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WILL THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY FAMILY

PLEASE STAND UP?

by

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## WILL THE 21st CENTURY FAMILY PLEASE STAND UP?

### Change: Time, Distance and Identity

It took me about twenty four hours to reach Australia from Europe. When I was young it would have taken me perhaps seven or eight weeks in an ocean liner - that is a factor of fifty times longer. I mention this as an indication of the rate of change that has taken place in a period of just fifty years or so, within my lifetime.

It is perhaps also of relevance here to examine some of the qualitative changes. Laurens van de Post has described vividly the departures of ocean liners - the dressing-up, the pre-sailing ship-board parties, the brass bands, the streamers and the gaiety amidst the tears as the ship slipped away from the shore, its horn drowning the last shouted farewells of the crowds deposited on the quay.

He might also have considered how on a long sea voyage a sense of community emerges as the passengers share the experience of living together at close quarters, day following day and the growing consciousness of the immensity of distances and new awareness of forces of nature - the receding solid land, the sea in its many moods, the appearance of marine and bird life, the smells, the sounds, the tastes and the feels, the sight of the sun, clouds, moon waxing and waning, and crossing the equator, the North star disappearing from the vast sky, (a lifetime's point of reference). All these enhancing a new sense of the eternal flow of the universe. This would be enriched by hearing from one's fellows who they are and what has been their experience behind and in front of you, the traveler. There is time within these far horizons to live, dream, and contemplate the very nature of being, where one has come from and where one is going to, to consider anew, who you are and who you might become. There is time for lifelong friendships to be made and in such closed environments even romances and liaisons leading to the contracting of marriages and eventually the foundation of family. The possibilities, in fact, as in the title of van der Post's book, to dwell on - "Yet being someone other"<sup>1</sup>.

Contrast this with the "processing" on modern-day airliners. Little of all this takes place between airport takeoff and landing<sup>2</sup>. There is a parallel here, I believe, in the conditions of modern travel to the accelerated rate and nature of change in society; an increasing tendency to capsule living in space with the absence of an embracing sense of community<sup>3</sup>; the disappearance of points of reference and the

<sup>1</sup> See also the voyage to Australia in Peter Carey's novel "Oscar and Lucinda"

<sup>2</sup> In the wartime air-force walking to the plane I could smell the grass and look up at the sky and have the sense of an air-field. Clad in sheepskin and leather, there was the feel of the wind and the cold, and one remained profoundly conscious of the earth as we roared up against the pull of gravity into the exhilarating loneliness of cloud and stars. But that is now gone as one is tooth-pasted along corridors into the seat-belted tubes of airliners, with plastic meals, musak, movies, and queues for toilets all of which divert attention from the experience of actually flying at all.

<sup>3</sup> The analogy of the space capsule can be stretched further in suggesting that it is as though we find

disorientation that this brings to the inner and fundamental sense of identity; and the loss of what it really is that we are seeking and gives meaning to travel and to life.<sup>4</sup>

### Family Values: When, Where, and Which?

This is the Year of the Family and this conference reflects in its brochure the anxiety that it is the breakdown of the family which is a major concern. Certainly there is a growing popularity among politicians in the West for the idea of returning to "Family Values". The inference seems to be that somehow there was a golden age of family and society which we have lost or are fast losing. It should be said immediately that some of the ideas of what a family was, and perhaps should be again, conveniently glosses over some of the iniquities and inequities of such family life. To mention just a few, the subservient role of women, the limitations on the choice of a marriage partner, the lack of opportunity in education or career prospects. These and much more give some idea that all was not necessarily desirable in earlier times and certainly is still not today in many places and situations.

There is also the difficulty of identifying what these values were and whether there are universalities to be found in "The Family" given the immense range of differences determined by country and culture, economic situations, religion and over time.

### Whose Values? Migrants in Time, Space and Culture

For example, on a special programme designed for senior personnel from newly emerging countries, (mostly people who had a great deal of experience in independence movements but who had had limited opportunity for formal and advanced study), I set my students to invent two interviews, the first with one of their grandparents and another with one of their own children. The interviews were to explore the hopes and aspirations of the interviewees.

Interestingly, grandparents emerged as full and rounded figures in the interviews in contrast to the children who seemed relatively unknowns to their parents. This of itself was of significance and was considered. However, there were a host of fascinating examples between the generations:

A grandmother who had been a slave longed only for a verandah, a rocking chair, and time and peace to sew and just be. Three generations on, my student's child had the ambition to be a translator at the United Nations.

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ourselves in a space capsule without anyone making it clear to us that the forces of gravity no longer operate. When in the familiar way we reach out for something it is not where it is supposed to be. It is no longer securely attached as expected but, if we are lucky, what we need might still be found floating around elsewhere and can be retrieved.

<sup>4</sup> Van der Post, also in his "Venture to the Interior", elaborates on how journeys take place within oneself as well as geographically.

Another grandmother who controlled the family and their finances insisted that her great-grandchild had to be married at fifteen as was the practice within the culture. The youngster wished to go abroad to study at a University. The interviewer, my student, was caught between his grandmother's control and insistence and his daughter. Incidentally the group of students examining this material sided with the younger generation and were outraged when the interviews ended with the report that "Fortunately a very acceptable young man came along, my daughter married and the problem was solved"! Whose problem exactly?<sup>5</sup>

I urge you to read a most fascinating autobiography of the life of the former Director of the School of Social Work in Iran.<sup>6</sup>

She grew up in the Teheran compound of her father's six wives and surrounded by a multitude of servants. She was born when he was sixty years old and had thirty-two children. As the Shah's regime fell she had expected there to be positive political change. Instead she found herself threatened with execution and is now exiled, the divorced mother of a single child born, and who is now married, in the USA.

Imagine the transformation experienced within two generations in the meaning of family.

My own grandfather could not sign his name and as a small boy I would write for him on his pension book "His mark" and he would add an "X". The traditional wisdom and power of elders is hard to maintain where youngsters in new circumstances can demonstrate skills, understanding and make adaptations which their "betters" cannot. My mother had ten brothers and sisters. This side of the family provided more than thirty cousins of my own and daily life took place within the enclosed orbit of this large tribe of internally squabbling but externally united relatives. My two children have only one aunt from either side and no cousins at all to provide the range of interacting liaisons and support which I experienced. I could not speak the native language of my grandparents and it is likely that be there children of my son who lives in Latin America they will not ordinarily speak mine. Between my grandfather and my grandchildren we will have crossed at least three cultures within a hundred years.

Culture is not used here loosely, it is well defined as:

"...the accumulation of the group's experience, its ways of solving problems,

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<sup>5</sup> In exploring family structures, I would ask these students to describe their own families. On the occasion of one seminar a student was describing the compound in which he grew up with the children of his father's six wives. A very anglicised student from a former colony took it upon himself to remark "How interesting! to have six mothers! Do tell us more about....." He was rounded upon by the first student who mimicked in an exaggerated British accent "How interesting! to have but one mother! do tell us about it".

<sup>6</sup> Satterah Farman-Farmian Daughter of Persia. Corgi Press

of life demands and needs, the attitudes, folkways, mores, ways of behaving and feeling that have been invented, tested, approved, and perpetuated in a particular people's history. All these habits and ways of doing things become organised into complexes and patterns, institutions for meeting economic needs, organising political relations, expressing religious worship, regulating marriage and family relations..<sup>7</sup>

Cultures in their own setting are free to adapt and change but immigrants are frequently caught in a time-warp and the young generation who look to their new surroundings and the new ways are often considered as traitors to the old, somehow sacred and unchangeable, culture and are burdened with a sense of guilt by the elders. I am sure something of this is common here in Australia.

Oscar Handlin in the introduction to his book "The Uprooted" wrote

"Once I thought to write a history of the immigrants in America. Then I discovered that the immigrants were American history".

The book is largely based on the fascinating collection of family correspondence exchanged between the old world (Europe) and the new (USA) at a time when such journeys were likely to be one way and once in their lifetime. There is a rich literature of autobiography and novels of the confusions and impact of the experience of these immigrants.<sup>8</sup>

I met these cultural conflicts time and time again in working in the mental health field. Parents would be sorrowing,

"..My father came to this country with nothing, ..he started a business which we have struggled all our lives to build up...what did we do it for?...our children!..we have given them everything.. and they don't want anything to do with it... and look at them... the way they dress and behave...we don't understand it..we are ashamed of them..."

### The space-ranger

Some immigrant groups attempt to recreate and isolate themselves from their new world and to embalm the old values and ways of doing things.<sup>9</sup> I can speak

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<sup>7</sup> 'The caseworker's need for orientation to the culture of the client' The Family M. Boie Oct. 1937

<sup>8</sup> Now increasingly there is a rich literature from those crossing the Pacific rather than the Atlantic and the experiences expressed in these must be particularly relevant to you here in Australia. There is a new factor in that immigrants at this end of the century are able to maintain better contact with those left behind and have the opportunity to return on visits which was not available earlier.

<sup>9</sup> It is common for immigrants to cluster together and to try to recreate the climate of their past. Many Koreans, Vietnamese and Cambodian families were resettled spread throughout the USA. Gradually many have revolved back into ethnic enclaves reestablished on the west coast, Florida, and elsewhere. There is a

from experience in a child guidance setting of such a confusion of culture and identity;

Referred was a youngster from a very orthodox religious community which had reconstituted itself in a tightly-knit social enclave. Interviewing as many members of the immediate family as possible,<sup>10</sup> I became aware of influences much wider even than the extended family. It was striking that forces were still strongly at work derived from the pre-immigration world and history of this community. These forces were apparently very significant in the complex origins of my small boy's anxiety attacks which brought him to a modern psychiatric clinic.

This very intelligent child's sense of identity was confused. There was that impressed upon him and required by his parents and grandparents. Unlike the child, they had actual first-hand experience or at least very intense impressions from their family and neighbours of the "home" society and the relatively static centuries from which they had come. In contrast the child had no solid reference to the old country and there was the immediate influences seeping, even flooding insistently, into this child from the twentieth-century USA culture surrounding him. He had only the remotest third-hand, hearing-about, the society from which the old ways and values derived and might make real sense.

The discontinuity of these conflicting models confronting the boy can perhaps best be epitomised when at one session I asked this child, literally dressed and enmeshed in the style of the Middle-Ages, what he would like to be when he grew up. He looked at me through his long traditional side-curls and said he was going to be a "space-ranger". This was at the period well before sputnik and recognising my surprise he added, "By the time I am your age there will be such things". He clearly had a grasp of his dilemma, for truly I discerned, on many levels he was already ranging a multitude of

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tendency to congeal the old cultures. As a student I used to go with a group at weekends to the beach on Long Island. One evening we stopped at a "Swiss Chalet Restaurant" and discovered a Bavarian wedding in progress. We had a good time with the squeeze-box music, the stamping feet, the guests in leierhosen, the tankards of beer, sauerkraut and sausages. We said to the German student with us "You must have really felt at home" He replied that such goings-on must have been familiar in the 1890's but had little resemblance to modern-day Germany.

<sup>10</sup> Despite the child guidance concept of the importance of parent-child relationships it was frequently the case that treatment regimes evolved round mother-child. A number of articles did appear with titles such as "Father gets worse"!. A suspicion grew from my practice that in families there often was a kind of scapegoating in which one member's problems were offered up which allowed other members to function well as long as the problem could be accepted and identified as belonging to the one. From the theoretical perspective which located problems in individuals, it raised the question of 'Who actually was the patient' in the psycho-dynamics of family situations, or even more challenging, was there a group 'core' of the problem(s)? In pursuing this, I developed a method of seeing as many members of a family as possible on an on-going basis.

spaces - psychologically between his parents, geographically between continents, between centuries, between cultures, and much else.

Even these very tight and encapsulated communities were incapable of holding back external pressures and were unable to provide for its members in traditional ways.<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, I could see an almost biblical "unto the third and fourth generation" quality in my analysis of the family in this situation. I began a thesis to try and write classical psycho-analytic psychiatry in parallel generational sociological terms!

Titmuss has pointed out,

"We now know that what is passed on through the family, the central mechanism for the transmission of culture, cannot be rapidly changed. External social changes often involve, however, traumatic changes in the roles played by members of the family.....Different norms of behaviour and different roles that often have, in consequence to be internalised. People..do not 'play' roles like actors. A role is something the person is. It follows,..from our understanding of these processes that the capacity of the family to function as a kind of institutional brake cannot, therefore be stretched too far without running the risk, perhaps some generations later, of causing wide-spread instabilities in family life and much mental ill health."<sup>12</sup>

You here in a growing culturally diversified Australia, all have a relatively recent immigrant background, (except for the indigenous people who exhibit perhaps even more serious destructive problems as they struggle with the overwhelming (fatal?) impact of we immigrants on their culture). In addition, the recent wave of technological communications are, to an increasing extent, making everyone an immigrant from the relatively unchanging past to the world of accelerating change. In a profound sense, not merely history in Handlin's America, but world history is also becoming that of immigrants.

### Family and Community

Where geographic movement was slow and social change almost imperceptible, family and community were very closely interwoven each defining the other. Where family was in difficulty, communities tended to provide some measure of support. Paternalistic gentry, religious institutions, and later very local government (such as parishes in the UK) administered to the poor, the sick, the widows and orphans.

The family was a basic economic unit. In agricultural and cottage industry societies, natural disasters and threats to livelihood would ordinarily effect the

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<sup>11</sup> See Chaim Potok's novels "The Chosen", and "The Promise", also, Lowndes and Zbrowski "Life is with People".

<sup>12</sup> "Industrialisation and the Family" International Conference of Social Work R.M. Titmuss, Munich 1956

whole community and stimulate a communal response. With the coming of industrialisation, - mines, heavy industry, and factories superseding cottage industries, family units clustering in towns were no longer production units. Men were no longer the sole monetary providers, women and children were drawn from the home and the economics of family life and much else began to change. Nevertheless where such industries were located and where movement was still limited, communities and support systems, however inadequate, evolved.

### "Development" and the break-up of Community

But now, increasingly, even these communities which evolved in industrial areas are breaking down and their inherent web of support is becoming ineffective. Ironically the breakdown of communities often takes place as the fallout of so-called "development".

This can be illustrated even in situations where the means and intention has been specifically to bring about improvement in social conditions;

A tenant was complaining at the noise and general mayhem which seemed to be taking place in the adjoining flat and, given the thin party wall, was a great disturbance to her and especially her large family of cats.

I presented myself at the door of the new housing high rise. There I found an elderly couple, he a small wiry bantam of a man and she a rather forbidding apron-clad heavyweight. It seemed that they had recently been decanted from old run-down rows of houses in a mean Victorian working-class neighbourhood much damaged during the war. The authorities in their well-intentioned plans to clean up these squalid worn-out districts had razed them to the ground to make way for new developments and in the process had dispersed the population to much improved accommodation elsewhere. The couple who had lived all their forty years of married life in a family house, their children having grown-up and moved away, were readily considered now to need just a labour-saving flat in a nice new district.

It turned out that this noise-producing, cat-troubling couple had spent four decades of apparently satisfying co-habitation in what might (if so inclined) be professionally described as a sado-masochistic relationship. Saturday nights were regularly the high point of their interaction, when much stimulated by their evening in the congenial local pub, they weaved their way homewards roaring abuse at each other, rising to a climax of much bruising -(but not altogether without affection) - physical combat, until either exhausted, or frequently separated by understanding and long-time neighbours, they fell, or were put, to bed. They had settled long-ago to a turbulent style of mutual-disparagement which seemingly met each one's deep-seated needs. Sunday mornings, were a time of bleary reconciliation and rehabilitation for the week to come.

In their new surroundings their familiar and comforting pattern of behaviour had with some adaptation in relation to the new pub and loss of familiar buddies, had continued. They were somewhat surprised that the spinster lady

next door had no understanding of the fact that despite the blood-curdling nature of the altercations coming through her walls, four decades of tumultuous bliss had resulted in no untoward injuries. They smiled indulgently at the quirkiness of their new neighbour, inexperienced in the ways of normal married life and so engrossed in her concern for her smelly toms and feline friends. However, they were prepared to live and let live and made no serious complaint at her peculiarities.

The problem here was not to be tackled at any level of personality adjustment. What really was to be done to an embedded life style which had been accommodated and given support by a neighbourhood throughout a lifetime, other than attempting some modification of decibels and battering better matched to their newly acquired genteel environment?

This example is from long ago and far away in a relatively affluent place and palls into insignificance compared to many situations here in Asia. However, this example raised policy issues regarding the clearance of slum areas which have implications still. Whatever the shortcomings and deterioration of buildings and physical facilities, social fabrics had been built up over years, if not generations and, in this case, not only survived but indeed had been much reinforced by the war-time experience of shared dangers and the nightly threat of destruction. Old neighbourhoods had a built-in informal support system of shared responsibility and mutual obligations which carried a whole range of social and psychological needs, many of which would never surface to the social services or be provided for, by them, even if they did.

Social services it can be seen should aim to be fully aware of, and strengthen, these indigenous structures and not, as in this simple example, disperse and destroy them in the process of pursuing the commendable objective of providing an improved housing situation. The implication is that the human side of neighbourhoods and communities should be preserved in the process of physical upgrading. Thus, instead of clearing people out and bulldozing large areas, (which is convenient for developers contractors and builders) might it not be possible to invite the communities into the process of planning the physical nature of a prospective improved neighbourhood or settlement. In fact build around the old facilities and move the people as the improvements become acceptably available in the original geographical location.

It will surely be argued that this would make building more expensive, but how much more expensive? In budgets other than in that of the housing department the costs of social disruption and the services to deal with them, pay for the lack of human considerations and continue well beyond any five year building plan. There are also the staggering financial losses that can be imagined as we are now being treated to the spectacular sight of vandalised high rises being detonated following upon the discovery of the social wildernesses and their accompanying social ills that many new housing estates have spawned.

Where has the sense of community gone? Has the all-too common anomic housing estate ambiance of violence and political cynicism become increasingly the brutal expression of rampant materialistic individualism and the failure to maintain

and stimulate an active sense of community and citizenry? Such considerations began to emerge as the tip of a post-war iceberg of questioning about the nature of non-person centred planning.

It led me to an ever-widening conviction about the need for community involvement in the processes of decision-making in developments which will directly and significantly alter the nature and prospects of their lives.

#### When is a community not a community?

However, just like the question, what is a family? - what is a community?

A mass of people living in close proximity do not necessarily share a sense of belonging, and to involve them in the way I think essential for positive social change is no mean task.

Here in Asia I have seen industries being set up and attracting migrant labour from far away (given the relative ease of travel these days). The industries are said to prefer locations where they do not need to employ workers from the surrounding existing communities. Such existing communities have a social cohesion which can be mobilised to insist upon acceptable work conditions and wage structures and may be able to resist inroads on their way of life. However, for the incoming labour, attempts to organise are destroyed and little is done to promote or enforce acceptable standards of living. Industry is not required to provide decent accommodation, health facilities or social infrastructure for their workers. The migrant workers, usually exclusively male, (leaving the rest of their families to function without them in their distant villages) have no interest in establishing and supporting community facilities. They do not intend to stay and invest socially or financially in their surroundings. They send what they can back to their villages or find they spend most of their (non-legislated or enforced minimum) wages on the appalling exploitive and squalid provision for their daily survival and most fundamental and primitive needs. The migrants are brutalised and stigmatised. Indeed the migrant labour and the original occupants of the terrain upon which the industries have been set-down are destined to become enemies one of the other rather than allies in a common social cause.

#### The marginalised community and families

Even where work-seeking migrants do have their own sense of community, they are considered non-people and are marginalised from society.

An example is that of Klong Toey in Bangkok:

Klong Toey was the marshy swampland owned by the Port Authority behind the harbour upon which 25,000 squatters had built their shanties. There was to be a large "development" investment in expanding the port as a major contribution to national economic development. The public image of the squatters then was itinerant, unemployed delinquent, altogether parasitic. It was/is common everywhere for squatters to be bulldozed out of

their hovels. The social disruption which follows such "solutions" falls not upon the evicting authority, nor on the land owners, nor on development budgets. There is little concern for this underworld losing their illegal homes.

University students as an exercise in social survey methodology began to uncover some unknown facts. 93% household heads and 33% of all the men women and children were working. Indeed a very large number actually worked for the Port Authority within the port. Resettlement on the periphery of the city would have serious consequences for the labour force in the docks.

Far from being itinerant they were found to be a highly stable community with remarkably little crime or vice. The squatters had ingeniously constructed 4000 dwelling units on land considered unsuitable for building at no cost to anyone but themselves at an estimated one-tenth of the lowest-cost government housing. They received no public services such as post, schools, clinics, water, sanitation, roads, lighting, transport etc, whatsoever. Acknowledgment of the squatters' existence by providing any public services would, it was believed, be tantamount to recognition of their right to the land. In no way were they a drain on taxpayers.

As they did not have to pay the rocketing rents that speculative land purchase and building forced upon others, the people of Klong Toey were able to survive on wages impossibly low for those living elsewhere. Much of the city's manual and unskilled work was being financed by the low wages and low-cost living of citizens like those of Klong Toey. The squatters actually subsidised the city.

An interesting thing to note here is that the investigation (research) redefined the nature of the population studied and in consequence if the findings were accepted would logically influence any plans which might have social interests in mind. However, it should be well appreciated by Social Scientists and Social Workers that the collection of information (especially from Academia) does not automatically come to the attention of decision-makers. In addition, information and findings of themselves rarely indicate sufficiently the nature of the options and solutions, and for that matter, information and specific recommendations alone do not guarantee that they will be taken into account when other interests are the primary concern of the planners and power groups.

In this particular example, two factors were of great importance. One, was the publication and promotion of a popular version of the Survey by a respected international organisation, UNICEF, which had moral and some modest financial clout. Two, was the serendipitous fact that the students at the University who had conducted the survey (merely as it happens as an academic exercise in social research methods) were by and large the sons and daughters of the governing elite. This accident of birth was particularly decisive in bringing the findings and a philosophy of social idealism (not very pronounced in the political activities of their parents!), to the attention of the powers in the land. In an unexpected way the population of Klong Toey at that time had been rehabilitated as worthy and

provided with a voice being heard in high places. Literally and symbolically they began to count for something rather than just being counted. Both from within and outside of Klong Toey activities to accommodate some of their community and family needs were formulated.

Klong Toey, a generation on, is now something of a slum area showpiece and is perhaps a story for a forum other than this one in Darwin today<sup>13</sup>

The challenge here is whether what was politically achieved here on a small scale by accident can become planned and effective activities by the profession of Social Work elsewhere, with the backing of relevant and socially significant research derived from the Social Sciences. There is a desperate need for Social workers to translate, what they see coming through their agency doors or what they find while moving about in the streets and fields of their society, into subjects for investigation, promotion of findings, spelling out options and recommendations and for mobilising political action for positive social planning, legislation and change.

#### Implementation, something else

However, responsibility does not end there. There are examples where positive social legislation and rules are in place but where implementation is something else.

An example;

Manila is one of Asia's burgeoning and out of control mega-cities. There is the usual juxtaposition of the mega-wealthy and the mega-destitute. The infra-structure of roads, electricity, water and sewage are totally inadequate and what there is, is falling apart. The pollution and squalor are palpable. Recent disasters such as volcanic inundation of farming areas and the politically popular closing down of American military bases has led to a more than usual explosion of migrants becoming squatters in the metropolitan area. Shanties are spreading everywhere, even along the runway of the International Airport which is threatened with close-down by the International Aviation authorities.

The Filipino people, still exalting in their astonishing demonstration of "people power" which brought down a corrupt regime without the price of much bloodshed which is only too familiar elsewhere. Popular governments have been installed which have legislated laws and guidelines in the interests of the multitudinous poor. However, land reform, as everywhere in the world, becomes entangled in dispute and strong resistance. The underprivileged do not understand their rights nor are they adequately or effectively represented against the vested and powerful interests. Even on the grounds of the University itself (with its social work, community development and social science departments) the squatters rights to protection have been transgressed.

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<sup>13</sup> See "Listen, listen to the People" D. Drucker and "A long Shot: A day in the life of Klong Toey" B. Cooper in UNICEF NEWS: ISSUE 124/1986

There are clear and specific government guides regarding the necessary provision for people who have to be resettled from squatter areas in the interests of "Development". Formally acknowledged is the need to see that livelihood possibilities must be available in resettlement areas and basic living provision made available etc. Yet, I traveled through the choking backed-up traffic three hours out to a settlement area some 50 miles out of town. The possibilities for employment were mainly back in the city to which the youngest and most active were returning, or perhaps 30 miles on where daily travel costs would make prohibitive inroads on their minimum wage.<sup>14</sup> (assuming they were able to find jobs and they were actually paid the minimum.).

The first 3000 squatters had already been transported out and there was much activity in setting up shelter. The impressive water-tower was fitted, as yet with a derisive rubber hose-pipe at which the people waited up to three hours to fill their containers, schools and clinic facilities had not yet been provided.

Ironically, the squatters had been removed from land which was to be "developed" with a private hospital and yet one more luxury hotel. Where, squatters can be removed from city land, land price will soar and developers are prepared to contribute a modest something from the profits to the resettlement programmes. Even so, at this "model resettlement area" I was shown, it was openly acknowledged that it was much too costly to be replicable.

So, here too, where governmental power has declared itself and put in place protective measures and legislation there is an enormous social work job to do in ensuring that intent has some reality, for it is at these levels eventually that the viability of the family can be supported or destroyed. The Philippines is rich with voluntary organisations and potentially could organise itself as a power in the land. But much needs to be done to co-ordinate and focus its potential and social impact in community and political affairs.

#### Employment, and exploitation. International implications

The matter of employment, its nature, its conditions and its rewards are of course crucial matters for those concerned with family.

As I left a city area waist-deep in putrid black-water supporting a strata of garbage and plastics, there was a notice "Hi-Speed Sewers Wanted". At first sight I thought this was an apt sanitation plea. However, it was a factory of sewing machines, the manager telling us darkly "we have no souls here". However, the girls were sewing the uppers only of internationally well known sneakers. Labour laws are either non existent or openly flouted in

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<sup>14</sup> The bicycle tri-shaws from the main road to the settlement site and the jeepnies to the next town or back to Manila seemed to be the one major employment opportunity available.

most third-world and informal economies. In the Philippines Levi jeans (as well as trademark imitations) are manufactured at the lowest possible desperate-to-work labour costs. Incidentally the Levis are exported to Japan.

In business of course it is the law of economics, to produce at minimum cost and to sell in the best markets. Modern communication and transportation makes it possible to shift production world-wide, resulting in the increasing opportunity for gross exploitation of unprotected workers (and frequently child and slave labour). This is the internationalising of the national situation described earlier. If industry had to fund decent standards of living for its workers, it is argued, they would become "uncompetitive". With whom do they compete? The competition is perhaps mainly in terms of where in the world labour and associated costs can be driven down to the lowest common survival denominator.<sup>15</sup>

As this global process grows apace it is destroying employment and investment in the affluent traditional industrial and manufacturing countries. In those countries there is a huge rise in unemployment which some fear is likely to become a permanent feature. Gone are the erstwhile goals of achievable "full employment". There is a rising tide of destitution on the streets, violence against immigrants and "foreigners" (who had been welcomed to fill booming factories and menial tasks not too long ago), political instability, cynacism and the loss of credibility of government.

However, unsympathetic one might be for the feather-bedded and used-to-being-affluent unemployed in the industrial countries relative to the conditions elsewhere, we cannot remain indifferent to what this new unfettered global economy means to families around the world. What happens on this level of social anarchy clearly effects what happens in homes and shanties everywhere. Without some global social concepts and philosophy, shared social objectives, social planning, and social means for implementation, all, whether "developed" or "developing" are seriously at risk.

Internationally then, it can be seen that in government circles and board-rooms decisions are being made, and not made, over which ordinary people have no say-so and the implications ripple out and impact upon families however remote. This is the case in the most spectacular destroyers of human life, family, community and social progress of all- military conflict.

#### Military conflict; the backlog of misery

Here in Asia during the fifty years in which I have framed my own experience of change, we have suffered the incredible destructiveness of military conflict and the continuing "profitable" uncontrolled proliferation of armaments. The Japanese across China, Korea, South East Asia, the Philippines, Indonesia and through the Pacific Islands culminating in the advent of nuclear destruction in Japan itself. There has been (and still are) "civil" conflicts; against the colonial and post-colonial

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<sup>15</sup> If I heard a BBC business programme aright, 86% of USA manufacturing profits derive from goods manufactured outside of the USA.

powers, in China, Korea, Vietnam, Indonesia, Philippines, Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, Kashmir and perhaps most horrific of all in Cambodia. This roll call does not begin to address the fact that each one of the dead and maimed had been somebody's child, relative or parent and belonged to families. Nor does it begin to record the long-term social and psychologically radiating fall-out which will continue to erupt and surface in the years to come. Again "unto the third and fourth generation"? This is undoubtedly a submerged back-log of human misery with which social workers will have to find ways and resources to come to grips in their honourable traditional role of stretcher-bearers to society.

### Change from Reactive to Pro-active

You may well be thinking that this is really a long way from the Year of the Family and of what it is we can do in the social welfare professions. I have been fond of saying to students "Life is a theatre and you are sitting in the best seats. Nobody sees everyday what you see". Social Workers are in a privileged position earning their daily bread by witnessing the human misery end-results of what goes on in the world. But to a considerable extent we, established even in independent, citizen non-government agencies oppose or defend and are typically re-active rather than fundamentally pre-actively involved in promoting public interests.

It is essential that we utilise our unique perspective by translating what we see and understand in terms of prevention<sup>16</sup> and to promote the widest possible enhancement of the quality of living. We must keep asking ourselves What does this individual and family misery mean in social, community, and political terms? It is a professions' responsibility to profess beyond its immediate task and to generalise from the particular - not just for research and teaching purposes but to determine wider dimensions of action. Social work understanding must contribute to propositions and projects not just to alleviate but to play an effective role in placing human social concerns in the mainstream of "Development".

### Mainstream Development

This orientation and goal should be no news to us. Let me remind you that in 1968 (more than twenty five years ago, half-way back in time from my imagined ocean liner trip to Australia) Asian social work educators, administrators and planners reported;

"...that professional social work and social work education were still (sic) not sufficiently attuned to developmental needs and problems as currently defined in the plans of the countries in the ECAFE region, and that greater

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<sup>16</sup> Social Work is a labour intensive occupation in time and human resources and it is expensive to deal with problems one at a time. Social Workers must collaborate with others who can be effective in prevention. A medical/public health analogy is that of cholera. The "cure" for the victim of cholera remains problematical, we know more about its management. But prevention has not been the responsibility of the medical profession alone but required public health measures related to water and sanitation and legislation for the protection and processing of foods and standards of housing etc, which is legally binding and enforced, involving others such as sanitary engineers an inspectorate and so forth.

efforts should be made to improve that situation"<sup>17</sup>

Later that same year, at the International Conference of Ministers Responsible for Social Welfare, 89 countries endorsed the recommendation that priority be assigned:

"...to the developmental tasks of social welfare and therefore, to orienting social welfare training toward preparation for such tasks"<sup>18</sup>

The Asian Ministers meeting in Manila extended this concept more specifically:

"Curricula on social work training should be geared to social development goals ..."<sup>19</sup>

Following upon these declarations, in 1971 an Asian "exploration" was conducted and an international seminar held on the findings and recommendations for urgent action around the emphatically proclaimed social work development roles.<sup>20</sup>

### Western Concepts and Asia

Yet just a few months again there was once again an authoritative cry that "western concepts of social work which help a few marginal people to adjust to society have irrelevantly dominated Asian social work" As the author of those explorations of those twenty or more years ago I came back to Asia to try to understand why so little had apparently happened and to review again what direction might be taken towards a broader development role in society. A role we seem not to have achieved.<sup>21</sup> This is how I came to be invited by Dr Venka Rao Pulla to address this conference here in Darwin.

He seemed to be interested in my work in Asia (and elsewhere) which had continued to explore social work activities related to social development. The changing perspectives in my work, and in this presentation today I have tried to

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<sup>17</sup> Report of the Seminar on the relationship of Social Work Education to Developmental Needs and Problems in the ECAfe Region United Nations ECAFE Bangkok 1968.

<sup>18</sup> Proceedings of the International Conference of Ministers Responsible for Social Welfare United Nations New York 1968

<sup>19</sup> Recommendations of the First Asian Conference of Responsible for Social Welfare United Nations Manila 1970

<sup>20</sup> These roles were related to, Social Policies and Planning; Social Justice; Participation by the people in policy formulation, planning and implementation; Institution Building; Social Work Helping Methods (in identifying gaps and inconsistencies in policies and programmes). See; An Exploration of the Curricula of Social Work in Some Countries in Asia, with Special Reference to the Relevance of Social Work Education to Social Development Goals. Drucker D. ECAFE/UNICEF Bangkok 1972

<sup>21</sup> The Social Work Profession in Asia: Look Homeward 1968-1993 Drucker D. The Indian Journal of Social Work Oct 1993

place the family and their problems in context. In the process the family has receded from being the major focus of work.

Even in the affluent West, also twenty years ago, this was being seen as the need for the profession to change it's emphasis;

"..social work ...will either change markedly or disappear as a profession. One aspect of it which will certainly have to change is its emphasis on the family as the unit of discourse, the unit of treatment, and to a surprising extent, the social unit around which our services are organised"<sup>22</sup>

In Asia I originally came to Indonesia at a time of economic ruin in that vast country which was emerging from a political catastrophe which had cost perhaps half-a-million fatalities. Returning with the United Nations from which Indonesia had previously withdrawn, the assignment was to help establish a programme of professional training. In addition, it became necessary to organise fact-finding teams traveling thousands of miles throughout the archipelago to try to determine what priority had to be given to UNICEF assistance; assessing the conditions of people transmigrated; and much else. The complexity and magnitude of the problems permanently altered my personal and professional vision of the world and what needed to be done.

Soon after I was to conduct the "Exploration" (mentioned earlier) in six countries which in time led to professional social work practice in a wide range of development roles.

This has included;

- (based on the situations in Nepal, Laos and Afghanistan) the creation of a from the bottom-up village level planning project for front-line and supervisory personnel and it's implementation <sup>23</sup>.
- becoming the bottom-up member of the World Health Organisation's South-East Asia region's planning team for Country Health Programming; study of the community services of fishing folk in southern India and the establishment of primary health care; the nature of assistance to psychiatric problems in rural areas and collaboration with indigenous healers; etc.
- in Burma the abortive attempt to set-up a school of social work but which led to devising ways and means of involving children and village people in planning and implementing their own priority projects and programmes. This resulted in

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<sup>22</sup> Norman A. Polansky "Beyond Despair" in Shaping the new Social Work  
Alfred J. Kahn ed. Columbia University Press 1973 pg.69

<sup>23</sup> Report of the UNDP/ECAFE Project Development Mission to the United Nations Office of Technical Co-operation on a Mobile Training Scheme for the Training of Front-Line and Supervisory Personnel in Landlocked and Least Developed Countries in the ECAFE Region Yasas F. Drucker D.& Basnyat ECAFE Bangkok 1973

a growing expertise in community planning of rural water-supply and sanitation followed by devising training programmes, publications and evaluations of projects throughout S.E. Asia

- the management and professional development of a programme for the disabled and psychiatrically disturbed, involving the refugees themselves and the indigenous healers in the twenty-three Lao, Cambodian and Vietnamese camps in Thailand.
- involvement with volunteers from the neighbouring developing countries here in Asia and across the Pacific, establishing village community planning.
- membership of an international team considering what might be done in an overall attack on the problems of the mega-cities world-wide which might include similar work to the above with volunteers from neighbouring developing countries.
- In the course of this work here and more recently in Africa I find that ordinary (frequently illiterate) people thinking, planning and working for themselves offer a limitless opportunity for social workers and social scientists contributing to mainline development.

It is true that there continues to be a fallout of the vulnerable, individuals and families both; the young and the old, the halt and the lame, the under-employed and the burgeoning unemployed, the victims of famine, the migrants and the refugees - the new ever-increasing social casualties, and the great backlog of the chronically dispossessed and those who have never had possessions anyway. Certainly enough to keep many social workers busy for the rest of their working lives. However, we should not consider that work for the family is confined within the agencies and services which have so swiftly become "traditional" and "professional". We cannot exclusively and myopically deal with the massive floods of human trouble with our limited resource coffee-spoons. It is essential for us to find effective ways of linking up with the relevant others in developing the skills of partnership with other professionals and the common people, asking the right questions, setting the priorities and objectives and homing-in on where the torrent is coming from.

### The Future and new Resources

This is surely the first generation in the history of mankind where at least theoretically there is enough to go round to meet everyone's fundamental basic material needs. That there is a gross maldistribution of resources and opportunity, meets our eye everyday and thunders out incessantly with each news bulletin so that perhaps we no longer hear. Disasters and human suffering which might have been previously regarded as a slip-up in the grand design by the Gods can now be recognised as largely man-made disasters, or at least man-made failure to use his intelligence for correcting what ails mankind.

Politically and organisationally even in the democracies, the people at the grassroot's receiving end of what is being decided elsewhere are rarely effectively

consulted and genuinely represented. Elections every so many years do not address the details and complexities of policy and programme. In the most affluent and technically sophisticated societies elections are turned into a branch of entertainment in which the electors are invited to root for one team of actors or another.

The marvelous possibilities that widespread education and technical innovation could make into effective organisational reality have nowhere been translated into political innovation for genuine participation of the people in what most affects them. Indeed these technologies have in large measure been captured by multi-nationals answerable to no-one, or if at all, to elitist boards of directors and silent shareholders. Where individual governments and international organisations are in a position to make rules to control the more obvious excesses and negative social repercussions, those governments and organisations to a great extent are in the hands of those who represent these multi-nationals, or powerful self-serving lobbies.

Yet, it seems to me, that there currently exists no social work or politically coherent voice or serious vision of where at the end of the twentieth century we should be heading. In the West everywhere governments are abandoning hard fought-for social services and communal responsibilities as unaffordable in an indiscriminate gaderine rush to "privatise". This is resulting in the political vandalism of all public services and throwing the social support philosophy and systems of the welfare state to the market place and commercial wolves. It is against this background that we increasingly see the families entering our agencies. In the face of this scenario where does the profession stand beyond the doors of the specific and narrowing mandates of the agencies and organisations that pay our salaries?

Change is most certainly not all bad and in any case there is no way of halting it, it is in the very nature of things. The need is to channel change in the most positive human way possible, maintaining what is and can be creative and caring in families, and spelling out what new family options, services, structures, and social strivings and goals for society on our planet, might best serve mankind's movement into the coming centuries.

I hope you will want to discuss the Year of the Family along some of these themes amongst yourselves and informally with me during this conference.

David Drucker

Geneva and Kaunas Lithuania,  
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Draft

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FAMILIES AND THE FUTURE

WILL THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY FAMILY

PLEASE STAND UP?

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