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% American Consulate-General
Bombay, India
(written at Poona, November 14, 1947)

Dear Mr. Rogers:

Last week, in the company of Dr. Kakade and other members of the Servants of India Society, I went to Bombay, primarily to attend the four-day All-India Conference of Social Work.

My purpose was not a specific one. Being sensitive to newspaper headlines and letters from friends in northern India, I have (vicariously) shared to a small degree in the tragedy of disruptive conflict and mass migration taking place there. Perhaps as a reaction I wished to share (also vicariously, as a visitor, not a social worker) in the spirit of constructive human work also being done in India. Certainly much of the Conference's value was in meeting men and women vigorously and intelligently tackling the social ills of the day.

Dozens of national and local groups, large and small, have long been engaged in various types of social service work in India. A generation ago, one or two all-India organizations existed to bring together the problems and experiences of these separate groups. For some years now, however, such coordination has been absent, and the present Conference was convened mainly in an attempt to restore it. About four hundred social workers, philanthropists, government specialists in social service fields, and professors attended as delegates, to discuss their work and decide on a permanent organization to facilitate and strengthen their efforts.

The Conference was called largely on the initiative of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, a school established some twenty years ago by India's pioneering industrial family, the Tatas, for the study of social problems and the training of social workers. Besides the Tata group, other members of the Parsi community - long known for its philanthropic undertakings - were active in organizing and financing the Conference, as were such prominent groups as the All-India Women's Conference and its President, Lady Rama Rau. Financial aid was also provided by such a dissimilar group as the very left-wing Indian Peoples' Theater Association, who conducted a benefit performance for the purpose. Most of the planning of the Conference agenda and discussion program, however, was the work of the Tata Institute, whose staff members and graduates were active participants.

A wide range of problems was included in the Conference's concept of "social work" and covered by qualified workers present. As a layman, I for the first time became really conscious of how many different professional talents are required in the field of social work. Dividing into topical groups, each of which had professional workers present, the Conference discussed papers on the following subjects:

- * Family and child welfare, including education for marriage and family life, pre-natal and maternity care, guidance of maladjusted children, care of juvenile delinquents and neglected or abandoned children.
- * Youth organization, such as boy scouts and girl guides, with the

goal of all-round development: physical, mental and cultural, vocational, and social (civic fellowship and citizenship).

* Community reorganization, rural and urban.

* Labor welfare, some objectives mentioned being: adjustment of the worker to his work "in terms of the full span of his life"; decent home as well as decent working conditions; more opportunities for recreation and 'culture'. In the last connection, however, the primacy of economic factors, the frustrations of subsistence and slum existence were stressed. "Only a happy man can play", was one speaker's dictum.

* Rehabilitation of the mentally and physically handicapped, and of the socially maladjusted: beggars, prostitutes.

* Aboriginal welfare, to help India's 25 million tribal peoples in adjusting to the dominant and encroaching civilizations about them. As the Honorable B.G.Kher, Congress Party Premier of Bombay Province, said in inaugurating the Conference, "Social problems in India are not only different in different areas and groups, but they are even related to different stages of social development."

* Social service of the State:

- Social security, with emphasis on the rural need in India, and the possibility of crop and cattle insurance.

- Public health, physical and mental, with stress on preventive measures. Mention was made here of the periodic family health checkups carried out in the Peckham community experiment near London (one exists in Bombay on this model).

- Adult education, geared to meet the needs and aspirations of the people taught, and to appeal to them.

- Prison and criminal law reform, plus inculcation in society of a more humane outlook toward the criminal.

The quality of papers and discussion was naturally uneven, yet many of the speakers probed deeply and put forth educational and stimulating ideas. I was particularly struck by the general acceptance of a scientific approach in the study of human affairs. Fundamentally analytical and unprejudiced in outlook is the attitude, either expressed or implied by many speakers, that social distress must have a cause, an origin, and that proper action consists first in finding and then in attacking that root cause. The significance of environmental as well as hereditary factors, and the failure of society as a whole to provide a healthy environment for some of its groups and individuals, was often mentioned, and it seemed implicit in many speakers' remarks that society is something organic in which the health of each part and of the whole affects the health of the other parts.

This outlook was expressed most explicitly by Mr. Justice Chagla of Bombay, Chairman of the Reception Committee, in his welcoming remarks to the conference. He even used scientific terminology. "We are often prone to pass severe judgments on the failings and shortcomings of our fellowmen", he said. "In doing so, we often forget to what a large extent this is due to frustrations and maladjustments for which society is largely responsible. Our function, therefore, should be not so much to judge as to understand, not to condemn but to abolish the cause of frustrations and to set right the maladjustments."

Specifically, the role of particular social sciences was apparent. Careful anthropological, sociological and historical study has preceded and guided most of Hyderabad State's work among aboriginal peoples. In other fields mentioned above, frequent pleas were made for application

of psychology and psychiatry to broad social problems, and for increased psychiatric social work. A doctor, attached to the Tata Company, argued for increased attention to Industrial Medicine and Industrial Psychology, comparatively new fields. The fact that the Tata Institute of Social Sciences has psychologists and psychiatrists on its teaching staff partly accounts for this emphasis in the discussions. With others, these professors pointed out the opportunities of social workers to collect statistics and conduct the field research necessary for proper understanding of social problems. They argued for constant interaction of theory and practice, and described how the Institute's students, in case and field work, have applied and modified the social theories of the classroom, and how the Institute's curriculum has progressively developed to meet real problems found in the field.

One of the chief values of the Conference was, in fact, the bringing together of experienced social workers, on the one hand, with academicians and administrators on the other. If speakers of the latter group wandered into second-hand vagueness, their auditors were not slow to raise practical questions or demand concrete illustrations. Men who have devoted a lifetime to the aid of their fellowmen were able to suggest that the scientific approach should not eliminate sympathy. "The aboriginals", said A.V.Thakkar, the eldest welfare worker present, "should be approached and treated as human beings". Spontaneity and a warm personal touch are "the essence of social service", others remarked, and there should be no condescension in one's attitude. A vibrant personality from Hyderabad State, full of humor, intellect, and vigor, demonstrated how scholarship and sympathy can be combined. His work among the Gond tribal people has been done under the tutelage of an Austrian anthropologist, yet it was apparent from his manner that rigorous study had not dampened his lively appreciation of and great fondness for the Gond hillsfolk.

One had to realize, nevertheless, that the workers present represented only scattered efforts in the huge potential field for social service. A full section of the Conference gave its attention to the training and equipment of the social worker, and mention was made of "the terrible shortage of trained personnel". A recommendation was made that universities introduce pre-professional courses in social sciences, as preparation for specialized courses in graduate Social Science institutes. The need for more institutions and training camps for social work was brought to the attention of public and government.

As planned by the organizers, the Conference drew up and accepted a constitution for a permanent "Indian Conference of Social Work", with membership open to any individual or organization actively engaged in social work. Its object is the furthering of the progress of social work, through study, exchange of information, education of public opinion, recommendation of legislation, fostering of social service agencies and training schools, periodical conferences, and participation in international conferences in the field. A Parsi, Jamshed Nusserwanjee, was chosen as first President of the new organization, and the leaders of three active groups were named as Vice-Presidents: Lady Rama Rau, of the All-India Women's Conference, H.N.Kunzru, of the Servants of India Society, and Dr. J.M.Kumarappa, Director of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences.

Conferences have a way of appearing from time to time in news headlines, and it remains to be seen how effectively words spoken in Bombay

will be translated into action that impinges on the lives of people throughout the country. One factor is in favor of this organization: India is now free. Apparent in the words of many was a consciousness of the urgent responsibilities of independence. Furthermore, the task of relief and rehabilitation of millions of uprooted people in north India is an unlimited challenge. Already staff members and students of the Tata Institute, among other organizations, had gone to Delhi and the Punjab and actively taken part in relief work. Calamity will be their training ground, and their experiences there will mould much of their future lives.

In addition to the permanent private organization established, the Conference recommended the creation of permanent government Departments of Social Welfare at the Center and in the Provinces, to coordinate and aid social services performed by separate Departments such as Labor, Health, and Education. "The doctrine of laissez-faire has already died a natural death", said Mr. Justice Chagla. "No one now suggests that it is not the duty of the State to redress social wrongs and social injustices". No one challenged this remark, but it was recognized that private philanthropy and efforts must bear much of the burden of social work for many years to come in India. No attempt was made to make a clearcut division between the role of the state and the role of private endeavors. An experimental and fluid approach seemed to characterize the delegates to the Conference. "After all", concluded Premier Kher, "the search for right living is a continuous process. Social problems assume new patterns in every age and therefore need new solutions. We can only do our best by approaching them in a spirit of inquiry, and apply ourselves to their solutions with all the sincerity of purpose we can command so as to fulfil the purpose of human life and make it happy, healthy and worth living."

To close, a word about my own present and future program. Since late September I have been doing general reading in Indian economics at the Gokhale Institute. I have also roamed about Poona sufficiently to learn some of the characteristics of the staunch, often militant, Hindu communal consciousness which has been growing stronger since the establishment of Pakistan. In an early letter, I intend to discuss this.

Meanwhile, next week I plan to make a 12 to 14 day trip into Hyderabad State. This extensive land mass, centrally located in the Indian peninsula, ruled by a Muslim prince, the Nizam, but overwhelmingly populated by Hindus, presents today a delicate political problem to the leaders of the sub-continent. I hope to learn something of the forces and tensions at work there.

Yours sincerely,



Richard Morse