
One may do more with a man by getting ten words spoken to him face to face, than by the black-lettering of a whole life's thought.—Ruskin.



Ready to be Moved to Action

HOW THE SOCIAL CENTER PROMOTES REFORM MOVEMENTS

By Clarence Arthur Perry

The amoeba grows by engulfing the particles with which it comes into contact. A social movement spreads by gathering to itself more and more people who, regarding a given matter, think and feel alike. The task of its promoters is simply that of making converts. The two means of persuasion most commonly used are written and spoken appeals: the two instruments, printed matter and public meetings.

Circular letters, pamphlets and monographs can be distributed over the country with such facility that they are being more and more resorted to as a means of winning new supporters. Because the printed word carries so far and so cheaply, there is a tendency to forget the human voice and its peculiar ability to influence masses of people. Let me illustrate.

A bill prohibiting child labor had reached the critical point in its passage through a certain State Legislature. The forces which

were specially promoting and opposing it—the social workers on one side and the mill-owners on the other—just balanced each other. It needed only a ripple of general public sentiment regarding the bill to decide its fate. But no manifestation came from the outside world to break the deadlock.

Both sides had sent their literature to all the organizations and individuals who, conceivably, were open to persuasion. So far as printed matter and postage stamps and newspaper articles could do it the public had been informed about the merits and demerits of this measure.



Courtesy of Langlow, Fonder Co.

The Socialized Class Room

In common with the other women's societies of the state the Mothers' Club of S——— had been well educated regarding its duty in this matter. It had received an artistically individualized circular letter, packed with all the statistics about the evils of child labor and all the arguments for immediate action which skillful and diligent reformers could dig up. This letter had reached the Club at precisely the same time eight other letters did. Each missive contained an appeal for a reform affecting child welfare

and each asked for urgent action. All eight had been laid upon the table, for further consideration, just as had happened in similar meetings throughout the Commonwealth.

Mrs. H——, a modest member of the club at S——, happened the next day to be visiting a local factory. While walking about upon an upper floor she noticed a peaked-faced girl who, every now and then, looked furtively out of the window. "Tend to your work," shouted the foreman. The visitor placed herself at the young woman's view-point but at first she could see only a pebbly expanse of roof. Finally through a tiny vista framed by



Setting Up the Machinery of a Reform

brick walls and a galvanized cornice, she perceived far away a green lawn upon which there appeared at intervals the just distinguishable forms of girls at play. Turning, she looked again at the spare back and pigtailed head now bent closely over her machine and in that moment she herself *felt* the injustice and the pathos of child labor.

At the next meeting of the Club, as soon as Mrs. H—— could get the floor, she related what she had seen. It was a simple story, told without any of the conventional arts of the orator.



The Social Center vs. the Saloon—The Affirmative

But somehow it transferred to the mental eyes of the audience the picture she had seen, and partly through it and partly through the infectiousness of the feeling in her tones and manner, they were led to share her emotion. The Club unanimously voted to endorse the child-labor bill and to telegraph their approval to the Capitol. The wife of an editor persuaded her husband to advocate it in his columns. The newspaper accounts of the meeting brought invitations to Mrs. H——— to address other clubs, where similar action was taken. Thus a wave of popular sentiment was started which rapidly carried the bill through the remaining stages of enactment.

The school center affords a convenient gathering-place where just such a contact as Mrs. H——— established between her fellow-members and the live wire of child labor can be made between a neighborhood and any social movement. It is a relay station where a fresh generator can be connected up and new energy be turned into the current of a feeble agitation. There are few causes so assiduously and skillfully promoted by means of newspapers and campaign pamphlets as those of modern politics, and yet party managers do not rely solely upon the printed word to make their converts. Their spellbinders are sent out at great expense into all parts of the country because they know the com-



The Negative

elling force of the eloquent, emotion-laden word. Why should not society facilitate the propagation of movements which are unselfish in origin and preservative in purpose by providing them with the necessary centers for public discussion and personal appeal?

That the plan is entirely feasible has been demonstrated in many localities. Here are a few topics, picked at random, which have been actually presented at social centers:

Factories, Tenements and the Sweating System.

The Relation of Pure Milk to Public Health.

How to Exterminate the House Fly.

Public Recreation vs. Private Vice.

Housing Conditions in Our City.

Out-of-Work and Sick Benefits.

Six O'Clock Closing Movement.

Preventing Tuberculosis.

Duties of an Alderman.

City Planning.

Baby Saving.

But social movements need centers of organization as well as centers of motivation and information. Every activity which flows from the impulses sent out from the heart of the reformer is carried on by bands of workers. These need a place where they can come together, be assigned to specific duties and be heartened for their tasks. New machinery for work in new localities is

always left in the wake of a healthy movement and its progress is greatly facilitated if it can find well-distributed centers of organization in its path. The social center is admirably well adapted for this purpose, as is attested by the following cases of reforms or campaigns which were launched from school centers:

Boston, Mass.—Improvement of yards and vacant lots.

East Orange, N. J.—A mosquito extermination campaign.

New York, N. Y.—Organization for cleaner streets.

Orange, N. J.—Proper observance of Fourth of July.

Philadelphia, Pa.—Agitation for new elementary school.

Rochester, N. Y.—Improvement of street railway service.

The third kind of service which the social center renders to



The Dance Hall or—

reforms is illustrated by the opportunities for recreation and social life which it affords to the girls whom no kind of labor legislation will be able to keep out of factories and who otherwise would be tempted to spend their evenings in low dance halls and unwholesome resorts. In other words, it is the place where the reform operates, where it effects its purpose and administers its balm to a diseased social condition. Somewhat of the character of this service is indicated by the following additional examples:

1. Patriotic education of immigrants through public ceremonies held on the occasion of their naturalization, now practised in centers at Los Angeles, Cal., Superior, Wis., and Lawrence, Mass.

2. Civic and health education among adults effected by child and city welfare exhibits, as held in Louisville, Ky., centers.

3. The promotion of baby welfare through "Little Mothers' Clubs" organized in the school centers of Milwaukee, Wis.

4. The elevation of political discussions by holding them in public schools, as recently permitted in New York, Chicago, and Jersey City.

5. The dignification of voting by maintaining balloting booths



The Social Center? We can Decide

in public schools, as allowed in Boston, Worcester, Milwaukee, Los Angeles and other cities.

As the reader reflects upon the socialized school as a center of (1) motivation and information, (2) organization, and (3) administration, let him ponder what it would mean to all the movements for social amelioration if every one of the 275,000 public schools in America were manned and equipped for community use.

Social Center Pamphlets

By Clarence Arthur Perry

R 125. How to Start Social Centers.

A pamphlet treating in detailed manner the problem of arousing community sentiment, removing legal obstacles, and organizing a social center. The different stages of development are fully discussed. 39 pp. 10 cents.

R 123. A Survey of School Social Centers.—Season of 1911-12.

Contains statistics of the centers in existence last winter, a tentative definition of a social center, a list of cities having public library work in the schools, notes on recent civic happenings in school buildings and excerpts from several new state laws concerning social centers and the use of the schoolhouse as a public meeting place. 20 pp. 5 cents.

R 120. Social Center Features in New Elementary School Architecture.

An illustrated pamphlet showing the plans of the more advanced types of school buildings now being erected in the United States, with a description of those special features which will enable them to render extra-ordinary services to their communities. 48 pp. 25 cents.

R 119. Sources of Speakers and Topics for Public Lectures in School Buildings.

A directory of organizations which use the lecture platform to promote social amelioration. Also a list of topics suitable for discussion in public meetings and suggestions of local sources of speakers. 36 pp. 5 cents.

R 87. Recreation the Basis of Association between Parents and Teachers.

The value of using the school building as a recreation center after school hours, and suggestions for bringing parents and teachers together. 13 pp. 5 cents.

R 85. Evening Recreation Centers.

A description of various recreation centers in this country and a brief survey of the movement in England. Bibliography. 32 pp. 5 cents.

R 83. The Community-Used School.

Use of the schoolhouse to promote public health, civic efficiency, and social solidarity in the community. 9 pp. 5 cents.

Published by the

**DEPARTMENT OF RECREATION OF THE
RUSSELL SAGE FOUNDATION**

400 Metropolitan Tower, New York City