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The Legacy of McCarthyism on Social Group Work: An Historical Analysis

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This paper explores the impact of McCarthyism on the ideology, education, practice, and public image of group work. The authors argue that the witchhunts that occurred during the period and its climate of widespread fear purges and political conservatism diminished the gains the social work profession had made in the 1930s and 1940s through its participation in progressive activities and left the profession, particularly social group work ill-prepared for the issues and activism of the 1960s and 1970s.

Introduction

This paper explores the impact of McCarthyism on the ideology, education, practice, and public image of group work. It utilizes primary sources of the period under study, including oral histories, archival collections, and printed matter such as social work, journals and proceedings of social work conferences. The authors argue that the witchhunts that occurred during the McCarthy period and its climate of widespread fear, purges and political conservatism diminished the gains the social work profession had made in the 1930s and 1940s through its participation in progressive activities and left the profession, particularly social group work ill-prepared for the issues and activism of the 1960s and 1970s.

Despite the fact that Joseph McCarthy was active for only a brief period of time approximately 1947 to 1954, his name has

come to represent a longer period of U.S. history, roughly 1945 to 1960. For the purpose of this study, the term McCarthyism embraces the oppressive activities that span those fifteen years.

This study is significant because, as current political developments portend all too frequently, remnants of the past can reappear in new and more insidious forms. Many of the issues prevalent in the 1940s and 1950s, such as academic freedom, advocacy for the poor and oppressed, and support for politically unpopular positions (such as abortion rights and affirmative action today), continue to challenge social work. Because social workers today are frequently struggling against political and cultural mindsets that are fundamentally anti-social work in their orientation, the story of McCarthyism must be told to remind us that such persecutions could happen again.

The Place of Group Work Within Social Work Prior to McCarthyism

The roots of McCarthyism can be traced to political developments of the 1930s which both directly and indirectly involved social workers, particularly those within the group work field. A major development was the enormous expansion of the federal government to regulate the economy and establish a network of publicly-funded social services. For this to occur, it required the political cooperation of communists, socialists and their allies with all agencies of social reform

After the death of Roosevelt and the breakdown of wartime and depression-era alliances, the longstanding hostility of conservatives to the New Deal was fueled by the atmosphere of the Cold War. In this climate, those who sought to roll back the New Deal "were not always scrupulously careful to distinguish between liberals and communists . . . and seemed to say that subversives and social reformers were the same thing" (Latham, 1965, p. v). Since group workers had played such an active role in both the radical and reform elements of the New Deal coalition, they were particularly vulnerable to this type of attack.

Consequently, social group work, with its focus on humanism, equality, democracy, and social action was particularly affected by McCarthyism. With roots in the fields of recreation education

(informal and progressive) and social work, group work had long focused on such concepts as building relationships, mutuality, understanding others, and tolerance of diversity (Northen, 1994). Group workers organized in 1936 as the National Association for the Study of Group Work which became the American Association for the Study of Group Work in 1939, and, in 1946, the American Association of Group Workers. The organization cut across all agency, religious, racial, and occupational lines. AAGW focused specifically on advancing the principles of democracy, a focus out-of-favor with many conservative elements at the time.

In the 1930s and 1940s, these philosophical underpinnings were strengthened by the influence of Jewish refugees from Nazi persecution, such as Gisela Konopka and Hans Falck, who held strong humanistic beliefs in the rights of group members and a passion for democratic participation. Many of these seemingly moderate stances became politically suspect during the oppression of the McCarthy era. This led to a retreat from reform by many practitioners and educators who feared being labeled Communists or Communist sympathizers.

As strong advocates of civil liberties, social group workers were easy targets for political demagogues and their allies who equated the promotion of First Amendment principles with questionable allegiance to the state. In the October 1948 issue of *Social Work Journal*, the AASW listed among "Civil Rights in Social Work"

the right to hold and express opinions and to act in accordance with their beliefs . . . the right of association and membership in any organization . . . to solicit funds for any purpose, *except as prohibited by law,** [And] the right to advocate support or oppose legislation, to engage in political activity to publicly criticize agency policy, to join a union [and to engage in] boycotts or strikes (pp. 150–151).

Within the social work field, the risk of a McCarthy-like attack on civil liberties was perceived nearly a decade before the Senator's election. As early as 1938, Solomon Lowenstein declared to a social work audience,

*Emphasis added.

One cannot fail to be concerned st the serious efforts being manifested in parts of our country to prevent the constitutional guarantees of freedom of assembly . . . in the last presidential election various attempts were successfully made to prevent the appearance of candidates of the Socialist and Communist parties (Lowenstein, 1938. p. 5).

Nearly a decade later, in a climate of growing political repression Arlien Johnson proclaimed at the 1947 meeting of the NCSW that social workers must make the facts known regarding injustices and that social work is best served by keeping its integrity. She insisted that for the profession "To seek popularity is to deny its birthright" (1947, p. 17). Such comments however, created a great risk of being labeled subversive.

In the period between the New Deal and Korean War, social work experienced dramatic shifts in ideology and practice as it struggled to survive in a rapidly changing environment in which the provision of social welfare shifted from an emphasis on private charity to the increasing domination of the public sector in the funding and provision of social services. During these years, many social workers also fought to build the labor movement and argued for public provisions to protect workers (Dykema, 1978). The Rank and File movement of the 1930s, for example, attempted to respond to the changing environment by stressing social work's original focus on working with the poor and oppressed. It reflected the emergence of trade unionism, the rapid increase in the number of new public sector relief workers, and the return of social work to some of its ideals of the Progressive Era (Fisher, 1936). Many social workers active in this movement later suffered the fallout of McCarthyism.

Through its journal, *Social Work Today*, the Rank and File movement presented a left-perspective on social work and social welfare and warned of the growing threat of fascism at home and abroad. As the war effort increased, trade unions suffered defeats and the members of the Rank and File movement were increasingly redbaited, the movement declined and disappeared by the early 1940s (Fisher, 1980).

During the post-War era, group workers and caseworkers continued to struggle to find common ground and a more open acceptance of each other, a struggle which had begun in the 1930s.

Group workers were seen by many caseworkers as more political and less professional (Beatt, 1955; Schmidt, 1995). For example, as a student at the University of Chicago in the 1930s, Gertrude Wilson was strongly urged by Sophinisba Breckenridge to drop her interest in group work, who argued that Wilson was “wasting” herself by being a person who worked with groups (Gertrude Wilson memoir, 1979, p. 34).

The widespread perception of group work within social work in the immediate post-War period was that it played a leading role in promoting the acceptance of the “democratic premise within social work,” but was weak in its development of a clear, unified methodology or theory of practice. Group workers were seen as those social workers who most commonly worked with the least advantaged segment of the population and who ensure “that the unpopular view gets heard, believe in speaking up, taking issue and in compromise to the end of agreement and action.” It was not surprising therefore, that a high percentage of social work leaders came from the group work field despite its minority status within the profession (Bruno, 1957, pp. 421–423).

After 1945, building on the work of Grace Coyle, Gertrude Wilson and others, and borrowing from the earlier essays of Bertha Capen Reynolds, group workers also stressed the importance of mutual aid activities within communities and social service organizations (Simon, 1994). In her writings, Coyle clearly articulated the perspective of group work as an instrument of social transformation. She asserted that a primary goal of group work is to “help in the replacing of the social skills necessary in the present distracted state of the world.” These include skills at compromise, debate, self-government, *resistance to illegitimate authority*, democratic leadership, etc. (Coyle, 1947, emphasis added). These skills were compatible with the long-held conception of group work as “education for democracy through democracy in slow and gradual stages.” (Lindemann in Trecker 1955, p. 33) hardly a revolutionary doctrine.

The Impact of McCarthyism on Group Work

The forces released during the McCarthy era set the tone and direction of the social work profession including social group

work. Harold Lewis (1992) suggests that group work was one of the social work profession's first casualty of the Cold War period.

This was a serious loss, since this method of social work was the most democratic in the profession. The core concept of group work and the goal of its major proponents was participatory democracy . . . What survived, was the method's narrower function, therapeutic aid (p. 41-42).

It is hardly surprising that most social workers, like the rest of society, were fearful of taking a stand on controversial issues during the McCarthy era. Many who were social activists in the 1930s and 1940s were reluctant to continue such activity openly. They were silenced by the "paranoia of the times, the sense of stigma that accompanied the charge of subversion, and the strong need to hide such a discharge or resignation from neighbors, friends, or relatives" (Schreiber, 1990, p. 121). This silent time "divided, the true believers and the nonbelievers. It separated out those who would adapt and those who would fight back" (Krasner, 1995).

Group worker Gertrude Wilson, who spent several years on the social work faculty at the University of Pittsburgh, remembered the many gatherings at the home of Marion Hathway to discuss progressive ideas. These events were refreshing instances of private discussions where people could, at least behind the walls of Hathway's home, share such ideas. Wilson felt that "those conversations around the fireplace were parts of a valuable education in practical political science which has been very helpful to me in my professional and personal life and as a citizen" (Wilson memoir, 1979, p. 172). Particularly vexing to social workers like Wilson were those colleagues whose convictions were not very deep and who were easily intimidated into silence. She declared ". . . in the long run it produced that period prior to the sixties when everything seemed to be very quiet and evidences of social action, particularly among younger people, were very few" (p. 172).

Miriam Rosenbloom Cohn, a group work student at Pitt in the 1940s and later a faculty member at the University of Minnesota for nearly 40 years, remembered the honor she felt upon receiving an invitation to one of Hathway's "soirees," and the care she took

not to take these conversations out of the room (Cohn, 1995). Such informal networks had a lasting impact. In the late 1940s, when Hathway came under fire for her membership in several progressive organizations and there was an attempt to get her ousted from the University of Pittsburgh, she received a great deal of support from alumni and colleagues (Andrews & Brenden, 1993). Cohn found the environment at Pittsburgh in the 1940s very tolerant to radicals. She feels that group workers were more radical than other social work students. By contrast, at the University of Minnesota in the 1950s, she found the social work response at the school to be "dead," absolutely "no response" at all. At faculty meetings, discussions of McCarthyism took place only in abstract terms. These discussions never seemed to filter down to the student body. A strong sense of self-protection permeated the political culture of the school (Cohn, 1995).

Many of the students were veterans of World War II who just wanted to "get on with their lives." Jobs were plentiful and radicalism did not seem to exist among most of the social work students. In Minnesota there was no talk about the Rosenberg trials nor about those who were being persecuted by the McCarthyites. The dominant philosophy was "you don't talk about these things; it had to do with prudence" (Cohn, 1995).

Inabel Lindsay (1980), herself investigated for alleged Communist sympathies, recalled a meeting of the National Conference on Social Work (NCSW) in the late 1940s, when she was Dean of the School of Social Work at Howard University in Washington, D.C. A group of progressive social workers had organized a reception for Henry Wallace. Yet, when a receiving line was established,

Marion Hathway . . . and I were the only professional social workers in leadership roles . . . who dared to stand in the receiving line with him [Wallace] and give our approval (p. 16).

Jacob Fisher, active in the Rank and File movement of the 1930s, as well as many radical organizations, also found himself abandoned by many colleagues when, in 1954, he was charged with being a security risk at the Social Security Administration (Fisher, 1986). While some social workers came forward to support him, most did not. Finally, unable to find social work employ-

ment and alienated from his former colleagues, he left the field. Years later, through the Freedom of Information Act, he came to realize that some former social work friends and colleagues had informed on him. Other social workers experienced similar ostracism.

Meyer Schreiber (1995) found himself under scrutiny when he joined the staff at the U.S. Children's Bureau in 1964 and admitted that he was a member of certain organizations that were considered suspect by the FBI. While he did not lose his job, he later discovered, through the Freedom of Information Act, that colleagues were interviewed about him. He was surprised because "Strangely enough, not one coworker ever told me of being interviewed by the FBI" (p. 659).

Ira Krasner, an activist and group worker during the 1930s and 1940s, who joined the faculty of the Wayne State University School of Social Work in 1951, fought McCarthyism throughout the 1950s. He joined several progressive organizations and opposed the attempt of Michigan Representative, Kit Clardy, to investigate communism on campus. Several members of the School of Social Work also opposed the witchhunts and, while Clardy was successful in getting two faculty fired, "Dr. Fritz Redl of the social work faculty dispatched a telegram to [WSU] President Henry upbraiding him for his actions" (Krasner, 1995).

Later in the decade, Krasner went to Amsterdam on a Fulbright fellowship to assist a school of social work in the development of a social group work curriculum. After one year, he was recommended for a U.N. fellowship. At that time, he received a 42-page dossier listing all the meetings he had attended in his adult years that were of a progressive nature. He was then asked to describe his knowledge and involvement with twenty people who were listed in the dossier. He refused, withdrew his application, and returned to the U.S. When he got back to Wayne State, he was informed by Charles Brink, Dean of the social work program, that an F.B.I. agent had interviewed him about Krasner. The agent told the Dean that Krasner was being investigated because of his membership in an organization known to be infiltrated with Communists. The organization was the American Civil Liberties Union.

Two social work faculty at the University of Connecticut, Robert Glass and Harold Lewis, a student of Marion Hathway's and later Dean of Hunter College School of Social Work, were also investigated by the FBI for alleged communist sympathies. They were staunchly supported by the Dean of the School of Social Work and former AAGW President, Harleigh Trecker, who refused to cooperate with the FBI. As a result of persistent pressure from the University, however, both Glass and Lewis soon resigned from the faculty (Lewis, 1995).

Verne Weed, a long-time group worker and later professor of group work at Hunter College, found herself fighting accusations made against her by McCarthy's committee and even many social workers. She was a member of the Rank and File movement in the 1930s who remained an activist the rest of her life. Through it all, she remained true to her beliefs. "When McCarthy attacked me for signing the Stockholm Peace Appeal, I refused to go on the defensive and reaffirmed my opposition to the A-bomb. When I was attacked as a Communist in connection with the Connecticut Smith Act trial I didn't capitulate to tremendous pressure from some NASW chapter members . . ." (Weed, 1985, p. 84). Her attack by McCarthy in the 1950s resulted in her being forced to quit her job, although NASW support helped her receive a year's pay (Rosengard, 1986, p. 4).

In 1952, at the height of the McCarthy era, group work leaders were keenly aware of the combined effects of this climate of fear and the declining activism of social workers on political and social conditions. Settlement houses, long home to many group workers, were under constant attack. Summarizing the situation in its 1952 annual report, the National Federation of Settlements acknowledged that climate of fear.

Intercultural tensions were heightened in 1952 by the climate of distrust and fear that was created by Senator McCarthy and by his counterparts in local communities . . . Many settlement neighbors participated in groups which seemed progressive and constructive during depression days, but which have now been listed . . . as 'subversive' . . . Settlement neighbors perhaps feel this more keenly than some others. Some of them knew that kind of fear before they came here and in many instances it was the reason for their coming . . . (p. 3, 4).

For many residents of these neighborhoods, going anywhere was seen as risky and fear led them to avoid many group activities.

Saul Bernstein, President of the American Association of Group Workers from 1948–1950, recalls an incident he experienced during the McCarthy era while teaching at the New York School of Social Work. An article he had submitted was accepted for publication in an anthology about group work. He subsequently learned that his article was being considered for withdrawal because a faculty member of City College, who happened to have the same name as he, was suspected of being a Communist. Bernstein immediately “wrote an angry letter to the editor insisting that she be more careful about such things . . . why should my assumed membership in the Communist Party be allowed to reject the paper?” (Bernstein, 1995).

By dividing the progressive and liberal communities McCarthyism fractured the New Deal coalition which had supported the creation and expansion of the welfare state in the 1930s and 1940s. It severely weakened the power of the labor movement in U.S. politics and imposed a climate of censorship that influenced intellectual and cultural life in the country for nearly two decades. Individual social workers’ fears of losing their jobs combined with the profession’s collective anxiety over losing its tenuous status. Consequently, social workers were increasingly passive on social issues because “to propose a measure to relieve poverty or to combat racism was to risk being called ‘Communist’ ” (Ehrenreich, 1985, p. 142).

During the heyday of McCarthyism, the social work profession’s efforts were focused on moving toward unification and the formation of the National Association of Social Workers (1955). Although many social workers continued to work to reform welfare, expand civil rights, and promote true democracy in the group process, professional status received most of the profession’s energy. Additionally, the very concepts of welfare reform, civil rights, and democracy were labeled as telling signs of communist leanings. Some social workers agreed that there existed a strongly organized Communist Party, but insisted that people must still be allowed to speak out against social evils and engage in social action. Social workers argued that loyal Americans could

pursue such issues and expressed concern that many legislators and other leaders confused social reform with socialism.

By the mid-1950s, the primary emphasis of group work had shifted towards the "enabling" of clients and the therapeutic function of groups, although individuals like Coyle and Wilson continued to stress the importance of social objectives. Others wrote of the need to preserve group work's sense of moral values and concern for the democratic climate even as it strove to create a more scientific basis for its practice (Bruno, 1957, pp. 425–427). The demise of the journal *Survey* in 1952 exacerbated this trend because no other publication emerged to fill this void. Consequently, "the attachment of the profession as a whole to broad social action was irrevocably weakened" in a climate that was hostile to both social criticism and social reform (Chambers in Trattner, 1994, pp. 308–309).

Many social workers had no more than an intellectual curiosity about McCarthyism (Beatt, interview, 1995) African American social worker Lester B. Granger, president of NCSW, was concerned about social workers who did not seem to understand the impact of the political environment. In a philosophical presentation to the NCSW in 1952, he acknowledged the importance of the professionalization of social work and its commitment to the codification of professional standards and practices. Yet, he was concerned that social work was overlooking some of the critical changes in the contemporary environment and would not be prepared to deal with their effects. He lamented

. . . we in social work have been so occupied with learning our own way . . . that we have seldom been able to offer guidance and reassurance to our even more bewildered public. We have developed standards of professional practice . . . but frequently these standards have had slight relationship to professional resources and have been considered . . . as having little validity. And, often, as we have defined our standards of practice, we have seen our practitioners' resources swept away by careless, brutish action of half-informed legislators and incompetent administrators . . . (1952, p. 11).

In 1953, at the annual meeting of the NCSW, Patrick Murphy Malin, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union,

spoke powerfully of McCarthyism's influence on who actually was being hired in social work agencies and its suppression of the progressive wing of the social work profession: "Such intolerance and fear are producing the demand that our schools and our social work agencies should be staffed by people who are non-controversial." The result was ". . . inconspicuousness having become a qualification for employment in the very professions which ought to have people of light and leading and imagination and experiment." He concluded: "First, if you want to preserve your free speech, you speak freely. It is as simple, and as difficult, as that" (Malin, 1953, pp. 35–38).

Despite the silence, the hushed voices, and the movement toward mainstreaming the profession, there were social workers who spoke out against the terror that was McCarthyism. An effective strategy utilized by many social workers was to reframe the issue—from the threat of *communism* to the threat to *democracy*. Emphasis was placed on defending the newly established public welfare system and its clients, who were under constant assault by the political right. Correspondence on these themes were frequently published in *The Social Welfare Forum*; *Official Proceedings of the NCSW* or in *The Survey* or the *Survey Graphic*. From the 1940s onward, these publications openly discussed the nation's political climate and its implications for social work.

In 1947, at its annual conference, the American Association of Group Work changed the name of its Legislative Committee to the Social Action Committee, with the specific intention of encouraging programs of education as well as action. Such action would include ". . . corporate action, as well as individual effort, . . . to secure social legislation to meet [the] problems of adverse social and economic condition." Targets of social/political action included such diverse fields as housing, health care, child welfare and youth work, and minority rights (AAGW, 1947, pp. 3–6).

At this conference, Nathan Cohen (1947, pp. 8–11) strongly defended the preservation of an activist orientation among group workers. Speaking in opposition to recently imposed restrictions on social action placed on local agencies by Community Chests, he argued ". . . we [must] make clear that it is not possible to have social work as we understand it without a democratic cli-

mate." Cohen urged group workers to be active at all levels. The challenge, he stated, is clear, social action or reaction.

In 1948, *Survey Graphic* carried an article written by historian Louise Brown, who asked, "Can this country afford the cost of heresy-hunting?" Her conclusion was that the price included the creation of an intellectual vacuum that could only be filled by fear and hatred. In the same year, *The Social Welfare Forum* included a paper by Dr. Julius Schreiber from the NCSW meeting that connected the current political climate to issues of mental health. A physician, Schreiber discussed the threats to mental health when one is attacked because one has the strength to have patterns of thought and action that are different:

. . . there are men and women who experience anxiety, intense resentment, and frustration . . . because of the open or concealed threat to their security, should they dare to express what they think; they find that many chest-thumping individuals, waving the flag and braying loudly about their own special brand of 'patriotism', hurl at them the angry labels 'radicals!' 'New Dealers!' 'communists!' 'fascists!' (p. 194).

The following year, Benjamin Youngdahl spoke at the NCSW meeting on "civil rights versus civil strife," reminding his audience that

. . . America would not be great today were it not for the freedom of thought, of expression, of movement, and of association, that has been our heritage (p. 24).

He was particularly critical of loyalty purges that resulted in a person deemed neither innocent nor guilty of any violation; yet, condemned to "a life of impotence" (p. 28). Many of those present at the national meeting of 5,000 social workers testified in other sessions that freedom of thought was being threatened not only from the outside, but also from within the profession of social work itself (Close, 1949).

In the group work section, Grace Coyle warned against the imposition of goals on a group "for issues must be worked out by participation of those concerned." Reflecting on the serious nature of the times, she said "We have been born into a generation confronted with social issues so momentous that they stagger our

imaginations, and will render us helpless unless we can achieve some sense of social perspective" (Close, 1949, p. 380).

In a similar vein, Gertrude Wilson told a large session:

The goal of all those who desire to achieve a society where each individual has equal rights . . . and an opportunity to participate in decision making . . . is an interprofessional undertaking involving teachers, clergy, doctors, lawyers, business and industrial leaders, labor leaders, recreational leaders, social workers, and all citizens. Neither social workers nor group workers carry this responsibility alone . . . We have faith in the capacity of human beings to develop a basis of world wide cooperative living only because we have experienced human relationships in effective groups. No human being develops faith in isolation from others. Faith is the result of a reciprocal process (Ross, 1949, p. 382).

The *Social Work Yearbook* of 1949, in its entry on civil rights (Baldwin, 1949, p. 118), faced the "communistic issue" head-on by suggesting that the House UnAmerican Activities Committee had created an atmosphere fearful of change where procedures "undemocratic and contrary to American principles" were occurring. That same year, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Griffin, 1949, p. 6) announced that three universities—the University of Chicago, Harvard, and Columbia—were "hives of communism." Social worker Edith Abbott, along with others, was named in the article as one of the "most frequent sponsors of Communist fronts." Quoting Joseph Matthews, former director of research for the House UnAmerican Activities Committee, the paper explained that while these faculty were not necessarily communists or even communist sympathizers, ". . . they do the work of communism . . . Some professors have a sense of frustration, of unimportance."

Nathan Cohen's earlier concerns were not unwarranted. By 1949, even a relatively progressive publication like *The Survey* began to reflect the conservative climate of the post-war period. A December 1949 article by John Fitch, "The CIO and Its Communists," reflected the anti-communist environment of the day in its account of the expulsion of the United Electrical Workers and other left-leaning unions from the CIO for their "communist-dominated" leadership. Fitch uncritically used such terms as "fellow travellers" and accepted the underlying premise of the CIO that these unions followed the dictates of the Soviet Union rather

than their members. He also failed to place the attack on the unions in the larger context of the Cold War and severely misjudged the long-term impact of the CIO's actions on the U.S. labor movement (pp. 642–647).

In the face of a growing climate of political repression, the National Conference on Social Welfare continued to hammer away, if somewhat obliquely, at the issue of McCarthyism at its annual meetings through keynote addresses and paper sessions alike. In 1951, Joseph P. Anderson, executive secretary of the AASW, pointed out that the attacks being made in the “present challenge” stemmed from fear and were directly aimed at the philosophy and principles on which public and private social welfare programs were based.

Too many people have reached the conclusion that there are only two choices before us: One is that we must have a society which offers security with no freedom, such as the totalitarian states offer. The other choice is to have freedom but little security, and that is what people say democracy offers. Social workers say that there is another choice, which is that we have a democratic society where government can assume responsibility for human welfare—a society where we can preserve freedom and personal initiative and a democratic way of life and still have the government discharge responsibility in helps to meet the health and welfare needs of all the people (Anderson, 1951, p. 56).

As the attack on services for the poor, particularly public welfare, continued, social workers persisted in their defense of these programs (Dunn, 1952; Granger, 1952; Youngdahl, 1952). After McCarthy's censure by the Senate in 1954, it became somewhat safer to express such opinions. Nevertheless, it is important to point out that political repression inside and outside the profession continued well into the 1960s.

Not all social workers believed that McCarthyism was negatively affecting the practice of social work to any great extent. Many truly feared communism. Maybel Berg felt that the “hunt for communists was good, but it eventually went too far” (1995). Jane Foster felt that there were subversive activities that needed to be stopped, but felt that “innocent people were hurt” (1995). Both of the women practiced social work during the time and felt the era was, in general, a good time for social work.

When asked in a 1981 memoir about the McCarthy era, Arthur Dunham, professor of community organization at the University of Michigan School of Social Work from 1935 to 1963, could not remember anyone having any difficulty during this period. He was never asked to defend his political beliefs despite his pacifism (he was a Quaker), his subscription to *Social Work Today*, or his authorship of a book review for that publication. Yet, when asked if he had a general concern about the atmosphere within the social work profession regarding McCarthyism, he answered "yes" (Memoir, NASW, 1981).

Reflecting on the contradictory recollections of McCarthyism, Professor Paul Ephross of the University of Maryland noted:

Folks of the political left rightly attribute to McCarthyism not only various personal oppressions and tragedies but also get sentimental in a way that may not be accurate (1995).

He explained that we need to remember that the period in which McCarthy was active was "also a period during which we progressive people learned a lot about the horrors of Stalin. When the former had been shot down, the latter knowledge remained, only to be reinforced by other revelations."

The response to McCarthyism in the 1940s and 1950s had a lasting impact on group workers and on the entire social work profession. The fear and purging which occurred left many social workers unable or unwilling to risk "fighting back" or to engage in social action to any great extent. While in the 1960s social workers became involved in many of the movements for social justice, the extent of this involvement was blunted by the experience of the previous decades.

Ephross (1995), while asserting his belief that there was a legitimate concern about communism, acknowledges that one of the legacies of McCarthyism "is a fear of being found ideologically incorrect, even in the future, which I believe is still at work today." He feels that it "began the habit of viewing speakers as disloyal, or un-American, or something terrible, because the rest of us don't like their words or their opinions" (1995).

Krasner (1995) speaks of social work's movement away from social change and toward an investment in treatment modalities

as an outgrowth of McCarthyism. He finds this apparent in both the teaching and practice of social work. He feels that

. . . we should have learned from McCarthyism that there would be a time when it would return . . . I think we are witnessing that today in terms of the religious right and the conservative movement and the control in Congress by the Republicans . . . We fought McCarthyism in the 40s and the 50s and into the 60s, but today, by and large, our students are not prepared from schools of social work to understand the coming power that is being developed by the conservatives and the religious right. And social workers in general are not adequately prepared to deal with the coming onslaught.

Another major impact of McCarthyism occurred in the voluntary sector agencies in which group work had played such an important role, particularly since the 1930s. Here, the attack on social action and community participation implicit in McCarthyism had several different effects: (1) on the relationship between professionals and volunteers in voluntary sector agencies; (2) on the agencies' definition of their clients; and (3) on the focus of services within the agencies themselves.

While voluntary sector agencies had already begun to modify staffing patterns between professionals and volunteers in the aftermath of World War II, the inward-looking drive for professionalization within social work produced by the conservatism of the McCarthy era compelled these agencies to clarify such issues as the role of volunteers and the nature of board-staff relationships. Professionals, many of whom were trained as group workers (especially in settlement houses and the Jewish Federation field), were given control over direct service functions, administration, supervision, and training. Community-based volunteers were relegated to non-professional duties and, with the exception of boards of directors (increasingly dominated by upper class individuals who no longer lived in the community in which the agency was located), were denied a role in agency policy-making or resource allocation decisions. This contradicted the long-standing spirit of group work to use agencies and their programs as training grounds for democratic participation.

At the same time, voluntarily social service agencies shifted their client base from low income to middle and upper income

groups, whose needs were more likely to be defined as "problems of adjustment" rather than problems of socio-economic deprivation. While demographic changes, such as the growth of suburbs, and the expansion of public welfare contributed substantially to this new emphasis, the desire of agencies to acquire and maintain a higher status and more politically acceptable clientele also played a major role. Their "disengagement from the poor" complemented the political-economic goals of the social work profession as it struggled (again) to define its place in the changing occupational hierarchy of the U.S. It also reflected the growth of a consumer-oriented, service-dominated economy, in which affluence, rather than poverty, became a focus of concern, and in which technical discussions supplanted ideological debates about the future directions of the society. The influence of McCarthyism on the latter can not be understated. Social workers in voluntary agencies became more concerned with sharpening fundraising techniques and board development than with methods of encouraging community participation and community development. As a consequence, they were largely unprepared for the wave of social activism which swept urban communities in the 1960s (Reisch, M. & Wenocur, S., 1982).

Another consequence of McCarthyism can be found in the growing emphasis of the acquisition of technical expertise as the primary goal of social work education and practice and the concomitant omission of discussions of the ideological bases of practice. Evidence for this shift can be found in textbooks written during and after the McCarthy period, which shaped a whole generation of practitioners. This apolitical legacy persisted well into the 1970s, despite the growing ideological turmoil of the intervening period. Ephross and Reisch (1982) noted that texts provide "a definition of practice skills based on conceptions of the political and social order without necessarily [explicating] the [author's] ideological foundation" (p. 277). By ignoring the impact of McCarthyism and its underlying political and ideological messages, social work educators contributed to the growing dissonance between the stated goals of social work practice and the conditions practitioners experience in their day-to-day work.

Much of the literature on professionalism within social work emerged during the 1950s. Largely utilizing a structural-

functional perspective, most of these articles rationalized the growth of professionalization within social work and defined its primary components as the acquisition of scientific-technical expertise and skills and an ethical code (often inwardly directed). "This image justify[ed] the proposition that professionals represent an intellectual status group or class which can guide the public interest because they somehow operate beyond the bounds of [class interests]" (Wenocur and Reisch, 1983, p. 692). Professionalism thus simultaneously denied the existence of class divisions within society while rewarding a particular occupational stratum for its particular knowledge and skills.

The drive for professionalization within social work diminished, rather than expanded client control of services, in direct contradiction to the democratic ideal which had guided the group work field for decades. It encouraged conformity, rather than diversity, in practice models, theoretical perspectives, and program designs. In addition, the growing emphasis on services to individuals, instead of groups, contributed to the reduction in clients' "ability to collectively define problems, needs, and roles, and . . . potentially to [influence] the demand for certain kinds of benefits or services" (Wenocur and Reisch, 1983, pp. 714-715).

Conclusions and Implications

McCarthyism affected the character of group work long after the anti-communist fervor of the period subsided. In his monograph, *A History of Social Work Education*, David Austin summarizes the condition of social group work from the mid-1950s to the 1980s as

increasingly identified with the therapeutic emphasis in social casework, rather than with the developmental task-oriented and advocacy orientation [of an earlier era] (1986, p. 32).

In schools of social work, group work came to be regarded as "part of an inclusive direct services, treatment or clinical social work practice methods" approach, instead of being considered a distinct and separate method of intervention as it had been in the early 1950s (Austin, 1986).

This trend was already being promoted and recognized by the mid-1950s. In order to "save" group work in a politically

and professionally hostile environment, group work leaders like Harleigh Trecker (1955) argued that the key for group work's survival lay in creating closer theoretical and practical linkages to social work as a whole, in clarifying the role of the group worker in various practice settings, in recruiting more students into group work, and in helping shape the public's perception of group work services (pp. 383–385). This would require the development of "a more realistic approach to the use of group work" in social change activities, such as legislative action, and a reexamination of the connections of group work to the settlement house movement and the public social services (pp. 408–409).

At the end of the decade, William Schwartz (1959), one of the leading theoreticians in the group work field, traced the crisis in group work to the political and cultural climate of the day in which "the group experience stands accused of creating both conformity [e.g. groupthink, the organization man] and rebellion [e.g. juvenile delinquency, radical political activity]" (p. 127). Groups, he argued, were feared as somehow dangerous and subversive and "the theory and practice of social group work have been trapped, to an extent, by the pessimism of the time" (ibid).

Schwartz argued that group work was in the midst of a transition to a new identity. This would be accomplished through the development of a new interpretation of the group work function and a merger of group work into the larger social work profession and generic social work methods. While Schwartz acknowledged "the group will always be the most potent instrument of social change," (p. 137) the type of change Schwartz envisioned foresaw a role for group workers as socializing or civilizing agents of professional organizations and institutions, rather than instruments for the expression and stimulation of democratic ideals and processes.

Throughout its history, the United States has periodically experienced times of anti-radicalism, xenophobia, fear, and political hysteria. Further, the theme of repression's continuity, "the idea that systems of 'order maintenance' rarely get dismantled after the crisis that provoked them has eased, has not penetrated the public historical imagination" (Preston, in Belfrage, 1989, p. xvi).

Our nation's political leaders have often used repressive tactics and policies to solve what they have viewed as crises of soci-

etal disintegration. This belief that society was falling apart justified periods of political repression in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, most notably the political and labor upheavals of 1919 and the 1930s, the McCarthy period, and the Vietnam War era (Goldstein, 1978).

As we develop strategies to fight against the current anti-social work climate, it is important to remember that political repression, by and large, is created and fostered by elites, not masses. The people usually respond passively and often approvingly, particularly when political leaders play on their prejudices and anxieties about the future. "Their approval and non-interference are enough to permit elites to promote and administer repression. If fascism came to America it would not require popular participation—merely popular non-opposition" (Goldstein, 1978, p. 574).

While there have always been groupworkers who took great risks to fight for social justice—Ira Krasner, Marion Hathway, Verne Weed and others—many group workers and other social workers have often retreated from progressive stances when threatened. An analysis leads one to conclude that "social work's progressive roots only seem to flourish in the sunlight. When darkness overtakes the land, we hunker down and neither curse that darkness nor light a candle" (Newdom, 1993).

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