The Israeli Social Worker As A "Social Warner"*

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The function of the social warner is similar, but not identical, to the role of a military observer and/or the role of military radar . . . His physical proximity to social developments, his level of knowledge and his professional skills, give him the possibility and the responsibility to perform a warning function. This function constitutes the first step toward prevention.

Social work in Israel has in recent years arrived at a crucial crossroad. On the one hand, we are witnessing greater acceptance of the profession among the various health and welfare services throughout the country as a result of increasing social awareness of our tasks. Social workers are occupying a more central place in the formal education system, in the National Social Insurance Institute, in industry and in community centers, along with their expanding role in the welfare service structure. An important factor in this development is the role expansion due to the initiative of the Israel Association of Social Workers (I.A.S.W.), and the expansion of educational programs and training opportunities for social workers.

On the other hand, due to economic difficulties in Israel today, as in most countries, there are increasingly worrisome signs of trends that could hurt weaker population groups. We have recently seen drastic cutbacks in subsidies on basic commodities; child allowances might be reduced; there are intentions to eliminate the central progressive clause of the abortion law which was only recently adopted; and a complete freeze on new hiring in central and local government has been announced, including hiring of workers in social services.

These opposing trends obligate the social workers in Israel to re-evaluate their tasks. In this paper I would like to propose that we make greater use of a task which I shall call "social warning."

Before I go into a theoretical analysis of this concept, and illustrate it with the help of specific case studies, I would like to present a brief introduction to the factors which influenced the developmental patterns of Israel's social services.

The State of Israel was established to provide a national homeland for the Jewish people scattered throughout the world. The need to absorb people from so many countries and from different social environments—(about half of the State's citizens come from Islamic countries in Asia and North Africa and the other half from Europe and America)—led public social policy to focus to a large extent on questions of integration between the various ethnic groups. This emphasis on social integration remains strong to this day.

It is possible to distinguish three periods in the country's efforts to deal with problems of social integration and the narrowing of social gaps.

The initial period (i.e., the fifties), the decade following the establishment of the State, was characterized by the development of broad services in the fields of housing, employment, health and education. In other words, it was concerned with the development of services responsive to the basic needs of the general population.

The second period, the sixties, focused on the initial development of social services for specific population groups such as programs for the retarded, adult education, probation services and community work.

The third period, the first half of the seventies, was characterized by an energetic push for the consolidation of income maintenance services. Lately, we are witnessing a push in the development of day-care and community centers.

These three periods are all characterized by an emphasis on material needs, or in other words, on raising and insuring the basic standard of living. The ever increasing involvement of social workers in all these developments shows that Israeli society is not satisfied only with guaranteeing a standard of living, but is also interested in improving the quality of life. As one of the leading social workers in Israel has pointed out, ". . . the uniqueness of our profession lies in our responsibility to contribute to the humanisation of the society in which we live. This humanisation is expressed on two levels: the first, consists of the social services that we provide to people and the quality of their delivery. The second consists of the social reforms which we succeed in accomplishing for the promotion of the weaker groups according to professional goals which have to be formulated in advance."[1]

In order to emphasize the trends of humanisation, it is up to us to take upon ourselves the role which I have called "social warner." By the correct application of this role, we will be able to exercise a positive influence on the "Processes and Approaches of Social Policy Formulation and Planning," (the subject of the New Delhi seminar—ed.).

I have not found the term "social warner" among the role definitions of the social worker in the professional literature. The closest term I have found is that of the advocate in community organization. I see essential differences between these two role titles. In spite of these differences I would like to stress that in the following case studies it is difficult at times to put one's finger on the dividing line between the two concepts. I will begin by trying to make a theoretical distinction between the two.

The advocacy approach enables its followers (usually community workers) to aid disadvantaged groups in securing their legal or normative rights. The advocate, a legal term, intervenes with agencies on behalf of clients to secure rights which were obscured or denied.[2] He performs a vigorous mediating or ombudsman function on behalf of dispossessed groups in their relationships with public or voluntary bureaucracies as well as with political structures. He directly represents the interests of the less powerful, estranged or deviant, and usually less articulate, sectors of the population, and then persuades members of other professional groups and elite groups to represent these interests.[3]

Before beginning a detailed description of my understanding concerning "social warning," I feel compelled to note that, at present, there exists no definitive tool to direct us in identifying danger signs about which we should warn. However, despite this crucial lack, it is my opinion that we must already formulate a conceptual framework for the role of the "social warner."

The function of the "social warner" is similar, but not identical, to the role of a military observer and/or the role of military radar. It is up to the social worker to report and to warn of the development of, or the worsening of, social phenomena which he

[1] Jona Rosenfeld, "Social Work—The Profession at a Turning Point," *Saad,* March 1975 (in Hebrew).

[2] Cloward and Elman, "Advocacy in the Ghetto;" in Cox. Erlich Rothman and Tropman, eds., *Strategies of Community Organizing.* Itasca, Illinois: Peacock Publishing Co., 1970.

[3] Irving Spergel, "The Role of Community Worker," in Kramer and Specht, eds., *Community Organisation Practice.* Edgewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, New York, 1975.

witnesses. His physical proximity to social developments, his level of knowledge and his professional skills, give him the possibility and the responsibility to perform a warning function. This function constitutes the first step toward prevention.

The role of the "social warner" can be clarified by attempting to answer five basic questions:

1. *What are we warning about?*

Generally speaking we have to warn about those laws, programs, benefits and services which assure or strengthen provisions for meeting social needs recognized as basic to the well-being of the population and the better functioning of the social order.[4]

2. *Who should warn?*

Actually, every citizen in a democratic country should warn, but the social worker has a special role in this area. The majority of our profession's manpower maintains direct contact with different population groups. Daily, social workers see a variety of phenomena, and as they become more experienced, they can pick up early warning signals. Essentially, this is the element of feed-back to the employing organizations, an element which is central to the function of social control.[5] Based on their knowledge, they can even point out realistic directions for solutions. The greater the degree of trust in their professional skills and the more reliable their warnings are, the greater will be their effectiveness.

3. *When to warn?*

Warning signals are made the moment we discover social phenomena which may worsen the position of specific groups in the population. Such a decision is often value-charged. Therefore it is most important to formulate a series of claims which contain value judgments that are acceptable

to the profession's goals. Actually, these value-charged claims should direct the progress of society in which we live.[6] The formulation of such a code of ethics would further legitimize our intervention and would highlight the dimension which makes our profession unique.

4. *How to warn?*

The crucial tactical problem is how to make policy-makers aware of social problems? Letter-writing, the formulation of position-papers, research, persuasion, organizing study-days and protests are all considered legitimate methods of intervention, although they differ in their degree of consensus or conflict. What must be clear is that after firing a one-shot warning, we have not disposed of our obligations.

5. *Whom should we warn?*

Generally, we should warn that body which has the social mandate to take responsibility for the specific issue. It can be a local, district, or national agency, of legislative or executive status. What characterizes these bodies is that they concentrate authority and decision-making in their hands. It is desirable that advances to these bodies are accomplished with the cooperation of, or at least with the involvement of, the professional association.

"Social warning" often relies on political methods; however, it is not built on a basis of political organizing. Seen simplistically, social workers have the responsibility to relay information to political bodies. It is the responsibility of these bodies to make decisions based on the information they receive. It follows that, by adopting the method of "social warning," we take upon ourselves a central professional role: the need to influence social policy-makers. For this reason, it is most important that social workers as a group become acquainted with this system as an integral part of their repertoire of legitimate intervention methods.

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[4] Elisabeth Wickendan, *Social Welfare in a Changing World,* U.S. Dept. of H.E.W. 1965, page VII.

[5] Ch.D. Couger & Ch.R. Atherton, "Social Control, a Rationale for Social Welfare," *Social Work.* Vol. 19, No. 4 (July, 1974).

[6] Daniel Thursz, "Social Action as a Professional Responsibility," *Social Work,* Vol. 11. No. 3 (1966).

Beyond the answers to these questions, it is important to remember that the "social warner" does not always accept the central principle of classical community work which claims work *with* the population groups, and not *for* them. There are areas of unique expertise which social workers acquire in the course of years of study and first-hand experience which cannot be expressed and fully utilized in community group processes. Sometimes we do not even have the necessary time for their development. When we witness an event which in the future might harm a group, it is up to us to immediately send out a warning. Otherwise, it may be too late.

To illustrate the role of a "social warner," I have chosen to present three cases which recently occurred in Israel. The first case deals with an issue on the local government level. The second example involves a committee of professionals working on the national voluntary level. The third and final illustration presents perspectives on the regional voluntary level.

> The first case deals with a joint process of social warning and community action in a small local council near Jerusalem. This instance ended in the dispersal of the council by the Ministry of the Interior.

> The political stability of this council had been shaky ever since the previous elections because of difficulties in forming a local coalition. As a result, several development projects, especially in the fields of health and welfare, were not carried out. The workers of the local welfare bureau were especially bothered by the physical state of their offices, situated in a building which did not meet even minimal standards. They received clients in a rickety, leaky shack, lacking in office space and waiting rooms. It was therefore almost impossible to work on the desired professional level. This resulted in the impairment of the delivery services. The workers turned to the council, individually and as a group, regarding their working conditions. Seeing that these requests remained unanswered, they decided to invite a member of Parliament to the village. Although this member of Parliament did not represent

the population directly (because Israel does not have a regional electional system), he was of the same ethnic group as the residents. However, his visit did not help in improving matters. Intervention by the I.A.S.W. and the Ministry of Social Welfare also were fruitless.

During these first warnings, the workers of the welfare bureau realized that the health and education employees of the council (public health nurses, school psychologists, etc.) had similar problems. At the initiative of the I.A.S.W. it was decided to hold a joint meeting of all the social welfare personnel of the council. An interdisciplinary committee which was formed decided to distribute among the village residents a manifesto elaborating the procrastination in the development of various social services designed for the community. The manifesto requested the residents to join the health, education and welfare employees in a day of protest at the council.

On the set day, all of the above employees, their supervisors, and citizen representatives appeared, as well as representatives of the mass media who had been previously invited by the welfare bureau workers. The residents even prepared placards against the grim situation of their social welfare service. During the following discussion between the protestors and the local council, it was proven beyond doubt that the council was truly politically incompetent and that the focus of the warning should be actually directed to the Ministry of Interior, which is responsible for the proper functioning of local councils in Israel. On the spot, a bus was ordered by the welfare bureau to take the embittered residents and their workers to the Jerusalem office of the Ministry of Interior. There, a representative group was received by the Director General who announced that if the council would not succeed in renewing its activities within one week, it would be dispersed and replaced by an appointed council. Indeed, a week later the Minister of Interior dispersed the local council and announced an appointed council in its place.

This case began with a warning by the local social workers concerning the poor quality of services due to the physical state of their offices. They also warned that their professional fate as individuals and as a group was at

stake in these conditions. In the course of their action, they incorporated additional social welfare workers who were suffering similar distress. By involving them and the village residents, they turned this warning process into a professional community action. The process as a whole strengthened and united the workers, and gave them a sense of enhanced power and responsibility for their fate.

The second case which I would like to present in this illustration of the task of "social warner" concerns a group of social workers who organized under the name of "The Action Committee of Social Workers and Concerned Citizens in Jerusalem for the Improvement of Social Services in Israel." The Action Committee was formed in view of differences in opinion between the Jerusalem Social Welfare Department on the one hand and the Jerusalem City Council and the Ministry of Social Welfare on the other. These differences of opinion concern financial coverage of assistance in kind for citizens in distress. The first goal the Action Committee set for itself was to reveal the undeclared policy of the Ministry of Social Welfare to withhold services in kind from citizens in distress. This step, which proved to be successful in changing the restrictive policy, broke the ice for further actions of the group. The group decided to initiate and actively participate in the forming of a new social welfare system in Israel, a system in which social workers would not just be the "shock absorbers" of society.

The group based itself on three fundamentals of the social work profession:

1) Social workers bear a central social responsibility in matters of social betterment of the individual and of the society.

2) Social work organization affects the progress and development of its professional identity.

3) Following the first two assumptions, social work improves the level of delivery of services to the citizens.

It was decided from the start that the Action Committee would not function as a protest group but rather as a professional one, interested in acting and activating, and in thinking and bringing about fruitful thought. It aimed at resetting social work's professional designation to the disposal of problems of distress in Israel, using its value, knowledge and skills. This was to be attained by:

1) Studying the main social problems in Israel

2) Determining priorities for intervention

3) Determining strategies and tactics to influence social policies in preferential areas.

The Action Committee also wished to warn against attempts to turn social workers into bureaucrats, servants of the existing structure or workers who identify with the weakness of their clientele to the point of apathy and a sense of powerlessness. This was to be done by adopting methods of social reform in the following ways:

1) Encouraging changes in the structure of social welfare services by closing down welfare bureaus in their existing framework.

2) Encouraging workers to change their organizational structures in which they work by strengthening their loyalty to the values of the profession rather than their loyalty to their employing agency.

3) Encouraging workers towards professional intervention through political means.

4) Encouraging client autonomy in order to lessen dependency and, thus, indirectly to weaken the worker's image as a representative of the establishment.

Throughout its three-year existence, the Action Committee occupied itself mostly in the circulation of position-papers, and in warning political and administrative officials of faults and deficiencies in services and the lack of coherent social policy. It also organized protest meetings of social workers and succeeded in raising central issues for public discussion in the mass-media. The central issues raised included the need to guarantee:

1) Appropriate compensation for price increases in basic commodities.

2) Minimal living conditions.

3) A realistic minimum wage.

4) The development of family treatment services.

Above and beyond this, the Action Committee succeeded in initiating an innovative style of intervention by professional workers which led to a radical change in the I.A.S.W. One of the young, dynamic members of the Action Committee announced his candidacy for the post of National Secretary, and was democratically elected by an overwhelming majority. The new administration of the Association inherited in great part the working style of the Action Committee, which eventually decided to disband. In addition, a high percentage of its members were chosen as representatives in the Association or worked as volunteers within its framework.

One of the committees operating in the present administration is the Social Policy Committee. At its inception this committee took upon itself to explore three issues which were divided among regional committees:

1) The organizational affiliation of welfare services in Israel to the local or state authorities.

2) The duplication of social welfare services in Israel.

3) The structure of social welfare services on the local level.

As the third and final illustration to the function of "social warner" is this last subject that was dealt with in the Jerusalem subcommittee, which I headed.

Our Committee consists of nine members. From the beginning we insisted on inviting workers with varied interests in social work. Workers from a welfare bureau, a community work unit, a national sick fund, a mental health agency, the Ministry of Social Welfare and workers from the Hebrew University School of Social Work participated. The group functioned independently, free of ties to any existing organizational structure, and benefited from freedom of thought. The formative stage of the group stretched over several sessions. Eventually it was agreed to meet monthly in the evenings, in a member's home. I have purposely gone into detail at this stage because the atmosphere in which the group worked is of central importance to voluntary groups such as these.

The paper we proposed (under the heading: "A Proposal for the General Organization of Local and Neighbourhood Social Welfare Services," describes briefly the limitations and defects of the present local social welfare system, and proposes a new organizational structure to be based on a model which we call "An Overall Directory for Local Social Services." The report details the Directory's targets, its goals and functions, and its structural aspects. We concluded the paper with recommendations for its implementation and evaluated its implications for the wider system of social welfare.

We believe our paper is important and innovative, mainly for the following reasons:

1) The welfare bureaus in their present form should be abolished, since they offer services only to very limited population groups and stigmatize their clients.

2) Services should be based on a greater autonomy and decentralization, based on neighborhood differences, in contrast to the existing standard delivery system.

3) A differential use of existing budgets and manpower is called for. This change demands no new resources. The guiding principle is to try to integrate the activities of the existing services into an autonomous Local Overall Directory, with greater emphasis on local responsibility.

4) Change should start from the bottom; reorganization must begin within the delivery system of welfare services themselves, in limited geographical areas, and not necessarily on the national governmental level. We believe that by means of meaningful local change we will also be better able to pinpoint more concretely the desired directions of governmental restructuring.

Our paper was distributed with request for comments, to veteran social workers in the academic field, in public administration, to ministers and their director generals, and to parliamentary committees dealing with social welfare. We were amazed at the unusually large response to proposals such as these, and the interest and support exhibited for our ideas. There were also constructive comments which we incorporated in a revised edition which we recently completed.

We hope to examine the possibilities of implementing the model in Jerusalem. We shall try to gather support and backing of the directors of the social welfare services to launch the model on an experimental basis in several neighborhoods.

We still have a long and strenuous way before us. Of the three stages of innovation in organization theories which call for planned change-initiation, adoption, and implementation, we have completed the first, have gained only basic acceptance for the second, and all

the work on the third is still before us.

Luckily, our work has received the full support and encouragement of the Central Committees of the I.A.S.W. This has greatly strengthened the essential legitimization of our efforts.

In the three examples presented, I have tried to point out the variety of activities which I call "social warning." I described the social policy committees of our Association which warns by gathering support and by lobbying; in the Action Committee case the situations of conflict were more serious, although the methods of warning were still normative; by contrast, in the case of the local council, "social warning" went through a process of escalation to the point of community action.

I would like to point out that the methods described are basically applicable to a democratic society which values processes of participation and feedback. I find that the task of "social warning" has a potential which could urge social workers as individuals and in groups to organize. Unfortunately, such organizing processes appear too infrequently, in spite of the great satisfaction they convey to the participants. This may be due to the following reasons:

1) In general we are immersed in our daily work and limit the boundaries of our responsibilities from the start, in order to prevent frustration.

2) Some of us are skeptical and lack confidence in our ability to influence the foci of decision-making outside the defined limits of our responsibilities. Such a frame of mind makes it easy to blame "outside forces," and causes us to ignore the essential need to seek reform and change.

3) Beyond these behavioristic reasons, we often do not warn because we do not know *what to warn against.* In many social areas we have not crystallized our view from the moral, professional and social vantage points. Therefore we are unable to take a stand.

The satisfaction of warning lies mainly in its potential to refresh our mundane routine of work. It allows us freer imagination and vision. The choice of the subjects for warning also enhances the development of informal social contacts, which can serve as a positive stimulus for continuity and creativity.

I do not wish to ignore possible criticism. Goals of social reform lean heavily on ideology and on values, with systematic and scientific knowledge playing only a helping role. "Social warners" take tasks upon themselves for which they did not necessarily receive prior authorization from their clients, nor from their employers. Therefore, I place great importance on the search for support from the professional association as well as from the worker's group. Such support gives "social warners" the status of professional leaders.

A Bi-Lingual Monthly Newspaper as an Acculturation Aid for Soviet Jewish Resettlement

Marcia Greenberg Hoffman

Editor, The News Exchange and Officer of HIAS of Baltimore, Inc.

Not only does (a bi-lingual newspaper) help the emigre to understand the American Jewish culture. Perhaps just as important . . . the host community learns through this medium just how different the emigre's native culture was from that of the Russian of the early 1900's which many Americans knew . . .

An increasing concern of communities involved in the resettlement of Jewish emigres from the Soviet Union is their integration and acculturation into the American Jewish community. Particularly after the initial resettlement has been accomplished, the emigre is little involved in Jewish religious and communal life. This is a complex, many faceted problem. One effective instrument in the effort to meet the problem is a bi-lingual newspaper that fosters open communication and encourages involvement on the parts of both "Old" and "New Americans." The purpose of this article is to describe the development and growth in one community of such a publication, *The News Exchange,* a monthly bi-lingual newspaper, which could easily be duplicated by other communities and requires minimal funds and staff time.

In May, 1978, the first issue of *The News Exchange,* a Russian-English monthly newspaper, was published by Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) of Baltimore, Incorporated, with the support of the Federation. It was conceived primarily as an expedient way for constituent agencies concerned with resettlement to communicate necessary policy and other factual information to those Soviet Jews settled in the greater metropolitan Baltimore area, with whom active contact had not been maintained. Additionally, if the publication was well received, the plan was to further develop *The News Exchange* to disseminate a variety of practical and philosophical material about life as an American Jew.

The name *The News Exchange* was specifically chosen by the editor as it was hoped that this publication would become a vehicle for both "Old" and "New Americans" to express their mutual concerns. It was fully realized that, initially, there might be few contributions from emigres from the Soviet Union since they had come from a society that viewed both self-expression and self-determination as deviant behavior. Many emigres still continue to fear that publicly expressing their views could bring dangerous repercussions to their families still remaining in the Soviet Union. However, this fear is slowly abating.

The News Exchange is essentially a volunteer effort. The editor, because of her involvement with the immigrant community on many levels, is seen as a neutral friendly person and not as part of "the bureaucracy," which many emigres initially distrust until they learn otherwise. Though *The News Exchange* is seen as the editor's project, it enjoys a quasi-official posture, since it is published by HIAS. The translation and Russian typing of *The News Exchange* are done by an American-born woman who lived most of her adult life in the Soviet Union and recently emigrated to the United States. Her salary is set at a nominal sum per issue. The style of translation is particularly crucial for this type of a publication since many ideas communicated are particularly foreign to the Soviet experience. Even though words may exist in their vocabulary for some of the terms (i.e., food