RADICAL SOCIAL WORK:
What is it & can it survive?
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Editorial

A year has now passed since the April revolution brought the new Civil Service Department into being. While industry, magistrates, unemployment, welfare benefits, and housing subsidies are cut back or moved to the control of other, pre-existing bodies, the ever growing number of public social workers posted off the production lines of university and college courses are being deceived and started to come into existence. What is really at stake, however, is a fundamental contradiction between the dual purpose of the new Departments and the realities of the world in which they exist. This contradiction, and the problems it poses for 'radical' or 'revolutionary' social workers in what issue of *Pan-Cox* is mainly about, and it will also be the main subject discussed at our third conference.

In the past we have given considerable attention to theoretical criticism of social work ideology, discussing the problems of professional organisation and trade unions and criticisms of social policy development. What we have not done however is linked our theory and practice. The time has come to raise questions whose answers are vital to the work of social workers in the community. It is to the implications of our theoretical criticism of social work to what actually exists in the field.

For many social workers are engaged as 'radical' or 'revolutionary' social workers. How can social workers in general and *Socialist* supporters in particular, relate to 'grand organizational phenomena' (unions, parties, etc.). In radical activity something to be undertaken outside of the work setting is seen as 'bringing the work into our working lives.'

In reality and disagreement over these issues is not unconnected to the difficulties of finding a new name for the organisation. The same thing is true for the paper (in *Cox*) which really reflects what we are doing. This is a task besetted by the last conference to its successor. It will not be met satisfactorily unless the more important issues are settled too.

Perspectives for Case Con

The debate on the limitations and possibilities of radical social work, its relevance to trade union organisations and the struggle for socialism can perhaps be seen as starting from the Case Con statement of aims. Clause 1 commits us to a belief in working class consciousness as the means of achieving socialism. Clauses 2 and 3 commit us to the support of social work involvement with 'grass roots organisations such as tenants' associations' as well as the reorientation of training courses, enabling them to focus on the social worker's contribution to change through involvement in concrete forms of social action. The question not faced here is how far these aims are reconcilable. Are social workers and their clients, and the organisations through which they work (trade unions and community action groups) marginal or central to the achievement of socialism?

Three points must be considered here.

First, social workers like teachers and nurses, are not directly involved in the struggle for socialist change. They are not therefore directly exploited in the same way as workers engaged in productive labour. Since the taxes required to finance the social services come directly from surplus value, i.e. that part of their labour for which they are paid, social service employees live off the surplus value extracted from productive workers. In one sense therefore their interests are opposed, but on the other hand social services are necessary for the capitalist to pay for labour, using up resources that would otherwise be available for investment. In this sense the decisive class for improved social services and the demands of employees within those services coincide. However this apparent contradiction is resolved it remains clear that the industrial strength of social workers is minimal. Coal miners can stop production. Social workers cannot.

Secondly, social workers are part of the state apparatus which, in any class society, exists to protect the interests of the ruling class. Social work plays an important ideological role in society by encouraging the belief in the complex problems directly caused by capitalism are amenable to social work solutions. It also plays a particular role of interest in the ruling social classes. The state itself, however, is not without internal contradictions and to the extent that social workers become conscious of both their ideological and headshrinker role, both will be undermined. Again, therefore social workers can look for themselves in a contradictory position, being both a part of the apparatus of repression and, when radicalised, contributing to its undermining.

Third, social workers come mainly into contact with the less well organised sections of the working class - the unemployed, the old, the disabled, the ill. However radicalised, most social work clients are relatively powerless. They can be part of, but not central to, the struggle. Their politicalisation may be important in so far as their traditional lack of class consciousness has militated against its development among organised productive workers (e.g. the strike-breaking tendency of women, derived from their isolation in the home). As Michael Barratt-Brown writes in *Socialist Register* 1971 page 205: "It will not be by the very poor and the physically disabled. The state is dissolved and replaced by socialism, however much these groups may reveal of its nature."

In short the class position of social workers, their place in the state apparatus and, most of all, the class position of their clients lead to the conclusion that acting either on their own or their clients' behalf, are marginal to the struggle for socialism. Despite their potential importance in the battle of ideas.
A perspective for Case-Con must start by reaffirming the essential points in Clause I of our statement of aims:
Capitalism today in Britain and elsewhere is in a state of crisis, the most obvious symptoms of which are unemployment, industrial stagnation and the attempts of Governments to boost the industrial and political power of the working class. Resistance to this attempted regression is growing and it is the working class who are in the forefront of this resistance. It is their organisation which alone can transform defensive battles against the system into an offensive leading to its destruction.

Case-Con supporters should therefore consider future activity and organisation on the following lines:

1) We reject not only conventional social work but also that school of 'radical' social work which believes that the organisation of consumer groups in the social services is by itself a viable alternative solution. Such 'radicals' arrogantly reject and ignore the history and forms of organisation of the working class.

2) We reject 'dropping out' and believe that the practical task of Case-Con is to organise as part of the labour movement, rank and file social workers in local authorities and other statutory agencies.

3) We support, as part of this activity, trade union militancy among social workers on such questions as control of agency policies, reduced caseloads, principled stands on questions like refusal to accept children into care because of homelessness, and subversion, e.g. provision of information to client organisations. This sort of activity cannot be sustained without effective trade unions organisation and alliance with other groups of workers, e.g. through N.A.L.G.O. action.

4) We must continue to develop our critique of the dominant ideas of social work from a socialist perspective and work towards the democratisation of social work courses.

5) Whatever their limitations we must give all possible support to militant consumer groups and work towards the creation of links between them and existing working class organisations.

Our fundamental aim therefore is as much the liberation of the social worker as the client. Social workers organised in trade unions can play a part, alongside industrial workers, in both the long term battle of socialism and the immediate tasks of defending those who engage in valid, if limited, radical or subversive activity.

Bob Deacon

a social worker in your cupboard ??

Rumours were circulating in the city last night of an imminent takeover bid for Barclays Bank (Dominion, Neo-Colonial and Overseas) by the National Institute for Social Work Training. Such a merger offers exciting possibilities for new developments in social work training and practice, particularly when we remember the results of the Government's shortly to be announced plan for "hiving off" unprofitable Social Security Offices to the banks, with the introduction of casework training for Bank Managers and Clerks it will soon be possible to achieve rationalisation of all Social Services under sound financial direction. The "New Society" share index showed a sharp rise in Social Service Department shares when trading closed last night, but probation and medical social work showed a continuing fall.

F. Lucre - city editor

Client Refusal

a political strategy for radical social work

It will be no news to Case-Con readers that social work is in crisis, and that the objective is to prevent the rapid degeneration of capitalism. This realisation in itself answers nothing about what revolutionary social work in about.

One thing is clear, although one of the tasks that faces Case-Con is to preserve our colleagues that it is in clear. The traditional role of the social worker, as a generally progressive and liberal influence on the clients, operating via parliamentary lobby and high-level innovations of mandarins and ministers, is gone for ever. Social work 'pressure' has done nothing to prevent this Government from withdrawing school milk, from introducing a Fair Rent Bill, keeping social security benefits from strikers, and generally from introducing measures that are going to increase the gap between the rich and the poor and aggravate the unhappiness of the majority.

The powerlessness of social work in the face of a class offensive by this Government and its allies, in one sense, astonishing. The last decade has witnessed an unprecedented expansion in the numbers of social workers in the country (and in all capitalist societies) and also a revolution in the status of social workers. But the 'professionalisation' of social work - symbolised in the enormous salaries now offered to the conforming and ambitious, and in the new terminology to describe old jobs - has in itself contributed to the inability of social work to combat the new reproductive system and the emancipation of social welfare atgrass-root level. Social work, as a professional occupation, is increasingly distanced from 'clients' (the people), has become in itself a part of the new political power.

In the last two decades, in particular, social work agencies - an true professionals - have accommodated and re-organised in order to solve the new social problems thrown up by the crises of the system, falling in line with each and every fundamental high-level policy decision, and always accepting the new client as being, by definition, 'suitable case for treatment'. We have seen this accommodation in the attempt of authors in journals like Case Conference and Social Work Today to spell out the particular problems of these new clients - in such a way that they are appropriate to casework or similar relationships and organisational imperatives. We can see it too in the training programme, the initiation ceremonies of professionalism, through which social work students are processed and socialised into the correct (updated entrepreneurial) ideologies of the modern social work agency.

The dominating ideology of social work may have changed (form a form of Pragmatism to a more complex mystification) and the numbers of personnel involved may have increased, but the fundamental function of the task has not. Writing in 1948, the American sociologist, C. Wright Mills, diagnosed the "professional ideology of social pathologists" in familiar terms: "Present institutions train several kinds of persons - such as judges and social workers - to think in terms of 'situations'. Their activities and mental outlook are set within the existing norms of society; in their professional work they tend to have an occupationally trained incapacity to rise above "cases" and see the potentially fundamental changes and through such concepts and methods as the "case approach" that social pathologists have historically been tied to social work with its occupational position and political limitations.

In the process of this origin, and the power, lack of any continuous 'class experience' of the group of thinkers decrease their ability to imagine social structures other than a matter of situations. The medium of experience and orientation through which they respectively view society are too similar, too homogenous, to permit the class of dialectical angles which, through controversy, might lead to the construction of the whole.
Focusing on the individual problems of specific cases, social pathologists and social workers, have come up with a very widely varying set of diagnoses of particular situations, but all these have in common the notion that the problem individual is deviant or pathological in terms of society. The translation of public issues into personal, individualistic problems, then, is subtly bound up with the depoliticization of the poverty and misery that confront social workers on a daily basis. The irony of the whole process is that the modernization built into the logic by which social workers are allowed to interpret those issues.

The building of revolutionary social work, therefore, seems to me to involve at least three (interconnected but analytically distinct) endeavours (1) the final destruction of the myth of social work as a liberating influence with a voice in the corridors of power, (2) a rejection of the professionalism of social work, as a part of the tree of political power, distances the social worker from his client, and prevention of political alliances, and (3) a subversion of the fundamental logic of social work ideology – the day-to-day-individualisation of political questions into client interest. I suggest that there are two issues here which are already being confronted by the after-hours practice of radical social workers, but that the third – and most fundamental problem – has not yet appeared.

At present, revolutionary social work is largely something one does after 5. The idea seems to be that one can compensate for one's occupation in the bureaucratic of the office in evening at the community centre in leveling for the tenants, or working with the Claimants' Union. Ben Stone, for example, in Case-Cases 2, held out the orthodox political alternatives as an alternative to everyday social work practice: "Interestingly, social workers, who may not accept the whole or much of this approach (i.e. it's a partial analysis of capitalism in crisis) are nevertheless rejecting methods which encourage their clients to accept their problems, to try and live with them, without talking about their alternative to daily social work practice: the glbt notion that almoners are where they are because of their personal inadequacy, and to become more autonomous, and self-reliant, means, for them, supporting the economic activities of the claimant, claiming, knowing that this is the right thing to do. Black Power groups, and other groups which are liable to come into contact with them, offer them new choices and priorities which employ them.

An advance this may be on the liberal myth of social work as a professional group. I doubt that these possible alternatives are a direct enough response to the crisis of social work and the system. I doubt also that they are really an alternative, and equally meaningful alternative, to revolutionary social work practice which carries with it a whole set of rewards to condition conformity. A client in trouble who plays by the orthodoxy agency can get his rent paid and his kids clothed; a client who turns to the radical alternative will be offered a millionth of revolution. If revolutionary social work needs to be able to offer something more concrete than it does as well as the ideological alternative.

The only concrete offer that the revolutionary social worker can make is one in which he acts as lawyer rather than pathologist for the client. Social workers' usual concerns are composed of reluctant clients. People who have unwillingly come forward, or been apprehended, as having a problem with which involves public confrontation across the professionals' desk. People who have had to trade their pride for an ability to pay the rent, or their esteem among peers – the skinhead – for a probation officer's protection in court. They have wasted material, improved or a better quality of (psychic and emotional) life and a poor exchange – they've been offered the compensation of social work 'skills'.

These routine features of apprehension and refusal to engage the ground against which, I would argue, radical social workers can begin to break or disturb the logic of 'casework'. If, instead of seeing individual social work" in terms of evidence of individual pathology (encouraged perhaps by a degree of 'social casework', where the system is the enemy, or of systematic social exploitation), is premised on the view of society as a fundamentally healthy system of production, and organized as an entity: the skinheads are the moral of bringing home to deviants and others the benefits of conformity to these systems of relationships: the clients' interests are to be served because in the end the clients' interests will conform to those of the society.

In a situation where increasing numbers of people are abandoned to the job and have 'clients' alike, are rejecting such a view of society, and articulating their rejection through forms of individual direct action, the ideology of 'clients' interests first' is likely to fall under attack. The ability of the system to provide, and the ideology of general concern on social goals, are in doubt. The radical social worker is placed in the double position of defending the traditional elements of social work ideology against the encroachments of the system's new ideologies, and in doing so, maintaining the politicality of the client's actions.

To act as a lawyer for the client thrown up by unemployment, racism, and the general attack on working-class (and middle-class) youth, therefore, can throw the general ideology of social work liberalism into the melting pot. The fact that client and system interests may conflict is highlighted for all to see in this client. The revolutionary social worker is able to show that he is acting in the client's best interests (obtaining the necessary funds from SS, from social services etc) he is fulfilling the immediate needs of individuals who are oppressed by the system and fulfilling the traditional role of the social worker, as far as his liberal colleagues are concerned. He can, for example, justify his refusal to engage over the peer-group relationships of the soccer hooligan, and that the judgement to fight the skinhead: by ensuring that his other clients (a poverty-stricken 'predominantly working class') are receiving the right material help as a result of his letters and visits to social services departments. His professional discretion has told him the client needs help, and that his skinhead 'client' is not in need of his profession's 'skills'. Refusing the skinhead client, in a case like this, has the great merit of refusing the skinhead 'client' is not in need of his 'professional skills'. Refusing the skinhead client, in a case like this, has the great merit of refusing the skinhead client, in a case like this, has the great merit of refusing the skinhead client, in a case like this, has the great merit of refusing the skinhead client, in a case like this, has the great merit of refusing the skinhead client, in a case like this, has the great merit of refusing the skinhead client, in a case like this, has the great merit of refusing the skinhead client, in a case like this, has the great merit of refusing the skinhead client, in a case like this, has the great merit of refusing the skinhead client, in a case like this, has the great merit of refusing the skinhead client, in a case like this, has the great merit of refusing the skinhead client, in a case like this, has the great merit of refusing the skinhead client, in a case like this, has the great merit of refusing the skinhead client, in a case like this, has the
the working-class kid (the soccer ballon playing lower involved in periodic jaxcery) will be seen as a misfit or a 'cracker' by his peers - if he is caught, and especially if he is accepted a suitable case for treatment. In the process, the subject population will divide against each other, depending on their masters. To refuse to take the client on these grounds (and to justify this refusal, spending one's time with 'clients' in need of the help the professional can extract from other professional - the morally materially poor) is incomprehensible. And, so far as the social worker can openly impress to the skin-head (or his equivalent) that he is doing this on political grounds, as a lawyer, and as an ally in a struggle against the system, it highlights the divisions that exist between the master institutions: the 'probation' is not in league with the funs. Over time, the divisions amongst the master institutions can come to affect what we might call 'street-corner' knowledge - the common ideologies of working-class youth 'at risk' of apprehension and referral.

It seems to me that refusing the client as client, and accepting him as political ally (but one whom they must give to the institutions which provide the goods, and ascribe the 'deviant' labels - the specific position of the social worker, who has that access, and a supply of local authority notepaper) has the following merits:

1. It maintains the essence of 'deviance' and the social problem situation - in C Wright Mill's terms, as the creation of the 'whole' - rather than an aberration in the parts which take place, stable, and increasingly repressive, society.

2. It enables the radical social work worker to break the logic which has underpinned social work practice - the dilution of issues into cases - in such a way that the impact of the practice is thrown in doubt. In this way, it helps to speed the polarisation of the logic of repression - to take seriously what their clients say. Black inmates in Attica do not want a social worker who they think understand that social work is, in circumstances like those in Attica, a part of the mattification and oppression of the inmate.

To argue that racism in American prisons is qualitatively different from the depoliticisation of client needs is to miss the point. The point is that the client (subject) population has begun to speak for itself, despairing of the ability of the social worker to say it for them. The practicality of any radical social work strategy depends, it seems to me, whether the strategy reflects the needs and demands of the client population.

Two examples: the social worker (whatever his designation) who is asked to visit a school (whenever a boy or girl is 'in trouble') and the probation officer (who, until now, has done battle with what he has often seen as the forces of ignorance and reaction in the courtroom, armed only with a social assessment report, a psychoanalytical terminology and a co-operative court-room demeanour).

The school is the first formal institution of social control with which the child comes into contact. It is also, as Phillipson and others have shown, the institution in which children are first accorded a delinquent status and that status some degree. Delinquency rates, that is, vary enormously between schools. The position of an individual child, Headmaster or local authority to lay a label, and a delinquent career, on individuals seen, all kinds of reasons to be 'troublesome' or 'troubled', is considerable, and is unchallenged. Research has shown that the initial evaluation of a child's character in a school report (and especially in reports for courtrooms) is likely to form the basis of the social enquiry document which follows a child on his progress through detention centres, community homes, borstals and prison. In other words, the stigmatisation which occur about 'troublesome' children which occur quite early in a child's career - and which are usually seen to be caused by a lack of social care (or welfare) - have crucial consequences for that child's future and the likelihood of his involvement in further work caseloads. But this negotiation situation is one that radical social workers have not confronted.

Normally, the social worker accommodates to the 'authoritative' view of the boy as 'having a problem', concerning with the welfare of the school (e.g. to remove the child to a special institution, or guidance clinic). It is precisely at this point that 'client refusal' could begin to operate, the social worker attempting always to recommend 'no action' and denying the ideology of other-in-schools which underpins the attempt to segregate the 'troublesome'.

But it is in the courtroom, most of all, that the irreversible negotiations occur. Wave after wave of new delinquent 'types' - the accepatage of the system's cries - are defined and redefined, committed for 'treatment', and, under the Children and Young Persons Act 1969, this can all happen without the traditional (and of course inadequate, and indirect) defence of civil rights through law. The Children's Tribunals deal with politically-created 'cases' and must be combated politically. Where before social workers have seen these new irreconcilable situations as fundamentally beneficial situations in which magistrates, police and family are all concerned, with him, with the needs of the child, these could be seen clearly as political issues. We are more than ready to define the O2 trial as an example of a 'culture on trial': our reluctance to see this as happening on daily basis with the culture of working-class youth is an indictment of our alienation. 'Client refusal' in the courtroom is a social worker into the role of political lawyer working in defence of the culture of working-class youth. Strategies for the defence of youth should be worked out by those who support, in alliance with radical lawyers, with a view to defending the child's rights, especially in the new paternalistic CTPA tribunals (in so far as they are now operating). Refusing to serve the client as client in such a case, and arguing politically against the process, which bring him into court, throws up for question the very ideological base of social control under capitalism. If such a strategy were to mushroom, at a time when the courts are full to bursting in anyway, the working of the machinery itself could also be thrown into doubt.
**Victimisation in Hackney Seебohm Factory**

On Wednesday 19th January, David Pane, Senior Social Worker employed by Hackney Social Services Department, was given two and a half days' notice. Miss Carter, Associate Director, to transfer to a "specially created" administrative job and to be placed under "intensive supervision". As a team leader he had responsibilities to his team, their clients and to his students from the Polytechnic of North London. His transfer was not discussed with any of them. Did somebody mention "feelings" or a "planned move"? This was not a casework game. It was - and still is - a confrontation between £3,000 to £4,000, a year's Seебohm benefits and lesbian paid workers. Many new directors and their assistants have received literally thousands per year increases in salary, yet the ordinary social workers did not receive a single half new pay for their part in the Seебohm reorganisation.

The issue involved in the principle of our right to work, as well as how we work and where we work. David Pane is yet another radical social worker to produce a head-on confrontation in the newly created Seебohm factories between the new social work bosses and the freshly-labelled, all-purpose (cheap at the price!) generic social workers.

The Hackney Social Services hierarchy accused David Pane of being "mischievous", "disingenuous", "damaging to his team" and "incompetent and unfit to be a senior in charge of a team of social workers". Needless to say, no evidence was produced to support these spurious allegations. His team demanded his reinstatement. On Monday 24th January, at a mass meeting held at Shoreditch Town Hall - the day of David's transfer - two hundred social workers from Hackney, Tower Hamlets, Islington and Camden protested at the victimisation and unfairness demanded by a petition for his reinstatement and a written explanation from W.A. Harbert, Director of Social Services. The meeting was followed by a smaller demonstration outside the offices to which David Pane had been transferred.

David Pane should have stayed in his own office in the job to which he had been appointed, supported by his team and the rest of his department. Instead of the employers' intended worrying and demoralising negotiations, the social workers should have organised a sit-in. Not very professional, but Seебohm has organised many of us into factory-like conditions, so it therefore makes sense to emulate the factory workers, particularly when they are reported successful in saving their jobs as they were, for example, at the Fisher-Bendix factory at Kirkby, Liverpool. "The Guardian" reported recently that, "Over the past six months there have been six threatened or actual occupations of factories in Britain, and the latest score was Workers 3, Employers 1. Only Upper Clyde remains unoccupied." Hackney could have made the score 5 - 1.

David Pane was a threat to the Hackney Social Services hierarchy and his victimisation was an attack on all social workers who seek new ways of working and control over their work situation. The defence of David Pane, therefore, has implications for all social workers who claim to be 'radical'. As a radical social worker, he was responding sensitively and "responsibly" to the Seебohm Report demand for social workers to be more effective by accepting "greater responsibility", developing and initiating "more varied work" to promote "community involvement" and to actively encourage people to "seek help". He and his team were working along these lines. They had a coffee corner in their office for clients; clients were encouraged into their office; they worked with local community groups like the Claimants Union; and David had been critical of his department and on one occasion he went against departmental policy by placing a homeless family in a hotel. Revolutionary? Not at all. Like many more they were attempting to work in the 'spirit' of Seебohm. So beware, all you radical social workers who run 'moober' groups, invite your clients into your office, abandon inappropriate casework, break down client-worker barriers, organise free legal advice services and, above all, involve yourself with clients in challenging the power structure!!
We must be clear that when we involve ourselves in activities that challenge the power structure of the world, we risk being to act as social controllers, that is, we are taking political action as revolutionary social workers. We must be clear that the 'radical' social workers are more progressive in their attitude to the capitalist system. There should be no surprise in this when we see that the call for their removal came to be a threat by the new Socialists' leaders. They are desperately attempting to build social services departments without the necessary finance for building, administration or social workers. 

Conservatism is a growing necessity in the face of growing unemployment, the escalating housing problem and the increasing use of money from Section I of the Children and Young Persons Act, 1953, to make payments to Housing Departments to clear rent arrears and other debts that should be covered by the Department of Health and Social Security (Supplementary Benefits Section). 

Socialism is a rationalisation of the social services and the main burden of the services is being carried out by all the basic grade workers. The Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act, 1959, is a further example of this. To date no financial provision has been made to implement this new service by the Central Government. Yet the various surveys, questionnaires and advertisements in the Press are going to increase the demands made on the whole of the social services and, in particular, on the field workers who are being called on to do more investigations and to provide extra support. 

This Act is further exploiting social workers in the form of work-load pressures and an increase in overtime without pay. It must not be forgotten that money is found for the clients and for increases in staffing. Sir Frederick Sebold, chairman of the Barclays Bank, summed up the philosophy behind the phony rationalisation of the social services and such Acts as the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act, 1970, when he told an interviewer from 'The Spectator' recently (12th February) that he believed that you had to keep people very clearly divided into what is cash and what is in cash and I have always avoided talking too much about cash and the money side of this thing. I believe that what we need to have realised is that those things are not only things that we have to do, but they are things that we have to do. The trouble about the United States is that they are seen as being able to make cash, that you can buy your way out of any trouble. Well, I don't think money is as helpful in this field, and certainly a lot has got to be spent in buildings and this sort of thing - it is in the long term. What we are really talking about is care and attitude.

Thank you, Sir Frederick.

Buildings you must pay for, but those who provide care need not be considered. In other words, use the already over-exploited, often bullied social workers who have been moved to the Brigade for janitors and cleaning staff. The maintenance of the buildings will become the responsibility of the social workers. 

We have the same story over and over again. Care is equivalent to 'production'. Increased provision of care without salary increases or more social workers means a greater increase in exploitation. There is evidence that the exploitation of social workers leads to an increase in sickness, and many workers become chronically ill. 

As with industrial workers, more men-hours are lost through sickness than through any other cause. We call for strikes! This is not an attempt to put down the excellent work that many of the Hackney social workers have done, in particular the demonstration of 200 on Thursday, 17th February, but we must all learn the lessons of this dispute. Firstly, DavidPane should not have left his job and involved himself in the transfer. The H.A.G.O. branch executive should have led the social workers in militant action. The H.A.G.O. branch should have allowed itself to be led by the leading members of the H.A.G.O. District Organiser into the blind alley of secret meetings and, finally, the kind of resolution passed by the Hackney H.A.G.O. branch executive on the 2nd February containing thirteen points, including an instruction to the branch secretary to initiate a strike ballot if David Pane was not reinstated by 9th February, is fine only so long as it is backed by action. Clearly, the main lesson from Hackney is that unofficial action was vital for a speedy and successful end to the dispute. 

Contrast the organisation and militancy of the miners' dispute in progress at the same time as the Hackney dispute. The lessons are important for all workers, but especially for all workers in local Authority Social Services Departments. We must organise effective means of both defending our conditions and taking the initiative to improve our conditions and attacking the social control elements of the social services in an organised fashion. This means 100% membership of H.A.G.O.; the election of H.A.G.O. representatives in every department and the formation of H.A.G.O. sub-committees, representing all workers. 

Those sub-committees should form the core and focal point for all organisation. As reactionary as H.A.G.O. may be, it is our trade unionists' voice within limits, it can be made more effective and provides the vehicle for the kind of organisation which was missing in Hackney.

Our perspective must be to control our work situation. This means we must work to achieve workers' control at every level in our departments. We must work to put the control in social work where it really belongs, in the hands of the workers.

John Connor

Times is hard - they ate the last lady from the welfare....
Who is being Radical?

Many readers of Case Con believe that it is not possible to act as radical social workers in their everyday work. Apart from the types of collective action they may engage in outside work, they think they can change the sort of service they offer the client, and that they can treat their own clients in ways that differ radically from usual individualised casework. Yet the whole notion of radicalism is incredibly vague. It may serve as a source of hope for workers who get frustrated or humiliated in their attempts to change the service they give clients. But its very vagueness acts to invite a very odd collection of bedfellows - woolly liberals, Progressives, Fabians, CHAKES, Socialists, revolutionaries, the lot!

More particularly, different kinds of social worker, each claiming to be radical, have their own interpretations about what exactly radicalism actually means. One group follows the Titus/Townsend traditions, focusing their attention on the misdirection of the resources in Welfare away from those most in need of them to the better off sections of the working classes and middle classes. For them, radical social work means encouraging clients to exploit to the utmost the availability of social services as a right. They stress the importance of giving clients accurate information about welfare rights, of helping people to appeal on social security claims, of knowing about rent tribunals, and local authority rebate schemes. While this may appear to be new to social service departments (and in that sense radical) it hardly impinges on the organisation of the departments themselves. This is so, in spite of the fact that the same mechanisms of clients being denied their rights, discriminated against, labelled as inadequate and hence not worth bothering about, go on just as much in social services departments as elsewhere. Social workers may possibly go on being as factually based but they treat clients just as savagely as any other Welfare State operative.

This may merely be a massive rationalisation that helps social workers believable to do clients: it hardly changes the status quo.

The other kind of radicals take analysis of social work agencies and primary agents of social control. They see social workers forced to be servants of the courts, taking referrals from schools, social workers, departments, the police, social security and even parents - referrals that are only continued to suppress behaviour that is unacceptable to these institutions. As such, social work is an integral part of a capitalist state that protects the owners of wealth and property, and makes sure that those who are unable or unwilling to work are either rehabilitated or even given such a bad existence that they eventually choose to return to "productive work." Given that sort of analysis, many social workers would be pessimistic about changing their organisations or their work, and concentrate instead on what they consider to be the more important task of building up a political consciousness ready for a revolutionary situation, in the belief that nothing short of that will offer any real chance of real caring for the damaged and handicapped in our society.

It would be easier to discuss radical social work if we had a better analysis of the things social workers actually do, as well as the organisational constraints under which they work. The importance attached to casework skills in training courses has diverted our attention into attacking the ideological beliefs implicit in the profession. It is but easy to think from this that if we are clear about the perniciousness of casework, we have thereby liberated ourselves to achieve something different in our jobs. No-one has seriously looked at what happens to the new recruits as they are thrown off a professional course, given a caseload and forced to cope. Under such stress, social workers are very much more likely to rely mainly on the advice and useful tips from colleagues as well as the workers' sense of getting on and about clients and their inexplicable behaviour. In any case, few workers in Seeborn departments are likely to have time to take casework seriously. Problems such as how to get an electric bill paid quickly, how you do so without compulsory admission, or whether there has a vacancy available today for an urgent case, are much more pressing.

Working with such crises every day makes it hard for us to question what exactly we are doing. It makes us feel guilty and afraid to talk about everyday tasks with other radicals, and thus inhibits any real support we might get from other that would spark off further questioning. More importantly, it forces us to make compromises for our clients, it leads us to lie about clients to other agencies, it forces us to accept any deal we can make with our supervisors in order to get something at least to ameliorate the appalling conditions we see some clients experiencing. This "cooperation" with other departments and other colleagues serves to cloud even more any fuzzy radical analysis we may have of our organisations and render us quite impotent to change those organisations.

So often the experience of a bad department under stress gives radical workers the false belief that the grass is greener in other places; either higher up the organisation or in other departments. But the possibility of making a move depends on the sort of references we can get from our current supervisors. And so even the hope of eventual move pressurises us further into conforming for the time being to the rules that any radical ideology must be in social work organisations.

This explains why so few people who support to be radicals actually get victimised by department for their work. Few in fact are doing as well as workers who could be seen as at all disruptive to those organisations. Yet curiously local authority department make no case to sack workers for their actions. The shortage of workers, the long hours, the stifling of professional goals (especially for work that conforms to the mythical goals of the organisation) should, in theory, give us freedom to engage in radical action. But for some reason statutory work doesn't. And radicals continue to search this illusory freedom in jobs outside the statutory service: group work projects, youth projects, community work, family advice centres.

What do social workers actually do? Although the tasks are obvious enough, what is their significance for socialist activity? What ways do they actually benefit clients? It strikes me that we carry out three important functions in social work in justifying our existence. Indeed these functions are so central for those who control us from above that to change them would make our futures quite precarious.

We deal with the casualties of other departments, thereby preventing clients from suffering so badly that it would cause outrage among the public. We also offer a system of patronage for clients unable to get the resources they used to have. Institutions find very useful and these relationships with other departments are important in providing constraints for us. Ironically these constraints are effectively mystified for us by all the stress given the need for good relationships and cooperation with other departments.

Mapping up casualties

Local authority departments, in spite of their independence from industry, have a nasty habit of reflecting the values as compensatory consumer capitalism that encourages a high demand for new goods, and well motivated, aspiring recruits for the job opportunities. People who happen, for various reasons, to deviate from such life styles are not always catered for very well by local authority policies. Tenants with spick and span homes and the Jobs of Housing Association that much easier, concerned as it is with maintaining a reputation for neat and tidy estates, that helps when councillors vote on next year's estimates. Similarly schools find it easier to deal with passive pupils
who are well motivated towards academic pursuits. People are unable to fulfill the requirements of these departments' policies most likely to be reformed or reorganized. These policies that appear good to the moderate but patently fail to cater for the needs of minority groups and can only be changed. It is rare for organizations to be criticized for failing to fulfill the goals they have created for. Rather, people who don't fit neatly into their policies, are normally seen as the failures and sent to social workers for treatment. Social workers are often happy to collude with this since it justifies their existence and hence strengthens the case for a growing budget.

Frequently the powerful departments who control most of the resources of the local authority are themselves the very departments that seriously stigmatise some people who do not fit neatly into their policies. Social workers are constantly called on to negotiate with these departments, either to get a benefit for them for a client or to help make a client more acceptable to that department's policies. Social workers' high referrals from housing departments may be the result of teaching clients to improve their standards of housing, or their budgets and thereby clear their rent arrears. Social security clients may be referred to social workers for long term support (which might be seen as a cleaner term) while they go without possibly food and light to clear off outstanding bills which the S.U. are refusing to pay. Similarly school truancy is assumed to be the problem of the child with the attention of a social worker with appropriate insight, that is so blinkered that it can rarely focus on the home and family situation which at the same time completely ignore the institution where the kid spends almost as much time as the school.

The more that social workers are prepared to fit the demands of these powerful departments, the better placed they will be as individuals both for themselves and their clients. The more will the social work bosses be able to justify spending for a bigger allocation of money per year to pay for exciting, exciting new projects. The broad and buttery jobs of statutory agencies is doing this creative work for other departments and they are very many creative reactions to the local authority by the public and divides people up into different and underearning. Let us not be deceived into thinking that some departments are more enlightened than others. They also have other projects on the side. Exciting new developments may have been paid for in the past by social workers' presumably clearing up thousands of debts for the housing department. Social workers are essential in maintaining the relationship with other departments. They can only get houses for particular clients if they first of all fulfill the tasks required of them by those departments. Many social workers fail to recognize these constraints and kid themselves that they have influence with other departments. Other department workers, it is true, are prepared to modify their rigid attitudes and now and again it has become their duty. But it makes it impossible for social workers to take any action which is going to disrupt these bargains. For instance if they refused to take children into care because of services' demands, they would seem to be less acceptable with their senior managers for causing conflicts with the other departments, conflicts that are essential for radical action. Are we prepared for standards to deteriorate as we lose our current resources when we become more critical of the authority?

Patronage

The mixture of casework and resources that many long term clients get offered by social workers, is the domain of our departments makes it difficult to know who people, likely to be taken on a case and get appropriate services, are to do. Frequently low income people end up in social service departments after they have tried other more professional and helpful agencies with resources to offer them. We like to think (whether or not it is true) that our clients are given my belief that they are better placed to get things like housing and social security discretion and other help at the same time, because they have all the sorts of other perks that social work clients may get (electricity, holidays, bills paid, etc.) Hence for some reasons social work agencies offer a means of getting those added benefits, that make a great difference in the ability of the individual to cope on a low income. People are sometimes prepared to humour a social worker and suffer all the humiliations of having their family relationships laid bare if they think they stand a chance of getting a holiday for their kids.

This system of patronage gives social workers the power to "motivate" a family to introspect "for their own good". It also enables the worker to have the satisfaction of feeling that he or she is actually being useful in keeping the family together. Of course, the whole of this would be irrelevant if we did not choose to keep those resources in such meagre supply, and we give those clients who "respond" to our treatment. We have no idea of the effect we have on people as we treat them as deviant, delinquent, sick or inadequate. At the very least it destroys their own identity as worthwhile people. How can we, if we claim to be revolutionary, carry out such jobs every day without thinking of what we are doing to people? What are we doing if we talk on the one hand about the need to treat people as individuals? On the other hand, we destroy what consciousness they had by the way we treat arbitraries and grievance of tenants' associations that we support in fighting the "Fair Rent Bill" when we in fact deny the validity of these actions by working with some of those same families in helping them to get on budget so that they can pay back C.Y.P. loans. If we are still prepared to focus attention on their "inabilities to budget" while we talk outside of the need for a revolutionary consciousness, what sense does it make?...
Remember the residential workers?

Sonia Metherell

"The Revolution of Everyday Life" is the first half of a larger work in French called "Traite de Savoir Vivre à L'Usage des Jeunesses Domestiques" by Paul Vaneigem. "The Revolution of Everyday Life" blew my mind when I first read it and it still does when I reread and re-read it again.

It is part of a stream of actions, posters, books, graffiti, cartoons and ideas... called Situationism which have been seeping into the British Left for 4 years now. Yet, there has been, to my knowledge only one situationist group in England: King Mob... and all the books, posters and graffiti are anonymously published and produced... their qualitative effect has been quite out of proportion to their quantity.

"The Revolution of Everyday Life" is an unervering attempt to analyze the total contingency of existence in a class society outside of...

The revolution of everyday life critiques which have already been overtaken by events, after all, anybody can see that capitalism is gradually finding its fulfillment in a... place for which the Soviet model is nothing but a primitive form...

Present analyses, says Vaneigem, have forgotten subjectivity... yet",...

"What am I supposed to do in a group of militants, who expect me to leave in the salonism, I won't say a few ideas (for my ideas remain in a... group the dreams and desires which never leave me, the wish to live authentically and without restraint..."

He is not rejecting analysis, scientific or otherwise... but ideologies which constrain ideas and feelings into packets only to market them like Coca Cola in the market place of ideas as the real thing. There is a point to a 'revolutionary' group which considers its own emotional attitude... every day's existence...?

Vaneigem has little sympathy with the hawks of such scientific 'socialist' illustrations: he exorts us to push the "idealists of demystification" in front of us, so that they may not take advantage of our exploits or advance over our bodies. He is right. Where were the Tartar Ali and the Hess when brothers and sisters accused of being in the Angry Brigade are on trial for their lives while millions of people in their own groups have nervous breakdowns... or get assassinated...

Vaneigem and fellow writer, Guy Debord, author of 'The Society of the Spectacle' argues more to the point than this... about love, violence and work. For those of us, who are trying to understand the loneliness which leads to mental illness, the despair which leads to violence, the hopelessness of crime and other 'social' problems, Vaneigem has much to say. His is an analysis of capitalist SOCIETY, in all its aspects, from the gesture of the handshake to the only frenzy of the rush hour tube. In a sense, Vaneigem is more than a 'New Left' marxist, adding on blacks, students, homosexuals, a basically unchanged theory of classes... he is redefining class and Marxism itself.

Consideration: Case Co. is part of this stream of ideas. Many of you are saying that, our revolutionary activity is not after work, or at weekends but is part of our whole everyday life, our relationships at home, and yet in the social problems we confront...

If you have ever felt a nagging doubt that the only place for a revolutionary is the moment... If you have ever wondered at the conspiracy of silence in the British Left as what love, hatred, activity have to do with revolution... this is the book which asks those questions. Yet I have my criticisms too. Vaneigem, Debord and fellow authors present us with such a linguistically perfect and apparently complete analysis, that at times it becomes unclear, what precisely is going to be the motor force of change. What I mean in saying this is that their hitherto neglected contradictions of modern capitalism, they fail to examine how these will affect consciousness, how they will be rejected. And they are being rejected. Welfare, Mass Media, 'peaceable compromises' ARE being rejected.