

MUNEERA EL-SOLH TWENTY YEARS IN THE SERVICE OF MENTALLY HANDICAPPED CHILDREN

Private initiative has always played a leading role in the development of Lebanon, especially in the social and economic fields. To this initiative, the 18 centers created in this country for the rehabilitation of the physically and mentally disabled owe their existence. While a few of them receive financial help from the government, all of them depend primarily on private effort for maintenance and development.

Mrs. Muneera El-Solh, herself the mother of a mentally retarded son, decided 20 years ago to create a home for the mentally handicapped, where her boy, together with other children suffering from the same difficulty, would receive proper care. For this purpose she made several trips to Europe where she visited a number of centers for the mentally disabled. In 1960 she founded in Brummana, by her own means, the socio-medical Amal Institute, located in a building she had inherited from her father. «Before the Lebanese war», she said, «the Institute accommodated about 300 Lebanese and foreign children. Now the number is reduced to 70, including 50 children sent to us by the Office of Social Development (OSD). The other twenty are entrusted to us by their parents who live in Lebanon. No more children are sent to us from neighboring countries, the security conditions being unfavorable. As a result, our financial resources are greatly reduced.

Q. — How do you handle the situation?

A. — The OSD is responsible for the expenses of its fifty children. We freely accept the rest because they come from needy families but we do not know how long

we can continue it.

Q. — At what age do you accept the child?

A. — At the age of 7, with the possibility of keeping him until he is twenty. When his condition permits, I try to place him in some kind of employment.

Q. — What procedures are used for admission?

A. — For every child we prepare a card containing information about his case. For a whole week, he is submitted to certain tests which disclose the kind and stage of his handicap. It happens sometimes that the child is sound of mind but because of unhealthy home conditions he has developed neurotic symptoms which his family takes for mental disorder. Away from his family, he recovers his balance.

Q. — What program of instruction do you use?

A. — The government program is used for the less retarded who can go through it at a slower pace than normal children. The others are oriented toward manual work such as carpentry, gardening etc.

Q. — What do you expect from the government authorities?

A. — We first expect financial aid. Second there is a law that requires industrial organizations to send us freely whatever material they want to get rid of, which may help us to carry out our manual skills projects. Research teams must be created to study the kinds and causes of mental handicaps, as a necessary basis for their treatment.

*Information reported by Nayla Kassis,
in «Le Réveil» 21 Jan. 1981.*

EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN: THEIR PREPONDERANCE IN THE COMMERCIAL SECTOR

Women represent a growing proportion of employees in the distributive trades—banking, insurance, real estate and offices in general, according to a report prepared for the ILO Eighth Session of the Advisory Committee on Salaried Employees and Professional Workers convoked by the ILO in Geneva from 13 to 22 January 1981.

The preponderance of women in commerce and offices is most pronounced in the industrialised countries. Thus in Finland, women account for 84.0 percent of administrative staff and assimilated workers... In France they number 66.6 percent... and in the United States 79.8 percent.

What is so distinctive about women's employment in commerce and offices, compared to the employment of men, is their concentration into a narrow range of occupations, particularly in the clerical occupational

group. In many countries women account for the near-totality of all secretaries, stenographers, typists and related workers and for the majority of cashiers.

These occupations are at the lower end of the hierarchical structure and are usually characterized by low skill qualifications, routine and repetitive tasks and low pay.

This situation poses the complex question of measures which can be taken to secure full equality of opportunity between men and women at work. They include training, vocational guidance, recruitment practices and re-training. It puts in question, to a certain extent, the present distribution of responsibilities in the family. It also points up the problem of employment and conditions of work arising as a result of the more widespread use of electronics and telecommunications in commerce and offices.

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