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KEYNOTE ADDRESS

THE CHALLENGES OF INTERNATIONALISM IN SOCIAL WORK: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

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First, let me congratulate the University of Connecticut and the School of Social Work for its courage, wisdom, and foresight in establishing this Center for International Social Work Studies. We talk a lot these days about the world being a global village, a fact that is not lost on social workers who communicate by Internet with colleagues anywhere in the world--assuming, of course, they have the necessary savvy and technical equipment. The School is also to be congratulated on the appointment of Lynne Healy as the Director of the new Center. Because of her research, her publications, and her leadership as the Chair of the International Commission of the Council on Social Work Education, she is certainly the right person for the job. Her commitment to internationalism is recognized not only in the United States but in the International Association of Schools of Social Work and its member countries as well.

The topic assigned to me is certainly broad. Obviously, as you can see, I am the past. The present will be admirably dealt with by our colleagues on the panel. And, you are the future. So, what does or should internationalism mean to you? My remarks are based upon the assumption that well-educated members of any profession must have a world view of the field in which they practice. However, one does not wake up one morning with a world view, which, indeed, is more easily expressed than

achieved. The major objective of any program of professional education is to prepare practitioners for the tasks mandated by their particular society. This can and often does lead to a parochial and culture-bound view of the world. How, then, do we achieve a world view?

We are all aware that the interdependence of nations is no longer a matter simply for academic discussion. It affects everyone, from those in the seats of power to the man and woman in the street. Isolation is an impossibility in today's rapidly changing political and economic environment. Health problems, social problems, environmental problems, and many others that are experienced by industrialized and non-industrialized countries alike, transcend national boundaries and impair the capacity for world-wide economic and social development.

For social work, there are especially compelling reasons to look beyond one's own national boundaries. The problems with which social workers deal are indeed global in their impact. Social ills such as poverty, hunger, AIDS, family breakdown, drug addiction, child abuse, oppression of women, environmental deterioration, over-population are shared by many nations. Special populations at risk, such as the homeless, street children, indigenous peoples, migrants, refugees, and persons

displaced by war and ethnic conflict have moved in recent years into the forefront of international concern. The contribution of social work to policies and programs designed to prevent, ameliorate, or remedy intolerable social conditions and to achieve social justice may differ from country to country, but the mission for the profession is world-wide and calls for international understanding and support.

Having made the case for internationalism in social work, I hope, let me take on the role so often assigned to me now - that of historian and repository of facts about events that practically everyone here is too young to remember. It is a lovely role as it makes me practically immune to contradiction. After all - I WAS THERE.

Internationalism in social work and social work education has had a checkered history, characterized by great expectations, periods of remarkable achievement, and more than a few disappointments. But the past is worthy of resuscitation. In fact, you can take great pride in the number of ground-breaking firsts in international cooperation that are specifically related to social work. The first United States program authorized by Congress in 1939 featured assistance on developing qualified manpower for the social welfare field in Latin American. Nelson Rockefeller, as head of a new office of Inter-American Affairs in the Department of State, called upon the U.S. Children's Bureau to manage the program. The Children's Bureau quickly assumed leadership, created a special Inter-American Unit, brought the directors of 10 Latin American schools of social work together to plan a scholarship and technical assistance program, and then turned to the graduate schools of social work for advice and assistance in its implementation. The

Latin American social workers who then came to study in the schools had the distinction of being the first group to take advantage of "participant training" under Rockefeller's new program.

That was only the beginning of social work's involvement in international exchanges and other projects. After World War II, the Inter-American Unit of the Children's Bureau was renamed the International Service, with educational exchange becoming a significant program activity of the Bureau. Social workers from all corners of the world came as visitors and students. The Children's Bureau arranged their training or observation programs, again with the help of the graduate schools and NASW chapters. American social workers travelled outward as consultants and advisors, at first primarily to Latin America.

Perhaps you have heard of Truman's famous Point IV program, named after Point IV in his inaugural address in 1949? The first three points also dealt with international foreign policy concerns -- support of the United Nations, the Marshall Plan, and so forth -- but it was the fourth that brought forth a much broader concept of international cooperation than that sparked by previous legislation. Truman spoke of the "conditions close to misery" in which half the people of the world were living. What was needed, he said, was a sharing of technical knowledge so that peace-loving peoples in the developing countries could realize their aspirations for a better life. The Truman proposal was hailed in banner headlines. The Washington Post described it as a "Fair Deal Plan for the World." (McCullough 1992: 730-731) Social welfare figured prominently in the programs that followed, with social workers clearly recognized as the experts with technical knowledge of the field and especially the

area of professional education and training. Educational exchange programs with U.S. graduate schools multiplied as did requests for U.S. social workers as consultants and advisors. Social Welfare attaches were assigned to U.S. Embassies in India and Brazil. While it was clear that Truman had in mind a technical assistance approach more or less untainted by imperialism and as little as possible by foreign policy considerations, such considerations did arise. Before we leave the Point IV program, let me tell you about one of my experiences as a consultant under its auspices.

The country was Paraguay, the year was 1954, when Peron of Argentina was at the height of his power, and a short time before the long reign of Stroessner, the Paraguayan dictator. The Paraguayan government, faced with a State visit by Peron, was not too happy with his very generous offer (prompted, I suspect, by Evita) to assign social welfare experts to beef up their training and service programs. They turned to the U.S. government for help, perhaps because they wanted a U.S. body on the spot as a consultant on social welfare before Peron's arrival. Then they could say that no additional help was needed.

I was with the newly organized Council on Social Work Education which generously acceded to a request from the State Department that I take on this assignment as a special short-term mission. The stated purpose of the mission was to provide professional consultation on welfare services and training. The foreign policy consideration may have been to help the Paraguayan government outflank Peron in his desire to make over the Paraguayan welfare system in whatever image Evita may have had in mind. My professional task was to help develop sorely needed social services

and advise on the preparation of personnel to staff them.

Foreign policy aside, this was a fascinating learning experience for me and, perhaps, for my colleagues in Paraguay. It highlighted far more clearly than any other consultation assignment before or since the problem of relating U.S. experience to the needs of a less developed country. As my Spanish was serviceable, I proposed a seminar in which the Paraguayans would present papers on the major social problems with which they had to deal as social workers. Each presentation of a specific problem or area of work in Paraguay was then followed by a description of a similar problem or area of work in the U.S. and in other Latin American countries with which I was familiar. From both sets of papers, the group factored out what might be relevant and helpful in developing services and improving their social work training program.

The services that existed were administered by the Ministry of Health. Midwives and social workers were trained within the same educational framework. With health and welfare under the same umbrella, it was essential that any decisions reached on new proposals should take into account this close connection. Fortunately the Minister of Health, a good Social Democrat, was right in there with us throughout the mission and participated in formulating the final recommendations. No long after my return, he wrote that the Ministry of Health had been renamed the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, with social welfare as an identifiable new area of service with special sections for general social service, for child welfare, old age, rehabilitation, and private welfare. (CSWE, Social Work Education, 1954:3) Great news until Stroesner came to power. That spelled

political disaster for the Minister of Health and Social Welfare along with others who had worked so hard and well throughout the mission. Some of the good work on training remained, but the new structure went pretty much down the drain. That is the sad end of the story. More than one good story has ended this way.

Looking back, the story does raise one or two interesting questions. Why was the Paraguayan government so keen to have a U.S. consultant when they could have had much more generous and continuing help from Argentina, their neighbor? Might it not have been better for them to have had consultation from a country close to their national identity? Here, it is important to remember, as Herman Stein noted in an international conference sponsored by Hunter College, "that in the late 40's and early 50's, the United States was sitting on top of the world....The U.S. was not only the strongest power, it was the most popular country in the world and its economy was in high gear." (Stein 1990:11) He noted that all the world wanted American products and one product that was much in demand, particularly by the new nations, was expertise on the organization of social welfare services and the training of social welfare personnel. If, in the case of Paraguay, there was any question of imperialism, the government of that period much preferred the U.S. brand to that of Peron's Argentina. Likewise, for the new nations in Asia and Africa born out of the liberating forces of the post-War period, U.S. consultants represented what they regarded as the best available source of help in developing social welfare services and programs of professional education. This perception, heightened by U.N. endorsement of social work as a profession, seemed to place Americans as the "elite of the world" in social welfare and social work education.

That brings us now to the United Nations which, in the aftermath of World War II, was unquestionably the most significant of the internationalizing influences on the social work profession, not only in this country but throughout the world. From its first meeting in 1947, the Social Commission of the Economic and Social Council (now the Commission on Social Development) placed great emphasis on advisory social welfare services and social work training. This, in part, was the result of inheriting the restorative work of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), which operated in the war zones before the establishment of the United Nations in San Francisco.

It doesn't take much imagination to understand why social welfare was so important in the post-War period to the UN and to the war-torn as well as the new nations. No matter how heroic the deeds of individuals and armies, war can never be anything but dehumanizing. Death, destruction, broken homes, loss of parents, loss of children, divided loyalties, and much more can be listed in any inventory of the havoc wrought by war. Much much more than social work has to offer is needed to heal such wounds, but it was recognized within the UN that social welfare services and qualified personnel were essential elements in long-term planning for what they called the social field.

In 1946, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) established a permanent Social Commission to advise it "on practical measures that may be needed in the social field." The Commission, at its very first session, agreed unanimously that "the improvement of services to promote the well-being of the individual and of the community depend essentially on the existence of specially trained staff to

administer these services." (UN, Journal ECOSOC, 13 June 1946:371) A recommendation to that effect led to the passage of an ECOSOC Resolution authorizing studies to guide the development of social welfare advisory services, long-term training programs of assistance to governments, and international training fellowships. (UN, ECOSOC Resolution 43(IV), 1947:26)

It was my privilege to direct the study on training. That, too, was quite an experience. Let me again digress for a moment to tell you what it was like to join the UN Secretariat in the early years. In July 1947, I went to UN from the Children's Bureau where I had served as Assistant Director of the Inter-American Unit and later the International Unit. Presumably, the UN Personnel Office thought my experience in working with the Point IV program and its predecessor made me competent to undertake an international study. I wouldn't have thought so, but I am glad they did. Fortunately, the study turned out well and my term of office at the UN certainly was the determining factor in my decision, no matter what else I did as a social worker, always to remain involved in international work.

You may not remember that the United Nations was at first lodged in a cavernous building at Lake Success in Long Island, New York. Talk about turning canons into ploughshares!" It was quite wonderful that a huge building previously devoted to the production of war material (I've forgotten exactly what) should now become a palace of peace. Comfort was the last thing on our minds and a good thing, too, because we were not well-housed. Everyone was totally imbued (or so it seemed to me) with the spirit of hope and determination to make the United Nations a

reality. The staff was not nationalistic in the sense of putting the interests of one's own country ahead of what seemed best for the world as a whole. We were there as international civil servants and we were international. If we did not think and act as internationalists we could not have survived in the heady international atmosphere of those first years. It was really quite wonderful.

Best of all was the ease with which one could get things done. The bureaucratic system that later developed led to rigid operating requirements and specified avenues of communication. I produced a questionnaire--in retrospect much too long and complicated. However, it did produce facts, opinions, and interesting definitions of social work, which ran the gamut from charitable handouts to sophisticated professionalism. At a later stage in the UN, I would have had to go through departments but mostly I counted on locating the best informed persons or organizations in each country as sources of information. It was possible, then, to go direct to such sources outside of the governments. It was also possible for staff to get to know personally and socialize with the delegates to the Social Commission, most of whom were ministers of social welfare or highly placed social welfare officials. Even better, some of those with whom I worked were social workers. This was a Godsend because they became involved in identifying sources in their countries. Also, when the study was reviewed, Commission members were well-disposed toward the recommendations because of their earlier involvement in its preparation.

I did have one great disappointment. The questionnaire was sent to the translation service to be put into Russian, but could not be translated unless authorized by the USSR

delegate to the Social Commission. When I told him about the study and asked for his help, he said in effect -- no way. He added that the USSR did not need social work as it no longer suffered the ills of capitalism and besides the study would be just more U.S. propaganda. The obvious answer, which I gave him, was that the report would be based on the data collected and if he wanted the viewpoint of the USSR represented the best way to do it would be to participate in the study. He agreed, then, to come to my office and talk about it but only for 30 minutes.

When he came, he noted pictures of children on my desk and asked if they were my children. I said no, they were my Godchildren. Godchildren, he asked, what are Godchildren? I told him about my very close friendship with the family and explained that if anything happened to the parents, I would be a mother substitute. Then, I asked him if he had children and learned yes, that he had children and that he and his family lived in Brooklyn. We talked a little about his children. That led into a discussion of what happens when children are neglected, abandoned, abused. Most countries had such problems. Did they have problems like that in his country? Yes, oh yes. And how were they handled? There were special cadres. And did they have any training? Oh yes. We ran the whole gamut of marital problems, problems of illness and disability, juvenile delinquency, practically everything except poverty which, of course, he said did not exist under communism. What did exist, however, were all those common human problems that afflict the human race and those common human needs so eloquently described by Charlotte Towle. It was obvious that human beings in the USSR were not exempt. It was equally clear that they had ways in the USSR of dealing with the problems. They weren't

our ways, but there may have been common elements. I didn't learn enough to know. He remained in the office for more than an hour. Finally, he agreed to authorize translation of the questionnaire and have it sent to Moscow. I never heard another word. That was the great disappointment. What I did learn, however, is that there is a way of sharing, even when approaches to a question may be quite different. I truly believe that if you look hard at a question you know something about, you can factor out what is universal as well as what is peculiar to your country or your circumstances.

Back to the study. In the end, data were obtained from governments, national and international associations of social work and social workers, schools of social work and other educational institutions producing social welfare personnel, several *ad hoc* working parties, foreign-trained social workers who visited the United Nations, and a number of highly knowledgeable individuals. Thirty-three countries, widely distributed geographically and representative of every stage of social welfare development, provided the definitions of social work, the professional and economic status of social workers, and educational policies and resources. Forty of the 45 countries in which there were schools of social work sent detailed information on all aspects of their educational programs. Just think, there were only 45 countries with established schools of social work at that time. Now, the International Association of Schools of Social Work is producing a directory of some 1500 schools or programs in 100 or so countries offering training for personnel described as social workers.

A great deal of the material collected for the study is deposited in the Social Welfare Archives of the University of

Minnesota. I have often thought it would be interesting to revisit the returns, particularly the definitions of social work. In the light of current developments in social work education in China and the countries that have come out from behind the Iron Country, it would be enlightening to look at the information those countries provided for the United Nations study. China has now decided to revive a form of social work education. Very few of the consultants on their way to help in this effort know that, until 1948, there were well established social work programs in ten universities in China. Their definition of social work, produced by a working party made up of representatives of the Ministry of Social Welfare, several universities, and a U.N. consultant said:

Social work in China not only includes services rendered to needy persons but also includes helping individuals or groups of individuals to make social adjustments, remedying and preventing social illness, and promoting social welfare, leading to peace and security. (UN, Training for Social Work, 1950: 106).

The information I received from China for the study was the last to come out before social work disappeared.

Outstanding women in Poland and Czechoslovakia figured prominently as pioneers in social work and social work education in Europe in this period. One of the greatest was Mme. Helene Radlinska of Poland. In looking up material in personal papers for this journey into the past, I found the following item in a memo, dated April 1948, sent to all members of the International Committee of Schools of Social Work:

Mme Helene Radlinska, one of the founders of the International Committee of Schools of Social Work and a Professor at the State University of Lodz in Poland, had the great misfortune to see destroyed besides her private house, the Schools of Social Work she founded at the Universities of Warsaw and Lodz, and to lose by death 2/3 of her teaching staff. (Personal Files)

University schools in Europe at that time were pretty much limited to the United Kingdom as schools of social work on the Continent were non-university institutions functioning under private or governmental auspices. It was a loss to the profession to see the university-based schools in Poland and in Czechoslovakia disappear behind the Iron Curtain, but it is a great joy now to watch them reappear.

The study was presented to the Social Commission in 1950, where there was favorable discussion followed by a resolution declaring:

.....that social work should in principle be a professional function performed by men and women who have received professional training by taking a formal course of social work theory and practice in an appropriate educational institution...and that these courses, whether provided at universities or special schools of social study, should be of the highest possible quality and should be sufficiently comprehensive to do justice to both the variety and the unity of social work. (United Nations, Social Commission Report 1950:3)

Having been declared a profession by the United Nations with social work education as necessary preparation for its practice, social work took off like a rocket. A wide-ranging program was put into effect to assist governments in the staffing of newly established social welfare services. The program, which included expert working groups, international and regional seminars, technical assistance to governments, and international exchange and fellowship opportunities, encouraged a veritable explosion of schools of social work throughout the developing world. For North American social workers (Canadians were also much in demand) and particularly for educators this was the heyday of international cooperation and exchange. Consultants, advisors, and teachers were recruited by the United Nations, by individual countries under the Fulbright or other bilateral programs, and by individual universities or independent schools under various kinds of sabbatical arrangements. When one thinks of all the opportunities opened up in the 50's and 60's for international assignments, it is perhaps not surprising that some educators tended to develop a sense of mission about their role as teachers to the world.

Some of our colleagues have made quite a reputation decrying the American contribution as social work imperialism. Much of what has been said is based on failure to take into account the circumstances and the times in which events took place. Of course, mistakes were made; some consultants may have been overeager to impose their ideas; and schools in some countries may have been too anxious to look like Columbia University. But the notion that all American social work consultation was inappropriate is a canard.

Internationalism flourished, particularly among social work educators, in the periods I have described. Then it waned. Much of the erosion, beginning in the late 60's, can be explained by shifts and changes in the social, economic, and political climate of the times. Also, the schools that were started with help from outside consultants now functioned on their own. The United Nations turned its attention to economic development, with the result that the social field suffered from benign neglect. The Social Commission had become the Commission for Social Development, but the social in development was overshadowed by economic considerations.

While the situation in the United Nations remains a little murky, the tide in our profession does seem to be running again in the direction of greater interest in international cooperation and exchange. In some respects, the demand from the countries of Eastern Europe and China for social work services and education parallels the situation following World War II. U.S. consultants, along with experts from a number of western countries, are crisscrossing this new territory. The International Association of Schools of Social Work has consulted with governments, sponsored seminars, and attempted to direct at least some of the consultation traffic. The NASW has initiated international projects and developed special relationships with social work entities in other countries. And the United Nations, apparently taking to heart at last the view that economic development without regard to social development is counter-productive, is sponsoring a meeting of heads of state at a World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in March 1995.

The present looks more promising now than at any time since the 60's and

early 70's.. This augurs well for the future. With the 50th anniversary of the United Nations at hand, the time may be ripe to celebrate what has been achieved through the years in efforts to promote human welfare, human rights, and social justice. In any historical account, social workers will figure prominently as key participants in these international programs. We can take pride in our role in the past, we are beginning to make progress again in the present, and we can look forward, I am sure, to even greater achievements in the future and that is where this International Center is going to make a tremendous contribution.

Notes

This paper is based to a considerable extent on the recollections and personal papers of the author, who was professionally involved in the period under review in the international work of the U.S. Children's Bureau, in the United Nations as a member of the Secretariat, and as a volunteer Secretary of the International Association of Schools of Social Work.

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