

## William H. Werner and The American Bureau of Chiropractic: Organizing a Lay Constituency

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**One of the more colorful episodes in chiropractic history was the part played by organized lay groups to influence legislation. The most prominent of these auxiliaries was the American Bureau of Chiropractic, organized in New York in 1927. The author examines all the facets of the energetic ABC initiative as well as the role of its enthusiastic founder, Dr. William H. Werner.**

The American Bureau of Chiropractic founded by Dr. William H. Werner (incorporated June 27, 1927), played an integral part in licensing chiropractic, particularly in New York. The A.B.C. whose membership consisted of lay person auxiliaries, was the first of its kind rallying layman, patient and Chiropractor to a unified effort. The A.B.C. counteracted anti-chiropractic propaganda by educational means. Through the then new medium, radio, A.B.C. produced the first weekly chiropractic talk show (W.M.C.A.) on the east coast. Its membership grew nationally to include 114 auxiliaries. It is suggested that B. J. Palmer, who once supported the A.B.C., felt Dr. Werner had gone too far and made efforts to control A.B.C. activities. Dr. Werner died before licensure was granted in his home state of New York. The A.B.C. faded away shortly after New York was licensed.

"In considering the history of the A.B.C. we must consider the intensity of the effort of organized medicine to uproot Chiropractic throughout the United States and the particularly fierce intensity of the effort to destroy Chiropractic in New York.

"We will kill off Chiropractic in New York, Chicago and the other large cities first," said the Medical Organization in almost so many words, "then we can easily mop up the smaller towns" (The American Bureau of Chiropractic, History of the A.B.C., 1).

Many chiropractic organizations have come and gone. One such organization, the American Bureau of Chiropractic (A.B.C.), existed for over forty years. Its founder and president, William H. Werner, D.C. (1890-1959), fought a seemingly endless war for the recognition and license of chiropractic. Often times it seems difficult to comprehend how chiropractic can be denied the privilege of legal practice in any part of the United States. It is interesting to note that the practice of chiropractic in the State of New York remained unlicensed for sixty-eight years.

The A.B.C. stated in its publication entitled "The A.B.C. of Establishing Chiropractic" that the A.M.A.'s reasons for such aggressive attacks were economical:

"Medical men despite their far-flung claims of interest in public health, actually are motivated by the fact that the Chiropractic practitioner is taking away patients, and taking away patients means taking away fees. This economic factor is behind the desire to destroy the science. The American Medical Association is composed of members of a profession who devoted years of study to their science, who spent a good deal of money to prepare themselves for their business. Chiropractic is a competitor of that business." (A.B.C. 1928, 9).

The A.B.C. obviously felt the A.M.A.'s treatment of chiropractic was unwarranted.

"The struggle that faces Chiropractic is due not to the lack of evidence showing the benefits to be derived from the science, but rather to persistent and far-flung anti-chiropractic propaganda carried on by the organized medical forces. Without any evidence to show that Chiropractic is a fraud as they contend, they nevertheless constantly attack it by innuendo, insinuation, etc., and at the same time issue statements urging the people to consult medical doctors. The object of such activities naturally is the desire of the organized medical profession to 'talk down' a competitor in the healing arts and to boost his own profession" (A.B.C. 1928, 28-29).

In the 1920's there was indeed a monopoly on health care. Of course any new entry into the healing arts is going to be received with a certain amount of criticism and prejudice. Bill Werner sought to break down these barriers. Werner saw the methods to establishing and maintaining this monopoly.

"Through the might of their powerfully united organizations, and through its intensive propaganda program, the medical machine has influenced legislators to turn over to medical men legal control over all health and medical matters in the country. A control that menaces the right of the chiropractor to practice his science. This organization achieved and maintains control over health departments in every state, city and county in the country. By controlling Health Depart-

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ments, it directs the health activities of the Departments of Education; and through the Departments of Education it reaches the young during their most impressionable years" (A.B.C. 1928, 10).

Chiropractic education was hit extremely hard. In fact the anti-chiropractic push made it difficult to even consider a career in chiropractic.

"The medical men struck not only at the sick who need Chiropractic, not only at practitioners of Chiropractic, but at the very roots of Chiropractic upon which depends the future of the science—namely the Chiropractic schools. By propaganda and persecution the medical machine is killing the possibilities of schools getting new students and by this move the machine strikes at future Chiropractors, and striking at future Chiropractors means striking at future generations who will need the science but will not have it. But how can students be expected to go to Chiropractic schools, to spend their hard-earned money to devote years of study to a science when they know that upon graduation they face a seemingly endless struggle, arrest, prosecution, hounding, fines, jail. No patients, unless they are the ones sent by the police department seeking evidence sufficient to make an arrest" (A.B.C. 1928, 11-12).

The A.B.C. saw the product of medicine's efforts as being quite successful. Clearly frustration, confusion and bitterness were part of everyday practice of the New York chiropractor. This quote from "Is Chiropractic Doomed?" states the sentiment of the time:

"The sick, due to anti-chiropractic propaganda believe that the science is a fake and its practitioner a quack" (A.B.C. 1928, 11-12).

Unlicensed chiropractic practice in New York was similar in atmosphere to that of a speakeasy, always under fear of arrest. Bill Werner was critical of the New York State Chiropractic Society's efforts to protect its members.

"They chose to hire a detective agency to 'protect' its members. On the face of it the plan was simple. Before a chiropractor accepted a case, the patient was investigated. The sleuth's job was to inform the chiropractor whether the person investigated was a genuine case or a "spotter" in the employ of the Deputy Attorney General's Office. Simple isn't it? There was only one thing wrong. 'Mistakes.' The detective agency slipped up and Chiropractors were arrested because the 'genuine' patient turned out to be a decoy. The agency had an agreement with the then Deputy Attorney General that if the chiropractor would plead guilty to the practice of medicine, that is perjure himself, he would receive a suspended sentence. This was a conviction and was exactly what the Deputy Attorney General wanted. Woe be to the chiropractor who was apprehended a second time or a third time. He faced an indeterminate sentence of three years" (Legislation—A Resume and a Proposal Plan, 2).

Seeing so many obstacles put in chiropractors way it is truly amazing that chiropractic actually survived its first thirty years. Werner was equally critical of the New York State Chiropractic Society for its behavior in the political arena. Here is where the idea grew which led to the organization of the A.B.C.:

"Year in and year out the New York State Chiropractic Society went to Albany. They fraternized and patronized politicians and legislators. One year their efforts were rewarded. A bill actually passed both houses of the State Legislature. But the Governor (Al Smith) vetoed it (Legislation—A Resume and a Proposal Plan). The State Society pursued the same old course—relying upon political maneuvering and whispered conferences at Albany and elsewhere that led to nothing but a stream of promises from senators and assemblymen. Chiropractic had gained neither legal sanction nor increased favorable public endorsement through this method of seeking political preferment. In brief, what it amounted to was the profession seeking favors, not the people demanding a right. It was left for the group who really understood that only people could secure chiropractic to secure the bulk of Legislative memberships for the purpose of impressing the Legislature" (History of A.B.C., 40).

The character and conviction of Bill Werner is exemplified by this information circulated by the A.B.C. stating:

"Forseeing the absolute destruction of Chiropractic if organized medicine's program were carried out, and being imbued with the firm confidence that the public would not permit such an outrage against the sick or the world if the public knew the real value of Chiropractic, Dr. William H. Werner, President of the American Bureau of Chiropractic, decided to make a tremendous personal effort to convey the knowledge of Chiropractic to all the world" (The American Bureau of Chiropractic, History of the A.B.C., 1).

In 1923 he laid out what he believed was the only proper certain method of spreading knowledge about chiropractic. It was through public relations procedure that he thought would immediately secure the approval and backing of the profession (History of the A.B.C., 1).

There are more than a million chiropractic patients throughout the United States, wielding more than a million votes. There is not a political party in the United States which will not give almost any kind of legislation, national or state, when it knows you have a million votes to back your desires that is what the proper enforcement of the A.B.C. plan will do (A.B.C. 1928, 18).

"As the inaugural step, he rightly assumed that his patients and their families would like to hear more about Chiropractic, and a series of meetings quickly verified those conclusions. The few patients a week increased to a considerable number. He was making his section of the State Chiropractic-minded, and that helped the other practitioners in and around Richmond Hill just as it added to his own clientele" (History of the A.B.C., 2).

In those days radio was a relatively new medium. WOC Radio owned, operated and developed by B.J. Palmer, was a stop off point of soon-to-be famous announcer, Ronald "Dutch" Reagan. Radio as a public relations tool fit right into the Werner plan.

"The radio is one of the very influential ways of reaching the people. Today the radio is almost equal to newspapers in carrying out educational campaigns.

"You can reach people through the radio that you do not reach through newspapers. The radio also, has the advantage

off being listened to where the one you speak to is at leisure in his own home, or in reaching the housewife and children at home during the day, when they have time to think over what you say.

"In articles appearing in newspapers or in advertising columns, there is always the possibility that they may be overlooked in the hurry to read stories of more immediate interest, but over the radio, once they have tuned into your stations, they will generally listen provided the talk is interesting enough.

"In addition, the printed word is a cold medium whereas the spoken word is more persuasive. The subjects of radio talks should be of general interest to the people" (A.B.C. 1928, 23-29).

Dr. Werner heard that a new station was opening up in the Hotel Mcalpin and there he went to receive cordial greetings and cooperation. This was W.M.C.A. Through W.M.C.A. poured the first lectures on the science of chiropractic heard in the eastern part of the United States. A full hour once a week was engaged (History of A.B.C., 3).

In the interim, the success of those little meetings of patients had developed the program of organizing the public, always in the Werner mind. The A.B.C. was founded and auxiliary number one began its career (History of A.B.C., 4). That brings us to the formation of the American Bureau of Chiropractic:

"Headquarters were opened March 7, 1927 in the Styvusan building at 100 5th Avenue where the chief office remained with one change, and that to a larger quarters than were first occupied.

"A meeting was held with an invitation sent out to all Chiropractors of New York and vicinity including the Chiropractors of Northern New Jersey. The result was that on June 27, 1927, The American Bureau of Chiropractic was incorporated with a New York State Charter and shortly after the movement spread to other states, so that at the beginning of 1929 with five state organizations and the whole country interested in the A.B.C. project, it was decided to reincorporate with added powers on an international scope.

"The A.B.C. movement seemed to sweep the country. From representation in five states it had grown to an organization in forty-one states. On March 17, 1930, three years after opening its headquarters, it had 114 auxiliaries" (The American Bureau of Chiropractic, History of the A.B.C., 5).

It became powerful because it fulfilled a long felt need in the profession. It would not compromise. It fought cases in court, it counseled its members against pleading guilty to the charges of which they were innocent (Legislation—A Resume and a Proposal Plan, 2).

The A.B.C. organized to help chiropractors across the country. Its membership consisted of lay person auxiliaries. The main thrust of the A.B.C. plan is stated in a section of the A.B.C. of establishing chiropractic called "How can it be done?":

"Especially it is the object of the American Bureau of Chiropractic to educate laymen and to organize them to present a united front in fighting for the science that means so much to all. Essentially it is necessary to counteract anti-

chiropractic publicity disseminated by Medical men; and under the A.B.C. plan this anti-chiropractic publicity can be counteracted. The disorganized, chaotic condition that the science finds itself in can be remedied" (A.B.C. 1928, 18).

The internal structure of this laymen's organization was one of interest. The auxiliaries had a voice in A.B.C. policy and were involved in most aspects of operations:

"The A.B.C. is controlled by all its members. It is composed of state units, which in turn are composed of county and district auxiliaries. The auxiliaries are those organizations of laymen, organized under the central state body, which aid in the educational and organizational work.

"Each auxiliary is represented at the state unit so that every auxiliary has a voice in determining the policies of the organization.

"Each state unit is composed of officers elected by the auxiliaries, and all state units together is the A.B.C.

"The power to determine the policies of the A.B.C. is held by the state units whose delegates decide A.B.C. business at an annual congress. An organization of all for one purpose: the right of the sick to get well. An organization where all have equal voice in the business of the organization" (A.B.C. 1928, 21).

In December 1929 Dr. Werner was arrested and subsequently convicted of practicing medicine without a license. An account of those events goes as follows:

"One day a woman walked into Dr. Werner's office with a card of introduction from a brother Chiropractor, from whom, she said she had taken a few adjustments. She desired to have the services of someone near her home, in Hollis, Long Island. Dr. Werner disregarded at that moment the thought that she could have dealt with a practitioner in Jamaica much nearer to her abode. He assumed that the other Chiropractor had desired her to go to Dr. Werner rather than to a comparative stranger.

"A course of adjustments was prescribed and three visits followed. Then the woman came no more, for several months. When she did arrive a state trooper accompanied her with a warrant for Dr. Werner's arrest.

"It was obvious that it was a pre-arranged scheme in which another Chiropractor had been the innocent medium for a strike below the belt at Dr. Werner. Bill immediately made inquiries and within a few hours discovered the true identity of the plaintiff, a member of the staff of the Peterson Detective Agency. That same company engaged by the New York State Chiropractic Society for protective investigation service. The State Society was denied any connection with this situation" (History of A.B.C., 5).

The conviction of Werner was based chiefly on the testimony of Miss Marie Kroemer, a private investigator, of Freeport, L.I. Miss Kroemer said that a Freeport doctor suggested that she go to Werner for treatment of neck pains and headaches (New York Times, 6 May 1931). She charged that when she was being treated for a headache, Werner used undue force in twisting her neck about (Standard Mirror, 7 February 1931). On May 5, 1931, Bill Werner was sentenced to six months in the Queens County Jail. While in prison, Werner writes:

"Stronger than ever within me is the feeling that only in our A.B.C. movement we have the real salvation of Chiropractic everywhere. If my sentence in jail only arouses the Chiropractors themselves by getting them to organize their patients, then I will consider my time in jail well spent, disagreeable as it may be. Regardless of every other thing, the A.B.C. must go on for the welfare of the sick—we owe it to them" (William Werner, letter to Mrs. Phillip Gravelle, 8 June 1931).

Werner was released on October 5, 1931 to find the A.B.C. in shambles. Mass resignations of members and executive officers followed. International Vice President C. P. Eifertsen stated in his resignation letter:

"I hereby resign as International Vice President and as a member of The American Bureau of Chiropractic, Inc., to take effect immediately.

"As I stated Sunday afternoon (Dec. 20, 1931) at the general meeting, I can no longer act as an officer or as a member of an organization that persists in misleading Chiropractors and laymen about its true activities.

"You refused to listen not only to me and to the demands of the national field, you turned tail and refused to abide by their desires.

"When a man has been collecting money from the field for years under the pretense of giving them a say in the organization and does not give it to them, is finally told plainly what the field wants by the field itself, takes the attitude of: 'To hell with what they want! This is my organization and I will run it to suit myself!' Then I can no longer continue as an officer or as a member.

"I am sending a copy of this letter of resignation to B. J. Palmer with a request that it be published in the Fountainhead News as well as copies to the Chiropractic field" (Eifertsen, 17 January 1932).

Now being put on trial by his own profession Werner defends his position by stating:

"An organization that starts from scratch, facing the strongest organized enemies and builds itself to the heights, as ours did, is proof enough in itself that those responsible for its activities have not been lacking in initiative, loyalty and sincerity.

"Yet in one little year, that same organization which has taken our science to such magnificent heights, which built up such tremendous good will, has been virtually ruined and right now I do not hesitate that those responsible, in whole or in part are the worst enemies of Chiropractic and the sick. As to who those enemies are is a matter I believe that only time will tell.

"A year ago our office and organization were establishing itself into a most efficient machine. We had seven people employed in our office, systems were being installed whereby auxiliaries were almost becoming self operated, in a word arranging our forces so that every activity could be and would be conducted in the heights of efficiency.

"At this same time, however, my trial was pending, wherein I was charged with practicing medicine without a

license. Unfortunately we did not meet with success and I was obliged to go to prison. It is alleged that immediately after my imprisonment, certain members interested themselves in finding fault, creating dissension as it were, and it has also been reported that Dr. C. P. Eifertsen circularized a letter expressing dissatisfaction with the Bureau to many of our stated leaders, with the result that such confidence was destroyed and incoming monies were diminished.

"This situation kept growing worse week by week and by the time I was released from prison, Headquarters' staff was reduced to only four, practically all of our activities were crippled, contracts that were made had to be fulfilled and our organization heavily in debt. In other words, those that were out to tear down the Bureau sure made a fine job of it while I was away and you can possibly appreciate how I felt after giving up six months of my time to come back home and find all that we worked so hard for, labored for, suffered for, virtually destroyed.

"I was released on October 5, and on the tenth at a Get-Together meeting of the New York Western Division of the A.B.C. (in Buffalo) I was informed that there I would meet with B. J. Palmer and many of the leaders from other states. Where as all our Get-Together meetings were always constructive up-building and filled with enthusiasm, this affair proved to be just the opposite.

"Here I sat and listened to men we adored in the profession, to men that we were willing to sacrifice anything for, tearing in and at the loyal workers of our organization, breaking down their morale by discrediting their work and their efforts. This tearing down and general destruction continued throughout the meeting and only terminated after it was suggested that a conclave be called at Davenport, Iowa.

"And so on December 5 and 6, a conclave was held at which the proceedings were much the same as that at Buffalo, with the result that a state of general chaos existed." (Werner, February 1932).

The context dealt principally with the proposition that Dr. Werner had gone too far afield in his A.B.C. endeavors and that too large a portion of the nationally contributed funds were disbursed for the benefit of the New York State situation (History of A.B.C.). A reorganization of A.B.C. policy and structure was called for by B. J. Palmer. Werner goes on to say:

"Those from this section of the country who attended, were most disappointed in what they believed to be a direct attack on a most progressive organization, and because of Dr. B. J. Palmer's aggressive participation throughout these two affairs, the general opinion was that they would not have him as a guest speaker at our Get-Together." (Werner, February 1932).

Werner rejected the resolutions proposed by the conclave at Davenport putting further distance between himself and B. J. Palmer. The A.B.C. survived the crisis, then went on to hold a convention at Madison Square Garden, January 23, 1932. Animosity grew between Werner and B. J. B. J. states in a letter to Werner and Craig M. Kightlinger in 1939:

"I speak in Binghamton, New York, Sunday afternoon, November 19. I will get out of there that evening, if possible, and arrive in New York the morning of the 20th. However, I had one experience on late plans with Bill Werner, and I don't want to repeat that, so I'm asking, can you to meet with me at 10 o'clock." (Palmer, 8 November 1939).

The American Bureau of Chiropractic outlived both Wil-

liam Werner and B. J. Palmer. Finally, after chiropractic licensure was granted in New York State (1963), The A.B.C. faded away and eventually dissolved in 1965 (Minutes, 30 March 1965). Unfortunately, Bill Werner passed away in 1959 and never saw his ultimate plan of proper licensure come to fruition. As a final note, Dr. William H. Werner was never able to enjoy the legal practice of chiropractic.

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Monday, May. 18, 1931

## Chiropractic Slugged

Chiropractic took a hard slugging in a Jamaica, L. I., court last week. William H. Werner, president of the American Bureau of Chiropractic, was on trial for practicing medicine without a license. His income from chiropractic treatments and teaching was figured to be \$70,000 a year. Some 200 of his patients, who believed him a martyr, jammed into the courtroom where they caused so much disturbance that the trial judges had them ejected.

Chiropractor Werner was a martyr to his cause in one sense. Regular medicine, including homeopathy, uses drugs, surgery, physical therapeutics, every possible means to prevent and cure disease. Chiropractic in essence believes that spinal manipulations (one form of physical therapy) is sufficient to prevent and cure. A great many chiropractors have amplified this philosophy to include many of Medicine's teachings, as have osteopaths with their theory. Hence 40 States recognize chiropractic as a method. But not New York.

In New York when rich William H. Werner, doctor of chiropractic, treats the sick for pay, he has no more legal standing than a Pennsylvania "hexer." In court he proved an undiplomatic protagonist of his cause. He tried to harangue the judges on chiropractic. They squelched him and sentenced him to six months in the workhouse.

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