The Social Workers' Library
J. L. GILLIN, Editor

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

A STUDY OF ITS THEORY AND CURRENT PRACTICE

BY

JESSE FREDERICK STEINER

PROFESSOR OF SOCIAL TECHNOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA

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COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

PREFACE

The rapid growth of interest in the general field of community organization stands out as one of the striking characteristics of American life during the decade that has elapsed since the outbreak of the World War. This movement, initiated largely by the social workers and at first confined almost entirely to social work activities, has gradually extended its scope and made increasingly clear its real significance as a factor in social progress.

The few books that have already appeared in this field have been primarily essays designed to set forth their authors' conceptions of the subject and have made no attempt to discuss the whole movement in a systematic and comprehensive manner. The recent inclusion of courses in community organization in the curricula of universities and schools of social work has created a need for a general survey of this field suitable for the use of students. This book, which is an effort to meet this need, grew out of the author's course in community organization given during the past four years at the School of Public Welfare of the University of North Carolina and the Graduate School of Social Service Administration of the University of Chicago. The material, therefore, has been tested out many times in classes composed of graduate and professional students and owes a very considerable portion of whatever value it may possess to their suggestions and especially to their carefully prepared analyses of community situations, which have been freely drawn upon in the preparation of a number of the chapters.

Attention should be called to the fact that changes in the status of communities and social groups in general take place

so frequently that it is more or less unsatisfactory to give concrete examples illustrating points under discussion. Furthermore, reports of community undertakings are not always made by competent and unbiased observers. Just as in the field of ethnology, community organization has often suffered through inaccurate descriptions of situations and events, which, when published, are regarded as authoritative and become the basis for further action. Care has been taken in the sifting of the concrete material included in the text, but there always remains the possibility of being misled by information that is not entirely reliable.

No effort was made in Part II to include everything that might very properly be regarded as belonging in the field of community organization. All that was attempted was to make the list representative of the more significant types of experiments which have been influential in determining the course of development of the whole movement.

A general survey of this nature, which covers such a wide range of topics, must necessarily omit much material essential for class discussion. The carefully selected bibliography given at the conclusion of each chapter is intended to overcome this deficiency and should be used by the students as a guide in securing the detailed information needed for a well rounded view of the subjects under consideration.

Portions of several of the chapters have been published in recent issues of *The Journal of Social Forces* and *The Journal of Applied Sociology*. Thanks are due the editors of these Journals for permission to include this material in the book.

J. F. Steiner.

University of Chicago

INTRODUCTION

Social work has passed its infancy. It may not be past its adolescence, but it is developing rapidly. It has become conscious of its powers. It sees the fields of its opportunity. It is becoming sobered and steadied by experience. It is seeking guidance to meet its increasing responsibilities.

For some time social workers have felt the need of good books on various aspects of social work. Much material has appeared in various magazines and other ephemeral publications, but there have been very few books. Mary Richmond's *Social Diagnosis* and her later *What is Social Case Work?*, Mrs. Sheffield's *The Social Case History*, Halbert's *What is Professional Social Work?*, and Miss Cannon's *Social Work in Hospitals* are the first fruits of a harvest of experience in social work. Their usefulness to social workers and teachers has demonstrated how great is the need of such books. This series, of which Professor Steiner's volume is the first, is intended to supply certain gaps in the field.

One of the vexing problems of the social worker's life is how to organize the social forces in each community to enable a particular organization to do its best work. Experiments in social organization have been going on for some years. It is time that these experiments be studied and evaluated. They need to be carefully described; it should be pointed out where they have failed and where they have succeeded; and, if possible, certain principles which become clear in the study of the experiments should now be deduced. Principles of social organization cannot be drawn out of the air or spun out of the imagination of the writer. To be of any value they must rest upon a careful comparative study. Professor

Steiner has performed such a service in the present book. He has carefully studied a sufficient variety of experiments in community organization to arrive at certain sound principles for community workers of whatever sort. Thus he brings together in one volume material scattered throughout many fugitive sources, discovers the lessons which these experiments teach and points out the principles to be learned from a consideration of them. It is a comparative and critical study of actual experiments in community organization.

Professor Steiner has not attempted to investigate the technique of community organization in any particular locality. Such an investigation is also needed in order to see in the flesh and blood of a case study of a community what difficulties are met in the social psychology of a local community and in the clashing of the interests of diverse personalities and groups. It is likewise needed in order to learn something of the technique of leadership. This phase of the subject will be treated in a later publication of The Social Workers' Library. The present book is rather a broad, comparative study of various types of organization based upon a sociological analysis of the community. Both are needed. The one will supplement the other.

Courses in community organization are now being given in a large number of training schools for social workers and in some colleges and universities. As a text for such courses this volume will be valuable to those who have been struggling with the question of how to teach the subject. It will likewise be of inestimable value to workers in the field who are face to face with the problem of organizing their work in accordance with sound principles and are seeking the coordination of the various social forces in the community. In thus making available to teachers and social workers this material Professor Steiner has performed a real service.

J. L. GILLIN.

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PART I

THE COMMUNITY MOVEMENT AND SOCIAL PROGRESS

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

CHAPTER I

BACKGROUNDS OF THE COMMUNITY MOVEMENT

An exhaustive search into the backgrounds of the modern community movement might well begin with the rise of humanitarian work under primitive conditions and trace its development through successive stages, from its first manifestations in the custom of mutual aid within the tribe, until the philanthropic impulse under Christian influence broke down barriers of place and caste and gave service wherever need was found. Without doubt these long centuries of sentimental philanthropy, however limited and ineffective it may have been, prepared the way for more constructive efforts in recent years to deal more adequately with social problems. But with these more remote backgrounds of the community movement we are not here primarily concerned. Our chief interest for purposes of this discussion lies rather in the rapid changes in social philosophy and social practice during the past half century, which have led to a more general appreciation of the significance of community work as a means of improving social conditions.

Breakdown of Laissez Faire.—Fifty years ago the individualistic philosophy set forth by writers like Humboldt and Spencer had not been successfully challenged. In America the doctrine of laissez faire found a brilliant advocate in Sumner of Yale, whose book, *What Social Classes Owe to Each Other,* published in 1883, elaborated the thesis that the development of society is beyond voluntary control and

that the wisest procedure therefore is to "mind your own business". His fundamental assumption was that social as well as organic evolution is almost entirely an automatic, spontaneous process which cannot be greatly modified by social effort. The following passage from his essay, "The Absurd Attempt to Make the World Over", states in his vivid style the point of view of laissez faire with reference to social control:

"If this poor old world is as bad as they say, one more reflection may check the zeal of the headlong reformer. It is at any rate a tough old world. It has taken its trend and curvature and all its twists and tangles from a long course of formation. All its wry and crooked gnarls and knobs are therefore stiff and stubborn. If we puny men by our arts can do anything at all to straighten them, it will be only by modifying the tendencies of some of the forces at work, so that, after a sufficient time, their action may be changed a little and slowly the lines of movement may be modified. This effort, however, can at most be only slight, and it will take a long time. In the meantime spontaneous forces will be at work, compared with which our efforts are like those of a man trying to deflect a river, and these forces will have changed the whole problem before our interferences have time to make themselves felt. The great stream of time and earthly things will sweep on just the same in spite of us. It bears with it now all the errors and follies of the past, the wreckage of all the philosophies, the fragments of all the civilizations, the wisdom of all the abandoned ethical systems, the debris of all the institutions, and the penalties of all the mistakes. It is only in imagination that we stand by and look at and criticize it and plan to change it. Every one of us is a child of his age and cannot get out of it. He is in the stream and is swept along with it. All his sciences and philosophy come to him out of it. Therefore the tide will not be changed by us. It will swallow up both us and our experiments. It will absorb the efforts at change and take them into itself as new but trivial components, and the great movement of tradition and work will go on unchanged by our fads and schemes. The things which will change it are the great discoveries and inventions, the new reactions inside social organism, and the changes in the earth itself on account of changes in the cosmical forces. These causes will make of it just what, in fidelity to them, it ought to be. The men will be carried along with it and be made by it. The utmost they can do by their cleverness will be to note and record their course as they are carried along, which is what we do now, and is that which leads us to the vain fancy that we

can make or guide the movement. That is why it is the greatest folly of which a man can be capable, to sit down with a slate and pencil to plan out a new social world.''[1]

The first outstanding writer to combat this position was Lester F. Ward, whose *Dynamic Sociology* was published in 1883. With a wealth of argument from the field of physical science, Ward drove home his contention that social forces are a reality and that through their conscious direction man can shape the course of social evolution. Modern thought has followed Ward rather than Spencer and Sumner. Man's understanding of nature and control over natural forces are increasingly finding their counterpart in a recognition of the significance of social forces and the possibility of directing them in the interests of human welfare. Laissez faire still appears in various forms but its standing as a philosophy is gone. Future progress, it is now recognized, does not hinge upon cosmic forces beyond man's control. On the contrary, man's progressive development depends on his ability to work out more effective ways of controlling the social process. With the breakdown of laissez faire the modern community movement has been made possible. Men no longer need to stand by as spectators and watch helplessly the drama of life sweep by. By taking thought, planning wisely, and acting together, men have demonstrated the possibility of directing community progress and building communities more in accord with human needs.

Growth of Group Consciousness.—From one point of view the community movement has been a natural result of the decline of individualism and the rise of group consciousness. By 1880 the growing consciousness of the significance of the group and the realization of its fundamental rôle in social activity had proceeded far enough to begin to exert a profound influence on all phases of American life. The field of industry offers a notable example of this increasing trend toward group organization. The introduction of improved

[1] *War and Other Essays*, p. 195.

machinery, the use of steam and electricity, better means of communication and transportation, and similar factors revolutionized the older methods that had long been familiar to the industrial world. Individualism no longer could maintain itself successfully and combinations and corporations of all kinds began to demonstrate the power of group action in industrial affairs.

This industrial development increased the concentration of people in cities and gave new significance and prominence to the problems of labor. Group consciousness arose among the laboring people and this new need and desire for solidarity found expression in such organizations as the Knights of Labor and the American Federation of Labor. This rapid and effective organization of the working classes throughout the country is one of the best illustrations of the modern tendency toward the formation of groups based upon community of interests.

Additional evidence of the growing sense of group solidarity is found in the trend towards the larger participation of the government in affairs of daily life. Older theories of government have been overturned by this new movement to use governmental machinery for the promotion of the common welfare. In the field of public health, there is full recognition of the principle of group responsibility for the prevention and control of disease. Social legislation has grown by leaps and bounds until it now covers a wide range of activities that an earlier age would have regarded as belonging entirely to individual control. This new expression of group interest in social welfare as seen in child labor laws, regulation of public utilities, and municipal control of parks, libraries, hospitals, and public welfare organizations represents a new field of development far removed from earlier conceptions of the function of government in human affairs.

This growth of group consciousness might still further be traced through the whole range of community life. It can be readily seen in the schools, which insist upon a certain

measure of community control in order that education may be made more effective. The churches in a similar manner emphasize in addition to salvation of the individual the social reconstruction of the community. In all departments of life there has developed a fuller recognition of the need of group solidarity and of the power of the group when it works together for a carefully planned goal. All this is a modern achievement which has come about, for the most part, during the past fifty years.

The Group Approach to Social Problems.—"Whatever social problem we confront," says Small, "whatever persons come into our field of view, the first questions involved will always be: To what group do these persons belong? What are the interests of these groups? What sort of means do the groups use to promote their interests? How strong are these groups as compared with groups that have conflicting interests? These questions go to the tap root of all social interpretation, whether in the case of historical events far in the past or of the most practical problems of our own neighborhood."[1]

This insistence on the importance of group relationships strikes a new note not characteristic of the earlier efforts to save society through redemption of the individual. Instead of attempting to solve the social problem by means of manipulation of individuals, attention must be directed to the creation of conditions favorable to the development of the right kind of people. The group, therefore, becomes the strategic point of attack. When an individual breaks down in the struggle of life, it is not enough to study the personal causes of his failure. A complete picture of the whole situation must include also full knowledge of his social contacts through his family, club, lodge, church, neighborhood and business organizations, and other means of association with his fellows. Constructive efforts to restore him to normal life must pay due attention to the nature of his group relationships and to the possibility of modifying them in a way that may appear desirable.

[1] *General Sociology*, p. 495.

Many further illustrations might be brought forward showing how the group approach is becoming increasingly common. In modern education, the end in view is to fit the child into the life of the community instead of regarding the task accomplished when a certain amount of information has been gained or culture imparted. This appears in the new emphasis on vocational guidance and in the efforts to connect the traditional subjects in the curriculum with the daily experience of the child. Similarly in the field of crime, the responsibility of the community for anti-social conduct is becoming more widely accepted. Environment as well as personal causes of crime are being given serious consideration. In the administration of state prisons the development of the mutual welfare league as over against the honor system is an example of the use that is sometimes made of the group in bringing about the reformation of the criminal. The entire procedure of the juvenile court system is based upon the necessity of placing the delinquent child in the right kind of group relationships. City planning, improvement of housing conditions, development of parks and playgrounds, coöperative marketing, good roads associations, and the multitude of other projects designed to improve conditions of life show clearly the modern trend in dealing with problems affecting the community.

All this does not mean that the responsibility of the individual is being unduly minimized or that appeals to individual effort are not to be made. It simply indicates a growing belief that the individual does not stand alone, but is being constantly acted upon by the social environment in which he is placed. Social problems that find their cause in sickness or poverty are no longer thought of as sent from God, nor is the treatment of their victims determined by their classification as worthy or unworthy. On the contrary, such problems are regarded as amenable to collective action. They are group rather than individual problems, and are to be approached from the point of view of the entire community. The pro-