

MODERN SOCIAL SERVICE

In the Deutsches Rotes Kreuz, published by the German Red Cross in the Federal Republic of Germany (1964, No. 6), Dr. Hans Peter Mehl, Director of the Red Cross College of Social Studies at Hagen, repeats some of the ideas on which he had already expounded during an address to the Ladies Section of the Westphalia-Lippe Red Cross Society at Berlebeck in the summer of 1963. We give below a summary of his main ideas :

“Social service is Society’s conscience; but Society does not know it”, or at least not yet. This might seem a rather bold statement and the author considers it worthwhile to examine it closer.

Under the effect of economic expansion, the enormous growth in industrial production and the increase in leisure time, the social workers who endeavoured during the war and the after-war years to offset the direct effects of the conflict and the sequel thereto, have come to be faced with new problems. Their task has become one which calls for method, specialisation and greater co-ordination to achieve efficiency and results. Since 1961 the profession has been subject to legal regulations in the Federal Republic of Germany.

However, the author expresses the opinion that neither legal provisions nor practical experience in social welfare can safeguard that dignity which alone enables us to become conscious of the society to which we belong and aware of the social character which gives essential cohesion to the community. No one will deny that the social services have become necessary but it must also be

admitted that their functions are provisional. Indeed, the individual must first and foremost be helped to use his own abilities in order to provide for himself. Self-reliance of this kind should in turn arouse in the subject a sense of social responsibility. In this way social services will attain higher standards and become the creators of conscience in those they help.

The statement that social services are necessary needs no explanation or justification; they are taken for granted nowadays, but the corollary to this is that the task of assisting can only be carried out by qualified personnel well versed in socio-pedagogy and administrative matters.

In order properly to fulfil his rôle as guide and mentor to those people for and with whom he is concerned, the social worker must know how to give wise counsel at the proper time — often a more efficient remedy than material assistance. He must also show discretion and not substitute for the priest, the psychiatrist or the doctor. This will not prevent him from seeing things through the eyes of his client and from showing that compassion which is essential in all humanitarian activities.

It is not for the social worker to judge those to whom he gives assistance, nor to assess the extent of their responsibility for their predicament. His rôle, as we have said, is "to help those in need to help themselves". But in any case the importance of psycho-pedagogy in social work must be stressed, especially in modern communities where it fulfils a constantly increasing educative and cultural need.
