

MISCELLANEOUS

XIIITH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF SOCIAL WORK

The importance of social welfare activities to National Red Cross, Red Crescent and Red Lion and Sun Societies is well known. That is why the International Review regularly publishes reports on International Conferences of Social Work, the first of which took place in 1928.

In September 1966, the XIIIth Conference was held in Washington; we extend our thanks to Miss Florence Montandon for her account of the salient points.

We would mention beforehand that the meeting was attended by more than 70 representatives of Red Cross Societies for the purpose of examining the increasing importance of the Red Cross movement in social work. Discussions were concentrated mainly on the scope in the field of social work for co-operation among National Societies and also on the part played by other charitable institutions.

More than 3000 social workers made their way in autumn 1966 to Washington, D.C., to take part in the XIIIth International Conference of Social Work, the theme of which was Urban Development—Its Implications for Social Welfare. This host of delegates came from seventy-five different countries.

The programme of the Conference provided, apart from the six plenary sessions attended by all, a choice of meetings which participants could attend; they could take part in either the general meetings—that is to say, the lectures followed by discussions, or in the fifteen study groups and six working commissions.

According to the report of the Pre-conference, which was also held in Washington, *urban development* was to be construed as a process contributing to social progress, in contrast to *urbanization* which is meant to convey the universal phenomenon of urban expansion. From a social point of view, urbanization has both

positive and negative aspects ; these were examined during the Conference. Urban development includes, but is not limited to, urban community development and improvement.

Social work is to be interpreted in the widest sense, including social services, programmes and organizations of all kinds as well as the various categories of personnel, including social workers, who take part.

Urban expansion varies from one country to another, sometimes affecting towns which have existed for centuries, sometimes towns which are recent. There are occasions when urban populations decline, with a movement to the outskirts or the suburbs. In some cases, urban communities have only recently begun to grow but have done so with lightning rapidity without any planning or overall programme and with no corresponding growth in social resources. It is interesting in this connection to read the national reports sent to Washington for this XIIIth Conference, and to observe the solutions which have been found in each country. These vary according to general policy which may stem or delay urban growth or simply guide it and influence it, in keeping with national demographic trends. It was the general consensus that urban living conditions have radical effects on traditional aspects of family life, particularly on parent-children relations, the number of children to each family and the number of generations living together, as well as on ability to contend with daily problems without the help of specialized social services.

In every study group, mention was made of the lack of co-ordination between the various bodies involved in urban development. Closer co-operation was felt to be desirable among organizations, both private and public, which function for the benefit of the community. Co-ordination may also be on a national, regional and local scale. Little mention was made of the financial resources and the various responsibilities incumbent on public authorities. In this respect, the report of the pre-conference pointed out " a maze or rampant hotchpotch of self-styled officialdom ". One effect of the change in urban life has been to broaden the area of transition between " purely urban " and the " purely rural ", a situation which finds expression in the notion of suburbs and also in the neologism " rurbanization ", signifying urbanization and countryside !

The group which the writer joined studied in particular the problems of urbanization which affect children, that is to say, minors. At this group's sessions the chair was taken by Miss K. Oettinger, Chief, Children's Bureau, Welfare Administration, U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Washington. There were 25 persons in the group from 17 countries. During the seven half-day working sessions, we received visits from experts ; one was an architect ; another was Mr. Illovici, head of the U.N. Social Affairs Bureau in Geneva. He suggested we study questions with emphasis on :

1. Descriptions of child needs (in the wide sense) or social problems affecting children in urban centres in various countries ;
2. Existing programmes of urban development;
3. Future projects and planning requirements according to priorities.

As a start, each delegation described its achievements for the benefit of children, then came the moment when we had to broach matters which were not going so well. There was, for instance, a European delegation which raised the question : " Are we not too inclined to suggest specialized institutions for all ages and all categories of children, when we should be giving greater support to family structure to enable the family to raise its children without recourse to all these institutions which can never replace the family ? " Although this question might appear obvious it influenced the viewpoints of our working group and it was reflected in the first of our resolutions. There were nine of these ; the main ones which summarize our activity being as follows :

- The vital necessity for co-operation between official and private services.
- Necessity for health programme planning (prevention and treatment) and for educational service planning. In addition, there should be co-ordination between these two fields.
- The need to draw up priorities for the setting up of institutions, taking into account the needs, resources, cultural factors and level of development of the country.
- Child welfare planning should be the concern of the government and should be given priority.

- The importance of research work in social service for the benefit of children.
- The variety of professions involved in social action calls for a concerted approach to problems which affect the family, such as illegitimacy, adoption, family planning, etc. This approach will be reflected in relations with cases, the public (in the broad sense of the term) and the authorities.

Our working group affirmed its adherence to UNICEF's noble principles ; it will also remember how one of the English delegates asked one of the experts, an architect : " Where will the children who live in your towers play ? " He replied : " Le Corbusier thought of that before me ; if it cannot be on the ground then it must be on the roof ! " He added that the only means of finding a solution to this important problem was an exchange of ideas and agreement between builders and those aware of the needs of children.

It may be said that in the main the chief objectives of social work in connection with urban development are :

1. To help citizens to help themselves.
2. To provide a wide range of necessary services.
3. To enable people to make use of these services.

To carry out these activities qualified social service personnel are required, each member competent in his own particular field and familiar with the correlated disciplines of the other members of the multi-specialist team referred to by our architect (a team comprising an architect, a town-planning specialist, a doctor, a public health nurse, social workers, an economist, an administrator, a sociologist, etc.).

Several study groups recommended that universities and higher technical education establishments should prepare graduates to understand one another and to work in co-operation with a view to carrying out studies related to town planning. This could lead to the setting up of research and training centres in town planning for the systematic recruiting and preparation of post-graduate students in the relevant scientific and professional disciplines, and to provide facilities for consultation with multi-discipline faculties.

Mention should also be made of the theme chosen by the *XIIIth International Conference of Social Service Schools* which took place a few days earlier, namely "Changes in social service teaching trends". We were some five hundred who discussed this subject and we were privileged to hear some excellent lectures on the selection of students, teacher training and programme preparation. Small study groups were formed to examine these three topics.

Teacher training was the newest of these subjects and it was broached with intelligence and understanding by Dame Eileen Younghusband, president of the International Association of Social Service Schools. In the course of her talk, she said: "It is this dual enthusiasm for knowledge and the transmission of that knowledge by education which distinguishes the teacher of creative intellect from the pure academician. The teacher should be able to create an atmosphere conducive to learning. Every successful educational institution is a society in which students and teachers learn together". Dame Eileen also considered how new teachers should be systematically prepared for the transition from the practice to the teaching of social service. She declared that this preparation could take several forms:

1. One of these is to second the new teachers to a senior colleague for regular discussions concerning the preparation of a given course, to determine its objectives and content, how best to apply the most effective educational methods as well as to consider systematically student reaction and integration progress during the period of the course under examination;
2. Even more effective would be to appoint a development expert from the teaching profession as a consultant for several schools and to direct seminars on appropriate subjects;
3. The periodic holding of national or regional study sessions;
4. Comprehensive courses, either full-time or part-time, combining theory and practice for former social service workers who were ready to take up, or had already taken up, social service teaching; perhaps this last method would be the one most commendable.

It may be that these proposals seem Utopian, and yet, in the working group at which the writer took the chair, the Brazilian delegate gave an excellent example of achievements in teacher training. The Brazilian national association of social service schools had instituted a programme of teacher training lasting for three years. The Brazilian government had agreed to subsidize the scheme. All the courses are given at the University of Rio de Janeiro and each social service school sends its best teacher. Our Brazilian delegate stressed how great a sacrifice this was for each school but he also emphasized the spirit of solidarity among the schools by agreeing that this was the only way to ensure a proficient teaching body. Each year there were two courses of four months duration. The teachers then returned to their schools where some of them became instructors in the course for specialists. As Dame Eileen said: "The various methods in teacher training call for innovation. The first stage is to recognize the need to make available to teachers facilities for training and instruction. It must be admitted that proper training of social service teachers is essential, if a solution is to be found to the insufficiency of qualified social workers to meet requirements, without lowering professional standards. Although at the present time the number of workers is of importance, quality is no less essential".

This large conference in Washington, at which the vast problem of urban development was reviewed, and which was attended by a concourse of specialists anxious to ensure better training for future social workers, may be summarized as a period rich in interchange of ideas and work. There was a natural correlation between two needs: that of a profession required to strengthen its ranks in order to play an effective and acknowledged essential role, and that of a dynamic society, preparing for the future, organizing community life and calling for appropriate structures to promote its development.

Florence MONTANDON
Social Worker,
MSW Denver University
Lecturer at the Ecole de Service Social,
Geneva