

# Psychotherapy and Land Reform

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*Translated from the German by Bennett Challis*

PHYSICIANS in general, and we mental-disease specialists in particular, come in almost daily intimate contact with an overplus of want and suffering; thus we cannot avoid recognizing and evaluating the close relationship between the individual and society—between the human unit and the social stratification in which he is rooted—and we can, and *must*, grasp the organic cause of this relationship. In any case the physician can no longer by-pass the science of sociology; he would otherwise certainly fail to profit by serious and necessary new perceptions which, even in his medical profession, he cannot do without, and would overlook important new developments in therapeutics.

But just why psychotherapy and land reform? Surely the utter lack of adequate living quarters today, for millions of sufferers, is too well-known to need emphasis. In any case, no psychotherapeutic physician has the right to disregard the problem of housing. We know how many men and women, some of them still in their teens, deep down in their secret souls harbor feelings of anger, defiance, dislike, rage, and hatred; submerged, at first, in the realm of the subconscious, that ever overflowing reservoir of more or less controlled influences and desires that are born of the individual's physical and mental, as well as social-economic wants and necessities, they finally make their way into the front and upper levels of consciousness, and beyond that into the outer world, near and far. The lack of respect of children for their parents, and vice versa, is recognized as an eminently weighty subject for insistent psychoanalytic treatment, but we neither can nor dare narrow it down to a one-sided, orthodox standard.

Quite aside from other possible sources, however, there can be no doubt that *crowding*, as it determines the horrible destiny of so many families to an often directly catastrophic degree, is also *made to order* to condemn the emotions to an explosive atmosphere of irritability, and to keep them there. When people have to live cooped up together without room to move, they never have a chance, momentarily or for a necessarily longer time, to overcome or adapt themselves to the hurt feelings and misunderstandings that inevitably arise from the reciprocal relationship of perhaps the "nearest and dearest" of the family. Every human being has the need, at times, of being absolutely silent and alone. If ever such an essential condition for soul hygiene is realized, it may be said with certainty that

many an individual and social conflict may be easily avoided. In marked contrast with this hope for the future stands the dreary present, with its many spacial and temporal barriers which make it impossible for people to disassociate themselves, when the time were otherwise opportune, from a given community.

There is also reason to deplore the over excitement and emotional instability which social life today, in its manifold aspects, makes almost mandatory to men's souls. The strenuous economic conflicts, the frightful difficulty of earning a living, the general lack of security, the spectre of demolition (of old buildings or exhausted mines) with everything directly or indirectly connected with it—each of these is an abundant source of significant emotional outbursts, both individual and social, or injurious,

useless repression which then may have a positively toxic effect upon the whole psychophysical organism. Overcrowding is like a spark in a powder magazine: drop it into the emotional reservoir of a human soul, or of souls already filled to bursting with explosive stuff, and then watch the flames.

There are cases on record where a son has murdered his own father to protect his mother from the cruelties of a tyrant. If specialists in bettering the life-conditions of adolescents, instead of stopping at the first appearances of soul-life, would, as a matter of course, dig deep beneath the surface of obvious facts, down to the network of causal relations, they could not fail, at certain social levels, to recognize the enormous importance of overcrowding.

The same is true, in uncommonly numerous cases of the psychopathology of alcoholics. With housing shortage what it is today, separation or divorce of married couples is practically impossible—even separation from other members of the family. Many wives and children cannot be released from the brutalities of the "man" of the house, because a change of residence with the necessary expense of moving into some haven of refuge from their tormentor, is simply impossible.

When such a poor, worn-out woman, such a tortured child come in desperation "to the doctor," what can psychotherapy really, conclusively accomplish? Of course even then we do our utmost to soothe the feelings, check the outbursts of rage, indignation and hatred, and try in every way to rescue any spark of life-courage which may be left; but we cannot perform

miracles, nor have we the power to prescribe the last, really necessary, *only* indicated remedy. How significant, further, is the lack of adequate living quarters for the fulfillment and healthy growth of love-life and its corollary, thought-dualism? how often is marriage practically impossible because those longer-for "four walls to ourselves" are not to be found! how frequent are the cases where newly-weds are tempted to share the apartment of parents or step-parents! Many inner conflicts and temperamental "fire-works" are often the result.

Much emotional explosive stuff is apt thus to be accumulated — dammed up — and either brought to discharge, or to a no less effectual form of emotional repression. Need of living quarters and sexual need are found, regrettably, very close together; many a sexual problem could either be avoided or solved if only sufficiently commodious shelter were available, with space at least for a little healthy exercise. The housing shortage and prostitution are often closely related, indeed in both the narrower and broader sense. The lack of room restricts the natural release of healthy manifestations of feeling and temperament, and often stops them altogether; from this compulsory cause a congestion of sentiment and emotion is almost sure to result, with which we doctors, using psychotherapeutic weapons alone, are entirely unable to cope.

Every mental-disease specialist or other physician ought therefore to busy himself intensively with the problems of housing and of *land tenure reform*; for without the latter it is im-

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possible to solve the former. Now we psychotherapists, in almost all cases, are faced with the task of encouraging our patients, restoring their strength and courage to face life's problems, helping them to break through and overcome their egocentrism—in short we must lead them, new filled with hope and joy of battle, to appreciate their opportunities and duties as members of the *social* organism.

Precisely because the problem of shelter and its direct cause, our unjust system of land tenure, plays a tremendous role, individually and collectively, in the world today, we doctors can often best fulfill our psychotherapeutic mission by instructing our patients—in adapted cases only, and at the opportune moment—in the basic principles of land tenure reform.

The psychoneurotic, naturally only in promising cases, must through gentle treatment be led to free himself from the fetters of his narrow ego; he must win his way into the "promised land" of social freedom! must develop a conscious and spontaneous affirmation of community values. To this end the serious, insistent occupation with the truth regarding natural, just land tenure can be to him — and others — of great help.