

# Radical Social Work and the Social Work Action Network (SWAN)

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# Three themes

- What is social work?
- What is 'radical' social work?
- Looking At Alternative Futures?

# What is social work?

## IFSW Definition of Social Work

### Definition

The social work profession **promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people** to enhance well-being. ... Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work.

### Commentary

Social work's ... mission is to enable all people to develop their full potential, enrich their lives ... Professional social work is focused on problem solving and change. As such, **social workers are change agents in society and in the lives of the individuals, families and communities** they serve.

### Values

Social work grew out of humanitarian and democratic ideals, and its values are based on respect for the **equality, worth, and dignity of all people**. Since its beginnings ... social work practice has focused on **meeting human needs and developing human potential. Human rights and social justice serve as the motivation and justification for social work action**. In solidarity with those who are dis-advantaged, the profession strives to alleviate poverty and to liberate vulnerable and oppressed people in order to promote social inclusion.

Social work values are embodied in the profession's national and international codes of ethics.

# What is social work?

- The international definition – and its 'disconnect' to 'UK' (??) social services work.
- The international problem:
  - India (training like Britain, but...),
  - Europe (community, youth and social pedagogy),
  - China (US 'medical models'),
  - Brazil (social work *Versus* soc service work)

# Social Work's History (in Britain)

- Charity Organisation Society (1864)
- The Settlement Movement
- The development of social work education and the need for 'professional distance'
- The development of 'state social work' – and its contradictions.

# State-directed social work –

- Contested
- Minority hold onto 'pathologising' perspectives
- Majority hold ideas about the ability to help people reform themselves
- Minority form (and always have) a 'radical kernel' that focus on the 'public causes' of personal traumas

# Social work's 'radical kernel'

- Radical social work often thought of as a product of the late 1960s
- The impact of the women's, gay, black liberation movements – in an atmosphere of heightened class struggle. Some describe it as a movement restricted to UK, US and Australia. **BUT...**
- The 'radical kernel' – the 'forgotten names' of social work's radical past (Sylvia Pankhurst; Mary Hughes; Mary Neal; Elisabeth Pethick Lawrence)

# But this radical kernel is not just a British phenomena

- Mentona Moser (Switzerland) and Red Aid
- Irene Sendler (Poland) and the Jewish children of Warsaw
- Bertha Cappen Reynolds (USA) and the Minority Movement
- Greece's 'free zone' 1943-45
- *Mujeres Libres* and the *Colonias Infantiles* during the Spanish Revolution (and the campaign for refugee Basque children led by mainstream UK social workers like Eleanor Rathbone; and the US 'Social Workers for a Democratic Spain')
- Frere's influence on Latin American social work and the 'reconceptualisation movement'

# Some insights of 'Popular' alternative??

- Of community cafés and Miners strikes
- West Bank projects,
- Lebanon
- Occupy Sandy

# Two plains of activity

- The horizontal plain:
- State or State directed social work
  - Contested politically by social workers
  - Reflects the conflict or dialectic between 'care and control'
  - Contested between social work and the state
  - Shaped by state social policy (welfare regime shifts)
  - Radical sw has been a minority current here since its inception the 'radical kernel'

# The vertical plain

- 'Popular' social work
  - Roots back to 19<sup>th</sup> C.
  - Strong links with social movement activity
  - Contested – not uniform
  - Non-stigmatising, mutual aid, non-hierarchical, ethics based on solidarity
  - Offers a glimpse (and no more than that) of another social work

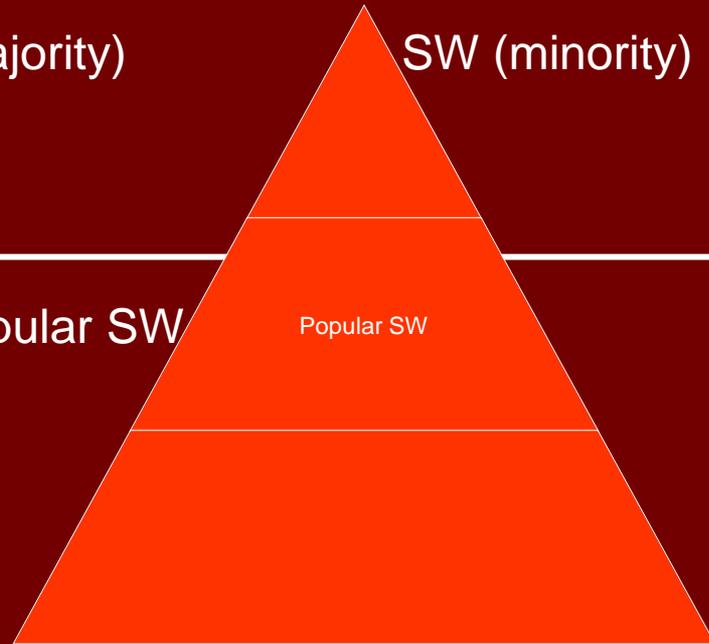
# Where do the plains intersect?

## State directed SW

Pathologising SW (minority) -----reform orientated SW (majority) -----Radical SW (minority)

Popular SW

Popular SW



Does this open up a space for  
the re-birth of a new radical  
social work?

# State directed Social Work and Crisis

- Source of the crisis
- Scale of the debt
  - Do we need to deal with it quickly?
  - Are there alternatives ways of dealing with debt?
- Political class unanimity – services and regulation must be cut. Austerity is the only solution. But austerity is being used as a cover for transformation!
- What this means for social workers and service users

# “I didn't come into social work for this ...”

- The experience of social work (for workers)
- The space for opposition
- Workers and service users together
- The development of SWAN