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1935—Silver Anniversary Year—1960

SEPTEMBER 1960

Oasis



A Quarter Century of Public Information

By Roy Swift, Information Officer, Division of Public Information and Personnel Management

Try projecting yourself backward in time a quarter of a century, into a depression-haunted land that had never heard the term "social security," much less seen such a system operating. How would you try to kindle national interest in this new undertaking and get 30 million people to "sign up" for it in a few weeks by taking out social security cards?

Well, one way the first Informational Service of the original Social Security Board, back in the fall of 1936, did it was to get the help of thousands of kids from one of the New Deal relief agencies, the National Youth Administration (NYA). They went out to the hedgerows and by ways, the gates of feebly stirring industrial plants, business offices, and billboards, and posted some 3 million of the placards illustrated on this page.

And a gentle, gray-haired lady named Ethel Smith sat down and wrote a little leaflet, ISC-9. Even that sharp journal, *The New Yorker*, was stirred to comment that the leaflet, given to all account number applicants in those early weeks, "carries the faint, troubling vibrations of great prose. . . . The first sentence, 'There is now a law in the country which will give about 26 million working people something to live on when they are old and have stopped working,' is something of a Government record for simple, good English."

Informing The Public

The really intensive activity was concentrated in November and December 1936, when the first account

number registrations were held. By Christmas about 50 million leaflets had been distributed, 3 million posters put up, and 3 newsreel-type motion pictures shown to over 100 million people in about 8,000 theaters.

Louis Resnick, the first Director of Informational Service, writing in June 1937, said that "establishment of the social security program in America during the past year created the necessity for a job of public information which in the opinion of experts on the subject . . . was considered the biggest and most difficult job of the sort confronting this country since the war." And Max Stern, who succeeded Resnick in May 1938, described the opening public information effort as "the most colossal mass-education task since the wartime draft registration."

In 1960, as it was in 1935 and 1936, the task of informing the public about their social security rights and re-

sponsibilities is important and large. The messages now may be a little different from those of 25 years ago, but the reasons why public information efforts are crucial were as clear then as they are now.

Today, our Bureau Objective No. 9, with its emphasis on our need not only to tell people how to be sure of all the benefits that are due them, but-just as important-to keep telling people *ahead of time*, so that the family will have an intelligent grasp of its stake in security, gives us a timely guide to the nature of our program.

Grassroots Theory

Right from the beginning, the basic framework for public information has been clear. First: the "grassroots" idea of reaching the public. The second Annual Report of the Social Security Board (for fiscal year 1937) said, "The initial function of the field office was to inform the public of the

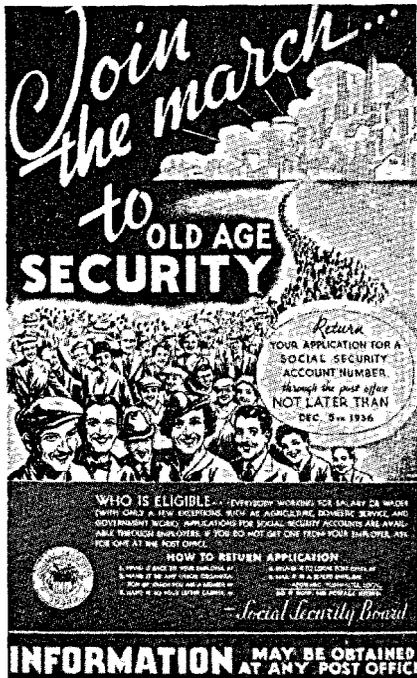
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Public Information

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provisions of the act." This early decision on the important public information responsibility of district offices, even during the months when they were first being established, still



shows up as a distinctive feature which has been the envy of other public administrators,

Second: a central unit to provide materials, program leadership, and staff services. An Informational Service, later the Bureau of Informational Service, was established under the Social Security Board on January 1, 1936. This was one of the original five service bureaus and three operating bureaus which made up "the Board." It was responsible for publicizing all the programs of the act, including the Bureau of Old-Age Benefits.

In the early years the Board's Informational Service had a much larger public information staff than has been available in the last 20 years. This staff was responsible for some other functions, such as the library; nevertheless, the tremendous public interest

in learning about social security, before the field organization was able to handle it, required a large central staff. In June 1936 there were about 60 on the staff, and a year later the staff had more than doubled to a total of 135. This staff included regional representatives of the Informational Service, a position which continued until May 1947.

On the Staff

Among the people prominent in the early days of Informational Service who are active now in Social Security or Department circles are Harvey Bush, now Director of the DHEW Office of Public Information; Helen Roberts, also of OPI; Marie Keller, most recently chief of our own Public Inquiries Group and now with Civil Defense in Public Assistance; Ollie Kincannon, information officer of OVR; Charles Garrison, manager of the Kansas City, Kans., district office; Mary Phillips, assistant manager, Memphis DO; Ova G. Stuart, manager, Fort Smith, Ark., DO; and Imogen Warden, management analyst, Division of Public Information and Personnel Management. Readers of *The Atlantic* will be interested to know that Charles Morton, who has for years been associate editor of that magazine, was an early member of the information staff. William Galvin, for the past 12 years staff information officer to the Commissioner of Social Security, was Deputy Director of Information Service in its later days. Among these, your writer was Johnny-come-lately, the last regional information service representative employed, serving in 1946-47 in the San Antonio regional office.

Informational Service was responsible for interpreting all titles of the Social Security Act, including Employment Security. Furthermore, OASI coverage from 1937 through 1950 reached only those people "employed in commerce and industry." Naturally, then, special emphasis was put on educational programs through organized labor. A special unit of

Informational Service, called the Labor Information Service, carried this responsibility under direction of the late Marion Hedges. Labor felt, with good reason, that it had much to do with the passage of social security legislation. Many doors were opened in those early days of communicating with labor which remain open to us today in pursuing OASI's information effort.

Ups and Downs

In 1948, the Informational Service was abolished, with certain functions retained under the Commissioner of



Social Security, but with the concept that the operating bureaus would conduct their own public information.

For about 2 years, from 1948 into 1950, the Bureau of Old-Age and Survivors Insurance maintained its public information activity in the Division of Field Operations, with only one person as full-time "special staff." Those were the days when the field, left on its own for the first time, began to develop the system of regional exchanges of scripts, news stories, etc., which continue until today.

By the spring of 1950, as OASI faced the sweeping 1950 amendments, the first significant program changes in 11 years, it was clear that a Bureau public information staff was required. In June of that year Public Information Services (now the Office of Information in DPIP) was established in the office of the Bureau Director. Your information officer, with Wal-

lace Kendall, G. Hinkley Porter, Broughton Tall (retired this July 22), and Esther Scheuch, recently of DAM, now of the Baltimore Payment Center, were original staff members. They were barely on the job when they were hit by the demands for an entire new series of informational materials covering the 1950 amendments. Among the institutions born in the first months were OASI-35; the "fact sheet" series; the first strictly OASI movie, "Your Social Security"; and not much later, NIME (National Informational Materials Exchange).

One of the memorable experiences of those days was our liaison with Fred Rosen, a public relations consultant who had not long before been hunting tigers from atop an elephant in the jungles of India. Fred was a real Madison Avenue laddie, but he gave us one thing valuable enough even to offset his chaotic impact on our travel office: he taught us the value of the "you" approach in public information materials. And it was around a council table in the old Federal Security Agency, with Fred, Harvey Bush, Bill Galvin, and Wallace Kendall, that we hatched up the "family on a map of the U.S.A." symbol which has become something of a trademark for OASI.

Through the Years

One of our early jobs was to establish some national awareness of the domestic workers' new status under social security. We weren't directly responsible for inventing the household employer's envelope report, Form 942; DAO, Oscar Pogge who was then Director of BOASI, and IRS collaborated on that. But it was our job to publicize it. One hot summer afternoon, Joe Fay, Assistant Director in charge of DAO, Oscar Pogge, the late Charlie Beach of DFO, and several others of us were on the train on our way over to a press conference at Internal Revenue, which was supposed to introduce this form to the public. Oscar Pogge opened a *New York*

Times he'd picked up at the station. There on the front page was *the envelope*, large as life. The *Times* had scooped us!

Symbols such as this envelope do help establish interest. From J. Wilbur Worker, the jolly little man who stood for OASI 15 years ago, we have moved to "Sam'l," who came to life 2 years ago in our first color movie. Sam'l has lent his personality to a number of other projects since, including the visuals for the Correspondence Workshops just started by the Public Inquiries Group of the Office of Information.

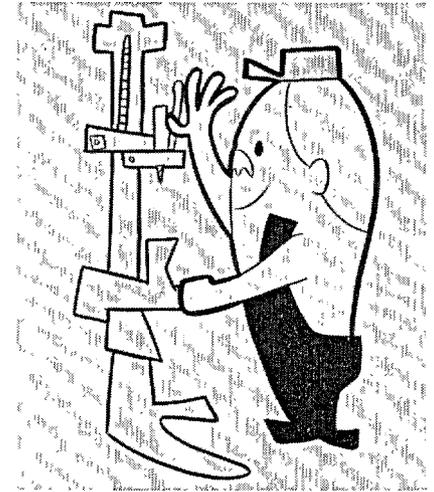
There were a good many raised eyebrows when our first "comic book" was launched a while back. But if they're good enough for the classics, they're good enough for social security. "John's First Job" gave us some trouble, especially in finding any artist these days who knew how to draw a horse collar! But when we got acquainted with Ed Dodd, the Mark Trail artist, he had no trouble at all creating the migrant workers' atmosphere, for Dodd is an old trail hand himself. Thus was born "Smash Up at Big Rock." It's in Spanish too, of course, as 'Choque,' and we're just in the process of getting an Arizona Indian to letter in the balloons for an edition in the Navaho language.

Real-life Drama

The development of centralized OASI staff services for information did not alter the concept that the field service, through Division of Field Operations, had first responsibility for reaching the public. Hugh McKenna has pursued that principle undeviatingly during his 17 years as chief of the field organization. Indeed, the delegation to the district manager and his staff has continued to be strengthened; a notable recent expression has been the weight placed on public information in the civil service standards for the manager-field representative jobs.

Some day we'll make a movie on the drama of the field representative

at work . . . work, that is, which revolves around his informational approach to the public he serves. Let us stay-at-homes picture him riding a tiny coastal steamer out along the mist-shrouded Aleutian Chain to talk to Eskimos on Kodiak Island. Or we see him next lunching with a television executive at The Brass Rail in Man-



hattan-or talking to a group of migrant laborers by their truck in a Florida tomato field. We find her- for there are many doughty lady field representatives as well-bumping her car up a mountain road in Kentucky to appear before a rural consolidated school (see Mary Lloyd Lane's account in the August OASIS) or counseling suavely with the American Association of University Women in Lowell, Mass. But the camera must not focus exclusively, in this movie of ours, on the OASI employee. The real focus is on the anxious widow, the resigned old man, the child, the concerned-or indifferent-w a g e earner whom we serve and whom we try to reach through every possible medium.

Twenty-five years ago all the major media of communications, except television, were available and used in social security public information. Even without television, extensive use of motion pictures was made, and especially showings in commercial theaters. In the last 10 years one of

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Behind the Scenes

By Betty Sanders, Chief,
Program Planning Branch
Division of Program Analysis

PEOPLE new to the program planning work of the Bureau, who come to it now in an atmosphere of major legislation every 2 years and minor amendments in the off years, often say to the oldtimers, "But what did you do before 1950?" Among those who think of themselves as oldtimers, only one is so much an oldtimer as to remember the work on the 1939 amendments and, before that, the work with the first Advisory Council on Social Security in 1937 and 1938. This dean of the program planners is, of course, Alvin David, Assistant Director in charge of the Division of Program Analysis. Alvin remembers working on so many proposals in connection with that long-ago Advisory Council-proposals numbered AC-1, AG2, AC-3 and so forth-that eventually he developed one that he numbered AC-99. As he remembers it, it wasn't too different from the program put into effect by the 1939 amendments.

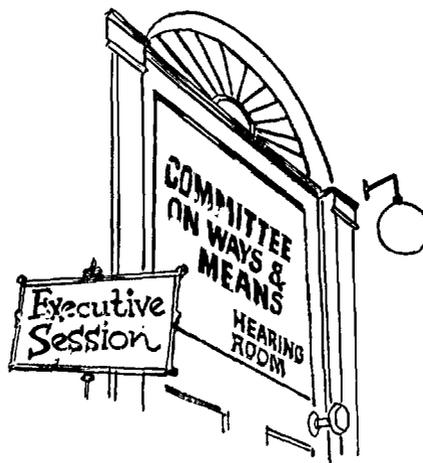
Some who think of themselves as oldtimers started in the program planning work around 1941 and 1942; others came in later in the 1940's. And to the new people who say to us, "What did you do all through the 1940's?" it is sometimes hard to know what to say.

Looking Back

Looking back, it seems to me now that the 1940's were dull years for social insurance program planning. First of all, they were war years; the energies of the Nation were absorbed in the war effort and later in the immediate postwar tasks of readjustment to peacetime conditions. There was a lot of work to do and everyone worked hard at it, but in an atmosphere that was almost academic in character. It was during this period

that some people in other parts of the Bureau came to look upon program planners as "longhairs" who presumably did a lot of thinking but didn't seem to have much to show for it. Hopefully, the growth of OASDI since 1950 and the legislative accomplishments that have in large part made the program what it is, have erased that impression.

We wrote what we used to call de-



velopmental program reports--reports in a series called "A Program for the Development of Old-Age and Survivors Insurance" that was intended to contain the definitive answers to the problems that we saw in the development of the then relatively small and ineffective social insurance program.

We answered letters from servicemen unhappy about losing their OASI protection as a result of their military service, and from old people unhappy at seeing the value of their benefits melt away as a result of price increase during the war and postwar period.

We worked out specifications and model agreements for covering State and local employees, and plans for coordinating Civil Service and rail-

road retirement with social security.

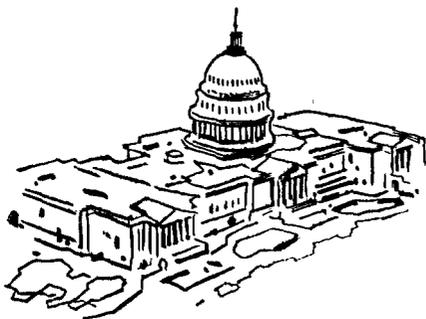
We made up specimen stampbooks to be used, we thought, in covering farm and household workers (they never were, of course) -indeed, some of us still have them among our possessions as souvenirs of those days.

We worked on proposals for paying disability benefits under old-age and survivors insurance.

But, though we worked hard and hopefully, we sometimes were quite discouraged, so little sign of external interest in the program existed. Bills that would have made tremendous changes in the program were repeatedly introduced, especially by Senators Wagner and Murray and Congressman Dingell, but all died in committee.

Amendments Begin

There were some amendments during the 1940's: The 1946 amendments provided 3 years of survivorship protection for veterans after discharge from the service; the Gearhart resolution, which had the effect of removing from coverage by Congressional action, people in borderline employment arrangements who had been brought into coverage by administrative interpretation of the law. Those of us who were working to extend the coverage rather than to narrow it found this Gearhart resolution particularly frustrating. In fact, a group of us who worked on plans to cover such hard-to-get groups as Federal, State, and local government workers were inclined to jeer at the people who worked on the definition of "employment," on the ground that even though we weren't getting more people covered we weren't losing people, so that at least we were holding our own.



And, as in other periods, there was a study group—a technical staff appointed by the Senate Committee on Finance to study the social security program. That technical staff was headed by Leonard Calhoun, who had previously been a member of the staff of the Office of the General Counsel and now is engaged in the private practice of law in Washington. As with other study groups, this one provided background material to the staff and assisted in drafting and editing the report. The technical staff worked in a little old building on Independence Avenue near the Capitol that has since been demolished to make room for House Office Building No. 3, now under construction.

Progress Questioned

Meanwhile, with the increased mobility of population resulting from wartime and postwar readjustments, and with the war-induced increases in prices and wages, the program, started originally on a very modest basis and expanded very little over the years, came to look more and more ineffective. In a period when wages and prices about doubled, average old-age benefits for a retired worker alone went up from \$22.60 to \$26. Those who were to be responsible for the staffwork in connection with the great series of legislative improvements of the 1950's were thinking about the program, were getting experience, were developing proposals that later became law; but so far as an outsider, or even some of us could tell, no progress was being made.

It was in 1948 that things began to change. First there was the establishment of a second Advisory Council on Social Security, and the very welcome news that the Staff Director was to be our old friend Bob Ball. As with Advisory Councils and other study groups before and since, Alvin David and the rest of us did a great deal of staffwork for and with Bob Ball to assist the Council in its studies. Some of us had known him from his earlier program planning work in the Division of Program Analysis, others really got acquainted with him then for the first time. The Advisory Council staff worked in the attic of the Library of Congress, a big bare room at the top of that fancy old building. The existence of the attic was actually unknown to the guard at the desk when, late one night, someone who had not been there before, tried to deliver some papers to the staff.

The Light of Day

At the end of 1948, with the election over, and the news that the current administration would continue in office for another 4 years, the Bureau began to develop a legislative program in the hope that it would this time see the light of day and become law. Late in the year, discussions started within the administration—with the Bureau of the Budget, the Treasury and Labor Departments, and other agencies concerned—to firm up an administration bill.

We were very busy well into 1949, working up specifications and draft language and writing testimony for the Commissioner of Social Security, Arthur J. Altmeyer, whom many of us think of as “Mr. Social Security,” to deliver before the Committee on Ways and Means of the House of Representatives. We drafted testimony, too, for use by Oscar Pogge, then Bureau director, who, with the Commissioner of Internal Revenue, appeared before the committee to assure it that plans for administering the

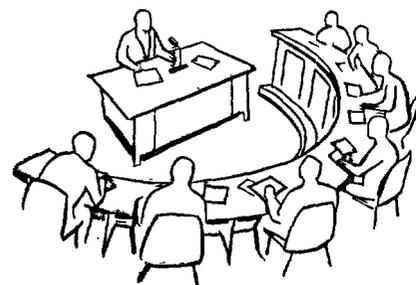
extended coverage that was proposed were practical and feasible.

Black-Book Theory

And we prepared background material, too, for the information of those staff members who were to testify before the committee. In particular, we helped to prepare background material for Wilbur Cohen, technical adviser to Mr. Altmeyer, whose appetite for facts and figures about social security seems to be insatiable. (In those days we used to put our background material in big black binders, and Wilbur used to refer to the whole procedure as “the black-book theory of public administration.” We now use blue and brown plastic binders—different colors for different subjects; this may be said to be a refinement of the black-book theory.) And all through the long open hearings and the succeeding executive sessions, in 1949 and 1950, in the House and in the Senate, we worked many long hours developing information with great satisfaction in the knowledge that it would be used and would perhaps affect the future course of the old-age and survivors insurance program.

Even those of us who had been around for quite some time before 1949 learned many things from the sessions of 1949 and 1950 about the process of letting social security proposals enacted into law. We learned for one thing how impossible it is to anticipate and prepare for all of the many questions and ideas that come up in the course of congressional consideration of social security amend-

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Behind the Scenes

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ments. We could not have begun to imagine, for example, at the start of the consideration of farmworker coverage, the many different combinations of coverage requirements-number of days worked, amount of money earned, and so forth-that would have to be analyzed for their effect in number of people covered.

Many were the frantic phone calls from Washington to Baltimore that sounded something like this: "See if John can make an estimate on how many farmworkers would be excluded if you added a qualifying quarter to the 90-day requirement-and tell him that no matter what he has to do to get it or how late he has to work, we have got to have an answer by tomorrow morning, because the committee is going to make a decision on this question."

Weightlifting and Track

We, of course, must keep on trying to anticipate all kinds of congressional requests, because so much importance is attached to them in terms of the sound future development of the program. And so it seems to us that every year the background books get bigger, the briefcases get heavier, we need to know more and more answers to more and more questions. It is a standing joke among US program planners that the first qualification that one must have to do the job is the ability to win a 100-yard dash with a 25-pound briefcase in each hand. There are many times, along about midnight, when we are trying to put background books together, that we think, "Here we are, overpreparing as usual, and most of this junk will never be used."

But our basic conviction that we are doing the right thing is renewed when we hear such comments as that made in the 1958 Senate Finance Committee hearings by Senator Kerr to the then very new Secretary of

HEW, Arthur Flemming : "I want to congratulate the Department of which you have become a part, Mr. Secretary. It comes nearer having the information available to answer the questions asked by this committee, I believe, than any other one that comes here."

The years since 1950 have been such busy and crowded ones in the program planning work that sometimes it is hard to remember what happened when. Highlights, of course, stand out in all of our minds. There have been colorful moments in House and Senate debates on the various social security bills. Few of us, for example, will forget the 1952 speech of that grand old man, "Old Mule" Doughton-chairman of the Ways and Means Committee and a man so venerable that he used to address our elder statesman of social security, Mr. Altmeyer, as "Young man"-in which he shouted, with all the vigor of his 88 years, about the disability provisions then under consideration: "There is no more socialized medicine in section 3 of the bill than there is frost in the sun."

And then there was the time late in the evening, in the course of the Senate debate on the 1954 amendments, when a distinguished Senator, who had already been speaking for some time, was asked by the Chair, "Does the Senator yield himself additional time?" and the Senator replied, "I yield myself the works !"

Stocking Feet and Staplers

There have been the moments of close comradeship that come to people working together under difficult and trying circumstances, when if it were not for the fact that we all had a sense of humor and not too strong convictions about the dignity of our positions, we would never have been able to survive. We can remember many times when we worked late into the night preparing material for a committee session the next morning. We remember branch chiefs walking

around the table in their stocking feet at 11 o'clock at night, assembling and stapling, and technical advisers typing addresses on envelopes to members of Advisory Councils. We remember times when, at an hour much later than the 11th, Bob Ball suddenly thought of a new angle to be explored-and we dashed off, regardless of the hour, to start working on that angle.

If He Says 'No'

We remember funny episodes, too. For example, we remember the time, during the work for the Curtis subcommittee in 1953, when included by mistake among the set of questions that we got from the subcommittee at 5 o'clock to prepare answers to by the next morning were a set of what could only be called stage directions for the subcommittee counsel. In particular, after one question which read, "Can you explain this situation?" appeared the following instruction: "(If the witness answers 'No,' say, 'I can't explain it, either, but it does seem peculiar, doesn't it?')." And we remember happy times of relaxation-for example, after the Curtis subcommittee hearings were over, the party Art and Nancy Hess threw for the "hearing aids."

Those of us who have had the duty and privilege of attending executive sessions of the congressional committees will always be grateful for the opportunity of seeing Congressmen operating in an informal setting, and getting acquainted with the personalities of the various committee members, each one individual and unforgettable.

We have learned to have great respect for the abilities of the committee members-how in spite of the highly technical subject matter, the sharp differences in philosophy among individual members, and the many pressures that impinge upon them, they quickly absorb the essentials of the questions at issue and time

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Public Information

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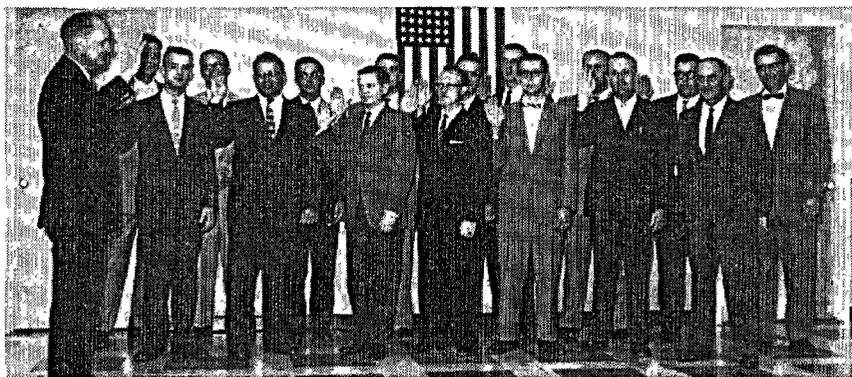
the big challenges, and a continuing one, is to use this new medium of television more effectively.

Enter TV

We don't know who made the first live TV appearance for OASI (it was probably in 1948 and we'd welcome any claims to that historic honor), but we believe we do know the first TV film spot on social security. It was made in the Providence, R.I., District Office, under direction of Fred Gorman, in 1949. Today the district office people take on any TV job, with aplomb, and of course Ed Kramer of the Hollywood District Office produces a full-fledged show every week: "Social Security in Action."

The tradition that OASI people in the field can and do undertake almost any informational activity is backed by a flow of training material, NIME draft stuff, Public Information notes, policy and procedural directions promulgated through DFO identical memoranda, and the Public Information Handbook. We believe that through this network of communications and cooperative enterprise, the Bureau has a public service team for interpreting the social security institution to the public that can make claims for being one of the most economical and effective information enterprises on the American scene.

As the information program enters its second quarter century, with the imminent possibility of pioneering new legislation we'll have to interpret, there are new tools at hand. We have worked with the disability insurance people in our first partnership with the American Medical Association, producing a movie, "The Disability Decision," as a direct aid for administration of the program in the medical profession. And in the dawn of this new day, we offer our half-hour motion picture reviewing the beginnings of social security and appropriately entitled, "Before the Day."



A picture of 12 new claims rep trainees being sworn in at the Portland, Oreg., DO doesn't mean that the regular staff has been cut down by an epidemic or was promoted en masse to the field-rep slot. It's simply that the DO has been operating also as a training center for the network, with the trainees being re-assigned to other DO's upon completion of the formal training.

Supervisory staff and trainees in photo

above are, (l. to r.) DO Manager Paul Johnson, administering the oath, Kenneth Deming, assistant mgr.; Jerry Thompson, trainee; Robert Bennett, claims supv.; Don Ille, Robert Lambert, Bob Moilanen, Bob Dunn, Lydell Pierce, Bryce McIntvre, Norman Ostling, Eugene Kossman, Richard Ekstrom, Richard Olfert, and Billy Lewis, trainees; and Leon Madison and Frank Charnholm, assistant claims supervisors.

Behind the Scenes

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after time make sound and responsible decisions.

Most people, of course, get emotionally involved in the work that they do, and program planners are no exception. Many of us get so wrapped up in and identified with specific proposals for program changes that watching the proposals make their way through the Department and the Bureau of the Budget and into the Congress, and observing them under consideration there, is a really intense emotional experience. We remember many a tense moment when an issue of importance on which we felt strongly was hanging in the balance, and the feelings of frustration or elation when the issue was decided.

We work long hours when legislation is hot; we hold ourselves constantly on call; and the actions of the Congress and the specific committees of Congress that we work with get to be the most important things in our lives. There is even a legend in the Division about an expectant mother

who felt that she couldn't have her baby until the last page of the current background book was finished; when it was, the story goes, she went to the hospital and had her baby right away.

When proposals that we get attached to fail to be enacted, we think about the months of work we have done--the research, the analysis, the writing and rewriting, the negotiating, the waiting, the compromising--all going down the drain, perhaps by a majority vote of one committee member, and we wonder if there isn't an easier way to make a living.

But we have our rewards, too. Sooner or later it happens to all of us: an idea we had many months ago works along through the legislative process to the point where it becomes the law of the land, or a report that we worked over for many long months is printed as a House or Senate document and goes out to make its contribution to the future course of the program. When this happens most of us, I am sure, think to ourselves, "Maybe this kind of work is worth doing after all."