

Effects of Riots on Social Agencies

Some Findings

The dissemination of a questionnaire by the Social Work Practices Committee of the AASW and the Detroit Association for the Study of Group Work on the effects of the June riots on social agencies, resulted in the return of 79 usable questionnaires, the contents of which were then tabulated. These questionnaires were divided into two major categories, those of "case work" agencies, (including hospital social service departments, O.P.D.'s, institutions with case workers) and "group work" agencies (largely settlements and community centers). The results from 25 group work and 54 case work agencies will be considered both separately and in combination.

More than a quarter of all of the agencies reported evidences of tension increasing previous to the riot. 35 percent of the group work, and 15 percent of the case work agencies reported increasing tensions. Recognition of racial tensions moved several executives to demands for action from appropriate officials, but, by and large, no concerted preparation by all agencies for prevention of riots, or even for better inter-racial understanding occurred.

Half of the agencies experienced a decline in activities during the tensions. This was directly related to the riotous condition of the area in which agencies were located, or was a consequence of official decrees issued at the time. The riotous area was almost uniformly regarded by agency executives as "the Negro area", which fact is interesting in view of the white rioters on Woodward and downtown on June 21.

Only three agencies made job shifts on a racial basis, during the riot period. The smallness of this proportion may be due to the fact that 49 percent felt that the question did not apply to their agencies, probably because they did not have Negro workers.

Normal office and building activities were curtailed by 37 percent of the agencies during the tensions, or during the period of troop quartering.

Not one of the 79 agencies regarded their relations with clients as having been affected by the riot situation.

Clients who were troubled or injured applied for aid to 38 percent of the agencies, which is of interest in view of the fact that 34 percent closed down either for hours or days during the tensions.

One third of the agencies had formal staff or board meetings at the time of the riots in which the agencies' responsibilities were discussed. Some of these consisted merely of discussions of whether or not to close. Other agencies attempted to have the matter of race relations more thoroughly discussed. Some all-white agencies felt that there was "no necessity" for such discussion.

Almost half of the agencies were directly affected on the first two days of the riots, and ten percent were affected during the period of troop quartering, yet only 3 percent of the agencies experienced permanent changes as a consequence of the riot. Only one of these changes could be regarded as directed toward constructive race relations. The Girl Scouts eliminated segregation in day-camping subsequent to experience with a successful inter-racial day camp during the period of tensions; another agency disposed of a "white girls' home" which had been on the edge of a Negro district; and a home for boys restricted the areas and times its clients could be out of the building.

Almost 60 percent of the agencies regard themselves as having programs aimed at pro-

moting inter-racial harmony. Since many have "always promoted harmony" some of the sting is taken out of the small permanent change resulting from the riot, but not all of these have active inter-racial activities. Eighty percent group work agencies in some way promote harmony, while less than forty percent of the case work agencies make such efforts.

Seventeen percent of the reporting agencies have since the riot noted recurrences of frictional inter-racial incidents with group worker agencies again more sensitive to the phenomena than case worker agencies. But friction is now generally regarded as occurring on a smaller scale, and as less overt in character. Since there would now be more awareness by agencies of the significance of these "thousands of little events" which give rise to riots, undoubtedly the decline in recognized incidents has been greater than the percentage decline, (from 26 percent recognition to 17 percent recognition) indicates.

The overall picture is one of confusion, of good will, of well conceived purpose, and of bias and ill-will. Racial ill-will is not accordant with the aims of professional social work.

Recommendations

The following recommendations develop naturally from the findings of this and other studies of the riot and its effects. They are based on the assumption that social workers as a professional group are dedicated to community betterment and to democratic action. Practicing democracy in those areas where irrational anti-democratic forces are most entrenched is especially difficult, and an expression of those very difficulties is an important first-step in clarifying the atmosphere. It would appear incumbent upon social workers, the most socially enlightened professional group, to move to the forefront in the struggle for the preservation and dissemination of democracy. And democracy, if it is to survive, must move forward, and must spread outward, for any attempt to stand still or to turn back is simply an invitation to anti-democratic forces to carry on their destructive work on a broader scale. Social workers, in short, must push democracy forward. They can do this by examining their own attitudes and actions, and those of their agencies, especially in the field of race and cultural relations. And they must be missionary in their efforts for a more integrated social order, just as they are missionary in improving other personal and social relationships.

The Committee on Social Work Practices of the AASW hereby recommends:

1. That the promotion of inter-racial harmony be regarded by all agencies as coming within the scope of their practices, and that the possession of an all-white or all-Negro clientele at the present time in no way absolves an agency from this responsibility.
2. That those agencies which have "always promoted harmony" honestly re-examine their practices, and that those agencies which have regarded themselves as having "no necessity" for such activities, think beyond the narrow confines of their immediate neighborhood and clientele to the results of this pseudo-isolation on the broader community.
3. That all agencies develop formal, responsible inter-racial and/or inter-cultural committees which seek to find methods of relating themselves to the appropriate civic or citizens committees, or both. (The City of Detroit Inter-racial Committee is the current, official, civic committee, and the Greater Detroit Inter-racial Fellowship is the dominant citizens committee).
4. That agencies develop procedures aimed at the promotion of constructive race relations, beyond the mere formation of committees.

5. That agencies develop procedures for maximum functioning in the event of another riot.
6. That agencies constitute themselves as responsible reportorial groups ready regularly to report the race relations climate to appropriate citizens and civic organizations, and that the appropriate civic and citizen organizations set up machinery for such regular reporting.
7. That the agencies re-examine the effects of the riots on established client relationships.
8. That the AASW itself develop a standing committee which establishes regular relationships with the civic and citizens committees for coordinating activity.
9. That the AASW approve the Inter-racial Code of the Council of Social Agencies as evidencing sound social work practice and that individually and as a body we assume responsibility ourselves for its acceptancy by agency boards and its institution as agency practice.