

the agencies the attitudes of the administrative staff toward the workers has been paternalistic. For that reason, perhaps, the workers have, to a great extent, allied themselves with their executives on such questions as salaries, size of case load, and other personnel practices. They have also, perhaps as a result of their ignorance of existing economic conditions, remained apathetic and have consequently taken no action in organizing and seeking participation through a workers' council. The stand which the Association of Federation Social Workers has taken, the response of its membership meetings called in order to protest salary cuts

and to act upon personnel practices, the assertion of the workers of two Brooklyn agencies that they are now planning workers' councils indicate to us the new trends in the field of social work. The growing awareness on the part of the social worker that she has problems in common with the industrial worker, as well as professional problems, point out that she does not find the title "professional" compensatory for unsatisfactory salary scales, insecurity of tenure, and limited voice in the formulation of those policies and practices which had in the past originated with the administrative staff.

Participation Within a District

By LUBA KEATS

Jewish Social Service Association, New York

SUPERVISION, like every other aspect of social work, requires from time to time a re-examination of its aims and content and revision of its practices, in pace with the general development of the profession.

The profession's rapid development in recent years and the resultant improvement in personnel and case work standards raise the questions as to whether supervisory practices and the structure of district life have developed along parallel lines and whether these practices, as they exist today, further the progress of the work. The theories and aims of contemporary supervisory practices are not to be found in professional literature. Shifts in practice have been rapid and the deluge of work during the depression has probably deterred the evaluation and formulation of new theories. Miss Paige's belief ("Supervising Case Work in a District Office," *The Family*, Feb., 1927) that the function of a supervisor is "to overlook and take charge, with authority to direct or regulate and see, frequently and systematically the work and workers," implies an administrative rod that the profession is no longer willing to accept. The contemporary schools of thinking, represented by Dr. Marion Kenworthy, Miss Grace Marcus, and Miss Virginia Robinson, have stressed chiefly the student-training aspect of supervision. Their theories on the case work relationship between student and teacher give the clue to the professional relationship that may be expected to follow the graduate's entrance into the field, but fail to outline specific methods and objectives. A progressive concept of supervision, best adapted to the composition of a district as we know it today, is expressed by Mrs. Anna Kaplun (in a paper presented at the Annual Staff Conference of the Jewish Social Service Association

in 1930) who says that the function of a supervisor is "to give professional leadership to a given group of case workers whose development she directs in the administration and practice of case work."

This presentation is not an attempt to evolve an "ideal system." No system is lastingly ideal or even permanently acceptable. The present status of the profession makes possible, and the goals the profession has set for itself makes imperative, the formulation of methods that will further development. Revision of supervisory and administrative methods can be achieved in a large measure through critical examination and candid expression by field workers, the group most vitally affected by these problems. Criticism based on intelligent and earnest thinking is not destructive—such criticism is essential, and should pave the way to the formulation of new ideas and to progressive change.

Two sources have been used in the attempt to formulate what supervisors and case workers think of supervision: the report of the Institute for Supervisors from Jewish Agencies (conducted in New York in June, 1930) and the material made available by the Workers' Council of the Jewish Social Service Association which initiated a discussion of supervision in each district of the organization.

The Institute for Supervisors concerned itself with three aspects of supervision: personality relationships, functional and administrative problems, and recording as a method in supervision. The participants gave thoughtful consideration to problems arising in supervision, but on the whole there was evident a tendency to generalization, a leaning toward the acceptance of the status quo, and a lack of awareness of the needs and reactions of those supervised.

In the discussion of personality relationships, the Institute accepted the case work process as the basis of the supervisor-worker relationship, failed to place sufficient emphasis on the qualifications of the supervisor, and without evolving concrete methods and objective tests, designated that the aim of supervision is to release the workers' productive and creative processes.

The analysis of functional and administrative problems pointed to the need of releasing the supervisor from the excessive volume of work, suggested relegating a portion of the work to the office secretary and registrar, and recommended the development of functional participation by the staff. The latter aspect was not stressed and no concrete procedures were agreed upon.

The Committee on Recording evaluated the merits of various types of recording in relation to their usefulness in judging the case worker's performance.

On the whole, the report of the Institute conveys the impression that its members accepted the existing structure of district life as adequate and that their interests were directed toward a more equitable division of supervisory duties and general improvement of administrative methods.

The material furnished by the Workers' Council was too extensive to permit its presentation in detail. The most important criticisms are here listed in the order of importance:

1. The present structure of district life makes of supervision "a one-man job." Workers are not acquainted with the totality of the district problem; they are required to handle only their immediate work, they are not given opportunities to test their abilities, and have little share in the organization, direction and administration of the district.

2. The supervisor is the final arbiter in case work decisions and in the evaluation of the worker's competence and professional development. Definite criteria to determine the qualifications of supervisors are lacking, methods of case work evaluation are few and inadequate, and judgments colored largely by subjective reactions, are not infrequent.

3. Supervision retains a "checking up" tendency. Individual conferences are routinized and are held at specified intervals and for definite periods of time, irrespective of the need for consultation. Staff conferences, in many instances, show a lack of planning and purposiveness and fail to arouse the interest of the staff.

These findings are not a condemnation of any particular organization or any particular group of supervisors. Informal conversation with any group of case workers yield similar opinions and reactions. The failure lies in the

continued acceptance of and sullen resignation to outworn concepts. The criticism points to the necessity of crystallizing the needs of the profession in contemporary terms and of evolving standards and methods to meet the new requirements.

Participation or democratic organization of a district has come to be regarded by some workers as an utopian dream. In reality, if all of our practices were instituted on the basis of deliberate experimentation, and if we had better media to avail ourselves of one another's experiences, we would probably discover that such plans have been tried successfully in many places. Because of my limited experience and because of my intimate acquaintance with a district where such practices are the accepted order, I shall have to draw on my experience from a training district, and cull out of it concepts and devices which have proved effective in this district and which I believe to be applicable to any district form of organization.

It is essential to define one's concept of supervision and what qualifications are expected of the director and coordinator before one can discuss the forms which district life may take. The function of a supervisor, as we see it, is to affect a thoroughly welded, democratically controlled organization, to develop the capacities of individual staff members, and to direct the staff toward effective, intelligent and responsible team-work. To give competent leadership and to coordinate productively group effort, a supervisor must possess, in addition to case work expertness and intellectual and emotional orientation, the power to stimulate creative expression in others, a sincere belief in collective effort, and the ability to derive satisfaction through team-work.

It is obviously impossible to enter into a discussion of detailed plans as to how a district should function. It is possible to formulate ideas and suggestions that may stimulate better and clearer thinking on problems over which social workers have expressed concern, such as major methods of supervision and the sharing of district responsibilities.

The individual conference is an important method of supervising a worker's performance. The nature and purpose of the individual conference cannot be described better than by referring again to Mrs. Kaplun, who says: "The conference should provide an opportunity for intellectual stimulation and emotional growth. It should tend to deepen the understanding of case work concepts and quicken social imagination; in short, it should enrich the daily job through the development of the worker's potentialities and perspective. The process of this professional ripening should be permeated by a sense of achievement and a consciousness of growth." An individual conference of the type described presupposes a leader who is able to gauge the worker's development and receptivity and to con-

sciously direct teaching plans and methods to further the worker's progress.

The problem of "evaluation" looms large on the case work horizon. Supervisors are sincerely troubled because they seek more objective criteria of evaluation, and workers because they question the validity of judgments based on inexact measurement given by individuals, who, like the rest of us, are subject to human frailties. It should be possible in a scheme where the development of self-evaluation and self-criticism are of paramount importance, to evolve a method of entrusting such measurement not to a single individual but to a group of individuals. It may be possible, for instance, to have such analyses made by an elected and qualified staff member working in conjunction with the supervisor and the individual worker. It is possible that such a procedure will not only meet an immediate need but that it may facilitate the development of more acceptable and objective measurement.

Suggestions for new procedures and methods, no matter how detailed and instructive, can effect no fundamental changes unless they are related to a philosophy that sets as its goal a structure which permits full and productive expression of individual effort in interaction with group effort. Staff participation is not a luxury—it is a fundamental requirement for the development of intelligent, responsible members of a profession.

A worker's creative energies are stifled when she is permitted to execute only her immediate job, without knowing the totality of the district problem and without having a voice in decisions pertaining to policy and the direction of the district. Staff conferences, too, are a success or a failure, in exact proportion to how fully they meet the

needs and interests of the staff. The programs, to be stimulating, must be based around the desires and plans of those who attend. At a time when social work is re-defining its philosophy and asking of itself, "Whither are we going?" staff conferences cannot be restricted to discussions of technical problems only. Technical aspects of the job have their place in discussion; vital clinical analyses, group consultations on case procedures and practices, considerations of district and organizational problems are important, but these must be coordinated with a program that places the immediate work in its proper relation to vital social developments. These discussions are most valuable when they permit individuals to test their own abilities and to collaborate with others on projects, studies, and administrative problems. True participation means "from each according to his ability; to each according to his needs." "Lone-wolf" thinking and administration, expedient though it may be at times, results in automatic execution of plans; thinking and planning accomplished by a group becomes part of their experience and is put into practice with consciousness and conviction.

The question I anticipate is "How can change be brought about?" There is no social work Messiah to lead social workers out of the wilderness of resigned and disillusioned acceptance into the land of productive, development-fostering team-work. The answers to the questions as to how we are to work in the present and in the future, are held by every practicing social worker and depend on the standards and conditions he is willing to accept for himself and for the profession and on the effort he is willing to put in to effect change.

DISCUSSION

ROSE MASIN (Brooklyn): The profession of social work being new in its development, attention seems to have been thus far concentrated on the evolving of techniques and the training of workers to use these techniques. What about the supervisors who direct the workers? One needs but look through recent professional literature to realize how little consideration the subject of supervision has as yet been given. The two outstanding recent contributions in the field of social work concern themselves mostly with the techniques and mechanics of the job and devote relatively little space to the subject of supervision. I am referring to "The Social Worker," by Louise C. Odencrantz, and "The Social Worker in Child Care and Protection," by Margueretta Williamson. In both these

books, we find a more progressive definition of the functions of a supervisor than that given by Miss Paige. Since Miss Williamson's definition is similar to that of Miss Odencrantz, I shall quote the latter, who enumerates the following as the functions of a supervisor:

1. To understand and help develop the ability of each worker.
2. To stimulate the staff to a high quality of work through building up a sense of responsibility.
3. To help and advise them in their case work.
4. To encourage further professional development.

However, both Miss Odencrantz and Miss Williamson accept the autocratic organization of the district with the supervisor playing the paternalistic role.

The progressive trend, however, definitely points toward a democratic organization. Workers are more and more recognizing the need for the organization of Workers' Councils with the idea of attaining greater staff participation in policies of agencies. In some of the more progressive agencies, such Councils have long been established. To effectively participate in such a plan should not the worker first have experience for participation in the smaller unit, namely, the district? This need for greater participation in the district on the part of the worker has been expressed by Alfred W. Hobart in his article, "What the Visitor Expects from Supervision," in the March, 1931, issue of the *Family*. He stresses the importance of participation for the visitor as a medium through which her need for recognition will be satisfied. We do not have to have psychiatrists point out to us how important a need it is. I am sure that all of you have had the experience of seeing people suddenly blossom forth, with their personalities appearing to have undergone a complete change for the better because of opportunities for participation and recognition. Mr. Hobart feels that the supervisor should work *not over but with the visitor*. He speaks of the supervisor as

"the first among equals, equals potentially if not actually." One of the difficulties in the supervisor-worker relationship has been the concept of it as one where the former does all the giving and the latter is merely receiving. Whereas in reality, it should be a relationship where there is mutual giving and receiving and which should result in mutual growth. This process is of course guided by the supervisor, but both are benefitting. The very term "supervisor" is a misnomer in the light of the more progressive concept of this term, as it applies to field work supervision. Perhaps the word "field-guide" expresses it more appropriately.

This raises also the question of the criteria that have been employed in choosing this guide. Has she been selected from the ranks of the successful senior case workers? But does success in case work necessarily make the senior case worker eligible for supervisorship? Training courses to prepare workers for case work are considered desirable, and schools have been established for this purpose. Is field work experience sufficient to prepare the worker adequately for the supervisory job or should supervisors also be trained for their position?