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Implications of Conservative Tendencies for Practice and Education in Social Welfare*

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This essay explores the meanings, sources, dynamics, and ideological themes of conservative tendencies in societal evolution and traces the dominance of these themes and tendencies in social welfare practice and education. The essay also suggests approaches for moving beyond these tendencies in our society and proposes an agenda for transition policies. Finally, the essay examines principles and elements of social-change-oriented political action and their implications for practice and education in social welfare.

Political discourse, public opinion, and public policy in the United States have undoubtedly shifted in conservative directions since the early seventies, and especially so during the Reagan administration. Illustrative of the conservative mentality is the widespread, uncritical acceptance of such notions as: fiscal constraints and their limiting impact in human services; misguidedness of "active government" in the interest of human well-being, and of the welfare state philosophy and programs; balanced budgets without corresponding progressive taxation, economic growth and competitiveness as self-evident public goods; equating democracy with formal elections, freedom with capitalist economics, and "national interest" with the business interests of multinational corporations; defining "national security" in terms of military superiority without clarifying the threats to security and the identity of "the enemy;" and, selfish pursuit of material wealth in the midst of growing poverty, and disregard for a sense of community.

It would be an oversimplification to blame prevailing social ills and waste of human potential and natural resources on the conservative philosophy and domestic and foreign policies of President Reagan and some of his predecessors, although these dehumanizing conditions have certainly intensified since the Nixon years. Rather, it seems that these social, economic, and ecological ills are the inevitable results of pervasive conservative

tendencies which have shaped the institutional order and the public consciousness of this country since colonial times. These tendencies, which were brought to the "New World" by European colonizers, have become the shared ideology, with minor variations, of all major political parties. Evidence of this underlying consensus concerning fundamental economic, political, and philosophical premises can be gleaned from the relative continuity of domestic and foreign policies throughout U.S. history, and from the absence of strong opposition movements promoting alternative visions of social and economic life. More specific evidence of the influence and durability of conservative tendencies, of special concern to the social welfare field, is the continuity of welfare policies and programs focused on changing individuals rather than changing social and economic institutions, and the de-facto acceptance of the alleged inevitability of unemployment, poverty, homelessness and hunger in the midst of affluence.

The conservative tendencies, which are shared, in varying degrees, by the major political parties, are also shared by many practitioners, educators, and professional organizations in the social welfare field, although they tend to identify themselves as "liberals." Hence, rather than merely challenging extreme conservative philosophies and policies of the current and of future administrations, we should explore our personal and collective entrapment in the pervasive conservative mentality of this society and culture, and we ought to search for ways to liberate ourselves from these dynamics and to assist students and people we serve through practice to do likewise.

Meanings and Sources of Conservative Tendencies

Webster's dictionary defines conservatism as: "a disposition in politics to preserve what is established; a political philosophy based on tradition and social stability, stressing established institutions and preferring gradual development to abrupt change." This definition is a good starting point for this exploration, though it does not unravel the roots and dynamics of conservative tendencies. According to anthropological and historical studies, these tendencies involve mutually reinforcing

biological, psychological, social, economic, political and ideological dimensions.

Humans developed social orders by interacting with one another and with their natural environments in pursuit of survival and security, usually in the face of relative scarcities of life-sustaining resources and other life threatening conditions. As human groups discovered solutions to survival and security problems and established ways of life which somehow satisfied survival needs, they simultaneously evolved a tendency to "conserve" what seemed to work, more or less, because it served their needs and perceived interests. They also came to regard changes in traditional patterns as threats to their very existence, developed taboos against them, and made sure that established ways of life were transmitted without deviations from generation to generation. The slow rate of social change and development in small, isolated, pre-agricultural, communal societies seems largely due to the complementary tendencies of conserving established patterns of existence and of resisting changes and innovation. An important function of religious institutions in these societies has usually been to reinforce these tendencies.

The conservative bias which seems inherent in societal evolution, is reinforced on the individual level by the biological and psychological conditions of the socialization experience of infants and children. This experience takes place in imbalanced, inequalitarian relationships involving physical, emotional, mental, economic and social dependence. Though infants and children are active participants in socialization relationships, adults are in control of power, resources, rewards, and sanctions. Children are exposed to a preexisting way of life as "objective reality" and as "good and valued," and they absorb the ideas which sustain and justify that way of life, under conditions conducive to uncritical acceptance, rather than to critical reflection and informed choice. Children's faculties for critical consciousness emerge only gradually over several years. By the time these faculties eventually mature, children have already internalized their society's institutional order along with the interpretations and justifications which legitimate and validate it, and they are no longer inclined to ask critical questions about it. They have come to take it for granted and are ready, in turn,

to pass it on unchallenged to their children. In the relatively few instances in which "primary" socialization fails to bring about conformity and adaptation to established patterns of behavior, relations, and beliefs, societies tend to respond with concrete and symbolic sanctions, i.e., "secondary" socialization, to promote and enforce social adaptation.

When human societies were not divided into dominant and dominated social groups, and their ways of life were designed to satisfy everyone's needs in accordance with egalitarian, cooperative, and communal values, conserving the status-quo was in everyone's perceived interest. Conformity and adaptation on the part of individuals to the established social order led to a sense of belonging, security, and well-being in physical-material, emotional-spiritual, and social-political terms. Motivation for social change was, therefore, limited, as long as population increases did not upset the balance between natural, life-sustaining resources and the existential needs of people, and encounters with other human groups did not result in tensions, conflicts, and crises.

Following increases of population and the subsequent development of agriculture, crafts, and trade, some 10,000 years ago, societies began to produce an economic surplus. This new societal context and capacity made possible the gradual emergence, within and between societies, of differentiations into dominant and dominated, exploiting and exploited, and privileged and deprived classes, races, and peoples. These social, economic, and political differentiations gave also rise to corresponding differentiations in life-styles and consciousness of different social groups and peoples.

Social differentiation began in nomadic, preagricultural, hunting and gathering societies as a relatively nonexploitative division of work and roles, mainly by age and sex. In sedentary, agricultural societies, social differentiation evolved, however, into essentially exploitative divisions of labor, social status and prestige, economic control and rewards, and political roles and power. Differentiations in agricultural societies did not come about voluntarily, but as a result of coercive processes involving organized physical violence and ideological hegemony by emerging secular ruling classes and their priestly associates.

Ideological domination brought about internalization into popular consciousness of ex-post-facto validation and legitimation of coercively established inegalitarian, unjust, and exploitative social orders. People came to believe that institutionalized inequalities along occupational, social, economic, political and civil dimensions were "natural," inevitable and unchangeable aspects of social organization. Usually these inequalities were explained and perceived as ordained by super-human sources, rather than as originated and maintained by humans. Having but limited insight into the coercive origins and dynamics of their exploitation and oppression, and lacking awareness of past and possible future, nonoppressive, egalitarian ways of life, people tended to submit to established social arrangements with varying degrees of overt acceptance and adaptation and covert rejection and resistance. Yet frequently throughout history, covert rejection and resistance flared up as overt insurrection, revolt, and revolution.

Once systemic inequalities in human relations and material exchanges have been established within and among different societies, intra- and intersocietal conflicts become inevitable. Inequalities are not readily accepted and maintained in spite of ongoing physical and ideological coercion. Hence, inegalitarian social and global systems tend to be unstable. They are usually in a stage of temporary equilibrium resulting from antagonistic and competitive interactions among individuals, social classes and peoples, aimed at conserving or expanding relative advantages, or at transforming the entire system. Over time, antagonistic and competitive dynamics tend to intensify.

The transformation of early, egalitarian-cooperative-communal societies into later, exploitative, competitive and internally divided ones is reflected also in the emergence of new versions and functions of conservatism. While in early societies conservatism conserved ways of life which served everyone's needs and interests, in antagonistically divided social and global orders, conservatism came to protect primarily the interests of privileged social classes by conserving the structures and dynamics of domination and exploitation, and by resisting efforts to bring about fundamental social transformations. Contemporary "liberalism" is merely a "soft" version of political

conservatism as it aims to conserve "lesser-degrees" of exploitation and privilege. However, just as other versions of conservatism, liberalism is opposed to unconditional elimination of all forms of structural inequalities, exploitation, domination and privilege, though it favors assuring a floor of social, economic, and political rights to everyone.

Ideological Themes of Conservatism

Advantageous conditions of living and privileged social status in stratified societies are usually accepted uncritically by individuals and groups benefiting from them. They tend to take advantages for granted and to perceive them as "natural," valid, and just as long as they conform to "law and order." Privileged conditions have been explained and justified as due to the "grace of god," to "innate superiority," or to merit by virtue of exceptional capacities and unusual efforts. These interpretations are conducive to "victim-blaming" attitudes which place responsibility for the conditions of disadvantaged individuals and classes on them rather than on oppressive social dynamics. Victim-blaming attitudes, in turn, tend to relieve the guilt and conscience of individuals from privileged classes, and also to protect unjust social orders against fundamental structural changes.

Conservative ideology tends to stress negative views concerning human nature, according to which people are selfish, greedy, lazy and power-hungry. Hence, they ought to be closely watched and controlled. Most people are thought to lack capacity for self-direction.

The negative characteristics of human nature are projected in conservative ideology mainly on dominated and exploited social classes, races and peoples while dominant classes, races and peoples are supposedly endowed with positive characteristics. Negative characteristics of oppressed groups are considered biologically determined rather than reactions and adaptations to oppressive conditions, and defenses against these conditions.

A related theme of conservative ideology is that certain individuals, races, and peoples are by nature superior to others. The superior ones should dominate and control and should be entitled to privileged conditions, since they are intrinsically

worthier and more important. Domination and control by naturally superior individuals and groups is said to be for the benefit of inferior ones who, allegedly, lack capacities to assure their own well-being through productive activity.

Dominance of Conservative Themes and Tendencies in Social Welfare

Overt and covert support for inegalitarian social orders, divided into dominant and privileged, and dominated and deprived classes, can be discerned as major themes and tendencies of institutionalized social welfare throughout history and on the contemporary scene. Of course, other themes and tendencies, including ethical and religious imperatives, and struggles for social justice and human equality and liberation, can also be traced throughout social welfare history; however, these themes were never dominant but merely provided a counterpoint.

In the course of several millennia, community-sponsored assistance to people in need was usually not intended to overcome the sources of poverty and assorted social ills, but only to alleviate their symptoms, case by case, and often in a dehumanizing and stigmatizing manner. Public assistance posed, therefore, no threat to established social orders. Instead, it actually contributed in subtle ways to their preservation by administering limited concessions to the claims of dominated and deprived classes, and by acting thus as a balancing and stabilizing force against potentially insurrectionary tendencies. Along with this conservative function, institutionalized social welfare has also been motivated by genuine humane tendencies, by a vague sense of guilt on the part of privileged, dominant classes, and by religious and ethical values.

On the contemporary social welfare scene, conservative themes and tendencies are evident in theory and practice, and in policies, language, and politics. Dominant theories tend to interpret human problems mainly as rooted in shortcomings and deviance of individuals, and they tend to deemphasize social structural sources of these problems. These theoretical premises are reflected in practice focused on personal solutions through individual change and adaptation to prevailing unjust and alienating social conditions, rather than on collective solutions

through social change and adaptation of existing social conditions to human needs and development.

Dominant theories also tend to fragmentize human problems into separate fields of practice, each concerned with different sets of symptoms and different population groups. Fragmented conceptions of human problems suggest, analogous to medical models, that experts can devise specific technical-professional solutions and treatments for every problem, and that, therefore, fundamental social change is not necessary for dealing with them. Alternative social welfare theories reject fragmentation and view all human problems as linked and rooted in underlying, common social dynamics. This view suggests interventions, analogous to public health models, involving long-range political efforts toward fundamental social change along with services aimed at immediate and short-range relief of human suffering.

As to policy development, conservative tendencies of social welfare are reflected in support for incremental, "liberal" reforms which accept, rather than challenge, the continuation of injustice and privilege, albeit with minor modifications. An apt illustration of this is support for "welfare reforms," rather than political action aimed at eliminating poverty and the welfare system and welfare mentality through policies such as constitutional guarantees of suitable, meaningful work and adequate income.

The language of spokespeople for social welfare in policy and political discourse also reveals conservative tendencies. They will often advocate "more justice and more equality," rather than "unqualified justice and equality." What they are actually advocating are merely different levels of injustice and inequality from levels now prevailing. Qualifying the concepts "justice and equality" with the term "more" is also illogical, since there are no degrees of justice and equality. A social order is either just and egalitarian, or it is not so designed. There are, to be sure, degrees of injustice and inequality. Another semantic reflection of conservative tendencies in social welfare is the use of the adjective "poor" as a noun in the phrase, "the poor," when referring to poor people. When used as a noun to designate a class of people, other, no less important, attributes of the

same people are ignored, and the condition of poverty is treated as their main characteristic, as if it was intrinsic to them. Once poverty is perceived as intrinsic to a class of people, rather than the result of human-created, changeable social conditions, it assumes an aura of permanence. This is a deeply conservative position, an implicit confirmation of the ancient myth that poverty is inevitable.

Involvement in politics by social welfare organizations conforms usually to conventional "realpolitik," an approach used by most participants in the political arena in the United States. Realpolitik can be effective for short-range, limited objectives within the established social and economic order. However, it is not suited at all for a long-range political struggle and strategy toward an alternative social order shaped by values of social justice, equality and liberty. It follows, that the political style of social welfare organizations, with very few exceptions such as radical caucuses and the Bertha Reynolds Society, is thoroughly compatible with their conservative, incremental policy agenda.

The earlier noted fragmentation of social welfare into fields of practice concerned with different problems and populations, tends to reinforce the political pragmatism, as different fields are usually forced to compete against each other for the limited resources available for human well-being under prevailing political conditions. This destructive competition tends to reinforce the status-quo. It is unlikely to be overcome as long as social welfare organizations are trapped in the conservative mentality of fiscal constraints and scarcity of resources for human needs. Some day they may come to realize that this scarcity is a fiction, that it is not real in an economic sense but only in a political sense. The simple evidence of the fictional nature of scarcity in the midst of plenty is the vast aggregate material wealth available in this country and a trillion dollar annual federal budget of which some 300 billion are invested in the illusion of national security, and about 150 billion are used to pay interest on the national debt—a euphemism for a "guaranteed income" to privileged classes from whom the government borrows to cover the budgetary deficit, instead of taxing their wealth.

Beyond Conservative Tendencies

Conservative tendencies which have dominated societal institutions and consciousness for centuries in the United States and many other countries, have led to conflicts and wars within and among nations, as well as to worldwide deterioration of the quality of life in social, psychological, economic and ecologic terms, in spite of advances in science and technology, and increases in material production. By now, these trends pose threats to the survival of the human species and necessitate a search for alternative societal paradigms geared to free and full development for all people, anywhere on earth. These paradigms should incorporate values and principles such as these: that all people be considered equals in intrinsic worth, rights and responsibilities; that no individual and no social group be exploited and dominated by others; and that the concrete and abstract resources discovered and developed by people throughout history be considered the shared inheritance of the species, to be used and preserved rationally in the interest of present and future generations.

Paradigmatic shifts of social institutions and values, from dominant conservative tendencies toward egalitarian, cooperative, communal, and liberating alternatives, will take much time to accomplish, as there are no known short-cuts to such comprehensive fundamental transformations. Widespread assumptions notwithstanding, such changes are unlikely to be achieved coercively through violent revolutionary events aimed at the seizure of state power. Rather, they seem to require extended, non-violent, democratic-revolutionary processes, designed to facilitate large-scale transformations of consciousness, involving new insights into history, present realities, and future human possibilities, and redefinitions of individual and social interests. Such transformations of consciousness seem to be essential precursors of fundamental institutional transformations, and social movements are therefore needed to act as catalysts for these transformations.

Practitioners and educators in social welfare, because of their work with people victimized by existing social conditions, and with students of these conditions, could contribute to the development of social movements toward fundamental social change.

Agenda for Transition Policies

They could do so by consciously integrating a liberating political perspective into practice and education in human service settings. More specifically, they could develop and advocate equitable transition policies to replace the prevailing conservative social policy system, and they could experiment with innovative approaches to political action, practice, and teaching, designed to be consistent with the goals and values of liberating societal paradigms.

An important step in challenging the prevailing conservative mentality is to put on the political agenda a coherent set of social policies, derived from values of social and economic justice, yet feasible within the legal framework of the established social order. Such policies are intended to eliminate unemployment, poverty, and related conditions, and to obviate thus existing, demeaning welfare programs, rather than merely "reform" them. The elimination of unemployment and poverty are feasible, first-aid measures, attainable even before overcoming their sources in capitalist dynamics.

The policies suggested below are based on an economic and political analysis which rejects many assumptions of neo-classical economics, including the notion of fiscal constraints with respect to human needs. Assumptions implicit in these policies are: that the real wealth of a society, as differentiated from symbolic wealth, i.e., money, consists of the physical, intellectual, and emotional capacities of all its members, the aggregate of natural resources, and the aggregate of human generated material products, knowledge, and technology; that these "factors of wealth and well-being" be used and allocated rationally, so as to meet the needs of the entire population, rather than the profit interests of dominant individuals and classes; that these factors of wealth and well-being be developed and preserved wisely, rather than wasted; and finally, that decisions concerning the use and investment of societal resources be made democratically rather than by economic elites.

Here are a set of policies suggested for a transition program.

- (a) Constitutional guarantees of employment suited to individual capacities and compensated at wage levels corresponding, at least, to the actual cost of a decent standard of living. Full employment can be achieved through adjusting the legal length of the workday of workweek in order to match

the number of positions in the economy to the number of individuals requiring work, or by publicly sponsoring projects designed to meet human needs not filled by private enterprise (e.g., housing, highways and bridges, hospitals, schools, parks, etc.)

- (b) Constitutional guarantees of adequate income, out of tax revenues, for people unable to work due to age, illness, and handicapping conditions. Income guarantees can be implemented through universal systems of children's allowances, retirement pensions, and sickness and disability benefits, and paid at levels corresponding to the actual costs of a decent standard of living.
- (c) Legal redefinition of the care of one's children and of disabled relatives in the home as socially necessary work; inclusion of such work in the G.N.P., and payment of adequate wages out of federal revenues to individuals engaging in this type of work rather than working outside their homes.
- (d) Federally financed high-quality, public child care as an option for parents.
- (e) Paid parental leave of 12 weeks; paid annual leave of 4 weeks; and eventually a universal system of paid sabbatical leave.
- (f) Federally financed, preventive and curative health care, administered in a decentralized manner.
- (g) Federally financed, life-long education, administered in a decentralized manner.
- (h) Federally financed construction and maintenance of housing stock, infrastructure, and public transportation within and between cities and towns, administered in a decentralized manner.
- (i) Federally financed environmental protection and conservation programs.
- (j) Comprehensive tax reform, to assure adequate financing, without requiring government borrowing, for the policies listed above. Tax-reform should establish a tax-exempt basic income corresponding to the actual cost of living. Income beyond this level, regardless of source, would be subject to progressive taxation.

- (k) Elimination of existing, stigmatizing welfare programs, AFDC, SSI, food stamps, Medicaid, etc., and phasing out of the regressive social security system.
- (l) Moratorium on interest payments on the public debt.

Implicit in this policy agenda is an unequivocal rejection of the notion that the people of the United States cannot afford the programs to be authorized under these policies. Contrary to widely taken-for-granted assumptions, these programs do not involve real economic cost, but only political costs. Rather, they are likely to revitalize economic activity and human resources, and to enrich the quality of life and human relations. They involve full use and development of available productive and creative human capacities, and reallocation of existing factors of wealth and well-being. They also imply equitable redistribution of rights to use available resources and wealth.

Implementation of the proposed transition policies would make possible further stages of social and economic development which are unrealizable under present conditions. Full employment and elimination of poverty would reduce the dynamics of individual and intergroup competition, and would thus remove economic sources of discrimination by race, sex, age and other factors. Once economic sources of discrimination are overcome, it should be possible to deal with its psychological and social dimensions.

Next, it will be possible to focus on reorganizing and redesigning work in order to minimize stress and alienation and overcome obstacles to individual development inherent in the present mode of work and production. And, it will also be possible to focus on transforming the quality of goods and services in order to eliminate built-in obsolescence and waste of resources and to assure long-term use of high-quality products.

The foregoing changes would be conducive to a global justice focus which necessitates voluntary reductions of resource use by "over-developed," countries to fair levels in terms of population size, and cooperative, nonexploitative economic relations between developed and developing countries. Fairness and justice in economic relations among the regions and countries of the world are preconditions for real peace. In turn, elimination of economic sources of wars should make possible

significant reductions of massive, irrational and wasteful investments of resources for "defense," thus freeing these resources for programs focused on the real needs of people.

Implementation of a nonconservative policy agenda requires readiness to reintroduce the notion of social and economic planning to the public agenda. Planning for people's needs through democratic processes would have to become a public priority, replacing the prevailing laissez-faire ideology, since fulfillment of human needs cannot be left to selfish interactions of profit-motivated actors in the market place. History has proved convincingly, that reliance on automatic, self-regulation by the "invisible hand" to promote the public good, is a hopeless fallacy.

Social Change Oriented Politics

Working toward a just society requires a style of politics compatible with the goals and values of such a society, rather than with those of prevailing unjust social orders. This means that pragmatic interest-group politics concerned with short-range solutions for separate policy issues and with winning limited concessions which do not challenge the status-quo of power and privilege, would have to be replaced with principled, nonmanipulative politics, aimed at promoting critical consciousness and redefinitions of interests, and at organizing social movements committed to long-range efforts toward social and economic justice. Realpolitik, the dominant mode of conventional politics, and the assumptions underlying it, are shaped by the dynamics and mentality of the established way of life and tend, therefore, to reproduce it, more or less intact. This approach can achieve incremental changes which may ameliorate suffering and problems. Such gains are meaningful as first-aid measures, but they are unlikely to add up to fundamental social changes.

Electoral politics in the United States and in many capitalist democracies are usually not conducive to alternative approaches to politics. Electoral politics are geared primarily to winning by manipulating the voting of ill-informed electorates. This involves dichotomizing issues into over-simplified alternatives, reinforcing unexamined assumptions and stereotypes, and

generating distorted images through media-technologies. Fundamental social change which requires profound transformations of consciousness and actions, is therefore unlikely to be accomplished through electoral politics. In spite of these dynamics and limitations, the arena of electoral politics should not be abandoned by social change activists. Rather, participation in this arena seems necessary for the following reasons, provided such participation is free from illusions concerning the social change potential of elections:

- (a) damage control or containment and reduction of the degree of destructive consequences of conservative politics for exploited and oppressed classes;
- (b) protection of civil and political rights by resisting tendencies to inhibit expression of system-challenging political positions, and to repress social movements promoting fundamental social change;
- (c) using the electoral arena for political education by presenting critiques of capitalist democracy and its fallacious assumptions, and visions of feasible, alternative social orders based on social and economic justice, and doing this in an open, honest, nonmanipulative dialogical manner.

From a social change perspective, electoral politics seem thus suited mainly for defense against severe exploitation, oppression, and repression, but less suited to advancing long-range social change goals. Those goals require strategies that reach beyond the electoral arena. Under present conditions, in the United States, these strategies should include the following components:

- (a) promoting critical consciousness through communications and interactions in everyday life, in places of work and education, and in social situations;
- (b) building networks of liberation movements, starting through organizing on local levels and linking up with similar efforts elsewhere, within and beyond national boundaries;
- (c) organizing active, nonviolent resistance to, and nonparticipation in, unjust practices and institutions;
- (d) developing horizontally linked and coordinated networks of voluntary, egalitarian-cooperative-democratic institutions

for production, exchange, and consumption of goods and services, in available spaces within, or parallel to, existing institutions and organizations.

Should conditions become more repressive, strategies may have to be modified, since every social situation requires different approaches toward social transformation.

Social Change-Oriented Practice

To overcome conservative tendencies in practice, and to function as agents for fundamental social change, practitioners require different theoretical frameworks from those now dominant, as well as attitudes of experimentation and critical consciousness toward their practice experience. They also need to help one another to study and evaluate evolving alternative approaches to practice, and to deal with resistance from administrators and supervisors in organizations practicing along conventional, status-quo reinforcing lines. An effective means for such help are support groups of practitioners from different organizations, who feel isolated and alienated in their respective places of work.

The following are suggested as elements of a framework for social-change-oriented practice:

- (a) Human problems with which social welfare practice deals, are usually rooted in societal institutions and values, rather than in people's attributes and shortcomings. Resolution and prevention of these problems require therefore, not merely individual adjustments, but transformations of established societal patterns in ways conducive to fulfillment of human needs and to individual and social development for all.
- (b) People, through their interactions, shape and maintain societal institutions and values. Hence, they are also able to transform established institutions and values through collective action, and to adjust them in ways compatible with their needs and with requirements of healthy development.
- (c) Practice cannot be politically neutral. It always involves explicit or implicit political dimensions; it either confronts and challenges established societal institutions or it conforms to them openly or tacitly. Practitioners should avoid

- the illusion of neutrality and should consciously choose and acknowledge their political philosophy.
- (d) Practice can also not be value-neutral; it either reflects or rejects of the dominant values of the established social order. Social-change-oriented practice should reflect values opposed to those underlying the status-quo: equality, cooperation, freedom from domination and exploitation, and affirmation of community.
 - (e) Practice should transcend technical-professional approaches, fragmented by fields, and concerned with relieving symptoms, reducing suffering, and facilitating adaptation and coping under prevailing social conditions. While these are valid and important, short-range objectives, they are not sufficient to overcome problems which are essentially social, economic, and political. Furthermore, human problems are usually not isolated fragments which can be solved by specific technical fixes, but symptoms of a way of life which needs to be transformed so that the problems may be overcome and prevented;
 - (f) A major medium for social-change oriented practice is a dialogical process, which begins with a sensitive exploration of problems experienced and perceived by people and moves on to help them discover links between their problems and societal dynamics. The process should facilitate insights into people's capacities to shape and change societal institutions, and should help them to assert their worth, dignity, and rights. Finally, it should encourage and support people to work on solutions to their problems through involvement in collective action for necessary social change. The dialogical process must never involve indoctrination and manipulation: its aim is to facilitate the development of critical consciousness through a supportive, liberating, non-authoritarian, sensitive relationship.
 - (g) Practice should involve advocacy to assure for people the rights and services available under prevailing conditions. However, the maximum available at present is unlikely to be just and adequate. Hence, advocacy should transcend demands for fulfillment of already existing rights, present demands for equal rights and responsibilities, and reject

policies which are merely variations on the ancient theme of inequality.

- (h) Practice should encourage development of everyone's innate capacities as the goal of just and free societies. It should unravel obstacles to such development in institutional and interpersonal violence—consequences of coercively established and maintained exploiting and alienating modes of work and exchange. And it should facilitate insights into the need for reorganizing and redesigning work as a condition for unobstructed human development.
- (i) Practitioners should explore, individually and in support groups, whether, in prevailing social realities, they too are unable to actualize their innate potential; whether their individual development is also inhibited; and whether they too are victimized by exploiting and oppressive social and economic dynamics, though in different forms and to a lesser extent than the people they serve. They may realize through such explorations that they too have a personal stake in human liberation and equality, and that they should cease to identify with dominant classes and their agencies and policies, and should instead identify with, and join the struggles and movements of oppressed people. They may also conclude that they should transcend divisions between themselves and the people they serve, divisions reflective of conservative concepts of professionalism, according to which education and professional skills entitle people to privilege, higher status and authority.
- (j) As far as possible, social-change-oriented practitioners should aim to transform the style and quality of practice-relations and of administration from vertical, authoritarian, inegalitarian toward horizontal, democratic, egalitarian patterns. Every space over which practitioners have influence, should be so transformed to reflect alternative possible human relations. In this way, counter-realities or prefigurations of future possibilities can be imagined and experimented with within existing human services settings, by and for the providers and users of the services. Unions and support groups of workers and service users could incorporate such prefigurations. Undoubtedly, such experiments are difficult.

They do involve risks, resistance and conflicts, since they test and strain the limits of what is possible within the prevailing social order. Such testing and straining of limits are, however, necessary elements of liberation processes.

- (k) Finally, social-change-oriented practitioners should initiate dialogues with colleagues concerning practice and work place issues, in order to spread critical consciousness concerning these matters. They should also try to organize unions, support groups, and units of social movements at places of work, and they should participate in social and political action.

Social-Change-Oriented Education

Universities, and especially professional schools, tend to prepare students for "successful" adaptation to established ways of life and for assumption of appropriate roles and positions, rather than for critical consciousness concerning societal dynamics and their consequences. Because of these conservative tendencies of schools, teachers pursuing a social-change perspective through education, are often isolated and may encounter resistance from colleagues and administrators. Philosophically, these teachers inhabit a different universe of discourse than most of their colleagues, and they have to link up with similarly oriented teachers and practitioners from other schools and work places, to develop mutually supportive and affirming relationships, and help one another to develop and evaluate their educational practice.

Style and substance of social-change oriented teaching are discussed below separately. It should be noted, however, that these are but two related dimensions of a unified process. For style is also substance: it either complements and reflects social-change-oriented substance, or it contradicts it.

Education can be a liberating experience when students are expected to be responsible for, and self-directing in, their studies, and when teachers serve as advisors, facilitators, resources, and nonauthoritarian assistants. This does not mean abandoning responsibility, initiative and leadership by teachers. It does mean, however, clarity concerning the limits of responsibilities of students and teachers, and fulfillment of one's part of a shared undertaking.

Major aims of liberating education are development of critical consciousness concerning socially shaped realities, alleged facts, and personal opinions, and discovery of one's self as a potentially creative, productive, and self-directing subject in relation to community, society, and nature. Such critical consciousness and self-awareness tend to emerge within cooperative, nonhierarchical settings in which teachers act as colleagues in pursuit of knowledge rather than as "experts" and authorities. In such settings, learning can be mutual and dialogical rather than competitive and one-directional. Also, in such a context, learning goals, requirements, and evaluations can be worked out cooperatively by students and teachers.

Teachers should map and recommend domains for study, facilitate the dialogical learning process, suggest appropriate sources and projects, consult with students on individual learning goals, respond critically and constructively to student projects, and facilitate student evaluations of their own learning. Implicit in this teaching style is the assumption that education toward self-actualization in a just and democratic society of the future, requires creation, in the present, of liberated spaces, i.e., counter-realities to domination and control, in which students can experience in the here and now of a classroom, prefigurations of self-directions and freedom.

The teaching style suggested here involves, however, dilemmas concerning the reactions of students to the absence of structures and controls and to the expectations that they assume responsibility for self-direction of their studies. For most students this is a new experience, different from previous schooling as well as from experiences in other classes in which they are concurrently enrolled. Reactions tend to range from uncertainty and helplessness to creative and enriching learning and personal growth. A constructive response to this is using reactions of students as opportunities for exploring the meanings, costs, and benefits of self-direction and freedom.

Other dilemmas result from conflicts with colleagues concerning the introduction of a radically different educational style and philosophy into a school. An appropriate focus for coping with this is everyone's commitment, in principle, to academic freedom. Experience suggests that being open about what one

does, asserting one's right to teach in accordance with one's educational philosophy and values, while respecting different philosophies, styles, and values of colleagues, does eventually bring about a *modus vivendi* and a measure of mutual tolerance.

As to substance, the following social-change-oriented curriculum has been derived from the practice framework suggested above. It reflects efforts to help students overcome misconceptions concerning societal realities which result from the hegemony of conservative ideology over all stages of education and consciousness formation:

- (a) human nature, human needs, and the natural environment of human life: the human condition;
- (b) requirements and dynamics of human development;
- (c) natural and human created obstacles to human development;
- (d) sources, evolution, and dynamics of social life and of different cultures;
- (e) consequences of variations in social institutions and ideologies, and in the organization of work, production, and exchange for human development and well-being;
- (f) critical-historical analysis of social, economic, political, cultural, and ideological dimensions of life in the United States with special attention to race, gender, and social class dynamics;
- (g) sources, evolution, and functions of value systems in social life;
- (h) exploration of personal values and interests in relation to personal history, experiences and goals;
- (i) social-change-oriented practice in direct service to individuals and social units, service design and administration, analysis and development of social policy, and social and political action toward short- and long-range objectives;
- (j) psychological insights for working sensitively and constructively with people of diverse backgrounds, in different situations, focused on different human concerns;
- (k) critical approaches to social research, transcending empirical, descriptive, positivist approaches.

The study foci listed here are organized by issues rather than by academic disciplines. Studying these issues may require dif-

ferent combinations of sources and methods from social and natural sciences. The various sciences should be viewed and used as complementary perspectives on aspects of human life in nature and in society.

The social-change-oriented curriculum suggested here involves dilemmas. It is obvious that there is more to study than students are able to in a conventional graduate program in social welfare which usually leaves little time for elective studies. The reason there is so much, is that preparation for alternative practice does require an entire "alternative" curriculum, including studies of theoretical foundations and practice, as well as analysis and critique of conventional foundations, assumptions, and service approaches. There is no solution to this dilemma other than acknowledging it, introducing students to the many domains they ought to explore, and motivating them to continue the process of study and critical experimentation as an integral aspect of responsible practice throughout their lives.

A related dilemma is that teachers may lack competence in some substantive domains to which students should be exposed. Here too, the solution is to acknowledge this reality, and to guide students to appropriate study sources. Of course, teachers are also students, and they should over time broaden and deepen their own knowledge, experience, and competence.

Epilogue

I have argued throughout this essay that people can overcome conservative tendencies which now threaten human development on local and global scales. I have also suggested approaches through which social-change-oriented practitioners and educators in social welfare can contribute to the struggle for human survival and liberation. The suggestions sketched here are tentative and incomplete, for the search for practice and teaching approaches consistent with an egalitarian-democratic philosophy is only in its early stages. This search has been going on for several years in the United States and elsewhere. Gradually, organizations and a literature have been emerging through which people are sharing and examining relevant experiences and ideas. Also, in many places, practitioners and teachers are meeting regularly to support one another and learn from

one another, in order to advance the liberation process and to transcend firmly entrenched conservative tendencies. The more people will get involved in these efforts, the greater the likelihood that we will succeed, and that the human species will survive and actualize its rich potential.

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