

# THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL WORK IN CANADA

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“ONE half the world does not know how the other half lives.” This trite saying is not quite so true as it was before the war, which forced men and women of quite different classes into closer contact than before. It happened on the battlefield; it happened at home. In so far as it was effected by genuine friendly co-operation in service to the nation, it gave rise to ambitious dreams of a future in which class strife would be eliminated; in so far as it was effected by the fake standard of money, it foreboded ill.

Ever since the introduction of power driven machinery into industry the class distinction has been evolving into a class difference. The distinctions of education, taste and manners have persisted, but to these have been added a difference in feeling. In its worst form industry has reduced its employees to the level to the machines they operate. There is little common pride in production. Private owners of industry have given place to company, corporation and trust. The division of labour between a number of different workers has divorced the worker from interest in a finished product which he may seldom see, and never use. The struggle for existence has always been a factor in the motivation of the worker, it has been a motivation at the root of which lay fear. Where there is fear there may be hatred, enmity, and jealousy. During the last two years we have constantly been told by employers and labour representatives that the fear of unemployment is the strongest factor in industrial unrest. There are arguments, however, which may be used to discount this contention. If the fear of being out of work, and hence without food and clothing, is so strong, one might expect more thrift, and more hesitation on the part of the worker before going out on strike. The cause of industrial unrest, in so far as it can be traced to the attitude of the individual, seems to be deeper rooted than the fear of unemployment.

The motion picture in the last decade has introduced the industrial worker to a representation of the life of the well-to-do which was infinitely more vivid and realistic than the picture painted by the yellow-back novel of the previous decade. For the most

part the worst and not the best in this life has been screened. It has been a picture which on the one hand causes contempt, and on the other hand inspires envy. The decent self-respecting manual workers may well have said, if that is the life of the rich, what right have they to wealth? whilst the younger generation of workers, on whom family, church and school have exerted a constantly decreasing influence, are tempted by the luxury the excitement, the daring of the life portrayed; contrasted with their own drab, dull experience it arouses envy and malice.

The privileges and responsibilities of wealth have been abused by the new rich, and the wage earners have abused the opportunities for culture which shorter hours and greater material prosperity made possible. They have followed the example of the new rich. If their dress is of less expensive material, it is of the same species; if the rich travel in luxurious motor cars, the workers buy second hand Fords. If the rich spend their leisure time on the golf course, at the country club, and at the theatre, the wage earners are at the prize-fight, the movie or the amusement park. If the family life of the wage earners has been reduced to a boarding-house basis for the husband and children through poor housing conditions, the popularity of the club, the hotel, the boarding-school, and the summer camp have wrought havoc with the family life of the well-to-do. Who will stem the tide of mad desire for amusement? What will make us sane in our ideas as to the use of leisure time? Who will make us realize that leisure ill spent is not recreative but destructive of the very elements of our nature that need recreation? When shall we seek leisure to strengthen us for work and service, instead of working for the almighty dollar in order to spend it on pleasure? Few of us have any philosophy of life to guide us through the years; we live from day to day heedless of the lessons of past history, careless of the future.

Aurora Leigh was contemptuous of her cousin Romney's efforts to help the poor through philanthropy; Mrs. Browning realizing that philanthropy could not make or save the soul of England. One wonders what her feelings would be could she witness the spectacle of an English Government spending 223 million pounds sterling per annum on public assistance in the form of state insurance, education, and protection of old age and health. But we in Canada do not have to face the social problems of the Mother Country: the virility of our people has not been sapped by three hundred years of English Poor Law and the demoralizing effects of the industrial revolution. We are, however, at a crucial stage in our history. There is evidence that we have with us some

thing of all that is worst in the social fabric. It is not there in such a degree as to cause much alarm, but it is there. High infant mortality, child labour, commercialized vice, bad housing, corruption in office,—all these serpents have raised their heads here and there. Shall we let them grow, or shall we exterminate them? We are just beginning to feel the financial burden which their existence causes, a burden which is borne lightly by public and private purse alike when times are good, but which weighs heavily at present.

At a very conservative estimate the annual bill to the Dominion of Canada for the care of those people who are in such a state of maladjustment to society as to be unable to care for themselves is fifty million dollars: a sum which is large enough to justify searching inquiry into the necessity for its expenditure, and the effectiveness of the treatment accorded.

It is virtually impossible to charge the social maladjustment of a particular person or group of people to a particular industry, community, or even social phenomenon. If we could, and if we could make the particular industry or community bear the financial burden of caring for its victims, they would be more anxious to avoid the production of these expensive parasites. We are apt to overlook the fact that every person in poverty, in hospital or in gaol is not only a consumer but also a non-producer; and that we are forced to spend vast sums of money on paying for the services of people who attend to his wants as a consumer, and who themselves are non-producers. Industry is very careful in the selection of its machinery of wood and steel; and when it is worn out and ceases to be productive, it can often be sold as scrap and the raw material can be recreated into productive machinery. At least the scrapped machinery of the industrial world costs nothing for further maintenance. Human machinery can never be scrapped so long as it lives. Society demands that it be kept in working order,—fed, clothed and housed, though it may produce nothing for the rest of its life. A licentious man co-habits for a single night with a feeble-minded woman who has slipped past the lax medical inspection at the port of entry, and an imbecile child is born. For forty years or more that human machine is a direct charge on the productivity of industry. In a drunken fury a man kills a chance acquaintance, and society gives him life-imprisonment in a gaol where he produces nothing. An ignorant mother is confined by an untrained midwife, and her child is blind for life because of lack of the simplest precautions at birth; and industry pays out of its productiveness for the care of this child in an institu-

tion for twenty years, and then gives it a license permitting it to shake a tin can in your face every time you pass it in the street.

Business men and politicians in this new country have given no serious thought to social problems. Their interest and attention have been limited to securing funds. They have willingly left this field to their wives, and their wives have read no more history than they have themselves. Consequently there is little appreciation of the seriousness of the social and economic problems which face us.

Who is to blame? Who can inspire a spirit of self-sacrificing service on the part of our ablest men and women—who if not the social worker? “The social worker,” as Rabbi Wise said in 1909 to three thousand social workers in conference at Buffalo, “is to be damned, not blessed, if he merely uses the surplus wealth of the rich to hide the evidences of social maladjustment.” The social worker is pre-eminently in the strategic position to interpret class to class. He (one should almost write she, for there are few men in social work in Canada) has nothing to lose by telling the truth. Capital and management will praise and reward him if he can prove to industry that anti-social conditions are costly to industry. The wage-earners for the most part despise the social worker today for not telling the truth, and will welcome the day when the social worker shows signs of living up to his oft vaunted motto, “prevention rather than cure.”

Some one has said that social work is not a professional activity, but that the importance of the social worker rests in his ability to socialize the professions. That is important enough to cry for the services of college-trained men and women; for if the social worker can socialize the attitude of the recognized professions to their work,—by which I mean if they can make them see that personal gain is of secondary importance to community welfare as an objective, they will have done much to bridge the gulf between labour and capital. Outside the field of social work which utilizes the medical profession, it is possible to count on the fingers of two hands the number of college trained men who are engaged in such work in Canada. Why is this so?

The situation is very different in the United States; and we cannot ascribe this situation entirely to the fact that there are few positions which command good salaries, because there are never enough men to fill the vacancies as they occur. If the proof of this statement was required, it could be found in the Charity Organization Society of Montreal having been obliged throughout the twenty years of its existence to invite men to come from the United States.

We are still very conservative in our ideas of social work; the day is not yet past when people will quite honestly tell you that they think that all social work should be done by volunteers, more often, however, the statement is that the attitude of the paid social worker is essentially different from that of the volunteer. Such people do not seem able to consider the social worker as in the same category as the nurse. Nurses are paid to do something which volunteers are incapable of doing; social workers are paid to do something which these people think volunteers are capable of doing. This attitude to the social worker is partly responsible for keeping able men and women out of social work. No one who has a genuine interest in his fellowman wants to be criticized for working because there is a salary check at the end of each month. The writer has become impervious to attacks of this kind, but he can still remember the cold shiver which he experienced when some ten years ago a newspaper published an article on his salary, divided it up into so much per month, day and hour, and finally insinuated that he was robbing the poor of the very clothes they were wearing on their backs in accepting such a salary.

In actual fact social workers are being paid to do things which very few volunteers are willing to do: the relief agent, the probation officer, the hospital social worker, the agent of a Children's Aid Society,—all these have to be ready to answer a call at any time, to any part of the city, risking health and even safety at times in the performance of their duties. They are moreover doing things which volunteer workers, with equality of such qualifications as tact, sympathy and good judgment, are unable to do as well. To the extent to which they are not specialists, that is to which they are not using knowledge acquired by special training, they are even holding back the status of the social worker. When the general public recognizes that it is no more possible to be a social worker without special training than it is to be a nurse, then we shall hear no more criticism of the social worker's attitude to his work, because he is paid for his service.

What is social work? The following is a recent definition: "Social work is the science and art of increasing social welfare by adjusting individuals to their physical and social environment, and this environment to their needs; i. e. it aids to raise the standard of individual development and of social organization in order to secure greater joy and freedom for all. It is based on applied science requires technical training and skill, and like most other professions, depends upon personality, character, and love or religion in its broadest sense." This definition will serve our purpose. The

dispensing of alms—of food and clothing or of money will hardly qualify the dispenser for the title of social worker. A knowledge of physiology, of psychology, of history and of economics, may be considered an essential background to the specialized training necessary for a particular form of social work. Without question an arts degree will in time be considered a pre-requisite to social training. Special training may be divided under two heads. First, the more or less theoretical study of the technique of case work, that is of diagnosis and after care, the study of social legislation, of methods of research and statistical presentation of facts, and of the technique of organization and administration, which will include publicity and finance. Second, the practical or field work under supervision of trained and experienced workers, in which will be included the acquisition of knowledge of the social resources of a community by actual visits and conferences. As yet no school of social work to the writer's knowledge, has included in its training a course on rhetoric or public speaking, but if social workers are to succeed in influencing public opinion, they must develop the ability to present in concise and convincing manner both on paper and on the platform the facts relating to social maladjustment.

The effective executive in social work must have the ready pen of a journalist, the facility of expression of a successful preacher, the knowledge of psychology of the advertising expert, the wariness of a lawyer, the diplomacy of a statesman, and to these might be added the ability to impart knowledge and enthusiasm to others in classrooms or office.

When one looks back at the history of social work during the last fifty years in England and America and finds that the outstanding social reforms of the half century have all been instigated and accomplished by social workers, and that most of these were college trained men and women, it is unnecessary to argue further that social work is a fruitful field for the college graduate. Toynbee, Barnett, Octavia Hill and Loch in England, Jane Adams, Veiller, Osborne, Lovejoy, and Florence Kelley in America are names that will be ever associated with the abolition of social and economic ills. Let us hope that within ten years it may be possible to add to such a list the names of men and women of Canadian birth.