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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA  
Seminar on Social Work Training in Africa  
Lusaka, 21 October - 2 November 1963

Opening speech by Dr. Kenneth Kaunda, the Minister of Local Government and Social Welfare at the Opening Session on 21 October 1963.

Your Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is, for me, a very proud occasion. To have here the United Nations, not merely in one of its sections but in three - the Economic Commission for Africa, the United Nations Bureau of Social Affairs, and the Technical Assistance Board - to have them as well as such a distinguished body of consultants and experts come here to our Oppenheimer College to discuss the future of social work training in Africa is indeed an honour for this country, a signal privilege for this College, and, I trust, a mark of the very real esteem in which Northern Rhodesia and its progress in social work training is held internationally. I join therefore with His Excellency in extending to you all a very warm welcome to our country.

Before you proceed with your discussions on the training programmes I would ask you to reflect that this College - this institution in which you are now meeting - is in itself a striking example of the self-help, the social improvement and the social leadership which it preaches. Nothing is taught at this College which is not practised and, as the Minister responsible for the Oppenheimer College, I have good cause to know that here you have an imaginative voluntary organisation which is formed of the people and for the people - you have here an organisation which has moved - both by instinct and by design - in the direction most beneficial to this country and to its neighbours.

Starting with evening lectures in one back-room in Cairo Road only three years ago, this College has developed in harmony with the aspirations and the wishes of the people of Northern Rhodesia. It has brought to this country a sense of the importance of its social as well as its economic development. It has kept firmly before us that our policy for the future must be based on the people rather than plans. It keeps us aware that whatever we do in the Government is a success or failure by the extent to which it helps the ordinary man and woman to lead a better life and to improve his or her own conditions. It reminds us continually that independence has a personal and family meaning as well as a national or political significance. The College is working solidly to produce not only for Northern Rhodesia but for a number of other African countries, the trained people who will carry the responsibility for social policy and for finding the solutions to those profound social problems which are by no means the least of the many obstacles to our future progress.

When you begin to discuss social work training, therefore, I hope you will not lose sight of the vital importance of practising what is being taught. The people want to see what can be done and not only to appreciate what happens to be known. We have here in Africa too many prophets and not enough pioneers. We have too many advisors and not enough workers. We have too great a dependance on slogans and not enough on practical solutions to our problems. Our people belong to the land and they belong to the industry which is going to develop here: but as our children sit in classrooms and fill their notebooks they all too often grow away from the realities of their own country, they grow away from the very land which is their hope for the future. They grow away from the people who have worked to give them the opportunity to study. Our great heed is to educate people for Africa and not merely to educate people from Africa. That is why training here in Africa becomes so vital to our future progress. Above all, it is important that we should

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not teach without practice. It is important that our education should be not merely in knowledge but also in doing what is necessary.

Here in Northern Rhodesia we have no doubt about the problems which lie ahead. At any time we can get a team of experts or a number of learned individuals to tell us in perhaps more technical detail or in more academic terms what every man and woman knows from his or her own experience. We know that there are social problems in our growing towns. We know that the land is being denuded of its people. We know that a balanced economy and a large number of secondary industries based on a greatly enlarged agricultural programme will be necessary for our future growth and advancement. It is necessary that we be told at times how this situation arose. It is, of course, necessary that it be outlined for us quantitatively and according to the cultural, economic, psychological and sociological factors which are involved.

But we should not be satisfied with reports and recommendations. We will not meet our needs with pen and ink. We still have to turn our attention to the practical solution to our great problems. We therefore need even more than advice from the teams of people who will help. We need our own people - every one of them - to join in the great effort to improve themselves and their country. We need to build our country with our hands as well as with our heads and by the use of tools as well as by the use of tongues. We should be proud of hard work and proud of manual work. We should be prepared to make our own contribution to the development of our country not merely from behind a desk but also amongst the people on the land, in the factories, and with the chiefs and their tribes. The challenge before us is not merely to unite but to unite in action. Our task is not only to consider but to create and this by our own efforts.

We are glad that you have joined us for this Seminar because it shows that this policy of making a practical contribution through social work education - of having students doing a practical job as well as their classroom work, of building the social services as well as teaching the methods - that this policy, which is the keystone of our work here at the Oppenheimer College, is one which has commended itself to you, and one about which you want to know more.

We are glad you have come too, because we would never suggest that this College and this country do not have a great deal to learn. Your combined wisdom and experience will help us to see what we should be doing. Your combined experience will give us the insight into our own limitations and, true to the tradition of social work education, we will be able to examine critically our own contributions and to discover the factors which are hampering our growth. Indeed, you are beginning what I believe the social workers would call a "case conference", but your case is Africa - an Africa which needs your help not merely to develop but to develop itself. Self-reliance is your aim for clients. Self-reliance is the basis of social work and you will make a notable contribution if you go forward to help Africa stand on its own feet - independent not only in name but in fact. And you begin with a great disadvantage in that the vast majority of people have no idea of what you are trying to do.

We welcome you as mothers and colleagues in a drive for better conditions throughout this Continent. We share our problems of unemployment, of family disintegration, of under-production and increasing populations with nearly all the independent countries of Africa. We all need vast development programmes. No one of our countries can depend upon politics or economics alone to give our people the vision of a better life which they can achieve if they pull together. We all need the deeper, more human and more personal attention with which social workers are concerned.

I would urge you, however, to look not only at the narrow professional needs of Africa in social work but at the importance of social work for our total development in these countries. The first social workers - the social workers of the 19th century - may not have been fully professional but they were people of deep conviction and determined action. They made social action a very real part of the national development. It seems to me that whilst we must ensure that we do not lag behind in Africa in the production of social workers with high professional standards we should also try to recapture some of that early reforming spirit which gave birth to social work: we should seek the spark of devotion to the people and the dedication and self-sacrifice which marked the advent of social work in America and in Europe if we are to help Africa in this crucial period of its growth.

/s/ His Excellency

His Excellency has referred to the motto of this College "No man is born for himself alone". This is a slogan we could well adopt for the tremendous effort which each one of our countries is to make to develop its resources for the benefit of everyone. Our drive should bring in everyone in a deep spirit of service to his neighbour. We must all pull together.

In Europe and America, social work grew naturally out of the people's demand for better conditions, out of their disgust with the old economic system and their revulsion from its social consequences. In the African tradition, we have never had need of social workers; social problems have been (especially in the rural areas) family problems to be handled within the family, within the village, within the kinship group. When we come to towns and see the degradation, when we see our people demoralised, when we see the families broken and men and women confused and bewildered, there is a great danger that we may accept this as a natural or necessary consequence of Westernization and of education. There is a danger that we may accept the urban jungle of selfishness as an opportunity to seek our own advancement and we might leave the less able to fend for themselves. There is already a tendency for some people to despise their own traditional standards or customary ways of life. This is a danger we should avoid. Our urbanization can be better to the extent we are prepared to see that it is better.

Social work and social workers do not then come easily within our African perspective. We look to the Government to supply our individual wants; we look to politics as the solution to many of our problems. Whilst no one could doubt that politics has, in fact, brought the African people to a position of dignity, there is no politician of my acquaintance who believes, that therefore, politics can answer all our problems. We need your expertise, therefore, not merely to solve our problems but to help us to see them in their true light, to help us to know their real consequences for society, and to help us to use social work skills not only for problem solving but also in developing our country effectively for the benefit of the people.

Economic progress - even political progress - is empty if it does not add to the happiness, the contentment and the prosperity of the people themselves. It is just not true that we have to tolerate this chaos of standards in our communities. It is not true that happiness lies in helping ourselves and not others. The evils exist only because we are not yet adequately organised to do something about them. We have to mobilise our traditional co-operative spirit and our kinship loyalties to the service of our people in modern conditions. We have to help them to see what they can achieve if they will but try and keep trying. We look to our social workers to give a wholeness to these development efforts. We look to our social workers to make family sense and human satisfaction out of our broad national schemes.

But the social workers can only do this if they are trained in a way which puts them in touch with the people and helps them to feel, to think and to act as true members of their own community. The social workers can only do their part of the job by understanding just how much the body of our effort needs the spirit of service to infuse it.

We believe we have gone some way in this direction in this country and especially at the Oppenheimer College. We believe that in combining casework, groupwork and community development in our training we have brought a realistic approach to social work and social development which is both powerful in and necessary to our future growth. We look to this Seminar to help us now to evaluate this effort, to help us to identify our

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