
The October 1968 edition of the journal, published in the International Year for Human Rights, contains a series of articles and comments around the human rights theme. The editorial by the then Ombudsman draws attention to economic, cultural and social rights while the summary of that year's IFSW conference refers, inter alia, to the rights of service users. A third article from Errol Braithwaite explores some of the individual human rights issues arising from the growing power of the state in relation to mental health legislation, suggesting, somewhat perversely, that the paternalism which he identifies 'results from the desire for equality'. The perverseness lies in the challenge to the push for greater equality, when extending equality to all citizens is a central human rights goal.

Where is social work and human rights four decades after the publication of this material? Let me take up this question with a series of questions for us to reflect on:

1. How familiar are we with the key human rights documents as they affect what we do – children; disabled people; indigenous people; women; refugees; ethnic minorities; economic, social and cultural rights; political rights?
2. Do we think of clients/users as humans with sets of rights, individually and collectively?
3. Do we limit our thinking about rights to the protection of individual rights or do rights also have a more general application?
4. How do we think about and operationalise the balance between rights and responsibilities? And do responsibilities sit with the powerful or just with the powerless?
5. How actively do we use the ideas and philosophy of human rights in our social work practice?

Guest editorial...

Human rights and the social worker

Sir Guy Powles, Ombudsman

The Charter of the United Nations, the constitutional document of the world community, creates binding obligations for Members of the United Nations with reference to Human Rights.

The human rights provisions of the Charter, although general in character, have the force of positive international law. As such they establish basic duties which all Members must fulfil in good faith. They obligate Member States to co-operate with the United Nations in promoting universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion.

The inclusion of human rights provisions in the Charter was a revolutionary break with the past; it established unequivocally that human rights are matters of international concern, and that the individual is a subject of international law.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, was drawn up by the United Nations Com-

mission on Human Rights under the chairmanship of Mrs Eleanor Roosevelt, and adopted by the General Assembly in December, 1948, is an authoritative interpretation of the Charter of the highest order, and has over the years become a part of customary international law. In 1948 the Soviet bloc abstained from voting for it, but since then all communist Member States of the United Nations, and all States which later became members, have on many occasions affirmed that the Declaration must be faithfully observed.

It is a great document in human history, perhaps all the greater because national and international performance falls so sadly short of this 'common standard of achievement' as it declares itself to be, and yet the nations of the world were prepared publicly to affirm what they ought to do. The validity and force of the Ten Commandments is not vitiated by the continuing prevalence of theft and murder.

But, like all great historical documents, it must be understood in its context. It is clearly the product of that great stream of American liberalism, of the 'give me liberty or give me death' concept, and had just been preceded by the Atlantic Charter, with its Four Freedoms. The Declaration strongly emphasises and particularises the political and civil rights, and is less emphatic and articulate about the economic, social, and cultural rights. This symptomises the cleavage between East and West, the former valuing economic and social security more highly than political freedom while the latter places political freedom first – or at least says it does. Some countries, like our own, attempt to find a way to have both sets of rights.

It seems to me that social workers, even in, or perhaps particularly in, the individualistic societies of the Western World, are more concerned with the economic, social and cultural group of rights. Some of the rights in the Declaration in which they are specially interested are such as the right to work, the right of free choice of employment, the rights to just and favourable conditions of work, and equal pay for equal work, the right to adequate standards of living, the right to education, and particularly the right to special assistance for motherhood and childhood.

The group of rights covering childhood has been elaborated in another great declaration of the United Nations, the Declaration of the Rights of the Child – a document not so well known as its famous parent. Under this Declaration the human child, wherever he is, and without distinction on account of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or other status, whether of himself or his family, is entitled to special protection, opportunities, and facilities to enable him to develop physically, mentally, morally, spiritually, and socially in a healthy and Norman manner in conditions of freedom and dignity. He is entitled to a name and a nationality, to adequate nutrition, housing, recreation and medical care and to protection from neglect, cruelty, and exploitation. Handicapped children are entitled to special treatment. But above all, the Declaration says, the child needs love and understanding – he is therefore wherever possible to grow up in the care of his parents in an atmosphere of affection and security, and a young child is not, save in exceptional circumstances, to be separated from his mother. Children without a family are to receive particular care from the public authorities, and state assistance to large families is desirable.

These principles are well known to the social worker in New Zealand, and it is encouraging to recall their universality and the essential identity of human emotions throughout

the world. But yet, there is something else. The social worker is concerned more with duties and responsibilities than with rights, and with tolerance, forbearance, understanding, and love, in all aspects of the human relationship. Thus the social worker should study the mirror image of these great Declarations – for every right there is a duty. The development and maintenance of human rights is only a means to the harmonious existence of mankind – ‘all human beings’, says the Universal Declaration, ‘should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.’ From the Children’s Declaration, however, one can gather what the nations of the world thought were the ideal characteristics of an adult human. The child, so it says, is to be given an education which will enable him to develop his abilities, his individual judgment, and his sense of moral and social responsibility, and to become a useful member of society. He is to be brought up in a spirit of understanding, tolerance, friendship among peoples, peace and universal brotherhood, and in full consciousness that his energy and talents should be devoted to the service of his fellow men.

Empty words? Not so – and no one knows this better than the social worker.

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Miss Avery Jack

Contributed by Miss Avery Jack, BA, DipSocSci, Senior Social Worker at the Child Health Clinic, Wellington, until April last when she went to England on a Churchill Fellowship. Miss Jack was one of the Association’s delegates to the Helsinki Conference; she also represented Father Leo Downey at the IFSW Executive Committee and Permanent Council meetings.

The 14th International Conference on Social Welfare was held in Otaniemi near Helsinki, Finland from August 18-24. It was arranged by the International Council on Social Welfare which is a permanent world organisation for individuals and agencies concerned with meeting the social welfare needs of people. The International Council is independent, non-governmental, non-political and non-sectarian. It has consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, UNESCO, WHO, UNICEF, ILO, the Council of Europe and the Organisation of American States (Pan-American Union).

The International Conferences, held biennially, form an integral part of the on-going programme of the I.C.S.W. They provide a world forum where all those involved in the work of agencies, and people interested in social welfare may meet to discuss the problems of social welfare. The basic working units of the I.C.S.W. are the National Committees and the international non-governmental member organisations. At the present time there are in membership 48 national committees throughout the world and 18 non-government organisations.

One member organisation is the International Association of Schools of Social Work which held a Congress and General Assembly from August 14-17 at Otaniemi. This Association is a world-wide organisation of individual Schools of Social Work and Association of Schools of Social Work. The present membership includes 16 Associations of Schools and 367 Schools in 47 countries. It holds non-governmental consultative status with the Eco-