

ED 083 077

SO 006 289

AUTHOR Gil, David G.
TITLE Praxis in the Human Services as a Political Act.
PUB DATE 27 Feb 73
NOTE 26p.; Presented at the 19th Annual Program Meeting of the Council on Social Work Education, San Francisco, California, February, 1973

EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.65 HC-\$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Activism; Change Agents; Disadvantaged Groups; Economic Change; Economic Factors; *Human Services; Models; Policy Formation; Political Attitudes; *Political Science; Political Socialization; Professional Services; Revolution; Role Perception; *Social Action; *Social Change; *Social Problems; Social Systems; Sociocultural Patterns; Speeches

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to develop a rationale for the conscious integration of a political component into professional practice. The rationale involves a re-definition of professional roles in the human services as a powerful means of political struggle. The aim of the political strategy is to eliminate the sources of social, economic and political inequalities, the underlying causes of social problems with which the human services profess to be concerned. A model for the study of social problems and policies is illustrated by a chart of the forces which interact with key processes of social policies. The poverty syndrome is used as an example in investigating the sources of inequalities within capitalism. A strategy to eliminate such sources is to replace the economic and political system with an alternative, achieved through a fundamental change of consciousness of social reality and the perceptions of self-interest by much of the population. Consequently, professional practice in the human services would become an important factor in effecting this comprehensive cultural and institutional change. This paper is based on the author's book, "Unravelling Social Policy: Theory, Analysis and Political Action Toward Social Equality." (Author/KSM)

Brandeis University

The Florence Heller Graduate School for Advanced Studies in Social Welfare

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

PRAXIS IN THE HUMAN SERVICES
AS A POLITICAL ACT

David G. Gil
Professor of Social Policy

Presented at the 19th Annual Program Meeting of the Council on Social Work Education, San Francisco, California, February 27, 1973. This paper was prepared within the Social Policy Study Program supported by the Office of Child Development, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (PR-288-1A-C2). The paper is based on the author's book, Unravelling Social Policy: Theory, Analysis, and Political Action Toward Social Equality, Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman Publishing Co., 1973.

FILMED FROM BEST AVAILABLE COPY

1. Introduction

My purpose in this paper is to develop a rationale for, and to suggest approaches to, the conscious integration of a political component into professional practice. Involved in this is a re-definition or re-conceptualization of professional roles in the human services as potentially powerful means of a radical, revolutionary political strategy. The overall aim of such a political strategy is to eliminate the systemic sources and dynamics of social, economic, and political inequalities -- in my view, the major underlying causes of the entire array of social problems with which the human services profess to be concerned.

Lest my explicit position be misunderstood and thus block communication and dialogue, I should like to emphasize right at the outset that the terms "radical" and "revolution" are, in correct English usage, not synonymous with physical force and violence. Physical force and violence are merely one possible set of means of revolutionary struggles, and, in my view, on both theoretical and practical grounds, not very appropriate means. As used here, the terms "radical" and "revolution" reflect a theoretical position and a goal concept. According to this position, professional intervention should identify and attack the roots rather than the symptoms of social problems, and, hence, should promote the transformation of the existing dysfunctional, alienating social order into one conducive to the fulfillment of the true human needs of all people, rather than facilitate the adaptation of people to the systemic requirements of the prevailing order and the vested interest groups that dominate it.

As for the notion to politicize professional roles, I submit that this is not an innovation, but merely an effort to do consciously what happens anyway, unacknowledged, and without sufficient awareness. It has long been known that one latent function of professional practice is political stabilization of society, and, hence, such practice has political implications and consequences, whether we

intend it that way or not. The widespread notion that professional practice is politically neutral is, therefore, erroneous and naive. This very notion is, itself, a politically powerful myth that serves the interests of groups benefiting from the existing social order by effectively neutralizing potential challengers of that order, and by contributing, thus, to its perpetuation and, alas, the perpetuation of social problems intrinsic to it. Politicizing professional roles as conceived here would, therefore, merely involve to acknowledge their intrinsic political function, and to shape it consciously in harmony with specified objectives of professional intervention.

2. A Conceptual Model for the Study of Social Policies and Social Problems

Having started this presentation with a condensed version of my conclusions I am now turning to the ideas and arguments leading to these conclusions. Human services professionals and others interested in overcoming social problems by eliminating their sources and dynamics in the fabric of society must first attempt to identify these sources and dynamics. Unfortunately, the established social and behavioral sciences whose help professionals enlist in efforts to unravel the sources and dynamics of social problems, do not offer definitive answers. Instead, social scientists tend to argue that the causal contexts of social problems are far too complex to be clearly understood, and, hence, specific causal chains cannot be explicated. What social science research usually discovers are more, or less, "significant" associations and correlations among selected, relevant, or irrelevant, variables, and, of course, hypotheses for further investigation -- a covert appeal for support of further research. The conventions and rituals of scientific research and the canons of evidence permit no more.

Many scholars have come to suspect, over the years, that the limited achievement of research into the causation of social problems was due, in part, to the

prevailing fragmentation of the social sciences into sociology, economics, political science, anthropology, psychology, etc. This fragmentation by academic disciplines is reflected in arbitrary, single-dimensional abstractions and distortions of multi-variate human reality which inevitably leads to faulty formulations of issues and of research design, and, hence, to doubtful, and often useless, findings. Obviously, relevant and valid answers cannot be obtained unless relevant and valid questions are asked. And to generate such questions one first needs a comprehensive, integrated, theoretical model of social, economic, and political reality. The existing fragmented theoretical models of the separate social sciences do not meet this requirement, and, hence, cannot but keep us from posing the proper questions, and obtaining valid answers.

Their arbitrary fragmentation is not the only dysfunctional aspect of the social sciences in terms of their usefulness for discovering and overcoming the sources and dynamics of social problems. Yet, for purposes of the present argument, we need go no further in the critique of the social sciences. Instead, I now wish to specify the relevant variables of an integrative, conceptual model which combines applicable knowledge from various social and behavioral sciences into a meaningful and reliable representation of social reality, useful to the study of social policies and social problems. While the task of developing such a theoretical model may seem overwhelming, once accomplished it appears actually quite simple and self-evident. What matters, however, is not whether a model is complex or simple, but whether it serves its purpose, which, in the present context, is to clarify specified aspects of reality as a basis for identifying and attacking the sources and dynamics of social problems.

The cornerstone of such an action-oriented, conceptual model is the often disregarded proposition that social problems are largely the inevitable consequences of man-designed arrangements -- "social policies" -- rather than of

natural phenomena. While these arrangements or policies are devised by humans over time through constant interaction with their natural environment, and while basic bio-psychological attributes are important factors of the policies by which humans regulate life in society, it is, nevertheless, erroneous and misleading to interpret specific social arrangements, as is often done, as "natural," and, hence, as unchangeable. Viewing social policies, and the social problems they generate, as "natural" is conducive to passive and apathetic acceptance of, and submission to, existing policy systems as exemplified in the traditional view, "The poor will always be with you." On the other hand, recognizing the decisive role of humans in the shaping of the policies by which they live reveals immediately that it is within their collective power, if they so choose, to redesign existing human arrangements whenever they prove not to be conducive to the pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness for all. This, by the way, is one of the essential messages of the American Declaration of Independence, which still makes excellent and essential reading in 1973 as one of the more eloquent arguments on behalf of the principle of revolution.

In accordance with the conceptual model suggested here, man-designed social arrangements or social policies are the major determinants of (1) the overall quality of life in a society, (2) the circumstances of living of individuals and groups, and, hence, (3) the nature of all intra-societal relationships among individuals, groups, and society as a whole. The model further indicates that these "output" variables of social policy systems are shaped largely through the social structuring of three key processes which can be found to operate in any human society, irrespective of its evolutionary stage. These key processes are:*

* For a detailed discussion of the conceptual model of social policies, its input and output variables, and its utilization in the analysis and synthesis of social policies, readers are referred to the author's book: Unravelling Social Policy: Theory, Analysis, and Political Action Toward Social Equality, Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman Publishing Co., 1973.

1. The development of material or symbolic, life-sustaining and life-enhancing resources (goods and services);
2. The "division of labor," or the allocation of individuals and groups to specific positions ("statuses") within the total array of societal tasks and functions, involving corresponding roles, and prerogatives intrinsic to these roles; and
3. The distribution to individuals and groups of specific rights to material and symbolic, life-sustaining and life-enhancing, resources (goods and services) through general or specific entitlements, "status"-specific rewards, and general or specific constraints.

The universality of these key processes derives from their origin in certain intrinsic characteristics of the human condition, namely, (1) the bio-psychological drive to survive, (2) the necessity to organize work in order to obtain relatively scarce, life-sustaining resources from the natural environment, and (3) the necessity to devise some system, and principles, for distributing these life-sustaining resources throughout a society. Obviously then, the overall quality of life of a society and the circumstances of living of its members depend largely on interaction with its natural setting and on the quality and quantity of resources it generates through investing human labor into its environment. Clearly, also, the circumstances of living of individuals and groups, and their relations with each other and with society as a whole, depend largely on the specific positions or "statuses" to which they are assigned, or which they attain, within the total array of societal tasks and functions, and on the specific rights they obtain, to concrete and symbolic resources within the totality of resources available for distribution by a society. The key processes of resource development, status allocation, and rights distribution are, consequently, the underlying key

variables of all social policies, and constitute thus the dynamic elements of the conceptual model proposed here.

The possibilities of variation in the way these key processes operate and interact in different societies at different times are numerous, and correspondingly numerous are, therefore, the variations of specific social policies and of entire systems of social policies. All changes of social policies and of entire systems of social policies involve, obviously, some changes in one or more of these key processes. Implied in this proposition is the frequently disregarded corollary that significant changes in human relations, in the quality of life, and in the circumstances of living will occur only when a society is willing to introduce significant modifications in the scope and quality of the resources it develops, and in the criteria by which it allocates statuses, and distributes rights to its members. New social policies which involve no, or merely insignificant, modifications of these key processes and their interactions, can, therefore, not be expected to result in significant changes of a given status quo with respect to the quality of life, the circumstances of living, and the human relations in a society. Anti-poverty policies throughout the history of American society are telling illustrations of this obvious fact. These policies consistently involved merely minor changes in resource development, in the allocation of statuses, and in the distribution of rights to deprived segments of the population, and, thus, have failed to produce expected changes in the quality of life, the circumstances of living, and in human relations. They always were, and continue to be, merely new variations on old themes.

Some further comments are indicated here concerning the interaction between two of the key processes of social policies, status allocation and rights distribution. Many human societies, including our own, distribute most concrete and symbolic rights as rewards for status incumbency and role performance, rather

than as universal entitlements by virtue of citizenship. This linkage between rights and statuses tends to result in considerable inequalities of rights among incumbents of different statuses as statuses are usually valued and ranked differentially. It is important to note in this context that while differences in statuses and roles are an essential aspect of task organization in a modern society, inequalities of rights are not an essential consequence of such differences, prevailing sociological, psychological, and economic theories notwithstanding. Many societies have, however, adopted inequality of rights as if it were an essential corollary of the division of labor, and have institutionalized inequality of rewards for different positions. From a theoretical perspective it is, of course, entirely feasible to distribute rights equally among all members of a society, by means of universal entitlements, irrespective of the different positions they occupy.

The linkage of rights to statuses is usually justified by prevailing theories concerning incentives and human motivation. It is claimed, axiomatically, that in order to recruit personnel for the diversity of statuses in a society, prospective incumbents must be attracted through incentives built into the reward system. While this may be a fairly accurate description of human behavior in our and in many other societies, it does not explain the sources and dynamics underlying this response pattern, nor does it answer the important question whether this response pattern is biologically determined and, thus, the only possible behavioral alternative.

Biological, psychological, and sociological research indicate that human motivation is a function of biologically given factors and socially learned tendencies. The relative importance of these two sets of factors is not known, but there seems to be little question that learned tendencies are a powerful force of human behavior. Based on these considerations, it seems that existing patterns

of motivation and incentive response reflect existing patterns of socialization, and that variations in these socialization patterns could produce over time different motivational attitudes and response patterns. One is thus led to conclude that the patterns of human motivation used to justify structured inequalities in the distribution of rights in many existing societies are not fixed by nature, but are open to modification by means of variations in processes of socialization. The view that man responds primarily to the profit motive is not necessarily a correct indication of mankind's social and cultural potential, but merely a reflection of the dominant ideologies of non-egalitarian societies.*

The key processes of social policy interact with various natural and societal forces represented schematically in the accompanying chart. Of special significance among these forces are the dominant value premises or ideology of a society -- its basic organizing principles -- which tend to constrain the malleability of the key processes, and, hence, of the policies. Not all the numerous values of a society are, however, equally relevant to the shaping of its policies. Since social policies involve primarily developmental, allocative, and distributive decisions, the following value dimensions which bear directly upon these types of decisions are most relevant in this context: equality vs. inequality; collectivism vs. self-centeredness; and cooperation vs. competition. Thus, a society which values "rugged individualism" and competitiveness in pursuit of self-interest, and which considers inequality of circumstances of living a "natural" order of human existence, will tend to exploit its natural and human resources, and to preserve structured inequalities through its processes of resource development, status allocation, and rights distribution. Conversely, a society which values cooperation in pursuit of collective interests, and which

* David Macarov, Incentives to Work, San Francisco, Cal.: Jossey-Bass, Inc., Publishers, 1970.

Chart 1. Natural and Societal Forces Limiting, Influencing, and Interacting with the Key Processes and General Domain of Social Policies.

A. Limiting Conditions	B. Intra- and Inter-Societal Force Field	C. Constraining Variables	Social Policies	
			<u>Key Processes</u>	<u>Common Domain</u>
1. Physical and biological properties of a society's natural setting	1. Intra-societal interest group conflicts		1. Resource development	1. Overall quality of life
2. Biological and basic psychological properties of man	2. Society's stage of development in cultural, economic, and technological spheres	Beliefs	2. Status allocation	2. Circumstances of living of individuals and groups
	3. Size and institutional differentiation and complexity of society	Ideologies	3. Rights distribution	
	4. Personal, cultural, economic, and political interaction with extra-societal forces	Customs		3. Intra-societal human relations
		Traditions		

Note: The forces represented in this diagram do not exert their influence merely in a linear progression from left to right, but interact with each other in multiple and circular ways.

is truly committed to the notion that all humans, irrespective of their individual differences, are intrinsically of equal worth and dignity, and, hence, are entitled to equal social, economic, civil, and political rights, will tend to develop social policies involving rational development, utilization, and preservation of natural and human resources, equal access to statuses, and equal rights to material and symbolic life-sustaining and life-enhancing resources.

While dwelling briefly on the importance of values, it should be noted that public discussion of social policies in the United States tends to neglect this crucial dimension. Instead, major, and often exclusive, emphasis tends to be placed on technical matters and on means, while the goals and values which policies are to attain are pushed to the background. Technical matters are indeed important, and alternative means need to be evaluated in terms of effectiveness and efficiency. However, unless goals and values serve as main criteria for policy development and evaluation, the preoccupation with means and technologies appears to be an exercise in futility.

3. The Sources and Dynamics of Social Problems in the Fabric of Capitalism:

Having identified through the conceptual model the universal key processes and output domain of social policies, and having stressed the crucial role of the policy-relevant value premises or basic organizing principles of a society, we are now ready to resume the exploration of the sources and dynamics of social problems. Let us examine as an illustrative case the poverty syndrome, no doubt, one of the most disturbing and pervasive social problems.

Using the conceptual model it is easy to recognize the social-structural dynamics of poverty in prevailing systematic inequalities in access to statuses, in the distribution of social, economic, and political rights and liberties, and in patterns of resource development derived from, and in turn reinforcing, the

existing imbalanced distribution of rights. Government statistics reveal a stubborn stability of these inequalities over many decades. Thus, the distribution of income flow from all sources, an important index of the distribution of rights in a market economy, has maintained the following characteristic shape ever since World War II in spite of the so-called "war on poverty" and hosts of other anti-poverty programs. The lowest fifth of families ranked by income receive about 5 percent of aggregate income, while the highest fifth receive over 40 percent, and the top 5 percent of families receive about 15 percent of income. Most recent government figures even suggest that the share of the lowest fifth has been decreasing.* The distribution of wealth, perhaps a more significant index of rights than the income distribution, is even more lopsided than the distribution of income flow. Not surprisingly, government statistics on ownership of wealth are almost non-existent.

Differential distributions of income and wealth, major factors of poverty, conceived in relative terms, are, in any society, functions of the prevailing economic and political systems. Accordingly, we are led to conclude that poverty and its complex social and psychological correlates in the United States are inevitable consequences of the economic and political dynamics of "free-enterprise" capitalism and its derivative versions, national and multi-national, oligopoly and monopoly, corporate capitalism. It is, therefore, to the essential features of capitalism that we must turn next in our efforts to unravel the sources and dynamics of poverty and related social problems.**

* Peter Henle, "Exploring the Distribution of Earned Income," Monthly Labor Review, Vol. 95, No. 12, Dec. 1972.

Letitia Upton and Nancy Lyons, Basic Facts: Distribution of Personal Income and Wealth in the United States, Cambridge, Mass: Cambridge Institute, 1972.

** For a systematic study of capitalism see: Howard Sherman, Radical Political Economy, New York & London: Basic Books, Inc., 1972. Richard C. Edwards, Michael Reich, Thomas E. Weisskopf, eds., The Capitalist System, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1972.

Capitalism as an economic-political system is organized around the value premises of rugged individualism, competition in pursuit of self-interest, and inequality of human worth and rights. Its basic institutional principle is the sanctity of private ownership of, and control over, the economic sources of life, including land, other natural resources, and means of production. This central principle of capitalism, it should be noted, is a blatant contradiction with the ancient Judeo-Christian concept of collective ownership of the sources of livelihood of the people as expressed symbolically in the scripture: "The land is mine says the Lord." American Indians and many tribes in Africa and Asia hold similar views concerning the indivisibility and collective control of tribal lands.

The central driving force or source of energy of capitalism is the profit motive, which is reflected in the constant drive to maximize the profits of individual and corporate entrepreneurs, the owners of various forms of capital, through competition and collusion in the marketplace. This acquisitive thrust, which is aided by the inheritance principle and by a broad range of tax and other policies in support of private business activities, results over time in constantly increasing accumulation and concentration of economic resources, and in corresponding concentration of political power and influence.

The values, principles, and dynamics of capitalism give rise to several kinds of exploitation. First of all, there is the exploitation of the workers-producers, the large segment of the population who own and control little or no capital and who, in order to survive, must sell their labor in the market for a mere fraction of the value of the products they create. For the profits of capitalists, the returns on their investments (rent, interest, and dividends) are nothing but parts of the fruits of labor, or, in Marx's terms, "surplus value," of which the workers-producers are deprived or "alienated" under prevailing institutional

arrangements. A second form of exploitation is closely related to the former. This is the business profit or mark-up; that part of market prices of goods and services which exceeds their real production and distribution costs, and which workers-producers must pay in their roles as consumers when buying back their own, alienated products. We may note here again that the Judeo-Christian tradition prohibits the charging of interest on loaned capital, and, thus, symbolically rules out some kinds of exploitation institutionalized by the capitalist system.

Exploitation under the acquisitive orientation of capitalism is not confined, however, to depriving workers of the full value of their products. Other aspects of the greedy, profit-motivated exploitation are evident in the thoughtless depletion and destruction of such natural resources as land, forests, animals, mineral deposits, water, and air; and in the immense waste implicit in such economically irrational practices as built-in obsolescence, annual model changes, marginal non-functional differences among equivalent products, packaging and non-utilitarian frills on products, emphasis on production of luxury goods in spite of large-scale unmet needs for essential basic goods, competitive and deceptive advertising, massive diversion of human and material resources to military production, wars, and space spectaculars, etc.

Exploitation is implicit also in the qualitative aspects of "efficient" production processes. Workers have little control over the usually dehumanizing nature of these processes, nor over the nature of the very products they create. They are viewed and treated as means, or "factors of production," rather than as ends or "masters of production." These aspects of the production context have resulted in widespread psychological alienation of production, service, and office workers, and, of late also, of management personnel. This growing alienation and its multi-faceted, negative consequences for business, workers, and

consumers is gradually becoming a cause for serious concern to the management of enterprises and even to the U.S. Government.*

The capitalist drive for profit and its corollary, exploitation, show little respect for national boundaries. The large scope of worldwide, economic, and political penetration of U.S. business interests, which is often perceived as a modern form of colonialism and imperialism, is reflected in a recent report of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research of the U.S. Department of State.** According to this report the U.S. controls nearly 30 percent of the "Planetary Product" though the U.S. population is less than 6 percent of mankind. Obviously, there is a significant linkage between the expansionary tendencies of U.S. capitalism in search for profit and imperialistic tendencies of U.S. foreign policies. Logical by-products of these tendencies are military adventures and other, less covert, forms of foreign intervention all over the globe, including support of many "anti-communist," oppressive, military dictatorships, and subversion of, and economic sanctions against, elected socialist governments such as in Chile, as well as the far-reaching influence in our own society of the military-industrial complex.

In reviewing briefly the essential features of capitalism we noted that efforts to maximize profits tend to be the overriding considerations in business decisions, although this may not always be evident in certain short-range decisions. According to the theoretical models of capitalistic market economies under conditions of perfect competition (which have never been realized in any modern, industrial society), the profit-oriented decisions of numerous, competing, individual enterprises should automatically result, in the aggregate, in the most

* See the recent H.E.W. study Work in America, Washington, D.C.: Superintendent of Documents, 1972. See also: Andre Gorz, Strategy for Labor, Boston: Beacon Press, 1969.

** U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, The World's Product at the Turn of the Decade: Recessional, RESS-54, Sept. 12, 1972.

efficient allocation and utilization of the human and material resources of a society. Moreover, these uncoordinated, separate decisions of entrepreneurs in competitive free markets are also supposed to assure the satisfaction of the needs of the entire population. Any one familiar with the prevailing modes and priorities of resource allocation and utilization in American society, and with the actual level of satisfaction of even such basic human needs as food, shelter, clothing, transportation, health care, and education, need not be told that the capitalist theories and promises of smooth and efficient self-regulation of supply and demand, of prices, and of resource allocation, by Adam Smith's "invisible hand," are merely a cruel hoax. Capitalism never intended, nor succeeded, to satisfy the basic and more complex needs of entire populations, for doing so would preclude profits and exploitation. Rather than organizing production and distribution to satisfy the real needs of all people, capitalism tends first to generate, and then to cater to, distorted needs in its constant drive for ever larger profits. Widespread, constant poverty and deprivation, cyclical depressions, and wasteful, high rates of unemployment and underemployment which exceed by far officially reported levels, and which would be even higher but for our vast military production and repeated involvement in wars, clearly demonstrate the mythical character of prevailing capitalist economic models and theories.

The conceptual model presented earlier in this discussion enables us to recognize the fallacies of capitalist theories which may more fittingly be referred to as ideologies. To summarize then, capitalism as an economic and political system is a cluster of related social policies shaped by the values and dynamics of competitive pursuit of narrowly-perceived self-interest, and by an implicit concept of humans as intrinsically of unequal worth. The three key policy processes of resource development, status allocation, and rights distribution conform to the profit-oriented, exploitative, and non-egalitarian tendencies of capitalism

according to which natural resources and humans are objects of exploitation for privately controlled capital rather than subjects in their own rights. On the "output" side of the capitalist policy cluster we find, consequently: (a) gradual deterioration of the overall quality of life in rural, suburban, and urban environments; (b) great differences in the circumstances of living of various population segments, ranging from masses of people living in abject poverty, deprivation, and apathy, through a constantly striving, hard-pressed, discontented, and insecure middle class, living in pseudo-affluence, to a small, isolated upper class, living in wasteful luxuries; and (c) an intensely pathological quality of human relations characterized by alienation, insecurity, anxiety, loneliness, isolation, escapism, superficiality, self-centeredness, competitiveness, hostility, exploitation, mistrust, and nearly complete absence of truly meaningful mutual bonds.

4. Implications: A Revolutionary Strategy and its Consequences for the Human Services Professions

Our illustrative case-study of the sources and dynamics of the poverty syndrome has led to the conclusion that this social problem is an inevitable, structural consequence of the economic and political dynamics of capitalism. At the same time we realized also that many other social problems, such as psychological alienation, are intrinsic to capitalism. Having identified these causal links, the requirements of an effective strategy for the elimination of the poverty syndrome seem now self-evident. Such a strategy must aim to replace an economic and political system of which poverty is an intrinsic aspect with an alternative system which is so constituted as to preclude poverty as a structural possibility. Such a system would be shaped by alternative value premises of cooperation in pursuit of collective interests, and by an implicit concept of humans as intrinsically of equal worth, irrespective of their individual differences, and as entitled to equal social, economic, civil, and political rights and liberties.

The key processes of social policies, and, through them, the political and economic institutions in such an alternative social order would conform in their operations to these alternative value premises and concepts. Land, other natural resources, and means of production would be owned and controlled collectively and would be developed, utilized, and conserved in a planned and rational manner so as to meet the real needs of all people and to preclude waste and destruction. Access to statuses would be open on an equal basis, and rights and liberties would be distributed equally, as universal entitlements, irrespective of individual statuses. It should be noted in this context that equality as conceived here, following R. H. Tawney's eloquent exposition,* is not to be achieved through monotonous uniformity, but through thoughtful and flexible consideration of individual differences and needs. Exploitation in any form will be prevented through appropriate institutional arrangements in production, distribution, consumption, and governance, and psychological alienation will thus be overcome. The overall quality of life will gradually improve as circumstances of living are equalized for all, and as human relations take on a healthy, constructive, caring, and positive quality.

Clearly then, poverty cannot be eliminated without a total revolution of our existing social and economic order, a revolution of value premises, organizing principles, and basic concepts of man, and a corresponding revolution of social, economic, and political institutions. That does not mean, it should be noted, that the scope of poverty could not be reduced within the existing order. Such a reduction is possible through significant reforms. We should realize, however, that such reforms within the capitalist system cannot overcome the dynamics and

* R. H. Tawney, Equality, London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1964. (First published in 1931)

the corresponding alienating and dehumanizing attitudes of self-centeredness, competition, and of socially-structured inequalities, the very roots of the poverty syndrome and many other social problems. We thus are faced with a simple choice. If we are committed to preserve the capitalist system and are unwilling to replace it with a humanistic, egalitarian alternative, we better get used to living with the inevitable by-products of capitalism, and, perhaps, even learn to like them. On the other hand, if we find these by-products utterly unacceptable, we have no choice but to eliminate their source, capitalism.

We now seem ready to consider the integration of a conscious, radical, political component into professional practice in the human services, and the transformation of this practice from an instrument of systems maintenance into one of revolutionary praxis. However, before articulating the specific contributions professional practice can bring to a revolutionary strategy, I need to sketch my views on the general principles of such a strategy.

I consider replacing the prevailing alienating, competitive, capitalist social order with a humanistic, egalitarian, cooperative one to be in the true interest of nearly everyone in our society and not merely in the interest of deprived segments of our population. For the existing social order oppresses not only deprived groups, but prevents the vast majority of citizens from leading meaningful, harmonious lives, and from realizing their inherent human potential. If, then, the revolution is in nearly everyone's true human interest, it does not seem valid to view it in conflict model terms, as a zero-sum context, where currently deprived population segments are the "winners" and the current middle and upper classes the "losers." Rather, the revolution is to be viewed as a truly liberating process for all with everyone coming out a "winner" in humanistic terms. Though acknowledged theoretically by many past and present revolutionary movements, this concept has not been integrated adequately into revolutionary strategy.

The major obstacles to a revolutionary transformation of our society at the present time are the existing social, economic, and political institutional arrangements, and the corresponding, dominant consciousness of nearly all groups in the population according to which the capitalist system either already serves their interests or will eventually do so. Most groups are ready to struggle for their perceived interests within the existing system and fail to see that such struggles can obviously not succeed for everyone. Not only must there always be losers in a competitive economic and political marketplace, but also the "winners" cannot achieve a meaningful existence because of the intrinsic social and psychological dynamics of that system. Other obstacles to the revolutionary process are uncertainty about the reality of an alternative social order for the United States, and, related to this, a vague fear of the unknown. There is also fear and rejection of the little that is known from selective and often biased information about various past and ongoing revolutions against capitalist systems.

In view of these considerations it seems that a revolutionary strategy for the United States should aim to overcome the prevailing misconceptions, or "false consciousness," concerning the complex realities, and especially the real economic and social "costs and benefits," of capitalism and of a humanistic, egalitarian alternative social system. Such educational or, rather, re-educational, efforts should be directed at every segment of the population rather than merely at oppressed groups, for, as I have suggested above, the revolution is for everyone, as it is in everybody's truest human interest. Accordingly, no groups or individuals, whatever their current social positions, should be cast in the image of enemies of the people and of the revolution, for such images tend to turn into self-fulfilling prophecies. They prevent communication to important and powerful segments of the population and undermine the potential for consciousness change among those labeled enemies. Such labeling also tends to invite and mobilize

action in defense of the status quo through repressive resistance to the revolutionary process. Thus, the false consciousness of powerful groups is merely reinforced. While, then, "personalizing the enemy" and expressing hostility toward him may unify oppressed groups and aid in overcoming their false consciousness, it seems certainly counter-productive in terms of an effective overall revolutionary strategy. Revolutionary interpretation and reeducation as conceived here should, therefore, identify the "enemy" not in specific individuals and abstract groups, such as the "ruling class," but in the prevailing non-egalitarian, competitive, oppressive, and exploitative value premises and organizing principles, in the institutional arrangements and social policies derived from these values and principles, and in the destructive interpersonal and intergroup relations and conflicts generated by these arrangements and policies. Such an interpretation should also reveal how we all, oppressed and oppressors alike, are trapped in, and act in accordance with, the same dehumanizing, irrational arrangements which humans have created and continue to maintain, and, hence, how the liberation of every group depends on the liberation of all the groups from the shackles of the existing order.*

The revolutionary strategy which I advocate is thus based primarily on reason and on man's capacity to use his intellect critically and creatively. While judicious use of civil disobedience, and dynamic, non-violent resistance are certainly appropriate means in terms of this strategy, the use of physical force and violence is contraindicated on various ethical, theoretical, and practical grounds. Not only are force and violence intrinsically incompatible with the revolutionary aims, but they are also unlikely to change the perceptions and consciousness of people.

* Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, New York: Herder and Herder, 1970.

Summing up these thoughts on strategy, a true revolution requires fundamental changes of consciousness concerning the social reality and the perceptions of self-interest on the part of large segments of the population. A true revolution is, therefore, a cultural change process, and not merely an institutional and structural one. These two change processes are, of course, very closely related to, and constantly interact with, each other. To advance such comprehensive, cultural, and institutional change processes in the United States, in spite of the prevailing mind-crippling and indoctrinating influences of our educational systems and our media of mass communication and entertainment, we need to organize a dynamic, non-violent, revolutionary liberation movement. A major function of such a movement is to unravel, by means of systematic counter-communications and reeducation, the illusions and distortions disseminated perpetually by the dominant communications media, which tend to reinforce the prevailing misconceptions and false consciousness of the population concerning capitalism and possible alternative systems.

Professional practice in the human services could become an important factor of such an evolving liberation movement if large numbers of practitioners in health, education, and welfare services would redefine their individual and professional roles in political terms. Professional practice seems particularly well suited for counter-communication functions aimed at overcoming false consciousness, as its primary operational mode is communication and interaction around basic human needs and service-programs, with individuals, groups, organizations, communities, or even larger and more complex human aggregates. The quality, content, and thrust of professional practice must, of course, be modified significantly if it is to unmask, rather than sustain, existing illusions, to unravel, rather than to cover up, the causes of social problems, and to promote identification with a liberation movement, rather than adjustment to the status quo.

The conceptualization of practice in the human services suggested here involves conscious politicizing of this practice by integrating into it counter-communications aimed at overcoming false consciousness and at attacking, thus, social problems at their roots. Because of this, this practice model is incompatible with the now-prevailing, systems-maintenance orientation of the human services. Professionals in these services have, of course, been aware for many decades of their systems-maintenance and social control roles and have struggled in vain with the dilemmas implicit in this situation. To ease the burden of these intrinsic contradictions of the human services context, professionals have tried to overcome them by arbitrarily de-politicizing practice. The political context of social problems, and, hence, of primary prevention, was recognized; but was split off from professional practice, and this arbitrary split was then rationalized conceptually. Accordingly, systems change efforts were assigned to social action units of professional agencies and organizations, and to political activities of individual professionals functioning as private citizens, while professional practice was naively defined as politically neutral. Yet, as pointed out earlier in this paper, the notion of political neutrality of professional practice is an illusion, since political neutralization of a large professional group constitutes in itself a significant, though covert, political act in defense of the status quo. The proposed conceptualization of professional practice as a conscious political act attempts to overcome this dysfunctional, status quo-serving, political neutralization of practice, by restoring the essential political component to the very center of practice. Obviously, there are many personal dilemmas and organizational conflicts implicit in the approach proposed here, and various difficulties may be expected in translating this philosophy into actual practice.

As for the personal dilemmas and the organizational conflicts inherent in the integration of a political reeducation function into professional practice in

the human services, considerable resistance may be expected from the organizations employing these professionals, as these organizations are linked, directly or indirectly, into the existing social order, its policies, and value premises. The solution to these dilemmas derives from the notion of individual responsibility for ethical action. In contrast with "organization-men" such as Lieutenant Kelly at Hi Lai and Adolph Eichman at Auschwitz, professionals are expected not to identify with organizational philosophies and not to blindly follow organizational directives when these philosophies and directives clash with basic human rights and social justice which they are committed to promote. This means that those who accept the conceptualization of an integrated, conscious, political-professional role will have to act thoughtfully in accordance with their ethical commitments in spite of organizational resistance, and will thus become focal points in a network of an emerging counter culture bent upon transforming the existing institutional system from within.

Politically informed practice in the human services, as conceived here, should be clearly distinguished from indoctrination and manipulation. For such practice is meant to be truly liberating in the fullest sense of this concept, as it aims to open up new vistas of choice for individuals and groups, even while facilitating maximum utilization on their part of now-available resources and services. Practice with an integrated revolutionary perspective involves consistent attempts to bring into consciousness the multiple causal links between specific personal and social issues or problems addressed by a given service and the dynamics of the prevailing social, economic, and political order. Beyond thus fostering awareness of the true, causal context of issues and problems, such practice should also facilitate insights into options available to individuals and groups for organizing themselves and others into a liberation movement against the systemic causes of their specific problems and of the existing, general oppression and exploitation.

It seems now indicated to provide a very simple illustration of the integrated political-professional approach suggested here. I have selected for this purpose a field with which I am familiar, child welfare, and, more specifically, protective services for children. In a recent study of child abuse all over the country, I was led to conclude that abuse inflicted upon children by society by far exceeded in scope and destructive consequences their abuse by parents. Moreover, I also realized that societal abuse and neglect, which is reflected in abject poverty, malnutrition, developmental deficiencies, ill-health, inadequate education, social deviance, etc., among millions of children and families, are a major factor of abuse and neglect by individual parents.* In spite of these facts, public child protective services throughout the country tend to convey a punitive, threatening, guilt-producing message to parents. The essence of this message is that parents are "bad," for if they were not, their children would not be abused and neglected. Furthermore, unless parents were going to correct their "unacceptable" child rearing patterns, their children will be taken away. Implicit in this message is the notion that society is "good," concerned about children, and, hence, free of guilt in their conditions. Reality, unfortunately, tends to be the reverse. Society, as now constituted, is "guilty" since prevailing policies doom millions of families to conditions which make adequate child care impossible. Many social workers might not be able to offer any more adequate care to children than poor parents do, were they living in similar circumstances.

In accordance with the integrated political-professional approach, protective services workers, in working with parents around the well-being of neglected children, should be straight-forward about the question of "societal guilt," and should facilitate the parents' understanding of the social dynamics underlying the child's neglect. Once parents comprehend these systemic roots of the neglect situation,

* David G. Gil, Violence Against Children, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970.

workers should help them to discover possibilities for organizing with others in the struggle for a just social order. This very exploration and clarification can contribute to a growing sense of self and of liberation on the part of parents, since they are not being threatened, blamed, and burdened with guilt as happens so often in conventional protective services practice.

Of course, not all child abuse and neglect are due to poverty and societal neglect. Yet, all child abuse and neglect has its roots in the social fabric, and the protective worker's task is always to unravel the specific causal context in given cases and then share this insight with the parents.

The model for professional intervention sketched here is, in a certain sense, analogous to the psycho-analytic approach according to which the discovery and adoption of more satisfying and constructive patterns of living is facilitated by bringing into consciousness repressed intra-psychic conflicts -- the covert dynamics of destructive patterns of living. Our practice model extrapolates, so to speak, this psycho-therapeutic principle to the level of socio-therapy as it deals with destructive social patterns and processes by making conscious the societal conflicts and dynamics underlying them, and by facilitating, thus, the discovery and choice of alternative, potentially conflict-free patterns. In view of this analogy, politically informed professional practice could be described and labeled socio-analysis and synthesis.

The broad range of social issues, problems, and programs, in which professionals in the human services are involved requires, of course, considerable flexibility, imagination, and creativity in adapting the general, political-professional intervention model to specific situations. To work out these adaptations for different fields and levels of practice seems to be the challenge now facing the human services professions. By meeting the challenge, in spite of the strong resistance this revolutionary thrust will arouse from defenders of the status quo, the professions could become truly relevant in terms of their original mission as conceived by Socrates and Plato -- to serve the good of mankind rather than their own narrow self-interest.