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A PSYCHOLOGIST LOOKS AT PRISON CASE WORK

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There has been, in the past few years, a tendency, on the part of "enlightened" criminologists to view with satisfaction and even complacency, the advent of the professionally trained person into the correctional field. It is at best only a few short years since the psychiatrist, the psychologist, and the social worker were entirely unknown in the prisons. Today a great many of our correctional institutions have in their organization what, for want of a better name, has been termed the Case Work Unit. Case work obviously means individual treatment as opposed to mass treatment; the realization that inmates are as unlike mentally, emotionally, intellectually, or morally as one set of fingerprints is unlike another. The emphasis today is placed upon the work of the professionally trained case worker. Naturally such a movement was not without its opponents as well as its proponents. The movement certainly has come in for perhaps more than its share of criticism, justified, and unjustified. However, as is usual with new ventures of this sort, the adverse criticism has come from people who in many cases were not exactly familiar with the type of work that was being attempted. The so-called "old time warden" was traditionally an enemy of this type of work. Whether he was actually opposed to the case work unit as a necessary part of his prison personnel, or whether the case workers merely thought he should be opposed to such a forward movement, has not been adequately determined. Feeling secure in his belief that he has something worth-while to contribute to penology, the case worker in many instances has ridden roughshod over the perhaps logical and well founded objections of the prison administrator. As a result, today, within a few short years of the inception of the work, the case worker faces almost an insurmountable barrier of prejudice and opposition. The case worker has not stopped to consider whether this opposition has been justified or not. He has taken it pretty much for granted that his work has been worth while, that the various personalities composing his unit were all that they should be and that the only

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possible opposition to such a movement could come from people who were too reactionary and hide-bound to appreciate the advantages that modern science and technique have developed. Both Stern and Branham have explained in their admirably expressed monographs, the importance of the case worker in the correctional institution. They have neglected, however, certain salient items, one or more of which, if allowed to run its course unchecked, may destroy the very aims and ideals of case work in the correctional institution.

The committee on case work of the American Prison Association has done admirable work in supporting and furthering the idea of case work in correctional institutions. This committee has, however, reckoned without its host. Members of the various case work units in our institutions throughout the country at times have oversold themselves; in other instances, in their zeal to demonstrate their importance, they have been guilty of unjustified meddling in administrative affairs, and in almost all instances they have been guilty of placing entirely too much emphasis upon the value of their own work, and entirely too little emphasis upon the value of the work of all other employees of a correctional institution. In the final analysis it is not the psychologist, it is not the social worker, it is not the psychiatrist who has the daily, hour by hour, minute by minute contact with the inmates of our correctional institutions. It is the guard, the trade instructor, the school teacher, perhaps even the clerk who must handle these men and through whom a great deal of constructive work must be done. It has seemed unwise that the case-work unit worker has neglected entirely in the past, not only the value of the contract of these men with the inmate for the purposes of social rehabilitation, but, and perhaps even more important, the feelings of these men themselves, when they listen to some case worker expound upon the doctrine that all that is new, all that is good, all that is worthwhile in modern constructive penology has been brought about and is being done exclusively and entirely by members of the case work unit. It is not the purpose of the writer of this paper to belittle the importance of the case work unit as a necessary adjunct in prison administration, or as a prime moving factor in the individual and social rehabilitation of the offender. However, the case worker must realize, for his own good, sooner or later, that he is but one unit in a necessary machine that has as its purpose the smooth functioning of a correctional institution.

The function of a case worker is in many instances purely diagnostic. On paper many case workers have pointed out that therapy is the prime aim and purpose, the guiding spirit of the case work unit. However, as a matter of cold fact, those of our institutions which do have case work units have kept the various members of the units so busy doing routine examinations and investigations that little or no time is left available for actual therapy. What therapy is done must be done with those men who come in daily, hourly contact with the inmate. The case worker is neglecting a real opportunity for service for the individualization of treatment by neglecting the opportunity of training the non-technical personnel of a correctional institution in the proper method of social adjustments.

One of our leading eastern states periodically conducts officers' schools for the training and improvement of their officers. These courses, which are conducted three or four times a year, usually last from six to eight weeks. During those six to eight weeks exactly two lectures are given by members of the professional staff; usually one lecture by the psychiatrist, and one lecture by the psychologist. This is an illustration of what is meant by the contention that the member of the case work unit is neglecting his opportunity, either willingly or unwillingly, for the proper training of the men who are really the case workers in a correctional institution. A carefully prepared and thought out therapeutic measure of the psychiatrist or the psychologist may be wiped out in an hour by careless handling on the part of an officer. This is not to be considered as an indictment of the officer but rather as an indictment of the psychiatrist and psychologist. No master workman can function successfully if the tools with which he works turn in his hand. The first action of the careful workman should be to insure the tempering of his tools. If case work is to be really a moving factor in penology, it behooves the case worker to take immediate steps for the training of the so-called non-technical workers in the correctional field.

Much of the internal strife between the professional and the non-professional workers in the correctional field has come about because of the assumption, either conscious or unconscious, that the technically trained social case worker is the only individual capable of the proper handling and rehabilitation of the prison inmate. Technical training in itself is never a substitute for long years of experience coupled with common sense. A great many guards in our correctional institutions today are far more qualified

to readjust distorted outlooks, to retrain and rehabilitate the individual offender than some of our so-called technical experts. Case work in our prisons has not as yet come to stay. It is up to the case worker to sell but not oversell his services. The yeoman work of such men as Branham and Stern is being rendered fruitless by the fact that many of our case workers will not, or cannot, take into consideration the natural feelings of the non-technical members of the correctional staff. The case worker in most cases can make only recommendations; in other, rather limited cases, he can actually do a little therapy. In the final analysis, however, the carrying out of his recommendations, the actual tools with which he hopes to accomplish his therapy, the real resocialization and rehabilitation of the inmate, must be carried on through the other officers of the institution.

Another necessity today, if case work is to really arrive at its ultimate goal, is the absolutely indeterminate sentence in our correctional institutions. Case work certainly cannot function successfully under the present laws governing the majority of our correctional institutions throughout the country. The readjustment of the individual in his community and within himself is not a matter which can be said must take one year, two years, or ten years. If there is any value at all in the concept of the individualization of treatment, the natural corollary of such a concept is the fact that the length of time necessary for rehabilitation varies with the individual himself. In many instances a complete readjustment, a complete rehabilitation can be made in a few months. In other instances it never can be made with our present limited knowledge. Too often has a case worker been brought face to face with the stark realization that he has failed absolutely because of the fact that a man was discharged too soon or kept incarcerated too long. Society has not fully been protected when a man has been kept shut off from that society for a period of say five years when that man's discharge into society at the expiration of two years would have meant a complete rehabilitation of that individual, and the fact that he was retained the unnecessary and futilely stupid three extra years, has made that man embittered, and a potential, if not actual menace to that very society which, in its fatuity, has set a series of laws which defeats its own ends. One may ask—what has this to do with the case work units? The answer is simple. Most modern progress has come about because a certain group of individuals were willing and able to point out to society at large the absolute necessity of a certain course of action on the part of

that society. The case worker is the ideal person to point out the absolute necessity to society of the indeterminate sentence. In other words, the case worker must broaden his horizon. It should be his function not only to do his work well within the confines of the institution or the home, or with any particular inmate of that institution, but to educate the public at large so as to give him, the social worker, a fair scope for his most worthwhile activities. It must be confessed that members of the case work unit at large are today too prone to blame others for the little headway that has been actually accomplished.

No one familiar with the situation today can deny that the average prison inmate resents intensely the administration and attention of any member of the case work unit. The reason for this is not difficult to discover. This distrust on the part of the inmate has a two-fold basis for its existence. First, the inmate believes—justly or unjustly—that members of the case work unit are a group of impractical, idealistic, rather mentally queer individuals who for some reason, unknown either to themselves or anyone else, periodically call up inmates to their office for a chat or a series of tests. The case worker has not sold himself to the inmate and this is not as unimportant as it may at first sound. Few, if any, people as yet have suggested that the case worker sell himself not only to the administrative officers of the institution but also to the inmate body at large. It goes without saying that cooperation and rapport on the part of the subject, or inmate, if you will, is absolutely essential for any form of psychotherapy. Today the case workers do not have that cooperation. Most apparent cooperation is either unwilling or a fraud. And before any constructive work on a large scale can be accomplished, the case worker must sell himself to the inmate. The second reason for the mistrust on the part of the inmate is the fact that, in the past perhaps, not so much as in the immediate present, the members of the case work unit have contented themselves with the so-called abnormal inmates. The psychiatrists and the psychologists have performed a real function in ferreting out the insane, in ferreting out the feebleminded, and in treating inmates mentally upset, but not necessarily insane. Over-emphasis has been placed upon this aspect of the case workers' problem and too little emphasis has been placed upon the rehabilitation of the vast majority of the correctional inmates; that is, the so-called normal inmate. This has been fully realized by the inmates themselves. Hence there is a stigma attached to being called up for an interview, other than the initial

interview, by the psychiatrist or the psychologist. The inmate is in fear of being "bugged." To many inmates and a great many prison officials this has been the sole function of the members of the classification unit. The importance of this work has not been decried. It has a real function that is an absolute necessity, and the correctional institution does not dispute it. The contention is made, however, that this is not the sole function of the case worker and that steps should be taken immediately by the case worker to correct if possible this distrust on the part of the inmate population. More work should be done with the so-called normal prison population as well as with the abnormal. After all, it must be realized that the vast majority of crimes are committed not by the insane, not by the feebleminded, in spite of statistical charlatany on the part of certain of our investigators, but by the so-called normal and psychopathic individuals.

Prison architecture is another field in which the case worker is not supposed to be interested. However, sober reflection upon the part of a great many prison administrators throughout the country has led to the conclusion that a certain form of architecture is essential to the proper functioning of a case work unit. The case worker by pointing out the necessity for such architecture can do much for himself to insure the proper functioning of his own unit. For example, a receiving building is a necessity if the case work unit is to function at its maximum efficiency. Men entering a correctional institution for the first time should be segregated in such a building out of contact with older and more sophisticated criminals, and protected from a vast amount of misinformation which is passed on from older inmates to the new man. The receiving building is necessary so that a proper study, diagnosis, and outline of treatment for each man may be made. In institutions where there is no receiving building, the case worker should interest himself in convincing the "powers that be," of the absolute necessity for such a receiving building. Individualization of treatment cannot be outlined without thorough investigation and study; and thorough investigation and study cannot be had unless the case worker has access, at least for the first thirty days, to the inmate at any time that he desires without interfering with the administrative routine of the institution.

Another element of prison architecture which should interest the case worker is the absolute necessity, within a state system, if not within a correctional institution itself, of having several types of institutions; that is the maximum security, the medium security,

and the minimum security. Different personalities require different modes and methods of treatment. An inmate must in most cases be gradually prepared for the outside world by increasing his responsibility and gradually changing his mode of living and his mode of confinement, so that as the time for his parole approaches the inmate is living in an environment which more nearly resembles the environment of the outside world. The rehabilitation of certain types of inmates can be accomplished only in an open type of prison. The younger, less sophisticated inmates must be kept separate from certain of his brethren if proper rehabilitation is to be considered. All these approaches require not only clinical classification but an assignment classification with the architecture of the institution in mind. The best interests of society as well as of John Jones, inmate, may best be served in one case by confining John Jones in a fortress type of prison; on the other hand, the best interests of society and of James Smith may best be served by confining James Smith in a medium or minimum security type of institution. The treatment of an inmate must not only conform to his particular needs but the architecture of the institution in which he is treated, must also conform to the particular needs of that inmate; and the necessity for this individualization of architecture as well as treatment must be demonstrated by the case worker. This is not a problem which with a wave of his hand he can delegate to the prison administrator or the prison commission. The case worker must and should interest himself in this problem.

We have come a long way in the individual treatment of the delinquent but the greater part of our journey lies before us. The case work unit must interest itself in other things than label sticking, other things than insolated therapy; other things than oft-times futile recommendations to administrative officers, other things than a querulous, semi-hysterical plaint anent "the antagonism of old-time wardens." Social work must become a positive and not a negative factor in our correctional institutions, as well as in all social problems affecting the rehabilitation and regeneration of the prison inmate. In the training of personnel, in the better relations of the case worker with his fellow employe, in the positive leadership in the struggle for laws vital to his program, in the selling of himself to the inmate as well as to the administrator, in the interest in the "normal" inmate as well as the "abnormal," in the interest in pertinent problems such as institutional architecture, and in the broad social outlook, lies the future of Case Work and Case Workers in the Correctional Field.