

# TRAINING FOR JEWISH COMMUNAL WORK

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## INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

THE subject for tonight's meeting—Training for Jewish Communal Work—is one which has interested the Conference from its very inception. At the second meeting of the Conference, in 1902 in Detroit, the "Executive Committee was authorized to establish scholarships for the purpose of training sociological workers in view of the fact that few volunteers have time to devote to extensive work".<sup>1</sup> The following year it was reported that scholarships had been provided for a year's training to two men, one at the University of Chicago and one at Columbia, with accompanying field work in local social agencies.<sup>2</sup> A year later three more men had been given training in philanthropic work through scholarship assistance by the Conference.<sup>3</sup>

There is no record of how long this program was continued. Since then various attempts have been made by local communities, such as Cincinnati and Boston, to organize training programs in social work. The most significant of these was the School of Jewish Communal Work, in New York, headed by the late Drs. Benderly and Drachsler. This lasted for about a year or two and went out of existence together with its sponsor, the New York Kehillah, during World War I.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> American Jewish Year Book, 1902-3, p. 126.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 1903-4, p. 148.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 1904-5, p. 267.

<sup>4</sup> Morris D. Waldman, NCJSS *Proceedings*, 1940, p. 71.

In relating those early efforts mention should also be made of the training institutes for Center workers sponsored by the Jewish Welfare Board during the two summer months of 1921 and 1922.

The need for trained personnel became more and more apparent, and again the Conference took the initiative at the 1922 meeting by calling a special conference on training in Cleveland in October, 1922.

The following year, at the Washington meeting of the National Conference, a report of a committee, chaired by Julius Drachsler, recommended the establishment of the training, later renamed, the Graduate School for Jewish Social Work. The history of that School is well known to most of you, and I do not propose to describe or evaluate it at this time. It will be sufficient to state that during the 14 years of its existence, 1925-1939, 175 students completed the full curriculum, including 26 who received masters' degrees. In addition there were 171 non-certificated and special students with an average attendance of seven quarters.<sup>5</sup> Hundreds of others attended summer institutes.

Today we are prone to take professional preparation for granted. Yet a mere twenty years ago the situation was altogether different. In a paper presented at the 1927 Conference Dr. M. J. Karpf reported that in 17 leading Jewish family and child care agencies, having

<sup>5</sup> *Student Register*, The Graduate School for Jewish Social Work, mimeographed.

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an aggregate professional staff of 264, only 10, or 4%, of the workers had graduated from a school of social work<sup>6</sup>—that in a field in which professionalization had advanced further than in any other. Some of the discussion at that conference makes strange reading to us twenty years later.

Mary Palevsky, for instance, observed that the apprenticeship system then in vogue, and the lack of formal training, resulted in a condition where "the overwhelming majority" of the social workers of her acquaintance "dislike their jobs, enter social work reluctantly, stay grudgingly, and leave with alacrity . . . They have no respect for social work as it is being done at present, no confidence in its future, and certainly no wish to identify themselves with it any longer than necessary."<sup>7</sup> A prominent layman, Wm. J. Shroder, actively identified with Jewish and general social work, remarked: "I do feel that the qualifications of the present staffs, particularly in the lower fields, . . . are deplorable from anything like a professional point of view. Neither the social workers generally, nor the boards of directors, nor the outside public realizes that there is any real need of professional training for social work."<sup>8</sup>

Since then the picture of course has changed completely, as you are well

<sup>6</sup> NCJSS, *Proceedings*, 1927, p. 163.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.

aware. A number of things have brought this change about. Among them undoubtedly, the most important single factor has been the Graduate School and the influence which it has exercised in many ways on the field and the profession of Jewish social work. It is fitting and proper, at a session on training, to accord due recognition to the Graduate School for its highly significant contribution to our development as a profession.

The Graduate School discontinued its program in 1939. For two years efforts were made to reorganize it, efforts which unfortunately did not succeed. In 1941 the late Dr. Solomon Lowenstein initiated action which resulted in the formation of the Committee on Training for Jewish Social Work, under the chairmanship of Kurt Peiser. One of the early decisions of this Committee was to engage in careful research "with regard to existing facilities and actual needs in the light of the changed conditions since the inception of the original school."<sup>9</sup> The study was conducted by Philip Bernstein\* who will tell us tonight of his findings and of the action of the Committee on Training based on these findings. He will be followed by George Rabinoff who will discuss the recently organized Training Bureau for Jewish Communal Service.

<sup>9</sup> NCJSS, *Proceedings*, 1946, p. 104.

\* *Editor's Note*: Mr. Bernstein did not prepare a formal paper. Mr. Rabinoff's talk follows in summary form.