

DISCUSSION OF TODD SIMON'S PAPER

interests; in sensitivity to others; in the appreciation of social, aesthetic, moral and intellectual values; in skills; in leadership; and in their capacity to make a contribution, modest or significant, to a better society.

As for Jewish center work, in addition to the factors just enumerated, its record and literature reveal how it has grown in

making the community more alert to its distinctive, sometimes unique, contributions in evoking pleasure in Jewish association; in strengthening feelings of Jewish kinship and identification; in improving Jewish group relations and in enhancing those Jewish values which bring about zestful Jewish living and a sounder adjustment to the world in which we live.

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MR. SIMON'S paper is frankly a provocative one and undoubtedly with this intent he has resorted to overstatement of many of his points in order to prod the social work profession to vigorous interpretive efforts on a broad front. His plea for more thoughtful and courageous programs in both national and community agencies is a valid one. However, his comparison of the attitudes of social workers as a professional group with those of the A.M.A. does seem far-fetched. Taking the long view, I cannot recall any assessment by our national organization for a fight against social security legislation. On the contrary, there has been strong support since the inception of these measures and looking back, many of you will recall that early in the depression social workers were among the first to mobilize efforts looking toward federal aid. A number of the leaders of our profession went to Washington to give expert testimony at Congressional hearings regarding the plight of the unemployed, and strongly advocated federal funds for relief. This was at a time when such ideas were considered "radical." I believe it can be fairly stated that as a whole our record in bringing human needs to public attention during the difficult '30s was a good one and also our subsequent record of cooperation in helping to develop public welfare programs of increasingly good standards. I mention this because this was important social work interpretation

and made for us some of our best and most long standing detractors.

When we ponder about whether or not the public likes social workers, and if they do not, why, we must examine all the factors, not only our own failures to clarify our specific contribution to a better society. If it is true, as has often been said that in our work we represent the social conscience of the community, we must remember that conscience can be an uncomfortable thing. Also, that we spend taxes and nobody likes taxes, and again that few positions in our welfare program are filled by politically sponsored persons, long a sore point with some legislators. Our stand on civil service and merit appointments is well known.

As to our failures, there is little doubt that there is public confusion as to what we do and what we mean by professional skills. This is probably especially true in the case work field. I cannot hold with Mr. Simon that this is so because we have felt the need to be secretive and mysterious about our work but rather lack of interpretive skills on the part of most social workers and many social work publicity specialists. Until quite recently we have depended too much on our day by day performance, our boards, our contacts with various community groups, pamphlets, etc., in the interpretation of our function. In short, Mr. Simon is correct in saying that if we believe social work services are important

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to our communities, we must embark on planned programs of public education which will insure their development and wholehearted support.

Sally Bright, Executive Director of the N.P.C., gives a keen analysis of the nature of the problems of our field in her article in the *Social Work Journal*. Among other aspects, she points out that the public does demand good care for sick people because people are sympathetic toward illness but "they haven't decided in their hearts whether they believe people in trouble—in poverty, in delinquency, in divorce, in unemployment—should have the money spent on them that social work costs." It is in the area of combatting these underlying attitudes that I believe our greatest failure lies. We in the case work field have perhaps justifiably been so engrossed in redefining our functions and areas of service in the light of rapidly developing public programs and in increasing our skills in order to better serve our clients that we have done little in the testing of the results of our work. Facts based on research which will demonstrate clearly that we are accomplishing the things that we talk about and that could not be done without the resources and specialized skills at our command are essential to inform and convince the public that people are worth helping and can be helped. This is a great deal more important than trying to tell what case work processes are and what social workers do. It is instead telling what they have done and with what results. Perhaps by this method and with vigorous efforts in publicizing the material from various fields we can convince the average citizen that the problems we see in our agencies can be anyone's problems, that we have defined method and skills in our work and that it is worth-

while to spend money on required services.

Although Mr. Simon does not bring out lack of licensing as one of our handicaps in interpretation, I should like to express the thought that this does create a serious problem for us in public relations. When the time arrives that our profession is recognized as a full-fledged licensed one, when any well-intentioned person cannot be designated in the press as a "social worker," we will no longer feel the compulsion to explain case work techniques indefinitely as a means of getting ourselves across to lay people, any more than a physician has to tell just how he did the appendectomy. The public will finally accept social work as a field in which expertness is required. Mr. Simon urges us to be less timid, not to keep to our narrow spheres. I would agree that we have been too passive about improving our professional status through licensure. The efforts in this direction have been sporadic, and aggressive action by our profession is long overdue.

I do not agree, however, that we have been so timid in other areas that our speaker cites, such as pointing out unmet needs and working for the extension of services both public and private and the initiation of new ones. Through our welfare councils, our national agencies, such as F.S.A.A., through our Federations and through our agency boards there is thoughtful planning and constructive action for better and more comprehensive services. There is no doubt that this important aspect of our work is too little known to the public. Much is wanting in our chest publicity to afford the contributor a true picture of the agencies and the people they serve.

The picture, though, is really not as black as painted so devastatingly by Mr.

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Simon. An increasing number of agencies, both national and local, are placing great emphasis on interpretation. They have come to realize that although public relations and interpretation are the responsibility of every staff and board member, an effective job cannot be done without the expert guidance of specialized personnel. In other words, interpretation is a year around job, must be intelligently planned and money must be available to secure competence in this field. In the family service field the F.S.A.A. has markedly strengthened its Public Relations Department and has embarked on an active program. Witness—Marriage for Millions, with radios as a

medium and for the press many excellent releases on such pertinent subjects as increased living costs and their effects, housing, etc. Individual agencies, notably the Jewish Family Service of New York are making outstanding contributions in the area under discussion. Of great significance is the Cleveland study and Miss Paradise's stimulating book.

If we interpret agency function as enabling and not limiting, if we are willing to meet new needs as they arise, and if we learn how to evaluate our results and bring them to public attention, social work will not be a winter tonic for a sick society but a creative force in our communities.