

does not matter in the same way as it would matter to the rest of us. She escapes from serious consideration of what is being done to clients with such remarks as, "The world would be better off without them anyway." Actually she does not believe in semi-starvation as an answer to anything. She merely cloaks herself in an attitude so that she may get through the day's work.

We may recoil from these negative attitudes of antagonism and disparagement, but just what exactly do we expect of a case worker these days? Well, for example, we expect her:

To maintain a constructive attitude toward society even if it does force her, against her intelligence, to become primarily a denying person.

Never to permit herself to lose sight of the fact that a client is a human being even if she has to refuse him what no human being should be refused.

To carry out justly rules that are in themselves unjust.

To strive without discouragement for improved relief practices while working within the framework of poor ones.

To keep up a steady, unspectacular struggle for higher relief standards against the ever-changing restrictions imposed by her agency.

Never to become callous to the things that happen around her, nor yet to take them to heart—thereby dissipating her strength uselessly.

That, I submit, is a large order, yet there are case workers scattered in city and county welfare departments the country over who are meeting it, keeping their balance and doing their jobs, chiefly by virtue of a sturdy phil-

osophy and, almost as important, a tolerant sense of humor. At the top of their equipment is the capacity to delegate to others all sense of personal responsibility while they themselves do the best they know how with the means at their disposal. They do not take unto themselves final responsibility for the things they have to do. Thus are they able to function and survive.

In general, case workers are recruited from young people who want to help other people. They need to be taught how to do this, but the desire does not have to be implanted; it already is there. If, when they go out on the job, they acquire the idea that certain kinds of people are not "deserving," it does not necessarily mean that they had no business becoming case workers, or that their wish to help people was not properly directed during their training period. It well may be that their natural drive to do things for people, reenforced by all that they had been taught, ran head on into such cold facts as scarcity of funds, agency restrictions, and an unsympathetic community. Something had to give way if they were not to be torn to pieces. They could not change the world around them, so they changed their own attitude. They were not prepared for the fact that this earth is a very imperfect place; that man's inhumanity to man, though it has decreased through the ages, is far from disappearing; that there always have been children who were permitted to go unfed; that actually there is little that the case worker can do to change anything. They were taught how to help people, how to refuse help in a way to do the least damage. They were not taught how to refuse without hurting themselves.

The Public Agency's Challenge

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THE public agency has had a long road to travel in its course from the traditions of pre-Elizabethan England up to the present time, but with the coming of the Social Security Act, America has at last gained some degree of certainty and the beginnings of adequacy for a few categories in public social services. It is the public agency which shoulders the major burden of people out of work and people in trouble; and it is the public agency, created and stabilized by law, which will handle these groups of people through the long future. It is interesting to remember that as early as 1895 Julia Lathrop had come to the conclusion that private charity would assume responsibility for only a small portion of the poor, because "when all the resources of private charity and neighborly aid have been exhausted," the community is inevitably sought as the *dernier ressort*. The public agency, she held, needed to be strengthened since it could not avoid or limit its responsibility for the problem as could the private agency. A study of 116 urban areas by the Social Security Board for June 1939 showed that "private assistance represented less than one percent of all payments" for assistance in that month.

The public assistance agency is operating at present under such pressure from inadequate funds and from the consequences thereof that it has had little time in which to take

stock and to put its professional house in order. This will have to be done, however, in spite of the pressures and also because of them if the public agency is to be maintained on a professional plane. The public agency is what the vision and the skill of its workers make it, consciously or unconsciously. So it is that the public agency worker needs to understand her job fully, both in its daily details and in its broader social implications. She must have a clear view and a long perspective of her job, a historical background to give her a firm assured footing, and a belief in the future of the agency to give her a sense of direction.

One of the issues faced today is the relation between the professional job and the administrative efficiency of the agency as a whole. The agency, working out a plan of operation under the law with a watchful evaluation of the plan and its meaning for the client, tries to avoid a trusting acceptance of business standards to help it gain an apparent but a false security. The worker is careful not to become so preoccupied with the need for administrative efficiency that she sacrifices the wider meaning of a social administration for the narrower non-professional achievement of a business administration. Administration is seen as an aid to the broader function of helping the client, and not in itself alone as an end.

In looking at the case work function of the public agen-

cy-the worker's job appears both harassing and taxing. But to the thoughtful worker it also is challenging. Since the public agency accepts as its responsibility the whole of the problem of people in need rather than a small part of it, and since the needs presented are as varied as the individual clients it seems inevitable that the trained worker will find her place here. Only by making skilled service available can people in need be helped in accordance with their individual differences, and only thus can the agency maintain its primary function of service to people.

THE public worker always is careful in thinking about the job not to confuse the present compromise on professional standards with the long time program of the public agency. Workers, public and private, need to be careful lest they unconsciously stabilize the function of the public agency at its present level of performance, and define its job by the performance of untrained workers rather than by the potentialities inherent in the job itself. It is here that a worker's professional philosophy and attitudes come into play. If she can keep her focus on the long view of the public agency's task, present pressures will assume their proper proportion and appear transitional. The worker needs to maintain her faith in the agency and in its clients who have so much more to bear than she has.

The professional worker's philosophy is broad enough to see the increasing attitudes of dependence in her client as a response to the particular situation in which he finds himself. The worker who sees beyond the immediate problem at hand understands that pauperization is one way that human nature expresses itself under continued unemployment and stress, and that there is no place for a critical attitude toward the client. It is the social pattern which asserts itself, shaping, in part at least, the attitudes of those people who happen to be on relief.

In clarifying her thinking on the matter of a client's "fraud" against the agency, the worker must define the word both historically and socially. Fraud is not a case work conception. It is one which we inherited by means of the statute books from our less understanding forefathers and we should be careful not to perpetuate their error. As long as the word fraud continues to appear in some of our welfare laws we probably shall have to be aware of it in our practice, but that does not mean that we should sanction the error. In the beginning the poor were considered thriftless and were blamed for their own poverty. As we grew wiser in our understanding of people and of society we saw that fraud was the result of the situations in which the client had been placed. Inadequate relief, high case loads, harsh relief policies, the social mores of our society, personal factors within the client, and the occasional critical attitudes of untrained visitors have helped to create what the statutes so glibly call fraud. Social workers today, with the benefit of findings in the social sciences and in social work, can see the many factors that operate to create fraud. They do not search for particular "methods and skills" for handling cases of fraud since fraud is only a passing phenomenon. We should be careful not to be intimidated by the laws because they are laws, but instead should see them as flexible rules made to the best of the ability of their drafters and needing to be changed with changing times and conditions. If we shape our skills to a temporary ruling we run the danger of building our professional house on the moving sands.

The case work function of the public agency is a realis-

tic acceptance of a professional job which has as part of its function an understanding and an investigation of the economic status of the applicant. The public worker is alert not to let this part of the job assume the dimensions of the whole. The function of case work is to help people in trouble if they want and can use help. This function is the same in both the public and private fields. The size of the case load which the worker carries and the amount of funds available are variants affecting ultimate performance, but the controlling factor in it all is the skill and the professional attitude of each worker and of the staff as a whole. The clients need many services which the trained worker is equipped to give. If the worker's attitude is one of service rather than one of investigation alone, the needs of the client can be met helpfully—as they are being met today by skilled workers.

The public agency worker, and the private as well, must be able to broaden her perspective to see both individual and social causation in the difficulties facing her clients, and to deal with them accordingly. In this way she can help to prevent the agency's case work function from becoming merely a palliative fringe of a total social program. She will see society as an entity in itself and will not limit her diagnosis of a case to the personal factors presented.

SOCIETY and culture are man's creations built up through the ages. But the increasing complexity of contemporary society, and our decreasing control of it, have created a veritable Frankenstein monster with which we find ourselves in a Frankenstein relationship. This relationship is one that needs further investigation and clarification with perhaps, in the end, a partial control by means of our better understanding of it. It is the economic system, with all its assets and liabilities, that created mass unemployment and it is unemployment which helps to create psychological problems in the unemployed while at the same time it serves as the stimulus to release dormant personality problems in the individual. We handle the problems which are personal in origin but we watch also for those which spring wholly or in part from social factors; and develop differential methods of treatment for both. It is because these problems do exist that we need trained workers to handle them. Even though the laws at present seem to define the public agency's function as one of relief giving alone, these deeper problems are evident all along the line. We cannot legislate against human troubles.

Public workers today find themselves in many respects at a professional crossroads needing all the vision they can muster to guide their course in the right direction. They have to decide about the quality of case work service to be given and to be careful not to allow a double standard to be established, one for the public agency and one for the private. Helping people in distress is a professional task, the same in quality and in purpose in both agencies. It is altered at present in the public agency by lack of funds and of trained staff, and by pressures of work, but case work is basically generic no matter where it is practiced. The public workers also have to decide on an administrative course, being careful not to become so preoccupied with business efficiency as to lose sight of the more important achievement of social welfare administration. They are having to decide whether to carry the social security categories in separate case loads and in separate agencies, or to carry them all in one case load in mixed almshouse fashion as was done under the old poor law. If we can

learn to plan from the point of view of the client and his family rather than from the perspective of the detached conference table, we shall not err seriously.

If a long view of the public agency task is gained, the worker will be able to see that in the past quarter century great progress already has been made and to see that the trend is steadily toward more acceptable standards than those which prevail today. The public agency is no longer the *dernier ressort* as it was a generation ago. There is much discouragement and hard sledding ahead, but if the

social work profession can fortify itself through this period there is little doubt that the public agency will meet its responsibility with qualified staff and real professional performance. The challenge is to the worker as well as to the agency, as both have their parts in building a program, soundly planned and professionally performed, to render service to people in need.

This is the first of two articles by Miss Houwink. The second, "Case Work in the Public Agency," will appear next month.

Grand Rapids Is Ready

AT the end of a winter-bound March the last of May seems a long way off, but to the officers of the National Conference of Social Work it is practically day after tomorrow. By the time this is read, the conference staff will be in Grand Rapids perfecting arrangements for the great annual congress of social workers during the week beginning May 26. If advance hotel reservations, now over 2000, are a barometer the conference will be as big as ever, which means an attendance of around 6000.

The program committee has completed its long laborious task as far as plan and content are concerned and there remain no more than the usual gaps in the ranks of speakers still to be announced. The process of program building, carried on over many months by means of committees, conferences and correspondence, seems to have produced a coverage of the scene that leaves few social stones unturned.

One difference noted in the program this year is in the number of speakers at the evening meetings. With one exception each of these meetings will have a single speaker who thus, as someone said, "will have time enough to say something." For her presidential address, Professor Grace L. Coyle of Cleveland has chosen the subject "Social Work at the Turn of the Decade." Other general session subjects and speakers are: "The Essentials of an Adequate Relief Program," by C. M. Bookman of Cincinnati; "The Challenge of the Forties for American Childhood and Youth," by Katharine Lenroot of the U. S. Children's Bureau, and Floyd W. Reeves of the American Youth Commission; "The Outlook for America," by Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver of Cleveland; "Implications of the European Situation for the United States," by Vera Micheles Dean of the Foreign Policy Association, New York; "Making Democracy Work," by Professor Max Lerner of Williamstown, Mass. In addition to these "speaking" general sessions there will be "The 1940 Review" produced by the Social Work Publicity Council, the annual reception to the president and, the idea carried on from last year, the National Conference Laymen's Dinner sponsored by the Association of the Junior Leagues of America and the National Committee on Volunteers in Social Work.

The popularity at recent conferences of the meetings on case work has caused this section to arrange for a large number of discussion groups as well as for sessions dealing with general material. The section has twenty-two meetings during the week. The section on group work, with eighteen meetings, will concern itself less with the philosophy and methodology of group work than with the "gap between . . . what we say and what we do."

The section on community organization, with eleven meetings, has set itself the task of "constructive self-analysis" in clarifying the direction and objective of past and future efforts. The social action section has six meetings, all with the promise of "open discussion." The program of the section on public welfare administration "has developed from the grass roots," with "burning questions submitted from more than half the states of the Union." Answers will be sought in five general and five group meetings.

To the sixty-seven morning meetings for which the sections are accountable are added twenty-five more under the wing of special conference committees which this year are on: delinquency, education for social work, interstate migration, national health program, older children, refugees, social aspects of housing, social work in rural communities and unmarried parenthood.

As in other years the afternoons of national conference week will be given to sessions of associate and special groups affiliated with the larger body. Fifty-two of these groups already have organized programs ranging from a single session to sessions running through the whole week.

As for the physical setting of the Grand Rapids conference, the opinion seems to be that "it might be better, and it might be worse." Conference headquarters and exhibits will be in the Civic Auditorium, readily accessible to the principal hotels. General sessions and many of the large section meetings also will be in the auditorium, but a good many meetings will of necessity be scattered about in churches, hotels and clubs. The housing of delegates presents certain difficulties chiefly because of the predilection of social workers for "single room and bath." The hotels have only a limited number of such accommodations and all have been reserved long since. They still offer double rooms with bath and singles without bath. In spite of a possible shortage of particular hotel accommodations, Grand Rapids will keep its promise, conference officials say, to house the conference comfortably and adequately. A local committee has compiled a new list of tourist accommodations, rechecked for acceptability, and the Council of Social Agencies is preparing a list of private homes that will welcome delegates for the week at very reasonable rates. No one wishing to go to the conference, say its officials, need hesitate for fear of lack of accommodations. There will be plenty of good ones, but they won't all be "single with bath in the best hotel." Just the same, they add, better make reservations promptly to the Convention Bureau, Grand Rapids, "just in case."