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The Origins, Growth, and Future Directions of the Social Work Profession

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Introduction

The direction that social work seems to be taking is important for highlighting certain elements and ideas. There have been certain discoveries that are very significant for the field and the greater good of society, while others have been less so. But first, let's think about the ones that seem to have the most impact. We've identified five such shifts in the field and provided them below.

One recent trend is social workers' renewed enthusiasm for social movements and activism.

2. The merging of social and industrial labor.

Third, adjusting social work to different contexts.

Fourth, social work being recognized as a respected and essential contribution to society.

5. The industry's sincere desire for well considered educational preparation, so that competent performance is enabled.

Let's give some quick thought to each of these issues.

First, the field of social work is seeing a renaissance. It's taking a good, hard look at itself in the mirror. It's adjusting to its new environment. It's really just restating what it believes in. Although early pioneers in the field of social work did not have the tools we today consider essential, they still placed a premium on their clients' social context. They had the guts to call attention to problems and try to make improvements, at least within the economic constraints of the 19th century.

However, in the nineteenth century, the situation was different, and almost all attention was paid to procedures and method. This is a natural and even desirable stage of any profession, so long as the forest is not lost sight of in the process. There was a risk of techniques becoming dictators rather than helpers. That viewpoint is now antiquated due to the Great Depression and World War II. Nowadays, social workers are more aware of the bigger picture and less self-absorbed. It aims to help people in distress by teaching them technical skills and addressing the problems that have led to their plight. This requires familiarity with economics, sociology, ecology, international politics, and methodology. For instance, in April 1944, Compass published an article titled "To social workers: A call to Action" by the emergency Committee for social work, which was made up of seventy social professionals from around the nation. Their overarching goals were to ensure

(1) complete development and equitable distribution of national and international resources,

(2) full employment and a wage price system that was fair to all workers,

(3) increased access to quality healthcare, education, and other social supports;

(4) racial and ethnic equality. These social professionals cared about issues of class and inequality.

Outstanding social workers and administrators are stressing the need of reimagining the social work curriculum in light of global challenges. Gordon Hamilton, a professor at the New York School of Social Work, thinks it's important for this process to involve a focus on positive programs for a comfortable standard of living, a global perspective, and a philosophy of racial and cultural democracy. The notions of rights, needs, responsibilities, tolerance, self-direction, and involvement must be assimilated and then translated into skills by the students.

All of this points to the social worker's renewed willingness to be a reformer, not in the sense of a uniformed fanatic or biogoted missionary, but rather as someone who combines factual knowledge with the hope that a better society is possible and takes action. Good professional ethics and sincere personal development need not be mutually exclusive, a situation Harold Laski refers to as "the divorce between scholarship and life." As he puts it, "the objective which separates the intellectuals of the main world of scholarship, above all the academic world, from the main problems of their time is as grave in its implications as it is wide in its extent." In their book titled "the professions," Carr-Saunders and Wilson express their disappointment that professionals only advance inside their own niches, fail to understand the fundamentals of social and economic conditions, and provide only a cursory treatment of issues outside of their area of expertise. They think the solution to this problem lies in

expanding the focus of their own organizations beyond the narrow interests of any one sector of society. Not many social work organizations are doing this.

The union of labor and social service is the next step, and it is intrinsically related to the previous one. Dr. Ellen Potter, president of the National Conference on Social Work in 1944, used these same words. From the perspective of

of the incoming president, the appearance of organized labor in strength (at the Cleveland sessions), the individuals enrolling as members, attending meetings, speaking from the floor, asking crucial questions, and officially addressing from various platforms, was the most profoundly significant change. Particularly influential in the eastern United States is the combined committee of Trade Unions in Social Work and the United Office and Professional Workers of America's National Social Service Division. Although the Great Depression spurred an intergroup awareness, cooperative engagement in war-relief activities was a significant role in its development.

The economic, social, and political well-being of the working man is of mutual concern to both the labor movement and the social work profession. Even if politicians, boards of directors, and special interests often stand in the way, unions and social service agencies will inevitably continue to collaborate. It's feasible that a disruptive organization like the old Dies Committee would assert that the labor movement is "the left wing of social work or social work the right wing of labour" and try to sway public opinion with this false dichotomy. The fact is that these two major organizations must have tight ties since their goals are so similar. It's probable that the primary forces driving targeted social change will emerge from these two communities.

Finally, the third and fourth changes are the recognition of social work as a desirable and essential role and the flexibility to adjust to new conditions. Different social work approaches have made, and are making, remarkable modifications in response to evolving circumstances. In part because social workers are not so technique minded and, paradoxically, have become better technicians, and in part because the people who need the social services understand and want them, there is less resistance to the profession today than there was in 1930. Even the military had to employ case workers, or what it vaguely termed "field agents," to collect psychological, physiological, and sociological data on possible recruits. There is a widespread acknowledgement of social workers' indispensability, and although few have a deep grasp of their goals and methods, the war significantly boosted both acceptance and comprehension.

Fifthly, the process of defining the cornerstones of each profession's required curriculum is arduous. Extensive and expensive research has been done in recent decades on the best way to train doctors, lawyers, dentists, nurses, and engineers. These investigations have led to several positive changes, such as improved teaching practices, revised course materials, more school funding, stricter admissions requirements, and so on. Many things have led to the need for such investigations, not the least of which is the realization by practitioners that many of them are not providing the level of service that the public is led to think is assured. The field of social work education has progressed to the point that a rigorous examination of its goals, content, and future is desired.

All social workers, but maybe especially those who have seen the widespread prevalence of harmful stereotypes in the field, should take great hope from this recent noteworthy breakthrough. Many of them are just technical experts who have no idea how to adapt their methods to a world that is moving quicker than ever before. Not that we want to put too small a premium on doing a good job. We feel it's important to highlight the risks associated with a "stand-point," "let the world go by," mentality. Most social workers, like most people, lack imagination and creativity. However, they should make it a part of their guiding principle to acknowledge the necessity for innovative thinking and reward instances of it. How often do we see practitioners in our field, the very features of which call for adaptability to change, pulling back rather than pushing forward? It's a contradiction that only exists in the field of social work.

An address entitled "Social Workers: Stand Up and Be Counted" was delivered during the Chicago convention of the American Association of Schools of Social Work. When Benjamin Youngdahl was elected president in 1947, he criticized his peers for certain ways of thinking and behaving. The following is what he has to say about a certain sort of offender:

He is a mechanical, technique-obsessed automaton who thinks very little. He is so oblivious to the world around him that he cannot fathom the risk of surrendering his independence. He is the sort of person whose focus on the particular prevents him from seeing the bigger picture of the difficulties in human interactions. On the other hand, he may be the kind of administrator who, while handling a large-scale project, overlooks the fact that people are individuals and focuses only on the average. He has a myopic view of the world and would prefer live in the comfort of the status quo than make any attempt to create a new economy or improve the one we now have. It's a telltale symptom of generalization. He's not a horrible guy in the traditional sense; he doesn't commit crimes on purpose. His professional identity is more important to him than his citizenship.

One of the main reason why the profession of social work needs an exhaustive study of its practices and professional needs is

to aid in repairing this kind of flaw. The growth and development are impeded by stereotypical thinking. The field of social work requires a rigorous educational curriculum that can adapt to new realities as they emerge.

Therefore, social workers can set the trends of the twenty-first century by considering the needs of modern people and the social, economic, cultural, emotional, and moral problems related to such needs and the cotemporary times by looking back at the development of social work as a profession in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

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