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# Social Work Concerns Related To Peace And People Oriented Development In The International Context

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*It is the thesis of this paper that the social work profession along with other human service professions has the potential of making a vital contribution in promoting peace and people oriented development and that the ultimate test of the profession's contribution to individuals, families, and communities in varying contexts is the ensuring of human survival and the enhancing of the quality of life for all people.*

The social work profession has a great tradition of reform and peace related efforts, however limited and sporadic it may be. The contributions of pioneers such as Jane Addams and Harry Hopkins symbolize some of the best peace, reform and people oriented activity in social work. The profession emerged toward the turn of the twentieth century, largely as an organized response to social dislocations and problems which were part of the process of industrialization and change in western societies. Today, the profession continues to be challenged to respond to the "priestly" and the "prophetic," and "service and reform" aspects of work with people in situations of development and change (Chambers, 1962).

While the challenge to the profession historically has been to respond humanely and effectively to both service and reform concerns, in actual practice there has been at varying times shifts in emphasis from one or the other, not so much as a response to the needs of people but as a result of succumbing to pressures due to changes in political and social climate (Ehrenreich, 1985). However, it is a tribute to the profession that it has within it

educators and practitioners who persist in raising critical questions about this tendency in the profession to oscillate between individual change and societal change. It is also encouraging that educators and practitioners are engaged in constructive efforts to deal with this problem.

Related to this effort of keeping in balance the service and reform traditions of the profession is the task of introducing the much needed international perspective in social work and of viewing concerns of peace and issues of hunger, poverty and oppression in the global context. As we approach the twenty-first century in an increasingly interdependent world, the social work profession will face the challenge of responding to issues of human survival, peace and people oriented development. The basic values of the profession, from which stem the respect for life, the concern for all people and the commitment to social justice will impel us to broaden our horizons and our intervention efforts in responding to these issues of life and death in the global community. It is the thesis of this paper that the social work profession along with other human service professions has the potential of making a vital contribution in promoting peace and people oriented development and that the ultimate test of the profession's contribution to individuals, families and communities in varying contexts is the ensuring of human survival and the enhancing of the quality of life for all people.

#### Issues of Peace and Nuclear Threat

In today's interdependent world the issues of peace and nuclear threat are—or should be—the concern of every profession and individual. Scholars and political analysts continue to raise questions about the nuclear armament and defense build-up and the technology of exploitation of natural resources taking precedence over people development in the global community. The nuclear shadow hangs over each individual as the most awesome threat in human history. There are now, we are told, in the East and West ready to be launched an army of nuclear weapons with the destructive power of a million Hiroshima bombs. Today the U. S. constructs approximately 200 warheads every two months and possesses a total of over 30,000. Worldwide there are over 50,000. The total explosive power of these

weapons (which at this point continue to increase) amounts to approximately 20 billion tons of TNT. In other words, a freight train carrying this amount of TNT would stretch approximately 4 million miles (Walsh, 1984, p. 13). With the shift from the earlier "balance of power" theory in international relations to the prevailing theory of a "balance of terror," thoughtful persons point out that humanity is headed for nuclear war, as "lambs to the slaughter" (Rogers et al., 1981, pp. 9–16).

The major policy issue in the international context is the issue of human survival in the global community. The Harvard Nuclear Study Group emphasizes the fact that the question of whether humanity can continue living with nuclear weapons (put differently, whether humanity can survive) is the central issue of our time (Harvard Nuclear Study Group, 1983, pp. 232–254). Similarly, Dr. Helen Caldicott (the founder of Physicians for Social Responsibility and more recently women's action for nuclear disarmament) maintains that the concern related to peace, nuclear war and the threat to human annihilation is the "ultimate issue," "the only issue" (Caldicott, 1980). Critics of the nuclear arms race point to the dehumanizing effect of living in a society and a world that tends to impart the view that there is no way to respond to serious international conflict except by preparing for nuclear war (Albert et al., 1983, pp. 1–6). The Harvard Study Group takes the position that there is no reason to assume that there are only absolute alternatives of either disarmament or holocaust in efforts to deal with the nuclear threat. It is clear that the choice made by individuals, as to whether they are committed to efforts toward arms control and constructive peace efforts or alternatively are resigned to a fatalistic view that a nuclear holocaust is inevitable, will make a crucial difference in efforts to ensure human survival and promotion of global peace. Social Work's contribution in this collective effort cannot be minimized, and will be discussed later in this paper.

Another fundamental policy issue in the context of the nuclear threat that is open to question, is the use of war as an instrument of national policy in settling international disputes. Since there is the danger of even regional disputes escalating into a nuclear war, renewed efforts are called for to set up an effective mechanism for resolving international disputes without

resorting to war. It is clear that nuclear war leads only to radioactive suicide. One nation may emerge from the holocaust as a temporary victor, but ultimately the human race as a whole would not survive (Wasserman et al., 1982, p. 268). Thoughtful persons continue to speak out on this issue of the use of force and coercion to settle international differences especially in the present situation. Yet, as long as the policy of confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union continues and enormous energies and resources are invested in the nuclear arms race, there will be hardly any possibility of exploring seriously alternate ways of settling international disputes.

There is also increasing concern related to the policy issue of the effects of the threat of nuclear war and nuclear testing on people, especially children. It is evident that the threat of nuclear war, the adverse consequences of nuclear testing, and the possibility of a leak in a nuclear plant are all sources of fear and anxiety to individuals and families. Parents are likely to pass on to their children their own feelings of anxiety due to the nuclear threat. Studies undertaken on the negative psychological effects of the nuclear threat indicate that nuclear issues have deeply affected both adults and children (Walsh, 1984, p. 75).

One of the surveys generated by a special task force of the American Psychiatric Association specifically examined the psychosocial effects of living with the likely threat of a thermo nuclear disaster on children and adolescents. The results revealed that not only were the children very aware of the nuclear threat, but it had deeply penetrated their consciousness. The majority of them did not think that they, their community or their country, could sustain a nuclear attack. There were also feelings of anger, powerlessness and frustration arising from this situation (American Psychiatric Association, 1982). In another survey similar sentiments were expressed. Kirk, a fifteen year old, stated: "There are old men with their fingers on the button and they're playing with our lives, which we haven't had yet, while they've had long full ones. It makes me mad" (Verdon-Roe, January 1983, pp. 24-31).

There are profound policy issues related to these reactions of children and adolescents to the threat of nuclear disaster. It is evident that adult responses to the nuclear threat shape chil-

dren's attitude's of trust and influence patterns of personality development. Adults respond in a variety of ways to the threat of nuclear war. There may be a powerlessness, fatalism and at times a feeling of personal vulnerability (Lylan, 1982, pp. 619–629). Individuals also experience what has been referred to as "psychic numbness"—a process of denial and repression. It is evident that the sense of powerlessness, anger and fatalism that children experience are the result of growing up in an environment which ignores the threat of nuclear destruction (Escalona, 1982, pp. 600–607).

Children need to be educated to the realities of the nuclear threat and helped to overcome the fear which may partly be derived from ignorance. There are also serious concerns expressed regarding the possibility of raising a new generation of people who may have no stake in the present or the future. Perhaps the most significant toll is levied on the unborn, whose fetal size and vulnerability make them infinitely susceptible to even the tiniest amount of radiation. Radiation doses received by the mother can have enormous effects on the unborn fetus. And those who survive may be so thoroughly mutated as to scarcely warrant the label "human."

A related policy issue that cannot be glossed over is the adverse effects of the many nuclear testings, the likely nuclear spills and accidents, and dumpings of nuclear waste on the environment and the health of people. It is now four decades since the first atomic bombs were dropped in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Since then the U. S. military is reported to have exploded over 700 nuclear bombs on the U. S. continental soil and the Pacific. France has had an average of ten tests per year since 1966 in the South Pacific, and testing continues on a regular basis in the Soviet Union. Public health and medical specialists warn that many of the adverse health effects are very likely currently being felt. It is claimed that thousands of tons of radioactive materials released by nuclear explosions and reactor spills are now contaminating the global environment. Toxic nuclear materials—nonbiodegradable with some likelihood of remaining potent forever—will continue to accumulate and ultimately their adverse effects on the biosphere and on human beings will be deadly (Caldicott, 1980, p. 3).

The risk of accidents, false alarms and the psychological problems related to first strike nuclear war are alarming. False alerts reportedly have been triggered by a flock of geese that the early warning systems interpreted as a fleet of Soviet missiles, by a rising moon and by a shower of meteorites (Caldicott, 1984, p. 14). It is necessary to point out here that the nuclear weapons are controlled and monitored by the most sophisticated security system in the United States. However, they are not free from errors both human and mechanical. The North American Radar Air Defense System (NORAD) designed to signal nuclear attack had 151 false alarms considered serious and 3,703 lesser alarms during the 18 months preceding June 30, 1980. Human decision making in such a security system is minimized. A computer is likely to decide whether or not to launch a nuclear war. In military jargon they refer to taking the human out of the loop. One U. S. Congressman concerned by the danger involved in this situation made the telling comment, "I fear this may take the human out of the planet" (Walsh, 1984, p. 14).

Yet, even if there is no outbreak of a nuclear war accidentally or otherwise and the hazards of nuclear waste storage are dealt with effectively, there is still a problem—and a significant policy issue—in the enormous waste of global resources both human and material. Nuclear weapons today consume over \$100 billion per year worldwide. Currently the world military expenditure is running at a historic high of over \$1.7 million a minute (Sivard, 1986, p. 7). It is painfully evident that we live in a global community that is overarmed and undernourished. As Bernard Lown, the President of the International Physicians for Prevention of Nuclear War (the international antiwar organization that was awarded this year's Nobel Peace Prize), notes: "A small fraction of these expenditures could provide the world with adequate food and sanitary water supply, housing, education, and modern health care." The President's Commission on World Hunger estimated that it would cost only \$6 billion per year to eradicate malnutrition, an amount equivalent to less than four days of arms expenditure (Walsh, 1984, p. 15). Clearly the negative impact of the nuclear arms race and military expenditure on people oriented development, especially in relation to the developing countries, weighs heavily in the conscience of the

global community. Humankind is faced with the troubling issue of the use of the world's resources for destruction rather than for human development.

### People Oriented Development

The world's arms race is a major factor in the world's economic crisis, and the negative effects of excessive military spending is especially evident in the adverse conditions of life of people in the developing countries. The global community can no longer afford the luxury of playing cowboys and Indians.

Adolfo Pe' rez Esquivel, the Argentinean advocate of peace and nonviolence, the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1980, poses the agonizing question, "But could not this war economy be transformed into an economy for development and peace among the peoples? . . . Children starve to death, families live in squalor, education and medical care are non existent . . . No one has the right to create an economy at the expense of the world's poor" (Esquivel, 1984, p. 34).

It is not possible to justify the "monstrous waste" of resources which takes place even in a limited war. Consider for a moment the \$25 billion per year spent on the Vietnam military effort and what the world will be like today if this amount spent each year of the war had been devoted to people development efforts—such as education, agricultural development, improvement of health services and family life education services in developing countries (Brown, 1973, p. 360).

People oriented development efforts have the potential of unleashing forces for positive change in societies and of contributing to growth, improved standards of living and enhanced quality of life for all. The traditional methods of establishing development objectives in terms of economic growth rate do not ordinarily take into account income distribution and thereby tend to contribute to further concentration of wealth among privileged groups. If the focus is on providing basic necessities, then development efforts contribute to the improvement of the conditions of life of the less fortunate people in society.

The concern in people development efforts is especially for "marginalized" people, the "little" people whom economic growth has bypassed, peasants robbed of their land, minorities who



are discriminated against, and the forgotten families of shanty towns and neglected villages. People oriented development expresses development objectives in human terms focusing on quality of life considerations such as conditions of family life, education of children, adequate income, health standards, people's participation and conservation of natural resources. In this quality of life emphasis, consideration is given to a combination of factors such as: increase in per capita goods and services; consideration of possible decrease in per capita natural amenities; distribution of income; and any likely negative effect of expanding economic activity, especially on marginalized people (Brown, 1973, pp. 321–329).

We can no longer justify the argument that there are not enough resources to provide a universal minimum living standard for all people. If we use the global community's resources responsibly through peaceful and people oriented productive efforts for most of humankind, this objective of minimum living standard is attainable in the near future. However, a breakdown of the Global Research and Development budget indicates that a major share of the resources is devoted to weaponry, followed by nuclear and space research. The more urgent human needs—for example, literacy programs, child health services and introduction of a high protein rice variety—claim only a small fraction of the total expenditure. What has been lacking is the concerted effort in the global community to mobilize scientific resources to meet pressing social needs. The challenge is to develop more appropriate and efficient technologies for use by the world's poor, techniques that would make possible the attainment of a higher level of a living at a considerably reduced cost.

Thoughtful persons point out that among the reasons why technology is not disseminated more effectively from rich to poor countries is that so much of it is not pertinent to the needs of the poor countries of the world. Additionally, scientists and technicians residing mostly in the rich countries have been somewhat indifferent to the needs of the world's poor. To ensure that scientific efforts contribute to people oriented development and quality of life, it is vital that global research and development expenditures are guided by improved knowledge and responsiveness to the social conditions in the global community.

The new technological frontier, it is argued, is not outer space or nuclear energy but rather "socially oriented technology"—technology designed to meet the needs of people. What is called for is a social vision, a social vision of what society could be like, guided by considerations of human values and enhancement of the quality of life of all people (Brown, 1973, p. 330).

### Emerging Social Ethic

The growing social sensitivity to the need for peace, people oriented development, human rights and eradication of world hunger has the potential of contributing to the emergence of a social ethic in international relations. This new ethic that would at a minimum undergird positive peace efforts, and humane developments, will help to foster harmony among human beings in their interaction with each other and with nature. There is greater emphasis in the new social ethic on man's harmony with nature and his environment than on his excessive dominion over it. Additionally, the view of man as the center of the universe will be changed to a concept of man as "an integral part of the natural system." There is a strong commitment to the "ideology of global unity" in the new social ethic and to pursuing the goal of raising everyone above the subhuman conditions of life evident especially in the developing countries (Brown, 1973, p. 361).

In the emerging social ethic the current almost exclusive emphasis on production and the acquisition of wealth as an end in itself would give way to distribution and sharing. The many forms of interdependence among nations and indeed the very survival of human beings in a "deteriorating biosphere" would suggest of necessity a much more cooperative arrangement in the use of global resources for people oriented development. Considerations of human survival and concern for the preservation of the global ecosystem would also necessitate a more collaborative arrangement. It is likely that for a number of individuals self-realization may take the form of cooperative efforts to solve human problems.

It is vital that the new social ethic is a universal one, free from cultural biases. Increasingly, it will be perceived as a necessary response to the human predicament of poverty, inhu-

manity, oppression and the possibility of global suicide as we approach the twenty-first century. Such an ethic could be expected to have a significant effect on the behavior of individuals, groups, national governments and the global community. There will be a reordering of global priorities and a major commitment of resources to deal with the global problems of poverty, hunger, malnutrition, destruction of human lives and environment (Brown, 1973, pp. 340–345).

The new social ethic would also challenge the global community—especially the affluent nations—to examine critically the current lifestyles and the pursuit of what is termed “super-affluence”—the consumption of goods and services to a point where it has limited bearing on individual well being, in an ecosystem which is already under considerable stress. Critics point out that at present we are in a phase of unprecedented ecological disruption and “drawdown,” a phase in which human beings are consuming the global resources at a faster pace than they are being replaced. It is a shocking situation in which they argue that we are mortgaging our future and that of future generations (Walsh, 1984, p. 10). Currently, in the United States we consume a third or more of the world’s resources in pursuit of “superaffluence,” though we constitute only 6 percent of its people. In contrast, there are in the global community, 2 billion people with yearly incomes less than \$100, an income approximately one fortieth the income of the average American (Brown, 1973, pp. 321 & 356).

If the global community impelled by a social vision makes a firm commitment to the emerging social ethic, then it will open the way to ensuring a minimum level of living for all humankind and to working toward a unified global society. For it is increasingly evident that the era of the “militaristic nation state” must end that humankind’s sustained effort toward a just unified global society is the only hope for survival and peace.

### Social Work’s Response

In the discussion so far, reference has already been made to the challenge that social work concerns related to peace and people oriented development pose for the profession. However, a few more specific comments related to the profession’s re-

sponse to the concerns of peace and development in the global community seems to be in order.

As mentioned earlier, a major thesis of this paper is that the social work profession along with other human service professions could make a vital contribution to promoting peace and people oriented development. And the ultimate test of the profession in the future in the global context is the extent to which it contributes to enhancing the quality of life of all people.

Social work along with other disciplines—especially philosophy and religion—could make a significant contribution in shaping the development of a social vision and a new social ethic that would emphasize respect for life, appreciation of diversity, justice in human affairs, people oriented development and peace. As discussed earlier, the global community—in the context of the nuclear threat, the dangers to the global ecosystem, and growing world poverty—is faced with the task of establishing more humane goals and priorities in the international context, to ensure the development of a world society that is geared more to life and growth than to death. In this critical task of fostering more humane values to influence peace and development efforts, social workers at varying levels (from individual, to national and international levels) are challenged to make a renewed commitment to humane and life affirming values and to actualize them in their professional and personal lives. We cannot minimize the significance of this renewed commitment of social workers to the positive, humane life affirming values, so vital for human interactions in society at every level. For more than any other group social workers are likely on a daily basis to deal with the consequences of global conflicts, poverty, human greed, fear and hatred in the lives of people. We have only to document the experiences of refugee families, migrant farm workers, trans national adoptive children, Vietnam veterans, prisoners of war and the victims of nuclear radiation to clearly establish this point.

Scholars and analysts point out that perhaps the current unprecedented threats to humanity may create the necessary conditions and the sense of urgency for individuals to reflect on the fundamental purpose of life. To the extent that we are open and honest and are willing to acknowledge and to reflect on the

reality of our own mortality, "rampant inhumanity" and the enormous "preventable human suffering," we are likely to experience at new and deeper levels, meaning and purpose. Paul Tillich refers to the "anxiety of meaninglessness" in human beings and the contribution that social workers could make in this context, in affirming values and in nurturing enduring relationships that would be vital for life affirmation and positive growth. He refers to the key contribution of social work in giving people in an increasingly secular and global society the feeling and the assurance of being "necessary." This, he points out, is vital in the present situation where there are "individuals who have lost the feeling of a necessary place, not only in their work and community, but also in the universe as a whole" (Tillich, March 1962, pp. 13–16). In being instrumental in providing this sense of being "necessary" he points out that social workers "help to fulfill the ultimate aim of man and his world, namely the universal aim of being itself."

In the context of the global problems impacting the lives of people it is vital that the social work profession incorporates in its future educational and practice efforts the overarching philosophic theme of peace (which embodies some key social work values) and directs its energies toward constructive efforts at conflict resolution (in varying contexts and levels), people oriented development, empowerment and the commitment to social justice and nonviolent change.

If the social work profession is to be responsive to the new areas of human concern in the global community such as constructive efforts toward peace and humanizing development, we are faced with the task of radically restructuring education and practice to meet the new challenges. The profession's efforts have to be viewed in a broader, interdisciplinary context. We need to go beyond the traditional service dimension to a developmental emphasis focusing on issues of people oriented development, resource and policy development, respect for diverse people and cultural traditions and concerns such as the nuclear threat, hunger and racial conflicts, and their impact on the daily lives of people, necessitating an international/cross-cultural perspective in social work. Such a perspective will not only widen the profession's horizon to an awareness of the global problems that

have a serious adverse effect on the lives of people, but also will facilitate constructive efforts towards conflict resolution, peace and development more responsive to the needs of people. In developing a global/pluralistic perspective, there is greater appreciation and understanding of diversity and a conscious effort to break loose from limiting and distorting cultural biases. This is referred to as a process of "detrribalization" by which a person matures from an "ethnocentric" to a global view, from "my country right or wrong" to "our planet," and from "exclusive identification" with a group or nation to "identification with human kind" (Walsh, 1984, pp. 79–80).

Suggestions have been made for the profession to give consideration to the potential value of using peace as a "major organizing concept" for its future practice and education (Chauncey, March 1984, p. 4). Concerns like peace, conflict resolution, people oriented development, empowerment of grassroots people, coalition building and development aid that stimulate people's capacity building by their very complexity and interrelatedness defy traditional approaches to dealing with human problems. The social work profession in responding to this challenge will, in both education and practice, explore alternate models and frameworks which would incorporate interrelated concepts, new knowledge and research in substantive areas and action oriented themes such as nonviolent change, people empowerment, development of resources, distributive justice, exploring new forms of conflict resolution and developing improved capacities for working with a variety of social movements and citizen groups in efforts to ensure resolution of conflicts and a more sustained and humane development at varying levels (Sanders, 1985).

The search for alternate systems in resource development, distribution, development aid and peace efforts is in response to the crying need for something more human, more participatory—facilitating greater collaboration and "self management"—in which human beings are not dealt with largely as objects.

### Conclusion

Faced with the enormity of the task of controlling the nuclear arms race, of fostering peace and more humane development in

the global society, a familiar question raised is whether this is, in fact, the province of social work. If social work is concerned as it has been in the past with respect for human life, human freedom and the enhancement of the quality of life for all, every situation that involves threat to human life, human freedom, and indeed to the collective well being of the human family at whatever level, poses a challenge to social work.

Jane Addams (who in her time was a joint recipient of the Nobel Prize for Peace) in organizing social workers for peace in 1914, commented on the instrumentality of war as a means of settling national disputes. She stated: "We believed that war, seeking its end through coercion, not only interrupted, but fatally reversed this process of cooperating good will . . ." (Addams, 1922, p. 3). In this context, it seems pertinent for social work to help to awaken the conscience and to mobilize the collective will of people to attack the sources of fear, conflict, oppression and violence at every level. Social workers along with other groups could play a significant role in the task of development and peace, in Paulo Freire's terms, to "raise the consciousness of people" and to facilitate empowering of people to collectively speak to the issues that affect their lives (Freire, 1970). Education that involves the whole person and integrates the philosophy of living in harmony with each other and with nature, and the responsible use of global resources becomes vital. Social work education must be focused on a deep concern for human rights and justice and an openness to diversity (Sanders, 1983). Related to education is also the need for peace and development-oriented research. Stimulus should be provided for research, especially in cross-national/cross-cultural perspective in areas such as impact of social movements, non-violent change efforts, people oriented development and conflict resolution. On the more practical side, there is the essential task of "coalition building" and collaboration, especially with peace groups, labor and women's organizations and others committed to human rights and justice. Efforts could also be made to strengthen the U. N. which, despite its limitations, strives to neutralize global tensions and conflicts and serves to promote peace and development activities.

The emerging social ethic and the values that are likely to

undergird peace and development efforts represent a positive force vital to the fostering of a just and humane global society. In this context, Alexander Solzhenitsyn in commenting on the need to reassess the fundamental purposes of human life and human society raises some critical questions that are pertinent. He asks: "Is it true that man is above everything?" "Is it right that man's life and society's activities should be ruled by material expansion above all?" "Is it permissible to promote such expansion to the detriment of our integral spiritual life?" (Solzhenitsyn, 1978, p. 59). At the least this should prod us to transcend the current preoccupation with narrow technology and to pursue equally the qualitative aspects of human life and interaction so vital to the global community.

The final hope for peace and human betterment rests in what Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Schweitzer and others called the law of love. When love and concern for our fellow human beings becomes the moving force in the global community then and only then will the vision of the sages and the prophets become a reality, and the people ". . . shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nations shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isaiah, 1957).

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