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Whither international social work?: A reflection

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What is This?

Whither international social work?

A reflection

● David Drucker

The journals *International Social Work* and *Social Work*

The July 1999 issue of *International Social Work (ISW)* and the letters celebrating the profession's American centenary in the November 1998 issue of *Social Work (SW)* provide a contemporary gold mine of interesting material and at the same time a minefield of macro issues and challenges. They raise profound questions over what kind of a profession social work has been, believes itself to be and really wants to become.

Apparently our journals, according to the *ISW* editor, mostly focus on micro issues and, although we claim 'many of our colleagues spend their professional lives with relief and humanitarian agencies', they have not shared and taught the 'accumulated bodies of knowledge . . . effective in situations of extreme, large-scale human need' (Turner, 1999: 260).

Perhaps this is a powerful indicator of the actual nature of the predominantly micro vision and practices of our profession?

In the 1998 special centennial issue of *Social Work*, the readers' letters emphasize and rejoice in social work's fundamental concern with social change, social injustice and the conditions of poverty and the poor. In the second paragraph of the journal's editorial which refers to a contributor's morose comment that our profession does what others do, but more cheaply, one is struck by the sentence:

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'In a society that assesses quality in monetary terms, such a distinguishing characteristic simply devalues our services and clients' (Witkin, 1998: 483).

Richard Cloward of Columbia University, as part of the 'celebration' of the USA's social work centenary year, was invited to be enshrined in a 'Hall of Fame'. He declined the honour. Cloward might well be too abrasive for some, but he raises important issues. In his letter to *Social Work* (1998) and on the Internet, he declared that instead of a celebration there should be a 'wake'. He explains:

What I see on social work's centennial is a divorce between professional education and professional practice . . . Graduate schools of social work, especially the better-known ones, are taking on the attributes of research institutes, with faculty venturing into the field of practice only to collect data . . . We need balance between practice and research, and as much integration as possible. What is happening instead is that the practice traditions of graduate social work education, including the tradition of close integration with social agencies, are being superseded, even extinguished, by this growing research movement. (Cloward, 1998: 584)

A personal review over 50 years and reflections

All this has prompted me to review my own half century of learning, practicing, teaching and living in the profession, and to respond. These reflections of course contain a personal perspective of my wide-ranging work and thinking, in the expectation that in the very values-laden nature of social work they have a proper place for discussion in a professional journal. I write from the foundation of a professional social work education and practice in the UK followed by further education and practice in the USA. After returning to the UK I taught (and learned much from) very senior people from a variety of developing countries. Subsequently I spent many years in areas of primary poverty and human catastrophe in the so-called Third World (in Asia and Africa). This included conducting a six-country study of social work in Asia (Drucker, 1972). This became the basis for a United Nations regional seminar in Bangkok later that year. More recently I have been involved in setting up social work practice and education in the Baltic state of Lithuania. Last year I was in the earthquake area with an assessment mission for the World Food Programme. In 1998, after a nine-year absence, I carried out a two-month lecture tour round the USA, speaking on 'The Search for the "Social" in Development'. Listening to the

comments of audience members, speaking to social workers and academics, actively seeking opportunities to make observations of current practice and listening to concerns gave me a renewed macro vantage point which has further shaped my thinking.

The subject matter

In this present article I ask whether social work can genuinely claim to be (as the name of the *ISW* journal suggests) an international profession with an international perspective and knowledge base. Are we to be found performing specialized and effective tasks in relation to large-scale human catastrophes and social needs? What is our record on the global scene in the cause of promoting attention to social issues and demonstrating action in the main stream of development? Do we actually possess the requisite education, skills and vision to work and teach others in the international arena? What have we been teaching theoretically, and imparting what skills related to practice on the international scene?

I ask, and illustrate with numerous observations, my doubts whether, as we proudly and insistently claim, we really are to be found significantly at the centre of concern with the poor, the excluded and the fundamental conditions of poverty. Despite our sworn values, do we in fact function largely as selective stretcher-bearers (as Richard Titmuss used to categorize those who dealt with the halt, lame and excluded) of our own society, and act predominantly with a Western cultural orientation, indistinguishable from others, currently dancing to the compelling tune of unrestrained free market forces?

I question, too, like Cloward, what the relationship should be between experience and practice in determining the nature and teaching of social work research.

Finally, from a range of proposals made nearly 30 years ago in *An exploration . . .* (Drucker, 1972) which regrettably after all these years, remains most relevant, I select some suggestions related to the place of research in the social work profession and a possible career structure for exploring social work in the development process.

The challenge

The *ISW* editor, witnessing on television the mobilization of a war machine which would add to the destruction and human misery in Kosovo, sets a major theme: '[as] a profession whose mission

espouses social justice for all, can we turn our backs on the terrible human suffering and violation of rights that take place in so many areas of the world?" (Turner, 1999: 259)

If as seems suggested, and from my own experience, our profession is not much found in such situations nor our learning from them embodied in our teaching, can we still think of ourselves as being committed to such things as are emblazoned on the rhetoric of national and international social work organizations?

Current (but not for long) situations

The editor's musings were prompted on the occasion of the events in Kosovo. Kosovo, horribly of course, is only one more example in a long line of murderous happenings. Just the recent rollcall is appalling: Bosnia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Rwanda, Algeria, Colombia, Chile, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Mexico (Chiapas), Afghanistan, Cambodia – need one continue? The list leaves out much that has been of relatively little media interest, such as Congo, Zaire, Sierra Leone, Liberia. The arena keeps changing, each becoming the focus of the media for relatively short periods until there is something new, an unending panorama of locations of human-inspired catastrophe.

The Kosovo situation, however, has made explicit at least two significant issues. We have known for a very long time that in modern conflict the number of civilian casualties greatly outnumbers the military casualties. Now (despite the enormous expenditure on weaponry and the military who are taught to kill and defend themselves) it has apparently become policy that the lives of soldiers take priority over the need on the ground to protect safe havens and the lives of civilians, women, children, the aged and, in fact, all non-armed non-combatants. The military are also usually much better provided for in the daily needs of living and are not ordinarily counted amongst the poverty-stricken. Does social work have a voice in such matters?

On the positive side there has been a grudging acknowledgement that concepts of sovereignty should not automatically allow governments to slaughter people who are supposedly their own citizens. However, in such situations it would seem there are very limited options, where the big powers and their self-conceived interests are involved, to do anything about it.

Turner (1999: 260), on Kosovo, goes on to declare: 'surely our profession has an important role in aftermath of these large-scale assaults on whole populations'.

Aftermaths, pre-maths and colonization – an East Timor example

Since the editor wrote the above, predictably, Kosovo sank back into minor media coverage. Soon after, East Timor and Indonesia temporarily took the limelight¹ (in its turn soon to be switched to other seething cauldrons of human misery).

Jim Ife (1999) went on an initial International Federation of Social Work East Timor 'aftermath' mission and circulated its report on the Internet. What he has to tell us is very significant. He provides powerful descriptions of the 'colonial behaviour' of the assisters in Timor. He has questions to ask and, one hopes inescapably, lessons to teach us:

There is, by all accounts, a rush of people who want to be 'part of the action', seeking UN or NGO jobs in East Timor, or contracts for health, education, welfare and housing programs. In this rush, the voices and wishes of the East Timorese may be ignored. (1999: 6)

Some at least of the NGOs see themselves as having a long-term presence in East Timor, and are apparently making plans to that effect. Some people even told me that it was most important to establish a 'civil society' in East Timor, apparently not being able to notice the considerable existing strength in East Timorese society. (1999: 5)

In words very much related to the stance of our profession he adds:

social workers in particular should be alarmed by any claim to be working 'in the best interests' of somebody else, this has in the past been the justification for the most oppressive and disempowering practices, and for the denial of the basic rights of dependent populations. Working 'in the best interests' of somebody else implies that one knows better than they do what they need. (1999: 4)

Any notion of external people defining the needs of the East Timorese, or prescribing solutions or programs for them, will not only not work, but will create tension and an understandable resentment from the East Timorese. (1999: 12)

Questions and precedents

In E. Timor (if my international experience is anything to go by) there are probably embarrassingly few of the ‘many of our colleagues (who) spend their professional lives with relief and humanitarian agencies’ referred to in the ISW editorial (Turner, 1999: 206).²

How is it that the social work profession, that declares an international relevance, has failed to appear on these scenes in such numbers as to critically influence the humanitarian organizations in regard to people-centred bottom-up assistance and self-determined and directed development processes?

Of course aid agencies and particularly non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have to find a market to justify their existence, to secure funding and employment possibilities. As governments abandon many responsibilities, NGOs (in the most recent jargon upgraded to ‘civil society’) have found expanded opportunities for funding. We certainly notice that the dramas of suffering which engage the media for limited amounts of time are convenient as marketing commercials for aid agencies. Ife indicates that Timor is no exception: ‘the popularity of the cause, [have] meant that most international NGOs have felt it necessary to have a strong presence on the ground there. It is hard to estimate the numbers, as they are increasing all the time’ (1999: 2). As is so familiar elsewhere, Ife can identify ‘little common ground that can be claimed as a basis for co-ordinated action’.³

The aid agencies (with honourable exceptions) are clearly getting, and often deservedly, a bad name. Not surprisingly, comment can be found in influential journals predominantly concerned with business and economics: ‘NGOs now head for crises zones as fast as journalists do; a war, a flood, refugees, a dodgy election, even a world trade conference will draw them like a honey pot . . . In Kosovo itself the ground is now thick with foreign groups competing to foster democracy, build homes, and proffer goods and services’ (*The Economist*, 29 January 2000).

How is it that with all the past experience of situations around the world, and much misguided assistance, do we not find a sufficient professional international presence able to effectively tackle the by now familiar destructive aspects of humanitarian interventions and their long-term development implications?

In 1998, at my speaking engagement with the international committee of NASW in New York City in their business meeting, the group seemed eager to continue meeting in the United Nations

building ‘despite the cost’. This was important, it was said, ‘in order to show the UN what social work is’. I pointed out that in the 1950s and 1960s there was a strong social work presence in the Social Development Division at the heart of the UN headquarters in New York. This division was eventually banished offstage to Vienna (as was the International Association of Schools of Social Work, IASSW). There they both declined into relative obscurity. As I understand it, the division became mainly concerned with social work’s earlier traditional micro concerns instead of striving to become an integral and influential part of international development processes.

We lost, as far as I can determine, the potentially effective presence of a cadre of professional social workers within shouting distance of the centre of mainstream organizations in international affairs. Can it truly be that our Western-dominated social work has little in the way of universality, education and practice skills to contribute relevantly and recognizably when it has a foothold opportunity on the world stage? Certainly, located centrally within the UN, social work failed to penetrate and influence their sister agencies and the international NGOs.

The Red Cross (IFRC, 1994), now aware of such a situation, has recently drawn up an approved list of NGOs and has had them put their names to a 10-point code of conduct (the code is equally appropriate, in my opinion, to UN operational agencies):

- The humanitarian imperative comes first.
- Aid is given regardless of race, creed or nationality on the basis of the aid alone.
- Aid will not be used to further a particular political or religious standpoint.
- We shall endeavour not to act as instruments of government foreign policy.
- We shall respect culture and custom.
- We shall attempt to build disaster response on local capacities.
- Ways shall be found to involve programme beneficiaries in the management of relief aid.
- Relief aid must strive to reduce future vulnerabilities as well as meeting basic needs.
- We hold ourselves accountable to both those we seek to assist and those from whom we accept resources.
- We shall recognise disaster victims as dignified humans, not hopeless objects.

What evidence is there that this code is being respected in the field? Social workers surely have a role to play to find ways to see it is observed, monitored and enforced.

Social work in a monetary-value society, market forces, poverty and the poor

The media constantly provide us with the vicarious opportunity for safely witnessing real-life human catastrophes. But it should not be just the spectacular images of disaster that stimulate questions of concern in identifying an appropriate role for social workers. There is the nagging ‘undrama’ which is the ongoing daily catastrophe of poverty and the plight of the poor. It is this that is claimed to be a major social work commitment. I had understood that such concern became embraced in the concept of social development.

In 1972 the state of social work was reported as follows:

If social work is to firmly grasp the fact that some of its traditional declarations of concern with the poor are now becoming the central focus of attention of many disciplines concerned with the human condition and that the political element is not just local or national but global, it will be seen why the profession has to organise its present and potential contribution swiftly and effectively. Without a concentrated frontal attack on mass conditions of poverty little else can have lasting significance. (Drucker, 1972, Epilogue, p. 2)

The same publication goes on to note that it should no longer be possible for leading social workers to come together as they did in the region in 1966 and to find:

Poverty as an observed cultural phenomenon in most Asian countries is striking because of its pervasive presence in the life of countless people who exist on the brink of starvation. Yet the handling of poverty in professional social work as an observed and cultural phenomenon in Asian case records is more striking in its absence. The question might be raised in what way do professional social workers in Asia come in contact with such poverty, how does this poverty actually affect the role of the client, as well as the role of the profession itself, not only in its objectives but also in its methods? (United Nations [ECAFE], 1966)

Individual social workers of course can choose to define themselves more narrowly than in the mainstream of development and issues of poverty. They have no doubt a right to take up an honourable and much needed local stretcher-bearer role. Florence Hollis, a renowned casework teacher and practitioner, took an honest position: ‘I don’t know’, I heard her say, ‘what I can do about the problems of society, but I do know something about how we can

help some people in emotional and domestic problems to live more comfortably and even creatively’.

However, whatever choice individual social workers make, and whatever necessary training is provided to fulfil the functions of dealing with such personal problems, the profession has constantly declared and repeated that it has much wider objectives and responsibility in giving direction to its oncoming practitioners. As a claim to being an international profession, social workers have emphatically adopted a wide social development mandate with high-sounding phrases, and genuinely believe that social work has a philosophy and mission to serve those excluded and ground down in poverty (of which more later).

Time passes and the poor endure – a selection of social work contradictions

In the mid-1950s I noted at Columbia’s New York School of Social Work the reluctance of students to be placed in the public service agencies, preferring the fashionable casework agencies and recreational-oriented groupwork and community organization with funding agencies for the NGOs such as the ‘Red Feather’ movement.

When I left the USA in 1961, a big issue for social workers centred on the pros and cons of private practice, which was where the relatively well-heeled were seeking psychotherapy and counselling. In 1980 there took place in Hong Kong the biannual meetings of the International Congress of Social Workers (ICSW), the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW). The Hilton Hotel was the major venue. Plastered all over the city was the ICSW conference theme, ‘Social Welfare in Times of Economic Uncertainty’. This was in the President Reagan era, when many American social workers were anxious about funding for their jobs and well before the rise of the so-called Asian economic tigers. My Asia was one where, for the Asians I worked with, economic uncertainty was as constant as the earth turning each day on its axis. I was uncomfortable in discussing such matters as social work’s concern for the poor in a venue in some of the most expensive accommodation and real estate in the world.⁴

On my return to the USA in the mid-1980s, I found there was to be a belated appreciation conference on the centennial of Bertha Capon Reynolds for which I wrote a docudrama on her life and works (Drucker, 1985). A suggested topic for the conference was

'Social Work in the Work Place'. It sounded as though it would be an examination of the conditions and social problems of workers, very much a matter with which she had been deeply concerned. I was astonished to find that in fact the topic was intended to be an opportunity to focus on the latest money-making opportunities for social workers, a new clientele, corporation executives suffering from drug- and alcohol-related problems. Great for social workers' fees, well-to-do executives, the insured or those otherwise financially covered?

During my 1998 circumnavigation of the USA (although I may have been seeing and hearing a very select group of social workers and academics), I was impressed by the seemingly large proportion of social workers much concerned with private therapeutic practice which can be paid for through 'managed care'. This apparently determines professional matters such as the number of times one meets a client and the advance requirement of specific goals for each meeting in order to match the criteria for the insurance company's payment. The aphorism about economists is well illustrated: 'They can tell you the price of everything and the value of nothing.' Social workers and agencies seemed to be despairingly enmeshed in a bureaucratic finance accounting straitjacket and the insurance companies themselves were reported to be unable to deal promptly with the claims for reimbursement. I had the impression that, as one commentator has put it: 'The war on poverty has become a war on the poor.'

The social malaise of rampant free-market theory, written in concrete and implemented in activities and programmes unhindered by social policy considerations or controls, is certainly not exclusive to the USA. These values are spreading like wildfire⁵ and accelerating worldwide.

Ming-sum Tsiu and Fernando Cheung from Hong Kong in their letter to *Social Work* say: 'globalization is coming at us with little warning' and 'Many developing countries are going through industrialization in a pressure cooker environment' (1998: 588).

It is my experience that everywhere governments are vandalizing hard-won public social services in a Gadarene rush to embrace the free-market global economy under pressure from the classic economics of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, which leave out of the profit-and-loss accounts what happens to the poor and the environment.⁶ In the process they are producing vast new populations of unemployed and the opportunity for international business to exploit labour in poor countries unhampered by civilized protection.⁷

Overall it is very clear that the monetary value of the poor themselves everywhere adds up to little or nothing in current economic terms and calculations. Their purchasing power is negligible and can attract little free-market attention. Their participation and decision-making possibilities can therefore either be ignored or, if necessary (when the poor become restive, too vocal or organized, and challenge the tenets of classical economics and the seats of power) suppressed by force. It is quite usual for such poor, in surplus supply anyway and generating so little effective economic or political demand, to be brutally expended in so-called security forces or rebel terrorist operations, examples of which I have personally witnessed in my professional social work experience.⁸

Social workers, more often than not, find themselves valued and identified with, and their services funded as inadequately as, the poor themselves. Social workers become marginal, professional and political outcasts, expendable too.⁹ More serious still, it is common to find that social workers rarely find a supporting public constituency derived from those they seek to serve. Social workers may well be devalued and, relatively to other professions, poorly rewarded and recognized in a society assessing value in monetary terms. Yet the poor characteristically more often than not perceive a social worker as an active employee, instrument and maintainer of such a society.

All such matters should clearly be of vital concern to social workers at the turn of the century. In my own experience I have been surprised by how few professionals I have met anywhere who are actually practising where the poor are to be found, despite the profession's declared mandate.¹⁰

All in all I am led to wonder whether we might expound our virtues from more solid ground if professional social work organizations around the world asked to raise hands (or more respectably conducted research) to discover what proportion of their membership and agencies' time is actually directly involved at some level with the poor. And which poor, where, are we talking about?¹¹ The Asian question needs to be answered again: 'In what way do professional social workers come in contact with such poverty, how does this poverty actually affect the role of the client, as well as the role of the profession itself, not only in its objectives but also in its methods?' (United Nations [ECAFE], 1966).

In *ISW* Martinez-Brawley (1999) maintains that:

The perceptions, assessments and interventions of social workers, among others, are influenced as much by the unintended learnings of daily exposure to market forces, the press and television as by professional preparation. While our professional preparation would have directed social workers to continue advocating for public services, for insuring the quality of life of all etc., market forces have led professionals to managed-care companies which are market driven, to private practice that might be less accessible to certain clients and so on. (1999: 343)

It seems to me that certainly it is the case as stated that 'social work is supported and shaped by the very system it seeks to change' (Witkin, 1998: 484). Can it be that we ourselves have self-depreciatingly adopted the same monetary values we seem to deplore?

Ife (1999: 11) says that what the Timorese now need are: 'advocates in the international community, who can speak out against economic exploitation in the interests of some imposed understanding of "development"'. Over these many years how is it that we social workers, with our proudly declared very basic professional concern for the poor and the excluded, have not naturally become recognized as such?

Stretcher-bearer functions and social development cause

What then, as a profession that claims to have an international conception of the relevance of social work, have our schools been teaching both theoretically and in terms of effective application to practice?

Martinez-Brawley raises searching questions about what the profession practices and is taught. She sees that the nature of the knowledge and educational base for social workers has become 'a survival issue for the profession' (1999: 334):

Discussion in social work centers on the question of whether social work proposes one single truth or many truths; whether a single world view, language, form of discourse or paradigm will dominate social work knowledge or whether there are many ways of knowing and practicing.

Social work has always had moralizing undertones; this was understood and appropriate in a profession based on overtly stated values. It often prescribed best ways of or orthodoxies of helping based not only on the prevailing values but also on dominant, often Eurocentric, theoretical assumptions and methods. More often than not, social work has sought to achieve metatheories . . .¹²

Does the profession speak with the single voice of science and empirical evidence or with the complex fluidity of art? Is it possible or even appropriate for social work to be bound by the canons of positivism and scientific methodology or should it accommodate alternative, less orthodox approaches to knowing? Can

a profession which is intimately bound to culture and language find generalizable principles? . . . What is the responsibility of educational institutions in social work in relation to the development of new professionals and the many diverse constituencies that characterize contemporary complex societies? How can social work avoid becoming 'benevolent colonialism' at a time when it seeks to move beyond the confines of western countries?

Here again we find Ife's colonization question.

In *ISW* there is also to be found the enduring and present theme: the very relevant problem of Western-dominated social work not being very appropriate to other cultures, conditions and situations in meeting priority needs internationally. The widespread introduction and adoption of Western-oriented social work practices, Midgley (1981) has termed 'professional imperialism'. Taylor (1999), in examining how we might avoid these colonial habits of imposing Western ideas and service priorities, also echoes Ife. She concludes and issues her challenge:

Social work education has been stuck in the quagmire of problem-solving for far too long. The end result of this is that we have failed to focus on individual strengths and the structural (organisational, community, political) changes which can support and mobilise these strengths. These strengths can be seen to be particularly useful for social work in an international context by virtue of its concentration on people's capacity to live in the face of seemingly overwhelming adversity. (1999: 317)

Given the nature of social problems such as poverty, pollution and unemployment, and changing social conditions internationally, social work education has a responsibility to educate students to be responsive to the realities. (1999: 314)

International realities? An example

Nimmagadda and Cowger in their *ISW* article (1999) address an aspect of Indian reality in demonstrating 'social worker ingenuity in the indigenization of practice knowledge'. Yet they in the main leave aside the wider questions for the profession and the nature of what might be incorporated and taught. Their study examines 'how Indian social workers in an alcohol treatment center, *which was patterned after an American treatment model, deal with technology transfer*' (author's emphasis). Their findings clearly indicate the shortfall and confusion in international social work education.

Those who might believe that social work practice knowledge might be destructive because of cultural incongruity give *too much credit to the power of such knowledge* and too little credit to the power of local culture and the ingenuity of culturally grounded practitioners. In the examples we looked at here, when workers

recognized cultural deterrents to a particular intervention or approach, *it was not tried or was tried and simply did not work.*

However, *had they been working from an indigenous model that reflected their culture to begin with, they no doubt would have had more self-confidence in their knowledge base and been less ambivalent about not following what they had been taught.*

Developing social work practice knowledge in the non-western world by non-Westerners is often difficult because of the absence of infrastructure to support knowledge development. The authors note that 'most of the literature on cross-cultural practice is devoid of knowledge grounded in everyday life of practitioner and client' and believe that 'research should be encouraged and promoted' (author's emphasis). (Nimmagadda and Cowger, 1999: 274-5)

Taylor very much widens the agenda: 'in concrete terms (this) would mean education for social policy development, team building, networking, conflict resolution, and organisational development' (1999: 317).¹³

From her experience in Scandinavia, the United Kingdom, Canada, Jamaica, Latin America, Africa and recently in Latvia she concludes: 'the common denominator . . . has been the disenchantment about the role of formal social work education as a strategy for promoting social development' (Taylor, 1999: 317).

Social work as social development: the past and continuing story

Of course, it is not just recently in Eastern Europe that social work is seeking to move beyond the concerns and confines of affluent Western countries. More than 30 years ago Asian social work was seeking to adopt just such a broadening of the educational agenda and practice and embraced the field of social development. In 1968 social work educators, administrators and planners meeting in Bangkok 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 Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE) region, and that greater efforts should be made to improve that situation' (United Nations, 1968a).

Later that same year, at the International Conference of Ministers Responsible for Social Welfare at the UN in New York, 89 countries endorsed the recommendation that priority be assigned: 'particularly in developing countries, to the developmental tasks of social welfare and therefore, to orienting social welfare training toward preparation for such tasks' (United Nations, 1968b).

In 1970 the Asian ministers meeting in Manila extended this concept more specifically: 'Curricula on social work training should be geared to social development goals and constantly examined, reviewed and evaluated in the light of the countries' changing needs' (United Nations, 1970).

This very clear message seems to be what Taylor and others are still saying today.

In Manila at the same time (1970) there were also conferences of the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Congress of Social Workers (ICSW). The in thing there was to exult at the prospect of social work operating effectively 'in the corridors of power'¹⁴ as the 'challenge of the seventies'. By 1970, then, leaving aside this hubris, at least social work had authoritatively had its attention drawn not only to the nature of the Asian situation, but emphatically to the necessary widening of social work priorities and direction everywhere.

Goals and a cause

A distinguished international group spelled out (ICSW, 1970) the national social development goals for the 1970s. They cited the national role in development as influencing national priorities; utilizing the political process; interpreting social development goals; dealing with areas of tension; working with related groups and professions; and helping those in need of service.

'Strategies for the Seventies' were expounded as: social development planning; legal measures; management of the economy; rural reform; income redistribution; universal social services; education and manpower development; population policy; family planning; community development; new towns; preventive programmes; rehabilitation; mutual self-help; citizen or client participation; advocacy and confrontation strategies; consumer protection and rights; the open communication strategy; modern management and a sense of community.

This was a wide-ranging and ambitious agenda. Presumably the profession had made a far-reaching choice and was intending to vigorously turn its major attention to society, its aberrations and reform.

To my mind a profession with international aspirations might have listened to what a major part of the world was saying back

then and begun to think profoundly of its implications nearer at home and for the future of the profession itself.¹⁵

To begin with, social work had seemed to declare itself determinedly once more as having a cause (the cause of contributing to a just social order). This would clearly require involving itself in areas of practice well beyond activities which had been diminished and superseded in the movement to professionalism, very much powered by the influence of social work in the USA. The American experience had been of a whole continent of untapped natural resources and a relatively small and determined population mainly of immigrants and refugees energetically committed to achieving material well-being. Self-reliance was a necessity. The eventual emergence of a strong culture of individualism was to welcome individualistic psychological theory. The medical model (within-the-individual's-skin) was enthusiastically adopted by social work as a major treatment of choice for those who were in trouble and needed to adjust.

However, the developing world does not have this kind of history, nor does it have a cultural tradition of highly prized individualism. Absent too have been the New World's advantages in resources and technology. Unlike the first industrializing nations, the emerging nations today find that they have to compete with firmly entrenched and dominant financial and technologically advanced economies.¹⁶

In the 1970s the foundation of social work was proclaimed as social development. Social development would not to be just the cherry on the top of economic development. It had to become a major goal of economic development, probably even the prerequisite for the creation of resources and wealth, and certainly for ensuring social justice in distribution.

At the same time it became only too apparent that social work teachers and practitioners had little direct experience in working in situations with a recognized social-policy macro perspective. Quite what did the development perspective demand?

Social work as development – the nuts and bolts

The six-plus country study (Thailand, South Korea, Hong Kong, Pakistan, the Philippines and Burma) (Drucker, 1972) sought guidance by examining the repeatedly pronounced key phrases to discover what they actually represented to social work educators and professionals in terms of roles to be undertaken and taught. These were distilled as:

1. Social policies and planning in development.
2. Ensuring social justice (with particular reference to more equitable distribution of national wealth).
3. The essential need for participation by the people in policy formulation, planning and implementation.
4. Improving the social and cultural infrastructure by institution building.

Where to place traditional social work methods in this developmental framework was approached as follows:

5. Social work helping methods. The situations dealt with by social workers very often illustrate the malfunctioning of our societies and the gaps and inconsistencies in our policies and programmes. The social worker role then is to be alert and sensitive to this and to systematically report these matters and so to be contributing decisively to policy and planning in the normal course of their 'helping' activities. It is this specific role of identifying such matters and reporting appropriately to policy makers and planners that we are asking about here.¹⁷

In the course of this study, the Asian educators and professionals emphatically endorsed the importance and definitions of these roles as fundamental to developmental social work.

Nevertheless, on scrutiny it was not found possible at that time to identify coherently what was actually taught and what might be the nature of an overall curriculum which would impart what roles.

It was concluded that: 'The fact of the matter seems to be that the current machinery linking schools, supervisors, agencies, professional associations, policy makers, planners, etc. is not adequate to the task of producing personnel for the important developmental roles which are currently being canvassed. This lack of coherent [*sic* institutional] machinery constitutes the major problem confronting the schools and the profession' (Drucker, 1972: 170).

It was seen that if social work education were to move firmly into the field of development and take up the wider challenge of poverty eradication, drawing upon its much heralded claim to be serving the poor, the dispossessed and the underprivileged, the teachers would need to discover and invent a growing fund of skills from first-hand experience in order to know what and how to teach.

However, given the high-sounding rhetoric, enthusiasm, even euphoria, how was this to be done? A whole range of recommendations

was made (Drucker, 1972), including the possibility of revising the role of the United Nations Social Development Division and its Advisor. But two areas were of particular relevance to how and what needed to be taught in a development orientation: the preparation and role of the educators in practice and theory and the matter of research. These areas of need seem as clearly relevant today as they were in 1972 and the proposals offered then might well be re-examined as a contribution towards finding solutions to our present problems.

The see-saw approach¹⁸, a recommendation

It was seen that if social workers were really going to operate in the development arena, many would need to locate themselves in new and unfamiliar settings. I thought it would be desirable and necessary for social work careers to move back and forth from teaching to the field. The see-saw approach was suggested and outlined in some detail. Social work careers would be structured to move from practice to supervision to teaching and round again to practice in new fields on a continuing basis.¹⁹ Practice and teaching would be constantly renewed and reinforced. The two worlds of the field and academia would meld into a single profession, avoiding the suspicions that flourish between the two very different institutional cultures.

Practice and research: research as knowledge or initiation ritual?

It can be gleaned from many sources that social work in America, as elsewhere, is in deep trouble in terms of the seemingly ever-widening gulf between research and practice.

It is difficult to conceive of social work as a profession whose preparatory and formulating education derived fundamentally from other than a practice-based and values-laden foundation. Its 100 years in the USA dates from the time when the Charity Organisation Society and similar workers thought that a university might offer a theoretical structure to enhance the skills of its volunteers and staff and provide an improved understanding for future recruits. It was expected, and correctly, that there was much to learn from a range of other disciplines engaged in the study of, and active in, human affairs, that could be utilized by social workers.²⁰ Social work is only unique, if that is not too presumptuous a word, because

its multifaceted nature combines and adapts borrowed and contributed knowledge. It takes from wherever it may to clarify and confirm experience, in order to inform its activities and develop skills in identifying, prioritizing and attending to what ails people and the societies in which they live.²¹ (Ominously for practice, early on in both the USA and the UK, fieldwork disappeared for some years from the curriculum of some of the major university programmes.)

Primarily social workers should be eager consumers of research in order to examine, discover and extrapolate what it can tell us regarding what we should do, do better or avoid doing. We have a responsibility to identify from our practice and convey to appropriate resources what needs to be researched.²²

At its simplest, as a profession which in practice recognizes it needs to act frequently, albeit with very limited information, research from whatever source (anything better than guess work) is to be welcomed. Social workers themselves need not be researchers in the formal academic sense, unless this is to become their professional speciality.

The implications of all this are that professional practitioners, mobilized through their Associations, would have a very strong life-long commitment to initiating research and, in contributing from their practice experience, the Association would feed social workers serving on policy and decision-making bodies. The schools would have the responsibility for constructing a curriculum which will constantly relate to, and involve the students in, these cutting-edge concerns of the profession.

The integral unity of practice and research was stated in a paper critical of the existing research requirement of students (Drucker, 1977a):

‘The primary responsibility for identifying research topics belongs to the profession in general and practitioners in particular. It is the practitioners in their daily work who are faced with questions that require answers’.

‘These answers are required not as fundamental truths but for practical application’.

‘The Association of Schools and individual schools should be responsible for collecting from the professional practitioners lists of . . . subjects for research, clearly stating the problem and indicating the practical implications which are likely to flow from an investigation . . . It would be the responsibility of a research group to examine these subjects and sketch in the broad lines of method

best fitted to the matter under consideration and judge whether it is appropriate for a student to undertake.'

'The range of topics thus identified is likely to give a student a much broader and practical view of social work and its priority professional concerns than can be expected from those with limited experience in the field as is the case with most students.'

'There are important implications here for the profession and for organising practitioners in such a way that appropriate dialogue takes place with . . . the schools, in order to produce this professional agenda for research. The need for relatedness of the research to the profession's progress, and the relatedness to the teaching to professional practice cannot be over-emphasised.' (Drucker, 1977: 3-4)

A detailed research sequence was recommended to the schools in *An Exploration* . . . (Drucker, 1972: 84-90), and seems perhaps even more necessary today.

Teaching social work research – a recommendation

Professional consumers of research would need to be familiar with the range and limitations of social research methods. Students would not be expected to initiate and complete their own research. Each research would be divided into a sequence in which succeeding intakes of students would complete one stage. However, they would be taken through all the stages of research: statement of problem; formulation of a researchable subject; identification of appropriate method; data collection; analysis; implementation of recommendations and evaluation carried out with the initiating agency. Each stage would be taught as a course in its own right. The students would be contributing a single step to different research works-in-progress along the stages to completion.

It was anticipated that the professional practitioners and the schools would be drawn together in identifying needs, pursuing research, creating and contributing knowledge, enhancing professional skills and translating them into action. From the students' perspective, they will have experienced how questions from the field are taken through all the stages to action and final evaluation. The students themselves will have had a role to play, having been taken through each stage with its specific focus. Although they would not have had to take responsibility for any one topic from start to finish, they would have begun to appreciate the practical pay-off of research and savor the excitement of having contributed to knowledge and change and of having precipitated organized

action. They would understand the importance of providing research topics from the field when they become practitioners as well as where they belong in contributing to an overall professional identity.

Of course it was realised that there were dozens of problems inherent in these wide-ranging sets of proposals career-wise and within university and agency structure. Clearly, here again the profession would need to do a lot of 'institution building', However, if we were to take seriously the roles of institution-building, social justice, participation, social policy and planning (which had been identified as fundamental elements of the development and social work role), like the adage 'charity begins at home', we would need to build effective institutions for professional social work. Before we could speak with some authority about what society should be doing to bring about change we would need to demonstrate our ability to manage change ourselves, particularly within and between our own professional organisations and those academic and social service institutions and structures of which the profession has some measure of control and already, to some degree, participates in decision-making. (Drucker, 1993: 524)

Several years on

Tom Brigham (1984) on his return to Asia compared five predominantly rural developing countries and continued to find that they: 'had adopted American urban models of education', and, he added 'social work arose in the West to help a few marginal people to adjust to society; whereas, in most of the developing countries the poor are the vast and significant majority!' (cited in Desai, 1993: 507, Editorial).

In 1993 Brigham's findings prompted the Tata Institute of Social Sciences' *Indian Journal of Social Work* to bring out a special issue on the apparently eternal theme that Western concepts have irrelevantly dominated Asian social work (see Drucker, 1993). Although the thrust of the journal's issue was the 'Social Work Profession in Asia', it was noticeable that none of the references provided by the editor included an Asian name. There was also a quote from Katherine Kendall (1986), retired secretary-general of IASSW. In her 'Accent on Change' (lack of change?) in what I suppose was diplomatic understatement, she put it mildly: 'particularly in Asia, the effort towards indigenisation of the curriculum to increase their relevance to the local situation seem to move rather slowly. Equally important is the slow process of indigenisation of the body of knowledge' (cited in Desai, 1993: 508, Editorial).

In the same issue of the journal Desai (1993: 508) said: 'Indigenous social work knowledge is a must for indigenous social work

education and professional practice . . . Whatever literature has been developed in the Asian countries it has not been successfully disseminated even among the Asian countries. As a result, the exchange of knowledge has not taken place (except at seminars and conferences) . . .’.

Indeed! What an indictment of what emerged from all those expensively mounted seminars and conferences of which the United Nations, the IASSW and others have been major sponsors. Can it be that the subject matter proved to be untranslatable at the national and operational level or that a generation of respected conference-goers proved as expensively marginal to the needs of their profession as the profession seems to have remained marginal to the needs of their societies?

Epilogue – the international scene

In 1996 IASSW and the fellow conferences again located their international conference in Hong Kong.²³ Hong Kong was by then the third most expensive venue in the world. I would have dearly liked to hear what our Asian members had to say about the conference’s by now only too repetitive theme, ‘The Social Work Profession in Social Development’. The political climate of globalization was certainly not as socially benign as that being expressed by government ministers back in the 1970s. Just that very conference week the BBC news reported that the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) ministers meeting in Jakarta had warned that ‘rights, labour and environmental matters would not be allowed to be placed on the agenda of the ASEAN business conference in Singapore next December’. Social issues clearly must not be allowed to interfere with serious economics.²⁴

What were organized social work, its educators, philosophers and practitioners planning to do these many years later in relation to development? And I wonder very much if Tsui and Cheung’s 1998 challenge to *Social Work* to devote a special issue to ‘how social work is critically adopted and reinvented by social workers in developing countries according to their own cultural and socio-political contexts’ was a vital matter made very manifest (1998: 589). Certainly I believe that if these activities were seriously addressed and incorporated into the professional psyche and agenda, we really might be able to claim internationalism. It may well also be that, as our Hong Kong colleagues hope, it might

'shed light on the current identity crises of our profession in the West'.²⁵

There are at least 100 years of practical experience behind us to be drawn upon; a century of borrowing, integrating and adapting theory from a range of sources, and the establishment of professional schools and training worldwide. Without complacency, how is it that we seem to betray so little confidence in defining what we do, how we do it and why? Our graduates leave schools, I trust, properly knowing that they face a lifetime of continuing to discover and learn about the human condition and what ails it. They should also know that they are joining a profession likely always to be a minority in terms of its particular idealism and social concerns, and that they will not receive too much public acclaim or financial rewards. Perhaps they may too often have the sense of falling short of their highest hopes and aspirations in a job that will by its nature present them daily with so much of society's sorrows. Can we provide a sense of belonging to a fellowship of professionals that provides an ongoing solid foundation of support and assurance? Should we not have a sense of pride and security in understanding and contributing to a maturing recognizable professional agenda, albeit diverse and consisting of many strands?

The 1972 ambitious proposals for restructuring the role of social work, its organization and educational research requirements, seem particularly relevant still. I would like to hear whether this missive strikes a rallying and rededicating note with the readership; whether the erstwhile ambitious vision for social work's international role, organization, careers, practice, education, theory and research is still (or ever was) really relevant, and is practical and possible today.

Given social work's need to play an effective part in dealing with major areas of human suffering, and Cloward's 'wake' and cry that the teachers are increasingly out of touch with the field and rarely, if at all, act as a united group of interactive professionals, can some of the ideas revisited here lead to the resurrection and a true internationalizing of the profession? Optimism, and just a bit more and better of the same is nowhere enough.²⁶ What is needed is to be clear and agreed as to what now needs to be done, in both schools and field, as the profession enters the new century. This cry of my own is offered as a contribution to the debate that surely our honorable profession deserves.

Notes

- 1 East Timor was an example of how little has been learned by the international community at the UN. If there was no contingency plan for a swift adequate military presence it was predictable that there would be an intensification of slaughter as soon as the referendum had been held. Instead there was a fatal wait while approval was sought from Jakarta, although no one had ever acknowledged Indonesia's sovereignty over East Timor. The slaughter in Rwanda, in Bosnia's Sebrenitce (a promised UN 'safe haven' provided with no effective military protection) and in Kosovo (which continued between Albanians and Serbs, with no effective policing) should at least have taught something about fine words without matching big-stick resources. The UN has come very close to the fate of the League of Nations, which did nothing about Mussolini and Abyssinia in the 1930s.
- 2 In 1981, of the 80 international organizations working out of comfortable Bangkok in the 28 refugee camps on the Thai borders, the number of professional social workers could be counted on one hand. In Zaire, in 1992, there was none at all.
- 3 See *The Kosovo Refugee Crisis: an Independent Evaluation of UNHCR's Emergency Preparedness and Response* (UNHCR, 2000/01). The summary of conclusions and recommendations included:

The unusual concern of states to have a visible field presence through national NGOs or state agencies (military or civilian) was in UNHCR's perspective also a double-edged sword. It brought enormous resources to the emergency, but relatively little of it was channelled through the agency, and consultation with UNHCR varied considerably. Uneven consultation combined with a large number of actors – about 250 NGOs operated in Albania and FYR Macedonia at the peak of the emergency – made co-ordination difficult. Only about 20 per cent of the NGOs were UNHCR implementing partners . . . UNHCR can only co-ordinate those willing to be co-ordinated . . . UNHCR alone cannot 'screen' independently funded NGOs to ensure that numbers and experience correspond to need. This is a shared responsibility of host governments and the NGOs. EXCOM should address ways in which all NGOs can be made accountable and brought into the co-ordination framework, making reference to professional standards developed by the NGOs such as the Code of Conduct and the Sphere project.

- 4 An East European graduate student of mine was at a conference in Cairo housed in a five-star hotel. Her room cost per night perhaps two months of her miserable salary at home, the air ticket 18 months' worth. The conference topic was 'concern for the poor'.
- 5 One of the *Social Work* letter contributors uses the terminology about social work's 'market appeal'. In his *ISW* article Dolgoff (1999: 299) argues that 'ways to justify social welfare need to be identified that are consistent with the international market economy and the rigors it applies to societies'. He tempers his position by adding: 'The identification of these benefits is not an argument against fairness or social justice, but suggests that the humanitarian arguments need to be supplemented'.

- 6 See the interesting October 2000 'discourses' on the websites e-susst@jazz.worldbank.org and cdf@jazz.worldbank.org, which raise just such issues. The negative social aspects of their role and practice on the conditions of the world's poor can be seen to be troubling World Bank director, James D. Wolfensohn, and the World Bank itself.
- 7 Ironically, as reported from the fiasco of the World Trade Organisation in Seattle, the developing countries are said to be resisting standards for labour protection on the grounds that their cheap labour is a main element of competition in the global economy. Incidentally, how many social workers were concerned about these globalization issues before Seattle?
- 8 Not too serious an outcome in many places, it would seem, as the arms trade (politely termed defence industries) does very good business in amply keeping all sides of violent conflict provided with murderous weaponry and maintains vital armaments employment in 'civilized' countries.
- 9 See the discussion some three years ago on the NISW (UK) website intsocwork@mailbase.ac.uk stimulated by Harriet Meek's deep concern at how eager young social workers are constantly thrown into violent situations with a minimum of sound agency support.
- 10 The NASW Code of Ethics states 'with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of the people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty' and also emphasizes 'social work's determination to promote social justice and social change'.
- 11 The poor, even perhaps particularly in affluent countries, are a significant and excluded culture. They have been described by an unusual group (Fourth World) that has taken the plight of the poorest seriously, calling the poor the Fourth World (as distinct from the Third). See Rosenfeld (1989) and Rosenfeld and Tardieu (1998).
- 12 Yet perhaps social workers have too quickly reached for theoretical fragments, and in the process forced reality into straitjackets, often leaving out what does not fit and forgetting the limitations of any theory and the narrow areas of effective application of such theory. Can it be that we professionals in particular have sought respectability by adopting a pseudo-scientific academic stance? Social workers have a scientific duty to describe and tell it how it is, or looks to them – external and internal perceptions, thought and feelings, confusion, mystery and all. In my teaching I reach out constantly to the non-social sciences, novels, poems, songs, films, etc for material to provide understanding and to convey where and how to learn continuously. This includes the availability of a lifetime of learning to be mined from even the most inarticulate of our clients. For example, Singer and Burgin (1985): 'When he gets an idea into his head it becomes so strong that he forgets about everything else . . . The obsessed person becomes funny because he cannot see the exception to the rule, or he creates non-existent rules. I would say that the great misfortune of literature and life itself is the cliché, the generalization, while life itself has more exceptions than rules'. Burgin: 'Maybe the rule is that life is full of exceptions' (p. 45).
- 13 Butler's (1999) book review also echoes this broadening orientation: Knutson (1997) locates the child 'not simply in the "small circles of family, home and neighbourhood"' but in the global politics of poverty'. Knutson's book, *Children: Noble Causes or Worthy Citizens?*, is 'about children and development, as distinct from the development of children', although development is soon discarded as ideologically tainted and technocratically biased.

- 14 *Corridors of Power* was the title of a novel by C.P. Snow (1964).
- 15 The social work conferences were the largest of any kind ever held in Manila and the overwhelming majority of registrations to the conferences was from the USA. Their costs, such as round-the-world airline tickets, conference fees and accommodation, apparently could be claimed as professional expenses for income tax purposes. Subsequently the IRS became suspicious whether claimants actually attended, and required a register to be kept of presence at each session, much to the irritation of other nationals. The suggestion that the fortunate with tax relief might voluntarily donate their refunds to a fund to enable social workers from the poorest countries to attend such conferences was not well received. The location for the 1970 Philippine conferences was at the dilapidated Manila Hotel (the former headquarters of General McArthur) owned by President Ferdinand Marcos and his wife, 'Iron Butterfly' Imelda. The staff of the hotel went on strike, complaining that the service charges and health benefits had not been paid to them as contracted. President Marcos and the minister of labour and social welfare arrived with armed outriders through the picket lines and gave splendid accounts of their concern for people and just labour laws. The social work conference committee apparently decided that as we were all guests of the Philippines, we had no business to express in any way our concern at the employees' situation.
- 16 The United Kingdom, whence the charity organization had come to the USA at the end of the nineteenth century, had also at that time a vast empire of resources and the poor upon which to fuel its industrial revolution and economic dominance.
- 17 An approach, I have since discovered, which echoes C. Wright Mills in *The Sociological Imagination* (1959): 'Know that many personal troubles . . . must be understood in terms of public issues . . . and in terms of the problems of history-making. Know that the human meaning of public issues must be revealed by relating them to personal troubles – and to the problems of the individual life.'
- Shankar Pathak (1981) was later to point out that this role, so defined from the current practices of social work, was in fact a version of the first, an essential development role in policy and planning.
- 18 This idea was first unveiled in Thailand. To my surprise it evoked much embarrassed laughter. Not at the content, I learned, but because the term 'see-saw' in the Thai language meant something sexual.
- 19 This was attempted on a modest scale by UN ESCAP's Mobile Training Scheme in Nepal. In the short run (1974–5) it displayed great promise.
- 20 In the main, entrance to universities took place at a time when worldwide those elitist and conservative institutions derived their prestige from the laboratory-based myopic ('pure') static science of the nineteenth century or from the more romantically-inclined abstractions of the humanities formulated in the comfort of learned literary discourse in ivory towers far from the misery and chaos of everyday life. Social work, if it had been less concerned with its status and acceptability and more with the workings of society and social injustice, might even have contributed dynamic concepts well before the fixed state of the physical sciences gave way to the flux, uncertainties and living with the unknown, of atomic and biogenetic research (Drucker, 1993: 517–18).
- 21 Again very much in the perspective of Singer and Burgin (1985: 1–2): 'Every life is strange . . . This visitor . . . is, after all, part of the big universe . . . I'd like to hear what he has to say. I am sure in his telling it, I will hear something which is completely new as far as my knowledge of human beings is concerned . . . The more

- you see what other people do, the more you learn about yourself . . . I say to myself, why don't they look into the human ocean which surrounds them where stories and novelties flow by the millions? It's there where my experiments take place – in the laboratory of humanity, not on a piece of paper.'
- 22 I was told recently quite bluntly at one distinguished American school of social work that what gets researched is determined by the funding source. Market forces again, permeating academia?
 - 23 This was to be the last year of British rule in Hong Kong before it was returned to China. It was ironic to observe that during the UK's 99 colonial years no recognizable democratic structure had been established. However, much very late agonizing was expressed for Hong Kong's democratic fate under the communists.
 - 24 So soon afterwards came the collapse of the Asian Tigers' economies. Leading economists had previously been enthusiastically encouraging the West to learn from their success. Alas for the poor, with loss of their miserably paid work, and public services and projects, which the World Bank advises countries to cut in order that governments might receive enormous loans which will add to the debts that will need to be repaid.
 - 25 That there is a crisis in the West is very clear. 'Social Work Education is in the midst of crisis and responses are scattered and minimal.' The profession is also in crisis. The wide range of problems both in education and practice call for a sustained, critical examination of the profession, something that has gone unattended for more than 30 years. Although the Madison (1977) and O'Hare (1981) conferences attempted in a small way to chip away at the problem of conceptualizing practice, the last serious and studied examination of practice took place in the late 50s with the publication of the working definition of *Social Work Practice* (1958). 'Thus, the call for thoughtful analysis and comment is long overdue.' Dean Kay Hoffman, First Conference Chair, College of Social Work, Lexington, KY, in an April 2000 Internet call for papers for a series of conferences to be held throughout 2001/3.
 - 26 Both academics and practitioners seem comfortable with suggesting, if only by omission, that staying with a variant of the current course will lead eventually to some sort of comprehensive progress. This tendency is prevalent particularly in academia, where the development enterprise is tinged with the patina of hopefulness unjustified by experience. V.S. Naipaul's warning about how it is wrong to 'corrupt (one's) views by injecting optimism or hope into what (one) is seeing' obviously is given short shrift by development specialists, possibly because we personally do not pay the price for disregarding reality. The real cost is borne by other people, on whose behalf the development community works, and who remain consigned indefinitely to misery and want (P. Olpadwala, 1998).

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