

MEET THE SOCIAL WORKERS

Some 10,000 of them are CIO members. The reasons why. "They are not responsible for niggardly relief allowances." The reason for dissatisfaction.

AN ASSIGNMENT given is not necessarily an assignment accepted, and there are definite indications that America's social workers are being a little recalcitrant these days about taking on a certain kind of morale job that is popular with Tories in Washington. Whereby hangs a tale, one which takes us to Atlantic City for the Sixty-Eighth National Conference of Social Work.

But before walking along the board walk into Convention Hall, perhaps a bit of background is in order. The scientific and social significance of social work has been developing so rapidly in recent years that many socially minded people outside the field are not completely aware of its implications.

(1) The present decade has produced a marked trend in the direction of sloughing off the *noblesse oblige*, sympathy-charity connotations of social work, and ushering in a new phenomenon; social work as a science. A good, thick book could be written on this subject, but suffice it to say here that, principally from sociology and psychiatry, most social workers have come to regard themselves as something less than fairy godmothers. They have begun to apply scientific disciplines in meeting the inner emotional, and the outer social, necessities of those in need of such service. It just isn't good social work any longer to look down upon the "client" as a "recipient of charity." There is a good deal more tendency to examine the immediate economic and personal difficulties of the individual and to use whatever resources are available to help him get going again.

The science of picking up the pieces of a decadent order, you may say. Well, maybe. But there are an awful lot of human pieces left lying about unemployed, bruised, confused, sometimes hopeless, by the system of which we are a part. There's nothing progressive about just leaving them in the mud. The job of the moment is to help them realize what's happened to them, to get them vertical again, so to speak. There are scientific, unscientific, and demoralizing ways of doing this and (here as elsewhere) what is scientific is progressive.

(2) Coincident upon this tendency has been an exodus from social work of the unlovable character known variously as Creeping Carry, Nosey Nelly, or Pantry Snooper. Definitely past is the day when social work was run by volunteer debutantes or emotionally deprived spinsters of "the upper classes" (who, often enough, were doing nothing more significant than putting inadequate bandages on the industrial and social wounds caused by their male kin, the employing barons). A good proportion of social workers in this period come from actual working class homes. Nearly all the rest are from garden variety white collar families.

(3) An undreamed development a decade ago, today about 10,000 practicing social workers (in the field of public relief and in that of community chest agencies) are CIO members through the Social Service Employees Union, one of the divisions of the United Office and Professional Workers of America, and the State, County and Municipal Workers of America. Beginning in the early depression years in the form of discussion groups and independent protective societies, this trade union movement in social work took definite form in 1936, when several thousand organized social workers entered the AFL. With the launching of the CIO, these workers felt that both their personal security and the objectives of their profession would be more effectively advanced in the new progressive industrial union movement.

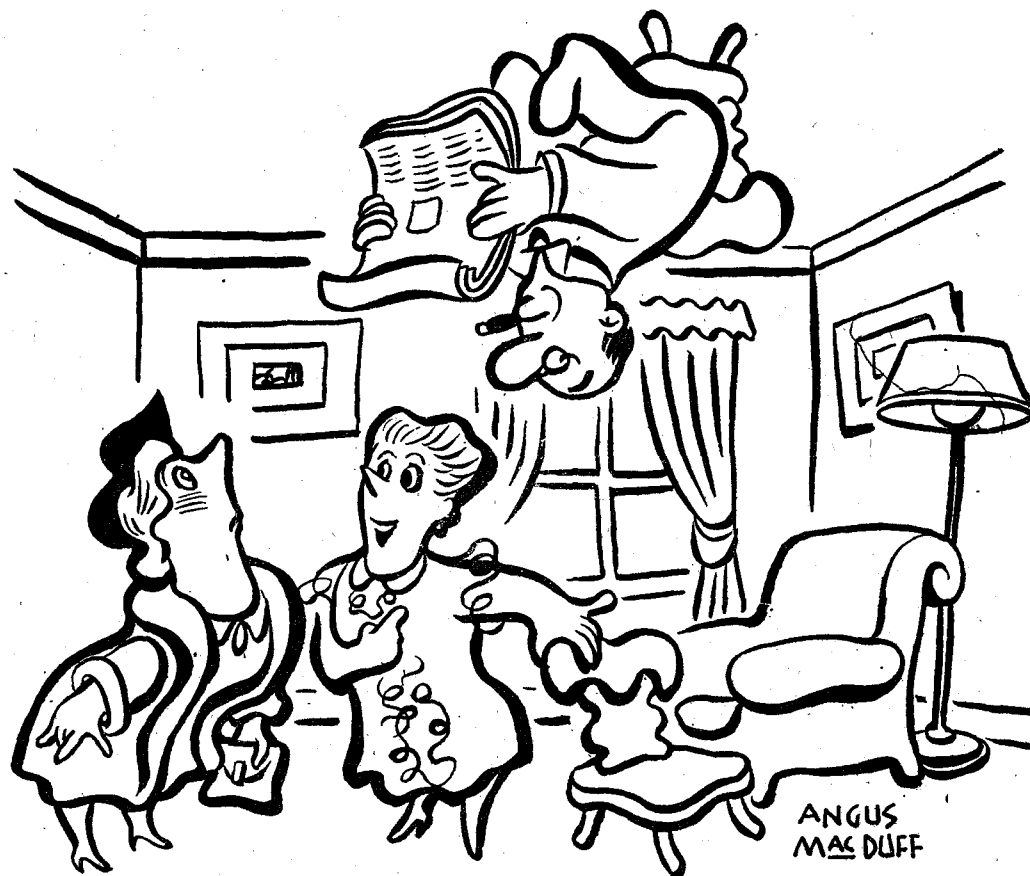
Since that time vigorous, and at times militant, fights have been waged by both unions around protective issues, and also around the advancement of the social services. Under the current assault upon all public welfare programs, both unions have recently shown themselves capable of dealing telling blows in defense of their members and of the men, women, and children who receive, and sprely need, their services.

(4) With ever increasing clarity, most social workers understand the forces in the midst of which they work. They realize that,

from the standpoint of the dominant minority in our society, their role is to administer a social deficit in such a way as to dull the edge of mass protest; or, from that of the most "forward-looking" of the industrial leaders, to be the labor service in a "social service state" which would pump out just enough purchasing power to keep the wheels of industry going profitably under an increasingly regimented economy.

In justice to modern social workers, it must be pointed out repeatedly that they are not responsible for the niggardly relief allowances and service facilities they administer. They work for wages under definitely established limitations, and are about as responsible for the adequacy of the allowances and the services as is a bus conductor for the vintage of the contraption he guides around the public streets. In justice to them, it should be understood that, particularly through their trade union movement, they have played an increasingly articulate role in demanding of legislative bodies that these allowances and services be made more adequate.

This social realization on the part of social workers themselves is, I believe, of tremendous significance. Many social workers are coming to understand which side is up in our social and economic order. They more frequently feel social kinship with the men and women they visit in rat-infested tenements than with



"He says he can read the Nazi communique better that way."

the exploitive employers and landlords who put and keep them there, or even with the oily-mouthed politicians and philanthropists who are their employers.

(5) The contradictions of today's social cataclysm have gone far to speed this process. Of all groups in the population except the unemployed themselves, it is hardest to convince social workers that the war boom has solved unemployment. Their day-to-day direct contact with the most impoverished sections of the population prove unmistakably that it's a colossal lie. Their social consciousness and, even more important, their political awareness, are now jumping ahead by leaps.

WELL, that is part of the background to the national conference in Atlantic City. Although I have worked in public and private social agencies in the East and Far West for nearly ten years, the present national conference was the first I have attended. Many of us were not surprised at the attempt Washington reactionaries made to pull social work, body and soul, into their camp upon that occasion. Compared with most other professions, social work has been pretty "backward" about parking itself alongside the diehards. And these diehards couldn't tolerate it any longer, because social workers have a very special role to play.

Their role comes in around the wondrous

word *morale*. Generally speaking, morale is a good thing. Everything from a Chamber of Commerce to a People's Army has to have it to get along in the world. But Washington Tories want social work to perform what *The New Yorker* would caption "the neatest trick of the week." It wants them to sanction the removal of the only material basis for morale, and then to pump in gallons of it from nowhere. In other words, it wants them to supply the "expert" testimony for the castration of WPA, NYA, CCC, FSA, civilian housing, child welfare legislation, direct relief, and all the rest—and to make the unemployed and the exploited like it.

Most of the delegates I talked to didn't coddle up too well to this morale assignment. Simple people, they continued to think of morale in terms of full bellies, well-clothed children, nice houses, real jobs—and they resented being asked to climb up a rope which isn't hitched to anything. Furthermore, they were wondering just what is going to happen to their own security. They only average about \$28 a week the country over, you know. Don't draw the conclusion from this that there is truth to the old bromide that social workers welcome mass misery because it widens their work opportunities. It doesn't. It's during socially progressive periods, when the masses exercise telling political power, that social services are most fully supported.

So, instead of storing up *ersatz* morale, they were wondering about the immediate future for the unemployed and for themselves.

But they did a lot more than wonder. These big evening sessions are only one part of a National Conference of Social Work. There are morning professional sessions (and these seemed to me remarkably sensible, even progressive, on the whole). And there are voluntary afternoon sessions conducted by several score associate and special bodies.

THE BEST ATTENDED of these—and by far the most significant from any progressive angle—were the meetings under the auspices of the Joint Committee of Trade Unions in Social Work, which coordinates the Conference activities of SCMWA and UOPWA members. At the three sessions conducted by the social work unionists—and they were attended by hundreds of unorganized social workers—the authentic voice of modern American social work spoke forth. Dr. Harry F. Ward, of Union Theological Seminary, analyzed present social welfare needs as the people know and feel them, not as the Chambers of Commerce disguise them. Lewis Merrill, UOPWA National President, pledged his organization, as a part of the CIO, to the continued fight for civil rights, labor's rights, all social rights. Marion Hathway, Executive Secretary, American Association of Schools of Social Work, etched deeply in the minds of her audience the fact that the best social work in the world is the social work the people do for themselves, through their own organizations; and that the battle for civil rights is the battle for everything that is social and decent. And then Rockwell Kent, president of the United American Artists (CIO), brought the social workers to their feet with deeply stirring testimony to the people's immovable determination to satisfy their cultural hungers.

The voice of the constructive elements in the field of social work also found expression at a luncheon held by the progressive professional monthly, *Social Work Today*. This was addressed by Bertha Reynolds, one of the ablest and most beloved of social work's professional leaders; Rose Segure, from the office of Carey McWilliams, California Commissioner of Immigration; Sidney Williams of the Cleveland Urban League; Jack McMichael, president of the American Youth Congress; Rudolph Hanson, organizer of District 50, United Mine Workers; and Dexter Masters, director of publications of Consumers Union.

There is much to encourage those of us who feel that social workers have a positive contribution to make to human progress and enlightenment. The reactionaries are by no means having things their own way among this group. They can, of course, count upon the articulate support of a few social work leaders, but as for the majority, they have been feeling the tug of history. They may not see all issues clearly, but along with the rest of the American people, they are taking their democracy and their security seriously.

THOMAS L. ROGERS.

Here in the City

All night the streets
lie thick with light;
all night the city streets run up and down
carrying the summer's heat;
all night the slap of feet
repeats incessantly along the street.
The crowded heat climbs up the tenement,
fingers the sleeper's dream.

At nine o'clock the child asked for a drink of water.
At ten o'clock the child, its hair flat with sweat,
whimpered, woke, and asked for a drink of water.
The mother saw prickly heat on its arms and legs,
pushed the bed a little nearer the window.

At one o'clock the child, its eyelids twitching,
woke and saw its mother's naked breast
and father's sleeping nostrils clutch at air,
wanted a drink, cried a little, slept again,
dreaming of melons. All night the heat
sat on the fire-escape. It was a pretty child,
blue eyes in smudges of shadow.

All night the flies
sizzled upward from the garbage pails
ranked along the alley to salute the dawn.
Out of the river to the eastward morning
came with a rattle of milk cans and a breath of air;
the early truck squealed in the street's emptiness.

The child woke in the asphalt-colored sunlight
and all the English sparrows sang together.

JOY DAVIDMAN.

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Whither the Catholics?

THE Pope spoke twice last week, once to the National Eucharistic Congress, and again in a special short wave broadcast last Sunday. Neither time did he take a clear cut stand on the Nazi attack against the Soviet Union. And while he did mention the "tide of black paganism" sweeping the world, "stronger than the Mississippi," which was interpreted as a reference to fascism, nevertheless his remarks were distinguished by their vagueness. A difference of opinion is therefore making itself vocal in Catholic circles. While one spokesman for the Catholic War Veterans implored the President not to implement his pledge of aid to the Soviet Union, a committee of prominent laymen and clerics came out strongly against any confusion of the issues, insisting that "the first enemy of humanity, killer of our priests, despoiler of our temples, the foe of all we love as Americans and Catholics is the Nazi." Hitler is still our greatest enemy, says this group, among whom are Colonel Donovan, the Rt. Rev. John A. Ryan of the Catholic University, and Michael Williams, special editor of the *Commonweal*, and "he must be stopped even if we and the Soviets are temporarily on the same side. . . ."

There is little question where the sympathy of millions of Americans whose forefathers came from central Europe now lies. The organized church has suffered deeply in loss of communicants and property in Poland, Germany, and Austria, its major European strongholds. Some Catholics have seen in fascism an authoritarian order, under which they hope that their institutions might somehow survive. But every Catholic knows that the "Aryan" mythology challenges a basic premise of the Church, namely that all men are created equal before Christ. And all of us have seen how the Nazis have bombed the Polish people, have forced Austrians to decimate Belgians, have turned Catholic against Catholic in a virtual civil war within the church. Certainly, official Catholic policy toward Spain is now admitted as disastrous: it degraded the Spanish people of Catholic faith and it only opened up the path for Hitler's victories over millions of other peoples.

So there is no reason why issues ought to be confused. Consider, for example, the stand of the Orthodox Church in the Soviet Union, or the stand of the Russian community in this country under Church influence. Our

readers must have seen the dispatch which describes the special services in the Moscow cathedral attended by some 12,000 people, praying for the victory of Soviet arms. And messages to the same effect have come from the Primate in this country as well. This incident reveals once again the freedom of conscience which is guaranteed in the USSR by the Constitution. But more significantly, it indicates that religious elements among the Soviet people are in no way misled by Hitler's propaganda of a war against "atheism." American Catholics, with their powerful influence, have the same opportunity: to stand against Hitler propaganda no matter how skillfully disguised in religious forms.

Brown Derby to Brown Shirt

THE Brown Derby had a son, whom he called Junior. And Al Smith, Jr., is making good. He was elected to the New York City Council. He was made the head of an investigation into the Municipal Civil Service Committee. And some people thought the young fellow would use the investigation to improve democratic methods.

It didn't turn out that way. His old man upheld "liberty" by helping to form the Liberty League which turned out to be the very apple of reaction's eye. Now Junior is following in papa's footsteps. His investigation, it turns out, was inspired by the Christian Front and has the approval of Father Coughlin. And its purpose, far from spreading democracy, is to abolish the merit system in civil service and to exclude Negroes and Jews from many civil service jobs.

In fact, Al Junior's committee, after taking a crack at the CIO, after attacking the State, County, and Municipal Workers Union on the grounds that city workers have no right to organize, really got down to brass tacks. It selected as its quarry Paul Kern, president of the Civil Service Commission. Paul Kern was a monster, the committee claimed. He had spread civil service to many formerly exempt jobs that Tammany used to hand out, he had refused to deny the rights of Negroes and Jews under the merit system. The number of Negro and Jewish firemen, policemen and sanitation department employees had increased since Kern took office. More than that, Kern had publicly voiced his opposition to Nazi persecution of the Jews, had in other years called for Tom Mooney's freedom, had sponsored civil liberties, educational reform, and social legislation, had favored union organi-



zation, and had actually opposed vigilantism.

So Al, Jr., calls Kern a Communist. For proof—Kern believes in democracy and also admits subscribing to the *Daily Worker* and NEW MASSES. "If I were not permitted as a free citizen to subscribe for the *Daily Worker*, neither you nor Councilman Cohen would be here to criticize me," Kern remarked to the committee's counsel, Emil K. Ellis.

Obviously, Kern is *too* democratic. Al Smith, Jr., is intent on bringing about a *safe* democracy—in which books and newspapers are banned, or Jews and Negroes (and Catholics, Mr. Smith?) are kept in their place, unions don't exist, and civil rights are canceled. Hitler's program is similar—on a larger scale, of course. But like Junior, Hitler had small beginnings. And the only way to stop Hitlerism before it throttles life itself is to throttle it. The investigation headed by Al Smith, Jr., is fascism and nothing else.

Beating Jim Crow

"I LOVE America but I do not love the poll tax, lynching, Jim-Crowism, job discrimination, unequal education, and oppression." In that statement by Roscoe Dunjee, militant Negro editor of the Oklahoma City *Black Dispatch*, is the briefest summary of the problems tackled by the Houston convention of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Within each category of things we "do not love" is a multitude of related problems taken up by the 300 delegates. There is not only the poll-tax denial of vote, for example, but the "white primary." There is not only night lynching but murder in open court. And besides the problems that press most heavily on Negroes there are those common to all oppressed people, black and white—the whole fight for jobs and wages, the right to organize, civil liberties. To the delegates these issues are, of course, anything but new; it was the NAACP's thirty-second annual convention, and the issues existed before the organization was born. But at this meeting, in the Jim Crow state of Martin Dies, were reflected the progress, the strength that comes from long years of working together for common advancement.

A victory for all Negroes came during the course of the convention, with President Roosevelt's executive order against job discrimination in defense industries. The order is to be backed by a five-man enforcement board which must certainly include representatives of the Negro people. This, however, does not mark the end of the long campaign to abolish job discrimination. Negroes well know that no enforcement agency will be sufficient unless it is made, through pressure from the people, to function in accordance with its purpose. Surely the President's order was no real reason for A. Phillip Randolph, Negro Social Democrat, to call off the planned job march on Washington. This arbitrary action weakens the strongest weapon in the fight for Negro job equality—the weapon of demand and protest by which Negroes won the presidential decree in the first place.