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1953

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Recommended Citation

Fuchs, Ralph F., "Our Clients in Mid-Century: Welfare in the Modern State" (1953). *Articles by Maurer Faculty*. 1626.

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THE SOCIAL SERVICE REVIEW

volume xxvii

JUNE 1953

number two

OUR CLIENTS IN MID-CENTURY: WELFARE IN THE MODERN STATE¹

RALPH F. FUCHS

HISTORY records that when Wayman Crow, William Greenleaf Eliot, and their associates founded Washington University a century ago they had two main purposes. They wished to establish an institute which should give training of immediate practical benefit to the youth of this community, and they intended to start a great institution of learning that would rival, in time, its earlier counterparts in the East. Those who created the department of social work three-quarters of a century later and so began the present George Warren Brown School were proceeding in accordance with these aims. They proposed to train a profession dedicated to offering "help in behalf of society to persons in difficulty" so that "happier and more useful lives can be lived"² and, as Professor Towley has

said recently,³ "to increasing knowledge of human behavior, of social forces, of interpersonal relations."

The same dual purpose of rendering human service and of increasing knowledge runs through all American higher education and through much of the work of our great professions. The ministry endeavors to serve many immediate needs of parishioners and at the same time to penetrate into the meaning of the universe. Medicine and its supporting sciences exist to strengthen human health and to inquire into the conditions of its maintenance. Engineering and law as universal disciplines are more neutral with regard to welfare, since they can and do serve many masters in the world at large without violating any principles to which they are inherently committed; but in a democracy they too are dedicated to the service of mankind and to research to this end.

¹ Address at a dinner of the George Warren Brown School of Social Work, Washington University, St. Louis, March 13, 1953.

² *Happier and More Useful Lives: A Statement on Social Work Education* (St. Louis: Washington University, 1953).

³ Louis Towley, "Professional Responsibility in a Democracy." (Unpublished MS of address at meeting of Council on Social Work Education, St. Louis, Missouri, January, 1953.)

All the professions began with the practice of limited arts which the current culture thought it needed. Priest and physician have a common ancestor in the primitive medicine man; lawyer, warrior, and public administrator go back to the tribal chieftain and his aides. Social work scarcely loses luster, even though it finds less popular appreciation and understanding, because its origins are at once more modern and more modest. The workers in nineteenth-century urban charities were known as "friendly visitors." They and the leaders of early group activities which were designed to benefit the participants, such as recreational organizations, claimed no occult powers and no authority over the lives of others. They sought to assist and to inspire, not to cure or command; and their descendants, using finer techniques, are moved by the same humane purposes.

Each of the professions, proceeding from its narrow base, has constantly sought and used increased knowledge and more varied methods in pursuit of the aims to which it has been dedicated. The story of this advance is too familiar to need telling here. All of us are acquainted with medicine's great progress as it has refined its techniques and used the results of research in biology, chemistry, physics, and now psychology and sociology. We also are aware of engineering's similar strides on the basis of physical science and its propagation, together with biology, of social planning; and we also know of the growing use of the physical and social sciences by government and law in many different fields. As these developments have taken place, two major consequences have come about: the different professions, and indeed the sciences, have overlapped to an increasing extent; and all alike have felt an ever growing need of exploration and

research to supply the knowledge and the methods still lying beyond their frontiers.

What could be more natural, therefore, than that the various professions should find a common training ground and laboratory within the universities—those ancient, great institutions of our civilization which have had as their aim the pursuit and the inculcation of truth, whether for the greater glory of God or for the satisfaction of a fundamental human urge?

Having in mind the aims of those who have fathered this School of Social Work, supported it, and worked in it, let us look at the human scene that confronts us, to perceive there, if we can, answers to two questions: How far have the purposes which the founders sought to serve been realized in society? and What are the prospects for the future success of those purposes?

As a preliminary to this larger inquiry, we need to look more particularly at the aims of social work. Regret appears frequently in the literature of social work, because its province has not been more clearly defined. Social work educators sometimes complain, too, that they cannot tell precisely what they are training for. Yet in view of the progress and the broadening of each of the professions, to which I have referred, this problem is common to all. Each profession has its doubtful zone. We know well enough that at the heart of social work lie types of knowledge and techniques which are used to assist individuals and families to add to their personal well-being. We should expect that in the boundary zones of the social work area, where uncertainty arises, practitioners from other professions would also be operating and that no lines could be drawn which would mark off the territory of one class of

workers to the exclusion of others. Ministers, physicians, psychiatrists, and lawyers will meet the social worker there, none knowing precisely where his province begins or ends.

It is, in fact, coming to be recognized increasingly that the most significant matters with which each profession deals require also the services of others or else a borrowing of the knowledge and techniques of others. Frequently, individual illness involves mental and social, as well as physical, factors. If the physician cannot deal with them all, he must call in others who can. When it comes to institutional or social problems, the method of interprofessional co-operation is clearly essential. It would be foolhardy to locate a large new factory without consultation among business managers, engineers and architects, public officials, lawyers, and, if wisdom be the guide, experts in sanitation, housing, education, recreation, and other aspects of life in communities. The adoption of an extension of the social security system, the administration of a foreign-aid program, and other measures that come easily to mind call clearly for similar collaboration. It is worthy of special note that the contributions of different experts to such a project often relate, not to separate aspects of it, but to single decisions in which all must take part. It requires many to decide, for example, whether it would be sound fiscally, administratively, psychologically, and politically to dispense with need as the basis for rendering assistance to the aged. When it comes, moreover, to the administration of such matters and to public discussion of them, men and women from each of the specialties involved may have equal competence; and so the head of a great corporation or public agency may come from any one of numerous backgrounds.

Frances Perkins and Harry Hopkins transcended social work as Paul Hoffman and William Rand have transcended business, and many lawyers, engineers, and economists are constantly stepping beyond their special spheres. Jane Addams, rising beyond social work in another way, has joined Abraham Lincoln, Woodrow Wilson, and Louis Brandeis among the revered prophets of American democracy.

In such a state of affairs it is futile to demand a precise definition of the province of social work or of any other profession. Each has its historical starting point and its current core of knowledge and of skills. Commencing with these, its potentialities are unlimited, as they should be, and the ultimate purposes of each are common to all. They are best realized if the workers in each profession can be trained in schools linked with those of other professions in universities; and it is cause for congratulation and confidence that it has come to be so with social work. Dr. Bruno has told us⁴ that it was doubtful until the time of World War I whether social work could qualify as a member of the family of professions. Abraham Flexner thought in 1915 that it could not, because it did not possess an "educationally communicable technique." Shortly afterward, however, Mary Richmond brought about recognition of the case-work technique through her book on social diagnosis. Later the group-work methods were recognized and written about. Like other professions, social work may, as Dr. Bruno suggests, have concentrated too much upon its inner techniques at the expense of due regard for broader knowledge and methods. Few deny, however,

⁴ Frank J. Bruno, "Twenty-five Years of Schools of Social Work," *Social Service Review*, XVIII (1944), 152-62.

that major social problems, lying beyond case work as such, are the concern of social workers, as they are of other professions. To their study and their solution, as Dean Helen Wright has suggested,⁵ the social worker brings skills and insights derived from the profession's inner methods. The schools continue to strive, with increasing knowledge, to develop these skills and their broadened application.

Let us pursue, then, our broader inquiry into social circumstances today, to determine the effectiveness with which social work, together with the other professions, may function now and in the future. We need not search far to find the feature of today's world that conditions professional efforts most vitally. It is the enlarged power of the political state. Harold Laski in his *Grammar of Politics* has pointed out that the political state possesses primacy among social institutions today because it alone among them assumes ultimate responsibility for the interests of people as individual wholes, instead of merely for one aspect or another of their lives. It serves them not merely as producers or consumers or learners but in all of these capacities. There must be some such over-all coordinator in human affairs if conflict and chaos are to be avoided. If the political state were to yield to another organization, that other would take on many of the same aspects; and its power would be an enlarging one under present conditions.

The most important single question about the state is: To what ends shall it discharge its functions? Dean Youngdahl has noted that the business of social work, which is "human relations and

well-being," "is also the business of government."⁶ We have heard the term "welfare state" used as one of reproach in recent years; but in truth there is no other kind of state that is ethically justifiable according to the ideas which social work and democratic political theory hold in common; and this has been the philosophy of the whole main stream of Western culture. We regard service to individual human beings as the aim of all social institutions, whether public or private. It must be the central aim of that institution which we endow with sovereignty and to which we give active or latent authority over all others. Whether government has remained true to this purpose is at the heart of our inquiry.

The recognized reserve of governmental authority to take all necessary steps to serve the general welfare has been translated into more and more public measures for the control of private power, the performance of public services by government, and the defense of the common heritage. In this country as well as elsewhere the tempo of this development has increased enormously during the brief span of time since the George Warren Brown School of Social Work was established. The whole New Deal, the tremendous governmental operations of World War II, and now the huge effort to preserve the peace and prepare for the war that may come, have occurred during this period. We scarcely comprehend, even yet, the scale of the budgets and of the activities of governments that have resulted.

As to personal welfare, the enlarged responsibility of the national government and the preponderance of public welfare

⁵ Helen R. Wright, "Social Work Today: Some Questions." *Social Service Review*, XXIV (1950), 74-78.

⁶ Benjamin Youngdahl, "Social Workers: Stand Up and Be Counted," *Compass*, XXVIII, No. 3 (1947), 21.

activity over private, at least in terms of size of effort, have become accepted. I do not need to recite the legislative and other developments which have produced this result. It is enough to mention the Social Security Act, the state legislation that co-ordinates with it, the welfare work of the Veterans Administration and the Defense Department, the multiplying children's programs, and the growth of governmental welfare work in the international sphere. In terms of personal security, development, and health, we live, consequently, in a different world from that of the 1920's and early thirties. In the formulation and administration of all these measures, social workers have played a major role and continue to do so. To an extent not previously known or contemplated, they guide and serve the political state.

It would be easy simply to celebrate this apparent success of the aims of social workers and the government's adoption of their cause and of their services. All is not well, however. There are signs of retrogression and rumblings of discontent; and in some ways the government which sponsors well-doing threatens to consume the welfare of the wards and beneficiaries of its good measures. We look anxiously at other countries where tyranny stalks the land, oppressing some while serving the advantage of others, and abusing democratic symbols in the process. The welfare state can be made to yield sheep's clothing to totalitarianism. Perhaps it could happen here. Even if the destruction of human dignity and freedom which has occurred under fascism and under communism could not happen here, we would remain disturbed by the extent to which our government consumes the national product, drafts manpower for the armed forces, and threatens civil liberties.

In some ways this phenomenon of harm from government, or the danger of it, is only a normal incident to the creation of powerful instruments of good, whether physical or social. Power can always get out of hand or be abused and so wreak destruction. Our task is to prevent this from happening—to measure power properly, to channel it, and to restrain those who would divert it to harmful ends. We do not shrink from this kind of task in relation to electricity, internal combustion engines, atomic fission, or big business, because we perceive the benefits to be derived from these agencies. No more can we draw back from harnessing and using the power of government to serve welfare. The problems to be solved are those of ways and means.

In estimating these problems, we must take account of certain characteristics of the particular instrument called government which are relevant to our inquiry. The first is that government today has a near-monopoly of the lawful use of coercive physical force against human beings. This power it shares only, to a limited extent, with persons in authority over children and with individuals engaged in immediate self-defense or the defense of others. In this fact lies the main, although not the only, reason for the complete terror which government can arouse. This terror was limited when people could have force at their individual command which might cope with the force of government if resistance were aroused; but in these times small arms are of no avail once the engines of destruction in the hands of a government are turned against its subjects. There is no more striking fact than this in the modern social scene, as the dictatorships bear witness.

The other characteristics of govern-

ment which I shall mention relate to democratic government specifically. A leading feature of government as we know it is that people participate in it through the ballot and by means of petition and public discussion. Because of this, its authority is at once strengthened by readier acceptance, directed to humanly desired ends, and given moral justification. Democratic government, further, is characterized by "checks and balances"; by allocation and separation of powers; and by bills of rights which impose effective restraints upon abuse so long as courts continue to apply them and power to disregard them is not seized. Finally, in modern democracy government employs physical and social science experts and gives scope to their professional standards and sense of responsibility. It has done so in the planning and construction of public works; in the regulation of business, labor, and agriculture; in managing the armed forces; and outstandingly in rendering those services which lie in the special province of social workers.

Because of these characteristics of specifically democratic government, more than for any other reason, our society has made great strides in achieving certain values to which most of us subscribe. To the extent that democratic participation in political affairs has been secured, the sense of dignity and responsibility of individual human beings has been enhanced. It requires only mention of the struggle for women's suffrage and of the continuing effort to secure the political rights of Negroes in the South to remind us how significant this factor is. We have, further, established both opportunity and economic security for individuals to a high degree, despite the enormous increase in population and the disappearance of the western frontier

where many formerly sought advantage. Few among us must cringe or beg for bare subsistence. The foundation of this advance has lain, of course, in the natural resources, the technological development, and the business organization which have created the means of production and brought them together; but it has required the power of government to provide education, to open new territory, to gather statistics and other needed data, to provide social security, to reduce exploitation of workers and secure their right of self-organization, to win for the farmer his rightful share in the common wealth, to protect health and safety, and generally to secure that potential of consumption which is as necessary to a thriving economy as is productive capacity. To a considerable extent through government we are, finally, engaging in an advancing effort to secure to each individual, regardless of race, color, or creed, an inviolate core of immunity from oppression, discrimination, and control. Complete success in this endeavor is essential to individual health, safety, and dignity and to that participation by each person in our common affairs which democratic social organization requires.

Despite our success thus far in achieving these aims, there are features of our society, other than the mere size and power of government, which account for our growing doubts and anxiety. These call for specific consideration.

There is in our system, for one thing, a tendency to reduce the labor of employees to assembly-line routine and to standardize consumption and desires, to which attention has often been called. It has been said that in the United States "productivity has replaced creativity"; and it might be added that consumption has to some extent replaced enjoyment

and discussion has yielded to propaganda. In spite of ourselves, people live and are moved as masses rather than as individuals. The results are felt in frustration, cynicism, preoccupation with material pursuits, and an apparent lessening of individual capacity to reach decisions without stimulation by mass media, whether the issues relate to foreign policy or to a detergent for washing dishes. The temptation is correspondingly strong for seekers after power to attempt to gain it by manipulation. Democratic processes seem correspondingly less secure and reliable.

Our progress in accomplishing improvement through government, accompanied by the demands of the military effort, have caused trouble, too, by pushing hard upon established interests and accustomed attitudes. Most significant for social work is the popular reaction against experts in government. The staffs of welfare agencies have felt its full brunt. The feeling against social workers was strong in Missouri in the 1930's when I knew of it through collaboration with Professor Burke in efforts to secure good administrative provisions in state social security legislation. If this feeling afterward abated, it probably is undergoing a revival today, as it is in much of the nation. It figures prominently in the campaign against so-called "domination" of state and local administration by the federal government, in demands for reduced appropriations, and in the movement to open the welfare rolls to public inspection.

This reaction against experts in government is part of a larger reaction against intellectuals and their work, which has brought universities and faculties under attack and has given quick popularity to the term "egg heads." The creations of learned minds which have

aroused hostility are the economic, political, and social innovations that change accustomed ways of doing things and impair the wealth or power of many who have enjoyed positions of advantage. Most of these measures have been effected through the national government. Hence we have proposals for transferring federal authority to the states, for limiting the federal income tax to 25 per cent, and for restricting the treaty-making power lest it be used to extend federal responsibility in economic and human-rights matters. Professors at work in government are correspondingly less popular than before.

A cause contributing to this revulsion has been the folly or treachery of some of the unstable or unfaithful among the intellectuals, who have succumbed at one time or another to communism. Not only has espionage succeeded occasionally through them, but, aided by the revulsion against it, some of the opponents of innovation are trying to identify reform here and abroad with the enemy behind the iron curtain. Alongside sincere opponents of particular reforms, unprincipled seekers after power do not hesitate to employ the basest tactics to attain their ends. Slander of individuals and entire government agencies through congressional committee proceedings has become commonplace. Under pressure from attackers, loyalty proceedings involving government workers and persons in various areas of private employment have come to lack many of the rudiments of fair play. In the entertainment world there exists a private black list of authors and performers with nothing to sustain it except the unsupported innuendos of self-appointed censors. Test oaths have become the order of the day in large areas of education and public employment, and in federally financed housing

and even in some social security administrations, eligibility to benefits depends upon superficial loyalty tests. We are on the road to creating, without due process, a sizable caste of economic untouchables, with all the poignant human consequences of such a state of affairs.

A rich prize awaits the schemers after power, if they can succeed. If they can discredit democratic government as it has evolved; if they can subjugate the centers of learning and make outcasts of many of the ablest, most sensitive persons among us; if, then, they can dominate the media of mass communication—by these means they can subvert the political state itself and gain control of its engines of coercion. The democratic welfare state would be supplanted by institutionalized intolerance, self-seeking, and oppression.

The attack upon the foundations of our progress comes just at the time when the extension of welfare and of the methods of its attainment has become more important than ever. It is no accident that the prime target of the attackers has been the Department of State and has lately come to embrace the United Nations too; for it is crystal clear that international measures to increase human well-being, such as can be accomplished through these agencies, are essential to the peace of the world and to the continuance of democracy at home. Throughout the world the cry for education, for decent subsistence, for self-respect and self-determination, and for a place in the sun is insistent and unmistakable. If it can be satisfied, opportunity will continue for our way of life and our way of progress to grow stronger and more beneficent. If it is not satisfied, conflict and disorder may serve the purposes of those among us who seek after power—or so they hope.

Another danger, stemming from the international situation, must be reckoned with. It has been said recently that “the greatest of all perils in these next few years is that we shall build up only military strength,” neglecting the real foundations of our stability and progress. “If we trust only in military strength . . . it is as certain as that night follows day that we shall become demoralized and lose our patience and forbearance and be tempted into total war. If military might is the only might we have, we shall surely use it. And then, win or lose, catastrophe will overwhelm us. But if we are stronger in other ways, stronger in mind and the power of reason, stronger in nerve and fortitude, stronger through the cleansing of our national life, stronger through a wider benevolence, stronger through a higher justice and a deepening unity—if we are stronger in these other ways as well as in military might, we have the hope”⁷ of success.

We must, then, develop the knowledge, the methods, and the spirit that have brought us where we are. In the world sphere, as well as in the national, understanding among the most diverse groups is to be obtained, civil liberties and economic opportunity are to be assured to all, the basic elements of personal security are to be placed within the reach of each person, the right of individuals to participate in political affairs is to be guaranteed, and the rich contributions of national and ethnic groups to the common culture are to be encouraged. I do not say that the American, or even the Western, way of life is to be imposed upon all; but we believe we have learned through experience that these fundamental aspects of life in society, in

⁷ A. Powell Davies, *The Churches and the Fight against Communism* (Washington, D.C.: Publication Committee of All Souls Unitarian Church, 1952).

some form, are essential to human fulfillment. They must be made universal, even in the face of the struggles for power and the hatreds that divide us now.

The way forward is the way we have come, stretching on to new horizons. The dangers that threaten must be met by firmness and by adherence to the best in our experience and our tradition. Our professions and our universities, marshaling their resources anew, must play their part in solving the problems that confront us, enlarging the boundaries of knowledge and ministering to the welfare of human beings everywhere.

We shall proceed in accordance with American history and the American tradition itself. We shall be seeking to secure life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all men; we shall be trying to establish and strengthen just government with the consent of the governed. We do not ask for certainty as to the ultimate outcome, such as the human adventure does not afford. We in this group lack even the assurance of yester-

year that these buildings we revere will stand for long as shelters of service and of learning and as symbols of the values that inspire our endeavor. But we are grateful for the heritage they embody, for the opportunity to improve and extend it, and for the companionship of our endeavor. We are grateful, too, for the knowledge that, as Jerome Nathanson has just reminded us,⁸ the universe "supports our best as well as our worst, our highest as well as our lowest," giving them, at least, an equal chance to survive.

There is strength enough in our inspiration and our knowledge to secure that enlarged service to the future's client, mankind itself, which present circumstances portend. Welfare in the modern state, so notably advanced within our time, can yet become welfare throughout the world.

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Received March 21, 1953

⁸ Jerome Nathanson, "Sources of Courage," *Standard*, XXXIX (1952), 237-43.