Globalisation, austerity and social movements: Whose side are we on?

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Introduction: "A spectre is haunting Europe"

In Canada, Australia, Britain and the US the neo-liberal assault is fundamentally changing our economies, our welfare systems, our cities and the roles, procedures and activities of social workers in the field. In each of the four, 'fast policy transfer' (Minton 2009) is resulting in initiatives being 'shared' between the four welfare regimes – and this means that developments in any one of these societies is relevant and has importance for analysts, theorists and practitioners in each of the others.

More so, the mantra that 'there is no alternative' (to marketisation, neo-liberal policy regimes and public policy retrenchment) is now being exported to other nation-states: in a global world of integrated economic crises, we are told, all countries will eventually have to follow the lead of the 'neo-liberal four'. Across Europe, and especially within the Southern Euro Zone, vicious austerity measures are being implemented. Welfare regimes are being cut, jobs lost and the lives of the poorest made much worse

(see, for example, Pentaraki [forthcoming]).

In 1848 Marx and Engels began *The Communist Manifesto* by referring to 'a spectre haunting Europe'. For them this was the spectre of revolution, of the dismantling of capitalism and the establishment of a system based on meeting human need. But the haunting spectre today is not one of immediate social liberation, but the threat of unreconstructed neo-liberalism responsible for growing levels of inequality, poverty, social misery, alienation and social violence inflicted on the many by the few.

But the neo-liberal assault has not gone unanswered. The last two years have witnessed a range of social movements – most notably the revolutionary movements across the Middle East and Northern Africa (MENA), but also the struggles of the Greek working class against austerity and the Occupy Movement across Europe and North America which has started to pose radical alternatives in the interests of the 99%.

In this paper I want to look at the present British Government's attempts to

dismantle the post-war welfare state. It does so partly as warning but partly to argue that, internationally, social workers (academics and practitioners) and service users need to stand together to defend social/public welfare and to make a clear case for an alternative: to argue that an alternative welfare system and an alternative form of social work practice is possible, despite the neo-liberal thrust emanating from Government policy makers.

Shock doctrine Britain

What remains of the British welfare state is facing its greatest ever crisis (Yeates et al 2011). The economic catastrophe that started in the US sub-prime housing market in 2007 and spread to engulf the banking system across the Western world in 2008 has left the British state with a massive debt problem because state funds were used to bail out failing banks. At the end of 2010 the public sector budget deficit was £85bn (though this is £6.8bn lower than in the same period of 2009/10); whilst public sector net borrowing was £113bn (again £14.1bn lower than in the same period of 2009/10) (The Guardian 2011a).

Dealing with the 'debt crisis' has been the dominant theme in British politics for the last two years and the Conservative/Liberal Democrat Coalition Government, elected in 2010, have set about repaying the debt by launching the most extensive public sector spend-

ing reductions since at least the early 1920's.

Interestingly, the level of debt as a percentage of GDP is lower than it was at any point during the entire period from 1918-1961; lower than it was in 1945 when the British welfare state was set up (PCS 2010). So the figures themselves do not necessarily mean welfare spending cuts are 'inevitable' or 'necessary' (though this is the Government's mantra). Further, other ways of paying the debt have not been seriously considered. Some alternatives include: increasing top tax rates (which, for the highest earners are 10 pence in the pound less than when Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister), closing tax avoidance loop-holes (the UK Treasury estimated it failed to collect £42bn in tax in 2009; the Tax Justice Network puts the estimates for that year at closer to £95bn [Turner 2010]), ending military intervention in Afghanistan (with an estimate annual saving of£2.6 billion per year [PCS 2010]), announcing that the Trident missile system won't be replaced (the total costs of Trident renewal will amount to between £94.7bn and £104.2bn over the lifetime of the system, estimated at 30 years. This equates to £3.3bn per year. [PCS 2010]), and introducing one-off levies on bank bonus payouts given the banks' role in initiating the crisis (the bonuses for Christmas 2010 in London's financial sector amounted to an estimated £7bn [Treanor 2010]; in 2011 Angela Knight, the Chief Executive of the British

Bankers Association claimed the era of big bonus was over because the banks had restrained bonuses to only £4.2 billion in 2011 [This is Money 3/12/2011]). But instead we are told there 'there is no alternative' and dramatic and punitive welfare cuts have been announced.

The scale of the cut's package is so large that it is difficult to comprehend. For example, local government in Britain remains an important provider of social and public services. Education, social work, social care, social housing, local leisure and library services all rely on local government funding. Yet their budget has been cut by 27 percent (after inflation) over the period 2011-2015.

Welfare budgets (including unemployment, incapacity and housing benefits, Disability Living Allowance, Child Benefit, Children and Working Family Tax Credits, Employment Support Allowance, family allowances and pensions, for example) have been slashed. According to Brewer and Browne: £80bn a year spending cuts … £18bn will be found from cuts in welfare [benefit] spending by 2014/15" (2011: 4).

Further, remaining benefits will now resonate with an older social policy theme: 'less eligibility'. Changes to benefit rules mean that no family on benefits will receive more than the income of an average family in work, no matter what their family circumstances or the reality of the lives lived by their children. Single unemployed people

under the age of 35 will no longer receive housing benefit for anything other than a room in shared accommodation. The state pension age has been raised to 66 and the public sector pension pot has had £1.8 billion removed from it. A million people currently on employment and support allowance due to ill health will each lose £2,000 a year from their benefits package (Dorling 2010a).

Growing inequality has been a feature of British society for the last 25 years (Dorling 2011). But the cuts will mean even greater inequality. As Bruchart (2011) notes the outcome of the cuts will be regressive, with the bottom 10 percent of the income distribution hit hardest.

The social costs of the cuts are becoming clear: the most vulnerable will suffer the most. The most vulnerable are likely to suffer the most. For example, the Refugee Council is facing cuts of almost 62% to its budget, which will impact directly on frontline services. These cuts, announced in February 2011 and implemented in April 2011, are of such a scale and have been introduced at such speed, that service providers have had no opportunity to adapt to their new circumstances. As a result refugees will be left destitute and many will be forcibly returned to the murderous regimes from which they were trying to escape. These cuts were in addition to the 22 per cent funding reduction the Council made in the previous financial year which resulted in 52 staff being made redun-

dant and a reduction in key services, including support for unaccompanied refugee children (Hill 2011).

The weekly magazine *Community Care* (2011) proclaimed that the 'cuts put children at risk'. They reported the results of a survey they had conducted which suggested that 88 per cent of social workers surveyed suggested that council cuts put vulnerable children at risk. They went on to report that 82 per cent of those surveyed claimed that child protection thresholds had increased over the past year and quoted one social worker who claimed:

> [In my area] several cases were reclassified to clear caseloads for each team to meet regulatory targets.

Whilst another claimed:

> A child had been in care for several years with episodes of secure accommodation. A meeting was arranged to identify which child could go home with the least risk, due to having to manage the residential care budget. The child was returned home and immediately resumed his behaviour.

The evidence is already mounting up: it is social work service users who will suffer most from welfare cuts and retrenchment.

In addition to the cuts, Government changes to tax and National Insurance rates and rising inflation (especially to food, fuel and clothing) mean that the tax year 2011-2012 will see the stan-dard of living plummet for poor, working class and lower middle class families. According to the accountancy firm PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) households will be on average £1,000 worse off this coming year (O'Grady 2011). The Government's own data suggests that a family with three children on close to average income (of £26,000 per annum) will lose some £1,700 a year, and thousands more if their salaries fail to keep up with inflation. (O'Grady 2011).

Every government department has started on a programme of 'debt reduction' which will destroy public and social sector jobs, with hundreds of thousands of workers being laid off in local government (where the majority of social workers work). For those who remain, working life will get harder as employers erode pay rates and working conditions won through collective bargaining agreements.

This drastic reduction of state support and state supported services is to be replaced by what Prime Minister David Cameron calls 'The Big Society'. This is a vision where volunteerism and voluntary sector organisations, in conjunction with private sector service providers, step in to fill the gap vacated by the state.

However, there are a number of barriers to the fulfilment of any such vision. There is no evidence that the voluntary sector will be able to fulfil the role Cameron has given it. Most voluntary

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sector organisations rely on the local government funding that has now been drastically cut – some estimates suggest the voluntary sector will receive grant and contract reductions in the region of £4.5bn over the deficit reduction period (The Guardian 2011b). Further, the squeeze on family budgets means that Charities and voluntary sector organisations are also reporting a reduction in their charitable donations (Chanel 4 2011). In any case, many voluntary welfare organisations want to provide additional, specialist support networks to service users, rather than become the main providers of essential services. And finally, the long hours that full-time workers in Britain work clearly limit the ability of many workers to undertake any significant voluntary commitment. According to the Trade Union Congress, "Full time employees in the UK work the longest hours in Europe. The average for full timers in the UK is 43.5. In France it's 38.2 and in Germany 39.9" (TUC 2011).

Cameron's real vision for the future was captured at the end of February 2011, when he announced that all services would be subject to tendering and all areas of state activity (with the exception of the military and the legal system) would be 'open for business' – opened up to enable private, for-profit businesses to bid to be service providers. He stated:

> This is a transformation: instead of having to justify why it makes sense to introduce competition in some public ser-

vices – as we are now doing with schools and the NHS – the state will have to justify why it should ever operate a monopoly (Cameron 2011).

Cameron declared that the deciding factor in any contract would be 'quality assurance', recent history suggests the key variable will be price.

The political discourse around the systemic economic crisis of 2008-present has been used by neo-liberal politicians in Britain to launch a previously untried experiment (at least in a so-called advanced Western economy) to restructure British society fundamentally in the interests of the already wealthy and powerful. This is the shock doctrine at work in Britain in the form of public sector cuts, privatisation and the destruction of jobs. (Klein 2007)

The scale of the neo-liberal assault is such that it raises important questions over the role and future direction of social work in British society.

Social work's crisis once more

However bad things are - or are about to become - is there anything *specific* to social work about what is happening? Of course, as a state funded service social work will be hit like all others, but is there anything particular about what is happening that makes this a 'social work crisis'. Or is this just intellectual laziness from the academic social work left, always waiting to re-use their cliché that 'social work is in crisis'?

It is certainly the case that social work in Britain has had its share of 'crises'.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there was a 'crisis' in social work because some workers within the Charity Organisation Society (COS) and the Settlement Movement were 'going native' and questioning the social conditions within which 'clients' were living and the iniquities of British society at the time (Lavalette and Ferguson 2007). One of the proposed solutions was a move towards professionalization – through the development of social work education – as a means of inoculating workers from 'contamination', establishing professional distance between workers and service users and constructing an 'appropriate' knowledge base (Jones 1983).

At the end of World War Two and with the formal establishment of the British welfare state, social work faced another crisis as it was excluded (as a recognised, uniform and coherent institution) from the new state settlement; a situation that was not resolved until the Social Work (Scotland) Act (1968) and the Local Authority Personal Social Services Act (1970) which established generic, local authority social work/service departments (Payne 2005).

Just as the new social work/service departments were being established the world shifted; the long-post war boom came to an abrupt end and welfare states were said to be in crisis (c.f. Mishra 1983, Culpitt 1992). As the first period of post-war welfare retrenchment started to take hold (from 1976-1982) social workers found themselves at the forefront of a 'war on welfare' led by politicians and media pundits. Social workers and social work theories were blamed for establishing a 'culture of welfare dependency' and promoting, a cycle of dependency (Lowe 1993); themes that were to reappear during subsequent periods of welfare cuts and restructuring under both the Conservative and New Labour governments.

Social work also came under attack after a series of high profile cases where children involved with Social Services Departments died at the hands of carers within their families (Maria Colwell in 1973, Jasmine Beckford in 1984, Tyra Henry in 1984, Kimberley Carlisle in 1986, Victoria Climbe in 2000 and Peter Connelly ['Baby P'] in 2007). These deaths raised questions within political and media circles about the 'worth' and 'value' of social work.

Social work came out of these episodes battered and bruised, its scope, tasks and modes of working often changed but, nevertheless, still with us.

So talk of 'crises' seem to be part of the very fabric of social work's development and history in Britain – so is this most recent anything to concern us?

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I want to suggest that the scale of the attack on public welfare in Britain today is so great that there are now real concerns about the continuing viability of the social work project. There are concerns over:

- The viability of a range of social work projects whose funding streams will disappear.
- The position of social work as a state activity (the arena where the vast majority of social workers are employed) as all services are put out to tender.
- Social work's ability to work in positive and progressive ways with service users (whose numbers are likely to increase because of the austerity measures).
- Social work's ability to meet the needs of the most vulnerable and to practice in secure settings with the appropriate time and space to build relationships and support networks.

Whilst it is evident that some form of social work will survive the social shock that Britain is about to face, what is less certain is what this social work will look like. Will it be a social work shaped by ethical values and commitments, with appropriate resources to meet service user needs, or primarily a deskilled labour task whose primary role will be to manage and control the poor and the marginalised?

To get a glimpse of what this 'deskilled' social work might look like we do not have to stray too far into a 'thought experiment'. Social work in Britain at the start of the twenty-first century already has elements of a debased profession.

Social Work and Neo-liberalism: Before the Storm Broke

It is widely recognised within the social work literature that most people come into the profession because they want to make a difference – to help people to tackle the problems in their lives and, for some, to address the social causes of so much private pain (the poverty, unemployment and alienation that blight people's lives and lead to all manner of personal and social traumas). These commitments are captured, for example, within the International Federation of Social Work's definition of social work, which has been widely quoted and has garnered support from national associations and affiliates. It argues that social work:

promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people … (It) addresses barriers, inequalities and injustices that exist in society. It responds to crises and emergencies as well as everyday personal and social problems… Social work interventions range from primarily person-focused psychosocial processes to involvement in social policy, planning and development. …[Including] counselling, clinical social work, group work, social pedagogical work and family treatment and therapy… Interventions also include agency administration, community organisation and engaging in social and political action (IFSW 2000).

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The IFSW statement indicates the importance of 'values' that seem to reflect the essence of the job: that social work is a professional, helping task that puts people and their needs first. It describes a social work that is shaped by notions of social justice and it is for this reason that the Global Justice campaigning organisation, *People and Planet*, list social work as one of their 'ethical careers'.

However, in Britain – and increasingly across large parts of the globe – state directed social work has increasingly been shaped by the demands of neo-liberal policy regimes which threaten to undermine such 'ethical commitments' (Ferguson et al 2005, Lavalette and Ferguson 2007, Lavalette 2011).

Neo-liberalism has deepened its hold on British society over the last two decades. Although there were significant year on year reductions in social spending budgets at the end of the 1970s (under the then Labour Government), and whilst the early Thatcher Governments reduced welfare benefit payments (relative to wages), moved to privatise local government housing and introduced competitive tendering systems within some areas of local government, it was only after their third election victory in 1987 that the Thatcher governments fully moved to bring market principles into state welfare services (Timmins 1995, Lavalette and Mooney 2002, Mooney 2006). The Education Act (1988) and the National Health Service and Community Care Act (1990) marked the implementation of New Public Management (NPM) into welfare services.

According to Clarke et al (2000) the key characteristics of NPM in Britain can be summerised as:

- Attention to outputs and performance targets rather than inputs;
- Organisations being viewed as chains of low-trust relationships, linked by contracts or contractual type processes;
- The separation of purchaser and provider or client and contractor roles within formerly integrated processes or organisations;
- Breaking down large scale organisations and using competition to enable 'exit' or 'choice' by service users;
- Decentralisation of budgetary and personal authority to line managers.

Welfare systems were increasingly based on three key elements: (i) internal marketisation, (ii) the portrayal of service users as 'consumers' who expressed their welfare 'choices' through market mechanisms, and (iii) managerialism – a work system that reduces space for worker autonomy and decision making and tries to control and restrict the labour process within welfare organisations. These trends continued and deepened under New Labour's focus on work procedures, output measurement and centrally de-

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fined targets between 1997-2010 (Baldwin 2011).

In terms of social work, neo-liberalism had a significant impact in three important ways.

First, neo-liberal welfare regimes brought increasing levels of poverty, inequality and alienation and these, in turn, produced and magnified a wide range of social problems. In Britain, research by writers like John Hills and Kitty Stewart (2005), Richard Wilkinson (2005), Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett (2009), Daniel Dorling (2010b) and John Hills and his team (Hills et al 2010) describe a society where the gap between a wealthy minority and growing numbers of poor people gets wider each year. For example, Hills et al found that inequalities in income in the UK are higher now than they have been at any time since shortly after the Second World War (Hills et al, 2010:39). The household wealth of the top 10% of the population stands at £853,000 and more – over 100 times higher than the wealth of the poorest 10%.

As Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) argue, the level of income inequality is a key determinant not only of health and mortality rates but of a host of other social problems, including mental illness, obesity and homicides.

Such inequalities have a significant impact on the lives of the most vulnerable. For example, in the most comprehensive recent survey of children's

lives produced by Unicef in 2007, the UK ranked bottom of 21 industrialised countries in its child "well-being assessment". This assessment was based on 40 separate indicators—including relative poverty, child safety, educational achievement and drug abuse. Britain has a higher number of children in poverty, defined as living below 60 percent of the typical income, than any other West European country. In Britain 22 percent of children are poor, compared to 8 percent in Sweden and 10 percent in Denmark; thirty years ago the British figure was only 13 percent (Ferguson and Lavalette 2009). One in ten five to 16 year olds now have clinically significant mental health difficulties, but only a quarter of children who are seriously troubled or disturbed by mental health difficulties are getting any kind of specialist help.

Wilkinson and Pickett argue that it is inequality and poverty that are creating a range of mental health problems – the direct result of the alienation of modern social life under neo-liberal regimes. But they go on:

> We are not suggesting that the problem is a matter of individual psychology, or that it is really people's sensitivity, rather than the scale of inequality, that should be changed. The solution to problems caused by inequality is not mass psychotherapy aimed at making everyone less vulnerable. The best way of responding to the harm done by high levels of inequality would be to reduce inequality itself.

And of course it is social workers who have to step in to deal with the mounting crises caused by the growing levels of poverty and inequality.

But neo-liberalism has impacted on social work in a second important way, as public services have increasingly been opened up to market competition, privatisation and to encroachment by private capital (as opposed to state owned and controlled services) and, in the process, any notion of democratic accountability has been lost. Privatisation has affected formerly state owned public utilities – like electricity, gas and water services – which are now expensive, owned by a confusing array of competing companies and where those who cannot pay (many of whom will be social work clients) find themselves 'cut-off' loosing the supply of vital services. Public services, like rail and bus transport and, increasingly, welfare services – such as social services, housing, schooling and health care – have all been subject to privatisation and forced to open up to market competition (Whitfield 2001, 2009). As noted above, vast sectors of the welfare state are now structured around 'internal' markets – where purchasers and providers of services have to act 'as if' they were operating on an open market (Mooney 2006). But in addition, services have also been subjected to 'open' market competition, where previously state run services are provided by national and multinational private corporations. A number of researchers have

shown conclusively that marketisation has not improved the quality of service delivery (Ferguson and Lavalette 2007, Beckett 2007, Wriggley 2006). Instead it has undermined the working conditions of those frontline workers who actually provide the services (Mooney and Law 2007) and has enabled large private corporations and global multinational corporations to make massive profits from the public purse by bidding for government contracts (Pollock 2004, Lister 2008, Ferguson and Lavalette 2007, Whitfield 2009).

Neo-liberalism has had an impact on social work in a third, more direct way: the profession itself has increasingly found itself shaped by the demands of marketisation, managerialism, privatisation and 'business methods' of working.

State social work has, over the last two decades, been increasingly shaped and restricted by budgetary constraints and, as a result, many social workers find themselves playing a role as 'rationers' of scarce resources (Ferguson 2008). At the same time, market methods of service delivery and the construction of 'care-packages' for 'customers' increasingly dominate the practice of frontline workers who find themselves operating as 'care managers' (Baldwin 2011). As a result state social workers rarely operate in ways that allow them to meet fully service users' needs (Harris 2003).

Further, workers increasingly find themselves subject to a wide variety of 'managerialist' pressures at work. For example, they have to meet set targets, their work is dominated by form filling, their case-loads are excessive and their hours very long (Ferguson and Lavalette 2009). In a recent survey conducted for the British Association of Social Workers, 85 per cent of respondents thought that the pressure of work had increased in recent years and more than two-thirds of them said their job had caused them emotional or mental instability – and of those, 45% had taken time off work as a result. Ninety-five per cent of respondents suggested that clients had been put at risk as a result of the pressures placed on social workers (The Guardian 6 October 2010).

Social work practice is also increasingly dominated by IT systems which embody such managerialist concerns and regulate work patterns (Harris and Whyte 2009). In one recent study it was estimated that child protection social workers now spend close to 80 per cent of their time in front of computers (White et al 2009). These IT systems also mean that social work is increasingly dominated by software packages that have reduced the space for professional judgement, relationship building with service users and for provision of appropriate care (White 2008).

It is not surprising that, as a consequence, state social work suffers from high staff turn-over. Jones (2001) reported the results of research carried out with workers which suggested that anyone who managed to stay in frontline statutory work for five years could be considered as a team 'veteran'; more recently Unison (2009) suggest that anyone who stays in frontline work for three years is likely to be amongst the most experienced staff members in their team. Social work today is a demoralised profession – or at least frontline workers are increasingly demoralised about their working lives and their ability to work alongside service users to bring about substantial change in service users' lives (Ferguson and Woodward 2009).

So, despite social workers' commitments on entering the profession, and despite some of the strong value statements embodied in the IFSW definition of social work, state social workers in Britain increasingly find themselves reduced and constrained to a type of working practice that clashes with their values and aspirations.

Thus, even before the recent austerity measures were announced by the Government, social work was straining under the pressures of NPM and neoliberal welfare. The impact of the budget cuts – and the wholesale privatisation of state services preferred by Cameron – threaten to make all this much worse.

Are there alternatives?

Given the present state of social work in Britain – and in the face of the austerity measures now being put in place

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- what alternatives are open to social workers?

The first point to make is that doing nothing is not an option. Over the last two decades the leadership of the social work profession in Britain have remained relatively passive and quiet in the face of the dramatic changes to the profession outlined above. In part, the explanation for such a state of affairs rests in the political attacks that both Conservative and Labour governments launched on social work over the period, portraying it as a 'failed profession' (see Ferguson and Lavalette 2009, Penketh 1998). But silence has not saved social work from the neo-liberal onslaught and now is not the time for either silence or passivity. Instead, some traditional social work 'values', like anger and passion, are required to 'speak truth to power' and to engage in the campaign against the cuts.

The second point to make is that as social work has increasingly shrunk into a dominant model of 'care management', a rich repertoire of social work methods and approaches – like group, community and individual therapeutic work – have been marginalised (at best) or lost to state social workers. Yet there is growing evidence that this is generating frustration within frontline circles and pushing some to look for alternatives. Seven years ago the Social Work Action Network (a coalition of social work academics, practitioners, service users and

students) was formed in Britain as a development of the 'Social Work Manifesto for a New Engaged Practice' written by Jones et al (2004). The Social Work Action Network (SWAN) has organised a series of very successful events around the twin themes "I didn't come into social work for this" and "Social Work: A profession worth fighting for?" The conferences have regularly attracted around 300 people involved in social work – though this year 400 people came to the event in Liverpool. The conferences have created a social space to think about the problems we face and consider a range of actions necessary to re-assert more radical social work values. There are five key themes within SWAN's work.

First, SWAN has set out to 'reclaim' a social work practice that is supportive of service users, non-hierarchical, based on 'relationship building' and focussed on meeting human need (www.socialworkfuture.org). SWAN is not just an organisation of social workers and the involvement of service users is not tokenistic. Rather SWAN is committed to rejuvenating social work practice through full engagement with the various service user movements. The slogan 'service users and workers together' captures this spirit but, more importantly, stresses that in the face of the present cuts 'unity is strength'.

Second, it has involved re-assessing what social work is – or could be – by looking at alternative models drawn from history and from cross-national

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studies. We have started to plot a range of 'popular social work' (PSW) projects that provide examples of a range of campaigning and politically engaged social works (Ferguson et al 2005, Lavalette and Ferguson 2007, Lavalette and Ioakimidis 2011).

PSW tends to be linked to broader social movement activity, and undertaken by a range of people (some with official training, some without) who are focused on producing, providing and developing services for their community within the context of unequal, oppressive and hierarchical societies.

Examples of such popular social work are sprinkled throughout the history of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In Britain it was present in the work of individuals like the Marxist Feminist Sylvia Pankhurst, the socialist activist George Lansbury, (the future Labour Prime Minister) Clem Attlee, (the Christian socialist, turned communist) Mary Hughes and (the socialist feminist) EmmelinePethick. These people combined political campaigning (for women's rights, political representation for working class communities, trade unionism and against World War) with case-based advocacy work, representation of 'clients' to the Poor Law Guardians, provision of community cafes and meals for poor school children and fighting for housing and jobs in the face of poverty and mass unemployment. (Lavalette 2006, Lavalette and Ferguson 2007).

Visions of popular social work can also be seen in the community and campaigning work of Jaynne Adams and Bertha Reynolds in the United States in the first half of the century (Reisch and Andrews 2002). It is also present in aspects of the social action models within the Settlement Movement in Canada, and in the work of Mary Jenison, a founder member of the CASW, famed for her progressive work with children, youth and unemployed workers in Hamilton and who found herself on the Government 'red list' because of her views and activities. Or, in the work of Mentona Moser, the Swiss social work pioneer and leader of, and practitioner within, *Red Aid* in the 1930s. Red Aid was an international social services organization that provided support to politically persecuted people across the world and active support for revolutionary Spain (Hering, 2003). 'Popular social work' was also part of the US welfare rights movement of the 1960s when a number of social workers, like Bill Pastreich, Rhoda Linton, Richard Cloward and others from the Community Action Training Centre, played leading roles in the movement. These workers organized and campaigned alongside black women's groups against poverty, for welfare payments and for a range of political and social rights (Nadasen 2005).

But examples of popular social work are not restricted to the more distant past. In Britain during the year-long Miners Strike of 1984/85 the mining communities organised soup and food

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kitchens, pantomimes at Christmas, children's parties and entertainment on occasional weekends. The intention was, above all, to survive, both physically and mentally; to keep up spirits and morale; to stop people feeling isolated; to help counter individual trauma, frustration and depression, and to meet basic needs.

Similar examples can be found in many parts of the world today. It is visible in the community orientated youth and disability programmes run by 'non-professional' social workers in the Palestinian refugee camps across the West Bank. These provide grassroots services to their community that embody a deep understanding of the political and historical situation that the refugees find themselves in, and recognize the importance of understanding and confronting the 'public causes' of the private pains of so many of those in the camps (Jones and Lavalette 2011).

The welfare and social work activities undertaken by the members of the campaigning group *Samidoun* during the 2006 Israeli attack on Beirut provide another example. *Samidoun*members organized to provided shelter, food and medical and psychological support for the war refugees as the Israeli assault was in full flow (Lavalette and Levine 2011).

At the same time, much asylum and refugee work across Europe is community orientated, rights based work,

that brings together community activists and a range of unqualified 'helpers' (often from a range of political and religious organizations) to provide support, help and a campaigning network as part of the struggle for refugee rights (Mynott 2005, Ferguson and Barclay 2002, Teloni 2011).

The narrowing of social work's history to the development of one version of a regulated, qualified professional activity has meant that many exciting, engaged initiatives – with deep connections to their communities and their struggles against inequality and oppression - have been excised from social work's history. SWAN is involved in trying to (re)discover and celebrate such examples and consider what lessons they might offer for social work today.

Third, SWAN is committed to the idea that new, radical social work developments will arise, not internally from within the professional boundaries of social work, but from a full engagement with social movement activity.

The significance of social movements for social work have often been underestimated but the fact is that, on several occasions over the past one hundred years, social work has been able to renew itself – and to renew its commitment to social justice - through its contact with, and involvement in, the great social movements of the day. The radical social work movement of the1970s, for example, and the anti-

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oppressive practice to which it gave rise, did not fall out of the sky but grew out of the radicalisation of social workers by their contact with the women's' movement, the civil rights movement and the trade union struggles of the late 1960s and early 1970s (Thompson, 2002).

More recently, some of the most significant contributions to social work theory, practice and service development have come from the 'new social welfare movements' which have emerged in the past twenty years, such as the disability movement and the mental health users' movement (Williams, 1992; Barnes, 1997). These collective movements have challenged social work and other health-related professions at four distinct levels. First, at the level of the professional relationship, they have challenged paternalism and advocated much more equal relationships between workers and service users. Second, they have contributed to the development of services which are much more in tune with their own needs and wishes, including forms of advocacy, social crisis services and models of independent living. Third, they have confronted dominant ideologies of disability and mental ill-health to the extent that the social model of disability and health, if not yet hegemonic, can no longer be ignored by either academics or governments (Oliver, 1995; Tew, 2005). Finally, at the level of policy and legislation, their impact can be seen in respect both of disability rights legislation and

(in Scotland at least) mental health legislation (Ferguson, 2003).

In fact, however, a wide variety of social movements, including earlier anti-war movements, have impacted on social work since its origins, often through the direct involvement within them of leading members of the profession (Lavalette and Ferguson, 2007). Jane Addams, for example, one of the founders of social work in the USA, was also an anti-war activist who founded the Women's Peace Party in 1915 and chaired an international peace congress in Hague in the same year demanding an end to the First World War. Her actions led to letters in the respectable *Chicago Tribune* demanding that she be hanged from the nearest lamp-post (Reisch and Andrews, 2002)! Another prominent social worker, Lillian Wald, was President of the American Union Against Militarism, and in an interview with the *New York Evening Post* in December 1914 outlined her view of social work as follows:

> In its broadest conception, social work is teaching the sanctity of human life and… the doctrine of the brotherhood of man…The social workers of our time are dreaming a great dream and seeing a great vision of democracy…War is the doom of all that has taken years to build up (cited in Reisch and Andrews, 2002: 42).

Other examples of social workers seeking to engage with popular movements include the Rank and File Movement in the USA in the 1930s,

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associated with the Marxist academic Bertha Reynolds, which worked with unemployed people, or the reconceptualisation movement in Latin America in the 1980s (Mendoza Rangel, 2004; Wilson and Hernandez, 2007).

In each of these cases, social work theory and practice has been radicalised by its contact with these movements, leading to new forms of practice (including advocacy and collective approaches), a desire for more equal relationships between workers and those who use services (often reflected in a critique of notions of professionalism), and a deepening and extension of social work's value base.

In the present, social work radicalism will be revived by a full engagement with the range of social movements posing the demand that 'another world is possible'.

Fourth, SWAN is trying to establish links with other social workers across the globe facing similar issues and problems. Through research and campaigning networks there are now groups in Canada, Ireland, Hong Kong, Japan, Greece and South Africa. At the International Association of Schools of Social Work conference in 2010 SWAN ran three symposia that were lively and busy and gave space for discussion around the themes 'social work and neo-liberalism', 'social work and war' and 'social work futures'. In addition a fringe meeting on the issue of Palestinian rights was held

with speakers from across the Middle East which led to a motion being submitted to (and passed at) the IASSW conference that condemned the Israeli assault of the Gaza Peace Flotilla.

Finally, as an 'action network' SWAN is also involved in campaigning activity. When social workers found themselves under attack in the aftermath of the death of 'Baby P' at the end of 2008, SWAN launched a petition to defend social work and ran three one-day conferences for frontline workers in various parts of Britain. In the South-West of England the local SWAN group ran a campaign against a local taxi firm that won a contract to transport children with special needs to school – because the taxi firm owner was a member of the fascist organisation, the British National Party. In Manchester and Liverpool SWAN has been on picked lines with both social workers and social care workers, whilst in Birmingham and Glasgow it has been part of a campaigning network in support of refugee rights. Part of that work has included establishing 'Frontline Practice Notes' which offer advice to workers on how they can challenge funding cuts, local government policy dictates and 'unjust procedures' (this includes advice on the law, on practice based initiatives and suggestions, on local campaigning and on national political demands [www.socialworkfuture.org]).

SWAN is involved in these campaigns because they embody values of empa-

thetic solidarity, radical social justice, human rights, anti-oppression and collective action and which reflect a re-assertion of radical social work values that have always been present within social work (albeit as a minority current). These values pitch us, as social workers, into the struggle for a better world alongside service users and movement activists and allow us to start the process of re-building a social work that is relationship based and non-hierarchical; that is committed to 'speaking truth to power' and promoting equality and human need; a social work that joins the resistance against the assaults of the powerful on the poor, the marginal and the dispossessed. A social work that asserts that in a conflict between the powerful and the powerless we are not neutral but proud to make it clear whose side we are on.

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