

victory would extinguish poverty in America. Both prophecies have not been marked with unerring accuracy.

We are, nevertheless, arriving at the very goal which was so enthusiastically forecasted, paradoxically enough, not through the elimination of poverty, but as a result of an economic disaster without precedent. This much is certain: The Jewish agency will no longer, at least for some years to come, be in a position where it can say, "We will provide for all dependent Jewish families in our community." The major responsibility for such care will rest squarely on the shoulders of the public, and the Jewish agency will become more and more a supplementary and service agency. Not that this is necessarily a minor or unimportant role. In a sense, this condition will act as a challenge to the claim of Jewish agencies that they are better equipped to deal with Jewish families than the non-sectarian or public agencies. This claim still needs to be proved. The reading of records in many agencies will perhaps dispel this notion. To prove to our communities that there is a real need for separate Jewish agencies, communities must be in a position to attract the more thoroughly trained workers. This they can do only if salary standards and working conditions are at least as attractive as those of public agencies. In my own city, the Department of Outdoor Relief of Milwaukee County is in a position where it can successfully compete with the private agency. Its salaries are higher, and the security offered to its workers is much more definite than is the case with the private agency.

The family agency of the future will place less emphasis on mental hygiene as a tool for individual treatment. Many workers have by this time come to realize that we have all been somewhat too much under the spell of the psychiatrist and psychoanalyst. True to form, we have always been ready to become enthusiastic disciples of every new tendency, every new school in the field of psychology. The latest and most vocal is, of course, the mental hygiene movement.

The agency of the future will give greater thought to the point of view developed by Dr. Frankwood Williams

in that brilliant series of articles on Russia, which he has recently published in *The Survey*. Dr. Williams regards the Russian revolution as having achieved a spiritual, rather than an industrial and social, revolution. Here alone does he find mental hygiene made use of as a part of the whole social program, as a tool whereby to achieve social sanity. Instead of using mental hygiene as a means of restoring an individual to mental health and to bring about a better adaptation to a chaotic economic and social system, in Russia it is part and parcel of a mass movement. Only when society and all its agencies and activities are organically integrated, Dr. Williams concludes, only when all society's efforts are directed towards the same goal, namely, the national well-being, can we give life a meaning; only then can the individual feel that sense of security which we are aiming at; only then can he be conscious of the fact that he really "belongs," that he is an important and worthwhile member of society.

The agency of the future will perforce concern itself with more than rendering service to individual families. The social agency will become a social agency in the real sense of the term, in the sense that it will concern itself with the social causes of maladjustment. It will be the source from which will radiate efforts at community education concerning the vital social problems of the day. No family agency can any longer do its work without being very definitely aware of the conditions which make its work necessary. In order to be socially useful, it will of necessity familiarize itself and its constituency with the importance of national planning in the use of our resources and our man power, so that family life may have a dignity and a meaning which our present disorganized world precludes. It will furthermore help the community in an understanding of the inadequacy of any program of public relief. In the final analysis, public relief is not enough. The social agency should and must take the leadership in helping to develop a carefully planned system of social insurance, to safeguard the worker against the ever increasing hazards of old age, sickness, and unemployment.

Social Work Practices in the Present Depression*

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THE discussion group which met to consider the above topic soon found itself involved, not only in a consideration of present day techniques, practiced in social work but also in a re-evaluation of their own philosophical outlook in relation to current economic and political problems. Three main topics were discussed in weekly group meetings which covered a period of six weeks. The general topics treated were The Effect of Depression on Family Life, Public and Private Social Work and the Responsibility of Social Work to Client and Community. An underlying relationship of all the topics treated made it possible to incorporate the material in one paper.

In discussing the effect of depression on family life, it was felt that the changing philosophy in regard to the scope of service of public and private agencies has not only brought about a change in the attitude of the social worker but also in that of the client. It is this change of attitude on the part of the client that we would consider, since it materially related to problems in family life. Due partly to the interpretation of the social worker on the job and also to the newspaper publicity given to public relief work, the client is coming to regard the type of assistance that a social agency offers as a necessary contribution by the community to meet his problem. The present economic situation manifests itself in the everyday life of the individual. It affects his family relationship, his health, his education, his entire social outlook and attitude. Prolonged frustration of efforts to secure work results in the gradual loss of the individual's confidence in his own ability. Parallel with this feeling of inadequacy comes the belief that his position is not peculiar to himself but that his continued unemployment is only a product of social forces beyond his control. This attitude may have destructive as well as constructive elements. The perils of projecting the blame on outside conditions inclines the individual to rationalize the acceptance of relief. The feeling that the inability to provide is not a personal defect leads the individual to believe that the responsibility for his survival and that of his family depends on some outside agency. There is, however, a constructive side to this same experience. As the individual becomes aware that resident within his social environment are forces which through no fault of his own make for his destruction, he is less inclined to take this

same environment for granted. The questions and doubts which arise within him may be the impetus towards clearer social thinking and may result in efforts to reconstruct or better the present social order. This is of course also fraught with danger and there are conservative elements in every community who would consider this a doubtful blessing. Another positive aspect of the attitude which looks upon the economic assistance as a proper communal function is the lessening of the sense of shame or fall in self-respect that usually accompanies requests for financial aid.

Many women who in normal times are not the breadwinners, are forced into industry today to supplement a very inadequate income or provide the only income. When an able-bodied man looks continuously but futilely for work, his wife becomes either suspicious of his efforts or slightly contemptuous of his helplessness. When the wife on the other hand becomes a successful wage earner, the strain on their marital relationship is intensified. Changing values attach to the various members of the household. The man's previous primary function as provider no longer exists. He must find a new place for himself in the family group or must resign himself as a repeated failure.

Frequently sons or daughters in their teens become the main or only wage earners. This elevates them to a position of authority which frequently undermines the position of the parents. The parents feel themselves inferior and are often forced to succumb to the less mature judgment or will of their children, thus creating additional instability in the home.

In times of unemployment many children of working age, who in more prosperous times would have continued their schooling, are forced into so-called blind alley jobs. This same group forms our future under-employed or seasonal workers who are the first to lose their jobs in any economic depression or whose earnings in good times are insufficient to maintain independence. There is also, on the other hand, a group of young people of working age which, since no work is available, is forced to continue its schooling even though it has no capacity to benefit from additional training. We have also the group which in normal times continues its training through college and which is

* Exposition of views formulated by a group of case workers for presentation at the sessions sponsored by the Regional Case Workers Committee.

now thrown upon the labor market, becoming the competitor of older men who are often heads of families.

There is likewise an ever increasing group of young people which when unable to find work takes to the open road. What effect this type of life will have upon their future adjustment in any work and home relationships is difficult to say. It appears, however, that it would not be too speculative to predict that many social and economic maladjustments will be the result of these wanderings.

Living on short rations as many families are at present doing, brings in its wake resultant physical deterioration that must be measured over a period of years. The relationship of the morbidity rate to malnutrition has not been definitely established but it is apparent that there must be a very real correlation. Dr. Theodore Appel, Pennsylvania's Secretary of Health, has stated, "There is a lowered resistance and while it is too early to get figures on the relationship between present economic conditions and tuberculosis, that disease will more easily claim its victims among young children where physical resistance has been steadily kept at a low level." Schools from poorer sections in the city also report a lowered vitality and loss of alertness among their enrollment.

The second topic for discussion dealt with private and public agencies. The necessity for a historical perspective presented itself as a background toward understanding the present development. It was felt that due to the limited scope of this paper, it would be necessary to confine ourselves to a brief survey of the development of public and private agencies in this country. The American system of poor relief is the lineal descendant of the English system of the time of Elizabeth. Just as the colonists brought with them religious, political and intellectual viewpoints that had their background in England, so did their attitude toward welfare work reflect the same background. Early legislation in this country enacted ordinances forbidding single persons to live by themselves or in families other than their own, the chief object being to secure responsibility for support. In case the head of the family was unwilling to support his dependants, there is abundant evidence to show that civil authorities were not loath to compel him to do so. Later developments made the township or county the administrative unit for the dispensing of relief. In contrast with England, the federal government of this country never assumed the care of dependants except the comparatively small number of military and naval veterans. Sectional differences as emphasized by New England and the South made for differences in problems which had to be met by different handling. An early method by which the town official handled dependency was by a system of boarding out the members of the dependent family to other families who would keep them for their services. This, how-

ever, was found to be unsatisfactory and the almshouse was soon found to be a more economical method of relief. Here there was little classification as to age or sex. These "community catch-alls" afforded small opportunity for occupation and were breeders of vice and disease. In 1863 the first American State Board of Charity was organized in Massachusetts.

It recommended that able-bodied men and women be separated from the insane and idiotic and put to work, and that children should be separated from the adults. State supervision of private agencies was also undertaken at this time and certain states embarked upon the policy of subsidies to private charities. The State Board also undertook supervision of all local relief. Municipal poor relief in many cities has lagged far behind the ideals of the State Boards.

The Poor Department of many cities is still used as a dumping ground for political office seekers and relief is frequently given in return for political favors. In some cities conditions during the last part of the 19th century became so bad that out-door relief was entirely abolished and the poor house was used as a Municipal relief center. In some cities, however, the welfare department has been taken out of politics entirely, trained workers employed and the carefully worked out technique of private agencies adopted. State supervision has done much to bring about the above change. In Philadelphia, public out-door relief was abolished shortly after the organization of the Philadelphia Society for Organizing Charity in 1878. This organization was to act as a central agency through which all the public and private charities of this city might work. The success of this organization has proven itself through the years following its inception. In 1894 during a severe winter, a large relief fund was collected under the voluntary direction of the Mayor's committee. From that time to the present emergency, there has been no distribution of public out-door relief.

Private welfare work came into being in America with the rise of more populous towns. These agencies were formed to give special attention to some particular class of needs, as for example the German Society of New York, organized in 1787, or the Widows Society in Boston in 1816. Religious sects likewise attempted to meet the needs of their groups. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is an example of Catholic efforts in this direction. Historically the Jews in America have striven to meet the needs of their own group. However, due to the growing complexity of an industrial civilization, other necessary organizations were created to take care of the problems which arise out of such a society. Thus workmen's compensation, old age, pensions, and mothers' aid were made available to residents of various states, regardless of race, color, or religion.

This has to a certain extent broken down the barriers of philanthropy administered purely from a religious point of view and appears to pave the way from private to public welfare organizations. To generalize, then, one might say that public agencies express the attempt of society to protect itself, and to begin to function only in response to pressing needs. Penal institutions and correctional agencies were created to punish the offender and render him powerless as a threat to society rather than to treat his problem. Not only crime but poverty, problems of old age, widowed mothers with dependent children and health were met in some way by public agencies. In most instances these agencies came into being after the problems became imminent and in order to meet an emergency endangering the welfare of the community. The establishment of health agencies through the enactment of social legislation came only at a time when a particular health problem endangered the lives of multitudes. Although malnutrition was a serious problem for many years, it attracted the attention of the body politic after its relation to tuberculosis was established. The Community becomes actively concerned about the purity of the water supply when an epidemic threatens the lives of the citizens. Recreational centers are established when juvenile delinquency manifests itself and gangs prevail. While this country has always had its body of unemployed, it was not until the unemployment situation assumed its present proportions that public agencies were created to meet the needs of the unemployed. On the other hand, private welfare organizations created manifestly to meet the needs of a particular group or to treat particular problems evolved a more individual type of treatment. Consequently, the individual and his needs were points of emphasis in their activities. The criminal rather than his offense, was the primary concern, and the treatment was directed toward the rehabilitation of the individual rather than the safeguarding of society at large. Health problems were also met on the same level. A case of tuberculosis was considered from the point of view of the patient and his family and the possibility of his economic and social adjustment to the group in which he lived. Personality disturbances do not generally affect the group as a whole. Little attention has been paid to them by public agencies and it is not uncommon that only patients who become dangerous to society are committable to hospitals for mental diseases. Personality difficulties, which endanger the integrity of the family and prevent the individual from adjusting in society, have been treated primarily by private agencies through case work methods.

Of necessity, the scope of the public agency is much larger than that of the private agency, since the former is not in a position to be selective in accepting problems it wishes to deal with. In most instances because of limited equip-

ment, lack of adequate professional staff and little recognition of case work standards, there is a tendency to make the approach routinized and impersonal. Because the scope of public work is larger, it cannot penetrate very deeply into the needs of the individual, although in some instances this method may be more acceptable to him.

In this recent depression, however, the private agencies unable to meet the growing demand upon their resources, brought pressure to bear upon the community to assume the responsibility of dealing with the increased need. It is obvious that the aftermath of the emergency situation will require attention which the private agency will not be able to deal with. The public agencies which came into being as a result of this emergency should continue functioning on a more permanent basis in order to deal with problems not touched upon while working under pressure. This would necessitate a reorganization and re-evaluation of functions enabling them to adapt themselves to new needs. The problems will then be those of individuals rather than those of the mass and will have to be met by current case work methods. Under those conditions the activities of public and private agencies would converge. Former periods have seen agencies developed to meet an emergency cease functioning when the situation became relatively less urgent. Likewise agencies which have had their birth in a crisis have been known to continue their functions in a somewhat modified capacity long after the original need has ceased to exist. What will be the future of our public agencies for unemployment relief? Only time alone can answer that question.

The final topic of our group discussion dealt with the responsibility of social work to the client and the community. We felt that the very term social work carries with it a meaning of responsibility towards the individual client and to the community. The responsibility to the client may be seen in two lights: First, in its active participation in dealing with his problems and secondly, in a timely withdrawal from the situation. It is essential from the very outset to define the real reason of the problem presented as differentiated and separated from the interpretation offered by the client. This interpretation is vital from the standpoint of planning social treatment. The capacity of a client to recognize his problem and the extent to which he can deal with it determine whether or not the social worker participates in an active or passive capacity. There are situations commonly recognized where the client because of the existence of circumstances beyond his control is unable to take any part in the direction of his destiny. In this category are the mentally ill and those handicapped by grave physical disorders. It is very important for the worker to understand exactly what the client expects of this relationship. Social work should be able to withdraw

from participation as soon as a client has, through the process of education, reached the stage where he understands his problem and is able to deal with it.

The responsibility of social work to the community might be approached from two aspects. In the first place, it should be regarded as an educational force in interpreting its methods and philosophy, which are in the process of evolving. In the second place, social work should concern itself with an interest and cooperation with government or legislation that directly or indirectly affects the work in which we are engaged. For the sake of further clarification, let us develop these two concepts more intensively. We will first deal with the educational aspect of our responsibility toward the community. We are all aware of the individuals outside our profession. Directly interested and concerned in this matter is the board of the agency. An adequate understanding of the aims of the agency by this group is imperative to the working out of its policies. Through the board, other less directly interested members of the community are reached. We as workers also are called upon frequently to interpret or justify to this group our technique in handling our clients or matters which directly concern our clients. The handling of these contacts as we all know, can make or mar the reputation of an agency in the community and their importance on a educational and interpretative level cannot be overemphasized.

Let us next touch upon that educational aspect of our work that is characterized by the contribution made by social work as a science and an improvement of technique which enables us to deal more successfully with situations

presented to us. We should consider this part of our work as our responsibility to the members of the community who are our co-workers in similar or related fields. It is through this medium of experimentation that a technique is evolved which successfully enables us to deal with problems which we were not aware of. It appears likely that this scientific thinking, experimentation, and subsequent contributions forms one of the most serious and vital aspects of the responsibility of social work to the community. It is perhaps the one upon which the least amount of time is expended by the average worker due in part to the exigencies of the job itself.

Consideration must be given next to the responsibility of social work to the community from a social standpoint. It is perhaps a commonplace to point out that the problems with which we deal are often directly or indirectly the outcome of civic, state or federal misgovernment or retarded social thinking. It is therefore very necessary that we concern ourselves with these matters by identifying ourselves with groups which are putting forth efforts in behalf of the more constructive type of social legislation and reform. Of these, such apparent legislative necessities as unemployment insurance and old age pensions present themselves immediately to mind.

It is therefore apparent that our duty to the community becomes in substance our duty to our state, our country and perhaps the world, for the integration of all these has become so closely knit that we are often no longer able to see the dividing boundaries.

DISCUSSION

DORA TANNENBAUM (Brooklyn): In the paper presented by Miss Seidenman, the effects of the current depression on the clients of social work agencies were summarized under the following categories:

- (1) A realization that the personal need for relief arises out of a situation for which the individual is not responsible and over which he has no control.
- (2) An increase in internal family strain, resulting from an unnatural shift of the responsibility for economic support from the father to other members of the family.
- (3) The wasting of potential adults through the malnutrition of children and curtailment of their education.

Before analyzing the effect of these situations upon the social worker and the agency, I should like to point out that to these should be added the variety of behavior dis-

turbances among the young developed by the depression. The loss of assurance and the sense of futility and inferiority as well as the feeling of superiority resulting from being part of a much talked of problem are factors which contribute to the breakdown of youthful personality. There is pathological restlessness and a craving for excitement leading to gambling, drinking, sex escapades and criminal delinquency or, on the other hand, loss of pride and self-respect, avoidance of social contact and a retreat within the lonely depressed self.

To the victims of the depression must also be added, from the psychiatric point of view, the nursing infants of this decade who will grow up to be the delinquent adolescents of the next because of the feeling of insecurity of which their present demoralized home environment makes them conscious.

I feel that in some of the reactions which social workers

anticipate from the present clients of social work agencies, they are projecting their own interpretation into the depression. For example, from my own contact with numerous clients who have come only for unemployment relief, it seems less likely that they will develop a realistic understanding of the nature and causes of their present life and an objective appreciation of their relationship to the social agencies; they are merely likely to react by developing a fatalistic attitude toward their problem or a violently negative understanding of the existing economic order. Despite their parrot-like repetition of the current rationale for seeking relief, I feel that many of them become in reality psychologically pauperized.

It seems, in effect, that the attempt to discover constructive elements in the demoralizing experience through which these people are now passing can only succeed by blinking the facts in the case.

What concrete changes in the technique of social work agencies have these untoward conditions brought in their train? Increased case loads have made it imperative that emergency methods be adopted, adequately to meet an overwhelming situation. An emergency technique has been devised which calls for changes in routine and procedure. Under the spur of necessity, new methods have been tried, some of which commend themselves for permanent use. We have "spread ourselves thin" in a great many cases; decisions have been made on the basis of office interviews; only short-cuts were devised in unemployment interviews; resources were not followed through because of the knowledge that they would yield little more than a verification of the situation and perhaps a new client in the relative visited; letters and 'phone calls were substituted for reference calls; registration at State Employment Bureaus serves as an indication of willingness to work.

This was necessitated by the larger group demanding our attention and the awareness that resources formerly called upon unquestioningly were now either non-existent or so valueless as to be of little avail in case work. Our financial difficulties limited us to covering the elementary necessities of life and then compelled us to change our interpretation of what these necessities are.

Cases have been closed sooner than in normal times, overlooking all but the immediate problem of relief and health unless the situation was so flagrant as to compel attention. We have not had time to delve into the problems and tragedies peeping out at us during our hasty interviews since these are of the spirit rather than of the flesh. We are forced to forego the desirable processes of adjustment of family difficulties, guidance to a better home life and educational and vocational therapy—and this at a time when the need for these techniques is at its height and

when, for the lack of them, we could observe the demoralization of the family gaining momentum under our very eyes.

The trend of public social work toward the assumption of relief burdens should, on the other hand, be viewed as a progressive step in the development of social work generally—and private social agencies should make every effort to have the publicly supported organizations continue, in the future, the administration of those relief functions which they have assumed in times of stress. Other directions in which private social work may influence public agencies are indicated in a paper presented by Mr. Harry L. Lurie at the Minneapolis Conference last year. "The drift to public relief is, in my opinion, a progressive and thoroughly justifiable development in family social work. If we remain conscious of the values and of the shortcomings of public relief and continue to measure it in relation to a more ideal goal, our drift into public relief may prove to have been a desirable forward step. We may come to consider it as a real contribution made by family social work in the evolution to a modern economic and social program."

The obligation of the social worker to the client and the community presented in this connection, important though it is, does not take into account the fact that the root causes of social work problems must be sought in the socio-economic structure of our modern civilization. A realistic social philosophy can only be arrived at after the following factors have been considered:

- (1) That the overwhelming bulk of our maladjustment problems have an economic origin and that while their treatment may be the function of the social worker, their prevention can only be accomplished by a structural reorganization of society.
- (2) That without prejudice to the necessities of the daily job, the enlightened social worker must realize that the future of his profession depends on the enactment of enlightened social legislation.
- (3) That even in a society whose economy is one of social justice, private social work will find its place in dealing with an irreducible minimum of personality deficiency and maladjustment—the depreciation, wear and tear and breaking down which must inevitably accompany a complex civilization.

Until such time as social workers achieve an understanding of this nexus of forces at play within our body politic and adopt a militantly constructive attitude which seeks the removal of underlying evils, social work will continue to be confronted by cyclical crises which it is lacking the capacity to cope with or to control.