

*Olwe Steverson*

**NEW THINKING**

**about welfare —  
values and priorities**



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**ABOUT**  
**WELFARE**  
**Values and Priorities**

Published by the Education Sub-Committee,  
Association of Social Workers,  
Denison House, Vauxhall Bridge Road,  
London, S.W.1.

1969

10/6

*Signature underlines*

*Paper given at the Study Conference of the Association of Social Workers 1969 and published in New Thinking About Welfare - Values and Priorities A.S.W. 1969.*

## WELFARE: PROBLEMS AND PRIORITIES

~~OLIVE STEVENSON~~

### *The State, the Community and the Social Worker*

One of the difficulties with which this conference had to grapple was the breadth and the vagueness of the word "welfare". The conference was deliberately planned to range widely over the field of something which was called "welfare". Yet at no point has an attempt been made to define what we mean by the term, today, in 1969.

X Titmuss<sup>1</sup> is of some help in clarifying the notion in his classification of the three different elements in social security and social service programmes in a welfare state. These, he suggests, are as follows: first, forms of future investment, whether compulsory or voluntary, individual or collective—for example, education; secondly, forms of consumption, immediate increments to individual or family welfare as a method of distributing income or resources—for example, family allowances or subsidised housing; thirdly, forms of compensation to individuals or families for disservices or diswelfares caused by society—for example, social work services for the delinquent or the deprived child. The third category is, as Titmuss points out, "more difficult to specify because one is raising some fundamental questions about the causal agents in society responsible for disservices or diswelfares . . ." He refers to such phenomena as smoke pollution, road accidents, to the "victims of ethnic or religious prejudice", and to "the victims of the mistakes we make in our educational system by wrongly stigmatising and rejecting people as failures . . . They represent, in some senses, the people who are compelled to pay—as diswelfares—part of the costs of other people's progress in a dynamic and changing society. It is one of the major functions of social security and social service programmes to make some provision for these victims of diswelfare; to compensate them in part for income loss and other injuries to life chances".

The majority of those who attended this conference are concerned mainly in day-to-day work with this third aspect of welfare, compensations for "diswelfare". The Titmuss argument is open to some question, however, in the emphasis which it lays on the damage done to people by the march of industrial progress. That such damage is done is indisputable. But we can remind ourselves that the most primitive society has its lame, its bereaved, its deviant and that all societies, sophisticated or primitive, in the course of interaction and development harm some and then devise means of caring for them.

We could have subtitled the conference, "a caring society". We have spoken of community participation, of the use of voluntary endeavour and of the place of the state and of organised statutory

services in such a society. Professor Vereker reminded the conference that the idea of the state making a positive contribution to welfare is, in historical terms, comparatively recent; the burden of caring for its unfortunate members rested, for many centuries, upon the community and upon those—usually the churches—who volunteered to do so. The increasing complexities of an industrialised society necessitated greater social control for the protection of its weaker members and few would now question the intervention of the state on a large scale to control forces which, left unchecked, would result in destitution or humiliation for many of its citizens. A contemporary example concerns large-scale redundancy of labour in an age of rapid technological change, which could bring untold misery to thousands of men and their families if long-term national planning were not undertaken.

Yet, having said that, let us not underestimate the distrust of state intervention in matters of welfare which exists in society. A potent aspect of this distrust in the minds of many is, of course, the fear of undermining the independence of individuals. However, this is not, by and large, the fear which looms largest amongst social workers—indeed one may ask if insufficient attention is sometimes paid to this aspect of the question by social workers, whose motivation to give rather than to withhold is very powerful. More significant to social workers may be a fear, shared by many people in society and sometimes expressed quite openly, that the caring process is in some sense depersonalised when offered by the state. This may seem strange and irrelevant to social workers employed in statutory organisations who know the direct and face-to-face relationship they have with, and the concern they have for, their clients. Yet the notion dies hard. A few years ago I recall reading an article on the woman's page of a reputable newspaper describing some admirable voluntary work by an individual with homeless families. The article concluded with an observation to the effect that the worker offered what was an anachronism in these days of a welfare state—"a gesture of love". Such a statement to those of us who know the commitment of our friends and colleagues in the statutory services is patently absurd. Such attitudes are rooted in history and refer back to the idea of the state representing social obligation rather than "caritas", as Professor Vereker discussed. We should not underestimate the force of such anxieties and we should be ready to look at them anew in the light of changing power and organisation in statutory social work services.

Certainly, part of the fear about which social workers themselves express concern relates quite simply to the question of size. Talk of state welfare tends to become associated with phrases like "monolithic structures"—as I heard one probation officer describe a Seebohm-type department. Will the individual feel swamped by, and alienated from, the organisations from which he has to "get his welfare", whatever that may be—hospitals, local authority social service departments and so on? There is always a tendency to idealise the good old days when everyone knew each other and problems could get solved by a chat over a cup of tea. Yet the

reality of depersonalisation in larger structures exists and cannot be ignored. It is interesting, however, to note that at the very moment when organisations are getting larger, there are strong forces pulling in the other direction, whether it be the Scots and the Welsh clamouring for a greater share in the running of their own affairs or the Seeborn report suggestions of Area Teams. Such anxiety as exists at present amongst social workers on this matter is not concerned simply with the welfare of clients but also with the welfare of the workers, who are likely to find themselves in larger organisations at a time when common values or goals are in doubt.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps in this connection we can helpfully remind ourselves of G. K. Chesterton's comment, quoted by Titmuss: "God expresses himself in many ways, even by local government".

The current preoccupation of social workers with community work and work with volunteers is an important aspect of an attempt to ensure that the gap between the statutory agency and the community it serves is not so wide as to produce the alienation which we all fear. Here is a way by which the statutory employee may relate, not only to his clients but to the community of which his client is a member. Indeed one group member referred to a social worker as "a bridge over to another set of resources". Yet we should not gloss over the difficulties which arise from this developing concept of the social work function. These difficulties figured prominently in this conference.

They arise from a widening sense of responsibility towards the total society of which our client is a member. ~~Joan King referred in her opening talk to my remarks at the summing up of the 1963 A.S.W. Conference in which I raised the dilemma as between equity or fairness and individualised treatment; the distinction which Tillich<sup>3</sup> draws between "proportional and creative" justice. My recent work with the Supplementary Benefits Commission has highlighted this. The officers of the Supplementary Benefits Commission have on the whole been more concerned than social workers with the idea of "proportional justice", of fairness in terms of equity. (Although Child Care Officers have had to give attention to this since they were given powers to dispense financial or material aid.) Social workers, on the other hand, have, by and large, pinned their faith to "creative" justice and individualised treatment. Because of late their work did not by and large involve much dispensing of material aid, social workers have been able to isolate themselves to some extent from the reactions of the local community to the service which they offered; casework, however skilfully offered, is likely to raise less envy and demand in the neighbours than a suite of furniture. Once, however, we seek to mobilise community good will towards its less fortunate members, once this is seen as a prime function and proper use of a scarce professional resource, it will be our professional responsibility to deal with the feelings of resentment, anger, envy and all the rest, which undoubtedly exist at present but from which the social worker can, to a not inconsiderable extent, cut himself off. An example of this is given in Spencer's<sup>4</sup> *Stress and Release in an Urban Estate* in which the antagonism of the local~~ 1967

community to social work with adolescents is vividly described. (In passing, one may remark that this book was ahead of its time and would attract much more attention today if newly published.) Social workers have been taught to deal with intra-psychic conflict and inter-familial conflict. The next step is to learn how to cope more effectively with inter-community conflict.

Such a proposition, however, raises a quite fundamental problem of increased participation with communities and one which is, in my opinion, frequently dodged by the community work enthusiasts. We know that social workers are temperamentally and by training inclined to see everyone's point of view. Once they become more strongly aware of the feelings of a local community about their clients they will, inevitably and properly, see their clients from the point of view of those who live with, around or near them. It is a very short step from this to concern and identification with those who may suffer considerably from the behaviour of the clients—as every Child Care Officer knows in relation to foster parents, for example. This must raise the question in some situations—who is my client? As the needs and problems of people who are, in effect, the client's environment become apparent, the social worker is faced with the need to respond, not simply to the reactions which concern the behaviour of his client but also to the distinct needs of those whose participation and co-operation he has sought to enlist. Let us put this in simple terms. The old-type social worker has been dedicated to some "under dog" or other. Is the new type social worker to maintain those individuals as his focus of concern; even although he uses new methods and resources in relation to the community his client lives in? Or is the new type social worker going to find commitments to serve the needs of those who could not, in any realistic sense, be described as "under dogs" even although they have certain social problems at a point in time?

#### *Conflict in Social Work*

It will not have passed unnoticed that I have written of "old-type" and "new-type" social workers. Such descriptions are imprecise and oversimplified but they reflect an important element in the conference and one which is paralleled in social work generally at the present time. Moreover, some of our deliberations at this conference may need to be taken in the context of an ever more general challenge to authority, to stability and to order which is omnipresent in our society today and across the world. By the side of the Red Guards, the Paris Student riots of 1968 or the Negro riots in the U.S.A., social work unrest is pretty small beer. Yet to the fact that it exists this conference bore witness. Nor is it possible to dissociate this unrest altogether from conflict between the generations. Perhaps because I am thirty-eight years old, at a half-way house so to speak, I have of late become increasingly aware of discomfort between the generations of social workers. Social workers today live in a society which permits a degree of open challenge to authority which would have been difficult, if not impossible, in earlier days and it would indeed be unhealthy if they were not part of

such a movement. Yet there is little doubt that an older generation of social workers finds it threatening both because, in the natural way of things, stability and order are usually valued more highly as one grows older and because—even allowing for exaggeration—there does seem to be a real increase in the extent to which such challenge is possible.

It would be foolish, however, to write as if this was purely a "generational" clash. Margaret Tilley referred in an earlier paper <sup>There are</sup> to the temperamental factors which determine the choice to influence and stay in or to rebel and get out. Denis Allen spoke of the inevitability of opting out if you disagree fundamentally with the operation of the system. Temperament—and perhaps sex?—will influence such choices profoundly and there seems to be room in social work for both. But the need for personal insight is as great for the one as for the other. The social worker who chooses to stay in and to attempt to change the system from within, has to watch, as Margaret Tilley said, that instead of shaking the dust off his feet, the dust does not slowly and imperceptibly settle on him. It can happen that a gradual process of identification with the system, with the "given" goals, objectives and methods of social work, takes place until eventually the issues to which one originally took exception are forgotten. There is a gradual insidious process of adaptation in which integrity is lost. For those who choose to "get out", that is, to disassociate themselves from conventional statutory structures, there is a danger of rationalising as concern for the under dog what is, in fact, a hatred of authority and an erratic protest which is not sustained, in the search for new false idols to smash. In sheer practical terms the social worker who wishes to dissociate himself from conventional structures will, in the course of time, need more money for his purposes. This means wooing the state or private benefactors. Thus, ~~at the end of the day,~~ <sup>at the end of the day,</sup> there is no alternative to the social worker relating constructively to the society which feeds him and his client, whether from voluntary or statutory services.

As well as age, temperament and sex, training plays its part in creating differences between social workers in their attitudes to authority. Broadly speaking, experienced, untrained workers have tended to identify more completely than have their trained colleagues with the system which gives them their orientation and their security. They may, like administrators, see it as their primary point of reference and of loyalty and there is always the possibility that to defend and maintain the system becomes an end in itself. It is not difficult to see this mechanism in operation in certain sections of the child care and probation services, for example, in the last ten years.

Trained workers of the older generation have always had an alternative professional frame of reference, incorporating notions about the purposes, methods and values of social work and have been able to test these against the work which their organisation required them to perform, but their training was available at a time when there was less challenge to authority—including the authority of the professionals, the practitioners and the teachers in social work. Now they must expect more open challenge to the fundamental assumptions

of what they teach, whether in the field or within educational establishments, by the new generation of social workers. It is difficult to avoid clichés about "on-going dialogues". Yet it seems most important that in the next few years deliberate, planned occasions are arranged in which the doubts, conflicts and divisions in social work are freely aired. The older generation should be grateful for the discomfort which will be created because it means social work is growing. Can we also hope that the contribution to social work made in the past twenty years by social caseworkers in relatively defined and structured settings will not have to be lost and found again but will be incorporated into the growth process of social work?

#### *The Social Worker in relation to Social Control and Change*

One of the conference issues concerned the role of the social worker as an agent of social control and social change. It was pointed out that these were not incompatible and that a social worker must be involved in both. This is a vital matter which must be explored further.

It seems unarguable that social workers are agents of social control, if by that is meant that they encourage individuals to adapt to certain ways of behaviour which society deems desirable and from which they have deviated. The moral obligation of social workers is to analyse the values they are being asked to uphold and to be sure that they accept them or that they are insufficiently important to stand out against. (This last point needs emphasising. Repeated stands on unimportant issues of alleged principle can be excessively tedious.) It appears equally unarguable that a social worker, being a child of his time and rooted in the cultural and social values of the age into which he has been born, will often uphold, even after such scrutiny, the values he has been appointed to protect. Thus, to take concrete examples; to prevent or treat delinquency, to encourage payment of rent arrears; to encourage certain child rearing practices and discourage others—all these reflect notions of the desirable and the good which most social workers will accept. We know, however, that we shall look pretty silly to some of our successors in the twenty-first century as do some of our nineteenth century fore-runners to us, concerning the values to which we subscribed. To be aware of this should ensure a proper humility and a reasonable degree of flexibility as we approach other cultural patterns—as for example, in West Indian immigrant families—or as we grapple with unusually rapid change in accepted norms of behaviour.

There are two main pitfalls for the social worker as an agent of social control. First, there is the possibility that he will be used by the system to reinforce and encourage adaptation to situations which are a fundamental infringement of human rights. One group member wondered if social work was a huge confidence trick by the government to distract attention from the fundamental inadequacy of certain services (for example, housing). It must be accepted that social workers' records in this respect are not blameless. Why, for example, did social workers not cry louder and act more vigorously against the policy of many welfare departments to separate husband

and wife who became homeless? Should anyone have been "helped to adjust" to that fundamental infringement of human rights? Yet we have to remind ourselves of Joan King's opening remarks: "Whatever hopes there may be for future reforms, clients have to live in the world as it is". It seems, therefore, that social workers will frequently be faced with difficult decisions *about the timing, direction and extent of their protest*. Only the personal integrity and insight of the social worker will enable him to decide whether, on a specific issue, he flatly refuses to help his client adapt and protests publicly, or seeks to do the former whilst at the same time he protests privately, or delays his protest for tactical reasons in order to make it eventually the more effective. Facile generalisations and moral posturing are to be avoided. As social workers become more powerful and, it is to be hoped, more effective in protest on behalf of their clients, their responsibility in the exercise of such powers becomes crucial. Two questions will need to be asked before action. First, how much does this issue matter in terms of the well-being of my client, to the best of my knowledge at this moment? (To say more is to play God.) Secondly, if it matters enough, what should my tactics of protest be for maximum effect? Thus it can be seen that considering the problems which arise in the exercise of the power of social control takes the social worker into a consideration of his role in relation to social change.

A second pitfall for the social worker in relation to social control lies in the reinforcement of social values which, whilst not necessarily of fundamental importance, are highly subjective either to individuals or to social classes. An example from residential work with children or old people may be pertinent. It is very easy to create discomfort and tension by requiring standards of behaviour which are alien to the background and the norms of the young or the old. Clothes, length of hair, table manners, all bound up with personal identity and security, are often called in question by those who care for the most vulnerable—the young and the old. The influence of public school mores on Borstals has been vividly described in Sillitoe's <sup>5</sup> *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*. In no other field of social work does the morality of social control and its implications need to be more urgently examined than in residential institutions.

It is clear that increased emphasis on community work as a method of social work will bring the role of the social worker in social change into much more prominence. It seems important, therefore, at this stage to remind ourselves that promotion of social change implies just as many value judgments as does the exercise of social control. It is to be hoped that community workers will not fall into the same errors as caseworkers and exaggerate the "fiction of non-directiveness" until a latter-day Halmos <sup>6</sup> arises to explode this myth.

However, even if community work brings social workers more into the limelight of social action and social protest leading towards change, we must not overlook the part which has already been played in this process by social workers. Taking Titmuss' three aspects of

welfare outlined at the beginning of this paper, it is clear that in the last twenty-five years social workers have contributed comparatively little to the first—forms of future investment—or to the second—forms of consumption—until recently. Undoubtedly, the splitting off of the Poor Law and income maintenance in 1946 from the personal social work services contributed to the neglect by social workers as a whole of this second aspect. (There were other reasons which cannot be explored here.) In the third aspect of welfare, however—forms of compensation to individuals as families, for disservices and diswelfares—social workers have, within the last twenty years, made some steady and some quite dramatic contributions to the processes of social amelioration necessitated by damage done in the cause of progress. One may cite as an outstanding example the care of deprived children. The fact that all who work in that field are aware of glaring inadequacies should not destroy the historical perspective and sense of achievement resulting from the setting up of the Child Care Service in 1948. One might hazard a prediction that out of the ferment and tension in the Probation and After-Care Service will come a contribution to change of those institutions whose need for change is greatest—our prisons. These are but two examples. It is a temperamental tendency of social workers to be self-deprecating and, under attack, to acknowledge perhaps too readily the justice of their critics. It seems important at this moment that an older generation of social workers should not accept too readily a blanket criticism of their lack of involvement in constructive social change. What does give food for thought, however, and cause for self-criticism, is that in both the examples given and in many others which could be cited, the original impetus for change did not come from social workers although its implementation lay in their hands. This leads to the question of means and resources which will be the theme of the last section of this paper.

One further aspect of social change—the question of its speed and extent—needs to be considered in relation to social workers. It is obvious that a complete rejection of society's current values and attitudes would make it impossible to be a social worker in any conventional structure. But this is not likely to trouble many. What is likely to be a point of difference between social workers—and one in which age and temperament as well as ideological dispute plays a part—is the speed and extent of change which social workers believe they are entitled to expect and to work for. Many factors enter into this: scarce resources, the complexity and size of the change that is sought, the degree of resistance to it in society generally and so on. Most of the things social workers are interested in changing involve a long haul. It is necessary therefore to combine patience with vigilance and persistence and the memory of Shaftesbury's years of struggle to get protective legislation for women and children in the mines or Martin Luther King's battle for civil rights should help to strengthen our resolve. On our own doorstep, for example, we have seen ten-year struggles to close or modify unsuitable residential nurseries by some enlightened children's departments. The fear is that acknowledgment of the complexity involved in change will

somehow defeat the original impetus—as indeed it has done on occasions. But this need not be so.

### *Resources, Needs and Demands*

At the conference we were told that resources, in terms of money, are always scarce or economists would be out of a job. As individuals we can do little to counter these assertions of scarcity unless we are in positions of responsibility where we have the chance to argue for, or command, resources. An aspect of Richard Smethurst's talk at the conference, however, which was of particular value, was its implicit reminder that we can easily be hoodwinked by politicians into thinking we are faced with an economic impossibility—a non-existent resource—when in fact we are faced with a political choice between priorities. This suggests that social workers at national level must indulge in continuing pressure for an increased share of resources for those who, by definition, cannot and do not fight for themselves. The subnormal at Ely Hospital are a recent and tragic example. It also suggests, however, that we will need to employ experts to advise us and to fight experts on their own terms. I put forward to the new British Association of Social Workers the serious suggestion that they should retain the services of an economist as a consultant as a part of their strategy for political pressure.

One of the major arguments put forward by Seebohm in favour of a unified department was that it would command a proportionately greater share of resources than the separate departments and therefore more power. One of the worrying aspects of current amalgamations with health departments is that the lion's share of such resources may go to the health services rather than to the personal social work services. Here is an occasion when, it seems, we should try not to see the other person's point of view and to oppose strongly any hint of reductions in resources allocated. Of course, this needs concerted professional action and the new Association should be interested in supporting its members at local level in such struggles.

If, however, such arguments are to be put forward convincingly, it is essential for social workers to examine critically the deployment of their existing resources. This is something which can be done at all levels from the fieldworker's examination of the use of his own time and skill, through the "middle manager's" responsibility for organising a group of workers, to the Chief Officer, who must look at the total situation. It is generally agreed that a shortage of professional skill in many, if not all, aspects of our society is likely to be with us indefinitely, for an increased demand for professionalism and expertise is a mark of an increasingly sophisticated society. We all know the efforts which are being made to increase the output of trained social workers. It is equally clear that there is no prospect of the demand being met. It must therefore follow that a primary task of social workers in the next ten to twenty years will be to consider re-deployment of the scarce resource of their time and skill.

One of the most important forms of re-deployment is, of course, the use of voluntary workers. It is not suggested that such workers

must be used as "a second best", for their contribution can be seen as part of a strategy for increased community participation. However, some social workers who may not care about such global concepts, may see in the use of voluntary workers a valuable source of support for clients whose problems do not require the attention of professionals. It is important to add, however, that in whatever sphere the voluntary worker operates, there is a complex and sensitive organisational task to be done by the professional. For example, in a very large school for disturbed children which I visited in the U.S.A., there was a full-time worker in charge of a variety of arrangements for voluntary work, taking children out at weekends, sitting with them in classrooms so that the teacher should concentrate her teaching skill on one at a time and so on. It will also be the responsibility of the professional in some instances to help the voluntary worker to define the task and the objective and to support him in the impact of suffering, emotional disturbance and unlikeable behaviour so that disillusionment and rejection does not follow.

A second form of re-deployment concerns different levels of worker within the organisation. Despite experiments such as that referred to by Denis Allen by certain children's departments, despite the recommendations of the Younghusband Report, it would be fair to say that there is considerable resistance amongst local authority social workers still to the notion of the use of different levels of skill. The problem is avoided by talk of "trainees", inexperienced workers who will be protected and then sent for training, after which they will be as good as everyone else. The idea of an educational elite—i.e., of the inherent superiority of university trained workers over those trained in colleges of further education has been rightly rejected by all fair minded people who see abundant proof to the contrary. Yet the Younghusband idea of "a welfare assistant" who may in some instances not be a potential trained social worker for any type of course seems one which only hospital medical social workers have developed to any extent. There is a mixture of fears and feelings in such resistances. Alongside sincere dislike of the superiority which this seems to imply may rest fear of professional dilution, common in situations of greatest insecurity. It has been paralleled in the teaching and medical worlds. There is also a possessiveness about clients which can easily be rationalised as a laudable desire to preserve the continuity of relationship and concern for practical detail which is part of the relationship. There is no clear answer as yet to the ways in which such welfare assistants should be used. But it must be part of the profession's task to carry experiments further and to share experience. For—to use an actual example—nothing will convince me that it is a good use of a scarce resource to send a social worker, with a total of six years further education, including an advanced casework course and with fifteen years' experience, to collect and deliver a battery for a blind person's transistor radio. In the field of child care, the transporting of children is an example of decisions in which the importance of continuity in relationship and the opportunity such journeys give for important feelings to be discussed has to be weighed against the

priorities of the worker's load as a whole and the importance of the particular occasion. It is, par excellence, an area for professional rather than administrative decision making but the resources should be available which make delegation possible when it is decided to be desirable.

In the earlier discussion of social change, I pointed out that social workers have not often been responsible for initiating the programmes which have resulted in a great increase in work for them. They have frequently had it thrust upon them and there then ensues a long battle for the necessary resources. Thus, for a long period, they have to live either with increased pressure, which may be almost intolerable, or with the knowledge that the job is not being done properly or, more usually, with both. Over the last ten years in the field of child care and probation and after care, at any rate, the rapid increase of statutory responsibilities without a commensurate increase in resources has been an intolerable burden. This has to be linked to the higher professional expectation which one expects trained staff to have—training would indeed have failed if standards were not as a result set higher. The combination of these two ingredients—of greatly increased demand and of raised standards—sets the stage for what one might describe as a kind of corporate professional duodenal ulcer. The fragmentation of social work, both professionally and organisationally, and the consequent lack of readily ascertainable facts and figures about social work activity have all contributed to a situation in which successive governments have increased responsibilities with inadequate increase of resources. There is a danger of a professional gramophone record played over and over again to the powers-that-be in which we plaintively cry—"it can't be managed". Its repetition is bound to give an impression of reactionary reluctance to venture into new fields, whereas in fact most of the responsibilities which have been, or are being acquired, are legitimate and proper extensions of social work activity. Somehow, social workers have got to find convincing ways of saying: "give us the tools and we will finish the job". To do this, evidence must be marshalled which involves systematic collection of information about social work practice.

During the conference reference was made to the fact that need and demand for welfare services are not necessarily identical. ~~Denis Allen and Chelly Halsey both~~ <sup>It was</sup> pointed out that demand may be met while inarticulate need remains unmet, and there is no doubt that this is a form of "rationing", to use Parker's<sup>7</sup> word, used frequently in the welfare services. In matters of material and financial provision, the issue appears fairly clear cut. In my view, there is no justification for a society which claims to offer certain rights and benefits and then avoids full demand by not bothering about those who do not claim them. There may, however, be demands for improvements in financial benefits from certain groups, which are refused by a government because they appear inequitable in relation to other groups in the community. Furthermore, in the community as a whole, the sky is the limit so far as definitions of need are concerned. ~~Chelly Halsey reminded the conference that~~

We were

poverty is a relative concept. In a society of rising wealth, there is bound to be a continued tension between a government's definition of need and the community's demands at certain points in time. It is indeed difficult to know at what point need has turned into greed.

When we turn to the less tangible demands and needs for personal social services, we get into even deeper waters. We may ask two questions.

First, can there be demand without need? The answer one gives depends in part on certain assumptions about dependence and self-reliance. It is obvious that available services are used and that people exist without other services and it is really impossible to generalise about the personal cost—psychological or social—resulting from the lack of these services. Nor is it possible to generalise about the risks to self-reliance about which opponents of the welfare state are prone to prattle so glibly. The question for social workers at present is perhaps somewhat hypothetical since it is usually accepted by them that we are a very long way from the situation in which services are offered and thereby appetites for them created which are in excess of genuine need. Indeed it is doubtful whether this will ever be so in the public sector; but the example of some of the private sectors in American social work (where fees are paid for social work services rendered) should at least keep the possibility open in our minds that there could be demand without need.

Secondly, can there be need without demand? The answer is, of course, an unequivocal "yes". In some instances, the reason is obvious. This person did not know he could ask. This person was afraid to do so. This person was put off by the complexity of the asking process.

Such explanations are simple and their remedies not hard to find, though they may be complex operationally. But what about the situations in which we, the social workers, say a person needs something and he says he does not—for example, in some cases of child neglect or some compulsory admissions to old people's homes? Or the situations in which the client says he needs something and we, the social workers, say he needs something different? For example, he says he wants more money and a new house, we say it's a displacement of a marital problem. Both these questions involve the kind of assumption which infuriated Lady Wootton<sup>8</sup> in the 1950s. The first raises starkly the question of the social worker as the agent of social control with authority and power. The second implies an assertion that people do not always say what they mean or rather, to put it in a different way, they may express certain needs obliquely and that the interpretation of need is a vital part of a social worker's skill.

It is clear that decisions that need exists where it is not admitted or decisions that the need is other than that which is acknowledged are open to abuse and demand the maximum professional insight and responsibility. Yet they are inevitable and inherent in social work practice and their recognition—not their denial—is the only possible protection to the consumer.

Where demand and need co-exist happily, the pattern of resources

is of most significance. A rising level of demand for personal social work services and more subtle definitions of need—as for example in cases of marital difficulty—will undoubtedly be a feature of the next twenty years. The balance which must be found between creative innovation and consolidation of existing services will be no easy matter. ~~Chelly Halsey spoke of an~~ ongoing surveys of need, ascertained through available statistical and practical data in a given locality. ~~Such an exercise, undertaken through the analysis of facts and figures,~~ need not raise consumer demand as would direct questioning about need. I see this as an essential part of a social service department's planning; but I am sure that there will be resistance to the idea, partly because of the fear of the need it will uncover which cannot at present be met.

Before embarking on such "diagnostic programmes", therefore, it seems important to accept the inevitability of the fact that the resources will not meet the need. Yet we cannot plan rationally and systematically and establish priorities for the use of scarce resources without such surveys of need over the whole range of social work provision. This problem takes on a particular urgency if we are to have some unification of our social work services. For we shall not only be concerned with the battle for resources from the outside but with the internal conflict amongst social workers for resources. How are we to decide what share the old people or the children in a given area need without some appraisal of relative need? There are, of course, absolute values involved in this which social workers must reflect upon before they construct priorities. At the conference, we heard informally from our economist lecturer of some of the processes involved in cost benefit analysis, a technique which, it seemed, could most helpfully be made available to social workers to achieve greater precision in putting a monetary value on certain alternative forms of provision. Any such procedure, however, must be preceded by consideration of values which are not quantifiable in terms of money. Thus, it is perfectly possible and desirable to consider the siting of a children's or old people's home in terms of cost benefit analysis, which would take into account whatever monetary factors are considered to be relevant, whether they were the fares involved in visiting, the cost of bringing facilities to the home or the cost of social workers' travelling time, for example. It is not yet possible to estimate in precise financial terms—nor may it ever be—the saving in money to the next generation of better provision for deprived or delinquent children—although we base many assumptions on this. Even if it were to be possible, however, we would be left with decisions which are not financial. For example, it is clear that to some extent at least, investment in youth is an insurance policy for society. This is not true of services for the aged. Yet in a humane and compassionate society, it is unthinkable that the aged should be denied a share of the resources.

Surveys of need and costing of projects by the most sophisticated techniques available to us—these are ways of dealing with conflicts of priorities without making arbitrary and subjective decisions.

They are necessary to the development of social work in partnership with the social sciences.

### *Partnership with the Social Sciences*

This conference had lectures and discussions in which what one might describe as "the hard facts", concerned with measurement, prediction, evaluation, cost have been the focus of attention. It has also had lectures and discussions in which "the soft facts" of feelings, intuitions and impression have been the focus. It is, I believe, important to say that for many who attended the conference "the hard facts" do not come easily. Many of us—of whom I am one—have an educational background of the arts, not of the sciences. Few of the older generation of social workers were taught the rudiments of research methodology in the social sciences, nor even what one might describe as "the social science approach". First reactions, therefore, to talk of measurement are panic and anxiety. It is a short step from that to the familiar mechanism of defence by which one says—"and, anyway, what I am interested in cannot be measured". We fear that in the process of scrutiny and analysis, our intuition may be destroyed and devalued. There is an intellectual defence which is used against the truth of feeling. But there is also the intuitive defence which is used against the truth of the intellect. Such defences are likely to be put most strongly into play when established ways of working are challenged. ~~Yet, as Richard Smethurst said of economic measurement and social work,~~ if we do not play a part in it, others will do it for us, without benefit of social work experience and wisdom about the subtleties of human problems and of social work practice. It may sound cynical to say "if you can't beat them, join them" in this context. Yet this is precisely what is necessary. Social scientists are here to stay and will play an increasing part in determining the affairs of social workers. Social workers do not have to turn into social scientists but they do have to know enough for constructive communication between the two. Social workers, in such processes, will have to look with greater precision and openness at their activities. However, the best scientists all know the limitations of their discipline in the understanding of the problems they seek to understand. Some social scientists, insecure in their own academic position, are not characterised by this humility. It was Keats who said—"There are different avenues to truth". The important thing is to be sure it is not a cul-de-sac. Intuition can be, as can that highly suspect quality common sense, a cul-de-sac if it neglects any attempt at analysis. Scientific research can be a cul-de-sac when, in the process, issues are oversimplified by naïve social scientists to facilitate measurement. The need for partnership is therefore urgent and it is to be hoped that this conference demonstrated the possibility.

1. R. Titmuss: *Commitment to Welfare*. Allen & Unwin, 1968.
2. Since the Conference, the Maud Report on Local Government has been published, which provides another illustration of the issue.
3. P. Tillich: *Love, Power and Justice*. O.U.P., 1954.
4. J. Spencer: *Stress and Release in an Urban Estate*. Tavistock, 1964.

5. A. Silletoe: *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*. W. H. Allen, 1962.
6. P. Halmos: *The Faith of the Counsellors*. Constable, 1965.
7. R. A. Parker: "Social Administration and Scarcity: The Problem of Rationing". *Social Work*, April, 1967.
8. B. Wootton: *Social Science and Social Pathology*. Allen & Unwin, 1960.

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