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COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION ON ALCOHOLISM HISTORIC EVENT, SAYS DWIGHT ANDERSON

Those who read this issue of *The Grapevine* are privileged to be present at what may very well prove to be an historic event. The birth of the National Committee for Education on Alcoholism, first publicly announced in this issue, means far more than the mere name would imply. It is the beginning of a new public health movement. It is the first step toward getting the alcoholic out of the jail and into the hospital; toward making it possible for the medical man and the psychiatrist, the social worker and the lay therapist, to pool their skills with Alcoholics Anonymous in modifying the ravages of an illness to which society has been indifferent almost until this very moment.

Alcoholics Anonymous made possible such an institution as this by first laying the groundwork in its thoroughly proved and tested rationale for group therapy, which convinced people that the alcoholic can be helped. A further contribution A.A. has made is in giving the new organization Marty Mann, as executive director. A better qualified person for this task would be impossible to find. For years A.A. has been making constant and regular impressions on the public through newspaper publicity, and what is better, word-of-mouth publicity, of the concept that the alcoholic is sick, that he can be helped, and that he is worth helping. The foundation has been laid, over the past ten years, so that today the public is ready for educational work on a broad scale, such as the new organization is to undertake. Unless this bold, widespread pioneering work had

-been done, such a movement as this would have been laughed to death. Everybody would instantly classify it as just another "blue-nose, kill-joy" Prohibition organization in disguise.

So gradually and imperceptibly do important changes in the public mind take place, that few except those who make a specialty of studying public opinion, realize when they are happening. But looking back ten years we realize that the idea that the alcoholic was an utterly hopeless person was practically unanimous, not only among the public as a whole, but among the medical profession as well. We have gone in the meanwhile perhaps a quarter of the way toward sufficient acceptance by the public to make the new thought dynamic in results. This is an accomplishment principally of Alcoholics Anonymous. The writer regards this as fully as great, if not greater, than any other achievement of this organization. Its members are unaware of this contribution; few persons will ever recognize it or stop to appraise its far reaching consequences.

The public is now ready and waiting to receive the facts which this new Committee has been formed to publicize. Authorities estimate that there are in the United States 66 million persons not arrayed on either the "wet" side or the "dry." They are neutrals sitting in the "bleachers" while watching the contest between two opposing teams who are calling each other names, asserting and denying every statement made in favor of, or against, the use of liquor.

The National Committee for Education on Alcoholism will address its material to the man in the "bleachers" while talking about somebody else - the alcoholic. A public relations program to influence these 66 million people may have as its objective to inform them:

- 1 - That the compulsive drinker, or alcoholic, is a sick man, exceptionally reactive to alcohol.
- 2 - That he can be helped.
- 3 - That he is worth helping.
- 4 - That the problem is therefore a responsibility of the healing professions, as well as of the established health authorities and the public generally.

The minds of the people in the "bleachers" are open to receive these four kinetic concepts. After fully accepting them, what would follow would be an interest in knowing whether they or their friends might be on the way toward becoming alcoholics. With the stigma of alcoholism removed by acknowledging that it is a sickness, the whole subject can be brought out in the open and discussed. The time will arrive when the hostess at a cocktail party will not insist upon a guest taking a second or third cocktail, or even the first one if he has once declined, recognizing he might be one of those persons who should never take a drink at all. The social sanctions surrounding drinking - the prestige factor - would be discouraged automatically and voluntarily. The whole door would be opened wide by this new approach to change the mores in favor of moderation in the use of alcohol.

This is what is meant by saying that we who read this issue of *The Grapevine* are witnessing an historic event. Previous efforts have been stalemated by the two opposing teams who have played the game for the sake of killing each other off, rather than for the benefit of the people in the "bleachers." For the first time in the history of mankind's effort to control the use of alcohol, we have an instrument which offers real hope of affecting the behavior of a majority of the people of the country by their own voluntary and spontaneous intention.

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