

## DISCUSSION OF PAPERS BY S. P. GOLDBERG AND GEORGE BRAGER

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I AM glad to hear that at least one social worker was "shocked" by the revelations of the Bureau of Labor Statistics' study of social workers' salaries. I hope that thousands more are shocked, because it is going to take the combined efforts of thousands to remedy the situation.

The problem is neither new nor simple. Depending upon our own inclinations, we can adopt a Freudian approach to it, or an economic one. As in most life situations, it is a combination of factors that accounts for the realistic situation in which we find ourselves. The problem of salaries in social work is as old as the profession itself. Historically the close affiliation between religious organizations and charity created the concept that the emotional and spiritual satisfactions derived from helping people compensated for low salaries. This same attitude is widespread among lay people even today.

In campaigning for funds, for example, every opportunity is used to emphasize the percentage of the funds going directly to clients, while little, if anything, is said about salaries for workers. In public welfare appropriations, primary consideration is given to direct relief costs while administrative needs are relegated a minor role. The law of supply and demand has a relatively small effect on salaries as has been indicated by the fact that case workers' salaries, for

example, have not risen very much in spite of the rather high demand for their services.

The key factor, of course, is the availability of funds. It governs what can be demanded, and what will be received in the way of compensation. Many considerations affect the amount of money that can be so used. Some, such as economic conditions, are beyond our control; others, such as conviction on the part of lay people as to the importance and value of social services and the most effective use of funds, we can perhaps do something about.

Much has been written, and even more has been said, about the need to "interpret" social work; to educate the community to its values. How much has been really accomplished remains questionable. The lack of understanding, and the distorted notions of social work and social workers that so many people have, is brought out clearly in the course of fund-raising. Here one can see the difference in giving that is based on conviction as to the worth of social services and that which is based on "traditional" giving. How often have we heard fund-raisers cry, "The money is here! If only we knew how to get it!"

A good part of the responsibility for "helping to get it" rests on our shoulders. We, who know what constitutes social services, what their values are to all people in the community, have a great

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responsibility to assist in securing the funds that are basic to any planning for our own economic security. By this I do not necessarily mean the actual solicitation of funds—although this would be a valuable experience in interpretation for all practitioners. I refer to the need for continuous "selling" of social work on a day-by-day basis. We cannot adopt the attitude in our relations with the lay community that social work is good and worth its cost simply because we say so. Its values must not only be explained, but demonstrated as well.

In spite of impressions that some people may have, professional fund-raisers are not employed to raise as little as possible. It is obviously to their advantage to raise the maximum. And, by the way, who really raises the money? I hope those of my colleagues who, like myself, are involved in fund-raising, will not feel too affronted if I disclose a trade secret and say that the ones who really raise the money are the lay volunteers, with the professionals setting the stage for lay performance, so to speak.

The success or failure of a campaign rests in great measure on the understanding and conviction that these lay persons, and those whom they solicit, have with reference to the services that their funds will purchase. Consider, for example, the current experience of Welfare Funds throughout the country. Preliminary reports indicate that many cities are having difficulty in raising the same amount of money as last year, and may wind up with even less. If the overall picture shows a smaller amount raised, then this will be the third successive year of decline. Is this because business is bad? In some instances, yes; but on the whole, no. There is increasing talk of people being "tired" of giving at previous levels and of wanting to get back to so-called

"normal giving." In short, it would appear that they do not think that the services are worth the current cost. It is the job of social workers to help show that they are worth the cost.

The decline in amounts of money raised by Welfare Funds in 1949 and 1950 must be borne in mind in connection with the Jewish Welfare Board's analysis showing salary increases at a decreasing rate in these years for group workers.

It has been pointed out that on the whole, salaries for Jewish social workers are somewhat higher than for the total field. I am sure you will agree that this is small consolation for a profession with beginning salaries not much above those of clerks today. In my opinion, the salary advantage that Jewish workers hold over their Christian colleagues is not due to the dollar-getting value of the sectarian angle. Remember, there are sectarian services other than Jewish ones. I am inclined to believe that the differential is more closely related to the deep-rooted tradition of communal responsibility in Judaism upon which Jews have had to call throughout their history. Its importance in Jewish life has demanded high standards for which they are willing to pay at a rate higher than that of other sectarian groups.

The problem of salary rates has been tackled sporadically in the past. The inevitable studies of existing rates were made. There was the usual wailing and gnashing of teeth—but no real progress was made by the profession as a whole. Certainly there are many complicated variables that would go into establishing any salary level. But unless a floor is established for at least the basic jobs, and related to minimum qualifications, I do not see how the profession can get out of the salary doldrums.

Such action, to be effective, must be undertaken on a collective basis, by the entire profession. This is an area in which the professional associations could well take the leadership. Positive action would benefit not only their members and make social work more inviting to potential recruits, but it would also make more palatable to their members the increased dues and assessments of the professional associations.

The other aspect of economic security for social workers that is under discussion today relates to the provision for retirement and disability. Here, again, concern with a problem affecting the security of the social worker dates back many years—in this case at least for 39 years. Relatively little has been accomplished in all that time. Very few, if any, agencies provide disability insurance, and only a small minority of all Jewish social agency employees are included in the National Health and Welfare Retirement Plan. More agencies are taking advantage of the amended Social Security Act, but its liberalized provisions are still inadequate to provide a reasonable retirement pension. The NHWRP, as expensive as it is, is also not adequate. Both of these plans together begin to approach a more decent level. However, with the recently approved option of the NHWRP making it possible to adjust the plan by reducing payments equivalent to the Social Security tax, and thereby reducing benefits too, social workers included in NHWRP are threatened with the loss of a substantial part of that retirement benefit.

The National Health and Welfare Retirement Association has recommended that the option not be exercised, and that Social Security benefits be added to the benefits under its plan. This point

of view must be promoted, particularly among local chests whose attitude will influence the action to be taken by local Jewish agencies.

Success with this immediate problem will by no means give us cause to sit back and rest on our laurels. It will still be necessary to examine the total question of retirement and disability benefits, and to chart the course to be followed.

Some set of criteria or goals for retirement and disability pensions will have to be established. I am no actuary, and have no competence in the technical aspects of pension systems. Believing, however, that what happens with industrial personnel relations tends to influence some of the working conditions in our own field, I took a look at some of the more significant pension systems for workers in the large industries.

The job done in this respect by the unions in the automobile and steel industries is most outstanding. Our concern with retirement plans coincides with theirs—salaries are too low to permit savings for old age, and Social Security is inadequate to provide a decent standard of living. This leaves the choice of continuing in the job even though the worker should quit, or trying to live on a substandard level.

In the automobile and steel industries a series of legal and factual circumstances helped in bargaining for pensions. In 1942, an arbitration award favored bargaining on pensions on the supposition that a retirement plan was a matter affecting wages and working conditions. Later a series of War Labor Board decisions prevented the companies from making unilateral changes in the pension plans, and required joint union-management action even on company-initiated and company-financed plans.

The cause of pensions was further aided by other actions; such as the report of the Steel-Fact-Finding Board, which in September, 1949, considered pensions as part of the normal business costs to take care of temporary and permanent depreciation in the "human machine," just as provisions were made for depreciation and insurance on plant, machinery and equipment. Consequently, the Board recommended pension plans to be established with the employers bearing the full cost of the plans.

Without going into the historical details, it should be pointed out that within five short years the United Automobile Workers secured pension systems from the manufacturers that provide for normal retirement at sixty-five years of age, and permit late retirement, usually up to sixty-eight under certain conditions. Early retirement at sixty is also possible if service and other requirements are fulfilled. All of the plans in the industry provide for some type of disability retirement.

Pension benefits originally provided \$100 per month, including primary social security benefits, for normal retirement with 25 years of credited service. However, when the Social Security Act was revised, benefits were increased to \$125 per month. Benefits are proportionately reduced for less than 25 years of credited service. Early retirees must accept a reduced benefit, and no additional amount is granted for late retirement. Disability benefits for those who qualify vary with service and are notably lower than normal retirement benefits.

All plans in the automobile industry provide for joint union-management control through the establishment of a board of administration, usually consisting of three union and three company

appointees. Provision is also made for the appointment of an impartial chairman who has the power to cast the deciding vote in case of a deadlock.

Before commencing negotiations for pensions the UAW established three criteria for themselves as follows:

1. Complete employer financing of pensions.
2. Establishment of a trust fund to which payments for past and future services would be made.
3. Joint administration of the plan with equal representation from management and labor.

In mentioning these criteria I am not suggesting that social workers adopt them for their own purposes. I list them only for illustrative purposes, and to emphasize the necessity of establishing goals if the problem of pensions for social workers is to be handled intelligently, constructively and effectively.

There are many differences between the industrial and philanthropic settings which materially affect the kind of pension system that can be considered. In industry, the existence of the profit factor and the ability to pass a good portion of the pension cost on to others, such as the consumer, made it possible to secure company agreement as to financing. Another important consideration is the fact that a large portion of the employer's costs are tax deductible. None of these items have any bearing on social agencies.

Although at first blush complete employer financing sounds very attractive for the employee, it means that, for the present at least, the employee has no vested rights in the pension and can receive them only if he remains with the same company.

The principle of joint union-management administration assures protection

of the employee's rights. This kind of protection does not exist in the NHWRP to the best of my knowledge. Take, for example, the simple matter of providing all member employees with periodic statements as to the total credits to their individual accounts. The way the system operates now the employee never knows whether all his pay deductions have been properly credited to him, or not. These deductions pass through many hands, and a series of complicated bookkeeping systems in different organizations before they wind up on the employee's account with the NHWRA. The employee will never know if any errors were made in his credits. When he is ready to retire after 30 or 40 years it is too late to try to trace errors. Agency records showing his pay deductions may no longer be available—indeed, the agency itself may not be in existence.

I carried on a long correspondence with the NHWRA officials on this subject a few years ago, and the reason advanced for failure to provide employees with yearly statements of their accounts was that it would be expensive. Such statements are available, however, upon request but the Association obviously hopes that not too many employees will take advantage of this right.

This is an example of the need to protect employees' interests, and I am sure there must be others of an even more serious nature. Undoubtedly questions arise in administering a retirement plan which can be resolved in various ways. Employees should be represented by persons of their own choice who would see that, whenever possible, decisions are made in favor of the employees.

The maximum retirement pension that many automobile workers now enjoy of \$125 per month approximates 50 per cent of their average annual wage. This level

of benefits is commonly accepted as a reasonable and desirable goal. The amount of benefits, age for normal retirement, disability benefits, and other aspects of a well-rounded pension plan are all dependent primarily on the cost factor. More detailed consideration of these items would lead us into actuarial technicalities which I doubt we are ready to discuss today.

In summary, I believe it can be said that although the dollar wage of social workers has increased somewhat over the past several years, the average salary currently being paid is extremely inadequate in the light of the mounting cost of living and what can be considered a reasonable return for the investment it takes to become a qualified worker, and for the responsibilities the jobs entail.

Improvement in this respect cannot be hoped for except through collective action which should include the establishment of a salary floor for at least the basic positions in the total field.

As social workers we have a responsibility to work for our own economic security which includes continuous interpretation and demonstration of the values of social work to the individual and the community. These values are not always self-evident and we must work toward the end of developing understanding and conviction on the part of the lay community as to the wisdom of paying for sound social services.

Some improvement has been made in the area of retirement plans but much more remains to be done. There is the immediate threat of loss of retirement benefits if the NHWRP option is exercised by agencies in the plan. For all employees there remains the problem of adequate retirement and disability benefits.

Before intelligent action can be taken it is necessary, in addition to collecting facts as to the status quo, to establish criteria to guide the development of suitable plans. Here, too, it is my opinion that collective action by social workers and social agencies will be required to achieve reasonable security for employees.

The problem of economic security for social workers has arisen in the past and, apparently through our own negligence, years were allowed to go by with little having been done. The subject is again under discussion. Time will tell whether we really are only "talkers" or whether we are "doers" also.