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## THE SOCIAL WELFARE WORKERS MOVEMENT:

### A CASE STUDY OF NEW LEFT THOUGHT IN PRACTICE

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During the upheavals of the 1960's many human service professions and academic disciplines (e.g. psychology, sociology, law, medicine, etc.) underwent severe criticisms of their goals and methodologies, generated both from within and without. In social work one such critique came from the Social Welfare Workers Movement (SWWM), born out of protest-oriented activities at the National Conference on Social Welfare in New York City, 1969. Although SWWM dissipated after about two years, interest in radical social work is still very much alive today. The intent of this paper, then, is to record and analyze the career of the Social Welfare Workers Movement through a case study of the Boston SWWM Chapter, so that others may profit from its successes and failures. The process of explication should also clarify the use of social action as a method of deliberate social change and the potential for a "radicals-in-the-professions" type of social movement. New Left theory will be used as the conceptual framework for analysis, the application of theory to practice as it were.

#### PART I: THE NEW LEFT THEORY OF SOCIAL CHANGE<sup>1</sup>

The New Left theory of social change, especially as expounded by its main proponents in the 1960's, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), is neo-Marxist theory in the grand style. It provided a broad socio-political analysis of post-industrial American society, outlining some of the conditions for change and suggesting some general guidelines for social action. It necessarily omitted explicit formulas, leaving these to the interpretations and inventiveness of those individuals actively struggling to radically restructure American society. For as Zinn has pointed out,<sup>2</sup>

"A dialectical approach-in the Marxian sense-suggests that we evaluate a situation not as fixed, but as in motion, and that our evaluation itself affects that motion. Dialectical materialism asks awareness that we are creatures of limited vision in eyes and brain, and so must not assume that what we perceive is all-that conflicting tendencies often lie just beneath the surface of any event."

The central concepts of the theory were: centralized power, social class, alienation, radical consciousness, ideology, conflict, and participatory democracy. The manner in which these concepts were loosely tied together into a theory will be briefly explained in the succeeding paragraphs.

Essentially the theory argues that the socialistic vision of a planned cooperative society, a participatory democracy where people truly have control over the institutions that affect their lives, is

conceivable in America because of the promise of a post-scarcity economy. In the American past where resources were insufficient to meet basic human needs, there would always be competition and exploitation. But since the American economy now produces surplus goods, with planning and new mechanisms for distribution, society could be re-ordered for the benefit of all, rather than for the accumulation of profit and wealth by a few.

Presently American society is stratified into at least four social classes: a Ruling Class, a New Working Class, a Traditional Working Class, and an Under Class.<sup>3</sup> The Ruling Class<sup>4</sup> consists of a relatively small number of corporate capitalists, top level politicians, and the military establishment who control large national and international corporations and their corresponding public organizations. An outstanding characteristic of post-industrial society has been the proliferation of large organizations and bureaucracies in all spheres of life. Through the development of computer technology and the centralization of communications and mass media, these organizations form regulated systems which manipulate and control the lives of the mass of people in the society. Thus the Ruling Class is able to define the parameters of social policy decisions in their own interests and continues to accumulate an inordinate proportion of the society's wealth and power.

In order to bring about a fundamental reordering of American society, a mass based political movement will have to be created. This movement will be peopled in particular by the New working Class, but will also include members of the Traditional Working Class and the Under Class. The New Working Class consisting of intellectuals, professionals, administrators and managers, white collar and middle management personnel, is pivotal to this new movement for several reasons.

First, because of the "socialization of production", the New Working Class represents a growing majority of the workers in the country. According to New Left author, David Gilbert, this means there has been,<sup>5</sup>

"1. ... the extension of commodities into all spheres of human activity besides those directly connected with material needs (everything ranging from cultural and educational industries to defense); and 2. a restructuring of work because of the tremendous growth of jobs that no longer relate directly to material production (more and more jobs that have to do with the machines that turn out products rather than with the products directly; there has been a huge increase in jobs that deal with the social aspects of production--e.g. accounting, advertising, social services)."

Secondly, the New Working Class is alienated<sup>6</sup> because of the advanced organizational system that fragments "man's existence and consciousness (and) which impedes the wholeness of experience and activity". Large organizations, corporations, and bureaucracies require complex management tasks and specialized work roles such that individual workers cannot comprehend their contribution to the whole. The individual worker is powerless to assert his individuality, to make a difference.

His labor is merely an input into the system, and thus his person is dehumanized as well. Because of its alienation the New Working class has the latent motivation to work for change.

Thirdly, because New Working Class members are not caught in a daily struggle for subsistence, and because they are generally well educated, they have the potential for grasping the significance of economic surplus and waste production. They can respond to ideology which for a social movement can be defined as "the belief in a set of constitutive ideas (which) binds the movement together and gives then the elan needed for the persistent pursuit of the movement's aims."<sup>7</sup>

If alienation and the vision of a planned participatory society represent the motivational base of New Left theory, and counter-ideology is the potential glue to bind the movement together, then radical consciousness and conflict may be considered as the general strategies for building the movement and eventually effecting the desired social change.

The concept of radical consciousness (called class consciousness by Marx) is central to the transition from passivity to action. It suggests that if man can view his conditions objectively, his perceptions will enable him to transcend his oppression and move to action. Where men have been exposed to common dehumanizing experiences, political education can produce a like-minded radical consciousness. Thus the leaders of the counter-movement seek to educate, both through the presentation of alternative interpretations of social realities and through actions that point up the contradictions and oppressiveness of "the system" as it is presently constituted.

Ultimately, in order for fundamental social change to occur, conflict will have to be generated internally within the potential actors who are to be "radicalized" and externally in political struggles with those in power in the society. Internal conflict relates to the stresses that change agents invariably experience in a radical struggle. The radical adherent must undergo an identity crisis, wherein his previous beliefs about the structure of society and his role in it have been opened to question. He is helped with this internal encounter through the movement organization which serves as a psychological support group as much as it does as an external change strategy. For the New Left, the building of communities and alternative life-style groups were consciously viewed as a means of constructively coping with the stresses of change. For some, these efforts also became the embodiment of the revolution itself, the strategy for achieving the new social order. As Margolies has pointed out,<sup>8</sup>

"Several years ago community was the cop-out of those who couldn't cope with our political struggles. Today we find our political and psychic renewal in the creation of community. Our hardships in the past few years have shown the road that supports us in helping each other to work things out emotionally and intellectually is the path of greatest political relevancy as well... Our 'program' is what we are already about; the discovery of our true selves and our need for new relationships, which is the creation of community where there was just alienation."

External conflict refers to the recognition that radical changes in the social system can only come about through a political struggle. Radical changes in the system are large changes, qualitatively different changes, changes in the structure of the system that are indicative of a break in the continuity of the normal elaboration of the system. Radical change challenges the legitimacy of the system as it is presently constructed, and in so doing, the radical political movement challenges the authority on which the system rests. Protracted conflict must necessarily ensue as a strategy and as a consequence of action. Winning adherents to the movement presents the task of involving people in internal conflict, which in itself begins to create system changes. Furthering that system change presents the task of converting individual internal conflict into sustained collective political action.

## PART II: THEORY IN PRACTICE

In Boston as in many other large cities the Spring of 1969 was a time of increasing social ferment. Minority leaders, poor people's organizations, and students were engaged in a long term struggle for justice and equality, a struggle to realize the humanitarian ideals espoused by the society's human service institutions, among others, but so far yet from fruition. In this climate a group of human service workers from diverse social agencies, had begun to meet weekly to share their concerns about the seeming indifference and conservatism of the social welfare "establishment" in the face of urgent appeals for social change. This group consisted mostly of MSW social workers, all white including the author, with about equal numbers of men and women, ranging in age from 24-35, and in experience from relatively new workers to high level supervisors. Later that Spring at the National Conference on Social Welfare, the protest-oriented activities of the Welfare Rights Organization, the National Association of Black Social Workers, and the newly formed Social Welfare Workers Movement, and other dissident groups,<sup>9</sup> touched a responsive chord among Boston group members and others who attended the annual forum. One outcome of the Conference was the formation of SWWM Chapters across the country, born now out of the common experiences of confrontation and the hammering out of a position statement and linked to a new national communication network.<sup>10</sup>

In Leftist terms many social workers who had attended the NCSW were "radicalized". The conditions had created the readiness for a group of alienated professionals to pull together, engage in "radical" activities, and to move tentatively towards an ideology that could provide a framework around which to organize other members of the New Working Class.

The difficulties involved in building a political movement among social welfare professionals were understood intellectually from the outset. But the emotional stress of so ambitious a project could not be fully perceived by the organizers, or the attempt never would have been made. As Hoffer points out in The True Believer, for individuals to become involved in vast undertakings, they must be "ignorant of the vastness of their undertaking".<sup>11</sup> Emotion rather than detached intellectual analysis fuels the determination to overcome great odds.

Feelings had been activated at the NCSW, but feelings fraught with contradiction, mood swings, and crises, all of which were reflected in the subsequent struggles to launch the Social Welfare Workers Movement (SWWM). Since internal and external conflicts were pervasive in the formation of SWWM, these will tend to be emphasized in the presentation of case material. Perhaps this approach will also serve as a corrective to the coherence imposed upon a disorderly process by the organizational requirements of a paper.

### Beginnings: Purposes and Objectives

The first and most persistent conflict in SWWM was that so many things had to be done at the same time. An organization had to be built, but the nature of that organization had to be worked out. How large? Was it a movement or an organization? Should it have a formal structure? How could SWWM establish a presence in the community? Was that really important? How could it stay in contact with other movement activists? How could it build an alliance with client groups? What "actions" should be taken on what fronts? Time was of the essence; should it be spent on strategizing? But how would people know what kind of group SWWM was? What kind of group was it? What did the position statement mean? Did anybody agree with it? Was that necessary now? Pass it out. Understanding would come later. Out of this initial confusion SWWM was built; a structure was developed, "actions" were taken, positions worked out, and conflicts faced. Some, to be examined later, remained intractable.

Whether one prefers to call SWWM a Movement or an organization, it was, nevertheless, a coordinated body with tasks and goals. These goals and objectives were ideologically inspired by the New Left's analysis of the society and the SWWM critique of the social welfare system. SWWM's general position statement, however, did not specify short range objectives. These had to grow out of the concerns and context of each SWWM group. In general the position statement rested on the corporate capitalist critique of American society suggested in Part I of this paper and on SWWM's view of the social control role of the human service professions. The perspective of the statement was radical in the sense that the solutions to social problems were located in the social system rather than in individuals, so that institutions would have to be fundamentally changed in order to bring about a healthier society.

According to SWWM, not only did the corporate controlled capitalistic system oppress the poor through its profit-making activities, but also the very structure of the human services designed to help the poor and the needy further dehumanized both clients as well as the professionals who provided the services. In this light the role of social workers and other human service workers is to provide a social control function for the society. In attempting to mediate between those who have the resources and those who do not have them, social workers act as buffers, deflecting and absorbing the conflict that might lead to more basic change. Thus the social work profession funded by the power structure, unwittingly serves the political end of maintaining the status quo.

To counter this social control function, SWWM's position paper incorporated the concept of participatory democracy achieved through decentralization and de-professionalization. The long term goal was to achieve worker-community control over social welfare institutions whose decisions daily impacted negatively on people's lives. Rather than being run by a professional elite, human service organizations were to be operated by trained and untrained workers and clients with equal opportunities for influence, and perhaps even with equal remuneration.

For organizing purposes the broad strategy of SWWM was to educate human service professionals as to their true political roles in the system, and then to form an alliance with client groups creating a mass movement for change in social welfare institutions. A more specific program and set of organizing strategies was left to be developed by each group. For the Boston Chapter, SWWM's activities and concerns can be divided loosely into three categories: building radical consciousness; building participatory democracy; and building resource networks. Many activities served several of these ends simultaneously, and many activities could not be included because of the space limitations of this paper. The discussion that follows will both describe various SWWM activities briefly and attempt to illuminate the difficulties involved in applying New Left theory in practice.

#### Building Radical Consciousness:

Most SWWM activities aimed at building radical consciousness because this was seen as a necessary prerequisite for commitment to the movement. Some examples of such activities were: teach-ins, development of a newsletter and mailing list, general educational meetings and rap sessions, study groups, outreach to students in schools of social work, disruptions of professional meetings and conferences, etc.

A major source of activity centered around the Massachusetts public welfare system since many SWWM members were public welfare employees, and the local welfare Rights Organization (MWRO) was strong, and because the state was considering enactment of a series of repressive welfare measures. SWWM never imagined it could prevent enactment of repressive legislation by itself. It saw the opportunity, however, to try to activate public assistance workers and the public employees union through education and protest-oriented activities. However, SWWM's decision to move into the welfare arena militantly was difficult to make. For there was the ever-present danger that militant activity might provoke further repressive measures. This, in fact, was the position of professional welfare leaders who sought to include SWWM in a larger welfare coalition and thereby assert some measure of control over its activities.<sup>12</sup> Conflicts such as these were generally resolved in SWWM by consulting or allying with client groups who stood to bear the brunt of repression. But SWWM also had to maintain its independence from client groups, lest it become simply a support group for Welfare Rights Organizations, et.al. SWWM could not afford to lose sight of its position that welfare workers were also dehumanized by the system, for alienation was a necessary ingredient of the motivation for a Worker's Movement.

Other consciousness-raising activities of SWMM sought to point up the absurdities and contradictions of the system, and the complacency of the Welfare Establishment. In this vein SWMM members set up an alternative dinner of peanut butter sandwiches and other surplus foods outside of the \$7.50 a plate banquet of the Massachusetts Conference on Social Welfare in order to emphasize the theme of hunger. Hunger had not been a major agenda item of the Conference, though a parallel Conference on Hunger was going on in Washington, D.C. at the same time. SWMM also sought to provide comic relief by conducting a public funeral, on the State House steps which laid to rest the widely acknowledged as moribund State Department of Public Welfare. Although the funeral was not well attended by welfare dignitaries, evidently the timing was right. The following day the Commissioner of Public Welfare resigned.

Despite SWMM's energetic efforts, no task proved more difficult than winning recruits to the movement. (See later discussion of structure, p. 12 for membership figures.) SWMM may have experienced difficulties with recruitment because it was disorganized, unskilled, and lacked resources. It is more likely, though, that alienation and enlightenment are insufficient motivating factors for members of the New Working Class. There are at least four important reasons why this is so: 1) joining a radical movement does not resolve conflicts; it creates additional ones; 2) the short term risks of joining a radical movement outweigh the long term gains; 3) professional and bureaucratic norms work against involvement in a movement for radical change; and 4) the concept of alienation is too global or diffuse.

First of all, to join a radical political movement is to deliberately expose one's self to intense internal conflict. The professional human service worker, alienated because he has to perform dehumanizing acts, looks for opportunities to reduce his role conflict. Sometimes adoption of a firm position on one side or the other achieves this end. But to adopt a radical stance means identification with an unpopular cause that immediately exposes the holder to new conflicts with even less opportunity for support. Moreover, partial commitment that might enable testing out a new role is also conflict-ridden, since the movement seeks true believers, and any other stance is difficult to rationalize.

Secondly, for professionals to join a radical movement means the sacrifice of immediate benefits in exchange for uncertain future gains. Professionals do earn reasonable salaries and pay checks arrive on a regular basis; they do usually profit from the fringe benefits of vacations, health insurance, and retirement plans; and many do enjoy a degree of autonomy on the job. Additionally, the more that professionals have become invested in a career as such, the greater is the risk in identifying as a radical. One obviously cannot rancorously attack the system which furnishes a livelihood without expecting unpleasant consequences. And the professions hold out the seductive promise that their members will become a new power-elite, the consultants and managers on whom the post-industrial society increasingly depends for technical



expertise. In sum, the present is not so uncomfortable, nor the future so grim for the New Working Class. Alienation of the "cog-in-machine" variety by itself is too impotent as an explanatory variable in a cause/effect formula for radical commitment.

Thirdly, professional and bureaucratic norms work against radicalization of professionals, especially in "semi-professions", such as social work. Social work's democratic and humanitarian base does not conflict with its members' aspirations for upward mobility. In a profession which is status conscious, professional norms become quite significant guides for acceptable behavior. These norms value political neutrality and the development of technical expertise. To join a movement that advocates de-professionalization and politicization implies climbing back over a recently erected and still shaky class barrier.<sup>13</sup>

For a large segment of social work the psychiatric model of treating individual deficiencies is the dominant approach for creating the healthy society. A further hindrance to an ecological and sociological perspective is the fact that the profession is highly subdivided into areas of specialization. These sub-areas tend to form fairly rigid professional communities, e.g. psychiatric social workers vs. group workers vs. school social workers vs. child welfare workers, etc. Partially because of these professional subdivisions, SWWM experienced difficulty, even within its own structure, in getting social workers to view the system as a whole and to see the interconnectedness among different types of social problems.

Professional and bureaucratic norms also help to socialize social workers into dependent roles that inhibit active involvement in social action. A primary technique for socialization in social work and some other "semi-professions" is the close supervision frequently required over several years of practice. Herein lies the expectation that social workers will resolve conflicts in and through the supervisory relationship, even when these conflicts arise from institutional problems and require structural solutions. The dependency on social welfare organizations as the context for practice and source of livelihood has already been mentioned.

Finally, on a more theoretical plane, because the concept of alienation encompasses many different dimensions, it cannot usefully account for radical involvement. Fragmentation, for example, as one form of alienation, interferes with involvement as much as it creates the potential for it. Life is fragmented for the professional because of the complexities of his modern situation. Both at work and outside of work the individual must assimilate large amounts of varied information and make constant choices about how to allocate one's energies. The "revolution" requires still more time commitments, absorption of new information, and less attention to matters that were previously important.

Furthermore, the professional has absorbed the value orientation of the larger society that time is money. If one is to make time commitments, one needs some reassurance of an eventual "pay-off". Not only is man's labor a commodity, but time has become a precious commodity not to be wasted. The Great American Ego insists upon pragmatic, attainable objectives. Everyone may agree that fundamental changes are necessary, but joining a movement which has no clearly defined social program represents involvement in a utopian idealism that runs counter to the ethos of American society.

Perhaps the reader may argue that the professionals described herein as truly caught up in the system are not really alienated in Leftist terms. The question then becomes one of operationalizing the concept. If alienation is demonstrated when an individual becomes "radicalized" and joins the Movement, then the definition is tautological. If everyone in the New Working Class is identified as alienated, then the concept is too diffuse, and more the definition of a social problem than a useful concept for separating out potential recruits to the "cause". To build a truly useable theory of social change, key concepts and their interrelationships will have to be defined and specified more carefully. In this case it can be said that recruitment suffered at least in part because of a faulty theory.

#### Building Participatory Democracy

Building participatory democracy was both a long range goal and a guiding precept of organization for SWWM. Ultimately, SWWM envisioned a cooperative socialistic society where many citizens would have maximum control over important decisions rather than a relatively powerful few. The shorter range objective of worker-client control of social agencies represented one form of actualizing this goal. But this objective immediately provoked a means-end conflict.

Participatory democracy is more than a political system; it is also a value system. The dilemma was how to gain enough power to institute reform, while at the same time acting cooperatively in keeping with the socialistic vision. If the strategies for gaining power involved a hierarchical political organization that employed disruptive tactics, could the leaders then make a successful transition to a socialistic society? But pragmatically the members also realized that without political power that includes the power to define reality, fundamental changes in the society were also unlikely. Stated more boldly, SWWM faced the choice between revolution in the streets or evolution in people's minds. Both political power and value change were necessary at the same time, a conflict which cut to the roots of both the movement proper and SWWM and eventually split both into disparate bits. The Habers' model of a pluralistic revolution capture some of this conflict rather eloquently:<sup>14</sup>

"The revolutionary situation, if it does occur, will be created slowly, without a single decisive struggle and transfer of power:

by mobilizing small enclaves of radicalism in a variety of social locations, by changing people's consciousness, by creating alternative ways of living, by extending people's definitions of the possible... The role of the radical is to create programs which lead people beyond their subjective experience of discontent toward a radical analysis of society and into struggles for root changes. Such struggles will not be successful until there is enough strength on the Left to change the whole system at once. But escalating the confrontation with power around a variety of issues in a variety of social locations is seen as the major tool for drawing isolated problems into radical focus, and for radicalizing new constituencies. Eventually a number of disparate segments of the movement will have to coalesce. But how and when that will happen is not foreseeable."

Organizationally and practically the issue for SWWM became how to find an appropriate structure for developing a mass-based political movement within the parameters defined by a participatory democratic mode. The requirements for such an organization were the capacity for 1) quick mobilization for action; 2) growth by recruitment to the movement; 3) shared responsibilities and decision-making; 4) mutual support in the face of controversy; and 5) effective use of political power. Several of these requirements were potentially contradictory. Shared decision-making helps to reinforce group closeness, but it is also inefficient in terms of rapid mobilization. Careful recruitment biases towards hierarchical structure and bureaucratic division of labor, but bureaucratic organization interferes with shared leadership. SWWM came close to resolving these paradoxes, but never quite surmounted them.

The structure which SWWM deliberately adopted at first was the development of a small core of active members, numbering 10-20 at any one time. Surrounding this core of committed members or "activists" was a penumbra of about 120 "followers", who could be mobilized quickly by a telephone tree for protest-oriented actions. The "followers" moved in and out of the core group at various times, provided some resources, and formed a communication network into most of the social work agencies and departments in Boston. A third outer ring of "sympathizers" numbered 300-400 individuals who had expressed interest in SWWM and were on the mailing list. These were potential recruits and sources of support for "actions" and financial resources occasionally.

The core group functioned as a coordinating committee. There were no officers. Core group meetings were always open and informal and the agenda ratified by all. The core committee was pointedly open to new members, but also made clear that they would have to wait until they were familiar enough with the group's style, values, and objectives before fully participating in decisions. This norm was particularly important since all core members spoke for the group in the community. Over time a loose and flexible structure developed, built upon mutual trust, that could mobilize for action rapidly when necessary. Other informal rules also helped to cement this structure, as for example, the agreement that coordinating committee members should avoid committing the group to a uni-lateral position with the public until consulting with at least two other core members.

Each member of the core committee also participated in all of the tasks and roles of the organization. Thus each served as chairperson, secretary, recruiter, etc. Some specialization did take place based upon different skills and availability, but no role was considered as fixed. Since most core group members also were employed full time, the group was tempted, but declined, to hire a staff person to handle organizational maintenance tasks. All agreed that the efficiency that might be gained, would diminish the perseverance necessary to maintain the group in the long run.

The coordinating committee structure was quite helpful in SWWM's early stages for sorting out feelings, testing "actions", ironing out position statements, and building intimacy. However, this structure could not accommodate sufficient numbers to create a mass-based movement without resorting to a less democratic form of decision-making.<sup>15</sup>

Therefore a decentralization phase was initiated which used the coordinating structure as a prototype organization. Since core group members were linked into different welfare subsystems in the community, e.g. community mental health, child welfare, public assistance, family agencies, etc., rather than build hierarchically, the group attempted to spin off a series of duplicate, but autonomous, groups modelled on SWWM. This approach had the advantage of consistency with the objective of workplace organizing mentioned in the original position statement, and groups could be developed based upon the more specific issues relevant to different social welfare institutions.

The idea of a decentralized, cellular type strategy seemed sound, but was never very successful. Separation from the co-ordinating committee proved very difficult because the loss of psychological supports for core members was too uncomfortable. Also, most of the core members lacked organizing skills or inclination, even though training sessions were held. These deficits could not be corrected quickly enough. Coupled with the fact that workplace organizing was a risky venture for employees, the decentralized approach faltered. On balance SWWM'S structural dilemmas probably contributed as much to its evanescence as its other problems, since its retarded organizational development interfered with incorporation of environmental nutrients necessary for continued growth.

### Building Resource Networks

Aside from attempts at decentralization, SWWM also concentrated on building links to other radical movement groups, unions, and client-action groups. Always in mind was the need for gathering intelligence and future alliances. SWWM developed contacts or loose ties with perhaps a dozen such groups in the Boston area including the Medical Committee for Human Rights, the Public Employees Union, The Boston Teachers Union, Massachusetts Welfare Rights Organization (MWRO), the Boston Tenants Union, the Black United Front. Toward the end of its first year of operation SWWM attempted to form the Radical Alliance for Social Change among New Working Class insurgent groups. This alliance proved premature as member organizations were themselves in incipient stages of development and SWWM lacked the resources to spread itself so

broadly into new organizing ventures. Also, in some cases there were strong ideological differences between SWWM and other radical groups, such as the Progressive Labor Party, which fostered mistrust and dissension. Still the work which was accomplished was useful because an eventual underground alliance could be imagined in the not too distant future.

With client-action groups SWWM mainly acted as a support group, cooperating successfully with MWRO and other groups on a few campaigns. A side benefit of these client contacts was that SWWM members could sometimes assist clients through the bureaucratic welfare maze. Joint endeavors with client-action organizations also forced SWWM members to confront their own identity conflicts so that worker alienation could be clearly separated from empathy with oppressed clients.

SWWM's role with the professional unions was to help form radical caucuses which would move the unions to the Left. The aim was to shift the agenda from simple wage and fringe benefit issues to inclusion of demands for increased client benefits and services and to resistance in implementing repressive administrative fiat. These efforts met with small degrees of success because SWWM's resources were strained beyond its limits once again.

### PART III: THE CONVERSION OF PROTEST TO RESISTANCE

For many of its members and sympathizers, SWWM's attractiveness had been its protest-oriented style. Social work professionals, disaffected by excessive work time spent on system-maintenance tasks and seemingly patchwork endeavors, could identify with SWWM's methods and goals, directly and/or vicariously. Support of SWWM was an outlet for frustration with "the system"; support was an act of protest.

But protest alone is insufficient to mount an effective movement for fundamental social change. Protest outside of the work-place is emotionally satisfying, a form of "ego-tripping", a catharsis. It is an outburst of emotion encapsulated within a short time span. And in this form, ironically, it may enable the professional to endure his ineffective work role even better. SWWM's challenge was to create a level of tension that could sustain a long term struggle for change, to transform transitory sparks of passion into deeper commitments. The challenge was to convert protest to resistance, that is, to an organized, persistent, and durable movement for institutional change within the social welfare arena and beyond it. SWWM was unable to accomplish this conversion.

After about a year and a half of involvement, SWWM's core group began to break apart. For the Boston Chapter, and perhaps for other chapters as well, the turning point occurred at the National Conference on Social Welfare, 1970, in Chicago. Prior to the Conference representatives from several SWWM chapters had met to try to share experiences and rekindle a sense of Movement spirit. However, the meeting revealed that various members and groups were developing in quite disparate directions. For example, women members had become increasingly united around the

Women's Movement and carried those issues into the group. Others were divided about strategies and future directions for SWWM nationally and for their local organizations. No overall agreements on Conference action could be reached except to allow individuals to relate to the Conference as they wished. While this strategy may have prevented severe conflicts from erupting, it also led to fragmented action at the Conference and feelings of alienation from the SWWM group by some of its members. Thus rather than serve as a rallying point, the Conference brought new uncertainties to the surface and aided SWWM's disintegration.

After Chicago, without a renewed sense of identity with a larger Movement, Boston SWWM began to come unraveled. For some the strain of full-time work plus SWWM demands became too burdensome. For others tangible successes were too few to merit the continued costs. Some members resolved Movement-generated internal conflicts by withdrawing from social work activities altogether to adopt totally different life styles. Some returned to the University and hence to a search for understanding more compatible with earlier patterns of solace and present realities. Some members temporarily withdrew from social work activities to try to sort out meaningful roles for themselves away from the demands of job or Movement. Some found ways of staying within the social work sphere either in new jobs or through re-definition of older ones. Other SWWM chapters around the country fared similarly. Like other Movement groups of the late 1960's, SWWM withered and died.

In retrospect, many sociological and social-psychological factors contributed to SWWM's inability to convert protest to sustained resistance. First of all, SWWM was operating under an inadequate theory of deliberate social change. The achievement of worker-client control presumed a set of conditions that proved not to be accurate, i.e. a deep sense of alienation among a New Working Class that could serve as a motivation for joining an insurgent movement. Other aspects of New Left theory were contradictory, such as an unresolved conflict between participatory democracy as an end and the use of conflict in a struggle for power as the means for achieving it.

Secondly, SWWM never resolved for itself the question of whether it was a social movement or a socialization and psychological support group. Social movements require a commitment to a counter ideology. SWWM members were largely unschooled in Leftist thought and had not really internalized a coherent ideology. Without this understanding and commitment, notions like worker-client control become rhetorical rallying cries, insufficient to bind a group together over time.

Thirdly, related to the above, it could be argued that SWWM's structural problems reflected these theoretical and structural inconsistencies. Structurally, SWWM was unable to add to its numbers and in this way gain resources. Nor were the core groups able to function within a disciplined revolutionary social action tradition. The lack of viable structure could probably be attributed most to member discomfort with external conflict, a discomfort that might have been overcome in other circumstances by a revolutionary ideological commitment and a less than ambivalent sense of personal alienation.

The result of these failings can perhaps be summarized with the thought that SWMM members, in the end, could not surmount their own social class positions. SWMM members had been socialized into a professional class. They had tried to undo this class training, but like the professionals they sought to attract, most SWMM members were themselves too tied into a middle-American way of life. They could not wean themselves, and therefore, not surprisingly, could not wean away others from the benefits which accrue to a professional class and from its "tradition" of avoidance of conflict as a professional ideal.

#### PART IV: CONCLUSION

To many observers SWMM's eventual demise was a foregone conclusion. They understood the obstacles of class and profession for creating a lasting "radicals-in-the-professions" movement the notion seemed to be a contradiction in terms - and so the venture was deemed unworthy of the attempt. (Yet these professionals offered no better alternatives at the time.) Therefore it may be in order to state some of the ways in which SWMM and moreso the New Left generally, have contributed to the role of human service professions in American Society.

Howard Zinn has suggested three essential ingredients for a New Left theory of social change.<sup>16</sup>

"First we need a vision of what we are working towards - one based on transcendental human needs and not limited to the reality we are so far stuck with. Second, this theory should analyze the present reality, not through the prism of old fixed categories, but rather with an awareness of the unique here and now and of the need to make the present irrationality intelligible to those around us. Finally, such a theory would explore-in the midst of action-effective techniques of social change for the particular circumstances we find at the moment."

New Left theory has made a beginning towards meeting Zinn's requirements. It has introduced a much needed critique of the social control functions of social work and other human service professions, while at the same time offering professionals, new and old, some alternatives to earlier "realities". Also the theory has examined reality through new categories in some cases and thus has suggested new potential alliances for social change. Perhaps even more importantly the New Left has reaffirmed the value of struggle and conflict for continued growth both for persons as individuals and collectively in the political arena. And finally, the New Left has rejected the coming of technocracy as the new messiah, the insertion of a necessary balance in an increasingly specialized, complex, and technologically sophisticated society.

While the New Left and its splinter groups like SWMM seem to have passed on, this is not to imply that the vision of the sixties has also died. Only that there is less certainty about how to advance it. What of the future then? Three avenues to follow for social work and other human service professions bear mention here: changes in the nature of professional education; the growth of professional unionism; and the

creation of viable political alternatives under a banner of democratic socialism.

Because the society will continue to require human service professions, educational institutions that perform a major socialization into the profession function must be attended to. Here the point quite simply is that less formal attention and concern ought to be paid to socialization into the profession experiences through heavily structured curricula, which by force of rigidity, profess a "knowledge" of future human service professional roles, and thereby limit the creation of new roles at the same time. Socialization will occur regardless of formal concern. Instead, many more curriculum options need to be provided, including in particular, opportunities to explore political theory. Coupled with a more open curriculum, the incipient trend towards androgogy ought to be fostered as a way of developing professionals who can think and act independently. These changes will further require that professional schools revamp admission criteria to enable better selection of inner-directed, creative, and mature students.

Secondly, human service professionals and academics must give more serious consideration to the formation of professional unions. Such unions have begun to grow in nearly all human service fields. While the danger exists of union bureaucratization and co-optation of union leadership by power elites, as has occurred in the past, the advantages seem to outweigh the risks. Briefly, the argument in favor of union-ization is: 1) strategically the society is unlikely to redistribute social benefits to the disadvantaged alone, but as professional unions press for benefits such as health insurance, full employment, dignified retirement and leisure, the poor may well be carried along; 2) unions represent large numbers of people, hence potential political leverage; 3) unions have financial and skill resources with which to press their political agenda; 4) unions have a tradition of political involvement, and social workers and other professionals have shared this tradition in the past; 5) professional class barriers may be broken down through vertically structured unions; and 6) unions could press for other than traditional self-interest benefits, though this assumes a more radical consciousness among the membership.

Finally, there has been an increase in reform-oriented advocacy agencies, such as public-interest law agencies, Common Cause, environmental protection groups, etc., which have attracted liberal-left New Working Class professionals. These need to be supported and developed and ultimately co-aligned into a new political party, whose purpose would be to provide the study, analysis, and on-going political work necessary for generating a uniquely American socialism. This mechanism would not necessarily function immediately to elect candidates, but it would provide a more durable organizational framework which could continuously pose policy alternatives, provide alternative political experiences and shape the public agenda. According to Christopher Lasch,<sup>17</sup>

"...What are needed...are institutions that would parallel existing structures of government (city councils, for instance) and without any recognized authority or immediate hope of implementing their decisions, undertake the social



planning of which existing institutions are incapable. In other words the Left has to begin to function not as a protest movement or as a third party but as an alternative political system, drawing on the abilities of people who realize that their talents are often wasted in their present jobs. It has to generate analysis and plans for action in which people of varying commitments to radicalism can take part, while at the same time it must insist that the best hope of creating a decent society in the United States is to evolve a socialism appropriate to American conditions."

In other words, we must continue to build towards participatory democracy, ever keeping in mind a vision of what we want America to look like as a guide for the way we conduct our lives.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The presentation of New Left theory in this paper reflects the author's interpretations and perceptions of New Left thought based upon the literature, observations, personal experiences and discussions. This is not to imply the existence of a coherent, widely-accepted, and systematic theory called "the" New Left Theory of Social Change.

A useful bibliography on New Left material can be found in James O'Brien, "A History of the New Left", 1960-1968, originally published in three installments in the May through December issues of Radical America, 1968, and reprinted by The New England Free Press, Boston, Mass. See also, Jim Jacobs, "Power in American Society", Radical Education Project Study Guide Series, reprinted by The New England Free Press, Boston, Mass. Additionally, helpful collections of articles and books are: Adelson, Alan, S.D.S., New York, Charles Scribner, Sons, 1971; Erlich, John and Susan Erlich, Student Power, Participation, and Revolution, N.Y. Association Press, 1970; Priscilla Long (ed.), The New Left: A Collection of Essays, Boston, F. Porter Sargeant, New Republic, Thoughts of the Young Radicals, New York, Pitman Publ. Corp. 1966; Armand L. Mauss, issue editor, "The New Left and The Old", Journal of Social Issues, V. 27, No. 1, 1971.

2. Zinn, Howard, "Marxism and the New Left", in Long, (ed.), p. 58
3. Since the emphasis in this paper is upon organizing professional human service workers, more attention is paid to the New Working Class. See David Gilbert, "Consumption: Domestic Imperialism", in Long, 1969. See also Bob Gottlieb, Gerry Tenney and Dave Gilbert, "Praxis and the New Left", in New Left Notes, Feb. 13, 1967. New Left activists were heavily involved in community organizing projects among poor and working class people especially. New Working Class organizing was really an outgrowth of student

organizing, for students mostly came from the New Working Class families and many were preparing to enter this grouping.

The Traditional Working Class referred to in the paper are the Marxist proletariat, blue-collar workers of American industry, already well organized into trade unions. According to Gilbert, this group represents some 30% of the American work force. The Under-Class, referred to in the paper, represents the economic poor in the society, the victim of the capitalistic system. Because this group does not work on a sustained basis, it has no direct control over the means of production. Its revolutionary potential is as disruptive and potentially violent force in the struggle for power.

4. See, Mills, C. Wright, The Power Elite, New York: Oxford University Press, 1959; Mills, C. Wright, "Letter to the New Left", in Long, 1969. See also, Fred Cook, The Warfae State. New York: Collier Books, 1964; McDermott, John, "Technology: The Opiate of the Intellectuals", in the New York Review of Books V. 13, 2, July 31, 1969; McDermott, John, "Thoughts on the Movement", in Long, 1969; Pillsuk, Marc and Tom Hayden, "Is There A Military Industrial Complex That Prevents Peace?", Journal of Social Issues, XXI, (1965) pp. 67-117
5. Gilbert, *ibid* p. 37
6. Blauner, Robert, Alienation and Freedom, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964.
7. Heberle, Rudolph, "Social Movements", in the International Encyclopedia of Social Science, 1968, David Sills, editor, New York: The MacMillan Co.
8. Margolies, Rick, "Community Building", in Long, 1969, pp. 355-356.
9. An account of the protest-oriented activities at the National Conference on Social Welfare, 1969, can be found in articles by John C. Kidneigh, "The New York Conference Story", and Howard E. Prunty, "The New York Story-A Participant's Viewpoint", both in The Social Welfare Forum, New York: Columbia University Press, 1969.
10. This communication network was greatly facilitated by the publication of Hotch Pot, a bi-monthly socialist newsletter, operated by the Hotch Pot Collective, Box 2492, Cleveland, Ohio. Hotch Pot served as the Social Welfare Worker Movement's link between chapters around the country and with many other Movement and Leftist groups. (Copies should exist in the University of California-Berkeley library system, School of Social Welfare, and Undergraduate Library.)

11. Hoffer, Eric, The True Believer, New York: Harper and Row, 1951, Chapter I.
12. It might be noted that for all of their carefully cultivated relationships with State legislators the professional social welfare "establishment" had been unable to prevent enactment of H.885, (in 1969), a repressive welfare measure. Later (1970) neither this group nor any protest-oriented organizations were able to prevent an inadequate flat grant system from being implemented as well.
13. A number of articles and books lend support to the points made in this paragraph. To mention but a few: Bisno, Herbert, "How Social Will Social Work Be?", Social Work, V. 1, No. 2, April 1956; Brager, George, "Our 'Organization Man' Syndrome", Social Work, V. 13, No. 4, October 1968; Brager, George, "Institutional Change: Perimeters of the Possible", Social Work, V. 12, No. 1, January 1967; Epstein, Irwin, "Professional Role Orientations and Conflict Strategies", Social Work, V. 15, No. 4, October 1970; Epstein, Irwin "Social Workers and Social Action: Attitudes Towards Social Action Strategies", Social Work, V. 13, No. 2, April 1968; Etzioni, Amitai (ed.) The Semi-Professions and Their Organizations, New York: The Free Press, 1969; Heffernan, Joseph Jr., "Political Activity and Social Work Executives", Social Work, V. 9, No. 2, April 1964; Leonard, Peter, "Social Workers and Bureaucracy", New Society, June 21, 1966; Lipset, S. W. and Mildred Schwartz, "The Politics of Professionals", in Professionalization, ed. by Vollmer and Mills, Englewood-Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice Hall, 1966; Wilensky, Harold L. and Charles N. Lebeaux, Industrial Society and Social Welfare, New York, Free Press, 1965.
14. Barbara and Al Haber, "Getting By With a Little Help From Our Friends", in Long, 1969, p. 300 (my underlining).
15. The danger to be avoided has been pointed up by the classic study by Robert Michels of goal displacement within the Socialist parties and labor unions in Europe before World War I. See, Robert Michels, Political Parties, New York: Dover, 1959. Michels found that the organizational requirements for leadership in revolutionary parties subverted socialistic intentions and replaced them with conservative goals, thus Michel's statement of "The Iron Law of Oligarchy".
16. Schwartz, Edward, "Towards an Alliance for Radical Change", original unpublished paper, copyright, Cambridge, Mass. 1970.
17. Zinn, op.cit. p. 58.
18. Lasch, Christopher, The Agony of the American Left, New York; Vintage Books, 1969, pp. 200-201.