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SUPPLEMENT TO

PORTLAND CITY CLUB  
BULLETIN

"Harmony in  
Diversity"

"Active  
Citizenship"

VOLUME II

PORTLAND, OREGON, MAY 19, 1922

NUMBER 34

THE PUBLIC WELFARE BUREAU  
OF PORTLAND, OREGON

*A Study of Its Administration and Methods for  
Disbursing County Relief Funds*

BY

THE CITY CLUB  
OF PORTLAND

The Public Welfare Bureau is an organization charged with the proper application of funds placed at its disposal for giving relief to poor, destitute and unfortunate families in this city. Since early in the summer of 1921 considerable criticism has been directed against the Public Welfare Bureau, and particularly the methods employed by it in disbursing county relief and other funds placed at its disposal, and also the expense of maintaining the bureau. The local press has afforded these criticisms some publicity and the work of the Welfare Bureau is of such importance that the Board of Governors considered this investigation necessary.

In making this investigation the members of the Committee have considered it of prime importance to ascertain the facts of the situation and have entertained the opinion that if the facts are once established the entire controversy will in a measure clarify itself. The Committee feels that the people of Portland have a right to know what is being done by the Welfare Bureau, and particularly where the money has gone and the results that have been obtained. The Committee has, therefore, confined its efforts primarily to ascertaining the facts of the situation. If the facts are once established the proper conclusions will naturally follow.

The individual members of the Committee have approached the work with open minds and have from the outset attempted to determine the true situation. The Committee feels that it has made as thorough and painstaking an investigation as the time at its disposal will permit.

*Thorough Survey Made*

The investigation made has extended over a period of several months. Numerous hearings have been held at which both friends and opponents of the Welfare Bureau have been afforded an opportunity to appear before the Committee, and state their views and criticisms. A thorough and painstaking survey has been made of the work that is being carried on by the Bureau. The individual members of the Committee have met and interviewed many, if not all, of the Social Welfare workers now engaged in carrying on the relief work of the Bureau. A careful examination has been made into the internal management and organization of the Bureau with special regard to the expense of maintenance. The individual members of the Committee have visited and interviewed many of the families receiving relief through the Bureau and have familiarized themselves with the average type of family to which relief is extended. An inspection has also been made of



the Industries Plant conducted by the Bureau at 474 Johnson Street.

Reports, submitted by similar Welfare Bureaus in other cities have been examined and compared with the results obtained here in Portland. The Committee is particularly indebted to Mr. Francis H. McLean, of New York City, for aid in its investigations. Mr. McLean is Field Director of the American Association for organizing Family Social Work with headquarters in New York, and beyond question is the leading authority on the administration of social welfare work in the United States. Mr. McLean spent some ten days in Portland in January and the Committee was particularly fortunate in having the opportunity of meeting with Mr. McLean on a number of occasions and discussing the various problems attendant upon social welfare work in Portland.

#### *Charges Against Bureau Listed*

The principal charges of mismanagement in disbursement of relief funds that have been brought to the attention of the Committee are the following:

- a.—A sufficient proportion of the funds contributed have not reached families in need of relief.
- b.—The expense of distribution is entirely disproportionate to the total amount of funds disbursed.
- c.—Relief funds are being expended lavishly and without proper investigation and accounting.
- d.—County relief funds should again be distributed through the County Commissioners or an agent employed by them.

#### *History of Public Welfare Work.*

A comprehensive view of the situation requires a brief summary of the history of Organized Welfare Work in Portland covering a period of several years.

For a number of years relief funds have come from two principal sources. Each year the County Court of Multnomah has set aside a substantial fund for distribution among poor families. Independent of the county, numerous charitable organizations in the city have distributed relief funds.

Prior to 1920 all county relief funds were distributed by the clerk of the County Board of Relief at the Court House. No organization other than the clerk of the Board was maintained. No appreciable attempt was made to afford relief along what are now termed scientific lines adopted by social welfare organizations in large

cities. Relief funds were disbursed by the clerk largely upon personal application of families in indigent circumstances. Little, if any, investigation was made of families applying for relief. Under the circumstances proper investigation could not be made. No organization was maintained for that purpose and the clerk did not have the time, or facilities, at his disposal to investigate each individual case.

There were undoubtedly abuses attendant upon the old system that could not be avoided. It is to be said for the old system, however, that the total amount of disbursements each year was kept to a fairly low figure. From 1915 to 1919 the average annual disbursement was about \$23,635.

In 1919 the County Board of Relief began to follow the method of looking to the Public Welfare Bureau for the investigation of families needing aid and upon its recommendation advanced county funds to such families. Early in 1921 the County Commissioners came to the conclusion that the Bureau was in a better position to handle the work than its own Board of Relief, and on February 1, 1921, the County Court discontinued its Board of Relief and appointed the Bureau as its disbursing agent in the handling of relief funds.

Independent of county relief funds there were, prior to 1921, a host of independent charitable organizations affording considerable relief to poor families. On the advent of the Community Chest, an attempt was made to consolidate the disbursing of all relief funds in the Public Welfare Bureau. Since February 1, 1921, the disbursing of relief funds, contributed by both the county and the Community Chest, has been handled through the Bureau.

#### *Personnel of Bureau.*

The personnel of the Public Welfare Bureau consists of the following:

A Board of Directors consisting of 24 members, a General Secretary and Assistant Secretary, two office interviewers, two bookkeepers, eleven visitors and five stenographers.

In addition to, the above office force and field workers are a considerable number of volunteer workers who serve without pay and perform a valuable service. Also in the various districts in the city, local community organizations of men and women have been organized to assist the Bureau. The work of these community organizations commands participation. They are composed of public spirited citi-



zens deeply interested in relieving the distress of the poor and their work is of inestimable value to the Bureau.

The General Secretary, Assistant Secretary and field workers have, most of them, received special college training fitting them for their work.

#### *Welfare Work Has Grown.*

Organized public welfare work has grown to very great proportions in Portland—far greater proportions than the average citizen probably realizes. The work has become highly specialized and comprehensive in its scope. Commendable effort is being made to aid the poor along constructive lines that tend to reduce pauperism. The giving of alms is a dangerous task. If given unwisely, the result is pauperism. The scriptural precept, "The poor ye have with you always," has probably caused more harm than good. Of late years the unmistakable trend of all scientific welfare work has been along constructive lines looking toward the regeneration of the individual. The goal is constructive relief that will enable the poor to help themselves. It is entirely within the realm of possibility to hope that we may not always have the poor with us—at least not in the status or condition in which we see them today.

Unfortunately, the average individual has the misconception that the Welfare Bureau is merely an agency for distributing money. The work of the Bureau is not confined to the giving of money or material relief, but is a clearing house for all kinds of aid to poor families. The giving of money is but one of its functions and should in time become only a minor one.

For convenience the relief work of the Bureau may be divided into two classes: material relief, consisting of the supplying of food, shelter, clothing, etc., and, service relief, covering all forms of indirect relief not involving the expenditure of money.

During the past year there have been some 2577 families under the supervision of the Welfare Bureau. Of this number 1036 were given material relief. The remaining families were given supervision and indirect forms of relief.

#### *Has a Sufficient Proportion of the Funds Contributed to the Bureau Reached Families in need of Relief?*

This is the most important question in this investigation. It has been a part of the work of this Committee to consider the evidence as to whether a sufficient proportion has reached its intended destination.

The charge has been made by critics of the Bureau that a sufficient proportion of the funds placed at the disposal of the Bureau has not reached families in need of relief—that the expense of disbursement is out of all proportion to the amount actually reaching dependant families. In some instances the charges have reached the assertion that only fifty cents of each dollar contributed actually reaches families needing relief. Numerous charges and assertions of this character have tended to undermine the integrity of the Bureau and to lessen its efficiency.

The Committee has made an investigation into the merits of these criticisms and a painstaking effort has been made to ascertain where the money has gone and the proportion that has actually reached families needing relief.

#### *Chest Pays Relief Charges.*

We find that in so far as County relief funds are concerned the criticism is without foundation. Every dollar of this fund goes direct to dependent families free from any expense incurred in distribution. Under the arrangement entered into with Multnomah County, none of the funds contributed by the County may be applied to the overhead expense of the Bureau, or expense incurred in the disbursement of County Relief funds. All maintenance expense of the Bureau is paid from funds appropriated by the Community Chest.

In so far as Multnomah County and its taxpayers are concerned the charge that sufficient of the county's relief funds do not reach families needing relief is without merit. Every dollar raised by taxation goes direct to families applying for relief.

Your Committee finds that in so far as Multnomah County is concerned, the employment of the Welfare Bureau as the disbursing agent for county relief funds is a capital arrangement in that the county's funds are being administered free of charge.

If criticism as to administration expense is proper, it should apparently come from the officials of the Community Chest and its donors because the entire expense of maintaining the Bureau is paid from the Chest.

#### *Figures are Submitted.*

The Committee has carefully investigated the matter of receipts and disbursements of the Bureau and submits the following analysis.

During the fiscal year ending September 30, 1921, the receipts of the Bureau were as follows:



Received from Multnomah Co.....	\$ 72,953.30
Received from Community Chest.....	42,750.00
Received from outside sources.....	19,048.70

\$134,752.00

Less overdrafts.....	6,783.81
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Net amount for distribution.....	\$127,968.19
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Comprehensively speaking this amount of \$127,968.19 was expended by the Bureau during the fiscal year 1921, as follows:

1. Furniture, Inventory and Industrial Plant.....	\$ 8,178.88
2. Direct Relief.....	89,511.12
3. Indirect or Service Relief.....	17,776.34
4. Overhead.....	12,501.85

Total.....\$127,968.19

The first disbursement item, \$8,178.88 covers what may be termed investment of capital in the plant operated by the Bureau and is deductible from the \$127,968.19 under consideration, leaving net amount for distribution of \$119,789.31.

#### *What Relief Consists Of.*

The second, item "Direct Relief" covers the disbursement of County Relief and other funds for food, shelter, clothing and other forms of material relief. This item covers the expenditure of \$89,511.12 and is sub-divided into the following classifications:

Food.....	\$ 51,434.84
Housing and Fuel.....	21,421.88
Clothing.....	2,996.95
Industrial Equipment.....	7,535.95
Transportation.....	2,921.54
Cash.....	2,469.73
Sundries.....	730.23

Total.....\$ 89,511.12

The third item, "Indirect or Service Relief" covers salaries as follows:

Assistant Secretary.....	\$ 2,239.75
Office Interviewers.....	1,589.23
Social Welfare Visitors.....	11,242.74
Stenographers.....	2,704.62

Total.....\$ 17,776.39

The item of \$12,919.73 charged as overhead is subdivided into the following classifications:

Office salaries.....	\$ 6,722.46
Office expense.....	3,927.94
Industrial Plant Overhead.....	1,851.45
Depreciation.....	417.88

Total.....\$ 12,919.73

The items "Indirect Relief" and "Overhead" are commented upon elsewhere in this report.

#### *Appendix is Prepared.*

The foregoing analysis of Receipts and Expenditures of the Bureau for the fiscal year 1921 is further amplified and analyzed in detail in a comprehensive and detailed report, found in the tables, charts and graphs, on page seven.

The result of the Committee's analysis of Receipts and Disbursements for the fiscal year 1921 is that after deducting items covering permanent investment of capital every dollar received and expended by the Bureau was applied in the following manner:

74c for Direct Relief.
15c for Indirect Relief.
11c for Overhead.

A further result from the analysis is that \$119,789.31 was applied to Direct and Indirect Relief and Overhead, and the Overhead amounted to 10.75%.

Your Committee has made a careful study of this issue and has attempted to analyze at least some of the reasons for the increase in expenditures.

#### *Are Relief Funds Being Disbursed Lavishly and Without Proper Investigation and Accounting?*

Criticism has been made that relief funds are being disbursed lavishly and without proper accounting for the proceeds. It is true that the total amount of annual disbursements for relief has increased greatly in the past several years. During the period covering 1915 to 1919 the average annual disbursements for relief was \$28,635. In 1920 it increased to \$68,798.23 and for the fiscal year 1921 it reached \$89,511.12.

In so far as the system and methods employed by the Bureau in administering relief funds are concerned, the Committee has made a rigid examination. The Committee finds that relief is not granted without proper investigation. Before relief is extended to any family, an initial examination is made, by a Bureau representative. If granted, the relief is confined to such essentials as fuel, food, clothing, etc. During the period in which relief is granted, repeated personal investigation is made to ascertain if the relief is being used properly and the giving of relief is discontinued as soon as the situation will warrant.

#### *System Is Improved.*

It is possible that in spite of these precautions, families have received relief who are not entitled to it, but, unquestionably the present system of administering county relief funds is far in ad-



vance of the old method used by the County Board of Relief, wherein but little, if any, investigation was made.

It is apparent to the Committee that an unwarranted increase in disbursements for relief would necessarily result from two principal causes: (a) extending relief to too many families—families not actually needing relief, or (b) extending relief in too large quantities—that is to say, too large an allowance to each individual family. In short, an unwarranted increase in disbursements would result either from extending relief to too many families or from giving too much relief to each family.

The Committee finds that the increase in relief disbursements has not resulted from extending relief in too large amounts. The record of the Bureau shows that the average expenditure per family has materially decreased rather than increased during the past several years.

During the period from 1915 to 1920 in which relief funds were disbursed by the County's agent, the average disbursement per family per year was \$130.63. In 1921, under the administration of the Welfare Bureau, the average disbursement per family per year was reduced to \$82.79, a reduction of \$47.84. During 1920 the average monthly disbursement per family was \$33.40. In 1921 this average was cut down to \$23.13, a saving of \$10.27 per family, per month.

The reduction in the average monthly and yearly disbursements per family demonstrates the efficiency of the Bureau in keeping the amount of relief extended each family at a minimum. It further demonstrates that the increase in annual disbursements for relief has not resulted from extending relief in too large quantities.

#### *Relief Per Family Decreased.*

Your Committee finds that while the average disbursement of relief per family has quite materially decreased, the number of families given relief has greatly increased, and this in view of the Committee accounts primarily for the marked increase in annual disbursements for relief.

During the period from 1915 to 1919, the average number given relief was 209. In 1920, the number increased to 449, and in 1921 jumped to 1036, more than double that of the previous year.

Charges have been made that relief is being given families that are not in need of it. It has been impossible for this Committee to make a personal investigation of every family receiving

relief in order to determine if all are entitled to it. This would have required a personal examination of some 1036 families. We have, however, made a careful examination of the methods followed by the Bureau for determining whether or not families should be given relief. The Committee has acquainted itself with the average type of family to which relief is extended, and has made a personal examination of a considerable number of families receiving relief—these being selected at random throughout the city. The Committee has, further, investigated charges brought to its attention of relief improperly granted.

#### *Unwarranted Relief Guarded Against.*

As heretofore stated the Committee finds that reasonable safeguards are being used by the Bureau for preventing the giving of unnecessary or unwarranted relief. Before relief is extended to any family a personal investigation of such family is made by a representative of the Bureau. The Committee finds that the system of investigating and reporting on cases is both rigid and comprehensive and should reduce the possibility of giving undeserved relief to a minimum. In spite of these regulations and precautions it is possible that relief has in some cases been granted to families underserving of charity.

The Committee has not found that the marked increase in annual disbursements for relief—an increase from \$23,635 (being the average disbursement for 1915 to 1919), to \$68,798.23, for 1920, and to \$89,511.12, for 1921—has resulted either from extending relief in too large amounts to individual families, or from extending relief to too many families.

It is probable that the increase in disbursements for relief has resulted from external conditions over which the Bureau has no control.

A large part of the increase may be due, to increase in population and change in economic conditions. Lack of employment during the past two years has been a contributing factor. The business depression for the same period has thrown many families out of employment and more families have been compelled to seek aid from relief sources. Unquestionably the number of dependant families in Portland has increased during the last two years. The extent of this increase is not known to the Committee.

#### *Relief Sources Consolidated.*

Another important factor in the increase of relief disbursements has been the consolidation



of relief sources in the Public Welfare Bureau. Prior to 1921, there were a host of relief organizations giving independent relief to poor families. The Muts, the Journal and the Telegram, the Elks, the Ben Selling Soup Kitchen, and various church and civic organizations, at various times during each year carried on effective campaigns for relief for poor and destitute families. Upon the advent of the Community Chest, relief work was consolidated in the Public Welfare Bureau. In all probability there were, relatively speaking, as many poor families receiving relief prior to the time the Bureau took over the work, but they were scattered among a number of different relief-giving organizations.

Again, it must be admitted that during the time the County Relief Board had charge of relief administration, the work was poorly organized and the field was inadequately covered. In all probability, but a small portion of the families actually needing county relief were reached by the County Board. It is impossible to compare the relief disbursements of the Welfare Bureau with those of its predecessor, the County Board of Relief, and charge mismanagement on the part of the Bureau. The two situations are not analogous.

#### *Overhead of Bureau*

The overhead of the Bureau, as well as the salaries paid in Service Relief have materially increased during the past several years. The work of the Bureau has also been materially extended. Whether the increase in overhead has kept pace with the increase in the work of the Bureau, the Committee has not been able to determine with accuracy at this date.

During the period from 1913 to 1920 the number of families under the supervision of the Bureau ranged from 700 to 1000. In 1921 it increased to 2577. The disbursement of material relief also increased considerably by reason of taking over the distribution of County Relief Funds.

The Committee has not had at its disposal complete data for the overhead of the Bureau during the years 1913 to 1920, and it is impossible for the Committee to say whether the increase in the maintenance of the Bureau has been in proportion to the material extension of the work of the Bureau.

According to figures submitted by the Welfare Bureau the overhead not including Indirect or Service Relief salaries of the Bureau for the fiscal year 1921 amounted to \$12,501.85.

The opponents of the Bureau contend that the overhead is considerably in excess of that amount. It is urged that the item of \$17,776.34 charged to Service Relief should be considered as Overhead and charged as expense of administering relief funds.

#### *Bureau Work Is Two-fold*

The question of the overhead of the Bureau presents debatable ground. Unfortunately misapprehension has arisen as to the scope of the work carried on by the Welfare Bureau. In the minds of a great many the Bureau is regarded as an institution whose sole function is the disbursing of relief funds. This view is incorrect. As pointed out early in this report the work of the Bureau is not confined to the disbursing of relief funds. The work of the Bureau is two-fold. It consists in administering relief funds where necessary and also administering other forms of indirect relief which do not involve the payment of money or the giving of direct relief. If the Bureau were an organization whose sole function consisted in disbursing relief funds the situation might be different. The two forms of relief are so closely interlocked that it is impossible to draw a line between the two to determine with accuracy the amount to be charged to Overhead and the amount to be charged to Service or Indirect Relief. Salaries paid to the Welfare Workers primarily engaged in administering service relief are probably not Overhead. The situation does not warrant the charging of the entire maintenance cost of the Bureau as Overhead expense in the disbursement of relief funds.

It is the opinion of the Committee that the total charges to Overhead and Indirect or Service Relief may be somewhat reduced without impairing the efficiency of the service rendered.

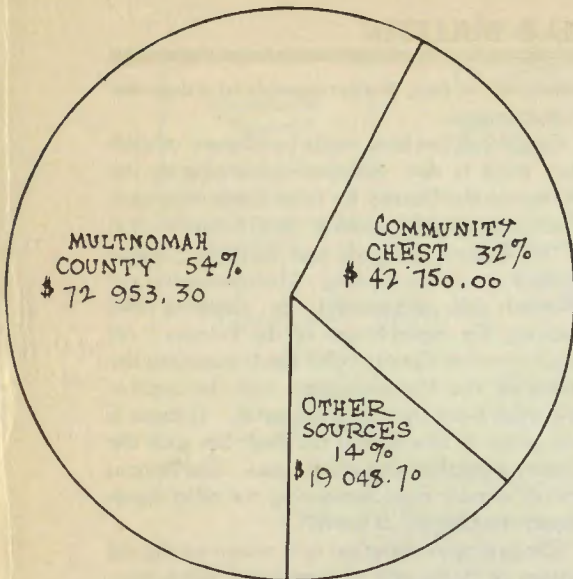
#### *Service Relief*

According to the accounts classification of the Bureau \$17,776.34 is charged to Indirect or Service Relief for salaries paid Welfare Workers engaged primarily in the administering of Service Relief. The criticism has been made that the benefits from this branch of the work do not justify the expenditure of the amount charged to Service Relief.

In the opinion of the Committee it is of prime importance that Service Relief be continued. If anything it is of equal importance with the administering of relief funds. The giving of money to the needy is not as essential as administering constructive relief that will enable them to help themselves. The elimination of

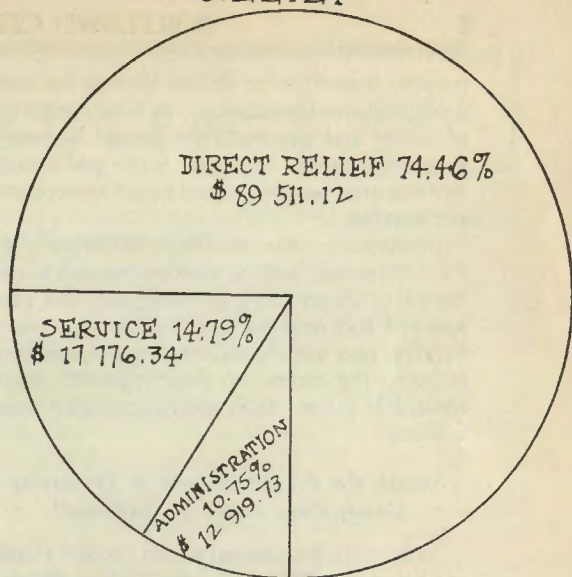


# RECEIPTS



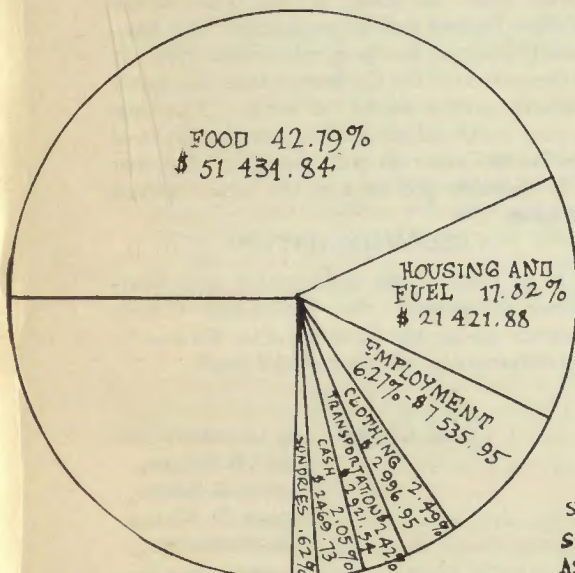
MULTNOMAH COUNTY	72,953.30
COMMUNITY CHEST	42,750.00
OTHER SOURCES	19,048.70
TOTAL RECEIPTS	134,752.00
OVERDRAFT 9/30/20	7,112.12
OVERDRAFT 9/30/21	127,639.88
DISTRIBUTED	328.31
	127,967.19

# ADMINISTRATION AND RELIEF



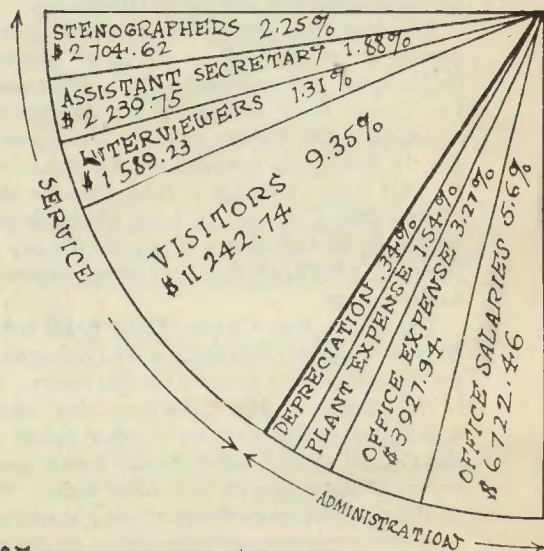
DIRECT RELIEF	\$89,511.12
SERVICE	17,776.34
ADMINISTRATION	12,919.73
	120,207.19

# DIRECT RELIEF 74.46%



FOOD	\$51,434.84	42.79%
HOUSING + FUEL	21,421.88	17.82%
EMPLOYMENT	7,535.95	6.27%
CLOTHING	2,996.95	2.49%
TRANSPORTATION	2,921.54	2.42%
CASH	2,469.73	2.05%
SUNDRIES	730.23	.62%
	89,511.12	

# SERVICE AND ADMINISTRATION



SERVICE		ADMINISTRATION
STENOS	\$2,704.62	OFFICE SALARIES \$6,722.46
ASST SECY	2,239.75	OFFICE EXPENSE 3,927.94
INTERVIEWER	1,589.23	PLANT EXPENSE 1,851.45
VISITORS	11,242.74	DEPRECIATION 4,178.88
	17,776.34	12,919.73

Chart Courtesy of the Oregon Journal



poverty is more to be desired than giving temporary financial assistance. In time the giving of money and material relief should become a minor function, at least that is the goal toward which welfare organizations thruout the country are working.

Incidentally it has come to the attention of the Committee that welfare workers engaged in this branch of the service have during the past year, solicited and received from relatives of needy families, and outside sources aid and contributions to the extent of about \$20,000, which amount is greater than the salaries paid these workers.

*Should the Present System of Disbursing County Relief Funds Be Continued?*

As heretofore explained County Relief Funds are being administered by the Welfare Bureau as disbursing agent for the County. It is urged by some of the County officials that the employment of the Welfare Bureau as disbursing agent for County relief funds be discontinued and that the County return to its former method of disbursing relief funds by County Agent.

The principal grounds urged for the proposed return to the old system are that relief funds have been disbursed extravagantly by the Bureau, and excessive cost of maintaining the Bureau.

The claim that the cost of maintaining the Bureau is excessive has no great bearing on the issue. As explained early in this report the County bears no part of the expense of maintaining the Bureau, nor does the County pay the Bureau any compensation for disbursing its relief funds—the work is being done for the County free of charge. It is an admirable arrangement for the County in that the County is having its relief funds disbursed without expense to the County.

The charge that County Relief funds have been extravagantly expended by the Bureau has, we think, been fully answered in this report. It is the opinion of the Committee that there would be no probable saving in relief funds if the County should return to the former procedure of disbursing its own relief funds. To handle the work properly the County would be required to maintain an organization similar to that of the Welfare Bureau and this added expense would more than counterbalance any saving that might be made in relief disburse-

ments—if, in fact, it were possible to reduce the disbursements.

Complaint has been made by County officials that there is not sufficient accounting by the Bureau to the County for relief funds expended. The Committee has made a careful examination of this feature and finds that both the County Auditor and the County Commissioners are afforded full opportunity for checking and auditing the expenditures of the Bureau. All requisitions on County relief funds pass thru the hands of the Commissioners and the auditor and must have their final approval. If there is any laxity in this respect the fault lies with the County as well as with the Bureau. The Bureau invites a more rigid accounting for relief funds should the County desire it.

The principal objection to a return to the old system of disbursing County relief funds thru County agent is that it will result in duplication and overlapping of relief work. Such a procedure would not put an end to the Welfare Bureau and would result in maintaining two independent relief organizations when but one is necessary. The Committee finds that the present system of disbursing County relief funds is right in principle, has brought reasonably satisfactory results in practice, and should be continued.

It has come to the attention of the Committee that no audit of the books of the Welfare Bureau and its predecessor, the Associated Charities, has been made since 1916. It is the opinion of the Committee that reasonably frequent audits should be made. This suggestion is not an implication that the affairs of the Bureau make an audit necessary, but that it is desirable and may in the future obviate criticism.

**RECOMMENDATION**

As a result of the investigation your Committee recommends that Multnomah County continue to use the Public Welfare Bureau for the disbursement of County relief funds.

*Signed,*

**THE CITY CLUB COMMITTEE**

JULIUS R. BLACK,  
HAROLD S. SMITH  
WILSON D. WALLIS  
C. L. WHEALDON,  
*Chairman.*