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THE PROBATION OFFICER IN THE NEW SOCIAL REALIGNMENT AFTER THE WAR¹

A. J. Todd²

While we all recognize that the war places a greater responsibility than ever before upon the ordinary average citizen, we recognize a still greater responsibility which our lawfully created leaders must assume in this time of crisis. This is a testing time for our past choices of leadership. If our leaders are failing us it is an indication that we have not scrutinized carefully enough their qualifications, that we have permitted some question of expediency or some meretricious quality in the person himself to cloud our better judgment. For several reasons the probation officer stands in a particularly prominent position in these times of war and a forecast of imminent social reconstruction makes it necessary that we should review how things stand with the probation officer in order to estimate what his proper role will be in the new social order. In the first place the war has enhanced the position and the prestige of the social worker. The President of the United States, the Secretary of War, the Secretary of the Navy, and the Secretary of the Interior have all recognized in a marked degree the social worker, and have placed heavy responsibilities upon him. It is obvious that this new accession of honor and responsibility means that the social worker must be on his mettle to make good. If we have thought that our methods were good enough before, if we have not felt the need of improving our technique, this new position alone ought to offer us the compelling sanction for taking stock of ourselves. I am convinced that after the war, social work will occupy a position very much more advantageous than it has heretofore. Our whole attitude, then, as probation officers must be one of mental and professional preparedness.

Moreover, the steady growth of state socialism during the war makes it necessary that we should be very sure about the quality of our administrative service. State socialism may easily become a great menace to our liberties and our free civic life if it is not characterized on the one hand by high administrative efficiency and on the other by

¹An address before the National Probation Association, Kansas City, May, 1918.

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intensive local neighborhood political and social activity. For this reason the probation officer must be extremely careful, more careful than ever, to eschew all politics in the bad sense, and must cease any suspicion of being a mere seat-warmer.

In a recent study of the probation officers' work in some 75 or 100 American cities, I was pained to discover that there is a good deal of feeling about some of the men serving as probation officers particularly for adult cases that they are little more than cogs in the local political machine. This is not only a personal grievance to the rest of us who are trying to maintain high professional standards, but it is also an insult to the spirit of probation and cannot fail to hamper and hinder and discredit the whole idea of probation.

Somehow or other, despite the gospel, we must add another cubit to our height, we must develop new energies, we must improve our technical efficiency, we must, if necessary, right-about-face in our whole attitude to our work. For by some means or other, probation work and the probation officer himself must mean more to the community. In the study which I referred to a moment ago, I tried to find out how many of the probation officers were able to get their work over to the community, that is, to interpret to the community the meaning of probation work, what the court stands for, what the causes of delinquency are, and how the community may co-operate in removing some of those hindrances to decent life. I tried to find out also how many of the probation officers were rated by responsible people in their community as leaders or as people who could be counted upon to join with other leaders of social work in big community social movements. I was a little bit disappointed, for while I found many cases in which the probation officers were definitely and constantly in touch with the public and while I found a good many who were rated leaders, I found a good many more who apparently were content to do the day's routine work day after day and month after month without ever attempting to set into motion those forces which would tend to ease up their own work. I found some cases where men were conspicuous for their lack of co-operation. Some cases were reported where the probation officers did not think that communities were any of their business. Other cases where they were too busy with their own case work either to find time for interpreting themselves to the community or for caring anything about what the community thought about their work. This, of course, is a weak and paralyzing attitude. Moreover, it is bound to defeat the whole professional attitude which should mark the probation officer. Here let me repeat what I used to

insist upon years ago as a probation officer in San Francisco, that the chief business of the probation officer is to put himself out of business just as speedily as possible. In other words, his work should be so thoroughly done that it will not need doing over. That is to say, probation work really done means not simply hearing reports or visiting families, but it means getting down after root causes and troubles in the community. The sooner those root troubles are eliminated, of course, the sooner there will be vacant jobs in the probation staff and vacant offices in the City Hall. So much the better for the community, so much the better for its children, so much the better for the probation officers as self-respecting citizens. All of this means, then, that particularly in this time of war when certain tendencies toward juvenile delinquency are intensified and exaggerated, the probation officers must make special efforts to organize their communities for preventive and protective work. Here is a chance for real leadership at hand, even though the probation officer may not have considered that he was strategically placed for community leadership before. If he loses this opportunity, he is sacrificing an unparalleled chance to serve his country by doing really constructive, patriotic, and scientific work.

If you ask me what I should do, I should say, take every opportunity offered and see that opportunities are offered for presenting this work through addresses to chambers of commerce, civic associations, to women's clubs, to the churches; strengthen our position by service on joint committees for civic welfare work, by the organization of juvenile court auxiliaries, by attending conferences of various types of social and civic work. To a certain limited extent also the newspapers may be utilized. Of course, here one is always up against the difficulty that he must so sterilize all personal details in interesting case stories, that they lose the larger part of their "human interest" quality for newspaper publicity. Still there are certain cases and certain facts and figures which can be given out through the press and which it is the probation officers' business to see are transmitted through the press to the public. It is not a bad idea to take newspaper reporters into confidence. Usually an arrangement can be made with them whereby they will agree not to flare any stories which would injure children or the court and in return the probation officer will let them in on any material which not only will not militate against either the court or the probation work, but which also has real publicity value.

Probation officers must be quick to recognize the new political, economic and social currents which the war has started running. I should recommend particularly that they keep in touch with the newer

developments in the labor movement. Since one of the first principles in probation is to get in proper contact with the probationer, this means that the probation officer must know the likes and dislikes, the prejudices and particular attachments of his probationer. A very considerable change of attitude is coming over not only working people, but business men also with regard to the share which the real workers are going to have in the new social order. Hence from the standpoint both of the personal education of a public official as well as from that of his being able to function properly in a new medium the probation officer must sense the new order and adjust his thinking accordingly. Furthermore, from the standpoint of the creation of a new set of social conditions in which human beings may thrive better than they have in the past the probation officer will do well to study carefully such a remarkable document as the program of the British Labour Party with its demands for certain national minima, such as a minimum wage, minimum amount of leisure, minimum standard of decent housing, etc. These are not matters of merely curious and idle interest, but they are fundamental for both the social worker's technique and for his philosophy as a citizen and as a worker.

The probation officer may take great encouragement from certain new educational methods coming out of the war. I mean particularly the methods for reclaiming and utilizing "human scrap." A probation officer has as his usual job to handle individuals of marginal utility in our present social order: that is, those who are broken in health or whose moral standards are deficient, or whose education is retarded. In other words, dealing with the maladjusted. We have been too prone in the past to assume that these maladjustments could not be overcome. Therefore we dumped these marginal people on the "scrap heap." But the demand for labor has shown that many of these folks under the new stimulus could produce and produce quite effectively. From practically every prison in this country we get the report that its population is declining. That is partly because many of the young men who would ordinarily be sent to jail or prison for misdemeanors and minor felonies have either enlisted or been drafted into the armed forces of the nation or have been put to work by watchful guardians of the peace or have responded to the inducements of profitable jobs. This has been so true of the East end of London that that seething pool of misery has been almost transformed by work and prosperity since 1914. There is inspiration also in the new plans for vocational reclamation of returning soldiers. If you did not look too closely at etymologies you could make quite a parable out of the fact that the

French term for the wounded and crippled soldiers who have been made over by surgery and education is *reformes*. It will be the probation officer's business to accept these new lessons in physical and moral surgery and to apply them with genius to his own work.

As part of the probation officer's community program, he must include the promotion of some of the newer health measures. In perhaps no other field has the United States gone ahead so rapidly under the stress of war as in that of public health. We have run with seven-leagued boots, particularly in the matter of venereal disease. This is a matter intimately and vitally connected with the probation officer's work. He must at once not only understand the government's program for social hygiene, but also back it up with every resource in the community which he can bring to bear upon it. Community control over the venereal situation will in some respects lighten the worries of the probation officer, but it will also open up a whole new field for his endeavors. Let us be thankful that at last the eyes of some of our fellow citizens are being unbandaged so that they can see straight in this particular health problem. It is at this point that the probation officer can serve his community from the standpoint of eugenics and racial strength.

Likewise the probation officer is called upon now to support the new recreation program. Here again our government has gone ahead rapidly through the creation of its war camp community service. This service is designed to organize and develop the latent recreational resources in the communities adjacent to the camps. If I may speak of but one item, I should call attention to the creation of community centers as hang-outs for soldiers and sailors. The prophylactic effect of such sane recreation cannot, I believe, fail of having some effect upon our civilian leisure problem after the war. We as probation officers are committed to the job of preventing delinquency as well as of taking care of some of the people who actually fall into the hands of the law. Therefore, we must recognize and promote these new developments in the direction of a sane program of community decency through a wise and liberal provision of public recreation.

I am hoping, although I must confess that the evidence so far is somewhat contradictory, that out of this war will come a new respect for law. Thousands of young Americans are being subjected to discipline for almost the first time of their lives. They are being taught to obey, they are being taught to do certain things regularly, they are being taught many of the regular habits of attention, of industry, of courtesy, of health, and decency, for which heretofore

many of them have had to go to the reformatory or the prison to obtain. One of the great opportunities of the probation officer, however, is with the younger men and boys and girls who are not of military age and for whom the present war situation can be made a social stimulus to patriotism, to law-abidingness and to a constructive social attitude. Here the probation officer can work along with the teacher and while promoting the Liberty Loan, the Thrift campaign, and the other patriotic drives, put in a few well-timed licks for just plain, ordinary obedience to the law.

There is a possible source of considerable help to probation work through the large number of trained volunteers which are being turned out by various war courses including the Home Service Institutes of the Red Cross. These volunteers should not be allowed to go stale after the war impulse is over, but should be utilized in the various fields of social work. Many of them, I believe, will prove to be admirable material from which to recruit both volunteer and professional probation officers. My main reason for believing this is the fact that these training courses are making use of the military virtues of promptness, sense of responsibility, and team work. These volunteers, therefore, are vastly different from the type which used to confront us. I know from sad experience as a chief probation officer and as a settlement worker how difficult it was for us to utilize a volunteer corps. They could not be relied upon at any particular place, at any particular time or to do any particular piece of work thoroughly. In other words, they were, at least in my experience, frequently more a liability than an asset. But the newer crop of volunteers strike me as having not only a well-developed sense of responsibility, but also persistence, a grasp of the problem and some sense of technical finish to their work.

In response to this call to a new responsibility, the probation officers will probably offer the plea of low salaries, of an insecure tenure of office, of too large a bulletin of work, of an insufficient staff, and of an indifferent public which does not support their work. It is unfortunately true that salaries in many communities are low and that the tenure of office is slender and that these other difficulties actually do hinder the probation officer in the proper conduct of his work. But once more I come back to the fundamental demand upon the probation officer that he educate the public to a better grasp of what probation means. So long as people still speak about probation officers as "privation officers" or "prohibition officers" they are not going to offer any very generous or intelligent support to probation

work. If the mountain will not come to Mohammed, Mohammed must go after the mountain. In other words, the function of the probation officer like that of the nurse, or the charity case worker, or of the hospital social service worker, is primarily and constantly education: education with regard to his particular clients or cases and education with regard to the large public which after all is his final resource in money, interest and preventive energies.

Now it is perfectly clear that no such large sized job of constructive education can be carried through by mediocre men and women. No uneducated person can educate either probationers or the community in the broad sense which I have been pointing out. Indeed, I am frank to say that nobody can be too well educated for probation work. We might as well confess here among ourselves, that many of us have not measured up fully to a high educational test, whether from the standpoint of ordinary fundamental elements in education or from the standpoint of strictly professional training. A good many of us have picked up both just as we happened to find them. There are still too many probation officers in practice who do not sustain the appeal of probation officers to be taken seriously as cultivated men and women, as broadly educated citizens, and as members of a skilled profession. I, for one, cannot believe that ability to use good English, or to make an intelligent address, or to write a respectable report, is any disqualification for probation work. And I hope the day will come when these will be recognized as much more essential than a record of national guard service, or the friendship of some politician as a qualification for appointment as a probation officer. Moreover, I firmly believe that it is the duty of every probation officer to get proper professional training. Some of you are probably saying, "But I have been in this work for a long time and have never had any opportunity to get definite professional instruction, and more than that, I do not know where it would be possible to get this training you speak of." Here with becoming modesty, let me announce that at the University of Minnesota we are just finishing a professional course on juvenile court and probation work given jointly by Judge E. F. Waite of the Hennepin County Juvenile Court, and myself. So far as I know, this is the first attempt made by any state university to offer this type of training, but there is nothing peculiar or unusual about it to make it impossible for any of our great universities to follow suit. I am sure that many of the universities would be glad to offer either short institutes during the year or special courses in the summer school if a sufficient demand were manifested by the proba-

tion officers. This would give us at least one opportunity of repairing our improper education. But whatever the method, we must achieve a better education if we ever hope to measure up with any of the other real professions, such as law or medicine or engineering.

I am very critical of probation officers and of probation work; I feel keenly our lack of education; I deplore the backwardness of some of our officers to share in community leadership; all because I am so deeply interested in raising and maintaining the whole level of probation technique. We have not been improving as fast as we might have hoped. The war gives us, perhaps, the opportunity for getting a sort of second wind for pulling ourselves together and taking advantage of the new social movements to justify ourselves and our work and to make for both a really dignified and valued place in the great work of social reconstruction which confronts us.