

**THE SPIRIT OF
SOCIAL
WORK: ADDRESSES**

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The Spirit of Social Work: Addresses by Edward T. Devine

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EDWARD T. DEVINE

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EDWARD T. DEVINE

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TO SOCIAL WORKERS

WHAT is to say, to every man or woman who, in any relation of life, professional, industrial, political, educational, or domestic; whether on salary or as a volunteer; whether on his own individual account or as a part of an organized movement, is working consciously, according to his light intelligently, and according to his strength persistently, for the promotion of the common welfare—the common welfare as distinct from that of a party or a class or a sect or a business interest or a particular institution or a family or an individual.

There is no need to disparage the hardest kind of work for one's self or his family or his business or his institution or his church or his party; but in so far as the point of view is selfish, exclusive,

TO SOCIAL

institutional, sectarian, or partisan, the worker is not a social worker. In so far as he rises above his private and selfish interests, and considers the effect of what he is doing, or leaving undone, on the general welfare, he takes the social point of view and brings himself consciously or unconsciously into the ranks of the nation's social workers.

One of the extraordinary developments of the opening decade of the twentieth century is the extent to which the multitude of social workers, engaged in various occupations, enrolled under various banners, have made mutual discovery of one another's existence, have become aware of one another's common aims and aspirations. They have found themselves, so to speak, and in doing so have found that this social point of view, this mutual interest in social work, differentiates them not only from the exploiter but from the neutral and indifferent member of society.

This new view of life and of human relations is at once conservative, constructive, and wholesome; radical, revolutionary, and disturbing;

WORKERS

absolutely non-partisan, catholic, and social; comprehensive in its grasp and yet sternly practical and acquainted with the humility of the scientific and inquiring mind. It is a view which tempts to no violence and yet leaves no wrong permanently on the throne; a view which exalts the family, the state, religion, security of life and of property, and yet insists that all institutions are made for men and not men for institutions; a view which opens our eyes to the evils which are, but yet does not seek to make them, in some mystical sense, symbols of imaginary evils which are not.

Social workers are not Utopians. They are sober citizens of a real commonwealth. Yet the community which they have in their mind's eye, as the not too distant goal of their diversified and yet co-ordinated endeavors, is one in which premature death shall have been conquered, in which feeble-mindedness shall have been abolished, in which childhood shall be protected and nourished, in which neither men nor women shall be exploited for gain, in which toil though it may

TO SOCIAL WORKERS

still be severe will not be destructive, in which heredity and environment shall be joined in a holy wedlock of which high physical and moral character shall be the offspring, in which there shall be leisure and opportunity for the growth of the spirit, in which always and everywhere men shall rule things, being worthy to rule and under no domination save that of loyalty to the highest and best that the mind of man has conceived.

To the social workers of the nation, whose spirit I have sought in these addresses to interpret, I venture to dedicate the volume in which they are collected. To social workers, at any rate, the unity of the problems which they discuss will be apparent. They have long been accustomed to discern the interlocking relations of diverse problems and to say with Terence, *Humaní nihil a me alienum puto.*