

**IT'S NOT DARK YET BUT IT'S GETTING  
THERE':  
GLOBAL CRISES, RESISTANCE AND  
SOCIAL WORK  
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# THE TRIPLE CRISIS

- The Biological Crisis
- The Economic Crisis
- The Political Crisis

## VISIONS OF SOCIAL WORK

”In its broadest conception, social work is teaching the sanctity of human life..and the doctrine of the brotherhood of man...The social workers of our time are dreaming a great dream, and seeing a great vision of democracy, of a real brotherhood among men...War is the doom of all that has taken years to build up”. (Lillian Wald, New York, 1914).



RESPONDING  
TO  
POLITICAL  
CHALLENGES

‘Social work has played various roles in contrasting systems of social provision, and has served a number of political ends. Its great virtue – that it is almost infinitely adaptable to circumstances – also makes it open to exploitation for any kind of policy objectives’ (Jordan, 1984)

SOCIAL WORK AS A *CONTESTED*  
PROFESSION:  
THREE MAIN TRADITIONS

- Remedial social work
- Developmental social work
- Activist/radical social work (Midgley, 2001)

# SOCIAL WORK RESPONSES TO POLITICAL CRISES

- Collusion
- Compliance
- Contestation

## ACTIVE COLLUSION WITH THE STATE

- Social work in Nazi Germany in the 1930s
- Greek social work under the dictatorship: 1967-74
- UK Child Migrants Scheme: 1880s to 1970s

## SOCIAL WORK IN NAZI GERMANY

- ‘Sticking to their professional task with the air of value neutrality and scientific detachment (especially after the ‘non-conforming’, ‘politically active’ social workers had been sacked or imprisoned) they did not feel responsible for the consequences of their assessments and may indeed not have been conscious of the full implications their work had in the national context.’ (Lorenz, 2006)

## COOPERATION BETWEEN LEADERSHIP OF GREEK SOCIAL WORK AND THE GENERALS 1967-74-

‘The Greek government during the general ongoing labour reform will look after all the remaining social work demands ... On the other hand, we really appreciate social workers’ contribution in the constructive implementation of our social programs ... The ministry of social services will take all the appropriate measures for the advantageous and coherent organization of social workers in commission’.  
(Ioakimidis, 2011)



# THE UK CHILD MIGRANT SCHEME



## MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE

- Between the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 1970s, around 150,000 children who were in care and from poor backgrounds were sent from Britain to Australia, Canada and other British colonies. They were seen as 'good white stock'.
- Leading British social work organisations administered the scheme
- Many children were used as cheap labour and experienced physical and sexual abuse.
- In 2010, the Prime Ministers of Britain and Australia publicly apologized to the survivors for the abuse that they had suffered.

## COMPLIANCE: THE QUEST FOR PROFESSIONAL NEUTRALITY AND RESPECTABILITY

- A profession 'above politics'?
- 'Social work is a very practical job. It is about protecting people and changing their lives, not about being able to give a fluent and theoretical explanation of why they got into difficulties in the first place' (UK Health Minister Jacqui Smith launching the new social work degree in England and Wales, 2002).

# RADICAL SOCIAL WORK IN THE 1970S

- Emphasis on structural inequality, not individual failings
- Critique of the welfare state as oppressive and controlling
- For a different relationship between workers and clients
- Emphasis on collective approaches
- For alliances between social workers and collectives of service users
- Social workers are workers too
- ‘Radical social work, we feel, is essentially understanding the position of the oppressed in the context of the social and economic structures they live in (Bailey and Brake, 1975)’.

## CONTESTATION: THE ACTIVIST/RADICAL TRADITION

- ‘One group who have traditionally been moved to action by ‘pity to the poor’, we call ‘Charitable’; the other larger or smaller in each generation but always fired by the’ hatred of injustice’, we designate as the Radicals’.
- Jane Addams, The President’s Address, “Charity and Social Justice”, Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections (St. Louis, MO: The Archer Printing Co., 1910)

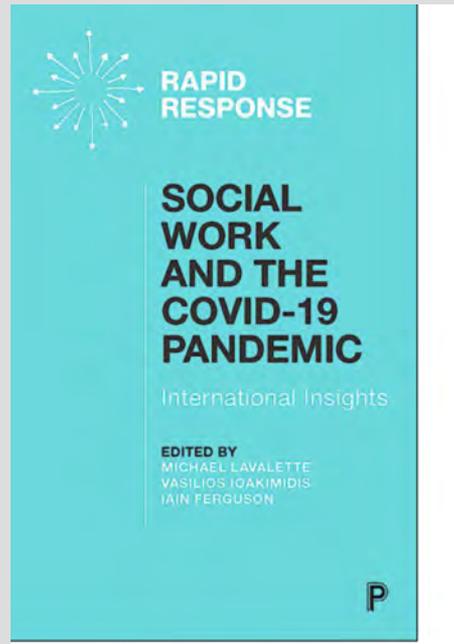
# THE RECONCEPTUALISATION MOVEMENT IN LATIN AMERICA

- Social Workers should begin from popular culture and rediscover the needs and problematic conditions generated by economic oppression
- The object of knowledge and innervation in social work should be focusing on unfair structures
- People should be considered as historical and social beings with capacity to think and transform themselves as the main promoters of their welfare, well- being and history. (Gagnetten, 1986, cited in Ferguson, Ioakimides and Lavalette, 2018).

# THE NEW RADICALISM IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

- 2008: the return of capitalist crisis - who pays?  
Cuts, austerity, privatisation and demonisation
- The influence of social movements (Anti-capitalism, Occupy Wall Streets, anti-racist movements)
- Dissatisfaction with New Public Management, managerialism and neoliberal social work: 'I didn't come into social work for this'

# SOCIAL WORK AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC (POLICY PRESS, 2020)



# FEATURES OF NEOLIBERAL SOCIAL WORK

- Shaped by New Public Management/managerialism
- Domination of budgets
- The service user as customer/consumer
- Rooted in individualism and rejection of collective social work approaches
- Social work as a technical occupation, not ethical profession
- The de-politicization of social work
- Increased bureaucracy and domination of technology

## 2014: THE ORANGE TIDE, SPAIN



# OCCUPY CENTRAL, HONG KONG, 2011



# HONG KONG SOCIAL WORKERS STRIKE FOR DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS, 2019



# 3<sup>RD</sup> ANNUAL PROGRESSIVE SOCIAL WORK CONFERENCE, KYOTO, JAPAN, JUNE 2019



PROGRESSIVE SOCIAL WORK  
CONFERENCE, KYOTO, 2019  
(CONTINUED)



# BOSTON HEALTH LIBERATION GROUP, USA

- 
- Holistic: situating individuals in their full matrix of personal structural, ideological and institutional determinants;
- Critical: refusing to accept neo-liberalism and refusing to accept the notion that social work ought to subordinate itself to its social agenda;
- Empowering: seeking to liberate clients and social workers from the confusing belief that current conditions are inevitable and beyond our power to change; seeking to support their becoming active allies of individuals and movements working for social change;
- Hopeful: rescuing memory of and valuing “the collective human capacity to create change” (Reisch, 2013: 68) (Martinez, 2014)
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THE SOCIAL WORK ACTION NETWORK  
(UK):  
'I DIDN'T COME INTO SOCIAL WORK  
FOR THIS!'

- ◆ 'SWAN is a network of social work practitioners, academics, students and social welfare service users united in their concern that social work activity is being undermined by managerialism and marketisation, by the stigmatisation of service users and by welfare cuts and restrictions' ([www.socialworkfuture.org](http://www.socialworkfuture.org))
- ◆ Annual conferences
- ◆ Campaigning
- ◆ *Critical and Radical Social Work: an International Journal*
- ◆ *SWAN - International*

## ON THE IMPORTANCE OF SOLIDARITY

I don't believe in charity.

I believe in solidarity.

Charity is so vertical. It goes from the top to the bottom.

Solidarity is horizontal. It respects the other person.

I have a lot to learn from other  
people.