

Address by R.J. Hawke, President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions to the New Zealand Association of Social Workers (Inc.) Conference, Dunedin, 7th February, 1974.

Mr. Chairman, The Minister of Social Welfare, Mr. N.J. King, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am very pleased to be invited to follow the opening of this Conference by the Minister as he has now had more than a year to become acclimatised to the rapid development of Social Welfare in New Zealand while I will be relying heavily on your participation at this Conference to give me some guidelines before Saturday when I will attempt to comment on the main themes presented this week in the summing up session, "What This Conference has been saying".

As a Unionist and a non social worker, I come to this Conference feeling something of an outsider. Obviously I have been invited as such to give a few remarks on your system from outside of that system.

I can't help feeling that in this role I have much in common with those served by your system - those people who by their difference from the rest, become the outcasts in society. People who feel excessively estranged and alienated from the areas where decisions are made which have important bearings on their lives and who are increasingly more confused as to how these decisions have been made. This applies just as easily to the man who learns too late that bulldozers have ripped out an avenue of his favourite trees, to the man negotiating a vehicle insurance policy or the man who tries at 4.30 p.m. to obtain an answer from the main enquiry counter of a Social Security Department to why his cheque has not arrived at the usual time.

Your organizing committee has indicated that you are particularly interested in the background to social action and social welfare, the rights of the "little man" - his frustrations at being caught in a web of systems that affect him when he needs help or is in some form of trouble, and the place of social workers and their associations within the scheme of proposals for a society in which there is freedom for the individual.

Unfortunately, your committee neglected to provide me with your definitions of "the system" or of "freedom", although I noted the efforts in your April issue of the NEW ZEALAND SOCIAL WORKER by girls from a Social Welfare Department girl's home and feel that they provide some of the key issues better than any of us could put them. Let me just refresh your memories with a few of their definitions of "freedom" -

"Being free is being able to do what you want to do, being able to go out and not having to be punished. You can't always have your own way though. Freedom is not being forced to do things you don't want to, just doing what you think is right."

"Freedom is being allowed to enjoy things."

"Freedom is being allowed to help people."

"I like my freedom of the girls' home because you don't get into trouble here."

"Why doesn't some bastard help me to stop running away?" (1)

I also liked the poem on freedom in the same issue -

"Freedom is not running,
It's to stay and have no fear,
Freedom isn't cunning schemes,
It's open as the air,
Freedom is like the sun,
It's beams express no shadows of life,
To go wherever and leave again,
Freedom's not like glue to stick and stay at bay,
It's like the autumn leaves,
To fall and drift away."

If we must continue to make the artificial division between the helpers and the helped, between clients and workers,

these lines should remind us of the danger of academic discussions on freedom and the individual. They should remind us of the ever present danger of retreating to the safeness of our professional systems and away from the realities of our more private inner system. We all have our own private definitions of freedom, and many of us will feel our views are common to the views of the girls in one of our institutions - that is - we all feel the restrictions on our aspirations, the pleasure of institutions which protect us while holding us in, and the desire to see freedom as a positive as well as absence of a negative restraint.

Eric Fromm, an American Psychologist and Socialist, in The Fear of Freedom puts the same thoughts in a more complex way -

"What then is the meaning of freedom for the modern man? He has become free from the external bonds that would prevent him from doing and thinking as he sees fit. He would be free to act according to his own will, if he knew what he wanted, thought and felt. But he does not know. He conforms to anonymous authorities and adopts a self which is not his. The more he does this, the more powerless he feels, the more he is forced to conform...Both helplessness and doubt paralyse life, and in order to live, man tries to escape from freedom, negative freedom." (2)

At the same time he points out that "positive freedom consists in the spontaneous activity of the total, integrated personality". I will return to Fromm's view of a positive freedom later in this address.

Let me first turn to the concept of the "the system". What do we mean - the machine that provides for the welfare of the community, the bureaucrats who decide what is the welfare of the community, or again the way in which our society functions to provide roles for the individuals involved? Burns, in Uncommon Sense - comments -

"Millions of young Americans reject the system because they believe it is beyond salvation. Its arteries have hardened so that blood cannot flow through any more. They see the voting process as mere game-playing, freedom of the press as a charade, civil liberties as therapeutic devices that conceal from the people the sources of their real oppression. Work, in this system, is mere exploitation and the nine-to-five working day in vast bureaucracies a long indoctrination in conformity. Patriotism, asserting a superiority that the nation is unworthy to claim, is a farce. Racism is so embedded in the national consciousness that no gradual means can root it out. The nation is essentially evil and the evil can be exorcised only by turning the system upside down." (3)

In the Pelican "The Dialectics of Liberation" (4) Marcuse raises these issues -

"What is the dialectic of liberation with which we here are concerned? It is the construction of a free society, a construction which depends in the first place on the prevalence of the vital need for abolishing the established systems of servitude; and secondly, and this is decisive, it depends on the vital commitment, the striving, conscious as well as sub and un-conscious, for the qualitatively different values of a free human existence. Without the emergence of such new needs and satisfaction, the needs and satisfactions of free men, all change in the social institutions, no matter how great, would only replace one system of servitude by another system of servitude."

However, it is far too easy to 'escape from freedom' by scapegoating "the system" as if it were an ever present, unitary object which is capable of lifting the blame for any problem off our shoulders. In the same book (the Dialectics of Liberation) Psychiatrist R.D. Laing makes this point very strongly, drawing attention to the network of our acceptance of patterns of being obedient -

"The people who exercise power can do so only if people carry out their orders. We have the spectacle at this very moment in the earth's history of white troops in the middle of jungle darkness blazing away at the darkness, for reasons they do not know, except that if they were forced to, I would think they would probably come down to saying 'well, ours is not to reason why. We are carrying out our orders'".

Laing goes on to present a simple morality tale about the way we tend to blindly accept the orders of those in authority along with their values even if we feel a little uncomfortable about the rights of the individuals who become the victim.

To return to James Macgregor Burns for a moment. After explaining the means-ends dilemmas of modern revolutionaries, the theory of cumulative change, he also turns to the question of liberty :-

"During the past century men slowly came to see a crucial fact - that since they lived amid a web of restraints of all kinds, personal and private institutional and psychological, to abolish one type of restraint was to vest more control in other types; and that, specifically, the diminishment of Governmental power simply gave more scope to private economic and social power, such as that wielded by capitalists and industrialists. Compared to these forces government was not a tyrant; the question was whether government could liberate men from these forces.

Liberty, in short, was a matter of the reorganisation of restraints. A social or political force could be a restraint on liberty; it could also be a generator of liberty."

Our task is not to paste some ideas together and try to invent a credo, one that will excommunicate the unbelievers, but to locate, to discover, the ideas that are deep within us, to sort them out and clarify them, to analyse how they link with one another, and finally to see their relation to existing and changing institutions in society. Purposeful change requires hard thought. First, factors that block imperatively needed social change must be analysed and strategies must be explored to overcome the blockage. Second, the ends we wish to achieve must be defined and understood. Unless we can think through both these dimensions of un-common sense, the course of social change will have neither theoretical substance nor long-run practical effect. Change will be erratic in its direction and defiant of social control. We will continue to be the victim of events.

When we go into the courts for an increase in the minimum wage, the amount that our system determines as the 'survival level' which employers must pay, we do not find that the mere production of evidence that the system is inequitable leads the forces holding power and resources to concede the logic of our case. We do not find that those in authority

are prepared to give power to the workers to participate in the management of the systems in which they work. We don't find the rich are yet prepared to provide more than 'charity' to the poor.

Our experience has been that we must fight long, hard campaigns to improve the opportunities that are available for the 'little man' who feels frustrated at being just a cog in the industrial system; that those opportunities are only likely to emerge through organised action which brings together those who feel that our society is structured on behalf of the affluent at the expense of the worker and the poor. Within the trade union movement we are aware of the need to take up the fight on behalf of the ordinary worker if he is to have any voice against the system which employs him. We do not believe that it is sufficient to deal with the system in the work setting alone. Many of the economic decisions made by the business system can undo in minutes of a price cartel meeting, what has been won in the courts over months. For this reason, the A.C.T.U. has decided to take the fight back to the system, to challenge it on its own grounds. We have entered the retail trade through an enterprise called BOURKE'S in Melbourne which has allowed us to challenge effectively the practice of retail price maintenance which was robbing the community of their right to purchase items at their real value. We have entered the travel and holiday business, as we believe that the community has the right to a more adequate leisure time without the exploitation that the system would seek to reap from their wages. We are looking at the housing industry to see how it is possible to reduce the system's domination of the lives of those who would like to have a house of their own at a reasonable price.

Some have questioned the propriety of trade union entry into these fields but let me repeat the rationale of our decision. Since their inception unions have had a major influence on the amount of money a person earns, the hours he works, and the conditions under which he works and the amount of leisure he enjoys. By their achievements in these fields the unions have done much to improve the standard of living. But these gains have been offset to the extent that workers and their organizations have had little influence on the prices charged for the goods and services they produce, which is particularly significant in a period of rapid inflation. Bourke's-ACTU Store was the start of trade union initiatives to provide a restraining influence on the retail price of a wide range of goods. Before the ACTU took over Bourke's in 1971, the evil but not unlawful practice of resale price maintenance prevailed in Australia. It was not unlawful for manufacturers and retailers by collusive and anti-social private agreements to arrange a price structure which forced consumers to pay unnecessarily high prices for goods. This meant that the freedom of workers to utilise the gains made in other aspects of the system could be taken away in the market place with no chance for the individual to 'beat the system'. The joint action of the union movement through the A.C.T.U. led in the short space of three months to the emasculation of the practice of resale price maintenance which had plagued the country and victimised its people for decades. Belatedly the conservative Government of the day was forced to resile from its repeated assertions that legislation against this practice would constitute an intolerable interference with the sacred rights of private enterprise. The ACTU stands ready to extend these principles of "intrusion" against the system and we are encouraged in our

purpose by the fact that this has been done successfully by other movements in other countries. At the same time their experience contains the warning that the justification for intrusion diminishes or lapses if the enterprises relax their motivations and become indistinguishable from other operatives within the system.

My reference to experience in other countries serves usefully to remind ourselves in any talk about the "system" that no-one surely can any longer deny the reality of the concepts involved in the expressions "one world", "one planet", "spaceship earth" or their equivalents.

In recent months we have seen, as a result of decisions by the Arab nations about the supply and pricing of oil that man relies very heavily on the one system of supply for many of his most fundamental adaptations of the environment and that the supply is both limited and exhaustible. In many ways the oil embargo has become the symbol of the sort of world system that we must eventually come to accept as providing the relevant scale upon which we must project our plans. Unfortunately we come to heed environmental warnings about the need to recognize the interrelated nature of the eco-system only in such crisis situations. We were introduced to the magnitude of the problem by the 'Torrey Canyon' disaster, when the breakup of just one of the industrial giant oil tankers destroyed or polluted British beaches, costing millions to clean up and forcing the adoption of new legislation and international conventions to relate sensibly to the dimension of the issues involved.

Man has only a short time in which to learn the lesson that his freedom to survive depends on his establishing a sensible relationship with the environmental system in which he lives and to establish the means by which the exploiters who have no concern other than profit can be

brought under the control of the community. There are still many establishment figures who argue that concerns such as these are beyond the charter of the union movement - that gaining salary awards and improving job conditions is one thing, but doing something about the social situation is quite another. The trade union movement believes that "the system" cannot be allowed to pass on the social and economic costs from the work place into the community at large, recognising that the worker and his family are not separate entities but integral parts of our society.

It may well be that things are different in New Zealand. It may well be that in this country you would refuse to accept orders that lead to a poor service for clients. Those of you who work in the psychiatric field in this country may well ensure that the institutions are run for and by the patients and not for and by the system. Those of you who are probation officers may not act on behalf of the courts and our system of law and order. Those of you in the Childrens Court area may not be instilling in the children you work with an understanding of the obvious fact that they must accept the system's values. If so, then this country is extremely fortunate but the very fact that you have invited me to address this Conference on the topic FREEDOM - THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE SYSTEM makes me suspect that you, too, experience the difficulties involved in acting on behalf of what you see as right instead of merely on behalf of the authorities who employ you.

Daniel Thursz, Chairman of the Social Action Commission, Division of Social Policy and Action of the American National Association of Social Workers presented an excellent paper on 'SOCIAL ACTION AS A PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY' (5) IN 1966 in the middle of the war on

poverty and the war on the people of Vietnam -

"It is not surprising" he states "that the social work profession was not left unscathed by the revolution that has dominated the American scene for the past six years. The effect on the profession is not easy to assess at this stage, since the process is still very much at work and since every aspect of the profession - mission, deployment of manpower, training, sanctions, philosophy and knowledge base - is affected."

"There are three underlying views of biases that ought to be identified at the outset. FIRST OF ALL, the social work profession cannot allow its preoccupation with status and with the acquisition of various professional attributes or artifacts to hinder its full commitment to social action and social reform. Some of its well intentioned pious declarations need to become operational...Social action requires far more than a philosophical stance. It requires an understanding of the methods by which change occurs and an awareness of the political process in which it unfolds...Therefore, the first proposition is that SOCIAL ACTION IS THE BUSINESS OF SOCIAL WORK."

"The second view deals with the concept of conflict. Much of the education for professional practice is designed to provide the skills to understand others, to listen attentively, to analyse motivation, and to recognize the powerful influences of environment and other forces on individual and group behaviour...He is asked to value consensus, good will and tolerance and perhaps to fear confrontation, struggles and conflict. These may be appropriate concepts to the training of a psychiatric caseworker but they can be paralyzing if used undifferentially in all professional and nonprofessional activities...Some of the skills taught are inappropriate to community organization and to social action."

"We have not given up the notion that social planning and enlightened administration are crucial elements in dealing with the complex problems of our society, but we must now recognize the lesson that the Negro Revolution - among other influences - has taught us. That is, people do not change willingly. Those with power, money, prestige or other things that you want them to give up, change even less willingly. CONFLICT, THEN, IS NECESSARY AND CAN BE CONSTRUCTIVE..."

"The third underlying proposition is crucial and inseparable from the two previous assertions, namely that SOCIAL WORK CANNOT BE WHOLLY SCIENTIFIC. Despite cherished images of what professional conduct should be like, social workers must realise that in the long run, the significance of the profession will not be judged by the degree to which it has developed proper procedures for multi-disciplinary approaches or maintaining adequate case records, but rather by its ability to express value judgements that will help to modify the course of human civilisation. Social workers must do more than provide information to the policy makers."

"One of their professional functions must be to influence policies based on the best judgements as to the needs of society. Social workers have a point of view - they do not approach clients, groups or communities from a detached, impersonal, "scientific point of view."

I began by stating my feeling as an outsider to your system. That was, of course, too simplistic a stance. One of the constant dilemmas of human existence involves negotiating the balance of being both outsider and insider within one system and through a network of systems. Whether it be in social work, or the trade union movement, the issue of choosing whether to become even more professional or more industrial are one and the same. We exist in a common environment of industrial society, and are faced with the common problems of moving into what in some senses may be properly called a post-industrial society in which leisure and social problems will be very significant issues of joint concern. In this regard Wilensky and Lebeaux (6) argue persuasively that there are six main links between the effects of industrialization on the structure of society on the one hand and the nature of welfare services on the other -

"1. The problems the social worker deals with would not be matters for organized public attention if it were not for industrialization. Some of them - old age, unemployment, leisure time - have increased in importance with economic growth. Others, whether they have increased or decreased in frequency are now visible, urgent subjects for public action - family breakup, delinquency, mental and physical illness, poverty and so on. No social problems - no welfare services, no profession of social work.

2. Welfare expenditures on a scale which evokes the name of "welfare state" could not be made if the resources were lacking. Industrialization so vastly increases the income of a society that it makes such expenditures possible. No industrialization - few welfare services and few specialists to dispense them.

3. A major function of social work, its liaison function, derives from a major effect of industrialization; the specialization of modern life. The social worker is, among other things, a guide through a kind of civilised jungle, made up of specialised agencies and service functionaries the citizen can hardly name, let alone locate. From this fact stems another function many social workers and agency administrators perform - the planning and co-ordination of specialised services.

4. Changes in the clientele of social agencies derive from another major effect of industrialization: shifts in stratification. On the casework rolls the people of poverty and low status are dwindling and those from the middle class growing - with lasting effects on the services demanded, relations with clients, and the status of social work.

5. All industrial societies develop large numbers of "bureaucracies" - large scale formal organizations; all move toward central controls over many spheres of community life, including the welfare services... Working out a satisfactory relationship with these men in the formulation of welfare policy is a major problem for welfare professionals. Another major problem is that of resolving the conflict between professionalism and technique, on the one hand, and social reform, on the other.

6. American culture (especially those values shaping economic action - our individualism, our ideas about private property, the free market, and the role of government) affects not only the amount of cash we spend for welfare services but also the kinds of services we assign to private versus public agencies, local and state versus federal agencies."

All of these arguments about the relation of the industrial system to welfare apply very much to Australia as to the U.S. and increasingly to all western nations. In striking a blow for the individual against the system or rather helping the individual to regain control over the system, where the system is seen as the total environment of man, we are fighting for positive freedom rather than merely breaking the chains.

Harry Specht, Associate Professor of the University of California School of Social Welfare (7) argues that your profession is becoming "deprofessionalized" by the ideological currents of "activism, anti-individualism, communalism and environmentalism" which are increasingly demanded by the younger generation. He urges you to become more objective, more concerned with social work practice and less with social welfare advocacy. He feels that you should become experts at helping people with the methods and skills at the disposal of the professional social worker, rather than becoming experts in social welfare with knowledge and skill about the different kinds of organizational and institutional arrangements by which society deals with specific problems.

I would hope that you will adopt a view that sees Social Action as your professional responsibility, that sees a responsibility to promote the freedom of the individual to make use of the system rather than to be used by it, and to reject the view that professionalisation is an end in itself.

It is time that all professionals, social workers, lawyers, doctors, engineers, planners or whatever, come to accept that the problems we are TRYING to solve are common problems relating to the same system, and that there is not that much time left for us to reach a solution if man is to survive.

I have spoken earlier of "intrusion". Quite clearly I have personally intruded in these remarks into areas beyond my normal bailiwick. For this of course no apology is necessary. I merely express the hope that should I, in my innocence, have ventured in your opinion to a point anywhere between or including gullible nonsense and dangerous subversion then you will feel free to say so. That after all is what it's all about - freedom can only be nourished and protected if it is well and frequently exercised.

- (1) The New Zealand Social Worker Vol. 9 No.1., April 1973
p.p.23 - 25
- (2) Erich Fromm, The Fear of Freedom (Kegan Paul)
- (3) James McG. Burns, Uncommon Sense
- (4) The Dialectics of Liberation (Ed D. Cooper) Pelican Original, p.175 - Article by Herbert Marcuse
"Liberation from the Affluent Society"
- (5) Daniel Thursz - 'Social Action as a Professional Responsibility' in SOCIAL WORK, July 1966
- (6) H.L. Wilensky and C.N. Lebeaux, Industrial Society and Social Welfare, p.p.14 - 15
- (7) The Deprofessionalization of Social Work - H. Specht in SOCIAL WORK, March 1972, p.p. 3 - 15.