A SOCIALIST VIEW *of* SOCIAL WORK

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Why so many social workers'!

Over the last 30 years, and particularly since the war, there has heen asteadyincreaseinthenumbrofsocialworkersemployedinbolhthe statutory and voluntary social services. Estimates suggest that there are at least 11,000 m)o and women engaged in full-time paid social work, excluding health visitors and youth and community leaders. Yetmanyofthesocialservicesareunder-staffed.Alloverthecountry the demand for social workers far exceeds the supply. Moreover, th volume of work is increa sing to th e extent that, in every branch of social work, social workers arc having to respond to demands that are far beyond their powers to deal withsatisfactorily.

This shortage of trained personnel is, of course, not confined to social work. But socialists think it is necessar y to cla rify the reasons for this constant call for more social workers, and to distinguish betweentheobviousneedformoremidwivesandteachers,forchildren must be helped into the world and later taught, and the demand for more social workers, who arc chie0y concerned witl1 personal and social problems of breakdown andstress.

The employment and training of more social workers involves rising costs for the social services and a higher absorpt ion of the cou ntry 's manpower and resources. These are economic questions. The fact that more social workers are required, ostensibly to help and support peoplewhoareunabletodealwiththe stressesoflifo,promptsinquiry into the factors which produce the stress situations and into the very nature of society itself. Those are politicalquestions.

One of the purposes of this pamphlet is to take a political look at what lies behind the demand for more social workers.

It describes bric0y, the development of social wor k as a profession, the duties of each main group of social worke rs and the training and professional standards for social work. It discusses, in more detail, some of the factors at work in prese nt-day society which have a significant bearing on the structure and use of the social services and on the role of social workers.

How social work became a profession

The 19th Century

Social work in this country developed out of the economicand social conditions of the last century. In the 19 th century very few peop le understood, or were prepared to admit, that the " vast ocean of poverty " [1] which existed at the time was due to the exploitation of the working class for the purpose of accumulating wealth. Other explana-tion s had to be found, and the one which was most favoured was that

[1] **Beatrice Webb, *My Apprenticeship.***

poverty was due to individual failure, and that the Poor Law and indiscriminate charity made things worse.

The Poor Law, based on the 1834 principles , was so harsh and -deterrent tl1at only as a last resort could its relief be accepted. To obtain treatment in a Poor Law hospital a patient had first to b come -destitute and therefore a " pauJX!r." T here was no sick benefit nor unemploym nt pay. The only other source of help was charity. Most self-respecting people could only hate charit y almost as much as the Poor Law; hence the tendency arose for individual gifts to go to those who had b;)com e demoralised and were prepared to use cadging and mendicancy.

In this situation, there arose in the 'seventies the movement which crysta llised in the establishment of the Charity Organisation Society (now the Family Welfare Associat ion). The aim of its founders was, by applying " scientific method ," to prevent overlapping of charitable g ifts, and to help the individual to overcome what they termed his i nad equacy, which, in their view, was the cause of hispoverty.

Thistaskentaileddetailedinvestigationofthecircumstancesofevery "applicant,"toensurethatfinancialhelpwentonlytothe"deserving," .as well as to determine the most effective way of helping him. The C.O.S., however, found that it had set itself problems which it could not solve.For the ocean of poverty was so vast that the" deserving" includedfartoomanywhosepovertywassochronicthatnoshort-term charitablehelpcouldrelieveit,andwho,aftersearchinginquirieshad beenmade.hadthentobelefttothePoorLaw.

Poverty , the Poor Law and philanthropy were in the mid-nineteenth century c"-:arly political questions. But the C.O.S., by "replacing the habit of unthinking charity by a doctrine repellent in its apparent hardness " made it " impo ssible for politicians to become associated with it." • This is one of the main reasons why the lege nd has grown up that social work has nothin g to do with politics. This view was pn:.valcni at least as long as th1;; C. O. S. dominated social work and .social work training.

Social Reform

An important section of the early social workers grossly under-estimated the economic causes of distress, believed that indiscriminate gifts were the main cause of mass misery, and opposed all state provision, holding the view that " the State shares with indiscriminate charity the distinction of being a mighty engine for evil."•At the same time, others were associated with campaigns for social reform by legislation, with campaigns against Landlordism and sweated labour, for extending social amenities, for the break-up of the Poor Law, and for planned socialsecurity.

The great advances of the 20th century, however, were du e not so much to the campaigns of individuals as to the growth in influence of

[1] Beatrice Webb, *My Apprenticeship.*

the Labour and Trade Union Movement. The imp acl or the years of depression in the 30's made untenable the th<.:ory t hal I he individual citizenwasresponsibleforhispovertyandthatitcouldh(.:t:11.:klcdby individual effort. The state has been forced to take incrcas(.:d responsibility for meeting the basic needs ofthepeople.

Pullemploymentafter the Second World or War has made possible a rising standard livingforwage-earners. A new principle has beenintroducedsincethe war by which benefits and services of all kinds are available, as a right, to everyone, irrespective of class or income, though full imple- mentation or universal acceptance of this is still obstructed by the conservative forces inSociety.

The Post-War Years

As the widespread poverty of the pre-war years recededundertheimpetus of post-war reconstruction and as thepopulationadjusteditself to peace, men and women began to be concerned notonlywiththeir right to enjoy a reasonable standard of life but withtheirclaimtohappiness. A higher degree of personal satisfaction withthenon-material aspects of life, which many hadexperienced in the senseofcommon purpose in the war against Nazism, was fdt to be oneoftherewardsduetothegenerationswhichhadsufferedbefore,andsacrificedduring, thewaryears. An increasingly affluent societywasexpectedto bestow not only full employment but an increasingly satisfyinglife.

T he industrial and social relationships of the war years reverted to pre-war 1-tyles, and what is now called the " rat race " returned as a dominant feature of economic and industrial life. Personal relationships, however, particularly those of marriage and family life, assumed a new-found importance and were singled out for special attention There were fears that the concept of family life, so sacred to the establishment, would break down, and social workers were inevitably drawn into what was considered a ma.ior problem of the times.

New Ideas

. Social workers were particularly receptive to the idea that, with the apparent reduction of the material problems of life, difficulties in human relationships would become their main field of work. Absorbing relatively quickly the theories of psycho-analysis that had dominated social work in the United States for some years, social workers developed a new approach to personal problems. This new approach emphasised the significa11ce of early childhood experiences to adult life and the role of unconscious feelings in some of the more serious personal situations that required help.

The adoption of these ideas was a process not without some misuse of knowledge. There was a tendency to overestimate emotional factors and to under-estimate enviromnental factors, such as poor housing and unemployment. Nevertheless, the way was open for the application of new knowledge about human behaviour based on the understanding of the interdependence of personality and environment.

The Changing Character of Social Work

The need for social work has not, therefore, been reduced over the years. Its character, however, has cha11ged. Formerly, social workers were nearJy all employed by charitable m1d voluntary agencies, and their function was largely the investigation and relief of economic distress. Now they are increasingly employed by central government and local authorities to assist people to use the services to which they are entitled by right. In,,estigation into income or character (by questioning employers and shopkeepers) a11d the application of the means test are no longer part of a social worker's duties; nor does the alleviation of distress by the application of charity dominate the work, as in the past. New ideas have influenced social policy and brought about more humane and less punitive practices, particularly in the institutional care of children, the elderly and the mentally ill. It remains to be seen, however, how far this process can go, since the universal adoption of such ideas would demand a degree of understanding and toleration of human needs which is quite incompatible with the aims of an acquisitive society, such as we live in today in Britain.

Who are social workers and what do they do?

Professional social workers today are employed in a number of specialised services. Some are involved with individuals, some with families and some with communities. The duties of some are to give gene ral advice md information; others are required to help people whoan.:experiencingseriouspersomtlandenvironmentalproblemsand who need long-term suppm'L Most social workers are involved in helping people in distress or difficulty; some, however, are carrying out work essentially preventive in character and related much more to everyday needs than to situations of crisis.Many of the social services also rely on voluntary workers who may not beprofessionally trained, but who are generally under the wing of the professionalworker.

The professional associations formed in the past to safeguard the conditions of employment and to establish standards of practice and training in each separate branch of social work are now reviewing their aimsandmovingtowardsamoreunitedorganisationofsociaiworkers. The social workers represented in this movementare:

Child Care Officers, who are mainly employed by local authoritie . Their primary duty is to promote the well-being of children, preferably within their own famWes and, where this is impossible, to provide alternathe care and to create suitable conditions for their return home as soon as possible. Children are received into care on a voluntary basis or committed by the Courts. Child Care Officers visit children inresidentialhomes,findandsupervisefosterhomes,arrangeadoptions andhelpwiththeemotionalproblemsofparentsandchildren. (1,980)*.

•Numbers relate to the a pproximatenumbers employed in each group.

Probation Officers, who are servants of the Courts, both adult and juvenile. They are appointed by Area Probation Committees and their work is subject to inspection by the Home Olficc. Their duties are: (i) to advise, assist and befriend persons who arc put on probation or under supervision by the Courts; (ii) to provide after-care for people released from prisons, approved schools or Borstal institutions; (iii) to act as counsellors in matrimonial disputes, referred either by the Courts or by social agencies.(2,380)•.

Me dical Social Workers (previously known as hospital almoners)who are responsible either to Hospital Mmiagement Committees orto local authorities. They co-operate with doctors and other members of hospital teams in helping patients and their families to overcome thesocial stresses which frequently accompany or follow illness. (l,270)•.

Family Caseworkers, many of whom arc employed by voluntary agenciesendeavourtoseethefamilyasaunitmidwhopla11theirwork in relation to each member of the family. They include **Family Service Unit** workers. Families whose personal and environmental conditionscreatediverseproblemsforthemselvesandsometimesfor thecommunityarehelpedbybeinggivenco11sistent,strongandlong-term support, both material and personal.(500+190)•.

Psychiatric Soc ial Workers, who are specially trained to deal with the socialproblemsconnectedwithmentalillnessandemotionaldisorders. They are mainly employed by Hospital Management Committees or local authorities. They work with patients in, or discharged from, mental hospitals, and in psychiatric out-patient and child guidance clinics. (940)•.

Moral Welfare Workers, who usually work under the auspices of the churches or the Sahation Army. They are particularly concerned with the problems of unmarried mothers and their children. They provide and supervise homes for unmarried mothers and their babies, and undertake educational work. (300)•.

Since the National Health Service Act of 1948 and the Mental Health Act of 1959, local authorities employ **mental health workers** who provide after-care for people who are recovering from mental illness, and also undertake the social care of the mentally sick or subnormal person for whom the local authority is responsible; and **welfare officers,** or social workers whose duties include the care of the aged, the physically handicapped and the homeless. They are responsible for placingoldpeopleinresidentialhomes,forhomevisiting,forproviding sheltered employment and equipment for the handicapped, and for many other associated services. (1,300)•

While not normally defined as social workers, another important group of workers associated with the family are **health visitors.** They are members of the public health team, and work in ante-natal and child health clinics. They have a statutory responsibility for visiting

•Numbers relate to the approximate numbers employed in each group.

the newly-born, and their work covers many aspects of family health, particularly that of the pre-school child. (7,240)•

Adviceforthecitizenaroseoutoftheneedforsystematicadviceand information during the war years. **Citizens' Advice B ureaux** have remained tomeetapermanentneedforinformationandadviceabout suchquestionsasRentActs,hirepurchase,socialinsuranceandfamily problems. The C.A.B.s work in close contact with local authorities, from which many receive financial aid.(500)•

Limitations on space do not allow full reference to be made to the social work of the churches, or to that of a host of voluntary organisations, such as the National Marriage Guidance Council, the National Association for the Mentally Handicapped Child, the N.S.P.C.C., the National Council for the Unmarried Mother and Her Child, and many others which employ paid and voluntary workers who help those who are not provided for satisfactorily, if at all, by the statutory or nationa.1 services. There arc also those who work in youth or community centres, or with children out of school, whose regular contact with individuals and families may frequently prevent breakdown and sustain people in difficult times.

One important distinction, however, between social workers is that, for social work in the children's, probation, hospital, mental health and familycaseworkservices,professionaltraining,undertakenbyfull-time attendance at a university or college for a degree or diploma, is necessary.In other branches of social work , specialin-servicetraining may be given, but this *is* not as intensive or as comprehensive as that n;q1tircd for the degree or diplomacourse.

The training of social workers

Intheearlydays,socialworkwasregardedsolelyasa" vocation." The question of training, and the development of social work as a profession, did not arise until after the First World War. There may be some people who still think of social work as requiring only the exerciseofgoodwill,kindnessandpatiencetowhichthe"deserving" oasesgladlysubmit.Butsocialworkersarepresentedwithproblems too complex for a sympathetic approach alone.. It is necessary for social workers to have a working knowledge of the mass of social legislationwhichtheyhelptooperateandoftheinter-relatingfunctions ofalJthesocialservices.Theymustknowwhatthecitizenisentitled toreceivefromthestateinthewayofbenefitsandservices,andwhich particular service may help him most. They also need to develop skilled understanding of human motives and behaviour, so as to diagnose the problem and tQ know what kind of help to give. They shouldbeabletoadviseontheformulationofsocialpolicy,andshould have some grasp of social administration. To meet these multiple tasks adequately, specialised training, which must be comprehensive andrigorousenoughtoleadtoarecognisedqualification,isrequired.

• Numbers relate to the approximate numbers employed -in eachgroup.

Basic Training

Comprehensive training for social work consists of two parts. First, a basic degree or diploma in Social Science, Social Administration or Social Studies. These courses are provided by the Universities, Colleges of Commerce and Colleges of Further Education. The subjects studied include the development and administration of the social services, economics, psychology and sociology. The second part includes experience in working in the social services, and students normally work in a social agency under strict supervision. It is at this stage that the trainee gets first-hand experience in helping peopleand putting into practice what has been learnt.

There are many socialworkers who, in addition to the basictraining, take further training. This is also provided by the universities and arranged by the employing bodies. Some courses prepare students for family or individual casework, for psychiatric socialwork, for work with children or with the handicapped. The emphasis in these courses is on human growth and development, on the theory and practice of social casework, on psychiatry and mental illness. It is this further training which equips the experienced social worker for more highly skilled and specialised work, for training and supervising others, and for social administration. The Younghusband Courses now make a considerable contribution in the field oftraining.

Refresher training , full and part-time, is also offered, and local authority departments are increasingly releasing workers on secondment for new and further training.

The Professional Standards

Besides giving the necessary theoretical and practical knowledge, training also provides the necessary professional standards by which social workers may give the best possible service within the framework of the agency in which they work. Natnrally these standards have changed since the last century, and are in marked contrast to those which characterised the social worke1· of pre-war years. The authoritarian type of social worker who frequently " bullied " the " inadequate" individual or family, who was rarely objective about her judgments, and who foLmd it possible to help only the acquiescent, has given way to a social worker who has been trained to respect the autonomy of others and their right to make their own decisions. Lady Bountiful, who worked out her guilt by wallowing in the miseries of others, is an image of horror to the trained social worker of today.

The Basic Principles

Seven basic principles could be said to constitute the generally accepted standard of professional social work today. These are:

(i) To allow people who seek help to make their own decisions once they have been helped to bear a stressful situation, so that they retain their self-respect and their sense ofilldjviduality.

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(ii) To understand that the behaviour of an individual is not due to original sin or to perversity, but is explicable in terms of the individual in the course of hisdevelopment.

(iii) To understand their own emotional involvement with the people who seek their help and to recognise the importance of their own feelings on theirwork.

(iv) To develop a scientific attit ude towards their work and towards social questions, and to abandon moralistic judgments in the professionalsetting.

(v) To be aware of the wider social aspects of individual problems and to assess whether there is some need for some change in the environment or with.in theindividual.

(vi) To respect all confidence in regard to information obtained from people who seek their help and to withhold such information from others unless the permission of the person concerned isgiven.

(vii) To help the community to develop a sense of responsibility forthosewhofinditdifficulttoconformto theprevailingsocialnorms.

The Socialist and Non-Socialist Social Worker

All social workers, irrespective of their political beliefs, should be governed in their professional work by these standards. It is perhaps fair to say, however, that the socialist social worker, while sharing with the non-socialist, knowledge about the individual and society and thewishtohelpothers,alsobelievesthatindividualactionforindividual difficulties is not enough, and that there is need for change within society itself. The non-socialist may take the structure of present-day society for granted and may feel that, though changes in the material or personal circumstances of the individual are justi£.ed, the *status quo* in general should be maintained. The socialist social worker is more likely to see that the prevention and treatment of individual and social problems are related, in a very fundamental way, to the aims of society, to the issues to which govemments give priority, and to the importance that is attached to helping each individual to develop as a fully active member ofsociety.

Unfortunately there is, even among socialists, a tendency to believe that by an expansion or reorganisation of the social services and by the employment of more social workers such problems as delinquency, homelessness, mental ill-health and child deprivation will, in some magical way, be reduced and no longer prick at the conscience of the well-meaning, or demand from governments more radical policies. This assumption is an illusion, for it ignores the way social workers are used in a capitalist economy.

How social workers are used

New Services

The war years accelerated the development of state responsibility for the welfare of the citizen. The post-war years saw the creationof

the first comprehensive system of health and welfare services and of social insurance to include the whole population, irrespective of economic and social class. Local and central authorities played an increasingly active and important part in providing health and social services, one of the results of which was the employment of many more social workers to implement the statutory provisions.

This development can be regarded as a positive advance in the standards of care for the citizen. Particularly as, ill certain instances, carefully regulated statutory safeguards were designed to ensure greater assurance of the welfare of the individual than ever before. Perhaps one of the most outstanding examples of this is in the Children's Acts of 1948 and 1963, which included provision for the supervision of children boarded out in the care of the local authority, so that there would be no repetition of the tragic O'Neill case of 1945. Procedures relating to the adoption of children have also been laid down with the welfare of the child predominantly inmind.

Increased legislation has also meant that more time of social workers is spent in explaining to the public what their rights and responsibilities are and how they can best make use of the services available to them. Post-war governments have not been willing to carry out publicity on the social services, nor to plan their explanatory material on simple and effective lines. Much time of social workers would be saved if the public were kept as well informed about their rights as they are, for instance, about the products commercially advertised.

Too Many Casualties in the Welfare State

On the other hand, the absence of legislation to control profits on property and land has produced casualties for whom existing legislative provisio11s were never designed, and which have proved inadequate and punitive. The Rent Act of 1957 and the financial speculation in land have resulted in the eviction of thousands of families. The local authorities have had to take into their care the children of these families. Quite apart from the financial cost which, it is estimated, is upwards of £50 a week for a family of five children, the emotional damage to children separated from their families is incalculable.

Social workers are required not onJy to give help and support in the extensive stress associated with problems which occur when a family unit is broken up in this way, but to take part in the actual transfer of children from their parents to residential care, though S.W.s are themselves fully aware of what this experience inflicts on all concerned. Separation is tragic enough when a parent has died, or has become too ill to look after children, or when children are abandoned; but when it occurs because of the free play of the market in rents, socialists feel that social workers are simply being used to soften the blows delivered by a society in which profit takes priority over family needs.

New Knowledge

Another important factor in the increasing numbers of social workers is the use in social work of new knowledge of human development,

of the theories of the dynamics of relationships in the family and in groups, and of the learning capacities of individuals.

Social workers are expected to work with each individual with a greater depth of understanding than in past times. To work in such a way as to use what is known about human behaviour and motivation takes far more time than did the methods of the past; more social workers are therefore needed to work with the same number of people, let alone any increase in. the populatioP. For example, children were at one time boarded out from one day to the next without preparation. Today, the selection and introduction of each child to the prospective foster-parents and vice versa takes a considerable amount of skill and time, and the responsibility for a successful placing is one that rests primarily on the social worker.

Out of this knowledge has also developed a greater understanding of the need, as far as possible, to accept the physically and mentally handicapped into the community rather than to place them in segregated and closed institutions. More social workers are needed to enable this to happen, though a greater burden falls upon them than needs to, since most of the essential day care services are lacking. Yet, given safeguards, the trend towards desegregation is a sound and humane one.

New Stresses

Then there is what is popularly expressed in current phrases as the "increased pace of modern life" or the stress of" urban living." This is a factor which certainly affects the extent of the demands upon social workers and therefore merits some consideration in this context. References are constantly made to the " lack of parental control " and to the " breakdown of moral values " as a reason for the apparent increase in delinquency, crime and anti-social behaviour. Higher admissions to mental hospitals, increased rates of divorce and illegitimacy, are held to be other indications that present day conditions of life create " problems " in individuals or families. There is need, it is argued, for more social workers.

Certain features of society today suggest that modern life contains particular elements which press upon the individual and make special demands upon him. To take one example only, in the industrial field some of the effects of this pressure are seen in the increased tempo of production and in the speeding up of productive processes. Many of these allow very little choice to the worker to modify even his movements or to pause as he works. In one of the largest industrial concerns in the country, for example, even the visits of workers to the lavatories are timed and accounted for.

Keeping up the Pace

Higher wages and an increased standard of living are undoubtedly there for those who can measure up to the efforts required, but the deep anxiety about being able to maintain the "pace" well into advanced middle age, about redundancy, automation, and provision in

,old age, underlie the search for financial security. Social workers have perhaps paid less attention to the working lives of their clients than to their social conditions. Yet, since most people have to work for their livin,g, the part that work plays in contributing both to the stresses and the satisfactions of life cannot be ignored.

But what of the people who are not able to stand the pace, to keep up with the demands of modern production or to compete for employ-m..:nt ? The N.A.B. is assisting over two million people and their dependents who arc chiefly in families where the father is absent or chronica lly sick, families with low incomes, and the old, the weak and the ha ndicapped. Thdr only hope to maintain an adequate place for themselves in society is to rely on the social services. Yet by doing so they tend to live in a segregated circumstance of physical and cultural impoverishment, only on the verge of, or beyond , what is termed the "affluent society."

This is inevitable, since a competitive society is based on production for profit, and only invests in man to the extent that he is a source of profit. Social services in a capitalist society would seem to be regarded as essential and important only in so far as they satisfy the need to maintain a certain level of health and literacy for that section of the population which is likely to contribute most to the production of profitable goods and services.

In this context, features of our educational system merit study. Hitherto,socialworkershavetendedtointerestthemselvesinsu!Hciently in what is offered to children in their normal educational experience. The Report of the Central Advisory Council for Education, 1963 (Newsom) should have the serious attention of socialist social workers since the system of education which a society offers reflects itsfunda-·mental attitude towards its future citizens.

ThetermsofreferenceofthisReportcovertheeducationbetweenthe ages of 13 and 16 of pupils of average or less than average ability.The large number of children invo lved is sharply underlined by the title of the Report, "Half OurFuture."

In their findings, the conunittee quote at length from contributors who expressed their opinion in these terms: "We feel bound to record our impression that many of these less gifted young people are socially .maladroit, ill at ease in personal relationships, unduly self-regarding andinsensitive,theircontactwiththeirµecrsisoftenineffectual,they understandably resent being organised by adults and show little gift fororganisingthemselves."TheReportcontinues:"Theseareserious comments, certainly not applicable to *all,* but not, either, easily to be dismissed. This matter of communication affects all aspects of social andintellectualgrowth.Wesimplydonotknowhowmanypeopleare frustrated in their lives by inability ever to express th-.:msel ves adequately,orhowmanyneverdevelopintellectuallybecausetheylack thewordsinwhichtothinkandtoreason.Thisisamatterasimport-anttoeconomiclifeastopersonalliving;industrialrelationsaswellas marriagescometogriefonfailuresjucommunication."

Social workers nted to ask whether many of those who today are so unpleasantly referred to as" inadequate" parents were not lacking the help they needed towards personal development as they passed through the lower streams of our secondary schools, where for example, as the Report points out iu the section on " Education in the Slums," 79 per cent of all the secondary schools in their sample had buildings which must be condemned as seriously inadequate. Schools in such areas also faced " desperately unsettling changes of staff " with obstacles to serious learning that this presents.

Undoubtedly, policy in educational matters has wider social implica-cations and the Report voices " anxiety lest the relatively unspectacular needs of the boys and girls with whom we have been concerned should be overlooked."

If social workers are to be truly concerned with preventive action in relation to personal and social breakdown in our society today the profound importance of the quality of the education offered to all our children today must be a matter for serious thought.

The Expendable" Under-class "

Moreover,thesocialservicesoperatewithinaclassstructureinwhich the non-productive groups are to be found at the bottom. At the top is the managerial, administrative and professional group which, though representing only 5 per cent of the population, nevertheless owns something like 75 per cent of all personal wealth. Then there is the large middle stratum, to which new technological and economic ad-vances have brought raised standards of living and where the new affluence is most apparent. At the bottom is what has been termed the "under-class" of the unemployed, the one-parent family, the aged, the handicapped, the prison population- in fact, all the non-productive section of the population. These people are"expendable" in the competitive structure ::>f the economy; they represent the " burden on the taxpayer "; anc. their share of economic affluence is the outcome of what is a continuous struggle to extract, from the profit-making interests, a fairer distribution of nationalwealth.

Social Tranqulilisers

The demand for a long-term expansion of the numbers of trained social workers to mitigate the lot of the casualties of the so-called " welfare state " prompts the question as to how far social workers serve as props to mask and perpetuate the underlying injustices a nd inequalities of an acquisitive society. Do social workers lay themselves open to being termed " social tranquillisers "? Are social workers willing accessor ies to what Beatrice Webb referred to as "pulling people out of the swamp when they should be draining it "?

Though there is frequently no clear line between the proper and improper use of professional skill, social workers have the right and a duty to question the use to which their insufficient numb-:rs are being

put. Should they or the taxpayer accept a situation where medical socialworkersfruitlesslysearchforaccommodationforelderlypatients ready for discharge from hospital, and child care officers frantically telephone for vacancies for residential care for children, often to find a solution which is below the desirable standards and which will produce new problems before long? Should local authorities, when resources are inadequate, expect conscientious social workers to help their clients by trying to engineer some priority for them, when this means that they jump the queue over others on waiting lists for new housing, hospital beds or old people's homes? Or do they think it more proper for them to help their clients to do without the sei:vices theyneed?

No Substitute for Services

Professor Titrnuss has pointed out that " the effectiveness of the social worker and the effectiveness of the social service cannot be divorced."• Social workers are not a substitute for the service itself, nor can they make an inadequate service work efficiently. Their work isonlybroughtintodisreputeandtheirskillsabusediftheyareexpected to shoulder burdens which are beyond thefr powers. It is essential to distinguish between what is a professional task- namely, to give the best possible service within the framework of theagency or service - and what is a political task- namely, to bring about improvements in the scope and function of the service itself.

Socialists would approve of an increase in social workers to help individuals to develop their potential in a valid and creative way and to take part in research on social problems; but they should oppose the use of social workers to persuade people to tolerate what is clearly into lerable.

A Ceaseless Struggle

Therearesignsthatsocialworkersarebecomingincreasinglyuneasy about some of the tasks expected of them, and concerned that their knowledgeandskillaremis-spentonthepreventionandtreatmentof "crisis" situations produced by the inadequacy of tb.e services, and bythefailureofsociety toprovidesul'licientcareandprotectionfor thepopulation.Socialworkers,aspartoftheirtraining,areawareof thestrains,bothinternalandexternal,thatpressontheindividualas hetriestofulfilhimself.Theyarealsoawarethat,inasocietywhich is capable of producing unprecedented affluence, there is, nevertheless, aceaselessstruggletoensurethatthesocialservicesenrichthelivesof peopleanddonotperpetuatetheirimpoverishment.

Some degree of frustration, grief and conflict is the natural and inevitable outcome of all individual and social development. Bqt the conditions which give rise to the deprived and underprivileged in present-dayBritain are peculiar to an economic system where property-owningand profit-making take precedence over human needs.

•ease conference, May 1964: "The Administration of the Social Services" .

Socialists believe that mankind is worthy of an investment commensurate with the wealth that is produced. That is why they believe that a socialist society would plan its social services to support, protect and help the citizen as. an integral part of normal, everyday community life. In this setting, social work would have a new meaning, for knowledge and skill could be properly applied as a vital instrument for human progress.

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