilbert,² and de-Schweintz.³ One difficulty encountered by each of the above writers was that, of necessity, the magnitude of the subject caused them to leave out much from their surveys that could justifiably be included in the term "social legislation". Thus Gilbert, while acknowledging the difficulties of defining the term, attempts some limitation of the field by stating that for him the principle that separates measures of true social legislation from other forms of parliamentary activity is that in them there "occurred the transfer of income through the medium of the State from the pocket of the taxpayer, not to some general service available to all citizens, but rather to the benefit of certain designated individuals, who suffered, moreover, no pain or penalty on account of the aid they received, and who were chosen principally on the basis of their need."⁴

¹ Bruce, Maurice, "The Coming of the Welfare State" Batsford, 1961.

² Gilbert, Bentley B. "The Evolution of National Insurance in Great Britain - The Origins of the Welfare State", Michael Joseph, 1966.

³ de-Schweinitz, Karl, "England's Road to Social Security" University of Pennsylvania Press, 1943.

⁴ As (2) above Preface p. 9.

Because the present study is confined to the development of social policy as manifested in statutory provision as it affected two minority groups of disabled in the community, it has been possible to give a wider connotation to the term "social legislation", Social policy for the disabled^(a) as shown in this thesis, has gradually evolved to mean far more than the relief of poverty consequent on handicap. A comprehensive scheme includes provision for special education and vocational training, followed in suitable cases by sheltered or open employment designed to enable a handicapped person to become, so far as is possible, self-supporting. It also includes facilities for social rehabilitation and recreation, measures designed to compensate for his affliction and to restore him to some extent to parity with his non-handicapped contemporaries, and finally preventative action to reduce the future incidence of the disability. The transfer of income to achieve these ends is not merely from citizens as taxpayers but also involves them in their capacity of ratepayers and possibly further, as persons who freely contribute to the funds of a voluntary society. Furthermore, as shown in this thesis, social legislation may include measures which do not include a financial element such as the Blind Voters Act, the object of which was to ensure that a blind person had the same privacy in polling as that enjoyed by a sighted voter. This thesis, therefore, deals with every proposal whether actually enacted or not to benefit the blind or deaf during the period covered by the investigation. It is also concerned with the persons and organisations that played a leading part in promoting such legislation and the pressure group

(a) Gorman (reference 35) p. 18, makes a useful distinction between a "disability" and a "handicap". He regards a "disability" as an incapacity, physical or mental, which may be possessed by a person. A "handicap" denotes the psychological or social limitations which a disabled person may experience as a result of his disability.

strategies by which they sought to achieve their objectives. Finally, descriptions are given of the various ways in which statutory provision was implemented at both the central and local levels and the practical difficulties that arose in making legislation effective. The subject matter of the thesis therefore falls broadly into the fields of both social administration and social politics.

The starting date of 1834 was chosen by the writer not only because the Poor Law Amendment Act of that year introduced principles that were to influence statutory provision throughout the period covered by this study but also for the reason that in that Act both blindness and deafness were referred to in a legislative setting for the first time. The original intention was to trace the subsequent development of legislation for the two disabilities as far as the National Assistance Act of 1948. The decision to end the narrative earlier in 1939 was taken for two reasons. Firstly, under the "thirty year" rule, access could not be obtained to any material in Government archives that was dated later than 1942. Further, despite extensive searches by the staff of the Department of Health and Social Security, no records could be found after 1937 relating to the work of the Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind which, as stated in Chapter 4, was the most important factor during the inter-war years in determining both policy and provision relating to services for the blind. Secondly, by 1939, the "break-up of the Poor Law" was, so far as the blind were concerned virtually complete. In the case of the deaf, however, as with all other disabilities, no statutory provision apart from the Poor Law was available for adults until the National Assistance Act of 1948. A further thirteen years elapsed before it became mandatory for local authorities to exercise their powers under Section 29 of the Act in relation to persons who were "deaf or dumb" or "substantially and

permanently handicapped by illness, injury or congenital deformity". It was, therefore, considered better to end the study at a point at which a comparison could be made between the privileged position from the statutory viewpoint enjoyed by the blind in contrast with the much less favourable situation of the deaf. By ending in 1939 the narrative is concluded before such events as the Beveridge Report of 1942, the Disabled Persons and Education Acts of 1944 and, of course, the National Assistance Act of 1948. It is the hope of the writer that either he, or some other researcher, will be able to carry forward the story from the point at which the thesis ends when the source materials become available.

(2) Definitions.

For the purpose of this investigation the term "blind" is applied to persons with a profound loss of sight as distinct from the "partially blind" or in the more positive modern terminology "the partially sighted". For such persons in adult life the definition of "so blind as to be unable to perform any work for which eyesight is essential" has, since 1920⁵ been the basis of statutory provision. Similarly, the term "deaf" is applied to persons formerly and inaccurately described as the "deaf and dumb". This class, as a Ministry of Health Circular stated,⁶ included persons who were born deaf and those who had lost their hearing so early in life that they had little or no recollection of sound and had, therefore, to be educated in the same way as those born deaf. In 1961, however, the Advisory Council on the Health and Welfare of Handicapped Persons made a recommendation which was accepted by the Minister of Health that "all persons who suffer from a disabling loss of hearing should be regarded as forming a single class" which for registration purposes should be classified according

⁵Blind Persons Act, 1920, Section 1.

⁶Ministry of Health Circular 32/51, 28th August, 1951.

to the persons existing condition and needs rather than according to the origin of his disability into the three categories of :-

- "(a) Deaf without speech - those who have no useful hearing and whose normal method of communication is by signs, finger spelling or writing.
- (b) Deaf with speech - those who (even with a hearing aid) have little or no useful hearing but whose normal method of communication is by speech and lip-reading.
- (c) Hard of Hearing - those who (with or without a hearing aid) have some useful hearing and whose normal method of communication is by speech, listening and lip-reading."⁷

It is with persons falling into categories (a) and (b) with which this thesis is concerned. In the days before accurate definition and means for the ascertainment of visual or auditory loss, the distinctions between the blind and partially blind and the deaf and hard of hearing were, however, very blurred. Finally, no attempt is made in this thesis to deal with assistance either from statutory or voluntary sources to the war blinded or deafened.

(3) Literature relevant to this study.

The development of social legislation and its implementation with reference to blind or deaf persons can be traced in the Annual Reports of the Board⁸ and after 1944, the Ministry of Education⁹, the Local Government Board¹⁰ and its successor, in 1919, the Ministry of Health.¹¹

⁷Ministry of Health, Circular 25/61.

⁸Board of Education - Annual Reports of the Chief Medical Officer 1908-1938
See especially - 1918 - The Education of the Blind, pp. 137-147
1920 - Special Schools for Defective Children, pp.126-130
1931 - Vision and Hearing in School Children, pp. 71-77
1933 - Partially Sighted and Blind Children, pp.102-106
1934 - The Ophthalmic Service, pp. 65-76
1937 - Report on Partially Deaf Children, pp. 101.108

⁹Ministry of Education - Reports of the Chief Medical Officer 1939-1947
See especially - 1939-44 Special Educ. Treatment of Handicapped Pupils
1946-47 Partially Sighted Children pp.108-118 (pp.97-104)

¹⁰Local Government Board, Annual Reports 1917-18 and 1918-19.

¹¹Ministry of Health Annual, Reports 1920-1939.

The twelve published Reports of the Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind are also invaluable in providing a continuous record of the main issues in blind welfare between 1918 and 1937.¹² Useful historical summaries of the growth of various aspects of work for the blind are to be found in the Handbook on the Welfare of the Blind¹³ and the Reports published by the Ministry of Labour on Blind Persons in Industry¹⁴ and Workshops for the Blind.¹⁵ Material relative to both the blind and the deaf is contained in the Younghusband Report¹⁶ The Eicholz Report of 1932¹⁷ gives information relating to the establishment of schools and voluntary welfare societies for the deaf up to that date. The most important earlier sources are the Report and Minutes of Evidence of the Royal Commission on the Blind, Deaf and Dumb of 1889 and the Report and Minutes of Evidence of the Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind 1917.

Apart from Government sources, authoritative material in an easily accessible form is sparse. Published and unpublished work on the education of the blind or deaf tends to deal mainly with methods of teaching, the theories of educators and the establishment of special schools. Butterfield¹⁸ and Pritchard¹⁹ have described the development

¹²Ministry of Health, Reports of the Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind - 1918-1919, 1919-20, 1921-22, 1922-23, 1923-24, 1924-26, 1926-27, 1928-29, 1930, 1931-32, 1933-34, 1934-37.

¹³Ministry of Health. Handbook on the Welfare of the Blind, Third Ed. 1939.

¹⁴Ministry of Labour. Report of the Working Party on Blind Persons in Industry, 1951. pp. 9-13.

¹⁵Ministry of Labour. Workshops for the Blind, 1962. pp. 1-6.

¹⁶Ministry of Health. Report of the Working Party on Social Workers in the Local Authority, Health & Welfare Services, 1959. Par. 265-291 pp. 65-74.

¹⁷Ministry of Health and Board of Education "A Study of the Deaf in England and Wales" 1930-32 especially pp. 24-30 and 99-103.

¹⁸Butterfield, P.H. The Evolution of Special Education 1893-1939 Unpublished Ph.D. (Education) Thesis, London 1970.

¹⁹Pritchard, D.G. "Education and the Handicapped" 1760-1960 Routledge and Kegan Paul 1963.

are given in Bulletin No. 7 issued by the National Institute for the Blind³⁰ and Rose.³¹ Three other publications which are invaluable to persons concerned with the development of blind welfare are Wagg,³² Thomas,³³ and a summary of legislation prepared by the Southern Regional Association for the Blind.³⁴ Richmond³⁵ and Skottowe³⁶ deal with legal aspects of blindness.

Only two original studies by Gorman³⁷ and Lysons³⁸ have been made which deal with aspects of social welfare provision for the deaf. A collection of essays relating to various aspects of deaf welfare was published by the North Regional Association for the Deaf in 1958³⁹ and a short outline of deafness in Britain was issued by the Royal National Institute for the Deaf in 1961.⁴⁰ Finally, the researcher

³⁰National Institute for the Blind. Bulletin No. 7. A History of Blind Welfare in England and Wales (undated).

³¹Rose, June. "Changing Focus" - The Development of Blind Welfare in Britain, 1970.

³²Wagg, H. J. "A Chronological Survey of Work for the Blind" (From the Earliest Records up to 1930) Pitman and Sons, 1932.

³³Thomas, Mary G. "A Chronological Survey of Work for the Blind" 1931-51. Pitman and Sons, 1953.

³⁴Southern Regional Association for the Blind. "Chronological Summary of Legislation Relative to the Blind" Third Edition 1965.

³⁵Richmond, Lawrence. "Local Authorities and the Welfare of the Blind with particular reference to the Blind Persons Acts 1920 and 1938. Law and Local Government Publications Ltd. 1938.

³⁶Skottowe, P. F. "The Law Relating to the Blind" Butterworths, 1967.

³⁷Gorman, P. P. "Certain Social and Psychological Difficulties Facing the Deaf Person in the English Community" Unpub. Ph.D. Thesis Cambridge 1965.

³⁸Lysons, C. K. "Some Aspects of the Historical Development and Present Organisation of Voluntary Welfare Societies for Adult Deaf Persons in England 1840-1963. Unpub. M.A. Thesis, Liverpool 1965.

³⁹North Regional Association for the Deaf. "Deafness" A Survey of the Problems. Manchester 1958.

⁴⁰Royal National Institute for the Deaf. "The Deaf in Britain". London, 1961.

would be well advised to consult the library catalogues of the Royal National Institutes for the Blind and the Deaf. In the latter case two bibliographies compiled by Gorman, a former librarian, are of special interest.⁴¹ A very dated, but still useful catalogue is that of the Library for Deaf Education of the University of Manchester.⁴² The relative paucity of references given above provides some idea of the extent to which the present study has had to rely on primary sources and also some justification for the research involved in its compilation.

⁴¹Gorman, P. P. Hearing and Spoken Language - A select list of Books National Institute for the Deaf 1964.
Gorman - A List of British Periodicals on Deafness 1855-1962. National Institute for the Deaf 1962.

⁴²Leigh, C. W. E. Catalogue of the Library for Deaf Education. University of Manchester 1932.

LIST OF TABLESTABLE

1	Summary of the Returns Relating to Blind or Deaf Persons who were Assisted from the Poor Rates in the week which included 2nd September 1887.	Opposite Page 14
2	Number of Blind or Deaf Children in Receipt of Relief above 5 and under 15 years of age in the week which included 2nd September 1887.	Opposite Page 14
3	Blind Persons Receiving Relief under the Poor Law on 1st July 1914.	Opposite Page 19
4	Methods of Relief to Blind Persons under the Poor Law on 1st July 1914.	Opposite Page 19
5	Proportion of Blind Persons Per Million of each Sex in England and Wales 1851-1911.	Opposite Page 48
6	Proportion of Deaf and Dumb Persons Per Million of each Sex in England and Wales 1851-1911.	Opposite Page 48
7	Main Interests of Witnesses who appeared before the Royal Commission on the Blind, Deaf and Dumb, etc., 1885-1889.	Opposite Page 61
8	Schools and Accommodation for Children Handicapped by Blindness or Deafness 1896-1899.	Opposite Page 90
9	Number of Blind Persons in England and Wales between 50 and 70 years of age in receipt of Old Age Pensions on account of Blindness 1921-1939.	Page 210
10	Distribution of the Blind in England and Wales according to Age, Periods 1919-1938.	Page 223
11	Percentage of Registered Blind Persons aged over 16 classified as "Unemployables" to the Total Numbered Blind 1919-1936.	Page 271

TABLE

12	Numbers of Home Teachers for the Blind 1922-1936.	Page 287
13	Certified Home Teachers of the Blind 1924-1936.	Page 293
14	Schemes and Regulations of Local Authorities in England and Wales with regard to Domiciliary Assistance to unemployables and other necessitous Blind.	Page 315
15	The Welfare of the Blind. Ministry of Health Grants to Voluntary Associations and Local Authorities 1921-1922 - 1929-1930.	Opposite Page 319
16	Expenditure of Selected Local Authorities in England and Wales under the Blind Persons Acts 1920 and 1938 for the year ended March 31st 1938.	Page 324
17	Analysis of 5,290 B.D.8 Forms relating to cases of Eye Defect in England and Wales in which the cause was the same in each eye. 1937.	Page 411
18	Persons in Receipt of Poor Law Relief (England and Wales) 1929.	Opposite Page 514
19	Statement of Councils.	Opposite Page 544

CHAPTER I

The Blind, the Deaf and the Poor Law 1834-1919

Section 5 of the Local Government Act of 1929 gave permissive powers to local authorities to make "declarations of their intention" to provide relief to the blind by virtue of the Blind Persons Act of 1920 and not under the poor law. Apart from those authorities which made such declarations, the welfare of the blind in post school life, was, until the implementation of the Blind Persons Act of 1938, a poor law responsibility. Not until the formal abolition of the poor law by the National Assistance Act of 1948 were local authorities given permissive powers to provide for the welfare of adult deaf persons other than under poor law auspices.

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the development of poor law policy relating to blind or deaf persons and its administration by the boards of guardians from the passing of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 up to the replacement, in 1919, of the Local Government Board by the Ministry of Health. The Chapter is therefore divided into six sections, the first of which endeavours to give a brief outline of the general principles underlying the philosophy and administration of the "New Poor Law" of 1834. This section is followed by an outline of poor law legislation relating to the disabled with special reference to the blind or deaf up to and including the Amendment Act of 1834. The third section described subsequent legislation in respect of the two disabilities until the passing of the Elementary Education (Blind and Deaf Children's) Act of 1893. The fourth section is concerned with the incidence of pauperism among persons handicapped by the two disabilities and some aspects of the implementation of both "outdoor" and "indoor" relief to blind or deaf persons. The final two sections are concerned with a brief consideration of some of the factors that led to a gradual modification of poor law principles as applied to the

blind or deaf during the period 1880-1918 and the recognition of the need for state assistance to persons handicapped by blindness or deafness.

(1) The Principles and Administration of the "New Poor Law"

The Report published in 1834 of the "Commissioners for Inquiring into the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws" recommended a new social policy and a revised system of social administration in respect of poor relief. The Commissioners distinguished between two classes of paupers^(a) namely, the able-bodied and the impotent and between two methods of relief, i.e. indoor and outdoor according to whether assistance was or was not given in a workhouse.¹

The panacea advocated by the Commissioners for the social problem of able-bodied pauperism was a strict application of the principles of "less eligibility" under which the situation of the able-bodied pauper should be deliberately made inferior to the condition of the lowest paid independent labourer. Since the Commissioners considered that, in general, it was impossible to guarantee that outdoor relief would be "less eligible", they recommended that, with some exceptions^(b) "all relief whatever to able-bodied persons or to their families otherwise than in well regulated workhouses should be declared unlawful"². In the workhouse the enforcement of a penal regimen of work, confinement and discipline would both provide a test of genuine need and act as a deterrent to applications for relief by the indolent and vicious.

¹Report made in 1834 by His Majesty's Commissioners for enquiring into the Administration and Practical application of the Poor Laws. (Afterwards referred to as the Poor Law Report 1834) p.13.

²Poor Law Report p. 262

(a) The Report later classified these two broad divisions of pauper into four sub-categories, i.e.

- (1) the aged and the really impotent,
- (2) the children,
- (3) the able-bodied females,
- (4) the able-bodied males.

(b) Medical attendance and the securing of apprenticeships for the children of poor parents.

The Report gave little attention to the impotent (a) (b) poor which it defined as "comprehending all except the able-bodied and their families,"³ since the Commissioners found that, in contrast to assistance given to the able-bodied, outdoor relief to the impotent was subject to less abuse. The impotent were therefore to continue to be the recipients of outdoor relief. As Theobald⁴ pointed out the duty of the poor law officials with regard to "the lame, impotent, old and blind and such other poor as are not able to work" was to raise "sufficient sums for their necessary relief." In contrast, the obligation placed on the guardians with regard to those applicants who were able to work was "not to relieve but to provide work and to apprentice the children."

The above policy could not, however, be put into practice without radical changes in the existing machinery for the administration of poor relief. Accordingly the Report recommended that a Central Board should be appointed "To control the administration of the Poor Laws with such Assistant Commissioners as may be found requisite."⁵ This Central Board would, by means of regulations enforced by the Assistant Commissioners, "divest the local authorities of all discretionary power in the administration of relief"⁶ and thus ensure uniformity of practice throughout the country.

³Poor Law Report 1834. p. 42.

⁴Theobald, William. "A Practical Treatise on the Poor Laws as altered by the Poor Law Amendment Act." Stevens & Sons, Bell Yard, London, 1836. pp. 43-4 (The British Museum Shelfmark is 516d. 17.)

⁵Poor Law Report 1834. p. 297.

⁶Poor Law Report 1834. p. 294.

(a) The Majority Report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of distress 1909 Vol.II p.13 defined some of the terms used by the 1834 Poor Law Commissioners. Thus the word "indigent" was applied to "those paupers who are unable to work - to the impotent of the 1601 Poor Law Act of Elizabeth. Three classes of indigent poor were recognized in 1836 (a) those indigent from age; (b) persons who were indigent from being crippled or from incurable disease; (c) persons indigent by reason of temporary sickness. Widows, who like the able-bodied were generally able to work were termed "destitute".

(b) Skottowe, "The Law Relating to the Blind", Butterworths 1967 p.1 mentions that in construing one of the early Poor Law Acts it was held that the term "sickness" included blindness'. R.v. Bucknell (Inhabitants) (1854).

The Assistant Commissioners would also be charged with the task of carrying out the Board's policy of incorporating "parishes into unions" responsible for the establishment and management of the "common workhouses" and for the appointment and payment of permanent "relieving officers" answerable to locally elected "boards of guardians". Thus, individual applicants for relief would be dealt with at the local level by the guardians who would have the duty of interpreting and applying the regulations of the Central Board to the circumstances of the particular case. Among other recommendations the Report proposed that unions should adopt a uniform system of accounting and audit⁷ and that the Central Board should have authority to prosecute poor law officials guilty of the misappropriation of funds.⁸ Finer⁹ has summarised the administrative devices which the Commissioners sought to introduce as

"central supervision, central inspection, central audit, a professional local government service controlled by elected bodies and the adjustment of areas to administrative exigencies".

When enacted by the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 the recommendations of the Commissioners formed the basis of poor law policy in England and Wales for the next seventy-five years.

(2) Poor Law Policy relating to the Blind or Deaf and Dumb 1530-1834

It has been stated by the Webbs¹⁰ that the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 recognized a new class of pauper, namely, the physically defective "initially those who were blind or deaf or dumb". This statement, however, is not strictly correct since earlier poor law Acts had recognized pauperism due to physical disability as constituting a special social problem.

⁷Poor Law Report 1834. p. 319.

⁸Poor Law Report 1834. p. 331.

⁹S. E. Finer. The Life and Times of Sir Edwin Chadwick (Methuen 1952) p. 26.

¹⁰S. and B. Webb. English Poor Law Policy Longmans Green & Co. 1910. p. 50.

Nicholls¹¹ mentions that the Act for Beggars and Vagabonds¹² passed in 1530 distinguished between "aged poor and impotent persons" and persons "being whole and mighty in body and able to labour" allowing the former but not the latter class to beg under licence. Five years later, a further Act relating to Beggars and Vagabonds¹³ provided that while "sturdy vagabonds and valiant beggars" should be set to work, the "poor, impotent sick and diseased people being not able to work may be provided, holpen and relieved" by means of voluntary alms. The distinction between the able-bodied and the impotent is continued in later legislation. Thus the Act for the Provision and Relief of the Poor of 1551-52¹⁴ was passed with the express object of ensuring "that valiant beggars, idle and loitering persons, may be avoided and the impotent, feeble and lame provided for which are poor in very deed". Despite these provisions, however, London seems to have been overcrowded with beggars and Nicholls¹⁵ refers to an order given in 1569 to apprehend "all beggars and idle people, whether men, women or children or other masterless vagrants". The order provided that "vagabonds and sturdy beggars" were to be taken to Bridewell; the "aged, impotent, sick, sore, lame or blind to St. Bartholomew's or St. Thomas's Hospitals and the children under sixteen to Christ's Hospital.

The first specific reference to the blind in any British Statute occurs in the Act for the Relief of the Poor of 1598¹⁶ which appointed "overseers of the poor" in every parish who, in addition to "setting to work" of pauper

¹¹Sir George Nicholls. A History of the English Poor Law (1854) Revised Edition Vol. I pp. 115-7. Frank Cass & Co. Ltd. 1967.

¹²22 Henry VIII C.12 The Act for Beggars and Vagabonds.

¹³27 Henry VIII C. 25 For Beggars and Vagabonds.

¹⁴5 and 6 Edward VI C.2 For the Provision and Relief of the Poor.

¹⁵Sir George Nicholls (as 11) p. 177.

¹⁶39 Elizabeth C.3 An Act for the Relief of the Poor.

children and adults were charged with the duty of ensuring "the necessary relief of the lame, impotent, old, blind and such others being poor and not able to work". This Act also introduced the principle of family responsibility for the support of the poor by stating that the parents or children of every poor and impotent person "being of sufficient ability" should "at their own charges, relieve and maintain every such poor person". This duty was extended to grandparents by the Poor Law Act of 1601¹⁷ and as Bruce¹⁸ has stated "even further extended during the centuries". As late as 1930 the Poor Law Act of that year laid down¹⁹ that "it shall be the duty of the father, grandfather, mother, grandmother, husband or child of a poor, old, blind, lame or impotent person if possessed of sufficient means to relieve and maintain that person". Not until the Determination of Needs Act of 1941²⁰ was the view that the income of relatives should be regarded as a resource available to all members of the family especially if without it they would become a charge on public funds, abandoned, and the household means test abolished in respect of applicants for poor relief.

While statutory recognition was given to the blind in 1598 it was not until the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834²¹ that similar mention was made of the deaf. The inclusion of the deaf in the 1834 Act is attributed to the efforts of the Earl of Harewood although the present writer has been unable to confirm the Earl's responsibility from an examination of the Parliamentary Reports. It appears, however, that the inclusion of the deaf in the poor law legislation was due to the initiative of Charles Baker, the first Principal of the Yorkshire Institution for the Deaf. In the

¹⁷₄₃ Elizabeth C.2 An Act for the Relief of the Poor.

¹⁸ Maurice Bruce. "The Coming of the Welfare State" R.T.Batsford, 1961. Preface p. vii

¹⁹₂₀ George V Ch. 17. Sec. 14

²⁰₄ and 5 George VI Ch. 11. Sec. 1.

²¹₄ and 5 William IV C.76 S. 56.

early days of the Institution which was founded in 1829, the Committee of Management found that many parents were unable to find the small sum required as a contribution towards the maintenance of their children in the establishment. Appeals to the parish authorities for assistance in respect of such contributions were generally futile since

"it was difficult to convince overseers and other parish officers that there was a wise economy in paying for the education of the indigent deaf and dumb children or to persuade them that such children would thus be rendered able to learn a trade and become self-supporting."²¹

Baker relates that a desultory attempt was made to secure some provision for the education of the deaf and blind in the Poor Law Amendment Bill during its passage through the Commons. Nothing was achieved, however, and the needs of the handicapped would probably have been completely ignored had not Baker drawn the attention of the Earl of Harewood to the fact that

"from the poverty of the parents and the parsimony of some of the parishes many children were denied the benefits of education; that this obstacle was felt in all schools of the kind; that where a natural infirmity existed, the worst effects of which might be wholly overcome by education as in the case of the deaf or dumb or partially as in the case of the blind, some legislative provision was desirable."²²

It was also pointed out that the favourable chance of supplying this defect under the Poor Law Amendment Bill was apparently lost.

According to Baker²³ these representations resulted in the Earl of Harewood promising to champion the cause of the deaf and dumb when the Poor Law Bill came before the Lords. Initially the Earl endeavoured to make the education of the blind or deaf compulsory on the parishes to which they

²²Historical and Financial Statement of Forty Years Work at the Yorkshire Institution for the Deaf and Dumb. Published by order of the Committee Doncaster, 1869. p. 10.

²³Supra. p. 11.

belonged as "the most economical policy for preventing them from becoming a future burden". Although this attempt was unsuccessful, an exception was made in the Act to the general principle of indoor relief by providing that relief given to or on account of a blind or deaf and dumb wife or to a child or children suffering from these disabilities should not be regarded as given to the husband or father as the case might be.²⁴

(3) Poor Law Legislation relating to the Blind or Deaf 1834-1893

Between 1834 and 1893 Poor Law legislation gave increasing recognition to the blind or deaf and dumb as classes which the guardians had permissive powers to assist. The earlier Acts were concerned mainly with the education of children but later measures applied also to adults and institutions. The relevant sections of the principal Acts are summarised below:-

(a) Children:

The Poor Law (Certified Schools) Act of 1862²⁵ provided that blind or deaf and dumb children might, at the discretion of the guardians, be removed from the workhouse and sent to certified institutions which would be reimbursed at a rate not exceeding the total sum that would have been charged for the maintenance of such a child if it had been relieved in the workhouse. A certified school was an institution that had been certified as efficient by the Central Authority following an inspection carried out at the request of the managers of the school. This Act, which was passed as a result of the Royal Commission on Education which reported in 1861, was initially, however, of very limited usefulness since few institutions were prepared to receive handicapped children in return for a payment only equivalent to the cost of workhouse maintenance.

²⁴4 and 5 William IV C.76 S.56.

²⁵25 and 26 Victoria C.43 S.10

Ross²⁶ has shown that, as the law stood in 1862, "maintenance" meant only such amounts as were chargeable to the parish under Section 26 of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 and not the sum chargeable to the union under Section 28 of the same Act, such as the rent of the building, salaries of staff and general upkeep. As Ross²⁶ observes, "In brief, the guardians were allowed to pay the certified schools for the children's clothes, food and little else". There was, in addition, the disadvantage of the inspection by the Poor Law Board and the possibility of visits from the representatives of the boards of guardians which had sent children to the school. Both under the Poor Law Board and its successor the Local Government Board, however, the investigation prior to certification seems to have been extremely superficial. A school was certified on the basis of a report by one of the Board's General Inspectors who satisfied himself that the children were properly clothed and fed and that "the cubical and superficial space" was sufficient for the number of pupils for which the institution was to be approved.²⁷ No report was obtained from any educational expert as to the sufficiency and suitability of the instruction which the school provided. Moreover, once certified, a school was not subsequently inspected. In 1883 a board of guardians in London enquired "with some anxiety" whether there was any central inspection of the education being given in the certified schools to which it was contributing. As a consequence of this enquiry the Local Government Board directed that twenty-three out of the fifty-five Roman Catholic certified schools should be inspected. There appears to be no explanation for the invidious selection of Roman Catholic schools for inspection to the exclusion of all other certified institutions.²⁷

²⁶Ross, A. M. "The Care and Education of Pauper Children in England and Wales 1834-1896" Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis Univ. of London 1955. p. 143.

²⁷Report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress Vol. 3. Being the Minority Report 1909. p. 123.

The Poor Law (Certified Schools) Act became law in July 1862 and by the following May a total of six schools catering for 183 children had been certified. Five of these schools trained females for domestic service and the sixth was the Yorkshire Institution for Instructing the Deaf and Dumb which was therefore the first school for the handicapped to be certified.²⁸ Gradually other schools for the blind or deaf applied for certification and this movement was given impetus by the passing of the Poor Law Amendment Act 1868²⁹ which removed some of the disadvantages of the Certified Schools Act by rescinding the ceiling of payment. The measure relating to the sending of children to certified institutions exclusively was also repealed and in its place the Act stipulated that the consent of the Local Government Board should be obtained if the guardians proposed to send a child to an uncertified school. The permissive powers of the guardians were further extended by the Divided Parishes (Poor Law Amendment) Act of 1882³⁰ which allowed the guardians with the consent of the Local Government Board to send any pauper child to a school certified under the Act of 1862 and to pay the reasonable expenses incurred in the maintenance, clothing and education of such a child whilst in the school to an amount not exceeding the rate of payment sanctioned by the Board.

As shown in the second chapter of this study, the Elementary Education (Blind and Deaf Children) Act of 1893³¹ laid an obligation on the parent to cause a blind or deaf child to receive a suitable education. The fact that there was no special school for the particular handicap within a reasonable distance of the residence of the child was not regarded as an excuse for non-attendance. The Act also created school authorities

²⁸Poor Law Board Fifteenth Annual Report 1862-3 p. 21 and Appendix 42 p. 324.

²⁹_{31 and 32} Victoria C.122 Section 42

³⁰_{45 and 46} Victoria C.58

³¹_{56 and 57} Victoria C. 42

charged with the duty of enabling blind or deaf children for whose elementary education provision was not otherwise made, to obtain such education in a school certified by the Education Department. The Act of 1893 also repealed the Poor Law (Certified Schools) Act of 1862 and the amending legislation referred to above except with regard to three classes of children, namely, (a) idiots or imbeciles, (b) children resident in workhouses or institutions to which they had been sent from a workhouse, (c) children boarded out by guardians. A distinction was therefore made by the Act between children who were in receipt of outdoor assistance and those who were receiving relief in a workhouse. The former category became the responsibility, so far as education was concerned, of the Education Department and the Act of 1893 expressly provided that where guardians were giving outdoor relief to a parent they should make it a condition that elementary education was provided for his blind or deaf child and where necessary were required to give extra relief for this purpose. Because the guardians stood in loco parentis to them pauper children normally resident in workhouses remained within the purview of the Poor Law. The section relating to such children was included in subsequent Acts up to the Poor Law Act of 1930. Not until 1930 did the Board of Education announce that after April, 1931, they would cease to pay direct grant in respect of pupils sent to special schools by Public Assistance Committees.³²

In 1908 there were eleven certified institutions for the blind, and eight for the deaf and dumb with 129 and 300 poor law inmates respectively.³³

The conflicting opinions regarding the policy of sending pauper

³²Ministry of Health. Ninth Report of the Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind, 1930. p. 11.

³³Royal Commission on the Poor Laws 1909 (Cd. 5077)
Appendix X Volume 25 - Statistics relating to England and Wales.

children to certified institutions are well illustrated by the views expressed in the Minority and Majority Reports of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws issued in 1909.

The Minority Report criticised the policy on the grounds that certified institutions were generally not inspected with the consequence that children resident in them were without "the protection that inspection affords".²⁷ Furthermore, the Report pointed out that many certified institutions were merely homes and that no arrangement existed for ensuring that their managers caused the children entrusted to them to receive schooling. The Webbs³⁴ regarded the certified school as "an evasion not a solution" of the problem. This verdict, as Ross³⁵ observes, is not surprising since the Webbs must have regarded certified schools as anomalies.

"Here was a private venture caring for children who were a public responsibility, half-subsidized yet half-independent; half-autonomous yet half-regulated."

In contrast, the Majority Report averred that the certified school represented "a beginning of co-operation between Poor Law and voluntary charities which might form the basis of a much wider scheme".³⁶ So far as blind or deaf pauper children were concerned such schools were a means of ensuring that handicapped children were cared for in a more suitable environment than the workhouse and that some attempt was made to cater for their special educational needs. Seen thus, the policy of sending such children to certified institutions represents an interesting experiment in early social administration relating to the handicapped.

³⁴ Sidney and Beatrice Webb. *English Poor Law History* Vol. II
Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1929. Reprinted 1963. p. 268.

³⁵ Ross, A. M. *The Care and Education of Pauper Children in England and Wales 1934-1896*. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis. Univ. of London 1955. p. 149.

³⁶ Report on the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress
Vol. I. (The Majority Report) 1909. Par. 431. p. 255.

(b) Adults:

The Poor Law Amendment Act 1867³⁷ enabled the guardians to provide for the reception, maintenance and instruction of any adult pauper being blind or deaf and dumb in any hospital or institution established for the reception of persons suffering under such infirmities. The conveyance of any such pauper to and from such a hospital or institution was also authorised.

(c) Institutions:

The Poor Law Act of 1879³⁸ empowered the guardians, with the consent of the Local Government Board, to subscribe towards the maintenance of "any asylum or institution for blind or for deaf and dumb persons or towards any association or society for aiding such persons." The practical effect of this Act was that a board of guardians could subscribe any amount towards an institution whether or not they had actually sent handicapped persons to it. These powers were subsequently included in all Poor Law Acts up to 1930.

(4) The Incidence and Implementation of Poor Relief to the Blind or Deaf

By 1893, therefore, the Boards of Guardians had extensive powers to assist if they so desired, blind or deaf juveniles and adults as well as institutions or societies established for the education or welfare of persons so afflicted. How this legislation was interpreted by the Central Poor Law Authority can be studied in the reports and correspondence of the Poor Law Commissioners (1834-1847) and their successors, The Poor Law Board (1847-1871) and the Local Government Board (1871-1919). Fortunately for the researcher a summary of this material has been made by the Webbs³⁹ and it is not necessary to make an independent study of

³⁷_{30 and 31} Victoria C.106 S. 21

³⁸_{42 and 43} Victoria (1879) C. 54 S. 10

³⁹ See Webb, S. & B. "English Poor Law Policy" Longmans Green & Co. 1910 especially pp. 50, 127 and 226-9.

TABLE 2

Number of Blind or Deaf children in Receipt of Relief above 5 and under 15 years of age
in the week which included 2nd September, 1887

	<u>UNDER INSTRUCTION</u>							
	Blind Males	Deaf Males	Blind Females	Deaf Females	Total Blind	Total Deaf		
In Special Schools	154	335	132	240	286	575		
In Workhouse Schools	2	21	3	12	5	33		
In public elementary schools other than workhouse schools	2	3	8	5	10	8		
TOTAL	158	359	143	257	301	616		
	<u>NOT UNDER INSTRUCTION</u>							
Indoor	15	15	6	17	21	32		
Outdoor	7	17	7	7	14	24		
TOTAL	22	32	13	24	35	56		

TABLE 1

Summary of the Returns Relating to Blind or Deaf Persons who were assisted

from the Poor Rates in the week which included 2nd September, 1887

	Blind Males	Deaf Males	Blind Females	Deaf Females	Total Blind	Total Deaf
<u>INDOOR</u>						
Above 5 and under 15 years of age	171	371	144	267	315	638
15 years of age and under 21 years	99	59	64	42	163	101
21 years of age and under 45 years	232	120	222	133	454	253
45 years of age and upwards	804	161	813	136	1,617	297
Total	1306	711	1243	578	2,549	1289
<u>OUTDOOR</u>						
Above 5 and under 15 years of age	9	20	12	14	21	34
15 years of age and under 21 years	20	23	31	33	51	56
21 years of age and under 45 years	464	57	379	152	843	209
45 years of age and upwards	1429	96	1378	191	2807	287
Total	1922	196	1800	390	3722	586
Total Indoor and Outdoor	3228	907	3043	968	6271	1875

the sparse references to the blind or deaf in the central poor law records. At the local level the implementation of the poor law with respect to the blind or deaf can be observed in such source material as the Reports and Minutes of Evidence of the Royal Commission on the Blind, Deaf and Dumb of 1889, the annual and conference reports of voluntary educational and welfare societies for the blind or deaf and the journals of such national organisations as the Charity Organisation Society. Before considering the application of outdoor and indoor relief to the blind or deaf, however, it is desirable to study the incidence of pauperism among persons so afflicted in order that the extent to which the two handicaps constituted a social problem from the standpoint of the poor law can be accurately estimated.

(a) The Incidence of Pauperism among Blind or Deaf Persons

Although there are incidental references to the numbers of blind or deaf persons who were resident in workhouses in the Census Reports from 1851-1911, no attempt seems to have been made to assess the extent of pauperism with respect to the two disabilities until 1888 when the Local Government Board, at the instigation of William Woodall, the then Member for Stoke-on-Trent, prepared a summary of the numbers of blind or deaf persons who were assisted from the poor rates during the week which included 2nd September, 1887.⁴⁰ Details of this Return are shown in Tables 1 and 2 from which it can be seen that 6,271 blind and 1,875 deaf and dumb persons were in receipt of assistance at the date to which the Return referred. Of the blind persons 2,549 (40.6%) were relieved in the workhouses or other institutions and 3,722 (59.2%) were in receipt of outdoor relief while the corresponding figures for the deaf or dumb were respectively 1,289 (68.7%) and 586 (21.3%). One reason for the higher incidence of

⁴⁰ Return - Blind and Deaf-Mute Persons (England, Wales and Ireland)
Ordered by the House of Commons to be printed 12th September, 1887.

indoor relief among blind persons is probably found in the nature of the handicap since it is harder for a person with little or no sight to live in the open community than for a person who has a profound loss of hearing. Often a blind person would receive outdoor relief while resident with parents or other relatives but on the decease of such persons there would be little option for him but to enter the workhouse and, having once become an inmate he would probably remain one for the rest of his life.^(a)

The Tables also reveal the striking contrast in the age-incidence of the two disabilities since 336 (5.4%) blind children were in the 5-15 age group as against 672 (36.4%) children classified as deaf and dumb.

From Table 2 it appears that the majority of guardians were exercising their powers to provide for the education in special schools of children suffering from both of the disabilities which are the subject of this study. In respect of the class interval of 45 years of age and upwards, however, 4,424 (77.5%) blind persons were returned as against only 584 (33.6%) deaf and dumb cases in receipt of either indoor or outdoor relief. According to the 1891 census^{40a} 23,467 persons were returned as afflicted by blindness or one blind person in every 1,236 of the total population. The corresponding figures for the deaf and dumb were 29,280 or one in 991. On the basis of the figures for the nearest census, therefore, approximately 22.4% of the blind population and 6.4% of the deaf population were in receipt of either outdoor or indoor relief at the date to which the return referred.

(a) This point is exemplified in a statement made by William Hibbert, a Senior teacher of the Home Teaching Society for the Blind in his evidence to the Royal Commission on the Blind, Deaf and Dumb. Par. 2375 "Though outdoor relief might be discouraged in general, yet with regard to the blind you think it would be an advantage to make an exception?" - "Yes, because when a person becomes blind and suffers in health he is compelled to seek refuge somewhere, and the workhouse of the parish to which he belongs is the only place open for him. Then when once he has entered the workhouse his little home is broken up, and he is obliged to remain in the workhouse, as there is nowhere else for him to go."

^{40a} Census Report 1891. pp. 70 and 72

It is perhaps significant that after 1887 no subsequent attempt seems to have been made to obtain statistics of the number of deaf persons who were being assisted from the poor law until 1931 when such an enquiry was made in connection with the investigation carried out by Dr. Eichholz between 1930 and 1932 into the industrial and educational condition of the deaf and dumb. Reference to this investigation is made later in the present study.^(a)

Between 1887 and 1931 therefore, information in official sources regarding the position under the poor law of the blind or deaf is limited to the former disability and is found in two reports to which reference is made below.

In 1888, at the request of the Royal Commission on the Blind, Deaf and Dumb, reports on the condition and treatment of the adult blind in workhouses were furnished by the 16 inspectors responsible for the 15 poor law districts of the Local Government Board. Unfortunately not all the inspectors gave details of the numbers of blind persons in the workhouses situated in their districts, but the return for London showed that 619 blind persons of all ages were being maintained in 30 workhouses.⁴¹ One factor that clearly emerges from the returns is that the numbers of blind persons in any one workhouse were very small. Thus, the Inspector responsible for District 12 (Yorkshire) reported⁴² that he had 46 unions under his supervision in which the number of blind inmates were as follows:-

(a) See Chapter 7. p.

⁴¹ Report of the R.C.B. & D. H.M.S.O. 1889 Appendix X p. 123.

⁴² Report of the R.C.B. & D. Appendix X pp. 145-6

<u>Number of Blind Inmates in Workhouse</u>	<u>Number of Unions</u>	<u>Totals</u>
0	15	-
1	7	7
2	6	12
3	5	15
4	1	4
5	2	10
6	2	12
7	2	14
8	2	16
9	1	9
10	1	10
17	1	17
20	1	20
—	—	—
	46	146

The figures of 20, 17, 10 and 9 were in the populous districts of Leeds, Sheffield, Dewsbury and Huddersfield where the total workhouse populations at the date of his survey were respectively, 978, 1420, 315 and 554. The impression conveyed by this and other reports submitted by the Inspectors is that of a tiny minority of blind persons submerged in the mass of sighted workhouse inhabitants.

After 1888 no further official enquiry appears to have been made into the position of blind persons under the poor law for a period of twenty-six years. In 1914, however, the Departmental Committee on the Blind appointed by the President of the Local Government Board^(a) earlier in the year requested the Board to obtain a return from the Poor Law Unions of England and Wales of the numbers of blind persons in receipt of relief. The Return made a very useful distinction between two classes of blind persons. Class I consisted of persons who were capable of education, training or employment whose sight was so defective that without special education and training they would not be capable of becoming reasonably efficient in any ordinary profession or industry.⁴³ Class II comprised persons who from age or any other

(a) Herbert Samuel

⁴³ Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind
Minutes of Evidence, Appendices and Index. H.M.S.O. 1917
Appendix IV p. 474.

cause were not capable of education, training or employment and whose sight was so defective that they were unable to count fingers at a greater distance than three feet.⁴³ The information obtained by the Local Government Board was presented in five sets of tables providing statistics relating to the ages of the persons enumerated, the date of onset of blindness, the causes of blindness, education, training and employment and methods of relief. Details of the numbers of persons receiving relief and the methods of relief are reproduced in Tables III and IV from which it can be seen that only 2029 or about 23% of the cases chargeable to the poor law unions were considered capable of education, training or employment. In addition, the Committee was informed in the course of oral evidence, that 34% of the number of persons in England and Wales classified as totally blind were in receipt of some form of poor relief.⁴⁴

(b) The Implementation of Poor Relief

As stated earlier in this chapter^(a) the Poor Law Report of 1834 advised that, in contrast to the able-bodied poor to whom the workhouse test would be rigorously applied, the impotent poor should continue to receive outdoor relief. Table I shows that out of 5721 indigent blind persons who were over 21 years of age on 2nd September, 1887, 2071 (37%) were in receipt of indoor relief as against 3650 (63%) who were receiving outdoor assistance. In the case of the deaf and dumb, the proportions were reversed since the numbers receiving indoor or outdoor relief were respectively 550 (53%) and 496 (47%). An explanation of

⁴³ Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind
Minutes of Evidence, Appendices and Index. H.M.S.O. 1917
Appendix IV p. 474

⁴⁴ Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind. Minutes of Evidence.
Evidence of A. V. Symonds, Assistant Secretary of the Local Government
Board. Par. 8951. p. 306.

(a) See page 3

TABLE 4

Methods of Relief to Blind Persons under the Poor Law on 1st July, 1914

Ages on 1st July 1914	M A L E				F E M A L E				Total Class I and Class II
	In Institutions		In receipt of Outdoor Relief	In Institutions		In receipt of Outdoor Relief	Total Class II	Total	
	Poor Law	Other Institutions		Poor Law	Other Institutions				
					CLASS I				
Under 16 years of age	17	34	4	13	35	12	115	76	191
Over 16 and under 25	22	181	44	23	162	36	468	148	616
Over 25 and under 50	130	124	466	78	120	344	1,262	1,263	2,525
Over 50 years of age	25	15	70	16	8	50	184	5,450	5,634
Totals	194	354	584	130	325	442	2,029	6,937	8,966
Total	1,902	81	1,513	1,796	146	1,499	6,937		
Grand Total	2,096	435	2,097	1,926	471	1,941	8,966		

TABLE 3

Blind Persons Receiving Relief under the Poor Law
on 1st July, 1914

Age groups	Class I	Percentage of Total in Class I	Class II	Percentage of Total in Class II
Under 16 years of age	115	5.7	76	1.1
Over 16 and under 25	468	23.1	148	2.1
Over 25 and under 50	1,262	62.2	1,263	18.2
Over 50 years of age	184	9.0	5,450	78.6
Totals	2,029	100.0	6,937	100.0

this dissimilarity is possibly found in Table IV which shows that 1,010 (53%) out of a total of 1,914 blind persons over 16 years of age who, in the year 1914 were classified as capable of education, training or employment, were recipients of outdoor relief. In contrast, only 1,499 (22%) of the 6,937 persons who were categorised as ineducable or unemployable were being so assisted. It would appear, therefore, that the deaf and dumb referred to in the surveys of 1887 were persons incapable of supporting themselves in the open community.

While outdoor relief applied in theory to the impotent poor of all ages the tendency, which applied also in the general population, was for the proportion of blind and probably also deaf persons receiving indoor relief to increase with the ages of the recipients. This fact is well exemplified in a survey undertaken in connection with the International Conference of the Blind held in 1905⁴⁵ which showed that of 561 blind persons who were inmates of the workhouses maintained by nineteen boards of guardians, the respective ages were as follows:-

	<u>Under</u>								<u>Over</u>	<u>Total</u>
	<u>10</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>40</u>	<u>50</u>	<u>60</u>	<u>70</u>	<u>80</u>	<u>80</u>	
Males	2	1	14	17	38	31	74	44	28	246
Females	2	4	13	15	27	35	78	94	47	315
	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>27</u>	<u>32</u>	<u>65</u>	<u>66</u>	<u>152</u>	<u>138</u>	<u>72</u>	<u>561</u>

Thus 428 persons (76%) had attained the age of fifty years. In the present section of the chapter an attempt is made to consider the implementation of poor relief with reference to children and those adults who were receiving outdoor relief. In the following section the condition of blind or deaf persons in workhouses will be considered.

⁴⁵W. H. Tate. "Boards of Guardians and their Relation to the Blind" in Report of the International Conference on the Blind, Edinburgh, 1905. p. 297.

(c) Children and "Outdoor" Adults

Evidence given by witnesses appearing before the Royal Commission on the Blind, Deaf and Dumb which reported in 1889 indicated that, although some boards of guardians were using the provisions concerning the blind or deaf contained in the Poor Law Acts of 1834, 1862, 1867, 1868 and 1879, other boards were either neglecting to do so or were doing so perfunctorily. Complaints made to the Commissioners related to five forms of maladministration at the local level, namely, (1) failure to send children to institutions giving special education appropriate to the disability;⁴⁶ (2) the imposition of a "workhouse test" as a condition of relief;⁴⁷ (3) excessive officialdom towards applicants for relief;⁴⁸ (4) failure to grant outdoor relief at all;⁴⁹ (5) insufficient relief to individuals or inadequate contributions to voluntary societies;⁵⁰ Corroboration of these allegations is found in such sources as the annual reports of voluntary societies providing for the education or welfare of children or adults afflicted with one or other of the two disabilities, a typical example being the description given in 1887 by the missioner of the Liverpool Adult Deaf and Dumb Benevolent Society of a refusal by the guardians of assistance towards the education of

⁴⁶

R. C. B. & D. Volume 3. Minutes of Evidence. H.M.S.O. 1889
Para. 4501-2. pp.130-1, and Para. 18022 p. 653.

⁴⁷Supra. Para. 12914-6. pp. 450

⁴⁸Supra. Paras 18379-80. p.666

⁴⁹Supra. Paras. 17250-61, 17267-75, 17278, 17338-40, pp. 621-5.

⁵⁰Supra. Paras. 17225-6 p. 620.

a deaf girl.⁵¹

" A deaf and dumb couple with five little ones (two of whom have unfortunately inherited their parents infirmity) have almost always lingered along the brink of total destitution Great efforts were made to induce the Board of Guardians to send the elder of these mute children (7 years old) to the Liverpool School in Oxford Street but all in vain. When I add that the almost chronic poverty of the parents was not at all disputed by the Guardians I have really exhausted this painful subject. Who can, however, contemplate without horror the prospect of such an intelligent-looking girl being left to grow up totally uneducated in a Christian town like Birkenhead?"

That no assistance had been given twelve months later is evident from the ensuing report of the society.⁵²

" The painful domestic case referred to in my last report has not yet assumed a happier aspect I can only hope that before it is too late the local Board of Guardians may come to perceive that to expend on her education £50 (£10 per year for five years) would not only be the finest charity, but the wisest economy, for she would otherwise grow up to be a life burden on the local rates."

The failure of some boards of guardians to use their powers to assist blind or deaf children and to provide outdoor relief to adults so handicapped can be attributed to one or more of the following reasons:-

(a) Some guardians were only vaguely aware of the provisions of the various Poor Law Acts. Stanier,⁵³ giving evidence to the Royal Commission on the Blind, Deaf and Dumb declared that "in many cases the guardians and their advisers, their clerks and their solicitors were ignorant of the law on the subject." Addressing the Charity Organisation Society in 1888, Stanier again stated⁵⁴ that the clause in the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834

⁵¹Liverpool Adult Deaf and Dumb Benevolent Society Annual Report 1887. p.

⁵²Liverpool Adult Deaf and Dumb Benevolent Society Annual Report 1888.

⁵³R.C.B. & D. Minutes of Evidence Paras. 20908. pp. 776-7

⁵⁴Stanier, Dr. W. "The Powers of the School Board and the Poor Law Guardians in relation to the Care and Education of the Deaf and Dumb". Read at a special meeting of the Charity Organisation Society, London, on Monday, 30th July, 1888, and reported in the "Quarterly Review of Deaf-Mute Education" Vol. 1. No. 12. Oct. 1888. p. 300.

relating to the blind or deaf had been "doubted and denied by many boards and only very recently and that after reference to the Local Government Board has it been assented to by the Metropolitan and other Boards of Guardians." In fairness to the local boards it is clear that there was an almost equal ignorance of the various enactments concerning the blind or deaf both on the part of the Local Government Board itself and the friends of persons afflicted by the handicaps. The extent of this ignorance is well exemplified in the experience of William Woodall, M.P., who on his election to Parliament in 1880 had been induced to take up a Bill providing for "the Elementary Education of Blind and Deaf and Dumb Children and for the Governmental Inspection of Schools for such children".⁵⁵ This Bill, which sought to place an obligation on the guardians of any parish or union to send a blind or deaf child under the age of fourteen to school, if requested to do so by the parents, had first been introduced by Wheelhouse in 1870 and in 1874 had actually passed through both the Commons and the Lords but failed to be enacted due to the dissolution of Parliament. When Woodall assumed responsibility for the Bill he found that one of the chief obstacles to its passage was the opposition of the Local Government Board based on the principle that the Bill laid down that aid given under the proposed measure should not be construed as pauperising the recipient of relief. Woodall relates⁵⁶ that when the Bill reached the Committee stage he found that the "fundamental principle to which objection was taken was distinctly laid down" in the Poor Law Act of 1834. As the provisions of his Bill would have been more restrictive than the existing law relating to the blind or deaf Woodall withdrew the measure. It appears

⁵⁵Bill to Provide for the Elementary Education of Blind and Deaf and Dumb Children etc. A.D. 1870.

⁵⁶Proceedings of the Conference of Headmasters of Institutions for the Deaf and Dumb, 1885. p. 125

therefore that between 1870 and 1880 a considerable amount of parliamentary and other time had been devoted to the promotion and opposition of proposals which were already largely covered by existing legislations.

(b) Frequently the local guardians completely misconstrued the spirit of the various Poor Law Acts. The object of Section 56 of the Poor Law Act of 1834 for example, was to avoid the pauperisation and consequent disenfranchisement of the husband or father respectively of a blind or deaf and dumb wife or child. While, however, the Act prevented pauperisation from taking place de-jure there were occasions when an application for relief by a husband or father in respect of his handicapped dependants resulted in de-facto pauperisation. The following dialogue from the proceedings of the Royal Commission of 1884⁵⁷ illustrates the point:-

Paragraph 18379 "In the case of parents applying for their children to be educated and maintained at the expense of the rates do they have to apply to the Board in person?" "Yes, and they have also to go more than once, in some cases many times."

Paragraph 18384 (Chairman) "Supposing it is the fact that the parent is not pauperised, he feels that he is in a position which is disagreeable to himself." "He feels it degrading if he is a decent man. The enactment that the parent should not be made a pauper makes very little difference practically except that the man does not lose his vote because he feels that he is a pauper when he goes to the guardians and the guardians do not care to remove that impression."

Stanier⁵⁸ stated that as late as 1888 there were Boards that refused to authorise the admission of deaf children to his homes until they had been given up by the parents to be kept for a period in the workhouse thus pauperising both parent and child.

57

R. C. B. & D. Minutes of Evidence. p. 666

58

Stanier, W. "The Powers of the School Board and the Poor Law Guardians in relation to the Care and Education of the Deaf and Dumb". Quarterly Review of Deaf-Mute Education. Vol. 1. No. 12. October, 1888. p. 381.

(c) The permissive character of the legislation relating to the blind or deaf also gave ample scope to parsimonious Boards which desired to dispose of social problems on the principle of doing so at the lowest possible cost to the poor rates. Roof⁵⁹ mentions that as late as 1899 the Secretary of Gardners Trust for the Blind declared that many guardians considered that their first duty was to avoid chargeability. This emphasis on economy rather than on effective assistance was probably accentuated by the local administrative machinery concerned with poor relief. As Midwinter⁶⁰ has shown in his study of Poor Law Administration in Lancashire, the most important functionary in practice, was the salaried relieving officer. It was to the relieving officers that most applications for relief were initially made; the investigation and interviewing of cases was his responsibility; the decision as to treatment was largely based on his recommendations and the payment of relief when granted and subsequent accounting was his duty. In Lancashire, and doubtless elsewhere, "practically all the Boards did little except rubber stamp the decisions and the accounting of the Relieving Officers and these officials were the key figures of the whole system".⁶⁰ In any event the reality of the situation was that a particular meeting of the local Board might be attended by only two or three Guardians and the treatment given to an individual case could differ according to such fortuitous circumstances as the knowledge of the poor law and the humanity of the relieving officer and the ability or willingness of the members of the Board to distinguish between the needs of applicants who were destitute as a result of indolence and vice and those who were indigent, as was the case with the blind or deaf, mainly because of physical disability over which the person seeking relief had no control.

⁵⁹Rooff, Madeline - Voluntary Societies and Social Policy
Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957. Chapter 16. p. 195

⁶⁰Midwinter, E.C. Social Administration in Lancashire 1830-1860.
Manchester Univ. Press, 1969. p. 40.

(d) The main hope of avoiding recourse to the poor law for out-relief in the case of an indigent blind person was that he or she would be fortunate enough to obtain an annuity from one of the numerous pension societies for the blind. In 1888 the largest such charity by number of pensioners was the Indigent Blind Visiting Society established in 1834 which was giving assistance to 915 cases. Other important charities were Hetherington's Charity for the Aged Blind (1774), Day's Charity or the "Blind Man's Friend" (1836), The Christian Blind Relief Society (1843), The Royal Blind Pension Society of the United Kingdom (1863) and Gardner's Trust for the Blind (1879). Pensions for the blind were also distributed by the City Companies either in pursuance of their own charitable activities or as trustees of funds entrusted to them for the purpose. In 1888, the Clothworkers Company had 857 blind pensioners and the Cordwainers, Drapers, Goldsmiths and Painters were, to a lesser extent, also making grants to the blind. The annual amount of the pension paid might be as low as £2 as with the South London Association for the Assistance of the Blind or as high as £50 which was the maximum granted by the Governesses' Benevolent Association.⁶¹ In 1902 the pensions paid by Gardner's Trust were £20, £15 and £10. An official of the Trust stated that the lowest scale had the effect of relieving a blind householder of anxiety regarding the payment of the rent but did not enable him to dispense with the necessity for exertion.⁶² The conditions laid down for the receipt of a pension related not only to age, residence and such factors as the denominational persuasion of an applicant for relief but also his moral character and usually the requirement that he should not at any time have been the recipient of parish relief. This provision was

⁶¹ R. C. B. & D. Report. Appendix XIV pp. 222-7

⁶² Report on Matters Relating to the Blind, Westminster, 1902. p. 168

as the Report of the Royal Commission on the Blind, Deaf and Dumb stated "a direct temptation to make a false return" and the example of Gardner's Trust which excluded only those applicants who had received poor law assistance within a year or two of their application was quoted with approval.⁶³ In this context it is of interest that, as Gilbert⁶⁴ has pointed out, the Charity Organisation Society and the officials of the Local Government Board advocated that stringent conditions of a similar nature designed to ensure that allowances were confined to the "deserving", should apply to non-contributory state pensions. The Old Age Pensions Act of 1908 was as Clarke states "strongly moralistic reflecting the strict non-conformist backing of the dominant Liberal Party they were to be the reward of virtuous living rather than any token of communal responsibility for the well-being of the enfeebled citizens."⁶⁵ Among the disqualifications for the old age pension were the fact of being in receipt of poor relief or of having received subsequent to 1st January, 1908, any poor relief which entailed disenfranchisement. This disqualification was not removed until the Old Age Pensions Act of 1919.⁶⁶

In 1886, only Cames' Charity, administered by the Cordwainers Company and which, inter alia, provided for annuities of £5 "to deaf and dumb persons living within 100 miles of London, and not in receipt of relief,"⁶⁷ existed as a source of pensions for the deaf. The difference between the charitable resources available for pensions to the blind and the paucity

⁶³R. C. B. & D. Report. Para. 254. p. 41.

⁶⁴Gilbert, Bentley B. The Evolution of National Insurance in Great Britain, Michael Joseph, 1966. p. 218. See also the footnote in Gilbert p. 217, which suggests that the exclusion of paupers "was only an expedient until the Government could make up its mind ... about fitting pensions into the reconstruction of all poor relief."

⁶⁵Clarke, J. S. "Widows, Orphans and Old Age Pensions in Robson W.A. Ed. Social Security". Published for the Fabian Society by George Allen and Unwin 1943

⁶⁶9 and 10 George V. Sec. 3.

⁶⁷Waterland, C.H. "A Concise Historical Account of the Worshipful Company of Cordwainers" Printed in 1831 for private circulation by Mander, London. p. 1842 and R.C.B. & D. Report Appendix XXIX pp. 290-1.

of similar philanthropic provision for the deaf is indicative of the popular sympathy aroused by the former disability and the widespread indifference which existed with regard to those whose handicap was auditory and therefore invisible.

(d) Indoor Relief

One of the expectations of the Poor Law Commission of 1834 was that the consolidation of parishes into unions would make it possible to improve the classification of paupers who, when granted indoor relief in a workhouse would be accommodated in separate buildings. As has been shown earlier in this chapter^(a) four categories of inmates were identified, namely, (1) the aged and really impotent, (2) the children, (3) the able-bodied females, (4) the able-bodied males. In the implementation of the Poor Law Act of 1834, however, the suggestion that the four classes of workhouse inhabitants should be housed separately was completely disregarded. All paupers - children, the aged, the physically sick, the mentally defective as well as the able-bodied were indiscriminately herded together into the general mixed workhouse and subjected to the same penal discipline of less eligibility. In such a situation it was clearly almost impossible to achieve the mixture of deterrence and humanity obtaining in the workhouse at Bingham which the Commissioners had noted was so administered that it might be a means for rendering relief so irksome and disagreeable that no one would consent to receive it who could possibly do without it, while at the same time it should come in the shape of comfort and consolation to those whom every benevolent man would wish to succour - the old, infirm, idiots and cripples.⁶⁷

Two facts relating to blind inmates of workhouses have already been established in this study. Firstly, that only a small number of persons so afflicted was to be found in any one workhouse and secondly, that they were predominantly men and women over fifty years of age. For such persons, as the Report of the Royal Commission on the Blind, Deaf and Dumb pointed out,⁶⁸ the State did nothing "except through the guardians to offer them the workhouse, without any special provision for them to alleviate their lot or to distinguish them from the general mass of the paupers reduced by their own vice or folly, idleness or improvidence to seek poor relief."

One important factor that contributed to the unsatisfactory condition of both blind and deaf persons in workhouses was that, as in the case of outdoor relief, there was an abysmal ignorance on the part of the Central Local Government Board and the local Boards of Guardians of the incidence and needs of the two classes of disability. Thus, when the General Inspector of the Local Government Board was called to give evidence on the condition of blind persons in workhouses to the Royal Commission on the Blind, Deaf and Dumb his answers were so vague that the Commission requested him to institute an enquiry to be carried out by the Board's District Inspectors with a view to obtaining information regarding the following matters⁶⁹ (1) whether any special arrangements were in force in any of the workhouses for enabling the blind to be treated with greater consideration than ordinary paupers, (2) what provision was made for instructing the blind to read or receive visitors from such voluntary agencies as the Indigent Blind Society for the purpose of receiving such instruction or the loan of embossed books, (3) what

⁶⁸R.C.B. & D. Report p. 124. p. xxviii.

⁶⁹R.C.B. & D. 1889. Report. Par. 136. p. xxix.

arrangements were made for blind inmates to learn a trade outside the workhouse, (4) to what extent boards of guardians had availed themselves of their powers to send blind paupers to institutions specially provided for their reception and treatment. The returns obtained by the inspectors indicated that "with some rare exceptions" the treatment given to blind paupers was similar to that given to infirm inmates of workhouses.⁷⁰

That this opinion was over sanguine is evidenced by the statement of a correspondent of the "Charity Organisation Reporter" who, writing in 1884, stated⁷¹ that in 22 out of 30 Metropolitan Unions from which replies to an enquiry had been received, there were 299 blind inmates.

In 6 of the unions the total of 96 blind inmates had no special privileges whatsoever although in the remaining 16 workhouses some concessions were extended to the blind, such as permission to receive sixpence weekly from the blind societies, special diet and sanction to receive visitors⁷²

at any time. So far as instruction in reading was concerned the Inspectors reported that unions were prepared to offer reasonable facilities to mission societies to visit and teach the blind in the workhouses. Such visits were only being made in a minority of cases, however, because outside London the remoteness of the societies from the unions precluded frequent visitation. Where the blind wished to learn a trade the guardians were generally willing to send them to a special institution for this purpose and to pay the cost of maintenance.

The above findings were somewhat suspect since in many cases they were based on information furnished by the workhouse masters although some inspectors took the trouble to verify the particulars by personal visits.

⁷⁰R.C.B. & D. 1889. Report. Par. 138. p. xxix.

⁷¹Charity Organisation Reporter. 31 January 1884. p. 43.
Letter from A. G. Crowder (An East End Guardian)

⁷²R.C.B. & D. 1889. Report. Par. 139-141.

It is probable, however, that the survey did good by creating a greater awareness on the part of the Local Government Board of the special problems of blind persons who were receiving indoor relief and thus assisted in creating a more humanitarian attitude towards them.

A second reason why the condition of blind and, to a lesser extent, deaf, workhouse inmates, was deplorable is found in the simple fact that the institutions were completely unsuitable places in which to domicile persons afflicted by the disabilities. The gaunt, several storied poorhouse clearly presented physical hazards for a sightless person. In his evidence to the Royal Commission the chaplain to the Woolwich workhouse alleged⁷³ that there had been many accidents to the blind as a result of their running against iron gates and stumbling down stone steps. This assertion was strongly challenged and denied by the two Local Government Board Inspectors for the Metropolitan area⁷⁴ but a further statement made by the chaplain⁷⁵ was incontestable -

"The workhouses themselves are not built suitably. The chapel, for instance, is raised up over the dining hall and approached by a great flight of steps which the blind have to go up and down, the building is not arranged for them."

The physical disadvantages of the workhouses were trivial, however, compared with the complete lack of appropriate social and recreational provision for persons afflicted with the two disabilities. It has already been noted that in the workhouses respectable blind persons were, as the Woolwich chaplain testified,⁷⁶ "herded with many who were just outside the criminal class and who had little or no sympathy with genuine distress or helplessness though themselves needy." Small wonder that as another

⁷³R.C.B. & D. 1889. Minutes of Evidence. Par. 19,160. p. 701.

⁷⁴R.C.B. & D. Report. Appendix X pp. 121-2

⁷⁵R.C.B. & D. Minutes of Evidence. Par. 19,161. p. 701.

⁷⁶R.C.B. & D. Report. Par. 125. p. xxviii

witness before the Commission observed ⁷⁷

"when they (the blind) go into the workhouse they become mutes, because they are put into the company of men who have not the feeling for the blind that they ought to have, and, by aggravating them and one thing and another they become completely mutes, they keep themselves to themselves and become complete imbeciles."

Due to the nature of their handicap the social isolation of the deaf was even greater than that of the blind. Just how desolate could be the lot of an aged deaf person in a workhouse has been graphically described by Eichholz ⁷⁸

"the old persons are in a particularly hard case. Their entry into a workhouse means confinement to mental solitude and isolation for the rest of their lives. Neither inmates nor staff can, as a rule, understand them or extend to them even the limited amenities of social life. Save for the occasional visit of a Missioner to the deaf and dumb or of a chance relative, they are cut off from contact with the human mind and to many, the friendly visit eagerly awaited never comes."

In the case of the blind their loneliness was relieved only if some fellow pauper would read to them or by the ministrations of a visitor from one of the voluntary organisations such as the Home Teaching Society for the Blind.

In addition to physical hazard and social isolation the burden of a disabled person in a workhouse was increased by the general degradation which residence in a workhouse was deliberately intended to entail. Just what incarceration in a workhouse meant to a blind person has been vividly portrayed by Rooke ⁷⁹

"If you will but look at these structures (workhouses) you will find that they have high walls, great doors, great locks and keys, showing that they are places where freedom is not enjoyed. The blind so consigned have no right to vote in the affairs of the country

⁷⁷R.C.B. & D. Minutes of Evidence. Par. 10,131. p. 349

⁷⁸Eichholz, Dr. A. "A Study of the Deaf in England and Wales" 1930-32 H.M.S.O. 1932. p. 114.

⁷⁹Rooke, W. H. "Britain's Blind in Workhouses" "The Blind Advocate" March 1909. p. 5.

where they live, and their appetite is controlled by a matron, and altogether the common law of the land hardly affects them, for they are held in closer check by inner laws, termed bye-laws. I have recently received a letter from a middle aged man who says, "I have been 16 years in a workhouse. I came out of a school for the blind at the age of 18 to a father out of employment. After a period of want my parent, very much to his sorrow, deposited me in the workhouse. I have been used to cloth clothes - now I have corduroys. I have been used to a collar and tie - but now I must wear a neck handkerchief. I should like to attend public lectures etc., but I must not be out after 7 p.m. except when the master will condescend to grant me the extreme favour. But I must not apply for this favour too often. We scarcely ever have any fruit in the workhouse, not even when it is half the price of bread and the monotony of the workhouse is such that I wish I were free as others domiciled in this country.'

The blind walk for exercise in these places, but only a few steps each way. The workhouse wall surrounds them - most of them do not stand upon more than two or three acres of land and when one begins to think of the hundreds of human beings who are confined in these limited spaces one must understand the hard lot of the blind. For as blindness by reason of its affliction prevents light from reaching the brain, the blind must suffer deterioration more or less. Hence it is imperative that citizens who cannot see should be given as much air and light as possible, that the vital power of the blind may not go down but that their normal conditions may be sustained."

Not all Boards of Guardians were unmindful of the special needs of blind workhouse inhabitants. Possibly because the numbers in metropolitan workhouses were generally higher than in provincial institutions some London Guardians attempted to make special provisions for blind persons resident in the unions. In 1884, for example, the Mile End Guardians appointed a special committee to consider how the treatment of blind workhouse inmates could be improved. This Committee made seven specific recommendations as follows:-⁸⁰ (1) All blind persons whether sick or otherwise should be classified as "aged and infirm" and dieted accordingly. (2) The friends and relatives of the blind should be allowed to visit

⁸⁰ Charity Organisation Reporter. 21 February, 1884. p. 64.

them at all reasonable times. (3) Blind persons should be allowed to go out during the daytime in charge of friends. (4) On application to the Board inmates should be allowed to attend classes and entertainments arranged for the blind. (5) Blind Institutions should be asked to provide instruction and light employment once a week in the workhouse and to lend books in raised type. (6) Efforts should be made to arrange for weekly reading sessions for blind persons to be undertaken by lady or gentlemen visitors. (7) The Committee proposed that it should be allowed to retain its power and meet periodically seeing that the question of the treatment of blind indoor paupers was likely to be taken up by the press or otherwise. Broadly similar rules were also adopted in 1884 by the Guardians of St. George-in-the-East, who in addition, resolved that a register of all blind inmates should be kept by the master of the workhouse and made available for inspection by visitors. It was also laid down that the term "blind" should be extended to include "all partially blind persons incapacitated from work by reason of infirmity."⁸¹ The Royal Commission, however, recognized that such enlightened treatment was "exceptional" and that, apart from isolated instances, the condition of the indoor blind was such as to produce the deterrent effect which had been one of the basic principles of the Poor Law of 1834. One witness before the Royal Commission testified⁸² that "they (the blind) have a great dread of the workhouse and their repugnance to the workhouse is quite justifiable considering how they are treated there." In the same way that the pension societies sought to take the deserving blind out of the province of outdoor relief, so a number of local voluntary organisations

⁸¹R.C.B. & D. Minutes of Evidence. Footnote to p. 662.

⁸²R.C.B. & D. Minutes of Evidence. Par. 10,130. p. 349

established homes for the accommodation of blind or deaf persons withdrawn from the unions or which could prevent them going to a poor law institution in the first place. The capital and running costs of establishing and maintaining such homes was, however, beyond the resources of most societies even though the Poor Law Act of 1879 empowered the Guardians to contribute towards the support of residents. In 1857 the Bath Blind School Home was established for the support of twelve blind women previously educated at the Institution for the Blind and Deaf and Dumb which had been founded seven years earlier.⁸³ In 1889 the institution at Bath was still the only "home" as distinct from schools or workshops for the blind in England and Wales. By 1917, however, when the Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind reported there were over twenty homes for blind persons in the United Kingdom most of them being charitable institutions which only charged a small fee.⁸⁴

The first voluntary society for adult deaf persons in England was the "Refuge for the Destitute Deaf and Dumb" established in London in 1841 which changed its name two years later to the "Institute for Providing Employment and Religious Instruction for the Adult Deaf and Dumb".⁸⁵ In 1845 the Committee of the Institution reported that an enquiry had shown that "in almost every workhouse throughout England there are Deaf and Dumb in the prime of life wasting their existence in idleness".⁸⁶ In 1845 the Committee of the Institution which provided domiciliary accommodation also reported that the inmates included "several Deaf and Dumb females who previous to their reception had been

⁸³Wagg, Henry. A Chronological Survey of work for the Blind. National Institute for the Blind, 1932. p. 29.

⁸⁴Report of the Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind 1917 Appendix II pp. 63-8.

⁸⁵Institution for Providing Employment and Religious Instruction for the Adult Deaf and Dumb. Minute dated 7th August, 1843.

⁸⁶Institution for Providing Employment Relief and Religious Instruction for the Adult Deaf and Dumb, Annual Report 1845. P.7.

pent up in a workhouse and that the St. Mary-le-Bone Guardians, after inspecting the work done, had agreed to place all the deaf and dumb in their area under the care of the Institution.⁸⁷ The Committee anticipated that the Institution might be made self-supporting by the labour of its inmates in such occupations as shoemaking and lithographic work for males and needlework and dressmaking for females, but the low output achieved by many of the persons employed and the difficulty experienced in disposing of the articles produced were such a burden on the Institution's financial resources that in 1851 it was compelled to suspend its industrial and residential activities. Three years later the Institution was reorganised as a primarily evangelistic society under the title of the "Association in Aid of the Deaf and Dumb."⁸⁸

Although the writer has been unable to obtain supporting evidence there appears to be a connection between the demise of the Institution for Providing Employment and Religious Instruction in 1851 and the establishment in the same year of a residential institution named "the British Asylum for Deaf and Dumb Females". The objects of the British Asylum which was situated in Lower Clapton, London, were threefold. Firstly, it endeavoured to give instruction in general subjects both of a secular and a religious character to girls or women under thirty years of age who were too old to attend a school for the deaf. Secondly, it trained females under the age of thirty in needlework, laundry work and domestic service so as to equip them to earn their own livelihood. The third object was to provide a home for the "aged and infirm and the unprotected and those who can do nothing to help themselves."⁸⁹ In 1886

⁸⁷Institution for Providing Employment Relief and Religious Instruction for the Adult Deaf and Dumb, Annual Report 1845, p. 4.

⁸⁸Resolutions passed at a Meeting of the Subscribers and Friends of the Adult Deaf and Dumb Society held at Exeter Hall on 14 June, 1854, appended to the Annual Report of the Association in Aid of the Deaf and Dumb, 30 April, 1855.

⁸⁹R.C.B. & D. Min. of Evidence. Evidence of W. T. Hellyer Esq. Secretary, British Asylum for Deaf and Dumb Females. Par. 9823. p. 340.

the asylum had thirty residents, many of whom had been in workhouses and its secretary claimed that it was the only residential institution exclusively for the deaf in the country. (a) 90

As will be shown in the next section of the present chapter, towards the end of the Nineteenth Century Boards of Guardians began to make increasing use of their powers to send blind or deaf persons from workhouses to special residential establishments. Such financial assistance gave local and national voluntary societies an impetus to establish additional homes for blind or deaf persons. (b)

(5) The Break-up of the Poor Law 1880-1918

In retrospect the shortcomings of the two cardinal principles of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, namely, the workhouse test and less eligibility were obvious. As Mowat⁹¹ has asserted, the Poor Law was

"seldom so mean as to be less eligible than what the lowest of the poor could obtain for themselves; it was never so generous as to be just to those, particularly the aged, whose recourse to it was through no fault of their own."

Nevertheless, public and official recognition that poverty was not a crime and charity no sovereign remedy came slowly and for over seventy years after 1834 the Poor Law represented the only statutory provision for persons in distress.

The "break-up of the Poor Law" to use the famous phrase coined by the Webbs and used as the title of the republished Minority Report of the 1909 Royal Commission on the Poor Laws, was characterised by the removal of one category after another - the aged, the unemployed, children, the sick, the mentally deficient and the blind into special schemes.

⁹⁰ R.C.B. & D. Min. of Evidence. Evidence of W. T. Hellyer Esq. Secretary, British Asylum for Deaf and Dumb Females. Par. 9832

⁹¹ Mowat, C.L. "The Approach to the Welfare State in Great Britain" Address delivered to the Annual Meeting of the American Historical Assoc., Chicago. 29 Dec. 1950, and reported in American Historical Review Oct. 1952. p. 56.

(a) This home is still in existence (1970) under the name of The British Home for Deaf and Dumb Women.

(b) In 1970 the R.N.I.B. had 19 homes for the Blind in England and Wales, 7 of which were for the aged. In addition there were some 128 homes of various kinds established by other bodies. The R.N.I.B. had 8 homes or hostels in E. & W. of which 6 for aged. Additional 14 homes under other auspices.

As with other classes of involuntary paupers, recognition that the Poor Law, indiscriminately applied, was not the most appropriate treatment for a person whose destitution was a direct consequence of blindness or deafness was tardily and grudgingly given by the Local Government Board. Reference has already been made to the almost complete lack of information possessed by the Board's General Inspector when giving evidence to the Royal Commission, regarding the number and condition of blind persons who, at that time, were being assisted from the Poor Law.^(a) The Webbs, in fact stated⁹² that for the first twenty years after its establishment in 1871 little attention was paid by the Board to either mentally or physically disabled persons or "defectives". Within the generic designations of "the blind" or "the deaf" the extension of more humane treatment by the Central Board and the local Boards of Guardians can be traced by noting the gradual improvements made in the application of the Poor Law to children, and the recipients of indoor and outdoor relief. Due to the paucity of references to the deaf, the examples of the amelioration of indoor and outdoor assistance are confined to those affecting blind persons.

The Children:-

Prior to 1893 Boards of Guardians had wide permissive powers to provide for the education of blind or deaf children. Nevertheless, as one witness before the Royal Commission on the Blind, Deaf and Dumb claimed,⁹³ there were blind children in the workhouses throughout England who received no education or training whatsoever, apart from that given by the visitors and teachers of the voluntary home-teaching societies. In 1891, however,

⁹²Sidney and Beatrice Webb - "English Poor Law Policy"
Longmans, Green & Co. Ltd. 1910. p. 226

⁹³R.C.B. & D. Minutes of Evidence. Par. 765. p. 29.

(a) See page 28

the Secretary of the Local Government Board issued a circular⁹⁴ to the Board's Inspectors drawing attention to the statements and recommendations of the Royal Commission and requesting that, on the occasion of their visits to workhouses, inspectors should give special attention to blind or deaf children and

"either by entry in the visitors book or by such other means as they think best, recommend the guardians to provide for the removal of any such child to a separate institution when the circumstances appear to render this course desirable."

As stated earlier in this chapter the Elementary Education (Blind and Deaf Children) Act⁹⁵ removed children handicapped by either of the two disabilities into the jurisdiction of the Education Department except for pauper children normally resident in workhouses.

Indoor Relief:-

Bruce⁹⁶ refers to the steady relaxing of the administration of poor relief that took place from 1886 onwards. Among the factors responsible for this change was a growing recognition that poor relief should be specific rather than general, preventative rather than punitive and ameliorative rather than deterrent. So far as blind or other physically disabled persons were concerned this changing attitude is reflected in the recommendations of Royal Commissions, the circulars of the Local Government Board and the attempts made at the local level by some Boards of Guardians to remove blind inmates of workhouses to more suitable accommodation.

In 1889 the Royal Commission on the Blind, Deaf and Dumb specifically

⁹⁴Local Government Board "Blind and Deaf Inmates of Workhouses". Circular Letter to the Board's Inspectors, 23 March, 1891. Published in the Twenty-first Annual Report of the Board 1891-2. pp. 73-4.

⁹⁵56 and 57 Victoria C.42.

⁹⁶Bruce, Maurice, "The Coming of the Welfare State". Batsford 1961. p. 109.

recommended⁹⁷ that the workhouse test should not be applied to "industrious and well conducted blind" who were unable to work and that liberal outdoor relief, free from disenfranchisement, should be given to those blind persons for whom accommodation was available outside the workhouse. In the case of blind persons who were workhouse inmates it was suggested that they should be housed in a union located in a town where an institution or association for the blind was also in existence and that more generous treatment should be provided than that given to ordinary paupers. The Report also advocated that Guardians should set apart separate wards or homes for the aged blind or combine with other unions in establishing separate homes. Mention was also made of the expediency of placing aged pauper women in cottage homes.⁹⁷

Six years after the publication of the Report of the Royal Commission on the Blind, Deaf and Dumb further support was given to the view that the workhouse was unsuitable for aged persons rendered destitute by physical disability in the form of a recommendation made by the Royal Commission on the Aged Poor.⁹⁸ This recommendation was to the effect that the Boards of Guardians should make careful enquiries into the antecedents of destitute persons applying for relief whose physical faculties had failed by reason of age and infirmity and that where such an applicant had been of previous good character and had made reasonable efforts in accordance with his opportunities to provide for his old age, outdoor relief should be given unless the nature of the infirmity and the circumstances of the individual made it expedient that indoor relief should be granted.

⁹⁷R.C.B. & D. Report. Par. 263. p. xlii

⁹⁸Royal Commission on the Aged Poor 1895. Report. Summary of Recommendations, Par. 2. p. lxxxiii

The need for relief to aged and infirm persons to be based on some more constructive basis than the indiscriminate application of the principle of less eligibility was also emphasised in 1909 by both the Majority and Minority Reports of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws. The Majority Report recommended⁹⁹ that the aged in receipt of institutional relief should have accommodation and treatment apart from the able-bodied and be housed on a separate site. In addition such persons should, so far as practicable, be sub-divided into classes based on their physical condition and previous character. It was also suggested⁹⁹ that greater care should be taken to ensure that the outdoor relief granted was adequate for the needs of the recipients and that the aged were periodically visited both by officers of the Local Authority and voluntary helpers.

The Minority Report recognised that an essential preliminary to any effective reform of the poor law was the breaking up of the existing unscientific category of the "aged and infirm" into distinctive classes according to the age and the physical and mental characteristics of the persons concerned. This observation was prompted by the observation, which practically reiterated that made by the Royal Commission with regard to the blind,^(a) that the majority of Destitution Authorities of England and Wales made no other provision for the diversity of age and mental and physical characteristics to be found among inmates of poor law institutions than the General Mixed Workhouse or, in the case of persons receiving outdoor relief, the provision of relief that was "indiscriminate, inadequate and unconditional - cruel to the deserving and demoralisingly attractive to those who are depraved."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Report on the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws 1909.
Vol. I of the Majority Report. p. 232

¹⁰⁰ Royal Commission on the Poor Laws.
Minority Report Conclusions. p. 284. par. 1, 2 and 5.

(a) See page 20

The Minority Report itself made a very useful distinction between the aged and infirm of pensionable age and those persons "who being under the age at which either the national superannuation allowance or the local pension can begin, are nevertheless so infirm or so injured in mind or body as to be incapable of earning their maintenance in competitive industry".¹⁰¹ Among the classes of disability specifically mentioned as examples were the blind and the deaf and dumb. The Report stressed the importance of Old Age Pensions either national for those persons to whom the Act of 1908 applied or local in respect of persons who were temporarily or permanently omitted from the national scheme, as being the proper provision for the aged. For the prematurely incapacitated, the Report suggested that "some sort of institutional treatment was desirable". Such treatment could take the forms of "boarding out" the crippled or the blind with friends or relations, making use of special institutions under voluntary management or the establishment of Farm Colonies for several forms of disability in which "the lame could help the blind and the epileptic be attended to by the crippled".¹⁰² Finally, due to the medical superintendence involved, it was recommended that the responsibility of making suitable provision either domiciliary or institutional for the prematurely incapacitated or the helpless aged should be entrusted to the Local Health Authority.¹⁰³

The importance of differentiating between different classes of pauper and to make more humane provision for persons who had been reduced to pauperism through causes outside their control had also been communicated to Boards of Guardians in circulars issued by the Local Government Board.

¹⁰¹Royal Commission on the Poor Laws. Minority Report. p. 281.

¹⁰²Royal Commission on the Poor Laws 1909. Minority Report. pp. 283-4.

¹⁰³Royal Commission on the Poor Laws 1909. Minority Report - Conclusions. Par. 10. p. 285.

Two such circulars issued in 1895 and 1896 had specifically stated that, since the character of the workhouse population had changed since 1834, the administration of institutions need no longer be so deterrent.¹⁰⁴ Bruce¹⁰⁵ mentions that in 1891, books and toys were permitted in the workhouse; in 1892 men were provided with tobacco and two years later women received a corresponding ration of dry tea. It was in keeping with this greater humanity of treatment that the Local Government Board Circular of 1891 to which reference has already been made^(a) suggested that arrangements might be made for persons to visit the workhouses for the purpose of reading aloud to blind inmates. The importance of providing instruction for blind adults capable of receiving it was also strongly emphasised.

At the local level, some Boards of Guardians were endeavouring to provide more congenial conditions for blind persons than those which obtained in the workhouses. The Royal Institution for the Blind at Bradford had established residential homes for blind men in 1906 and blind women two years later, to which the Bradford Guardians had agreed to send all blind persons in their area who had previously been accommodated in workhouses.¹⁰⁶ A similar arrangement was made about the same time between the Manchester Board of Guardians and the Governors of Henshaw's Blind Asylum. In 1915, the Guardians of the West Derby district of Liverpool adopted a policy of removing suitable blind persons from the local workhouses and boarding them out in private houses where they could, so far as was possible, live the free life of an ordinary citizen.¹⁰⁷ The unsuitability of the workhouse

¹⁰⁴Local Government Board. Circular on Workhouse Administration, 29 Jan. 1895, and Circular on Classification in Workhouses, 31 July 1896, in 25-26 Annual Reports of the Local Government Board 1895-6 and 1896-7.

¹⁰⁵Bruce, Maurice. "The Coming of the Welfare State" R. T. Batsford, 1961. p. 109.

¹⁰⁶Tait, W. H. "Boards of Guardians and the Blind". Report read to Second Triennial International Conference on the Blind. Manchester 1908. p. 301.

¹⁰⁷Liverpool Society for Promoting the Welfare of the Blind. Annual Report 1915. p. 12.

(a) See reference 94.

for blind persons had been a recurring theme in the Annual Report of the Liverpool Society for Promoting the Welfare of the Blind since 1857 and commenting on the action taken by the West Derby Guardians the 1915 Report observed.¹⁰⁸

"The principle has been acknowledged that the Poor Law Institution is not the right place for the respectable blind and we believe this will prove the first step towards better provision being made for such in other districts."

The actions of the Guardians at Bradford, Manchester and West Derby were indicative of what could be done for blind persons incarcerated in workhouses given the will and the imagination. The fact that the Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind signalled out the homes at Bradford and Manchester as offering a "valuable example of the humane treatment of the blind"¹⁰⁹ is perhaps evidence that even as late as 1917 such enlightened policies were only being implemented by a minority of guardians. These actions are, however, examples of the abandonment of the principle of "less eligibility" in favour of a policy of greater humanity.

Outdoor Relief:-

By the end of the nineteenth century the principle laid down in the 1834 Act that the impotent poor should continue to be assisted by outdoor relief appears to have obtained widespread acceptance. One of the difficulties that beset the local boards of guardians when adjudicating on the treatment to be given to a blind or deaf applicant for relief was the fact that there were no official or authoritative definitions of the terms "able-bodied" and "impotent". The Majority Report of the

¹⁰⁸ Liverpool Society for Promoting the Welfare of the Blind. Annual Report 1915. p. 14.

¹⁰⁹ Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind. Report 1917. Par. 181. p. 42.

Royal Commission on the Poor Law~~s~~ of 1909 showed¹¹⁰ that, with the development of medical relief, a distinct class of pauper had gradually been formed, consisting of persons whose infirmities were amenable to medical treatment in contrast to the "aged or impotent in very deed", where the impotency was irremediable. It would, at first sight, appear that blind or profoundly deaf persons would automatically be placed in the latter classification but there was the difficulty that some blind and the majority of deaf persons were, in spite of their disability, still capable of learning a trade and earning a living. Thus, in 1880, the Bridgenorth Guardians, after a long discussion as to whether a blind man who had unsuccessfully attempted to make a living by making mats could be considered able-bodied, decided that he was not infirm and therefore refused him out relief.¹¹¹ The Webbs noted¹¹² that in England and Wales no Order had ever been made "regulating or controlling the very extensive provision for the great mass of the non-able bodied poor". In the absence of any central direction on this point there developed a mass of local bye-laws governing outdoor relief, frequently making assistance outside the workhouse dependent on such factors as the previous character and conduct of the applicant.¹¹³ In spite of these facts and those causes mentioned earlier in this chapter^(a) which resulted in outdoor relief to the blind or deaf being either refused or inadequately granted, there was a gradual abandonment of the application of the workhouse test with reference to the disabled. The publication of Relief Regulation Order 1911

¹¹⁰Royal Commission on the Poor Laws 1909.
Majority Report. Vol. I. Par. 306. p. 214.

¹¹¹Charity Organisation Reporter, 1st July 1880. p. 162.

¹¹²Royal Commission on the Poor Laws 1909.
Minority Report. p. 26.

¹¹³As above.

(a) See page 28

which, while reiterating¹¹⁴ that, "except as hereinafter provided the Guardians of a Poor Law Union shall not afford relief other than institutional relief" went on to make a specific exception from this general principle in the cases of persons requiring relief on account of sickness or accident or of bodily or mental infirmity whether arising from old age or otherwise, affecting the person or any member of his family who is dependent on him for support, represents an authoritative statement on the part of the Local Government Board that in the case of persons who did not come under the poor law through any fault of their own there should be no workhouse test.

The Need for State Provision for the Blind or Deaf.

By 1918, therefore, state provision outside the poor law in respect of blind or deaf persons applied only to the education of children up to the age of 16 who were not resident in workhouses although the Education Act of 1902¹¹⁵ gave permissive powers to local education authorities to supply or aid the supply of education other than elementary. The power to provide at public charge for the further education of blind or deaf children who had attended a certified school up to the age of 16 years was thus included in the general powers of the local education authority. Welfare, as distinct from education, remained within the purview of the poor laws and, although as shown earlier in this chapter, the implementation of poor relief to the blind or deaf was marked by increasing humanity and imagination, the stark fact remained that, with minor exceptions, the receipt of assistance from the guardians was accompanied by the stigma of pauperisation including disenfranchisement. Not until the Representation

¹¹⁴Local Government Board. Relief Regulation Order 1911. Par. 2.

¹¹⁵₂ Edward VII C. 42. Pt. 11.

Note - The Medical Relief (Disqualifications Removal) Act of 1885 provided that there should not be disenfranchisement where Poor Law relief had taken the form of medical relief.

of the People Act of 1918 was disenfranchisement for the recipients of poor relief abolished.¹¹⁶

Although legislative measures were meagre, however, there was from about 1870 onwards, a growing recognition on the part of those connected with the two disabilities, that at all ages blind or deaf persons required educational and welfare provision that was more certain, widespread and uniform than could be furnished by unassisted charitable agencies. The movement for state-aid for the blind or deaf, apart from the Poor Law, was pioneered mainly by educational interests concerned with children afflicted by one or other of the two disabilities, although, as shown in Chapter II the necessity for Government assistance was also emphasised by individuals as well as organisations such as the Charity Organisation Society.

The first result of this movement was the appointment in 1885 of the Royal Commission on the Blind which in 1886 had its terms of reference extended to include "the Deaf and Dumb and such other cases as from special circumstances would seem to require exceptional methods of education."¹¹⁷ The Report of the Commission published in 1889 contained a mass of information relating not only to educational matters but also to the condition of the blind or deaf in post-school life. In turn the Report of the Royal Commission resulted in the enactment of the Education (Blind and Deaf Children) Act of 1893 which made the first breach in the Poor Law by making the education of all blind or deaf children, apart from those resident in workhouses, the responsibility of the school authorities. The Royal Commission of 1885-1889 was, therefore, a landmark in the development of state-aid for the blind or deaf and it is with the origins, recommendations and consequences of this enquiry that the following chapter is primarily concerned.

¹¹⁶₇ and 8 George V C.64

¹¹⁷_{R.C.B. & D. Report. Commissions. p. v.}

CHAPTER II

The Report on the Training of the Blind 1876 and the Royal Commission on the Blind, Deaf and Dumb 1899.

The social problem of blindness and deafness has always been obscured by the sparsity of persons so afflicted relative to the total population of a given area. Not until the community began to see blindness and deafness in other than individual terms did private philanthropy and public provision combine to meet the various needs of these handicapped minority groups. As with other classes of deprived persons, the need to measure the extent to which the two classes of disability constituted a social problem was an essential pre-requisite to the formulation of social policies designed to ameliorate or remedy their condition. The first attempt to measure the incidence of blindness and deafness in the population was made at the 1851 census. The inclusion of the deaf among the "infirmities" regarding which the census endeavoured to provide information was due to the representations made over a period of twenty years by Charles Baker, headmaster of the Yorkshire Institution for the Deaf. Although unsuccessful in his efforts to obtain some estimate of the number of persons by means of the decennial census, Baker persevered with the matter both by writing to and interviewing the Registrar General with the result that it was agreed that at the 1851 Census an attempt to collect details regarding the deaf should be made.¹ The statistics relating to the Blind and Deaf and Dumb from the 1851 and six subsequent censuses are

¹A Magazine intended chiefly for the Deaf and Dumb.
Vol. IV. 1876. p. 27.

TABLE 5

PROPORTION OF BLIND PERSONS PER MILLION OF EACH SEX IN ENGLAND AND WALES 1851-1911

	<u>1851</u>	<u>1861</u>	<u>1871</u>	<u>1881</u>	<u>1891</u>	<u>1901</u>	<u>1911</u>
Total Number of Blind of both sexes	18,306	19,352	21,590	22,832	23,467	25,317	26,336
Proportion in total Population) Males	1,110	1,050	1,030	950	870	830	760
Females (Per million)	940	880	880	810	750	720	700
Total - Males and Females (Per million)	1,025	965	955	880	810	775	730

TABLE 6

PROPORTION OF DEAF AND DUMB PERSONS PER MILLION OF EACH SEX IN ENGLAND AND WALES 1851-1911

	<u>1851</u>	<u>1861</u>	<u>1871</u>	<u>1881</u>	<u>1891</u>	<u>1901</u>	<u>1911</u>
Total Number of Deaf and Dumb of both sexes	10,314	12,236	11,518	14,874	16,444	15,246	13,427
Proportion in total population) Males	784	700	566	563	548	524	468
Females (Per million)	620	524	451	464	434	417	373
Total - Males and Females (Per million)	702	612	508	513	491	470	420

given in Tables V and VI. Little reliance can be placed on the accuracy of these census figures, however, mainly because the Registrar General and his enumerators had no means of counteracting the reluctance of parents to acknowledge defects in their children or of adults to admit to their handicaps.² At the 1921 Census it was decided to omit the enquiry as to "infirmities" in view of the generally recognized fact that reliable information upon these subjects cannot be expected on returns made by or on behalf of the individuals afflicted.³

More detailed information was required regarding the condition of the blind or deaf at all stages of life than could be obtained from the Census Reports. Such information was obtained from two surveys. The first, carried out by the Charity Organisation Society related only to the blind in the London area. The second, the Royal Commission on the Blind, Deaf and Dumb was undertaken after considerable pressure for such an enquiry had been exerted on the Government. The origins, recommendations and consequences of these investigations form the subject matter of the present chapter.

(1) The Report on the Training of the Blind 1876.

At a meeting held on 13th July, 1874, the Council of the Charity Organisation Society decided "as a matter both of philanthropy and sound political economy" to convene a special committee "to consider what more could be done to promote the welfare of the Blind and especially their industrial training".⁴ The need for such an enquiry

²General Register Office, letter from W. Ogle, M.D. Statistical Superintendent to David Buxton Esq., 5th August, 1890. Reproduced in Quarterly Review of Deaf Mute Education, October, 1890. p. 244.

³Census Report 1921. p. 2

⁴Charity Organisation Society Report of a Special Committee on the training of the Blind. Presented to the Council 21st February, 1876. p.3.

had been impressed upon the Charity Organisation Society partly by the examples of congresses held in the United States of America and Europe for the purpose of discussing "the best means of fully developing the remaining faculties of those who are suffering from that most distressing affliction, the loss of vision"⁴ and partly as a result of pressure for such an investigation by institutions and individuals concerned with the education and welfare of blind persons.

The Committee, which consisted of forty-eight members, held its first meeting on 4th November, 1874, and met on thirty-eight subsequent occasions, adopted as its terms of reference the investigation of the following questions.⁵

- (i) What is being done industrially for the Blind and in what ways:-
 - (a) For children.
 - (b) For untrained adults.
 - (c) For trained adults.
- (ii) What more can be done through existing agencies?
 - (a) By improvements in systems of working.
 - (b) By opening up new employments.
 - (c) By co-operation among agencies.
- (iii) What new agencies, if any, are required?
- (iv) To what extent can the blind become self-supporting?
- (v) What provision at present exists for the support of the Blind not able to maintain themselves by their own industry, and what improvements, if any, are desirable in the system on which funds for this purpose are administered?
- (vi) To what extent should the education and training of the Blind be provided from the rates and other public sources?

The Committee confined its survey to London where, according to the 1871 Census there were 2,890 blind persons of whom 292 were under the

⁴Charity Organisation Society Report of a Special Committee on the Training of the Blind. Presented to the Council 21st February, 1876. p. 3.

⁵As above. pp. 4 and 5.

age of 15 years, 991 between 15 and 50 years and 1,607 who had attained 50 years or over. Statistics furnished by the Local Government Board showed that 493 blind persons were inmates of Metropolitan Workhouses.⁶

The findings of the Committee can be grouped under the following five headings: (1) the importance of providing suitable education for the infant blind, (2) the need to extend existing facilities for the mental and industrial education of blind persons, (3) improvements in the opportunities for and conditions of employment of trained blind workers, (4) how co-operation between agencies established for promoting the welfare of the blind might be achieved and (5) the claim of the blind for state aid. Only the latter aspect of the Committee's findings is of primary importance to the present study and the recommendations made under this heading were based on the utilitarian approach that lack of education in childhood was the major cause of the depressed economic condition of many blind persons in later life. The Report specifically stated⁷ that

"As a general rule it may be asserted that, in the interest of the body-politic, it is within the province of the State to aid its poorer and weaker subjects to become intelligent wealth-producers, adding to the national prosperity and the national strength, instead of remaining a national incumbrance, a burden both to themselves and others, dependent even for the means of subsistence upon public or private charity. If this obligation is recognized in the case of those who, although poverty-stricken are blessed with all their faculties, as shown by the grants to the elementary and other schools, how much more is it incumbent on the State to consider the case of those whose helplessness is caused by one of the most distressing visitations by which humanity can be afflicted."

The Report therefore recommended⁸ that attempts should be made to secure suitable educational and industrial training for blind persons in

⁶Charity Organisation Society Report of a Special Committee on the Training of the Blind. Presented to the Council 21st February, 1876. p. 5.

⁷As above. p. 27.

⁸As above. pp. 21 and 28.

two ways. Firstly, by inducing the Guardians of the Poor to make the fullest use of their existing powers to provide such assistance and secondly, by urging upon the State the necessity of modifying the Educational Code so that regulations somewhat similar to those contained in the Industrial Schools Acts might be applied to establishments for the maintenance and industrial training of the blind. As Government grants would presumably involve Government inspection the Committee considered that the suggestions put forward by the inspectors would lead to a general improvement of the institutions under their supervision. It was further recommended⁸ that grants should be made towards the support of necessitous blind persons while they were learning a trade. The Report concluded with one final recommendation. Conscious of the fact that their enquiries had been restricted to the metropolis the Committee expressed the hope that their observations might be of sufficient importance

"to induce the Council of the Charity Organisation Society to urge, both upon the Government and the community at large, the necessity for enquiring fully into the subject of the treatment of the Blind, with the view of ameliorating their general condition and enabling them - instead of remaining, as at present, isolated and too often neglected - to take their share in the work of life and to⁹ become active useful and happy members of society"

A weakness of the Report was the fact that although the Committee had set out, inter alia, to ascertain what provision existed for the support of blind persons not able to maintain themselves by their own industry, their only observations on this subject related to the need to co-ordinate the information possessed by charitable institutions for the blind to "check duplicity and falsehood". The whole Report

⁸Charity Organisation Society Report of a Special Committee on the Training of the Blind. Presented to the Council 21st February, 1876. pp. 21 and 28.

⁹As above. pp. 28-9.

epitomised the central doctrine of the Charity Organisation Society namely, that distress was the result not of economic conditions but of personal faults in the individual such as indolence and the absence of thrift. From this premise the Charity Organisation Society drew the important conclusion concerning the administration of charity that almsgiving, by demoralising the working classes and making them dependent on outside help was a principal cause of poverty since it encouraged rather than corrected the weaknesses of character which produced distress. Thus, the Charity Organisation Society strongly opposed charity of an indiscriminate nature which based relief on the needs of the individual and substituted its concept of a scientific charity based on central administration and the careful sifting of deserving from undeserving applicants for relief. This reasoning the Report applied to blind persons equally with persons whose poverty stemmed from causes other than physical handicap.

"In the case of the able-bodied blindequally as in that of the sighted" stated the Committee,¹⁰ "the continuance of the dole system is greatly to be deprecated, and every opportunity should therefore be seized of raising them (the blind) in their own estimation by affording them the means of emancipating themselves from the thralldom of pauperism, rather than by retaining them under the demoralising influences of small occasional gifts."

The main importance of the Charity Organisation Society Report, however, lies in the fact that it was the precursor, so far as blind persons were concerned, of the much more comprehensive enquiry into their condition undertaken by the Royal Commission on the Blind, Deaf and Dumb.

¹⁰ Charity Organisation Society Report of a Special Committee on the Training of the Blind. Presented to the Council 21st February, 1876. p. 20.

(2) The Royal Commission on the Blind, Deaf and Dumb.

(i) The Background to the Commission. Lack of education in childhood was one of the major causes of the depressed economic, social and spiritual condition of the majority of blind or deaf persons in later life. The inadequacy of the schools founded under voluntary auspices to meet the demand for educational facilities on the part of blind or deaf children was shown by the census of 1861. Of the estimated blind population of 19,352 in England and Wales the inmates of all a_ges in institutions for the instruction of persons suffering from the handicap numbered only 760. Since, according to the census returns, there were 2,173 blind persons between the ages of 5 and 20 years of age¹¹ the insufficiency of accommodation is apparent. The distribution of the schools was also defective. Yorkshire, with upwards of two millions of population and 324 blind under 20 years of age had one institution with 65 inmates while in the South Midlands and Wales with an aggregate population of 2,600,000 including 257 blind persons aged under 20 years there was no institution whatever.¹¹ A similar lack of opportunity for education obtained in the case of the deaf and the 1861 Census Report estimated that the number of deaf and dumb children under instruction did not exceed 10.5 per cent or about 1 in 9.¹² In connection with the 1861 census a supplementary inquiry was made into the circumstances attendant on the cases of blindness and deaf-mutism in the county of Herefordshire where, according to the returns, the ratio of the blind and deaf to the general population was higher than in any other part of England and Wales. The answers showed that only 12 out of 131 blind and 19 out

¹¹Census Report 1861. p. 51.

¹²Census Report 1861. p. 62.

of 94 deaf persons in respect of whom information had been obtained had received any form of instruction either in institutions or elsewhere.¹³ Because of this shortage of accommodation admission to a residential institution for blind or deaf children usually depended on an applicant being fortunate enough to obtain a majority of the votes of the subscribers to the charity at the yearly or half-yearly election.

The Education Act of 1870 provided¹⁴ that all the children "resident in each school district" should be educated. The only exemptions being in respect of a "reasonable excuse" such as illness. In 1876 a further Act¹⁵ relating to elementary education defined the term "reasonable excuse" more precisely and neither blindness nor deafness was mentioned. While the Act of 1870 made no direct reference to blind or deaf children therefore it did not specifically exclude them and the parents had a legal duty to provide them with elementary education. Although a very few enlightened authorities followed the example of the London School Board which had established classes for the deaf in 1874 and the blind in 1875 the overwhelming majority of school boards chose to ignore the existence of children with the two handicaps rather than to attempt to solve the practical difficulties of educating them. In 1885 St. John Ackers, M.P., himself the father of a deaf child, stated that national and local indifference to the education of the deaf stemmed from the following causes:-

"Want of public interest in the deaf. The exceptional provisions necessary for instructing the deaf entailing a larger cost per scholar than is the case with hearing children. The absence of direction on these points in the Education Acts. The refusal of the Education Department to compel school authorities

¹³Census Report 1861. pp. 49 and 64.

¹⁴33-34 Victoria. C.75. Elementary Education Act 1870.

¹⁵39-40 Victoria. C.79. Elementary Education Act 1876.

to educate the deaf children in their districts. The anxiety of the Education Department and many of the school authorities to advance the education of hearing children in Elementary Schools to such an extent as, on the one hand, largely to increase the sums which the Department has yearly had to ask from the Treasury under the head of the Elementary Education, and on the other hand, largely to increase the education rates. Thus the Education Department has been afraid to ask for funds to ensure the education of the deaf for fear of not getting all it wanted for schemes of more advanced education for hearing children, and school authorities have been afraid in the same way of the ratepayers. Many think that the education now given has, to a considerable extent exceeded (I will not say what is desirable but) what was intended under the Elementary Education Acts." 16 (a)

What St. John Ackers averred in respect of the education of the deaf applied with equal force to the education of the blind. There was therefore a need to create an awareness on the part of both the Education Department and the local School Boards of the failure of the existing Acts to provide for the elementary education of the blind or deaf.

The movement for state assistance which resulted in the appointment of the Royal Commission on the Blind, Deaf and Dumb was initiated by persons concerned with the interests of the blind. In 1869, Elizabeth Gilbert, the blind daughter of the then Bishop of Chichester had recognized that the pending legislation relating to elementary education provided an opportune time for laying before those in authority "the needs of the blind, their number, the possibility of minimising their affliction and, by means of adequate education, opening to them avenues of employment and independence."¹⁷ A memorial relative to the

¹⁶ St. John Ackers, M.P. "The State in Relation to the Deaf in Proceedings of the Conference of Headmasters of Institutions and other workers for the Deaf and Dumb" London, 1, 2 & 3 July, 1885 p. 107.

(a) The matter was put more succinctly by Wheelhouse - "The simple truth is that those unfortunate children are sparse in number, and are for the most part, poor almost to the verge of pauperism, and therefore, little or no heed is taken of their necessities in this respect." Letter from Wheelhouse to Elliott reported in Proceedings of the Headmasters Conference 1881. p. 150.

¹⁷ Martin Frances. Elizabeth Gilbert and Her Work for the Blind Cassell & Co. Ltd., 1891. p.200.

condition of the blind was sent by Miss Gilbert to the Privy Council in July 1869 and in February 1870 Earl de Gray, Lord President of the Council, together with Mr. Foster received a supporting deputation consisting of the representatives of twenty-nine institutions for the blind and fifteen other notabilities among whom was Mr. Wheelhouse. The representations of the deputation that "blind persons should have a fair share of protection and interest in any measure of general education which might be designed by the Government,"¹⁸ were sympathetically received. Lord de Gray pointed out, however, that there were many points connected with the institutions for the blind which placed them in a different category from the elementary schools. He also suggested that if the claims of the blind institutions were accepted it would be difficult to resist those advanced on behalf of other categories of handicap such as the deaf and dumb. No tangible result accrued from this deputation and in 1870 Wheelhouse introduced a Bill providing for Exchequer grants to institutions for the blind and deaf which was read each year until it was withdrawn in 1880.¹⁹ The next positive step in the campaign for state assistance was the appointment in 1874 of the special committee on the Training of the Blind of the Charity Organisation Society to which reference has already been made in this Chapter.^(a) The need for an investigation into the educational provision for the blind was further emphasized at a Conference of Managers, Teachers and Friends of the Blind held at York in 1883.²⁰ In the following July, the Duke of Westminster

¹⁸Martin Frances. Elizabeth Gilbert and Her Work for the Blind
Cassell & Co. Ltd., 1891. pp. 202-3

¹⁹Bill to Provide for the Elementary Education of Blind and Deaf and Dumb Children and for the Governmental Inspection of Schools for such Children. Bill 499 A.D.1870. See also pp.

(a) See pp. 48-52

²⁰Report of the Conference of Managers, Teachers and Friends of the Blind, York. 1883. Yorkshire School for the Blind, 1889.

convened a meeting at Grosvenor House at which it was unanimously resolved that the Government should be requested to appoint a Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Condition of the Blind and the means adopted in this and other countries for promoting their welfare.²¹

Workers for the deaf began their movement for state aid later than those concerned with the interests of the blind. At a Conference of Headmasters of Institutions for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb held in 1877, however, a paper was read on "The State and Deaf Mute Education" pointing out that Government grants would enable the institutions to enlarge their buildings and extend the period of instruction given to the pupils.²² Government grant, however, carried the corollary of government inspection which some headmasters regarded with apprehension and a resolution that a deputation should wait upon the Government and lay their views before it was modified to an agreement that the secretary should be authorised to write to Mr. Wheelhouse, M.P. to acquaint him with the fact that "the Conference was unanimously of the opinion, though without pledging itself to the details of any scheme, that state aid was necessary in the education of the deaf and dumb".²³ Three years later a so called^(a) "International Congress" on the Deaf and Dumb held at Milan passed important resolutions concerning the method of instructing the deaf and dumb and stated that as a great number of such persons were not receiving the benefit of instruction "Governments should take the necessary steps that all the

²² Elliott Richard, Headmaster, Deaf and Dumb Asylum, Margate, "The State and Deaf Mute Education" in Proceedings of the Conference of Headmasters of Institutions and of other Workers for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, London. 24-26 July, 1877. p. 143.

²³ Proceedings of the Conference of Headmasters as above. p. 150.

(a) "So called" because 53 per cent of the members were from Italy, 34 per cent from France and 7 per cent from England and America. There was only one representative from Germany and nine from Belgium and Switzerland. R. Elliott Esq. to the Conference of Headmasters in London, 22-24 June, 1881. p.11-12.

deaf and dumb may be educated".²⁴ The changes in the system of educating the deaf recommended at Milan were so radical that in 1881 a Conference of Governing Bodies of Institutions for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb in the United Kingdom was convened to consider them and among the resolutions approved was one urging "That the Government be memorialised to take the necessary steps that all the Deaf and Dumb be educated, and to make special provision for the inspection and cost of their education".²⁵ As a consequence a deputation waited on Mundella at the Education Department and presented a Memorial. No action was taken by the Government, however, and in January 1885 the Committee of the Manchester Schools for the Deaf and Dumb convened a further conference for the express purpose of considering the subject of "State Aid for the Deaf and Dumb for educational purposes and also to prepare a Memorial for Presentation to the Right Hon. A. J. Mundella M.P." Once more the attention of the Government was drawn to the necessity of state aid and among the resolutions incorporated in the Memorial were the proposals that such aid should take the form of a capitation grant on the average attendance of each child in the school and that it should be made compulsory upon all parents or guardians of deaf and dumb children to send them to school.²⁶ Again the deputation received no promise of assistance from the government and on 18th May St. John Ackers took advantage of Question Time to ask whether the Government would grant

²⁴ Report of the proceedings of the International Congress on the Education of the Deaf, held at Milan, 6-11 Sept. 1880; taken from the English official minutes London, W. M. Allen, 1888. p. 5.

²⁵ Report of the Proceedings of the Conference of the Governing Bodies of Institutions for the Education of the Deaf, London 1881. p.

²⁶ Proceedings of the Conference held under the auspices of the Committee of the Manchester Schools for the Deaf and Dumb to consider the subject of State Aid for the Deaf and Dumb for Educational Purposes and also to prepare a Memorial for Presentation to the Rt. Hon. A. J. Mundella, M.P. Manchester, 8th January 1885. p. 28.

"an inquiry into the education of the deaf in the United Kingdom and Dependencies by means of a Royal Commission or otherwise." In his reply, Mundella stated that the question of an inquiry into the education of the blind, deaf and dumb was under consideration by the Government and that a decision would shortly be arrived at.²⁷ The preparation for a Royal Commission at least in respect of the blind had in fact already reached an advanced stage and the majority of commissioners had been appointed but on 8th June Gladstone's Liberal Government was dissolved and replaced on 24th June by a Conservative administration under the Marquis of Salisbury with Stanhope taking Mundella's place as Vice-President of the Council. The question of state aid was naturally the subject of considerable discussion at the Conference of Headmasters of Institutions for the Education of the Deaf held in July 1885. The demands of the representatives of the deaf were concisely stated by St. John Ackers as being "State Recognition, State Aid and State Compulsion"²⁸ and, at the conclusion of the Conference the following resolutions were unanimously adopted:-

"That in the unanimous opinion of this Conference state aid is absolutely necessary to secure the efficient education of all the Deaf and Dumb children in the United Kingdom.

"That Lord Egerton of Tatton be respectfully requested to urge upon the Prime Minister, the Marquis of Salisbury, the importance of steps being taken without delay to give effect to this Resolution either by immediate legislation or by the appointment of a Commission of Enquiry."²⁹

The above resolutions were passed on 3rd July, on 14th July Stanhope

²⁷Hansard - Commons 18th May, 1885. Col. 701

²⁸Proceedings of the Conference of Headmasters of Institutions and of other Workers for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, London. 1-3 July, 1885. p. 112.

²⁹As above. p. 126.

in moving the Education, Science and Art Estimates announced that it was the intention of the Government to issue immediately a Commission to enquire into the condition and means of support of the blind. The need for an investigation into the adequacy of educational provision for the deaf was also recognized. In their case, however, Stanhope stated that he did not think that the same Commission could investigate the case of the deaf and dumb. He proposed, therefore, to instruct the Inspectors of Schools in certain districts to report to him regarding how far the Education Acts had failed to meet the case of the deaf and dumb.³⁰

The fact that the deaf had obtained less than the blind was due in part to their representatives. Following his question in the House on 13th May, St. John Ackers had pressed Mundella not to unite the blind with the deaf in the same Commission or at all events to allow a separate enquiry into the condition and education of the deaf.³¹

The Royal Commission on the Blind was appointed on 28th July, 1885, its terms of reference being

"To investigate and report upon the condition of the Blind in the United Kingdom, the various systems of education of the blind, elementary, technical and professional, at home and abroad, and the existing institutions for that purpose, the employment open to and suitable for the blind and the means by which education may be extended so as to increase the number of blind persons qualified for such employment."³²

Initially there were five members under the chairmanship of the Duke of Westminster but four later appointments raised the total number of commissioners to ten. Although appointed in July the Commission did not

³⁰Hansard - Commons 14th July, 1885. Cols. 687-8

³¹Proceedings of the Conference of Headmasters of Institutions and of other Workers for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb, London. 1-3 July, 1885. p. 111.

³²Royal Commission on the Blind Deaf and Dumb Report. p. iii

TABLE 7

Main Interests of Witnesses
who appeared before the Royal Commission on the
Blind, Deaf and Dumb, etc. 1885-1888

The Blind

Schools and Institutions	23	
Workshops	13	
Home Teaching, Visiting and Relief Societies	15	
Homes	7	
Pension Societies	10	
Embossing Societies	4	
Miscellaneous	17	
e.g. Blind persons in special occupations, ophthalmic surgeons, teachers of music, workhouse chaplain, etc.	—	89

The Deaf

Schools	18	
Training Colleges	3	
Missions for the Adult Deaf	9	
Homes	4	
Miscellaneous	8	
e.g. Aural surgeon, scientists, Dean of Chapel Royal, Dublin, etc.	—	42
Blind and Deaf	5	5
Idiots and Imbeciles	3	3
Central and Local Government	10	10
		149

Some witnesses were associated with more than one interest, e.g. institutions for the blind might include both schools and workshops. Allocation has been made on the basis of major interest in so far as this could be ascertained from the Minutes of evidence.

interview its first witness until 17th December.

Meanwhile the friends of the deaf had not been inactive. On 23rd July and 4th August St. John Ackers and William Woodall respectively had asked questions in the Commons relating to the appointment of a further Royal Commission to consider the condition and education of the deaf. On both occasions, however, Stanhope had held out no hope of an enquiry other than that mentioned in his statement on 14th July.³³ Egerton's deputation to Salisbury seems to have led to a change in the Government's attitude. On 20th January, 1886, a new Commission was issued extending the original terms of reference to include "the Deaf and Dumb and such other cases as from special circumstances would seem to require exceptional methods of education." The number of Commissioners was increased by three and Lord Egerton^(a) replaced the Duke of Westminster as Chairman. The Duke had, in fact, never presided at any of the previous five sessions at which witnesses had been called. The Commission was subsequently augmented by five further appointments so that from 1887 it consisted of eighteen members including the Chairman.

In all the Commission held 116 sittings in London, issued letters of enquiry to more than one-sixth of the total number of blind persons in the United Kingdom from whom nearly 6,000 replies were received, visited the principal schools and institutions for the blind, the deaf and for imbeciles in the United Kingdom and inspected the leading establishments for the blind and the deaf in Paris, Germany, Switzerland and Italy. Some idea of the comprehensive nature of the enquiries can be obtained from the analysis in Table VII of the main interests of

³³Hansard - Commons 23rd July, 1885. Col. 1625 and
4th August, 1885, Cols. 1053-4.

(a) Wilbraham Egerton. 1832-1909. For biographical details see
Who was Who 1897-1916

the 149 witnesses who gave oral evidence.

The Commissioners published their Report in 1889. The detailed consideration of the three classes of handicap was prefaced by a number of preliminary remarks. "The blind, the deaf and the educable class of imbeciles", observed the Commissioners, "form a distinct group, which, if left uneducated become not only a burden to themselves but a weighty burden to the State."³⁴ "The great majority of persons so afflicted were in a condition of poverty so little removed from want that such a calamity in itself was sufficient to produce indigence."³⁵ Since such poverty was entirely due to causes beyond the control of the persons concerned, liberal treatment with regard to education or outdoor relief would not be an inducement to vice, folly or improvidence nor should their infirmity subject them to any legal disqualification. Although the cost would be higher than in the case of normal children it would be in the interest of the State to educate the handicapped "so as to dry up as far as possible the minor streams which ultimately swell the great torrent of pauperism."³⁴ Fear had been expressed that if the education of the handicapped was undertaken by the State the result would be a diminution in voluntary charity. "When it is remembered how much remains to be done for them", countered the Commissioners, "it is obvious that even were such aid given, there will still be room for the action of private benevolence which experience shows to be often stimulated rather than discouraged by state aid judiciously given."³⁴ Having based the case for the education of the blind, the deaf and the mentally retarded on the utilitarian argument that instruction would diminish the amount of

³⁴R.C.B. & D. Report. p. 12. Par. 6-12.

³⁵R.C.B. & D. Report. p. 13. Par. 14.

involuntary pauperism, the Commissioners proceeded to consider each of the three types of disability in detail. Only their recommendations concerning the blind and deaf are within the scope of the present study.

(ii) The Recommendations of the Commission.

A. The Blind

The recommendations of the Commission concerning the blind can, for convenience be grouped under six headings: (1) Statistics and the causes of blindness; (2) Education; (3) Training and after care; (4) Pensions; (5) The Poor Law, and (6) Co-ordination.

(1) Statistics

For their statistical information regarding the incidence of blindness the commissioners had relied mainly on the figures provided by the Census of 1881 according to which the total number of blind persons in England and Wales was 22,832 of whom 1,710 were between the ages of 5 and 15 years. The Report recognized, however, that the number of persons who were blind for all practical purposes was almost certainly substantially higher than was indicated by the census returns due to the disinclination of many partially blind persons to admit to their disability.³⁵ To secure more reliable census returns the Report made two recommendations, firstly that there should be a uniform schedule of enquiry for the blind throughout the United Kingdom including the causes and extent of blindness: secondly, that every school or institution for the blind should have pupils examined on admission by an oculist or medical practitioner and keep records relating to the origin and degree of blindness and the subsequent career of each scholar.³⁶

The Commissioners next turned to the causes of blindness many of which, such as industrial injury, granular ophthalmia and ophthalmia

³⁶R.C.B. & D. Report. p. 42. par. 265.

neonatorum they declared to be preventable. The preventative measures advocated by the Report were that the intermarriage of blind persons should be strongly discouraged and that information respecting the treatment of purulent ophthalmia should be circulated by the sanitary authority or through the Post Office. Children with defective sight who were attending elementary schools should be periodically examined by a medical officer and glasses prescribed for the purpose of preserving residual vision. The need for increased attention to ophthalmic surgery on the part of general practitioners was also stressed.³⁷

(2) Education

The major parts of the Commission's enquiries so far as blind persons were concerned, however, had been connected with education and industrial training. With regard to education the Report stated unequivocally that "the provisions of the Education Acts be extended to the blind and that the compulsory education at school be enforced from 5 to 16. From 5 to 12 years of age the children should pass through the ordinary standards but between 12 and 14 years technical or industrial training would commence. The Commissioners had been very impressed by the work of Worcester College for the Blind which, from its foundation in 1866, had endeavoured to provide a higher education which had enabled a number of students to qualify for university entrance and subsequently for professional occupations. The Report, therefore, recommended that blind persons of exceptional promise should be encouraged by scholarships to qualify for education at a high class college."³⁸

Compulsory education, however, raised the problem of ensuring that there was adequate school provision. In the towns the Report

³⁷R.C.B. & D. Report. p. 43. par. 266.

³⁸R.C.B. & D. Report. p. 39. par. 243

envisaged that the school authority would follow the examples of London, Bradford, Cardiff, Sunderland and Glasgow where special classes had been formed in the elementary schools. Where the number of blind children were insufficient to constitute a class it was recommended that the school board should be empowered and required to send a child to a residential institution or, alternatively, to establish a school itself or in combination with other authorities. Irrespective of the financial situation of the parent the Report advocated that each school should be paid a capitation grant equal to half the cost of providing instruction. This grant which would be given only under the certificate of a properly qualified inspector would, however, depend on the aggregate proficiency of all the blind pupils in the school rather than on the merits of each scholar.³⁸

While the education of the blind was to be compulsory the Commissioners did not concur with the view that it should be free or that the parents of a visually handicapped child should be absolved for paying to the extent of their ability for its education and maintenance. They recognized, however, that while parents might be able to pay the ordinary costs of educating a sighted child in an elementary school it might be difficult for them to meet the additional costs involved in maintaining a blind child in a residential institution. The Report recommended, therefore, not only that parents should receive liberal assistance towards such costs for the whole of the period between 5 and 16 years but that such help should be given without recourse to the guardians. The considerable evidence obtained by the Commissioners of the disinclination of parents to acquire any stigma of pauperism by applying to the guardians and the reluctance of some

³⁸R.C.B. & D. Report. p. 39. par. 243.

guardians to give assistance led to the recommendation that the power of making grants should be vested in the school authority rather than in the poor law administration since with the latter body assistance would "assume the form of a charitable concession rather than an educational duty."³⁹

The Report also made a number of recommendations regarding the curricula and the internal management of schools and institutions. One of the basic problems was the most suitable form of raised type in the use of which blind persons should be instructed to enable them to read embossed books. The leading types which the Commissioners considered were Alston or Roman, Braille, Lucas and Moon. Apart from Lucas type which they averred was gradually dying out the Commissioners recognized that each of the other three systems was not without merit. Roman type could be taught to the blind and understood by any seeing person. It also had the advantage that it put the blind more readily in communication with the seeing world. Moon type was specially suited to aged blind persons. For blind persons who had been handicapped from birth or early childhood the Commissioners conceded the superiority of Braille since this system could be read more quickly and printed in a much smaller bulk than any other. Other merits of Braille were its capacity to be quickly written in a frame and the fact that it was the only system well adapted to musical notation. The Report did not, however, entirely discard Roman and Moon type. "It seems better for the young when at school to be first instructed in Braille", declared the Commissioners, "afterwards they can easily learn to read Moon or Roman type and thus profit by the existing literature printed in these types. In fact, it is useful to the blind to know all the leading types."⁴⁰

³⁹R.C.B. & D. Report. pp. 38-39. par. 241-242.

⁴⁰R.C.B. & D. Report. pp. 32-33. par. 170-190.

The Report stressed the importance of increasing the vitality of the blind by physical exercise, outdoor sports and gymnasias and stated that covered play sheds should be provided at all schools for the blind.⁴¹

Two problems faced the Commissioners regarding the teaching staffs of the schools and institutions. Firstly, the Regulations of the Education Department did not require, as a condition of grant, that assistant teachers in school board classes for the blind should be certificated. Secondly, many blind persons wished to become teachers in schools for the blind. With regard to the latter matter the Commissioners considered that it was advisable to make use of blind teachers subject to the proviso that where there was only one teacher in a school he should be sighted since "there are many defects of manner and habit which a sighted person alone can correct." They further recommended that blind teachers should be placed under the same regulations as sighted teachers in elementary schools before being allowed to teach and that in all cases they should be provided with such sighted assistance as might be necessary to ensure the efficiency of their teaching.⁴²

(3) Training and After Care

The Commissioners next turned their attention to the subject of technical and industrial training which, like education, they recommended should be placed under the Education Department. The need for such training related both to persons under 21 years of age who were or had been educated at a school for the blind and persons who had lost their sight in adult life and who required instruction in an occupation suitable for a sightless person. The Report laid down three basic principles in respect of the technical training of persons

⁴¹R.C.B. & D. Report. pp. 36. pars. 212-216
43. pars. 266

⁴²R.C.B. & D. Report. pp. 34-5. pars. 193-203
42. pars. 264

under 21 years of age. (1) that such training should be given between the ages of 12 and 16 years; (2) that except for special cases and pupils preparing for a career in music or the liberal professions the emphasis should be on training for manual occupations; (3) that school authorities should be empowered and required to give "liberal assistance to enable persons between the ages of 16 and 21 to maintain themselves while learning a trade." This recommendation applied particularly to persons who had either not attended an institution and were, therefore, untrained in any occupation for the blind or who, on leaving a primarily educational institution at the age of 16, had acquired only an imperfect degree of proficiency in a trade. The Commissioners expressed the view that the technical instruction given in many institutions was not sufficiently practical and that manual dexterity needed to be developed at an earlier age. The employment of boys under the age of 16 with adults in institutions which had both school and workshop departments was deprecated. The Report further recommended that persons who lost their sight between the ages of 21 and 50 should be assisted by the school authority to learn a trade under the same conditions that applied to those under 21 years.⁴³

Extrapolating from the replies received to a survey of the extent to which blind persons practised the trades in post school life which they had been taught in the institutions, the Commissioners concluded that 42 per cent were unable to do so while about 34 per cent of the remainder were earning less than five shillings weekly. This inability to support themselves from the proceeds of the occupations in which they had been trained was attributed by the Commissioners to indifferent instruction and the lack of adequate facilities for the blind to work and afterwards dispose of their output. A further factor was that

⁴³R.C.B. & D. Report. p. 40. par. 207. and p. 43. par. 266.

only a few institutions had any arrangements for the after care of their former pupils. To improve the employment opportunities for skilled blind persons to obtain employment and sell their products the Report recommended that a central workshop should be set up in every large centre of population. Such workshops would enable the blind to obtain employment, furnish them with materials at cost price should they wish to work at home and to provide an agency for the sale of manufactured articles. The commitment of the Commissioners to voluntaryism was reflected, however, in their recommendation that such workshops should not be directly subsidised by the State but established and maintained by "private benevolence."⁴⁴

The Report stated that it was desirable that institutions for the blind should start a scheme of supervision of the pupils who had been trained in their workshops and advocated that this should be done so far as possible by the adoption of the "Saxon Scheme". Under this system, which had been started in 1843 at the Institution for the Blind in Dresden, a blind person who had been taught a trade would be equipped on his discharge with an initial set of tools. Subsequently the institution would provide him with raw material at cost price and purchase whatever goods he could not sell himself. A local supervisor described as a "respectable, benevolent, practical man capable of producing custom for his works" would be appointed to superintend his welfare. Finally, the institution would, if necessary, augment earnings from a fund established for such a purpose.⁴⁵

⁴⁴R.C.B. & D. Report. p. 20. par. 65
p. 25. pars. 116-117

⁴⁵R.C.B. & D. Report. p. 25. pars. 118-123
p. 42. pars. 260-261

(4) Pensions

A further matter into which the Commissioners made a detailed investigation was that of pensions. They ascertained that the annual interest on funds invested for the purpose of paying pensions to blind persons was over £35,000. Of this figure some £30,000 was distributed by London charities mainly to persons in the metropolis and southern England, although generally their regulations imposed no geographical restrictions on the residence of beneficiaries. Notwithstanding the funds available, however, the applications for assistance far exceeded the resources that the trustees of the various charities had at their disposal. In any event the Commissioners indicated several faults in the existing system of distributing pensions. The conditions for the award of a pension differed widely. Some societies made grants only on the condition that the applicant had never been the recipient of parish relief; others stipulated the attainment of a minimum age, usually 50 or 60. Due to the absence of communication between charities some blind persons were receiving grants from more than one source. There was evidence of nepotism, pensions being awarded to applicants with the most influential friends. In some instances lack of proper discrimination by charities resulted in grants being given to the undeserving and refused to worthy cases. The most serious criticism made by the Commissioners, however, was that pensions were being distributed in such a way as to be a deterrent to industry since they acted as a disincentive to blind persons to exert themselves. "It is difficult to exaggerate the want of self reliance of blind people who have been brought up in dependence on existing or expected charity," remarked the Commissioners. As an illustration of this statement they referred to the evidence of one witness that there was a general hope among many of the indigent blind that the result of

the Royal Commission would be that every blind person would receive a pension.

To meet the above criticisms the Report made three suggestions. Firstly, that there should be co-operation between all pension societies whereby a united register would be kept of all applicants thus obviating pluralism in the making of grants. Secondly, that the rules of the charities should be altered to give greater flexibility to trustees thus enabling them to "reach all meritorious cases of adults of any age, so that the pensions should act as an incentive to industry". Thirdly, that to avoid waste pensions should be paid weekly rather than quarterly in lump sums and the payment should be made through local magistrates, medical practitioners or clergymen who could report on the "conduct and deserts" of recipients. It was observed that distribution might be facilitated by the adoption of the Saxon system.⁴⁶

(5) The Poor Law and the Co-ordination of Effort

Two other matters considered by the Commissioners were the position under the Poor Law of the incapable or aged blind and the need for greater co-operation between the institutions. The recommendations of the Report relative to the Poor Law have been stated in the first chapter of this study and do not require reiteration.^(a) With regard to co-operation the Commissioners noted that the existing workshops for the blind had no system of inter-communication and that, in consequence, they were frequently competing in the same market. The Report, therefore, recommended that institutions should endeavour to achieve greater co-operation in such ways as the exchange of information, the demarcation of manufacturing activities and a policy of reciprocal trade by which workshops should purchase from each other goods for which they had orders but did not make themselves.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ R.C.B. & D. Report. p.31- par. 161

⁴⁷ R.C.B. & D. Report. pp.28-30. par. 124-145; pp.42-43. par. 263-266

(a) See Chapter 1 p.38-39

⁴⁸ R.C.B. & D. Report. pp.43-45. par. 267-282; pp.61. par. 24.

B. The Deaf and Dumb

As with the blind the Commissioners began their investigation of the condition of the deaf and dumb with a consideration of the incidence and causes of the disability. According to the 1881 Census 19,518 persons in the United Kingdom had been returned as deaf and dumb, of whom 5,129 were estimated to fall within the 5 to 15 age group. The Census figures for the deaf, however, were probably less accurate than the corresponding statistics for the blind since parents were unwilling to return a child as deaf and dumb until it had attained the age of 5 years and the disability could be ascertained with certainty. Many infants with defective hearing had not therefore been included by the enumerators. The Report sought to obtain greater accuracy in obtaining information regarding the incidence of deafness by reiterating the recommendation that there should be a uniform schedule of enquiry of the deaf for the census returns of the whole of the United Kingdom which should be verified by reference to the local sanitary authority.⁴⁸

The Commissioners classified persons with defective hearing into three categories, namely, (1) the congenitally deaf; (2) those who had become deaf after birth either before or subsequent to acquiring speech, and (3) those who possessed some hearing power. Congenital deafness was attributed to two causes, namely, the intermarriage of deaf mutes or the intermarriage of near relations. They considered that strong discouragement should be given to the intermarriage of the congenitally deaf and also to consanguineous marriages especially where there was any family tendency to hereditary deaf mutism.⁴⁹ After disposing of these preliminary matters the Commissioners directed their

⁴⁸R.C.B. & D. Report. pp. 43-45. par. 267-282.
p. 61. par. 24.

⁴⁹R.C.B. & D. Report. pp. 45-51. par. 283-314
p. 61. par. 26

attention to the important subject of the education of the deaf and dumb and their recommendations fall broadly under the headings of educational administration, and methods, missions to the deaf and teachers of deaf pupils.

From the administrative standpoint the recommendations of the Report with regard to the extension of the Education Acts to deaf children, their compulsory attendance at school, the requirement of school authorities to provide or arrange for their instruction and to make grants to parents and institutions, repeated, with minor modifications the measures advocated for the blind.⁴⁸ There was, however, one important exception. While the suggested period of instruction for the blind was from 5 to 16 the Commissioners proposed that in the case of the deaf the age of entry to school should, so far as possible, be 7 and that the period of attendance should be compulsorily enforced for at least 8 years.⁵⁰ The reason for this differentiation between the two handicaps was that deaf children were considered to be less forward at the age of five than their hearing contemporaries and that in consequence the teaching of language could not profitably be begun before the seventh year.⁵¹ While it is now recognized that the sooner a deaf child commences language study the better his chance of making progress, it should be noted that in making their recommendation the Commissioners were only endorsing what, at that time, was current practice. An Irish deputation which in 1856 visited 14 schools for the deaf in Great Britain reported that "In the majority of schools ... eight was the minimum and twelve the maximum age for admission and that the scholars were retained for six years".⁵² In 1876 Dr. Buxton, the headmaster of the Liverpool School

⁴⁸R.C.B. & D. Report. pp. 43-45. par. 267-282, and p. 61. par. 24.

⁵⁰R.C.B. & D. Report. p. 90. par. 620.

⁵¹R.C.B. & D. Report. p. 58. par. 354

⁵²Report of a Deputation from the National Association for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb Poor of Ireland who visited several institutions for the Deaf and Dumb in Great Britain. Printed by James Charles, Dublin 1856.

for the Deaf stated that at Doncaster the age of admission had been lowered from 8 to 7 and that at Liverpool 7 had always been the recognized age for entry.⁵³ As with the blind it was suggested that from the age of 12 male deaf pupils should be given some technical training but this should be instruction in the use of tools and the principles of mechanics rather than training for a particular trade. Girls would be taught household work. This training would continue until the age of 16 after which it would be left to the institutions either to apprentice their pupils or send them to technical or industrial schools for ordinary children.⁵⁴

Although there were institutions both at home and abroad in which blind pupils were being educated along with the deaf and dumb, the Commissioners expressed their disapproval of such association of the two disabilities on the ground that where it occurred there was a tendency for the education of the blind to be neglected.⁵⁵

The most difficult task facing the Commissioners when considering the education of the deaf was the evaluation of three different communication systems, namely, (a) manual, (b) the oral, (c) the combined method.

The main advantages claimed for the manual method, i.e. signing, were that it was the natural way for the deaf to express themselves, that it was the only practicable way in which religious services and lectures could be conveyed to the deaf, and that, as it was the readiest method by which a knowledge of written language could be acquired, more general knowledge could be taught in a given time by this method than by any other system.

⁵³Buxton, David, in a paper read to the Education Section of the Social Science Congress held at Liverpool, 12th October, 1876, and reported in "A Magazine intended chiefly for the Deaf and Dumb" vol.iv. 1876. p.182.

⁵⁴R.C.B. & D. Report. p. 60. par. 364 and p. 90. par. 620.

⁵⁵R.C.B. & D. Report. p. 85. par. 581.

The aim of the oral method was to give the deaf child not merely language but speech and, therefore, to enable him to communicate and associate with hearing and speaking persons.

The combined method, as its name suggests, was an attempt to integrate the advantages of both the systems previously mentioned. The utility of the combined method was itself a subject of controversy among the teachers. Some agreed with the views of Fay who, in his evidence to the Commission declared that "the development of the faculties and the acquisition of verbal speech by pantomime, by finger spelling and by books are an excellent preliminary training for teaching associated with subsequent oral speech itself."⁵⁶ Other teachers held that because it was so much easier to learn, the sign system crowded out the oral system. As one witness informed the Commission "If you attempt to combine the two systems, one neutralises the other. They do not agree any more than an acid and an alkali."⁵⁷

Faced by a mass of conflicting evidence from the protagonists of each of the three methods the Commissioners stated that

"They did not think it wise for the State to lay down a hard and fast line and say that they only approve or recognize one system; more especially as some of the best schools in the country are in a transition state and have the two systems ... carried on side by side under one management".⁵⁸

They did, however, commit themselves to the view that "every child who is deaf shall have full opportunity of being educated on the pure oral system," and that for the first year at least the oral method should be the approved method of instruction.⁵⁹ Partially deaf children should in all cases be taught by oral means.

In making these recommendations the Commission were clearly

⁵⁶R.C.B. & D. Report. p. 67. par. 434

⁵⁷R.C.B. & D. Report. p. 67. par. 433.

⁵⁸R.C.B. & D. Report. p. 70. par. 454

⁵⁹R.C.B. & D. Report. p. 73. par. 489 and p. 90. par. 620.

influenced by two of the eight resolutions adopted by the Milan Congress of 1880. These resolutions, which were carried by large majorities stated:-

(a) "The Congress considering the incontestable superiority of articulation over signs in restoring the deaf mute to society and giving him a fuller knowledge of language declares that the oral method should be preferred to that of signs in the education and instruction of the deaf."

(b) "The Congress considering that the simultaneous use of articulation and signs has the disadvantage of injuring articulation and lip-reading and the precision of ideas declares that the pure oral method should be preferred."⁶⁰

The most impressive event at the Milan Congress, however, was the adoption of the pure oral system by the French who had previously used the manual method. This conversion was particularly significant since the French Government had actually sent a representative to Milan to protest against the oral system.⁶¹

In the course of his evidence to the Commission Dr. David Buxton, a former headmaster of the Liverpool School for the Deaf, was asked how deaf persons regarded the oral system. Buxton at first retorted that "the deaf and dumb themselves are not competent witnesses".⁶² On being pressed for an answer, however, he gave the opinion that the answer depended on the standard of attainment of the individual deaf person. "I would say that those who appreciate all the advantages which knowledge of speech gives will be friends of the oral system. On the other hand, those who have lived in a cage all their lives are so much attached to their cage that they have no desire to fly outside."⁶³

⁶⁰ Quoted in Arnold on the Education of the Deaf, Second Edition. Revised Farrar, 1923. p. 106.

⁶¹ R.C.B. & D. Report. p. 73. par. 483

⁶² R.C.B. & D. Minutes of Evidence. Par. 9325. p. 318.

⁶³ R.C.B. & D. Minutes of Evidence. Par. 9327. p. 318.

For two reasons the Report was dubious about the value of missions for the adult deaf which were the fore-runners of the present welfare societies for hearing-impaired persons. It conceded that "mission work for the deaf is most necessary" and that "these societies undoubtedly do much useful and benevolent work."⁶⁴ The Commissioners considered, however, that the missions should limit their activities to the manually taught deaf and that with the spread of oralism the need for such adult societies would gradually disappear. "So long as there are adult deaf and dumb who have been educated on the silent system", the Report stated, "it will be necessary that these societies should hold meetings where services, lecturettes, etc., are given to such adults in their own language."⁶⁵ With the orally taught deaf, however, the situation was different.

"They should not be encouraged to attend such meetings ... and special services for the deaf so taught are both unnecessary and undesirable, the object of the best education being not to encourage them to form a class apart to inter-marry and to a great extent to lose their self-reliance."⁶⁶

There was a second reason why the Report regarded the missions with some disfavour. The Commissioners had been considerably impressed with the testimony of Mr. Graham Bell who had informed them that in America intermarriage of deaf and dumb persons had been so frequent as to lead him to speculate on the possibility of there being a deaf and dumb variety of the human race."⁶⁷ Bell attributed such intermarriage to three factors.⁶⁸

⁶⁴R.C.B. & D. Report. p. 88. par. 609

⁶⁵R.C.B. & D. Report. p. 88. par. 610

⁶⁶R.C.B. & D. Report. p. 88. par. 611

⁶⁷R.C.B. & D. Report. p. 82. par. 559

⁶⁸R.C.B. & D. Report. p. 82. par. 560

- (1) that the language of those taught on the manual system was not the language of the general population,
- (2) that in the institutions the deaf were brought together in large numbers,
- (3) that on leaving the institutions the deaf, as a consequence of their inability to mix socially with the hearing world were again forced to seek social satisfaction in the company of other persons who were similarly afflicted.

The Commissioners, therefore, recommended that the mixing of the sexes in the schools was in all cases inadvisable.⁶⁹ Segregation of the sexes in adult life was also commended and the Report asserted that

"A great responsibility will rest on those societies which encourage meetings where both sexes of the deaf congregate together for lectures, entertainment or other purposes. We strongly recommend that at such meetings only one sex should associate at the same time or that precautions should be taken to keep them as separate as possible."⁷⁰

The basic reason for the dislike shown by the majority of the Commissioners both to the manual system and the adult deaf missions was that these factors tended to produce a result at variance with the recommendation "that the deaf and dumb be kept as far as possible from being a class apart."⁷¹

The above views were strongly contested in a joint reservation to the Report signed by the Rev. William Blomefield Sleight and the Rev. Charles Mansfield Owen who were the only members of the Commission possessing extensive knowledge of work with adult deaf persons. The reservations objected to the "hostile tone" which the Report

⁶⁹R.C.B. & D. Report. p. 83. par. 566

⁷⁰R.C.B. & D. Report. p. 83. par. 568

⁷¹R.C.B. & D. Report. p. 91. par. 620

adopted towards the manual system "as not borne out by the evidence of those who have had long experience in teaching the deaf and dumb".⁷² They stated that missionaries to the adult deaf had found "that the oral method breaks down in after life and that its pupils not infrequently resort to writing or the manual alphabet." The purpose of the manual system was not to build up an "elaborate and complex system of signs intelligible only to the deaf themselves but to give familiarity with written language in its common colloquial forms" and thus equip them "with a ready means of communication with those among who they may be placed in after life". The evidence in favour of the combined method, especially that of Dr. Gallaudet of the Deaf Mute College at Washington, was considered to have received inadequate attention while undue importance had been given to the resolutions of the Milan Conference.⁷² An "emphatic protest" was made against the sign and manual language being stigmatised as "a cage" and it was held that on the contrary it was the orally taught pupils who were caged since it was as natural for a deaf and dumb child to sign "as a bird to fly".⁷²

Sleight and Owen also criticised the passages in the Report relating to the association and intermarriage of the deaf. They considered that undue weight had been attached to the evidence of Bell and observed that except in a few cases of hereditary tendency they knew of few instances where deaf and dumb parents had children with the same handicap.⁷² Finally, they contended that irrespective of the method of instruction deaf and dumb persons would always associate with each other and that it was desirable that there should be societies and missions where control over such association could be exercised. "Besides we know full well", stated the two dissentients, "the great benefit of these associations and the inestimable boon they prove to our afflicted fellow creatures."⁷²

⁷²R.C.B. & D. Report. Reservations of Charles Mansfield Owen and W. Blomefield Sleight. pp. 125-7

If Sleight and Owen are regarded as the representatives of those who supported the manual and combined methods of communication then Benjamin St. John Ackers and Lionel Van Oven may be looked upon as the champions of the pure oral system. In another joint reservation to the Report Ackers and Van Oven declared that it was impossible for deaf children to have the full benefit of the Pure Oral System if they had at any time become acquainted with the manual alphabet or system of signs.⁷³ In practice, this attitude implied that, not only should the orally taught deaf children be segregated in the schools from the manually taught pupils, but that in adult life they should also be kept away from the deaf missions where signing was the accepted method of communication.

The Commissioners expressed the view that the ratio of teachers to pupils should be 1 to 8 in pure oral schools and 1 to 14 or 15 in sign and manual schools.⁷⁴ They also emphasised that except in schools where the sign and manual system was used exclusively every teacher should be in possession of all his or her faculties and have had previous experience in teaching hearing children.⁷⁴ In 1871 the Association for the Oral Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb which had been founded the previous year had opened a training college for teachers in Fitzroy Square, London. Seven years later a second training college for teachers of the deaf had been established at Ealing. The Commissioners did not consider that these two institutions satisfied the criteria required for recognition by the Education Department or that they were likely to do so without state assistance in the forms of grants, examinations and inspection that obtained in ordinary training colleges.⁷⁴ In particular they stated that training should be compulsorily enforced for a minimum of two years. In contrast the courses

⁷³R.C.B. & D. Report. Reservations of B. St. John Ackers and Lionel Van Oven. p. 124.

⁷⁴R.C.B. & D. Report. p. 91. par. 620

offered at Ealing and Fitzroy Square were only of one year and twelve to eighteen months duration respectively. Subject to the approval of the Education Department the Report recommended that the two Colleges and any other well qualified institution should be recognized as training colleges for teachers of the deaf and receive grants at least equal to those given to ordinary training colleges.⁷⁴ Examinations would then be conducted by inspectors specially appointed by the Education Department supplemented by a test of the candidates knowledge of the physiology of the organs of speech which would be carried out by a qualified medical practitioner.⁷⁴ The practice obtaining in Germany where teachers of the deaf received enhanced salaries was commended and it was recommended that teachers of the deaf should receive a higher rate of remuneration than applied to trained teachers of ordinary children as an inducement to persons of special attainments to enter the profession.⁷⁴

Such were the principal recommendations of the Royal Commission on the Blind, Deaf and Dumb. So far as the blind were concerned the Report owed much to the influence of T. R. Armitage, the founder of the British and Foreign Blind Association, who in his book "The Education and Employment of the Blind" published in 1871 had anticipated many of the recommendations of the commission regarding state aid, the superiority of Braille and the introduction of the Saxon system of after-care.⁷⁵

On the deaf side the advocates of the older manual system of communication had not only been outnumbered by the supporters of the oral method but had produced much less influential evidence in support of their cause. So far as the welfare, as distinct from the education,

⁷⁴R.C.B. & D. Report. p. 91. par. 620.

⁷⁵Armitage, T. R. "The Education and employment of the Blind" sub-titled "What it has been, is and ought to be". Harrison & Sons, 69 Pall Mall, 1871.

of both the blind and deaf was concerned the faith of the Commissioners in voluntary charity and their fear that state aid for purposes other than educational ones would encourage dependence and result in relief to the undeserving reflects the philosophy of the Charity Organisation Society. In this connection the fact that three members of the Charity Organisation Committee on the Training of the Blind of 1876 were subsequently appointed to the Royal Commission to whom eight other members of the Charity Organisation Society Committee also gave evidence is not without significance.

C. The Results of the Commission

(1) The Movement for Legislation

Both the factions interested in the deaf and in the blind were anxious that the Government should take action on the Report of the Royal Commission without delay. On 29th October, 1889, a conference of Governing Bodies, Head Masters and School Board Representatives concerned with the education of the deaf and dumb was held in the Manchester Town Hall under the chairmanship of Lord Egerton of Tatton. Five resolutions endorsing the most important recommendations of the Commission with regard to the deaf were carried unanimously together with a sixth motion "That the President of the Council be requested to receive a Deputation to urge upon him to introduce such legislation as will enable the Resolutions passed by this conference to be carried out with as little delay as possible."⁷⁶

Exactly one month later the representatives of the institutions for the blind met under the chairmanship of Sir Lyon Playfair at the Society of Arts in London. Here a further resolution was passed urging that the Government should take immediate action on the Report of the

⁷⁶Printed Copy of Resolutions passed at a Conference of Governing Bodies, Head Masters and School Board Representatives held in the Town Hall, Manchester. Tuesday, 29th October, 1889, in Public Record Office, Education File E.D.31.8.

Royal Commission. The Conference also passed four other motions. The first declared that the time had arrived when the education of the blind should be put on at least an equal footing with that available to the seeing and that the provisions of the Education Acts and Codes should be extended to them. The second stated that in the case of the blind whether children or adults it was desirable that 'special technical and industrial training should be aided by the Education Department in addition to other subjects.' The third resolution reiterated the recommendations of the Commission relative to the non-application of the workhouse test to old and respectable blind persons, that they should receive liberal outdoor relief free from disfranchisement and that in the case of indoor relief this should be more generous and, where possible, separate from that given to ordinary paupers. Finally, the meeting agreed that the Charity Commissioners should not be empowered to vary of their own accord the conditions attached to their bequests by the donors of endowments and pensions for the blind.⁷⁷

Action on the Report was not long delayed. On 18th December, Cumin, the Secretary of the Education Department, wrote to the Treasury requesting that Parliamentary Counsel should draft a Bill "making better provision for the better instruction of the Blind, Deaf and Dumb." His instructions were brief but specific. The Bill was to be based on the resolutions passed at the Conference held at the Town Hall, Manchester on the previous 29th October.⁷⁸

Meanwhile, as Watson has shown⁷⁹ on 12th December a Conference of Representatives of Scottish Institutions had been held in Edinburgh and

⁷⁷Resolutions of a Conference of Blind Institutions held at the Society of Arts, 29th November, 1889. Public Record Office, Education Class File 31.8.

⁷⁸Cumin, P. Letter to the Secretary of the Treasury dated 18th December, 1889. Public Record Office. Education Class File 31.8.

⁷⁹Watson, T. J. A History of Deaf Education in Scotland from 1760-1939. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Edinburgh, P.109.

a resolution concerning state grants for the deaf had been sent to the Secretary of State for Scotland. During the following month a deputation appointed by the Conference was sympathetically received at the Scottish Education Office and in response to their request that the Report of the Royal Commission should be implemented steps were taken for the preparation of a Scottish Bill. The Education (Blind and Deaf Mute Children) (Scotland) Bill was introduced in the Lords on 22nd May, 1890,⁸⁰ passed rapidly through all its stages and received the Royal Assent on 14th August.⁸¹

In contrast the passage of the corresponding English Bill was attended by accidents and hindrances. It was first introduced in the Lords by Lord Cranbrook on 1st July, 1890⁸² and read a third time on 1st August.⁸³ On 18th August the Session came to an end before the Bill could be considered in the Commons. The following year the Bill was again presented by Cranbrook on 1st February, 1891.⁸⁴ At the second reading, Egerton pointed out that

"If there was one point more than another upon which the Commissioners were entirely unanimous it was that there should be compulsory powers between 14 and 16, and especially with regard to the industrial training of the blind and deaf, which the Commission thought they should have between these ages."⁸⁵

On this point the Bill was ambiguous. The interpretation clause of the Bill stated that apart from the terms defined therein expressions should have the same meanings as those assigned to them in the Elementary Education Acts. In the Elementary Education Act 1876 the expression "child" was defined as meaning a child between the ages of 5 and 14 years.⁸⁶

⁸⁰Hansard, 22nd May, 1890. Col. 1549

⁸¹Hansard, 14th August, 1890. Col.

⁸²Hansard, 1st July, 1890. Col. 418

⁸³Hansard, 1st August, 1890. Col. 1527

⁸⁴Hansard, 1st February, 1891. Col. 196

⁸⁵Hansard, 16th February, 1891. Col. 658

⁸⁶33-4 Victoria. c.75. Elementary Education Act, 1870.

To meet this limitation the Bill specified that "the provisions of this Act shall apply as if a blind or deaf young person between the ages of 14 and 16 years were a child but nothing in this Act shall extend the age of compulsory education."⁸⁷ The effect of this clause of the Bill was to make education compulsory up to the age of 14 but to regard blind or deaf persons as children until they were the age of 16, so that up to that age school authorities would be eligible to receive grants in respect of them, both from Parliamentary grants and from the rates. In any event, as Cranbrook asserted, it was possible for ordinary children to leave school before the age of 14 by passing certain standards and it would, therefore, be unreasonable to tie people down to a hard and fast line at 16 since some blind or deaf children would probably be capable of taking an active part in life before that period.⁸⁸ Thus, the enlightened recommendation of the Royal Commission that there should be eight years of compulsory instruction was to be disregarded on the grounds of economy.

The Bill passed the Lords on 12th March, 1891. There was now a period of delay and on 2nd July Egerton's son who was the Member for the Knutsford Division of Cheshire asked the Vice-President of the Committee of Council on Education (Sir Hort Dyke) when the Government intended to proceed with the Bill. The reply was unsatisfactory. The Vice-President professed that he would be glad if the Bill could be enacted in that year but that having regard to the advanced stage of the session and the fact that certain provisions of the Bill were likely to be opposed he was afraid that it would not be possible to proceed with it within the next few weeks.⁸⁹ In fact no further action was taken before the session came to an end.

⁸⁷Elementary Education (Blind and Deaf) Bill. (H.L.) No. 33. 1891. Clause 17.

⁸⁸Hansard, 16th February, 1891. Col. 661.

⁸⁹Hansard, 2nd July, 1891. Col. 207.

Pritchard⁹⁰ has shown that the principal grounds of opposition to the Bill were financial and anti-sectarian. The financial objection was mainly to Clause 11 which provided inter alia that the contribution payable by the parent of a handicapped child should not exceed "the ordinary weekly fee payable in a public elementary school for a similar child not blind or deaf".⁹¹ At the second reading of the Bill, Lord Norton expressed his disagreement with the principle of "a more costly education at ordinary charge in consideration of painful circumstances, whatever the parents condition." The acceptance of such a principle he suggested would not only strike at the spirit of independence of the people but would convert the whole system of national education into an eleemosynary provision.⁹² "The cost of educating these children", declared Norton, "is much larger than the cost of educating ordinary children." "Why should the fee be limited to the same fee which is payable for ordinary education in the case of parents who are capable of paying the actual cost?"⁹² The answer to the question was provided by Egerton. "The Royal Commission was of opinion unanimously that parents should not be taxed in any way because they happen to have children suffering under these infirmities of blindness and deafness but that the position and means of the parent should be taken into consideration and that the school boards and the parents were the right persons to come together for the purpose of making an agreement in the matter."⁹³

The anti-sectarian objections to the Bill were stated in a memorandum prepared by the National Education Association. This Association was a pressure group, formed to resist the enactment of the majority report of the Cross Commission of 1886 which had recommended that voluntary schools should be supported from the rates. The main aim of the

⁹⁰Pritchard, D. G. Education and the Handicapped 1760-1960. p.110
Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963. pp. 109-110.

⁹¹Elementary Education (Blind and Deaf) Bill. (H.L.) No.33 1891 Clause 11.

⁹²Hansard, 16th February, 1891. Col. 654.

⁹³ Hansard, 16th February, 1891. Col. 657.

Association was to promote a system of education which should be "efficient, progressive, unsectarian and under popular control."⁹⁴

It was consistent with the above objective that the memorandum should disapprove of the Bill on three grounds. Firstly, that it endowed from the rates, to an indefinite extent, privately managed denominational institutions without any control by the representatives of the rate-payers ... Secondly, that it had the effect of stimulating sectarianism by giving preference to ecclesiastical organisations in the establishment and maintaining such institutions at the public cost. Finally, that while imposing on public bodies an obligation to support voluntary schools it did not give them a corresponding right to demand admission for any child which the school authority might wish to send.⁹⁵

"The Association regrets", concluded the memorandum, "that the Government, by introducing into the Bill proposals of a highly controversial and reactionary character of no educational advantage, but rather calculated to hinder efficient education, should render impossible the acceptance of the measure for the better education of a class of children for whom every sympathy must be felt."⁹⁵

On 16th May, 1892, the Bill was introduced by Cranbrook for the third time.⁹⁶ On this occasion it came to grief because after the resumption of Parliament following the summer recess Salisbury asked for a dissolution and was defeated in the resultant election.

In Gladstone's administration the Earl of Kimberley was appointed Lord President of the Council and Arthur Acland Vice-President. Acland introduced the Bill in the Commons on 31st May, 1893⁹⁷ and it

⁹⁴Armytage, W. H. G. Four Hundred Years of English Education Cambridge University Press. 1965. p. 155.

⁹⁵National Education Association. "Observations on a Bill" "To make better provision for the Elementary Education of Blind and Deaf Children in England and Wales" introduced by Lord Cranbrook. 23.2.1891 in Public Record Office Education Class File 31.8.

⁹⁶Hansard, 16th May, 1892. Col. 937.

⁹⁷Hansard, 31st May, 1893. Col. 1692.

had passed through all its stages in the Lower House on 24th July.⁹⁸ As originally introduced the Bill did not raise the age for compulsory attendance to 16 but at the Committee stage in the Commons a provision to this effect was inserted.⁹⁹ Some suggested amendments were amicably agreed between the two Houses and the Bill at last received the Royal Assent on 12th September¹⁰⁰ and became operative from 1st January, 1894.

(2) The Elementary Education (Blind and Deaf Children Act 1893).¹⁰¹

For the purpose of the Act the expression "blind" was defined as "too blind to be able to read the ordinary school books used by children". The corresponding term "deaf" was applied to children who were "too deaf to be taught in a class of hearing children in an elementary school". The word "school" was held to include any institution in which blind or deaf children were boarded and lodged as well as taught. "Elementary Education" was construed as including industrial training whether given in the school which the child was attending or otherwise.

The Act laid responsibilities in respect of the elementary education of the two classes of handicapped children, on the parent, the school authorities, the Boards of Guardians and the Education Department.

The first duty of a parent under the Act was to cause his blind or deaf child to receive "elementary education" which was to be regarded as including "instruction suitable to such a child". The facts that a child was blind or deaf or that there was no public elementary school within a particular distance from the residence of the child were specifically excluded by the Act as being "reasonable excuses for non-attendance at school". Both blind and deaf children were required to remain at school until they reached the age of 16 years but, in the case of a deaf child compulsory attendance was not required before the

⁹⁸ Hansard, 24th July, 1893. Col. 407.

⁹⁹ Elementary Education (Blind and Deaf Children) Bill 1893 No. 412 as amended by Select Committee and ordered to be printed 10th July, 1893.

¹⁰⁰ Hansard, 12th September, 1893. Col. 937.

¹⁰¹ All references to the Act in this Section refer to 56-57 Victoria Ch.42 Elementary Education (Blind and Deaf Children) Act.

age of 7 as against 5 for children afflicted by blindness.

As explained earlier in this chapter the reason for such differentiation was that the Commissioners, mistakenly in the light of present knowledge, did not believe that the teaching of language could usefully begin before the age of 7 years. Not until the passing of the Education (Deaf Children) Act of 1937¹⁰² was this distinction between the two disabilities removed.

The second duty imposed on a parent under the Act was to contribute towards the expenses incurred by the Authority in respect of his handicapped child such a weekly sum, if any as might be agreed upon by the Authority and himself. Any sum so agreed might be recovered by the Authority as a civil debt.

The responsibility of the School Authorities was to enable blind or deaf children resident in their areas for whose elementary education "efficient and suitable provision" had not otherwise been made, to obtain such education in a certified school. The Authority might either establish, acquire or maintain such a school or contribute towards the capital and revenue costs of such an establishment. The duties of the Authority included the boarding out of children who lived too far from a certified school for it to be practicable for them to attend as day pupils. Two or more authorities were permitted to combine for the purpose of carrying out their duties under the Act.

As from 1st July, 1894, the powers of Boards of Guardians under 25 and 26 Victoria, C.43 and 31 and 32 Victoria, C.122, to send blind or deaf children to school were repealed except with regard to children who were idiots or imbeciles or who were either resident in a workhouse or boarded out by guardians. The first of these exceptions was to

¹⁰² 1 Edward VIII c.25 Education (Deaf Children) Act.

avoid any legal obligation to send blind or deaf children to school who were also mentally handicapped. The second reservation was, as mentioned in Chapter I^(a) because the guardians were regarded as standing in loco-parentis to workhouse children.

Finally, the Act required the Education Department to ensure that the school authorities carried out their duties under the Act, to undertake the certification and inspection of schools and to lay an annual report on the working of the Act before both Houses of Parliament.

(3) The Implementation of the Blind and Deaf Children's Act 1893.

Three important aspects of the implementation of the Act related to (a) its effect on elementary provision for the education of blind or deaf; (b) Parliamentary grants and (c) the absence of any reference to technical education after the age of 16. These aspects are now briefly discussed.

(a) The effect of the Act on elementary provision for the education of the blind or deaf.

As can be seen from Table VIII the passing of the Act resulted in a rise in the numbers of blind or deaf children who received elementary education with a consequent increase in the amount given by the Education Department by way of grant. The number of certified schools also grew steadily. One major difficulty was that the numbers of blind or deaf children especially in rural areas was too small to justify the provision of a special school and the Local Government Board considered that it would have been expedient to have left the responsibility for the education of blind or deaf children to the Guardians since the cost would then have been spread over the wider area of a Union.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Letter from the Assistant Secretary of the Local Government Board to the Secretary of the Education Department, 10th April, 1897, on Public Record Office Education Class File E.D. 50.13.

(a) See Page 11

Some parsimonious authorities turned a blind eye to the enforcement of the Act rather than pay the cost of sending a child to a residential institution. In this they were often encouraged to do so by parents who were reluctant to part with a handicapped child. As the Senior Chief Inspector remarked in his Report for 1897 "A few afflicted children in a widely scattered area are easily forgotten by a school attendance committee."¹⁰⁴ Some authorities erected small and entirely uneconomic day schools. In one very small school board district the expense of educating one deaf child trebled the school rate for the district.¹⁰⁵ Only at Stoke-on-Trent where the North Staffordshire Joint Board's Blind and Deaf School was erected in 1897 to cater for both blind and deaf pupils did a number of authorities adopt the obvious solution and combine for the purpose of contributing equitable proportions of the cost of the erection and maintenance of a school.¹⁰⁶ Twenty-five years after the passing of the Act the school at Stoke was still the only establishment which existed as a result of the combination of several local authorities. The inadequacy of the School Boards to cater for the education of the blind or deaf was not remedied until the Education Act of 1902 by which the 2,568 school boards were supplanted by 328 local education authorities.

(b) Parliamentary Grants for Elementary Education 1894-1919.

The Commissioners recommended that irrespective of the position of the parent a capitation grant of not less than half the cost of the education of the child should be paid to the school authority by the Exchequer in respect of blind children in attendance at an elementary

¹⁰⁴ General Report for the year ending 31st March, 1897, by the Rev. T. W. Sharpe, C.B., H.M. Senior Chief Inspector on the Certified Schools for Blind and Deaf Scholars. p. 5.

¹⁰⁵ General Report for the year ending 31st August, 1898, by T. King Esq., H.M. Senior Chief Inspector on the Certified Schools for Blind and Deaf Scholars. p.13.

¹⁰⁶ General Report for the year ending 31st August, 1897, by T. King Esq., H.M. Senior Chief Inspector on the Certified Schools for Blind and Deaf Scholars. p.5.

school.¹⁰⁷ The same proposal was reiterated in the case of deaf children except that the maximum grant recommended was £10.¹⁰⁸

In 1893 the average cost of education and maintenance in a residential institution was between £20 and £26 per child so that the grant suggested by the Commissioners represented, at that time, between 40 per cent and 50 per cent of the total cost.¹⁰⁹ By a Minute dated 2nd April, 1894, however, the Board of Education prescribed that the annual grant should be £3 3s. for each pupil with an additional grant of £2 2s. per annum in respect of either manual or industrial training. Thus, the maximum contribution that the Board of Education was prepared to make was £5 5s. or slightly more than half the amount recommended by the Commissioners.¹⁰⁹ The financial difficulties of the voluntary institutions was accentuated by the fact that the Act of 1893 laid down that if a certified school was not managed by a school authority then not less than one-third of the total expenses of maintenance should be met from sources other than local rates or monies provided by Parliament.¹¹⁰ This Clause as H.M.I. King stated, pressed very unequally on the institutions. "A well endowed institution does not feel it, a struggling institution mainly filled with pupils sent by School Boards or Boards of Guardians may have great difficulty in fulfilling the conditions".¹¹¹ In 1903 a Private Member's Bill to amend the Act by deleting the one-third clause had a first reading in the Commons but was subsequently dropped.¹¹² Not until 1907 was

¹⁰⁷ Report of the Royal Commission on the Blind, Deaf and Dumb 1889. P. 39. par. 243 (2).

¹⁰⁸ As above. p. 90. par. 620

¹⁰⁹ See "The Blind" No. 66. p. 191. 20th April, 1914.

¹¹⁰ 56-57 Victoria. Section 7 (1) (b).

¹¹¹ As 105 p.15.

¹¹² Hansard, 25th May, 1903, Col. 1601.

this condition for the certification of voluntary schools repealed.¹¹³

Between 1894 and 1914 the costs of educating and maintaining children in special schools rose considerably. These increased costs were partly due to the general increase in prices but were principally caused by the stringent regulations imposed by the Board of Education with regard to such matters as the minimum standards for buildings and equipment, the limitation of classes to a maximum of 10 pupils, the prescription of special qualifications for teachers, the introduction of medical inspection and the insistence that manual and industrial training should be included in the curriculum. Yet, while the expenditure was increasing many of the non-provided schools were faced by a declining income from voluntary subscriptions and in all cases the grant received from the Board remained at that fixed in 1894.

Representations for increased financial assistance were made to the Board by both the school authorities and the managers of the voluntary institutions. Thus, as early as 1899, a memorial was addressed to the Lords of the Committee of the Privy Council on Education by the Bradford School Board showing that in Bradford the cost of educating blind or deaf children was over £16 per head and that after deducting the Government grant a deficit remained of about £11 which the memorialists claimed was "too heavy a burden to be borne by the local rates."¹¹⁴ They therefore petitioned that the grant should be increased by at least £5 5s. in respect of each child. Although such appeals appear to have been frequent it was twenty years after the issue of the 1894 memorandum before the amount of the Government contribution was increased. This improvement was the direct result of

¹¹³7 Edward VII C.43 Education (Administrative Provisions) Act 1907.

¹¹⁴"The Blind" No. 6 p. 102. 20th April, 1899.

a joint deputation of representatives of institutions for the blind and the deaf which was received by the President of the Board of Education on 23rd January, 1914. The deputation claimed that the average annual cost of educating a handicapped child was £18 in a day school and £45 in a residential school, towards which the State contributed only £5 5s. per year. Thus in day schools 29 per cent of the cost was being met by the State and 71 per cent from other sources. In residential schools only 12 per cent of the cost was met by the Board's contributions. This inequality as the deputation pointed out was out of all proportion with the treatment given by the Board to other educational work, especially since in ordinary elementary education at least 50 per cent of the entire cost was defrayed by state grants.¹¹⁵ The President conceded that a revision of the amount of grant was overdue and promised to take up the matter with the Treasury and on 17th July, 1914, a minute of the Board increased the grants to £7 and £13 for each unit of average attendance at day and boarding schools respectively. In 1918 the above amounts were again raised "as an interim measure" to £8 and £16 10s.¹¹⁶ One year later the Board introduced a new principle. Local authorities would be responsible for meeting the whole cost of the education and maintenance of a blind or deaf child that had been sent by them to a certified school or institution but would be reimbursed by the Board for 50 per cent of the expenditure incurred. Grants would, therefore, no longer be payable by the Board direct to the institution except in respect of pupils such as Poor Law pupils who had not been sent by the School Authority. The decision to modify and substantially increase the grants had, as the Board stated, been taken for two reasons:

¹¹⁵"The Blind" No. 68 pp.246-248. 20th October, 1914.

¹¹⁶"The Teacher of the Blind" Vol. 6 No.2 p. 46. March, 1918.

firstly, because a large proportion of children could only be provided for in residential institutions; secondly, to encourage the more active co-operation in special education of the Local Education Authorities.¹¹⁷ The cessation of grants in respect of the "special services" meant that the schools for the blind or deaf had been brought into line with the other forms of elementary education.

(c) The Technical Education of Blind Persons, 1893-1905.

As shown earlier in this chapter the Royal Commission recommended that from 16 to 21 the School Authority should have the power and duty to give all necessitous blind persons a liberal grant for the purpose of maintaining themselves while they were learning a trade, and that the adult blind and those who became blind from 21 to 50 should equally receive help from the School Authority to learn a trade in the same way as if they were under 21.⁴¹ In the case of the deaf, however, the Commissioners contented themselves with the suggestion that, after the age of 16, deaf persons should either be apprenticed by the institutions or sent to the technical or industrial schools provided for ordinary children.⁵² As indicated by its title the Act of 1893 was only concerned with 'elementary' education up to the age of 16 and, as Pritchard has observed¹¹⁸ in view of the opposition which the extension of the school leaving age had aroused it was hardly to be expected that the Act would include any reference to grants beyond that age. Yet the omission of any reference to technical training or higher education nullified to a large extent the principle which the Commissioners had accepted as providing the justification for the education of the two classes of handicapped pupils, namely, that it

¹¹⁷Board of Education Grant Regulations No. 21, 30.3.1920
(applicable from 1.4.1919).

¹¹⁸Pritchard, D.G. "Education and the Handicapped 1760-1960"
Routledge and Kegan Paul 1963. p. 112.

was better for a local education authority to devote funds to the elementary and technical education of the blind for a few years than to have to support them through life in idleness or to allow them to obtain their livelihood from public or private charity. The practical effect of the omission of any reference to training after 16 was that after that age pupils had either to be awarded free places by the institutions or school authorities, assisted from charitable sources, or given grant aid under the Poor Law by the Boards of Guardians. An example of the first of these practices was that adopted by the Bradford School Authority. At Bradford, pupils from the day school for the blind were received at the age of 16 at the Royal Institution for the Blind. If after a month's trial they were found suitable for training a report was made regarding them to the Bradford Education Authority who thereupon granted maintenance scholarships tenable for 3 years at the Institution.¹¹⁹ The second source of help is exemplified by the fact that in 1898 the Committee of Gardners Trust for the Blind made grants amounting to £4,703 to enable 158 pupils to complete their training at various institutions.¹²⁰ Although many Boards of Guardians were liberal in making grants, the absence of any general policy gave rise to local difficulties. Thus, the Secretary of Gardners Trust referred to one case in which the Aston Guardians would not help a boy because the Institution for the Blind was in Birmingham and the Birmingham Guardians refused help because the applicant resided in Aston.¹²¹ In any event there were at least two reasons why the Poor Law was not the most appropriate medium of assistance. Firstly,

¹¹⁹Illingworth, W. H., "The Higher Education of the Blind" in report of the International Conference on the Blind, Edinburgh, 1905. p. 103.

¹²⁰"The Blind" No. 5 p. 98. 20th January, 1899.

¹²¹As above. p. 99.

since, under a strict interpretation of the law such aid could only be given to destitute persons and, secondly, because it had the effect of pauperising the recipient. In these circumstances it is not surprising that many blind persons were reluctant to approach the Guardians for help.

On 3rd December, 1896, two resolutions were passed at a Conference on the matter convened by the British and Foreign Blind Association at the residence of the Duke of Westminster. The first asked the Education Department

"to procure an Act to extend the age of the educational and technical training for the blind from 16 to 21 or any other age which may be approved and that the School Authority shall have the power and responsibility of providing the funds and seeing the new Act carried out in that particular."

The second resolution expressed the opinion of the Conference that

"it should be compulsory on the School Authority to provide funds so that blind persons over the age of 16 may for a period not exceeding 5 years be instructed in suitable professions or handicrafts in cases where such instruction would be of benefit."¹²²

The following day these views were put to the President of the Board of Education (the Duke of Devonshire) by a deputation, headed by Lord Playfair, which had been appointed by the Conference. The Duke of Devonshire agreed that it might be in the interest of the community that additional facilities should be given for the technical instruction of the blind and that such a course could prove to be an economical expenditure of public money. He pointed out, however, that any attempt to introduce legislation on the lines of the proposals made by the deputation would meet with opposition from at least two sources. The ratepayers would resist any expenditure

¹²² British and Foreign Blind Association Motions passed at a meeting held at Grosvenor House, 3rd December, 1896. On Public Record Office Education Class File 50.13.

involving an increase in the rates. The Boards of Guardians who already had permissive powers to do what the deputation required would withstand any proposals to take the matter out of their hands and make it compulsory on another authority to do what the Guardians had perhaps not thought it necessary to do themselves.¹²³ The Duke did take some action, however, in that he requested the Local Government Board to make an enquiry regarding the extent to which the Boards of Guardians were exercising their powers in respect of this matter.¹²⁴ This enquiry elicited the information that there was no reason to suppose that the Guardians were not availing themselves of their capacity to assist the education of necessitous blind persons who were over 16 years of age; on the contrary, there appeared to be a general desire on the part of the Boards to render assistance to the blind who were learning a trade.¹⁰³

The Education Act of 1902 laid down that Local Education Authorities should consider the educational needs of their areas "and take steps ... to supply or aid the supply of education other than elementary."¹²⁵ In 1903, the manager of the Birmingham Institution for the Blind, Mr. Stainsby, wrote to the Board of Education to ascertain whether the above provision could be construed as enabling the education authorities to continue the training of the blind beyond the age of 16. The Board replied that any power to provide education for blind or deaf children over 16 could only be given under Part II of the Act in respect of "Higher Education" and that any proposal of a Local Education Authority to aid such children should be submitted to the Board in definite terms

¹²³"Times" 5th December, 1896. Cutting on Public Record Office Education Class File E.D. 50.13.

¹²⁴Board of Education - Internal memo to Sir George Kekewich 5.12.1896 on Public Record Office Education Class File E.D. 50.18.

¹²⁵₂ Edward VII C.42 Education Act, 1902. Part II.

for their consideration.¹²⁶ A memorandum was subsequently sent by Stainsby to all the education authorities who were sending children to the Birmingham Institution with the object of inducing them to submit proposals to the Board for the higher education of the blind. The memorandum further suggested that the term "higher education" should include instruction in the following subjects:- music, piano-forte tuning, typewriting and shorthand, basket making, brush making, mat making, boot and shoe making and repairing, knitting, machine-sewing, chair-seating, gardening, poultry-keeping, mattress making and shampooing.¹²⁷

A year later the Board of Education had sanctioned applications made by thirteen education committees for permission to contribute under Part II of the Act of 1902 towards the maintenance of persons over 16 at schools for the blind.¹²⁸ A second avenue by which technical education after the age of 16 might be obtained without recourse to the Poor Law was discovered by H. W. P. Pine, the Superintendent and Secretary of the Midland Institution for the Blind at Nottingham. In 1901 this institution had closed its elementary department and thereafter catered entirely for blind persons over 16 to whom it gave not only industrial training in a wide range of "blind" occupations but also tuition in music, singing, gymnastics and other school subjects. Pine therefore submitted an application to the Board of Education that the Institution should be recognized as a "Technical Institution" and thereby be eligible to receive grants under the Technical Instruction Regulations. The Board agreed to grant recognition if it could be shown that the curriculum afforded

¹²⁶"The Blind" Vol.II No. 24. 20th October, 1903. p.79

¹²⁷"The Blind"Vol.II No. 25. 20th January, 1904. pp.105-108

¹²⁸As above. pp. 127.

organised instruction adapted to the technical requirements of students at the Institution and requested that a syllabus of work should be submitted. Subsequently the Institution was specially inspected by the Board and later notified that recognition as a "Technical Institution" would be given with effect from 1st August, 1905.¹²⁹ The precedent was thus created for recognition to be given by the Board to similar establishments and by 1912 eight other institutions had been certified and grant was being paid in respect of 434 students. Three of these schools were exclusively for pupils over the age of 16. In the remaining five both elementary and further education was provided and pupils could, therefore, pass without interruption from one stage to the other. In addition grants in respect of thirteen evening classes attended by 275 students were being paid under the Technical Instruction Regulations.¹³⁰

Yet the general position regarding technical instruction for the blind at the start of the twentieth century was unsatisfactory. The Poor Law was unsuitable as a source of grant aid. The Education Act of 1902 was permissive. The Technical Instruction Regulations applied only to a minority of institutions. There was a dearth of facilities for instruction which in 1914 Eichholz estimated to be of the order of 300 places,¹³¹ with the consequence that in many areas blind persons on attaining the age of 16 went straight from the school to the workshop without any intermediate stage of technical training. The technical instruction of the blind was, therefore, inadequately covered by legislation and beyond the unaided resources of voluntarism

¹²⁹Midland Institution for the Blind Annual Report 1906. p. 6.

¹³⁰Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind. Minutes of Evidence. Appendix II. p. 466.

¹³¹As above. p. 19. par.454.

to provide on a national basis. Only by some form of state assistance could the problem be satisfactorily resolved. Technical education was, therefore, an important element in the campaign for state aid waged between 1900 and 1920 by two pressure groups, the National League of the Blind and a National Employment Committee consisting of representatives of the voluntary institutions. An account of this campaign is given in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3

"THE MOVEMENT FOR A BLIND PERSONS ACT 1900-1920"

The aim of this chapter is to provide an account of the movement for state aid to blind persons from its inception until the passing of the Blind Persons Act of 1920. The first two sections are concerned with the efforts made by the National League of the Blind and the National Employment Committee set up by the voluntary agencies concerned with the disability to secure state assistance for "capable" and "incapable" blind persons. These efforts culminated in a number of draft Bills prepared by the League or the Committee which were eventually integrated into proposals for legislation which represented the agreed views of the two parties. The following three sections deal respectively with the socialist influence on welfare for the blind 1900-1914, the setting up in 1914 of the Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind which issued its report three years later and a short comparison of the recommendations of the Departmental Committee with those of the Royal Commission on the Blind, Deaf and Dumb established in 1884. In the seventh and eighth sections descriptions are given of the creation of a central authority and an Advisory Council concerned with the welfare of the blind. The chapter concludes with an account of the campaign waged mainly by the National League between 1919 and 1920 which culminated in the Act of 1920.

(1) The National League of the Blind

In 1891 a society was formed in South London by a small group of blind workers. It was designed to bring blind persons into closer association for the purpose of protesting against the unsatisfactory

conditions experienced by the majority of people without sight and with a view to securing their economic and social betterment. ⁽¹⁾ This initial effort failed, but in 1893 a small conference of blind men, mostly workshop employees from Manchester and London, issued a manifesto under the title of "A Blind Person's Charter". This document which claimed that charitable institutions for the blind were inefficient and corrupt, described the existing workshops as "sweating dens" in which labour was exploited and advocated that the State should accept direct responsibility for the employment of the blind and their remuneration at an adequate rate of pay. In 1894 an unregistered association entitled "The National League of the Blind of Great Britain and Ireland" was founded to advocate the views expressed in the manifesto. ⁽²⁾ Even so, little progress was made. "The main obstacle to effective development was due to the fact that the branches (of the League) were not effectively co-ordinated. There were no national officers, no central offices or central funds. The only link between the branches was through correspondence on matters of common interest. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that this second venture to unite the blind in their own cause was swiftly threatened with extinction. ⁽¹⁾ Furthermore, probably because of the difficulties involved

(1) National League of the Blind. Golden Jubilee Souvenir Brochure 1949. P.6.

Note: All the early records of the National League were, with the exception of odd items, destroyed by enemy action in the second World War.

(2) Typewritten memorandum entitled "The National League of the Blind" on the files of the R.N.I.B. Ref. SG/JFW/AD, dated December 19th, 1947.

in travel the branches in the south had lost effective contact with the northern branches of the League. In November 1897, however, the northern branches organised a conference in Manchester at which an executive committee was appointed and Ben Purse^(a) elected as General Secretary.⁽¹⁾ This conference had the effect of reviving the activities of the League in northern England and in September 1898, Purse devoted a small legacy of £60 to launching a monthly Journal "The Blind Advocate" as a means of disseminating information regarding the objectives and activities of the League.^{(b) (3)}

In 1899, the London section of the League which had become almost moribund was similarly revived by the election as secretary of William Banham. Under Banham's leadership a national code of rules was adopted and, on December 21st 1899 the League was registered under the Trade Union Acts of 1871 and 1876 with the objects of

"(1) Organising and obtaining state aid for the Blind i.e. the creation of a State Department whose duty it shall be to find useful employment for the capable Blind in Municipal Workshops; for the incapable - education and support" and (2) "the raising of funds for such trade union purposes as strike and unemployment pay, legal assistance and⁽⁴⁾ funeral benefit, and the general protection of members interests".

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- (a) Benjamin Ormond Purse 1874-1950 became blind early in life and was trained as a piano tuner at Henshaw's Institution for the Blind, Manchester. He became the first paid Secretary of the National League of the Blind and in 1901 devoted his whole time to this employment. In 1907 he was the only witness to give evidence on the blind to the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws. He was a member of the Inter-departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind 1914 and on the Advisory Council for the Welfare of the Blind from 1917-1942. He published numerous books and pamphlets. In 1944 he was awarded the O.B.E. for his work for the blind. For fuller details of Purse see - Dictionary of National Biography, 1941-1950 O.U.P. 1959 p.p. 699-700. Who-Was-Who 1941-1950. p 945.
- (b) The only complete set of the "Blind Advocate" is to be found in the Reading Room of the British Museum.
- (3) The New Beacon April 15th, 1950.
- (4) Original Rules of the National League of the Blind of Great Britain and Ireland - deposited at the Registry of Friendly Societies December 6th 1899.

Both Banham and Purse took vigorous action to effect the integration of the London and the northern branches of the League and this objective was achieved at a joint conference held at Derby on Easter Monday 1900.⁽⁵⁾ Later in the year 1900 a representative Executive Council was elected and Banham, who was appointed General Secretary, thus became the first full-time official to be employed by the League. In 1901 Ben Purse became the League's National Organiser and in the following year the League was affiliated to the Trades Union Congress. This latter step had important financial and political consequences since donations from wealthier unions were made annually to augment the League's scanty funds, while, as will be shown later in this study the negotiating and political influence of the League was greatly strengthened by the support given by the organised Trade Union movement.

The extent of the social problem which was the *raison d'être* of the League and the policy adopted by the League for its solution was clearly described by Purse in the first issue of the "Blind Advocate". According to Purse,⁽⁶⁾ there were, in the United Kingdom 36,711 blind persons not including a further 3,000 who were under school age. Among the blind population of school age and over it was estimated that between 3,000 and 4,000 persons were independent of both the Poor Law and private charity, while, at the other extreme, there were nearly 5,000 blind persons receiving outdoor relief and a further 3,278 blind men and women in the workhouses "fed upon the measured slice of bread like the ordinary pauper and otherwise debarred of their liberty. Many of them are parents torn from their homes and children and the sacred bonds of matrimony are broken through blindness. It is from pauperism" wrote Purse "from the gutters, from the work shops that the blind cry out for state aid direct."⁽⁶⁾

(5) National League of the Blind, Souvenir Booklet 1949. P.8.

(6) Statement issued by the Executive Council of the National League. Blind Advocate Vol. 1 No. 1, September 1 1898.

To meet the economic and welfare needs of the blind Purse stated⁽⁶⁾ that 61 Institutions and workshops, 55 missions and about 40 pension societies existed under voluntary auspices. To such 'voluntaryism' the League was, from the first implacably opposed, for several reasons. In the first place the League was a trade union which had from its formation made a political levy and its leaders were committed to the Fabian principle that "distress whatever its cause ought to be recognized as a public liability and its cost met out of public funds".⁽⁷⁾ (a) Secondly, as has been shown, there was the fact that voluntary provision for the blind was woefully inadequate. As the League alleged some years later⁽⁸⁾ the blind of London numbered 3,556 but only 250 were provided for industrially. In the East End of London no workshops existed for the 650 blind inhabitants. Similar

(7) Cole Margaret "The Story of Fabian Socialism" p.141 Heinemann 1961.

(8) National League of the Blind, Manifesto issued in connection with the General Election 1910.

(a) There does not appear to be any direct reference in Fabian literature to voluntary societies for the handicapped. What one finds in the early tracts is a plea for school clinics to be established to deal with various diseases, infections and handicaps e.g. Tract 154 "The Case for School Clinics" L. Haden Guest 1911 and Tract 156 "What an Education Committee Can do", Education Group 1911. This type of demand broadens out in Tract 158, "The Case against the Charity Organisation Society" by Mrs. Townshend 1911 - "It is better for England that her citizens should grow up crooked, diseased and undersized than that they should believe in mutual aid and learn to look upon state funds as common funds, to be wisely administered for the common good". Such, in plain words is the C.O.S. attitude towards poverty ---- If the present condition of affairs suits us, much satisfaction is to be derived from the assurance that any alteration of outward conditions, any changes in human laws or institutions, would be worse than useless".

The argument is pressed further in Tract 160 "A National Medical Service" F. Lawson Dodd, 1911:- "With these institutions in their hands", (he is referring to ratepayers' support of asylums, T.B. hospitals etc.) "there are no arguments left to oppose the abolition of all so called charity in connection with the treatment of disease". Few Fabians would now (1972) dispute the usefulness of voluntary bodies supplementing state provision. Peter Townsend, for example, concedes the superiority of voluntary old peoples homes over local authority homes in his book "The Last Refuge". There has, however, always been Fabian opposition to private charity substituting for state provision.

deficiencies existed in other places. In Manchester, workshop accommodation in 1898 was available for only 1 in 13 of the blind population while in Hull and Liverpool working accommodation in the local institutions was sufficient for 1 in 6 and 1 in 5 respectively.⁽⁶⁾

A third objection to 'voluntaryism' put forward by the League was that of maladministration. Cited as examples of such maladministration were the multiplicity of organisations that existed to aid the blind which resulted in a consequent disproportionate expenditure on administration charges. Thus, the League stated that 50 separate societies had been formed to distribute pensions to 5,751 blind persons and that because of vested interest the various voluntary organisations were so disunited that they were unable to take concerted action to improve the condition of the blind.⁽⁸⁾

Fourthly, some of the workshops for the blind appear to have been somewhat indifferent employers. Wages were low, calculated on a piecework basis and due to the difficulties inherent in the handicap substantially less than those received by sighted workers. In 1910, the League stated that although no reliable statistics relating to the average wages of blind workers were available it was certain that the figure was less than fourteen shillings weekly and that some voluntary organisations were paying less than ten shillings for a week's work.⁽⁸⁾

Hours of work were also long - in some workshops a twelve hour day was required from blind employees. Finally, the League objected to the paternalistic attitude displayed by many of the voluntary society committees and resented the fact that only in a few cases were blind persons given the opportunity of participating in the management of the organisations purporting to cater for their welfare.

That there was considerable substance in the above allegations is beyond question but it is also true that in its propaganda the League tended towards hyperbole. Thus, the statistics quoted in respect of the lack of workshop accommodation were exaggerated since a

considerable proportion of the blind population in any area would, due to such factors as age and lack of training be unsuitable for workshop employment. Some of the City Companies such as the Cloth workers and Cordwainers undertook the distribution of pensions to blind persons without making any charges for the administrative expenses incurred. The workshops had often the greatest difficulty in obtaining orders since their labour costs per item tended to be substantially higher than those of their competitors who used sighted employees.

However, the League's case, that only through state aid could the welfare needs of the blind be met, was incontestable. Initially the League considered that such state aid should comprise three things namely

1. registration, whereby the blind would be placed under "some central electoral authority and the Government thereby brought into direct touch with them";
2. inspection, under which "each electoral authority should have state inspection with power to inspect all existing institutions for the blind";
3. employment, which should be the responsibility of the state.⁽⁸⁾

Subsequently, the League's concept of state aid was extended to include the establishment of technical schools which would provide trade training thereby enabling the capable blind to become self-supporting and the provision of pensions "adequate to keep the incapable, infirm and aged blind in a humane and proper manner".^{(9)(a)}

The campaign to achieve the above objectives was to occupy the League for the next forty years.

(9) Blind Advocate June 1 1901.

(a) See also footnote page 114

In the early years of its existence the League had to face considerable hostility from the voluntary organisations for the blind. Such opposition was inevitable due to the League's socialism, its emphasis on the municipalisation of the workshops (and some militancy in them) and the strong and sometimes virulent criticisms of 'voluntaryism' published in the "Blind Advocate". One example of this hostility was the refusal of Gardner's Trust to allow the League to send a representative to a conference on the blind held in London in 1902. This action led the League to hold the first of many subsequent protest meetings in Trafalgar Square on April 27 1902.^{(10)(a)} Despite this opposition the League, supported by the Trade Union movement, grew steadily in both membership and influence. In 1916 it had 3,000 members.⁽¹¹⁾ Between 1920 and 1948 the membership rose to over 7,000 of whom between 4,500 and 5,000 were workshop employees and the remainder home workers or unemployable blind persons. After the passing of the National Assistance Act in 1948 the membership declined and in 1970 the League's membership comprised approximately 3,000 workshop employees, 1,000 home workers or workers in open industry and 1,000 unemployable blind persons. On January 1 1968 the name of the League was changed to the 'National League of the Blind and Disabled of Great Britain' thereby making it possible for the League to accept into membership the seeing disabled some of whom were taking up employment in the workshops for the blind.⁽¹²⁾ The National League is unique in that there is no other British Trade Union catering for persons suffering from a specific disability.⁽¹³⁾

(10) The Blind Advocate Vol. IV, No.17, May 1902.

(11) Purse Ben. Evidence given to the Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind. Minutes of Evidence. Page 413. Par. 11,942.

(12) Parker, T. J. General Secretary, the National League of the Blind and Disabled in a written communication. 23.4.1971. This information was supplemented by oral particulars.

(13) Registry of Friendly Societies. Written communication 28.7.71.

(a) Also in 1902 the blind ships fender makers employed by the Sunderland and Durham Royal Institute for the Blind were locked out after having been refused permission to submit a suggested reduction of 27% in piece work rates to the National League for discussion with the Institute's management. Blind Advocate. Oct.1902. Page 1

(2) The National Committee for the Employment of the Blind

At the close of the conference organised by Gardner's Trust for the Blind which was held in London in April 1902 a Committee was appointed to organise a further conference at some future time.⁽¹⁴⁾ The Committee subsequently decided to hold an international conference for the purpose of discussing important subjects relating to the improvement of the condition of the Blind in conjunction with an exhibition in Edinburgh during June 1905.⁽¹⁵⁾ The Edinburgh International Conference was, in fact, the first of four such conferences held at triennial intervals until the convening of international gatherings of workers concerned with the education and welfare of the blind was halted by the First World War of 1914-1918.

At the 1905 Edinburgh Conference a paper on 'The Problem of the Better and More General Employment of the Blind' was read by the manager of the Dundee Institution for the Blind. This paper drew attention to the fact that according to the Census returns of 1901 only 7,133 blind persons out of a total United Kingdom blind population of 32,823 were in employment and that the number of places available in the workshops and institutions for industrial employment were only 2,560.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Among a number of suggestions put forward for increasing the employment opportunities available to blind persons in workshops and for improving their productivity were two constructive proposals. Firstly, that the institutions should "endeavour to secure from Government Offices, City Councils and other public authorities at contractor's prices such of their requirements as the blind are able to execute;⁽¹⁷⁾ and secondly, that the conference should keep the question

(14) Report of the International Conference on the Blind. Edinburgh. 1905. p.16.

(15) 'The Blind' Vol. 2 1904. p. 247.

(16) MacDonald Colin "The Problem of the Better and More General Employment of the Blind" in 'Report of the International Conference on the Blind' Edinburgh 1905. p. 136.

(17) As 16 above. p. 139.

of employment under continual scrutiny by appointing "a strong Committee from its members to sum up and crystallise the whole into a few comprehensive propositions on which definite action may be taken".⁽¹⁸⁾

The proposal for a standing committee on employment was adopted and a "National Committee for the Employment of the Blind" was inaugurated its terms of reference being "The consideration of what could be done to secure the better and more general employment of the blind of this country and to take whatever steps are deemed necessary to carry the same into effect".⁽¹⁹⁾

Between 1905 and 1908 the National Committee appointed a deputation to seek interviews with the chief officials of several Government Departments for the purpose of requesting a share of orders for Government stores which would provide employment for blind workshop employees. As a result of these approaches, interviews were obtained with the controllers of the purchasing departments of the War Office, the India Office, the General Post Office and the Office of Works.⁽¹⁹⁾

The deputation explained that many of the larger institutions for the blind had found it impossible to obtain sufficient orders to keep blind workers fully employed despite the business placed with them by municipal and other public bodies. Orders received by the institutions from the Government Departments had been secured by open tender in competition with contractors employing sighted labour. The deputation therefore requested three concessions. Firstly, that orders for goods required by the Government should be given to the institutions in such quantities as might be required to keep the blind fully employed;

(18) As 16. p. 146.

(19) Report of the Second Triennial International Conference on the Blind, Manchester 1908. p. 43.

secondly, that a uniform price should be paid to all institutions for the blind; thirdly, that an assurance should be given that the prices paid to institutions for the blind should not be less than the average price paid to contractors using sighted labour.⁽²⁰⁾ The deputation was sympathetically received and asked to furnish a list of institutions to which government departments might send orders. As a result of this approach orders from Central Government sources were received by a number of institutions but as the National Committee reported "the orders obtained from each Department, while of advantage in the way of employment were largely unremunerative to the institutions".⁽²¹⁾ In 1908 the Committee reported that, after an exhaustive investigation into the difficulties experienced by the voluntary institutions, they had reached the conclusion that the time had arrived for the Government to be asked to do something to assist the workshops for the blind.⁽²²⁾ Three years later, on the recommendation of the Employment Committee, the International Conference on the Blind meeting at Exeter sent a message to the Government in the following terms

"This Conference of representatives of institutions, societies and agencies, and others interested in the welfare of the blind throughout the United Kingdom, assembled at Exeter July 3 - 8th 1911, respectfully calls the attention of H.M. Government to the urgent need for the better and more general employment of the blind of this country; deplores the serious loss to the community and to the blind themselves by reason of the enforced idleness of a large number of capable blind workers trained for the most part at public expense; and declares its conviction that the difficult question of providing employment for the blind cannot properly be solved without assistance from national and municipal sources".⁽²²⁾

(20) As 19. pp. 44-45.

(21) As 19. p. 46.

(22) Report of the International Conference on the Blind, Westminster 1914. p. 141.

A further resolution urging the Government to ameliorate the condition of the indigent blind by means of "uniform and general pensions" was also passed.⁽²³⁾

In March 1911 the vigorous campaign waged by the National League of the Blind to secure both the enactment of a Blind Aid Bill and increased recognition of the necessity for state aid on the part of the voluntary institutions led the National Employment Committee to set up a special committee "to consider the whole subject of the employment of the blind and the question of Government aid in relation thereto".^(23a) This Committee consisted of six members of the National Employment Committee together with a number of co-opted members some of whom represented several of the largest institutions for the blind. With the setting up of a separate body for the purpose of considering Government aid and the promotion of legislation the National Employment Committee for the Employment of the Blind decided to suspend its activities in these directions.

(3) The Battle of the Bills 1905-1912

By 1906, therefore, both the National League of the Blind representing the majority of workshop employees, and the National Employment Committee for the employment of the Blind who broadly presented the views of the employers of blind labour were agreed that Government assistance was essential if the problem of the employment of capable blind persons was to be solved. There was, however, a divergence of views between the two bodies as to what state aid to the blind should comprise and how it should be administered. As shown

(23) Report of the International Conference on the Blind, Westminster 1916, p.140.

(23a) Report of the International Conference on the Blind, Exeter 1911, p.409.

below, between 1905 and 1912 both the National League and the National Employment Committee prepared two draft parliamentary bills setting forth the matters that they considered should be provided for by legislation. Not until 1912 were the differences of opinion between the two parties reconciled and unanimity reached with the result that concerted action for the promotion of a Joint Bill could be taken.

In 1906, the National League prepared "A Bill to provide for the Technical Education, Employment and Maintenance of the Blind which, if enacted would be known as the Blind Aid Act 1906." (24)(a) The Bill set out to remedy three defects in existing provision for the blind namely (1) the inadequate opportunities available for blind persons to receive technical education; (2) the shorter period of time allotted by the existing institutions for the instruction of a blind person in a trade compared with the period of training given to a sighted person in the same industry; (3) the fact that few institutions existed for the purpose of supplying blind persons with raw materials and disposing of their finished products.

(24) A Bill to provide for the Technical Education, Employment and Maintenance of the Blind. Bill 195
Ordered by the House of Commons to be Printed May 7 1906.

(a) The League had first raised the matter of legislation by means of a Parliamentary Question in 1899. (See Hansard 12.6.1899. Col. 906). On May 16 1901 a petition presented by Keir Hardie on behalf of the League was ordered to lie upon the table. See Hansard. 1901. Col. 234. After reciting the condition of the blind the petition continued "your petitioners humbly pray that your Honourable House will take into consideration the present condition of the destitute blind of the United Kingdom with a view to providing for their proper maintenance by the creation of a State Department with a Cabinet Minister at its head whose duties shall be to make the requisite provision for the blind by

- 1) The erection of National and Municipal Workshops with the guarantee of a real living wage.
- 2) The establishment of technical schools for the capable blind who can be made self supporting, and
- 3) For the incapable, aged and infirm blind, their maintenance by adequate pensions to keep them in a proper and humane manner."

To rectify the above defects the Bill made four proposals. The first specified that County and County Borough Councils within the United Kingdom should be "empowered and required to establish, equip and maintain technical schools" in which blind persons over the age of sixteen might receive technical education and maintenance for a period of not less than five years. Secondly it was proposed that it should be mandatory for local authorities to provide and maintain municipal workshops "wherein the blind may be employed at such trades as they are able to follow and at such wages as will enable them to live". The third clause required local authorities to provide blind persons who, though unable to work in municipal workshops, were still capable of working in their own homes with raw material at cost price and to purchase the finished products at prices which would ensure that the remuneration paid would not be less than that which would have been received in the workshops. Finally, the Bill required that infirm or incapable blind persons should receive a weekly allowance adequate for their proper maintenance. It was envisaged that the cost of the proposals should be shared equally by the Exchequer and the local authorities.

The opposition of the League to the voluntary organisations is apparent from its pointed omission of any reference to them and its desire to make both technical education and home or workshop employment entirely a local authority responsibility.

The Bill was introduced into the House of Commons on May 7 1906 by W. C. Steadman, M.P. the then Secretary of the Trade Union Congress. It was read a first time, ordered to be printed and put down for a second reading on May 10.⁽²⁵⁾ On this latter date it did not even

(25) See Hansard. Commons. May 8 1906. Par.1002

come up for consideration. Even had it done so the chances of its success were non-existent for three reasons at least. Firstly, the Government was convinced that as there were "numerous agencies for assisting the blind" the proposals were "a matter for private philanthropy rather than for state or municipal aid".⁽²⁶⁾ Secondly, the Bill was too loosely worded to have had any chance of enactment without substantial redrafting. Thirdly, unlike the great majority of private members bills, it contained proposals that would have entailed new expenditure from public funds and the Government would therefore have been able to prevent the discussion of the money clauses by refusing to bring in a financial resolution.^(a) The Bill was, however, reintroduced without success in 1908, 1909 and 1910.⁽²⁷⁾ Meanwhile the National Committee for the Employment of the Blind had decided that because it was unable to support the Blind Aid Bill prepared by the National League it was desirable that steps should be taken to promote an alternative Bill.^(27a) "A Bill to provide for the Technical Education and Employment of the Blind" which, if enacted would be known as the "Training and Employment of the Blind Act" was therefore drafted in 1906 and copies were sent by the National Committee to every institution for the blind in the United Kingdom of whom approximately two thirds declared that they supported the proposed legislation.⁽²⁷⁾ However, due to the time required to obtain the approval of the institutions it was 1909 before the details of the National Committee's Bill were published generally and from this time onwards there were thus two bills in existence each

(26) Note on Home Office Minute dated 17.5.1906. Public Record Office Reference. HO/45/10524/2895.

(a) For an excellent account of the difficulties besetting Private Members' Bills see Bromhead P.A. "Private Members' Bills in the British Parliament. Routledge and Kegan Paul 1956.

(27) See Hansards. April 11 1907. Col. 393, June 29 1908 Col. 381 June 10 1909. Col. 473.

(27a) Report of the 3rd Triennial International Conference on the Blind. Exeter 1911. p.356. 357.

seeking to obtain some measure of state aid for the blind. The Bill of the National Committee became known as the "Institution Bill" to distinguish it from the "Blind Aid Bill" promoted by the National League.

Like the Blind Aid Bill, the Institution Bill began by enumerating three deficiencies in the existing provision for blind persons namely:

- (1) the inability of many of the institutions for the blind to give adequate training and employment to all eligible blind persons;
- (2) the fact that after the completion of a course of training in a suitable trade many blind persons were unable to obtain employment;
- (3) the difficulty experienced by many blind persons in "earning sufficient wages for their proper maintenance when fully employed at the ordinary rate of pay".⁽²⁸⁾

The Institution Bill sought to impose four main duties on County or County Borough Councils although it made provision for local authorities to combine for the purpose of carrying out their responsibilities under the proposed Act. As with the Blind Aid Bill, the first such requirement was that authorities should be empowered and required to provide for the technical education of blind persons aged over sixteen but the League's stipulation that the period of such instruction should be "not less" was modified to "not exceeding" five years. Following the completion of the period of technical education local authorities were to be authorised and required to make suitable provisions for the employment of the blind at such trades as they were able to follow. To ensure that facilities for the performance of the above duties were available County and County Borough Councils were required to contribute such sums as might be

(28) Blind Advocate February 1911. p.5 Draft of the Training and Employment of the Blind Bill.

necessary towards the maintenance, enlargement, equipment or alteration of existing schools and institutions for the blind and to establish and maintain technical schools and/or workshops where they were not already in existence. The Bill provided that, the terms of contribution might, "where practical and expedient", allow the contributing body to be represented on the governing body of a school or workshop. The third proposal incorporated in the Institution Bill was that a "Grant-in-Aid" should be given to each institution where blind persons were regularly employed "for the purpose of augmenting the wages actually earned by such blind persons who are unable to earn sufficient to maintain themselves". Finally the Bill sought to empower local authorities to provide vehicles for or to pay the travelling expenses of teachers, officers and blind persons attending a technical school or workshop and to defray "on such terms and to such an extent as may be necessary" the fees of blind persons at institutions whether such technical schools or workshops were within the area of the authority or otherwise". As with the Blind Aid Bill it was stipulated that the cost of the proposed measures should be shared equally between the Exchequer and the County and County Borough Councils.

This Bill - the first of two to be drafted by the National Committee - was therefore more limited in scope than that prepared by the National League in that it made no reference to the need to cater for the maintenance of the incapable blind. This omission was deliberate since the promoters of the Institution Bill held that the question of pensions for the blind was not so acute as the need to ensure that adequate facilities were available for technical education and employment.^(a) In support of this viewpoint it was stated that

(a) As a result of a paper on "Pensions to the Blind" read at the International Conference on the Blind of 1908 a Committee had been appointed to consider this matter which reported to the Conference of 1911. See Report of the International Conference on the Blind. Exeter 1911. pp. 346-350.

approximately half the blind population who had attained the age of 55 were over 70 years old and were thus eligible for Old Age Pensions under the Act which had become operative as from January 1 1909. The Institution Bill also differed fundamentally from the contemporaneous Blind Aid Bill in that while the latter envisaged that aid would be given directly by the local authorities the former document contemplated that for the most part County and County Borough Councils would discharge their obligations in respect of technical education and workshop employment for the blind through the agency of the existing voluntary organisations.

Pressure of parliamentary business in 1909 precluded any attempt to introduce the Bill in the Commons in that session and, as an interim measure, the National Committee decided to lobby the Government for the purpose of emphasising the urgent need for legislation and to press for a capitation grant to assist blind persons employed in the institutions until such time as the Bill could go forward.⁽²⁷⁾ A sub-committee was therefore appointed to seek interviews with the Local Government Board, the Secretaries of State for Scotland and Ireland and the promoters of the Blind Aid Bill. In March 1910 a request by the Secretary of the National Committee that a deputation might wait on John Burns, the President of the Local Government Board to discuss the subject of the blind led to an informal meeting between Burns and the Chairman and Secretary of the National Committee. After considering the representations made to him, Burns subsequently stated that he did not consider any advantage would accrue from the attendance of a formal deputation.⁽²⁹⁾

(29) Report of the 3rd International Conference on the Blind, Exeter 1911. pp. 358, 359.

Meanwhile, the Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress had taken charge of the Blind Aid Bill of the National League and suggested a meeting with the National Committee, the object being the discovery of some common ground so that united action could be taken to secure early legislation. A meeting was therefore convened in December 1910 between representatives of the Parliamentary Committee of the T.U.C. and the Sub-Committee of the National Committee at which four members of the National League were also present. At this meeting the representatives of the National League produced for consideration an amended Blind Aid Bill which was new to the Parliamentary Committee and was subsequently introduced into the Commons by Mr. C.W. Bowerman on March 30 1911.

The revised Bill was also entitled A Bill to provide for the Technical Education, the Employment and the Maintenance of the Blind but it differed in a number of respects from its predecessor.⁽³⁰⁾ The preamble to the Bill merely referred to the insufficiency of the existing institutions providing technical education and employment for all blind persons capable of profiting thereby and the difficulties in earning a livelihood experienced by men and women who became blind in adult life. The provision that local authorities should erect or acquire workshops was consolidated into a single clause. As in the National Committee Bill the term of apprenticeship for which national and local authorities were to be financially responsible was specified as "not exceeding five years". The vague phrase in the original Blind Aid Bill that County and County Borough Councils should pay workshop employees "such wages

(30) Education of the Blind Bill. 240 1911.

as will enable them to live" was altered to "a rate of wages such as will enable them to maintain a decent existence". This criterion was defined in respect of an adult female as a minimum weekly wage of thirteen shillings. For males the prescribed amount was more loosely stated as "a rate of pay to be determined by reference to the wages paid by local authorities to unskilled sighted workers. Blind persons who, because of infirmity or incapacity, were unable either to learn a trade or support themselves by their earnings would receive a weekly maintenance allowance of ten shillings per week. Recognition of the voluntary institutions for the blind was expressed for the first time by the League in the proposal that County and County Borough Councils should not contribute to the equipment, enlargement alteration or maintenance of a school or workshop maintained by voluntary contributions unless the managers complied with the provisions of the Bill concerning minimum wages and the public were adequately represented on the management of the institution. A further requirement was that technical schools or workshops receiving financial assistance under the proposed Act should prepare yearly statements of account showing "the amounts paid in salaries to teachers, in wages to officers and in wages and allowances to blind persons employed". These accounts were to be subject to examination by auditors appointed by the Local Government Board. Finally, two clauses relating respectively to the payment of fees and travelling expenses and the combination of authorities for the purpose of discharging their duties under the Act were taken directly from the Bill prepared by the National Committee.

While the National Committee were naturally unable to support all the above clauses they recognized that the Bill represented a substantial modification of the earlier proposals made by the National League. This recognition gave rise to the convening of a conference in

March 1911, at which representatives of the institutions for the blind in the United Kingdom met for the purpose of discussing the Bill. At this conference resolutions were passed to the effect that the State should be responsible where required for the technical training of capable blind persons over the age of sixteen years in the same way that under the Elementary Education (Blind - Deaf Persons) Act of 1893 it was already providing for the elementary education of the blind under sixteen and also that the State and County and County Borough Councils should assist in the better and more general employment of the blind.⁽²⁹⁾ The representatives regretted that they were unable to approve the Bill as drafted and, as stated earlier in this chapter^(a), appointed a special committee "to consider the whole subject of the employment of the blind and the question of the necessity of Government aid in relation thereto with instructions to draft a new Bill if, in their judgment they found one was needed".⁽²³⁾

The Special Committee unanimously decided to promote a further Bill. It was decided to use as a basis the proposals previously adopted by the National Committee and to submit these, somewhat modified, together with "full instructions to counsel" in which the whole position regarding the blind was described to a parliamentary draftsman requesting him to prepare a new bill.⁽²³⁾ A first draft entitled "A Bill to provide for the Technical Education, Employment and Maintenance of the Blind, which if enacted was to be known as "The Technical Education and Employment of the Blind Act" was completed late in 1911 and, apart from those relating to definitions, contained nine sections.⁽³¹⁾

(31) "Education of the Blind Bill" - Copy of the Bill circulated to Institutions for the Blind on December 4 1911 by H. W. P. Pine of the Midland Institution for the Blind, Nottingham and Hon. Secretary of the Committee appointed on March 25 1911

The first section made it mandatory for local authorities to make "adequate and suitable provision for the technical training and employment ---- of every blind person over sixteen years of age resident within the area of the County or County Borough Council.

The second section gave permissive powers to local authorities either to contribute towards the "enlargement, equipment, alteration or maintenance of schools for the blind whether or not such institutions were situated in its area" or alternatively to "establish, acquire, equip and maintain such technical schools themselves." Technical training was to be for a period not exceeding five years and restricted to persons who, in the opinion of the authority, were unable to provide for themselves and capable of benefitting from training. No contribution was to be granted or expense incurred by any local authority under this section without the consent of the Board of Education.

The third section of the Bill dealt with workshops, again empowering local authorities to provide employment either by making contributions to workshops established under voluntary auspices or by means of workshops under direct municipal control. Authorities were, "so far as was reasonably practicable", to obtain or provide employment for each blind person who had completed a course of training or was otherwise able to practice a "trade, industry or employment with reasonable efficiency". Contributions made and expenditure incurred by County and County Borough Councils under this section were subject to the approval of the Secretary of State defined as "one of His Majesty's Principal Secretaries of State".

Section four of the Bill reiterated the provision contained in the earlier National Committee Bill that representatives of bodies making contributions to an institution might be appointed to its governing body.

In the fifth section of the Bill local authorities were required to make an annual grant to institutions in respect of the augmentation of the wages of each blind person employed therein for whom the authority had the duty of obtaining or providing employment. The amount of such grant which was to be applied by the governing body of the institution "in such manner and in such proportions" as seemed desirable was not to exceed five shillings each week.

Permissive powers were given by section six for County and County Borough Councils to provide the expenses of blind persons at institutions, hostels or technical schools up to a yearly amount prescribed by the Board of Education or the Secretary of State as the case might be.

Local authorities who had made contributions to an institution for the blind were, by section seven, to be furnished with a copy of the institution's accounts "prepared, verified and audited" as prescribed by the appropriate Government Department.

The penultimate section permitted local authorities to combine for the purpose of discharging their duties under the Bill. Lastly the Bill laid down that the receipt of any assistance under the proposed Act should not deprive any blind person of "any franchise, right or privilege or subject him to any disability".

Subsequently as a result of submissions made by individuals and institutions concerned with the Blind the original draft as described above was extensively amended.⁽³²⁾ The power of a local authority to decide whether or not a blind person was capable of undergoing training was made subject to a right of appeal to the Board of Education against the authority's decision. A similar right of

(32) Blind Advocate November 1912. Draft of the Education and Employment of the Blind Bill.

appeal to the Secretary of State was included in respect of the decisions of a local authority regarding a blind persons ability to practice some trade, industry or employment with reasonable efficiency. The restrictive clauses of the original draft which made contributions or grants subject to the consent, where appropriate, of the Board of Education or the Secretary of State, were amended in order to enable Government Departments to deal with such matters by general regulations rather than by individual applications. The amount of the local authority grant with regard to the augmentation of wages which was originally specified as "not exceeding five shillings each week" was modified to "not less than a sum equivalent to a weekly payment of five shillings in respect of each blind person employed, nor more than a sum to be fixed by the Secretary of State in respect of each blind person". The clause in the earlier Bill of the National Committee which gave permissive powers with regard to the payment of travelling expenses of blind persons to and from workshops or institutions where they were employed, was reinstated but without any reference to the extension of similar concessions to teachers and officers of an institution. Where a local authority had itself established a technical school or institution it was required to vest the management in a government body of not less than six persons. Important modifications were also made in the definitions appended to the Bill, In the first draft the expression "blind" was taken directly from the Education Act of 1893 as meaning "too blind to be able to read the ordinary school books used by children".⁽³³⁾ In the final draft of the Bill the definition adopted was "too blind in the opinion of the local authority to perform work for which eyesight is ordinarily required" and a right of appeal to either the Board of Education or the Secretary of State against the Authority's verdict was again given. In both

(33) Elementary Education (Blind and Deaf Children) Act 1893.
56-57 Victoria. Chap. 42. Section 15.

the initial and final drafts of the Bill it was stated that both for the purposes of the proposed Act and in deciding settlement under the Poor Law a blind person resident in an institution or boarded out should be deemed to be resident in the district from which he was sent.

The Bill in its final form was submitted to the National Employment Committee and agreed upon by that body. It was also sent to the institutions for the blind in the United Kingdom. Forty one of these institutions declared themselves in favour of the Bill, three were neutral and five disapproved of it. Subsequently a meeting of representatives of the institutions, at which the Bill was formally adopted was held and the Special Committee was instructed to proceed with the Bill in whatever way they considered advisable and to arrange for its presentation to Parliament at the earliest opportunity.⁽²²⁾ The National League while recognizing that the proposals were of value was nevertheless highly critical of the Bill. In particular objection was made to the permissive character of many of the clauses; for example, the paucity of the grant of five shillings weekly in respect of the augmentation of wages and the fact that this amount was payable to the institution rather than the individual blind person; the lukewarm acceptance of representatives of contributing bodies to the managements of the institutions, and the failure of the Bill to mention the need for some provision for the maintenance of the unemployable or incapable blind.⁽³⁴⁾ The Bill^(34a) was, however, introduced into the Commons by Alan Burgoyne the Conservative member for North Kensington on October 28 1912 and a second reading was ordered for December 5th.⁽³⁵⁾ In 1912, therefore, two Bills, one sponsored by the

(34) Purse, Ben. "Another Institution Bill". Blind Advocate February 1912. pp. 1 & 2.

(34a) Bill to provide for the Technical Education, Employment and Maintenance of the Blind) Bill 312. 1912.

(35) Hansard. Commons. October 28th 1912. Vol. 43. Col. 76

National League under Labour Party auspices and one emanating from the National Employment Committee with joint Liberal and Conservative Party support were before the Commons.

Although the League and the Employment Committee differed fundamentally in their concepts of what state aid should comprise and how it should be implemented both sides had recognized that until there was unanimity the chances of either Bill being enacted were minimal. In February 1912 a deputation from the League to the Home Secretary (McKenna) had, in fact, been advised to return when an agreement with the National Committee had been reached.⁽³⁶⁾ Two further attempts to secure a rapprochement were made by the Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress.

On May 8 1912, at the request of the National League, the Secretary of the T.U.C. Parliamentary Committee arranged a meeting in one of the Committee rooms of the House of Commons. This meeting was attended by about sixty-five M.P.'s of all parties and addressed by Ben Purse. In his statement Purse declared that all authorities concerned with the Blind had agreed on the necessity for state aid. The fact that a modus operandi had not been found in which all the varying interests in the "Blind World" could be brought together to act in concert was not the fault of the National League which had done everything possible to promote joint action without sacrificing every vestige of principle. Purse therefore asked the meeting either to go to the Government as a deputation or, alternatively, to appoint a Committee for the purpose of ascertaining the feasibility of proceeding with a bill framed along non-contentious lines. This latter suggestion was accepted and a resolution passed that "A Committee be formed, representative of all parties to consider and consult with the

(36) Blind Advocate. April 1912. p. 3.

National League of the Blind and other organisations as to the preparation, if possible of a non-contentious measure to be presented to Parliament".⁽³⁷⁾ A Committee consisting of four Liberal, two Labour and two Conservative members was therefore set up to carry out the terms of the above resolution.^(a)

On July 18 1912, the Parliamentary Committee made a further attempt to bring the two sides together. A meeting, presided over by the Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee, was held at the offices of the T.U.C. for the purpose of discussing the amalgamation of the two Bills dealing with state aid for blind persons. The representatives of the Special Committee set up by the National Employment Committee argued that their Bill was the only practical one. Parliament would not be induced to grant a minimum wage for the blind as proposed by the League but it was possible that sanction would be given to the suggested grant of five shillings for wage augmentation. Legislation approaching that required by the League might be obtained at some future time. The Bill was not permissive and the Special Committee hoped that their proposals would be accepted by the League as an instalment.

In reply Purse reiterated the objections of the League. The proposal in the League's Bill for a legal minimum wage was regarded by them as vital. So too was the question of pensions which affected the largest portion of the blind community. Further, the Bill of the Special Committee had been approved not by the blind workers themselves, but by the directors of the institutions who were naturally anxious to uphold the existing voluntary system. Neither party was willing to recede from its existing position and the Special Committee

(37) Blind Advocate. June 1912. p. 5.

(a) The Committee consisted of Messrs. Acland Alan, W. Middlebrook, Sir H. Norman and E. T. Wiles (Liberal); C. W. Bowerman and J. R. Clynes (Labour); H. L. W. Lawson and R. J. Neville (Conservative).

declared their intention of tabling the Bill they had prepared.

The question of a further friendly conference after the Parliamentary recess was put to the two bodies and the Special Committee members expressed their willingness to hold a later meeting with representatives of the League to see if after further reflection the two Bills could not be approximated.⁽³⁷⁾

1913 was the first year since 1906 that no Blind Aid Bill was introduced into the Commons. This was probably due to the fact that the Special Committee had decided that it was expedient to find a modus vivendi so that in the presentation of a Bill to Parliament it should have the united support of all parties.⁽²²⁾ Certain "conversations" then took place between the League and the Committee and in May 1913 the "Blind Advocate" published the details of "A Bill to Provide for the Technical Education, Employment and Maintenance of the Blind" which was to be known as the "No. 2 Bill".⁽³⁹⁾ This Bill had been agreed upon at a "Joint Conference" and was commended to the consideration of all persons interested in state aid for blind persons. The Bill was, in fact, identical with that prepared by the Special Committee in 1912, apart from the addition of three important sections. The first section made provision for home workers by stating that a local authority might issue a certificate permitting a blind worker to carry on his trade, industry or employment away from a workshop in such cases as it could be shown to be advantageous for him to do so. Such a certificate might be withdrawn by the local authority if on the report of its Inspector it transpired that it was no longer to the advantage of the worker to carry on an occupation outside the workshop. Such withdrawal was

(38) Annual Report of the Trades Union Congress. 1912. Pages 88-89.

(39) Blind Advocate May 1913. pages 1-2.

subject, however, to the right of the blind person to be personally heard on the matter and if still aggrieved, to make a subsequent appeal to the Secretary of State. The clause in the earlier Bill of the Special Committee specifying that the augmentation subsidy of five shillings should be applied at the discretion of the governing bodies of the institutions was altered so that the grant received by workshop or institutions was payable directly to each blind person employed. Finally, the Bill laid a duty on every County and County Borough Council to make a monthly maintenance payment to each blind person who through infirmity or incapacity was unable either to learn a trade or support himself by his earnings. The amount of such payment was to be determined by the local authority but was not to be less than "a sum equivalent to a weekly payment of ten shillings nor more than a sum to be fixed by the Secretary of State".

The Bill in its revised form was submitted to a ballot of the members of the National League and adopted by a majority of 1,101 votes.⁽⁴⁰⁾ There were, however, dissentients and Purse devoted an article in the "Blind Advocate" to the refutation of critics "who have thought it wise to indulge in a series of recriminations" believing, as they say, that we have sacrificed our colours by an ignoble capitulation to the enemy".⁽⁴¹⁾ Whatever the objections, the fact remained that, if enacted, the benefits conferred by the proposals would be substantial. In summary the Bill would secure (1) A thorough technical training for all capable blind persons. (2) Guaranteed maintenance throughout a reasonable period of apprenticeship. (3) Permanent employment or maintenance for all adult blind persons

(40) Blind Advocate August 1913. p.10.

(41) Purse, Ben "The New Bill and the Old Critics" - Blind Advocate October 1913. p. 1-2.

who were able to work. (4) The payment of maintenance grants to institutions for the blind and the concession of subsidies for the augmentation of the earnings of sightless workers. (5) Pensions of not less than ten shillings weekly for all aged and infirm blind persons. (6) The removal of disenfranchisement as a consequence of relief under the proposed Act.

Thus, after considerable negotiation the National League and the National Employment Committee reached agreement. In the process both sides had modified their original viewpoints. The League had begun by ignoring the contribution of voluntarism; the National Committee had started from the premise that state aid should, whenever possible, be implemented through the voluntary system. In the No. 2 Bill there was the recognition that state aid could utilise both voluntary and municipal enterprise. The National Committee had initially been concerned only with training and employment and the difficulties of the institutions. Due to the League's insistence this rather narrow outlook had been widened to recognize the need for provision for the more numerous problem of the infirm and incapable blind. In the contemporary climate of political thought some of the League's proposals were impracticable. Conversely, from the Socialist standpoint of many of the League's members, certain concepts of the National Committee were unacceptable. The Bill, as finally agreed had its weaknesses. Not least from the League's point of view was its failure to define what should be a living wage for a blind person. It did, however, postulate two principles as the basis of state aid for blind persons namely the right to work or failing that, the right to maintenance. If enacted, as Purse pointed out, the Bill would represent a new departure in legislation and become "The Magna Carta of the sightless worker in Great Britain".⁽⁴¹⁾

As a result of the agreement the League agreed to drop their own proposals which were backed by the Labour Party and to devote their efforts in concert with the Special Committee to promoting the No. 2 Bill.⁽⁴²⁾ Support for the revised Bill was promised by members drawn from the three major political parties and it was decided that the measure should be introduced in the Commons by Burgoyne.⁽²²⁾ The ground for Burgoyne was prepared by Mr. G. J. Wardle, the Labour member for Stockport who took advantage of Private Business on March 11 1914 to move the motion "That, in the opinion of this House, the present system of voluntary effort in aid of the Blind People of this Country does not adequately meet their necessities and that the state should make provision whereby capable Blind People might be made industrially self-supporting and the incapable and infirm maintained in a proper and humane manner".⁽⁴³⁾

The motion was warmly supported by members of all parties, the single dissentient speech made on the ground of economy by Sir J. D. Rees the Conservative member for Nottingham East being severely criticised. In winding up the debate, Lewis, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Local Government Board referred to the Bill which Burgoyne had announced he would shortly lay before the House and declared that, as Government Departments had had no opportunity of considering the question it was proposed to appoint without loss of time an Inter-Departmental Committee to consider the matter as an essential preliminary to any action in respect of state aid to the blind. "I am bound to say on behalf of the Government",

(42) J. Ellis Cunliffe - Solicitor to the Board of Trade in a letter to S. W. Harris - Private Secretary to the Secretary of State, Home Office. February 9 1914. Public Record Office File HO/45/10524.

(43) Hansard, Commons. March 11 1914. Cols. 1313 and 1353.

said Lewis, "that we cannot anticipate what the findings of the Committee will be, and we cannot at the present moment give any undertaking on the points which will come within the scope of the inquiry. But, if this Resolution is passed, as I have not the slightest doubt it will be after the Debate, we shall interpret that Resolution as meaning that the time has arrived when the questions covered by the Resolution must be inquired into and the results of that inquiry considered carefully and in a sympathetic spirit with due regard to all the public interests concerned".⁽⁴³⁾

The Resolution was passed. Three months later when moving the supply estimates, Herbert Samuel announced that a Committee had been appointed "to consider the whole position of the blind and to examine the present position for their education and assistance and to report what improvements are necessary and desirable".⁽⁴⁴⁾ Burgoyne had introduced his Bill on the previous May 21⁽⁴⁵⁾ but before the date fixed for its second reading the measure had been withdrawn and not printed.⁽⁴⁶⁾ It was, however, re-introduced on July 2.⁽⁴⁷⁾ With the appointment of Samuel's Committee it was clear that the Government would permit no legislation until the investigation into the condition of the blind had been completed. Due to the time required for the enquiry and the intervention of the First World War (1914-1918) five years were to elapse before a Blind Aid Bill next came before Parliament.

(44) Hansard. Commons. June 18 1914. Col. 1344.

(45) Hansard. Commons. May 21 1914. Col. 2169.

(46) Commons Journal. Col. 169. pp. 236, 306.

(47) Hansard. Commons. July 2 1914. Col. 572

(4) The Socialist Influence on State Aid for the Blind, 1900-1914

Although the voluntary institutions for the blind had accepted the need for state aid for reasons of economic necessity, the impetus behind the campaign waged by the National League had been that of political conviction. In its campaign the League's strong allies were the Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party. The contributions between 1900 and 1914 of these three organisations to the movement to secure legislation for the blind are now briefly considered.

(a) The Trades Union Congress

The first recorded instance of the involvement of the trades union movement with the needs of the blind is in 1899 when John Kerr, a prominent blind trade unionist from Aberdeen was successful in having a motion calling for state aid for blind persons adopted by the Scottish Trades Union Congress.⁽⁴⁸⁾ Three years later the British Trades Union Congress unanimously passed a resolution proposed by the National League and seconded by the delegate of the French Polisher's Union "That in the opinion of this Congress the time has arrived when the Government should seriously consider the dependent blind of Great Britain and Ireland with a view of granting a measure of direct state aid and instructs the Parliamentary Committee to take all necessary steps to obtain support for the Bill that is to be introduced into the House of Commons on this subject next Session".⁽⁴⁹⁾ In 1904, the resolution was moved by the Railway Servants Union and expanded by reference to the inadequacy of voluntary effort to promote the welfare of blind citizens and the need for the Government to provide municipal workshops, a guaranteed living wage, technical education and pensions for the aged, infirm and incapable.⁽⁵⁰⁾ Twelve months later the

(48) National League of the Blind. Souvenir Brochure. Golden Jubilee 1949. p.12.

(49) Trades Union Congress. 35th Annual Report 1902. p.83.

(50) Trades Union Congress. 37th Annual Report 1904. pp.92 and 93.

Congress was informed that a Bill drafted on the above lines had been sent to and approved by the Parliamentary Committee of the T.U.C. and duly forwarded to the Chairman of the Labour Group of the House of Commons with the request that he should bring it forward as soon as possible.⁽⁵¹⁾ Similar resolutions were subsequently adopted at the Congresses held in 1906 and 1907 and from 1909 to 1913 inclusively.⁽⁵²⁾

The assistance received by the League from the T.U.C. was not, however, limited to the passing of resolutions. Between 1908 and 1914 the Parliamentary Committee of the T.U.C. arranged for at least five deputations from the League to be received by the Home Secretary. On each occasion the deputation led by Ben Purse outlined the League's case for state aid and thus ensured that the matter was regularly before the Home Office.⁽⁵³⁾ As shown earlier in this chapter the T.U.C. was, through its contacts with the Labour Party, responsible for arranging the meeting of M.P.'s of all parties at the House of Commons in 1912 and also exercised a mediating influence between the League and the National Employment Committee.^(a) Nor was the support of the trade union movement only available at the national level. In 1904 a circular was sent by the League to the Secretaries of the principal Trade Councils asking for resolutions in support of the Blind Aid Bill. The response to this circular was uniformly favourable.⁽⁵⁴⁾

(51) Trades Union Congress 38th Annual Report 1905. p.122.

(52) See Annual Reports of the T.U.C.
 1906 p.121 1907 p.157 1909 p.131
 1910 p.131 1911 p.159 1912 p.131
 1913 p.276

(53) See Public Record Office File HO.45/10524/2895. Also Blind Advocate April 1910. April 1912. May 1913.

(a) See Page 127

(54) National League of the Blind Circular to Trades Councils 1904.

(b) The Labour Party

Apart from being the medium through which the Blind Aid Bills of the League were presented to Parliament the Labour Party members also made use on a number of occasions of the parliamentary question. Stewart⁽⁵⁵⁾ has pointed out that the parliamentary question is "best used as a means of prodding, not as an appeal. It is a weapon against inaction rather than against action". In the movement for legislation for the blind the Labour M.P.'s used the question as a further means of forcing a dilatory government to reach a decision. Thus, in 1907 the member for N.E. Manchester (Mr. Clynes) asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether his attention had been called to the case of a blind man who had declined to enter the Manchester workhouse but had suggested that the guardians should obtain his admission to Henshaw's Blind Workshops where he could learn to do useful work. As this example illustrated the position of the majority of blind persons, only a few of whom were provided for in voluntary institutions, the Home Secretary was asked whether he could take steps by legislation or otherwise to provide means by which adult blind persons might be trained in state organised municipal workshops to become self supporting workers instead of a charge on the guardians and public charity. In his reply Gladstone stated that the Royal Commission of 1889 had advised that the State should not directly subsidise assistance to the blind and he was not therefore prepared to propose that the Government should introduce legislation on the subject.⁽⁵⁶⁾ Broadly similar answers were given

(55) Stewart J.D., *British Pressure Groups*. Oxford University Press 1958. p. 80.

(56) Hansard. March 5 1907. Cols. 633, 634.

to two further questions put in 1907 relating to state aid for the blind.⁽⁵⁷⁾ The recommendation against state aid made by the Royal Commission was reiterated by the Prime Minister (Asquith) when responding to a question asked by Clynes in 1909 as to whether a promise could be given of an early opportunity for the passing of the Blind Aid Bill.⁽⁵⁸⁾ A second question, put on the same day, elicited the reply that the Prime Minister could hold out no expectation that the passage of the Bill would be facilitated.⁽⁵⁹⁾ The single question asked in 1910 regarding legislation for the blind also received a negative answer.⁽⁶⁰⁾ In 1914, however, Asquith promised that consideration would be given to the suggestion made by Snowden that there was a need for an inquiry into the condition of the blind "with the object of devising some scheme of national assistance which would remove these people from having to accept pauper relief or beg for their bread".⁽⁶¹⁾

(c) The National League of the Blind

While the T.U.C. and the Labour Party utilised the deputation, the private members Bill and the parliamentary question as means of bringing direct pressure on the Government, the National League concentrated on influencing public opinion. In 1909, 1910 and 1913 demonstrations in support of the Blind Aid Bill were organised by the

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- (57) Hansard. August 1 1907. Col. 1198 and August 6 1907. Col. 1814.
 (58) Hansard. July 15 1909. Cols. 2299 and 2,300.
 (59) Hansard. July 15 1909. Col.
 (60) Hansard. June 29 1910. Col. 954.
 (61) Hansard. Feb. 17 1914. Cols. 765-766

League in Trafalgar Square. The assistance derived by the League from the trade union movement is evidenced by the account of the 1910 meeting.⁽⁶²⁾ Accompanied by bands and carrying over seventy banners of the League, various trade unions, temperance societies and other organisations three processions converged on the Square from the East, North and South of London. Large crowds faced two sides of the column from the pedestal of which they were addressed simultaneously by two sets of speakers, the two principal speeches being given by Labour M.P.'s. At the conclusion of the meeting a resolution was passed calling for state aid and approving of the Blind Aid Bill. Similar demonstrations, usually addressed by Labour Councillors, were held in provincial centres.⁽⁶³⁾ "The open-air seems to hold the foremost position as a place in which to make known our claims",⁽⁶⁴⁾ declared a note in the "Blind Advocate" and, as will be shown later in this study open-air meetings accompanied by processions of blind persons with their powerful appeal to humanitarian sympathies became one of the most potent propaganda devices utilised by the League in soliciting public support. The League also endeavoured to influence opinion by issuing manifestos in connection with the General Elections of 1906 and 1910. The first of these manifestos was designed to rally support for the Labour Party⁽⁶⁵⁾ while the second suggested three questions ascertaining the attitude of parliamentary candidates to state aid that could

(62) Blind Advocate. July 1910. p. 9

(63) See for example accounts of open-air gatherings at Oldham. Blind Advocate July 1910. Paddington and Gateshead. Blind Advocate. August 1913.

(64) Blind Advocate. August 1913. p.13.

(65) National League of the Blind. Manifesto issued in connection with the General Election 1906.

be asked at election meetings.⁽⁶⁶⁾ The supreme contribution of the National League, however, was that of leadership. The movement for legislation for the blind was initiated by the League and the content of such legislation was largely determined by it. Between 1900 and 1920 the impetus behind the movement for state aid was provided by the leadership of Ben Purse. From the viewpoint of political action the tribute paid to Purse by G. J. Wardle in 1914 during the course of the debate on the condition of the blind was no exaggeration: "Mr. Purse is a blind man who has done more than any other single person for the benefit of the blind. He has organised and written and agitated, and I think I am right in saying that, but for his efforts, it is very doubtful indeed whether we should have got to the position of having the Debate in the House of Commons on this question".⁽⁶⁷⁾

(5) The Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind 1914-1917

Herbert Samuel had informed the Commons on June 18 1914 that a Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind had been established. The Committee, initially consisting of twelve members under the chairmanship of W. Hayes Fisher,^(a) had actually been appointed on the previous May 7.⁽⁶⁸⁾ It is of interest that thirty-two years earlier two of the members, Mrs. Alice Westlake then of the London School Board and Henry J. Wilson, the Secretary of Gardners Trust, had given evidence to the Royal Commission on the Blind, Deaf and Dumb. At first the Committee did not include any representative

(66) National League of the Blind Manifesto issued in connection with the General Election 1910.

(67) Hansard. March 11 1914. Col. 1315.

(68) Report of the Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind 1917. H.M.S.O. p. 5.

(a) Hayes Fisher 1852-1920 was Member of Parliament (Conservative) for Fulham. Parliamentary Secretary to the Local Government Board 1915-1917 and President 1917-1918. He became Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster Nov.1918 - Jan.1919. In 1919 he became Lord Downham of Fulham. See Who Was Who - 1916-1928. pp. 299, 300.

of the National League of the Blind. This omission was, however, speedily rectified and in reply to a question on March 25 asking whether he would consider the desirability of placing a direct representative of blind employees on the Departmental Committee, the President of the Local Government Board was able to state that an invitation to serve on the Committee had been extended to and accepted by the Organising Secretary of the National League of the Blind.⁽⁶⁹⁾ Purse's appointment together with those of Arthur Pearson, the President of the National Institute for the Blind and H. C. Warrilow the Director of the Music Department of the National Institute were officially made the following day bringing the number of members up to fifteen. Pearson, Purse and Warrilow were themselves blind.

The terms of reference of the Committee were "To consider the present condition of the blind in the United Kingdom and the means available for (a) their industrial or professional training, and (b) their assistance and to make recommendations".⁽⁶⁸⁾ The first witness was interviewed on June 11 and ten sittings had been held when the work of the Committee was interrupted by the outbreak of war and adjourned sine-die. In March 1915, however, the Committee met again and decided to resume its activities. This decision may have been prompted, as one writer suggested, partly by the public interest that had been aroused in the obligation to make provision for the maintenance and industrial training of blinded sailors and soldiers.⁽⁷⁰⁾ In all the Committee held 38 meetings, examined 53 witnesses and paid visits to the Royal School for the Blind, Leatherhead and the Royal Normal College for the Blind, Upper Norwood.

(69) Hansard. May 25 1914. Col. 24. A similar question was also asked on June 9.

(70) Charity Organisation Review No. 254. February 1918. p. 61.

The activities of the Committee were, however, seriously curtailed by the outbreak of the war which on the ground of economy prevented the members making a tour of inspection of schools and workshops or from pursuing an investigation of the condition of the blind in other countries.⁽⁷¹⁾ The Committee issued its Report in July 1917 and its principal recommendations can be conveniently grouped under seven headings namely

- a) Administration and Central Control;
- b) The Incidence and Prevention of Blindness;
- c) Elementary Education;
- d) Professional and Industrial Training;
- e) Workshops for the Capable Blind;
- f) Pensions to Blind Persons
- g) Miscellaneous.

(a) Central Control

The Committee declared unequivocally that they had concluded that the condition of the blind in the United Kingdom called for more active intervention on the part of the state to secure (a) "central control, organisation and assistance for the existing voluntary agencies" which they held "could be utilised with far greater effect if centrally directed" and (b) additional assistance to the blind.⁽⁷²⁾ To give effect to such of their proposals as did not fall within the purview of existing Government Departments such as the Education Department or the Charity Commission they recommended that "a special department whose function should be the general care and supervision of the Blind should be set up in the Local Government Board pending the establishment of a Ministry of Health."⁽⁷²⁾ The

(71) Report of the Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind. 1917. Par. 1-3. p. 5

(72) As above. Par. 218. p. 49.

administration of this department would be carried out under the immediate guidance of a "strong advisory committee of persons associated with the care of the blind to whom all matters of policy would be referred. This Advisory Committee, it was suggested, should consist of seven members including a representative of Scotland and of Ireland under the chairmanship of the Parliamentary Secretary of the office in which the special committee was located. The Advisory Committee would be empowered to appoint sub-committees either for general or local purposes to which persons experienced in the management of institutions and organisations for the blind and representatives of blind workpeople might be appointed. All executive functions would be exercised by the Department which would be answerable to Parliament through the Parliamentary Head of the office in which it had been created. The Committee expressed the view, however, that executive functions should be exercised in accordance with the recommendations of the Advisory Committee as accepted by the Parliamentary Secretary. The proposed department and its Advisory Committee were subsequently referred to in the Report as the "Central Authority".⁽⁷³⁾

To finance the capital and revenue expenditure involved in carrying out their proposals the Committee recommended that Exchequer funds should be made available for the purpose. The capital expenditure envisaged was wholly concerned with increasing the existing workshop accommodation and the Report estimated that a sum not exceeding £500,000 would be required representing the cost of providing an additional 3,000 places. Annual expenditure computed at approximately

(73) Report of the Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind 1917. Par.220. p.49

£250,000 comprised the probable cost of grants to institutions and other organisations for the blind, pensions and such other objects that the Central Authority might determine.⁽⁷⁴⁾

(b) The Incidence and Prevention of Blindness

The Committee reiterated the views on the unreliability of the Census returns relating to blindness that had been expressed by the Royal Commission of 1889 and again emphasised the importance of securing statistical data relating to the disability on a uniform basis.⁽⁷⁵⁾ Like the earlier enquiry of 1885-1889 the Committee also considered the incidence and causes of blindness especially loss of sight arising from ophthalmia neonatorum and industrial injury. The recommendations of the Committee relating to infantile blindness are considered later in the present study.^(a) With regard to blindness caused by accident the Committee found that, with the exception of persons engaged in the bottling of aerated waters, there was no industry in which employers were compelled to provide, or work people required to wear, protective goggles. The Report therefore suggested that the provision and use of goggles should be made obligatory in all industries where there was proved risk of injury to the eyes. The desirability of keeping statistics in such a form as to give more precise indication of the extent of blindness due to mechanical injury was also stressed.⁽⁷⁶⁾

(c) Elementary Education

The Committee expressed the view that the provision of elementary education for the blind in England, Wales and Scotland could be regarded as being "generally satisfactory".⁽⁷⁷⁾ They had

(74) Report of the Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind 1917. Par. 219. p.49.

(75) As above. Pars. 223-224. p.50.

(a) See pages 397-398

(76) As above. Par. 226. p.50.

(77) As above. Par. 227. p. 51.

evidence, however, that more children should be in school and that there was a tendency for the Act not to be strictly enforced in respect of children under ten years of age. In a memorandum submitted to the Committee, the Board of Education referred to the beneficial effects of the School Medical Service established in 1907 in bringing more blind children into the schools. Two important developments recommended by the Committee were that steps should be taken to increase the number of schools or classes for the separate treatment of myopic and partially sighted children⁽⁷⁷⁾ and the establishment of a system of public elementary education in Ireland.⁽⁷⁷⁾

Witnesses called before the Committee differed in their opinions as to whether it was preferable for blind children to be educated in day or residential schools. The witnesses who favoured the day schools emphasised the undesirability of withdrawing children from their homes and segregating them from their sighted contemporaries. The counter arguments in support of the residential system were that it provided better discipline and attention to individual needs, more constant and skilled care, superior physical recreation, proper dietary and medical supervision and generally greater educational facilities. The Committee recognized that blind children had benefitted when educated with sighted pupils. Nevertheless they recommended that residential institutions should be regarded as preferable to day centres for the majority of young children. Three members of the Committee, however, expressed their disagreement with this statement in a reservation to the Report.^{(a)(78)} An attempt to fit the education provided to the occupational inclinations of the child is represented by the recommendation that the attention of elementary

(78) Report of the Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind 1917. Par. 228. p. 51 and p. 58.

(a) i.e. A. A. Allen, Henry Bowyer and Arthur Downes.

education authorities should be drawn to the "imperative necessity" of seeing that all possible steps should be taken to discover the aptitudes of blind pupils. A major hindrance to the provision of satisfactory education for the blind was that, notwithstanding the efforts of the National Institute for the Blind, a serious shortage existed of suitable school books in Braille, and the Committee expressed the opinion that establishments producing books for the blind should be assisted by Government grants.⁽⁷⁴⁾ Finally, the recommendations relating to elementary education made reference to two matters namely, the employment of blind teachers and the after-care of blind pupils, that had also received considerable attention by the Royal Commission on the Blind and Deaf. With regard to the first of these matters, the Report concurred with the opinions expressed in 1889, that it was advisable to make use of blind teachers with sighted assistance. Indeed, the Committee expressed their confidence that, "teaching is an admirable profession for the blind and a blind instructor must be of the greatest advantage to the pupil." They did not think, however, that the ratio of blind to sighted teachers should be higher than one in three.⁽⁷⁹⁾ On the question of after care the Report advocated that the Central Authority should work out details of a uniform scheme with the Education Departments under which a detailed register should be made of all the children in the elementary schools and that they should be supervised by paid visitors until transferred either to the secondary education authority or a recognized organisation for the blind.⁽⁷⁸⁾

(d) Professional and Industrial Training

Having disposed of elementary education the Committee next turned their attention to the means available for providing for

(79) Report of the Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind 1917. Par. 76. p. 19.

professional and industrial training. The term "professional" was used loosely to distinguish certain occupations from "trades", and music, pianoforte tuning, Holy Orders, the Law, teaching, massage, business callings and typewriting were listed as the professions which had proved suitable for blind men and women.⁽⁸⁰⁾ Of these occupations, the Committee considered that music and pianoforte tuning offered the best prospects of professional employment to a blind person and that, whenever possible, proficiency should be acquired in both playing and tuning thereby ensuring two sources of income. The need to establish a uniform standard of efficiency in pianoforte tuning was stressed and the attention of local education authorities was drawn to the desirability of employing blind tuners for school pianos.⁽⁸¹⁾ Other recommendations related to business employment, massage and typewriting and the Report suggested that a limited number of blind typists might be found work in Government and other large offices.⁽⁷⁷⁾

In 1917 there were four principal institutions in England concerned with the professional training of the blind. The Royal Normal College for the Blind at Norwood provided a mainly musical training for both men and women and, in addition, maintained a special Teachers' Training Department. The College for the Higher Education of the Blind at Worcester had, as its primary aim, the provision of a sound secondary education as a preliminary to university or professional training. Finally, both St. Dunstan's and the National Institute for the Blind had established facilities for the training and, frequently, the subsequent employment of blind masseurs. The Committee considered that the above institutions offered adequate opportunities

(80) Report of the Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind 1917. Paras. 90 - 103. p. 22-24.

(81) As above. Paras. 229-30. p. 51 - 52.

for professional training except that education authorities were asked to consider whether it would be advantageous to establish a small school for the higher education of blind girls.⁽⁷⁷⁾ (a) Local Education Authorities were reminded that the permissive powers conferred on them by Part II of the Education Act of 1902 to provide education other than elementary could be construed as giving a discretion to furnish or assist in furnishing professional training for blind persons. The Report also urged the Government to increase the facilities for the higher education and professional training of blind persons by making improved grants to institutions and individuals. (81)

The Committee accepted as established that basket, brush, mat and mattress making, boot repairing, chair caning, upholstery and cork fender making together with carpentry and cabinet making were the most suitable industrial trades for blind men. Knitting, sewing, weaving, chair caning and light basket work were the traditional occupations for blind women.⁽⁸²⁾ One witness who had made a special study of the subject declared that, except in rare cases, no industry for women was remunerative. The period of training required after the age of sixteen varied, of course, according to the trade ranging from two years or less for upholstering and mattress making to as much as five years for the complicated craft of basket making.⁽⁸³⁾ The Committee refrained from specifying a precise period of training and simply expressed the view that, on average, four years after the age of sixteen would be required.⁽⁷⁹⁾ They further stated that it was problematic whether a blind person could usefully embark on a course of

(a) Chorleywood College for Blind Girls was opened by the N.I.B. in 1921.

(82) Report of the Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind 1917. Par. 116. p. 27.

(83) Report of the Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind 1917. Paras. 118-119. p.28.

training for a trade after reaching fifty years of age.⁽⁸³⁾ For persons aged between 16 and 25 years the Committee considered that, apart from local variations, there was adequate provision for instruction in the training establishments associated with the voluntary institutions and workshops for the blind.⁽⁸⁴⁾ There was, however, a shortage of training facilities for persons who had become blind in later life⁽⁸⁵⁾ and the Report recommended that special arrangements should be made through the Central Authority to make grants to such cases to reduce the financial hardship suffered while learning a trade.⁽⁸⁶⁾ Two other factors influenced the provision of training accommodation. In England the persons accepted for training substantially exceeded the number for whom employment could subsequently be found in the workshops. There was, therefore, little point in providing further training places until the shortage of workshop accommodation had been remedied.⁽⁸¹⁾ Secondly, although many local education authorities and boards of guardians were making sympathetic use of their discretionary powers to make grants in respect of persons over sixteen years of age, all institutions for the blind had to meet a deficiency of at least £10 per head per annum out of voluntary funds over the amounts received from rates and taxes.^{(a) (87)} There was thus no incentive for institutions to undertake additional training

- (84) Report of the Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind 1917. Par. 122. p.28.
- (85) As above. Par. 121. p.28.
- (86) As above. Par. 232. p.52.
- (a) This deficiency was reduced to £6 in England and Wales by a Board of Education minute dated July 14 1914 which increased the grant payable by the Board of Education from £3 to £7 per head.
- (87) Report of the Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind 1917. Par. 126. p.30.

when the result would be to increase their financial burdens. The Committee reiterated the opinion of the Royal Commission on the Blind and Deaf that young pupils should be segregated from Journeymen wage earners⁽⁸⁶⁾ and recommended that the Education Departments in consultation with the Central Authority should co-ordinate the schemes of industrial training for the blind throughout the country.⁽⁸⁶⁾

(e) Workshops for Capable Blind

The shortage of workshop accommodation to which reference was made in the preceding paragraph was regarded by the Committee as being the crux of the problem of the blind in the United Kingdom.⁽⁸⁸⁾ The major recommendation for the reduction of unemployment among trained blind workers was that the existing workshop accommodation should at least be doubled, involving the immediate provision of between two and three thousand places each costing not less than £100 to establish.⁽⁸⁹⁾ Since the existing institutions were not able to finance the extension of their workshops from their own resources, the Committee recommended that Government funds should be made available to the Central Authority for the purpose.⁽⁸⁹⁾

Two existing problems which could only be accentuated by the suggested increase in workshop accommodation related to the marketing of goods and the rationalisation of relationships between the institutions. The Committee concluded that while there was not generally any difficulty in disposing of goods made by the blind, high production costs precluded the output of the workshops from being sold at a market price which would yield a profit.⁽⁹⁰⁾ In particular, such production costs were influenced to a considerable degree by the earning capacity and wages paid to blind labour. The earning capacity

(88) Report of the Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind 1917. Par. 233. p.53.

(89) As above. Par. 234. p.53.

(90) As above. Par. 141. p.33.

of blind workers was estimated as generally being not more than half of that attainable by their sighted contemporaries. In consequence, the actual piece rate earnings of workshop employees had usually to be augmented if they were to receive anything approaching a living wage.⁽⁹¹⁾ Although state aid in augmentation of wages was given in Sweden, Australia and some of the States of the U.S.A., the Committee did not specifically recommend that the practice should be adopted in the United Kingdom. They did, however, suggest that the actual earning power of blind workpeople might be increased if greater attention was given to placing individuals in jobs which they could do well.⁽⁹²⁾

The financial difficulties of the workshops were also enhanced by the competitive relationship which existed between them, manifested in such ways as price-cutting to obtain orders, the purchase of materials in uneconomic quantities and the solicitation of subscriptions by rival societies in the same area. In addition, the operations of some workshops were on too small a scale to enable the overhead costs of selling and supervision to be absorbed without excessively inflating the market prices of their goods.⁽⁹³⁾

The first solution proposed by the Committee to the above difficulties was that in placing contracts for certain classes of articles, Government Departments should give preference to the blind institutions. While it was recognized by the advocates of this suggestion that such a system of preference would involve a non-commercial price it was pointed out that the additional cost to the State would probably be very small and would be offset to some

(91) Report of the Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind 1917. Par. 144 & 145. p.34.

(92) As above. Paras. 147 & 148. p.35.

(93) As above. Par. 150. p.36.

extent by the savings on grants and poor rate. Among the indirect advantages would be the inspection and standardisation of production that would be consequential on the Government giving preference to goods made by the blind.⁽⁹⁴⁾

The second remedy put forward by the Committee was the elimination of unnecessary competition between institutions and the amalgamation or affiliation of small workshops to larger organisations. Evidence given by the heads of institutions for the blind had stressed the need for the establishment of a central regulating body and the Committee stated categorically that Government assistance was needed, that it would be welcomed and a measure of Government control would be readily accepted.⁽⁹⁵⁾ The recommendation was therefore made in the Report that a Central Authority should be entrusted with the duty of generally supervising the workshops for the blind. The duties of this Central Authority would include those of securing the affiliation of the smaller workshops, regulating relations between all institutions for the blind, classifying work and workers, consolidating the purchase of materials, placing orders received from Government Departments, the standardisation of work, and, in consultation with the Education Departments, the standardisation of training.⁽⁹⁵⁾ The Committee further suggested that a system of certification should be introduced and a register maintained, whereby the Central Authority might indicate to the public the institutions which were co-operating in the systematic care of the blind. By this means it was intended to divert public charity to the support of institutions which were operating on the lines laid down by the Central Authority.⁽⁸⁹⁾ Four other duties that the Committee proposed should devolve on the Central Authority were the making of grants from

(94) Report of the Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind 1917. Paras. 141, 142. pp. 33-34 and Par. 234. p.53.

(95) As above. Par. 151. p.36. Par. 232. p.85.

Government funds for the assistance of certified institutions; the establishment of schemes for ensuring that a minimum wage should be paid to workshop employees; the inauguration of a systematic scheme for the visitation of home workers who would be assisted with the purchase of raw materials and the marketing of their output and attention to the employment of blind women. (89)

(g) Pensions to the Incapable Blind

The Committee expressed the view that an adequate pension, rather than poor relief, should be secured for every incapable blind person who was "worthy" i.e. of good character. (96) For the purpose of the Report the term "incapable" was used to denote a "person who, by reason of age, could not profit from industrial training", and a blind man or woman who had attained 55 years of age would almost certainly fall into this category. (97) From the returns of persons in receipt of poor relief in 1914 over 9,000 blind persons were, due to age or other infirmities incapable of earning a living sufficient for their maintenance. (98)

Although the provision of old age pensions under the Old Age Pensions Act of 1908 had benefitted a number of blind persons over 70 years of age the support of such cases as did not qualify for a pension depended, apart from the Poor Law on the voluntary blind pension societies. The Royal Commission of 1885-1889 had recommended that a united register should be kept of all blind persons receiving pensions with a view to obviating relief to the undeserving or the payment except, in special cases, of more than one pension to each beneficiary. From such a register prepared by a private individual it

(96) Report of the Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind 1917. Par. 183. p. 42.

(97) As above. Par. 40. p. 12.

(98) As above. Par. 182. p. 42.

appeared that in 1912, 79 charities, 52 of which were endowed, had distributed £47,541 to 5,386 pensioners.⁽⁹⁹⁾ Three main criticisms of the pension societies were made to the Committee, namely that their administration costs were too high, that pensions were distributed unequally throughout the United Kingdom and that the grants disbursed were inadequate.

With regard to the first of these criticisms the National League of the Blind urged that the societies were too numerous for efficiency or economy and that administration should be centralised in the State. The Committee acknowledged the excellent work done by the City Companies such as the Clothworkers and the Goldsmiths in administering funds for the blind without charge. They recognized, however, that administrative economies could be achieved if small charities were grouped with larger organisations and recommended that the Central Authority should co-operate with the Charity Commission to encourage such rationalisation. It was also proposed that the powers of the Charity Commission should be extended to enable them to exercise some scrutiny and control in the case of all charitable funds for the blind.⁽¹⁰⁰⁾

The Committee repeated the observation made in the Report of the Royal Commission on the Blind that there was geographical inequality in the distribution of funds available for the payment of pensions, since a large percentage of the beneficiaries resided near London.⁽¹⁰¹⁾ Some of the smaller pension societies were in any event known only in a restricted area, while in some localities organisations were energetic in applying for pensions on behalf of incapable blind persons.⁽¹⁰¹⁾ Not surprisingly, therefore, the Committee recommended that the distribution of pensions over various parts of the United

(99) Report of the Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind 1917. Par.184. p.43

(100) As above Par.188. p.43 and Par.241. p.55.

(101) As above Par.196. pp.44 & 45.

Kingdom should be so arranged as to secure equal opportunities for applications.⁽¹⁰²⁾

When considering the amount of pensions paid from charitable sources the Committee laid down the principle that to be of real use the sum given should be sufficient to enable the recipient to live in reasonable comfort and that it was preferable to make fewer but more substantial grants rather than small doles of limited assistance which tended to promote the undesirable practice of "cadging for pensions".⁽¹⁰³⁾ The long waiting lists of applicants was evidence that charitable funds were incapable of meeting the demand for pensions even when the amounts given were relatively small. Furthermore, the qualifications such as age, residence, income and the non-receipt of poor relief imposed by most of the pension societies were primarily a device to limit the number of eligible candidates for grants.⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ Two recommendations made by the Committee were therefore designed to overcome the inadequacy of funds possessed by the voluntary pension societies. The first suggested that information should be obtained as to charitable sources from which blind persons might receive help other than those which had been established exclusively for people without sight.⁽¹⁰²⁾ The second, and more important proposal, was that the deficiencies in charitable funds should be made good by placing Government grants at the disposal of the Central Authority to enable it to meet the need for financial provision in respect of the aged and incapable blind. The Report emphasised that in discharging the above duty the Central Authority should draw up schemes by which the grants placed at its

(102) Report of the Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind 1917. Par. 241. p. 55.

(103) As above. Paras. 194-195. p. 44.

(104) As above. Par. 199. p. 45.

disposal for pensions should be co-ordinated with pensions paid by voluntary agencies.⁽¹⁰²⁾

(g) Miscellaneous Recommendations

Under this heading it is convenient to refer to a number of recommendations made by the Committee relating to three further aspects of work for the blind, namely the co-ordination of services at both the local and national levels, the position of blind persons under the Poor Law and the special situation of blinded soldiers and sailors.

Apart from the large institutions concerned with providing elementary education, industrial and professional training and workshop employment, a number of other organisations were, in 1917, catering for the welfare of the blind at local, regional and national levels. At the local level some fifty-six Home Teaching Societies had been founded with the objects of instructing blind persons to read embossed type and to place books so printed or transcribed at their disposal. In addition, some forty to fifty voluntary bodies such as the Manchester and Salford Blind Aid Society and the London Indigent Blind Visiting Society were scattered up and down the country for the purpose of assisting blind persons in various ways. Regionally, there were the seven Unions of Counties for the Blind. Nationally, the three most important bodies were the National Institute for the Blind, the National Library for the Blind and Garners Trust for the Blind.⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ The Report commended the excellent work done by these bodies but considered that their usefulness would be increased if their activities were controlled and co-ordinated. It therefore recommended that the duty of co-ordinating the efforts of the various organisations which catered for blind persons outside the institutions should be entrusted to the proposed Central Authority.⁽¹⁰⁶⁾

(105) Report of the Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind 1917. Paras. 157-174. pp. 37-41.

(106) As above. Par. 236. p. 54.

One service to which the Committee gave particular attention was the production and distribution of books for blind readers. In 1916 the services of the National Library for the Blind had been made free to every blind person and to ensure the continuation and development of this organisation the Committee recommended that a state subsidy should be given either by way of capital or of an annual grant.⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ The report also stated that the Central Authority should encourage the efforts of the National Institute for the Blind in maintaining the supply of books in Moon type and that consideration ought also to be given to the desirability of assisting establishments engaged in the production of books for the blind.⁽¹⁰⁶⁾

When considering the position of the blind under the Poor Law the Committee expressed the view, with which the Local Government Board concurred, that there was no sufficient reason for the exclusion of a child from the scope of the Elementary Education Act of 1893 if it was boarded out or resided in a workhouse. The Committee therefore recommended that all Poor Law children under the age of 16 should be dealt with directly under the 1893 Act by the local education authority of the district from which they had come.⁽¹⁰⁷⁾

The Report also suggested the adoption of two important principles concerning Poor Relief to blind persons. Firstly that, in general, blind applicants for assistance should either be granted out-relief or receive special accommodation in the workhouses, i.e. the principles of the workhouse test and less eligibility would not apply. Secondly, that persons who had become blind should not be disfranchised by reason of Poor Law assistance given for their maintenance while learning a trade. The Committee suggested that the whole question of the disfranchisement of the blind and of those on whom the blind were dependent should be sympathetically considered.⁽¹⁰³⁾

(107)

Report of the Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind 1917. Par. 238. p. 54.

Finally, the Committee referred to what they described as a "new element" that had arisen since their appointment in 1914, namely the increase in the blind population resulting from the First World War.⁽¹⁰⁸⁾ In 1914 a Blinded Soldiers and Sailors Care Committee had been formed by the National Institute for the Blind and later, a large house, St. Dunstons, Regents Park, had been placed at the disposal of the Committee by the owner Mr. Otto Kahn.⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ The Committee made no recommendations with regard to the war blinded since they considered that their State disability pensions together with the training programmes and after care arrangements instituted by St. Dunstons constituted "highly satisfactory steps" to secure the welfare of those who had given their sight for their country.⁽¹¹⁰⁾

After the prosaic pages of evidence and recommendations the Committee ended their Report on a note of idealism.

"Now that our investigations have shown that by a reasonable expenditure of money and by well directed effort we can greatly reduce the numbers of the blind, and, at the same time, materially improve the condition of those whose sight we cannot restore, we ought not, as a nation, to rest content until at least we have set an example to all other nations.

A great nation ought undoubtedly to direct a portion of its resources towards the adoption of wise measures for the relief and suffering members of its citizens. In years to come it should be part of Great Britain's pride that in these islands can be studied the best methods for the prevention of blindness and the best treatment of those whose blindness cannot by any human knowledge or resource be averted." (111)

(6) A Comparison of the Recommendations of the Royal Commission and the Departmental Committee

It is instructive to compare the recommendations made by the Departmental Committee of 1914-17 with those made twenty-eight years earlier by the Royal Commission on the Blind and Deaf.

(108) Report of the Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind 1917. Par. 205. p. 46.

(109) Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind Minutes of Evidence. Par. 12,552. p. 439.

(110) Report of the Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind. Par. 242. p. 55.

(111) As above. Par. 243. p. 55.

Some of the issues which had engaged the attention of the Commissioners such as the most suitable system of raised type had been resolved and were not even considered by the Committee. On several matters the two reports were in substantial agreement. Among the subjects on which there was a consensus of opinion were the following: the need for uniformity in the collection of statistics; the desirability of employing some blind teachers; the segregation of Juvenile and adult workshop employees; the removal of disfranchisement as a consequence of receiving poor relief; the provision of grants to persons undergoing training for an occupation suitable to the visually handicapped; the control of pensions given by voluntary societies and the importance of disseminating information regarding the causes and prevention of ophthalmia neonatorum. The two reports differed, however, in some of the premises underlying their recommendations. These differences of principle were indicative of the change in attitudes regarding relief to the needy that had taken place between the publication of the Report of the Royal Commission in 1889 and that of the Departmental Committee in 1917.

The recommendations of the Royal Commission were based on three premises. First, that apart from elementary education, state assistance to the blind should be given through the Poor Law. In this respect, however, it is only fair to mention that in their recommendation that the Guardians should deal liberally with the aged, the Commissioners were anticipating to some extent the more human treatment of workhouse inmates advocated by Local Government Circulars published in 1891, 1895 and 1896. Second, that the doctrines of opposition to state aid and the control of indiscriminate charity preached by the Charity Organising Society were applicable to the blind as well as the sighted. Finally, that assistance to the blind

apart from the Poor Law ought to be the province of voluntary charity which should be subject to the minimum of state control or inspection.

In contrast, the Departmental Committee were influenced in framing their recommendations by the movement for the break-up of the Poor Law and the involvement of the Government in measures of social reform that had gathered impetus during the early years of the Twentieth Century. The change in approach is evidenced by two concepts: firstly, that whenever possible assistance to blind persons ought to be given other than under Poor Law auspices; secondly, that voluntary effort was something that required to be subsidised, supplemented and supervised by the state. The first such concept can be exemplified by the recommendations that pensions to blind persons, the elementary education of blind workhouse children and grants to blind persons undergoing industrial training, should be outside the Poor Law. The second concept is illustrated by the recommendation that the condition of the blind in the United Kingdom required the more active intervention of the State for the purpose of securing the central control, organisation and assistance of the existing agencies concerned with voluntary assistance. Even so, the majority of the Committee were unwilling to endorse the comprehensive programme for the technical education, employment and maintenance of the blind agreed in 1913 between the National League and the National Employment Committee. Rather, the Report sought to identify the elements that constituted the social problem of the blind and to make broad proposals for remedial action the detailed working out of which would be left to the suggested Central Authority and its Advisory Committee. Both the Royal Commission and the Departmental Committee were essential preliminaries to legislation, the former investigation to State provision for elementary education of blind children and the latter for

action in respect of the education and welfare of blind persons in adult life. The action taken by successive governments to interpret and implement the recommendations of the Report forms an important part of the remainder of the present thesis.

(7) The Establishment of the Central Authority

Shortly after the publication of the Report of the Departmental Committee in July 1917, Hayes Fisher, the Chairman, was promoted from Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Local Government Board in Lloyd George's Coalition Parliament. In his new capacity he was in the position of having to present the Report to himself. Little time was lost by the voluntary organisations and the National League of the Blind in discussing the Report. A meeting of nearly two hundred workers for the blind held at the National Library for the Blind in October 1917 for the purpose of considering the recommendations contained in the Report passed a resolution "heartily welcoming and approving the Report" and expressing the opinion that the recommendations "were reasonable and practical and that they would form the basis of a scheme for the permanent benefit of the Blind Community".⁽¹¹²⁾ The resolution, copies of which were sent to the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the President of the Local Government Board, further argued that the Government should set up the Central Authority without delay. The members present at a Conference called by the National League in Manchester were less satisfied, although they accepted the recommendations of the Report as something gained. The viewpoint of many League members was, no doubt, summed up in the words of a correspondent in the "Blind Advocate" - "No one is satisfied - even some of the members of the Committee themselves are not satisfied - but it is a beginning of "State Recognition" which may evolve into

(112) The Blind. Vol 81. January 1918. p. 14.

something better. There is but one thing that will satisfy and that is the total abolition of voluntary "charity" and the substitution of direct "State Responsibility". (113) Notwithstanding such dissatisfaction the League also was anxious that no time should be lost in implementing the proposals contained in the Report and to this end it launched a campaign requesting trade unions, Poor Law Authorities and County and County Borough Councils to pass resolutions calling on the Government to take early action. (114)

In fact, Hayes Fisher needed no prodding. On October 18 1917 he sent a Memorandum giving a resumé of the Report to the War Cabinet and stating that subject to the Cabinet's concurrence, he proposed to take immediate steps to set up a special department in the Local Government Board and to appoint an Advisory Committee of persons associated with the care of the blind which should act for the whole of the United Kingdom. Legislation, he pointed out would not be required in respect of such action. The Memorandum also referred to the capital expenditure of £500,000 and the annual grant of £250,000 recommended by the Committee. No capital expenditure on workshops, it stated, would be undertaken until after the War and grants in respect of annual expenditure for the first two years would probably fall short of the Committee's estimate of £250,000. (115)

On November 8 the Memorandum was considered by the Cabinet, along with one submitted by the Secretary for Scotland, stating his objection to Hayes Fisher's proposal that the Advisory Committee should act for the United Kingdom and expressing the opinion that a separate Committee should be set up in Scotland to advise the Secretary for Scotland on all matters concerning the welfare of the blind. (116) In

(113) Charles J. Lothian, "Critical Comments", *Blind Advocate* Nov. 1917. p. 9.

(114) *Blind Advocate*, January 1918. p. 1

(115) Hayes Fisher. Memorandum on the Welfare of the Blind. No.T.2348. Cabinet Paper CAB. 24/29. Public Record Office.

(116) Robert Munro. Welfare of the Blind, Memorandum by The Secretary of State for Scotland.No.T 2483. Cabinet Papers CAB 24/30. P.R.O.

the discussion on the Memorandum, Sir Thomas Heath, the Joint Permanent Secretary to the Treasury, pointed out that it would be in accordance with precedent that the whole expenditure should not fall on the Treasury but should be met in part by contributions from the local authorities concerned. Heath also considered that the schemes as outlined was "rather far reaching and would probably require legislation before it could be brought into effect". In reply, Hayes Fisher concurred that it was not unreasonable to look for local contributions towards maintenance and training. Capital expenditure, however, he considered would have to fall on the Treasury since the workshops would serve areas which might not coincide with administrative and rating areas. Eventually the Cabinet decided to authorise:

(a) The setting up of a special department in the Local Government Board and the Local Government Board for Scotland to deal with the question and to sanction the expenditure required for immediate administrative purposes;

(b) The establishment of an Advisory Committee for England and Wales and one for Scotland on the lines proposed whose first duty would be to advise the Departments on the preparation of schemes for the consideration of the War Cabinet. ⁽¹¹⁷⁾

The special department was accordingly established at the Local Government Board under E.D. Macgregor, ^(a) a First Class Clerk, in December 1917. Meanwhile, on receiving news that the Government had decided to take action with regard to the recommendations of the Departmental Committee, the National Institute for the Blind had convened a Conference of Representatives of Institutions, Societies and Agencies for the benefit of the blind at which Hayes Fisher had

(117) Minutes of War Cabinet Meeting 268, held at 10 Downing Street, November 8, 1917. Conclusion 9 in Cabinet Papers 23/4. Public Record Office.

(a) Eric Dickson Macgregor 1886-1950. See "Who's Who" 1941-1950, p.728. Macgregor became a Principal in 1919.

agreed to speak. In opening the Conference, the Chairman, Sir Arthur Pearson, stated that he had been authorised by Hayes Fisher to announce the names of the Advisory Committee which had been set up to act in conjunction with the Central Authority. In addition to the Chairman, Stephen Walsh, the Parliamentary Secretary of the Local Government Board, the Committee was to comprise fourteen members (a) each of whom was initially appointed for a period of three years. Two of the members were women and five of the fourteen were themselves blind. (b) (118) Thus, as Hayes Fisher declared in his speech to the Conference, a chain of communication had been established that led up to the Cabinet itself - "The Advisory Committee will have a connecting link with Parliament through my friend the Parliamentary Secretary who will have a connecting link with me as President of the Local Government Board and I shall have a connecting link with the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer so I think that the chain is complete". (119)

(8) The Work of the English Advisory Council on the Welfare of the Blind 1918-1920

(a) Administrative Machinery

During 1918 and 1919 the Advisory Committee devoted considerable effort to the setting up of further administrative machinery and obtaining information that would facilitate their future activities. At an early stage, however, the work of the Committee was hampered by the lack of knowledge relating to the conditions appertaining to the blind that existed in various parts of the country. Representations,

- (a) H. J. Wilson (Vice Chairman), Miss E.W. Austin, Messrs. G.M. Campbell, P.M. Evans, C. Hartley, G.F. Mowatt, Alexander Pearson, Sir Arthur Pearson, Mrs. Wilton Phipps, Messrs. M. Priestley, B. Purse, H. Stainsby, W.H. Thurman, H.C. Warrilow.
- (b) Mowatt, Alexander Pearson, Sir Arthur Pearson, Purse and Warrilow.
- (118) Report of the Conference of Representatives of Institutions, Societies, and Agencies for the Blind held in the Armitage Hall of the National Institute for the Blind on Friday 7 December 1917. p. 12.
- (119) As above. p. 16.

were therefore made by the Advisory Committee to the President of the Local Government Board "that it was desirable that they should have at their disposal the best advice obtainable with a view to the effectual co-ordination of the work for the Blind throughout the country and that the Committees of the several Counties Unions for the Blind should be asked under certain conditions to undertake the work of local Advisory Committees for their respective areas." (120)

Hayes Fisher accepted the recommendation subject to the condition that the Union Committees should be strengthened and reconstituted so as to be fully representative of all interests concerned with the blind including voluntary agencies, Education Authorities, Boards of Guardians and the blind themselves. (121)

At a meeting held in London on October 3 1918, the representations of the seven Counties Associations of Societies for the Blind agreed to undertake the work of the local Advisory Committees and the first meeting of these bodies were held in March 1919. (122)

The Advisory Committee recommended that two registers should be kept. The first was for the purpose of implementing the suggestion of the Departmental Committee that the Central Authority should maintain a register of institutions and organisations which were co-operating in the systematic care of the blind. The second was a register of individual blind persons. The registration of institutions, societies and agencies for the blind was undertaken by inviting all known organisations concerned with the disability to submit applications for registration to the Local Government Board

(120) Report of the Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind 1918-1919. H.M.S.O. p. 12.

(121) 'The Blind' October 19 1918. pp. 85 & 86.

(122) 'The Blind' April 19 1919. p. 129.

and also giving notification of the preparation of the register by means of newspaper advertisements.⁽¹²³⁾ In the event the Local Government Board received an application from practically every known agency for the blind in the country and the applications were submitted for adjudication to the Advisory Committee. Three basic criteria for entry in the register were laid down by the Committee namely (1) the existence of a properly constituted committee of management; (2) properly audited accounts; (3) in the case of workshops for the blind, the payment of trade union rates of pay in all cases where such rates were applicable. The Committee reported that insistence on these three conditions had resulted in the payment of union wages and the auditing of accounts by a number of organisations which had not previously complied with such requirements.⁽¹²³⁾ On the advice of the Committee a list of registered organisations was published by the Local Government Board together with a recommendation that subscriptions by members of the public in aid of the blind should be restricted to agencies that had been so approved.⁽¹²³⁾

The basis of the register of individual blind persons was a questionnaire sent by the Board to all local sanitary and education authorities, Poor Law Guardians, County Nursing Associations and societies directly interested in the blind. The questionnaire was designed to provide, inter alia, information regarding the age, sex, number of dependents, previous and current occupation, the cause, degree and age of onset of blindness and the proficiency in Braille or Moon Type of each person in respect of whom a return was made.⁽¹²⁴⁾ By April 1 1920, 30,785 names had been entered on the register.^{(125)(a)}

(123) Report of the Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind 1918-1919. H.M.S.O. pp. 2 & 3.

(124) As above. Appendix 'A'. p. 14.

(125) Second Annual Report of the Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind 1919-1920. p. 9.

(a) On September 9 1919 the Minister of Health announced that he would in future look to the Counties Associations to secure the registration of all blind persons within their respective areas.

One further important administrative proposal was made by the Committee. This developed from a scheme by which the spending departments of the Governments promised to place as much work as possible, without preference in respect of policy or price, with workshops in respect of whom particulars had been provided by the Advisory Committee. To ensure a uniform standard of quality the Committee decided that initially the scheme would be limited to workshops already experienced in undertaking Government contracts and that additional undertakings would be included only after a favourable report on their capabilities had been made by a competent inspector. For this purpose and "other reasons" the Committee recommended that "a fully qualified inspector whose standing and authority would carry the necessary weight in the blind world" should be appointed to the staff of the Local Government Board. (126)

In fact two inspectors were appointed in the persons of Miles Priestly the Manager and Secretary of the Royal Institution for the Blind at Bradford, and W. H. Thurman the General Superintendent and Secretary of the Birmingham Royal Institution for the Blind. Until they resigned on joining the inspectorate both Priestley and Thurman had themselves been members of the Advisory Committee from its inception. Priestly took up his post on September 1 1919 and, with headquarters at Bradford, was responsible for the area covered by the Northern, North Western and Eastern Counties Associations of Societies for the Blind. Thurman, who started one month later, had headquarters in Birmingham and covered the rest of England and Wales. (127) The first duty of the inspectors was to make a thorough survey of all agencies for the blind with a view to their approval as grant earning services under the grant earning regulations issued earlier in

(126) Report of the Advisory Committee 1918-1919. pp. 9 & 10.

(127) Welfare of the Blind - Inspectors Duties. Memorandum on Ministry of Health File. 55/86 in the Public Record Office.

1919. They were expected to "report freely" on all agencies inspected and to make suitable recommendations but they were forbidden to make suggestions other than on points of detail direct to any official of an agency. It was also their duty to keep informed of all developments in the Blind world and to study how such developments could be utilised in the improvement and extension of all work carried on for the welfare of the Blind. They were to have full discretion to make suggestions in all matters relating to the Blind and to initiate such proposals as they thought fit. It would then be for the administrative staff in consultation with the inspectors to see how far such proposals could be carried out and to put the matter in a conclusive form before the Minister of Health. The inspectors were to attend meetings of both the local and Central Advisory Councils, and, in the former case to report particulars of the proceedings to the Ministry. Finally, they were as officers of the Minister to carry out the policy settled by the Ministry. (127)

With the establishment of the local advisory committees, the registers of organisations and individuals and the appointment of the Inspectors of Blind Welfare, the administrative machinery of the Central Authority was virtually complete.

(a) Grants

The first duty placed on the Advisory Committee was to advise the Local Government Board on the preparation of schemes for securing contributions towards the total cost involved in meeting the capital and current expenditure required by a comprehensive programme of provision for the blind. This task occupied the Advisory Committee for the first four months of its existence and the resultant recommendations for grant aid were submitted to the Board in a lengthy memorandum. The proposals were based on the provisions of the Education,

Employment and Maintenance of the Blind (No. 2) Bill which had been agreed between the National League of the Blind and the National Employment Committee in 1914. The Advisory Committee stated that the proposals contained in their memorandum were capable of easy adjustment to the provisions of the No. 2 Bill if and when it became law, that they approved of the principles of the Bill and hoped that an early opportunity would arise for enabling it to be put on the Statute Book.⁽¹²⁸⁾ From a study of the memorandum it appears that on making their proposals for grant aid to institutions and individuals the Committee adopted five main principles.

The first principle was that only a proportion of the expenditure should fall directly on the Treasury, the residue being met as applicable from local sources such as the Education Authorities, the Boards of Guardians and the voluntary institutions.

Secondly, that the detailed procedure for giving grants from the Treasury would be left to the Local Government Board.

Thirdly, that the voluntary institutions should be regarded as the normal unit for the education, training, employment and maintenance of the blind. Throughout the memorandum the term "institution" was applied to training or employment establishments, Home Teaching Societies, Pensions Society or other such establishments as might be deemed to be the most suitable agency for the particular purpose. As the existing workshops were, with one small exception provided by voluntary agencies it was clear that apart from the Boards of Guardians there was no other machinery available.

The fourth principle was that by the use of the institutions to whom grants would be paid for re-distribution to individuals, blind

(128) Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind. Memorandum to the Local Government Board (undated). Copy on Board of Education File ED.50. 88. P.R.O. The date stamp on the Board of Education Copy is April 25th 1918.

persons could, in many cases, be prevented from coming into direct contact with the Poor Law.

Finally, that, as recommended both by the Royal Commission and the Departmental Committee, the receipt of assistance should not disqualify a blind person either for the purpose of franchise or the receipt of a pension from a Blind or other pension society.

The Committee first dealt with the subject of capital expenditure which they recognized would have to be deferred until the end of the War. They considered it desirable, however, that plans and estimates should be prepared in readiness for the time when the existing restrictions on capital expenditure were removed. The memorandum reiterated the estimate given by the Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind that ultimately not less than £500,000 (of which £350,000 related to England and Wales) would be required either for the erection of new premises or the extension of existing workshops. It was envisaged that at least half of the initial cost of workshop provision should be met by the Treasury leaving the remaining amount to be raised from local sources subject to the proviso that any loan charges incurred by the institutions should rank in future years for a maintenance grant of 50%. Thus, the initial cost to the Treasury on capital account in respect of England and Wales would be £175,000 and the final expenditure would be an estimated £262,500. The Committee also pointed out that while workshop accommodation would comprise the principal item of capital expenditure, money would also be required for such purposes as the provision of residential homes for incapable blind persons.

The Committee prefaced their recommendations relating to current expenditure by specifying three objects which they considered to be essential to any comprehensive scheme for the blind, namely:

- "(1) Provision for the Education, Technical Training and
Employment in any suitable Trade, Industry or Profession

of blind persons over 16 years of age in institutions approved by the Local Government Board.

- (2) Assistance to outworkers who should be attached to the approved institutions but who may be employed in their own homes or elsewhere.
- (3) Assistance to Blind persons who through infirmity or incapability are unable to learn, or support themselves by, any Trade, Industry or Profession." (128)

The Committee presented their proposals for achieving the above objects under the headings of (a) accommodation, (b) education and technical training, (c) employment, (d) maintenance or relief and (e) miscellaneous.

With regard to accommodation the Committee advised that institutions might be recognized as centres for the education, technical training and employment of blind persons over 16 years of age. Such centres should then be required to work on lines approved by the Local Government Board or, in so far as was applicable, by the Board of Education. The Committee promised to give guidance on such matters as the area of operation, co-operation, standardisation and rates of pay in relation to the workshops. As a temporary expedient it was suggested that it might be possible to extend existing accommodation by either renting suitable premises or taking them on lease with an option to purchase when the existing restrictions on capital expenditure had been removed. (128) Grants under the heading of "education and technical training" referred to amounts paid to training institutions and for the instruction and/or maintenance of blind persons who were being taught. The Committee recognized that there was no obligation on the part of the local education authorities to provide further education and training for blind persons over 16 under Part II of the Education Act of 1902. They stated, however, that there was reason to believe that the Board of Education concurred with

the view that such further education was indispensable for the adequate equipment of blind individuals and that the Board was prepared to give sympathetic consideration to increasing the grants to Local Education Authorities and Institutions in respect of expenditure on the education and training of the blind. The Committee therefore recommended that the total cost of an institution should be met (a) by direct grants from the Board of Education and/or (b) contributions from the Local Education Authority and (c) special funds of voluntary institutions reserved for educational purposes.

Where the Poor Law Guardians were making provision for such education and training the Committee proposed that a grant should be given by the Local Government Board equivalent to that made by the Board of Education. "The Committee trust, however," declared the memorandum "that an early opportunity will be found of removing the education and training of blind persons wholly into the jurisdiction of the Local Education Authorities". Special provision was recommended for the further education and training in their own homes of the estimated small number of blind persons who for "adequate reasons" were unable to attend classes in an institution. The cost of such extra mural provision would devolve on the Local Education Authority, the Poor Law Guardians, the Institution or the Treasury with at least 25% of the expenditure falling on the Institution. (128)

Grants in respect of maintenance for persons between the ages of 16 and 21 who were not resident in institutions might include the provision of "proper food and clothing" and the Committee suggested that assistance of this kind could best be dealt with "by a wise discretion in granting such allowances through the institutions". Another class of non-residents consisted of persons, often with dependents, who had lost their sight in later life and required re-training in an occupation suitable for the blind. For persons who

were not inmates of institutions a maintenance allowance of 15/- per week for the first year was recommended. In subsequent years this grant was to be augmented by a percentage of earnings calculated at the standard rate of payment for the work done. The Committee held that half the cost of maintenance allowances should be borne by the Treasury and the residue by the Guardians and the Institution. They also emphasised that pressure should be exerted on the Guardians to make use of their ample powers to provide assistance to individuals in respect of maintenance but that all Poor Law assistance given to blind persons of good character should be given through the institutions. (128)

The principal expenditure in respect of "employment" was in connection with "augmentation" i.e. the payment of a supplementary allowance to bring the earnings of blind employees up to the amount required for an adequate living wage. The Committee envisaged that the extension of workshop facilities would result in a substantial rise in the number of blind persons in employment with a consequent increase in augmentation payments. They therefore suggested that the cost of such employment namely the difference between the commercial and the actual wages paid should be met to the extent of 25% by the institution and 75% by the Treasury and the Poor Law Guardians. (128)

Current expenditure on the maintenance and relief of the incapable blind related to assistance given either by full maintenance in a residential home or by a weekly allowance paid through an institution to persons who continued to live in their own homes. With regard to the latter class, the Committee recommended that the total weekly income should be made up according to the following scale:

Single person (under 16)	5/-
" " (over 16)	10/-
Man and wife (one sighted) 7/6 each =	15/-
" " " (both blind) 10/- each =	20/-
First Child	5/-
Second Child	4/2
Third Child	3/4
Fourth and subsequent children	2/6 each

The memorandum stated that apart from the grants for children which corresponded to the amounts payable to the children of disabled soldiers,^(a) the suggested rates represented a minimum scale. The Committee recommended that Poor Law Guardians should make subscriptions to institutions of an amount not less than they would have given in out door relief to blind persons resident in their areas. Such subscriptions would then be distributed by the institution to individual cases of need. By this device incapable blind persons who were assisted by way of such contributions rather than by out-relief would, to that extent, be removed from the auspices of the Poor Law. Not more than 25% of any deficiency in the total cost of maintenance would be met by the institutions.⁽¹²⁸⁾

Finally, a number of grants of an unspecified amount were recommended for such miscellaneous purposes as the development of an efficient system of after care, research with a view to the establishment of new industries and professions, the production of embossed books and financial assistance to the several unions of Counties Associations and the National Library for the Blind.

Pending the compilation of a Register of blind persons the Committee were unable to compute the total cost of their recommendations which they estimated would ultimately amount to at least the £250,000 specified by the Departmental Committee. In the interim they asked that a sum of not less than £100,000 should be placed at the disposal of the Local Government Board for England and Wales to cover the cost of their proposals for the financial year April 1 1919 to March 31 1920. They further requested that the scheme outlined in the memorandum together with the expenditure entailed thereby should receive the

(a) In the years 1919 to 1920 a private soldier with 100% disability received a War Disablement Pension of £2 per week. In addition a totally blinded war pensioner received a Constant Attendance Allowance of £1 weekly. (R. Buckley, Public Relations Officer, St. Dunstons in a written communication 8.3.72).

sanction of the War Cabinet at an early date and that the institutions and the public should be informed in general terms that such sanction had been obtained. (128)

The memorandum was sent to the Local Government Board at the end of April 1918 and adopted on May 5th by Hayes Fisher who instructed that steps should be taken to submit the proposals to the Treasury.

Three days earlier when speaking on the Estimates, Hayes Fisher made some strong references to the welfare of the blind. After referring to the Report of the Departmental Committee he continued: "Now for the first time the State is going to do for the blind what it should have done many years ago. It is going to make special provision for them. It is going to see that there is some supervision of their general education and general maintenance. I want this country to be the country to which everyone will come in order to study the best methods of treating the blind. Of course, philanthropic effort, much as it has done, and is continuing to do, cannot do everything and I am quite certain that what is wanted is supervision over all the great agencies that exist for the blind. Co-operation too is needed. It is necessary to fill the gaps. We want to establish workshops for the blind, to help them to sell their goods in what I admit is a limited market, and for those who cannot work even when you have trained them it is necessary to provide an adequate pension. That is all in process of being done". (129)

Some delay now occurred in submitting the Advisory Committee's recommendations to the Treasury mainly due to the necessity for the Local Government Board to agree the terms of the memorandum with the Board of Education and the Scottish Local Government Board and Education Department. In the interim, the First World War had come to

(129) Hansard. 2 May 1918. Col. 1746.

an end. Another less spectacular event had also taken place. On November 4th 1918 Hayes Fisher tendered his resignation as President of the Local Government Board and was replaced by Sir Auckland Geddes.⁽¹³⁰⁾

Eventually the Advisory Committee's proposals were forwarded to the Treasury on December 2nd 1918. In an accompanying memorandum the Local Government Board explained that, while the Advisory Committee's proposals were based on the provisions of the "Education, Employment and Maintenance (No.2) Bill of 1914", adapted so far as is possible without legislation to present circumstances" there were practical difficulties in applying the principles of the Bill to the scheme formulated by the Committee. The Bill, following the practice then current, had assumed that the Exchequer contribution to the cost would take the form of a repayment to the local authority of half the expenses involved. The Bill had defined the term "local authority", however, to mean the County or County Borough Council concerned, but apart from the Education Authorities the only local authorities under the existing law which had definite obligations to blind persons were the Boards of Guardians. If, therefore, the Exchequer contribution was to take the form of grants to the local authorities such grants would have to be made to the Boards of Guardians. Such a course, the memorandum suggested, was politically impossible since it would have the appearance of suggesting that the policy of the Government was to perpetuate the existing systems of leaving the blind to the care of the Poor Law Authorities.⁽¹³¹⁾

(130) Gilbert, Bentley B. "British Social Policy" 1914-1939.
B.T.Batsford. 1970. p.130

(131) Memorandum by the Local Government Board to the Treasury on the Welfare of the Blind forwarded to the Secretary of the Treasury December 2nd 1918 on Treasury File T.1. 12937/44812/1919 at the Public Record Office.

Conversely, there was a further difficulty that was only mentioned by inference in the Local Government Board memorandum. In 1918 the Government had accepted the Report of the MacLean Committee on the "Transfer of Functions of Poor Law Authorities in England and Wales"⁽¹³²⁾ This Report recommended the abolition of the Poor Law Guardians and the distribution of the various Poor Law functions such as the care of children, the sick and the aged among appropriate local authority committees. At a time when the Government had under consideration the transfer of all the activities of the Boards of Guardians to the County and County Borough Councils it would have been invidious to have selected the blind for transfer leaving all other classes under the care of the Guardians. The memorandum, therefore, suggested that the alternative to either distributing grants through the Guardians or removing the blind only from the Poor Law was "as a purely provisional measure and without prejudice to future arrangements", to accept the scheme put forward by the Advisory Committee by which grants would be given to approved institutions and other organisations. To ensure that local rates were not relieved of charges already being borne by them in respect of the blind and to maintain a flow of contributions from private charity the Local Government Board suggested that the Treasury should endorse the proposals of the Advisory Committee subject to the following safeguards:-

- (a) Grants made by the Local Government Board in aid of annual expenditure should be limited to cases in which no grant was payable by the Board of Education.

(132) "Report on Transfer of Functions of Poor Law Authorities in England and Wales". Local Government Committee, Ministry of Reconstruction. Cd.8197. 1918.

- (b) Grants in aid of maintenance, augmentation of wages, relief and special schemes such as book production and after care should be paid by the Local Government Board to institutions and organisations after consultation with the Advisory Committee.
- (c) No Local Government Board grant to an institution or other organisation should exceed one half of the approved expenditure defined as "net expenditure after deducting contributions from local rates, of the institutions or organisations during the financial year (or half year)".
- (d) A condition of the approval of expenditure by the Local Government Board would be that no contribution made by a Poor Law Authority in respect of any one case, under the care of an Institution, and chargeable to the authority, should be less than the amount paid in the previous financial year. (131)

Two modifications were also made to the grants originally suggested by the Advisory Committee. With the end of the War the agreement that no capital expenditure in respect of accommodation for the blind should be incurred during the period of hostilities had ceased to apply. The sanction of the Treasury was therefore requested for capital expenditure amounting to £25,000; in addition, the estimate for grants was raised from a sum of not less than £100,000 to £125,000. (127)

The reply of the Lord's Commissioners of the Treasury was sent on January 7th 1919. This rejected the request for funds submitted by the Local Government Board on the ground that "Their Lordships ... would not feel justified in starting on a policy of assistance

involving both immediate and prospective expenditure of very large amounts without a prior settlement of the principles in accordance with which the respective spheres of responsibility of local authorities and the Central Government in dealing with this problem should be clearly laid down". "Such a settlement", the letter continued, "cannot, in their Lordships opinion be arrived at without legislation and they would deprecate most strongly providing funds without an Act being first passed which should deal exhaustively with the position of the blind and the methods of treating and assisting them. If sanction were given for the provision of funds prior to such legislation being passed M.L. cannot but anticipate that the possibility of inducing local authorities to bear their share in administration and in meeting the expenditure would be rendered much more difficult".⁽¹³³⁾

On February 3rd, Christopher Addison,^(a) who on January 10th, had succeeded Geddes as President of the Local Government Board, directed that the request for funds should be re-submitted. Ten days later the Treasury again replied refusing to sanction any expenditure.⁽¹³⁴⁾

When the Advisory Committee was appraised of the Treasury's rejection of their proposals on March 6th they were extremely angry and threatened to resign en-bloc and then raise the whole issue in public. Before taking this drastic step, however, they decided to seek a meeting with the President of the Local Government Board. On March 19th a deputation from the Committee was given an assurance by Addison that he would look carefully into the whole matter

(133) R.S.Meiklejohn. Joint Secretary Treasury. Letter to the Local Government Board January 7th 1918 on T.1.12397/44812/1919 Public Record Office.

(a) Addison, Christopher. 1869-1951. Afterwards Lord Addison. Minister of Health 1919-1921. See Dictionary of National Biography 1951-1960. pp.3-7.

(134) Grants in Aid of the Blind Memorandum by the President of the L.G.B. 26.5.1919. Cab.24/80. P.R.O.

including the possibility of appropriate legislation.⁽¹³⁴⁾ The more closely the possibility of legislation was investigated, however, the more insuperable the difficulties appeared to be. As stated above, the Government had given a specific pledge to undertake the reform of the Poor Law in accordance with the general principles recommended by the MacLean Committee at the earliest practicable date. It would therefore have been invidious to have selected one class of recipients of Public Assistance for legislation the effect of which would be to remove them from the Poor Law in anticipation of the general reform which had been promised. Furthermore, the passing of special legislation for the blind would have raised a number of administrative difficulties such as those of areas, the relationship between County and County Borough Councils and the functions and composition of the local authority committees which would be responsible for the Welfare of the blind. Such difficulties would, of course, have to be resolved when the general reform of the Poor Law was undertaken. The Government also feared that special legislation for the blind would create a precedent capable of being cited in support of claims for legislative action in respect of persons afflicted by other infirmities. Finally, assuming that the above difficulties were resolved, there would still be the understandable reluctance of local authorities to embark on a new system of public assistance in a piecemeal fashion. Pending the general transfer of public assistance to the County and County Borough Councils as recommended by the MacLean Committee it appeared that all that local authorities could or would do was to act as agents of the Central Government in passing on grants to voluntary organisations for blind persons.⁽¹³⁵⁾

⁽¹³⁵⁾ Grants in Aid of the Blind. Memorandum 26.5.1919. Appendix 'A' Difficulties of Legislation. Cab.24/80. P.R.0

The need for the Local Government Board to deliberate on such matters led to further delay which led the Advisory Committee for the Blind to reiterate their threat of resignation. To obviate such action Addison appears to have attempted to buy time by asking the Committee to draw up alternative recommendations under which, in the absence of legislation requiring or empowering local authorities to act in the matter, the Board might dispense aid to and through the voluntary agencies for the blind. It is probable that this way out of the impasse was influenced by the experience of Sir Robert Morant at the Board of Education since precedents were to be found in connection with Board of Education Grants to Voluntary Schools as well as Home Office contributions to Industrial and Reformatory Schools. One of Addison's first acts at the Local Government Board had been the replacement of the then Permanent Secretary, Sir Horace Munro, by Sir Robert Laurie Morant. (136) (a)

The modified proposals of the Advisory Committee related to grants in aid to workshops, homes and hostels, home teaching societies, book production and local societies affiliated to the seven regional associations for the blind. Essentially the proposals were for various forms of per capita payments. In the case of workshops grants intended to assist the extension of premises and the supervision of home workers would be based on the number of employees. Home teaching societies would receive a contribution in respect of each teacher, while payments with regard to embossed books would relate to the number of volumes produced. (137) Significant omissions were made of grants payable to

(136) Gilbert, Bentley B. "British Social Policy" 1914-1939. B.T.Batsford. 1970. p.133

(a) Robert Laurie Morant 1863-1920. Permanent Secretary Board of Education 1903-1911, First Permanent Secretary Ministry of Health 1919-1920.

(137) Advisory Committee on the Blind:- Report of Grants Sub-Committee (undated). See also, Blind Advocate August 1919.

the unemployable blind and for the augmentation of wages.⁽¹³⁴⁾ The dissatisfaction of the Advisory Committee with these modifications of their earlier recommendations was strongly expressed in a footnote published in their first Annual Report. After explaining that "subsequent developments had compelled them to make alternative proposals to those originally submitted" they continued:-

"We regard with the gravest concern the omission from our present proposals of arrangements whereby direct assistance by way of weekly allowances could be given in their own homes to the unemployed blind, the class of the blind, which, in our opinion deserves the most urgent consideration. It is only in view of the strong representations made to us on behalf of the Government as to the inherent difficulties in making weekly allowances until the necessary legislation has been passed, that we make the following proposals as a temporary instalment, dictated by expediency, until the whole matter of the welfare of the blind can be legislatively dealt with. We would not regard it as consonant with our duty if we did not state that we recommend the present proposals only on the understanding that the vital matter of the unemployable needy blind be dealt with by the Government at the earliest possible moment and we trust that an announcement to that effect will accompany any declaration of the Government's acceptance of these proposals".⁽¹³⁸⁾

The revised suggestions for grant-aid were sent to the Treasury on May 14th and submitted to Baldwin, The Financial Secretary to the Treasury and Austen Chamberlain the Chancellor of the Exchequer along with a memorandum prepared by the Secretary, Meiklejohn. This memorandum stressed the importance of prompt action if the pledge given by Hayes Fisher in 1918 was to be honoured. It also stated that, in the

⁽¹³⁸⁾ Advisory Committee on Welfare of the Blind.
1st Annual Report 1918-1919. p.2

opinion of Morant, the matter had been mismanaged disgracefully since his predecessors at the Local Government Board had failed to make it clear to the Advisory Committee that any schemes they put forward could not be implemented without legislation. Finally, Meiklejohn asked whether, as a matter of policy, the Treasury Ministers were prepared to depart from the decision communicated to the Local Government Board on January 7th. Baldwin's advice was "I should stick to that letter" and with this view Chamberlain signified his assent.⁽¹³⁹⁾ On May 17th, therefore, the Local Government Board was formally notified that "Mr. Baldwin and the Chancellor of the Exchequer remained of the opinion that no Government grant could properly be provided for the blind in anticipation of legislation."⁽¹³⁵⁾

Addison was now in an extremely difficult position. He had inherited the promise of widespread assistance to the blind made by Hayes Fisher. He was faced by a rebellious Advisory Committee which threatened a public show down. In Parliament pressure was being exerted by the Labour Party. Most difficult of all, was the dilemma that the matter could only be resolved by the Government either departing from or circumventing the principle that no assistance could be given without legislation. On May 24th Addison decided that the question should be placed for decision before the Home Affairs Committee of the Cabinet.

Four days later the Home Affairs Committee considered a Memorandum prepared by Addison outlining the history of the movement for grant aid to blind persons from the setting up of the Departmental Committee on the Blind in 1914. Two Appendices 'A' and 'B' were also presented with the Memorandum. Appendix 'A' summarised the difficulties

(139) Memorandum by R.S. Meiklejohn. May 14th 1919 with annotations by Baldwin and Chamberlain. File T.12397/44812/1919. P.R.O.

of legislation while Appendix 'B' recapitulated the proposals rejected by the Treasury on May 17th for grants without legislation. In the course of discussion, Addison described his difficulties, particularly the threat of resignation that had been made on three occasions by the Advisory Committee and the impossibility of introducing a Bill to meet the Treasury objection to grants without legislation because such a measure would open up "the whole complicated Poor Law question". The Financial Secretary to the Treasury stated that the Chancellor had reaffirmed that he could not make grants before there was a Bill. Morant retaliated by repeating that there were numerous precedents for making grants without provision for legislation for disbursement through local authorities and that the Board of Education made many such grants. Eventually the Chairman, H.A.L. Fisher^(a) expressed the opinion that, in view of the definite pledges given, a grant would have to be made. The Committee therefore decided to recommend to the War Cabinet that it was desirable

- (1) "that grants should be made in accordance with the lines of Appendix 'B' of the Memorandum of the Local Government Board.
- (2) that legislation should be introduced as soon as possible in view of definite pledges given but that grants should not be delayed for this".⁽¹⁴⁰⁾

Despite the strong opposition of Austen Chamberlain these recommendations were ratified at a Cabinet Meeting held on June 13th.⁽¹⁴¹⁾ On the same day the Secretary of the Local Government Board wrote to the Treasury

(a) Fisher was President of the Board of Education.

(140) Home Affairs Committee, Minute 6. May 28th 1919.
Cab.26/1. 1096. P.R.0

(141) War Cabinet Minute 579/5
Cab.23/10/1914. P.R.0

asking that arrangements should be made for the presentation of supplementary estimates to Parliament and asking that the grant should be made payable from July 1st. ⁽¹⁴²⁾

Although the newly created Ministry of Health ^(b) did not issue the regulations and an accompanying explanatory circular until August 7th 1919, grants were back-dated for the first year to July 1st 1919 and in subsequent years operated from April 1st. ⁽¹⁴³⁾ The regulations provided for the payment of grant at a rate not exceeding 50% of the estimated grant for the period or year the balance to be retrospective after audited accounts had been received from the voluntary agency by the Minister. Conditions to be satisfied as a prerequisite for grant aid were laid down for various classes of voluntary organisations. Thus, in the case of workshops, the regulations specified that recognized standards of pay, bonus, hours of work and holidays appertaining to the trade in which employees were engaged would apply. It was also prescribed that in no case should the hours of labour exceed 48 per week. Agencies were also enjoined to submit to the Minister schemes whereby suitable provision was made for the care, assistance and supervision of home workers. Rules were also given for the keeping of registers in respect of workshops, homes and hostels.

(142) Anderson to Meiklejohn. 13.6.1919. File T.12397/44812/1919.

(b) The Ministry of Health replaced the Local Government Board on July 1st 1919. Among the duties of the Minister as prescribed by the Act was "the treatment and care of the blind".

(143) Meiklejohn to Anderson. 18.6.1919. File T.12397/44812/1919.

Grants to approved voluntary agencies were payable at the undermentioned rates:-

Workshops	£20 per head
Home Workers	£20 " "
Homes	£13 " "
Hostels	£ 5 " "
Home Teaching	£78 per teacher
Book production	2/6 per volume; 2d per copy of magazine, periodical or sheet music.
Counties Associations	£20 per 100 registered blind persons in area. ⁽¹⁴⁴⁾

The circular letter which accompanied the above rules was at pains to adhere to the request of the Advisory Committee that any grant aid to voluntary agencies should be made along with a statement that the question of the unemployable blind would be dealt with as soon as possible by the Government. "These Regulations" explained the Circular ... "are from the large point of view, a temporary expedient, yet one which it seems clear should not be held back, pending the passing of fresh legislation, for it is confidently believed by the Minister, in concurrence with the opinion held by the Advisory Committee on the Blind, that pending legislation, the system of grants now to be introduced will materially assist in improving the conditions of the blind in many directions".⁽¹⁴⁵⁾

In the Advisory Committee the one dissentient voice raised against the grant proposals had been that of Ben Purse.⁽¹⁴⁶⁾ On August 15th Purse wrote to Macgregor stating that he was "quite unable to agree with the views expressed by Addison in his Circular" since

(144) Regulations under which grants will be paid by the M.O.H. in aid of the Welfare of the Blind, with Circular 7 B.D. 7.8.1919. Pages 4.9.

(145) M.O.H. Circular 7.B.D. 7.8.1919. p.1.

(146) Blind Advocate September 1919. p.5.

"these grants will not in any degree affect nine tenths of the members of the Blind Community".⁽¹⁴⁷⁾ The dissatisfaction of the National League of the Blind with the grant proposals had already been conveyed by a deputation led by Purse to the Ministry of Health on July 7th.

The principal grounds of such dissatisfaction being:-

- (1) that the grants were to be payable to voluntary institutions "and would be swallowed up in administrative expenses without one penny accruing to the blind themselves".
- (2) the failure to make provision for State pensions.
- (3) the absence of provision for the augmentation of wages.

The deputation was given an assurance that the Government intended to introduce legislation in respect of Poor Law reform in the following year and that the proposals for grant aid were an interim rather than a permanent solution.⁽¹⁴³⁾ There is little doubt that this promise was made in good faith. Gilbert⁽¹⁴⁸⁾ has shown how, throughout Addison's tenure of the Ministry of Health, statements relating to plans for the reform of the Poor Law were released at approximately six-month intervals. Thus, even before the Ministry of Health had officially come into existence "The Times" reported - "It is understood that one of the first tasks to be undertaken by the new Ministry of Health is the long overdue reform of the Poor Law. A scheme is now in preparation and Dr. Addison may even introduce a Bill this session".⁽¹⁴⁵⁾ Six months later the same source informed its readers that "Since last year the policy of the Government has remained unaltered. Boards of Guardians and the functions of Poor Law authorities are to be merged in the County Councils and County Borough Councils".⁽¹⁴⁵⁾ It seems clear that the

(147) Purse to Macgregor 15.8.1919. File M.H.55 104.

(148) Gilbert, Bentley B. "British Social Policy" 1914-1939. p.134

Government intended to deal with the problem of the blind along with such matters as such services as health, venereal disease, tuberculosis, etc., which were largely provided through the Poor Law by a measure for the break up of the Poor Law. In the interim, the grants introduced in 1919, represented an acceptance of the principle that the State accepted some measure of responsibility for blind persons in addition to their special education. The publication of Circular 7.B.D.1919, therefore represented the next important step forward in State Aid for the Blind after the Education (Blind and Deaf Children) Act 1893.

(9) The Campaign for Legislation 1919-1920

Although the Government contemplated dealing with the blind as part of a major reform of the Poor Law, the National League of the Blind remained pledged to secure specific legislation along the lines laid down in the No. 2 Bill of 1914. The failure of the Government to implement the initial recommendations of the Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind caused the League to start a vigorous campaign, the object of which was to secure State action. Early in 1918, trade unions and other bodies throughout the Country forwarded to the Government a resolution framed by the League in the following terms.

"Whilst approving the value of the Department set up within the aegis of the Local Government Board we call upon the War Cabinet to place at the disposal of that Department adequate funds in order that the economic reforms in the condition of the blind recommended by the Committee established to advise the Department may be carried out. We further urge His Majesty's Government to place on the Statute book, without delay, an Act which will secure to the blind of the United Kingdom improved educational facilities and technical training, employment for the employable, and, for the aged and infirm blind, pensions adequate to maintain them in a humane manner, such pensions to be equivalent to those at present paid to soldiers and sailors blinded in the War".(149)

(149) National League of the Blind 18th Annual Report 1918. p.4.

Throughout 1918 and 1919 the National League waged a rigorous campaign with the object of rallying public support for legislation. Resolutions demanding such legislation were, at the League's instigation, passed at the Labour Party Conferences of 1918 and 1919⁽¹⁵⁰⁾ and at the Trade Union Congress of 1919.⁽¹⁵¹⁾ In July 1918 a demonstration addressed by a number of prominent speakers including George Lansbury and Ben Purse was organised in Trafalgar Square.⁽¹⁵²⁾ In August 1919 a further demonstration preceded by a procession in which several hundred blind men took part was held in Hyde Park.⁽¹⁵³⁾ Meanwhile a meeting had been held at the House of Commons in July 1919 between members of Parliament and a deputation from the League led by Purse. After speeches by Stephen Walsh M.P. who presided over the meeting, Ben Purse and R.D. Smith, a member of the Advisory Committee, the members of Parliament who were present agreed to form a committee or group to "watch and press the Government" on the subject of State aid for the blind.⁽¹⁵³⁾ The above endeavours reached their culmination on November 25th 1919 when the Blind (Education, Employment and Maintenance) Bill was introduced into the Commons by Stephen Walsh. Apart from its title and minor modifications such as the raising of the amount payable by way of augmentation to workshop employees and home workers from five shillings to one pound and the increase of the proposed grant for maintenance to unemployable blind persons from ten shillings to one pound, seven shillings and sixpence, the Bill was identical with

(150) Reports of Labour Party Conferences 1918-1919. (Resolutions).

(151) Trade Union Congress. 1919. Report p.67

(152) Blind Advocate. September 1918. p.1

(153) "The Beacon" Vol.3. No.33. September 1919. p.15

that which had been presented by Burgoyne in July 1914. Walsh received a sympathetic hearing and his Bill was ordered to be read a second time on December 9th.⁽¹⁵⁴⁾ On this date, however, it was blocked at the request of the Board of Education in concurrence with the Ministry of Health.⁽¹⁵⁵⁾

The failure of Walsh's Bill to make progress caused the League to intensify its efforts with a view to the introduction of the measure early in 1920. On January 18th 1920 the North Western District Council of the League passed a resolution moved by Mr.J.Orr that public attention should be called to the Government's delay in fulfilling its promises with regard to the blind by a march of blind men from various provincial centres ending in a mass demonstration in Trafalgar Square.⁽¹⁵⁶⁾ On learning of this march which the League proposed should take place in April, Sir Arthur Pearson, the President of the N.I.B requested an interview with the Minister of Health and suggested that a special Bill dealing with the blind might be introduced without delay.⁽¹⁵⁷⁾ Early in March Pearson told the Standing Committee of the Institute, that he had met Dr.Addison, Viscount Astor, Sir Robert Morant and Mr.McGregor at the Ministry of Health and had been informed that the Blind Aid Bill had been postponed indefinitely since an annual expenditure of £2,000,000 would be involved. He (Pearson) was therefore arranging a meeting with the Chancellor of the Exchequer for the purpose of urging that the equivalent of an old age pension should be granted to

(154) Hansard. November 25, 1919. Cols. 1635-1638.

(155) File Ed.31 193. Memo. 8.12.1919 with M.O.H note added P.R.O.

(156) Blind Advocate. June 1920. p.11

(157) National Institute for the Blind. Minutes of the Standing Committee. February 24th 1920.

blind persons between the ages of 50 and 70. The estimated yearly cost of providing such pensions was £175,000. Chamberlain would also be asked to bring in legislation empowering local authorities to assist their blind charging 50% of the cost to the Treasury.⁽¹⁵⁸⁾

In the event the Government was not permitted to procrastinate. In the ballot for Private Bills held on February 13th an early place was secured by Ben Tillett, the Labour Member for Salford North, who re-introduced the Blind (Education, Employment and Maintenance) Bill, which was ordered to be read a second time on March 12th.⁽¹⁵⁹⁾ The imminent prospect of a further debate together with the pressures that were building up both inside and outside the House led Addison to recognize that positive action would have to be taken. While determining to oppose Tillett's Bill, therefore, he decided to introduce some constructive proposals of his own. Accordingly on March 8th Addison prepared a Memorandum for the consideration of the Cabinet in which he asked that he should be authorised to inform the House that the Government intended to introduce a measure relating to the blind dealing with three matters

- (1) capital grants to local authorities for the provision and maintenance of workshops, etc.
- (2) cash payments to the unemployable blind between the ages of 50 and 70 at the rate of ten shillings per week.
- (3) legislation requiring all agencies which appealed to the public for funds on behalf of the blind to be registered by the appropriate local authority.

(158) National Institute for the Blind. Minute dated March 2nd.

(159) Hansard. February 13th 1920.

The estimated cost of grant aid in respect of capital expenditure by local authorities in connection with the provision of workshops, hostels and homes for the blind was £250,000 spread over a considerable number of years, the proportion for the financial year 1920-21 being £25,000.

Before grants could be paid to the unemployable blind it was necessary for Addison to resolve the legal and political difficulties that had prevented progress on this matter in 1919. As stated earlier in this chapter the legal objection was that payments by local authorities to the incapable blind could only be made through the Boards of Guardians. The political aspect was that the Government was reluctant to pass special legislation making possible payments to the blind other than through the Guardians pending the general reform of the Poor Law. Addison suggested that a way out of the dilemma could be found by recognizing that blindness in itself did not ordinarily require medical services and did not naturally fall within the ordinary medical services carried out by the Health Authorities. Nor, since blindness was a particularly disabling condition from the age of 50 upwards so far as capability for training and employment was concerned, could it be regarded as properly falling within the non-health services of a reformed Poor Law Authority. In the circumstances Addison proposed that allowances should be given to incapable blind persons between the ages of 50 and 70. The lower age was taken because of the general recognition that after 50 most blind persons were no longer trainable and the upper age as marking the point at which the Old Age Pension Acts would operate. The rate of allowances was ten shillings as recommended by Pearson in order that when a blind person reached 70 he could become automatically eligible for an old age pension without any diminution of income. The conditions of income limit which applied to non-contributory

old age pensions would apply equally to these given to the blind. Unlike Pearson's proposal which would have shared the cost between the local authorities and the Treasury, Addison's scheme provided that the total annual amount estimated at £170,000, would be borne by the Exchequer but that, for the purposes of administration, the local Pensions Committees already in existence in each County and County Borough area would be utilised. ⁽¹⁶⁰⁾

Senior Treasury officials were not without misgivings regarding Addison's proposals. Sir George Barstow, Controller of the Supplies Service, disagreed with the view that blindness should not fall within the scope of a reformed Poor Law Authority. He also held that by taking sole financial responsibility for the unemployable blind the Exchequer would lay itself open to three charges - firstly, that the grant of ten shillings was inadequate; secondly, that no provision was made for other sections of the blind; thirdly, that a precedent would be set by which other handicapped persons might claim the right to receive pensions. To avoid such criticisms Barstow advocated that only half the cost of each allowance up to a ceiling of ten shillings should be borne by the Government, the residual amount being met from the rates. ⁽¹⁶¹⁾ In contrast, A.F.Hurst considered that there was less danger of pressure for the extension of the allowances to persons afflicted with disabilities other than blindness if the cost was met by the taxpayer rather than the ratepayer. ⁽¹⁶²⁾

⁽¹⁶⁰⁾ Welfare of the Blind - Memorandum by the Minister of Health. 8.3.1920. Cab. 24/100/1726. P.R.O.

⁽¹⁶¹⁾ Payments to the Blind - Memo to the Chancellor of the Exchequer by Sir George Barstow. 10.3.1920. File T.1/12555/19804/1920 P.R.O.

⁽¹⁶²⁾ Payments to the Blind - Memo to the Chancellor of the Exchequer by A.F.Hurst. 10.3.1920. File T.1/12555/19804/1920 P.R.O.

One further difference between the provisions of Tillett's Bill and the scheme advanced in Addison's memorandum was the absence in the latter document of any new proposals for the technical training of the blind. This omission was due to two factors. In the first place, Addison concurred with the sanguine view of the Board of Education that there were already ample powers contained in the existing legislation to enable the local Education Authorities to do all that Tillett's Bill required.⁽¹⁵⁷⁾ Secondly, as stated in the previous chapter, one of the reasons for increasing grants in 1918 had been the hope that the additional payments would encourage L.E.A's to co-operate more actively in the provision of special education.^(a) In any event, the Board of Education had in preparation some new Regulations relating to the vocational training of the blind under which the Board would reimburse the Education Authorities to the extent of half the expenditure incurred on training blind students at approved courses.⁽¹⁶³⁾ The powers possessed by L.E.A's, however, were only permissive and there was ample evidence that in many areas little or nothing was being done to provide technical training. When Eichholz, the Acting Chief Medical Inspector at the Board of Education, was asked for his comments on Tillett's Bill he wrote, "There is no stimulus available for inducing the L.E.A's to do the proper thing by the blind adolescent and if it had to depend on the L.E.A's we should be in a bad way. In fact, if it were not for the Guardians and private effort the further education of the blind would be practically non-existent I should not be sorry to see L.E.A's under compulsion to give the blind adequate trade training and

(a) See Page 95

(163) Board of Education (Training of the Blind etc. Students Higher Education) Regulations 1920.

Mr. Tillett's Bill provides for this - on the right lines". (164)

Addison's memorandum came before the Cabinet on March 11th, when a resolution was passed to the effect that "The Cabinet authorised the Minister of Health, while rejecting the Bill of the Labour Party, to promise legislation broadly on the lines of his Memorandum". (165)

The following day Tillett's Bill received its second Reading. Although proposed and seconded by Labour Members, speeches in favour of the measure were made by members of all parties, the only opponent being Sir F. Banbury, the Member for the City of London. In the course of his own speech Addison spoke of the need to extend the existing knowledge regarding the causes and prevention of blindness and agreed that an enquiry should be set up to investigate the matter. After outlining the legislation that the Cabinet had agreed to approve Addison concluded - "I think the promoters of the Bill will see that the Government have given very careful consideration to this matter. We want to meet the difficulties with them in a friendly spirit and I therefore suggest that while the House gives this Bill a second reading I will consult those who are interested in this subject and either reform this Bill or introduce another to give effect to the proposals of the Government". (166)

On March 30th a meeting for the purpose of discussing the Government's proposals with regard to the blind in relation to Tillett's Bill was convened by Lord Astor. At this meeting Tillett was accompanied by two other Labour Members and Ben Purse. A number of points were raised including the omission of any reference to the technical education

(164) Eichholz to A.H.Wood. Board of Education Minute. February 20. 1920. on Board of Education File ED.31 193. P.R.O.

(165) Cabinet Minutes 14/20. March 11th 1920 on Cab/20/914.P.R.O.

(166) For the whole debate see Hansard March 12th 1920. Cols.1695-1742.

of the blind, the permissive nature of the Government proposals, local authority representation on the governing bodies of voluntary institutions and the amount of the allowances to be paid to the unemployable blind. In the latter case the difficulty was pointed out by saying that a blind man at 50 was more incapacitated from an economic standpoint than he would be at 70. It was also explained that the receipt of a pension of ten shillings did not preclude this amount being augmented by an equivalent amount from other sources, such as the Guardians, without diminution of his allowance. In this respect a blind person over 50 years of age was exactly on the same footing as an old age pensioner under the Old Age Pensions (Amendment) Act 1919. Finally, it was agreed that the Government proposals should be incorporated in a new Bill which would be introduced without delay. (167)

A request that instructions to Parliamentary Counsel for the drafting of the Bill was sent to the Treasury by the Ministry of Health on April 9th. (168) On April 26th the Bill "To Promote the Welfare of Blind Persons" had its First Reading. (169)

Meanwhile, on April 5th 1920, Easter Monday, a total of two hundred and fifty blind men assembled at Newport (Mon.), Manchester and Leeds for the purpose of marching on London in accordance with the resolution passed by the North Western District Council of the League earlier in the year. At the end of the first week the Newport and Manchester contingents joined forces at Birmingham and the Leeds marchers had reached Nottingham. Ten days after the start of their journey the two contingents, each headed by a band, marched by different routes into

(167) Memorandum of the Meeting between Astor and Tillett (undated) on File ED.31 193. P.R.O.

(168) E.H.Strohmeyer, Secretary, Ministry of Health to the Treasury 9.4.1920. on File T.1/12555/19804/1920. P.R.O.

(169) Hansard 26.4.1920. Col.859.

Leicester, where they united in the centre of the City. From Leicester the march continued until Watford was reached on Friday, April 23rd. At Watford the marchers were met by the Executive Council of the League. There is little doubt that the march had achieved the aim of arousing public interest in the blind far beyond the most sanguine hopes of its promoters. Meetings had been held in every centre where the marchers had halted. The progress of the march was reported in both local and national newspapers. Each morning telegrams had been sent to Downing Street giving particulars of the position, receptions received and similar information concerning the march.⁽¹⁷⁰⁾ On Sunday afternoon April 25th the march reached its climax when the survivors, numbering about 200 of those who had set out, headed a great procession of trade unionists who, with their banners, marched into Trafalgar Square where it was estimated that a crowd of over 10,000 had gathered. With the marchers ranged on the plinth of Nelson's Column, a number of speeches were made by persons prominent in the Labour Party, including Herbert Morrison, the then Secretary of the London Labour Party, who moved the following resolution, which was carried by acclamation.

"This mass meeting of the citizens of London deeply deplores the unsatisfactory social and industrial conditions of the blind and demands that the Government shall, without further delay, redeem its promises by providing the necessary financial arrangements with which to give effect to the proposals embodied in the Technical Education, Employment and Maintenance of the Blind Bill".⁽¹⁷¹⁾

The following Friday, a deputation from the League, led by Ben Purse and including two marchers from each of the three contingents, was

(170) Blind Advocate. June 1920. pp 11-12.

(171) "The Times", Monday, April 26th 1920.

introduced to the Prime Minister at 10, Downing Street, by Stephen Walsh. After describing the action taken by the League since 1902, for the purpose of securing legislation, Purse outlined the four main objections which the League had to the proposals contained in Addison's Bill. The first was that the proposals were permissive and not mandatory so that a reactionary local authority would be able to evade its responsibilities to the blind. Secondly, Purse contended that the whole cost of the training and maintenance during training of the adult blind should be borne jointly by the Treasury and the local authorities and that the blind "ought not to go cap in hand to a voluntary association asking for the means by which we can subsequently gain the equipment designed to transform us into useful citizens. Just as blindness is a national calamity, so we contend that the contingent responsibilities following in its train should be undertaken and fully discharged by the community". (172)

The third issue raised by Purse was that no cognizance was taken in the Government Bill that, with the existing system of payment on a piecework basis, blind persons employed in the workshops were unable to earn a living wage. Purse, therefore, suggested that a "compensation for blindness grant" should be made, presumably as a substitute for the practice of supplementing the actual earnings of the blind by augmentation payments.

Finally, Purse strongly attacked the inadequacy of the allowances which the Bill proposed to introduce for the incapable blind. "Think of it, Sir", he exclaimed, "10/- a week in these days to a person so handicapped, and you hope to bring the 5,000 blind persons out of the union workhouses because of this grant, and by reason of the fact that

(172) Cabinet - Position of the Blind. Statement of the case to be submitted to the Prime Minister on behalf of the National League of the Blind. C.P.1210 on File T.1/12555/19804/1920.P.R.O.

under the Old Age Pensions Amendment Act, Poor Law disabilities have been removed".

The reply of the Prime Minister was non-committal. On the one hand the Government was being pressed to reduce rates and taxes while on the other it was being pressed from many quarters to increase expenditure. He assured the deputation, however, that there was no lack of sympathy on the part of the Government towards the blind and that the representations made would receive full consideration.⁽¹⁶⁷⁾

Before withdrawing Purse mentioned two other matters. Firstly, that some of the marchers were likely to be victimised for absenting themselves from their work to take part in the march. Secondly, whether the Government would assist in the matter of granting facilities for the blind marchers to return to their homes. The Prime Minister replied that any victimisation was unthinkable and asked for any case to be brought to his attention. It was also agreed that free railway passes should be issued to the marchers.

At a meeting of the Executive Council of the League held on the same day the following resolution was passed:-

"Having interviewed the Prime Minister this morning in respect of the proposals contained in the Government Bill for the Welfare of the Blind, we deeply regret that Mr. Lloyd George was unable to make a more explicit statement. Such phrases as he employed do not lead us to anticipate that drastic changes are about to be made in the condition of the blind and such a circumstance is in itself wholly unsatisfactory. We are, therefore, dissatisfied with the attitude of the Government as expressed by the Prime Minister".⁽¹⁷⁰⁾

When the Blind Persons Bill was read for the second time on May 14th, Addison was warmly congratulated by members of all parties although there was a general feeling that some strengthening and extension of its provisions was needed if the measure was to effectively

benefit the blind. In addition to reiterating the objections raised by the deputation of the National League to the Prime Minister on April 30th members suggested that no minimum age for the receipt of a pension should be specified and deprecated the intention to make allowances conditional on a means test. (173)

Outside Parliament the main opposition to the Government's proposals had been that of the National League. With legislation imminent, however, the voluntary organisations recognized the importance of influencing both public opinion and the Government to ensure that any Blind Persons Act was more than an innocuous measure. On June 4th, a letter to "The Times" from Sir Arthur Pearson made public the views on Addison's Bill held by the Council of the National Institute for the Blind. Permissive legislation, the Council considered, would, in the overwhelming majority of cases, result in no active steps being taken by the local authorities. They also held that the amount of the allowance to blind persons over the age of 50 should be £1 per week and that on reaching 70 the old age pension payable to a blind person should be augmented to this figure. A similar grant, it was suggested, should also be given to blind persons below the age of 50 who were incapable of earning anything substantial towards their livelihood. Reference was made to the desirability of widening the scope of the Blind Persons Bill by the insertion of a clause under which the local institutions could be provided with funds sufficient to enable them to care for blind people who were not workshop employees. "It is surely unfair" wrote Pearson, "to insist that blind persons should be herded into workshops, regardless of their predilections as to locality and to the solace and help which they may obtain from relatives and friends

(173) For the Debate see Hansard. March 14th 1920. Cols. 968-996.

near whom they reside. Each responsible and properly conducted workshop throughout the Country should be placed in a position to care for the scattered blind in the neighbourhood of which it is the centre, training them for homework, supplying them, on the most moderate possible terms, with raw material and assisting them to market their goods". The letter ended by expressing the hope that when the Bill came before the House for its third reading it would do so in a form which would benefit blind people much more materially than as originally drafted. (174)

Under the Parliamentary procedure in force before 1938, any Bill, which entailed the expenditure of public money, had to be authorised by a financial resolution of the whole House before proceeding to its Committee stage. The money resolution in respect of the clause relating to pensions was first moved on June 10th but because of shortage of time discussion was deferred. In a short speech, however, the dissatisfaction of many members was voiced by the Conservative Unionist Member for Royton, Mr. Sugden, who appealed to the Treasury to extend the financial provisions to include all persons of any age who were afflicted by blindness and to increase the amount of the proposed pension. (175)

When the financial resolution came before the House for the second time on June 25th almost every speech was critical of the inadequacy of Addison's proposals and some members advocated that the motion should be rejected in the hope that such action would compel the Government to make more satisfactory financial provision for the blind. At this point, Baldwin, the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, intervened and advised that the House would be unwise to vote against the resolution since even if a motion to "report progress" was carried there would be

(174) "The Times" June 4th 1920.

(175) Hansard. June 10th 1920. Col. 763.

no prospect of the Government increasing the amount of pensions. In spite of this warning the House divided, the resolution being carried by 110 votes to 18.⁽¹⁷⁶⁾

In addition to pensions, there was, as stated earlier in this chapter, considerable disquiet over the absence of any reference in Addison's Bill to the technical education of the blind. On June 28th, Barker, the Principal Assistant Secretary of the Legal Department of the Board of Education, sent an internal memorandum to the Permanent Secretary, Amherst Selby-Bigge, stating that, from the temper of the House, it seemed fairly clear that it would be necessary to insert in the Blind Persons Bill some amendment making it compulsory to provide technical education for the blind and that unless some steps were taken in this direction the Standing Committee would probably insist on accepting Mr. Tillett's clause which was on the Order Paper.⁽¹⁷⁷⁾ This clause placed on local authorities the duty of providing technical education and maintenance for a period not exceeding five years to such blind persons, who, at the commencement of their training were over sixteen but under fifty years of age, and, in the opinion of either the Authority or the Board of Education, were capable of benefiting from instruction. In Barker's view, Tillett's clause was unacceptable on four grounds. Firstly, it imposed a duty on County and County Borough Councils to educate but not in their capacity as Education Authorities. Secondly, it was "far too particular" in the responsibilities it purported to prescribe. Thirdly, it was undesirable to confine the training by statute to five years and to rigid age limits. Finally, it was injudicious to place on the Board of Education the onus of determining whether a blind person was able to maintain himself. To

(176) Hansard. June 25th 1920. Cols. 2614-2615 and 2633-2634.

(177) Board of Education - Internal Memorandum June 28th 1920. on File ED.31 193. P.R.O.

obviate the acceptance of Tillet's proposal, Barker, in consultation with officials of the Ministry of Health, suggested that Addison should put down an amendment in Standing Committee in anticipation of Tillet's clause extending the provision in the Blind Persons Bill that "Nothing in this section shall affect the powers and duties of local Education Authorities under the Elementary Education (Blind and Deaf Children) Act 1893" by the addition of the words:-

"and the local Education Authorities in the exercise of their duty to contribute to the establishment of a national system of public education available for all persons capable of profiting thereby shall make or otherwise secure adequate and suitable provision for the technical education of blind persons in their area who are capable of receiving and being benefited by such education, [and any question whether a blind person is so capable shall be determined by the Board of Education]".

Barker considered that the last sentence, enclosed in brackets, should not be put down as part of the amendment but held in reserve in case it was pressed for. The objection to the insertion of the sentence being that the duty of adjudicating suitability for training would place a heavy burden on the Board's medical staff. The Permanent Secretary, however, did not agree with the inclusion of the words at all and with this view, Fisher, the President of the Board, concurred. (177)

The above amendment, with the omission of the words in brackets and the minor addition of the qualifying term "ordinarily resident" before "in their area", was moved by Addison at the meeting of Standing Committee 'A' held on July 21st and accepted. A further amendment moved by Addison substituting the mandatory wording of "It shall be the duty of every County and County Borough to make arrangements to the satisfaction of the Minister of Health for

promoting the welfare of blind persons" for the previous permissive expression of "It shall be lawful" was also adopted. In one or two minor particulars the section of the Bill dealing with charitable organisations was also strengthened.⁽¹⁷⁸⁾

Thereafter the progress of the Bill was rapid. It passed the Third Reading in the Commons on August 3rd without incident.⁽¹⁷⁹⁾ With the end of the Session approaching the measure was dealt with expeditiously in the Lords, the First, Second and Third Readings taking place on August 4th, 9th and 10th respectively.⁽¹⁸⁰⁾ On August 11th the Commons agreed to some minor Lord's Amendments, the most important being the extension of the period after the passing of the Act within which local authorities were required to make schemes for the welfare of the blind from six to twelve months. This amendment was moved because it had been urged by the County Councils Association that the preparatory work involved in making schemes could not be done in six months.⁽¹⁸¹⁾ On August 16th the Bill received the Royal Assent.⁽¹⁸²⁾

Thus, after eighteen years of strenuous effort the National League, through its allies in the Trade Union Movement and the Labour Party, with some assistance from the voluntary organisations, had succeeded in obtaining legislation for the welfare of the blind in post-school life. The Act, which was the foundation stone on which the subsequent structure of blind welfare was to be built, owed its being to "The untiring efforts of the blind rank and file, mostly,

(178) Proceedings of Standing Committee 'A' July 21st 1920. Commons Papers.

(179) Hansard. August 3rd 1920. Col. 2381-2382.

(180) Hansard (Lords) August 4th Col. 718. August 9th Cols.1094-1095
August 10th Cols.1166-1167.

(181) Hansard. August 11th 1920. Cols. 539-540.

(182) Hansard. August 16th 1920. Col. 678.

it has been said, desperately poor".⁽¹⁸³⁾ Yet, although the League had achieved a great victory it had not won the war. The implementation of the Act and the campaign for the further improvement of its provisions, forms the subject matter of the next chapter.

(183) "The Building of Blind Welfare" Editorial "The New Beacon"
June 15th 1940.

CHAPTER IV

"ASPECTS OF BLIND WELFARE 1920 - 1939"

The present chapter falls into three sections. The first section is concerned with the implementation of the provisions contained in the Blind Persons Act of 1920. This is followed by a consideration of some aspects of the work of the Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind between 1920 and 1939. The final section deals with the effect on blind welfare of the Local Government Act of 1929.

(1) The Implementation of the Blind Persons Act 1920

As was shown in the previous chapter this Act contained three main provisions relating to (a) pensions, (b) local authority responsibility for blind welfare and (c) the registration of agencies making public appeals for subscriptions on behalf of the blind.

(a) Pensions

The Blind Persons Act came into operation September 10th 1920. On August 31st a circular was addressed by the Ministry of Health to all local pension committees and sub-committees drawing attention to Section 1 of the Act which provided for the granting of pensions under the Old Age Pensions Acts to blind persons on their attaining the age of fifty. (1) Five days earlier the Ministry of Health had also circulated a Memorandum (2) specifying the conditions to be satisfied for the receipt of a pension. Before a pension could be granted a claimant had to prove five things, namely:-

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- (1) Ministry of Health Circular 126, August 31st 1920. "The Old Age Pensions Acts 1908 - 1919". "The Blind Persons Act 1920".
- (2) Ministry of Health Memorandum August 26th 1920. "Claims to Pensions".

- (1) that he or she was "so blind as to be unable to perform any work for which eyesight is essential"
- (2) the attainment of the age of fifty
- (3) British nationality for at least ten years prior to the claim
- (4) residence in the United Kingdom for at least twelve years subsequent to attaining the age of thirty
- (5) that the yearly income from other sources was not in excess of £49.17.6.

A person who fulfilled all the above requirements was, as in the case of old age pensions paid to sighted pensioners, entitled to a non-contributory pension at the undermentioned rates:-

(A) In the case of a claimant who was one of a married couple living in the same house:-

<u>Combined means of husband and wife</u>	<u>Weekly rate of pension</u>
Not in excess of £52.10.0. per year	10/-
In excess of £52.10.0. but not £63.10.0.	8/-
In excess of £63. 0.0. " " £73.10.0.	6/-
" " " £73.10.0. " " £84. 0.0.	4/-
" " " £84. 0.0. " " £94.10.0.	2/-
" " " £94.10.0. " " £99.15.0.	1/-
" " " £99.15.0.	No pension

(B) Other cases

Where the yearly means were not in excess of £26.5.0.	10/-
Where the yearly means exceeded £26.5.0. but not £31.10.0.	8/-
Where the yearly means exceeded £31.10.0. but not £36.15.0.	6/-
Where the yearly means exceeded £36.15.0. but not £42.0.0.	4/-
Where the yearly means exceeded £42.0.0. but not £47.5.0.	2/-
Where the yearly means exceeded £47.5.0. but not £49.17.6.	1/-
Where the yearly means exceeded £49.17.6.	No pension

A person wishing to claim a pension had first to obtain from a Post Office, the normal application form for an old age pension. On completion, the form was forwarded to the local Pension Officer who would then investigate the claim and submit it, with his comments, to

the local Pensions Committee who before making a decision, would usually interview the applicant. An unsuccessful claimant could, within seven days appeal to the Minister of Health against the rejection of his application by the local committee. While this procedure was prima-facie simple in practice, some difficulty seems to have been experienced particularly with regard to the degree of blindness that constituted eligibility for a pension. (2)

As indicated above, every claimant for a pension had to submit evidence that, because of his blindness, he was "unable to perform any work for which eyesight is essential". This definition was substantially the same as that contained in the Grant Regulations issued by the Ministry of Health in 1919 which specified that any person in respect of whom a grant was claimed should be "too blind to perform work for which eyesight is required". (3) A number of cases arose, however, in which a Pensions Committee had decided that a person was not blind for the purpose of a pension which had accordingly been refused while the registration authority had adjudicated the same individual to be blind and therefore entitled to domiciliary assistance. In other cases, the converse of these circumstances applied. The main cause of such an anomaly was that the local Pensions Officer acted under the instructions of the Customs and Excise who appear to have directed that, for the purpose of a pension, evidence of blindness might take the form of a certificate signed by the secretary and countersigned by a member of the management committee of a recognized voluntary association. Under these rules no provision was made by which a Pensions Officer could seek the advice of a qualified ophthalmologist. Circular 126, did in fact, lay down that the onus of determining whether a claimant satisfied the

(3) Ministry of Health Circular 7BD Grant Regulations, August 7th 1919, Para. 10.

statutory definition of blindness, was, in the first instance, the responsibility of the local Pension Committee and that "It was not considered necessary that professional assistance should be available at this stage but that in the event of an appeal to the Minister against a decision of the Committee the Minister will, whenever it is necessary, refer the case for investigation by a medical man".⁽¹⁾ In practice, the procedure on appeal was that the appellant was examined by one of the Regional Medical Officers of the Ministry of Health. Only in the very few cases in which an element of doubt remained was the case referred for a final decision to an ophthalmologist selected by the Minister. In any event it was not until 1926 that an explanatory circular regarding the definition of blindness contained in the Act was issued by the Ministry of Health.⁽⁴⁾ From the date of the operation of the Act to March 31st 1927 8,333 appeals in respect of pensions were made. Of these 4,288 were referred to Regional Medical Staff and 183 to ophthalmologists.⁽⁵⁾

Because of their inability to call for professional assistance in deciding whether or not the loss of vision constituted "blindness" for the purpose of the Act, pensions officers relied heavily on the certificates furnished by the voluntary societies. Some officers appear, in fact, to have interpreted the suggestion made by the Customs and Excise, that supporting evidence of blindness might be obtained from a voluntary agency, as constituting an essential requirement, and in some instances pensions were refused to applicants who were unable to produce such a certificate. Thus, a certain Mrs. Cluff, aged sixty eight, who had had both eyes removed was at first refused pension apparently on the ground that she had not attended a school or institution for the blind.⁽⁶⁾

(4) Ministry of Health Circular 681, March 29th 1926.

(5) Annual Report of the Ministry of Health 1927, P.55.

(6) Hansard, March 9th 1921. Col. 467.

TABLE 9

Number of blind persons in England and Wales
aged between 50 and 70 years of age in receipt
of old age pensions on account of blindness.

1921 - 1939 (Source:- Annual Reports of the
Ministry of Health 1921 - 1939)

<u>Date</u>	<u>No. of persons</u>	<u>Estimated Cost</u> £
March 31st 1921	7,826	
1922	9,107	
1923	9,921	
1924	10,625	
1925	12,024	
1926	13,663	
1927	14,563	
1928	16,264	
1929	17,516	437,900
1930	19,048	
1931	20,262	507,000
1932	21,057	525,000
1933	21,670	540,000
1934	22,195	553,000
1935	22,387	
1936	22,415	558,000
1937	22,572	575,000
1938	23,199	585,400
1939	27,564	695,000

- Notes:- (a) Where the estimated cost is not shown no figure was given in the Ministry of Health Report.
- (b) On April 1st 1938 the age at which a blind person's pension could be obtained was lowered from 50 to 40.

In 1931, the Committee on the Prevention of Blindness set up by the Union of Counties Associations of the Blind, proposed that the procedure of certifying blindness both for the purpose of entry in the blind person's register and the granting of old age pensions should be unified, and that no person should be eligible for a blind old age pension unless his or her name was also entered on the register of blind persons. (7) This recommendation was adopted in 1934 as a result of an agreement between the Ministry of Health and the Commissioners of Customs and Excise which provided that the Pension Officer, before reporting on a claim for a pension on account of blindness, should send a form of inquiry to the appropriate local authority. It was further agreed that if, after replying to the Pension Officer's enquiry the local authority should subsequently reverse its decision as to registration the Pension Officer would be notified. (8)

As shown later in this chapter although the number of young persons afflicted by blindness declined as preventative measures became effective, greater efficiency in registration led to a steady increase in the pensions paid to persons aged between 50 and 70. The number of persons in the 50 - 70 age group who were in receipt of a pension on account of blindness at the end of each successive year from the passing of the Blind Persons Act to 1939 is shown in Table 9. On March 31st 1936 there were 26,455 registered blind persons between the ages of 50 and 70 of whom 22,415 or 84.7% were in receipt of pensions. The remainder were presumed not to be qualified for pension by reason of means in excess of the statutory limit or on other grounds. (9) Section 1 of the Blind

(7) Union of Counties Associations for the Blind - Report on the Certification of Blindness and the Ascertainment of the Causes of Blindness, 1931. P.5.

(8) Ministry of Health Circular 1430, September 10th, 1934.

(9) Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind. Twelfth Annual Report, 1934-1937. P.5.

Persons Act was repealed and its provisions re-enacted in the Old Age Pensions Act 1936. (9a)

(b) Schemes

Section 2 of the Blind Persons Act required each local authority to prepare and submit to the Minister of Health a scheme for the promotion of the welfare of blind persons ordinarily resident within its area. On September 25th 1920, a Circular (10) was issued drawing the attention of county and county borough councils to the provisions of the Act with particular reference to the responsibilities of authorities under Section 2. The Circular expressed the hope that, as soon as possible, local authorities would make use of their optional powers to appoint special committees concerned with the welfare of the blind. The Circular also stated that the Minister would be prepared to pay a grant towards approved capital outlay incurred by a council in the provision of new accommodation or equipment either directly or by way of a capital contribution to a voluntary agency. Such a grant would take the form of a proportion of the loan charges not exceeding 50%, except where the expenditure was met from revenue, in which case the grant, unless otherwise agreed, would be an annual contribution equivalent to 50% of the loan charges that would have had to be paid if the capital expenditure had been met by loan. The Circular ended with an appeal for co-operation from the local authorities:- "Dr. Addison feels sure that the new duties imposed by the Act will be undertaken in a spirit of warm sympathy and that the local authorities under the Act will cordially co-operate with him and with the voluntary agencies in the development of assistance to the blind. The services

(9a) 26 Geo. 5 and 1 Edward 8.C.31.

(10) Ministry of Health Circular 133 September 25th 1920 "Blind Persons Act 1920".

of his officers including the two Inspectors who assist the Minister in the administration of the present grant in aid of the blind, will be readily placed at the disposal of the council".⁽¹⁰⁾

The Circular was accompanied by a Memorandum giving guidance to local authorities in the preparation of their schemes. The Memorandum specified three desirable preliminary steps to the detailed preparation of a scheme. Firstly, the appointment of a Committee which would, in consultation with the appropriate voluntary agencies, ascertain the number classification, condition and needs of known blind persons and what was already being done for them. Secondly, a county or county borough council had to decide whether to inaugurate a directly provided local authority service for the blind or to discharge its responsibilities by means of an agency agreement with one or more voluntary organisations. Thirdly, "in the interests of efficiency and economy", authorities were urged to formulate joint schemes for certain aspects of the work.

The Memorandum stated that a comprehensive scheme for the welfare of the blind should include the following:- (a) Registration; (b) children under school age; (c) education and training of (1) children (11) young persons and adults; (d) employment (1) in workshops, (11) by means of Home Worker's Schemes; (e) augmentation of wages; (f) hostels for blind workers; (g) homes; (h) home teaching; (1) assistance to unemployable blind persons living in their own homes.⁽¹¹⁾

Although the Act made it mandatory for authorities to submit their schemes within twelve months, some councils were dilatory in preparing their proposals. As at October 13th 1921, just over thirteen months after the Act became operative the position was as shown:-

(11) Memorandum 27.B.D.

Schemes submitted	72
Schemes in preparation	41
Schemes outstanding	<u>32</u>
Total	<u>145</u>

Of the schemes submitted, nine had been held to be unsatisfactory and the Minister had deferred approval pending modifications or further information.⁽¹²⁾ By 1923 schemes had been submitted by 136 authorities⁽¹³⁾ but it was not until the following year that every county or county borough council had had its scheme approved by the Minister of Health⁽¹⁴⁾ schemes differed widely in the thoroughness of their preparation and the extent of their proposals. Some idea of these differences can be obtained from a comparison of the schemes prepared by two Lancashire county borough councils namely, Bolton and Warrington which are given in Appendix 1. The considerably more detailed and imaginative proposals submitted by Bolton as compared with those made by Warrington substantiates the observation made in the Report of the Advisory Committee for the Welfare of the Blind for 1926-27 that in those areas where "a virile voluntary agency for the blind was in existence prior to the passing of the Blind Persons Act" the local authorities had "generally made a better and speedier provision for the blind man ^{than} elsewhere".⁽¹⁵⁾

(12) Memorandum to Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind "Progress of Schemes of Local Authorities" October 13th 1920", on file ED.50.88 P.R.O.

(13) Annual Report of the Ministry of Health - 1923. P.18.

(14) Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind Fifth Annual Report 1923-24, P.4.

(15) Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind Seventh Annual Report 1926-27. P.4.

As a general rule schemes proposed that local authorities should make the fullest use of existing voluntary agencies for the blind and contribute, where necessary, to the cost of their services. In return representatives of the local authority were usually given places on the management committees of the voluntary organisations. (16)

Although the Ministry of Health was anxious that the administration of schemes should be vested in "special committees", this recommendation was disregarded by the majority of authorities who delegated their responsibilities to an existing body such as the Public Health Committee. This failure on the part of many councils to appoint a committee specifically responsible for the welfare of the blind was viewed by the Advisory Committee with some concern on two grounds. Firstly, that the problem of the blind might not receive the detailed attention merited if it was dealt with by a committee primarily concerned with other matters. Secondly, that in the absence of such a committee, it was difficult to give representation to bodies such as local education committees, boards of guardians or voluntary agencies who were particularly interested in the welfare of the blind. (16)

Even when schemes had been submitted and approved there was sometimes procrastination in implementing their provisions and in 1923 the Advisory Committee mildly censured local authorities in the North Eastern area for the delay in putting their schemes into effect. This delay, the Advisory Committee observed, was not only causing discouragement to the voluntary agencies in the area but also hardship to the blind themselves in comparison with their contemporaries in other parts of the country. (17) To some degree all local authorities were

(16) Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind Sixth Annual Report 1924-1926, P.4.

(17) Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind Fourth Annual Report 1923, P.4.

inhibited in developing their schemes by the issue in February, 1921 of Circular 182 which impressed on councils the necessity for economy in local expenditure. The Circular specifically dealt with the welfare of the blind and advised authorities to continue with the submission of schemes within the period laid down by the Act. Such schemes would be considered by the Minister of Health in the light of the national financial situation but it was stated that the Minister would "find it very difficult" to sanction expenditure by local authorities on new buildings. "Much can be done" advised the Circular "by the proper utilisation of existing facilities and buildings and every inducement should be given to the continuance of voluntary effort".⁽¹⁸⁾ As late as 1929 the Advisory Committee was commenting on "the variable rate of advance" among councils and expressing the hope that in the areas where progress was unsatisfactory the responsible local authorities would "make a careful study" of the provision made for the blind in the more advanced areas and consider whether it would not be possible to follow more closely their methods of organisation and treatment.⁽¹⁹⁾ It was also noted that the areas where progress was slow coincided with those in which voluntary organisation was weak and ineffective.⁽¹⁹⁾

(c) Registration and Certification of Blind Persons

The Ministry of Health recognized that a necessary part of the machinery for carrying out local authority schemes was a "proper system of registration of blind persons". Although statistical information regarding the incidence of both blindness and deafness had been available in the Census Reports issued between 1851 and 1911 it was widely acknowledged that little reliance could be placed on the accuracy of the returns.

(18) Ministry of Health Circular 182, February, 1921.

(19) Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind Eighth Annual Report 1928-29, P.P.4,5.

In any event as Sorsby ⁽²⁰⁾ has pointed out, the definition of blindness for the purpose of the census was "total blindness" which to the lay mind probably meant no perception of light or perception of light only. As has been shown earlier in this study, ^(a) both the Royal Commission on the Blind Deaf and Dumb of 1889 and the Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind of 1917 emphasised the importance of more accurate statistical information than that provided by the Census Reports. The need for a central register had also been frequently voiced at conferences held by voluntary workers for the blind, and was eventually secured in 1919 when the Ministry of Health established a Central Register of Blind Persons. This register was discontinued by the Ministry in 1921 since it was considered that, although it had been of value in estimating the general requirements of the blind from a legislative point of view its main purpose had been served with the passing of the Blind Persons Act of 1920. ⁽²¹⁾ From 1921 therefore the Central Register was kept by the Seven County Associations for the Blind as agents of the Ministry. ⁽²²⁾

In 1922, local authorities were reminded that "an essential part of the arrangements made in connection with schemes under Section 2 (of the Blind Persons Act) will be the maintenance of adequate records of the blind persons ordinarily resident in the area of the authority". ⁽²³⁾ While the Circular did not prescribe the exact form

(20) Sorsby "The Causes of Blindness in England and Wales" Medical Research Council Memorandum No.24, 1950, p.21.

(a) See pages 63-64 and 143

(21) Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind Third Annual Report, 1921-1922, p.14.

(22) M.A. Henham-Barrow - Social Welfare for the Blind in Trends in Social Welfare. Ed. Farndale, Pergamon Press, 1965.

(23) Ministry of Health Circular 294. Blind Persons Act 1920, 31st March, 1922.

of such records it required them to be kept in such a way as to enable authorities to make periodical returns regarding

"The number of blind in the district of each sex and of the ages 0-5, 5-16, 16-21, 21-30, and thereafter for each period of 10 years up to 70; the number under school age, the number of children of school age at school and not at school, the number of blind persons under training, the number of blind persons in employment and occupations (scheduling the occupation) the number in each category of deaf, mentally defective or physically defective blind together with particulars of the age incidence of blindness".⁽²³⁾

To enable the above information to be easily provided the Ministry suggested that local authority records should contain the following minimum details:-

Name.
 Address.
 Age.
 Date of birth.
 Sex.
 Married, single, widower or widow,
 Number of children or other persons dependent.
 Age at which blindness occurred.
 Degree of blindness (total or partial).
 Causes of blindness.
 School or Institution for the Blind at which trained or being trained.
 Occupation for which trained or being trained.
 Date of leaving School or Institution.
 Present occupation.
 Occupation before blindness.
 Amount and source of weekly income or earnings.
 Physical or mental disabilities.⁽²³⁾

The Circular further stated that, although the responsibility for the compilation and maintenance of the above records was that of the local authority, it was not anticipated that in all cases they would carry out the actual registration directly, and the Ministry suggested that it might be more convenient to delegate the work to the local voluntary agencies for the blind particularly since such agencies already had fairly complete records of blind persons coming within the scope of their activities.⁽²³⁾

Although the Circular drew attention to the definition of blindness laid down in the Blind Persons Act, namely, "So blind as to be

unable to perform any work for which eyesight is essential", the Ministry did not specify any procedure or test for determining conformity with the definition other than the general direction that in forming an opinion on any particular case, "the criteria adopted should be purely objective without regard either to the occupation previously followed or to the possibility of the person being able to follow some special occupation, after suitable training or assistance had been afforded to him."⁽²³⁾ Reference has already been made in this chapter to the anomalies which had sometimes arisen between applicants for pensions and for domiciliary help, as a result of the different interpretations of the definition of blindness made by local pensions officers and the registration officers of the local authorities who were usually officials of voluntary organisations. Further difficulties also arose because the definition of blindness contained in the Education Act 1921, namely, "too blind to be able to read the ordinary school books used by children" was wider than that contained in the Blind Persons Act. In consequence, some persons who had been considered "blind" for the purpose of education were not subsequently considered to have a sufficient loss of vision to enable them to be registered under the Blind Persons Act. In some instances students who had been admitted to courses of instruction for occupations suitable for the blind had discovered that at the end of their training they had too much vision to enable the Minister to regard them as eligible for employment as blind persons.

In 1926, following consultations with the Board of Education, the Ministry of Health issued Circular 681 with the object of clarifying certain difficulties in the interpretation of the definition of blindness and improving co-ordination between the agencies responsible for the education and training of the blind and those concerned with employment. This Circular stated that, in interpreting the

definition of blindness contained in the Blind Persons Act, the Minister had followed the recommendations contained in a Report issued in 1915 by the ophthalmological section of the Royal Society of Medicine. This Report had not only suggested the definition of blindness contained in the Act but had also indicated a standard of interpretation to the effect that persons whose acuity of vision was below one-twentieth of the normal (3/60 Snellen), were usually unable to perform work requiring eyesight, while persons with vision better than one-tenth (6/60 Snellen), were usually able to perform some such work. Intermediate cases were indeterminate, capacity for work depending on such factors as the intelligence and bodily strength of the individual and the nature of the blindness. The practice of the Minister was accordingly not to regard as blind persons applicants whose visual acuity was greater than 6/60ths (Snellen) unless the defect of eyesight included special conditions. The Circular directed that the above considerations should be taken into account by everyone responsible for certifying persons as blind and that all applications to the Minister for the approval of new entrants to a grant aided service for the blind should be "accompanied by medical certificates indicating the degree of visual acuity in each eye of the new entrant and the nature of the visual defects present".⁽²⁴⁾

Notwithstanding the explicit wording of Circular 681 the directions contained therein appear to have been frequently misconstrued as meaning that the decision as to whether a particular applicant should be entered on the register or otherwise was to be based only on his level of visual acuity. To correct this impression a further Circular was issued in 1927 emphasising that the degree of visual acuity should not be regarded as the sole determining factor but that due

(24) Ministry of Health, Circular 681, March 29th 1926.

consideration should be given to all the visual conditions. In particular, the test to be applied was not whether a person was unable to follow his ordinary occupation or any particular occupation, but whether he was "too blind to perform work for which eyesight was essential". The Circular was also accompanied by a form of certificate to be completed by a medical practitioner when adjudicating on the eligibility of an applicant for entry in the register of blind persons. (25)

There was, however, no legal obligation for an allegedly blind person to be examined by a medical practitioner prior to entry on the register. As late as 1931 the Standing Committee on the Prevention of Blindness appointed by the Union of Counties Associations for the Blind reported that it was not unknown for a person to be entered on the register without any medical evidence at all. (26) There was also the fact that such benefits as pensions, domiciliary allowances, dog licences and wireless licences provided a considerable inducement for persons with eye defects to accentuate their disability with a view to securing registration and thereby obtaining the financial advantages available to a person certified as "blind". To obviate such malingering the Ministry of Health further advanced from the position that certification by a medical practitioner was necessary to the view that such certification should be undertaken by a skilled ophthalmologist. This view was conveyed to local authorities by Circular 1086 issued in 1930 which suggested that county and county borough councils should consider the desirability of making arrangements whereby before being entered on the register of blind persons

(25) Ministry of Health, Circular 780, April 27th 1927.

(26) Union of Counties Associations for the Blind. Report on the Certification of Blindness and Ascertainment of the Causes of Blindness, 1931, P.3

the applicant should be required to undergo an examination by a medical practitioner with special experience in ophthalmology. "It appears to the Minister", the Circular continued, "that the necessary expenditure for this purpose would be clearly justified by the consequent avoidance of registration of persons who are not blind within the meaning of the Blind Persons Act and the saving of expenditure which might otherwise have been incurred in respect of such persons".⁽²⁷⁾ In the same year the Minister of Health asked local authorities to include a clause in their schemes under Section 2 of the Blind Persons Act to the effect that no persons name should be added to the register of blind persons until he had been examined and certified by a medical practitioner with special experience in ophthalmology.⁽²⁸⁾ By 1937 this clause had been included in the schemes of 133 local authorities and 7 of the remaining 13 did in fact require such an examination.⁽²⁹⁾

Meanwhile, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, the Report of the Prevention of Blindness Committee on the Certification of Blindness had been issued in December, 1931. This Report stated that the main objects to be aimed at with regard to certification were threefold:-

(a) That no one should be registered as blind until he had been examined and certified to be blind by a medical practitioner with special experience in ophthalmology. For this purpose the words "medical practitioner with special experience in ophthalmology" were defined as meaning -

(27) Ministry of Health Circular 1086, March 21st 1930.

(28) Annual Report of the Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind, 1931-32. P.13.

(29) Annual Report as 28 above for 1934-37. P.18.

"a medical practitioner who devotes his or her whole time to the practice of ophthalmology in all its branches or who is in charge of the Ophthalmic Department of a General Hospital of not less than 100 beds; failing such practitioner, one who holds a Diploma in ophthalmology from a University, The Royal Colleges of Surgeons of England and of Physicians of London, or other examining body recognized by the General Medical Council".

- (b) That no certifying ophthalmic surgeon should be appointed unless approved by the Minister of Health or the Board of Education in cases coming respectively under their jurisdiction,
- (c) That in all certification a common form of certificate should be used. In this regard the Report recommended the adoption of a form of certificate which had been developed at the Glasgow clinic, the essential point of which was that it made a distinction between (a) the ascertained condition of each eye and (b) the cause of such condition. In the opinion of the Committee it was the failure to make such a distinction which had led to some confusion in defining the causes of blindness. (30)

The above recommendations were conveyed to local authorities and voluntary associations by Circular 1353 issued by the Ministry of Health in 1933. The most important recommendation contained in the Circular was that the form of certificate approved by the Prevention of Blindness Committee should be generally adopted throughout England and Wales. The form, (B.D.8), had a twofold purpose. While its primary function was the certification of the individual, it was also designed to record particulars which would ultimately be of scientific value in the prevention of blindness. (a)

For the latter purpose, the Ministry of Health and the Board of

(30) As 26 above P.10.

(a) Circular 4/55 "Certification of Blindness and Partial Sight" issued on March 2nd 1955 carried the requirement further by directing that all applicants for registration should be examined by an "ophthalmologist" of consultant status".

TABLE 10

DISTRIBUTION OF THE BLIND IN ENGLAND AND WALES ACCORDING TO AGE, PERIODS 1919-1938

Sources: 1919-1932 - Reports of Advisory Committee on Welfare of the Blind
1936-1938 - Ministry of Health Reports

Year	Total No. of Blind	0-5	5-16	16-21	21-30	30-40	40-50	50-60	60-70	70-	Unknown
1919	25,840										
1920	30,708										
1923	34,894	231	2,723	1,567	2,896	3,720	4,339	5,592	6,805	8,026	619
1925	36,518	257	2,720	1,682	3,101	4,267	4,832	6,634	8,414	9,865	368
1927	42,140	258	2,554	1,670	3,162	4,474	5,331	7,495	9,737	11,958	183
1929	46,822	258	2,438	1,623	3,288	4,716	5,897	8,568	11,581	14,304	54
1932	52,727	225	2,066	1,588	3,414	4,930	6,564	10,021	14,292	18,914	65
1932	62,079										
Year	Total No. of Blind	0-5	5-16	16-40	40-50	50-					
1936	67,534	206	1,855	9,537	6,983	48,953					
1937	69,378	196	1,728	9,534	7,263	50,657					
1938	71,875	195	1,676	9,287	7,278	53,439					

Note:-- The last published Report of the Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind was issued in 1937. This contained a table with amended class intervals as below:--

Year	Total	0-1	1-5	5-16	16-21	21-40	40-50	50-65	65-70	70-	Unknown
1936	67,534	10	196	1,855	1,391	8,146	6,983	17,841	8,614	22,369	129

Education directed that a duplicate of the form should be sent by the local authority to the Prevention of Blindness Committee which had established a sub-committee for the purpose of examining and classifying the information obtained from the certificates and tabulating the statistics for the use of local authorities.⁽³¹⁾ The arrangements for registration set out in Circulars 64/BD and 1353 therefore established sound procedures for ascertaining the incidence of blindness, obviating abuse of the services administered under the Blind Persons Act and contributing to the prevention of the disability by obtaining at the time of certification, all available information relative to its causes.^(a) Standards for the illumination of test cards for use in connection with the certification of persons under the Blind Persons Act 1920 were prescribed by Circular 1520 issued by the Ministry of Health in 1936.⁽³²⁾

The statistics of registered blind persons according to age periods from 1919-1938 are shown in Table 10. In interpreting the data it is necessary to remember that as registration as a blind person was voluntary, no conclusions can be drawn regarding the actual incidence of blindness. There is also the fact that every increase in benefits tended to be accompanied by an increase in registration. The decrease in the figures in respect of children and adolescents reflect the measures taken during the period under review for the prevention of infantile blindness and the preservation of the sight of school children. In 1938 the increase in the numbers of elderly blind persons may be attributed to the severance

(31) Ministry of Health Circular 1353. October 5th 1933.

(a) For a discussion of some of the weaknesses of Form B.D.8 see Sorsby as Ref. 20, pp. 5 & 6.

(32) Ministry of Health Circular 1520, Certification of Blindness Standard Illumination of Test Types. January 21st 1936.

of assistance from poor relief and the increased benefits under the Blind Persons Act of that year. Overall, the continuous increase in the number of registered blind persons may be ascribed to more complete and efficient registration rather than any increase in the actual incidence of blindness. When compared with the optimistic statement made by Addison in 1919 that a complete register of practically every blind person in the country "amounted to 30,000 names"⁽³³⁾ the growth in the numbers registered indicate that there must have been a very considerable amount of submerged blindness unknown to either educational or welfare authorities whether statutory or voluntary. Since the rises in incidence applied particularly in the older age groups the task of preventing and ameliorating blindness was far greater in the case of the blinded rather than with the born blind. Overall the figures exemplify the importance of accurate statistics in identifying and catering for any social problem.

(d) Registration of Charities

Section 3 of the Act provided that, subject to certain minor modifications, the War Charities Act of 1916⁽³⁴⁾ should apply to charities for the blind "as if it were herein re-enacted and in terms made applicable to such charities". The term "charity for the blind" was defined as "any fund, institution or association (whether established before or after the commencement of this Act) having or professing to have for its object or for one of its objects the provision of assistance in any form to blind persons or any other charitable purpose relating to blind persons".⁽³⁵⁾ Where such objects

(33) Grants in Aid of the Blind. Memorandum by the President of the Local Government Board on Cab. 24/80. P.R.O.

(34) 6 - 7 Geo. 5. C.43.

(35) 10 - 11 Geo. 5. C.49 - The Blind Persons Act, Section 3.

were only subsidiary to the principal purposes of the charity, however, it was not to be regarded as a "Charity for the Blind". The effect of the section was to place charities for the blind in the same position as War Charities with regard to such matters as registration, management and public supervision. In England and Wales the duties and powers of control with regard to Charities for the Blind were entrusted at the control level to the Charity Commissioners and locally to "registration authorities" namely the county and county borough councils.⁽³⁶⁾

The most important consequence of Section 3 of the Act was that as from September 10th 1920 it became unlawful for any appeal to be made to the public for donations or subscriptions either in money or in kind for any Charity for the Blind or to promote efforts such as bazaars, sales, entertainments or exhibitions for the benefit of such charities unless the charity was registered under the Act and the Committee of the Charity had given its consent in writing to such an appeal or effort. Regulations relating to the criteria and procedure for registration as a charity for the blind and the control of appeals and other efforts having as their objects the raising of money for the purpose of the charity were issued by the Charity Commissioners with the approval of the Minister of Health on September 10th 1920.⁽³⁷⁾ By December 31st 1920 88 charities had been registered by the Charity Commissioners, one had been exempted from registration and in a further instance registration had been refused. In five cases the Commissioners had adjudicated as to whether the charitable organisations concerned were "charities for the blind" within the meaning of the Act.⁽³⁸⁾ In addition, some forty-three

(36) The Charity Commissioners Sixty Eighth Annual Report 1921, P.8.

(37) S.R.& O. 1920. No.1696. The Charities for the Blind Regulations.

(38) As above, P.10.

-charities connected with blindness had been previously registered under the War Charities Act. Four of these were directly connected with St. Dunstan's; while a number of others, such as the Stowe-by-Chartley Soldiers' Comforts Fund, were mainly concerned with raising funds in aid of St. Dunstan's. (39)

In April 1925 the Secretary of State for the Home Department appointed a Committee "To consider and report whether any form of supervision is desirable over collecting charities (that is to say, charities which seek financial support from the public) and if so to make recommendations in the matter". (40) The Committee reported in 1927 and stated that the aggregate number of charities dealt with under the two Acts up to September 1926 were as follows. (41)

	<u>War Charities</u>	<u>Charities for the Blind</u>
Charities registered	11,950	252
Charities refused registration	52	7
Charities removed from register	93	1

The corresponding figures for the County of London alone were:-

	<u>War Charities</u>	<u>Charities for the Blind</u>
Charities registered	927	39
Charities refused registration	26	7
Charities removed from registration	58	1

In his evidence to the Committee, MacGregor, the Head of the Blind

(39) Charity Commission:- Blind Persons Act 1920 - Charities for the Blind, H.M.S.O. 1921.

(40) Report of the Home Office Departmental Committee on the Supervision of Charities Cmd. 2823 1927. Par. 2 P.5.

(41) As 38 above. Par. 42. P.14.

Department at the Ministry of Health, declared that to his knowledge the Act had prevented the registration of two bogus charities and that in fact, it was the notoriety attaching to one of these bodies that was primarily responsible for the inclusion of the registration provisions in the Blind Persons Act.^(a) In another case, which consisted of a dividing out organisation run by a number of blind men for their own benefit registration had been revoked. In Macgregor's view there was no evidence that registration had resulted in any appreciable reduction in the costs of collecting money for charitable purposes or that the legislation had proved burdensome to the charities for the blind. He was not able to give a definite opinion as to whether the registration provisions had resulted in an increased efficiency of administration.⁽⁴²⁾

At least two weaknesses were present in both the War Charities and the Blind Persons Acts in relation to their requirements. In the first place there was considerable variation at the local level in the administration of the Acts. Thus, in the statistics given above, while the proportion of charities for the blind registered in London compared with those registered throughout the rest of England and Wales was only 15%, the charities refused registration or subsequently removed from the register were all in the area of the London County Council. As the Committee observed with regard to the War Charities Act, "while on the one hand certain of the larger counties and boroughs carried out their duties with care, numbers of authorities, and these not always the least important, quickly allowed the Act to

(a) A note on this matter occurs in the First Annual Report of the Advisory Committee for 1918-1919. p.3.

(42) Minutes of evidence taken before the Home Office Departmental Committee on the Supervision of Charities, 1927. pp.78-81.

become a dead letter". (43)

The second weakness derived from the fact that the War Charities Act and the Blind Persons Act were the only measures which imposed registration requirements on collecting charities. Even if registration was refused or revoked, therefore, there was nothing to prevent the promoters of a bogus charity for the blind from transferring their activities to other classes of civilian disabled such as the limbless, in respect of whom no registration requirements applied. Two cases cited to the Home Office Departmental Committee exemplified how easily the registration requirements could be circumvented:-

- (a) "B.C. had organised collections for two blind societies, neither of which had any actual existence, though one of them had been officially registered as a "Friendly Society". He was convicted and fined £10. Three months later he pleaded guilty to a similar charge at the sessions and was sentenced to six months imprisonment with hard labour. The evidence showed that the collectors were paid 50% of their takings while the principal took £1 a week as salary in addition to another 25 per cent of the money collected and there were other deductions. The passing of the Blind Persons Act in 1920, with its provision that blind charities must be registered interrupted B.C.'s career. But he is busy again today begging for shadowy charities for the sighted where no registration is required. The case is well known to the police. (44)
- (b) C.D. who was formerly employed by B.C. in connection with several of his charities for the blind, started one on his own account. It failed to obtain registration, and the balance at the bank was estreated by the Charity Commissioners under the powers conferred upon them by the Blind Persons Act. Thereupon C.D. converted his office and staff into a Branch of a Society and Institute which was registered as a War Charity by an extra Metropolitan Urban District Council. This charity in its turn was removed from the Register. C.D. then started a Blind Relief Society registering it as a Benevolent Society under the Friendly Societies Act. As soon as the fact was brought to the notice of the authorities they took action and the society came to an end. It has been succeeded by another society which is outside the scope of the registration authorities". (44)

(43) As 38 above, Par. 43. P.14.

(44) As 40 above, Par. 14. P.4.

Notwithstanding the above and other examples, the Committee, while recognizing the existence of attempts to make illicit gains from fraudulent charities, concluded that the extent and degree of dishonest practices were "relatively far too limited to warrant Parliament requiring public authorities to undertake a burdensome supervision, which in the great majority of cases would be entirely unnecessary".⁽⁴⁵⁾ It did, however, recommend the institution of a system of licensing for door to door collections, collections in public places, of entertainment and public houses, and boxes in shops and public houses.⁽⁴⁶⁾ Bills, having as their object the control of house to house collections, were introduced in the Commons in 1929⁽⁴⁷⁾ and the Lords in 1938⁽⁴⁸⁾ but it was not until after the preparation of a further Report by a Joint Committee of the House of Lords and House of Commons⁽⁴⁹⁾ that the House to House Collections Act was finally passed in 1939⁽⁵⁰⁾ which imposed licencing requirements on the promoters and collectors involved in such appeals. By Section 3 of the Act certain national charities such as the R.N.I.B. were exempted from this requirement providing the Secretary of State had made an order to that effect.

The War Charities Act of 1916 and Section 3 of the Blind Persons Act were repealed respectively by the War Charities Act of 1940⁽⁵¹⁾ and the National Assistance Act of 1948.⁽⁵⁰⁾ Section 41 of the latter

(45) As 38 above. Par. 97. P.32.

(46) As 38 above. Par. 132. P.43.

(47) See Hansard, July 25th 1929. Col.1496 and October 29th 1929 Cols. 143-51.

(48) See Hansard (Lords) Feb. 15th 1938. Col.645.

(49) Report by the Joint Committee of the House of Lords and of the House of Commons on the Collecting Charities Regulations Bill (H.L.) 1938.

(50) 2 - 3 Geo. 6, C 44. War Charities Act 1939.

(51) Eichholz Report. p.178

Act related to all charities having as their "sole or principal object the promotion of the welfare of persons to whom Section 29 of the same Act applied", "namely, not only the blind but the deaf or dumb and other persons who are "substantially and permanently handicapped by illness, infirmity or congenital deformity or such other disabilities as may be prescribed by the Minister". (52)

The Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind

Between December 1917 and 1939, when its activities were curtailed by the outbreak of war, the most important influence in blind welfare was the Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind. The changing composition of the Committee, the members of which were appointed for triennial terms, does in fact reflect the gradual shift in responsibility for the welfare of blind persons as well as providing a background to some events concerning two organisations of the blind.

As shown in the previous chapter^(a) the first Advisory Committee consisted of fourteen members in addition to the chairman. At least twelve of the members were associated in some way with voluntary schools and institutions. During the year 1919, the most significant change was that two of the members, Priestley and Thurman, resigned from the Committee on being appointed inspectors of blind welfare. (53) The period of office of the first Committee expired in December 1920 and in April of the following year the Committee was reconstituted in view of the passing of the Blind Persons Act so as to give representation to the local authorities and boards of guardians as well as to voluntary agencies for the blind. In addition to the chairman and vice-chairman there were seventeen members of whom 4 represented the County Councils

(52) Eichholz Report. p.176

(a) See page 163.

(53) Second Annual Report of the Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind. 1919-1920. P.15.

Association, 1, the London County Council, 4, the Association of Municipal Corporations, 3, the Association of Poor Law Unions, and 5, Voluntary Agencies for the Blind.⁽⁵⁴⁾ Although Ben Purse had been a member of the first committee he was not re-appointed, nor was any representative of the National League of the Blind. In response to several Parliamentary questions on this matter the reason given for this omission was the refusal of the League to register as a charity as required by Section 3 of the Blind Persons Act.⁽⁵⁵⁾ This refusal was, in fact, to have more far reaching consequences. In June 1922 two members of the Camberwell Branch of the League, Barber and Dale, had been observed in the Old Kent Road each with a collecting box inscribed "National League of the Blind, Home Counties Council, to secure Social Justice for the Blind". When challenged by a police officer on the ground that the League was not registered as required by the Blind Persons Act and therefore not entitled to solicit money from members of the public, Barber had replied that "the Society considered that it was not liable to registration under the War Charities and Blind Persons Acts as it was a Trade Union". The Charity Commissioners, however, decided that the League was a charity and as such required to be registered under the relevant Act. As the War Charities Act provided that any question as to whether a particular "fund, institution or association" constituted a charity should be finally decided by the Charity Commissioners, the magistrate fined each of the defendants the nominal sum of 2/6 in addition to which Barber was

(54) Third Annual Report as above, 1921-1922. P.2.

(55) See Hansard, March 8th 1922. Col. 1312 & 1313 and February 21st 1923, Col. 1079.

required to pay three guineas by way of costs.⁽⁵⁶⁾ This verdict was upheld on appeal to the High Court and the legal principle was thus established that, an organisation which is a charity, and is certified to be such by the Charity Commissioners, is not absolved from the requirement of registration by reason of the fact that it is also a registered trade union.⁽⁵⁷⁾

Although the National League did not register as a charity until 1933⁽⁵⁸⁾ the reconstituted committee appointed for the period 1924-1927 included two additional members in the persons of J.A. Clydesdale who represented the League and the re-appearance of Ben Purse as the representative of the National Union of the Professional and Industrial Blind. This latter body had been established by Purse, with the assistance of the National Institute for the Blind, on July 6th 1921,⁽⁵⁹⁾ as a rival organisation to the National League from the Presidency of which, he (Purse) had resigned in 1920, on the grounds that the League was ceasing to represent the genuinely employable element in the blind population, that it had lost its independence and become largely supported by contributions from other trade unions, that it was spending its funds on grants to individuals and that it had reverted to a barren policy of indiscriminate opposition to voluntary organisations.⁽⁶⁰⁾ In contrast with the antagonism to voluntary bodies manifested by the League one of the objects of the National Union specifically provided that:-

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- (56) National League of the Blind. Verbatim Proceedings of the Case of Barber and Dale, 1922. P.3 & P.14.
- (57) Law Reports, Kings Bench. Barber V Chudley, December 19th 1922.
- (58) Charity Commission, Personal Communication, June 16th 1972.
- (59) National Union of Professional and Industrial Blind Handwritten minute of Inaugural Meeting on the files of the R.N.I.B.
- (60) Typewritten memorandum entitled "National League of the Blind" on the files of the R.N.I.B. Ref. SG/JFW/AD dated December 19th 1947.

"It shall be the policy of this Union generally to protect the individual and collective interests of the Blind and to co-operate with any or all existing Institutions, Societies and agencies for the Blind for the furtherance of the above named objects, or with a view to undertaking any activities which shall have for their purposes the advancement of the interests of the members of this Organisation".⁽⁶¹⁾

A further object declared that the Executive Council of the Union "shall adopt every legitimate means for the purpose of avoiding disputes between members of this organisation and their employers....." ⁽⁶¹⁾

In a few months the Union had recruited more than a thousand blind workers⁽⁶²⁾ and commenced the publication of a monthly magazine in Braille entitled "the Tribune" which Purse continued to edit until 1942. The Union^(a) subsequently changed its name to the National Association of Blind Workers. The Association seems to have expired about the year 1945 and was succeeded by a non-trade union body, The National Federation of the Blind of the United Kingdom, which was established in 1947.⁽⁶³⁾

On April 1st 1925 a further member of the Committee, Miss Winifred Bramhall, resigned to join the inspectorial staff of the Ministry.⁽⁶⁴⁾ No changes, other than in personnel occurred in the Committee appointed to serve from 1927-30. On March 31st 1930, the Association of Poor Law Unions ceased to exist as a consequence of the passing of the Local Government Act 1929, but the three nominees of the Association

(61) National Union of the Professional and Industrial Blind.
Rules (undated) P.3 & 4.

(62) As 60 above.

(a) It is doubtful whether the organisation was ever registered as a Trade Union since no trace of the National Union or National Association can be traced by the Registry of Trade Unions and Employers Associations. Written communication August 7th 1972.

(63) Whitton Kenneth R. President of the National Federation of the Blind of the United Kingdom in a written communication January 16th 1970.

(64) Advisory Committee Sixth Annual Report 1924-26. P.24.

continued for the full term of the Committee. (65)

The main feature of the Committee appointed in May 1931 was that the number of members nominated by the Minister of Health "for their special experience of voluntary work among the blind" increased from 6 to 10. This pattern was repeated in the Committees which served from 1934-1937. No information is available on the work of the Committee after 1937. (66)

In 1948 the Advisory Committee was succeeded by the Advisory Council for the Welfare of Handicapped Persons, which in turn was replaced in 1957 by the Advisory Committee on the Health and Welfare of Handicapped Persons.

Between 1918 and 1937 the Advisory Committee published twelve reports outlining their general activities, four reports dealing with special problems and a handbook prepared "for the guidance of those engaged in work for the benefit of blind persons." (67)

The principal matters which came before the Advisory Committee during the above period may be summarised under six headings namely:-
(A) Education; (B) Training; (C) Employment; (D) The Unemployable Blind; (E) Home Teachers and (F) Miscellaneous.

(A) Education

Although the terms of reference of the Advisory Committee were "To advise the (Local Government) Board on matters relating to the care and supervision of the Blind in England and Wales including any

(65) Advisory Committee Ninth Annual Report 1930. P.20.

(66) Ministry of Health letter August 8th 1972, Ref. D/C274/11 to the writer stated:
"I am afraid the papers you wanted to see, minutes of the Advisory Committee for the period between 1937 and 1940, cannot be traced. We have carried out exhaustive searches but unfortunately with no success. The file office where these papers would have been kept during that period was, we understand, bombed during the war and it is assumed that the papers you seek were destroyed."

(67) Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind. Handbook on the Welfare of the Blind. Preface to First Edition 1927.

question which might be specially referred to it by the Board",⁽⁶⁸⁾ it was soon clear that some matters which would come before the Committee for consideration were also of interest to the Board of Education. In 1918, the Advisory Committee had set up a sub-committee of seven members to deal with educational questions⁽⁶⁹⁾ and in 1917 it had been agreed that the most satisfactory way in which the Local Government Board and the Board of Education could keep in touch with each other on matters of mutual interest was for the Board of Education to appoint an Assessor who would attend Advisory Committee meetings.⁽⁷⁰⁾ Accordingly from 1918 Dr. Alfred Eichholz,^(a) Chief Medical Inspector, acted as the Assessor of the Board of Education. When Eichholz retired from the Inspectorate in March 1930 he was immediately appointed as an additional member of the Committee and subsequently served until his death in February, 1933.⁽⁷¹⁾

The Advisory Council through its Education Sub-Committee was concerned to note the effects that educational legislation would have on the welfare of the blind. Thus, in 1919 the Committee reported that the clauses of the Education Act passed in the previous year had been "carefully scrutinised with a view to safeguarding the interests of blind children".⁽⁷²⁾ Among the early matters which received consideration were physical training and facilities for musical

(68) Advisory Committee as above. First Annual Report 1918-1919. P.1.

(69) Memorandum unsigned but probably by Dr. Eichholz headed "Education Sub-Committee Memorandum of Interview October 14th 1918" on ED 50/88. P.R.O.

(70) Memo to Sir George Neman dated 15th December, 1917 on File ED 50/88 P.R.O.

(a) Alfred Eichholz 1869-1933. Chief Medical Inspector of Education 1919-1930. See Who Was Who 1929-1940. P.409.

(71) Advisory Committee as above Eleventh Report 1933-34. P.14.

(72) Advisory Committee First Annual Report, P.11.

education while, at a later date, the Board of Education was asked to make an enquiry regarding the extent to which domestic training was taught in the schools for the blind. (73)

Attention was also given to higher education particularly to the practice adopted in most schools of giving trade training indiscriminately to all children between the ages of 14 to 16. This, the Committee stated, was detrimental to pupils who had the ability to benefit from secondary education. The Board was therefore asked to consider whether the curricula could not be adapted to meet the needs of such cases as well as to ascertain if some means could be found of transferring boys of academic promise to Worcester College for the Blind. (72)

In the Report for 1924-1926, the Committee, while acknowledging that it was doubtful whether the matter came within its terms of reference, referred to the question of partially blind children. Although the definition of blindness contained in the Education Acts embraced children who had a considerable amount of vision and who would not necessarily become blind within the meaning of the Blind Persons Act the only way in which such a child could receive special schooling under the Education Act of 1921 was to regard him as "blind." The Committee were opposed to this course on two grounds: firstly, because on leaving school a partially blind child would not be eligible for registration under the Blind Persons Act and the benefits deriving therefrom and secondly, because it was not possible to give such children adequate attention in ordinary elementary schools in which the majority, particularly in rural areas, were being educated. (74)

In the Report for 1926-27 the Committee stated that a complete

(73) Advisory Committee Ninth Report, 1930. P.12.

(74) Advisory Committee as above, Sixth Report 1924-26. P.19.

ascertainment would probably show a total of some 7,000 partially blind children of whom only 1,500 were in special schools. The Committee further pointed out that, as there was no Government Department specially responsible for the after-care of partially blind persons, there was thus "ample scope for voluntary enterprise to take up and develop what is really a new social service".⁽⁷⁵⁾ The suggestion was therefore made that the County Councils Association, the Association of Municipal Corporations and the Association of Education Committees "might well explore the position as regards the education, training and after-care of partially blind persons and consider whether it would not be possible to make a more satisfactory provision for this class".⁽⁷⁶⁾ This recommendation was taken up by the Board of Education and in December 1931 a Committee was appointed under the chairmanship of Dr. Ralph Crowley "to enquire into and report upon the medical, educational and social aspects of problems affecting partially blind children".⁽⁷⁷⁾ In its Report published in 1934 this Committee made a number of enlightened recommendations of which two may be singled out for special mention. The view that both educationally and socially the partially blind belonged to the sighted world was expressed in the proposal that the term "partially blind" should be superseded by that of "partially sighted". As a corollary of this emphasis on normality the Committee condemned the practice of educating the partially sighted in schools for the blind as a "deplorable failure in educational administration" and recommended that such children should be taught in classes forming an integral part

(75) Advisory Committee as above Seventh Annual Report 1926-27. P.23.

(76) Advisory Committee as above Seventh Report 1926-27. Pages 22-23.

(77) Board of Education: Report of Committee of Inquiry into Problems Relating to Partially Sighted Children, 1934. P.6.

of the ordinary elementary schools.⁽⁷⁸⁾ Between 1934 and 1939 however, there was little change in the arrangements made by local education authorities for the education of partially sighted pupils. "Very few new schools were established and in only two of these, the Wolverhampton School at Graiseley and the Manchester School at Queen Street, was the recommendation that such schools should be parts of ordinary schools for fully sighted children carried out".⁽⁷⁹⁾

(B) Training

As distinct from its interest in general education, the Advisory Committee frequently had under review matters appertaining to the vocational training for manual occupations of adolescents and adults. Some idea of the range of occupations in which training was given in the schools and institutions is provided in the table given below which shows the trades in which the 1,430 persons under training as at March 31st 1932 were receiving instruction:-⁽⁸⁰⁾

Basketmaking and Repairing	357	
Light Basketry	22	
Bootmaking and Repairing	121	
Brushmaking	187	
Bead Curtains	1	
Chair Covering	19	
Rush Seating	3	
Cork Fenders	7	
Coal Bags	2	
Domestic Science	2	
Furniture	23	
French Polishing	4	
Hand Weaving	17	
Literary	6	
Matmaking	112	
Machine Knitting	307	
Hand Knitting	24	
Music	66	Continued ...

(78) As 77 above. Chapter I pages 7-9 and Chapter 5, page 73.

(79) Ministry of Education. The Health of the School Child. 1946-47. P.108.

(80) Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind. Report of the Sub-Committee on Marketing and Other Matters Affecting the Employment and Vocational Training of Blind Persons 1934. P.39.

Mattress Making	32
Massage and Medical	15
Netting	1
Piano Tuning and Repairing	75
Shorthand and Typing	16
Upholstery	<u>11</u>
TOTAL	<u>1,430</u>

In 1920 the Board of Education issued amended regulations in respect of the training of blind pupils including persons who had become blind in adult life.⁽⁸¹⁾ These grant regulations were further amended in 1925.⁽⁸²⁾ One of the earliest tasks of the Advisory Committee was to impress on local education authorities the economic importance of using such grants for the purpose of securing expert training for all adult blind persons who were capable of benefiting thereby. "It is neither wise nor even economical", counselled the Committee,⁽⁸³⁾ "for a local education authority to leave the matter to the Poor Law Authority or to act on the view that if training is not provided the effect of such lack of training will not be a burden on the education rate but on the poor rate i.e. on a body other than itself".⁽⁸³⁾ In spite of the Committees exhortations, however, some authorities were neglectful and, in 1930, the fact that a number of local education authorities were not carrying out their duty to provide training for all blind persons over 16 was again mentioned.⁽⁸⁴⁾ One possible reason for this non-fulfilment of a statutory obligation was that, while the Education Act 1921 only gave permissive powers to local education authorities to provide higher education, the Blind Persons Act, 1920 made the vocational training of the blind mandatory. A second factor was that in many cases blind

(81) Board of Education (Training of Blind etc., Students, Higher Education) Regulations 1920 (cmd 852).

(82) Board of Education (Special Services) Regulations 1925, Grant Regulations No.19.

(83) Advisory Committee Second Annual Report 1919-1920. P.13.

(84) Advisory Committee Ninth Report, 1930. P.11.

persons were themselves reluctant to undergo training. In the case of a married man training would often mean leaving home for instruction in a residential institution. In addition there was the question of maintenance of himself and his dependents during training and in the latter case such help could only be given through the Poor Law. In the Report for 1924-26 reference is made to the fact that the Committee had considered the question of emoluments to persons who were undergoing approved courses of training at institutions recognized by the Board of Education and had made recommendations.⁽⁸⁵⁾ In 1934 the Committee expressed the view that in some cases the grants made to unemployable blind persons acted as a disincentive to training and suggested that the Regulations governing such grants should be amended to provide for the cessation or reduction of the grant to blind persons who refused training and employment for which they were suitable.⁽⁸⁶⁾

The Committee was not only assiduous in encouraging and facilitating training but also concerned that the instruction given, should, so far as possible, be standardised. The need for such standardisation arose from the recognition that a person trained in one workshop was frequently unfitted for work in another because he had not learned the particular techniques practiced there or was unfamiliar with the machinery used. In 1918 a Sub-Committee was appointed to draw up syllabuses of courses of instruction in industrial subjects such as basket, brush and boot making, machine knitting and handloom weaving.⁽⁸⁷⁾ The syllabuses which were designed to ensure

(85) Advisory Committee Sixth Report. 1924-26. P.17.

(86) Advisory Committee Report of Sub-Committee on Marketing etc. as above, P.42.

(87) Syllabuses of Instruction for Subjects of Industry on File Ed. 50/88. P.R.O.

that each pupil received a training adequate to make him a competent craftsman, were completed in 1921 and in the same year were circulated by the Board of Education to all institutions which undertook the vocational training of blind pupils. For adolescents the training, which also included some general education, was intended to occupy the period between 16 to 21 years of age while for adults the duration of instruction varied from between 2 to 4 years. The syllabuses were subsequently extended and brought up to date by a Joint Committee of the National Association of Workshops for the Blind in co-operation with the College of Teachers of the Blind.⁽⁸⁸⁾

A third matter affecting training to which the Committee gave attention was the relationship between the type of instruction given and the subsequent opportunities for obtaining employment. In 1923 a Circular⁽⁸⁹⁾ issued by the Ministry of Health stated that it was not infrequent for persons to be taught a trade for which there was no demand in the area in which they would afterwards reside, for training to be continued even though it was clear that a pupil would never become proficient and for the course to be completed without any effort having been made by the training agency to secure employment. In consequence of such practices, much money had been wasted and many more blind persons had been trained that could be ascertained to be in useful and satisfactory employments. To obviate such an unsatisfactory state of affairs the Circular stressed that attention should be given to "the selection of suitable trades, the care given to the training itself and the continuity of the whole process from the last years of special school education through the period of vocational training to the commencement of employment", so as to ensure that individual blind persons would

(88) Courses of Instruction in Industrial Subjects for the Blind.

(89) Ministry of Health Circular 387. April 24th 1923.

become satisfactory Journeymen. To secure this end the circular made a number of suggestions for improved co-operation between the schools and training institutions and the training institutions and workshops. In particular, it recommended that local education authorities should require a pupils progress records to be sent from the schools to the training institutions and that the latter agencies, preferably in consultation with the future employing workshop, should, during the last six months of instruction, assess the pupils capacity from the standpoints of (1) quality of work, (2) speed of execution and (3) the degree of independence attained. As from April 1st 1924 the Ministry of Health declared that it would not admit a Journeyman to their registers for grant purposes, other than on a temporary basis who had not achieved a reasonably high standard in the quality, speed and independence of his workmanship. (89)

An example of the importance that trainees should attain a high level of proficiency in their craft is found in the training and later employment of blind piano tuners. The Report of the Advisory Committee for 1924-26 contained an analysis of the occupations practiced by employed blind persons over 16 years of age from which it appeared that the number of piano tuners had increased from 382 in 1923 to 507. This increase led the Committee to question whether the country could profitably absorb any greater number of tuners and training institutions were recommended to make a careful inquiry as to the future employment prospects before training more persons in the occupation. (90) The statement made by the Committee regarding the employment prospects of piano tuners was queried in January 1927 by the National Institute for the Blind and the Blind Social Aid Society who nevertheless agreed that there was a need for a more careful selection of candidates for training and a stiffer test

(90) Advisory Committee Sixth Report 1924-26. P. 11.

of proficiency.⁽⁹¹⁾ Meanwhile in 1925, Eichholz of the Board of Education and Macgregor of the Ministry of Health had explored the possibility of setting up an examining board for piano tuners but had failed to obtain the co-operation of Guy Campbell of the Royal Normal College for the Blind.⁽⁹¹⁾ In January 1927 the Advisory Committee recommended that the two Government Departments together with the National Institute for the Blind should continue their efforts "with a view to the adoption of a better and more uniform standard of efficiency."⁽⁹¹⁾ Later that year Eichholz and Lovett, who had succeeded Macgregor at the Ministry of Health made an investigation into the after careers of 81 piano tuners who had been trained at seven institutions for the blind. This survey showed that only 21 of the persons concerned were definitely making a satisfactory living from piano tuning⁽⁹²⁾ and supported the view expressed by the Advisory Committee, that the relatively high remuneration to be obtained, attracted would be practitioners who were neither suitable nor competent for the work.⁽⁹³⁾ At a meeting between representatives of the Board of Education and the Ministry of Health held on July 29th 1927 it was agreed that Eichholz and Lovett would confer with the College of Teachers of the Blind with a view to the establishment of a proficiency examination based on a common syllabus which would be used in all recognized institutions where blind men were trained as tuners.⁽⁹¹⁾ The College agreed to be responsible for the conduct of the examination and the preparation of the syllabus. In July 1929 the Board of Education laid down that all

(91) Memorandum of Conference held at the Board of Education July 28th 1927 between Mr. Eaton, Mr. Bosworth Smith, Dr. Eichholz and Mr. Lovett on MH55/116. P.R.O.

(92) Memo to Dr. Eichholz on Ministry of Health File MH55/116.

(93) Advisory Committee Seventh Report 1926-27. P.10.

men who had commenced a course of training in piano tuning in a recognized institution, after January 1st 1927, would be required to sit the examination set by the College. The Circular further stated that it was undesirable that any blind piano tuner who had not passed the examination should be approved as a Home Worker unless he had commenced his training before January 1st 1927. (94)

An important aspect of training was the quality of instruction given in the institutions. The Report for 1919-20 mentioned that the Committee had given consideration to the "training, recruitment, qualifications and salary of craft teachers" and that the matter had been referred to the College of Teachers who had been asked to report on the subject. (95) In fact, in May, 1918, Eichholz had asked the College to consider the training of craft teachers and the award of a Diploma to candidates who had demonstrated their proficiency as instructors. Eichholz was prompted to raise the question "on account of the general low intellectual calibre of craft teachers in senior blind schools". "These men", he stated, "belong practically entirely to the artisan type and are quite unable to promote a real educational ideal whether as regards mode of life, commercial outlook or industrial rehabilitation". (96) No further action on the matter seems to have been taken until 1927 when a scheme of training prepared by the College was submitted by the Board of Education for the consideration of the Advisory Committee. Due to the difficulty in recruiting suitable instructors the Committee was unable to support the proposal of the College that it should be made compulsory for craft teachers to obtain

(94) Board of Education Circular 1403. July 1st 1929.

(95) Advisory Committee, Second Annual Report 1919-1920. P.13.

(96) Memorandum by Eichholz on Meeting of Examiners of the College of Teachers of the Blind. May 17th 1918, on File ED.50/88. P.R.O.

the qualification and it was suggested that until the staffing position improved the examination should be conducted on a voluntary basis. (97) The examination, for which over twenty candidates presented themselves, was held for the first time in October 1929. In their Report issued in the same year the Advisory Committee declared that, when the existing difficulty in obtaining craft instructors had been overcome, the Board of Education should "consider the desirability of requiring all newly appointed craft instructors to pass this examination within a stipulated period". (98) Five years later the Committee reiterated this viewpoint in stronger terms by recommending that the Board of Education should make it a condition of permanent approval, that newly appointed craft teachers should obtain the Certificate for Craft Instructors issued by the College of Teachers. (99) This suggestion was also repeated in 1936 by a Joint Committee of the College of Teachers and the National Institute for the Blind. The two recommendations were accepted by the Board of Education which had not previously required craft instructors to possess specific qualifications. Accordingly from April 1st 1939 all newly appointed full time instructors in training institutions were required to obtain the Craft Teachers Diploma within a period of two years from being appointed. (100)

One other administrative matter affecting training, but not directly connected with the Advisory Committee, may, for convenience, be mentioned at this point in the study. In 1935 the Board of Education agreed with the Ministry of Health that the part time services of the two Inspectors

(97) Advisory Committee Seventh Report 1926-27. Pages 19-20.

(98) Advisory Committee Eighth Report 1928-29. P. 24.

(99) Advisory Committee, Report on the Sub-Committee on Marketing etc. (as 80 above) P. 44.

(100) Board of Education - Administrative Memorandum 187. December 9th 1938.

of Blind Welfare, W.H. Bennett and Miss Winifred Bramhall, should be placed at the disposal of the Board for the purpose of "inspecting and reporting to the Board on the vocational training carried out in Continuation Courses for the Blind".⁽¹⁰¹⁾ In addition to routine visits and the elucidation of matters that had arisen in general correspondence, the duties of the inspectors were specified as, "to take references from the Board on any questions that may arise in the course of the administration of these institutions and to give their advice on such matters as the suitability of trades to certain areas, the adequacy of syllabuses of instruction or time-tables, staffing matters, fees, premises, the progress and employment of students and other miscellaneous matters which may or may not involve a visit, and to act generally in the capacity of experts available for consultation by M.O.s and A.O.s of the Board on all matters affecting the training of the Blind".⁽¹⁰²⁾

(C) Employment

Before 1945 the majority of employable blind persons on the completion of their training practised their craft either in workshops for the blind or as Home Workers. Whether a person took up employment in a workshop or as a Home Worker tended to depend on two main factors namely, the nature of his occupation and the availability of workshop accommodation. Piano tuning, for example, was clearly unsuitable for anything other than work outside a workshop. Workshops were also located in towns and for blind persons living in rural areas the difficulties of travelling made it practically impossible for them to work other than at home. In 1917 the Departmental Committee on the

(101) Board of Education M. Instruction No. 50 - Circulated
5th February 1935.

(102) Board of Education Internal Memorandum. December 5th 1939 on
ED. 50/276. P.R.O.

Welfare of the Blind had stated that, as a general rule, the blind should be encouraged to gravitate to the workshops since such employment was in most cases preferable to home industry.⁽¹⁰³⁾ Among the advantages of workshop employees as reported by Ben Purse, were that they worked for wages, had settled hours of employment and were insured under the National Health and Insurance Acts. In contrast, the Home Worker did not receive wages but the price of the goods produced, worked irregular hours and was not eligible for unemployment and health insurance unless a contract of service could be inferred.⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ There were also the difficulties that the Home Worker suffered from a lack of supervision with consequent detriment to the quality of the goods produced and that, unless assisted by an institution for the blind, had often great difficulty in disposing of his output. In 1917 between 2,600 and 3,000 persons were estimated to be in workshop employment.⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ With the advent of registration and the obligation laid upon local authorities under the Blind Persons Act to make schemes providing for employment either in workshops or under Home Worker's schemes the number of blind in employment rose steadily. In 1921, the Advisory Committee reported that, in consequence of the development of arrangements for Home Workers by voluntary agencies, "some 700 to 800 blind persons hitherto left largely to their own devices have been included in organised schemes and their earnings considerably increased."⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ By 1932, 3,342 blind workers were employed in workshops and 1,631 as Home Workers.⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ As at March 31st 1936 local authority returns of blind persons showed that 3,812 were employed in institutions, 1,828

(103) Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind Report, Page 36. Par.152.

(104) Advisory Committee - Report of the Sub-Committee on Marketing etc. P.28.

(105) Advisory Committee Third Annual Report 1921-1922. P.9.

under Home Workers schemes and 3,146 elsewhere.⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ By 1939 there were over 60 workshops catering for 4,500 blind workers.⁽¹⁰⁷⁾

(a) Workshops

The Advisory Committee strongly repudiated the viewpoint that workshops were little more than occupation centres in which payments made to the blind bore little relationship to the value of the goods produced. "The proper function of a workshop" observed the Committee "is to give efficient blind workers an opportunity of an independent economic life and not merely to provide occupation for the blind without due regard to their efficiency".⁽¹⁰⁸⁾ The main aspects of workshop employment which received the attention of the Committee between 1918 and 1937 may be classified under the headings of (1) the remuneration of employees; (2) the marketing of output; (3) the development of employment opportunities and (4) the improvement of management efficiency.

(1) The remuneration of employees

In 1919 the Ministry of Health defined the term "workshop employee" as meaning "a blind person who is regularly employed by an approved agency in or about a workshop for the blind and in receipt of weekly pay at the Trade Union or other standard rate customary in the particular class of work in which the blind person is employed and who is not a pupil undergoing training or an apprentice".⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ As indicated in the third chapter of this study the Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind estimated that the wages earned by blind workers at Trade

(106) Advisory Committee Twelfth Report 1934-37. P.17.

(107) Ministry of Labour Report of the Working Party on Workshops for the Blind, 1962. Par.9. P.3.

(108) Advisory Committee - Report of Sub-Committee on Marketing etc. Par.60. P.28.

(109) Ministry of Health Circular 7B.D. Welfare of the Blind. Grant Regulations August 7th 1919. P.6.

Union rates were in general not more than half of those received by their sighted contemporaries. (a) Some system of augmenting wages was therefore essential if the amount received from piece-rate earnings was to be sufficient for a living wage. In 1918 the Advisory Committee referred to the "variety of systems of augmentation in force" which they stated "reflected the great diversity of considered and expert opinion on this contentious topic", and recommended that some uniform system should be in operation throughout the country. (110) In fact, the amount of augmentation received depended on the system of payment used and the financial resources and consequent ability to make augmentation grants of each voluntary workshop. In each workshop augmentation payments were computed on the basis of one of three main systems namely (1) flat rate; (2) sliding scale and (3) grading.

Flat rate augmentation consisted of a constant amount added to actual piece-rate earnings. Thus, if the amount of augmentation was fixed at 15/- the effect on the income of workshop employees would be as follows:-

<u>Worker</u>	<u>Earnings</u>	<u>Augmentation</u>	<u>Total Income</u>
A	15/-	15/-	30/-
B	20/-	15/-	35/-
C	25/-	15/-	40/-

With the sliding scale system the amount received by way of augmentation diminished as actual piece-earnings increased. Thus, where the scheme of augmentation in operation provided for a grant of 15/- on earnings up to that amount and a deduction of 3d in the 1/- in respect of every 1/- earned in excess the amounts received would be as shown:-

(a) See page 150.

(110) Advisory Committee First Annual Report, 1918-1919. P.9.

<u>Worker</u>	<u>Earnings</u>	<u>Augmentation</u>	<u>Total Income</u>
A	15/-	15/-	30/-
B	17/-	14/6	31/6
C	20/-	13/9	33/9

Where grading was in operation, workers were placed into categories according to such factors as actual earnings at piece-rates, the quality of work produced and even their personal conduct in the workshop. Thus, in 1935, workers at the Hull and East Riding Workshops for the Blind were allocated to one of four grades in which the respective weekly rates for men were 44/-, 48/-, 52/-, and 56/- while for women the corresponding payments were 32/-, 34/-, 36/-, and 38/-.⁽¹¹¹⁾

As distinct from piece-rate earnings plus augmentation, the National League of the Blind advocated that earnings should be computed on the basis of time rates and in its draft legislation for 1911 specified that workshop employees should receive a minimum wage to be determined by the wages paid by local authorities to unskilled sighted workers.⁽¹¹²⁾ As will be shown at a later point in this study, this principle was reaffirmed in the draft Bills for the amendment of the Blind Persons Act 1920 prepared by the League between 1924 and 1930. The Bills presented in 1926 and 1928 actually included a clause specifically abolishing the use of the piecework system in workshops for the blind.⁽¹¹³⁾ Time rates were, however, strongly opposed by the managements of the voluntary workshops on the ground that the system provided no incentive to effort and led to reduced output.

(111) The examples are taken from National League of the Blind, "The Case for a Minimum Income for all Blind Workers", 1935 on MF55/124. P.R.O.

(112) Blind Advocate - February, 1911. Draft of the Technical Education, the Employment and the Maintenance of the Blind Bill.

(113) Bill to Amend the Blind Persons Act, 1920. Bill 27. February 5th 1926 and Bill of similar title. No.16. February 10th 1928.

On three occasions the Advisory Committee recommended the universal adoption of the sliding scale method of augmentation on the ground that this system was the most equitable way of taking into account the varying capacities of workshop employees. In their Report for 1918, the Committee suggested a fixed sum of 15/- "which should be given by way of compensation for the deficit of blindness to all workers earning up to 5/- per week at trade union or other standard rates of pay. Where over 5/- is earned per week at such rate the grant should be reduced by 4d in the 1/- for every 1/- earned over 5/-". (110)

Three years later, the limitations on income prescribed for pension purposes by the Blind Persons Act 1920 caused the Advisory Committee to again consider the question of augmentation. On this occasion they advocated a maximum grant of 15/- on weekly earnings up to 10/- decreasing by 3d in the 1/- to a minimum payment of 5/- where weekly wages were 50/- or more. This recommendation was circulated to county and county borough councils and voluntary agencies by the Ministry of Health in March 1922 with the suggestion that, before committing themselves to contributions in respect of augmentation payments in excess of the proposed scale, local authorities should "have regard to the amount of funds available not only for the workshop and other employees but also for the unemployable blind who are unable to earn anything towards their own support". (114)

In their Report for 1924-26 the Advisory Committee stated that the above proposals had not been generally accepted, the principal objection to them being that the graduations consequent upon improved earnings were too steep, with the result that they had a disincentive effect on the more skilled and industrious workers. To overcome this result the Committee modified the scale to give augmentation of 15/- on all earnings up to 16/-

weekly with deductions of 1d in the shilling for earnings between 16/- and 20/- rising to 2d and 3d in the shilling for amounts between 20/- and 30/- and over 30/- respectively. These deductions were to be subject to a fixed augmentation allowance of 6/9 for all earnings in excess of 55/-. (115)

Little success seems to have attended this further attempt to secure some degree of national uniformity in respect of allowances and in their Report for 1934-37 the Advisory Committee stated that there had been no general acceptance of the sliding scale system of remuneration and that a tendency had developed for workshops to adopt the principle of a minimum wage. Because this form of payment was a departure from the method prescribed by the Minister of Health when Exchequer grants to workshops had been first made, the Advisory Committee had been asked whether they still adhered to the piecework system or wished to make alternative proposals. (116)

Meanwhile, about 1933, the London and Home Counties District Council of the National League of the Blind had requested the Joint Committee of London Workshops for the Blind to substitute time rates for piecework rates in the workshops under its purview. The reasons submitted in support of this request were, that low and uncertain piece-earnings had a detrimental effect on the health of blind persons, that the average workshop employee was only able to achieve $33\frac{1}{3}\%$ of the output of a sighted worker and not 50% as was the popular estimate and that in some institutions where time rates had been introduced, both production and the level of workmanship had improved. (117) As the question affected all workshops the Joint Committee requested the

(115) Advisory Committee Sixth Report, 1924-1926. P.15.

(116) Advisory Committee Twelfth Report, 1934-1937. P.8.

(117) Association of Workshops for the Blind, Report on Methods of Payment of Wages in Workshops for the Blind, 1934. Pages 10-11.

Association of Workshops for the Blind to make an enquiry into the matter. A Sub-Committee was therefore appointed for this purpose which reported in 1934. The Report rejected a flat rate of payment on the economic ground that it could only be implemented by institutions which had either large financial reserves or the full backing of a local authority. It conceded, however, that a method of payment was desirable which did not operate too severely against a less efficient worker as was the case with the piece-rate system and suggested that this objective could be attained either by a variation of piece rate plus augmentation, which provided for further assistance according to the needs of individual workers or, alternatively, by the adoption of the graded system. The Report pointed out that the graded system had the advantage of providing an incentive to good work while at the same time relieving an employee of any anxiety that in any one week his piece earnings would fall below subsistence level. In effect, the graded system provided every worker with a minimum wage according to his ability. (118) At a Conference held later in 1934 a resolution was passed in the following terms:- "That this Conference, having considered the Report on "Methods of Payment in Blind Workshops", recommends for the consideration of all Workshops for the Blind the adoption of a graded scheme on the lines indicated in recommendation No.2 Paragraph 49 of the Report. (119)

The following year, a policy statement, setting forth the case for a minimum income, was issued by the National League of the Blind. (111) As a result of considering the Report of the Association of Workshops and the evidence submitted by the National League the Advisory Committee

(118) As 117 above, Pages 15 and 16.

(119) Association of Workshops for the Blind - Report of Conference held on November 2nd 1934 at the School for the Blind, Swiss Cottage, London, N.W. 3. P.16.

suggested that the two bodies might collaborate, "with a view to the drawing up of such a scheme for governing the payment of wages as might be acceptable both to the Authorities conducting Workshops for the Blind and the blind workers themselves". (120)

Three meetings between the Association and the League were subsequently held and it was finally agreed that the following proposals should, after ratification by the Executives of both bodies, be presented to the Advisory Committee.

(1) That the method of payment in workshops for the Blind be based on Trade Union, Trade Board or other agreed piece rates.

(2) That an approved worker should receive at the end of a full working week a fixed minimum amount.

(3) That the minimum suggested for the consideration of the Association and the League should be a figure up to 50/- per week.

(4) That the following test of efficiency for entry into a workshop be accepted as an essential condition of the above payment.

(a) That the candidate be able to make a reasonable assortment of articles in the industry in which he is engaged.

(b) That all work be made satisfactorily, and without an abnormal amount of sighted assistance and supervision.

(c) That the candidate be capable of working at a speed satisfactory to the Management. (121)

While the above agreement was unanimously endorsed by the National League only half the members of the National Association of Workshops were prepared to accept it in its entirety. (120) The Advisory Committee also considered that it was still essential that the

(120) Advisory Committee Twelfth Annual Report, 1934-1937. P.8.

(121) National Association of Workshops for the Blind. Report of the interviews between Representatives of this Association and Representatives of the National League of the Blind on the question of Methods of Payment of Wages, typewritten June, 1936.

remuneration of blind workers generally should be related to earning capacity which, in effect, meant the retention of the piece rate system. They recommended, however, that, in the operation of the system, there "should be such adjustment as will ensure to every worker a reasonable minimum wage subject to proper safeguards for the maintenance of efficiency".⁽¹²²⁾ The National League had therefore won its struggle for the adoption of the minimum wage. The second objective of the League, that the amount of the wage should be determined by the rates paid by local authorities to unskilled sighted workers was not achieved until 1951 when the Local Authorities Advisory Committee on the Conditions of Blind Workers established in the previous year, after putting on record their opinion "that it was desirable to introduce in workshops for the blind uniformity of payment" recommended (a) that for this purpose Group II Non Trading Services (Manual Workers) be adopted; and (b) that the conditions of service of the Manual Workers Council apply to blind workers in workshops for the blind".⁽¹²³⁾

(2) Marketing

One of the most serious problems encountered by the workshops for the blind was the sale of the goods made by their employees. It is not surprising, therefore, that this matter which is frequently mentioned in the annual reports of institutions for the blind and which was regularly discussed at the conferences convened by the voluntary bodies should also have been the subject of both deliberation and action on the part of the Advisory Committee.

One solution which was frequently advocated and commended by the

(122) As 120 above, P.10.

(123) National League of the Blind. Paper submitted to the Working Party on the Employment of Blind Persons, 1951. P.9.

Departmental Committee of 1917 was that the spending departments of both the Government and the local authorities should be instructed to place suitable orders with the workshops for the blind provided that this action did not involve either the payment of a higher price or the acceptance of a lower quality of product. As indicated in Chapter Three, between 1905 and 1908, the National Committee for the Employment of the Blind had appointed a deputation for the purpose of soliciting orders from Government Departments. ^(a) In 1918, the Advisory Committee also held a conference with the several spending departments of the Government which asked to be furnished with details of the capacities and monthly production requirements of the various workshops. ⁽¹²⁴⁾ In 1921, after referring to the fact that, because of shortage of orders due to the general depression, it had been necessary for a number of workshops either to close down or to put their employees on short time, the Advisory Committee had stated that they regarded it as of the utmost importance, that blind workers should be kept fully employed and averred that the local authorities could give assistance by placing as many orders as possible with the institutions for the blind. ⁽¹²⁵⁾ The attention of the local authorities was drawn to this statement by a Circular issued by the Minister of Health in 1922. ⁽¹²⁶⁾

A second approach to the marketing problem which, had also been proposed by the Departmental Committee, was concerned with attempts to eliminate the competitive trading between workshops which often led to price cutting in an effort to secure the limited orders available.

(a) See pages 110-112

(124) Advisory Committee First Report 1918-1919. P.9.

(125) Advisory Committee Third Annual Report 1921-1922. P.9.

(126) Ministry of Health. Memorandum 64/B.D. Blind Persons Act, 1920. P.4.

To obviate such competition, the Committee strongly recommended the formation of local Marketing Boards for the disposal of the output of groups of workshops operating in the same area. (127) By 1928, the heavy losses sustained by the workshops arising from the general depression in trade and competition from abroad especially in the basket trade, caused the Committee to request the National Institute for the Blind to convene a conference of the managements of workshops for the purpose of discussing their common difficulties. A direct outcome of this conference held in January 1929 was the formation of the Association of Workshops for the Blind which was established for the purpose of (a) Fostering co-operation among workshops; (b) promoting research into all problems connected with the employment of the blind; (c) facilitating united action in all common concerns; (d) raising the standard of efficiency by disseminating information and encouraging new methods and ideas, and (e) providing machinery for the pooling of experience by holding conferences and other means. (128)

Shortly after its formation the Association of Workshops considered the subject of Marketing and set out the existing situation in a Report published in December, 1929. This Report stated:-

(a) "That there was a potential surplus of blind-made goods, defining "potential surplus" as including goods which could be produced over and above present sales were all available workers to be fully employed and all available space to be occupied".

(b) "That there was need not only for the development of the existing machinery of Marketing but for the introduction of new methods and the exploitation of new markets".

(c) "That the problem could best be met by the establishment of a Central Marketing Board charged with the duty of disposing of this potential surplus". (129)

(127) Advisory Committee Seventh Report 1926-1927, P.12.

(128) Advisory Committee Eighth Report 1928-1929, P.15.

(129) Advisory Committee, Report of the Sub-Committee on Marketing etc. 1934, Pages 8-9.

The function of the proposed Central Marketing Board would be to do what the ordinary selling agencies were unable to do themselves. This included the employment of one or more salesmen of a calibre beyond the resources of a single institution to employ, the obtaining of wholesale orders which the Board would distribute to workshops and Home Workers schemes which required work, and the maintenance of quality by the institution of a "National Mark" of approval to be awarded to workshops and schemes which were able to satisfy the Board of their ability to maintain a high standard of quality in respect of a specified list of goods. (130)

The Report of the Association of Workshops was referred to the Minister of Health who, after consultation with the Advisory Committee, expressed his general approval of the principle of a Central Marketing Board. In June 1930 a Second Report was published in which the details of the proposed Marketing Board were presented together with statistics showing that the annual potential surplus of goods capable of being sold on the open market might be valued at £50,000. In July 1930, therefore, the Association of Workshops had decided to implement the scheme which had also been approved in principle by the Advisory Committee and the Minister of Health. At this point, internal dissention among the members of the Association, initially on matters of finance and interference with local autonomy and later to the concept of central marketing arose, and in March 1932 it was decided that no good purpose could be served by the Association of Workshops devoting further time to the subject. On April 27th 1932, Eichholz, in an attempt to break the deadlock, brought the matter before the Advisory Council when it was resolved to set up a Sub-Committee under his chairmanship "to investigate and report on the general matter of marketing including the disposal of Home Workers' goods". (129) The Committee soon discovered, however, that the subject

(130) Report of the Sub-Committee on Marketing etc. 1934. Pages 18-19.

of marketing could not be dealt within isolation from several other aspects of the employment of the blind. In May 1932, therefore, it was agreed that the terms of reference should be amended as follows:-

"To consider and report on -

(i) The marketing (including advertising and salesmanship) of the products of blind labour whether made in workshops for the Blind or under Home Workers Schemes.

(ii) To consider and report, in relation to Marketing on -

(a) The training of blind persons and arrangements made for passing into employment schemes only those who are economically efficient.

(b) The supervision of blind workers.

(c) The business management of Workshops for the Blind and of Home Workers Schemes."⁽¹³¹⁾

The Sub-Committee reported in 1934. The Report stated that the usual channels of distribution used by the workshops for the disposal of output were retail shops, wholesale contracts with the Government and other public authorities, and wholesale or retail sales effected by travellers. In addition, some mail order business was secured. In the case of Home Workers schemes, sales were mainly to retail shops, at organised bazaars or garden parties, by travelling motor vans and as a result of personal goodwill connections built up by individual blind persons.⁽¹³²⁾ On the evidence obtained, the Sub-Committee concluded that no scheme of purely retail selling would meet the problem and that the most satisfactory solution was along the lines of the Central Marketing Board proposed by the Association of Workshops. Since, due to the opposition of some local workshops, such a scheme was impracticable, they recommended the setting up of Regional Boards for the purpose of disposing of surplus output. These Regional Boards,

{131) Report of the Sub-Committee on Marketing etc. 1934.

{132) Report of the Sub-Committee on Marketing etc. 1934.

which would have areas co-extensive with those of the Counties Associations for the Blind, would be controlled by Committees of Management on which Workshops and Home Workers schemes in the area would be represented and financed by a Commission levied on the sales effected. A number of other suggestions relating to ancillary matters such as costing and stocktaking were also made. (133)

Although a Company known as United London Workshops for the Blind (Sales) Ltd. was formed in 1936 to market certain items on behalf of four London workshops, (134) little progress was made in setting up co-operative marketing organisations. As late as 1962 the United London Workshops for the Blind (Sales) Ltd. was the only joint marketing agreement in existence except for an arrangement by which the National Association of Workshops for the Blind had become responsible for matters relating to the production of goods ordered by Government Departments. (135)

(3) The development of employment opportunities

Closely associated with marketing was the need to develop new avenues of employment to supplement the traditional "blind" trades such as basket making and chair-mending. In their Report for 1922-23 the Advisory Committee stated that the employment situation of blind manual operatives could be assisted if some such persons could be found work in open industry rather than in sheltered workshops. In an endeavour to stimulate attempts to place blind persons in such employment the Committee had circularised 40 Chambers of Commerce to ascertain whether any trades carried on in their areas might provide openings for the blind. Although the response was disappointing, one Company in the

(133) Report of the Sub-Committee on Marketing etc. 1934, pages 25-27.

(134) Advisory Committee Twelfth Report, 1934-1937, P.12.

(135) Ministry of Labour Report of the Working Party on Workshops for the Blind, 1962. Par. 38. Page. 12.

Midlands had agreed to experiment with the employment of a small number of blind workers in such operations as the testing of lamp glasses and the assembly and packing of cycle bells.⁽¹³⁶⁾ In the following Report, the Committee asserted that, while apart from the stringing of tennis racquets, it did not seem practicable to introduce any new trades into the workshops, there was a possibility of finding employment in the more simple and unskilled operations carried on in industrial concerns. As a result of enquiries made by the Inspectors of Blind Welfare, seven firms in the Midlands had promised to give trial periods of employment in a range of jobs including the preparation and labelling of tins, smearing and packing of golf balls and the sorting of hemp. Blind workers were also continuing to be employed on the assembly and packing of cycle bells. The Committee emphasised that the importance of finding employment in open industry had been increased by the fact that, with advances in measures for its prevention, blindness was increasingly becoming a handicap acquired by persons in middle life who might be unwilling or unsuitable to undergo the protracted training required for a "blind" trade. To encourage voluntary agencies in securing such employments, the Committee recommended that they should receive a grant of £20 per annum in respect of all blind persons employed in ordinary factories and workshops providing it could be shown that the agencies were rendering tangible assistance to the worker in such ways as supervision and the augmentation of wages.⁽¹³⁷⁾

A further development in the direction of the employment of the blind in open industry took place in 1927 when the National Institute for the Blind set up an "Appointments Board" of businessmen who were

(136) Advisory Committee Fourth Annual Report, 1922-1923. P.13.

(137) Advisory Committee Fifth Annual Report, 1923-1924. Pages 13-14.

willing to give their special knowledge to help their blind fellow countrymen in extending the range of employment open to them."

Subsequently, the Appointments Board was re-organised as a "Placement Committee" which, in conjunction with the National Institute of Industrial Psychology undertook research into the possibility of extending employment opportunities.⁽¹³⁸⁾ The first Report issued by the Placement Committee in 1930 was concerned with "The Employment of Blind Persons in Ordinary Factories and Workshops" and "Sub-contracting as a means of finding New Occupations". Under the first heading it was stated that posts in operations connected with toy making, soap making and chocolate manufacture had been found for a few workers who were receiving wages averaging two thirds of those paid to sighted employees. In the portion of the Report concerned with sub-contracting details were given of an experiment in the employment of blind workers on a repetitive process known as "bell-set forming" which had been carried out for the Telephone Manufacturing Company in the Workshops of the London Association for Teaching and Training the Blind.⁽¹³⁹⁾ A later Report dealing with the subject of Basket Making was also published.⁽¹⁴⁰⁾ The war-time demand for labour gave a further impetus to open as distinct from sheltered employment.

By 1961 60.5% of the registered blind persons in employment in England and Wales were in "other occupations" as against 28.7% in the workshops and only 10.8% in Home Workers' schemes.⁽¹⁴¹⁾ In the workshops,

(138) National Institute for the Blind Bulletin No.1. Employment of the Blind (undated) P.2.

(139) As 138 above, pages 3-8 and 8-15.

(140) National Institute for the Blind Bulletin No.5 (undated) Basket Making by the Blind.

(141) Ministry of Labour Report of the Working Party on Workshops for the Blind, 1962. Appendix 2. Page.56.

however, little progress had been made in finding new employments. In 1962 it was reported that the great majority of workshop employees were still on handicraft work and that "much of the work done and the methods used are just as they were described on the Report of the Departmental Committee of 1917".⁽¹⁴²⁾

(4) The improvement of management efficiency

In addition to wages, marketing and the extension of employment opportunities the Advisory Committee was concerned to improve the management of workshops. While they recognized that it was exceptionally difficult to conduct a workshop at a profit, the Committee considered that the losses sustained by some institutions were excessive. In their Report for 1922-23 the Committee made reference to an investigation made by one of the Inspectors for the Blind which showed that, in the workshops studied, the losses due to augmentation and trade deficit varied from £34 to £150 per worker employed with a mean figure of £69.⁽¹⁴³⁾

One factor which made it difficult to compare the performance of one workshop with another was the lack of a uniform method of keeping accounts. To facilitate the comparison of trading results and the general financial situation of the workshops the Committee had, in 1918, drawn up a method of presenting accounts which they suggested could be generally adopted.⁽¹⁴⁴⁾ Although this recommendation was circulated by the Ministry of Health in 1921⁽¹⁴⁵⁾ it seems to have had only limited acceptance since in the Report for 1928-29 reference was again made to

(142) As 141 above, par.28, page.8.

(143) Advisory Committee Fourth Annual Report 1922-1923, P.8.

(144) Advisory Committee Report 1918-1919, Pages 10 and 24-25.

(145) Ministry of Health Circular 262, December 21st 1921. Workshops for the Blind.

the difficulties arising from the lack of uniformity in workshop accounts. ⁽¹⁴⁶⁾ A further Circular issued in 1933 set out a somewhat modified form of accounts drawn up in consultation with the Association of Workshops for the Blind and requested that thereafter all workshop accounts should be presented in the manner shown. ⁽¹⁴⁷⁾

In 1923 a uniform system of costing which had been devised at the request of the Advisory Committee by the Inspectors of Blind Welfare was also recommended for general adoption. ⁽¹⁴⁸⁾ As previously mentioned, the Sub-Committee on Marketing also made pertinent suggestions with regard to costing, stock-checking, stock-taking and the reduction of waste. Other proposals made by the Committee designed to increase efficiency and reduce costs such as the need for joint purchasing arrangements in respect of raw materials, were largely nullified by the general lack of co-operation between workshop undertakings.

(b) Home Workers

The term "Home Worker" was applied to "adult blind persons who, for sufficient reasons, are employed elsewhere than in a workshop in occupations usually practiced in workshops, and are attached for the purpose of care, assistance and supervision to an approved agency". ⁽¹⁴⁹⁾

In the preparation of Home Workers schemes voluntary agencies were required to include arrangements "for the maintenance of the necessary tools and equipment, the supply of materials to the workers, the supervision of and assistance in the making of the article and the marketing of the finished article". ⁽¹⁵⁰⁾ For the effective discharge of the

(146) Advisory Committee Eighth Report 1928-1929. P.14.

(147) Ministry of Health Circular 1306, March 17th 1933. Welfare of the Blind.

(148) Advisory Committee Fifth Annual Report 1923-1924. P.9.

(149) Ministry of Health Circular 7.B.D. August 7th 1919, Par.19.

(150) As 149 above, Par.20.

prescribed duties it was necessary for a voluntary agency to be large enough to provide specialist supervision and adequate marketing facilities. Although the number of Home Workers increased steadily many schemes were too small and in 1934, 876 or more than half of the 1,631 Home Workers, were in six schemes all of which were associated with voluntary agencies in the South and Midlands.⁽¹⁵¹⁾ There was, in fact, opposition to such schemes both from the voluntary agencies which questioned whether it was possible for Home Workers to attain a satisfactory standard of workmanship and the National League of the Blind, which regarded them as a cheap alternative to workshop accommodation. In addition, the League maintained that Home Workers frequently carried out their trades in unsuitable conditions and that their earnings were low.

"Many blind persons are attempting to produce marketable articles in their own homes, frequently in cold damp cellars and huts where the conditions of sanitation and comfort are such that in place of being encouraged by public authorities they should be positively forbidden and adequate workshop accommodation provided.

The earning capacity of Home Workers under these deplorable conditions is very low, and the responsibility of the Agencies employing them, while costly in relation to the services rendered to the blind worker, does not even provide them with such regular employment as might reasonably be expected in workshops".⁽¹⁵²⁾

As with the workshops, the main problems considered by the Advisory Committee with regard to Home Workers related to (a) earnings; (b) marketing and (c) the range of occupations open to persons employed on their own account.

(a) Earnings

In 1921 the Ministry of Health laid down that the weekly earnings of Home Workers should amount to 16/- and 8/- for men and women respectively before the full grant was payable to the supervising agency. While recognizing that the object of this proviso was to "keep this

(151) Advisory Committee Sub-Committee on Marketing etc. P.33.

(152) National League of the Blind Handbook, 1932. Pages 17 & 18.

service on a high plane of industrial effort", the Advisory Committee considered that, having regard to the conditions under which Home Workers carried on their trades, it was difficult for them to achieve the specified level of earnings and recommended that full grants should be paid in respect of all Home Workers whose average weekly earnings were not less than 10/- in the case of men and 5/- for women. This recommendation was not accepted by the Ministry on the ground that the prevailing financial conditions precluded them from so doing. (153)

In their Report for 1922-23 the Committee observed that, although a few agencies were augmenting the wages of Home Workers by a few shillings weekly, no attempt had been made to introduce a scheme of augmentation suitable for general adoption. The Committee, therefore, stated that they considered that the time had arrived when, as with workshops employees, the earnings of Home Workers should be augmented according to a definite system. Accordingly a flat rate of 10/- week was recommended as an interim measure until more information regarding the actual earnings of Home Workers was available. (154) Although, by the next Report, a number of agencies had adopted this suggestion there was still considerable diversity both with regard to the amount and the method of augmentation and the Committee reiterated their view that "it would add prestige to the service and inculcate a genuine industrial spirit among the home workers, comparable to that obtaining in workshops, if at an early date more uniformity could be established throughout the country in regard to augmentation". (155)

The Report for 1926-27 contained the results of a survey of the earnings of 737 persons employed in 15 Home Worker schemes. This survey

(153) Advisory Committee Third Annual Report, 1921. P. 9 & 10.

(154) Advisory Committee Fourth Annual Report, 1922-23. P.9 & 10.

(155) Advisory Committee Fifth Annual Report, 1923-24. P.10.

showed that the average weekly amount earned by 455 men was 20/6. If, however, the earnings averaging 27/- weekly received by 159 piano tuners was deducted, mean earnings dropped to 17/- as against the weekly average of 25/- in respect of male workshop employees. For women, the average weekly earnings of Home Workers was 8/- as against 15/- in the case of females employed in workshops. (156)

Little progress was made, however, in securing greater uniformity in augmentation payments. In 1934, the Sub-Committee on Marketing expressed the opinion that, providing a proper standard of efficiency was maintained, there was no reason why there should be a distinction between the rates of augmentation paid to workshop employees and Home Workers to the detriment of the latter. (157) In their last published Report for 1934-37, the Advisory Committee again dealt with this subject and stated that, while they did not consider it practicable to make any suggestions for a rate of augmentation that would be generally acceptable, they could see "no justification for the very low rates paid in certain areas" and placed on record their regret that the local authorities concerned had not seen fit to deal with the Home Workers in a more generous spirit. (158) Not until 1952 when County and County Borough Councils were advised to operate their Home Workers' schemes in accordance with the recommendations made by a Working Party sponsored by the Ministry of Health earlier in the year were minimum rates of augmentation adopted by all local authorities. (159)

(156) Advisory Committee Seventh Report, 1926-1927, Pages 14 & 15.

(157) Advisory Committee Sub-Committee on Marketing etc. 1934. P. 33.

(158) Advisory Committee Twelfth Report, 1934-1937, P. 11.

(159) Association of Municipal Corporations Local Authorities Advisory Committee on the Conditions of Service of Blind Workers. Minutes of Meeting held on June 17th 1952, Pages 2 & 3.

(b) Marketing

The Advisory Committee considered that three essentials had to be satisfied with if the goods produced by Home Workers were to be satisfactorily marketed, namely:- (1) that the goods should be well made; (2) that the price should be reasonable and (3) that the class of goods made should be in demand. ⁽¹⁶⁰⁾ To ensure that these criteria were met it was important that the Home Worker should be adequately supervised. There was also the fact that the quantity of goods that a Home Worker could sell locally was likely to be insufficient to keep him fully employed. To assist in extending the area of sales the Birmingham and Nottingham Institutions pioneered a scheme under which each agency took three counties and provided a motor cycle by which a competent supervisor could visit outlying workers. ⁽¹⁶¹⁾ Some of the larger schemes used motor sales vans to secure retail sales in remote country districts. The supervisory agencies also assisted in marketing goods by such means as organising sales of work, garden parties, exhibitions and other means of disposing of goods made by the blind. As shown in the section on workshops, the Sub-Committee on Marketing appointed by the Advisory Committee in 1932 expected that the proposed Regional Marketing Boards would dispose of surplus goods made by Home Workers as well as those produced by workshop employees.

(c) The Occupations of Home Workers

In 1921-22 the Advisory Committee pointed out that the clause in the definition of a Home Worker which limited the occupations undertaken by such persons to those "usually practiced in workshop" was too restrictive since it prevented the recognition of such employments as masseurs, poultry keepers etc., although the Ministry of Health had agreed to accept

(160) Advisory Committee Fourth Annual Report, 1922-1923, P.10.

(161) Advisory Committee Second Annual Report, 1919-1920, P.6.

piano tuners and music teachers as constituting special cases. (162)

In the Report for 1923-24 the Committee noted that it was often impracticable to train a person who had become blind in adult life for one of the recognized "blind trades" and that in such cases the only satisfactory occupations that could be found were those for which little special preparation was required such as shop-keeping or tea selling. They therefore recommended that the definition of a home worker should be revised to read:-

"blind persons attached for the purposes of care, assistance and supervision to an approved agency, who, for sufficient reasons, are engaged elsewhere than in a workshop in occupations usually practiced in workshops or taught in training institutions for the blind recognized by the Board of Education or in such other occupations as may be approved by the Minister".(163)

No action was taken on the matter, however, until after the passing of the Local Government Act 1929 as a result of which grants ceased to be paid direct to voluntary agencies. In 1930 a Ministry Circular stressed the desirability of local authorities recognizing blind persons as home workers irrespective of whether or not their occupations could be practiced in workshops. Two conditions were laid down for such recognition. Firstly, that the occupation "should not be a mere pastime" but one in which the home worker might "be in a position to maintain himself out of his earnings assisted by augmentation as in the case of an employee in a workshop". Secondly, that "the occupation should be such as to enable the Association which supervises the scheme to render tangible and continuing service to the home workers". (164)

(162) Advisory Committee. Third Annual Report 1921-22. p.10.

(163) Advisory Committee. Fifth Annual Report 1923-24. p.11.

(164) Ministry of Health Circular No.1086, March 21st 1930.
Local Government Act 1929. Welfare of Blind Persons Para.16. p.4

TABLE 11

Percentage of Registered Blind Persons Aged over 16 classified
as "Unemployables" to the Total Number of Blind 1919 - 1936

<u>Year</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1919	46
1920	47
1921	49
1923	59.6
1925	63.6
1927	67.6
1929	71.2
1932	77.3
1936	80.9

(Source; Reports of Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind)

(D) The Unemployable Blind

The term "unemployable blind" was used to describe blind persons over 16 years of age who were "not employed in an economic sense or under training". As the Advisory Committee pointed out the term "unemployable" was not used in any denigratory sense but was rather a generic description given to a number of groups of the blind in varying circumstances.⁽¹⁶⁵⁾ Some indication of the various classes of blind persons, who, for statistical purposes, were included in this category is given later in this section when dealing with the Report on the unemployable blind issued by the Advisory Committee in 1929.

As can be seen from Table 11 the percentage of "unemployables" to the total blind population showed a constant increase throughout the period 1919-1936. This increase was attributed by the Advisory Committee to the increased efficiency of the Home Teaching Service in locating cases and the inducements to register as blind persons provided by the benefits given by the State, the local authorities and the voluntary agencies which had brought to light many cases which had previously been unknown.⁽¹⁶⁶⁾

Assistance to unemployable blind persons took two main forms namely, the promotion of their general social welfare and arrangements for financial assistance. General social welfare was mainly the responsibility of the Home Teaching Service to which reference is made in the next section of the present Chapter and by the social centres and clubs promoted by the voluntary societies for the blind. The more complicated matter was that of financial assistance to persons,

(165) Advisory Committee. Seventh Annual Report 1926-27. p.16.

(166) Ministry of Health. Advisory Committee Report on the Unemployable Blind 1929. Para.2. p.4

who, for a variety of reasons, were unable to contribute to their own maintenance and support.

The Blind Persons Act 1920 imposed no specific obligation on local authorities to provide financial assistance although County and County Borough Councils were reminded that it was an essential part of their duties under Section 2 of the Act to secure that reasonable provision was made for the unemployable blind living in their own homes. (167)

In their Report for 1924-26 the Advisory Committee gave details of the arrangements made in four different areas for the provision of monetary aid to necessitous blind persons.

In the first area the Town Council had assumed full responsibility for the relief of the unemployable blind. The local voluntary agency had been authorised to investigate all cases and at the Councils expense, to make grants sufficient to bring the weekly incomes of single and married blind persons up to a minimum of 16/6 and 25/- respectively. The Council also met the cost of indoor cases resident in Poor Law institutions. (168)

In the second area the Council had divided responsibility between the voluntary agency and the Board of Guardians. All difficult and destitute cases having no permanent income were dealt with by the Guardians who were prepared to give relief to single persons of up to 15/- weekly. Other cases, which had some permanent independent income were the responsibility of the voluntary agency which was furnished with local authority funds sufficient to enable it to make a payment up to a maximum of 20/- per week to each single blind person. (168)

(167) Ministry of Health. Memo 27.B.D.1920. Blind Persons Act 1920. Memorandum as to Schemes of Local Authorities. Para.4(h) p.4.

(168) Advisory Committee. Sixth Annual Report 1924-26. pp.13-14.

The third example quoted was that in which the local authority made no specific payment in respect of the unemployable blind but ensured that its general grant was sufficient to enable the voluntary agency to meet its obligation in respect of relief. In this instance weekly allowances ranging from 15/- to 25/- were made by the voluntary agency according to a scale covering a variety of circumstances and differentiating between widows, widowers, married and single persons, householders and individuals who were living in lodgings or with relatives. (168)

The final example cited was that of a County Council which made an annual grant of £500 specifically for the unemployable blind to a voluntary agency on the condition that destitute cases should be left to the Board of Guardians. The agency therefore used the grant to bring the weekly income of non-destitute cases up to a minimum of 15/- and 19/- for blind persons living in rural and urban areas respectively after taking rents into consideration. (168)

The Advisory Committee emphasised, however, that while a considerable number of Authorities had made arrangements such as those quoted for the domiciliary assistance of unemployable blind persons, there were still many areas in which no systematic attempt had been made to deal with the question. They therefore considered that County and County Borough Councils should consider the problem with a view to ensuring greater uniformity of provision and suggested that local authorities "in co-operation with the appropriate Boards of Guardians and voluntary agencies should make a survey of the position as regards the unemployable blind in their areas and consider proposals for dealing with their requirements according to a definite policy of assistance". (168)

This recommendation was reiterated in the next Report of the Committee⁽¹⁶⁹⁾ and accepted by the Minister of Health who asked all local authorities to make a detailed return of (a) the general circumstances and (b) the financial circumstances of unemployable blind persons ordinarily resident in their areas. These returns which related to the registered blind population over 16 years of age as at March 31st 1928, were reviewed by the Advisory Committee which published their findings in a Report issued in July 1929.⁽¹⁷⁰⁾

The Report began by presenting a number of important statistics. Between 1927 and 1928 the number of "unemployables" had increased from 31,667 to 36,485 or from 67.6% to 71.8% of the total blind population above school age. Of the 36,485 persons, 5,111 were resident in institutions of which only 763 were in homes and hostels specifically for the blind; the remaining institutional population being made up of 3,130 in Poor Law accommodation, 909 in mental asylums and 309 in undesignated places. The 31,374 cases who were living either in their own homes or in lodgings represented a variety of circumstances and comprised:-

5,780	married women living with their families.
7,960	married men " " " "
12,085	children or members of a family living with parents, relatives or friends.
618	widows living with dependent children.
272	widowers " " " "
4,573	widows, widowers, married or single persons living alone.
86	circumstances unknown (probably well-to-do persons who declined to give any information concerning their domestic circumstances)

31,374

(169) Advisory Committee. Seventh Annual Report 1926-27. p.17.

(170) Ministry of Health. Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind. Report on the Unemployable Blind 1929.

According to the returns, 4,181 of the above cases were in receipt of outdoor relief from the Guardians. Of the total of 36,485 individuals covered by the survey 6,565 or 18% were classified as "defectives". These disabilities additional to blindness related to mental defectiveness, deafness and physical disabilities. Of 2,108 blind mental defectives, 1,250 were in institutions and 858 were living at home. In the case of 1,888 persons who were both blind and deaf, 1,550 were at home as against 338 in institutions. The large majority of blind persons with physical defects were also at home since 2,122 were in this category as against 447 who were resident elsewhere. Finally, the Report summarised the financial circumstances of the 31,374 unemployable blind outside the institutions. From the returns it was shown that before receiving grants from either a local authority or a voluntary agency only 48.7% possessed means in excess of 15/- weekly while after receiving such allowances 66% had an income greater than this amount. From this latter evidence the Committee concluded that the general standard of "means" was lower than they wished to see for unemployable blind persons living in their own homes or in lodgings. Only 60 out of 146 local authorities had, in fact, taken advantage of the powers given by Section 2 of the Blind Persons Act to make definite schemes for the financial assistance of the unemployable blind although others had various arrangements regarding the matter with voluntary agencies. (171)

After surveying the general position the Committee proceeded to make a number of general recommendations relating to the social welfare of the unemployable blind and more detailed proposals for a comprehensive scheme of financial assistance.

(171) As 170. Paras.2-8. pp.4-8

The most important general recommendations were the following:-

1. That the Counties Associations for the blind should be asked to investigate the reasons for the reluctance of the unemployable blind to enter homes and hostels, whether the extent of such residential accommodation was adequate and if there was scope for the establishment of a home to cater for chronic invalids who could not be housed in the other existing establishments. (172)
2. That every encouragement should be given to voluntary agencies working in conjunction with the responsible authorities to do everything possible through the Home Visiting Service to promote the social well-being of blind persons in Poor Law institutions. (172)
3. That the voluntary agencies should take special care to mitigate any sense of isolation on the part of blind persons living alone. (173)
4. That local authorities should consider whether more institutional accommodation was required for blind mental defectives. (174)
5. That the age of eligibility for the receipt of an old age pension should be reduced on the ground that experience had shown that "A proportion of blind persons between the ages of 40 and 50 years are unable to profit fully by training". (175)

Important recommendations were also made for the provision of financial assistance by the local authorities to unemployable blind persons.

(172) As 170. Para.3. p.5

(173) As 170. Para.4. p.6

(174) As 170. Para.6. p.6

(175) As 170. Para.9. p.8

The Minister of Health was urged to encourage local authorities to make declarations under Section 5 of the Local Government Act 1929 to the effect that assistance to the blind in their areas should be given under the Blind Persons Act of 1920 and not by way of Poor Relief. (176)

Local authorities were also asked to consider the adoption of a comprehensive scheme for the monetary assistance of the unemployable blind in their areas including the prescription of "a definite standard" up to which incomes should be brought after taking into account the existing means of the individual and such factors as the cost of living and the social and financial conditions of the locality. For two reasons the Committee considered that this standard should be higher than that applicable under the Poor Relief: firstly, because, in general, greater assistance was required to relieve the destitution of a blind person as distinct from a sighted person; and secondly, because the blind were "deserving, as some compensation for their social and economic handicap, of at least a few of the comforts and amenities of life". (177)

The Committee expressed the view that a weekly income of 25/- was required "for the adequate maintenance of an adult blind person living alone under urban conditions but that 18/- might be sufficient in rural areas". A lower individual standard of assistance was also held to be justified to a blind married couple living together due to such shared expenses as coal, gas and rent. (178)

(176) As 170. Para.9. p.8

(177) As 170. Paras.10-12. pp.8-9.

(178) As 170. Para. 12. p.10.

The Report gave guidance on the calculation of the means of blind applicants for relief including the provision of a special appendix giving examples of the calculation of the means of "difficult cases" such as blind married persons with dependent children and the treatment of savings or investments where an adult child had remained at home to take charge of blind parents. (179)

Apart from such cases or exceptional circumstances e.g. permanent illness where the resultant expenses were abnormally heavy, the Committee were of the opinion that means should be assessed on the same bases as applied in connection with the Old Age Pensions Acts. They also considered that local authorities would be justified in exploring the possibility of requiring near relatives to contribute to the support of unemployable blind persons before giving relief from public funds. (a) (180)

The Report suggested that the responsibility for the administration of a scheme of relief should be vested in either a Committee or sub-committee of the local authority or, alternatively, delegated to a Committee of a voluntary agency. In either event the Report advocated that the Committee should meet monthly and have machinery for making a careful enquiry into the "circumstances, environment and personal needs of the blind person whose case is to be submitted for consideration". An important function of the Committee was to ensure that only blind persons who were "genuinely and permanently unemployable" were put forward for assistance and that those who were capable of work or

(179) As 170. Appendix pp.14-15+16

(180) As 170. Para.12. p.11.

(a) See page 316 for an explanation of the reason for this recommendation.

suitable for training should be debarred from benefiting under the scheme of the authority or agency. The need to review the circumstances of beneficiaries at regular intervals was also stressed.⁽¹⁸¹⁾

Finally, the Committee urged that local authorities should be encouraged to take advantage of the facilities provided by Section 6(3) of the Local Government Act of 1929 by which, on making a declaration of its intention to provide relief under the Blind Persons Act, assistance both to the blind person and his sighted dependents could be given through the Committee of the council responsible for administering the Act rather than through the Public Assistance Committee.⁽¹⁸²⁾

The Report of the Advisory Committee on the unemployable blind was circulated to the local authorities and voluntary agencies by the Minister of Health without comment. Little in the way of direct results seems to have accrued from the Committees recommendations although in 1930 it was stated that, following the circulation of the Report, an additional 20 authorities had made schemes for the assistance of the unemployable blind.⁽¹⁸³⁾

In 1934, therefore, Mrs. I. Cowley, one of the members of the Advisory Committee who had been nominated by the Minister of Health because of special experience of voluntary work among the blind, suggested that the position of the unemployable blind should again be reviewed. In a lengthy memorandum submitted to the Advisory Committee, Mrs. Cowley specified a number of matters raised in the

(181) As 170. Para.12. p.11.

(182) As 170. Para.12. p.12.

(183) Advisory Committee. Ninth Annual Report 1930. p.17.

Report of 1929 to which no answers had been received and suggested that a Report should be prepared and published giving "A comprehensive list of what is done in each of the 146 local authorities areas for different classes of unemployable blind e.g. single persons living alone, married with sighted wife or husband, married, both blind, etc. No place should be allowed to escape with "Treated on merits". Does an area giving a minimum of 27/6 really give a better income than one making up to £1? The categories and the method of giving averages etc. should be indicated".⁽¹⁸⁴⁾

In November 1934 Mrs. Cowley's proposal was accepted and a sub-committee was appointed to "Consider and report to the (Advisory) Committee upon any of the points in the existing Report on the unemployable blind which appear to need modification or simplification".⁽¹⁸⁵⁾ The Report of this second investigation which was published in 1935 first reviewed the methods adopted by the local authorities with regard to domiciliary assistance and then reviewed the matters which had been dealt with in the Report issued six years previously.

The sub-committee did not consider that they would be justified in obtaining further data regarding the unemployable blind since the statistics contained in the 1929 Report probably gave a true picture of the number of blind persons in each of the various categories. They did,

(184) Suggested Review of Position of Unemployable Blind. Memorandum embodying the observations made by Mrs. Cowley at the meeting of the Advisory Committee held on July 18th 1934. On M.H.55/120. P.R.O.

(185) Ministry of Health. Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind. Report of the sub-committee on the Unemployable Blind 1935. p.3

however, note that the percentage of unemployables to the total blind population had risen from 71.2 in 1929 to 79 in 1934. This increase was explained by the rise in the number of blind persons who had attained 50 years of age from 34,453 in 1929 to 45,770 five years later. (186)

As requested in the earlier Report, the Counties Associations had investigated the position regarding homes for the blind and had concluded that the existing accommodation was adequate. The sub-committee expressed the opinion that, in any case, it was better that blind persons should live with the sighted rather than be accommodated in segregated communities. (187) The recommendation made in 1929 that a reduction in the age for the receipt of a blind pension from 50 to 40 would be justified was repeated. The Committee, in fact, declared that the proposal applied with even greater force since the effect of reducing the age of eligibility for pension would be to enable the State to share with the local authorities, "the cost of providing an adequate system of domiciliary assistance to all unemployable blind persons". (188) The amount of 25/- was again recommended as constituting an adequate sum for the maintenance of an adult blind person living alone under urban conditions although the sub-committee agreed that the standards set out in the 1929 Report were not necessarily to be regarded as maximum and noted that some authorities had, in fact,

(186) As 185. paras. 9-10. pp.5 & 6.

(187) As 185. Paras.11-13. p.6.

(188) As 185. Para. 16. p.7.

decided to increase the weekly income of the unemployable blind up to 27/6.⁽¹⁸⁹⁾ An Appendix to the Report gave details of the scales of financial assistance to the unemployable blind in each of the 146 local authorities. This appendix showed that there was considerable variation in the amounts paid ranging from 15/- to 27/6 and 25/- to 52/-⁽¹⁹⁰⁾ for individuals and married couples respectively. As the Report pointed out, however, the figures given had, for purposes of comparison, to be treated with some caution, as a great deal depended on the conditions for relief laid down in the regulations of each authority and in particular the method by which the means of applicants for assistance were assessed. Thus it was possible for an amount of 25/- to be actually less generous than a grant of 22/- if in the former case the conditions for the assessment of means were more strict than in the latter instance.⁽¹⁹¹⁾ In an endeavour to promote greater uniformity both with regard to payments and procedures for assessment the Report included two further appendices, the first setting out a model set of regulations with regard to domiciliary assistance to unemployable and other necessitous blind persons and the second showing a specimen schedule completed as a suggestion to local authorities as to the method of assessing the means of blind applicants for relief.⁽¹⁹²⁾ A suggestion was again made that, to remove one of the principal objections that prevented local authorities from making declarations under Section 5 of the Local Government Act, the Blind Persons Act

(189) As 185. Paras.21 & 23. p.8

(190) As 185. Appendix II. pp.14-17

(191) As 185. Para.24. pp.8 & 9.

(192) As 185. Appendix III. pp.18 & 19.

should be amended to enable relief given to the blind to be recovered from relatives as was the case when such assistance was provided under Section 14 of the Poor Law Act of 1930. (193)

Finally, the Report urged the need for an early review of the Law of Settlement, deprecated the provision made in the scheme of one local authority (Burnley) that no person should be assisted "who had not applied and been eligible for assistance before attaining the age of 70", stated that relief should not be given, except in special circumstances, to a blind wife with an able-bodied husband in full work and referred to the need to expand the existing social and recreation facilities for the blind. (194)

The two Reports of the Advisory Committee dealt with in this section contained both progressive and conservative elements. On the progressive side the recommendations for the lowering of the pension age and for a rate of relief above the minimum due to the special circumstances of blindness may be instanced. On the conservative side the concession to the less generous local authorities who objected to their inability to secure contributions from relatives in respect of assistance to the blind given under the Blind Persons Act reflect the persistence of Poor Law attitudes. The true significance of the two Reports is probably that they helped to secure a greater awareness on the part of both the Ministry of Health and the local authorities of the special problems of the unemployable blind and assisted in securing the reduction of the age for the receipt of a blind pension from 50 to

(193) As 185. Para.29. p.10.

(194) As 185. Paras.32-34. pp.11 & 12.

40 years. The effect of the Local Government Act on provision for the unemployable blind is dealt with later in the present Chapter. (a)

(E) Home Teachers

The development of home teaching for the blind is attributable mainly to the pioneer efforts of the Indigent Blind Visiting Society, founded in 1834 by the Lords Shaftesbury and Ebury and the Home Teaching Society for the Blind established in 1855 by a Miss Graham of Clapham and William Moon. Both organisations owed their origins to evangelical motives. The object of the Indigent Blind Visiting Society, for example, was "To assist and ameliorate the conditions of the aged and destitute blind poor in London and its vicinity by providing them with daily readers of the Scriptures at their habitations, with conductors to church, with temporal relief in necessitous cases". (195) The Home Teaching Society, however, regarded its field of activity as extending beyond "London and its vicinity" and, by 1884, its Annual Report contained a list of 79 Home Teaching Societies in London and the Provinces. (196)

Although the title "home teacher" had had a long usage it was not until 1919 that the term was first used in an official context when the Ministry of Health notified voluntary agencies that, inter alia, a grant of £78 per annum would be paid in respect of each home teacher employed by an agency with the consent of the Minister. Such

(a) See pages 313-319

(195) Indigent Blind Visiting Society.
Tenth Annual Report 1844. p.5

(196) Home Teaching Society for the Blind.
Twenty-eighth Annual Report 1884. p.14

consent was not required in respect of home teachers who had been employed before July 1st 1919. For the purpose of the Grant Regulations the expression "home teacher" was defined as "a person paid and employed by an approved agency to teach adult blind persons in their own homes how to read embossed type, to read to them, and to instruct them in simple forms of home occupations". (197)

The home teacher therefore was a key person in any scheme of blind welfare. After 1920 he, or more frequently, she, became the link between the provisions of the Blind Persons Act and the individual blind person. Three aspects of home teaching received the attention of the Advisory Committee during the period 1919-1937 namely,

- (a) Recruitment
- (b) Training
- (c) Conditions of service.

The work of the Advisory Committee with regard to these three topics is now discussed.

(a) Recruitment

As a result of grant aid and the strong encouragement given to local authorities to make arrangements in their schemes for the employment of home teachers as "a means of providing considerable amelioration of the lot of many blind persons in many very real though indefinite ways", (198) the number of such appointments rose rapidly. In 1921, the Committee estimated that 65 sighted and 144 blind or partially blind persons were employed as home teachers by various agencies throughout the Country. The figures, so far as they are

(197) Ministry of Health. Circular 7.B.D. Welfare of the Blind August 7th 1919. p.8

(198) Ministry of Health. Memorandum 27.B.D. 1920. Blind Persons Act. Schemes of Local Authorities.

available, for ensuing years are given below:-

TABLE 12

Numbers of Home Teachers for the Blind 1922-1936

<u>Year</u>	<u>Blind or Partially Blind</u>	<u>Sighted</u>	<u>Total</u>
1922	146	84	230
1923/24	159	111	270
1924/26	161	182	343
1926/27	148	230	378
1928/29	146	284	430
1930			441
1936			493

Sources: 1922-1930 Reports of Advisory Committee.
1939 M.O.H. Handbook "The Welfare of the Blind".

As can be seen from Table 12 prior to 1923 home teaching was primarily an occupation for blind persons and in 1920 the Ministry of Health advised local authorities that home teaching afforded a satisfactory field of employment especially in urban areas. (199)

Although the blind home teacher had certain advantages such as a personal understanding of the difficulties of the disability, there were obvious drawbacks particularly in connection with travelling or the inability of a sightless person to help with forms in ordinary print. These disadvantages caused agencies and authorities to recruit sighted rather than blind persons to fill new posts. The change in the proportion of sighted to blind home teachers resulted in a vigorous

(199) As 198

protest on the part of the National League of the Blind which made representations to the Ministry of Health that blind persons should have preference to sighted persons when appointments as home teachers were being made. These representations were, in turn, referred to the Advisory Committee which, while recognizing that in some cases suitably qualified blind individuals could, with advantage be employed as home teachers, also pointed out that other circumstances such as an extensive area or the supervision of home workers made it essential for a sighted person to be employed. The Advisory Committee therefore refused to support the claims of the League "irrespective of the particular circumstances of each area" and urged the Ministry "in considering the appointment of a home teacher to consider the whole of the circumstances of the area and to approve the person best suited to carry on the work in that area, whether blind or seeing". In reply to the assertion of the League that home teaching provided an avenue of employment for suitably qualified blind individuals, the Advisory Committee retorted that "it would be a mistake for a few blind persons to be employed in this way if it means that large numbers of unemployable blind will not receive the attention and assistance they require". (200)

The National League also arranged for a number of questions on the matter to be raised in Parliament. Thus, in 1923, Morgan Jones, the Labour Member for Caerphilly, asked whether the Minister of Health

(200) Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind.
Fourth Annual Report 1922-23. pp.12-13.

"has received any protests against the policy of his Department in advocating the employment of sighted persons as home teachers under the Blind Persons Act; whether he is aware that His Majesty's Inspectors informed the Blackpool Borough Council that the Council had no right to employ a sightless person and that approval had been given by the Department to the appointment in Chester of a sighted person and also of an advertisement requesting applications from sighted persons willing to be trained as home teachers, and whether, in view of the fact that by this means an avenue of employment for blind persons is being closed, he will give instructions that the local authorities are at least to be left free to use their own discretion".

In reply, the Minister of Labour, Sir W. Joynson Hicks, representing the Minister of Health, stated that a protest had been received from the National League of the Blind. In a number of cases, however, the appointment of blind persons had been approved the test applied being the ability of an applicant to do the work, and, as grant was payable free discretion in the matter of appointment could not be given to the local authorities. (201)

The National League continued to raise the matter both with the Advisory Committee and in Parliament, ^(a) and as late as 1937 the Committee found it necessary to rebut the suggestion that one of the objects of the home teaching service was to provide employment for blind persons and that the duties of home teachers should be prescribed to make people without sight more eligible for appointment.

The Committee did, however, express their unanimous opinion that "in areas where one set of workers can be complementary to the other" there was scope for the employment of some blind persons as

(201) Hansard. February 13th 1923. Cols. 340 & 341.

(a) See for example, Hansard December 17th 1924 Col. 990
February 19th 1925. Col. 1286.
Advisory Committee Reports 1923-24 pp. 11-12. 1924-26 p. 20.

home teachers provided they were suitably qualified to undertake the duties involved. (202)

It is of interest that in 1951, the Working Party on the Employment of Blind Persons reiterated a recommendation made in 1947 by the Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind that "encouragement should be given to the appointment of blind persons as home teachers" where they possessed the necessary qualifications and were otherwise suitable. (203) This suggestion was subsequently commended to local authorities on the ground that sighted and blind home teachers working in co-operation would be able to provide a better service than either working alone. (204)

(b) Training

On June 12th 1920, the Registrar of the College of Teachers of the Blind stated that a report on the subject of home teaching had been received from the Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind. The report was accompanied by a request that it should be submitted to the Committee of the College for the purpose of ascertaining their views on it "and (possibly), subsequently in co-operation with the Board of Education, to take over the duties of examining body". (205) In their report the Advisory Committee suggested that the approval of appointment on the part of the Ministry of Health of new entrants should be

(202) Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind.
Report of the Sub-Committee on Home Teaching 1937. para.33. p.12.

(203) Ministry of Labour and National Service.
Report of the Working Party on the Employment of Blind Persons 1951. Para.211. pp.54-55.

(204) Ministry of Health, Circular 8/52, April 15th 1952.
The Home Teaching Service.

(205) College of Teachers of the Blind Minute Book 1915-1924.
Minute of Committee Meeting held on June 12th 1920.

conditional on an undertaking that each newly appointed home teacher would attend, within twelve months, a training course of lectures to be given twice yearly, and "satisfy the examiners". On February 21st 1921 a Sub-Committee of the College was appointed to prepare an examination scheme.⁽²⁰⁶⁾ The proposals were finalised on July 9th 1921 and forwarded to the Ministry of Health with an intimation that the College would conduct the examination if the Ministry so desired.⁽²⁰⁷⁾ On August 19th 1921 the Ministry of Health replied accepting the scheme and agreeing that a grant of £20 per annum should be made to the College for undertaking the conduct of the examination.⁽²⁰⁸⁾

A recommendation that the scheme prepared by the College should be adopted by the Ministry of Health was also mentioned by the Advisory Committee in their Report for 1921 to 1922. The Committee further expressed the view that the salary of a certificated home teacher should not be less than £156 per annum.⁽²⁰⁹⁾

The original scheme of examination for home teachers involved six subjects. Four compulsory subjects were specified namely,

1. Braille
2. Moon
3. Manual Alphabet (including the single hand system)
4. Professional knowledge.

In addition candidates were required to show proficiency in any two

(206) As 205. Minutes of Meeting held on February 21st 1921.

(207) As 205. Minutes of Meeting held on July 9th 1921.

(208) Letter from E.D. Macgregor to the College of Teachers dated August 19th 1921. In Minute Book 1915-1924.

(209) Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind. Third Annual Report 1921-1922. p.11.

"Pastime Occupations" selected from:-

- a. String bag making and netting
- b. Hand knitting
- c. Straw bag making
- d. Raffia and pulp-cane basket making
- e. Rug Making
- f. Cane seating
- g. Rush seating

The examination was open to both blind and sighted teachers and a candidate who failed to gain the certificate in any one year was not required to re-take any subjects in which he had passed. (210)

The first examinations under the above scheme were held in May 1923 at the School for the Blind, Swiss Cottage, London, when over 50 candidates presented themselves for examination. (211) In 1925 the College of Teachers issued a "handbook" to serve as a guide to candidates for the examination and also a manual which would assist the home teacher in his day to day activities. (212)

Meanwhile the Ministry of Health had informed local authorities and voluntary agencies that all home teachers appointed on or after April 1st 1923 were, as a condition of appointment and the receipt of Ministry grant, required to pass the examination of the College of Teachers within a period of two years. Existing teachers were, however, under no obligation to take the examination although the Ministry was anxious that they should be encouraged to do so. (213) The rapid

(210) College of Teachers of the Blind. Home Teachers Examination. Regulations and Syllabus 1923.

(211) Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind. Fourth Annual Report 1922-23. p.12.

(212) College of Teachers of the Blind. Handbook for Home Teachers of the Blind. First edition 1925.

(213) Ministry of Health. Circular 369. January 18th 1923. Examination and Certification of Home Teachers.

increase between 1924 and 1936 in the number of certificated home teachers as a result of the action of the Ministry of Health in making certification compulsory is shown in Table 13.

TABLE 13

Certificated Home Teachers of the Blind 1924-1936

<u>Year</u>	<u>Certificated</u>	<u>In Process of Certification</u>	<u>Exempt</u>	<u>Total</u>
1924/26	93	121	129	343
1926/27	187	72	119	378
1928/29	272	51	107	430
1930	276	69	96	441
1936	414	42	37	493

For Sources see Table 12.

The examinations of the College of Teachers did not, however, test personal qualities and in 1937 the Sub-Committee appointed by the Advisory Committee to report on Home Teaching stated that "much unsatisfactory home teaching" was due to the appointment of persons who, although holding the certificate of the College, had not the necessary personal qualities for the work. For the guidance of local authorities in selecting staff, the Advisory Committee drew up the following list of the "essential qualifications" which, in their opinion, should be possessed by all home teachers:-

- (i) Suitable age (at first appointment not to be under 25 and not normally over 40 years of age)
- (ii) Temperamental suitability (Home teaching is to be regarded as a vocation rather than a mere livelihood)
- (iii) Personality
- (iv) Judgement, tact and resourcefulness
- (v) Previous experience of work of a welfare nature

(vi) Certification by the College of Teachers of the Blind.

(vii) General good health and physical fitness.

The Committee also pointed out that as in some rural areas home teachers were required to use a car, the possession of a driving licence might be essential. (214)

The Sub-Committee made several other recommendations regarding the selection and further training of home teachers. In particular local authorities and voluntary agencies were asked to arrange conferences for the purpose of providing opportunities for discussion and the exchange of views between serving staff. Local authorities were also asked to consider whether refresher courses in such subjects as the law and administration of social welfare could be arranged. The importance of ensuring that home teachers were aware of the various appliances and apparatus designed for the use of blind persons was also emphasised. (215) (a)

(214) Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind.
Report of the Sub-Committee on Home Teaching
H.M.S.O. Paras.10. p.6. 1937

(215) As 214. Paras. 16, 17 and 18. pp.7 and 8.

(a) After the Second World War two patterns of training developed for home teachers. Some entrants without previous experience of the work attended courses of one year in duration organised by the Northern and Southern Regional Associations for the Blind. Others received in-service training while working as probationer home teachers. In 1969 the Department of Health and Social Security, the College of Teachers and the Regional Associations agreed that, because of the changing concept of social work resulting from the Younghusband and Seebohm Reports the examination, in the form devised by the College of Teachers, should be held for the last time in July 1973.

(c) Conditions of Service

As shown in the previous sections of this study, by 1934 substantial progress had been made in the recruitment and training of home teachers. In 1934, however, the Advisory Committee expressed concern at what it termed "certain disquieting factors in the Home Teaching Service", particularly the insufficient numbers of home teachers in certain areas and the fact that, in some places, home teachers were being utilised to distribute domiciliary assistance, with the result that their primary duties of visiting and instructing were being neglected.⁽²¹⁶⁾ The attention of local authorities and voluntary agencies was drawn to the situation of the Home Teaching Service in a memorandum on the subject prepared by the Advisory Committee.⁽²¹⁷⁾

This memorandum stated that the ratio of home teachers in proportion to the blind population of a given area varied from 1 in 56 to 1 in 428, the average being 1 in 157. The efficiency of a service could not, as the Advisory Committee pointed out, be measured solely in the number of teachers employed. Among the variable factors involved in determining how many home teachers were required to provide an adequate service in a particular area were the number of registered blind who needed visiting, the length and frequency of visits, the distances to be covered, available transport and the nature of the services given by the individual home teacher. In this last connection the memorandum pointed out that, while in some localities, the duties

(216) Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind
Eleventh Report 1933-34. p.13

(217) Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind
"The Home Teaching Service" printed as an Appendix
to the Eleventh Report of the Advisory Committee 1933-34
pp.18-20.

of a home teacher were confined to visitation, in others additional responsibilities such as the supervision of Home Workers Schemes or the distribution of assistance were imposed. Such additional tasks were deprecated by the Advisory Committee on the ground that they could not be carried out "without detriment to the home teacher's proper duties" which were listed as follows:-

- (i) Discovery of blind persons and ascertainment of their needs
- (ii) Visiting
- (iii) Teaching Braille or Moon
- (iv) Teaching pastime occupations
- (v) The pre-school child and the school child on holiday
- (vi) Hygiene
- (vii) Welfare work
- (viii) Social centres and classes
- (ix) The special care of the Deaf-Blind.

(218)

The concern of the Advisory Committee at the state of the Home Teaching Service was further manifested by the appointment in 1935 of a Sub-Committee "To investigate the service of the Home Teaching of the Blind from all aspects and with due regard to previous memoranda and recommendations, with a view to the making, if necessary, of further recommendations in such form as might be acceptable to the Minister of Health for general circulation to those concerned". (219)

The Sub-Committee reported in 1937. The Report reiterated practically word for word the observations made in the earlier memorandum regarding the duties of home teachers and expanded the comments concerning the proportion of home teachers to the blind population.

(218) As 217

(219) Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind.
Report of the Sub-Committee on Home Teaching H.M.S.O.1937
Para.1. p.3

The recommendations of the Report relating to the training of home teachers have already been mentioned. So far as conditions of service were concerned the Sub-Committee suggested that the normal working week should not exceed 44 hours, that in view of the strain imposed by their work home teachers should have "ample periods of recuperation" and that the retirement age should be within the range of 60-65 years. It was also recommended that, whenever practicable, home teachers should be included in superannuation schemes and that the grants of local authorities to voluntary agencies should be increased to cover payments made for this purpose. Finally, local authorities were advised to ensure that the work of home teachers was adequately supervised either by a Committee or person to whom weekly reports should be submitted. (220)

Following the publication of the Advisory Committee an independent investigation into the conditions of service of home teachers was undertaken by the College of Teachers of the Blind. The results of this survey, published in 1938, gave particulars of the terms of employment of 395 of the 466 home teachers then at work in England and Wales. Of the 395 home teachers, 306 had case loads of less than 150 blind persons while 19 had between 200-250 names on their registers; 237 out of 375 had salaries of £156 or above and about 60% were in superannuation schemes. (221) (a)

(220) As 219. Paras.13,14,15 and 26-28. pp.7,10 and 11.

(221) College of Teachers of the Blind. Report of the General Executive on the Status and Emoluments of Home Teachers. December 1st 1938. pp.3, 5 and 6.

(a) A National Association of Home Teachers of the Blind was founded in 1943. In 1946 Home Teachers were placed in the A.P.T.Division of the Local Government salary scales. In 1966 the Association changed its name to the National Association of Social Welfare Officers of the Blind of England and Wales. Home teachers are therefore now known as Social Welfare Officers of the Blind.

(F.) Miscellaneous

Under this heading reference may be made to the work of the Advisory Committee with regard to:

- (1) The centralisation of collections made by voluntary agencies for the blind
- (2) The welfare of certain special categories of blind persons.

(1) The Centralisation of Collections

In their Report for 1919-1920 the Advisory Committee stated that "numerous conferences and discussions" had taken place during the year with regard to a "scheme of centralisation, which while preserving local interests would secure the creation of a common fund out of which both the ordinary requirements of all agencies, both national and local, could be met and extraordinary needs immediately satisfied as emergencies arose".⁽²²²⁾ Among the advantages claimed for such a scheme was that it would obviate wasted effort and remove the friction that frequently arose between local and national agencies as a result of both types of organisations appealing for funds in the same district. A Sub-Committee was therefore appointed to consider how a centralised scheme of collections could be arranged. In 1921 this Sub-Committee reported to the effect that the only body in a position to carry out such a scheme was the National Institute for the Blind.⁽²²³⁾ The Council of the National Institute had already expressed the view that a strong combined appeal from a number of agencies for the blind in the Greater London area would meet with more support than a number of small scale appeals on behalf of individual institutions and in 1921 negotiations with

(222) Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind.
Second Annual Report 1919-1920. pp.11-12.

(223) Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind.
Third Annual Report 1921-1922. pp.11-12.

various metropolitan workshops resulted in the formation of The Greater London Fund for the Blind. Under this scheme, the net proceeds of the Fund were distributed among the participating organisations in agreed proportions according to the numbers of blind persons assisted by each institution. One consequence of the establishment of the Fund was that the expenses of collection declined in relation to the income raised. (224)

The subject of the centralisation of collections continued to receive the attention of the Advisory Committee but, due to a failure to secure agreement between the various agencies for the blind, partly on the ground that unification would undermine local sentiment, it was 1926 before a compromise scheme was worked out by the National Institute and the Advisory Committee. This provided that "the existing collecting machinery of the Institute should be utilised in the interests of all Agencies for the Blind". In turn, as a means of securing "the wider confidence of the Country and to foster a better appreciation of both national and local services", the National Institute agreed to reconstitute its Council on a more representative basis. The existing Council of 19 members was therefore increased by an additional 17 members drawn from local voluntary agencies for the blind and local authorities concerned with the administration of the Blind Persons Act. In making the initial appointments the National Institute undertook to accept nominations made by the Advisory Council but it was also agreed that as an essential part of the arrangements the newly constituted Council would consider the expediency of amending the Institute's

(224) National Institute for the Blind.
Annual Report 1925-1926. pp.41-42.

Articles of Association "so as to provide for filling up a proportion of future vacancies on an elective and representative basis".⁽²²⁵⁾

By 1928 negotiations between the Institute and local voluntary agencies had resulted in the making of 67 collecting agreements. Such agreements fell broadly into two types. Under the first type the collection of funds was undertaken by the Institute which retained 25 per cent of the amount raised for national work and gave the remaining 75 per cent to the local agency. With the second type of agreement the local agency organised the collection. In this case the proceeds were divided in the proportions of 80 per cent to the local organisation and 20 per cent to the Institute. Not all the money received by the Institute was retained for its own purposes, however, since agreed proportions were redistributed to other national organisations such as the National Library for the Blind.⁽²²⁶⁾

In 1931, the National Institute notified the Advisory Committee that, in fulfilment of the undertaking given in 1926, it proposed to increase the size of its Council to 62 members of whom 24 were to be national members, elected by the Council, and the remainder elected representatives of the Local Government Associations, the Counties Associations and other national organisations for the blind. Provision was also to be made for the co-option of members. Of the national members, so far as was reasonably possible, not less than one third were to be themselves blind.⁽²²⁷⁾

(225) Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind.
Sixth Report 1924-1926. pp.20-23.

(226) National Institute for the Blind. Annual Report 1928 p.8.

(227) Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind.
Tenth Report 1931-1932. pp.15 and 16.

By 1939 the number of collecting agreements had risen to 98.⁽²²⁸⁾ Writing in 1945, Wilson⁽²²⁹⁾ reported that the Institute had made agreements for the unification of collections with local societies covering the greater part of the Country and that "this simplification had reduced confusion in the public mind" and had done much "to cement friendly relationship between the Institute and the local agencies". At that date, however, the Institute and the National Library for the Blind were the only national parties to the agreement. "A number of other national agencies, the largest of which is St. Dunstons - which separated from the Institute in 1923 - continue to make independent nation wide appeals. A few local societies continue, illogically, to make appeals on a national scale".⁽²²⁹⁾ Nevertheless as Wilson suggests, unified collecting machinery assisted in preparing the way for the broader co-ordination of services for the blind. An account of this movement for the rationalisation of voluntary effort, one consequence of which was a further enlargement in 1937 of the Council of the Institute to 100 members, is given later in the present Chapter.^(a)

(2) The Welfare of Special Categories of Blind Persons

The Reports of the Advisory Committee frequently made reference to blind persons who, because of additional disabilities or personal defects of character constituted special problems.

(228) National Institute for the Blind.
Annual Report 1939-1940. p.16.

(229) Wilson, J.F. "Voluntary Organisations for the Welfare of the Blind" in Bourdillon A.F.C (Edit) "Voluntary Social Services" Methuen 1945, Chapter 4. p.68.

(a) See page 339

Of the blind with additional disabilities, three categories received special attention from the Advisory Committee namely,

1. Those with mental defects
2. The chronically infirm
3. The blind-deaf

In 1920 the Committee drew attention to the needs of the mentally defective blind and the desirability of effective action on the part of the Ministry of Health and the local authorities in the direction of the erection and equipment of suitable homes for the accommodation of such cases.⁽²³⁰⁾ In the following Report the Committee referred to the fact that from the returns made by local authorities 1,383 persons had been classified as mentally defective out of a registered blind population of 34,894. As the voluntary institutions that had contemplated making provision for this class had been obliged to abandon their efforts through lack of funds and the local authorities had been restrained from using their powers under the Mental Deficiency Act of 1913 by the Board of Control, no organised services for such cases were in existence.⁽²³¹⁾ Some progress was made in 1922 when the Braille and Servers of the Blind League opened a small home for mentally defective blind children at Reigate in Surrey.^(a) Initially the intention was to cater for children under the age of 7 but one age range was subsequently fixed at 7-16.⁽²³²⁾ In their Report for 1923-24

(230) Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind.
Second Annual Report 1920. p.14.

(231) Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind.
Third Annual Report 1921-1922. pp.16-17.

(a) This home, The Ellen Terry Home for Blind Defective Children was, subsequent to 1948, taken over by the South West Regional Hospital Board.

(232) Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind.
Fourth Annual Report 1922-1923. p.16.

the Committee also noted that a separate building had been reserved for 40 mentally defective blind girls over 16 years of age at Stoke Park Colony, near Bristol.⁽²³³⁾ No further reference to the matter was made by the Committee until 1931-1932 when mention is made of a conference convened by the Minister of Health at their instigation between representatives of the Board of Control, the National Institute for the Blind and other interested bodies "to consider the possibility of utilising certain premises for the accommodation of mentally defective blind persons over sixteen years of age".⁽²³⁴⁾ On the ground of the existing need for economy it was agreed that further consideration of the matter should be deferred.

The 1922 Report of the Advisory Committee drew attention to the fact that the majority of homes for the blind lacked equipment and staff to enable them to care for blind persons who were chronically infirm. The Committee therefore expressed the view that a special home for the chronically infirm should, if possible, be established under voluntary auspices.⁽²³⁵⁾ Again progress under voluntary auspices seemed possible since in 1923 the Committee noted that the National Institute for the Blind had acquired premises at St. Leonards on Sea which it was intended should be adapted for the accommodation of physically defective blind persons.⁽²³⁶⁾ In the event, the home which was opened on July 30th 1925, was used for holiday and convalescence purposes.

(233) Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind.
Fifth Annual Report 1923-1924. p.17.

(234) Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind.
Tenth Report 1931-1932. p.18.

(235) As 231

(236) As 232

In 1928 the Committee referred to the problem of children in the 2-8 age range who were deaf as well as blind. Because the expense of providing for even a few such children would be considerable no recommendation was made regarding the establishment of a special home. The Committee did, however, express the hope that because the conditions under which some of these doubly afflicted children were living were "so distressful something will be done for them before long".⁽²³⁷⁾

The publication in 1932 of the Eichholz Report which showed that 688 out of 2,803 cases who, on March 31st 1930 were both deaf and blind, needed an interpreter, caused the Committee to give further attention to the deaf-blind.^(a) A small Committee was appointed by the Advisory Committee to consider the matter. This, in turn, led to the establishment of a Central Consultative Committee on the Deaf Blind comprising representatives of organisations both of the blind and of the deaf.⁽²³⁸⁾

On the initiative of this Committee the National Institute for the Blind issued a Handbook on the Deaf Blind.⁽²³⁹⁾ Subsequently the Consultative Committee decided that it would be desirable to appoint a peripatetic organiser of services to the deaf-blind. Such an organiser

(237) Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind.
Eighth Report 1928-1929. p.22

(a) A distinction is made between the "blind-deaf" and the "deaf-blind" according to whether blindness or deafness was the primary handicap. The distinction is important since the psycho-social development and rehabilitation of the individual will be influenced by the disability which occurred first.

(238) Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind.
Eleventh Report 1933-1934. pp.12-13.

(239) National Institute for the Blind "The Deaf Blind" N.I.B. Bulletin No.4, 1933 (Now reissued as R.N.I.B. Bulletin No.20. 1959)

was appointed in 1935 and seconded by the Consultative Committee to the Northern Counties Association for the Blind for a period of two years for the purpose of surveying the position in the area of the Association. A survey of deaf-blindness in the area of Southern Regional Association was undertaken later. The salary of the organiser during these surveys was paid by the National Institute for the Blind.⁽²⁴⁰⁾ Holiday homes for deaf-blind persons were subsequently opened at Hoylake by the National Deaf-Blind Helpers League in 1936,⁽²⁴¹⁾ and at Harrogate by the National Institute for the Blind in 1939.⁽²⁴²⁾

In addition to blind persons with additional disabilities the Advisory Council gave consideration to blind persons with various manifestations of character defect. In their Report for 1922-1923 reference was made to the problem of the blind beggar who, it was stated, "is very largely the product of a previous generation, when the blind, in the face of difficulties now largely removed, were not provided for in a systematic and regular manner". The action of Bradford and some other towns which had taken action to suppress street begging by the blind was commended but it was also pointed out that "the problem of the blind beggar can only be solved by concerted action on the part of all local authorities". The Ministry of Health was therefore asked to remind local authorities of the provision made by the Blind Persons Act to enable individuals to obtain an adequate

(240) Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind.
Twelfth Report 1934-1937. p.7

(241) National Deaf Blind Helpers League "Fellowship House" Hoylake
First Annual Report 1935-1936. p.18.

(242) National Institute for the Blind
Annual Report 1939-1940. p.14.

living without begging. Local authorities were also advised to exercise stricter control over the issue of hawker's licences to blind persons. (243)

In 1932 the Ministry of Health circulated a Memorandum containing extracts from a Report prepared by the Advisory Committee on "Some aspects of the Administration of Services for the Welfare of the Blind". This Report made special reference to what it termed "difficult cases" such as "those blind persons who have been turned out of institutions (for training or employment) because of indiscipline, and those who ought to have been turned out; those with other defects such as epilepsy; those who have broken the law; those who are of peculiar temperament and those who are wanderers and have no place of ordinary residence within the meaning of the Blind Persons Act". (244) Particular reference was made to three cases of particular difficulty namely blind sex perverts, blind delinquents or potential delinquents and blind individuals who were also mentally defective. In each case the importance was emphasised of close association between the voluntary associations for the blind and the appropriate central or municipal authority. Thus, in the case of blind delinquents the tendency of voluntary organisations to regard such cases as outside their jurisdiction was deprecated and the need for closer contact between the Courts of Justice and the voluntary bodies was stressed. The Committee also recommended that the Minister of Health should ascertain from the Home Office the feasibility of devising procedures whereby the

(243) Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind. Fourth Annual Report 1922-1923. pp.16 and 17.

(244) Ministry of Health. Memorandum 162.B.D. Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind. Extracts Relating to the Work of Local Authorities from a Report on some Aspects of the Administration of Services for the Welfare of the Blind. p.1.

local voluntary association could be informed immediately when a blind person was charged in a Court of Justice. (245)

The Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind - An Appraisal.

Vernon⁽²⁴⁶⁾ has pointed out that when "Government has annexed new provinces or invaded new territory, there are no previous papers in its registers, no precedents to serve as guides (or warnings), no experience won by its functionaries in the past". The recognition of this circumstance may lead to the setting up of an Advisory Committee by which the "perhaps reluctant initiator of new Government interferences" can be brought "into close association with the persons who were at home in the territory he proposed to invade, were fully acquainted with their history in the past, were likely to be affected by their control in the future, and were in a position to contribute co-operation which was vital or obstruction which might prove fatal, to the application of the methods and expedients he contemplated".

Such was the case when the State invaded the new territory of blind welfare in 1918 and the need for expert advice on the many problems to be encountered regarding which the Government had little or no knowledge was the justification for the establishment of the Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind.

The description of the work of this Committee given in the preceding pages of this Chapter and elsewhere in the present thesis enables some conclusions to be drawn regarding the functions of the Committee during the period 1918 to 1937.

(245) As 244. pp.2-3.

(246) Vernon R.V. "Introduction" in Vernon R.V. and Mansergh N. "Advisory Bodies" - A Study of their uses in Relation to Central Government 1919-1939. George Allen and Unwin 1940. p.20.

In the first place the Committee provided the Ministry of Health with the expertise of its members. The Committee itself may be classified as an "Expert Committee" i.e., a body formulating recommendations for action in a particular field.⁽²⁴⁷⁾ As noted on page 231-4, however, the membership tended to change with developments in the wider field of Government policy. The first Committee which included three teachers of the blind, the secretary of a charitable trust, one ophthalmic surgeon, two superintendents of institutions who later resigned to become inspectors of blind welfare and four members of either the Council or the staff of the National Institute for the Blind was truly "expert". After 1922, however, the Committee tended to become less "expert" and more "representative" since members who were the nominees of voluntary agencies and, as such, had a first hand knowledge of work for the blind, comprised only 5 out of 17 members excluding the Chairman and Vice Chairman. The rest of the Committee consisting of representatives of the County Councils Association (4), the London County Council (1), the Association of Municipal Corporations (4) and the Association of Poor Law Unions (3), were presumably appointed for administrative reasons rather than their understanding of the disability of blindness. The expertise of the members representing the voluntary agencies was, however, reinforced by the presence at the meetings of the Committee of Macgregor, the Principal in charge of the Blind Department at the Ministry of Health, the two Inspectors of Blind Welfare and Dr. Eichholz who attended as the Observer of the Board of Education. The Advisory Committee on the

(247) P.E.P. Advisory Committees in British Government. P.E.P.1960. p.14
 Three main types of Advisory Committees are distinguished namely,
 (a) Consultative Committees
 (b) Expert Committees
 (c) Committees for independent administration.

Welfare of the Blind was therefore a large Committee as Advisory Committees go but as Spann⁽²⁴⁸⁾ suggested its inclusiveness may have had the effect of making it "a valuable means of keeping in touch with many different interests or points of view".

The second obvious function of the Committee was that of providing a standing body to which issues and representations made by individuals or organisations could be referred for advice and information by the Ministry of Health. The appointment of Eichholz as an observer which has been mentioned above also assisted in ensuring that policy relating to the blind in the two closely related fields of education and welfare was kept in step.

Thirdly, as indicated by the Reports on the Unemployable Blind (1929-1935) Marketing (1934) and Home Teaching (1937), the Committee could itself initiate research by setting up special Sub-Committees to investigate specific problems affecting the welfare of the blind. No minutes of evidence were published in respect of any of the four reports, but, from an inspection of such papers as are available, it appears to the writer that the work of the Sub-Committees merit the general criticism made by Spann that "The advisory bodies of the Ministry of Health have not been conspicuously successful in their taking of oral evidence They have been good collectors of opinions, but poor assemblers. The evidence they have received has been an inextricable mixture of fact and prejudice, which they have done little to sort out".⁽²⁴⁸⁾

(248) Spann R.N. "The Use of Advisory Bodies by the Ministry of Health" in Vernon and Mansergh "Advisory Bodies" As 246, p.277

Fourthly, the Advisory Committee was responsible for initiating many progressive developments which improved administration or raised the standards of provision. Such developments included the centralisation of collections, the co-ordination of workshops, the emphasis on improving the qualifications of craft instructors and home teachers and attempts to widen the opportunities for employment available to blind people.

The Committee could also adjudicate between conflicting interests and, on occasion, issue a rebuke to partisan interests as was the case in 1928 when they "expressed regret" that, in some quarters so much attention is concentrated on the financial assistance of the blind and the elimination of voluntary effort, to the neglect of other considerations which must be borne in mind if the blind are really to be helped in overcoming their handicap". (249)

On occasion, the Advisory Committee could act in a way which could hardly have been foreseen when it was established. Thus, on page 178 there is the interesting episode in which the Advisory Committee turned itself into a pressure group by threatening to resign en bloc because of the Treasury's rejection of their proposals for grant aid.

The Committee could also retard the progress of desirable legislation. As mentioned on page 377 the provision of special voting procedures for the blind was held back for seven years by the statement made in 1925 by the three blind members of the Committee that, in their experience, no difficulties had been encountered by blind persons when

(249) Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind.
Eighth Report 1928-1929. p.8.

casting their votes. The efforts made to secure special legislation with regard to voting by the blind also show how the permanent staff of a Government Office may use a resolution passed by an Advisory Committee as a means of delaying or avoiding action on a matter for which they have little enthusiasm. As shown on page 383 the rescission in 1932 of the resolution against special legislation relating to voting passed in 1925 was viewed with dismay by officials of the Home Office.

The Advisory Committee along with the permanent officials of the Ministry of Health made for consistency and continuity in policy making for the blind. The overall impression is that there was hardly an aspect of blind welfare at the national or local level, statutory or voluntary or a category of blind person which did not at sometime or other receive the attention of the Committee. The Advisory functions which the Committee exercised relative to the Ministry of Health, the breadth of its interests and the innovations that it inaugurated validate the statement made on page 231 that between 1918 and 1937 the Committee was the most important influence in blind welfare.

The Local Government Act 1929 and the Welfare of the Blind.

In Chapter 3 reference was made to the expectation of Addison that the reform of the Poor Law recommended by the Maclean Report of 1918 would be implemented during his period of Office at the Ministry of Health.^(a) In fact it was not until November 28th 1928 that Chamberlain introduced his Local Government Bill which provided, inter alia, for the transfer of Poor Law administration from the 625 Poor Law Unions to the 146 local authorities. The Local Government Act 1929

(a) See pages 186-187

influenced blind welfare in two ways. Firstly by the changes consequent on the transfer of powers from the Boards of Guardians to the County and County Borough Councils and secondly as a result of the financial measures contained in the Act by which the percentage grants in aid of various health services including the welfare of the blind were replaced by a system of block grants.

(a) The effect of the Poor Law provisions of the Act on Blind Welfare

Prior to April 1st 1930 when the Local Government Act came into operation each County and County Borough Council was required to prepare a scheme outlining the Administrative arrangements under which it would discharge the new duties devolving on it as a result of the transfer of the Poor Law. In these schemes provision was to be made for the delegation by the Council of the newly acquired functions either to an existing Committee or to a Committee established specifically for a stated purpose.

Although, prior to the passing of the Local Government Act, the Blind Persons Act of 1920 had imposed on local authorities a duty to provide for the Welfare of blind persons in their area, the relief of the destitute blind had generally been regarded as the responsibility of the Poor Law. The Minister of Health had, however, been advised that he need take no exception if a Council preferred to give relief to blind persons under the Blind Persons Act rather than under Poor Law auspices. If an authority took this step the practical effect was that the blind person concerned never became destitute and therefore did not become subject to the Poor Law. Conversely, the local authorities were under no duty to give relief under the Blind Persons Act with the consequence that if a County or County Borough Council decided that financial assistance should be given under the Poor Law

the Minister had no power to declare that such action was wrong. (250)

Section 5 of the Local Government Act brought the alternative of giving relief to the blind under the Blind Persons Act rather than under the Poor Law more forcibly to the notice of local authorities by providing that:- "A Council, in preparing an Administrative Scheme, shall have regard to the desirability of securing that as soon as circumstances permit, all assistance which can lawfully be provided otherwise than by way of Poor Relief shall be so provided, and accordingly any such scheme may declare that any assistance which could, after the appointed day, be provided either by way of Poor Relief or by virtue of any of the following Acts as amended by any subsequent enactment including this Act, i.e (e) the Blind Persons Act 1920 shall be provided exclusively by virtue of the appropriate Act and not by way of Poor Relief, but nothing in this sub-section or in any scheme shall diminish or otherwise affect the duty of a Council under Section 34 of the Poor Law Act 1927 to provide relief for the poor". (251)

Local authorities who wished to make a declaration of their intention to provide relief under the Blind Persons Act were required to insert in their schemes a clause to the following effect:-

"Unemployable or other destitute Blind Persons

- (a) In conjunction with the Public Assistance Committee to consider the cases of unemployable or other destitute blind persons who are in need of institutional or other non-domiciliary assistance and to render such assistance as may be desirable in each case, either by payment of recognized fees at approved homes for the blind, by boarding out or otherwise.

(250) Memorandum by Mr. Lovett on Financial Assistance to Blind Persons. On M.H.55/118. P.R.O.

(251) 19 & 20 George 5 Chapter 17. Local Government Act 1929. Section 5.

(b) To provide such domiciliary assistance as may be necessary to any blind persons who, in accordance with the declaration made with regard to the domiciliary assistance of blind persons in the Council's Administrative Scheme under Part I of the Local Government Act 1929, must be dealt with under the Blind Persons Act 1920". (252)

Local authorities were not, however, encouraged by the Ministry of Health to make declarations in respect of institutional as distinct from domiciliary relief unless they could accommodate all blind persons in homes or hostels other than Poor Law Institutions. By 1936 only two authorities, i.e. Manchester and Southport, had tried to include institutional relief in their schemes and even these had been obliged to include a safety clause to the effect that institutional relief apart from the Poor Law applied only to cases which had no disability other than blindness. The bulk of blind persons needing residential care were, apart from special cases such as those in asylums, still being catered for in public assistance institutions. (253)

On the other hand, because he regarded "proper rules for the administration of grants as a matter of great importance" the Minister was anxious that local authorities that had made declarations should go "one step further" and make, with his approval "Regulations for the grant of financial assistance to unemployable or other destitute blind persons". A draft set of such "Regulations" designed to "secure the proper examination and adjudication of applications, orderly methods of payment and a defined and equitable ascertainment of existing means"

(252) As 250

(253) Ministry of Health internal Minute Ref.93203/5/P.25
On M.H.55/607. P.R.O.

was prepared for the guidance of authorities. No scales of assistance were laid down, however, because the Minister considered the amount of relief to be a matter which should be determined by the Council as the representative of the ratepayers who would meet the cost. In consequence, as shown in the Reports on the Unemployable Blind published by the Advisory Committee the rates of relief varied widely between authorities.

By 1937 the position with regard to declarations and regulations governing assistance was as shown by the Table given below:-

TABLE 14

Schemes and Regulations of Local Authorities in England and Wales with regard to Domiciliary Assistance to unemployable and other necessitous Blind.

(Adapted from Eleventh Report of the Advisory Committee 1934-1937. p.5)

MARCH 1937

	Declaration			No Declaration		
	Regulations	No Regulations	Total	Regulations	No Regulations	Total
County Councils	17	5	22	26	14	40
County Boroughs	45	2	47	27	9	36
City of London	-	-	-	-	1	1
	62	7	69	53	24 *	77

* Of these local authorities 3 County Councils and 2 County Borough Councils were still giving assistance to the necessitous blind exclusively under the Poor Law. The Common Council of The City of London was an Authority under the Blind Persons Act but not a Public Assistance Authority.

Two main factors were responsible for inhibiting local authorities from making declarations under the Local Government Act. Firstly, while the Poor Law Acts of 1927 and 1930 provided that it should be the duty of a "father, grandfather, mother, grandmother, husband and child of a destitute person"⁽²⁵⁴⁾ to maintain their relative if they possessed the means to do so, no similar provision was made by the Blind Persons Act. It was the absence of any such power of recovery that led the Committees on the Unemployable Blind appointed by the Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind to recommend that the Blind Persons Act should be amended to enable family means to be taken into account in assessing the amount of grant to be given to a blind person in the belief that if this was done "it would remove one of the strongest obstacles to local authorities making declarations under the Local Government Act 1929".⁽²⁵⁵⁾

In 1936 the officials of the Ministry of Health decided to take no action on the recommendation on the grounds that to do so would "revive the general agitation" against "means tests" which would not be justified by the size of the problem. They also concluded that it would be illogical to grant a power of recovery in respect of domiciliary assistance only and that, in some cases, the liability to contribution might result in a diminution of the support given by relatives and even the break-up of the household to the detriment of the blind person.⁽²⁵⁶⁾ In any event, it appears that most of the local authorities that had made regulations had provided for actual contributions from relatives

(254) 17 & 18 George 5. Chapter 14. Poor Law Act 1927.

(255) Ministry of Health. Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind. Report of the Sub-Committee on the Unemployable Blind 1935. p.10.

(256) Ministry of Health, internal Memorandum, "Financial Assistance to Unemployable Blind. Recovery from Relatives" January 1936. On M.H.55/82. P.R.O.

and in one or two cases had specifically stated that the earnings of sons and daughters should be taken into account in assessing the means of a blind parent. (256)

Schemes made under Section 4 of the Local Government Act also made it possible for County and County Borough Councils to make a declaration that all education and training should be given by virtue of the Education Acts and not by way of Poor Relief. An opportunity was thus presented of implementing the suggestion made twelve years earlier by the Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind that all blind children under 16 should be dealt with directly under the Act of 1893 by the local education authority of the district from which they originated and that there should be no differentiation between children who were in receipt of out-relief and those who were in a workhouse or boarded out. (257)

By 1930 about 50 of the Authorities had made such a declaration and the remainder were brought into line when the Board of Education announced that after April 1st 1931 they would cease to pay direct grant in respect of pupils sent to special schools or continuation courses by Public Assistance Committees. (258)

One other special case also received attention. In January 1934 the National League of the Blind drew attention to the fact that much of the benefits received from pensions and augmentation allowances was being nullified by the action of Public Assistance Committees in

(257) Local Government Board. Report of the Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind 1917. Para.176. p.41.

(258) Ministry of Health. Ninth Report of the Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind 1930. p.11.

taking such grants into consideration when unemployed members of a blind persons family applied for transitional benefits under the Unemployment Insurance (National Economy) Order No.1 of 1931. Some Committees took the whole of the blind persons income into consideration while others made some allowance for the special needs arising from the handicap. "In addition to the hardship imposed on blind people by the unsympathetic attitude of local committees", observed the League, "there is the humiliation suffered by unemployed members of their households, who have to depend, at least in part for their maintenance upon compassionate allowances granted to unemployable blind persons. It is surely no part of the conscious policy of the National Government to reduce the already admittedly low standard of living of the blind by encouraging the Authority responsible for transitional payments to effect trifling economies at the expense of the most seriously handicapped members of the community". (259)

As a result of pressures by the League the Officers of the Unemployment Assistance Board were, in 1934, instructed to treat blind persons' pensions under the Act of 1920 as attributable entirely to the blind person's maintenance and special requirements. Any assistance received by a blind member of a sighted applicant's household was also to be regarded as being offset by the special needs arising from blindness. Allowances given to a blind person were not therefore to be regarded as available for the support of any member of the household other than the recipient. (260) The Blind Persons Act of 1938 which

(259) National League of the Blind. "The Blind and the Means Test" Circular to Members of Parliament, January 1934.

(260) Unemployment Assistance Board. Memorandum A.7/34. Contacts with Local Authorities. Section E. Domiciliary Assistance to the Blind 1934.

TABLE 15

The Welfare of the Blind

Ministry of Health Grants to Voluntary Associations and Local Authorities 1921-22 - 1929-30

	1921-22	1922-23	1923-24	1924-25	1925-26	1926-27	1927-28	1928-29	1929-30
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Book Production ..	4,912	3,414	4,440	4,683	5,036	6,552	8,327	8,486	9,204
Capital Expenditure	-	30	63	577	2,651	3,035	1,482	1,834	2,598
Counties Associations	6,844	7,002	7,169	7,292	7,866	8,428	8,892	9,356	9,951
Homes	6,673	6,705	7,409	7,735	7,572	7,628	8,572	8,495	8,020
Home Teaching ..	12,978	14,753	16,667	19,034	20,630	23,209	24,895	26,599	28,318
Home Workers ..	6,117	9,212	10,838	15,013	17,440	20,007	22,551	22,737	23,446
Hostels	739	786	842	915	924	1,001	959	1,074	1,450
Workshops	31,476	33,356	35,809	39,365	41,130	42,212	44,417	46,800	46,576
Tools and Equipment	147	187	213	336	725	418	422	623	1,733
Miscellaneous ..	-	-	20	20	20	20	33	25	72
Total	69,886	75,445	83,470	94,970	103,994	112,510	120,550	126,029	131,368

Source: Annual Reports of the Advisory Council on the Welfare of the Blind

provided that in giving relief the Council should take into account not only the needs of the blind person himself but also those members of his household who were dependent on him, further regularised the position. (261)

The second factor which made some local authorities reluctant to make declarations was that when relief was given exclusively under the Blind Persons Act, the law of settlement no longer applied and in consequence the County or County Borough Council became responsible for all the blind "ordinarily resident" in its area whether settled there or not. This matter, which has been the cause of much previous controversy, was also dealt with under the Blind Persons Act of 1938 and is more conveniently considered later in the present study. With the passing of the Act of 1938 which provided, inter alia, that all relief to blind persons other than medical or institutional assistance should be given under the Act and not by way of poor relief the need for "declarations" on the part of local authorities disappeared.

(b) Grants

As shown by Table 15 there was a steady increase between 1921 and 1929 in the annual percentage grants made by the Ministry of Health to voluntary agencies in respect of various services to the blind.

The arguments for the replacement of percentage by block grants in respect of health services as part of the general policy of de-rating which was the *raison d'être* of the Local Government Act of 1929 were set out in an explanatory White Paper published in 1928. Briefly these arguments were that the payment of percentage grants on varying bases

(261) 1 & 2 George 6 Chapter 11. Blind Persons Act 1938. Section 2.

required detailed supervision by the Ministry of Health of the services for which direct grants were made. Moreover such grants were related to expenditure rather than needs. Their effect was that the poorest areas which could least afford to maintain an adequate standard of service were those which received the least assistance from central funds. The Act therefore provided that the Minister of Health, after consultation either with the County or County Borough Councils or their local authority associations, should make a scheme for the payment of agreed amounts "to any voluntary association which provides services for the welfare of the blind by the Councils of Counties and County Boroughs in which are resident blind persons for whose benefit these services are provided".⁽²⁶²⁾

So far as the local voluntary agencies were concerned the new block grants were calculated on the basis of the amount of grant paid by the Ministry of Health to each such agency to which sum was added the contributions made by the local authorities for the year ended March 31st 1929. In certain cases the total figure was augmented by a payment to cover developments or alterations in the work of the voluntary agency which had taken place after the standard year 1928-1929. The Ministry stressed that the contribution calculated on the above basis was the minimum payable to local authorities to voluntary bodies unless a change in circumstances justified a reduction in the amount payable. No reduction could, however, be made without the approval of the Minister of Health.⁽²⁶³⁾

(262) Ministry of Health. Proposals for Reform in Local Government and in the Financial Relations between the Exchequer and the Local Authorities. Cmd.3634. 1928. Para.16 p.12.

(263) Ministry of Health. Circular 1086 March 21st 1930. Local Government Act 1929, Welfare of Blind Persons.

In the case of organisations such as the National Institute for the Blind and the National Library for the Blind which were providing national voluntary services, it was clearly inconvenient for the contributions that had previously been made by the Ministry of Health to be collected in small amounts from 146 local authorities. It was therefore decided by the Ministry, after consultation with the County Councils Association, the Association of Municipal Corporations and the London County Council that contributions for national services should be paid directly to the National Institute for the Blind which, in turn, would undertake the re-distribution of the total amount of the subscriptions to the four other national bodies^(a) on the basis laid down in the scheme prepared by the Ministry of Health.⁽²⁶⁴⁾ The reaction to this proposal reveals the antagonism that then existed between the College of Teachers of the Blind and the National Institute for the Blind. In the Advisory Committee, Dr. Ritchie of the College of Teachers strenuously opposed the suggested arrangement and proposed that if the contributions were to be paid through one channel it would be better if the London County Council, in whose area the headquarters of all the national agencies concerned were situated, should undertake the duty. In reply, Lovett, the Principal in charge of the Blind Department at the Ministry of Health, stated that the officers of the L.C.C. had intimated in an informal conversation that they did not wish

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- (a) These other "national bodies" were :-
1. The National Library for the Blind.
 2. The British and Foreign Bible Society.
 3. The Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge.
 4. The College of Teachers of the Blind.

(264) As 263

to undertake the responsibility. Another speaker suggested that the Public Trustee might be substituted for the National Institute. Blanesburgh, the Chairman of the Advisory Committee, objected to the arrangement not because of any antipathy to the National Institute but on the principle that it was undesirable that a distributor of public funds should have any interest in the funds distributed. Eventually a resolution was carried in the following terms:-

"The Advisory Committee view with concern the proposal contained in the Draft Scheme, to be made by the Minister under Section 102(1) of the Local Government Act 1929, that the contributions from local authorities in respect of the national services shall be distributed by the National Institute for the Blind to the various National Associations concerned. The Committee are of the opinion that such a proposal is not only contrary to the spirit of the Act but also wrong in principle. It seems to them desirable that the distribution of public funds should have no personal interest in the funds to be distributed, and they would urge the Minister to amend the Draft Scheme so as to provide for the distribution of the contributions for national services by the Public Trustee".(265)

The views of the Local Authority Associations prevailed, however, and no alteration was made in the Scheme for the distribution of funds drawn up by the Ministry.

The first scheme for the payment of contributions by local authorities to voluntary agencies covered the financial years 1930-1933. The second scheme was for the four years 1933-1937. Afterwards the schemes covered quinquennial periods. As with the percentage grants, the expenditure on blind welfare continued to rise mainly because more financial assistance to the unemployable blind was granted under the Blind Persons Act rather than by way of poor relief.

(265) Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind.
Minutes November 27th 1929.
On M.H.55/88

TABLE 16

Expenditure of selected Local Authorities in
England and Wales under the Blind Persons Acts
1920 and 1938 for the year ended March 31st 1938

Counties	Expenditure £	Rate in the £ Pence	Number of Registered Blind Persons	Rate Expenditure per Head £
Yorkshire, West Riding	97,315	3.4	2,975	33
Brecon	3,462	3.3	193	18
Durham	42,212	3.2	1,851	23
Sussex (East)	6,024	0.5	511	12
Berkshire	3,272	0.5	303	11
Hampshire	7,457	0.5	728	10
Rutland	213	0.6	36	6
62 Counties	1,003,487	1.17 (Average)	47,153	21 (Average)

County Boroughs	Expenditure £	Rate in the £ Pence	Number of Registered Blind Persons	Rate Expenditure per Head £
Merthyr Tydfil	7,046	8.68	309	23
Bradford	34,020	4.28	681	50
South Shields	11,128	5.27	361	31
Coventry	3,422	0.60	220	16
Bournemouth	3,204	0.40	183	18
Eastbourne	1,220	0.34	77	16
Worcester	1,220	0.83	99	12
84 County Boroughs	858,445	2.03 (Average)	47,153	21 (Average)

Source: Robson, W.A. "Social Security"
George Allen & Unwin 1943. pp.174-175

Thus, while the total expenditure in the first year of the block grant system was £778,339 it had risen by 1934-5 to £1,093,691.⁽²⁶⁶⁾ By 1939 the expenditure on blind welfare of the County and County Borough Councils had risen to £1,985,212.⁽²⁶⁷⁾ A further amount approaching £200,000 was expended on the education of blind children and adults. As can be seen from Table 16, however, the expenditure varied considerably between authorities. The payment of grants on the basis of the Ministry of Health schemes continued until the repeal of Section 102 of the Local Government Act 1929 by Section 30(3) of the National Assistance Act 1948.

The revision of the grant system by the 1929 Act affected three other administrative aspects of blind welfare namely,

- (1) The supervision of services
- (2) The rationalisation of voluntary effort
- (3) The municipalisation of services for the blind.

(1) The Supervision of Services

As indicated earlier in this section, one of the arguments advanced by Chamberlain for the abolition of percentage grants in respect of health services was the detailed supervision which such payments required on the part of the Minister. As from April 1st 1930, therefore, the detailed supervision of local authority services which the Minister had exercised through the inspectors of blind welfare was withdrawn although the assistance of the inspectors was,

(266) Ministry of Health. Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind. Twelfth Report 1934-1937. p.6.

(267) W.McG.Eagar. Blind Welfare in England and Wales in Robson W.A. (Edited) "Social Security" George Allen & Unwin 1943. p.174.

as far as practicable, still available to any local authority requiring their advice. The supervision of national services such as the production of embossed literature and the conduct of the examination for the Home Teachers Certificate of the Blind remained the responsibility of the Minister. The Minister also informed the local authorities that in each fixed grant period he proposed to cause an inspection to be made of the arrangements made in each area for the welfare of the blind.⁽²⁶⁸⁾ By December 31st 1932 surveys had been made of the blind welfare services of 47 County and 57 County Borough Councils the main criticisms of local authority arrangements being directed at :-

- (a) Supervision
- (b) Registration and certification
- (c) The maintenance of the unemployable blind
- (d) Home teaching arrangements
- (e) Social welfare (269)

Apart from this central supervision it therefore became necessary for each County and County Borough Council to satisfy itself "as to the efficiency of the services of the Associations" to which it was required to contribute. Most local authorities contented themselves by appointing a Council member with, in some cases, the Medical Officer of Health, to serve on the Committee of Management of the voluntary agency. This system as was pointed out in a Ministry Memorandum on the subject had a serious disadvantage, in that the supervision of workshops in particular involved considerable technical knowledge which a lay local authority

(268) Ministry of Health. Circular 1086, 1930

(269) Ministry of Health. Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind. Tenth Report 1931-1932. pp.6 & 7.

member rarely possessed. One enlightened development was the action of the Northern Counties Association for the Blind which in 1930 appointed a regional supervisor. By March 31st 1931, 37 out of the 46 local authorities in the area of the Northern Counties Association had agreed that he should investigate the work of the voluntary organisations to whom they were paying grants.⁽²⁷⁰⁾ As the Advisory Committee pointed out, this arrangement ensured that the local authorities concerned had the benefit of a specialist in supervising the services for the blind.⁽²⁶⁹⁾ By 1947, however, only two of the four Regional Associations for the Blind had appointed supervisors to assist the local authorities with the inspection of blind welfare services.^(270a)

(2) The Rationalisation of Voluntary Effort

Early in 1932 the Minister of Health had asked the Association of Municipal Corporations and the County Councils Association for their observations in respect of applications made by the Association of Workshops for the Blind and the College of Teachers of the Blind for the inclusion in the grant scheme for 1933-1937 of certain payments to them under Section 102(1) of the Local Government Act. While the Associations made no objections to the required grants, the County Councils Association expressed the view that "the number of voluntary bodies undertaking functions in connection with the welfare of the blind appeared to be excessive", and the two organisations therefore requested

(270) Northern Counties Association for the Blind.
Annual Report 1931. p.49.

(270a) Ministry of Health Internal Memorandum 94018/1/22.
May 20th 1947. "Grants to Associations".

the Minister "in the interest of efficient and economical administration, to secure greater combination of effort, preferably under the auspices of the National Institute for the Blind". (271)

Later in 1932, the two local authority associations established a Joint Blind Welfare Committee for the purpose of "correlating and advising upon the work of the County and County Borough Councils in connection with the welfare of the blind". (272) (a) One of the first questions which the Joint Committee was asked to investigate was the re-organisation of voluntary bodies, their precise terms of reference being:- "To consider (a) the continuance of contributions by County and County Borough Councils to voluntary associations which have ceased to render effective services and (b) the extent, if any, to which the existing voluntary associations (central and local) are redundant". (272) The outcome of this investigation was the issue in October 1934 of a Report on the administrative re-organisation of voluntary organisations for the blind.

The interest of the national and regional organisations in the re-organisation of blind welfare was further stimulated by an entry submitted in 1932 by Dr. J. M. Ritchie under the pseudonym of "Simplissimus" in an essay competition adjudicated by the College of Teachers of the Blind on behalf of the Union of Counties Associations of the Blind.

(271) Association of Municipal Corporations - Blind Welfare. Report of the Joint Blind Welfare Committee of the A.M.C. and C.C.A. adopted by the Council of the Association of Municipal Corporations October 25th 1934. Para.2.

(272) As 271 Para.3.

(a) The Joint Welfare Committee was disbanded in 1948 on the ground "that the considerations which led to its formation and which have justified its continuance until now, are in the process of disappearing". Resolution of Public Health Committee of the Association of Municipal Corporations, October 20th 1948.

This competition had been instituted for the "E.D. Macgregor Prize" established as a tribute to the first secretary of the Blind Department at the Ministry of Health when he was transferred to other duties in 1926. In 1932, as a consequence of the resolution passed by the County Councils Association, the essay topic set was "The Machinery for the Administration of the Welfare of the Blind and the Best Means for its Simplification". In his essay, which was subsequently published in the "Teacher of the Blind", Ritchie attacked the Local Government Act, which he denounced as a "retrograde step" because it interposed the local authorities between the Ministry of Health and the voluntary agencies and also substituted local for central supervision. In addition, Ritchie made proposals relating to grants for the unemployable blind and the re-organisation of the national voluntary societies. With regard to the latter matter, the National Institute for the Blind was admonished for wishing "to be thought national in the wider sense" and advised to confine its activities to "such lines of work as are not already being fruitfully discharged by the Union, the College and the Association".

It was further suggested that a "national council" should be set up consisting of four representatives each from the Union of Counties Association, the College of Teachers and the Association of Workshops for the Blind. The Council would also serve as the Advisory Committee of the Ministry of Health with the added function of advising the President of the Board of Education on all matters relating to the education of the blind. (273)

(273) New Beacon, January 15th 1937. pp.11-12.

The controversy as to whether national work for the blind should be co-ordinated under the National Institute as recommended by the County Councils Association or by an independent "national council" based on the Union of Counties Association as proposed by Ritchie, thus became a key issue in the administration of blind welfare. In an attempt to obtain a rapprochement, a further "Joint Committee" this time of the Union and the National Institute was formed and instructed to prepare a plan for the closer co-operation of the two bodies. The Committee proposed, however, that the Institute should take over the Union and run it as a department. At the meeting of the Union held on November 23rd 1933 this suggestion was almost unanimously rejected and it was agreed that a "Conference on Co-ordination" should be established consisting of delegates from the Union, the College of Teachers, the Association of Workshops, the National Institute and the National Library of the Blind.⁽²⁷⁴⁾ The first meeting of this Conference was held on April 12th 1934 at which members of all five organisations were present for the purpose of considering a memorandum on the re-organisation of national work for the blind. Afterwards, the Council of the National Institute decided not to participate in further discussions on the memorandum until after the publication of the Report of the Local Authorities Joint Committee.⁽²⁷⁵⁾

As stated earlier the Report of the Joint Blind Welfare Committee was issued on October 11th 1934. It was adopted by the Council of the Association of Municipal Corporations on October 25th and by the County

(274) Teacher of the Blind. November 1934. p.37

(275) Union of Counties Associations for the Blind Annual Report 1934-1935. p.13.

Councils Association in the following month and therefore represented the official policy of the local authorities regarding the co-ordination of voluntary effort for the blind.

The Report began by surveying the existing organisations of blind welfare services. This survey showed that the 63,000 registered blind persons in England and Wales were being dealt with by 436 different agencies comprising 146 local authorities, 270 local voluntary associations, 7 counties associations and 13 national organisations. This "labyrinthine system of organisation", as it was described by the Joint Committee, was recognized as being the natural outcome of the evolution of the blind welfare services from their voluntary origins to their public provision under the Blind Persons Act.⁽²⁷⁶⁾

Apart from some reduction in numbers, the Joint Committee did not consider that there was any cause for interference with the local agencies for the blind. In the cases of the national and regional organisations there was considerable criticism of the extent to which their functions overlapped. It was therefore suggested that strong grounds existed for centralising a number of activities that were divided between a number of relatively small agencies, in "one national body, preferably the National Institute for the Blind suitably re-constituted".⁽²⁷⁷⁾ The Committee further observed that the existence of a number of discrete national bodies, each requiring some headquarters, inevitably led "not only to a waste of effort and a somewhat acrimonious scramble for functions, but also to considerable waste of money which could be better spent on additional services and comforts

⁽²⁷⁶⁾ As 271. Para.4

⁽²⁷⁷⁾ As 271. Para.5

for the blind themselves".⁽²⁷⁷⁾ Thus, one of the principal allegations that had been consistently made by the National League against the voluntary system was substantiated.

The Report strongly favoured the retention of regional associations for the blind on three grounds: firstly, that "sufficiently close contact" between the proposed national body and the large number of local agencies could not be achieved without some intermediate organisation. Secondly, that while several functions, e.g. adequate inspection of voluntary agencies were beyond the capacity of all but the largest authorities, they were nevertheless too local in scope to be undertaken by a national body. Thirdly, that the regional bodies were likely to be instrumental in fostering a "desirable degree of uniformity" in local provision for the blind.

The Report therefore recommended that all matters relating to the welfare of the blind which were or ought to be undertaken by voluntary agencies on behalf of local authorities should be co-ordinated by the National Institute for the Blind which, except for such executive functions as might be assigned to it would act in an advisory capacity. It was further suggested that the National Institute should be divested of any purely local functions and re-organised to provide for a substantially increased representation on the part of the local authorities. The administration of the Institute would be the responsibility of a "national council", with appropriate committees, "appointed in such a manner that the four main branches of blind welfare work - medical, educational, social welfare (including home teaching) and employment are adequately represented".⁽²⁷⁸⁾ Certain national

⁽²⁷⁸⁾ As 271. Para.6

bodies namely, St.Dunstans, the Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind, the Joint Blind Welfare Committee, the National Association of Professional and Industrial Blind and the National League of the Blind would retain their separate existence. (279)

At the regional level, the Committee proposed that the seven Counties Associations for the Blind should be replaced by four Regional Associations each staffed by a full time secretary with qualifications and experience in local government. A detailed schedule which is reproduced in Appendix II, set out the proposed demarcation of functions between the national body and the regional associations. (280)

The Report ended by emphasising that the proposals made by the Joint Committee were in no sense directed towards the substitution of public administration for voluntaryism in the blind welfare service. Rather, the aim was to eliminate the waste of money and effort consequent on overlapping and to ensure that the local authorities obtained a better return for the grants made. (281)

On the question of regional re-organisation the Union of Counties Associations quickly agreed with the recommendations of the Joint Committee. In November 1934 the Council of the Union passed a resolution to the effect:-

"That the considered existence of Regional Bodies for the Welfare of the Blind is desirable, and that in the opinion of the Union, the number of areas be reduced from 7 to 4". On February 7th

(279) As 271. Part II. Para.4.

(280) As 271. Schedule C. Functions of National, Regional and Local Bodies.

(281) As 271. Para.12.

1935 representatives of the Counties Associations met the Joint Committee and a scheme for the redistribution of areas was tentatively agreed. (282)

The Union was, however, extremely hostile to the proposals made in the Report of the Joint Committee with regard to national re-organisation.

On January 17th 1935 the Council of the Union passed two resolutions:-

- (1) "That before any negotiation takes place between the Union and the Joint Committee on the re-organisation of national work for the blind, it would be advisable and courteous previously to ascertain the views of the national bodies mainly concerned".
- (2) "That the Council of the Union cannot agree to any scheme of organisation under an existing agency which has executive functions. The National Body should, in their opinion, be mainly of an advisory and consultative nature. Further, the National Body cannot be a money raising organisation, as it would then be in direct competition with other bodies, and its work must be carried out in a position of complete detachment and independence".(283)

These resolutions, together with resolutions from the Association of Workshops, the College of Teachers and the National Library were reported to a meeting of the Conference on Co-ordination held on January 31st. At this meeting a scheme for the promotion of a National General Council of Blind Welfare was also approved in detail. This scheme proposed that the Council should consist of 42 members, 20 of which should represent the Union of Counties Associations, 7 the Local Government Associations, 12 National Bodies other than the Union and

(282) Union of Counties Associations for the Blind.
Annual Report 1934-1935. p.14.

(283) As 282. p.15.

3 other persons concerned with national work for the blind. (284)

The Conference also passed a resolution :- "That the scheme, as agreed, be forwarded to the Joint Committee with a strongly expressed opinion from the Conference that negotiation should be by consultation with all the bodies concerned at one time, and not seriatim". (284)

The reply of the Joint Committee was uncompromising. They were not prepared to contemplate any proposal that would increase instead of diminish the existing number of voluntary bodies or to negotiate upon any other basis than that laid down in their scheme. (285)

This attitude was reiterated at an interview granted by the Joint Committee to representatives of the Conference on Co-ordination on February 7th 1936. The Union therefore decided to implement a decision taken prior to the interview to forward a Memorial to the Minister of Health setting forth their objections to the Scheme of the Joint Blind Welfare and advocating the plan for a National General Council of Blind Welfare. The Memorial, over the signatures of the Chairmen and Secretaries of the National Library, the Association of Workshops, the College of Teachers and the Union of Counties Associations was accordingly sent to the Minister of Health on April 30th 1936. (286)

One of the consequences of this decision was that the Northern Counties Association resigned from the Union in protest against the proposal to add to the number of national bodies for the blind by the formation of a National General Council. The Union was thereby weakened by the secession of its strongest constituent member. (287)

(284) Teacher of the Blind. November 1934. p.42

(285) As 284. p.16

(286) Union of Counties Associations for the Blind
Annual Report 1935-1936. p.16.

(287) Northern Counties Association for the Blind.
Annual Report 1936-1937. p.47.

Meanwhile in May 1936, the Joint Committee issued a revised scheme for the re-organisation of the voluntary associations concerned with the blind. In this scheme it was suggested that England and Wales should be divided into five instead of four regions as recommended in the Report of 1934. A concession was made to the Association of Workshops and the College of Teachers that, subject to their acceptance of conditions relating to the representation of local authorities on their committees of management and the payment of grants through the National Institute, they would be allowed to maintain their separate identities instead of being merged in the proposed national body. The most important part of the scheme, however, was a draft constitution of the national body which provided for a Council of 95 members representing five groups of interests. In this constitution thirty places on the Council were allocated to representatives of the proposed five regional associations the representation of each region to be divided equally between the voluntary agencies and the local authorities. The second group comprised the representatives of the County Councils Association, the Association of Municipal Corporations and the London County Council to whom a total of 20 places were allotted. The third and fourth groups, who were each to receive 12 places, were respectively the National Agencies for the Blind and Organisations of Blind Persons. The final group of 21 places were to be filled by National members subject to the proviso that, so far as was reasonably possible, at least 7 such persons should themselves be blind. (288) On May 28th

(288) Co-ordination of Services to the Blind. Report Adopted by the County Councils Association and the Association of Municipal Corporations on the Recommendation of the Joint Blind Welfare Committee. June 1936.

details of this scheme were forwarded by the Joint Committee to the Minister of Health.

As a consequence of the publication of the Scheme of the Joint Committee the Co-ordinating Conference also redrafted their proposals for a National General Council. Under this revised version the membership of the Council was to be enlarged from 42 as drafted in 1935 to a membership of 66 comprising 20 from the Union of Counties Associations, 20 from the Local Authorities Associations and the London County Council, 16 from the National Voluntary Agencies, 4 from Organisations of the Blind and 6 National members. Details of this Scheme were also forwarded to the Minister by the Co-ordinating Conference on June 11th.⁽²⁸⁹⁾ The Minister replied to the Joint Committee on August 1st and to the Co-ordinating Conference on November 11th. In both cases he appears to have taken a neutral attitude, welcoming the principle of re-organisation, but stressing that the proposals of both parties, whether approved by him or otherwise, would have no binding force on the various organisations to which they related and that to a large extent both schemes were outside the scope of any action that it would be competent for him to take by virtue of his power to make a scheme under Section 102 of the Local Government Act.⁽²⁹⁰⁾

In the interim the National Institute for the Blind had notified the Joint Committee of its acceptance of the proposals contained in the revised scheme.⁽²⁹¹⁾

(289) New Beacon January 15th 1937. p.8

(290) New Beacon December 15th 1936. p.315

(291) New Beacon December 15th 1936. p.316

Somewhat encouraged by the Minister's refusal to father either of the two schemes submitted to him, the Conference on Co-ordination resolved to take positive action and on March 24th 1937 the Council of the Union passed a resolution that a National General Council of Blind Welfare should be established as from May 1st. The Council was to consist of representatives of the regional bodies, the College of Teachers of the Blind, the National Association of Workshops for the Blind, the National Library for the Blind "and such other voluntary bodies and local authorities as are willing to co-operate".⁽²⁹²⁾

The resolution to establish the National General Council was more an act of defiance on the part of the alliance of the four national bodies than a decision which could be effectively implemented. Without the support of the two Local Authority Associations, the National Institute and the Northern Counties Association for the Blind the National Council would have been "national" in name only and would have lacked the financial resources necessary for the adequate discharge of its duties. The Joint Committee's proposals were also supported by the National Association of Blind Workers and the National League of the Blind.⁽²⁹³⁾ Eventually matters came to a head when at its meeting held on May 14th 1937 the Joint Committee adopted three resolutions. The first advised local authorities generally that the County Councils Association and the Association of Municipal Corporations would not in any way countenance the National General Council proposal put

(292) Union of Counties Associations for the Blind.
Annual Report 1936-1937. p.14.

(293) New Beacon, Supplement June 15th 1936. Para.16. p.2.

forward as an alternative to the Scheme of the Joint Committee. The second resolution requested the National Institute to proceed with the re-constitution of its Council and the third asked the Union of Counties Associations to put forward details of their proposals for the constitution and administration of the new regional bodies. (294)

In October 1937 the National Institute passed a special resolution increasing the composition of its Executive Council from 65 to 100 members the allocation of places being in accordance with the recommendations contained in the Revised Scheme of the Joint Committee. By 1938 the number of places filled by nominations and elections was 83. (295) (a)

The following month the Union of Counties Associations also passed a resolution to the effect that "in order to assist the re-organisation of national work for the blind" the Minister of Health should take over its functions. Subject to an assurance that the Ministry of Health would assume responsibility for the collection and publication of national statistics relative to the blind, the co-ordination of regional work and the activities of the Standing Committee on the Prevention of Blindness together with the direct inspection of the regional associations, the Union would terminate

(294) New Beacon November 15th 1937. p.292

(295) National Institute for the Blind
Annual Report 1937-1938. p.3

(a) By 1968, 91 places on the Executive Council had been filled. The National League of the Blind had two representatives from 1938-1944; resigned between 1945-1949; re-appointed representatives between 1950-1961 and have not since taken up their right to a place as "Representatives of Organisations of Blind Persons".

its work at the close of its financial year. On March 1938⁽²⁹⁶⁾ the Union was informed that the Minister would appoint a Standing Advisory Committee on Blindness including its prevention and undertake the other duties specified to the extent that such arrangements were required.⁽²⁹⁶⁾ It is of interest that although the Union came to an end in 1938 a partly analogous body, the Inter-Regional Committee of the Regional Associations for the Blind, was formed in 1942 for the discussion of matters of national importance and the co-ordination of policy.⁽²⁹⁷⁾

The proposal to create five regional associations for the blind was dropped in favour of four such organisations as recommended in the original Report of the Joint Committee. The Northern and Southern Regional Associations for the Blind were therefore established in 1938 and the Wales and Monmouthshire and West Regional Associations in the following year. Thus, after nearly fifty years, the recommendation of the Royal Commission on the Blind, Deaf and Dumb "that there should be greater solidarity among the institutions for the blind and interchange of information and opinion among them",⁽²⁹⁸⁾ was brought to partial^(a) fulfilment.

(296) New Beacon April 15th 1938. p.93

(297) Henham-Barrow, M.A. "Social Welfare for the Blind" in Trends in Social Welfare - Edited by Farndale. 1965. pp.269-270.

(298) Report of the Royal Commission on the Blind, Deaf and Dumb. 1889. Para.266. p.43.

(a) "Partial" since co-ordination was not complete. For a criticism of the extent to which co-ordination had been achieved see Wilson J.F. "Voluntary Organisations for the Welfare of the Blind" in A.F.C.Bourdillon (Edited) Voluntary Social Services - Methuen 1945. pp.59-60.

(3) Municipalisation

One further consequence of the transfer of financial responsibility for blind welfare to the County and County Borough Councils was that a number of local authorities decided to make direct provision for at least some aspects of blind welfare either by taking over some or all of the functions of the voluntary agencies or establishing independent facilities. Examples of such municipalisation took place in Oldham (1930), Bradford, Stoke and Wakefield (1931), Blackburn, Bolton and Darlington (1932), Barnsley, Oxford and Tynemouth (1933), Walsall (1935), Newport (Mon.) and Walthamstow (1936) and Leeds and West Ham (1938).⁽²⁹⁹⁾ It will be seen that most cases of municipalisation took place in the North with its tradition of municipal socialism. A second factor was that of cost. In this connection it is of interest that in the year immediately before municipalisation the total income of the Bolton Workshops and Homes for the Blind was £17,017 of which £15,486 was accounted for by grants made by the County Borough of Bolton and the Lancashire County Council.⁽³⁰⁰⁾ In the case of the Royal Institution for the Blind at Bradford £18,649 of a total income of £22,997 was received from public funds.⁽³⁰¹⁾ Even so complete municipalisation was rare. In 1941 it was reported that three of the seven local authorities that had set up municipal workshops were still leaving the administration of general

(299) These dates are taken from M.G.Thomas - A Chronological Survey of Work for the Blind (Supplement) 1931-1951. Pitman 1953.

(300) Bolton Workshops and Homes for the Blind
Sixty-sixth Annual Report 1932-1933. p.31.

(301) Royal Institution for the Blind Bradford.
Seventieth Annual Report 1931. p.10.

welfare to voluntary societies. In London the converse obtained, the London County Council utilising the services of the voluntary workshops and making direct provision for other welfare services. Only seven workshops employing 493 blind persons were fully municipalised and a mere 31 out of a total of 1,686 home workers were employed directly by local authorities. (302) (a)

(302) Wilson J.F. "Voluntary Organisations for the Welfare of the Blind" in A.F.C. Bourdillon (Edited) Voluntary Social Services Methuen 1945. pp.59-60.

(a) By 1962, 27 Workshops were directly managed by local authorities. "Report of the Working Party on Workshops for the Blind" 1962. p.6. H.M.S.O.

CHAPTER V

Miscellaneous Legislation Relating to the Blind

Implicit in the term "handicap" is the recognition that a disabled person will be subject to disadvantages that are not experienced by his non-handicapped contemporaries. Such disadvantages may not only be physical and/or mental but also educational, vocational, economic, social, aesthetic and political. Legislation for the disabled, therefore, aims at either reducing the effect of the disability itself e.g. by appropriate education, or the compensation so far as is possible for the inequality that may exist between handicapped and non-handicapped members of the Community. The major part of this thesis is concerned, either with the development of legislation relating to special education for blind or deaf children, or the economic or vocational rehabilitation of blind or deaf adults. In the present chapter, however, reference is made to four minor Acts passed for the benefit of blind persons. These Acts relate to :-

- (1) Dog licences
- (2) Postal charges
- (3) Wireless licences
- (4) Voting procedures

The final section of the chapter describes the development of measures for the prevention of blindness.

(1) Dog Licences.

During the Nineteenth Century the expression the "blind man and his dog" was synonymous with dependency and mendicancy. It is of interest, therefore, that the first legislation for the blind, outside the Poor Law, was in respect of licences for guide dogs used by blind persons. As originally drafted the Customs and Excise Bill of 1878⁽¹⁾

(1) Customs and Inland Revenue Bill 1878. Bill 146.

contained no reference to dog licences for the blind. At the Committee Stage, however, the Chancellor of the Exchequer was successful in moving the insertion of a new clause to the Bill exempting dogs used by blind persons from tax.⁽²⁾ Subsequently it was enacted that "Nothing in the Dog Licences Act, 1867, or in this part of this Act shall render a licence necessary in the case of a dog kept and used solely by a blind person for his or her guidance or render such person liable to any penalty in respect of a dog so kept and used".⁽³⁾ Despite an extensive search of Custom and Excise and Treasury records the writer has been unable to discover the circumstances which led the Chancellor to introduce the above clause into the Customs and Inland Revenue Bill.

The importance of this concession increased with the movement to place the training of guide dogs for the blind on an organised basis. According to Campbell⁽⁴⁾ the idea of training dogs as guides for the blind originated in Austria in 1819. Nothing came of the proposal, however, until 1915 when the German Government trained considerable numbers of dogs for use by war-blinded ex-servicemen. The training of dogs to act as guides for the blind was later undertaken by the Swiss Organisation "L'Œil qui Voit" founded in 1924 and the American "Seeing Eye" movement established at Nashville, Tennessee, in 1929.⁽⁵⁾

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- (2) Hansard. April 15th 1878. Col. 1350.
- (3) 41 & 42 Victoria. Customs and Inland Revenue Act.
- (4) Campbell, Mary D. "Dog Guides for the Blind" in "What of the Blind?" Survey of the Development and Scope of Present Day Work with the Blind. Edited by Helga Lende. Volume 2. p.155.
- (5) "The Guide Dog Movement" - Editorial - "The New Beacon" July 15th 1932. p.1.

British quarantine regulations prevented the entry into the Country of guide dogs trained abroad and to meet the difficulty a small training establishment was opened at Wallasey, Cheshire, in 1931. Three years later the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association was founded. (6)

The clause in the Customs and Inland Revenue Act of 1878, relating to licences for guide dogs, remained in force until 1959 when it was repealed and re-enacted in the Dog Licences Act of that year. (7)

(2) Postal Charges.

In 1915 the Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind were informed, somewhat dramatically, that "Embossed literature is a necessity to the blind, often preventing insanity, and second only in importance to nourishment for their bodies". (8) The provision of literature for the blind involved four elements. Firstly, literary matter had to be produced in raised or embossed type by organisations such as the "Society for Embossing and Circulating the Bible in "Moons" Type for the Blind" and the British and Foreign Blind Association which had been founded in 1868 by Armitage for the purpose of promoting the use of Braille by the provision of embossed literature and apparatus. The second and third requirements were, respectively, some means by which blind persons, who had not been taught to use embossed type at school or who had been blinded in later life, could be instructed to read by

(6) Cuddy, R.D. Public Relations Officer, the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association - written communication 30.7.1971.

(7) 7 & 8. Elizabeth 2. Chapter 55.

(8) Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind. Minutes of Evidence. Par.10,054. p.345. Evidence of Miss M.A.Gilbert, Secretary of the Home Teaching Society for the Blind.

either the Moon or Braille systems and also a supply of books to provide a variety of reading matter. These two needs were met, in part, by the Home Teaching Societies. These Societies, in addition to providing instruction, also maintained stocks of books. Thus, an early Report of the first Home Teaching Society, founded by Miss Graham in 1855, gave the information that "The blind want some variety in their books, but cannot afford to buy them, nor have they room for many large embossed books in their small apartments. The loan of books seems to meet this difficulty".⁽⁹⁾ In addition to the Home Teaching Societies, books for the blind were available from a number of central libraries, the most important of which was the Lending Library for the Blind^(a) founded in 1882 by the Misses Arnold & Howden, "to bring within easy reach of the poor the inestimable boon of secular reading".⁽¹⁰⁾ The fourth need was a medium by which books available in such libraries could be loaned to and returned by blind persons scattered all over the country, many of whom were resident in rural areas not served by the Home Teaching Societies. The obvious method of distribution was to use the postal services. There was, however, the disadvantage that, as shown below, books in embossed type were far heavier and bulkier than the same volume printed in ordinary type, with the consequence that the high postal charges involved made the cost of borrowing prohibitive for blind persons the majority of whom had only small incomes.

(9) Society for Supplying Home Teachers and Books in "Moons" Type to enable the Blind to Read the Scriptures. Second Annual Report 1857. p.10.

(a) Later, from 1898, the National Library for the Blind.

(10) Cowburn, Lorna N. "The History and Development of the National Library for the Blind"- Unpublished Thesis accepted for Fellowship of the Library Association. 30.6.1966. p.1.

(a) Inland Postal Charges 1894-1908

In April 1894, W.H. Illingworth, then headmaster of the Royal Blind Asylum and School at Edinburgh, wrote to the Postmaster General stating that the educated blind people of the country were desirous of making an appeal for a reduction of postal rates in respect of embossed literature. Illingworth alleged that, as a rule, the blind were compelled to pay more than twelve times the amount paid by sighted persons for the transmission of books through the post.⁽¹¹⁾

In a subsequent letter Illingworth gave examples to substantiate this claim. In 1894 a sighted person obtained "Tit-bits" by post for $1\frac{1}{2}$ d, one penny being for prime cost and the halfpenny for postage. The cost of the same publication to a blind person would be $4/9$, i.e. four shillings prime cost and ninepence for postage. A novel, which a sighted person could purchase for 6d or 1/-, cost a blind reader $1/6$ or 2/- each way for postal charges alone. As a result of the additional postage payable, Illingworth stated that only the minority of the blind, who were in fairly good financial circumstances could avail themselves of the facilities provided by the central libraries established for their benefit.⁽¹²⁾ He, therefore, asked to whom the blind should address an appeal for a reduction in postal charges and what form it should take.⁽¹¹⁾ In reply, the Post Office advised that the applicants should state their case by memorialising the Postmaster General or that, alternatively, if the Postmaster General had no power to meet their needs, an attempt should be made to have the matter raised in Parliament.

(11) W.H. Illingworth letter to the Postmaster General dated April 3rd 1894. On G.P.O. Minuted Papers P.14289/1936. File 1.

(12) W.H. Illingworth letter to Postmaster General dated April 24th 1894. On G.P.O. Minuted Papers P.14289/1936. File 1.

Illingworth adopted the former suggestion and in December 1894 a memorial signed by Lord Haddington, the President of the Royal Blind Asylum at Edinburgh and twenty-one other persons, most of whom were either chairmen of management committees or principals of schools or societies for the blind, was forwarded to the Postmaster General.

This memorial reiterated the main arguments previously submitted by Illingworth and included the statement that an ordinary one volume novel, printed in embossed type, would extend to eight large volumes. The memorial also contained the suggestion that if some known responsible person or persons authorised by the Post Office could be allowed to stamp parcels certifying that they contained embossed books for the use of blind persons, then it might be possible for such packets to be sent at a reduced rate.⁽¹³⁾ The Postmaster General rejected the memorial on two grounds. Firstly, that the book rates of postage were already unremunerative and secondly, that to do so would benefit institutions for the blind to the detriment of the general taxpayer.⁽¹⁴⁾

The first minor concession made to blind persons in respect of postage rates seems to have stemmed from a complaint made in 1902 to Sir Thomas Wrightson, M.P. by H. Royston, a partially sighted former pupil of the Royal Normal College for the Blind. This letter alleged that a former Postmaster General, Henry Fawcett,^(a) had arranged that Braille letters could be sent at the Book Rate fee of a halfpenny. In consequence, "literally hundreds of letters per week" known to the

(13) Lord Haddington and others. Memorial to the Duke of Norfolk Postmaster General December 9th 1895.
On G.P.O. Minuted Papers P.14289/1936. File 3.

(14) Draft reply to Lord Haddington (undated)
On G.P.O. Minuted Papers P.14289/1936. File 3.

(a) Henry Fawcett 1833-1884. Postmaster General 1880. Dictionary of National Biography. Vol.18. pp.252-257.

local officials as "Braille letters" had, for some years, been delivered to and despatched from the pupils of the Royal Normal College. Letters in Braille at reduced rates had also been accepted at and delivered from the Blackfriars and St. Johns Wood Post Offices, both of which were in the vicinity of schools for the blind. The complaint arose from the fact that postal officials had begun to surcharge such letters as insufficiently stamped. When Royston had taken the matter up with the General Post Office the reply had been that if no surcharge had been made in the past the reason was that the staffs at the Post Offices concerned had been guilty of an oversight. Royston, therefore, asked for an investigation for three reasons, namely, that the practice of allowing letters in Braille to pass without surcharge would not have begun "if some such privilege (now perhaps forgotten) had not been granted"; that blind persons were unable to use postcards which were unsuitable for Braille and that the overwhelming majority of the blind were much poorer than their sighted contemporaries. (15) Royston's letter was passed by Wrightson to the Postmaster General. No trace of any concessions having been made by Fawcett could be discovered by Post Office officials though there was a "general impression that something of the kind was done". There were also the difficulties that post official staff could not be expected to distinguish between Braille documents which were entitled to go at the book rate and other documents which were not and that "it would be dangerous to create a precedent for the passage of private letters by book post". Eventually the Post Office decided to leave the existing practice, inconsistent though it was, as undisturbed as possible and Royston was advised to

(15) Letter from H. Royston to Sir Thomas Wrightson. 20.10.1902
On G.P.O. Minuted Papers P.14289/1936. File 4.

leave matters as they were and not to "enquire too closely" how the privilege enjoyed at certain Post Offices had arisen. (16) (a)

In 1903, however, the Post Office took advantage of alterations in the Inland Book Postage to revise its regulations so as to allow letters in embossed type, up to a weight of 2 ozs., to be sent at $\frac{1}{2}$ d instead of 1d. (17) This concession, which operated from January 1st, 1904, was granted to meet the practical difficulties experienced by Post Office staffs in distinguishing between documents in embossed characters produced by hand and similar documents produced by a mechanical process analogous to printing. (18) Also in 1904, the British and Foreign Blind Association wrote to the Postmaster General, Lord Stanley, requesting that the newspaper rate of postage should be extended to all embossed magazines for the blind published not less frequently than once a month and weighing less than one pound. The Association further asked that parcels of embossed books for the blind might be transmitted at a revised postal rate of 1d for the first pound and $\frac{1}{2}$ d for each subsequent pound up to the existing limit in weight. (19) This request was refused on the ground that to grant such a concession would introduce a new principle into Post Office finance, namely, the granting of privileged postal rates, from charitable motives, to a particular class of persons. (18)

(16) Letter from A.W.Coates to Sir Thomas Wrightson. 14.1.1902
On G.P.O. Minuted Papers P.14289/1936. File 4.

(a) There seem to have been other representations, i.e. "The Blind" Vol.11.No.25. January 20th 1904 refers to correspondence with the P.M.G by a George Burford of Cricklewood and ends "We are indebted to him (Burford) for having obtained this concession".

(17) Post Office Circular No.1532. December 16th 1903.

(18) Information given in draft reply of the Postmaster General to the British and Foreign Blind Association. Post Office Minute 13304 July 5th 1904. Post Office Minuted Papers, File 5.

(19) Letter from the British and Foreign Blind Association to the Postmaster General May 24th 1904. Post Office Records as above.

Two years later the campaign for reduced postage on embossed literature shifted to the Commons when in March 1906 the Postmaster General was asked by Lord Valentia whether, "in view of the small amount of such literature and the poverty of many for whose use it is now issued", parcels marked for the blind could be allowed to pass through the post, either free of charge, as was the practice in some countries, or at privileged rates. The Postmaster General, Sydney Buxton, replied that he did not see his way to grant such a concession.⁽²⁰⁾ Three months later, however, when dealing with the estimates, Buxton announced that there were two matters which were receiving his attention but about which he was not in a position to say anything definite. The first was a reduction in the postage to Canada; the second was the question of reducing the postage on the literature for the blind.⁽²¹⁾ In the ensuing debate Valentia suggested that, as the Post Office "invariably swelled the revenue instead of depleting it as other departments did", the Postmaster General could afford to be liberal without falling foul of the Chancellor of the Exchequer and follow the example of the countries which had instituted special postal arrangements for blind persons.⁽²²⁾ Buxton replied that, although it had not been possible for him to make a definite decision regarding the proposed concession, it would take the form of a material reduction in the cost of parcels post under instructions that would confine it to bona fide cases.⁽²³⁾

(20) Hansard. March 1st 1906. Cols.1311-1312.

(21) Hansard. June 21st 1906. Col. 395.

(22) Hansard. June 21st 1906. Cols.411-412.

(23) Hansard. June 21st.1906. Col. 427

Some difficulty was experienced by the Postmaster General and his advisers in deciding under which Post Office regulations embossed literature for the blind should be included. To send embossed literature at the newspaper rate was held to be inexpedient on the ground that to do so would strengthen the claim of monthly and other publications to be included in the category of newspapers. An alternative was to send embossed books at the parcel post rate but this procedure had the disadvantage that under the Parcel Post Act the Railway Companies were entitled to certain fixed rates and would have to be reimbursed for any losses sustained by them arising from exceptionally reduced rates of postage. In the circumstances the Post Office decided that the most suitable course was to include literature for the blind in the letter post, subject to appropriate regulations.⁽²⁴⁾

There was one further difficulty. On June 29th, Buxton had written to the Treasury asking whether a reduction in postage could be effected without legislation and suggesting that, in the event of legislation being necessary, the matter could be dealt with by an Act of one clause giving the Postmaster General power to deal specifically with literature for the blind.⁽²⁵⁾ The answer of the Treasury was that the Post Office Acts did not empower either the Treasury or the Postmaster General to prescribe postage rates applicable only to special categories of people, without the authority of Parliament. Thus, where special privileges had been given to particular classes of persons such as seamen and soldiers, this had always been done by

(24) Memo prepared by R. Bruce, "As to Granting Special Postal Facilities for Literature for the Blind" on File 7.

(25) Buxton to the Treasury. June 29th 1906. on File 8.

an enactment. On the other hand, the Post Office Act of 1875 gave large powers of regulating the post by Warrant with regard to the contents of postal packets. The Treasury, therefore, proposed that a Bill should be introduced giving the Postmaster General power to deal with the blind as a special class, but that it would be more convenient that the precise rates and conditions should be specified in a Warrant rather than in the Act itself. (26)

On July 18th Valentia asked the Postmaster General if he was then able to make a statement with regard to the reduction in postal rates for the blind, which he had promised in his speech on the Post Office estimates. Buxton replied that, as it was necessary for the Postmaster General to obtain special powers before he could effect any reductions in the postage on embossed literature, he proposed to introduce, that day, a Bill which would give him the necessary authority. "I venture to hope" Buxton continued, "that the House will allow me to take the Bill as a non-contentious measure in order that it may pass through all its stages before the adjournment so that the proposed reductions can be put into force at an early date. Until the Bill has passed this House I am afraid I cannot indicate the exact nature of the reductions I propose". (27)

Apart from its citation, the Bill consisted of one clause. This provided that the Postmaster General was empowered, under a Treasury Warrant, to "fix special rates in respect of books and papers impressed for the use of the blind" and to "specify any special conditions and regulations in respect of the transmission of such books and papers". (28)

(26) Treasury to Buxton. July 2nd 1906. on File 8

(27) Hansard. July 18th 1906. Col. 196

(28) Post Office (Literature for the Blind) Bill 6 Edward 7.

Introduced on July 18th, the Bill passed rapidly through both Houses without opposition and received the Royal Assent on August 4th 1906. (29)

On August 24th postal rates for packets consisting of literature for the blind were fixed by Treasury Warrant as follows:-

On every packet not exceeding 2 oz. in weight $\frac{1}{2}$ d

On every packet exceeding 2 oz. and not exceeding 2 Lbs. 1d

On every packet exceeding 2 Lbs. and not exceeding 5 Lbs. $1\frac{1}{2}$ d

"Literature for the blind" was defined as "books and papers impressed in Braille or other special type for the use of the blind but not including newspapers impressed for the use of the blind and registered at the General Post Office for transmission by post". A number of provisions were also prescribed, the purpose of which was to ensure that the concession applied only to bona fide blind literature and blind persons. Among such provisions were the requirements that the inscription "Literature for the Blind" should appear on the outside of each packet; that no packet should contain any article not being literature for the blind and that no communication or inscription, either in writing or in ordinary type, should be included, except for the title of a book or paper. (30)

Between 1906 and 1908 the Postmaster General had to adjudicate on a number of cases arising from the interpretation of the regulations. A request by the editor of a weekly Braille newspaper, "The Weekly Summary", that the metal plates used for printing should be allowed to pass through the post at the concessionary rate was refused, since no

(29) Hansard. August 4th 1906. Col. 1790.

(30) S.R and O. No.651. 1906. Inland Post Amendment No.5 Warrant. 28.8.1906.

provision for the transmission of such items was contained in the regulations.⁽³¹⁾ An application by the National Library for the Blind that the conditions should be modified to allow written exercises and printed catalogues of books to be enclosed in postal packets containing embossed literature was also unsuccessful.⁽³²⁾ Two important revisions were made, however, to the regulations as originally published. The first was due to the initiative of Miss Austin, the Librarian of the National Library for the Blind, who informed the Post Office that "quite half the packets" which she sent out exceeded the prescribed limit of 5 lbs in weight and that the usefulness of the concession would be greatly increased if the parcels of up to 7 lbs could be accepted.⁽³³⁾ Eventually, a compromise was reached and a Treasury Warrant raising the limit from 5 to 6 lbs was issued in January 1907.⁽³⁴⁾ Similar success attended a request by the Secretary of the Moon Society that an exception to the regulations might be made to permit her to send, at the reduced rates, an alphabet in embossed type prefaced by printed instructions for its use. The reason for the application was to enable a sighted friend or relative to give instruction, in the use of raised type, to a blind person who had not been taught the system of embossed letters.⁽³⁵⁾ A Treasury Warrant, authorising the inclusion in postal packets for the blind of any key or instructions for the use of special type, was issued on April 28th 1908.⁽³⁶⁾

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- (31) B.H.Scott, Editor of "The Weekly Summary" to P.M.G.28.8.1906.File 14.
- (32) E.Austin, Librarian, National Lending Library for the Blind to P.M.G. 3.5.1908. File 22.
- (33) E.Austin, Librarian, National Lending Library for the Blind to P.M.G 5.12.1906.File 18 and Memorandum 22.10.1906.
- (34) Inland Post Amendment Warrant 21.1.1907.
- (35) A.E.Moon, Secretary of Moon Society to P.M.G. 20.3.1908. File 21.
- (36) S.R and O. No.349. 1908. Inland Post Amendment No.10 Warrant. 28.4.1908.

Also, in 1908 the Post Office (Literature for the Blind) Act⁽³⁷⁾ was repealed and re-enacted in the consolidated Post Office Act passed in that year.⁽³⁸⁾

(b) Inland Postal Charges 1908-1939

Between 1908 and 1914 no attempts seem to have been made to secure either new postal privileges for the blind or to extend the concessions already granted. On July 6th 1914, however, Arthur Pearson, who in the same year was elected the first President of the National Institute for the Blind, visited the Postmaster General, C.B.H.Hobhouse, and urged that the practice which had been adopted in the U.S.A. and in some parts of the British Empire, of allowing inland postal packets, containing embossed literature for the blind, to pass free of charge should be introduced in the United Kingdom. In reply, Hobhouse expressed the opinion that the proposal to waive postal charges on literature for the blind would be opposed by the Treasury but he promised to ascertain the views of the Treasury as to whether a further reduction could be made in the rates applicable to such literature.⁽³⁹⁾ In fulfilment of his promise Hobhouse wrote to the Treasury on September 16th requesting authority to amend the charges to those shown below:-

<u>Weight</u>	<u>Existing Postage</u>	<u>Recommended Postage</u>
Not exceeding 2 oz	$\frac{1}{2}$ d	$\frac{1}{2}$ d
Exceeding 2 oz but not 2 lb.	1d	
Exceeding 2 oz but not 5 lb.		1d
Exceeding 2 lb but not 5 lb.	$1\frac{1}{2}$ d	
Exceeding 5 lb but not 6 lb.	$2\frac{1}{2}$ d	2d

(37) 6. Edward 7. Chapter 22. Post Office (Literature for the Blind) Act.

(38) 8. Edward 7. Chapter 48. An Act to Consolidate Enactments Relating to the Post Office.

(39) Post Office internal Memorandum July 6th 1914 on P.14289/1936. File 24.

In support of his request Hobhouse pointed out that the revised rates would increase the estimated loss of revenue on Blind Literature postage by £400, from £3,140 to £3,540, but that it would have the effect of enabling the great majority of postal packets for the blind to be sent at the 1d rate. Treasury consent to the proposals, which became operative on January 1st 1915, was given by a Warrant dated December 18th 1914. (40)

On April 22nd 1915, William Rochfort Wade, a Dublin Solicitor, wrote to the Postmaster General seeking a further concession in postal rates. This was that blind persons should be able to have the unembossed manilla paper, which they used for their correspondence, sent through the post at the same rates as were applicable to embossed literature. The anomaly that Wade sought to rectify was that while a blind person had to pay 4d postage on every pound of unembossed manilla paper he was entitled to send such paper, when embossed in the form of letters or magazines, at the rate of 1d, providing the package weighed not more than 5 lbs. (41) The following month Valentia now a Viscount, raised the matter at Question Time. (42) The Postmaster General refused to make any further allowance however, on the ground that privileged rates applicable to a particular class of paper could not be justified. (43) Thereafter, the issue of unembossed paper seems to have been quiescent until 1929 when the matter was revived by the National Institute for the Blind. In February 1930, a deputation (a) was

(40) Draft letter from the Postmaster General to the Treasury. September 16th 1914. P.14289/1936. File 24.

(41) Wade to Hobhouse. April 22nd 1915. P.14289/1936. File 27.

(42) Hansard. May 17th 1915.

(43) Post Office to Wade. June 2nd 1915. P.14289/1936. File 27.

(a) The deputation consisted of representatives from the National Institute for the Blind, the Union of Counties Associations, the National Library for the Blind and St. Dunstons.

received by the Postmaster General who, while expressing his sympathy with the request that concessionary rates should be extended to plain manilla paper, stated that legislation would be required before anything could be done. He also referred to a practical difficulty that would arise, even if such a concession was authorised by Parliament, namely, that because of the difference between the ordinary and the "Blind Literature" rates of postage, there would be an obvious temptation for sighted persons to send paper at the lower charge and that it was impossible to issue "instructions to thousands of sorters in the peculiarities of paper for Brailing".⁽⁴⁴⁾ Subsequently, it was conceded that the administrative difficulties might be overcome if the parcels of unimpressed paper bore a distinctive mark and were handed in at specified Post Offices by officials of Institutions for the Blind. The necessity for enabling legislation remained, however, and due to the pressure of Parliamentary business the Postmaster General regretted his inability to introduce a special Bill dealing only with the "Blind Literature Post".⁽⁴⁵⁾

Meanwhile, in 1921, the National Institute for the Blind had drawn the attention of the Post Office to the fact that the cost of sending newspapers in embossed type through the post was excessively high. Thus, while eight copies, each weighing under 3 ozs of a weekly embossed newspaper "The Braille Mail"^(a) could have been sent by post

(44) "The Times" February 20th 1930.

(45) H.B. Lees-Smith (Postmaster General) to Comdr. A.J.R. Southby April 3rd 1930. on P.14289/1936. File 31.

(a) A weekly edition of the "Daily Mail" printed in Braille began publication in December 1906. It was later re-named "The Braille Mail".

for ld at the "Blind Literature" rate, the existing cost under the Inland Newspaper regulations was 8d.⁽⁴⁶⁾ The anomaly arose because all Warrants relating to the matter issued from 1906 onwards had specifically excluded "newspapers impressed for the use of the blind and registered at the General Post Office for transmission by post" from the definition of "Literature for the Blind". The request, made by the National Institute, for the revocation of the condition excluding newspapers from the application of special postage rates, was approved by the Post Office subject to the condition that packages of books and newspapers impressed for the use of the blind should not contain any communication, either in writing or printed in ordinary type except the title, table of contents, date of publication, serial number, names and addresses of printer and publisher and price of the book or periodical, and any key to or instructions for the use of the special type, or any enclosure except a label for the return of the packet. At the same time the upper limit on the weight of postal packets for the blind was raised to 6½ lbs.⁽⁴⁷⁾ The maximum weight on such postal packets was subsequently increased to 11 lbs. in 1930⁽⁴⁸⁾ and 15 Lbs. in 1940.⁽⁴⁹⁾

In 1934 a Joint Committee was established by St.Dunstons and the National Institute for the Blind under the Chairmanship of

(46) Post Office internal Memorandum May 31st 1921 and later annotations. on P.14289/1936. File 28.

(47) Post Office Guide 1921. p.19.

(48) Notice for Post Office Circular of June 25th 1930. See also Post Office Guide 1930. pp.15-16.

(49) Post Office Guide 1940. pp.11, 49-50.

Ian Fraser^(a) for the purpose of investigating the feasibility of establishing a library of gramophone records by which blind persons would be enabled to listen to novels and other literature being read aloud. This development, it was hoped, would be of particular benefit to persons who had become blind in later life after having been engaged in manual occupations which had roughened their fingers so that their tactile sense had been affected, thereby making it difficult for them to use embossed type.⁽⁵⁰⁾ On February 11th 1935, Fraser informed the Postmaster General, Sir Kingsley Wood, that thirty minutes of reading matter could be put on one side of a twelve inch disc so that a complete book could be transmitted on eight such records. The letter further stated that Fraser had intended approaching the Postmaster General at a later date to ask whether the penny postage rate, which applied to embossed literature, could also be extended to the new "talking books". The decision of the Government to amend the Post Office Act of 1908 had, however, caused him to consider whether the matter could not be dealt with more conveniently by an amendment to the Post Office Amendment Bill.⁽⁵¹⁾ This Bill, designed to effect a number of useful extensions and improvements in some of the services of the Post Office as well as to make certain minor amendments which

(a) William Jocelyn Ian Fraser, Born 1897. M.P.(U) North St.Pancras Division 1922-1925, 1924-1929, 1931-1936 (resigned)
M.P. Lonsdale Division of Lancaster 1940-1950.
Morecambe and Lonsdale Division of Lancaster 1950-1958.
Chairman of the Council of St.Dunstan's since 1921.
See "Who's Who" pages 1082-1083.

(50) National Institute for the Blind, Annual Report 1933-1934. p.25
Half the cost of developing "The Talking Book" was met by St. Dunstan's.

(51) Fraser to Kingsley Wood. Letter dated February 11th 1935
in Post Office Box P.14289/1936. File 36

experience had shown to be necessary,⁽⁵²⁾ was read for the second time on February 15th.⁽⁵³⁾ An important modification to the existing Law was the addition of the words "paper posted to any person for the purpose of being so impressed" to the clause in the 1908 Act authorising special rates for postal packets consisting of books and papers impressed for the use of the blind. Thus, despite a change of Government, the statement made to the deputation from the National Institute for the Blind in 1930 that a concession on this matter might have been made had any Post Office Bill then been under consideration, was honoured.

In the course of a speech on the Second Reading of the Post Office Bill, Fraser thanked the Postmaster General for the concession in respect of impressed paper and expressed the hope that the House would endorse an amendment at the Committee stage making it possible for books of recorded speech to be sent to blind persons at special postal rates.⁽⁵³⁾ In fact, Kingsley Wood had requested sanction to include postal packets containing gramophone records and other articles, specially designed for the use of the blind, within the power prescribed under the Post Office Act of 1908 in a report submitted to the Treasury on February 13th.⁽⁵⁴⁾ The following day Treasury consent was given to the request, subject to the condition that it would be made clear in any public announcement that the new powers would not be used until a method had been found by which the

(52) 25-26. George 5. Chapter 15.

(53) Hansard. February 15th 1935. Cols.2239-2240.

(54) Kingsley Wood to the Treasury. February 13th 1935.
Post Office File 37.

extension of privileged rates could be limited to articles genuinely and solely intended for the use of blind persons.⁽⁵⁵⁾

In response to Fraser's request, therefore, Sir E. Bennett, the Assistant Postmaster General, was able to state that Sir Kingsley Wood was prepared to agree to the principle of the proposal and to introduce the necessary amendment to allow gramophone records, intended for blind persons, to be transmitted by the post at reduced rates.⁽⁵⁶⁾ On March 5th, Kingsley Wood moved the Amendment broadening the scope of the clause relating to reduced rates by the addition of the comprehensive phrase "or any articles specially adapted for the use of the blind". Such wording, he pointed out, would give additional opportunity either for himself or any of his successors "to give full advantage so far as postal rates are concerned to anything that may be of benefit to these people (the blind) under the clause as amended the Postmaster General of the day will have full opportunity of giving special rates".⁽⁵⁷⁾ At the same time further reductions were made in the postal rates:-⁽⁵⁸⁾

<u>Weight</u>	<u>Postage</u>
Up to 2 lb.	$\frac{1}{2}$ d
Exceeding 2 lb but not 5 lb.	1d
" 5 lb " " 8 lb.	$1\frac{1}{2}$ d
" 8 lb " " 11 lb.	2d

The Post Office (Amendment) Act 1935 received the Royal Assent on March 28th 1935.⁽⁵⁹⁾

(55) Treasury to Kingsley Wood. February 14th 1935.
Post Office File 37.

(56) Hansard. February 15th 1935. Col.2257

(57) Hansard. March 5th 1935. Col.6

(58) Inland Post Amendment Warrant 1935.

(59) 25-26. George 5. Chapter 15.

In April a meeting was held between the Secretary General of the National Institute for the Blind, W. McEagar and R. R. Radice, a Principal at the Post Office, at which the latter explained the principle that would govern Post Office action as a result of the Act, namely, that it was intended to remove any disadvantage in postal rates which was directly attributable to blindness but not to put the blind in a privileged position over the ordinary user of the Post Office services. As an illustration of the implementations of this principle Radice explained that books in embossed type, which were heavy in comparison with those in ordinary type, would be allowed to pass at the special "blind" rates. Conversely, the Post Office were not inclined to extend the concession to articles such as typewriters specially adapted for the use of the blind which varied very little from the standard machines used by sighted persons.⁽⁶⁰⁾ In turn, McEagar explained that articles for the blind fell roughly into two categories. The first category consisted of articles such as books and unembossed paper which passed between blind persons and were either already covered by existing regulations or could be so included by specifying the particular items concerned. The second category related to specialised aids such as gramophone records and appliances designed specifically for the blind, which would normally pass only between the user and a limited number of centralised institutes. To prevent any abuse of the use of the special postage rates in respect of these aids and appliances McEagar considered that the best course would be to licence a comparatively small number of institutions to issue them, rather than to allow the

(60) Post Office internal Memorandum signed by R. R. Radice dated April 12th 1935.
In Post Office Box 14289/1936. File 40.

articles to pass indiscriminately between blind individuals. These suggestions were accepted by the Post Office and the National Institute for the Blind was subsequently asked to prepare a list of items which it recommended should be eligible for concessionary blind rates, together with the names of institutions which should be licenced to send aids and appliances through the post.⁽⁶¹⁾ As a result of the advice of the National Institute the Post Office agreed that the expression "articles for the use of the blind" should relate to the following:-

- (i) Books and papers impressed for the use of the blind.
- (ii) Paper posted to any person for the purpose of being so impressed.
- (iii) Metal plates impressed for the use of the blind.
- (iv) Relief maps.
- (v) Frames for making impressions for the use of the blind.
- (vi) Pencil writing frames and attachments.
- (vii) Arithmetic and algebra frames and type.
- (viii) Braillette board and pegs.
- (ix) Metal graph board and pegs.
- (x) Playing cards.
- (xi) Crossword puzzle boards.
- (xii) Diagram boards.
- (xiii) Voice records on discs or films.
- (xiv) Wrappers and labels for use on packets for the blind (bulk supplies).

(61) McEagar to Radice. May 1st 1935.
In Post Office Box 14289/1936. File 40.

- (xv) Geometry mats.
- (xvi) Dominoes. (a) (62)

The National Institute for the Blind also suggested that initially the special licensing arrangements should apply only to the National Institute and National Library for the Blind, together with St. Dunstons, although it recognized that there were other institutions for the blind which might have claims for inclusion. (61)

The Post Office (Amendment) Act of 1935 was the last major concession made in postal rates within the period covered by the present study. In 1939 the Postmaster General, Major G.C. Tryon, was asked whether he would consider introducing legislation giving a total remission of postage on embossed literature for the blind. (63) No such undertaking was given and, in fact, it was not until May 1965 that all inland postal charges on articles for the blind were abolished. (64) In 1939 the Postmaster General further stated that the number of articles posted annually for the use of the blind was then 1,100,000 at an estimated loss of postal revenue of more than £25,000 each year. (63)

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- (a) This list was subsequently extended to include Braille watches, clocks and timers; tools, aids and precision instruments; rules and measures; sectional or collapsible walking sticks; harness for guide dogs. The term "voice" records also now applied to tape recordings.
 - (62) Extract from Inland Postal Warrant 1936. Articles for the use of the Blind.
See also Post Office Guide 1936. p.26.
 - (63) Hansard. July 3rd 1939. Col.915
 - (64) Post Office Guide 1965. p.42
See also "The New Beacon" March 1966.

(3) Wireless Licences.

Between 1922 and 1925 there was a rapid rise in the popularity of broadcasting. At March 31st 1922 the number of current wireless receiving licences was only 7,690. On the same date three years later 1,349,294 such licences were current.⁽⁶⁵⁾ The value of broadcasting as a means of providing auditory stimulus to persons with usual handicaps was recognized by Ian Fraser who approached the Post Office and the British Broadcasting Company with a view to securing free licences for blind persons to enable them to operate wireless receivers.⁽⁶⁶⁾ Fraser's representations were sympathetically received. In 1924, when the B.B.C. was receiving 7/6d out of each 10/- licence fee, the Company acceded to Fraser's request that it would waive its share of the revenue in respect of licences issued to blind listeners, providing that the Post Office would make a similar concession. Accordingly, Fraser approached the Postmaster General, Sir William Mitchell Thompson, who agreed to the principle of free wireless licences for the blind and promised to do what he could to make the concession by administrative action. When Thompson referred the matter to the Treasury, however, the view was taken that it would be undesirable to waive the licence fee without first obtaining the sanction of Parliament.⁽⁶⁶⁾

The opportunity of exempting blind persons from the 10/- receivers licence fee, by means of statutory provision, arose in 1925 when the Government introduced a measure under the title of the Wireless Telegraphy and Signals Bill. Although the original Bill

(65) Report of the Broadcasting Committee 1925. Cmd.2599, 1926. p.22

(66) Memorandum from Ian Fraser to The Rt. Hon. Ronald McNeill entitled "Free Wireless Licences for the Blind" (undated) On M.H.55/122. P.R.O.

made no mention of free receiving licences for the blind the Postmaster General had given instructions that a clause should be drafted making the concession which it was intended to be introduced as an amendment at the appropriate stage of the Bill's passage through Parliament. Due to the contentious nature of some of its provisions, however, and the pressure of Parliamentary time the Bill did not progress beyond its First Reading.

While both the Postmaster General and the B.B.C. supported Fraser's proposal there was considerable opposition to the idea from other sources. Thus, the National Union of the Professional and Industrial Blind rejected a resolution calling for free licences on the ground that the proposal was "A foolish appeal to charity and therefore distasteful".⁽⁶⁷⁾

Nor did Macgregor, the Principal in charge of the Blind Welfare Department at the Ministry of Health, show any enthusiasm. In reply to a request from Maclachlan, an Assistant Secretary at the Ministry of Health, for his views on the matter, Macgregor replied :-

"As regards the proposal generally I am doubtful whether it is desirable and I don't think it is necessary. Wireless is, no doubt, a great boon to the blind, though I am told they are beginning to tire of it and prefer gramophones: and voluntary effort up and down the country is supplying sets wherever necessary, and no doubt the licence also, and we have heard of no difficulty at all in the matter. It would seem that the question of free licences is one of indigency and not of blindness and that many other persons might, with equal and indeed more force, claim the same privileges. I suggest that the Postmaster General should be discouraged from assenting to the proposal".⁽⁶⁸⁾

(67) Letter to Sir Evelyn Murray. June 11th 1925.
On M.H.55/122.P.R.O.

(68) Macgregor to Maclachlan. June 10th 1925.
On M.H.55/122.P.R.O.

Macgregor's opposition to the principle of free receiving licences was again in evidence when, in January 1926, J.P.Kirkman attempted to persuade the Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind to recommend that as the B.B.C. was willing to relinquish its proportion of the licence fee the Postmaster General should also remit his share. Although a number of Advisory Committee members supported the suggestion the opposition to the proposition, led by Ben Purse and tacitly supported by Macgregor, was such that Kirkman withdrew his proposal. (69)

Meanwhile, Ian Fraser had been appointed a member of the Committee set up under the Chairmanship of the Earl of Crawford and Ballcarres, with the following terms of reference:- "To advise as to the proper scope of the Broadcasting service and as to the management, control and finance thereof, after the expiry of the existing licence on 31st December 1926". (70) The Crawford Committee reported on March 2nd 1926. Among the statements made by the Committee was one endorsing "the clause relating to free wireless licences for blind persons, which the Government expressed its intention of accepting in connection with the Wireless Telegraphy and Signalling Bill 1925". (71) The Committee also specifically recommended that "licences should be granted to blind persons free of charge". (72)

(69) Extract from the Minutes of a Meeting of the Advisory Committee January 8th 1926.
On M.H.55/122.P.R.O.

(70) Report of the Broadcasting Committee 1925.Cmd.2599. 1926. p.4

(71) " " " " Par.18 p.13

(72) " " " " Par.20 p.15

Ten days after the publication of the Broadcasting Committee's Report the Postmaster General was asked whether he would consider granting wireless licences either free or at a nominal charge to blind or crippled persons who possessed crystal sets. In reply, the Assistant Postmaster General, Viscount Wolmer, affirmed that, although he was unable to make a statement at that time, the proposal would be considered if the question of fresh legislation, with regard to broadcasting, became necessary.⁽⁷³⁾ A further question, this time from Ian Fraser, was addressed to Wolmer on June 28th. This question asked whether or not the Government proposed to put into effect the recommendation of the Broadcasting Committee that blind persons should be permitted to utilise wireless receiving sets without licences. When the Assistant Postmaster General declared that he was unable to add anything to his reply of March 4th, Fraser put a supplementary question asking for some indication as to how soon the matter would be dealt with "since it should not be held up by the general question of the future of broadcasting".⁽⁷⁴⁾ In reply, Wolmer stated that as the question of free wireless licences was one that would require legislation he could not give the required answer.⁽⁷⁴⁾

On July 14th, when speaking on the Post Office Estimates, the Postmaster General announced that the Government had accepted the Report of the Crawford Committee but that its main recommendations would be implemented, not by statute, but by Royal Charter.⁽⁷⁵⁾ The effect of this decision was that there was no pending legislation by

(73) Hansard. March 4th 1926. Col.1617.

(74) Hansard. June 28th 1926. Col. 812.

(75) Hansard. July 14th 1926. Col. 448.

which the recommendation regarding free wireless licences for the blind could be enacted. Accordingly, early in the next Parliamentary Session, Fraser began preparations for the introduction of a special Bill dealing with the matter. Once again, the measure was the subject of some opposition. At a meeting of the Advisory Committee, held on October 1st 1926, Kirkman, after reading a newspaper report that Fraser intended to introduce a Bill providing for free wireless licences, moved that the Committee should lend its support to the proposal. The Committee, however, decided to postpone any decision on their attitude until details of the measure were available and merely instructed the Secretary to obtain copies of the Bill as soon as it was published.⁽⁷⁶⁾ The Postmaster General had, however, approved the principle of free licences and even instructed the Solicitor to the Post Office to assist Fraser with the drafting of the Bill. In this connection Fraser had also telephoned Macgregor asking for his advise with regard to the framing of a definition of a blind person for the purpose of the proposed Act but had been informed that he (Macgregor) was leaving his post as Principal in charge of the Blind Welfare Department on October 8th. Fraser then wrote to Sir Arthur Robinson at the Ministry of Health, reiterating his request and asking with whom he could communicate.⁽⁷⁷⁾ The query seems to have been passed down the chain of command from Robinson to Maclachlan who, in turn, asked Macgregor for a note of his conversation with Fraser. Macgregor maintained his opposition

(76) Extract from the Minutes of the Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind held on October 1st 1926
On File M.H.55/122. P.R.O.

(77) Fraser to Robinson letter dated October 8th 1926
On File M.H.55/122. P.R.O.

to free wireless licences to the very end. In a memorandum to Maclachlan on October 11th 1926 - his last day in the post he had occupied since 1919 - Macgregor, after stating that he saw no objection to Fraser's suggestion that blind persons should be defined as those in receipt of an Old Age Pension under the Blind Person's Act 1920 and also those to whom the local authority was prepared to issue a certificate of blindness under the Act, concluded - "No doubt it is invidious to oppose a Bill of this kind and the granting of free dog licences and cheap Braille postage will no doubt be quoted as precedents. They are not, of course, precedents as Braille and the so called necessity for a dog guide were peculiar to the blind and wireless is not. I think the Bill is unnecessary and uncalled for".⁽⁷⁸⁾

On Monday, October 25th, Fraser had two important meetings at the House of Commons. The first was with the Financial Secretary to the Treasury^(a) who invited him to submit a memorandum on the subject of free wireless licences for the blind.⁽⁶⁵⁾ The second was with the Chief Whip^(b) who expressed his sympathy with the measure and stated that subject to any objection that might be raised by the Treasury, he would give time for the Bill, providing it was unopposed, in the Autumn Session.⁽⁶⁶⁾ Fraser lost no time in preparing his memorandum. After recounting the history of the movement for free wireless licences and the details of his proposed Bill he based his case on three arguments, namely, those of economy, precedent and necessity. From the

(78) Macgregor to Maclachlan. Minute dated October 11th 1926.
On File M.H.55/122. P.R.O.

(a) The Rt. Hon. Ronald McNeill.

(b) Commander Rt. Hon. Boulton Meredith Eyres-Monsell.

standpoint of economy Fraser pointed out that assuming that the minimum age at which the concession became applicable was fixed at sixteen (although no decision on this point had been taken), there were 39,263 blind persons in England and Wales eligible to receive the benefit so that the maximum possible loss of licence fees would be £19,631.10. 0.⁽⁶⁶⁾ This estimate, Fraser submitted, was in any event an overstatement since the measure would not apply to the thousands of blind people resident in institutions, workhouses and infirmaries. Moreover, the number of persons who might apply would, to some extent, be further reduced by the estimated 5,000 blind persons who were alleged to be mentally or physically deficient. As Macgregor had anticipated, Fraser used the argument that there were several precedents for giving special facilities, such as postage rates and dog licences to blind people. Also instanced was the arrangement by which some railway and omnibus companies allowed a guide to accompany a blind person on payment of one fare only.⁽⁶⁶⁾ Finally, Fraser turned to the question of need:-

"There is no other class of person in the Community who cannot read a daily newspaper, and there is no other class of sufferer from a disability who is so isolated and cut off from mental occupation in the evening hours as are the blind. Even bed-ridden persons or paralytics can, as a rule, read or sew. The experience of Voluntary Agencies for the blind throughout the country has been that the introduction of wireless into a home where there is a blind person has made an enormous difference to the happiness of this person and to the contentment of the home. Daily access to news and lectures of popular educational value such as are frequently broadcast, cannot but raise the general level of intelligence and education of the blind community.

Added to these considerations is the strong sentimental plea that this gift, simply because it means so much to the blind, and costs so little to other listeners, should be made as a contribution towards the easement of their difficult conditions of life, their loneliness and their incapability of enjoying other evening recreations almost universally available".⁽⁶⁶⁾

Fraser's arguments finally prevailed. Four days after his meeting with McNeill, both Fraser and the Ministry of Health were informed that the Treasury offered no objection to the grant of free wireless licences to the blind and that a Bill, as drafted by its Solicitor, would also be acceptable to the Post Office.⁽⁷⁹⁾

The Wireless Telegraphy (Blind Persons Facilities) Bill was introduced as a Private Member's Bill on November 10th.⁽⁸⁰⁾ The measure consisted of two clauses. The first clause enabled the Postmaster General, subject to appropriate safeguards, to issue wireless receiving licences free to the blind instead of exacting the normal fee of ten shillings. The second clause merely defined "blind person for the purpose of the Act" as "any person (not being resident in a public or charitable institution or a school) who produces to the Postmaster General a certificate issued by the Council of the County or County Borough in which he is ordinarily resident, that he is registered in the area of the County or County Borough".⁽⁸¹⁾

The Bill passed rapidly through the Commons, receiving its Second and Third Readings on November 15th and November 17th respectively.⁽⁸²⁾ In the Lords a small amendment was suggested, the purpose of which was to remove any uncertainty as to whether a

(79) R.W.Woods, Solicitor, the General Post Office to MacLachlan, letter dated October 29th 1926.
On File M.H.55/122. P.R.O.

(80) Hansard. November 10th 1926. Col.1086-1088.

(81) Wireless Telegraphy (Blind Persons Facilities) Bill.
Bill No.185.

(82) Hansard. November 15th 1926. Col.1654 and
November 17th 1926. Col.1928

local authority could employ voluntary agencies for the purpose of administering the Act.⁽⁸³⁾ This amendment was agreed by the Commons on December 14th and the Bill received the Royal Assent on the following day.⁽⁸⁴⁾ The Act operated as from January 1, 1927 and details of its implementation were circulated to Post Offices by the Post Office on December 22^(84a) and to local authorities by the Minister of Health on December 23.⁽⁸⁵⁾

Two consequences of the Act may be briefly mentioned. Firstly, the passing of the Act gave a further incentive to blind persons to register themselves as such and in 1929 Fraser claimed that there had been an "extraordinary increase" in the numbers on the registers of the blind. In London alone, no fewer than 900 blind people, who had previously been unknown or unregistered, had been discovered as an indirect consequence of the Act.⁽⁸⁶⁾ Secondly, the introduction of free licences gave a stimulus to voluntary effort. In 1926 the National Institute for the Blind began the publication of a Braille edition of the "Radio Times", thus enabling sightless listeners to know what programmes were available. Further, on the principle that "a free dog kennel is not of great use to one unable to afford a dog", the National Institute for the Blind intensified a campaign begun the previous year to obtain wireless sets for blind persons

(83) Lords Amendment to the Wireless Telegraphy (Blind Persons Facilities) Bill.

(84) Hansard. December 14th 1926. Col.2818 and
December 15th 1926. Col.2972

(84a) Post Office Circular December 22nd 1926.

(85) Ministry of Health Circulars 756 and 756A. December 23rd 1926.
Wireless Telegraphy (Blind Persons Facilities) Act. 1926.

(86) Hansard. May 1st 1929. Col.1603

who would otherwise have been unable to meet the cost of purchasing a receiver.⁽⁸⁷⁾ Three years later the National Institute for the Blind, in conjunction with the B.B.C., launched the British Wireless for the Blind Fund. The first radio appeal on behalf of the Fund was made on Christmas Day 1929 by Sir Winston Churchill. Since 1929 the radio appeal for the Wireless for the Blind Fund has been made on Christmas Day each year.

(4) The Blind Voters Act 1933

The Parliamentary and Municipal Elections Act of 1872 laid down special rules for persons incapacitated by blindness or other physical cause from voting in the usual manner at polling stations. The same rule also applied to illiterate persons, and, if the poll was taken on a Saturday, to any voter of the Jewish faith who objected, on religious grounds, to voting in the customary way. In such cases the Act made it mandatory for the presiding officer to cause the ballot paper to be marked in the presence of the agents of the candidates, in the manner directed by the voter and then place it in the ballot box. The Act further required that the name and number of every voter whose ballot paper had been so marked, together with the reason, should be entered by the presiding officer on a list. Section 4 of the Act bound every presiding officer and agent to maintain the secrecy of the ballot and prescribed penalties for any breach of this duty. There was, however, no obligation on an officer to clear a polling station if he was satisfied that the secrecy of the vote could otherwise be secured.⁽⁸⁸⁾

(87) National Institute for the Blind Annual Report 1927. p.26

(88) 35 & 36 Victoria Ch.33. Parliamentary and Municipal Elections Act 1872. First Schedule, Part 1. par.26.

In 1922 the Committee of the Eastern Counties Association for the Blind decided to notify the Minister of Health of the dissatisfaction with the above voting procedure which had been expressed by a number of blind persons. A resolution was therefore addressed to the Minister of Health in the following terms:-

"That this Committee considers blind persons are under a great disadvantage in respect of voting at elections, as they are compelled, if they wish to record their votes, to disclose the names of those for whom they wish to vote to the presiding officer and other officials, and it is believed that many blind persons consequently refuse to exercise the franchise. This Committee recommends that measures be taken to remove this serious disadvantage and they suggest, as one alternative, that blind voters should be permitted to appoint, by word of mouth in the polling station, some other person to vote for him or her".(89)

In practical terms the existing law precluded a blind person from taking his guide with him into the polling booth and made him entirely dependent on the presiding officer, who was usually a perfect stranger. (a)

The resolution was forwarded by the Ministry of Health to the Home Office. In a memorandum on the matter, Home Office officials construed the suggestion made by the Eastern Counties Association as being, in effect, a request that proxy voting should be extended to the blind. There was, however, no reason in the view of the Home Office officials why blind voters should have proxy voting in preference to other infirm persons. They further contended that, as

(89) Miss M.C.Tenney, Secretary, Eastern Counties Association to the Blind to Minister of Health November 27th 1922. On H.O. 45/15192. P.R.O.

(a) In Canada, Australia and Germany a blind voter was given the choice of having his paper marked by the official at the polling booth or by a friend or relative accompanying him.

there had been no substantial complaints regarding the voting procedure then current, this was evidence that the safeguards regarding secrecy were adequate. It was, therefore, extremely unlikely that legislation could be introduced to remove "what is really a sentimental grievance, if in fact, there is one at all".⁽⁹⁰⁾

Two years later the Ministry of Health received a further communication on the matter from the South Wales and South Western Group of the National Association of Labour Registration and Election Agents which had passed a resolution urging that the Representation of the People Act 1918 should be amended so as to allow blind persons to be placed on the Absent Voter's list and for instructions to be given to Registration Officers to adopt this procedure.⁽⁹¹⁾ The Home Office in its reply held out no prospect of any amendment of the law in the manner recommended by the above resolution.⁽⁹²⁾

In 1925 the question of altering the rules relating to voting by the blind was raised again by the Union of Associations of the Blind who requested that the Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind should be asked to give consideration to the matter and make recommendations. When the subject was discussed by the Advisory Committee, held on April 24th 1925, three blind members stated that in their experience no difficulty had been experienced with the existing voting procedure. On the strength of this evidence it was

(90) Home Office Minute December 8th 1922.
On H.O.45/15192. P.R.O

(91) H.E.Rogers, Secretary of the Association to Wheatley
September 16th 1924.
On H.O.45/15192. P.R.O

(92) Home Office to Rogers, September 24th 1924.
On H.O.45/15192. P.R.O

agreed that the Union of Associations should be informed that the Advisory Committee did not consider any amendment of the existing law concerning blind voters to be either desirable or necessary.⁽⁹³⁾

The recommendation of the Advisory Committee seems to have had the effect of inhibiting any further action to secure an alteration in the rules relating to the recording of votes by blind persons for almost four years. In 1929, however, the matter was revived by a letter sent to Ian Fraser by a Thomas Floyd, a war blinded man, who suggested that Fraser might write an article for publication in the "St. Dunstan's Review" dealing with the regulations relating to the recording of votes by blind persons.⁽⁹⁴⁾

As a result of this request Fraser approached the Home Office asking for a brief memorandum regarding the procedure for voting by the blind including the position of ex-servicemen who were away from home at election times for training or treatment. The Home Office agreed that, in the latter case, the Representation of the People Acts did not debar such persons from being absent voters and conceded that there was no definite statutory or other requirement that an absent voter should mark his ballot paper in secret. On the wider issue of the modification of the rules prescribed by the Parliamentary and Municipal Elections Act, Fraser was informed that any such amendment could only be effected by legislation.⁽⁹⁵⁾

(93) Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind
Minutes of Meeting April 24th 1925.
On H.O.45/15192

(94) Floyd to Fraser February 21st 1929.
On H.O.45/15192

(95) Home Office Memorandum to Fraser April 26th 1929
On H.O.45/15192

In October 1931 a General Election was announced. In the same month Fraser published a letter in the "St.Dunstan's Review" requesting blind voters to provide him with evidence of any difficulties or irregularities experienced by them at the forthcoming election. (96)

Ninety-five replies were received, a number of which referred to more than one case. (97) Thus, one Home Teacher reported that, at the Home

Teachers Conference, 112 out of 130 people had supported a motion

"That blind voters should be allowed to have with them a relative or friend who would mark their voting paper according to their

instructions". Another letter enclosed a petition, signed by 44 blind people, asking for the law to be changed in respect of blind voters.

The replies revealed considerable dissatisfaction with the existing procedure. One cause of dissatisfaction was that the rules laid

down in the Ballot Act were disregarded. At Worthing, for example, it

was asserted that the method adopted had been to summons a police constable who, after clearing away everyone within hearing, had led

the blind voter to a polling booth and asked him to name the

candidate for whom he wished to vote. The ballot paper had then

been marked by the constable instead of the Presiding Officer. A

repeated complaint was the tendency of Presiding Officers to equate

blindness with illiteracy by reading declarations that the blind

voter was unable to read and then asking him to attest the Illiteracy

Form by making his mark. There were also allegations that the lack

of secrecy had led to subsequent victimisation. A blind town crier

(96) "St.Dunstan's Review" October 1931. p.5

(97) Evidence of Fraser to Advisory Committee to the Blind
April 27th 1932.
On H.O.45/15192

claimed that prior to voting against the Labour Candidate at a local election he had received a substantial amount of work, announcing meetings for various Labour Organisation, but that afterwards his services had not been utilised. Another blind hairdresser "who agrees on politics with all his customers" found that, when he recorded his vote, the marking of the ballot paper was done by a customer who held opposite political views to himself. In only two cases did blind persons state that they were satisfied with the existing law. (98)

On February 16th 1932, Fraser visited the Home Office where he submitted the replies received in response to his letter to A.S.Hutchinson, the Private Secretary to the Permanent Under-Secretary, Sir John Anderson. In a letter confirming the appointment with Hutchinson, Fraser pointed out that when the Ballot Act of 1872 was passed only a minority of the blind population were able to read or write. In 1932, however, conditions had changed and many thousands of the blind were "responsible, sensible educated people" who had "enough judgement to choose their own proxy". (99) Fraser also stated that in Canada the possibility of abuse by an individual rounding up all the blind and offering to be their "friend" and vote for them was avoided by the "friend" or "relation" being compelled to take an oath that he was only acting for the one blind person. (99) In the course of his discussion with Hutchinson, Fraser announced his intention of introducing a Bill which, if enacted, would allow a blind person to

(98) Precipis of correspondence handed to Mr.Lovett by Captain Fraser at the Meeting of the Advisory Committee April 27th 1932.
On H.O.45/15192

(99) Fraser to Hutchinson February 15th 1932
On H.O.45/15192

have his ballot paper marked by an amanuensis and that, in pursuance of this objective, he proposed to endeavour to persuade the Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind to reverse the resolution passed in 1925 that an amendment of the law relating to blind voters was unnecessary. Hutchinson did not lead Fraser to expect that there would be no opposition to his Bill on the part of the Home Office. (100)

By invitation of the Chairman, Fraser attended the meeting of the Advisory Committee held on April 27th 1932. His purpose in so doing was to make representations with regard to the position of blind persons when voting at elections. Prior to the meeting Fraser had handed to Lovett a precis of the correspondence received in reply to his letter in the "St. Dunstan's Review". After detailing the provisions of the Ballot Act of 1872 with regard to blind voters, Fraser stated that blind persons criticised the procedure laid down on three grounds. Firstly, that they objected to being classified with illiterates. Secondly, that a blind person could never be sure that he was speaking to the Presiding Officer and that no other person was within earshot. Thirdly, that the oath of secrecy was broken from time to time and that, particularly in small villages, such a breach could be a serious matter for a blind person. Fraser's proposal was that blind persons should be given the option of voting under the existing rules or, as applied in Canada, Australia and Germany, taking a friend to the polling booth who, after being sworn to secrecy, would mark the ballot paper on behalf of the afflicted voter. The Home Office had taken the view that the definite recommendation against any change in the existing law, which had been made by the Advisory Committee in 1925,

(100) Minute dated February 18th 1932 by Hutchinson on his interview with Fraser
On H.O.45/15192

precluded any legislative action. It was for the purpose of securing the rescission of the 1925 resolution that he (Fraser) was attending the meeting.

In the course of the subsequent discussion Fraser was asked whether he proposed to apply his suggested procedure to the other classes who were subject to the same voting rules as the blind. In his reply Fraser stated that in his opinion the disability of blindness was quite distinct from those of the other categories and that his proposals should, therefore, be limited to the blind. Fraser answered a further question as to whether he was prepared to substitute voting by proxy for the method of voting which he advocated by asking "that his hands should not be tied to any particular method of effecting what he desired" especially since the Home Office might not welcome any extension of the practice of voting by proxy. Of the three blind members of the Advisory Committee namely, Clydesdale, Mowat and Purse, who had opposed the proposal to change the law in 1925, two were present at the meeting held in 1932. Eventually, Mowat asserted that he had been convinced of the necessity for the rules, laid down in Section 26 of the Ballot Act, to be changed. Clydesdale also concurred that secrecy was essential and that the confidences of blind persons were often abused. When put to the vote the Advisory Committee unanimously adopted a resolution framed as follows:-

"That the Committee, having heard the representations put to them by Captain Ian Fraser, M.P. at their meeting on the 27th April 1932, have reconsidered the opinion expressed in paragraph 54 of their sixth Report, that they did not consider that any amendment of the law with regard to blind voters was desirable or necessary. They are now satisfied that such amendment is desirable and they recommend an amendment of the law which would secure that blind voters have a greater assurance of secrecy in their voting".(101)

(101) Advisory Committee on Welfare of the Blind. Minutes of Meeting April 27th 1932.
On H.O.45/15192

The rescision of the 1925 recommendation was viewed with some dismay by the officials at the Home Office since, as stated in a subsequent memorandum probably drafted by Sir W.E. Holderness, a Principal, it had been relied upon as a good reason for not favouring any alteration of the existing system of voting. The memorandum suggested that the procedure advocated by Fraser would strike at the root of the principle of the secrecy of the ballot and would leave the way open for all kinds of undue influence. In the last resort a person with a blind voter depending on him or her would, in effect, have two votes.⁽¹⁰²⁾ The Ministry of Health also appear to have been lukewarm regarding the matter. Lovett, the Secretary of the Advisory Committee, had in fact informed the writer of the memorandum that the Ministry of Health "did not intend to convey the idea that they were in any way in favour of the Committee's resolution" and they would be quite prepared to accept the Home Office views on the subject. Finally, it was suggested that Fraser should be informed that the Home Office saw "serious objections to an amendment of the law as proposed" but that it was willing to deal with the matter generally by drawing the special attention of Acting Returning Officers to the importance of ensuring that polling officials were aware of the rules relating to voting by blind persons and investigating any cases of complaint with a view to avoiding future mistakes.⁽¹⁰²⁾ In a covering minute Holderness recognized that it was unlikely that Fraser would be satisfied by the proposed action and would move to bring in a Private Bill "which would be sure to receive a certain amount of sympathy in the House and might be difficult to resist". It was conceded that

(102) Home Office Memorandum (undated)
On H.O.45/15192

the amendment desired by Fraser was not important but it had the disadvantages of contravening the principles of the Ballot Act and opening the door to further alterations. In the circumstances Holderness suggested that the Home Secretary might offer to discuss the matter with Fraser. (103) On July 14th the Parliamentary Under-secretary, the Rt. Hon. Oliver Stanley, saw Fraser at the Home Secretary's request in order to ascertain whether he (Fraser) could suggest any mechanical contrivance for the purpose of enabling blind persons to record their votes themselves. Two objections to this suggestion were adduced. Firstly, as Fraser pointed out, ballot papers were not standardised and at local elections there might be as many as 12 candidates to choose from. Secondly, the number of polling stations in England and Wales numbered 30,309 and possibly exceeded the number of blind persons who would vote. In view of the fact that at many polling stations there would be no blind voters and at others only a few, the task of making special equipment and issuing instructions for its use would be out of proportion to the votes so recorded. Fraser, therefore, reiterated his conviction that the only way out of the difficulty was to allow a blind man or woman to vote through the agency of a relative or friend who, in practice, would know the political convictions of the person for whom he was acting. In the course of the interview Fraser was again asked whether he would object to any amendment of the law being extended to all classes of persons covered by Rule 26 of the Ballot Act. Fraser, therefore, revised the statement made to the Advisory Committee on April 27th that his proposals should relate only to the

(103) Minute by Holderness to A.J.Eggleston June 21st 1932
On H.O.45/15192

blind and agreed that his Bill should refer to all classes to whom the special rules applied. The meeting ended cordially. Stanley promised that, subject to the approval of the Home Secretary, the Bill would be drafted by Parliamentary Counsel. In turn, Fraser gave an assurance that his Bill would be supported by representatives of all parties - a matter on which he anticipated no difficulty.⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ On July 28th Herbert Samuel agreed that voting through the medium of a relative or friend "was a better plan than any mechanical arrangement especially in view of the difficulties that would arise in connection with local elections".⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ The following day the Treasury was asked to sanction the preparation of a Bill by Parliamentary Counsel⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ and four days later the Home Office was notified that Treasury approval had been given.⁽¹⁰⁷⁾

Some delay now occurred possibly due to the Parliamentary recess. Not until September 23rd did Fraser receive a written notification from Stanley that the Home Secretary had approved, in principle, that the law relating to voting by blind persons at elections should be altered. Stanley also proposed that Fraser should introduce his Bill in February or March 1933. Since a delay of five months was envisaged, and also because reference to the alteration of the law had been made in some newspapers, Fraser asked whether the Home Secretary would announce his intention to support amending legislation by means of an

(104) Minute by Holderness dated July 18th 1932 on Fraser's interview with Stanley
On H.O.45/15192

(105) H.Samuel. Minute dated July 28th 1932
On H.O.45/15192

(106) A.J.Eggleston, Assistant Secretary, Home Office to Treasury
July 29th 1932

(107) Strohmenger to Eggleston, August 4th 1932

answer to a suitably worded Parliamentary question.⁽¹⁰⁸⁾ This suggestion was accepted⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ and in reply to a question put by Fraser on November 30th, Stanley stated that "If a Private Member's Bill to effect the proposed change were generally acceptable to all political parties the Government would give it sympathetic consideration".⁽¹¹⁰⁾

Fraser, accordingly, gave notice of his intention to present his Representation of the People (Blind Persons) Bill on December 6th. Bicknell, the Principal, who seems to have taken over the matter, was not slow to point out that the title of the proposed Bill limited its application to blind persons whereas the intention, as agreed by Fraser with Stanley, had been that the measure should include all the categories of persons covered by Rule 26. Bicknell subsequently ascertained that Fraser had reverted to his original view that a Bill limited to blind persons would obtain wider acceptance than one which also made special voting arrangements for Jews, illiterates and individuals incapacitated by physical disability.⁽¹¹¹⁾

Two factors were now responsible for temporarily retarding progress. The first was the need to refer the measure back to obtain the Home Secretary's agreement that the Bill should be allowed to proceed in its more restricted form. The second factor was that, Bicknell, in his consultations with the draftsman, had found that the

(108) Fraser to Stanley, October 10th 1932. On H.O.45/15192

(109) Stanley to Fraser, October 24th 1932. On H.O.45/15192

(110) Hansard. November 30th 1932. Col.817

(111) R.L.Bicknell, Principal, the Home Office.
Memorandum to Stanley December 3rd 1932
On H.O.45/15192

preparation of the Bill had taken longer than anticipated, since some of the details were unexpectedly complicated.⁽¹¹²⁾ At least five matters had to be resolved, including the following:-

- (1) Safeguards to ensure that an individual should not assist more than two blind persons at any election.
- (2) The prescription of penalties applicable to any breach of secrecy on the part of the person assisting the blind person.
- (3) The form of the declaration to be made by the relative or friend that he had not already acted for more than one blind voter and understood the law relating to secrecy.

It was also necessary to decide whether the form of declaration should be inserted in the Bill or left to be prescribed by an Order in Council.

- (4) The modification of Section 4 of the Ballot Act to protect a person assisting a blind voter from the penalties relating to interference with a voter in a polling station.
- (5) The extension of the Bill to municipal elections and all other local government elections.⁽¹¹³⁾

On January 25th 1933, Fraser had informed Bicknell that he had secured the approval, in principle, of all Parties and that several prominent M.P's were prepared to support the Bill, which had been provisionally put down for presentation on February 22nd.⁽¹¹⁴⁾

(112) R.L.Bicknell. Memorandum dated January 31st 1933.

(113) R.L.Bicknell. Memorandum to the draftsman on decisions reached by Mr.Stanley with regard to the Blind Voters Bill February 6th 1933.

(114) Fraser to Bicknell, January 25th 1933.

In fact, the Bill was introduced on February 23rd (115) (a) and proceeded through the Commons without discussion, the Second and Third Readings taking place on March 2nd and April 27th respectively. (116) Before the Bill went to the Lords, however, the Home Office took the precaution of submitting it for comment to ten representative Registration Officers who made a number of constructive suggestions. One suggestion was that to obviate an attempt to simulate blindness the blind person should be required to satisfy the Presiding Officer by an oral declaration of his inability to vote without assistance. It is noteworthy that to avoid imposing on the Presiding Officer the onus of securing proof of incapacity, no mention was made in the Bill of a statutory definition of blindness or any requirement that a voter be registered under the Blind Persons Act. A further comment was that, as drafted, the Bill allowed anyone over the age of twenty-one to act as a "friend" providing he had not already assisted more than one blind person at that election. To obviate any possibility of blind persons being pestered by political agents, or others, to vote with the assistance of professional "friends", it was suggested that the expression "friend" should be more closely defined. (117)

(115) Hansard. February 23rd 1933. Col. 1909.

(a) The Bill was supported by Messrs. Edwards, Lansbury and Rea (Labour)
 Sir Shirley Benn, Mr. Smedley Crooke,
 Major Hills, Lieut. Ker and
 Captain Strickland (Conservative)
 Lloyd George, Sir Ian Macpherson and
 Sir H. Samuel (Liberal)

(116) Hansard. March 2nd Col. 693 and April 27th Col. 394.

(117) R.L. Bicknell. Memorandum on the Blind Voters Bill
 April 21st 1933

The above two recommendations which had been accepted by Fraser and the Home Office, together with some minor amendments in drafting, were made during the passage of the Bill through the Lords.⁽¹¹⁸⁾ On July 18th the Bill received the Royal Assent,⁽¹¹⁹⁾ and the Blind Voters Act came into effect on January 1st 1934. At the same time the Rules relating to Local Government Elections were amended to take cognizance of the provisions of the Blind Voters Act.⁽¹²⁰⁾

In its final form the "Act to amend the Ballot Act, 1872, so as to enable any blind voter at a poll regulated by that Act to avail himself of the assistance of a relative or friend, and for purposes connected with the matter aforesaid"⁽¹²¹⁾ consisted of only two sections, the second of which related to the citation date of commencement and construction of the Act. Section 1 specified the procedure by which a blind person could have the assistance prescribed by the Act and defined the persons entitled to act as "friend". So far as the procedure was concerned the Act laid down that an application by a blind elector to vote with the assistance of a friend should be allowed subject to the presiding officer requiring and being satisfied by two preliminary Acts, namely:-

- (1) An oral declaration by the voter that he was so incapacitated by blindness as to be unable to vote without assistance.

(118) Hansard (Lords) July 5th 1933. Cols.474-475.

(119) Hansard. July 18th 1933. Col.1735.

(120) S.R and O. 1933. No.1126. Local Government Elections. England and Wales.

(121) 23 & 24. George 5. Chapter 27. Blind Voters Act 1933.

- (2) A written declaration by the companion that he was a qualified person within the meaning of the Act and had not previously assisted more than one blind person to vote at the election then taking place.

Two classes of persons were qualified to assist a blind voter, namely:-

- (1) An individual who was entitled to vote at the election, i.e., to poll in the same parliamentary constituency, county electoral division or ward as the person to whom he was giving assistance.
- (2) The father, mother, brother, sister, husband, wife, son or daughter of the blind person, providing such a relative had attained the age of twenty-one.⁽¹²¹⁾

After the Act had been passed Lovett wrote to the Home Office suggesting that a circular, explaining the effect of the measure, should be sent by the Local Authority Committees responsible for blind welfare and the voluntary agencies for the blind.⁽¹²²⁾ This suggestion was accepted and a Circular, drafted by Bicknell, was issued by the Home Office.⁽¹²³⁾

The Blind Voters Act 1933 was subsequently repealed and its provisions incorporated in the Parliamentary Rules and the Local Election Rules contained in Schedule 2 of the Representation of the People Act 1949.⁽¹²⁴⁾ These Rules now allow a blind person to vote

(122) Lovett to J.N.Beckett (Assistant Secretary, Ministry of Health)
August 2nd 1933
On M.H.55/72

(123) Home Office Note on the Blind Voters Act 1933.
H.M.S.O.1933

(124) 12 & 13 George VI, Ch.68. Representation of the People Act 1949.

by post by making an application to be treated as an absent voter. The application to vote as an absent voter must be accompanied by a certificate of incapacity completed either by a doctor, or, in the case of a registered blind person, by an officer responsible for maintaining the Register of Blind Persons.

5. The Prevention of Blindness

In England, the first organised attempt to take preventive measures with regard to blindness seems to have taken place in 1879 when a Wimpole Street physician, Dr. Mathias Roth, founded a "Society for the Prevention of Blindness and the Improvement of the Physique of the Blind".⁽¹²⁵⁾ In a paper given in 1883, Roth, after describing the main causes of blindness, went on to refer to two other important factors that were frequently responsible for loss of sight namely, ignorance and neglect, which, he stated, applied to four principal groups:-

1. Ignorance regarding general and specially ocular hygiene of mothers, nurses and all those to whom the care of infants is entrusted.
2. Ignorance of schoolmasters and schoolmistresses in matters of health and physical education.
3. Ignorance and neglect of the working classes regarding the injurious influences affecting their general health, and causing diseases of the eyes.
4. Ignorance of many medical men regarding the knowledge and treatment of eye diseases.⁽¹²⁶⁾

(125) Wagg, H.J. A Chronological Survey of Work for the Blind. Pitman & Sons, for the National Institute for the Blind 1932. p.182. In his evidence to the Royal Commission on the Blind Deaf & Dumb on February 26th 1886 (Minutes of Evidences paras.5822 to 5911) Roth stated that the Society had been founded about six years previously.

(126) Report of the Jubilee Celebration of the Foundation of the Yorkshire School for the Blind and of Conference of Managers. York 1883. p.194

The Society ceased its activities about 1907. During its existence it did much to stimulate public interest in the hygiene of the eye and to disseminate advice concerning the treatment of eye diseases particularly ophthalmia neonatorum.^(a) Official action for the prevention of blindness during the period covered by the present thesis was mainly the responsibility of the Local Government Board and later, the Ministry of Health, although both the Board of Education and the Home Office had responsibilities with regard to the measures designed to reduce the incidence of visual defects. The development of measures for the prevention of blindness may conveniently be considered under three headings namely, (1) The Prevention of Blindness 1880-1920, (2) The Report of the Departmental Committee on the Causes and Prevention of Blindness 1922 and (3) The Prevention of Blindness 1923-1939.

(a) The Prevention of Blindness 1880-1920

Sorsby⁽¹²⁷⁾ has stated that "the most authentic data on the elimination of a blinding disease are available in the case of ophthalmia neonatorum which 60 or 70 years ago (1950) was probably the commonest cause of blindness in the country". The importance of ophthalmia neonatorum as a cause of blindness in the Nineteenth Century emerges from evidence furnished to the Royal Commission on the Blind, Deaf and Dumb by the Ophthalmological Society of London which reported that a survey of the inmates of schools for the blind revealed that between 30 and 41% of the pupils of the institutions studied had lost their sight from this cause. The Society estimated that about 7,000 persons

(a) Ophthalmia Neonatorum was defined in the General Order issued by the Local Government Board in 1914 as "A purpulent discharge from the eyes of an infant commencing within 21 days from the date of its birth".

(127) Sorsby, Arnold. The Causes of Blindness in England and Wales. Medical Research Council Memorandum No.24. H.M.S.O. 1950. p.31

(128)

in the United Kingdom were blind as a result of ophthalmia neonatorum. The procedures necessary for the prevention of ophthalmia neonatorum were first described in 1807, by Benjamin Gibson of Manchester who wrote as follows:-

"First to remove, if possible, the disease in the mother during pregnancy, second, if that cannot be accomplished, to remove artificially as much of the discharge as possible from the vagina at the time of delivery; and third, to pay, at all events, particular attention to the eyes of the child by washing them immediately after delivery with a liquid calculated to remove the offending matter or to prevent its noxious action".⁽¹²⁹⁾

One of the most important developments in the treatment of the condition took place, however, in 1881 when Credé, Professor of Obstetrics at the University of Leipzig, discovered that a solution of nitrate of silver dropped into the infants eyes immediately after birth would have a prophylactic effect.

Both the Society for the Prevention of Blindness and the Ophthalmological Society endeavoured to spread information regarding the effectiveness of Credé's method. In 1884, the Ophthalmological Society appointed a deputation to the President of the Local Government Board for the purpose of urging that instruction cards should be issued to those responsible for the care of newly born infants, pointing out the dangers of ophthalmia neonatorum and the importance of prompt treatment. The request made by the deputation was rejected on the

(128) Royal Commission on the Blind, Deaf and Dumb. Report P.XIV.

(129) Ministry of Health. Departmental Committee on the Causes and Prevention of Blindness 1922. Para.52. p.22.

ground that at a cost of 2p per card the expense involved would be £7,300.⁽¹³⁰⁾ This so called economy involved the country in subsequent heavy expenditure for the maintenance of many blind persons whose disability might have been prevented. As shown in Chapter II(a) the Royal Commission on the Blind, Deaf and Dumb made a number of suggestions for the prevention of blindness including a recommendation that information respecting the treatment of purulent ophthalmia should be circulated by the Sanitary Authority or through the Post Office. In 1896 the Postmaster General informed the Secretary of Gardners Trust for the Blind that, in his opinion, the circulation of information regarding the condition fell within the province of the Sanitary Authority rather than the Post Office. A further letter to the Medical Officer of the Local Government Board elicited the reply that "the question of purulent ophthalmia and its relation to blindness" in no way came within his province as Medical Adviser to the Board on matters relating to Public Health and that the communication was being forwarded to the Poor Law Department.⁽¹³¹⁾ At this point the correspondence appears to have ceased.

One factor that influenced the high incidence of ophthalmia neonatorum was that, at the end of the Nineteenth Century, the standard of midwifery in the United Kingdom was low in comparison with Germany where special precautions were enforced by law on midwives, who were required to obtain certificates of professional competence before being licensed to practice. In 1889, the Royal Commission on the Blind, Deaf

(130) Wagg, H.J. A Chronological Survey of Work for the Blind. Pitman & Sons, for the National Institute for the Blind 1932. p.183.

(a) See page 64

(131) "The Blind" January 20th 1898. p.11

The year 1909 also witnessed a further significant event in the prevention of ophthalmia neonatorum by public health measures when E.V.Greatbatch, the Chairman of the North Staffordshire Joint School Authority for Educating Blind and Deaf Children and of the North Staffordshire Workshops for the Blind, led a deputation to the Senior Medical Officer of the Local Government Board to discuss what could be done with regard to preventing blindness consequent on inflammation of the eyes of the newly born. The deputation was advised that two courses of action were available. The first was to make ophthalmia neonatorum a compulsory notifiable disease, by extending, with the approval of the Local Government Board, the provisions of the Infectious Diseases (Notification) Act of 1889. The second was for a local authority to adopt the Notification of Births Act of 1907. In the latter case the deputation was informed that the Local Government Board would not sanction the adoption of the Act unless the local authority wishing to do so agreed to employ a local nurse. Both Acts were subsequently adopted by the pottery towns of Staffordshire, the first to do so being Stoke-on-Trent. In the first nine months after the notification of ophthalmia neonatorum had been made compulsory 75 cases were reported in the five pottery towns. Of these cases, 61 resulted in the sight of both eyes being preserved, 7 lost the sight of one eye, and 2 became blind. What happened to the remaining 5 cases was not recorded. Apart from humanitarian considerations, Greatbatch pointed out the economic advantages of preventive measures. Thus, the seven children who had only lost one eye were capable of being educated in an ordinary school at an annual cost to the community of between £2 and £3 in comparison with the £35 which was the expenditure required for the special education of a blind pupil. (135)

(135) "The Blind" October 20th 1910. pp.389-393.

Following the lead given by Stoke-On-Trent, 275 sanitary authorities, including the London County Council, made applications between 1909 and 1914 to extend the provisions of the Infectious Diseases (Notification) Act to ophthalmia neonatorum.⁽¹³⁶⁾ Finally, in February 1914, the Local Government Board, under the powers given in the Public Health Act of 1875, issued Regulations⁽¹³⁷⁾ by which notification of the condition either by a registered medical practitioner or a certified midwife was made compulsory throughout England and Wales. This arrangement led to some confusion as to whether the responsibility for notification lay with the medical practitioner or with the midwife and in 1926 amending Regulations⁽¹³⁸⁾ which were brought to the notice of sanitary authorities by Circular 617 made notification the duty of the medical practitioner. A further amending regulation was made in 1937 by which, in the interests of expediting treatment, medical practitioners were required to send the notification direct to the Medical Officer of Health of the Maternity and Child Welfare Authority and not, as previously, through the Medical Officer of Health of the county district in which the notifying practitioner was attending the child.⁽¹³⁹⁾

The prevention of blindness whether arising from disease or accident was also considered by the Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind which reported in 1917. With regard to blindness due to disease, the Committee stated that there was "reason to doubt"

(136) Union of Counties Associations for the Blind. Report on the Prevention of Blindness 1936. Para.11. p.4

(137) Public Health (Ophthalmia Neonatorum) Regulations 1914
S.R.& D No.91

(138) Public Health (Ophthalmia Neonatorum) Regulations 1926
S.R.& O No.971

(139) Public Health (Ophthalmia Neonatorum) Regulations 1937
S.R.& O.No. 35

whether notification of ophthalmia neonatorum was being carried out with uniform efficiency throughout England and Wales. They therefore recommended that steps should be taken to ensure such uniformity. The Departmental Committee also endorsed the view expressed by a witness that "mere notification will neither prevent nor cure", and advocated positive action to ensure that immediate treatment was available for all cases reported either in hospitals or by competent nurses and health visitors where the patient remained at home. The Committee was disturbed by the action of the Central Midwives Board which had deleted from its instructions certain parts of the procedure known as Credé's method and a recommendation was made that this action should receive early consideration.

The extent to which blindness arising from ophthalmia neonatorum was preventable if properly treated was, however, vividly demonstrated by statistics given to the Departmental Committee by the Board of Education. In 1912 only one case of blindness had occurred out of 329 brought to the notice of the Liverpool Authorities. The following year one case of blindness had developed from the 220 notified in Birmingham. (140)

(b) The Departmental Committee on the Causes and Prevention of Blindness 1922

In September 1920, Addison, with the encouragement of the Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind, set up a special Committee "To investigate and report on the causes of blindness including defective vision sufficient to impair economic efficiency and to suggest measures which might be taken to prevent blindness". (141)

(140) Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind. Report Paras.46-51, pp.14-15.

(141) Ministry of Health. Departmental Committee on the Causes and Prevention of Blindness 1922. Para.1. p.5.

The Committee, half of whom were medical practitioners with an interest or specialism in ophthalmology, met 46 times, interviewed 66 witnesses and published a Final Report^(a) in 1922. The principal recommendations of the Committee were presented under four headings namely,

1. Ophthalmia neonatorum
2. Educational provision
3. Medical education
4. Industrial eye injury

The Committee indicated four ways in which action should be taken to prevent ophthalmia neonatorum. Firstly, although the disease was not necessarily venereal in origin, the majority of severe cases resulted from gonorrhoeal infection. Any general measures that related to the prevention and treatment of gonorrhoea could therefore be expected to have an effect on blindness which was a secondary result of venereal disease.⁽¹⁴²⁾ Secondly, the efficiency of the treatment and ante-natal care received by the expectant mother was clearly of importance.⁽¹⁴³⁾

The third stage of prevention related to the detailed care given to the eyes of a newly born baby. This care depended on the competency of the midwife. The Committee therefore recommended that, in addition to instruction in the cleaning of a baby's eyes, opportunity should be given for pupil midwives "to visit ophthalmic hospitals or the ophthalmic departments of general hospitals for the purpose of gaining direct experience of ophthalmia neonatorum, its treatment by ophthalmologists and the results of the disease both after treatment and in cases where

(a) An Interim Report regarding alleged dangerous lights in Cinema Studios was published by H.M.S.O. in 1921

(142) As 141. Para.51 pp.21-22

(143) As 141. Paras.52-54. p.22

it had been neglected or delayed". (144)

Justification for the amendment of the instructions with regard to Credé's method of the Central Midwives Board which, as indicated earlier, had been questioned five years earlier by the Departmental Committee was that the routine application of the procedure was liable to give a false sense of security for three reasons:-

1. The midwife might consider that the mere dropping of a solution into the eyes was sufficient and neglect the scrupulous cleansing of the eyes which was of even greater importance.
2. The use of drugs might itself set up an inflammatory condition which could be mistaken by the midwife for the onset of ophthalmia and notified accordingly.
3. Conversely, an actual manifestation of the disease might be regarded as "only a little reactionary discharge" and treatment neglected.

The Committee therefore stated that, although they were satisfied regarding the effectiveness of Credé's method in skilled hands, they could not recommend its routine adoption by midwives who were not under supervision. (145)

The fourth preventive measure to which reference was made by the Committee was the importance of prompt diagnosis and notification of ophthalmia so that it could be treated without delay. In this regard, the Committee were not satisfied that all medical practitioners notified cases with sufficient promptitude or always recognized the

(144) As 141. Para.59. pp.24-25.

(145) As 141. Para.60. p.25

condition in time to prevent serious damage to the eyes. To obviate delay arising from either or both of these causes the Committee expressed the view that in cases of suspected ophthalmia neonatorum facilities for consultation with an ophthalmic surgeon and for bacteriological investigation should be provided whenever possible. (146)

Having dealt with preventive measures the Committee next turned its attention to treatment. The Committee was strongly of the opinion that, wherever possible, treatment should be given in hospitals, one important advantage being that mothers admitted with their babies could also be treated for vaginal discharge or syphilitic infection. They therefore recommended "that in every area, whether urban or rural, the Ministry of Health should take measures to secure the provision of suitable accommodation for babies suffering from ophthalmic neonatorum and for their mothers". (147) Where hospital treatment was not given, the Committee emphasised the importance of ensuring that sufficient trained nursing provision was available to ensure that domiciliary cases received skilled supervision. (148) The Committee ended their consideration of ophthalmia by welcoming the development of public health measures directed towards the eradication of the disease. "The danger of blindness to the individual, the resultant loss to the community and the expenditure which may be involved in maintenance", were, as the Report stated, "ample justification for the provision of adequate preventive measures". (149) The Committee also pointed

(146) As 141. Para.62. p.26

(147) As 141. Para.74. p.32

(148) As 141. Para.66. p.28

(149) As 141. Para.76. p.33

A further observation made by the Committee of an educational nature, was that, under the Education Act of 1921, there was no obligation on the parent of an elementary school child to avail himself of the facilities for inspection and treatment provided by the school medical service. In this connection Butterfield relates that Eichholz had ascertained that many children suffering from chronic inflammation of diseases of the eye or ear were in danger of losing sight or hearing owing to the refusal of their parents to present them for medical examination and/or treatment.⁽¹⁵³⁾ The most suitable way of dealing with such cases of parental neglect, in the opinion of the Committee, was by an extension of the powers of the Education Authorities. Accordingly, the Report stated that "The Board of Education should consider the question of seeking additional powers to enable a Local Education Authority to require a parent to submit a child suspected of suffering from chronic external eye disease to medical inspection and adequate medical treatment where the authority deem such inspection and treatment necessary".⁽¹⁵⁴⁾ Sections 54 and 55 of the Education Act 1921 already gave Education Authorities powers to compel the compulsory examination and treatment of physically and mentally defective children. The Legal Department of the Board of Education eventually agreed, after some hesitation, that Local Education Authorities should be encouraged to use these powers in the case of children suffering from eye diseases which were construed as being physical defects within the meaning of the Education Act.⁽¹⁵⁵⁾

(153) Butterfield, P.H. The Evolution of Special Education 1893-1939
Unpublished Ph.D. (Education) Thesis London 1970. pp.503-4

(154) As 141. Para.98. p.41

(155) As 153 p.505

out that under the Blind Persons Act the Medical Officer of Health, in his capacity of Adviser to the Council, should take cognisance of the adequacy of the facilities existing within his area for the treatment of disease or injury to the eye and should report accordingly. (150)

The Report also contained a number of recommendations for the prevention of eye disease or defect capable of being implemented within the framework of the school medical service established in 1907. (a) Importance was attached by the Committee to arrangements whereby an infant, whose vision had been impaired either from ophthalmia neonatorum or any other cause, could be brought to the attention of the Local Education Authority at the earliest possible age so that special education and training could begin without delay. (151) The education and treatment in special residential schools of children suffering from chronic external eye diseases such as phlyctenular keratitis which, in a certain proportion of cases resulted in blindness or impairment of vision, was recommended. The reason for this suggestion was that eye diseases of this type developed "in conditions of poverty and squalor". Treatment in an environment away from that which was a contributory cause of the disease was therefore essential. (152)

(150) As 141. Para.265. p.104

(a) For a good account of the origins of the school medical service given by the first Chief Medical Officer to the Board of Education see Newman, Sir G. "The Building of a Nation's Health" Macmillan & Co. 1939.

(151) As 141. Para.47. p.21

(152) As 141. Para.92. p.39

Finally, the Committee advocated that Education Authorities should extend their existing arrangements for the discovery of myopic children who should be educated in special classes. (156) No new powers were required for the implementation of this recommendation since myope classes had been started in 1908 by Mr^e Bishop Harman, the Ophthalmologist to the London County Council, at the Boundary Lane School, Camberwell and had been subsequently established in a number of provincial centres. (157)

The third group of recommendations contained in the Report related to medical education. To remedy the inadequate knowledge of diseases of the eye possessed by the large majority of the medical practitioners when their names were entered on the Medical Register the Committee repeated in substance, a resolution submitted in 1915 by the Council of British Ophthalmologists to the General Medical Council, that every student presenting himself for a qualifying examination in medicine should be examined in ophthalmology. (158)

The General Medical Council did not, however, act on this suggestion which, in 1922 was used by the Council of British Ophthalmologists as the basis of a further approach to secure a compulsory examination on the subject of eye conditions for all medical students. Instead the General Medical Council referred to a Minute passed earlier in 1922 that "each student should receive instruction, inter alia, in the diseases of the eye refraction and the use of the ophthalmoscope". (159)

(156) As 141. Para.124. p.53

(157) Board of Education. Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Problems Relating to Partially Sighted Children. H.M.S.O. 1934. pp.9-10.

(158) As 141. Para.68. p.29

(159) General Medical Council. Minutes of Executive Committee May 30th 1923. Appendix 5. Report by the Examination Committee of the Annual Tables for 1922 and other matters. p.284.

The Committee also stated that in sanctioning appointments as Medical Inspectors under the Aliens Acts the Ministry of Health should, so far as possible, endeavour to secure that such officers "who had not already had special experience of contagious eye diseases and particularly of Trachoma, should be afforded the opportunity of acquiring it". (160)

The final group of recommendations referred to occupational eye disease or injury. No attempt was made to enquire into every industry where there was a risk of loss or damage to vision and the Committee confined its investigations to mines and quarries, and the metal and engineering trades. In addition three other factory industries namely, aerated water manufacture, textiles and chemicals, received attention and an enquiry was made into eye accidents among agricultural workers. (161)

Apart from miner's nystagmus which was not a cause of blindness, the principal occupational eye diseases were certain forms of poisoning, glass or iron worker's cataract and pitchulceration. Apart from miner's nystagmus which was the subject of a separate Report by the Medical Research Council (162), the number of cases of impaired vision caused by the above diseases was small. (163)

In mines and quarries the most common cause of eye injury was flying particles of mineral or stone. Similarly in factories, dust and flying metal, the splashing of molten metal or corrosive liquid

(160) As 141. Para.114. p.48

(161) As 141. Para.136. p.57

(162) Medical Research Council. First Report of the Miners Nystagmus Committee. Special Report Series No.65. 1922.

(163) As 141. Para.140. p.59

and also injurious radiant energy and intense glare constituted the major causes of eye accidents. No accurate statistics were obtainable by the Committee regarding the amount of loss or impairment of vision due to occupational accidents and to remedy this deficiency the Report recommended that insurance companies should pool their information regarding the extent of eye injuries in each industry and make such details available to the Government Departments concerned. (164)

Four other groups of suggestions for the prevention of eye injuries arising from industrial causes were also made. The first related to the examination of young people commencing work to ensure that they were placed in jobs suitable for their eyesight and that a test of vision should be given to persons over 16 who were taking up employment for which good eyesight was essential. Workers with defective vision should be provided with corrective glasses to reduce their proneness to accidents of all kinds including those to the eyes. (165)

Secondly, emphasis was placed on the proper lighting of factories and workshops. (166) In this regard detailed recommendations with regard to what constituted satisfactory lighting had been made in three Reports made by a Home Office Committee set up to investigate lighting in factories. (a) Except for a few special processes, however, no legal requirements had been specified by 1922 in respect of the illumination of factories.

(164) As 141. Para.139. p.59

(165) As 141. Paras.192-197. pp.80-81

(166) As 141. Paras.198-199. pp.81-82

(a) First Report of Departmental Committee on Lighting in Factories and Workshops Cd.8000. 1915.
Second Report Cmd.1418. 1921
Third Report Cmd.1686. 1922

Thirdly, the Committee recommended that "The Home Office should take steps to extend the use of screens on lathes and abrasive wheels and also of side screens wherever advantageous use can be made of them in order to give protection against flying particles".⁽¹⁶⁷⁾

The fourth group of preventive measures suggested in the Report related to the wearing of goggles which, the Committee stated gave the best protection to the eyes in factories, mines and quarries. Considerable opposition to the use of goggles was found to exist among miners and workmen mainly due to the unsuitability of many of the designs in use. To overcome this resistance the Committee further recommended that the Home Office should take steps to issue specifications relating to the most suitable forms of goggles for use in different industrial processes.⁽¹⁶⁸⁾ The Mines Department was also urged to extend the use of goggles in quarries and to enlist the assistance of the workmen's organisations in implementing this suggestion.⁽¹⁶⁹⁾ For two reasons the Committee did not "consider the time ripe" to endorse the opinion expressed by the Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind of 1917 that "Provision of goggles by employers and use by workpeople should be made obligatory in all cases where there is any proved risk of eye injury".⁽¹⁷⁰⁾

Firstly, difficulty had been experienced by Factory Inspectors in enforcing Regulations which had already been made in respect of aerated water manufacture and chemical works. Secondly because the Committee considered that a process of safety education was preferable

(167) As 141. Para.202. p.83

(168) As 141. Para.216. p.88

(169) As 141. Para.243. p.97

(170) Report of the Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind Cd.8655. 1917. Para.54. p.16

to compulsion. As an extension of this latter principle the Report recommended that all possible steps should be taken "to encourage the development of Works and Safety Committees with regard to the prevention of accidents, the use of safety devices and methods of propaganda, among which questions relating to the eyes would have their place".⁽¹⁷¹⁾ Stress was also laid on the importance of the prompt treatment of eye injuries particularly in the case of mines where neglect or delay in returning to the surface had sometimes resulted in initially trivial injuries assuming serious proportions. The Mines Department was therefore advised to require all ambulance stations above and below ground to be equipped for the first aid treatment of injuries to the eye.⁽¹⁷²⁾ Apart from persuasion on the part of the Factory or Mines Inspectorate little action was taken to implement the suggestions made in the Report concerning occupational accidents to the eyes. The Home Office and the Mines Department published several safety and welfare pamphlets which dealt, inter alia, with the protection of the eyes.⁽¹⁷³⁾ The Factory Department of the Home Office gave some consideration to improving the design of goggles. Regulations were made requiring employers in the shipbuilding industry to provide and compel the use of appliances for eye protection.⁽¹⁷⁴⁾ Not until the

(171) As 141. Paras.219-220. p.90

(172) As 141. Para. 248. p.99

(173) e.g. Home Office Safety Pamphlet No.7 "The Use of Abrasive Wheels" 1933. Home Office Welfare Pamphlet No.7 "Lighting in Factories and Workshops". Mines Department Safety Pamphlet No.7. "First Aid at Mines" 1935.

(174) S.R. and O. 133/1931. Shipbuilding Regulations February 24th 1931.

Factories Act of 1937⁽¹⁷⁵⁾ was the provision of "sufficient and suitable lighting both natural and artificial made mandatory in all factories. The same Act also empowered the Secretary of State to make Regulations⁽¹⁷⁶⁾ for the protection of the eyes applicable to all factories in which the prescribed operations were undertaken.

(c) The Prevention of Blindness 1923-1939

Although the Blind Persons Act of 1920 required County and County Borough Councils to make arrangements for promoting the welfare of the blind, the Act did not empower local authorities to give treatment for eye diseases or defects. As shown in Chapter VI of this study^(a), a memorandum prepared by Sir Arthur Robinson for Wheatley, the Minister of Health, in the Labour Government of 1924, suggested that powers might be given to local authorities to make arrangements for the treatment of diseases or injury of the eyes and for the prevention of blindness. After the fall of the Labour Government it was decided that this proposal should be included in a forthcoming Bill for the revision of the Public Health Acts. This decision was implemented in 1925 when the Public Health Act of that year provided that:-

"Without prejudice and in addition to any other power under any other Act, a county council or local authority shall have power with the consent of the Minister of Health, to make such arrangements as they may think desirable for the prevention of blindness, and, in

(175) 1 Edward 8 and 1 George 6 Chapter 67.
The Factories Act 1937. S.49

(176) S.R. and O. 654, 1938. The Protection of Eyes Regulations
July 5th 1938.

(a) See page 440

particular for the treatment of persons ordinarily resident within their area suffering from any disease of or injury to the eyes".^(176a)

Although the powers given by the Act were permissive, it was now possible for a local authority to establish facilities for the treatment of eye conditions, and, by Section 67 of the Act, to assist and supplement the work hitherto carried out exclusively under voluntary auspices with respect to the dissemination of information relating to the prevention of blindness.

A further development was the setting up in 1929 of the National Ophthalmic Treatment Board which enabled beneficiaries under the National Health Insurance Acts and non-insured persons with a family income not exceeding £250 to be examined by an ophthalmic medical practitioner and the subsequent provision through an approved society of spectacles supplied by a dispensing optician.

In 1930, the Union of Counties Associations for the Blind set up a Standing Committee to study the problems of the prevention of blindness. Of the twelve members who initially comprised the Committee, two were County Medical Officers of Health, five ophthalmic surgeons and another distinguished medical personage was Dr. Eichholz late of the Board of Education.⁽¹⁷⁷⁾ The Committee published its first Report on "The Certification of Blindness and the Ascertainment of the Causes of Blindness" in 1931. At the start of their investigations into the various aspects of prevention the Committee were confronted with "the lack of any scientific data of two essential

(176a) Public Health Act 1925. Section 66.

(177) Union of Counties Associations for the Blind.
Report on the Certification and the Ascertainment
of the Causes of Blindness 1931. p.1.

TABLE 17

Analysis of 5,290 B.D.8 Forms relating to cases of eye defect in England and Wales in which the cause was the same in each eye. 1937

<u>Causes</u>	<u>Percentage of Cases</u>
Primary cataract	24.97
Glaucoma	11.09
Congenital, hereditary and developmental	10.96
Myopia	10.24
Local infection of coats of the eye	5.97
Syphilis - Congenital	5.12
Syphilis - Acquired	2.83
Ophthalmia Neonatorum	4.91
Industrial Trauma and Disease	1.39
Other categories, i.e. Classified as "No information obtainable on the B.D.8 Form".	22.52
TOTAL	100.00

Source: As Reference 178

kinds", namely, "the actual defects of the eye which gave rise to blindness and the causes of such defects".⁽¹⁷⁷⁾ As is shown in Chapter IV^(a), the Committee considered that a standard form of certificate should be used when certifying blindness, a duplicate of which should be sent to the Standing Committee for classification and analysis. The concurrence of the Ministry of Health with this suggestion enabled data relating to the causes of blindness to be recorded on a uniform basis for the whole country.

By 1937, the Standing Committee had analysed some 20,000 B.D.8 forms. A study of 5,290 cases in England and Wales in which the cause of blindness was the same in each eye resulted in the information given in Table 17.⁽¹⁷⁸⁾

Two thirds of the cases analysed by the Prevention of Blindness Committee were over 50 years of age at the date of examination, a fact which accounted for the high incidence of such conditions as cataract, glaucoma and myopia in Table 17. Conversely ophthalmia neonatorum had declined dramatically in importance as a cause of blindness due to the effectiveness of the public health measures described in this section.

In their Report for 1931-1932, the Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind urged that the question of hereditary blindness should be referred by the Minister of Health to the Prevention of Blindness Committee. This request was made because it had been reported

(178) Union of Counties Associations for the Blind.
Report on an Analysis of a Preliminary Classification of the Causes of Blindness 1938. p.2.

(a) See page 222

that workers for the blind were frequently discouraging persons whose loss of vision was due to hereditary causes, from marriage, although, as the Advisory Committee acknowledged there was little scientific data to support such advice. (179) A "Report on Hereditary Blindness", dealing with the medical as distinct from the social aspects of the matter was issued by the Prevention of Blindness Committee in 1933. As the use of B.D.8 forms had only recently commenced the Committee was only able to make conclusions of a very general nature. The most important recommendation was that, unless there was medical evidence to show that the loss of vision was not attributable to hereditary factors, it was advisable for a blind person contemplating marriage to seek the advice of a competent ophthalmologist who would obtain a pedigree and, if necessary, consult an expert in genetics. (180) In this context it is of interest to note that the Report of the Departmental Committee on the Sterilisation of Mental Defectives issued in 1934 recommended voluntary sterilisation in the case of mental defect and added that this procedure should also be permitted in cases of hereditary blindness. (181)

A further Report issued by the Prevention of Blindness Committee reviewed the whole field of prevention, and thus covered much of the ground of the Report of the Departmental Committee on the Causes and Prevention of Blindness published in 1922. Recommendations extending

(179) Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind.
Tenth Report 1931-1932. p.14

(180) Union of Counties Association for the Blind.
Report on Hereditary Blindness 1933. p.4

(181) Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind.
Eleventh Report 1933-1934. p.11

those contained in the Ministry of Health Report, were made regarding the importance of a "comprehensive and adequate system of ante-natal supervision, the treatment of ophthalmia neonatorum and the ascertainment and care of eye diseases affecting persons in adult life. With regard to infants and children of school age the Report emphasised the importance of early detection and skilled treatment of eye defects as a means of preventing possible blindness in later life. The arrangements made by a number of maternity and child welfare authorities whereby the facilities of the school clinic and visiting ophthalmic surgeon were extended to pre-school children were commended.⁽¹⁸²⁾ The Committee also drew attention to a weakness in the procedure for the ascertainment of eye defects or disease which had already been noted by the Chief Medical Officer of the Board of Education in his Report for 1931. This was the fact that tests of visual acuity were not normally given as part of the routine school medical inspection until a child had reached the age of eight due to the inability of most children of five to read the letters on an E chart.⁽¹⁸³⁾ Skilled supervision entailed the provision of expert ophthalmic care in isolation hospitals to obviate serious eye trouble resulting from measles, schemes by which children referred by the school clinics could receive specialist attention from consultants and arrangements for the treatment of severe diseases of the eye such as trachoma and keratitis in hospital or a hospital school.⁽¹⁸²⁾

The Report also noted that out of 316 local education authorities all but one had made schemes for the treatment of visual defects. There

(182) Union of Counties Associations for the Blind.
Report on the Prevention of Blindness 1936. Para.85-100. pp.42-46

(183) Board of Education. Annual Report of the Chief Medical Officer
1931. p.75

were, however, differences between areas in the quality of provision. While 193 authorities employed consultant ophthalmologists for the treatment of eye defects in school children, 58 left all cases to the care of the school medical officers. In the remaining 64 authorities the work was done by the school medical officers who could call in consultant advice as and when required. (184)

The sections of the Report dealing with medical education and occupational eye disease or accident did little more than bring up to date the recommendations made by the Departmental Committee on the Causes and Prevention of Blindness.

The Report did, however make a number of important suggestions regarding future measures to be taken for the prevention of eye defect. An effective campaign for prevention, as the Committee pointed out, needed to be based on two matters, "(a) the results of research, i.e. the increase of knowledge of the causes of blindness, their prevention and treatment; and (b) on propoganda, i.e. the dissemination of such knowledge in an intelligible form". (185) If, therefore, the campaign for the prevention of blindness was to achieve its object, there was the need for an authoritative body with the following functions:-

1. To classify and collate the statistical information placed at its disposal.
2. To advise what further statistical information should be obtained.

(184) As 182. Para.95. p.45

(185) Union of Counties Associations for the Blind.
Report on the Prevention of Blindness 1936. Para.135. p.87

3. To indicate in what directions and upon what lines further research should be carried out.
4. To examine and collate the results of research.
5. To advise on propaganda.
6. To advise Government Departments, local authorities and agencies concerned with the welfare of the blind on questions referred by them.
7. To receive from, collate and circulate to, representative bodies in other countries information on the prevention of blindness. (186)

Such a body, the Committee suggested, should be along the lines of a "Standing Committee on the Prevention of Blindness", so constituted as to secure continuity of its work and the constant services of ophthalmic surgeons of repute. The Prevention of Blindness Committee already constituted a body similar to that advocated and would be prepared to continue its activities providing the requisite financial support could be made. (185)

The Committee also noted that the permissive powers relating to the treatment of persons under Section 66 of the Public Health Act 1925 had not been extensively used and that only 21 local authorities in England and Wales had made arrangements covering such measures as the provision of spectacles, hospital treatment and the payment of travelling expenses in necessitous cases. The Report therefore contained a model scheme for the guidance of local authorities wishing to make comprehensive provision, "for assisting in the prevention of blindness and for the treatment of persons ordinarily resident

(186) As 158. Para.144. p.90.

within their area suffering from any disease of or injury to the eyes". (187)

The fourth Report of the Committee dealt with cataract (188) and was brought to the notice of local authorities by the Minister of Health in 1938. (189) The previous year the Minister had also issued a lengthy circular to County Councils and local sanitary authorities drawing their attention to the importance of taking all practicable steps to prevent blindness and impaired eyesight and providing a commentary on the recommendations contained in the Report on the Prevention of Blindness issued by the Standing Committee of the Union of Counties Associations for the Blind. (190) An appendix to the Circular contained the model scheme prepared for the benefit of local authorities by the above Committee and published in their Report. By 1938, 12 County Boroughs and 10 County Councils had made comprehensive schemes and a further 5 County Boroughs and 13 County Councils had made partial schemes. (191) On October 1st 1937, the Public Health Act of 1925 was repealed by the Public Health Act of 1936. (192) This latter Act did not require County Councils or local sanitary authorities to obtain the consent of the Minister of Health to arrangements made for the prevention of blindness or the treatment of persons suffering from diseases of or injuries to the eyes.

(187) As 181. Para.121. pp.57-59.

(188) Union of Counties Associations for the Blind.
Report on Cataract 1937.

(189) Ministry of Health. Circular 1681. March 14th 1938.

(190) Ministry of Health Circular 1621. August 6th 1937.
Prevention of Blindness.

(191) Ministry of Health. Annual Report 1938/39. p.49.

(192) 26 George 5 and 1 Edward 8 Chapter 49.

Due to the circumstances described in Chapter IV^(a), the Union of Counties Associations for the Blind was wound up in 1938 subject to an undertaking by the Minister of Health that he would make arrangements for the continuation of the work of the Standing Committee on the Prevention of Blindness. In fulfilment of this promise an Advisory Committee on "matters relating to blindness including the prevention and treatment thereof", was appointed on August 4th 1938 to carry on the work previously undertaken by the Standing Committee of the Union of Counties Associations for the Blind⁽¹⁹³⁾. The work of this Committee was terminated due to war conditions when their first term of office expired in 1941 although it was agreed that it would be desirable to resuscitate it after the end of hostilities⁽¹⁹⁴⁾. In fact the Committee was never revived and the work of the Standing Committee on the Prevention of Blindness has since been carried on in two main ways. The first was the establishment in July 1938 by the Royal National Institute for the Blind of a "Prevention of Blindness Sub-Committee" with the following terms of reference:-

- (1) To consider all medical aspects of blindness and its prevention and to report to the Executive Council on matters requiring its attention.
- (2) To investigate and report on the existing arrangements for the prevention of blindness with a view to the initiation of propaganda and other necessary action; and in particular to ascertain
 - (i) How far powers conferred on local authorities are being exercised
 - (ii) What is the best form of co-operation between voluntary organisations and Local Authorities.

(a) See pages 327-340

(193) Notice of Appointment of Members of the Committee. May 25th 1938. On ED.50/260. P.R.O.

(194) Minute dated October 24th 1941 on M.H.55/619.

- (iii) What fields of medical research are still inadequately covered
 - (iv) How far propaganda to the general public is still needed, e.g. for the use of protection devices in industry.
- (3) To advise the Council from time to time on any other matter relevant to the prevention of blindness.
- (195)

The National Institute for the Blind seems to have had doubts as to the effectiveness of the Committee set up by the Ministry of Health. At one of the early meetings of the Sub-Committee on the Prevention of Blindness the point was made that it was

" very doubtful whether any Advisory Committee at the Ministry of Health would do any effective research unless it was provided with specific staff. If that expectation were justified it followed that any real research work into the causation of blindness must be carried out by medical research bodies and that the function of an Advisory Committee at the Ministry of Health, apart from advising the Minister of Health on actual problems as they arose, would be rather to indicate subjects of research to fully qualified research bodies." (196)

In pursuance of these principles the Prevention of Blindness Committee of the National Institute gave active support to the foundation by the Royal Eye Hospital, London, in conjunction with the Royal College of Surgeons of a Research Chair in Ophthalmology and the Department of Ophthalmology at the University of Oxford. It also assists individual and co-operate research into problems of eye defect or disease. (197)

(195) Miss M. Saunders, Reference Librarian. Royal National Institute for the Blind. Written Communication dated July 5th 1972.

(196) The Beacon. May 1939. pp.116-117.

(197) Royal National Institute for the Blind. Annual Report 1942-43. p.4.

The analysis of Forms B.D.8. was continued by Arnold Sorsby who, in 1943 was appointed Research Professor in Ophthalmology to the Royal College of Surgeons and the Royal Eye Hospital. Sorsby undertook the systematic annual analysis of B.D.8. forms with the assistance of the Southern Regional Association for the Blind and subsequently with the Northern and Western Regional Associations. A Report by Sorsby entitled "The Causes of Blindness in England" based on a survey of B.D.8. forms in respect of 19,149 persons out of some 70,000 to 80,000 cases accepted as blind within the meaning of the Blind Persons Act between the years 1933 to 1943 was published by the Medical Research Council in 1950.⁽¹⁹⁸⁾ Three further Reports by Sorsby on the same subject covering the periods 1948-1950⁽¹⁹⁹⁾, 1951-54⁽²⁰⁰⁾, and 1955-62⁽²⁰¹⁾ were published by the Ministry of Health in 1953, 1956 and 1966 respectively.^(a)

(198) Sorsby, Arnold. The Causes of Blindness in England and Wales. Medical Research Council Memorandum No.24. H.M.S.O. 1950.

(199) Sorsby, Arnold. The Causes of Blindness in England. 1948-1950 H.M.S.O. 1953

(200) Sorsby, Arnold. The Causes of Blindness in England. 1951-1954 H.M.S.O. 1956

(201) Sorsby, Arnold. The Incidence and Causes of Blindness in England and Wales 1948-1962. M.H. Report on Public Health and Medical Subjects No.114. H.M.S.O.1966

(a) At the time of writing (1972) a further Report for 1963-68 was in course of publication. Written communication from Professor Sorsby, November 20th 1972.

CHAPTER VI

THE CAMPAIGN FOR THE AMENDMENT OF THE BLIND PERSONS ACT 1921-1938

As the Blind Persons Act of 1920 was a much modified version of the Technical Education, Employment and Maintenance of the Blind Bill that had been agreed in 1914 by the National League of the Blind and the Special Committee set up by the voluntary institutions, it is not surprising that the League regarded the Act as merely a first step in its efforts to obtain state aid for blind persons. Before long the League also found causes of complaint in the ways in which the Act was being implemented by the local authorities. Between 1921 and 1938, therefore, the League waged a vigorous campaign to secure the amendment of the Blind Persons Act of 1920, which culminated in the passing of the Blind Persons Act of 1938. This campaign may conveniently be considered as falling into three main periods, namely, 1921-1923, 1924-1931 and 1932-1938.

(a) 1921-1923

In 1921 the dissatisfaction of the League with the Act and its implementation was expressed in a resolution moved at, and accepted by, the Trades Union Congress meeting at Cardiff:-

"This Congress instructs the General Council to take early steps in conjunction with the National League of the Blind in Great Britain and Ireland for the Amendment and strengthening of the Blind Persons Act 1920, by the application of the principles of the Bill introduced by Mr. Ben Tillett M.P., 1920, for the provision of the technical education, employment and maintenance of the blind. Further, this Congress calls upon all Trades Councils and their affiliated societies to use all their local powers to compel their respective local authorities to exercise their powers under Clause 2 of the Blind Persons Act 1920, in respect to all the social, industrial and economic needs of blind persons. Notwithstanding anything which may be done to ameliorate the bad conditions of life and labour for the blind by Acts and clauses which are mere palliatives, this Congress is resolved upon the principles of direct and complete state and municipal responsibility and the elimination of the necessity for voluntary charity for the blind".(1)

(1) Trades Union Congress, Annual Report 1921. p.344.

This resolution was remitted by the General Council of the T.U.C. to the National Joint Council which, in turn, requested its Secretary to communicate with local Trades Councils on the subject and also instructed the Joint Research Department, maintained by the T.U.C. and the Labour Party Executive Committee, to make an investigation into the working of the Blind Persons Act. A confidential memorandum, prepared by the Joint Research Department, was circulated in 1922. On the basis of the information obtained, the memorandum listed the following conclusions:-

1. The Blind Persons Act was not being put into operation in the way intended by Parliament when the measure was passed.
2. Most local authorities were anxious to work the Act, but were hampered by the Ministry of Health and the Board of Education. A few local authorities had evaded the responsibilities which the Act placed on them and had not apparently been penalised for so doing.
3. The Ministry of Health was pursuing a course contrary to the spirit of the Act by its refusal to allow capital expenditure and by exerting pressure on local authorities to work solely through voluntary agencies in spite of the fact that these agencies had failed in the past.
4. The interests of blind children were gravely jeopardised by the Board of Education's decision to allow no greater expenditure on Educational facilities during 1922-23 than was incurred in 1921-22.
5. The National League of the Blind should be represented on the Central Advisory Committee and on local committees wherever possible.(2)

More specifically, the objections of the League regarding the provisions and implementation of the Blind Persons Act, may be summarised under the three headings of pensions, permissiveness and politics. So far as pensions were concerned the League's objections were that the

(2) T.U.C. and Labour Party Executive Committee Joint Research and Information Department. Memorandum on the Blind Persons Act 1920. No.42. "Private and Confidential".

amount was too small especially in relation to the grants made to war blinded ex-servicemen; that the receipt of a pension was subject to a means test; that the qualifying age of fifty was too high and, most important of all, that until this age was reached unemployable blind persons could only be assisted through the Poor Law unless the local authority took steps by means of domiciliary allowances to prevent them from becoming destitute. In the event of no such help being given by a County or County Borough Council, the only way in which a necessitous blind person under fifty years of age could avoid recourse to the Poor Law was by being fortunate enough to receive a pension or other allowance from the funds of a charitable organisation. The second ground on which the League expressed dissatisfaction was the permissive character of the legislation since local authorities were given considerable latitude in deciding how they would discharge their responsibilities under the Act. The dilatory manner in which some authorities prepared their schemes, the wide variations in the schemes submitted and the failure of most Councils to appoint Blind Persons Committees, substantiated to some extent the view of the League that most authorities had little enthusiasm for the Act.

"For a number of years after 1920 the great majority (of local authorities) failed to make any special arrangements to improve the condition of the aged and unemployable, it being argued that by paying them Poor Law relief a local authority's obligations under the Act was being satisfactorily discharged. Some authorities laid down a programme of training and employment in their welfare schemes and did nothing further"(3)

The bulk of authorities, faced by a problem regarding which they had little knowledge were, perhaps not surprisingly, content to make grants to charitable organisations to whom they delegated their responsibilities by means of agency agreements.

(3) National League of the Blind, Golden Jubilee Souvenir Brochure. 1949. p.22

The objection to "charity" which the League maintained for doctrinaire reasons, constituted the third ground for dissatisfaction with the working of the Act. While Circular 27 B.D. stated that it was open to a local authority either of itself to make the necessary provisions contemplated by the Act or to assist an existing agency,⁽⁴⁾ it was clear that, in practice, the Ministry expected that the latter course would be adopted. As evidence of this policy the League instanced the prohibition of capital expenditure on new workshops and also alleged that, when advising on the preparation of schemes, the Inspectors of the Ministry invariably recommended that authorities should discharge their responsibilities through the medium of voluntary agencies. The League further asserted that where, as in the cases of Blackpool and Warrington, County Boroughs had appointed Home Teachers, such appointments had only been approved by the Ministry on the condition that the teachers would be transferred to voluntary societies in the event of such organisations being established.⁽²⁾ The Ministry of Health had in any case, drawn attention to the desirability on grounds of economy and making use of existing facilities and assisting voluntary effort.⁽⁵⁾

For the reason already mentioned in the previous chapter, the League had no representation on the Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind which sat between 1921-24.^(a) As the League was unable to urge its opposition through the Advisory Committee, it relied on the machinery of the trade union movement for its views to be conveyed

(4) Ministry of Health Circular 27 B.D. 1920. p.2

(5) Ministry of Health Circular 182.

(a) See page 232

directly to the Minister of Health. At the Congress of 1922, the League was successful in having a resolution adopted to the effect that:-

"The General Council be instructed to make representations to the Minister of Health urging him to exercise compulsion with regard to local authorities who have displayed apathy towards or a disinclination to carry out the provisions of the Blind Persons Act 1920.(6)

Subsequently, a Deputation from the General Council of the T.U.C. was received by the Minister of Health on February 7th 1923 when the above resolution, together with one protesting against the refusal of the Minister to give representation to the League on the Advisory Committee, were presented. Nothing conclusive emerged from the meeting. The Minister promised to consider the appointment of a representative on the Advisory Committee when the League had complied with the requirement of registering as a charity. As for the request that he should, "exercise compulsion", the Minister pointed out that all but ten authorities had submitted schemes and he suggested that he could achieve more by bringing pressure and persuasion to bear on apathetic authorities than by attempting to enforce acquiescence with the Act by such means as a writ of mandamus.(7)

(b) 1924-1931

The Bill of 1924

On January 12, 13 and 14, 1924, The Executive Council of the League met in Manchester and resolved that efforts should be made to promote a Bill amending the Blind Persons Act of 1920. It was also agreed that the Labour Party should be asked to sponsor such a Bill,

(6) Trades Union Congress. Annual Report, 1922. p.62

(7) National League of the Blind. Report on a Deputation to the Minister of Health, the Rt. Hon. Sir Arthur Griffiths Boscawen, February 7th 1923. pp.1-8

but a motion that the League should convene a conference in London to which every Trade Council and local Labour Party, as well as the Parliamentary Labour Party, should be invited was defeated. The meeting did, however, unanimously assent to a proposition that a demonstration should be organised at the House of Commons with a view to enlisting the support of M.P's, by means of interviewing them in the Lobby of the House. It was also decided to ask Trade Councils, Trade Unions and local Labour Parties to forward resolutions supporting the desired amending legislation to the Minister of Health. Finally, it was resolved that, at the conclusion of the meeting, three members of the League's Executive should proceed to London with the object of securing an interview with Ramsay MacDonald who would be asked to mention the condition of the blind when moving an amendment to the Government's Address to the King. (8)

It appears that a draft Bill must already have been in existence since four days later, on January 18, the Labour Member for Tradeston, Mr.T.Henderson, who had been requested by the League to champion its cause in Parliament, (9) was successful in obtaining a place in the ballot for Private Member's Bills and accordingly presented a Bill to Amend the Blind Persons Act 1920 which was put down for a Second Reading on May 23. (10) The Bill contained three amendments to existing legislation for the blind. The first amendment sought to reduce the age at which pensions were payable to blind persons from fifty to thirty and the abolition of the means disqualification contained in

(8) National League of the Blind. Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Council held at Manchester, January 12-14, 1924.

(9) Blind Advocate. April 1924. p.4

(10) Hansard. January 18th 1924. Col.392

the Old Age Pensions Act of 1908. The second amendment omitted the words in Section 2 (1) of the Blind Persons Act enabling a County or County Borough Council to contribute towards the provision and maintenance of "workshops, hostels, homes" or other places for the reception of blind persons and made the provision of such institutions a direct municipal responsibility to be discharged either singly or in combination with other local authorities. Thus, it was proposed to remove all local authority grants to voluntary agencies established for the blind. The third amendment stipulated that the remuneration paid to workshop employees should not be less than the average standard rate received by an unskilled labourer in the district in which the workshop was situated. Apprentices between the ages of sixteen and twenty-one were to receive maintenance allowances of not less than 50% of the adult pay in lieu of remuneration. (11)

The reference to the Address to the King in the League's resolution passed at the Executive Council Meeting of January 12-14, arose from the fact that significant events had been taking place in the wider political arena. In May 1923, Baldwin had become Prime Minister in place of Bonar Law who had retired due to ill health. In fulfilment of his predecessor's promise that no innovations would be made in the fiscal system that had not been submitted to electoral approval, Baldwin decided to go to the Country for a mandate to introduce protection as a means of solving the Country's economic difficulties and combating the rising level of unemployment. This policy was vigorously opposed by both the Liberal and Labour Parties which regarded the imposition of tariffs as both politically unwise

(11) A Bill to amend the Blind Persons Act 1920. Bill 14.

and economically inadequate. At the election held on December 6th 1923 the Conservatives secured 258 seats against 192 Labour representatives, 157 Liberals and 8 Independents, thus, the Conservatives, although numerically the largest party, were short of a majority.⁽¹²⁾ On January 15th, the King's Speech intimated that proposals to give effect to a policy of Imperial Preference would be submitted to Parliament.⁽¹³⁾ Two days later, J.R.Clynes moved the Amendment to the Address in the terms that "Your Majesty's present advisers have not the confidence of this House".⁽¹⁴⁾ On January 21st the Liberals voted with Labour to defeat the Government. The following day Baldwin resigned and Ramsay MacDonald was asked to form a Government. With a Labour Government in office for the first time the League was optimistic that further action would be taken to improve the condition of the blind. Some encouragement was given for this belief when, on February 8th, Wheatley,^(a) The Minister of Health, announced that the Government had considered the position in regard to the public health services, namely, maternity and child welfare, tuberculosis, venereal diseases, welfare of the blind and port sanitation, all of which were directly aided by grants from the Exchequer and decided to remove the restrictions on the development of these services which had been imposed in 1921.⁽¹⁵⁾ Nevertheless,

(12) For a good brief account of these happenings see either Brand, C.F. the British Labour Party - A short History pp.94-97 Oxford University Press 1965 or Whittaker's Almanac 1925, p.164

(13) Hansard. January 15th 1924. Col. 78

(14) Hansard. January 17th 1924. Col.301

(15) Daily Herald. February 9th 1924.

(a) Wheatley, John 1869-1930. Minister of Health 1924.

the League seems to have decided that the Government should be left in no doubt regarding its obligations to the blind now that the Labour Party had achieved office. At a meeting of the League's Executive Council, held at Manchester on April 12-14, a resolution to be used at meetings promoted for the purpose of favourably influencing public opinion in support of the amendment of the Act, was drafted in the following terms:-

"That in the opinion of this meeting, the provisions of the Blind Persons Act of 1920 have failed to secure the standard of life for blind people which has been advocated by the Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party during the last twenty years, and to put an end to the pernicious voluntary charitable system of assisting the blind. The limitations applying to a Private Member's Bill do not admit of such a Bill providing the necessary facilities. We therefore call upon the Government to introduce, as early as possible, a measure which will provide adequate maintenance and those other services required by the blind equal to that provided for sailors and soldiers blinded in the late war, and, for the employed blind, a wage equal to the average rate paid to unskilled workers by the Municipal Authority in the town where such blind persons are employed".(16)

From the above resolution it will be seen that between January and April the League had added an increase in the amount payable to the demand for a reduction of the age at which a pension should be paid to a blind person.

The League was not alone, however, in putting forward ideas for the improvement of the existing legislation for the blind. In February 1924 several constructive suggestions on the matter were put forward by Ben Purse, on behalf of the National Union of the Professional and Industrial Blind. Purse proposed that Section 1 of the Act should be varied to enable pensions to be paid at 40 on the ground that after this age the majority of blind persons were

(16) National League of the Blind. Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Council held at Manchester, April 12-14, 1924.

incapable of becoming efficient wage earners. He also held that the maximum weekly income of £1, inclusive of pension allowable under the Act, was too low and suggested that either the means disqualification should be abolished or the limit raised to £1.10. 0.

With regard to Section 2 of the Act, Purse recommended that County and County Borough Councils should be required to deal with the problem of mendicancy among the blind and suggested that blind beggars could be dealt with by :-

1. The provision of training for eligible cases.
2. The offer, where appropriate, of employment.
3. Reasonable outdoor relief for the unemployable.
4. The issue of a limited number of licences entitling blind musicians, of proven ability, to perform in public places, to be specified by the local authority concerned.

Finally, Purse advocated that Section 3 of the Act should be strengthened by the requirement that registration authorities should satisfy themselves at triennial intervals that none of the charities registered in their areas had become redundant.⁽¹⁷⁾

Early in May 1924, a strongly critical Memorandum on the Bill was prepared by the Advisory Committee on the Blind. Section 1 of the Bill was opposed on both financial and welfare grounds. It was held that the reduction of the age of payment and the removal of the means qualifications contained in the Old Age Pension Acts, thereby entitling every blind person to a full pension at 30, would increase the existing cost of pensions from £262,000 by an estimated £400,000 or a total of £662,000 in respect of England and Wales. The Committee also rejected

(17) The Times. February 8th 1924.

the proposal to reduce the age limit below 50 on the ground that to do so would have an adverse effect on the initiative of blind persons themselves by providing an unearned income for a considerable number of such people who were capable of being trained to become at least partially self supporting. The Committee pointed out that on several occasions they had stressed the desirability of dealing with each case on its merits rather than attempting to assess the disabilities of the blind "en masse".

"Blindness", the Memorandum stated, "is a handicap which in a good many cases can be substantially lessened by proper education and training, and it has, hitherto, been the policy of the Committee to recommend that blind persons should first be educated and trained up to their maximum capacity and then assessed on their disability and assisted according to their individual needs by voluntary agencies, Local Authorities, Boards of Guardians, or the State, as the case may be".⁽¹⁸⁾

The proposals made in Section 2 of the Bill for the municipalisation of services for the blind were, also, directly at variance with the policy of co-operation between the local Authorities and the voluntary agencies which was strongly advocated by the Committee. In their Third Report the Committee had, in fact, advised against municipalisation and recommended that both existing and future workshops should be under voluntary auspices.⁽¹⁹⁾ The Committee also considered that the minimum wage requirement contained in the Bill would, like the reduction of the age for pensions, act as a deterrent to individual effort, because

(18) Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind. Memorandum on the Blind Persons Amendment Bill.
On File M.H.109. P.R.O.

(19) Advisory Committee - Third Annual Report 1921-1922. p.5

unlike remuneration based on piecework it would not penalise restricted output. As for the proposed payments to apprentices, aged between 16 and 21, the Committee doubted whether there was any need for additional maintenance, particularly since the majority of persons under training were in residential institutions. Having stated that it was "impossible to reconcile the Bill in any of its particulars with the declared policy of the Committee", the Memorandum went on to assert that it appeared that the Bill "was promoted solely in the interests of the employable blind, who represent but a small fraction of the whole number". The only constructive suggestion made by the Committee for the amendment of the Blind Persons Act related to the prevention of blindness and the registration of charities. On the former matter the Memorandum recommended that local authorities should be empowered to promote arrangements for the prevention of blindness. Three proposals were made for the improvement of the legislation relating to the registration of charities for the blind, namely,

1. That redundant charities should be removed from the registers.
2. That new charities should not be registered with objects that were or could be discharged by existing agencies.
3. That every charity for the blind should be required to register separately in the area of each Registration Authority in which it wished to solicit subscriptions.

Most of the objections made by the Advisory Committee were reiterated in a Memorandum on the Bill drafted for Robinson, ^(a) the First Secretary of the Ministry of Health, by A.B. Maclachlan. Some

(a) Sir William Arthur Robinson 1874-1950. Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Health 1920-1935. See Appendix 2 to British Social Policy 1914-1939 by Bentley B. Gilbert, p.322.

additional reasons of an administrative nature, against the municipalisation proposals contained in Section 2 of the Bill, were also adduced. Maclachlan considered that, even if the Bill became law, the majority of local authorities would simply ignore the requirement to establish municipal workshops and other institutions for the blind and that there were no practical means of enforcing compliance. He also stressed the undesirability of competition between municipal workshops and private traders. Finally, he argued that a policy of municipalisation would both impose an additional burden on local rates and deprive services for the blind of the money raised from voluntary sources which would no longer be available. The basic reason for resistance to the League's proposals were, however, crystallised in one sentence:-

"It is submitted that any Bill which ignores the considerable part played by voluntary effort in promoting the welfare of the blind, and which would undoubtedly cripple that effort, should be opposed".(20)

At a Cabinet Meeting held on May 21st, Wheatley, the Minister of Health, asked "as a matter of urgency" whether the Government would give facilities for the passing of a Financial Resolution in respect of Henderson's Bill. In reply, the Prime Minister stated that he had informed the promoters of the Bill that it was out of order and he understood that they would not press the measure. The Cabinet therefore agreed "that the Minister of Health should inform the promoters of the Blind Persons Act 1920 (Amendment) Bill that the Government could not undertake the responsibility for a Financial

(20) A.B.Maclachlan - Memorandum dated May 20th 1924 on the Blind Persons Act 1920 Amendment Bill to Sir Arthur Robinson. On M.H.55/109. P.R.0

Resolution in connection with the Bill".⁽²¹⁾ This decision was conveyed to Henderson on the following day with the additional information that the Chancellor objected to Section 1 "not only on the grounds of finance but because of the proposed abolition of the means limits".⁽²²⁾ Two days later Henderson's Bill was read for the second time and received strong support from all Parties. While not opposing the Bill, Lord Eustace Percy pointed out that, if enacted, the measure would have the effect of providing a blind person in employment with a minimum wage which, after he had become 30, would also be augmented by a pension and that its effect might be to cause local authorities to concentrate on the relatively cheap provision of homes and hostels rather than the establishment of workshops and training facilities. One or two speakers questioned why the blind should be given preferential legislation to the exclusion of other classes of disabled, such as the deaf or crippled. One Member put in a plea that a scheme might be formulated under which the municipalisation of institutions should not totally exclude voluntary effort. Another speech pointed out that both the English and Scottish Advisory Councils for the Welfare of the Blind had reported adversely on the Bill. In the main, however, the House was in the mood to be swayed by humanitarian sentiment rather than administrative arguments. Faced by a situation in which all Parties were ostensibly in favour of a measure which had been consistently championed on Labour and Trade Union platforms, Greenwood, the Parliamentary Secretary to the

(21) Cabinet Minutes dated May 21st 1924. CAB 23/48. P.R.O.

(22) Wheatley to Henderson - Letter dated May 22nd 1924
On M.H.55/109. P.R.O

Ministry of Health, was in an unenviable position. In view of the Cabinet decision taken two days earlier he was only able to state that, while the Government agreed with the objects which the Bill was designed to serve, he was not prepared to undertake that they would accept its details. He did, however, welcome the fact that the Bill would receive the Second Reading without any Division. When pressed as to whether the Government would give facilities for the Bill, Greenwood replied that the question of facilities was a matter for the Leader of the House and reiterated that the Government would give "very sympathetic consideration" to the future of the Bill.⁽²³⁾ At a subsequent Cabinet Meeting, Clynes, the Lord Privy Seal, stated that, notwithstanding the decision taken on May 21st, he had felt bound, "in response to the sentiments expressed from all sides of the House", to authorise Greenwood to give the undertaking that the Bill would receive "sympathetic consideration".⁽²⁴⁾

On June 4th the attention of the Cabinet was drawn to a question which Henderson had put down for the same day, asking whether the Government was prepared to facilitate the Blind Persons Act (1920) Amending Bill by introducing the necessary financial resolution. It appears that, not having formulated any policy on the matter, the Cabinet decided to play for time and it was agreed that the reply should be to the effect "that the Government were considering the Bill in relation to its contents and the procedure in regard to it in relation to the Rules of the House, and, that if the Question were repeated after Whitsuntide a reply would be given".

(23) Hansard. May 23rd 1924. Cols.2567-2613.

(24) Cabinet Minutes dated May 27th 1924. CAB.23/48. P.R.O

It was also decided that the matter should be examined by the Chancellor of the Exchequer.⁽²⁵⁾ When Henderson asked on June 19th "whether it was the intention of the Government to introduce the necessary Money Resolution and facilitate the progress of the Bill," he was informed by Clynes that the Government was not able to put down a Financial Resolution to cover the Bill in its existing form but more consideration was being given to the introduction at a later stage of a resolution of a somewhat more limited scope. This reply caused Henderson to put a supplementary question - "Is the Rt. Hon. Gentleman aware that his reply will give great dissatisfaction to thousands of blind persons who relied upon the promises of the Labour Party to give them this small benefit when they had the power to do so?"⁽²⁶⁾

Further questions regarding the intentions of the Government on the matter were asked on June 25th⁽²⁷⁾, July 9th⁽²⁸⁾, and July 14th⁽²⁹⁾. On July 9th Clynes referred to his reply of June 19th and added that, in view of the state of Parliamentary business it would not be possible to proceed further before the recess. In fact, Macgregor had been informed on June 23rd that the Treasury regarded Henderson's Bill as moribund.⁽³⁰⁾ To clarify the matter, Robinson asked whether he might assume that the Bill was "dead" at least for the current Parliamentary session.⁽³¹⁾

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- (25) Cabinet Minutes dated June 4th 1924.
On CAB.23/48. P.R.O.
- (26) Hansard. June 19th 1924. Cols.2320-2321.
- (27) Hansard. June 25th 1924. Col. 430.
- (28) Hansard. July 9th 1924. Col.2254.
- (29) Hansard. July 14th 1924. Col. 176.
- (30) Macgregor to Maclachlan. Memo dated June 23rd
On M.H.55/109.
- (31) Robinson to Greenwood. Memo dated June 23rd
On M.H.55/109.

In reply, Greenwood agreed that it was doubtful whether any progress could be made for the time being, but added that consideration might be given as to whether the Ministry should not itself prepare a Bill for the ensuing session.⁽³²⁾ Meanwhile, the Minister of Health had agreed to receive deputations from three groups each of which wished to make representations regarding the Bill. The first deputation, from the National Union of the Professional and Industrial Blind, attended at the Ministry on July 28th. Through their spokesman, Ben Purse, the deputation advanced reasons for objecting to Henderson's Bill and pleaded that the existing system of co-operation between the State, the local authorities and the Voluntary Organisations should be retained and extended. The need for all possible steps to be taken for the prevention of blindness both in infancy and adult life was also stressed.⁽³³⁾

The following day, Wheatley met the representatives of thirteen voluntary institutions for the blind.^(a) These institutions were against the reduction of the pension age to 30, expressed disapproval of the principles of a minimum wage and opposed municipalisation. They did, however, support the payment of pensions at 40 years of age. The deputation stressed that the greatest needs of the blind were

(32) Greenwood to Robinson. Memo dated June 26th
On M.H.55/109

(33) "The Beacon" August 1924. p.12

(a) The institutions were the Barclay Workshops for Blind Women, Bradford Royal Institution for the Blind, Cardiff Institution for the Blind, Henshaws Institution, Manchester. Hull and East Riding Institute for the Blind, Leeds. Incorporated Institute for the Blind, London Association for the Blind, Metropolitan and adjacent Counties Association for the Blind, National Institute for the Blind, Workshops for the Adult Blind, Newcastle. Swansea Institution for the Blind, Workshops for the Blind of Kent, Yorkshire School for the Blind.

employment and independence. With regard to employment a protest was made that the vocational opportunities given by Workshops and Home Industries were insufficient and that "all avenues of honourable employment should be opened", especially occupations involved in the education and home teaching of the blind. It was further suggested that the Ministry grant of £20 per annum payable to agencies in respect of workshop employees and home workers should be made available to any organisation which undertook to employ a blind person in a recognized occupation at an adequate wage.⁽³⁴⁾ Finally, the deputation asked that the Ministry of Health should set an example to other employers by recruiting a number of blind stenographers and telephonists. The third deputation, this time from the National League of the Blind, waited on the Minister on July 31st to urge acceptance of the Bill. In addition the League made representations that competent blind persons should have preference over seeing persons in appointments as Home Teachers.⁽³⁵⁾

Wheatley gave no specific commitment to any of the three deputations other than promises to give consideration to the views expressed. Apart from the three groups represented by the deputations which broadly covered the interests of the blind themselves, public opinion was rapidly crystallising with regard to the provisions of the Bill. In support of the measure, a resolution was passed by the Joint

(34) National Institute for the Blind - Minutes of Meeting of Delegates to elect Speakers and formulate plans regarding the deputation to meet the Minister of Health on Tuesday, July 29th 1924.

(35) "Blind Advocate" September 1924. pp.4-5

Committee of the Trades Union Council and the Labour Party in the following terms:-

- . "That communications be addressed to the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, urging the Government to bring forward the necessary Finance Resolution and to provide facilities for the passage of the Blind Persons Bill promoted by Mr. Tom Henderson, M.P". (36)

The majority of informed opinion was, however, strongly opposed to the Bill. As mentioned earlier in this Chapter, ^(a) the Advisory Committee had submitted a strongly critical memorandum on the matter. On June 26th the Parliamentary Committee of the London County Council had recommended "that efforts be made to secure the deletion of Clause 2 (Power of local authority to promote welfare of blind persons) of the Blind Persons Act (1920) Amendments Bill". ⁽³⁷⁾ This recommendation was subsequently approved at the Council Meeting held on July 1st after a motion to refer the recommendation back, moved by the Labour Councillors had been defeated. ⁽³⁸⁾ Resolutions against the Bill had also been adopted by the Municipal Corporations Association, the County Councils Association and the Manchester Corporation. ⁽³⁹⁾ The hostility of such influential local authority organisations gave weight to the view expressed earlier by Macgregor that even if Section 2 of the Bill was enacted the majority of County and County Borough Councils would refuse to implement its requirements.

(36) Memo from A.F.Hemming, Principal, the Treasury, to D.Veale, Private Secretary to Minister of Health, August 4th 1924. On M.H.55/109. P.R.O.

(a) See page 430

(37) London County Council - Agenda, July 1st 1924, pp.23-24

(38) London County Council Minutes, July 1st 1924

(39) Memo prepared for use by the Minister of Health for use with the Deputations of July 28th, 29th and 31st. On M.H.55/109. P.R.O.

The Government could not, however, avoid doing something for the blind particularly in view of Clynes' statement on June 19th that "consideration was being given to the introduction of a resolution of a somewhat more limited scope". Nor does the Government seem to have had any intention of evading the issue. At the Cabinet Meeting held on July 30th, the Government took note of seven Bills on which action was to be taken in the Autumn Session. A reminder was also given that support had been promised for "a Private Members Bill greatly to reduce the pension age for the blind persons".⁽⁴⁰⁾ On August 8th Robinson mentioned that, having seen the three deputations, Wheatley had decided that he could not settle the question of amending the Blind Persons Act before the recess. He had, however, instructed Robinson to investigate the matter so that a memorandum on the subject could be laid before the Cabinet early in October.⁽⁴¹⁾

The memorandum drafted by Robinson contained proposals for improving the condition of the blind both by legislative means and administrative action. Four suggestions for amending the existing legislation were put forward namely :-

- (a) The provision of old age pensions at 40 instead of 50.
- (b) To empower the Minister of Health to make the necessary arrangements and recover the cost from any County or County Borough Council that showed indifference or inefficiency in carrying out its duty to promote the welfare of the blind.
- (c) To make the appointment of a Special Committee to deal with the blind mandatory for every local authority.
- (d) To empower local authorities to make arrangements for the treatment of persons suffering from disease or injury of the eyes and for otherwise assisting in the prevention of blindness.

(40) Cabinet Minutes. July 30th 1924
On CAB.23/48. P.R.O.

(41) Robinson to Hemming, Letter August 8th.
On M.H.55/109

As shown earlier in this study,^(a) the latter proposal was implemented by the Public Health Act of 1925. With regard to (b) and (c) the memorandum suggested that it would be advisable to obtain the views of the Associations of Local Authorities before a Bill was introduced.

The memorandum also advocated several ways in which administrative action could be taken to assist the development of blind welfare. It recommended that the Minister should press upon local authorities the desirability of taking over responsibility for the unemployable blind and securing for them an income appreciably in excess of the ordinary out-relief scale in operation in the district. Reference was made to the example of Bristol where, at a cost of £5,000 per annum for a blind population of 652, the Town Council had taken over financial responsibility for all expenditure incurred in the way of indoor relief for the destitute blind and for outdoor relief on a higher scale than that given to other destitute persons. Extrapolating the Bristol figures it was estimated that the cost of similar provision for the total blind population of 36,000 would be approximately £288,000. "If this policy is pursued", the memorandum stated, "it is possible that the local authorities will press for an Exchequer grant in aid of this expenditure, but it may be pointed out that the estimate of £288,000 is only very slightly in excess of the expenditure which already falls on the Exchequer for pensions to blind persons and which will be increased by about £70,000 a year if pensions are given at the age of 40".⁽⁴²⁾

(a) See pages 409-410

(42) Memorandum (undated) on Blind Persons Act (1920) Amendment Bill. On M.H.55/109

The memorandum did not, however, suggest any radical interference with either the statutory or voluntary machinery for blind welfare. Thus it considered that the destitute blind should not be specifically removed from the purview of the Guardians since to do so in respect of one class of persons "would be to raise the whole question of Poor Law reform prematurely". Similarly, in the absence of alternative accommodation, it was essential that, for the time being, the chronically sick blind should remain in the Poor Law infirmaries. The voluntary agencies were also indispensable in catering for certain classes of defective blind persons, who, because of their limited numbers and scattered distribution could not be adequately dealt with by the local authorities.

Other action recommended by Robinson was that the Minister should continue to encourage the closest co-operation between the local authorities and the voluntary agencies for the blind, "thereby securing the best of both systems ". He was advised to stimulate experiments in discovering new industries and professions for the capable blind. The appointment of additional inspectors particularly for work among the unemployable blind was commended. Finally, it was suggested that the Minister should encourage local authorities to promote financial schemes for the welfare of the unemployable blind over and above the monetary assistance received by them from sources such as Poor Law relief and grants from voluntary agencies.

"In these ways", the memorandum concluded, "legislatively and administratively, by the progressive development of existing lines of policy it is felt that the needs of the blind of the country can be better met than by the drastic proposals contained in the present Bill". (42)

Wheatley never had the opportunity of placing the memorandum before the Cabinet. On October 8th the First Labour Government fell.^(a) This event seriously retarded the progress of blind welfare since almost fourteen years elapsed before the age for pensions was reduced to 40. The enlightened proposals in the memorandum did, however, indicate the directions which state aid for the blind should take.

(2) Draft Legislation 1925-1931

After the fall of the 1924 Labour Government a meeting was held between Robinson, Maclachlan and Macgregor at which it was decided to drop the legislative proposals contained in the memorandum prepared for Wheatley except for the provision relating to the prevention of blindness which it was proposed to include in the contemplated Bill for the revision of the Public Health Acts. It was also agreed that something should be done for the unemployable blind, firstly, by stressing the duty of the local authorities to make provision for this class under the Blind Persons Act rather than through the Boards of Guardians and secondly by laying down a "standard of adequacy" in respect of financial assistance to such persons. With regard to the latter matter Macgregor pointed out in an internal memorandum that the Ministry had never been able to give a lead on the matter to local authorities for the two reasons of:-

- a. Economy and the fear of demand for further grant in aid.
- b. The absence of any standard of adequacy of relief.

Macgregor suggested that it would be reasonable to fix the maximum out-relief to a single person at 20/- of which 10/- should be assumed

(a) For an account see Lyman R.W. "The First Labour Government 1924" Chapman and Hall 1957. pp.237-245

to be old age pension and 5/- the out-relief already borne by the Guardians and that consideration might be given by the Ministry as to the possibility of offering local authorities half the cost of any approved scheme of relief which provided for a 5/- increase over the ordinary scales of assistance in force in the district.⁽⁴³⁾ No action was taken on these proposals, however, probably because of the difficulty of justifying a higher rate of relief to the blind than to other classes of applicants for assistance.

Meanwhile the National League had re-drafted the proposals made in the Bill introduced by Henderson in 1924. The revised Bill, introduced by Robert Young on February 13th 1925 differed in several respects from its predecessor. No reference was made to the lowering of the age of eligibility for the receipt of an old age pension. Instead it was proposed that every unemployed blind person over the age of 16 should be entitled to a weekly payment from local authority funds of not less than 25/-. The section making it mandatory for local authorities to promote the welfare of the blind by providing "workshops, hostels, homes or other places for the reception of blind persons whether within or without their area" was repeated together with the provisions relating to minimum wages and allowances for workshops employees and apprentices. In the case of employees the rate of remuneration was more clearly defined as "not less than the average standard rate received by an able-bodied unskilled labourer in the employment of the local authority in the district in which the workshop is situated". A third clause provided for the transfer, by agreement, of the assets of "any asylum or other place for the

(43) Macgregor to Maclachlan. Memorandum dated December 12th 1924. On M.H.55/105. P.R.O.

reception of blind persons" to the local authority in whose area the institution was located.⁽⁴⁴⁾

When the Bill came up for its Second Reading on May 8th 1925 it was talked out. Resolutions passed at a National Conference convened by the League in Manchester on October 31st 1925 resulted in the draft legislation being extended in four ways. Firstly, the weekly payment to be made to unemployed blind persons was increased to 27/6 as against 25/- in the 1925 Bill. While in the earlier Bill this payment would have been made to all such persons over 16 the revised proposals raised the age for the receipt of the full allowance to 21 and provided that between the ages of 16 and 21 the grant should be 15/-. Secondly, the Minister of Health was to be required to make periodical inquiries into the working of local authority employment schemes for the blind which, if necessary, he would have power to amend as well as to order an authority "to provide instruction, training or employment in any handicraft, trade or calling which he may specify". Thirdly, it was proposed to abolish piece-work in any workshop or institution for the blind. Finally, it was resolved that nothing in the intended legislation should disqualify any blind person from receiving maintenance as a result of the provisions of the Widows' Orphans and Old Age Contributory Pensions Act of 1924.⁽⁴⁵⁾

The reason for the last of the above resolutions may be briefly stated. By Section 24 of the Widows' Orphans and Old Age Contributory Pensions Act of 1925⁽⁴⁶⁾ it was possible for an insured blind person

(44) Bill to amend the Blind Persons Act 1920. Bill No.39 February 13th 1925.

(45) National League of the Blind. Memorandum to Branch Secretaries and Members. Entitled "Re New Parliamentary Bill". December 1925.

(46) 15 and 16, George 5. Chapter 70.

aged between 65 and 70 to receive two pensions namely, a non-contributory blind person's pension which was subject to means and a further pension, unrestricted as to means, by virtue of his contributions under the Act. By Section 40 of the Act, however, the blind person's pension ceased to be payable on the attainment of the age of 70 and thereafter an unrestricted pension was payable under the Old Age Pensions Acts, 1908 to 1924 by virtue of the Contributory Pensions Act. The practical effect of this rather complicated legislation was that at 70 years of age an insured blind person's income was reduced by the amount he had previously received in respect of his pension given specifically in respect of blindness. Since, in many cases, the needs of blind persons increased with advancing age, it was considered that some means should be found by which the reduction of income might be avoided. Questions on the matter were asked in the Commons on a number of occasions⁽⁴⁷⁾ and the Government actually considered amending legislation by which a blind person might receive a new pension at the age of 70 equivalent to the amount of his previous non-contributory allowance. They were deterred from taking any action on the matter by two considerations. Firstly, the insured blind person aged 70 was in a superior position to his uninsured contemporary of the same age in that he received 10/- weekly without regard to his means, whereas the latter, if his means exceeded the minimum of the scale allowed under the Old Age Pensions Acts, received only a reduced pension or no pension at all. If, therefore, legislation was introduced to secure the continuance of two pensions after the age of 70 it was feared that blind persons who had not been fortunate enough to obtain a

(47) See Hansard. October 31st 1929, May 29th 1930, June 22nd 1931, November 5th 1936.

contributory pension in addition to that for blindness might feel that they were being subjected to discrimination. The second reason why the Government was afraid to rectify the position was the possibility that increasing the amount paid to the uninsured after 70, might be regarded as an admission that the rate of blind persons' pensions was inadequate and, in consequence, lead to a demand for an increase in the scale of pensions paid to such persons throughout their pensionable life.⁽⁴⁸⁾ Eventually, when asked whether it was intended to introduce legislation to grant blind persons an old age pension in addition to a contributory pension on attaining the age of 70, Hore Belisha replied that he was unable to hold out any hope of legislative action.⁽⁴⁹⁾ A Bill incorporating the above four resolutions in addition to the measures set out in the Bill of 1925 was introduced into the Commons by Mr. Lee on February 5th 1926 but did not progress beyond its First Reading.⁽⁵⁰⁾ When the same Bill was re-introduced by Mr. Naylor on February 10th 1928 it was counted out.⁽⁵¹⁾ The Government did not, in fact, intend that it should proceed. When the attention of the Cabinet was drawn to Naylor's Bill, Chamberlain had undertaken to communicate with the Government whips regarding the measure.⁽⁵²⁾ Accordingly a message was sent stating that Chamberlain would be glad if steps could be taken to

(48) Ministry of Health internal memorandum entitled "Position of Persons aged 65 and upwards in receipt of Blind Persons Pensions.
On M.H.55/114. P.R.O.

(49) Hansard. March 8th 1934. Col. 2013

(50) Bill to amend the Blind Persons Act. Bill No.27.
February 5th 1926.

(51) Bill to amend the Blind Persons Act. Bill No.16.
February 10th 1928.

(52) Minutes of Cabinet Meeting, April 25th 1928.
On CAB.23/57. P.R.O.

secure that the Bill did not come on and that it should subsequently be blocked.⁽⁵³⁾ The legislative proposals of the National League were strongly opposed by the permanent staff of the Ministry of Health, the Advisory Committee, the Local Authority Associations and the voluntary agencies. As with the Bill of 1924 the officials of the Ministry of Health were opposed to the Bills of 1925, 1926 and 1928 on the grounds of cost, lack of inducement to work and the clear intention of the League to destroy the voluntary system and compel the municipalisation of all activities on behalf of the blind.

With a steady increase in the number of registered blind persons there was a corresponding rise in the cost of pensions and other grants. In 1925 it was estimated that the cost of providing a weekly allowance of 25/- for all unemployable blind persons over 16 would be approximately £1,400,000 or an increase of £930,000 over the then current expenditure.⁽⁵⁴⁾ By 1928 it was computed that a sum of £2,574,000 would be required to meet the cost of a weekly payment of 27/6 to the 36,000 blind persons who were unemployed or unemployable.⁽⁵⁵⁾ The automatic payment of allowances without regard to means or needs would, in the view of the staff of the Ministry of Health, put a "premium on incapacity" as well as creating practical difficulties in determining whether a particular blind person was "unemployable" or otherwise. The abolition of piece work, it was feared, would lead to

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- (53) Rucker to Harris. April 27th 1928
On M.H.55/112 P.R.O.
(C.J.W.Harris was Parliamentary Private Secretary to Churchill at the Treasury. Rucker was Private Secretary to Chamberlain at the Ministry of Health).
- (54) Ministry of Health Memorandum on the Blind Persons Act (1920) Amendment Bill 1925.
On M.H.55/110. P.R.O.
- (55) Ministry of Health Memorandum on Blind Persons Bill 1928
On M.H.55/114. P.R.O.

reduced and inferior output in the workshops. A substantial increase in remuneration would also have resulted from the implementation of the proposal to equate the wages of blind workshop employees to those received by unskilled local authority workers. In 1928, for example, it was reported that in some cases the pay of a dustman was over £3 per week. Seven years later the National League asserted that the average total income of male workshop employees did not exceed 35/- weekly. (55)

Finally, any attempt to abolish voluntary agencies was deprecated, not only because to do so was against the principle of co-operation between such societies and the local authorities which had been the policy of the Ministry since 1917, but also on the ground that considerable income from voluntary sources would have been lost. In 1925, for example, the voluntary income of the agencies in England and Wales which were in receipt of a grant from the Ministry of Health was approximately £420,000. If, as advocated by the League, these agencies had been municipalised it would have been necessary to find the sum of at least £420,000 from the Exchequer and local rates. As indicated in connection with the 1924 Bill the Advisory Committee was strongly opposed to the proposals. After considering the text of the 1928 Bill the Committee had observed that the main principles of the Bill were wholly inconsistent with the views that had been promulgated in their various reports and the declared policy of the Ministry of Health. "Apart from the very heavy additional expenditure that would be thrown on the local authorities", the statement continued, "the Committee are convinced that the operation of this Bill will rob the blind of all incentive and generally undermine their morale. The Committee, therefore, strongly urge the Minister to do everything in

his power to block the further passage of this Bill in Parliament".⁽⁵⁶⁾ The Advisory Committee addressed an admonitory comment to the sponsors of the Bill:-

"We have every sympathy with the legitimate aspirations of the blind to improve their conditions, and we cannot but express our regret that, in some quarters, so much attention is concentrated on the financial assistance of the blind and the elimination of voluntary effort, to the neglect of other considerations which must be borne in mind if the blind are really to be assisted in overcoming their handicap."⁽⁵⁷⁾

The local authority associations protested against the whole cost of the proposals falling on the rates and considered that the expense of any further provision for the blind should be borne by the Exchequer.⁽⁵⁸⁾ The London County Council objected to the clauses in the Bill which if enacted would have forced them to provide workshops and other institutions even though "perfectly adequate establishments" had already been set up "by private enterprise and charitable subscription".⁽⁵⁹⁾ The voluntary agencies, usually with powerful local support, resisted the demise or transfer of the institutions which they had founded and maintained. The National League, in fact got nothing by asking for too much that was controversial and which, in the prevalent climate of opinion and economic stringency no Government could countenance.

(56) Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind.
Minute of decision taken at the meeting dated April 26th 1928.
On M.H.55/122. P.R.O.

(57) Advisory Committee, Eighth Annual Report 1928-29. p.8.

(58) Association of Municipal Corporations.
Letter dated February 17th 1926.
On M.H.55/112. P.R.O.

(59) London County Council. Extract from minutes of meeting dated February 18th 1926.
On M.H.55/111. P.R.O.

Nevertheless, in spite of repeated rebuffs and strong opposition the National League persisted in the attempt to obtain legislation. At the Executive Meeting held in Manchester on December 8th, 9th and 10th 1928, it was agreed that a National Manifesto should be prepared drawing attention to the League's demands. These demands were broadly those which had been incorporated in previous draft Bills, but the fact that Chamberlain's Local Government Bill was before Parliament led the Executive to include a clause to the effect that "all blind persons should be removed from the Poor Law and dealt with under the Blind Persons Act 1920". Other requirements to be inserted in the manifesto called for central technical training schools to be established apart from workshops for the blind and that each such school should employ a proportion of blind instructors. A request was also made that persons should be examined by an ophthalmic surgeon prior to being placed on the register of blind persons and that a further examination of the eyes should be made prior to admission to a workshop or institution.⁽⁶⁰⁾ Some progress was being made towards meeting the less extreme demands of the League. As shown in Chapter IV, the Local Government Act of 1929, gave local authorities a discretion to provide domiciliary relief under the Blind Persons Act rather than the Poor Law. In 1933 effect was given to the recommendations of the Prevention of Blindness Committee that certification as a blind person should be undertaken by "a medical practitioner with special experience in ophthalmology".^(a)

(60) National League of the Blind. Minutes of an Executive Council Meeting held at 1a Bridge Street, Manchester, December 8th, 9th and 10th 1929.

(a) See Chapter IV. p.221

In 1929 Baldwin's administration elected in 1924 was nearing the end of its term and a General Election had been fixed for May 30th. At a Cabinet Meeting held on May 1st, Chamberlain mentioned that he had been approached by Ian Fraser who had made a strong case for the lowering of the age at which blind pensions could be granted from 50 to 40. Churchill, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, while not in principle opposed to amending the law, insisted that the financial implications of the proposal should be thoroughly examined since no money to meet the additional cost that would arise from a reduction in the pension age was available from existing taxation.⁽⁶¹⁾ On May 4th, Sir Arthur Robinson minuted Chamberlain that the estimated additional expenditure would be about £100,000 and that such a measure would have the advantage that it could be defended on merit against Labour suggestions that the pension age for the blind should be fixed even lower at 30. "If the money can be found and the political argument is judged strong enough", wrote Robinson, "I can raise no departmental objection but would think the proposal sound".⁽⁶²⁾ The matter was again raised by Chamberlain at a Cabinet Meeting held on May 6th and Robinson's estimate quoted. Churchill thereupon expressed his willingness to agree to the expenditure and the inclusion in the statement of Government Policy of a passage relating to the lowering of the pension age for the blind.⁽⁶³⁾ Four days later this decision was

(61) Minutes of Cabinet Meeting, May 1st 1929
On CAB.23/60. P.R.O.

(62) Robinson to Chamberlain
On M.H.55/120. P.R.O.

(63) Minutes of Cabinet Meeting, May 6th 1929
On CAB.23/60. P.R.O.

publicly announced by Baldwin in the course of an election speech at the Albert Hall.⁽⁶⁴⁾ A section relating to the blind was also included in Baldwin's election address which, after drawing attention to the fact that pensions were already provided at 50 for blind persons who had insufficient means to be independent, went on to state that "since at that age it is difficult, if not impossible, for a blind person to take advantage of the training facilities provided, the Government have come to the conclusion that pensions should be made available earlier in life, and if they should be returned to power they will introduce legislation to make the pensionable age 40 instead of 50."⁽⁶⁵⁾ Baldwin was not returned to power. At the election the Conservatives obtained 260 seats against 288 and 59 Labour and Liberal members respectively. In addition 8 seats were obtained by minority parties. Ramsay MacDonald formed his Second Labour Government which included Arthur Greenwood as Minister of Health on June 5th. On June 25th Parliament reassembled.

With a Labour administration in office the National League of the Blind was optimistic that their aims would be supported. "Some of us may expect great things being done, but it is possible that some of us may expect too much", wrote a contributor to the "Blind Advocate", "but one thing we do all expect, that is, an amendment to the Blind Persons Act of 1920".⁽⁶⁶⁾ Greenwood,

(64) Note on Memorandum headed "Blind Pensions at 40", undated. On M.H.55/82. P.R.O.

(65) Mr. Baldwin's Election Address. Conservative Party Manifesto 1929. p.22

(66) "Blind Advocate", July 1929. p.4. The Labour Government and the Blind Pensions Act.

however, was non-committal. On July 6th, he informed a correspondent that the age of eligibility for pensions for the blind together with other questions relating to the blind would be considered as a whole by the Government as soon as time permitted.⁽⁶⁷⁾ Five days later in reply to questions put by Conservative members regarding the lowering of the pension age, Greenwood stated that the matter was under consideration.⁽⁶⁸⁾ The publication in July 1929 of the Report of the Advisory Committee on the welfare of the blind on the unemployable blind with its recommendation for the reduction of the pension age to 40 gave further impetus to the supporters of the measure.

On November 7th the National League, which had been in correspondence with the Ministry of Health with reference to the receipt by the Minister of a deputation to urge the amendment of the Blind Persons Act, was informed that an audience would be granted on November 14th and asked that a statement of the case to be presented should be submitted prior to the meeting.⁽⁶⁹⁾ The familiar arguments were re-stated, namely, that the Government should introduce legislation to secure that every blind person should receive state compensation for his disability of at least 27/6 weekly, that piece work should be abolished in the workshops and that necessitous blind people should not be left to the mercy of the Poor Law. In reply, Greenwood pointed out that the principle of compensating the blind for their disability had been admitted in the provisions of the Blind Persons Act giving

(67) Note on Memorandum headed "Blind Pensions at the age of 40".
On M.H.55/120. P.R.O.

(68) Hansard. July 11th 1929. Col.1053

(69) National League of the Blind.
Minutes of Executive Meeting, November 7th 1929.

pensions to the blind at 50. He hoped that some advance along these lines might be possible, but the question was one that would have to be considered in the light of the many other commitments of the Government. The National League was asked to give further consideration to the question of piece work but the Minister undertook to make an enquiry into Scottish experience with regard to the abolition of the system. Finally, the deputation was reminded that the Local Government Act was expected to assist in removing the care of the unemployable blind from the purview of the Poor Law.⁽⁷⁰⁾

Meanwhile on November 1st, the Labour Member for Stratford, T.E.Groves, won a place in the ballot for private Bills and put down yet another Blind Persons Act 1920 (Amendment) Bill.⁽⁷¹⁾ In a subsequent conversation, Groves informed Ian Fraser that he desired a non-controversial measure. Fraser replied that the only non-controversial measure relating to the blind about which there was likely to be unanimous feeling in the House was the desirability of granting pensions at the age of 40. As a result of this exchange of views Fraser wrote to Sir Arthur Robinson at the Ministry of Health pointing out that under Parliamentary procedure a Private Bill requiring the expenditure of public money could not be accepted for a Second Reading unless it was extended by the inclusion of non-financial clauses. Thus, the Blind Persons Act 1920 (Amendment) Bill of 1924, although including a proposal to reduce the pension age to 30 had not been deemed to be a Money Bill since it had also included certain administrative

(70) "The Times" November 15th 1929.

(71) Hansard. November 1st 1929. Col. 478.

provisions.^(a) If, however, Groves Bill followed the pattern of the earlier Bills promoted on behalf of the National League the Government would be unlikely to sponsor it because of the controversial nature of the proposals. The effect, therefore, was that due to a technicality of procedure the opportunity would be lost of taking advantage of a strong feeling on the part of members of all parties that the age for pensions to the blind should be reduced. As a way out of this dilemma Fraser suggested that the Government might put down a money resolution before Groves Bill was presented. The Bill would then consist of one clause making provision for pensions for certain blind persons at the age of 40, came up for its Second Reading. "I think I could say with fair certainty", wrote Fraser, "that Conservatives and Liberals would not oppose a money resolution if it was pointed out to them that the Government had put it down in order to enable a one clause, non-controversial measure to be discussed as a Private Members Bill. All that the Government would be asked to do therefore would be to give time for the passing of an unopposed money resolution, say a few minutes, for immediately this has been done the Private Members Bill would have a fair field in Private Members time without bothering the Government".⁽⁷²⁾ Robinson seems to have been sympathetic to Fraser's suggestion which was forwarded for a ruling on the point of procedure to Parliamentary Counsel.

(a) For some elucidation of this point see - Erskine May "Parliamentary Practice". 18th Edition. Butterworths 1971. p.737 dealing with S.O.89 regarding resolutions authorising of expenditure.

(72) Fraser to Robinson, Letter November 14th 1929.
On M.H.55/144. P.R.O.

The reply was to the effect that a Bill restricted to reducing the age for blind persons pension from 50 to 40 years would be regarded by the authorities of the House of Commons as a Money Bill and that by reason of it being introduced on a money resolution necessarily presented by the Government it would be a Government measure. (73) Fraser was therefore informed that his proposed stratagem was impracticable and that in any event, the Government had already such a mass of commitments that they could not touch the subject of the blind during the session. (74)

Groves' Bill, which broadly followed the lines of its predecessors was nevertheless an embarrassment. The usual protests were received from the County Councils Association and the Association of Municipal Corporations. (75) Greenwood felt it necessary to present a memorandum to the Cabinet setting out the main objections to the measure and recommending that the line to be taken was that the Government had not had time to consider the various questions relating to the welfare of the blind, but that they would do so as soon as their other commitments permitted and then formulate their own policy on the whole subject. (76) At the Cabinet Meeting held on January 22nd 1930 the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Snowden, also reported that the Bill was open to strong objections from the financial viewpoint. (77) What happened next is

(73) A.W.Hurst, Principal Assistant Secretary, the Treasury, to Robinson, December 16th 1929.
On M.H.55/114. P.R.O.

(74) Robinson to Fraser, letter dated December 20th 1929.
On M.H.55/114. P.R.O.

(75) Letters dated January 29th, 27th respectively.
On M.H.55/114. P.R.O.

(76) Greenwood Memorandum, undated, to the Cabinet, Entitled "Blind Persons Bill"
On M.H.55/114. P.R.O.

(77) Cabinet Minutes, January 22nd 1922.
On CAB.23/63. P.R.O.

not recorded, but the Bill did not come up for its Second Reading on the appointed day.

- In 1930, Kingsley Wood on behalf of the Conservatives⁽⁷⁸⁾ and T. Smith, the Labour Member for Pontefract,⁽⁷⁹⁾ put down questions asking whether the Minister of Health was aware of the suggestion in the Report on the unemployable blind that the age limit for blind persons should be reduced to 40 and if any action on the matter could be expected. In both instances Greenwood gave the non-committal reply that the matter was under consideration but that he was not in a position to make a statement on the subject. On May 31st 1931, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Health, Miss Susan Lawrence, gave a more positive answer - "My Rt. Hon. friend regrets that at present he cannot contemplate the introduction of legislation to amend the Blind Persons Act. Local authorities have power under the Act to supplement the pensions payable to blind persons where need is shown, and the large majority of the authorities are already exercising these powers".⁽⁸⁰⁾

(c) 1932-1938

On August 24th 1931 the second Labour Government was succeeded by the National Government of 1931-1935. At the General Election held in October 1931 the Conservatives and Liberals obtained a total of 554 seats as against 52 by Labour and 9 by other parties. The relative smallness of the Labour representation and the serious economic situation was not propitious to further attempts to promote legislation

(78) Hansard. March 13th 1930. Col.1488

(79) Hansard. April 10th 1930. Col.2356

(80) Hansard. May 19th 1931. Col.1779

on behalf of the blind and in fact, after 1930 no further Private Bills to amend the Act of 1920 were presented.

The National League and its allies were not, however, inactive. Resolutions submitted by the League were adopted by the Trades Union Congress of 1923, 1927, 1928, 1929, 1932 and 1933.⁽⁸¹⁾ Motions presented by local party organisations were also passed by the Annual Conferences of the Labour Party.⁽⁸²⁾ In 1933 the Labour Party took more constructive action. A resolution in the name of the Greenwich Labour Party not only requested the Parliamentary Labour Party to press the Government to raise pensions, municipalise institutions for the blind and abolish piecework in workshops but also proposed "that detailed schemes shall be incorporated in the policy of the Parliamentary Labour Party to provide adequate maintenance for the blind and other persons who, by reason of infirmity, are unemployable; for the withdrawal from industry of persons whose infirmity is exploited in unfair competition with other workers; and the compulsory winding up of charities (which have failed to provide adequate maintenance), all monies held in trust to be taken by the State".⁽⁸³⁾ In response to this motion the Executive of the Labour Party agreed to present a report on the subject of the blind to the next Conference. A small "welfare of the blind" Committee was therefore set up under the chairmanship of Susan Lawrence who had been the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health in the Labour Government of

(81) See Annual Reports of the Trade Union Congress 1923 p.74, 1927 p.288, 1928 pp.110-111, 1929 p.304, 1932 p.408, 1933 p.288.

(82) See Reports of Labour Party Conferences - 1927, 1930, 1931 and 1932

(83) Labour Party. Report of 33rd Annual Conference 1933 p.198

1929-1931. This Committee presented a preliminary declaration of policy on the welfare of the blind to the Conference of 1934 which, if approved, would be expanded and published in pamphlet form. (84)

This statement was approved without amendment and in September 1935 a pamphlet entitled "The Blind Persons Charter" was issued on the authority of the National Executive as a statement of Labour Party Policy on the Welfare of the Blind.

The Blind Persons Charter contained three broad declarations of principle and a number of detailed recommendations relating to various aspects of blind welfare.

The first principle laid down was that the welfare of the blind should be a public service, directly administered by the local authorities and not delegated to the voluntary societies. "We are not unmindful nor unappreciative of the services rendered by the societies" stated the writers of the pamphlet, "but the provision of a primary social service cannot be left indefinitely to flag days, subscriptions and donations, legacies and other money raising efforts of private charity, supplemented by public grants. Moreover, the existing system is on the whole haphazard, cumbersome and inefficient". (85) The statement recognized that the individual county or county borough was often too small to be an efficient administrative unit for blind welfare and recommended that the service should be re-organised on a regional basis controlled by Joint Committees of local authorities. Such combinations of areas would

(84) Labour Party. Report of 34th Annual Conference 1934 p.227 and p.259

(85) Labour Party. "The Blind Persons Charter" 1935 p.2

absorb the great majority of the local voluntary societies.

The second principle put forward was that "No schemes for the welfare of the blind should be associated in any way with the Poor Law, and assistance both to the blind and their dependents should be provided otherwise than through the Poor Law".⁽⁸⁵⁾

The third principle, declared that the object of Labour policy was to "enable the blind to stand on their own feet, to be independent, to be citizens as their sighted colleagues are citizens, and to get rid of the atmosphere of charity which is often so well meaning and often so disastrous to self respect".⁽⁸⁶⁾

The "Charter" also contained a number of pronouncements on the kind of provision which the writers considered should be made for the blind. These recommendations related to registration, the education of blind and partially blind children under sixteen, vocational and non-vocational training, the extension of employment opportunities and the conditions of workshop employees and home workers. In this latter connection the "Charter" declared that home workers schemes should only be countenanced when absolutely essential, that the remuneration of such workers should be equal to the pay of workshop employees and that piece rates for both classes of employed blind should be abolished and replaced by time rates. With regard to the unemployable blind the pamphlet laid down that no one capable of training should be classified as "unemployable", that individual and social well-being should be developed to the utmost and that persons incapable of work should receive a pension of an amount equal to that paid to the war-blinded. Finally, the "Charter" urged the need for comprehensive action which it stated should be

⁽⁸⁶⁾ Labour Party. "The Blind Persons Charter" 1935 p.8

backed by a return by the Exchequer to percentage grants which, for the purpose of blind welfare, would be at the rate of 75% of local authority expenditure.⁽⁸⁷⁾ The policy statement therefore substantially endorsed the views put forward by the National League.

With the Labour Party in opposition the "Charter" was only of importance as a declaration of intent. Whether it would have been possible for a Labour Government elected before 1939 to have implemented any of the proposals particularly those relating to controversial issues such as the municipalisation of voluntary agencies or involving additional expenditure by raising pensions to the unemployable blind to parity with those granted to the war-blinded, is, in view of the difficulties experienced by the first two Labour administrations, extremely unlikely.

After the publication of the "Blind Persons Charter" there was a lull in the campaign to amend the Blind Persons Act. In February 1936, however, Ian Fraser wrote to the Minister of Health, Sir Kingsley Wood, offering to introduce an agreed Bill to give effect to the recommendations contained in the two Reports on the unemployable blind and the promise made in Baldwin's 1929 election manifesto that a blind persons pension should be payable at 40 instead of 50 years of age.⁽⁸⁸⁾ Although Fraser was informed that his letter was "receiving attention", no further action seems to have been taken, since on April 23rd, Fraser again wrote to the Minister asking whether further consideration could be given to the reduction of the age for the receipt of a blind pension. Fraser had been prompted to write a

(87) Labour Party. "The Blind Persons Charter" 1935 pp.3-8

(88) Fraser to Wood. Letter dated February 7th 1936
On M.H.55/607. P.R.O.

a second time because the matter had been raised by others at a meeting of the Advisory Committee on the welfare of the blind held on April 22nd and at a meeting of the Council of the National Institute for the blind on April 23rd. At both these meetings the hope had been expressed that the Minister would introduce the necessary legislation to lower the pension age. Fraser, therefore, repeated his enquiry as to whether he would have the Minister's support to bring in a Bill forthwith. "I believe", wrote Fraser, "that such a small Bill would be passed by general agreement without taking up Parliamentary time and it could be introduced behind the chair or under the ten minute rule whichever you thought desirable".⁽⁸⁹⁾ Among the reasons adduced by Fraser in support of facilitating legislation were that "it would be an act of social amelioration, greatly appreciated by some thousands of blind people who would prefer a statutory right to a pension to reliance on the vagaries and variations of local committees"; that the proposal would be welcomed by the local authorities; that the promise given by Baldwin would be redeemed and that "such a measure would be a most effective demonstration of the Government's declared intention to continue, in spite of other preoccupations, their policy of progress in the sphere of the social welfare of the less fortunate members of the community".⁽⁸⁹⁾

On May 6th 1936, a meeting was held between Fraser and Wood at the House of Commons but no record of what was agreed seems to have been made.⁽⁹⁰⁾

(89) Fraser to Wood. Letter dated April 23rd 1936.
On M.H.55/607. P.R.O.

(90) Fraser to Wood. Letter dated April 30th 1936.
On M.H.55/607. P.R.O.

The Minister of Health was probably very glad to discuss blind welfare with Fraser because pressure for the amendment of the existing legislation for the blind was building up from another source. At a sub-committee of the Advisory Committee held on February 11th, J.A.Clydesdale had informed C.R.Kerwood, a Principal at the Ministry of Health, that the National League of the Blind had resolved to promote a march on London similar to the one organised in 1920. When the marchers reached London the Prime Minister would be asked to receive a deputation who would urge the adoption, by the Government, of the programme set out in the "Blind Persons Charter". Clydesdale stated that he had endeavoured to persuade the League against the march which was to take place early in May but had been overruled and was, in fact, to be in charge of one of the contingents of marchers. (91)

When Kingsley Wood was appraised of the impending march he immediately asked that enquiries should be made to ascertain whether it could be prevented from taking place. (92) Maclachlan reported that, while it was desirable to stop the march in the interests of the blind persons who might be persuaded to participate, it was difficult to see what could be done. He did, however, suggest that the Minister might see Clydesdale and offer to receive a deputation from the National League on the understanding that in return for this promise the march would be abandoned. (93) The decision to proceed with the march seems

(91) Ministry of Health. Internal Memorandum Kerwood to Beckett (an Assistant Secretary) February 15th 1936.
On M.H.55/607. P.R.O.

(92) Memo to Sir George Chrystal, Permanent Secretary Ministry of Health, February 13th 1936.
On M.H.55/607. P.R.O.

(93) Memo, Maclachlan to Chrystal. February 15th 1936
On M.H.55/607. P.R.O.

to have been taken only after considerable controversy within the Executive of the National League. An article in the "Blind Advocate" by a pro-marcher, T.J.Parker, who had recently been elected London Organiser of the League, stated that the idea of the march had been adopted as a means of assisting the local authorities in the distressed areas to make adequate provision for the blind. As an example of the difficulties encountered by County and County Borough Councils, Parker quoted the case of Glamorganshire, where for five years the League had been attempting to persuade the predominantly Labour County Council to adopt a policy of municipalisation only to be informed that financial circumstances made it impossible for the Authority to adequately discharge its responsibilities with regard to social services. "A penny rate in Glamorganshire", Parker wrote, "raises less than ten thousand pounds; a penny rate in Middlesex raises seventy thousand pounds. In 1934 Middlesex had an expenditure on Blind Welfare of £21. 4. 7d. per thousand of the population or point sixpence in the pound, whilst Glamorganshire for the same year had an expenditure of £49.19.10d. per thousand of the population or three point eightpence. The foregoing figures clearly indicate the necessity for the State assuming this responsibility".

Opponents of the march advanced the objections of cost and public appeal. Parker answered the first of these arguments by stating that, while in 1920 the march had cost the League some £7,000 the expenditure in 1936 was estimated at about £3,000. The second objection that, due to the passing of the Blind Persons Act the case for legislation was less strong than in 1920 was met by reference to the wide disparity in the amounts of local authority provision as shown in the Report on the unemployable blind issued in 1935.⁽⁹⁴⁾ Two further

(94) Parker, T.J. "The March Must Go On".
Blind Advocate. April 1936. p.32

reasons against the march were advanced by Clydesdale in an article in the "Blind Advocate". The first was that, unless the support of the Association of Municipal Corporations and the County Councils Association could be obtained, legislation along the lines laid down in the "Blind Persons Charter" was only a remote possibility. The second was that, even if the marchers could persuade the Government to do something to secure greater uniformity, there was a danger that the standard of provision laid down would be that which obtained in the poorer authorities. "Why should we march to London", asked Clydesdale, "to ask for something that we will not get and to run the risk of getting something we do not want?".⁽⁹⁵⁾ In reply, Parker attacked the contention that it would be futile to ask a Conservative Government to pass an amending Act for the blind. "Perhaps our comrade is unaware", wrote Parker, "that the best schemes for our people exist where Labour is still a minority; perhaps he does not know that some of the recent improvements have come about through the suggestion of the Ministry of Health. Despite our allegiance to the Labour movement, we must face the facts; we must realise that it is often much easier to persuade the "Tory" local authority to give us a good scheme than it is to persuade a Labour authority. The overwhelming evidence is that the "Tories" respond more generously to our appeal. The scheme in operation in "Tory" Middlesex is a much better scheme than the one operated by the "Labour" L.C.C".⁽⁹⁶⁾

(95) Clydesdale, J.A. "Why March".
Blind Advocate. May 1936. p.8.

(96) Parker, T.J. "The March"
Blind Advocate. June 1936. p.7.

As Clydesdale had been a member of the Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind since 1924 it was unlikely that he was unaware of the facts that Parker purported to bring to his attention.

Early in April 1936, Clydesdale wrote to Kerwood informing him that the General Secretary of the League had been asked to apply for a deputation to be received by the Prime Minister. In Clydesdale's view, however, the League did not expect the Prime Minister to accede to their request and would be happy for the deputation to be granted an audience by the Minister of Health. He also expressed the view that if the Government promised some concession to the blind the march would be cancelled since there was still some uncertainty regarding the number of persons who were willing to participate. Conversely, any failure to recognize the League would provide a justification for the demonstration and result in increased support. Clydesdale therefore counselled that no statement of any intention to make a concession, such as the reduction of the qualifying age for blind pensions from 50 to 40, until after the deputation had been received. Any subsequent action by the Minister would then have the appearance of having been influenced by the deputation which might satisfy the League.⁽⁹⁷⁾

The advice that the march might be prevented by the reception of a deputation seems to have been accepted by Kingsley Wood since, in May, Sir Edward Campbell^(a) approached Ian Fraser for advice regarding the League and the demands that a deputation were likely to make. In reply Fraser set out three issues that the deputation

(97) Clydesdale to Kerwood. Letter dated April 4th 1936.
On M.H.55/607. P.R.O.

(a) Sir Edward Campbell was Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health.

might be expected to raise together with suggested answers that the Minister could give. The first such issue was that of municipalisation. Here Fraser suggested, the Minister might rebut the proposal that voluntary workshops should be closed down by reminding the deputation that there was no evidence that the blind were better off in municipal workshops than their contemporaries who were employed in organisations provided under voluntary auspices. Further, the blind needed all the help they could get, "state, municipality and voluntary agency, all working in harmony". The second issue was that of remuneration and the abolition of piecework. Here, Fraser pointed out, the Minister could refer to the discussions then taking place between the League and the National Association of Workshops for the Blind which were shortly to be reported to the Advisory Committee. In the event of the League and the workshop managers making unanimous recommendations these might be commended for implementation by the local authorities.

The third matter which the deputation might raise was that of the disparity in the payments made by different authorities to the unemployable blind. On this subject the Minister could indicate that local authorities to some extent met local variations in the cost of living by adjusting their standard rates of payment. In consequence the unemployable blind often obtained an increase in their allowance as a result of a revision of rates resulting from the initiative of an authority which had decided to raise the scale of payments. As a further means of promoting uniformity Sir Kingsley Wood might undertake to publish details of the amounts paid to the unemployable blind by each County and County Borough Council so that authorities whose rates were low might be made aware of the fact. Fraser also suggested that the Minister might make reference to the contribution made by the

League in awakening public consciousness to the needs of the blind, the achievements that had been made since 1920 and the service given by the League's representatives on the Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind. (98)

On May 19th 1936, a deputation of seven members of the National League was introduced to Kingsley Wood by Sir Francis Freemantle, the Conservative Member for St. Albans, who was accompanied by three other Members of Parliament drawn from the Conservative, Labour and Communist Parties. (a) The deputation submitted extensive proposals for the amendment of all three sections of the Blind Persons Act of 1920. With regard to pensions it was proposed that the age for payment should be reduced from 50 to 18 and the amount raised to that given to war-blinded ex-servicemen. A new principle put forward was that blind persons pensions should be removed from the operation of the Old Age Pension Acts and regarded as being a compensation for blindness. Section 2 of the Act was to be altered to make the welfare of all "resident", (i.e. not "ordinarily"resident) blind, a direct duty of the County and County Borough Councils. The cost of blind welfare was to be met by a percentage grant of 75% from the State, the balance being the responsibility of the local authority. The Committee responsible for blind welfare was to specifically include "Representatives of the Trade Union of Blind Persons as recognized by the Trade Union Congress". In consequence of the proposed municipalisation of welfare services, Section 3 of the Act, which related to charities for the blind was to

(98) Fraser to Campbell. Letter dated May 12th 1936.
On M.H.55/607. P.R.O.

(a) Lt. Col. J. Sandeman Allen (Conservative)
Mr. W. Gallacher (Communist)
Mr. H. Graham White (Labour)

be deleted in its entirety. (99)

In reply, Kingsley Wood was monumentally non-committal. On municipalisation and workshop remuneration he repeated, almost verbatim, the points suggested by Ian Fraser. He expressed the hope that more local authorities would make declarations under the Local Government Act 1929 and stated that he would do everything possible to encourage such action. As for the other matters raised by the deputation, these would receive his "careful consideration". (100)

On June 19th Maclachlan submitted a minute dealing with the points raised by the deputation. This suggested that if there was a prospect of legislation reducing the pensionable age to 40, consideration might also be given to enacting that all domiciliary assistance to blind persons should be given under the Blind Persons Act and not under the Poor Law and that the term "ordinarily resident" in the Act should be more precisely defined. (101)

In his attempt to prevent the National League from carrying out their march, Kingsley Wood had made the mistake of meeting the deputation before he was in a position to make any positive statement regarding future measures for the blind. The inconclusive nature of the meeting seems to have strengthened the position of those members of the League who were in favour of a national demonstration. On August 1st Kerwood reported a conversation with Ben Purse who had been made cognisant of the League's plans by Clydesdale who alleged that he was suspected of having taken clandestine steps towards preventing the march. Clydesdale had stated that it was for this reason together with

(99) National League of the Blind. Points submitted to the Minister of Health, May 19th 1936.
On M.H.55/607. P.R.O.

(100) Ministry of Health. Memorandum headed "Deputation from the National League of the Blind"
On M.H.55/607. P.R.O.

(101) Maclachlan to Rucker, Internal Minute, Ministry of Health.
On M.H.55/607. P.R.O.

his public opposition to the demonstration, that he had been given a prominent part, by way of punishment, in the organisation of the march. In a lengthy memorandum Kerwood declared that the objects of the march, which was to take place in the autumn, were both political and financial. The political aim was to stimulate the Labour Party and the T.U.C. to take further action to implement the programme laid down in the "Blind Persons Charter". The financial object was to collect a large sum of money on the march and enrol more members. The latter purpose was, in Purse's opinion, the main objective of the demonstration and he had informed Kerwood that, if the marchers could be prevented from marching through the main streets of the towns en-route and from making collections, the undertaking would be abandoned. Kerwood had discussed these possibilities with officials of the Home Office and had been informed that both the route to be taken and the matter of collections were at the discretion of the local police. It would, however, be possible for the Home Office "to call the attention of the police authorities on the route of the march to the proposed march and to suggest to them informally that it would be inadvisable to allow collections to be made and that it might be expedient, having regard to the fact that the procession would consist almost entirely of blind persons, to keep the procession out of the main streets in a town".⁽¹⁰²⁾

On being apprised of the fact that the march was again being planned Kingsley Wood was not long in taking action. On August 11th he wrote to the Home Secretary, Sir John Simon, asking what might be done by the Home Office particularly with regard to the re-routing of

(102) Kerwood to Beckett. Memorandum dated August 1st 1936 headed "The National League of the Blind Proposed March on London" On M.H.55/607. P.R.O.

the marchers and the prevention of collections. (103) Eleven days later a further letter was sent to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, apologising for doing so in the Recess, but explaining that due to the proposed march it was necessary to obtain Chamberlain's views on the introduction of legislation to amend the Blind Persons Act. The amendments proposed were the reduction of the pension age, the carrying forward of the principle established in the 1929 Local Government Act that assistance to the blind should be removed from the Poor Law and the removal of difficulties in connection with the definition of ordinary residence. Only the provision regarding pensions would involve additional expenditure estimated at £130,000 for England and Wales, but this would be offset by a reduction of about £25,000 in the block grants paid under the Local Government Act so that the net annual cost would be approximately £105,000. "It would clearly be most undesirable, if the march takes place", wrote Wood, "that the National League should be able to claim, as they did in 1920 when a similar march took place, that the march secured further concessions to blind persons. I wish therefore to be in a position to announce, if circumstances render it desirable, before the march takes place or is finally arranged, that the Government, as a result of their ordinary survey of social conditions, have decided to introduce next session a Bill to improve the position of blind persons under the Blind Persons Act 1920, which will include a reduction in the pension age from 50 to 40. The desirability of the legislation is not in doubt, as you and Baldwin recognized in 1929 and you will see that there may be

(103) Kingsley Wood to Simon. Letter dated August 11th 1936.
On M.H.55/607. P.R.O.

considerable political advantage in the making of an immediate pronouncement".⁽¹⁰⁴⁾

On August 28th the points made to Chamberlain were reiterated in a memorandum drafted by the Minister of Health for the consideration of the Cabinet. This memorandum stated that the Home Secretary had advised that there was no practical way of stopping the march through the agency of the police and that the Chancellor concurred with the proposals for legislation.⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ The memorandum came before the Cabinet on September 2nd when Kingsley Wood informed his colleagues that certain local authorities were contemplating the grant of financial assistance to facilitate the march and that he proposed to warn such Councils that monetary aid should not be given. After discussion, the Cabinet agreed

"To approve the proposal of the Minister of Health as set out in the concluding paragraph of Paper No. C.P.231(36) that he should announce as soon as possible, and before the march takes place or is finally arranged, that the Government, as a result of their ordinary survey of social conditions, have decided to introduce next Session, a Bill to improve the position of Blind Persons under the Blind Persons Act 1920 which will include a reduction of the pension age from 50 to 40".⁽¹⁰⁶⁾

On September 10th, the Government's intention to introduce new legislation in the interests of the blind was announced by Kingsley

(104) Kingsley Wood to Chamberlain. Letter dated August 22nd 1936
On M.H.55/607. P.R.O.

(105) Cabinet Memorandum. 231(36) Blind Persons. Memorandum by the Minister of Health dated August 29th 1936.
On CAB.241/264. P.R.O.

(106) Cabinet Minutes, September 2nd 1936. Conclusion 10
On CAB.23/85. P.R.O.

Wood to county local authority representatives at Worcester. (107)

Two days later the "Times" published an editorial on the welfare of the blind which asserted that the proposed measures would be generally approved and that the Minister of Health could "contemplate with satisfaction on the piloting of a beneficent and non-contentious Bill through the House of Commons". (108)

Details of the proposed Bill were submitted by the Ministry of Health to the Joint Committee on the Welfare of the Blind of the County Councils Association and the Association of Municipal Corporations on September 24th. (109)

A deputation from the Joint Committee was subsequently received by E.J. Maude, the Deputy Permanent Secretary to the Ministry on October 8th and agreement reached regarding a number of points arising from the contemplated legislation. (110)

On October 6th, a final attempt was made to secure the abandonment of the march to London when a conciliatory letter was sent to the National League reminding the Committee that the Government had agreed that it was desirable to improve the position of the blind and that an undertaking to introduce an amending Bill early in the next Parliamentary Session had been given by the Minister of Health. Any further suggestions that the League wished to make could be put

(107) "The Times" September 11th 1936. p.11.

(108) "The Times" September 12th 1936. p.13.

(109) Memorandum dated September 24th 1936 headed "Bill for the Amendment of the Blind Persons Act 1920". Endorsed "as sent to the A.M.C. C.C.A and L.C.C."

(110) Memorandum (undated) of deputation received by Mr. Maude from the Local Authorities Associations. October 8th 1936.
On M.H.55/608. P.R.O.

forward in Parliament at the appropriate stage of the Bill. "In these circumstances", the letter concluded, "it would appear that a march of blind persons to London could serve no useful purpose and moreover it may well involve hardship and inconvenience to those who take part in it and Sir Kingsley trusts that the National League will not proceed with it".⁽¹¹¹⁾

The reply obtained to this letter was uncompromising. The Committee of the League considered that the march was necessary to increase the volume of public opinion in favour of an Amendment to the 1920 Act along the lines indicated by the deputation which the Minister had received in May. In any event, the proposals announced at Worcester by Sir Kingsley Wood, "fell short of the present needs of the blind community".⁽¹¹²⁾

The League had, in fact, made extensive preparations for the march. In July, yet another resolution in support of a motion put forward by the League had been unanimously adopted by the Trade Union Congress.⁽¹¹³⁾ Articles on the purpose of the march appeared in several newspapers. A leaflet setting out the objectives of the demonstration and appealing for financial and moral support was distributed to trades councils, local labour parties, trade union branches and co-operative societies.⁽¹¹⁴⁾ In the North East it had

(111) Letter dated October 6th 1936 from F.S.Hearder, Private Secretary to the Minister of Health, to the National League of the Blind. On M.H.55/607. P.R.O.

(112) A.Henderson, General Secretary, National League of the Blind to F.S.Hearder. October 13th 1936. On M.H.55/607. P.R.O.

(113) Annual Report of the Trades Union Congress 1936. pp.403-405.

(114) National League of the Blind. Leaflet (undated) headed "Protest Demonstration" March to London.

been decided that only men who had passed a test of physical fitness would be accepted as volunteers. The greatest initial difficulty seems to have been to find sufficient marchers. It was at first intended that 250 members of the League from all parts of the Country should participate in the march. In the event, it was not possible to find more than 140 blind members fit enough to endure the hardship and strain. (115)

The march commenced on October 12th when three contingents of blind men set out from Leeds, Manchester and Swansea. One week earlier another party of 200 unemployed men, led by Ellen Wilkinson, had set out to march to London from Jarrow. (116) The National League had been approached by the Communist Party and the National Unemployed Workers' Movement to join forces with the Jarrow hunger marchers but these advances were rejected. Only on two occasions, at Watford, where members of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement carrying banners joined the procession and at Harlesden, where a meeting was addressed by Leonard Hines, a well known communist, did any extreme left-wing elements gain a footing among the marchers. (115) For the first stage of the march as far as Northampton, Clydesdale was the organiser but from this point onwards Parker assumed control.

(115) Report by Vivian Wright, Inspector, Special Branch Metropolitan Police on "National League of the Blind, Blind March to London" dated November 6th 1936.
On M.H.55/607. P.R.O.

(116) Wilkinson, Ellen. "The Town that was Murdered"
- The Life Story of Jarrow. Left Book Club Edition.
Victor Gollancz Ltd. London 1939. p.200.

Little information is available regarding the early stages of the march. On October 21st, however, the Leeds and Manchester contingents which, by this time had been reduced to 60 and 48 respectively, joined forces at Leicester. Subsequent stopping places⁹ were Market Harborough (October 22nd), Kettering (October 23rd), Northampton (October 24th), Bedford (October 26th), Luton (October 27th), St. Albans (October 28th) and Watford (October 29th). At Watford the combined Leeds and Manchester contingent was joined by the Welsh marchers who had travelled by way of Wallingford (October 21st & 22nd), Oxford (October 23rd & 24th), Reading (October 25th) and Slough (October 26th). On October 30th, the marchers left Watford for Willesden from where they were to march into London. Evening outdoor meetings and demonstrations were held at all the principal stopping places en-route. (117)

Two major difficulties were encountered on the march, namely the fitness of the participants and accommodation. To cover the distances in the time stated above, all the marchers were conveyed for a considerable part of the distance either by motor-bus or train. The general pattern seems to have been for the marchers to be picked up a few miles beyond a major town through which they had walked and set down outside the next stopping place. (117) In spite of this assistance, however, large numbers of men suffered from sore feet and some became too ill to continue the journey. This, as one observer commented, was only to be expected "since blind people normally do little walking and most workshop occupations are sedentary". (117)

(117) Ministry of Health Memorandum headed "National League of the Blind - March of Blind Persons to London".
On M.H.55/590. P.R.O.

The usual accommodation for the marchers was the casual ward of the public assistance institution in the town where an overnight halt was made. The normal casual diet was frequently supplemented by food or meals provided by the local co-operative society. At Wallingford the South Wales marchers had caused some trouble by refusing the casual's diet and the master of the institution had given way to the extent of providing bully beef at one meal and sausage for breakfast.⁽¹¹⁷⁾ At Kettering about 40 billets in private houses had been arranged by the Trades Council and the remaining men slept in the Corn Exchange which had been lent by the Urban District Council. At Luton, the town baths had been made available. In addition to the institutions, marchers were accommodated in such diverse places as chapels, army halls, schoolrooms, public halls and police stations. The general public were sympathetically disposed to the marchers and at several towns, the Salvation Army seems to have done everything possible to make extra comforts available. Only in Luton, where an inspector insisted that the marchers should alter their route into the town was any mention made of dissatisfaction with the conduct of the police.⁽¹¹⁸⁾

On Friday October 30th, the three contingents were augmented by 130 London members of the National League of the Blind and a demonstration was held at Paddington Green. At the termination of the proceedings the provincial marchers proceeded to Gideon Road School, Battersea, where accommodation had been reserved for them during their stay in London.⁽¹¹⁷⁾

(118) Blind Advocate. December 1936. pp.7 & 8

The march reached its climax on Sunday November 1st with a demonstration in Trafalgar Square. Before the meeting began a procession of blind persons and supporters headed by a brass band and carrying seven banners^(a) entered the Square. Five minutes later the main contingent of about 250 persons, including the marchers who were headed by the G.W.R. band, arrived accompanied by the banners of the Paddington Trades Council and Labour Party and the Paddington Branch of the National Union of Railwaymen. About 500 persons were present when the meeting was opened at 2.15 p.m.⁽¹¹⁹⁾ The meeting was addressed by twelve speakers including three Labour Members of Parliament and Hannan Swaffer, the writer, who remarked, "Look at Nelson up there. He was blind in one eye and they gave him a statue. If he had been blind in both eyes, they would have sent him to the workhouse".⁽¹²⁰⁾ The following resolution put by E.G.Hicks the Labour Member for East Woolwich was put to the meeting and carried unanimously:-

"That this meeting of the blind marchers recognizing the urgent need for amending the Blind Persons Act 1920, calls upon the National Government to amend the Act so as to provide for all blind persons an equal standard of living as is at present enjoyed by soldiers and sailors blinded in the Great War, and that it be made obligatory upon all local authorities to give effect to the provisions of the Act as so amended, including all blind welfare services, education, technical, industrial and professional training, employment and domiciliary assistance, and that 75% of the cost of all such services be provided by the National Exchequer, the remaining 25% by the local authorities, this amendment to the aforesaid Act as here outlined to be given effect to during the life of the present Parliament".⁽¹¹⁹⁾

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- (a) The banners of the South London, Greenwich, Tottenham and West London Branches of the National League of the Blind; the Southwark and North Southwark Labour Parties and the New Cross Mens Co-operative Guild.
- (119) Memorandum dated November 1st 1936 headed "National League of the Blind Meeting" by Vivian Wright, Inspector, Special Branch Metropolitan Police.
On. M.H.55/607. P.R.O.
- (120) Newspaper cutting. Source not shown on the files of the R.N.I.B.

At the end of the meeting a collection was taken which amounted to £4. 9. 3d. The demonstration ended at 4 p.m. Afterwards the marchers lined-up and paraded by way of the Embankment, Bridge Street and Victoria Street to the tram terminus from where they were transported to Battersea. (119)

The following day, all the marchers returned to their homes by rail, except for 14 who had been elected as a deputation to present the demands of the National League to the Government. The deputation accepted an invitation from Mrs. Van-der Elst to be her guests at the Caledonian Hotel during the remainder of their stay in London. (118)

The deputation was received by Ian Fraser and other Members of Parliament at the House of Commons on November 5th and received a promise that the League's case would be put before the Government. The last of the marchers from the provinces left London on November 6th. (115)

Compared with the earlier march of 1920 the demonstration of 1936 was a failure. No more was achieved by the actual march than had been secured by the threat of a demonstration, which, as shown above had the effect of precipitating Government action. In 1936 protest marches to London had become relatively commonplace. Simultaneously with the blind and the Jarrow marchers other contingents of unemployed men from Scotland, Wales, Cumberland, Durham and Yorkshire were proceeding to London in protest against the Means Test and the Unemployment Board Regulations. (121) In consequence the press

(121) Wilkinson, Ellen. "The Town that was Murdered"
 - The Life Story of Jarrow. Left Book Club Edition.
 Victor Gollancz Ltd. London. p.201.

publicity was less than the organisers of the blind march had anticipated. In particular the "Daily Herald" as a Labour newspaper was criticised for its failure to give adequate coverage to the march.⁽¹¹⁸⁾ The demonstration held by the National League on Sunday November 1st was adversely affected by the fact that the Jarrow marchers were also holding a meeting in Hyde Park. Clydesdale's view that the march should not have taken place was vindicated. Yet, the march itself was an achievement. Had they known of it, the organisers would, no doubt, have derived some satisfaction from the tribute paid in a confidential report prepared by an inspector of the Special Branch of the Metropolitan Police:-

"The proceedings were well organised, the behaviour of the marchers was exemplary, and no incident occurred necessitating police action. Local authorities, church and other organisations provided accommodation and rendered every facility to the marchers".⁽¹¹⁹⁾

The day after the rank and file of the marchers had returned home Parliament re-assembled after the recess. The King's speech included the promise that during the Session legislation would be introduced to lower the age limit for the award of pensions to blind persons.⁽¹²²⁾ A Bill to give effect to the measures promised by Kingsley Wood had already been drafted and included among a list of the Government's proposals for urgent legislation.⁽¹²³⁾ On October 28th the Minister of Health had given details of the effects of his Bill in a Memorandum submitted to the Home Affairs Committee.

(122) Hansard. November 3rd 1936. Col.13

(123) Cabinet Minutes, October 21st 1936, Conclusion 9.
On CAB.23/85. P.R.O.

The Memorandum indicated that, subsequent to the drafting of the Bill, representations had been made that a clause should be inserted enabling a blind person, so entitled, to receive both a non-contributory pension on account of blindness and a contributory pension by virtue of insurance payments until death, instead of the former allowance being withdrawn at the age of seventy. Kingsley Wood appears to have favoured this proposal since he stated that, if approved by the Cabinet, a provision relating to the payment of a double pension would be included in the Bill.⁽¹²⁴⁾ The Home Affairs Committee after considering the Minister's submissions agreed:-

"To authorise the introduction in the House of Commons of the Blind Persons Bill in the form of the draft annexed ... subject to the inclusion of a provision dealing with the double pension point should the Cabinet accept the proposals summarised in the above Minute and subject also to any drafting or other minor alterations that might be found necessary or desirable".⁽¹²⁵⁾

The above decision was reported to the Cabinet on November 4th when Kingsley Wood stated that he hoped to settle the double pension point with the Chancellor of the Exchequer. If agreement could not be reached, however, he would have to bring the matter back to the Cabinet. Subject to this proviso, the Cabinet agreed to approve the proposal of the Committee of Home Affairs.⁽¹²⁶⁾

(124) Home Affairs Committee. Memorandum by the Minister of Health on Blind Persons. HA/28/36
On CAB.26/20. P.R.O.

(125) Home Affairs Committee. October 28th 1936, 9th Conclusions (36) Minute 7
On CAB.26/20. P.R.O.

(126) Minutes of Cabinet Meeting held November 4th 1936 Conclusion 23.

The principle of double pensions seems to have been a bigger obstacle than had been anticipated. In answer to a question put on March 8th as to whether the Minister of Health was in a position to announce the introduction of the Bill to extend the principle of the removal of the blind from the administration of the Poor Law as promised in his speech at Worcester in the previous September, R.S.Hudson, the Parliamentary Secretary, stated that the Bill was in course of preparation but no date could be given for its introduction.⁽¹²⁷⁾ The same reply was given to further questions put on April 15th and June 17th.⁽¹²⁸⁾ Finally, when the matter was raised again on July 27th the questioner was informed that the Minister regretted that it had not been possible to introduce the Bill before the recess but that he hoped to do so early in the next Session.⁽¹²⁹⁾

On October 26th 1937 the Home Affairs Committee considered a further Memorandum from Kingsley Wood relating to the draft Blind Persons Bill. This stated that after discussion with the Chancellor, the Minister of Health had decided not to press the question of "double pensions" and that the draft Bill therefore contained no provision dealing with the matter. Apart from certain minor drafting amendments, the Bill differed from that submitted in the previous year only in that a sub-section had been added enabling the Councils who were the authorities for promoting the welfare of the blind to pay or contribute

(127) Hansard. March 8th 1937. Col.805

(128) Hansard. April 15th 1937. Cols.1176-77 and June 17th Col. 557.

(129) Hansard. July 27th 1937. Col. 2865.

to the cost of the funeral expenses of a blind person. This provision had been inserted at the suggestion of the Joint Blind Welfare Committee of the County Councils Association and the Association of Municipal Corporations.⁽¹³⁰⁾ The Home Affairs Committee agreed to recommend the Cabinet to authorise the introduction of the Blind Persons Bill forthwith.⁽¹³¹⁾ The following day, this decision was endorsed by the Cabinet,⁽¹³²⁾ and the Bill also received its First Reading in the Commons.⁽¹³³⁾ Apart from the citation, the Bill consisted of four sections.

The first section of the Bill reduced the age for blind pensions from 50 to 40. The second section substituted and re-enacted subsection (1) of Section 2 of the Blind Persons Act 1920 in three important respects. Firstly, that all assistance which after the commencement of the Act of 1938 could be provided either by way of poor relief or by virtue of Section 2 of the Blind Persons Act of 1920 should be provided exclusively under the terms of the latter Act. The practical effect of this provision was to take the welfare of the blind out of the province of the Poor Law. Secondly, that in computing the financial assistance to be given to a blind person consideration should be given to the needs of any members of his household who were dependent on him. Thirdly, that as indicated above, a local authority should have discretionary powers to contribute

(130) Home Affairs Committee. Memorandum by the Minister of Health on Blind Persons. HA/35/37.
On CAB.26/22. P.R.O.

(131) Home Affairs Committee. October 26th 1937. Minute 11.

(132) Minutes of Cabinet Meeting October 27th 1937. Conclusion 25.

(133) Hansard. October 27th 1937. Col. 85-86.

to the funeral expenses of a blind person "who at the time of his death was a blind person ordinarily resident in the area of the Council".⁽¹³⁴⁾

Section 3 of the Bill attempted to deal with the question of the recovery of the cost of assistance by one English local authority from another. Section 2 of the Blind Persons Act of 1920 had imposed on County and County Borough Councils the duty of making arrangements for the welfare of blind persons "ordinarily resident" within their area. No definition of the term "ordinarily resident" was laid down, however, other than the statement that a person who became an inmate of an institution should be deemed to continue to be ordinarily resident in the area in which he resided prior to his admission to the institution.⁽¹³⁵⁾ The Courts had never been asked to construe the term "ordinarily resident" for the purposes of the Blind Persons Act and the Minister of Health had no authority to interpret the Act. He had, however, been advised that, if a blind person moved into an area for the purpose of residing there and taking part in the general life of the area, he became "ordinarily resident" in that area. The local authority into whose area he had moved thereupon became responsible for his welfare and no qualifying period of residence was necessary.⁽¹³⁶⁾

The precise meaning of the term "ordinarily resident" became of importance since practically all the workshops for the blind were located in the County Boroughs with the result that blind persons

⁽¹³⁴⁾ Blind Persons Bill 1937, Sections 1 and 2.

⁽¹³⁵⁾ 10 and 11. George 5. Chapter 49. Section 2 (7)

⁽¹³⁶⁾ Ministry of Health, Circular No.1681. March 1938. "Blind Persons Bill".

normally resident in the County areas tended to migrate for training and subsequent employment into the towns where the workshops were situated. The effect, therefore, was that a local authority with a workshop in its area became responsible for augmenting the earnings of all blind persons employed therein as soon as they became resident in the borough. The tendency for the blind to migrate into towns such as Bolton, Bradford and Norwich was further accentuated by the fact that the scale of financial assistance payable to the unemployable blind was more generous in these boroughs than in other areas.

In a memorandum to the Minister of Health, Maclachlan stated that in some of the County Boroughs, resentment regarding the additional costs that were being incurred as a result of the migration of blind persons to the more generous authorities was so strong, that blind persons who had moved into an area solely to obtain employment were being refused admission to the workshops. Maclachlan therefore made the recommendation, with which Kingsley Wood agreed, that the recovery of the cost of assistance to the blind between authorities should be dealt with in any legislation amending the Blind Persons Act. ⁽¹³⁷⁾ Eventually a compromise solution was agreed between the Association of Municipal Corporations, the County Councils Associations and the London County Council. This agreement, which was incorporated in Section 3 of the Bill provided that, in effect, the life of a blind person should be divided into a series of quinquennial periods commencing on the date on which he received assistance after the coming into effect of the Blind Persons Act of 1938. During each five year

(137) Maclachlan to Kingsley Wood. Memorandum dated June 19th 1936
On M.H.55/607. P.R.O.

period the ultimate liability for the cost of any assistance given to him in England and Wales rested on the local authority in which he was last ordinarily resident for not less than twelve consecutive months in the preceding five years.⁽¹³⁸⁾ This rather complicated arrangement was elucidated by Richmond⁽¹³⁹⁾ as follows. A blind person who first received assistance on April 4th 1938 while resident in Area 'A', was ascertained to have been ordinarily resident for at least twelve months in the preceding five years in Area 'B'. The cost of assistance to the blind person would be recoverable from Area 'B' even though the person concerned might leave Area 'A' after a short residence there and subsequently reside and receive evidence elsewhere. In any event, however, the liability of local authority 'B' would expire on April 3rd 1943, i.e. five years after April 4th 1938.

Finally, the Section empowered the Minister of Health to decide any disputes which might arise on the question, "whether or not any sum is recoverable from a council by virtue of this Section or as to the amount of the sum so recoverable".⁽¹³⁸⁾

The Fourth Section of the Bill contained provisions regarding the ordinary residence of blind persons employed at institutions in Scotland.⁽¹⁴⁰⁾

When, on September 10th 1936, Sir Kingsley Wood had announced his intention to introduce new legislation in the interests of the blind, the "Times" had expressed the view that the Minister "could

(138) Blind Persons Bill 1937. Section 3.

(139) Richmond, Lawrence. Local Authorities and the Welfare of the Blind. Law and Local Government Publications Ltd. 1938. p.21.

(140) Blind Persons Bill 1937. Section 4.

contemplate with satisfaction the piloting of a non-contentious Bill through the House of Commons".⁽¹⁰⁸⁾ In fact, when the Bill came up for its Second Reading on November 11th 1937 it was subjected to strong criticism from Labour Members who, while not opposing the passage of the measure, made it clear that in their opinion the Bill was much narrower in scope than was required to meet the needs of the blind. Among the many proposals for the improvement of the Bill was the suggestion that, as the number of blind persons between 16 and 40 years of age numbered only 9,500, the cost of paying a pension at the age of 18 instead of 40 would only involve an additional expenditure of £90,000.⁽¹⁴¹⁾ More serious was the fact that very little of the £160,000 to be expended on paying pensions at 40 would directly benefit the blind, the effect being rather to subsidise the local authorities. Thus, in the case of Wolverhampton, the allowance paid at 50 to unemployable blind persons amounted to 25/- weekly of which 10/- represented the blind persons pension and 15/- the amount contributed by the local authority from the rates. The only effect of reducing the pension age to 40 was to make a contribution to the authority ten years earlier, thus preventing the whole cost of an allowance to an unemployable blind person aged between 40 and 50 from falling on the rates.⁽¹⁴²⁾ Objection was expressed at the anomaly that while a pension payable to a disabled ex-serviceman was disregarded in assessing his means, the pension given to a civilian blind person was taken into account in calculating his income.⁽¹⁴³⁾ A suggestion

(141) Hansard. November 11th 1937. Col.1903.

(142) Hansard. February 1st 1938. Cols.148-150.

(143) Hansard. November 11th 1937. Col.1905 and
February 1st 1938. Col. 158.

by Greenwood was that consideration should be paid to people afflicted with disabilities other than blindness such as the deaf or cripples and that in such cases an allowance should be paid purely on account of disability and not connected in any way with the Old Age Pensions Acts,⁽¹⁴⁴⁾ A recommendation was made that the matter of inter-authority payments could be simplified if the financial liability devolved permanently on the authority in which the person was living before he became blind.⁽¹⁴⁵⁾ Finally, it was advocated by Lansbury that, in the interest of securing uniformity of payments to the blind, the entire cost of assisting them should be met by the State.⁽¹⁴⁶⁾

The Committee stages of the Bill were taken on December 7th 1937 and February 1st 1938. On the first date, the three amendments proposed were all successfully resisted by the Government. These amendments related to the insertion of a clause requiring the arrangements made by local authorities to be subject to the "approval of the Minister of Health",⁽¹⁴⁷⁾ the making of duties under Section 2 of the Bill mandatory instead of permissive⁽¹⁴⁸⁾ and the proposal to omit the powers contained in the Bill enabling County and County Borough Councils to contribute to the maintenance of voluntary organisations.⁽¹⁴⁹⁾ On February 1st the main matters considered related to an attempt to abolish the means test in respect of the blind, the question of

(144) Hansard. November 11th 1937. Col.1925

(145) Hansard. November 11st 1937. Col.1911

(146) Hansard. November 11st 1937. Col.1916

(147) Hansard. December 7th 1937. Cols.317-322

(148) Hansard. December 7th 1937. Cols.323-336

(149) Hansard. December 7th 1937. Cols.339-350

inter-authority payments,⁽¹⁵⁰⁾ the relationship between the position of blind persons in Scotland⁽¹⁵¹⁾ and the possibility of providing institutional relief under the Blind Persons Acts rather than under the Poor Law.⁽¹⁵²⁾ Some amendments were, however, adopted. Sir Kingsley Wood moved that in computing the resources of a person for the purpose of determining his needs compliance should be made with the rules laid down in paragraphs (a) to (e) of Sub-Section 3 of Section 38 of the Unemployment Act 1934.^(a) ⁽¹⁵³⁾ The discretion of pay funeral costs was also extended to include the dependents of a blind person.⁽¹⁵⁴⁾

Thereafter the Bill made rapid progress. It received an uneventful Third Reading on February 17th.⁽¹⁵⁵⁾ On March 10th the Lords informed the Commons that they had agreed to the Blind Persons Bill⁽¹⁵⁶⁾ and the measure finally received the Royal Assent on March 30th 1938⁽¹⁵⁷⁾ and became operative on April 1st.

(150) Hansard. February 1st 1937. Cols.145-162

(151) Hansard. February 1st 1937. Col. 154

(152) Hansard. February 1st 1937. Cols.144-145

(a) These rules exempted:-

1. The first 5/- a week of any sick pay from a Friendly Society.
2. The first 7/6 a week of any benefit under the National Health Insurance Act.
3. Maternity benefit.
4. The first £1 a week of any wounds or disability pension.
5. One half of weekly payments under the Workmens Compensation Acts.
6. All money and investments treated as capital assets in so far as their value in the aggregate did not exceed £25.
7. Where a person had an interest in the dwelling house in which he resides any sum which might be obtained by selling or borrowing money on the security of that interest.

Certain minor conditions applied to some of these principles.

(153) Hansard. February 1st 1937. Cols.141-142

(154) Hansard. February 1937. Cols.143-144

(155) Hansard. February 17th 1938. Col.1938

(156) Hansard. March 10th 1938. Col.2125

(157) Hansard. March 30th 1938. Col.2057

Details of the effect of the proposed Act were circulated by the Ministry of Health to County and County Borough Councils in a Circular issued on March 14th. (136)

Although the Act assisted the local authorities more than individual blind persons it did, as Bernays, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health pointed out, benefit some classes of the blind. Those who did not receive assistance from local authorities or who lived in districts where the rate of augmentation was low received a valuable addition to their incomes. There were also a substantial number of blind persons who had preferred "to struggle along on their own resources rather than to apply for what they regard, and what is in fact in some areas, Poor Law assistance". (158) The great achievement of the Act was, in fact, that it removed the welfare of the blind from the stigma of the Poor Law and, as such, prepared the way for the greater dignity afforded to the disabled by the welfare legislation of the post-war years.

Yet the Act did not satisfy some local authorities. In 1939 the Minister of Health was asked whether he had considered resolutions from the Warrington Town Council and the County Borough of West Ham asking that "in view of the heavy and increasing rate burden of blind welfare services representations be made to His Majesty's Government for early legislation to amend the Blind Persons Act of 1938 with a view to pensions for blind persons being

(158) Hansard. November 11th 1937. Col.1947

granted at 21 years of age and the amount of pension being increased from 10/- to 20/- per week irrespective of means or income". In reply, Walter Elliot, who on May 16th 1938 had succeeded Kingsley Wood as Minister of Health, replied that no further legislation to amend the Blind Persons Acts was contemplated. (159)

CHAPTER VIIThe Eichholz Report of 1932
and the Movement for a Deaf Persons Act

As shown in the second chapter of this thesis, the Education (Blind and Deaf Children) Act of 1893 laid down that blind children should receive compulsory education between the ages of 5-16 as against a period of 7-16 in respect of their deaf contemporaries. The passing of the Blind Persons Act, and other legislation referred to in Chapters 3 and 5, had the effect of making the blind the most privileged of all handicapped groups from the standpoint of Statutory provision. The present Chapter is concerned with the efforts made between 1924 and 1944, by organisations representing the deaf, to secure parity of treatment with the blind. On the educational side this campaign was waged initially by the National College of Teachers of the Deaf and later by the National Institute for the Deaf. On the social welfare side the National Institute for the Deaf was the means by which pressure was exerted on the Ministry of Health to secure improved treatment as a result of legislation for deaf persons in adult life. The present Chapter, therefore, falls into three sections, the first of which describes the founding of the National Institute for the Deaf. The following section narrates the events which culminated in the investigation carried out between 1930 and 1932 by Dr. Alfred Eichholz into the educational and social conditions of the deaf in England and Wales. The Chapter concludes with an account of the efforts made between 1933-1939, mainly by the National Institute for the Deaf, to secure the passing of a Deaf Persons Act as a counterpart to the Blind Persons Act of 1920. For the sake of completeness this narrative is carried on to 1944 when the National Institute decided to abandon the attempt to obtain special legislation for the deaf.

(1) The National Institute for the Deaf.

In 1911 there were, in the United Kingdom, some 76 private and public schools for deaf children and 64 missions or welfare societies for deaf adults.⁽¹⁾ In addition to this local effort,^(a) both the teachers and missionaries had formed national organisations to represent the interests of workers engaged in educational or welfare activities for the deaf. The teachers' organisations included the College of Teachers for the Deaf and the National Association of Teachers for the Deaf which, in 1917, amalgamated to form the National College of Teachers for the Deaf⁽²⁾ as well as the Councils of Principals of Institutions and Day Schools for the Deaf. Welfare workers were represented by the Council of Church Missioners to the Deaf and the Institute of Missioners for the Deaf. In addition there was the British Deaf and Dumb Association which had been established in 1890 for the "elevation of the educational and social status of the deaf in the United Kingdom".⁽³⁾ While the B.D.D.A. claimed to be the "National Body" representing the adult deaf and dumb, its influence was, on its own admission, circumscribed

(1) National Bureau for Promoting the General Welfare of the Deaf. First Annual Report. September 1912. pp.7 & 8.

(2) Teacher of the Deaf. December 1917. p.178.

(a) Most welfare societies for the deaf were established primarily for evangelistic purposes. Hence, their superintendents were usually known as "Missioners". Even today (1972) the professional organisation of these workers is still named "The National Council of Missioners and Welfare Officers to the Deaf". For a history of the development of such societies see Lysons, C.K. "The Historical Development and Present Organisation of Voluntary Welfare Societies for Adult Deaf Persons in England 1840-1963" - Unpublished M.A. thesis, Liverpool 1965.

(3) Deaf and Dumb Times. March 1890. p.116.

by the lack of influential support and inadequate funds.⁽⁴⁾

Little had been done, however, to co-ordinate educational and welfare work for the Deaf. In many instances the schools and missions regarded each other with suspicion and even hostility, due to the divergent views of the teachers and missionaries as to the relative superiority of manual or oral methods of communication. "Each of these local or national organisations pursued its activities mainly without reference to the others, their work and experiences began and ended largely in themselves and co-operation between the various sections at work for the deaf was comparatively rare because there was no body in existence to observe the results of the work done, to record them and place them at the service of all, thus ensuring the wastage of power and effort in none. Of sectional machinery there was plenty, but the full impetus to the cause of the deaf of this Kingdom could not be given because no effective linking up of the different forces was available".⁽¹⁾

The setting up of a national agency for the purpose of co-ordinating educational work on behalf of the deaf, under the suggested title of the "Arnold National Society for the Deaf", was first proposed in an article published by A.J. Story, published in 1898.⁽⁵⁾ In a further article, Story mentioned the work of two other organisations working on a national basis, namely, the British and Foreign Blind Association, which later became the National Institute for the Blind, and the Volta Bureau for the Increase and Diffusion of Knowledge Relating to the Deaf which, as Story mentioned in a

(4) British Deaf and Dumb Association Annual Report
July 8th - December 31st 1924.

(5) Story, A.J. "A Glance Around - and a Proposal". Quarterly Review of Deaf-Mute Education. January 1898. pp.19-27.

later editorial, had been founded in Washington in 1887 by Dr. Alexander Graham Bell, who had devoted the prize money received from his invention of the telephone to this purpose.⁽⁶⁾ It was the establishment of a British equivalent to the American Volta Bureau that Story advocated.

In 1909 and 1910 Story reiterated his proposition for the establishment of a central body for the co-ordination of deaf education, in a series of articles and editorials published in the "Teacher of the Deaf", of which he, Story, was joint honorary editor. One such editorial⁽⁷⁾ urged that the foundation of a Central Office "for the purpose of collecting, collating and disseminating the information available from the various centres of education and other work for the deaf" should be undertaken as a development of the activities of the National Association of Teachers of the Deaf, to which, "with one or two exceptions", all organisations in Britain, concerned with the teaching of the deaf were affiliated. The N.A.T.D. formally adopted this suggestion at its Executive Meeting held in Liverpool on June 11th 1910, when it was resolved to raise funds for the "establishment of Central Offices with suitable labour to become, it was hoped, the Centre of Information respecting the deaf in these Islands".⁽⁸⁾ Meanwhile, a prominent teacher of the deaf, Miss Mary Hare, had secured the interest in the scheme of a deafened merchant banker, Mr. Leo Bonn⁽⁹⁾ who offered to found and maintain a national

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- (6) Story, A.J. "The proposed National Bureau to Promote the Education and General Welfare of the Deaf". Editorial in "The Teacher of the Deaf". April 1911. p.39
- (7) Story, A.J. and Hull, S.E. "To our Readers". Editorial in "The Teacher of the Deaf". July 1909. p.106.
- (8) Story, A.J. and Hull, S.E. "To our Readers" Editorial in "The Teacher of the Deaf". July 1910. p.106
- (9) National Institute for the Deaf. 11th Annual Report 1934-35. p.9.

institution for the deaf, for a period of two years. On June 9th, 1911, a meeting of representatives, concerned with the education and welfare of the deaf, was held at Bonn's residence in London, at which it was resolved that an organisation, known as the National Bureau for Promoting the General Welfare of the Deaf, should be established with the following general objects:-

1. Centralisation:- To get into touch and co-operate with all existing agencies and charities for the improvement of the deaf and to consider the question of overlapping.
2. Information:- To collect all information available from annual reports; periodicals; daily papers; Government publications, home and foreign, and to classify such information and keep it available for members of the Bureau.
3. Investigation:- To make special studies of any problem affecting the deaf which may recommend itself for the purposes of investigation, if any, to the Council for the purposes of public or private propoganda, of suggestions or reforms. (10)

Some idea of the educational, as distinct from the welfare, influence in the founding of the Bureau can be obtained from the composition of the first Council of Management. Of the 24 members, 14 were Teachers of the Deaf, 2 Otologists, 2 private individuals and 2 representatives respectively of the National League for Physical Improvement and the Social Welfare Association. The welfare element on the Committee consisted of three representatives of the British Deaf and Dumb Association and one from the Royal Association in Aid

(10) National Bureau for Promoting the General Welfare of the Deaf
Printed Circular dated June 24th 1911 signed by A.J.Story,
Acting Secretary.

of the Deaf and Dumb. Two hypotheses may be put forward to explain the low incidence on the Committee of missioners for the adult deaf, namely, the preoccupation of missioners with local rather than national issues relating to the deaf and possible opposition from the teachers deriving from the oral/manual controversy over communication methods. In fact, an editorial by Story in the "Teacher of the Deaf", commenting on the founding of the Bureau, declared that, "It is perhaps natural, at this stage of the great work in which we are engaged, that there should be a tendency to magnify the importance of divergencies of opinion" and appealed that all concerned with any aspect of deafness should "unite in things essential to the general welfare of the deaf in childhood, adolescence and adult life".⁽¹¹⁾

The activities of the Bureau are detailed in four Annual Reports issued in 1912, 1913, 1914 and 1916, and in references in contemporary magazines for the deaf. The outbreak of War in 1914, however, and the consequent call-up of the Bureau's full-time secretary, inevitably led to a curtailment of activity. Although attempts were made to carry on the Bureau's work by part-time voluntary effort such arrangements were neither satisfactory nor conducive to progress, with the result that on the cessation of hostilities the Bureau was moribund. No meetings of the Executive Committee of the Bureau are recorded between March 1919 and November 1921.⁽¹²⁾

Between 1921 and 1923, however, a number of schemes for the re-organisation of the Bureau were put forward by a Re-construction

(11) Story, A.J. and Hull, S.E. "To our Readers" Editorial in "The Teacher of the Deaf". August 1911. pp.106-108.

(12) National Bureau for Promoting the General Welfare of the Deaf. First Minute Book of the Executive Committee, June 9th 1911 to July 14th 1926.

Sub-committee set up for this purpose.⁽¹²⁾ To commence the re-construction of the Bureau, however, it was necessary that the Executive Committee should have the free use of the income accruing from the Trust Fund established by Mr. Leo Bonn. The Trustees of the Fund, however, considered that insufficient support both moral and financial, had been given to the Bureau by organisations connected with the deaf and that, until evidence of such support was forthcoming, they (the Trustees) were not justified in continuing to pay the income from the Trust Funds to the Bureau.⁽¹³⁾ Matters eventually came to a head in 1923 when the Trustees informed the Chairman of the Reconstruction Sub-committee that:- "We have all arrived at the definite conclusion that, whatever may have been the justification for the hope entertained at the start, the Bureau has not only been a great disappointment to those interested, but has not been able to secure sufficient general support. Under these circumstances the Trustees have decided to formally give notice that, after March 31st 1924, the income from the Trust Fund shall no longer go to the Bureau".⁽¹⁴⁾

Faced by the withdrawal of the Bureau's major source of income the Re-construction Sub-committee decided on the recommendation of Mr. Ernest Ayliffe, Superintendent of the Liverpool Adult Deaf and Dumb Benevolent Society, to convene a "Conference of Committees" to

(13) National Bureau for Promoting the General Welfare of the Deaf. Typewritten Report of a Deputation interviewing Mr. Max Bonn re the Re-construction of the Bureau. April 3rd 1922. p.4.

(14) Bonn, Max, Esq. Letter sent to Dr. Yearsley, Chairman of the Re-construction Sub-committee of the National Bureau for Promoting the General Welfare of the Deaf dated March 21st 1923.

consider the question of a National Committee to create interest in the work. (15) On May 19th 1924, a "Conference of Schools and Agencies and Persons interested in the Deaf", presided over by Lord Charnwood, and attended by some 250 representatives, was held at Kingsway Hall, London, when two resolutions were passed. The first declared the need for the re-construction of the Bureau "so that the claims of the deaf may be authoritatively expressed and nationally met. as those of the blind have been". The second resolution changed the name of the Bureau to "The National Institute for the Deaf" and made interim arrangements relating to the management of the newly constituted body. (16) On the evening before the Conference, Story had secured the agreement of the Trustees of the National Bureau to pay the income from their funds to the proposed National Institute for an initial period of three years and permanently if the Institute's progress justified the payment. (17)

As from March 31st 1924, therefore, the National Bureau for Promoting the General Welfare of the Deaf became defunct and, from April 1st 1924, the National Institute for the Deaf came into existence. (18) Later in 1924 Mr. A. J. Story, through whose initiative and perseverance a national organisation for the deaf became an accomplished fact, accepted an invitation to become the permanent secretary of the Institute (19) and retained this position until his

(15) National Bureau for Promoting the General Welfare of the Deaf. Minute Book of the Executive Committee. April 12th 1923.

(16) National Institute for the Deaf. Report of a Conference of Schools and Agencies and Persons interested in the Deaf, held at Kingsway Hall, London, on March 19th 1924. pp.7 & 9.

(17) As 16 above, pp.5 & 6.

(18) National Institute for the Deaf. Minute Book, Minute April 2nd 1924.

(19) As 18 above, Minute dated December 15th 1924.

death in 1938. The Institute became an incorporated body in 1948.⁽²⁰⁾ In 1961, on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of its establishment, H.M. Queen Elizabeth II commanded that the Institute should incorporate the word "Royal" into its title.

Between 1928 and 1930 as a result of conferences convened by the National Institute, a net-work of six Regional Associations covered the whole of England and Scotland.⁽²¹⁾ The Welsh Regional Association was not founded until 1950 and, as a result of reorganisation, there are now (1972) four Regional Associations.

2. The Movement for an Enquiry into the Condition of the Deaf 1924-1930

The two tributaries of health and education are conveniently merged in the Report of Dr. Alfred Eichholz to the Minister of Health and the President of the Board of Education which was published in 1932 under the title of "A Study of the Deaf in England and Wales 1930-1932".

The demand for the investigation which preceded the Report, was made over a period of six years by two distinct pressure groups representing respectively the interests of deaf children and deaf adults.

In 1924, Lord Sheffield the President of the Royal Schools for the Deaf, Manchester, wrote to the Board of Education requesting that the age for compulsory attendance at school of deaf children should be lowered from seven to five years, as applied in the case

(20) National Institute for the Deaf. Annual Report 1948. p.26.

(21) National Institute for the Deaf. Seventh Annual Report 1930-1931. p.19.

of both blind and non-handicapped pupils. In his reply, the President of the Board of Education stated that the Board, under its Regulations was prepared to recognize, for grant purposes, expenditure incurred on the education of deaf children from the age of two upwards, who were in attendance at special schools, but that, "in view of the evidence then available he would not feel justified in initiating legislation to modify the compulsory age of school attendance for the deaf".⁽²²⁾ Also in 1924, the Congress of the British Deaf and Dumb Association expressed concern at the economic and legislative difficulties which deaf persons were encountering in obtaining and retaining work.⁽²³⁾ The economic difficulties were due to the general depression and the low educational level of many deaf persons, while it was alleged that the Workmen's Compensation Act and the National Health and Employment Acts made employers reluctant to offer situations to deaf individuals.

The campaign to secure an enquiry into the condition of the adult deaf, with particular reference to their employment difficulties, was waged by the National Institute for the Deaf. In general, the Institute sought to secure the desired investigation by gathering appropriate statistical data and by Parliamentary action. In 1926 a questionnaire was sent by the National Institute to all missions for the adult deaf in England and Wales. Replies were received from thirty missions in respect of 12,088 deaf and dumb adults, or about

(22) Eichholz, Dr.A. "A Study of the Deaf in England and Wales" 1930-1932. H.M.S.O.1932. pp.2 & 3

(23) British Deaf and Dumb Association. Annual Report 1932. p.8.

11% of the estimated adult deaf population in the two countries. The returns from this survey as published by the National Institute in 1929 showed that, in the case of male workers who were deaf, some 40% were either unemployed or only in casual employment while, in the case of women, some 47% were in a similar condition. These particulars, however, referred to areas in which local welfare societies for the deaf were more or less actively engaged in attempting to secure employment for deaf persons and the Institute stated that, "since in no area is there anything like complete registration it is probable that the actual position may be worse it may be fairly assumed that in districts where no help of this kind is given the conditions of employment may be bad". (24) (a) After considering possible ways in which the employment difficulties of deaf persons could be mitigated the Institute declared, "We are, therefore, of the opinion that the time has arrived when an official enquiry should be made into the general industrial conditions of the deaf and dumb with a view to the amelioration or removal of the difficulties from which they now suffer". (24)

Meanwhile the demand for an enquiry was also being voiced in Parliament. On April 4th 1928, Sir Arthur Holbrook asked the Prime Minister whether he "would consider the appointment of a Departmental Committee to investigate the social and industrial position of the deaf and dumb with a view to the introduction of measures to relieve the growing difficulties with respect to their obtaining employment

(24) National Institute for the Deaf. "The Industrial Conditions of the Deaf and Dumb, 1929". p.10.

(a) These figures were unreliable since they represented roughly half the missions in the country - presumably those with the most severe unemployment problems. For a criticism see the Eichholz Report p.99.

owing to the restrictions in modern legislation with respect to young persons so afflicted".⁽²⁵⁾ Chamberlain, the Minister of Health, replied that, "as then advised, he did not see any grounds for the appointment of such a Committee".

On June 18th 1928, Lord Charnwood,^(a) the President of the National Institute for the Deaf, rose in the Lords "to call attention to the position in industry of the congenitally deaf and dumb and of those who are wholly or partially deafened in later life by disease or accident, and the limitations of the present provision made for their training and securing employment for them, and to ask His Majesty's Government whether they would (by means of an inter-departmental Committee or otherwise) enquire into the whole matter".⁽²⁶⁾ The ensuing debate was the longest discussion relating to deaf adults that had either previously or has subsequently taken place in Parliament. The demand for an enquiry was supported by a number of influential members of the Lords including the Duke of Montrose, Viscount Haldane and the Archbishop of Canterbury, but no promise that an investigation would be made was given by the Government.

In February 1929, and again in July of the same year, Lord Charnwood reiterated his demand for an enquiry⁽²⁷⁾ and pressed the Minister of Health to receive a deputation on the social and industrial conditions of the deaf and the deafened. This latter request was

(25) Hansard. April 4th 1928. Col.1977

(a) Benson Godfrey Rathbone, First Baron Charnwood. 1864-1945
See Dictionary of National Biography 1941-1950

(26) Hansard (Lords) June 18th 1928.

(27) Eichholz Report, as 22. p.3

refused by Chamberlain on three grounds namely:-

- (a) That the Minister was averse to appointing a Committee unless it was at least probable that he might be able to give effect to its recommendations.
- (b) That he would not advise the Government to provide (apart from the existing operations of the Board of Education) a national service for the deaf because, if such a service were set up, it would be difficult to resist similar demands for other classes of physically afflicted.
- (c) That the proposals contained in the Local Government Bill should go far to enable the County and County Borough Councils, who would replace the existing Poor Law Authorities, to deal satisfactorily with the situation.⁽²⁸⁾

The National Institute now turned its attention to the lobbying of Members of Parliament. A letter was sent to every Parliamentary candidate at the 1929 election asking whether, if elected, he or she would support the appointment of a suitable Committee to enquire into the social and industrial hardships of the deaf and dumb and the deafened. After the election a Memorandum was addressed to every M.P. which, in addition to referring to the handicap to securing employment arising from deafness, also stressed the possible waste of expenditure upon the education of the deaf and dumb since "no enquiry has yet been made by Parliament into the results in post-school life of this expenditure, nor have the effects on social and industrial welfare ever been considered".⁽²⁹⁾

(28) Deaf Quarterly News. April-June 1929. p.422

(29) National Institute for the Deaf. Memorandum issued to Members of Parliament 1929.

The Teachers, however, pressed their case for the lowering of the compulsory school age for the deaf independently of the National Institute. At the Conference of the National College of Teachers of the Deaf, held in 1929, a resolution was passed:-

"That there should be a Government enquiry into the present conditions of the education and training of the deaf". (30)

As a consequence of this resolution a deputation from the Executive of the National College met the Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Education in February 1930, when the following points were presented:-

1. That the compulsory school age for attendance should be lowered from seven to five years on the grounds of "equity, health, mental development and economy".
2. That the State should undertake direct responsibility for vocational training.
3. That the period of education should be extended to the age of 20 years, the ages of 5-15 years being occupied in general education and the time from 15-20 in trade training. (a)
4. That arrangements should be made for the classification of the children then being educated together in schools for the deaf, into such categories as the totally deaf, the semi-deaf, the semi-mute and the backward deaf, and for the education of each group in separate school units. (31)

(30) "Teacher of the Deaf" September 1929. p.98

(31) Eichholz Report, as 22. p.5

In April 1930, the combined efforts of the National Institute for the Deaf and the National College of Teachers of the Deaf had some effect. The Ministry of Health and the Board of Education agreed that Dr. Alfred Eichholz, who was retiring from his position of Inspector of Special Schools, should be appointed to undertake a survey "To obtain fuller information than is at present available on the position in industry of deaf and dumb persons and the facilities for their education and training and for securing employment".⁽³¹⁾

(3) The Eichholz Report 1932

When commissioned, Eichholz had been instructed to restrict his enquiry to the facts "the question of policy being very carefully reserved".⁽³²⁾ The document originally presented by Eichholz, however, apparently touched, at some points, on matters of policy. Before it was published in the Autumn of 1932, therefore, the Report was carefully edited by officials of the Ministry of Health and the Board of Education so as to leave in the facts and omit the observations made by Eichholz with regard to policy.⁽³²⁾ Apart from an introductory and a concluding section, headed respectively "General Considerations" and "Summary and Conclusions", the Report fell into two parts, namely, "The Education of the Deaf" and "The Deaf in Adult Life".

(A) The Education of the Deaf

The main facts presented by Eichholz in this part of his Report may be considered under the headings of :-

- (a) Ascertainment
- (b) Numbers and accommodation
- (c) Teachers of the deaf
- (d) Vocational training and the placement of school leavers
- (e) The cost of educating the deaf

(32) Memorandum on the Eichholz Report dated February 21st 1933
drafted by A.B. Maclachlan.
M.H.55/126/93204. P.R.O.

(a) Ascertainment (33)

Eichholz stated that for educational purposes children who were handicapped by auditory disability fell into two classes, those who were totally deaf or so deaf as to possess no useful hearing and the partially deaf, who, though seriously afflicted, still possessed some useful perception of sound. Unlike children who were mentally or physically defective there was no obligation on the part of local education authorities to submit a deaf child for medical examination for the purpose of diagnosis, although such a procedure was universal practice before a decision was taken to recommend education in a special school. The diagnosis of deafness was, however, not an easy matter and Eichholz observed that it was not infrequent for a child, who had been the victim of a faulty diagnosis, to be sent to the wrong type of school or not to be sent to a special school at all. In the case of deaf and dumb children there was the danger of classifying them as low grade mental defectives. With regard to the partially deaf, the absence of any definite medical standard to guide school medical officers in selecting cases suitable for admission to schools and classes for the partially deaf, sometimes caused partially deaf children to be taught with the deaf and dumb or, alternatively, kept too long in an ordinary school until their hearing power and speech had deteriorated to a marked extent. In the latter case, as Eichholz pointed out, "Nothing remains then but to send him to a school for the deaf and dumb, too late, perhaps, to attain the full benefit he would have reached, had he been sent earlier to a special school where, under proper medical treatment and education, he might

(33) Eichholz Report, as 22. p.33 and p.85

have been saved for the hearing world." To assist in the detection of ear defects for "educational, preventive and therapeutic purposes" there was a need for the more widespread usage of audiometer and other acoumetric apparatus.

(b) Numbers and Accommodation⁽³⁴⁾

In 1930, 3147 children, classified as "deaf and dumb" as distinct from the partially deaf, were at certified schools in England and Wales. In view of the efforts of the teachers to secure the lowering of the age for admission it is of interest that Eichholz ascertained that in 1930, 1,142 or 36% of children, had entered school at or before the age of 5 and 1,667 or 53% before the statutory age of 7. Conversely, an estimated 21% had been admitted to schools for the deaf after the statutory age. Parental objection to parting with their children was the principal reason for delayed admission to school.

According to the returns made to the Medical Department of the Board of Education by the School Medical Officers of each local education authority 1,882 children had been classified as "suitable for training in a school or class for the partially deaf".

Including the partially deaf, 3,951 pupils were attending 30 day and 20 residential schools in England and Wales. In addition vocational training was being provided at four centres. In the schools and institutions, however, accommodation was available for a total of 4,951 pupils, so that there was an excess of 760 places in excess of the number required.

Of the 1,882 children in England and Wales ascertained to be partially deaf, however, only 517 or less than 30% were in special

(34) Eichholz Report, as 22. pp.36, 37, 41, 42, 43, 86, 87 and 59-62.

schools for the deaf, the overwhelming majority of the remainder being in ordinary elementary schools. The only areas making direct provision in separate schools for the partially deaf were London and Bristol, in these two cities a total of 147 places being available. Eichholz ascertained that about 100 children, classified as "deaf" in schools for the deaf, were in fact only partially deaf.

No provision existed for the secondary education of the deaf apart from a private school for boys at Northampton and a similar institution for girls at Burgess Hill, Sussex. Certain education authorities had consulted with the Board of Education regarding the admission of deaf children into ordinary secondary schools and in London and Lancashire a few children of exceptional ability had actually been transferred.

(c) Teachers of the Deaf⁽³⁵⁾

In 1930, 126 men and 269 women were employed as teachers in certified schools for the deaf in England and Wales. Of the total number of 395, 165 were college trained certified teachers, 82 non-college trained certified teachers, 46 uncertificated and 102 "other grades". Two routes to qualification were available. Candidates could gain practical experience in the schools to which they were attached and prepare themselves, by part-time study for the Diploma of the National College of Teachers of the Deaf, the possession of which was one of the conditions of permanent recognition by the Board of Education. This method of certification had been supplemented in 1921 by the establishment of the Department of the Education of the Deaf at Manchester University, which, for the first time placed the training of teachers of the deaf on a university footing.

(35) See Eichholz Report. pp.62-65

(d) Vocational Training and the Placement of School Leavers. (36)

Eichholz gave extended consideration to vocational training which, on account of its importance in equipping deaf pupils for manual occupations in post-school life, "had assumed the magnitude of a slogan among teachers, missionaries and welfare officers to the deaf". Schemes of vocational training were in existence for pupils aged 13-16 in the schools of the London County Council and at the Royal School for the Deaf and Dumb, Margate. At the Royal School for the Deaf, Manchester, vocational training took place between the ages of 16-19. The majority of teachers were opposed to such training taking place before the normal leaving age of 16, on the ground that the introduction of craft instruction at an earlier age had a deleterious effect on general education and the acquisition of linguistic proficiency. At the above schools training for boys was taking place in such trades as bootmaking and repairing, tailoring, cabinet making, bakery and confectionery, printing and farm work. Dressmaking, lingerie and housecraft were taught to girls. In the case of schools where vocational training was not given, attempts were usually made to apprentice pupils to suitable trades. The advocates of this practice claimed that it had the merit of affording a greater choice of vocation than was possible in a school and enabling trades to be selected which were in demand in particular localities. Considerable difficulty was experienced on the part of both teachers and missionaries in persuading employers to offer apprenticeships to deaf school-leavers.

Unless a partially deaf child was fortunate enough to attend a certified school for the deaf, which made provision for vocational training in its curriculum, he received no such instruction.

(36) See Eichholz Report. pp.53-59 and 69-82 and 89.

"As a whole", therefore, Eichholz pointed out, "no provision for the vocational training of the partially deaf can be said to exist".

From a survey of 1,632 boys and 1,454 girls, who had left schools for the deaf during the period January 1st 1923 to December 31st 1930, Eichholz found that not less than 1,158 or 71% of males and at least 66% of females were, at the time of his enquiry, in employment. A memorandum on placement, prepared for Eichholz by the Ministry of Labour, stated that in only a few areas had the employment exchanges been able to undertake the task of placing deaf juveniles in employment and that even in such cases the closest co-operation with the local missions for the deaf had been essential. The view of the Ministry of Labour was therefore, that it was best "to encourage local missions to do their work assisting them by co-operation, as far as possible, and supplementing their effort wherever it is found necessary".⁽³⁷⁾ Notwithstanding this conclusion, however, the relationships between the schools and the missions varied considerably. In some areas, such as London, Liverpool and Manchester, co-operation was good. In other localities either the missionaries ignored the schools or the schools neglected to provide notification of school-leavers to the missionaries. Where antagonism, usually arising from conflict of opinion over communication methods existed, the placement of the deaf was adversely affected.

No special arrangements existed for the placement in employment of the partially deaf, the duty being part of the routine activities of the Juvenile Employment Agencies working in co-operation with Care Committees and the teachers of the schools.

(37) See Eichholz Report. p.131

(e) The Cost of Educating the Deaf. (38)

For the year ending March 31st 1930, the total estimated cost of educating 1,614 day and 2,337 residential pupils at £40 and £80 each respectively, was £250,000. The additional expenditure on vocational training courses was approximately £8,000, giving a total of £258,000 in all. The financial effect of reducing the age of compulsory attendance as desired by the National College of Teachers of the Deaf, was calculated as involving an additional expenditure of £56,000 per annum. If, in addition, the period of attendance was extended to an upper age limit of 19, to allow for vocational training, the yearly cost of education would be increased by £84,000.

(B) The Deaf in Adult Life

The data collected by Eichholz under this heading may be considered under six headings, namely :-

- (a) Incidence
- (b) The Poor Law and the Deaf
- (c) Voluntary Provision for the Deaf
- (d) The Condition of the Deaf and Dumb in Industrial and Social Life
- (e) The Deafened
- (f) The Blind Deaf

(a) Incidence. (39)

While the numbers of deaf and dumb children could be ascertained with reasonable accuracy through the statistics maintained by the education and health authorities, information regarding the incidence of deafness in adult life was less readily obtainable. Information concerning the deaf and dumb, as distinct from the deafened, was, however, available from two sources - the Public Assistance Authorities

(38) See Eichholz Report. pp.65-66

(39) See Eichholz Report. pp.12-14 and 92-93.

TABLE 18

Persons in Receipt of Poor Law Relief (England and Wales), 1929.

	General Population		Deaf and Dumb Population	
	No.	One in	No.	One in
Total in receipt of relief on 1st January 1929	1,240,666	32	2,636	13
In receipt of domiciliary relief	899,663	44	927	38
In receipt of Institutional relief suffering from sickness, accident, or bodily infirmity, excluding mental infirmity ..	95,797	412	199	176
In receipt of Institutional relief not suffering from sickness, accident, or bodily or mental infirmity	111,475	354	683	51
In receipt of Institutional relief, suffering from lunacy or other mental infirmity ..	133,731	295	827	42

Source: "A Study of the Deaf in England and Wales 1930-1932" p.113

and the voluntary welfare societies or missions. One weakness in attempting to estimate the extent to which the deaf constituted a social problem was that, unlike the blind, there was no system of registration of adult deaf and dumb persons. In any event, there was no inducement to such persons to register since to do so would not, as was the case with the blind, confer any benefit. By a somewhat complicated extrapolation of the proportion of children in the 15-16 age group who were afflicted by the handicap to the total population, Eichholz estimated that approximately 34,000 persons in England and Wales were deaf and dumb.

(b) The Poor Law and the Deaf.⁽⁴⁰⁾

From a comparative statement prepared for him by each Public Assistance Authority in England and Wales showing the number of deaf and dumb persons in receipt of poor-relief, Eichholz compiled the statistics shown in Table 18. The most significant fact emerging from the Table was, as Eichholz observed, that the number of deaf and dumb persons receiving assistance from poor law sources was 1 in 13 as compared with 1 in 32 of the general population, indicating that destitution fell with more than double the weight on the deaf and dumb than on their hearing contemporaries. The total annual cost of poor-relief to such cases was estimated at £140,641.

Although the Poor Law Act, 1930, empowered Public Assistance Authorities to contribute to the funds of the welfare societies for the deaf, Eichholz could only find evidence that 14 missions were being assisted, the total contributions amounting to only £416.12. 0.

(40)

See Eichholz Report. pp.112-116

This sum, as Eichholz observed, was "quite insignificant and in no way commensurate with the work done by the mission agencies in keeping deaf and dumb persons off the poor law by obtaining work for them". In fairness to the Public Assistance Authorities, however, Eichholz found that most missionaries were either unaware of the powers given by the Poor Law Act and had not applied for assistance, or were unwilling to accept help.

(c) Voluntary Provision for the Deaf.⁽⁴¹⁾

As with the blind, voluntary provision for the deaf was, in 1930 in existence at three levels - national, regional and local. As shown earlier in this Chapter, the National Institute for the Deaf had been resuscitated in 1924. Six years later, however, it was still a small organisation occupying only two rooms in Bloomsbury Square and employing a staff of four. The main difficulty encountered by the Institute was that of finance and in 1930 the total income amounted to only £1,762 against an expenditure of £1,878.

As a result of the initiative of the National Institute, six Counties Associations for the Deaf had been established to undertake duties similar to those carried out by the Counties Associations for the Blind.

At the local level, welfare work for the adult deaf was carried out by 60 missions in various parts of the country. Such missions were of two main types, namely, denominational missions and unsectarian societies. Of the denominational missions, 34 were diocesan undertakings under Church of England auspices, the largest of which, the Royal Association in Aid of the Deaf and Dumb, was

(41) See Eichholz Report. pp.94-112

responsible for most of the welfare and spiritual work for the deaf in London. Two societies were Roman Catholic missions and the remaining 24 agencies were undenominational in character. The denominational emphasis applied at the management rather than at the individual level and the Church of England societies catered for all deaf and dumb persons in their areas without regard to religious affiliation.

The total number of missionaries attached to the various societies in England and Wales was 74, of whom 15 were clerks in Holy Orders and one a Roman Catholic Priest. In 20 cases the missionaries were themselves deaf and dumb, or totally deaf.

In several respects the Church of England influence had initiated useful developments for the improvement of welfare work for the adult deaf. In 1912 the Council of Church Missioners to the Deaf had been founded with the object of being a bond of union and a means of co-operation amongst workers for the deaf. Ten years later a second body, the Central Advisory Council for the Spiritual Care of the Deaf had been established by the Convocations of Canterbury and York. These two bodies had co-operated to set up a Joint Examination Board for the purpose of laying down a scheme of training for welfare officers and attesting their proficiency by the award of a Diploma.

In summary, Eichholz stated that a number of areas were inadequately furnished with missions or not provided with such agencies. There was a wide variety in the quality of the work done by the societies. "Some offer a picture which cannot be surpassed in any field of social work, others fail lamentably in organisation both as regards financial control and social service". Practically every mission was handicapped for staff owing to lack

of funds. In fact the total annual income for the whole of the missions in England and Wales was approximately £40,000, and this, as Eichholz observed, represented the whole of the funds available from voluntary sources in aid of the deaf and dumb. The extension of the work of the missions, especially with regard to their activities in placing the deaf in employment, was, therefore, dependent on the augmentation of their existing financial resources.

(d) The Condition of the Deaf and Dumb
in Industrial and Social Life.(42)

An important aspect of the survey made by Eichholz was the obtaining of information regarding the industrial and social condition of the deaf and dumb population. Information regarding these matters was obtained by issuing questionnaires to the missions to the deaf, supplemented where necessary for purposes of clarification, by personal visits and/or correspondence. As a result of these enquiries Eichholz found that, of the estimated number of 35,000 deaf and dumb, 31,000 were adults, of whom 29,500 were outside mental hospitals or public assistance institutions. Of these 29,500, 18,268 or 62%, were on the books of the missions, the balance being unaccounted for due to such reasons as the absence of any system of registration, the lack of missionary organisation in certain areas and the reluctance of many orally taught and speaking deaf to join missions where the manual method of communication was used. After an adjustment of the returns in respect of 314 individuals who were insane, blind-deaf registered as blind, and deafened particulars were available in respect of 17,877 deaf and dumb persons.

(42) See Eichholz Report. pp.118-152.

Of these cases 7,802 out of 9,646 males or 81% were in employment. In the case of females 6,085 out of 8,231 or 74% were returned as being in work. Eichholz mentioned the tendency for the deaf to enter a narrow range of occupations, including tailoring, bootmaking and repairing, carpentry and cabinet making and bakery for men and laundry-work, dressmaking, lingerie-work and housework for women. This concentration of employment into a few trades was attributed, by Eichholz, to restricted vocational training in the schools and a lack of enterprise on the part of the missionaries in seeking out new avenues of employment for the deaf and dumb.

The high overall rate of employment obscured the fact that there was considerable disparity in the proportion of males employed in different localities. Thus, high rates existed in Rochdale (96%), London and Birmingham (95%), Stockton (93%), Hull (88%), Stoke-on-Trent (87%), Oldham, Wakefield and Walsall (85%), Derby (84%) and Bradford (83%). Areas where employment was seriously below the national average of 81% were Norwich (42%), Plymouth (51%), Carlisle and Lincoln (54%). Northampton and Wolverhampton (55%), Gloucester (58%), Northumberland and Durham (68%) and Leeds (69%). The majority of the low employment areas were rural districts where it was more difficult to find work for a deaf and dumb man than in localities offering a diversified range of industry. In every area, Eichholz emphasised, an important factor was the energy of the local missionary in advancing the case of the deaf and dumb to employers.

In the Report based on its survey of unemployment among the deaf, published by the National Institute for the Deaf in 1929, it was asserted that the National Health Insurance Act, the Trade Board Regulations and the Employers Liability and Compensation Acts adversely affected the employment prospects of deaf and dumb workers.

The alleged difficulties with regard to the first two of the above measures arose from the fact that a deaf boy or girl did not leave school until the age of 16, as against 14 in the case of a non-handicapped elementary school pupil. Under the Trade Board Regulations an employer was thus required to pay an untrained deaf school leaver the same wages as a hearing worker, who, due to finishing school two years earlier, had acquired two years experience in his trade. Furthermore, under the National Health Insurance Act, the employer was not required to stamp an Insurance Card until the employee had reached the age of 16. When a young deaf person started work, therefore, contributions on his behalf were payable immediately while there was a two year period of non-liability between 14-16 in the case of a hearing worker. So far as the Workmens Compensation Act was concerned the National Institute claimed to have information that higher premiums were often demanded by the accident Insurance Companies on the ground that deaf workers were more liable to injury. With regard to Trade Board Regulations, Eichholz was informed by the Ministry of Labour that there was no reason why an employer should not be issued with a permit to employ a 16 year old deaf and dumb school-leaver, who had received no vocational training in the particular trade, at the rate applicable to a person two years younger. As a result of a further enquiry, addressed to the Accident Offices Association which represented insurance societies covering about five-sixths of the whole of the accident business in Great Britain, Eichholz concluded that there was "no ascertainable support for the allegation that certain Insurance Companies demand higher premiums for deaf employees". Finally, Eichholz agreed that it was not easy to suggest a remedy for the difficulties said to be encountered with regard to National Health contributions, although

unemployment, poverty, sickness, mental or physical defect, were living in a state of actual domestic discomfort or distress". Of the 2,002 persons classified as living in circumstances which were not satisfactory, Eichholz had detailed information in respect of 1,039 men and 499 women and an analysis of the causes of distress is given in the following table :-

Causes of Unsatisfactory Conditions of the Deaf and Dumb 1930

<u>Cause</u>	<u>Males</u>	<u>Females</u>
<u>Employment Factors</u>		
(1) Obsolete trades and introduction of machinery.	30	3
(2) Difficulty in obtaining work through:-		
(a) Slack trade	250	45
(b) Living in rural area	12	10
(c) Missioner unable to give time to finding work	58	17
(3) Exploitation by employer at low wages	22	4
	<hr/> 372	<hr/> 79
<u>Personal Factors</u>		
(1) Lack of education or vocational training	317	112
(2) Too old for re-employment	34	17
(3) Unable to work at required rate	24	1
(4) Mental defective	85	36
(5) Physical defective	61	34
(6) Blind and deaf	29	14
(7) Character defect	93	30
(8) Wife of unsatisfactory male case		91
(9) Poverty		77
	<hr/> 1015	<hr/> 491
Miscellaneous	24	8
e.g. Failure in own business, bad home influence, etc.		
	<hr/> 1039	<hr/> 499

the high incidence of employment among the deaf raised the issue of whether any remedy was, in fact, required. Eichholz conceded that there were certain inherent difficulties in securing employment for the deaf arising from the nature of the disability. Examples of such difficulties were the problem of communicating with fellow workers and the loss of time required to convey instructions to a deaf and dumb employee in writing. He did, however, hold that the fact that 75% or more of deaf-mute men were in employment effectively rebutted the contention that the attitude of employers was definitely antagonistic to the deaf and dumb. "Indeed", he wrote, "the argument seems to me entirely the other way and to support the view that the deaf and dumb, even in times of stress and strain such as the present, can count on a generous measure of practical sympathy from employers".

Eichholz found that the number of deaf and dumb persons in "satisfactory circumstances" was actually higher than those in employment since any tendency to distress was "considerably mitigated by various forms of relief through unemployment benefit, poor law relief and care given by relatives and friends". Of the 9,646 men included in the survey 8,078 or 84% were regarded as living in satisfactory circumstances, 1,296 or 13.5% in the opposite condition and no information was available in respect of the remaining 272 (2.5%) cases. For the 8,231 women the comparative figures were respectively 7,297 (88.5%), 706 (8.5%) and 228 (3%). No definition was given as to what constituted "satisfactory circumstances". Each individual case had been first judged by the missionaries when making their returns and later scrutinised by Eichholz himself. The term "unsatisfactory" was, however, applied to "those deaf and dumb persons who, by reason of some disabling circumstances such as

As a result of his investigation into the industrial and social conditions of the deaf and dumb, Eichholz made two statements of great significance to the movement to secure special legislation for persons afflicted by the handicap:-

"It will be remembered that the advocates of special legislation for the deaf and dumb base much of their case on a supposed analogy between the deaf and dumb and the blind. It is quite clear that no such analogy exists. Reference to the Annual Report of the Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind 1930 shows that of 56,853 registered blind persons not more than 17% are employed. The position of the blind is, therefore, the exact reverse of the deaf and dumb in respect of employment and, while the case for the special treatment of the blind rests almost entirely on their non-employability, no such case exists in respect of the deaf who, given the opportunity of work, are able to support themselves".

In his analysis of deaf persons living in unsatisfactory circumstances, Eichholz had noted that only 304 out of 1,538 cases considered were over 50 years of age. "These 304 cases", he commented, "are those for whom the National Institute for the Deaf claim early provision for old age pensions. While the number returned is small, and would no doubt be subject to increase, if such provision were made, there does not seem to be anything in the magnitude of the problem as at present ascertainable, to justify special legislation. It is certain that this small number of cases could and would be dealt with fairly if brought to the notice of the Public Assistance Authorities".

(e) The Deafened.⁽⁴³⁾

For at least two reasons Eichholz was unable to obtain any estimate of the deafened or persons who had acquired hearing defects in adult life. The first reason was that the degree of hearing loss varied from a slight impairment to a total inability to perceive sound. The second reason was that because of this variation it was not possible to frame a definition as to what degree of deafness constituted disablement for the purpose of employment. The latter point had been recognized by the Medical Committee of the National Institute for the Deaf, which had stated that "no fixed degree of deafness can be set up as generally affecting either the efficiency or the employment of deafened persons on account of the wide variations of occupation and the differing attitudes of employers towards sufferers from deafness!"

Eichholz took the view that deafness as a social defect did not appear to be entitled to special social treatment any more than other chronic diseases, such as rheumatism or diabetes. Sufferers from the disability did, however, require all the help that voluntary agencies could give them, in such ways as the prevention and treatment of hearing defects, the provision of hearing aids, instruction in lip-reading and assistance in securing employment and adjustment to the handicap.

In general the deafened refused to associate with the deaf and dumb, who communicated by signs and finger spelling rather than speech, or with the missions for such persons. An attempt to establish local societies catering specially for the deafened was being made by the British League for the Hard of Hearing.

(43) See Eichholz Report. pp.153-159

(f) The Blind Deaf. (44)

Statistics furnished by the Counties Associations for the Blind showed that at the time of the survey 1,139 males and 1,664 females were afflicted with the double defect of blindness and deafness. Not every case was totally blind or totally deaf but all were affected by each disability in varying degrees. It was significant that 80% of the cases were over 50 years of age. Only 286 (10%) of the 2,760 persons over the age of 21 were in employment, 70 (3%) were either under training or awaiting suitable work and 2,404 (87%) were regarded as unemployable.

No schools or institutions had been established exclusively for the blind deaf but three residential schools had departments for both blind and deaf children. Training in basketry, mat-making and womens industries was being given at the Royal School for the Blind, Leatherhead. Eichholz considered that State aid, over and above what was then available, was unnecessary but that voluntary societies for the blind, in co-operation with the missions for the deaf, could provide the individual care which was essential for persons with the dual handicap.

(C) The Recommendations of the Eichholz Report

(a) Educational

A number of important suggestions regarding the detection, prevention, and treatment of hearing defects, together with recommendations concerning general and vocational education and training, were commended by the Report to the attention of the Board of Education.

(44) See Eichholz Report. pp.159-168

Eichholz urged that routine school medical inspections should include the use of acoumetric apparatus as being more certain in detecting faulty hearing than the whisper and watch tests usually applied.⁽⁴⁵⁾ Closely associated with the need for early detection was the importance of correct diagnosis, not only in connection with subsequent treatment but to obviate the possibility of a deaf-mute child being wrongly classified as mentally defective. This danger of confusion was the reason why the Report emphasised that the Board of Education, through its inspectorate, should call the attention of local Education Authorities and their medical officers to the importance of accurate diagnosis and that, in cases of doubt, a teacher of the deaf should be asked to assist the medical officer with his examination.⁽⁴⁶⁾

Eichholz considered that legislation to enforce compulsory attendance before the age of seven would be of doubtful value due to parental reluctance to send children to special schools at an earlier age. He therefore suggested that the Board of Education should endeavour to secure the earlier admission of children by calling the attention of local Education Authorities and voluntary schools to the "pressing need for making an early beginning with the education of deaf children on the purely educational merits of the case".⁽⁴⁷⁾ Such persuasion could be given either by a circular, by the inspectorate or by other means.

No encouragement was given to the proposal made by the teachers

(45) See Eighholz Report. p.172

(46) See Eichholz Report. p.174

(47) See Eighholz Report. P. 84

that the leaving age should be raised but the inadequacy of the existing facilities for vocational training was acknowledged and the Board was urged to take steps to ensure that all pupils capable of benefitting should have access to training courses in preparation for a trade under actual working conditions with regard to equipment and skilled instruction. The establishment of additional training courses was stated to be urgently necessary in the North, West and Midland districts of England and in South Wales.⁽⁴⁸⁾ As the residential schools had 760 vacant places it was suggested that by utilising unused accommodation the residential institutions might not need to incur any capital expenditure, other than in respect of equipment. Other uses for the available accommodation put forward in the Report, were the establishment of nursery schools and departments for the partially deaf.⁽⁴⁹⁾ The establishment of a secondary school for the higher education of the deaf was also urged.

The Report recommended that the Board of Education should instigate two enquiries. The first of the proposed investigations was the formulation of a medical standard of deafness to be applied in connection with the admission of pupils to schools or classes for the partially deaf and how such persons could be most effectively educated and rehabilitated.⁽⁵⁰⁾ The second enquiry was to relate to the effectiveness of the educational and communication methods utilised and taught in the schools for the deaf and dumb.⁽⁵¹⁾

(48) See Eichholz Report. p.176

(49) See Eichholz Report. p.175

(50) See Eichholz Report. p.180

(51) See Eichholz Report. p.178

In this latter connection a controversial recommendation was that "all children should, in the final period of school life, gain an opportunity of becoming acquainted with finger spelling".⁽⁵²⁾ In making this proposal Eichholz stated that while oral teaching had "prevailed almost unchallenged for the previous thirty years" and had "obtained extraordinary results" it had not altogether altered the outlook of the deaf-mute who "in spite of all his speech achievements is obliged, in adult life, to rely largely on finger spelling, gesture and writing".⁽⁵²⁾ The need for greater co-operation between the schools and missions was emphasised so as to facilitate the entry of school leavers into employment.⁽⁵³⁾

(b) Other recommendations.

The remaining recommendations of the Report related to matters falling mainly within the purview of either the Ministry of Health or the Ministry of Labour.

The Ministry of Health was urged to draw the attention of local authorities to the importance of giving early and continuous treatment, under the Maternity and Child Welfare Act, to infants suffering from ear defects.⁽⁵⁴⁾ The need for further research, on the part of the Ministry of Health and the Medical Research Council was stressed, into "the age incidence, causes and treatment of ear defect" for the purpose of providing information to public authorities which would assist them in the work of prevention.⁽⁵⁴⁾

Considerable attention was paid to the social and vocational problems of the deaf. From the social standpoint, as was shown in

(52) See Eichholz Report. p.176

(53) See Eichholz Report. p.179

(54) See Eichholz Report. p.172

the first chapter of this study, ^(a) Eichholz had been impressed by the isolation experienced by deaf persons in poor law institutions. He suggested, therefore, that local authorities, in considering the reorganisation of transferred institutions, should consider the extent to which the deaf and dumb might be accommodated together and visited by the local missionaries who might mitigate "the heavy burden of misfortune which these doubly afflicted persons are obliged to suffer". ⁽⁵⁵⁾ A similar need for social contact arose in connection with the blind deaf, and the Report enjoined the importance of agencies for the blind co-operating with those for the dumb to cater for such cases especially by training in each area a band of workers willing to "assume responsibility for two or three blind deaf persons". ⁽⁵⁶⁾

With regard to employment, Eichholz did not consider that the allegations that employers were unwilling to engage the deaf because of contingent responsibility for accident under the Workmen's Compensation Act or the adverse effect of the Trade Boards Regulations, had much substance in fact. In the case of the Trade Board Regulations, Eichholz persuaded the Ministry of Labour to agree that a statement from a headmaster that a person had been a pupil at a school for the deaf and dumb, would obviate the necessity of obtaining a Medical Certificate certifying that an applicant for employment was a deaf-mute. Thus, prospective employers would be saved the trouble of presenting medical evidence to the Trade Board as a condition precedent for the issue of a "permit" enabling a lower rate of wages for a given age to be paid. ⁽⁵⁷⁾

(a) See Page 31

(55) See Eichholz Report. p.180

(56) See Eichholz Report. pp.180-181

(57) See Eichholz Report. p.183

As stated earlier in this Report, Eichholz considered that the key to improving the employment position of the deaf and dumb lay with the missionaries who were best able to understand them. He estimated, therefore, that there was an "urgent need for the equivalent of ten additional missionaries engaged full time in placement work throughout the country at an annual cost of £3,000 for salaries and £1,000 for expenses".⁽⁵⁸⁾ Eichholz advised that in appointing new staff, preference should be given to missions in London, the depressed areas of Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle-on-Tyne, the West of England, North Lancashire, the Black Country, East Anglia and North and West Wales.⁽⁵⁹⁾ As the expenditure required in connection with these new appointments could not be found from voluntary sources, Eichholz suggested that the local authorities should extend their existing grants from public assistance funds under Section 67(b) of the Poor Law Act, 1930.⁽⁵⁸⁾ In addition, he recommended that "The National Institute for the Deaf and the Royal Association in Aid of the Deaf and Dumb unite in every endeavour, (a) in the direction of securing the establishment of new missions, where they are needed, (b) in the reorganisation of the weaker missions, and (c) in bringing about the co-operation of all missions throughout the Country within a single national welfare movement in aid of the deaf and dumb".⁽⁵⁸⁾

Eichholz ended his Report on a note which gave no support to any movement to secure special legislative provision for the deaf. All the suggestions made in his Report, he held, could be "adequately encompassed by an adjustment of existing administrative provisions in the fields of health, education, industrial and general welfare" which did not appear to call for new legislation.⁽⁵⁸⁾

(58) See Eichholz Report. p.184

(59) See Eichholz Report. p.112

(D) The Consequences of the Eichholz Report

At first there was some uncertainty as to whether the findings of Dr. Eichholz would be made public.⁽⁶⁰⁾ On October 20th 1920, Sir Hilton Young informed a questioner as to whether he was aware of the discrepancy in the treatment of the blind and deaf, that the Report on the condition of the deaf would shortly be published, although he was unable to promise any legislation for the deaf.^(60a) In the meantime the draft of Eichholz's Report had been subject to considerable editing at the Ministry of Health and the Board of Education, as well as by the Ministry of Labour. This editing was undertaken because Eichholz's brief had been to ascertain the facts relating to the industrial and educational position of the deaf and dumb, the question of policy being very carefully reserved. On some points, however, the Report trenched on policy and the Minister was informed that in editing the document the principle followed had been to leave in the facts and omit matters relating to policy.⁽⁶¹⁾ Two policy recommendations were, with the concurrence of Eichholz, omitted from the published Report. The first, for reasons that will be mentioned later in this Chapter, relating to the setting up of a "Ministry of Health Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Deaf" analogous to the Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind.⁽⁶²⁾ The second proposal was more far reaching. The full paragraph, as expunged from the original Report, read as follows:-

(60) Hansard. April 28th 1932. Col.576

(60a) Hansard. October 20th 1932. Col.332

(61) Memo to Sir Hilton Young, probably by Sir Arthur Robinson, dated March 15th 1933
On M.H.55/126. P.R.O.

(62) Memo by MacLachlan dated February 21st 1933.
On M.H.55/126. P.R.O.

"In regard to Labour Exchanges, the deaf and dumb have a real grievance. Like ordinary persons they make their contribution towards insurance against unemployment. On the other hand, the Labour Exchanges do not advance their claims for employment, in view of the fact that they are unable to support the case of afflicted persons as being suitable; further that they are pressed with an overwhelming mass of claimants from among the ordinary population, and finally, because they have not the expert staff for interpreting the needs of the deaf and dumb before employers and vice-versa. As a result the deaf and dumb get very little, if anything, for what they pay in. I suggest, accordingly, that the Ministry of Labour extend the policy they now adopt in London in regard to the placement of deaf and dumb juveniles, to the adult deaf and dumb generally and that they allocate from the funds at their disposal an amount to be paid to agencies engaged in placement work of the deaf and dumb. I suggest that these sums might be disbursed (a) as payments to the missions in return for placement services rendered (b) to the local authorities in the event of these bodies taking up the work of supervising the placement of the deaf and dumb, or (c) as salaries of special placement officers appointed by the Ministry of Labour to cover large areas".(63)

The reference to the placement in London of juveniles related to a grant then being made by the Ministry of Labour to the London Association for the After Care of Blind, Deaf and Crippled Children.(64) There was, in fact, an earlier precedent for assistance given by the Ministry of Labour towards the placement of the deaf in employment. In 1917 representations had been made to the Ministry of Labour by the Royal Association in Aid of the Deaf and Dumb for a grant of between £500 and £600 to enable the voluntary body to employ one or more special work-seekers for deaf and dumb persons. As a result of further discussions the Ministry had, in 1918, appointed a special officer

(63) Paragraph expunged from the original Report
(Study of the Deaf)
On M.H.55/126. P.R.O.

(64) Memorandum (unsigned) to Chegwidder, June 1932
On LAB.20/26. P.R.O.

attached to the City Exchange, specifically for the purpose of dealing with deaf and dumb applicants who had served in this capacity until his retirement in 1928. A successor had been appointed at the City Exchange on December 31st 1928 who had resigned on May 31st 1930. At this point the Ministry had decided not to make a further appointment on the ground that the duty of finding employment for deaf persons could be more effectively discharged by the voluntary organisations. (65)

On July 20th 1932, a detailed memorandum, dealing with the question of principle involved in Eichholz's suggestion that the Ministry of Labour should subsidise private agencies that were undertaking placement work on behalf of the deaf and dumb, was prepared by one of the Principals at the Ministry, T.S.Chegwidden. The first matter, as Chegwidden pointed out, was whether the Ministry should accept the principle of giving financial assistance to voluntary undertakings. The second point was a frank acknowledgement that "the placing of the industrially unfit or sub-normal is not a matter with which the Employment Exchanges are equipped to deal". Furthermore, the exchanges could only succeed if they could win the confidence of employers that the right man could be found for the right job, and even in the cases of disabled ex-servicemen, it had been necessary to enlist the co-operation of persons and organisations outside the service who could make some kind of sympathetic appeal to employers which the Exchanges were, in the ordinary way, unable to make. To provide a service to the deaf the exchanges would have to

(65) Note regarding the placing of Deaf and Dumb Applicants.
On LAB.20/26. P.R.O.

have staff qualified in communicating with persons afflicted with a profound auditory loss. Finally, if appeals were made for the deaf and dumb the Ministry could not refuse to make similar appeals for the blind, the industrially disabled, "and hosts of other and equally deserving people who are not up to the ordinary industrial standard". Chegwidden, therefore, took the view that the placing of the deaf should be undertaken by private and public agencies outside the Ministry of Labour.⁽⁶⁶⁾ For three reasons, however, Chegwidden was not satisfied that Eichholz had made out a sufficiently strong case that immediate financial help should be given in respect of the placement work undertaken by voluntary agencies. Firstly, the problem of the unemployed deaf was only small, while only 17% of the deaf were unemployed only 17% of the blind were in employment and the exchanges did nothing at all for this latter class. Secondly, as Eichholz had himself indicated in his Report, there was considerable disorganisation amongst the voluntary societies which a subsidy might possibly perpetuate. Thirdly, due to the urgent need for economy it was likely that the Treasury would object to providing the money requested by Eichholz.⁽⁶⁶⁾

During the previous month, a meeting had been held between E.A.Hitchman and Gordon Lee, who were respectively the Permanent Private Secretary and a Principal at the Ministry of Labour, and E.L.Turnball a Principal attached to the Medical Branch of the Board of Education. Turnball pointed out that the deaf and dumb community had suffered from a sense of grievance since 1920 when the Blind Persons Act had been passed. They felt that they deserved the same

(66) Memo from Chegwidden to Lowe Watson, July 20th 1932
On LAB.20/26. P.R.O.

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(66) Memo from Chegwidden to Lowe Watson, July 20th 1932
On LAB.20/26. P.R.O.

privileges as blind persons and were pressing for legislation accordingly. Latterly, their representations had taken the form of asking for a Royal Commission in the hope that from it would emerge a Deaf and Dumb Persons Act. While agreeing to the deletion of the reference to the question of contributions made by the Ministry of Labour, Turnball pressed strongly that the recommendations of Eichholz, relating to the need for further financial assistance by the Public Assistance Authorities in support of placement work and the need for the extension and co-ordination of mission effort, should be allowed to stand. Turnball's reason for the retention of these recommendations was the economic argument that "it was desirable that the Government should have some relatively cheap alternative to offer against the expensive claims of the deaf and dumb community".⁽⁶⁴⁾

Meanwhile, statements setting forth their views on the Eichholz Report had been published by the National Institute for the Deaf, the National College of Teachers of the Deaf and the Royal Association in Aid of the Deaf and Dumb.

On December 15th 1932, the Executive Committee of the National Institute for the Deaf had convened a special meeting for the purpose of considering the Report and published their main conclusions in a Memorandum issued in January 1933.⁽⁶⁷⁾ The National Institute expressed regret that Eichholz had not suggested that the machinery of the Counties Associations for the Deaf, which, it maintained, were uniting public authorities and voluntary societies concerned in helping the deaf "in a concerted effort to better the conditions of that class".

(67) National Institute for the Deaf. Memorandum by the Executive Committee on "A study of the Deaf in England and Wales 1930-1932" being a Report by Dr.A.Eichholz, C.B.E.

"Both", the Memorandum stated, "were waiting for a lead and looked for a report which would indicate a definitely constructive policy for dealing with the difficulties of deafness, of which they were aware, on an adequate and national scale".⁽⁶⁸⁾ The allegation was made that in drawing up the recommendations the Report had been influenced very largely by the economic circumstances of the times.⁽⁶⁸⁾ Further, in the opinion of the Committee, the Report did not provide any "adequate or practical solution of the grave and widespread problems of deafness, either congenital or acquired".⁽⁶⁸⁾ The only positive suggestion involving direct expenditure by the State was that ten Employment Officers should be appointed to approved missions at a cost of £4,000 per year. Such officers, the Committee considered, would be utilised more efficiently if they were spread over the areas of the Counties Associations for the Deaf proportionate to their populations and in relation to the geographical difficulties involved in each region, thus providing a placement service covering the whole country.⁽⁶⁹⁾ Disappointment was expressed that Eichholz had not supported the lowering of the age of admission for schools for the deaf from seven to five years of age. In particular, two conclusions, namely, that "Most leavers obtain employment fairly easily on leaving school", and that, "the deaf and dumb in ordinary life do not suffer any serious drawback as compared with the general population", were stated to be in conflict with the experience of practically every school and welfare society and contradicted by statements such as the fact that "destitution falls with more than double the weight upon the deaf and dumb than upon

(68) As 67. p.2

(69) As 67. p.3

hearing persons", which were made in the Report itself. (70)

Agreement was, however, expressed with the proposals to improve the condition of the blind deaf and the deaf in asylums and poor law institutions.

The Committee pointed out that only six pages out of 200 were devoted to the problem of the deafened and that the Report suggested practically nothing to lessen the social and industrial ills which burdened the lives of persons so afflicted, nor had any constructive proposals been made for their retraining or rehabilitation in employment. (71)

Finally, in addition to the proposals made in the Report, the Committee expressed their opinion that the following measures were "necessary and urgent" in the interests of both the deaf and dumb and the deafened. (72)

(a) The Deaf and Dumb

1. The lowering of the compulsory school age to five years.
2. The provision of suitable vocational training for all school leavers who are mentally capable and who cannot be satisfactorily placed in the ordinary way.
3. Suitable industrial training for below average school leavers.
4. Adequate provision of special means for placing school leavers and for finding employment for adults.
5. Earlier old age pensions for those who, through deafness, are unable to support themselves by their own labour.
6. The encouragement and assistance of special local societies as social centres and employment agencies and of the Counties Associations, also as employment agencies, and for organising welfare work and furthering the interests of the deaf and dumb generally.

(70) As 67. p.4

(71) As 67. p.5

(72) As 67. pp.7-8

(b) The Deafened

1. The extension of suitable educational provisions for deafened children.
2. The provision of suitable vocational training for school leavers who cannot be satisfactorily placed in the ordinary way.
3. The provision of opportunities for the retraining of deafened persons no longer able to follow their usual occupations.
4. Special provisions for placing school leavers and for finding employment for adults who cannot benefit from the ordinary agencies.
5. Earlier old age pensions for those who, through deafness, are unable to support themselves by their own labour.
6. The prevention of exploitation, whether by medicine or appliances, and the suppression of misleading advertisements.

(c) Generally

The construction of a national welfare scheme dealing with the whole problem of deafness by:-

1. The establishment of a permanent Advisory Committee, as in the case of the blind, to keep in touch with the conditions and needs of the deaf and dumb and the deafened.
2. The recognition and assistance of the Counties Association for the Deaf as uniting public authorities and voluntary bodies in the effort to ameliorate the conditions of the deaf and dumb and the deafened in the various areas.
3. The recognition and assistance of local voluntary bodies dealing with the deaf and the encouragement of similar agencies for the welfare of both classes of the deaf, where necessary.

The Memorandum issued by the National College of Teachers of the Deaf welcomed most of the recommendations made by Eichholz, although "profound regret and disappointment" was expressed at his failure to make a definite proposal that the statutory age for the education of the deaf child should be lowered to five years. To ensure that each child was given the opportunity "to prepare for and enter into" the

industrial life of the locality in which it was resident, the College repeated the assertion made in 1929 that the care of the deaf should be extended, by statutory obligation, up to the age of 20, the years from 16 onwards being devoted to supervised industrial training in a workshop, factory or trade school. With regard to the controversial recommendation that all children in the final period of school life should have the opportunity of becoming acquainted with finger spelling, the College declared that further enquiry was desirable before any regulation, endorsing this assertion, was made. Although recognizing the comprehensive nature of the investigation made by Eichholz, however, the College pointed out that the Report expressed the views and ideas of one man and therefore suggested that a further Committee of Enquiry should be appointed to consider the evidence and suggestions put forward, together with such additional information and proposals that might be submitted. Finally, support was expressed for the view put forward by the National Institute for the Deaf that a permanent Advisory Committee should be appointed to advise on all matters relating to the general welfare of the deaf. (73)

The appointment of an Advisory Committee was also advocated by the Memorandum issued by the Royal Association in Aid of the Deaf and Dumb, which also made a number of constructive recommendations relating to the classification of deaf persons requiring institutional care, the segregation of the mentally deficient deaf, special help for hearing impaired people who were also markedly deficient in sight and support for per capita grants to voluntary societies for placement work and the support of deaf persons, unable to secure employment, either by the

(73) Memorandum by the National College of Teachers of the Deaf on the Report prepared by Dr. A. Eichholz, C.B.E. July 1933.

payments of pensions, as in the case of the blind, at an earlier age or by special public assistance grants payable until the attainment of pensionable age. (74)

Of the three documents mentioned above the most detailed and potentially influential was that published by the National Institute for the Deaf. In February 1933, therefore, Maclachlan prepared a detailed statement on the Memorandum issued by the National Institute. Maclachlan rejected the idea of a Ministry of Health Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Deaf which, as mentioned earlier in this Chapter, had been favoured by Eichholz, on the ground that it was difficult to see what useful purpose would be served by such a Committee, the business of which would be to advise the Minister on matters appertaining to the welfare of the deaf. The Minister, however, had no specific functions regarding the deaf and a consequence of the appointment of an Advisory Body might be "a strong temptation for the Committee to press at the outset for fresh legislation, giving him powers of supervision or control over the present voluntary agencies". (75)

Maclachlan also disagreed with the recommendation that a sum of £4,000 should be found for the purpose of appointing ten additional missionaries in various parts of the country. He did, however, make a counter proposal that the attention of the Public Assistance Committees should be drawn to the relevant parts of the Report and advised to contact the agencies for the deaf in their areas with a view to ascertaining what additional financial assistance, if any, was required

(74) Memorandum by the Royal Association in Aid of the Deaf and Dumb on "A Study of the Deaf in England and Wales 1930-1932". April 1934.

(75) Memorandum entitled "The Deaf and Dumb" addressed to the Chief Medical Officer and the "Secretary" prepared by Maclachlan February 21st 1933.
On M.H.55/126. P.R.O.

to enable the missions to effectively carry out that aspect of their activities which was concerned with the placement of the deaf and dumb in employment. Such financial aid, Maclachlan suggested, should be made conditional on the money granted being used only for the purposes connected with placement and on the understanding that the missions would co-operate fully with the schools responsible for the training of the deaf and dumb. Proper co-ordination of effort between the Public Assistance Committees and the Education Committees, would thereby be secured. Maclachlan also recommended that, at the same time, the opportunity might be taken of bringing to the notice of the Public Assistance Committees the suggestions made by Eichholz regarding the desirability of bringing together, so far as possible, deaf and dumb inmates of poor law institutions and mental hospitals, the utilisation of the services of the missionaries with regard to the welfare of such persons, and the importance of securing an expert interpreter in all cases in which it was proposed to certify deaf individuals as mentally deficient or incapable. (75)

Sir George Newman, The Chief Medical Officer at the Ministry of Health, endorsed Maclachlan's statement to the effect that he concurred with the whole of the Minute and expressed his view that, "the practical suggestions made by Dr. Eichholz can, I think, be best implemented in our ordinary stride and not much by ad hoc action as for the blind". (75)

Maclachlan's proposals were implemented on May 22nd 1933, when the Ministry of Health issued two Circulars numbered 1337 and 1337(a). The latter Circular, addressed to Maternity and Child Welfare Authorities, dealt with Eichholz's suggestion that more could be done through the public health services with regard to the "early and

continuous treatment" of infants suffering from ear defects with a view to the prevention of deafness and deaf mutism in later life. (76)

Three further recommendations made by Eichholz were communicated to County and County Borough Councils by Circular 1337. These, as Maclachlan had suggested, related to the classification and visitation of deaf and dumb inmates of poor law institutions and mental hospitals; the importance of the presence of an expert interpreter to obviate a mistaken diagnosis in connection with the certification of a deaf and dumb person and the need for local authorities to make wider use of the powers given in Section 67(b) of the Poor Law Act of 1930 in order to provide the missions with the financial resources required to extend their employment activities. Councils were encouraged to ascertain what additional monetary assistance was needed to enable the missions to effectively perform their placement work, and the Circular stated that the Minister would be prepared to consent to any reasonable contribution for this purpose. Suitable conditions were, however, to be imposed by the authorities, both to ensure that the grants made by them were exclusively devoted to "placement work" and also to establish proper co-operation between the missions and the schools with regard to deaf school leavers. (77)

At first the response on the part of the local authorities to Circular 1337 was disappointing. In answer to a question in the Commons on July 19th 1934, the Minister of Health, Sir Hilton Young, stated that during the previous year thirty County or County Borough Councils had

(76) Ministry of Health, Circular 1337(a). May 22nd 1933.
"The Prevention of Deafness"

(77) Ministry of Health, Circular 1337. May 22nd 1933.
"The Deaf and Dumb"

applied for permission to make subscriptions to missions in addition to nine other Councils which were already making annual contributions. The Minister further declared that he considered this response to be inadequate and that, in consequence, he was taking further action with a view to securing closer attention by the local authorities to the suggestions made in Circular 1337.⁽⁷⁸⁾ In fact, the Minister had received a deputation, led by Lord Charnwood, representing the National Institute for the Deaf and various allied agencies^(a), on the previous May 30th. Among the proposals made by Sir Hilton Young was that a further discussion should be arranged with officers of the Ministry with particular reference as to how the National Institute might assist the missions to present their case for further financial assistance to the local authorities.⁽⁷⁹⁾ This discussion was held in June 1934, when Maclachlan admitted that the replies to Circular 1337 had been generally disappointing, although there was evidence of progress in London, including the Home Counties and in Lancashire. With regard to the local authorities that did not seem to appreciate the intentions of Circular 1337, the Ministry was endeavouring to bring the position home to them, either by correspondence or by arranging for the General Inspector to interview the local Public Assistance Officer and, if necessary, the Chairman of the Public Assistance Committee.⁽⁸⁰⁾

(78) Hansard. July 19th 1934. Col.1253

(a) These Agencies were:-

1. The Counties Associations for the Deaf.
2. The Council of Church Missioners to the Deaf.
3. The National College of Teachers of the Deaf.
4. The British Deaf and Dumb Association.

(79) Memorandum (unsigned) dated June 6th 1934 relating to the deputation.
On M.H.55/126. P.R.O.

(80) Memorandum by Maclachlan entitled "The Deaf and Dumb"
On M.H.55/126. P.R.O.

In fairness to the authorities, Circular 1337, gave no direction regarding the basis on which the contributions should be made, so that initially there was hesitation on the part of the Councils in making grants and diversity in their methods of giving assistance. Most Public Assistance Committees which made donations did so on a per capita basis of the known deaf population resident in their area; others paid according to the expenses involved in placement work. Some authorities even suggested that they should pay so much "per job found". This latter method was not widespread because it offered an inducement to missionaries to push their deaf and dumb in and out of jobs, since a high labour turnover was profitable.⁽⁸¹⁾ In a document prepared by the National Institute for the Deaf for the guidance of the missions it was stated that there were three ways in which local voluntary societies might equip themselves to act, in effect, as employment exchanges for the deaf. Firstly, they could appoint a separate officer whose sole duty would be the placement of the deaf in employment. The full cost of his salary and expenses could then be charged to the Public Assistance Committee, or Committees, of the areas served. Secondly, the mission could increase its staff to carry on all its activities, charging that proportion of their time spent on placement work to the Public Assistance Committee. Thirdly, a request could be made for a fixed per capita grant based on the known number of the deaf and dumb in the area.⁽⁸²⁾ In the event, the latter method became generally adopted and a per capita grant of ten shillings became practically universal.

(81) Rev. R.G. Young, a former missionary to the deaf, in a personal communication.

(82) National Institute for the Deaf. Circular 1337 (Ministry of Health) Memorandum by the Secretary, A.J. Story (undated)

TABLE No. 19

Statement of Contributions made by Councils of Counties and County Boroughs in England and Wales under Section 67(b) of the Poor Law Act, 1930 for the funds of local welfare societies for the deaf and dumb to which the Minister of Health either gave his formal sanction or approved under perpetual consents 31.3.1940 - 31.3.1945.

YEAR ENDING	NUMBER OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES MAKING CONTRIBUTIONS			CONTRIBUTIONS				NUMBER OF SOCIETIES ASSISTED							
	County Councils	County Borough Councils	Total	County Councils		County Borough Councils		Total	By 6 or more LAs	By 5 LAs	By 4 LAs	By 3 LAs	By 2 LAs	By 1 LA	Total
				£	s d	£	s d									£	s d
31.3.1940	26	36	62	1870	5 1	1745	5 5	3615	10 6	-	4	3	12	19	38
31.3.1941	31	49	80	2263	9 11	2355	16 8	4619	6 7	1	2	9	11	23	49
31.3.1942	35	42	77	2453	11 7	1957	1 9	4410	13 4	1	6	5	14	18	45
31.3.1943	33	42	75	2282	10 2	2097	15 4	4380	5 4	2	3	7	15	21	48
31.3.1944	37	42	79	1732	6 11	2101	5 7	3833	11 6	1	6	6	16	20	49
31.3.1945	38	45	83	2204	12 7	2489	16 5	4694	9 0	1	4	6	13	20	45

Source: Returns furnished by the Ministry of Health to the National Institute for the Deaf found among the papers of the late E. Ayliffe, Esq.

A second factor which inhibited the local authorities in giving assistance was that, in some cases, the local mission was afraid that the receipt of financial assistance would result in some loss of autonomy due to the Public Assistance Committee stipulating that they should have some representation on the management committee of the voluntary society.

Nevertheless, the number of Councils making grants and the aggregate amounts given grew steadily. The 1934-35 Report of the Ministry of Health mentioned that during the year under review, contributions amounting to £536 had been made by 14 authorities for the placement work of 8 missions.⁽⁸³⁾ In 1935-36, the total amount of contributions from 48 local authorities in England and Wales to the funds of 38 societies was £2,339.⁽⁸⁴⁾ Grants in respect of the year to March 31st 1937 totalled £4,059.⁽⁸⁵⁾ In 1938 the figure was £4,842.⁽⁸⁶⁾ Details for 1939 do not seem to be available but the particulars for 1940 to 1945 inclusive are tabulated in Table 19.

The Eichholz Report was significant for at least four reasons. Firstly, the investigation that preceded the Report was commissioned by the Ministry of Health and the Board of Education, "largely with a view to staving off the continued representations of the deaf and dumb community".⁽⁸⁷⁾ Nevertheless, it was the first official attempt

(83) Ministry of Health, 16th Annual Report, 1934-35. p.126

(84) Ministry of Health, 17th Annual Report, 1935-36. p. 55

(85) Ministry of Health, 18th Annual Report, 1936-37. p.47

(86) Ministry of Health. Typewritten list of Contributions to Deaf and Dumb Missions by the Minister of Health from April 1st 1937 to March 31st 1938 sent to the National Institute for the Deaf.

(87) Memorandum by E.A.Hitchman, Private Secretary, Ministry of Labour, of a meeting between himself and Gordon Lee of the Ministry of Labour and Mr.Turnball of the Board of Education June 14th 1932.

On LAB.20/26. P.R.O.

after the Royal Commission on the Blind, Deaf and Dumb of 1886, to review the educational needs of the deaf. It was also the first investigation carried out by Government departments into the condition and needs of the deaf in post-school life, i.e. the deaf and dumb, and persons deafened by disease or accident.

Secondly, in the field of deaf education the recommendations that enquiries should be instituted into the formulation of standards to be applied to children presented for admission to schools or classes for the partially deaf and the effectiveness of the educational and communication methods utilised and taught in the schools for the deaf and dumb, led to the setting up by the Board of Education of a Committee to inquire into and report on "The medical, educational and social aspects of the problems attending children suffering from defects of hearing not amounting to total deafness".⁽⁸⁸⁾ The terms of reference of the Committee were wider than those contemplated by Eichholz since they covered not only those children who needed special educational provision but also pupils who were "suffering from minor degrees of deafness not of sufficient severity to render them unable to benefit by education in the ordinary school".⁽⁸⁹⁾ The Committee published its Report in 1938 and its conclusions and recommendations were summarised under six headings namely, ⁽⁹⁰⁾

- (a) Classification
- (b) Causation, prevention, ascertainment and treatment
- (c) Education
- (d) Preparation for employment, placement and after-care
- (e) Training and qualifications of teachers
- (f) Hearing aids.

(88) Board of Education, Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Problems Relating to Children with Defective Hearing. H.M.S.O.1938. p.1

(89) Board of Education, Health of the School Child. Annual Report of the Chief Medical Officer of the Board of Education for 1933 pp.90-95

(90) As 88, Chapter 10, pp.125-133.

A particularly important recommendation was that children classified as Grade IIB or partially deaf, should, unless within reach of a school for the deaf which they could attend as day pupils in separately organised classes, be accommodated in one or more specially established schools for the partially deaf.

Action was also taken by the Ministry of Health with regard to the suggestion made by Eichholz concerning the blind deaf. The 1933-34 Report of the Ministry stated that a Central Advisory Committee had been established composed of representatives of workers for the blind and deaf, including members of the National Institutes for the Blind and Deaf respectively and that this Committee was endeavouring to arrange for the regional development of work on behalf of persons suffering from the double affliction. (91)

Finally, the issue of Circular 1337 represented the first official encouragement to local authorities to make contributions to the funds of voluntary societies for the adult deaf. The issue of the Circular may be regarded as one of a number of measures introduced by the State, between the Wars, to reduce the high unemployment level amongst persons with handicaps. Other such devices were the Blind Persons Act with its requirement that local authorities should prepare "schemes" which included provision for the employment, where appropriate, either in workshops or by means of home workers arrangements, and the "Kings Roll" under which only firms employing a certain percentage of disabled ex-servicemen were permitted to tender for Government contracts. The encouragement given by the Ministry of Health to Public Assistance Committees to provide

(91) Ministry of Health, 15th Annual Report, 1933-34. p.124

financial support in aid of special placement effort for the deaf and dumb was at once a constructive attempt on the part of the State to reduce unemployment among persons so afflicted and a recognition of the inability of the Employment Exchanges to deal adequately with the problems which the placement of the deaf entailed.

That the missions benefited from such assistance is beyond question. According to figures prepared by the Ministry of Health in 1933 only 10 local authorities contributed £82 in total to the funds of 9 societies.⁽⁹²⁾ As is shown in Table 19, in 1944, 49 societies benefited. The application of the suggestions in Circular 1337 gave the missionaries greater financial stability, reduced the amount of time required by the mission staffs in respect of fund raising rather than in welfare and enabled the more progressive voluntary societies to extend and improve their activities. Perhaps the most important consequence of the Eichholz Report, however, was to bring the social problem of the deaf forcibly before the public conscience and to prepare the way for the attention to persons afflicted by deafness which was later given under the National Assistance Act of 1948.

(4) The Movement for a Deaf Persons Act

Between the years 1924 and 1944 there was a sustained attempt led by the National Institute for the Deaf to secure the passing of a Deaf Persons Act. The efforts made by the National Institute to obtain an investigation into the social and industrial conditions of the deaf and dumb which culminated in the Eichholz Report of 1932 have been described in the previous sections of this Chapter and the

(92) Ministry of Health. Typewritten list dated December 28th 1934 entitled "Subscriptions already being made" (to missions for the deaf) found among the papers of E. Ayliffe.

expectations of persons representing the interests of the deaf was that such an enquiry would result in a recommendation that legislation should be introduced which would place the deaf on a parity with the blind. The conclusion of Dr. Eichholz that there was no justification for a Deaf Persons Act giving privileges to the deaf similar to those enjoyed by the blind caused the National Institute and other supporters of the deaf to intensify their efforts to secure legislation providing for certain needs of persons suffering from the disability.

A Conference convened by the National Institute and the Counties Associations for the Deaf in December 1933 to consider, inter alia, the recommendations of the Eichholz Report, adopted four resolutions which are indicative of the objectives which the movement for a Deaf Persons Act was, at that time, seeking to achieve.

Firstly, the Government was urged to "take such steps as may be necessary by the increased use of existing powers where possible or otherwise by legislation", to give consideration to the following eight points:-

- (a) The lowering of the compulsory school age for deaf and dumb children to five years, as in the case of non-deaf children.
- (b) The implementation of the recommendations in the Eichholz Report relating to the prevention and care of deafness.
- (c) The provision of more adequate education for deafened children.
- (d) The establishment of suitable vocational training for school leavers.
- (e) Assistance in placing school leavers and adults in employment.
- (f) The granting of old age pensions at an earlier age in "hard cases".

(g) The prevention of the exploitation of the deaf.

(h) The recognition and assistance of welfare organisations for the deaf. (93)

Secondly, the Minister of Health was requested to appoint a permanent Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Deaf similar to that for the blind. (94)

The third resolution expressed the opinion that it should be mandatory for local authorities to provide such services as might be necessary to meet the needs of deaf persons and stated that, "For this purpose the Conference emphasises that legislation is essential and urges its provisions on the consideration of the Government. (95)

Finally, it was resolved that the Minister of Health and the President of the Board of Education should be petitioned to receive either jointly or separately, a deputation which would lay before them the main propositions on which the Conference was agreed. (96)

A deputation from the National College of Teachers to the Deaf, led by Lord Charnwood had in fact already presented its Memorandum to Ramsbottom, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Education on July 28th 1933. Ramsbottom had stated that with regard to the lowering of the age of admission the Board, "recognised that the claim was reasonable and would be prepared, when the opportunity arose to

(93) National Institute for the Deaf and the Counties Associations for the Deaf. Report of Proceedings at a Conference held on December 14th 1933, pp.6 and 7.

(94) As 93, p.26

(95) As 93, p.30

(96) As 93, pp.49 and 50

advocate legislation to reduce the statutory age from seven to five".⁽⁹⁷⁾ This promise was subsequently repeated to a deputation for the National Union of Teachers and in a letter to the Association of Education Committees.⁽⁹⁸⁾

As shown earlier in the present Chapter^(a), a second deputation also headed by Lord Charnwood was received by the Minister of Health on May 30th 1934. The deputation pressed for legislation to make the welfare of the deaf the duty of the local authorities and asked for the appointment of an Advisory Committee. In his reply the Minister made three main points:-

The first was that a national welfare service for the deaf could not be considered because "there was no analogy with the case of the blind in that Dr.Eichholz's Report showed that the large majority of the deaf and dumb were in employment".

In the second place, progress was to be sought, "not in the imposition of compulsory duties on the local authorities but in the encouragement of the work of such authorities on the lines proposed in Circular 1337".

Thirdly, the Minister conceded that an Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Deaf would be useful if a national welfare service for the deaf was contemplated but since, for the two reasons previously mentioned, "he did not believe that such a service should be considered

(97) Memorandum on Deputation from the National College of Teachers of the Deaf by the Parliamentary Secretary of the Board of Education on July 28th 1933.
On M.H.55/126. P.R.O.

(98) "The Teacher of the Deaf". June 1937. p.91.

(a) See page 542

there would be no advantage in appointing such a Committee".⁽⁹⁹⁾

As a result of this refusal the Parliamentary campaign for a Deaf Persons Act was given further impetus. Between July 1934 and December 1936, the Minister of Health was questioned on nine occasions as to his intentions with regard to legislation for the deaf or the appointment of an Advisory Committee.⁽¹⁰⁰⁾

In January 1935, a further Conference called by the National Institute for the Deaf was informed that Lord Charnwood had expressed his willingness to introduce a Deaf Persons Bill in the Lords which would be seconded by the Duke of Montrose. A Committee was therefore appointed "to go into the whole question of the Bill and the preliminaries in connection with it".⁽¹⁰¹⁾ The following five matters were subsequently agreed upon as being indispensable in any Act passed on behalf of the deaf:-

1. The compulsory school age of deaf children should be amended from 7-16 years to 5-16 years.
2. State assistance should be extended to all cases of disabling deafness irrespective of its origins or the age of the sufferer.

(99) National Institute for the Deaf, Typewritten Report on the Deputation from the National Institute and Counties Associations with representatives of other bodies to the Minister of Health on May 30th last. Circulated by the Secretary of the Institute on June 20th 1934.

(100) See Hansard. July 19th 1934 Col.1253; March 3rd 1935 Col.1013;
 June 6th 1935 Col.2027; June 27th 1935 Col.1286;
 Dec. 16th 1935 Col.1418; Feb. 6th 1936 Col. 340;
 June 13th 1936 Col. 314; June 27th 1936 Col.1014;
 Dec. 7th 1936 Cols.1635/6

(101) National Institute for the Deaf and the Counties Associations for the Deaf. Proceedings at a Conference held January 17th and 18th 1935. p.35.

3. County and County Borough Councils should be under compulsion to provide for the vocational training of deaf adolescents and the re-training for suitable work of "all capable adults who, by reason of deafness cannot follow their normal trade or vocation, and to make provision for the placement or replacement of these persons in industry".
4. The age qualification for old age pensions should be lowered to fifty in respect of deaf persons who, "by reason of illness or other disability are unemployable".
5. A permanent Advisory Council (with knowledge and experience of the needs of deaf persons) should be established. (102)

In general the intention seems to have been to draft a Bill which with some modifications, consisted of the substitution of the word "deaf" for the word "blind" in the Blind Persons Act.

At this stage, for some reason which the writer has been unable to discover, Lord Charnwood severed his connection with the National Institute for the Deaf and the whole matter was dropped.

In May 1939, however, the subject of a Deaf Persons Act was revived. At a further Conference convened by the National Institute, there was considerable discussion as to what should be included in any Bill to be presented to Parliament. The National Institute advocated that, as agreed by the committee appointed after the 1935 Conference,

(102) National Institute for the Deaf. Circular issued by a Joint Committee of the National Institute for the Deaf and the Regional Associations for the Deaf, dated October 1935.

the provisions of the Blind Persons Act should be modified to meet the needs of the deaf. This proposal, however, was criticised on two grounds namely, that the deaf themselves had the "strongest objection" to a measure drafted along the lines of the Blind Persons Act since the needs of the two classes of handicapped people were dissimilar and also that the provisions suggested by the National Institute had been drawn up without consultation with the missionaries to the deaf who had had no opportunity to submit suggestions as to what aspects of deaf welfare should be covered by the proposed Bill. It was therefore agreed that the National Institute for the Deaf should convene a meeting of the British Deaf and Dumb Association, the Council of Church Missioners to the Deaf and the National College of Teachers of the Deaf with the object of obtaining the views of these bodies as to the provisions which a Deaf Persons Act should contain.⁽¹⁰³⁾ Before the Conference could be arranged, however, the out-break of hostilities in September 1939 caused the matter to fall into abeyance.

During the war years, however, the National Institute was not quiescent. Evidence relating to the deaf was submitted both to the Beveridge Committee on Social Insurance and Allied Services and the Tomlinson Committee on the Rehabilitation and Resettlement of Disabled Persons.⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ It was subsequently found that many of the recommendations in the Tomlinson Report were very similar to those

(103)

National Institute for the Deaf and Regional Associations for the Deaf. Report on Conference held May 11th and 12th 1939.

(104)

National Institute for the Deaf. Annual Report 1942 pp. 14-17.

made by the Institute in a Memorandum entitled "The Deaf, their Needs and Requirements for State Action" prepared in conjunction with the National College of Teachers of the Deaf and submitted to the Beveridge Committee. When the recommendations of the Tomlinson Report were enacted in the Disabled Persons Employment Act of 1944, it was clear that many of the measures such as facilities for placement and re-training of persons disabled by deafness, which the Institute had suggested should be included in a Deaf Persons Act, had been provided for. On March 24th 1944, therefore, after consultation with the missions and other bodies concerned the Executive Committee of the National Institute for the Deaf resolved:-

That this Committee recommend to the Executive that the National Institute for the Deaf should not proceed with its efforts for a Deaf Persons Act but should do all in its power to encourage the putting into operation of the proposals made in the Beveridge and Tomlinson Reports. At the same time to press for the setting up of a Permanent Advisory Committee with the necessary knowledge and understanding of the problems and needs of those with hearing defects to consider matters referred to the Committee by the Ministries of State concerned, or the setting up of small departments in the Ministries concerned with a permanent expert official to deal with the needs of those with hearing defects. (105)

Some of the reasons why the deaf were unsuccessful in securing legislation similar to that obtained by the blind are considered in the next Chapter of this study. The changing demands made by the National Institute during the twenty years in which it was endeavouring to secure the passing of a Deaf Persons Act illustrate how, although the desired provisions might not be obtained at one time in the form of a specific Act they may be realised "piecemeal" in several separate enactments. Thus, the age for compulsory schooling for the deaf was lowered to five years by the Education (Deaf Children) Act of 1937. As mentioned above, the placement and training of deaf or deafened adults was covered

(105) National Institute for the Deaf. Minutes of Executive Committee dated March 29th 1944.

by the general provisions for persons handicapped by disability which are contained in the Disabled Persons Employment Act of 1944.

When the Advisory Council for the Welfare of Handicapped Persons was appointed in 1949 to advise the Minister of Health on questions relating to persons to whom Section 29 of the National Assistance Act applies, the National Institute for the Deaf was invited to appoint a representative.

CHAPTER VIIIEPILOGUE AND CONCLUSIONS

The final chapter of this thesis comprises two sections. The first, a brief epilogue carrying forward the study from the termination date of 1939 to take account of the welfare legislation of 1944-1948. In the second section some conclusions are drawn from the material presented in the earlier chapters.

(1) Epilogue

As shown in Chapters I to VII, the blind had by 1939 reached a privileged position among the disabled in the form of the two Blind Persons Acts of 1920 and 1938 and the minor legislation described in Chapter V. A sustained attempt had also been made to secure parity of treatment so far as it was applicable in the case of the deaf. The emphasis of social legislation during and after the War of 1939-1945 was on the establishment of comprehensive facilities available to all persons rather than the creation of separate services applicable to segregated needs or disabilities. This development was welcomed rather than opposed by the National Institute for the Blind. In 1942, an editorial in the "New Beacon" acknowledged that "The differentiation then established" (i.e. 1920) "between the blind and other handicapped persons has never been substantially justified If the Poor Law was, and if Public Assistance is inadequate or unsuitable for the blind, it is for the same reasons, though perhaps in a different degree, inadequate or unsuitable for other groups of handicapped citizens. The blind are in a sense a privileged group, but only in the sense that certain things have been done for them that might well be done for others".⁽¹⁾

(1) New Beacon. April 1942 p.56

The main legislation passed up to 1948 of special interest to blind or deaf persons under which they are or were entitled to benefit not primarily as members of a disabled group but as members of the general community are detailed below:-

(a) The Pensions and Determination of Needs Act 1943

This Act amended the basis on which the means of blind persons were calculated under the Old Age Pensions Act of 1936. A blind person was allowed to possess capital assets to the value of £400 in addition to any war savings he had acquired. The Act further laid down that financial assistance given by a local authority under the Blind Persons Acts should not be taken into account in calculating the means of blind persons. The effect was to give the local authority discretion in determining the amount to which a blind person's income should be made up and to ensure that a blind person's title to pension should not be affected by the domiciliary assistance received. This Act was repealed by the Ministry of Social Security Act 1966.⁽²⁾

(b) The Disabled Persons "Employment" Act 1944⁽³⁾ and 1958⁽⁴⁾

The 1944 Act which embodies many of the recommendations of the Tomlinson Report of 1943 has, as its purpose, the assistance of persons handicapped by some form of disablement to obtain employment suitable to their capacities and which utilises their skill to the best advantage. For the purpose of the Act a disabled person is defined as "one who on account of injury, disease or congenital deformity is substantially handicapped in obtaining or keeping suitable employment".

(2) 1966. Chapter 20. Ministry of Social Security Act.

(3) 7 & 8. George 6 Chapter 10.

(4) 6 & 7. Elizabeth 2

A Disablement Resettlement Officer is attached to every local office of the Ministry of Labour (now, 1973, the Department of Employment) for the purpose of giving advice and assistance to disabled persons in securing suitable work. The principal provisions of the Act cover:-

1. The Register of Disabled Persons
2. The Quota Scheme
3. The Designated Employment Scheme
4. Employment under Sheltered Conditions
5. Industrial Training and Rehabilitation

The passing of the Act had important consequences for the blind since on April 1st 1946 the Minister of Labour and National Service took over from the Minister of Education responsibility for making grants to local authorities in respect of the training of blind persons. Between 1946 and 1948 grant for this purpose was payable at the rates previously approved by the Minister of Education, but with effect from July 5th 1948, the Minister of Labour announced that he was prepared to pay a capitation grant at the rate of £80 per year in respect of expenses incurred by local authorities in providing or contributing towards the provision of employment facilities for "approved blind workers" in approved workshops.⁽⁵⁾ Where the actual expenses were less than £80 per head the grant would be reduced accordingly. Provision was also made for grant aid in connection with approved capital expenditure. Such grants were, however, payable only in respect of blind persons who were registered under the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act and

(5) Ministry of Labour and National Service.
Circular D.P.1560/1948. June 21st 1948.
Training of Blind Persons in Workshops for the Blind.

who had been approved by the Minister. (6)

Responsibility for the training for workshop employment of persons under 21 years of age in England and Wales remained the duty of the Local Education Authorities. In such cases the training was given not in workshops but in residential establishments of further education. (7)

In 1951, as a result of a recommendation of the Blind Persons Committee of the National Advisory Council on the Employment of the Disabled, the Minister of Labour agreed that "the long established practice" of extending the training facilities open to blind persons to partially blind individuals who were likely to become blind within a period of four years should be continued. Disablement Resettlement Officers were therefore asked to consider whether persons registered with local authorities as partially blind who were likely to become blind within the above period would benefit from one of the courses of training primarily designed for blind persons. (8) In the same year the Minister announced his intention of giving grant aid to local authorities for blind home workers who were registered as disabled persons. (9)

A number of important recommendations with regard to sheltered employment were made in 1956 by the Piercy Committee on the Rehabilitation,

(6) Ministry of Labour and National Service
Circular D.P.1561/1948. August 28th 1948
Employment of Blind Persons in Workshops for the Blind.

(7) Ministry of Education. Circular 68, November 12th 1945.
"Training of Disabled Persons".

(8) Ministry of Labour and National Service
Circular D.P.1247/1950. May 21st 1951.
Training and Employment of Partially Sighted Persons.

(9) Ministry of Labour and National Service
Circular D.P.1373/1949. March 21st 1951
Employment of Blind Persons in Home Workers Schemes.

Training and Resettlement of Disabled Persons. The Committee expressed the view that sheltered workshops whether for blind or sighted disabled should cater only for persons "able to make a significant contribution to production"⁽¹⁰⁾ and that separate arrangements should be made for "those who are capable of only a modicum of effort and industry"; that a distinction should be made between disabled people in the employment field and those who were not and that the powers of the local authority to provide work for the former category should be exercised under the Disabled Persons Act 1944 under the guidance of the Ministry of Labour.⁽¹¹⁾ This latter recommendation was implemented by Section 3 of the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act of 1958. As from January 1st 1959 therefore the powers of local authorities to provide sheltered employment which were formerly exercised under the National Assistance Act of 1948 are now discharged under the Disabled Persons (Employment) Acts.

The above legislation seems to have been of more value to the blind and the hard of hearing than the deaf. In 1962, Lysons reported that while 7,979 persons classified as "deaf without speech" had registered^(a), the number of hard of hearing people on the Register of Disabled Persons as at the same date was 16,639.⁽¹²⁾ One possible

(10) Report of the Committee of Inquiry on the Rehabilitation, Training and Resettlement of Disabled Persons. Cmd. 9883. 1956. Para.199 p.48 and Para.200 p.49.

(11) As 10. Para.201 p.49, Para.205 p.50 and Para.207 p.51.

(a) As at December 31st 1957, 15,613 adults in this category had voluntarily registered with local authorities under schemes made under the National Assistance Act 1948. Of these persons 2,251 were over 65. See Report of the Working Party on Social Workers. H.M.S.O. 1959. Para.285. p.72

(12) Lysons, C.K. Some Aspects of the Historical Development and Present Organisation of Voluntary Societies for Adult Deaf Persons in England. Unpublished M.A. Thesis. Liverpool 1965. p.218

reason for the failure of the deaf to register is that due to the success of their welfare officers in placement work, employment is obtained without difficulty. A further factor is that registration gives no financial benefit to the deaf person.

(c) The Education Act 1944 and Supplementary Regulations. (13)

This Act places a duty on every Local Education Authority to provide schools "sufficient in number, character and equipment, to afford all pupils opportunities for education offering such variety of instruction and training as may be desirable in view of their different ages, abilities and aptitudes, and of the different periods for which they may be expected to remain at school". The Act itself does not specifically mention the blind or deaf or other disabilities but provides that "the Minister shall make Regulations defining the several categories of pupils requiring special educational treatment and making provisions as to the special methods appropriate for the education of each category". This section of the Act was implemented by Regulations relating to ten classes of "handicapped" pupils which were issued by the Ministry of Education in 1945 and have since been revised. The Regulations recognized two classes each of pupils with visual and auditory defects. In 1945 these categories were:-

- (a) Blind Pupils, that is to say, pupils who have no sight or whose sight is or is likely to become defective that they require education by methods not involving the use of sight.
- (b) Partially Sighted Pupils, that is to say, pupils who by reason of defective vision cannot follow the normal regime of ordinary schools without detriment to their sight or to their educational development, but can be educated by special methods involving the use of sight.

(13) 7 and 8. George 6. Chapter 31.

- (c) Deaf Pupils, that is to say, pupils who have no hearing or whose hearing is so defective that they require education by methods used for deaf pupils without naturally acquired speech or language.
- (d) Partially Deaf Pupils, that is to say, pupils whose hearing is so defective that they require for their education special arrangements or facilities but not all the educational methods used by deaf pupils. (14)

The Regulations also lay down rules relating to the size of classes, qualifications of teachers, premises, organisation of the schools and the admission of pupils.

In 1953, "partially deaf" pupils were redefined as "pupils who have some naturally acquired speech and language but whose hearing is so defective that they require for their education special arrangements or facilities although not necessarily all the educational methods used for deaf pupils." (15)

In 1962, however, the Minister considered that new developments in the education of children with impaired hearing involving aids and other auditory equipment in stimulating the use of even a small amount of hearing, had made it necessary to reconsider the suitability of the definitions contained in the Regulations then in force. Accordingly the definitions "deaf" and "partially deaf" were again revised as follows:-

- (a) Deaf Pupils, that is to say, pupils with impaired hearing who require education by methods suitable for pupils with little or no naturally acquired speech or language.
- (b) Partially Hearing Pupils, that is to say, pupils with impaired hearing whose development of speech and language, even if retarded, is following a normal pattern and who require for their education special arrangements or facilities though not necessarily all the educational methods used for deaf pupils.

(14) S.R. and O. No.1076.1945. Education, England and Wales Handicapped Pupils and the School Health Service.

(15) S.I.1156. The School Health Service and Handicapped Pupils Regulations 1953.

As the Minister of Education pointed out, "By substituting the term "partially hearing" for "partially deaf" it has been possible to reflect a more positive approach to the use of residual hearing and in this way underline the importance of early diagnosis".⁽¹⁶⁾

Section 34 of the Act provides that it is the duty of every local authority to ascertain what children in their area require special educational treatment. For this purpose any authorised officer of a local authority may serve notice in writing upon the parent of any child who has attained the age of two years requiring him to submit the child for examination by a medical officer of the authority for advice as to whether the child is suffering from any disability of mind or body, and the nature and extent of such disability. A request for such an examination made by a parent must be granted unless in the opinion of the Authority it is unreasonable.

(d) The National Health Service Act 1946 and Amendments.⁽¹⁷⁾

This Act laid upon the Minister of Health a duty to "promote the establishment of a comprehensive health service designed to secure improvement in the physical and mental health of the people and the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of illness and for that purpose to provide or ensure the provision of services in accordance with the Act".

As originally conceived the Act was intended to provide a complete medical service, mostly free of charge, at the time it was required for every person in England and Wales. A number of amending

(16) S.I.2073. Handicapped Pupils and Special School Amending Regulations 1962.

(17) 9 and 10. George 6. Chapter 81.

Acts have, however, been passed e.g. 1949⁽¹⁸⁾ (giving power to recover the cost of treatment from persons not ordinarily residing in Great Britain) and 1951⁽¹⁹⁾ (permitting a charge to be made for prescriptions) which have modified the original intentions.

The services administered under the Act fall into three distinct groups namely,

- (a) The hospital and specialist services.
- (b) The general practitioner services.
- (c) Services administered by the local authorities.

The Hospital Eye Service, staffed by specialists, is provided by the hospitals. Provision is made for the testing of sight and, if necessary, the supply of glasses under the Supplementary Ophthalmic Service Scheme. In 1943, the Inter-Departmental Committee on the Rehabilitation and Resettlement of Disabled Persons suggested that "the supplying, at the public expense but on a recoverable basis" of artificial hearing aids should be examined by the Ministries of Health and Pensions.⁽²⁰⁾ This recommendation was adopted and the Medresco hearing aid is among the appliances which may be issued under the Act on free loan.

- (e) The National Insurance⁽²¹⁾ and National Insurance (Industrial Injuries) Acts 1946⁽²²⁾ and Amendments

Most of the scheme of social insurance proposed in the Beveridge Report of 1942 is contained in these two Acts. Under the National

(18) 12, 13 and 14 George 6. Chapter 93

(19) 14 and 15 George 6. Chapter 31

(20) Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on the Rehabilitation and Resettlement of Disabled Persons.
Cmd. 6415. H.M.S.O. 1943. Para.100. p.38

(21) 9 and 10 George 6. Chapter 67

(22) 9 and 10 George 6. Chapter 42.

Act all persons above the school leaving age and below the age of retirement are required to become one of the three classes of contributors unless otherwise exempted. Exemption only applied to persons with very small incomes (initially £104 per annum) or married women, who could exercise an option whether or not to pay contributions. Where a person had an income in excess of £104 by reason of an old age or blind person's pension he was not regarded as being in receipt of the specified figure. The Act also provided that exemption from contributions by virtue of Regulations may be made for periods of unemployment or incapacity for work. Unless specifically exempted as a result of an individual application unemployed blind persons with an income of less than £104 per year were liable to pay contributions as Class 3 (non-employed) contributors.⁽²³⁾

Pensions under the Old Age Pensions Act 1936 (which governed blind persons pensions) ceased to be payable to persons other than the blind, except those who had attained the age of 55 before September 30th 1946.

The National Insurance (Industrial Injuries) Act 1946, which, like the National Insurance Act came into operation on July 5th 1948, substituted for the Workmen's Compensation Acts of 1925 and 1945 "A system of insurance against personal injury caused by an accident arising out of and in the course of a persons employment and against prescribed diseases and injuries due to the nature of a persons employment and for purposes connected therewith". An industrial disease does not qualify as a personal injury by accident where it is the result of a gradual

(23) Ministry of Health. Circular 150/48. August 20th 1948.
National Assistance Act 1948.

process. It is for this reason that by Section 55 of the Act the appropriate Minister may "prescribe" certain industrial diseases for particular classes of employed persons. In 1959, Regulations were issued appertaining to 42 industrial diseases among which were heat cataract, miners nystagmus and dystrophy of the cornea caused by the handling of or exposure to a number of listed substances including arsenic, tar, paraffin and soot. (24) The assessment of damages in respect of eye injuries is dealt with by Regulations issued in 1964. (25)

(f) The National Assistance Act 1948

The National Assistance Act began by stating categorically that "the Poor Law shall cease to have effect". In fact the Act not only repealed the Poor Law legislation then extant, but also other legislation which had modified or replaced the Poor Law such as the Unemployment Assistance Act of 1934, the Old Age and Widows Pensions Act of 1940 and the Blind Persons Acts of 1920 and 1938 except for Section 1 of the latter Act which related to the payment of non-contributory pensions to blind persons at the age of forty. In 1947 Bevan declared that the Government wished to approach the residual problem of persons not covered by the scheme of national insurance such as the chronic sick, the blind and old persons not qualified by contributions for contributory old age pensions, by making monetary help a national and welfare a local responsibility. (26)

(24) S.I.1959. No.467. The National Insurance (Prescribed Diseases) Regulations 1959.

(25) S.I.1964. No.504. The National Insurance (Industrial Injuries) Benefit Regulations 1964.

(26) Hansard. November 24th 1947. Col.1604 .

In keeping with this policy the Assistance Board became responsible for the maintenance of the blind while the local authorities were charged with the duty of making special schemes for the training and welfare of the blind both domiciliary and otherwise.

Part II of the Act laid down that the National Assistance Board should be responsible for assisting persons who were without resources to meet their requirements or whose resources (including benefits received under the National Insurance Acts) required to be supplemented in order to meet such needs. Section 5(4) of the Act specifically stated that special scales would be prescribed for blind persons and was implemented by Regulations issued shortly after the National Assistance Act had received the Royal Assent. These Regulations provided for two types of scale. The "ordinary" scale rates were applicable to all, except blind and tubercular persons in respect of whom "special" rates applied. Initially these two sets of rates were as follows:- (27)

Scales of National Assistance 1948
(To which was to be added an allowance for rent)

	<u>Before July 5th 1948</u>		<u>After July 5th 1948</u>	
	<u>Unemployment Assistance</u>	<u>Supplementary Pensions</u>	<u>Ordinary</u>	<u>Special</u>
	s. d	s. d	s. d	s. d
Married couple	31. 0	35. 0	40. 0	55. 0 *
Single householder	18. 0	20. 0	24. 0	39. 0
Other persons				
Aged 21 or over	15. 6	17. 6	20. 0	39. 0
" 18-21	} 12. 6	} 12. 6	17. 6	30. 0
" 16-18			15. 0	25. 0
" 11-16	10. 6	10. 6	10. 6	10. 6
" 5-11	9. 0	9. 0	9. 0	9. 0
" under 5	7. 6	7. 6	7. 6	7. 6

* 65/- when both husband and wife were in the special classes.

(27) S.I.1948. No.1334. National Assistance (Determination of Need) Regulations, 1948.

In the case of an application by a blind individual for assistance under the National Assistance Act the National Assistance Board required to know whether the person concerned had been registered or had applied for registration as a blind person and in 1948 the Minister of Health expressed his confidence that local authorities would furnish this information if requested by the Board. (23)

Persons who had become blind due to age still qualified (subject to means) for a non-contributory old age pension at 40 instead of 70 under the Old Age Pensions Act of 1936. As indicated in the section dealing with National Insurance, the National Insurance Act of 1946 commenced the winding up of non-contributory state pensions over a period of 15 years and the statutory position after September 30th 1961 was that no one except a blind person was able to qualify for a pension if he had not reached the age of 70 by that date. No discontinuation date for blind persons was, however, specified. Old age pensions for the blind were finally abolished by the Social Security Act of 1966 which repealed Section 1 of the Blind Persons Act of 1938. All persons, including the blind, who are in need and not in full-time work are now covered by the Supplementary Benefits Scheme under which the policy of special rates for the blind has been continued.

Section 29 of the Act empowered County and County Borough Councils to make arrangements for "promoting⁺ the welfare of persons who are blind, deaf or dumb and other persons who are substantially and permanently handicapped by illness, injury or deformity or such other disabilities as may be prescribed by the Minister". In June 1948, the Minister of Health issued a Circular directing local authorities to exercise their powers under Section 29 in relation to blind persons who were ordinarily resident in their area.

At the same time the Minister declared that he did not intend "for the moment" to give a similar direction in respect of other classes of handicapped persons although he promised that the desirability of doing so would be kept under review. Local authorities were therefore required to submit schemes of welfare services for the blind not later than October 31st 1948. (28)

Although the Circular indicated the "general outline" which the Minister wished the authorities to follow in making their schemes he recognized that:-

"The blind welfare arrangements which local authorities have developed - with the co-operation of the voluntary agencies - since the passing of the Blind Persons Act of 1920, are so comprehensive that the schemes to be submitted will consist of little more than a statement of the arrangements in force, amplified by particulars of any proposals for further facilities or constructional work...." (28)

Also in 1948, the Minister of Health announced that the amounts paid by local authorities towards the cost of producing Braille literature and of holding examinations for home teachers of the blind would be replaced by grants from the Exchequer which would in addition contribute to the financial support of the Regional Associations for the Blind. (29)

In 1951 a further Circular issued by the Ministry of Health contained a model scheme relating to the provision of welfare services for persons who are deaf or dumb and for handicapped persons other than the blind or partially sighted. The Circular did, however, suggest that a scheme for the welfare of the partially sighted should be submitted by local authorities if they had not already made

(28) Ministry of Health. Circular 87/48 June 7th 1948
National Assistance Act 1948.

(29) Ministry of Health. Circular 107/48 June 23rd 1948.
National Assistance Act 1948, Contributions to Voluntary Associations for the Welfare of the Blind.

arrangements for this class in their scheme for the welfare of the blind. The Minister repeated, however, that he had no intention of making local authority provision for the deaf or dumb or other classes of handicapped persons mandatory. He was, however, ready to consider schemes submitted by local authorities wishing to exercise their powers under Section 29 of the Act with regard to these classes.⁽³⁰⁾ In 1958 further encouragement was given to County and County Borough Councils to make general provision for the handicapped. He therefore directed that "The Council of every County and County Borough shall be under a duty to exercise their powers under Section 29 in relation to persons ordinarily resident in their area who, (a) are deaf or dumb or (b) are substantially and permanently handicapped by illness, injury or congenital deformity".⁽³¹⁾ By 1962 every local authority had made a scheme, generally on the lines suggested in Circular 32/51, for the welfare of the deaf and hard of hearing.

(2) Conclusions

The conclusions drawn from the preceding pages of this thesis may be considered under two broad headings namely, (a) Some General Factors Influencing Social Policy for Blind or Deaf Persons and (b) Some Reasons for the Failure of the Campaign for a Deaf Persons Act.

(a) Some General Factors Influencing Social Policy for the Blind or Deaf

Firstly, the statement of Donnison⁽³²⁾ that "Development and change - not stability and equilibrium - are the dominant features of

(30) Ministry of Health Circular 32/51. August 28th 1951. National Assistance Act 1948 Welfare Services for other Handicapped Persons.

(31) Ministry of Health Circular 15/60. July 18th 1960.

(32) Donnison, D.V. and Valerie Chapman. "Social Policy and Administration" George Allen & Unwin Ltd. 1965. p.29.

the social services", can be illustrated from the fact that Chapters I to VI show a gradual movement away from the provision for the blind under Poor Law auspices culminating in the permissive powers given to local authorities in the Local Government Act of 1929 to give assistance other than through public assistance. In 1938 the removal of the blind from the Poor Law was generally made mandatory. Thus, over a period of 94 years from 1834, social policy towards the blind had changed from that of regarding the necessitous blind individual as a special kind of pauper to a situation regarding which Robson⁽³³⁾ writing in 1943 could state that "The combined efforts of the local and central departments (for the blind) represented a far higher level of achievement in the provision of services than anything which had been attempted in the case of the sick, the disabled, the unemployed, the aged, the orphans, the widow or even the expectant and nursing mother". This process of evolution can be seen against a wider background. During the early part of the present century legislation designed to give assistance to persons in need other than through the Poor Law took two main forms. The first was the establishment of schemes of state insurance by which people were able to secure themselves against some of the vicissitudes of life by such measures as the National Insurance Act of 1911 which provided for both health and unemployment and Widows, Orphans and Old Age Contributory Pensions Act of 1925 which gave some protection against the poverty which might accrue from age and widowhood.

(33) Robson, W.A. (Edited) "Social Security"
George Allen & Unwin Ltd. 1943. Introduction p.32.

The Blind Persons Acts of 1920 and 1938 are examples of State provision for what may be termed the "residuary problem" of those unable for one reason or another to make contributions under an insurance scheme to secure benefits as of right. They were therefore in the same tradition of the movement for the break up of the Poor Law which commenced with the Old Age Pensions Act of 1908, and was continued by the Unemployment Assistance Act of 1924 which made assistance to the unemployed a State charge and the Old Age and Widows Pensions Act of 1940 by which supplementary pensions were payable.

With the deaf, however, there was, apart from educational provision, almost a complete lack of progress in the statutory services until the passing of the National Assistance Act of 1948.

Secondly, the study, while primarily concerned with State action, also shows the importance of voluntaryism as the foundation on which statutory provision for the blind or deaf has been built. Moreover, such voluntaryism has been a continuing influence. Milnes has pointed out that before 1914 "voluntaryism reigned supreme",⁽³⁴⁾ By 1918 its position was seriously assailed. In 1919, the Departmental Committee on the Blind encouraged the development of tripartite co-operation between the Ministry of Health, the local authorities and the voluntary agencies. The clash between the National League of the Blind and the voluntary organisations was, in essence, a microcosm of the Fabian versus Charity Organisation Society controversy regarding the rôle of the State in dealing with the problem of poverty. The

(34) Milnes, Nora. "The Position of Voluntary Social Services in 1918" in Mess Henry A. Voluntary Social Services since 1918. Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner. Chapter 11. p.13.

reasons for the opposition of the League to voluntaryism have been stated on pages 106-107. The objections of the League to the local authorities using the voluntary societies as their agents were, however, unrealistic. In most cases the County and County Borough Councils were only too glad to avail themselves of the services of the voluntary bodies not only on the grounds of economy but also because outside such societies there was hardly any knowledge of the needs and problems of the blind. As shown in Chapter VII virtually the same situation, as Eichholz discovered, existed with regard to welfare provision for the adult deaf. In any event, the Advisory Committee declared in 1927 that the local authorities had generally made a better and speedier provision for the blind where a virile voluntary society for the blind had been in existence prior to the passing of the Blind Persons Act. (35)

The League also failed to give adequate consideration to two further aspects of voluntaryism. The first was the substantial contribution made by voluntary effort in supplementing state provision. One example, from many in this thesis, is the way in which the National Institute for the Blind inaugurated a "Wireless for the Blind Fund" as an extension of the benefits conferred by the Wireless Telegraphy (Blind Persons Facilities) Act of 1926. Many of the services given by national voluntary societies for the blind were outside the scope of local authorities and no statutory provision existed for them. Some of these services were the printing and publication of books in embossed type, the maintenance of the Braille library services, the supply of special apparatus for the blind, the establishment of pre-school education in

(35) Ministry of Health. Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind. Seventh Annual Report 1926-1927. p.4

respect of blind infants and the education of blind children with other mental and physical handicaps, the training of persons for special occupations such as telephony and massage and the rehabilitation of the newly blind. The second aspect of voluntary effort ignored by the League was the way in which revenue from voluntary subscriptions could augment public funds. Thus, as shown on page 449, in 1925 the income of grant earning institutions from voluntary sources amounted to £420,000, which, in the event of municipalisation, would have had to have been raised by rates or taxation. Much of this money was applied either in the capital and revenue charges of establishing and maintaining such projects as those listed above or in direct services for the blind at the local level.

Voluntaryism had, however, its negative aspects. The declaration in the Blind Person's Charter issued by the Labour Party in 1935 that "The existing system is on the whole haphazard, cumbersome and inefficient", was endorsed by the proposals described in Chapter IV, which were made by the Local Authorities Associations to rationalise the multiplicity of voluntary bodies purporting to serve the blind at the local, regional and national levels. The rôles which the Joint Blind Welfare Committee considered to be appropriate for each type of organisation are set out in Appendix II. It is also true that the appeals made by the voluntary organisations that tended to emphasise the helplessness of the blind (and the deaf) were repugnant to many visually handicapped persons. Voluntaryism, at times displayed rigidity, resistance to change, self-interest and clandestine politics and, as alleged by the National League, some exploitation of the persons served, a condescending and discriminating patronage and occasionally the abuse of power. On balance, however, the writer considers that the positive contributions of voluntaryism to both blind and deaf welfare far

outweighed its negative aspects and support the tribute paid by the Younghusband Report of 1959:- "The range, variety and continued vitality of voluntary service is impressive and encouraging: impressive in its range and variety because of the compassion and concern for others which it shows; encouraging in its continued vitality because it confirms that the voluntary spirit is still actively fulfilling its traditional role of pioneering new services and complementing the statutory provision".⁽³⁶⁾

Thirdly, the study provides examples of the ways in which a Government can obtain evidence regarding the nature and extent of a social problem such as blindness or deafness. Thus, as described in Chapter II a Royal Commission may be set up, the members of which are appointed by a Royal Warrant and charged with the task of presenting a report to be laid by Command before Parliament.^(a) A second device is the appointment of a Departmental Committee reporting to a Minister. An example of such a Committee is given on pages 139-157 of this thesis. For the reasons given on page 179, the Report of the Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind would probably have been shelved but for the public commitment made by Hayes Fisher in 1918 that the Government would make special provision for the blind, the pressure group activity between 1918 and 1920 of the Advisory Committee and the National League and, to a lesser degree, the National Institute for the Blind, the sympathy and persistence of Addison and, so far as grant aid was concerned, the political sagacity of Robert Morant.

(36) Ministry of Health and Department of Health for Scotland. Report of the Working Party on Social Workers in the Local Authority Health and Welfare Services.

(a) For an excellent discussion of the functions of a Royal Commission see Hanser, Charles D. "Guide to Decision" The Royal Commission. Bedminster Press 1965. Chapter 8.

As an alternative to a Royal Commission or Departmental Committee the Government may set up a "one man" enquiry as was the case with the investigation made by Dr. Eichholz which is described in Chapter VII. This investigation was essentially a palliative designed to enable the Government to avoid action with regard to the deaf. The major administrative criticism urged against the Eichholz Report was that, being the work of one man it lacked the "co-optation of intelligence" which is one of the characteristics of a Royal Commission or a Departmental Committee.

Finally, as distinct from ad hoc inquiries such as those mentioned above, there is the on-going advice given to a Minister by an Advisory Committee such as that for the blind which was set up by the President of the Local Government in 1918. The activities between 1918-1937 of the Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind are described in Chapter IV.

Fourthly, the study shows that, in the determination of social policy, both political and economic considerations are inter-mixed. The provision of non-contributory blind pensions by the State and the granting of domiciliary allowances by the local authorities were attempts to deal with a situation in which, through disability, blind persons had an insufficient income to meet their subsistence needs. State grants in respect of education and training and also measures for the prevention of blindness could be justified on the ground that, in the long run, money spent in making the blind economically self-sufficient or in removing the causes of blindness and treating diseases giving rise to disability was more than recovered by the subsequent savings in not having to maintain persons so afflicted from public funds. Grants were also made to voluntary societies based on the recognition that the income of such bodies derived from legacies,

donations and subscriptions was insufficient to meet the demands on their financial resources arising from an expanding need for educational and welfare provision. Once the State had accepted the principle of assisting individuals and organisations then the extent of such assistance depended not only on what was humanely desirable but also on what was economically possible.

One fact revealed in the foregoing pages is that estimates of expenditure whether in respect of pensions to blind individuals, grants to local authorities or in carrying an anticipated loss resulting from the reduction of postal charges, were always too low. Addison's original estimate of the total annual expenditure on pensions for the blind, for example was £170,000. By 1939 such pensions were costing the Exchequer some £695,000 per annum. In this context it is relevant to mention that as Abel Smith has pointed out, when Lloyd George introduced his Old Age Pensions Bill at a cost of $8\frac{1}{2}$ millions, "he had to beat off amendments which, in total, would have cost $62\frac{1}{2}$ million".⁽³⁷⁾ It is in the light of such facts that the need for Treasury control of expenditure and the concern of Ministers and Civil Servants at creating precedents as expressed in the fear that State aid to the blind would open the door to granting assistance to other classes of disabled, must be judged.

Three important sources of funds for the provision of social services are mentioned in this study. Firstly, there are the proceeds of taxation. Thus, the cost of pensions to the blind was met entirely

(37) Abel Smith.B. "Social Security" in Ginsberg M. (Ed.) Law and Opinion in England in the Twentieth Century. Stevens & Sons Ltd. 1959. p.353.

from Exchequer funds. Secondly, certain local authority services can be financed by a combination of Exchequer grant and local rates. This method has several implications for policy. When a service is only partly financed by the Exchequer the freedom of the Central Government is curtailed, to some extent, by the necessity to obtain the assent of the local authorities to its proposals. As mentioned on page 433 Maclachlan recognized that, even if the municipalisation proposals contained in the Blind Persons Act (Amendment) Bill of 1924 were enacted the majority of local authorities would simply have ignored the requirement that workshops and other institutions should be established under municipal auspices. The basis of Exchequer grants to local authorities is also important. As shown in Chapter IV the Local Government Act of 1929 substituted block for percentage grants so as to enable more assistance to be given to poorer districts at the expense of the wealthier areas. At the same time the tie that had existed between the Ministry of Health and the local authorities was almost entirely cut by the substitution of local supervision of the blind welfare services for that previously exercised by the Ministry's inspectors. The reduction of the pension age for blind persons by the Act of 1938 is an example of how the Central Government may seek to reduce the burden of local authority expenditure by means other than a direct grant. The third source of finance is that obtained from the general public by the voluntary organisations. As shown in Appendix III the estimated total expenditure in 1941 on the education of blind children and the welfare of blind civilians and ex-service personnel from statutory and voluntary sources amounted to £4,597,812 of which £809,000 was contributed by voluntary organisations.

Fifthly, a substantial amount of the source material for this thesis has been obtained from the files of Government Departments. Such files present a fascinating picture of the day to day activities of an administrative class civil servant engaged in such multifarious duties as preparing answers to parliamentary questions, briefing his Minister or superiors in readiness for deputations, drafting memoranda relating to long and short term issues, consulting with his colleagues of equal rank in other departments, minuting the outcome of their discussions and often himself, deciding matters of minor policy. One example of a higher civil servant drafting policy that would provide the basis of later legislation is found in the memorandum prepared for Wheatley, the Minister of Health in the First Labour Government by the then Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Health, Sir Arthur Robinson. Due to the fall of the Labour Government Robinson's memorandum, which is dealt with on pages 440-443, was never presented to the Cabinet but it is of importance since some of its recommendations were subsequently enacted in the Public Health Act of 1925 and the Blind Persons Act of 1938. Two important aspects of policy making from the Civil Service standpoint can be discerned in Robinson's memorandum namely, respect for precedent and concern for consistency. Precedent is revealed in the recommendation that "the Minister should encourage the closest co-operation between the local authorities and the voluntary agencies for the blind" thereby securing the best of both systems. (38) In 1921 the Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind had declared themselves to be "emphatically of the opinion that

(38) Memorandum (undated) on Blind Persons Act (1920) Amendment Bill. On M.H.55/109. P.R.O.

the best interests of the blind themselves will be served by the continuance and fostering of the voluntary side of the work", and noted with pleasure that "this is the declared policy of the Ministry".⁽³⁹⁾ Consistency is shown in the suggestion that the destitute blind should not be specifically removed from the purview of the Guardians since to do so in respect of one class of persons "would be to raise the whole question of Poor Law reform prematurely". In seeking to prevent any piecemeal provision for special classes of persons pending the reforms recommended by the Maclean Report of 1918, Robinson was setting "wider and more enduring considerations against the exigencies of the moment in order that the Parliamentary convenience of today may not become the Parliamentary embarrassment of tomorrow".⁽⁴⁰⁾

After the fall of the Labour Government of 1924 we have the interesting meeting referred to on page 443 between Robinson (Permanent Secretary) Maclachlan (Assistant Secretary) and Macgregor (Principal) at which it was decided that the proposals contained in Robinson's memorandum should be substantially modified so far as immediate action was concerned.

Sixthly, reference is made in the study to many administrative considerations which arise in the implementation of policy. A full analysis of such factors would demand more space than is available in an already lengthy thesis and it is thus only possible to mention briefly some of the issues involved.

(39) Ministry of Health. Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind. Third Annual Report 1921&1922. p.4.

(40) Royal Commission on the Civil Service 1930. Appendix VIII to Minutes of Evidence. Statement submitted by the Association of First Division Civil Servants and quoted in, Critchley, T.A. "The Civil Service Today". Victor Gollancz 1951. Chapter 5. p.80.

One such matter is the means by which guidance and direction can be given by a central department to a local authority or voluntary agency as to what should constitute the content and standard of a service. Apart from the many Circulars referred to in the text, guidance as to what should be provided and how, can be given in model schemes prepared by a Central Department. Thus Memorandum 27 B.D. issued by the Ministry of Health in 1920 indicated what local authority provision for the blind should include and, in effect, laid down a national minimum below which the standard of service should not fall. In relation to schemes, however, it is important to distinguish between what is stipulated to be mandatory and what is left to the discretion of the authority. Much of the dissatisfaction of the National League with the Blind Persons Act of 1920 stemmed from the fact that Memorandum 27 B.D. gave no guidance as to the amount of assistance to be given by a local authority to the unemployable blind living in their own homes nor through what source such assistance should be given. In consequence there was a wide variation in the amount of domiciliary allowances between areas and some authorities were content to leave the whole matter in the hands of the Guardians or Public Assistance Committees.

A second important administrative matter is that of entitlement. To whom are services available and on what terms? Should benefits be universally available or restricted to persons falling within certain classes? This, in turn, raised the question of defining the degree of disability that would qualify a person for registration under the Blind Persons Act. Such registration was itself a prerequisite for benefit. On occasion it may be desirable to omit any reference to definition. Thus, to avoid laying a duty on the presiding officer

at a polling station of obtaining proof of eligibility from an intending voter the Blind Voters Act of 1933 contained no statutory definition of blindness or any requirement that a person wishing to avail himself of its arrangements should be registered under the Blind Persons Act.

Four other criteria were laid down for the purpose of determining eligibility for a blind person's pension, namely, age, means, nationality and residence. Age and means were, however, the factors which aroused most controversy. While the National League campaigned for pensions irrespective of means to all blind persons from as early as 18 years of age the Government applied the principle, endorsed by the Advisory Committee, that blind persons should be encouraged and assisted to become, so far as possible, self-supporting. To prevent the receipt of a pension acting as a disincentive to work the minimum age was initially fixed at 50 on the ground that a person who had attained this age was unlikely to benefit from training for workshop or other employment. As shown earlier in this study the minimum age was reduced to 40 by the Blind Persons Act of 1938.

Means tested benefits were originally determined on the basis of the family means test, which remained operative until the Determination of Needs Act of 1941. As late as 1935 the Report of the Sub-Committee on unemployable blind recommended that the Blind Persons Act should be amended to enable relief given to the blind to be recovered from relatives as was the case when such assistance was given under Section 14 of the Poor Law Act of 1930. Such an amendment, the Committee opined, would encourage more local authorities to make declarations under the Local Government Act of 1929 that domiciliary assistance to the blind would be given by virtue of the Blind Persons Act and not by way of poor relief.

The question of "means" raised the equally important issue of "needs". Such measures as the free issue of licences for guide dogs and wireless receivers and reduced postal rates recognized that a blind person had to incur expenditure that did not arise in the case of his sighted contemporary. In fact, the Beveridge Committee specifically stated that "the subsistence needs of a totally incapacitated blind person may be more than those attached to many other, though not all other forms of disability".⁽⁴¹⁾ In 1938 the Blind Pensions Act laid down that, in assessing the means of a blind person, consideration should be given not only to the individual circumstances of the applicant but also to the needs of any members of his family who were dependent on him.

Seventhly, the linking of pensions for the blind with old age pensions was not without its disadvantages. Apart from the misnomer of regarding a person of 40 as having reached "old age" there were the drawbacks that a flat rate payment took no account of individual needs, that the amount was inadequate for subsistence, that the method of assessing means often lacked uniformity and that only persons who had attained the minimum age qualified for benefit subject to such other income as they possessed. To overcome these disadvantages the National Institute for the Blind suggested that the Beveridge Committee should give consideration to the alternative of a handicap allowance given in the form of either a flat rate or percentage disability payment. The conception of a handicap allowance, as the

(41) Beveridge, Sir William. Social Insurance and Allied Services. Cmd.6404. H.M.S.O. Para.169(11) p.69.

Institute pointed out, was "inherent in the existing device of augmentation of wages" and in War Pensions based on a percentage of disability." In relation to blindness the allowance would cover not only the reduction of a blind worker's earning power but also the additional expense consequential on blindness. Such a payment would be given to all registered blind persons who had completed their education and training, and would be a national charge paid through the Post Office. The whole amount of the handicap allowance which it was suggested might be fixed at the rate of £1 per week would be disregarded in any assessment of means. It was not intended, however, that the allowance should be a subsistence minimum "but rather a core payment to which would be added earnings, or compensation for earning disability, whether that be the result of old age, invalidism or other handicap additional to blindness". Finally, unlike the non-contributory pensions given under the Acts of 1920 and 1938, the handicap allowance would be based on the insurance principle. This change from a non-contributory to an insurance basis was possible because, as a result of measures for the prevention of blindness, particularly the treatment of ophthalmia neonatorum, the disability had become one of later life. It was therefore possible for an employed person to insure against the risk of blindness. In 1947 a Joint Deputation from the National Institute, the National League and the College of Teachers of the Blind was received by the Minister of National Insurance and informed that the Government was unable for two reasons to accept the principle of handicap allowances. Firstly, such allowances, if conceded, would have had to be paid to many other, if not all, classes of disabled persons. Secondly, a flat rate allowance of £1 would not meet individual needs and in many cases

supplementation would still be required. (42)

Finally, apart from central guidance and direction to local authorities and the question of entitlement many other administrative matters relating to the implementation of social services are touched on in the preceding pages of this thesis. There was for example, the issue of the Local Authority Committee in which responsibility for blind welfare should be vested. While the Advisory Committee urged County and County Borough Councils to set up separate Blind Welfare Committees on which voluntary and other interests could be co-opted only a minority of authorities adopted the suggestion. A local authority had also to decide whether to set up a directly provided or "municipalised" service or to delegate the work to a voluntary society on a full or partial agency basis. There was a need to secure consultation, co-ordination and co-operation between agencies on such matters as marketing, workshop conditions and the solicitation of public subscriptions. A similar need for consultation on matters concerning the blind existed between the local authorities. In these respects the County and later Regional Associations and the Joint Blind Welfare Committee of the Local Authorities Associations played an invaluable part. The inspection of services, particularly after the withdrawal of the Inspectors of Blind Welfare following the passing of the Local Government Act of 1929 raised problems and here again the services of the Regional Associations were invaluable. The formulation

(42) Notes of a Meeting on November 6th 1947 between the Minister of National Insurance, the Rt. Hon. James Griffiths, M.P. and a Joint Deputation from the National Institute for the Blind, the National League of the Blind and the College of Teachers of the Blind.
On Ministry of Health file 94018/1/21.

and enforcement of acceptable standards of qualification with regard to staff such as Home Teachers had also to receive attention. The problem of the migration of blind persons to areas where workshop employment, or more generous domiciliary benefit, was available also raised difficulties, particularly with regard to the interpretation of the term "ordinary resident" and inter-authority payments.

Any discussion of such questions would make these conclusions inordinately long and they are therefore referred to only in passing. The aim of this section of the conclusions has been to indicate some of the major factors affecting the development of social policy particularly with regard to the blind. Some important aspects of policy making, however, remain unconsidered. It is submitted that such factors can best be illustrated by discussing the question of why efforts to secure statutory provision were successful in the case of the blind and the converse with regard to the deaf. This question is the concern of the final section of the present study.

(b) Some Reasons for the Failure of the Campaign for a Deaf Persons Act.

As shown in Chapter VII, between 1924 and 1944 the National Institute for the Deaf waged a sustained campaign to secure the passing of a Deaf Persons Act analogous to the Blind Persons Acts of 1920 and 1938. Some reasons why the blind succeeded in obtaining special legislative provision while similar action on behalf of the deaf was refused are adduced below:-

(a) As a class the deaf are more economically self-supporting than the blind. While the deaf are able to work in open industry^(a) following

(a) More blind persons now work in open industry than in sheltered workshops. On April 1st 1955, 6,119 blind persons were in employment under ordinary conditions as against 3,108 in sheltered workshops - vide Report of the Committee of Enquiry on the Rehabilitation, Training and Resettlement of Disabled Persons. Cmd.9883. 1956. Para.265. p.65.

any occupation to which they can gain access and for which hearing is not essential, the handicap of blindness as was pointed out in 1927 and repeated in 1939, "prevents most blind persons from earning a livelihood if they are paid only what they earn on a strictly commercial basis. It is necessary, therefore, to augment their earnings from sources other than the trading account". As late as 1949 nearly 25,000 out of 36,400 blind persons between the normal working age range of 16-65 were shown by the statistical returns made by local authorities to be "unemployed". Of the 25,000 unemployed, 22,000 were placed in the category of "unemployable".⁽⁴³⁾ In contrast, even in the depressed years of 1930-1932, Eichholz considered that "in England and Wales generally employment of both (deaf) men and women reaches a high standard that is to say 77 per cent".⁽⁴⁴⁾ The Report of the Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind of 1917 recognized that State aid was essential if the employable blind were to be made industrially self-supporting and the unemployable maintained to at least subsistence level, Eichholz, on the other hand, stated categorically that no analogy between the blind and the deaf existed, and that the position of the blind was "the exact reverse of the deaf and dumb in respect of employment and, while the case for the special treatment of the blind rests almost entirely on their non-employability, no such case exists in respect of the deaf, who, given the opportunity of work are able to support themselves".⁽⁴⁵⁾ It has

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- (43) Ministry of Labour and National Service. Report of the Working Party on the Employment of Blind Persons 1951. Para.38. P.16
- (44) Eichholz, Dr.A. "A Study of the Deaf in England and Wales 1930-1932. H.M.S.O. 1932. pp.126-127.
- (45) As above p.123.

been mentioned above that the investigation carried out by Eichholz was regarded by officials of the Ministry of Health as a palliative by which further action of the claims of the deaf could be postponed and it is probable that they welcomed such statements which could be used against demands for state action. It was therefore primarily on economic grounds that the Government was able to justify the rejection of calls for special legislation for the deaf. There were, however, a number of other factors which favoured the enactment of special legislation for the blind and militated against efforts to secure similar provisions for the deaf. These further factors may now be briefly considered.

(b) The establishment in 1917 of a special department at the Local Government Board and an Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind meant that representations could easily be made on behalf of the blind to a Government Department which could, in turn, obtain expert guidance and direction as a basis for policy. As Hayes Fisher pointed out^(a) in 1917, the Advisory Committee provided connecting links with Parliament, the President of the Local Government Board (later the Ministry of Health) and through him with the Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer. In contrast, the National Institute for the Deaf had no means of making representations other than by written communications, the agency of individual Members of Parliament or through deputations. Such communications were dealt with by Civil Servants who, it may be assumed, lacked any special knowledge of the handicap and whose decisions therefore tended to be based on administrative considerations rather than a first hand knowledge of

(a) See page 163

the special problems of deaf and deafened persons. It is noteworthy that after the publication of the Eichholz Report both the National Institute and the College of Teachers of the Deaf pressed for the setting up of a permanent Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Deaf similar to that for the blind. These requests probably originated from a recognition of the fact that, as asserted on page 231, the most important influence in blind welfare between 1917 and 1939 was the Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind.

(c) The setting up of the special Department and the Advisory Committee was a direct consequence of the Report of the Departmental Committee set up by Hayes Fisher in 1914. As shown in Chapter III this Committee, together with the passing of the Blind Persons Acts of 1920 and 1938 were predominantly the results of the pressure group activity of the National League of the Blind. Two factors made the National League a more powerful and successful pressure group than the National Institute for the Deaf; firstly, its political affiliations and secondly the appeal which blindness makes to humanitarian sympathies. The political affiliations of the League with the Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party, which are mentioned on pages 134-139, enable it to be placed firmly in what Finer has categorized as the "Labour Lobby".⁽⁴⁶⁾ In fact, the only reference to the League that the writer has been able to discover in the literature relating to pressure groups is a footnote in Stewart⁽⁴⁷⁾ to the effect that the main purpose

(46) Finer, S.E. "Anonymous Empire" A Study of the Lobby in Great Britain. Pall Mall Press Ltd. 1958. Chapter 2. p.10.

(47) Stewart, J.D. "British Pressure Groups" Their Role in Relation to the House of Commons. Oxford 1958. Chapter 8. p.168.

of the League's political fund is the payment of affiliation fees to the Labour Party. The action of the League in securing the passing of motions in support of its aims at most of the Conferences of the T.U.C. held between 1902 and 1938 resulted in representations on behalf of the blind being subsequently made by the Congress to the appropriate Ministry. In using the machinery of the T.U.C. the League was thus able to forward demands that its own influence would have been insufficient to support and which were not matters of general interest to the Trade Union movement.

From its affiliation to the Labour Party the League gained the advantage of effective representation in the House of Commons. Parliamentary procedures such as Question Time, the Private Member's Bill and informal contact between Government and Opposition Members, which, as recorded on page 188, led to the setting up of an "All Party Committee" to "watch and press the Government on the subject of state aid for the blind", were all means of keeping the League's aims before the House. As shown on pages 190 and 435 a Private Member's Bill could, on occasion, concentrate the minds of both Minister and Cabinet wonderfully.

Nor were the close connections between the League and the Trade Union and Labour movements limited to Parliament. At the local level the League could exert "pressure" on both municipal authorities and voluntary agencies through its allies in the Trade Councils and Labour Party branches. In contrast, the National Institute for the Deaf as an organisation with any party-political affiliations lacked such powerful support. The relative success of the League in comparison with the National Institute for the Deaf would seem to substantiate the view that "God is on the side of the big battalions".

The appeal that blindness normally makes to humanitarian instincts was also a strong factor in enabling the League to influence public opinion in support of the blind. Thus, members of all political parties appear to have welcomed opportunities of passing legislation on behalf of the blind especially when the proposed measures, as with the Wireless Telegraphy (Blind Persons Facilities) and Blind Voter's Bills were removed from the arena of parliamentary conflict. Apart from financial considerations the opposition to the Bills sponsored by the National League derived from the proposals to substitute municipalisation for voluntary effort. Had the League been prepared to compromise on this principle it is probable that the sympathy shown by all parties to the blind would have enabled the Government of the day to have successfully introduced legislation to reduce the pension age for the blind before 1938.

The marches organised by the League in 1919 and 1936 are examples of how a pressure group may seek to influence the electorate when the outcome of parliamentary action seems to be unreliable. How much a Government may fear a national propaganda campaign which has a powerful emotional appeal is demonstrated by the strenuous efforts described on pages 464 to 475 to secure the abandonment of the march of 1936. In the event this second march organised by the League was much less successful than its predecessor of 1920 due to the fact that marches to London had begun to lose their novelty and consequent news value. A march of deaf persons would, however, have aroused no interest at all since the participants would have displayed no visible evidence of their disability and therefore been indistinguishable from non-handicapped persons.

The National Institute for the Deaf also considered that an important contributory factor leading to the passing of the Blind Persons Act of 1920 was the obvious affliction of the 2,300 men who had been blinded in the First World War. The appeal of the war-blinded is evident in the enormous public support given to St. Dunstons. The less noticeable though not less grave affliction of those who had been made deaf by the War^(a), (48) the Institute claimed, made no such popular appeal. The Institute did in fact recognize that in terms of appeal the deaf came a poor second to the blind. "A Deaf Persons Act" declared a

(a) This statement while substantially correct was not wholly true. In 1918 a "National Benevolent Society for the Deaf" was established, which among other objects, sought:-

1. To seek out and assist the deaf who are in need; especially ex-servicemen deafened through the War and to provide Homes for all who require care.
2. To collect money for a Deafened Ex-Servicemen's Fund, for a Pension and Relief Fund and for General Expenses of Management.

In his Report for 1918-1919 the Secretary of the Society stated that of the 10,000 men discharged from the Armed Forces for deafness, some 40% had returned to former employers; 10% were only slightly deaf and had obtained work; 10% had asked for training although only a small number of persons had received help in this direction from the War Pensions Committees and some 20% were out of work. In this latter category a few men were still receiving hospital treatment and the remainder were "stone deaf or nearly so".

Although the resources of the Society were small, it claimed that in the six years prior to 1925 nearly 5,000 cases had been dealt with and assistance given in connection with pensions, treatment, employment, emigration, specialists examinations and earphones in addition to monetary grants or loans made either by the Society or obtained by the Society's intervention from other available funds. In 1950 the work of the Society was taken over by the National Institute for the Deaf.

(48) National Institute for the Deaf - Memorandum headed "The Deaf Persons Act". Undated and unsigned.

memorandum prepared by the Institute, "will not be obtained by any such popular demonstration as that which helped the blind but must come as the result of educating public opinion".⁽⁴⁸⁾ While, however, the appeal of blindness is instant and obvious, the process of educating public opinion regarding the deaf is, as workers in this field have found, slow and complex.

(d) Roof, ⁽⁴⁹⁾ has drawn attention to the part played in the development of blind welfare by men and women who were themselves blind and instances the names of Rushton, Christie, Braille, Moon, Gilbert, Campbell, Armitage, Sir Arthur Pearson and Ian Fraser. To this list might be added the name of Ben Purse to whom the National League owed so much particularly in its formative phase and who deserved the tribute paid to him by G.J.Wardle which is recorded on page 139.

The movement for special legislation for the blind was pioneered, sustained and brought to fruition by the efforts of individuals such as Ben Purse and Ian Fraser who had themselves lost their sight. Collectively the National League of the Blind was able to count on the pressure exerted by a considerable number of blind persons the majority of whom seem to have been clear regarding the political objectives which they wished to attain. The movement for a Deaf Persons Act has no counterparts to Purse or Fraser but had to rely on hearing leadership provided by such men as Lord Charnwood, A.J.Story and E.Ayliffe the "Missioner" to the Liverpool Adult Deaf and Dumb Benevolent Society.

The reason for this non-participation by deaf persons themselves lies in the nature of their handicap. Even a severely hard of hearing person, especially where the degree of hearing impairment is great enough to preclude the use of a hearing aid, may experience great difficulty in communication. The problem is infinitely more serious in the case of a person who has lost his hearing before acquiring speech and who therefore may have additional audiological and linguistic disabilities to overcome. While a blind person with normal hearing can perceive the direction of sound and make an appropriate response a deaf person

(49) Roof, Madeline. "Voluntary Societies and Social Policy" Routledge and Kegan Paul 1957. Chapter 15. p.178.

must depend on sight to know when another member of the group is speaking. Additional factors such as uncertainty regarding what is being said, the fear of unintentionally interrupting another speaker or speaking either too loudly or too softly as a result of not being able to hear one's own voice, may inhibit the deaf person from participating in discussion. With profound deafness, especially where this has been present from birth, the deaf individual may be compelled to utilise the services of an interpreter. Severe hearing loss or congenital deafness is thus a greater communication handicap than blindness where group discussion is concerned and may preclude participation in meetings, committees and conferences. Gorman,⁽⁵⁰⁾ for example, has shown that a deaf person is rarely able or willing to act as spokesman for the deaf group. In consequence, either deliberately or fortuitously because of his rôle of interpreter the welfare officer for the deaf tends to adopt the rôle of spokesman and as such is frequently the only link between the deaf and the non-deaf milieu. Thus, while the campaign for a Blind Persons Act was fought mainly by the National League of the Blind, the initiative for a Deaf Persons Act came from the National Institute for the Deaf. The distinction between "of" and "for" is indicative of the relative abilities of the blind and the deaf to actively participate in political activities designed to improve their condition.

(e) The question of terminology also raised difficulties. As shown in Chapter III the definition of "So blind as to be unable to perform any work for which sight is essential", while open to criticism had

(50) Gorman, P.P. "Certain Social and Psychological Difficulties Facing the Deaf Person in the English Community" Unpublished Ph.D.Thesis. Cambridge 1960. p.252.

the merits of providing a guide that could be related by an ophthalmologist to a given standard (3/60 Snellen) of visual acuity. The terms "deaf", "partially deaf" and "hard of hearing" were, however, vague and elastic although an attempt at accurate classification of hearing defect was made by the Committee set up by Sir George Newman in 1934 to inquire into the medical, educational and social aspects of the problems attending children with defective hearing not amounting to total deafness. The Committee, however, abandoned the idea of grading by degree of hearing defect due to the number of variables involved and decided to base their grades on the type of education that should be made available. Three grades were laid down of which Grade II was divided into two sub-categories Grade IIA and Grade IIB. The latter category consisted of children who would fail to make satisfactory progress in ordinary classes in ordinary schools and who, together with Grade III which included the totally deaf, required special educational provision. The standards to be applied in assigning children to the appropriate grade in terms of decibels as measured with gramophone and pure tone audiometers, together with other such factors as speech and language development and lip-reading ability were summarised in Chapter IV of the Report which was issued in 1938. (51)

It is probable that the persons who would have come within the ambit of a Deaf Persons Act were those with a hearing loss sufficient for them to have been classified as Grade IIB or Grade III. In none of the drafts of the Bill was an attempt made to define the degree of deafness qualifying for benefit in quantitative terms. The nearest

(51) Board of Education. Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Problems relating to Children with Defective Hearing. H.M.S.O.1938.

to a suggested definition for the purpose of the proposed Act that the writer has been able to discover was "So deaf as to be unable to perform their usual occupations and to be unable to find or to be provided with other occupations which can be performed."⁽⁵²⁾ The lack of precision in this definition would clearly have rendered it unacceptable as a basis for legislation.

(f) The difficulty with regard to definition resulted in uncertainty regarding the incidence of deafness. Wells⁽⁵³⁾ suggested that the main reason why the local authorities were unwilling to support legislation for the deaf was "the unknown magnitude of the problem". The authorities had no information regarding the number of persons who would be affected by the proposed Act and consequently of the cost involved and "without this support which has never been forthcoming they refused their support". Wells regarded his own investigation as a step "towards obtaining a Deaf Persons Act". He was, however, compelled to conclude that "no method of investigation of any kind would furnish an accurate figure" although on the basis of "samples" of the incidence of deafness in various sections of the population of London which were extrapolated in respect of the total population of England and Wales he estimated that the number of persons who would be covered by a Deaf Persons Act would be approximately 150,000.

The National Institute for the Deaf was aware of the importance of supporting its case with statistics regarding the incidence of deafness and as shown in Chapter VII sent out a questionnaire on the

(52) As 48

(53) Wells, Arthur G. "An Estimate of the Incidence of Defective Hearing in England and Wales with Special Reference to a Deaf Persons Act".
British Medical Journal, July 3rd 1937. p.18.

subject to all missions for the deaf in England and Wales. The response was unsatisfactory. Some missionaries did not take the survey seriously. Others expressed reluctance to obtain the information asked for on the ground that "The Deaf objected to giving information about themselves, they thought enquiries about age, circumstances, etc. were rude and inquisitorial". (54)

In contrast, the organisations for the blind had long realised the importance of keeping registers of known blind persons. One of the objects of the seven "Unions" of institutions, societies and agencies for the blind which were set up between 1906 and 1911 was "the registration of the blind within the area". Although these registers were incomplete, they did enable an estimate of the numbers of blind persons to be made and provided a basis for the scheme of registration which became the responsibility of local authorities consequent on the passing of the Blind Persons Act of 1920.

(g) It is also evident to the writer that notwithstanding the considerable overlapping of activity to which reference has been made the voluntary agencies, schools and workshops in the field of blind welfare had, from 1905 onwards, achieved a greater unity of purpose than their counterparts concerned with the deaf. In deaf work there was considerable antipathy particularly between the schools and the missions as a result of the ^{derisive} derisive influence of the oral/manual communication controversy which had persisted from the Report of the Royal Commission on the Blind, Deaf and Dumb of 1889. Thus, as shown on page 553, in 1939, after some fourteen

(54) Barnes, F.G. Letter dated February 9th 1931 to E.Ayliffe containing proposals for a Register of Deaf Persons in England.

years effort and discussion, the various sectional interests concerned with the deaf could not reach agreement as to the provisions to be included in a Bill.

(h) Finally, none of the Governments concerned were anxious to extend separate provision for a multiplicity of disabilities.

Chamberlain had stated in 1929 that he would not advise the Government to provide a national service for the deaf, because, if such a service were set up it would be difficult to resist similar demands for other classes of handicapped persons. This policy was probably supported by the local authorities. One of the questions sent out by the Beveridge Committee was "How far, (if at all) should such types of cases as deaf persons, cripples, epileptics, chronic bronchitics and other classes of persons who may be permanently debarred from working through no fault of their own, be singled out for special consideration in the same way as blind persons?"⁽⁵⁵⁾ Of the nine replies three were favourable and six unfavourable^(a). So far as the deaf were concerned the gist of the replies was that there was a case for separate provision for persons needing domiciliary assistance. The Association of Municipal

(55) Beveridge, Sir William. "Social Insurance and Allied Services" Appendix G. Memoranda from Organisations. Cmd.6405. H.M.S.O. 1942. Paper 36. p.187.

(a) Favourable replies were received from:-
 The Convention of Royal Burghs
 City and Royal Burgh of Edinburgh
 Corporation of Edinburgh

Unfavourable replies were sent by:-
 Association of Municipal Corporations
 County Councils Association
 London County Council
 Association of County Councils of Scotland
 City of Aberdeen
 Corporation of the City of Glasgow

Corporations, however, considered that "the tendency to make separate provision for separate classes should be resisted because experience shows that this tendency creates so many anomalies that the very structure of the scheme is jeopardised".⁽⁵⁶⁾

In any event a Deaf Persons Act would have had only a short life. Apart from one section of the Act of 1938, the Blind Persons Acts were repealed by the National Assistance Act of 1948. A Deaf Persons Act would have undoubtedly suffered the same fate.

(56) As 55. Paper 37. p.192.

APPENDICES

A P P E N D I X ISchemes of the County Borough of Warrington and Bolton under theBlind Persons Act, 1920

COUNTY BOROUGH OF WARRINGTON

Scheme to Promote the Welfare of Blind Persons
Ordinarily Resident in the Borough AreaProvisionally approved by the Minister of Health and by the
Borough Council

BLIND PERSONS ACT, 1920

The Act provides that the Council shall, within 12 months after the passing of the Act (viz., 16th August, 1920), prepare and submit to the Minister of Health a Scheme for the exercise of their powers under Section 2 for promoting the welfare of Blind persons ordinarily resident in their area.

There were resident in Warrington on the 31st January, 1921, so far as we were aware, the following Blind persons:-

Ages	Trained		At present Training		Untrained		Total
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	
Under 1 year	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1 to 5 years	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
5 to 15 years	-	-	-	-	*4	*6	10
15 to 25 years	3	4	2	-	4	2	15
25 to 45 years	5	-	1	-	4	2	12
45 to 65 years	1	-	-	-	8	8	17
65 upwards	1	-	-	-	9	10	20
Age not known	-	-	-	-	1	2	3
	10	4	3	-	31	30	78

* 8 of these are attending certified Schools for the Blind

In addition to the 78 cases there is one male, 19 years of age, whose eyesight has improved to such an extent that he is now able to work as a Hairdresser.

Nine of the 78 cases (6 males, 3 females) are in the Whitecross Infirmary.

HOME WORKERS

It shall be the duty of the Local Authority to make suitable provision wherever practicable for Home Industrial occupations. Proper records as to registration and work executed in the homes shall be kept of all home workers.

HOME TEACHING

It shall be the duty of the Local Authority to provide, where necessary, a suitable number of Home Teachers, and the Local Authority shall make provision for the efficient training of such Home Teachers in such cases as the Local Authority shall decide.

REGISTRATION

It shall be the duty of the Local Authority to make arrangements for the organisation of a proper system of registration and classification of all Blind Persons within the area, and full records, including medical history, shall be obtained and kept up to date. All persons who fall within the definition of Blindness as prescribed in Section 1 of the Act, viz. "so blind as to be unable to perform any work for which eyesight is essential" shall be duly recorded.

SOCIAL WELFARE

It shall be the duty of the Local Authority to make provision, as is deemed suitable, for the social and moral welfare of the Blind in the area, and for this purpose may provide suitable literature, comforts for invalids, as recommended by the Medical Officer, and organise, from time to time, social functions, concerts, lectures and visits to the country, as the Authority may think fit.

MEDICAL SERVICES

It shall be the duty of the Local Authority to provide for the examination of all Blind Persons and to record the results of all such medical examinations on forms to be prescribed by the Local Authority, and which forms shall be part of the records of the Authority.

GENERAL

It shall be the duty of the Local Authority to do all such other lawful things as may be necessary for carrying into effect within the area of the County Borough of Bolton the provisions of Section 2 of the Blind Persons' Act, 1920.

APPOINTED DAY

This Scheme shall come into operation fourteen days after the date of its approval by the Minister of Health.

28th July, 1921.

Kind of training received by the trained persons		Kind of training being given to those at present in Institutions	
Basket-making	6	Piano Tuner	1
Mat-making	2	Basket-making	1
Chair-caning and Knitting	2	?	1
Brush-making	1		
Piano-tuning	1		
Woodworking	1		
Music	<u>1</u>		
Total	<u>14</u>	Total	<u>3</u>

The requirements of the Blind community under Section 2 are set out in Paragraph 4, Page 2, of Memo. 27, issued by the Ministry of Health in September, 1920, under the following headings:-

- (a) Children under 5 years of age.
- (b) Education and training of children, young persons and adults.
- (c) Employment in workshops.
- (d) Home workers.
- (e) Hostels.
- (f) Home teaching and visiting.
- (g) Homes (mainly for aged and infirm who require provision).
- (h) Unemployable (relief, etc.).
- (i) Registration.
- (j) Miscellaneous (provision of literature, etc.).

It does not appear practicable, however, in a town the size of Warrington to suggest that provision could be made at once under all these headings, but it may be possible at a later date to combine with other areas for some of the work or to contribute to existing Institutions in other districts.

It is suggested that the following Scheme be submitted for the approval of the Ministry of Health:-

(1) CHILDREN UNDER 5 YEARS OF AGE

These will be dealt with as in the past through our Health Visitors. It is in this age period that much valuable preventive work can be done. In this connection it is noteworthy that out of 99 cases of Ophthalmia Neonatorum (a very dangerous form of inflammation of the eyes occurring in the new-born child) notified to us in the past eight years, only five cases of Blindness have resulted.

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BOLTON

First Draft of Scheme to be submitted to the Minister of Health under Section 2 of the Blind Persons Act, 1920.

The following Bodies are at present engaged in maintaining, aiding or supervising the work in connection with the Blind:-

1. The Local Education Authority.
2. The Bolton Schools and Workshops for the Blind.
3. The Guardians of the Poor.

The Scheme provides for:-

1. Blind Children under 2 years of age.
2. Blind Children over 2 and up to 5 years of age.
3. Blind Children over 5 and up to 16 years of age.
4. Blind Persons over 16 years of age.

Education and Training of Children under 16 years of age.

It shall be the duty of the Local Authority -

1. To make provision for Blind Children under 2 years of age where the home circumstances and conditions are unsatisfactory. Such children shall be dealt with by arrangement with the Public Health Committee, and the necessary supervision shall be exercised by the School Nurses attached to the Local Education Authority.
2. To make provision for Blind Children over 2 and up to 5 years of age, where the home circumstances and conditions are unsatisfactory. Such children shall be dealt with by the Local Education Authority; if possible, and it being necessary, a Nursery School or Department shall be attached to the Thomasson School for the Blind. It is to be distinctly understood that Blind Children are to be allowed to remain with their parents so long as they are adequately and properly cared for.
3. To make provision for Blind Children over five and up to 16 years of age where the home circumstances and conditions are unsatisfactory. Such children shall be dealt with by the Local Education Authority, and provision made in the Thomasson School for the Blind or elsewhere, if need be.

Education and Training of Young Persons over 16 years of age and Adults.

It will be necessary and essential if Blind Persons are to be adequately equipped for remunerative employment to provide further education (Secondary or Technical) beyond the age of 16. It is equally essential that persons who become blind in adult life should also have similar provision made for them. For this purpose, therefore -

It shall be the duty of the Local Authority to make provision for the suitable higher education for the special training by skilled teachers of young persons between the ages of 16 and 21. Such higher education and special training shall be undertaken by the Local Education Authority, and at least one whole school day per week shall be devoted to this purpose. Classes to be provided, if necessary, separately for boys and girls, due care being taken that adequate provision shall be made for the physical education and development of all such Blind Persons.

It shall be the duty of the Local Authority to make provision or aid in the provision at approved Institutions for the suitable training in industrial or other occupations of all Blind Persons between the ages of 16 and 21, the ordinary workshop hours and conditions being observed.

It shall further be the duty of the Local Authority to make provision, where necessary, for any Blind Person up to the age of 50 who is in need of vocational training for particular occupations, and who can reasonably be expected to benefit thereby, such selected occupations having been previously sanctioned by the Local Authority. Where desirable, provision of physical instruction shall be made for Blind Persons over 21 years of age. Where it is found necessary, and where pupils display exceptional ability, and where further training cannot be provided locally, it shall be the duty of the Local Authority to maintain such pupils during the necessary period of training in Institutions which are specially organised for the particular purpose.

EMPLOYMENT FOR ADULT BLIND WORKERS

It shall be the duty of the Local Authority to find work for the medically certified efficient Blind in the area, and to make provision for the earnings of the Blind to be supplemented on the principles recommended by the Advisory Committee of the Ministry of Health by such a sum per week as may from time to time be approved by the Local Authority.

It shall be the duty of the Local Authority to provide or aid in the provision of Workshops for the Blind or for additional Workshops when required. Small Workshops will only be encouraged as branches of a central or larger organisation, and advantage shall be taken of the experience and help of the Bolton Schools and Workshops for the Blind.

HOSTELS

It shall be the duty of the Local Education Authority to make provision where, in the opinion of the Authority, the home circumstances and conditions are unsatisfactory, for maintaining in suitable hostels or elsewhere all Blind Persons from 16 to 21 years of age receiving instruction in an approved Institution.

It shall also be the duty of the Local Authority to maintain or aid in the maintenance in suitable hostels or elsewhere, all employable Blind Persons over the age of 21 where the home circumstances and conditions, in the opinion of the Authority, are unsatisfactory. Where such Blind Persons are in employment, the rates of maintenance to be paid by such Blind Persons shall be determined by the Local Authority.

HOMES

It shall be the duty of the Local Authority to provide homes for the care and maintenance of all adult Blind Persons who, owing to age or infirmity, are incapable of work and are in need of accommodation which cannot be provided otherwise than in an Institution.

BLIND PERSONS IN NEED OF ASSISTANCE

It shall be the duty of the Local Authority to appoint a Blind Persons' Assistance Sub-Committee consisting of nominated members of the Local Authority (4) one of whom shall be a Blind Person; the Local Education Authority (3); the Bolton Schools and Workshops for the Blind (3); and of the Board of Guardians (3); and all applications by Blind Persons who require pecuniary or medical aid shall be referred to the above-named Sub-Committee. Applications for such aid may be made to the Relieving Officers of the Board of Guardians, or to the Bolton Schools and Workshops for the Blind, or to the Local Authority, provided that nothing contained herein shall be deemed to relieve the Board of Guardians through their Relieving Officers of the statutory duties with respect to the relief of all such temporary cases, whether temporarily urgent or otherwise, and all such applications shall be reported forthwith to the Blind Persons' Assistance Sub-Committee. The duties of the Blind Persons' Assistance Sub-Committee shall be:-

1. To grant assistance in money or in kind; to obtain, if necessary, hospital treatment for sick cases; to seek suitable institutional treatment for those requiring special care; to recommend cases for training in training homes; and to supervise or arrange for the supervision of the recipients of such assistance.
2. To make (or to arrange with the Board of Guardians to make) the necessary enquiries into financial and other circumstances of applicants for or recipients of (1) any forms of assistance in money or kind, and (2) institutional treatment, and to arrange for the administration of all such assistance in money or in kind given in the home of the applicant.
3. To keep a register (which shall not be open to public inspection) of all families within the area any member of which is in receipt of assistance, together with particulars of such assistance.

In the event of any Blind children between 2 and 5 years of age requiring Institutional Treatment, it may be possible for the Education Authority to make suitable arrangements for them in certified schools for Blind Children.

(2) EDUCATION AND TRAINING.

With regard to children between the ages of 5 and 16 years, the responsibility of education and training will fall upon the Local Education Authority as heretofore. This Authority also has power to deal with adults. It is suggested, therefore, that the Local Education Authority be asked to continue the work between 5 and 16 years, and also to make adequate provision up to the age of 21, and in special cases over 21 years of age. In some instances, too, the question of maintenance of the student during the period of training will have to be considered.

(3) UNEMPLOYABLE BLIND (Relief, etc.).

This clause is estimated at present to contain about 50 per cent of the total cases. Under the Blind Persons' Act, 1920, the statutory age for the receipt of an Old Age Pension in the case of the Blind is reduced from 70 years to 50 years, and this Pension will be a material contribution towards the proper welfare of many persons in this class.

There will still remain, however, various unemployable and necessitous cases, who have in the past been dealt with by the Guardians.

It is suggested, therefore, that the Guardians should continue to maintain these cases when needed, and should include additional benefits if and when arranged later.

(4) HOME VISITING AND WELFARE WORK.

It is proposed to inaugurate a very important and useful branch of welfare work by appointing a special visitor to be constantly in touch with the Blind community in the town. The person appointed would have to be kindly, full of tact and sympathy, and be able both to read and to teach Braille and Moon Type, and possibly simple home occupations to the Blind which will serve in many cases as a pastime. The visitor would act as agent for the provision of special literature.

This visitor would be responsible for keeping the registers and other records of Blind persons in the town, and would be able to give advice as to the best ways of assisting them.

In the Memorandum, the Ministry of Health say:

"This service is strongly urged upon the attention of Local Authorities as affording the means of providing considerable amelioration of the lot of many Blind persons in many real though indefinite ways."

Further, it is suggested that the remuneration should be not less than £3 per week for this visitor, of which cost the State will refund half.

(5) FURTHER PROVISION NECESSARY.

In time, extension of our Scheme will be necessary under some of the headings mentioned at the beginning, but this can be based on the reports of the special visitor as to the actual requirements of our Blind population, and it may be found that it will be possible to continue with certain neighbouring Authorities who are at present conferring on the subject.

ESTIMATES

Cost to Education Committee for education and training (with particulars of numbers, amounts, etc.).

Cost to Guardians for relief (with particulars).

Cost to Council for services not provided by the Local Education Authority or Guardians.

Home Visitor £156

Sundries (e.g. immediate relief,
travelling expenses, literature, etc.) 50 £206

A. T. HALLAWAY, Town Clerk.

G. W. N. JOSEPH, Medical Officer of Health.

Functions of National, Regional and Local Bodies for the Blind.
Taken from Report of Joint Blind Welfare Committee of the
Association of Municipal Corporations and the County Councils
Association, adopted by the Council of the Association of
Municipal Corporations at Meeting held on the 25th October 1934.
Functions should be allocated on the following basis:-

1. The National Body

- (a) International contact with bodies outside England and Wales.
- (b) The promotion of national conferences of regional bodies for the purpose of discussing matters of local and national interest, including the raising of money.
- (c) The collation of national statistics and the establishment of a national information bureau. Such statistics should not, however, be obtained directly by the national body, but should be derived by them annually from the detailed registers to be kept by the regional bodies.
- (d) The preparation of an annual report, which should contain comparative statistical tables, notes on recent legislation, a statement of grants made by local authorities to unemployables, sections recording progress or otherwise in each of the departments of the service (medical, educational, employment and social welfare), international notes, and information regarding research. There should also be included in the report financial and other particulars of the various national, regional and local organisations.
- (e) Making schemes for raising money for voluntary services, regard being had to such arrangements with local bodies as may now or hereafter exist.
- (f) The publication of a national periodical to provide a channel for the expression of opinions and the circulation of news relating to the blind welfare service.
- (g) The provision and management of certain special schools (e.g., those for retarded, epileptic and mentally defective blind) and sunshine homes. There should not, however, be any interference with local institutions.
- (h) The provision of literature, music and apparatus for the blind.
- (i) Assisting in the training and examination of school and home teachers, and subsequently awarding certificates.
- (j) Research and propaganda in connection with the prevention of blindness. The methods of propaganda should be defined and should include leaflets, films, lantern slides, gramophone records, press articles and broadcasting by wireless.
- (k) Research into methods of employment, the provision of training for specialised work, such as massage and placement therein.
- (l) Enquiry into the use of leisure, including such matters as apparatus, games, literature, guide dogs, gardening and competitions.
- (m) The consideration of resolutions received from and the giving of advice to regional bodies.

2. Regional Bodies

- (a) The keeping of a register and the collation of statistics obtained from local bodies. A live register should be the basis of regional work and the information collected should be used to watch tendencies and make forecasts. Statistics should be pooled annually with the national body.
- (b) Inspection on behalf of local authorities of the work of voluntary bodies in the region. It is impracticable for any but the largest authorities to employ an officer, with the necessary qualifications for this work, but the appointment jointly of such an officer through the regional body has been found to be both an economical and efficient arrangement.
- (c) The establishment of an Ophthalmic Surgeon Referee Service. Many registering authorities have found it necessary to have some machinery for dealing with appeal cases and it is believed that a regional service is more convenient than one on a national basis.
- (d) Assisting the national body and local authorities in educational work for the prevention of blindness. It is advisable that educational work should be on uniform lines, but administrative participation by regional bodies, who are acquainted with local conditions, is desirable.
- (e) The summoning of regional conferences, which would appear to be one of the best methods of fostering regional and local interest.
- (f) Assisting in the training of home teachers and organising conferences on their behalf.
- (g) The encouragement of large home workers' schemes attached to appropriate industrial institutions. It is believed that there are few organisations able to run a large scheme but there would not be any interference with those that can do so.
- (h) Assisting in the solution of special local difficulties, for example, the impossibility of providing accommodation or treatment in certain cases.
- (i) The provision of a training ground for local representatives in anticipation of and preparation for participation in the work of the national body.
- (j) The consideration of resolutions received from, and the giving of advice to, local bodies, matters of national interest being referred to the national body.

3. Local Agencies

To undertake, either as agents for the local authorities or otherwise, the care of individual blind persons.

4. General

- (a) To ensure reasonable elasticity of administration, each type of organisation described above should be at liberty to undertake, by arrangement with the other or others of them, functions in addition to those originally allocated.
- (b) It should be incumbent upon the national and regional bodies to co-operate in every possible way.

- (c) The Joint Committee have not reached any conclusion upon the question of the organisation or organisations to which collective buying and marketing should be entrusted. They think, however, that some central body or bodies (national or regional) as suggested in this scheme should in due course consider the subject in the light of the facts stated in the report of the Sub-Committee appointed by the Minister of Health's Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind.

Expenditure on Blind Welfare 1940-1941 taken from a Memorandum submitted by Mr. W. McG. Eagar, Secretary-General of the National Institute for the Blind, for the consideration of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Social Insurance and Allied Services under the Chairmanship of Sir William Beveridge, K.C.B.

A. Non-contributory sources of financial assistance for the blind and the total expenditure under each heading so far as it is known :

(a) From the Treasury :

(i) For blind Old Age Pensions, payable on a Means Test basis at the age of 40; 10s per week, total cost to the State, 1940-1941, for 26,579 old age pensioners aged 40-70	... ..	£678,600
To this must be added pensions paid to blind persons over 70 years of age, the amount of which for, say, 25,000 persons may be estimated at	... ..	£650,000
		<hr/>
		£1,328,600
(ii) War Disability Pensions for 1,900 ex-Servicemen, estimated in 1937 at approximately	... ..	£275,000

(b) From County Councils and County Borough Councils, i.e., Local Authorities responsible under the Blind Persons Act - as at 31st March 1939	£1,985,212
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This figure includes :

- (i) Domiciliary Assistance given on varying scales to unemployable blind persons.
- (ii) Contributions towards the Augmentation of Wages of blind persons employed in workshops for the blind, and in home workers' schemes, and to a small extent of blind persons otherwise employed.
- (iii) Per capita grants for employees in workshops, home workers' schemes, etc.
- (iv) Payment of fees for residents in homes.
- (v) Payments under Section 102(1) of the Local Government Act, 1929, being contributions in respect of embossed literature for the blind, etc.
- (vi) Cost of local administration of blind welfare services where municipalised, and payment of home teachers.
- (vii) Other incidental payments made to or on behalf of blind persons from rate funds.

B. Payments from Local Education Authorities for the education of blind children aged 5-16, and adolescents and adults, for the year ending 1940-1941.

£200,000

TOTAL, A and B, i.e., payments from public funds

£3,788,812

C. Expenditure by Voluntary Organisations :

(a) From Blind Pensions Societies a total estimated in 1940-1941 at approximately	...	...	...	£75,000
(b) By Voluntary Societies for the Blind (other than Pensions Societies and St.Dunstan's Organisation for Blinded Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen) a total estimated for the year 1937-1938 for the 72,424 "civilian blind" at	...	...	...	£530,000
(c) By St.Dunstan's Organisation for Blinded Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen in respect of the care of approximately 1,900 blind ex-Servicemen, 1937-1938	...	...	...	£204,000
Total Expenditure by Voluntary Organisations				£809,000
GRAND TOTAL, A, B and C				£4,597,812

D. Under the Workmen's Compensation Acts. A small and unknown amount is received by some blind persons by reason of compensation awards

... .. £x

E. Contributory Sources of Financial Assistance. From Contributory Schemes of general application payments are made to the blind for sickness benefit, contributory pensions and unemployment benefit

... .. £y

LIST OF SOURCES

LIST OF SOURCES QUOTED

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39 Elizabeth I, c.3	Act for the Relief of the Poor, 1597.
43 Elizabeth I, c.2	Act for the Relief of the Poor, 1601.
4 & 5 William IV, c.76	Poor Law Amendment Act, 1834.
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 6 & 7 George V, c.43 War Charities Act, 1916.
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 9 & 10 George V, c.102 Old Age Pensions Act, 1919.
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 15 & 16 George V, c.70 Widows', Orphans and Old Age Contributory Pensions Act, 1924.
 15 & 16, George V, c.71 Public Health Act, 1925.
 16 & 17 George V, c.54 Wireless Telegraphy (Blind Persons Facilities) Act, 1926.
 17 & 18 George V, c.14 Poor Law Act, 1927.
 19 & 20 George V, c.17 Local Government Act, 1929.
 20 & 21 George V, c.17 Poor Law Act, 1930.
 23 & 24 George V, c.27 Blind Voters Act, 1933.
 25 & 26 George V, c.15 Post Office (Amendment) Act, 1935.
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