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### The return of macro approaches in social work

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## 29 Iain Ferguson: The return of macro approaches in social work

### **Introduction: the client speaks**

I think that if you are going to have someone interview you and you need help like that, they should send someone who has a family and has gone through this and knows much more about it. Now this lady, I suppose, has been to college and had a good upbringing and was never short of money...but they don't know what it is to be short of money...I think they should go through a course of being in a family and see what happens. They just don't understand (Mrs Adam, social work client, cited in Mayer and Timms, 1970: 121).

Such pleas for understanding from social work clients in Mayer and Timms's classic 1970s text *The Client Speaks: Working-class impressions of casework* were one factor in highlighting the limitations of a then dominant psychosocial approach within professional social work which located clients' difficulties primarily in their early life experience and relationships (Mayer & Timms, 1970). Alongside factors such as the 'rediscovery of poverty', the impact of the social movements that emerged across the globe in the 1960s, and, in the UK, debates around the Kilbrandon Report in Scotland and the Seebohm Report in England, *The Client Speaks* contributed to the paradigm shift that took place in social work in that period in three main ways. Three issues were raised. Firstly, concern about the neglect of poverty highlighted the need for social workers in their assessments to address the material factors, such as lack of money, debt, and housing issues which often lay behind the difficulties which clients were experiencing. It also highlighted the need to be aware of the danger of seeing these difficulties solely as 'presenting problems' which masked the 'real', underlying, (and usually, psychosocial) problem. Secondly, the book pointed to the need for social workers to find new ways, including community work responses, of addressing the structural factors which were creating, or at least contributing to, the problems which their clients were experiencing. And thirdly, it provided early evidence of the importance of listening to service users and taking their views seriously.

In response to that critique of casework, practitioners and academics in the early 1970s began to develop new models of social work which sought to move beyond the level of the individual client, while still incorporating it to a greater or lesser degree, and to engage with the wider structural issues which Mayer and Timms and others had highlighted. One outcome was the radical social work movement which emerged at this time principally in Britain and other English-speaking countries, such as Australia, Canada, and the US. This movement which was influenced by Marxism and which located clients' problems in the operation of capitalism and encouraged more collective responses to these problems (Bailey & Brake, 1975). Another was the systems or ecological model developed in books such as Pincus and Minahan's *Social Work: Model and Method*, probably the most widely-used textbook on British social work courses in the 1970s (Pincus & Minahan, 1973). Systems approaches shared features with radical approaches, especially in directing practitioners away from an exclusive focus on the individual client towards wider systems such as the family, the school, or the housing agency, that might be contributing to his or her problems and

which would then be seen as the target for intervention. For that reason, they were seen by some on the social work Left as possessing a radical potential (Leonard, 1975; see also Chapter 16). Unlike radical social work, however, they offered no wider political or economic analysis of ‘the system’ as a whole. They were open to the critique of systems approaches more generally, that they relied on a consensus model of society in which the different sub-systems could, through a judicious intervention if necessary, harmoniously work together (Harris & White, 2013, pp. 448-9).

‘Macro’ approaches in social work, the main topic of this chapter, have features in common with both radical and systems approaches. Along with *micro* and *mezzo* approaches, they formed one element of a framework which also sought to steer social workers towards the most appropriate level of intervention (Lymbery & Butler, 2004). Like the former, they point to ways in which wider structural factors such as poverty, racism and sexism can shape the lives of social work service users and so encourage practitioners to address these factors in their assessments and consider how they can respond most effectively in terms of the methods they adopt. Like the latter, they explicitly acknowledge the need for social workers to intervene at different levels including the level of the individual client. They do not, however, carry the ideological baggage associated with systems theories.

Later in this chapter, I will explore the forms that macro approaches in social work take in different parts of the world today. The world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, however, is in important respects very different from that of the 1970s when these debates took place. Above all, the transition to a neoliberal model of capitalism in the 1970s and 1980s, consequent on the global economic crisis of 1973, has had profound implications for every aspect of life and society - political, economic, social and cultural - and not surprisingly, has also transformed social work (Harvey, 2005; Ferguson, 2008). That means the debates of today concerning the meaning and relevance of micro, mezzo and macro approaches cannot simply take up where the debates of the 1970s left off. The next part of this chapter therefore explores the ways in which that transition, as well as other major political, economic and cultural changes of the past few decades, have changed the terms of the debate and the usefulness or otherwise of micro/mezzo/macro framework as a way of addressing these changes. This will involve a discussion, firstly, of micro approaches followed by a necessarily brief discussion of mezzo approaches. The final part of the chapter will consider the forms that macro approaches are taking today, based on the experiences and activities of groups of social workers across the globe involved in challenging oppressive practices and policies.

### **The micro level**

In considering the three approaches discussed above (radical, ecological and micro/mezzo/macro) it is important to remember that all three were *models* or *approaches* to social work. That is, they did not prescribe a particular method, such as task-centred work or groupwork or community work. Bailey and Brake (1975, p. 9), for example, defined radical social work as ‘essentially understanding the position of the oppressed in the context of the social and economic structure they live in’. Nor did they or supporters of ecological approaches reject all individual or casework

approaches: 'Our aim is not...to eliminate casework but to eliminate casework that supports ruling-class hegemony'.

Rather, the critique of casework was based on three main arguments. Firstly, advocates of all three approaches criticized what they saw as an over-reliance on casework or individual approaches as the method of choice regardless of the problem which the client was experiencing. Pincus and Minahan, for example, quoted Kaplan's 'Law of the Hammer', namely that if you give a small boy a hammer, he will find that everything he encounters needs pounding! By contrast, the unitary approach which they advocated and illustrated in case studies such as 'The House on Sixth Street' allowed for a range of responses which included individual work but also community work, social networking and political advocacy (Pincus & Minahan, 1973, pp. 289-99). Their position was the reasonable one that good social work practice should start from the problem, not from the method.

The second element of the critique was more specific in targeting the dominant casework approach of the time, the psychosocial model. Whatever the potential merits of the psychoanalytic approach pioneered by Freud, there is little doubt that The particular version of psychoanalysis which prevailed in the West in the 1950s and 1960s, driven by US-based psychiatry and adopted in a diluted form into social work, was often politically conformist, highly individualistic and, at least as far as women and gays were concerned, frequently oppressive and pathologizing. In respect of gay men and lesbians, for example, as Herzog notes, in *Cold War Freud*, before the early 1980s some 500 psychoanalytic essays and books had been written on the topic of homosexuality. Of these, 'less than half a dozen claimed homosexuality might be part of a satisfactory psychic organization' (Herzog, 2017, p. 84). It took a concerted and militant campaign by US-based gay and lesbian organisations to convince the American Psychiatric Association in 1973 that homosexuality was not a mental illness.

The third strand of the critique of casework came above all from the emerging radical social work movement. For radical social workers, a central issue was the *ideological* role of casework in a society divided by class. Reflecting, four decades later, on the edited collection *Radical Social Work* which appeared in 1975, Bailey, with Mike Brake one of the two editors, argued:

What we did was to legitimize the notion that we could criticise the psychodynamic model or framework that dominated social work theory and practice. Mike and I were concerned to locate that theory and practice within the wider context of a political economy. We raised the idea that it was possible to resist being stigmatised, and to resist poverty being blamed on poor people. We hoped that social work in its understanding and practice might provide assistance to the victims of the worst excesses of a capitalist economy (Bailey, 2011: x).

## Revisiting the debates of the 1970s

How relevant, then, is that 1970s critique to our current situation? What elements still apply, what elements can be discarded, what new dimensions are necessary? The starting-point for any discussion of contemporary social work, especially in the UK but also in the many other countries where practice has been transformed by neoliberal ideology and policies, must be the widespread dissatisfaction felt by practitioners about the limited opportunities for what they often describe as ‘real’ social work. Early evidence of that dissatisfaction came from Jones’s (2000) influential study of the views of experienced workers in the UK and later evidence came from more official sources (for example, Scottish Executive, 2006; Department of Education, 2011). Lymbery and Butler summed up the prevailing mood:

[M]any social workers practitioners and students in the United Kingdom experience a gap between the ideals that informed their entry into the profession – for example, a commitment to social justice and to making a difference in people’s lives – and the realities of practice with which they are confronted. Practitioners are struggling to survive (let alone thrive) as they experience externally imposed changes to their work that move them away from their professional values (Lymbery & Butler, 2004, p. 1).

In the same year that their book was published, a well-attended meeting of social workers, students and academics in Glasgow that was the launchpad of the Social Work Action Network ([www.socialworkfuture.org](http://www.socialworkfuture.org)) took place under the title ‘I didn’t come into social work for this!’

While different factors contributed to that dissatisfaction, by far the most important were the ‘externally imposed changes’ referred to by Lymbery and Butler. In particular the implementation by a Conservative government in the early 1990s of a care management model in the context of a market in social care transformed the social work role and vastly reduced the opportunities for social workers to engage in direct work with clients (or service users, as they were now more often described) (Harris, 2002).

Relationship-based individual work (see Chapter 13) was undoubtedly one major casualty of the dominance of care management approaches. So too were collective approaches in any form, including groupwork and community development. Hence the insistence by the authors of the 2004 *Social Work and Social Justice: A Manifesto for a New Engaged Practice* on the need to defend a range of social work methods, and more importantly, the values which underpinned them:

So in opposition to those who would be happy to see a defeated and silenced social work occupation, we are seeking a social work that has prevention at its heart and recognises the value of collective approaches. At the same time we also recognise that good casework has also suffered as a result of the trends referred to above. We are looking to a social work that can contribute to shaping a different kind of social policy agenda, based on our understanding of the struggles experienced by clients in addressing a range of emotional,

social and material problems and the strengths they bring to these struggles (Jones, Ferguson, Lavalette & Penketh, 2004).

Relationship-based, one-to-one work, then, and more generally, the importance of relationship was recognized in the Manifesto as one component of good social work practice. And while the potential contribution of psychoanalytic theory to such practice remains a matter of debate (with some arguing that the radical critique threw out the baby with the bathwater: Pearson et al, 1988), few would dispute as a minimum the need for practitioners to have an awareness of the place of emotions in their work. In a paper directed primarily at probation officers but with obvious relevance to social workers, the criminologist David Smith suggests the following:

[R]emember that clients see you in your capacity as a member of an agency, and that this shapes the way they present their problems, as well as your response to them; attend closely to what clients say, how they say it, and what they do not say; be aware of the emotional as well as the rational, cognitive content of communication; be sensitive to the emotional effects clients have on you, the worker (because your relationship with the client may be shaped by feelings of which neither of you is fully aware); try to see clients in the context of their relationships, past as well as present; have respect for the complexity and ambiguity of clients' emotions, just as you have respect for the complexity and ambiguity of your own emotions, and the emotions of those who are close to you; and remain aware that emotions, which may be unconscious or unacknowledged, can be as important in shaping action as conscious, rational thinking (Smith, 2006, p. 369).

Such individual, relationship-based work can be viewed as one element of a radical approach, especially if it also addresses service users' material needs, challenges internalized stigma and stereotypes (what Bailey and Brake called 'ruling-class hegemony') and promotes their strengths and agency. There is now a very considerable body of literature from service users and their allies regarding what qualities and skills they find helpful in workers and which should underpin all such work (Beresford, Fleming, Glynn, Bewley et al., 2011).

However, such individual, or micro, work also needs to carry a health warning. Firstly, in a political context where Governments frequently deploy the rhetoric of individual responsibility and 'independence' as a cover for draconian cuts to the welfare state. In this political context, even progressive approaches which highlight personal agency such as strengths-based models or recovery approaches in mental health can easily be subverted by right-wing politicians to suggest that poor or disabled people should 'pull themselves up by their own bootstraps'. As an example, consider the following excerpt from a speech by the British Conservative politician Michael Gove in 2014 on the need for 'reform' in social work education:

In too many cases, social work training [sic] involves idealistic students being told that the individuals with whom they will work have been disempowered by society. They will be encouraged to see these individuals as victims of social injustice whose fate is overwhelmingly decreed by the economic forces and inherent inequalities which scar our society. This analysis is, sadly, as

widespread as it is pernicious. It robs individuals of the power of agency and breaks the link between an individual's actions and the consequences...Instead of working with individuals to get them to recognise harmful patterns of behaviour, and improve their own lives, some social workers acquiesce in or make excuses for these wrong choices (Gove, 2013).

In this context, A stress on 'the power of agency' means ignoring or even denying the role played by poverty, inequality and oppression in shaping people's lives and instead seeing their problems as the result of 'wrong choices'. It is not hard to see how politically convenient that view is for governments, including the one of which Gove was a member, committed to a politics of austerity and shrinking and privatizing the post-war welfare state.

Similarly, the disability activist and writer, Morris, has pointed to the ways some strategies of the disability movement have been exploited by both Conservative and New Labour governments in the UK as a means of undermining the universalist provisions of the welfare state (Morris, 2011). This includes, for example, the legitimate demand for individual payments to enable disabled people to gain increased independence and control over their lives,

Finally, while recognizing the radical potential within micro approaches, we still need to remind ourselves of their limitations, the most obvious one being that they are 'downstream' approaches which rarely tackle the *causes* of service users' problems, hence the need also to develop more for more preventative, 'upstream' approaches (Ferguson & Woodward, 2009). In the final section of this chapter, some of the ways in which social workers are currently challenging macro social problems such as the current refugee crisis will be considered. Here we will consider one contemporary example: loneliness and social isolation.

It is now clear that three decades of neoliberal policies based on Margaret Thatcher's dictum that 'there is no such thing as society, only individuals and families' has contributed to an epidemic of loneliness which is severely damaging the mental and physical health of millions of people, especially older people (Cox Commission, 2017). A social work response based on micro approaches would at best help a small number of individuals, even leaving aside the reality of rising eligibility criteria that mean that many people would not receive a service. By contrast, a social networking or community development approach of the type which might well have been employed in the 1970s or early 1980s could make connections between people. This includes bringing them together in a range of different forums from social clubs and activity groups, to discussion forums and campaigning groups (see Chapter 27). In themselves such responses may not sound very radical. However, they challenge the dominant individualism and reassert the importance of 'the social' (see Chapter 5). As Monbiot has argued, the current crisis of loneliness raises []questions about the impact of neoliberalism on our society and our social relationships and highlights the need for fundamental change:

This does not require a policy response. It requires something much bigger: the reappraisal of an entire worldview. Of all the fantasies human beings

entertain, the idea that we can go it alone is the most absurd and perhaps the most dangerous. We stand together or we fall apart. (Monbiot, 2016).

### **Mezzo approaches**

The mezzo level, Lymbery and Butler suggest, refers to

The organizational location of social work, and explores the way in which organisations have sought to manage their roles given the impact of social forces and government policies (Lymbery & Butler, 2004, p. 6).

Recognition of the ways agency structure and function shape, enable or, conversely, constrain social work practice is not a new development. It was a central concern of the functional approach to social work developed by two academics, Taft and Robinson, at the University of Pennsylvania in the 1930s. While not explicitly radical, the political significance of their findings was quickly grasped by US-based social work radicals of the period, organized in the Rank and File Movement. According to Reisch and Andrews, in contrast to traditional models of practice, their model

Provided radical social workers, especially those in the public services, with a practice paradigm that justified social action and the recognition of the mutuality of the worker-client relationship (Reisch & Andrews, 2002, p. 77).

The mezzo level is not the focus of this chapter, so its implications for practice can only be touched on. Despite that, an understanding of the organizational context of social work and the ways in which that context has been transformed by the managerialist policies of the past three decades is an essential starting-point for assessing the possibilities for progressive practice.

The implications of that transformation for practice have been the subject of debate in the literature in recent years, often framed around the issue of professional 'discretion', drawing on Lipsky's classic text, *Street Level Bureaucracy* (Lipsky, 1980). Without re-entering that debate, few would dispute that the combination of the organisational changes to which social work has been subjected since the early 1990s have significantly constrained the practice of even the most creative and committed workers. Examples include the relocation of social workers in many areas into call centres far removed from the communities they serve and ever-higher eligibility criteria which reinforce the prioritisation of risk over need. Also, the overall impact since 2010 of austerity policies have increased demand on services while hugely reducing the resources of both local authorities and voluntary organisations. In her preface to the 2014/2015 *Survey of Social Work in the UK*, for example, conducted by the recruitment consultancy Liquid Personnel and based on responses from around 1500 social workers at all levels, Munro writes:

There are a few positive findings: despite all the difficulties, a quarter of respondents rate their morale as high or very high and only a third rate it as low or very low; many newly qualified workers appear to be given the extra support they need as they start their career. However, there is plenty here to depress the reader. While direct cuts to front line social work have been

limited, there have been significant cuts that hamper social workers' ability to provide a good service. Cuts to managers reduce the capacity of the organisation to provide a good level of supervision. Cuts to administrative staff increase the bureaucratic demands on social workers. Despite the removal of many nationally prescribed timescales and targets allowing more local flexibility, time with families still seems a low priority in many offices.

Her conclusion is that:

Priorities need to shift away from processes and towards actively helping individuals and families who need a social worker. One major under-used resource at present is the expertise in the workforce that cannot be fully utilised because of the dysfunctional conditions in which practitioners are working. Rectifying this will be the most productive line of action (Liquid Personnel, 2015, p. 2)

While the survey usefully highlights the pressures on practitioners, noticeably absent from the discussion section is any consideration of the possibility of *collective* responses to these pressures, above all in the form of trade union responses but also through coalitions of workers and service users or through professional organisations. While few would dispute that the record of public sector unions in defending either services or their members' conditions in recent years has often been uninspiring and ineffective, there have nevertheless been examples of successful campaigns and industrial action. Also significant is the change that has taken place in the political climate in recent years. We will now turn to a consideration of that change, and to the possibility of social workers being able to influence the macro level.

## **Macro approaches today**

Writing in 2005, the President of the American Psychiatric Association expressed his concern about the domination of biomedical psychiatry by the major drug companies (see also chapters 6 and 28), arguing that:

If we are seen as mere pill-pushers and employees of the pharmaceutical industry, our credibility as a profession is destroyed. As we address these Big Pharma issues, we must examine the fact that as a profession, we have allowed the bio-psychosocial model to become the bio-bio-bio model (Scharfstein, cited in Mosher et al, 2013: 134/5).

In a similar fashion, if for different reasons, the micro/mezzo/macro model of social work has also in reality become the micro/micro/micro model. For example, it would be interesting to know just how little room is currently made available within social work education course curricula for the consideration of collective approaches such as community development, political action or even groupwork.

One of the reasons for that narrowing of the social work role, in the UK in particular, has already been discussed. A key feature of the neoliberal agenda as applied to social work and social policy in the early 1990s was the imposition of a care management model imported from the USA and aimed at promoting a value-light social work

capable of operating within the framework of a developing social care market. Unsurprisingly, advocates of that model had little tolerance for critical or structural social work arguments which suggested that the operation of these same market forces at a societal and global level was responsible for most of the poverty and inequality that led people to seek social work help in the first place.

In addition, radical social movements of the 1970s retreated into a narrow identity politics in the following decade. This led to the ascendancy of a neoliberal individualism which denigrated not only such collective struggles but even the very notion of 'the social' and any form of concern for the other. a retreat reinforced by the defeat of the great collective struggles of these years (particularly the air-traffic controllers' strike in 1981 in the USA and the British miners' strike of 1984/5 in Britain)

Since the late 1990s, however, continuing to the present day, there have been repeated challenges to the suffocating grip of neoliberal capitalism and to the economic and military competition which it fosters. The anti-capitalist or global justice movement which grew out of the protests against the World Trade Organisation in Seattle in 1999, for example, was followed soon after by a worldwide movement against the invasion and war in Iraq. While this failed to stop the invasion, it politicized millions and made such future invasions and wars more difficult (Callinicos, 2010). The emergence of Occupy Wall Street in 2012 as a protest initially against growing levels of inequality in the US quickly went global. The Indignados movement in Spain also emerged in 2012, with huge occupations of city squares by hundreds of thousands of mainly young people protesting a housing crisis and extremely high levels of youth unemployment. The austerity policies consequent on the global economic crash of 2008 have also given rise to resistance, most notably in Greece where their effects have been most brutally felt (Ioakimidis & Teloni, 2013; Ovenden, 2015).

These movements, coming on top of the dissatisfaction of many social workers about what their profession has become, have impacted on social work at a national and global level. They have contributed to a revival of interest in radical social work and to the search for macro responses to problems of poverty, inequality, racism and environmental destruction. 'Macro' responses in social work can, of course, take many different forms. These move from working to ensure the election of a candidate or political party sympathetic to social work goals and values to the involvement of national and international social work bodies with global campaigns and in developing policy responses.

All these approaches have their place. Here, however, the focus will be on macro approaches 'from below', on the activities and organization of practitioners seeking to change government or business policies or ideologies or at least to challenge their effects. The period since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has seen the emergence of groups of social workers, students and academics in several different countries committed to exploring and developing new forms of social work practice which challenge oppressive policies and the effects of these policies. To name just a few, they include the Boston Health Liberation Group in the US, the Orange Tide in Spain, the New Approach group in Hungary, the Progressive Social Work Network in Hong Kong, the Radical and Critical Social Work Groups in Germany, Rebel Social Work

in New Zealand, and the Social Work Action Network with groups or affiliates in the UK, Ireland, Greece, Japan and Denmark. Social workers are also involved with a range of radical social movements in much of the Global South, for example, in Brazil and South Africa (for more details, see Ferguson, Lavalette & Ioakimides, 2018, chapter 10). The activities of these groups differ from country to country depending on the local issues. Most are characterized by an overall orientation that is well summed-up on the website statement of the New Approach group in Hungary:

The New Approach to community work and radical social work is based on the idea of combining workshops and action groups, and also the renewal of social work codes of ethics. This dual function is located in a long-term goal:

Workshops: we want to provide space for discussing issues concerning the social sphere, development of action strategies.

As an action group we are committed to the profession and the public's attention is drawn to the situation of those excluded. We seek to be a professional community that is not afraid to stand up for those in need' (New Approach, 2011).

The first point requires creating safe spaces for critical and collective discussions, both theoretical and practical, on social work practice and strategy. Such forums are essential for four reasons.

1. The dominance of managerialism has not only shaped the way in which social workers respond to those who need help. It has also undermined collective forms of workplace organization and discussion, whether in the form of trade unions or team meetings and left many workers feeling atomized and isolated. Bringing practitioners together, then, is a way of breaking down that sense of isolation.
2. Across much of the public sector, in health services and higher education as well as in social work and social care, that dominance of managers whose values and priorities are often very different from those whom they manage has led to what workers often refer to as 'a climate of fear', an inability to speak out or criticize policy or management decisions for fear of being punished. Creating safe spaces, therefore, where workers can speak openly and critically about their practice experience without fear of victimization is a crucial part of developing a new engaged social work practice.
3. To a degree such collective gatherings can embody 'the change we wish to see' in pre-figuring new ways of working, both in the sense of modelling anti-oppressive practice and also in actively involving service users at every level.
4. By bringing together academics, practitioners and service users, they provide opportunities for developing social work theory in close connection with practice and not in ivory-tower isolation and abstraction.

The second function identified by Hungarian colleagues is no less important. In almost every case, the groups referred to are actively involved in one or more forms of social action. Most commonly, this has involved highlighting and challenging the effects of specific government policies, whether national or international. Perhaps not

surprisingly, work with asylum seekers and refugees has been a central activity for many of these groups, given the refugee crisis of recent years which has seen people forced to abandon their homes and countries and seek a new life elsewhere. Thus, social workers in Greece have been actively involved in supporting the tens of thousands of refugees arriving on the Greek islands (Teloni, 2011; Chatelet & Jones, 2015). In the UK, organisations such as Social Workers without Borders, the Social Work Action Network and the British Association of Social Workers have been involved in different ways in showing solidarity with asylum seekers and refugees, especially those languishing in makeshift camps in the north of France who are trying to reach Britain. In 2016, two social workers in Kent set up Social Work First[]. In an article in the *Guardian* newspaper describing their project, they discussed the challenges faced, and in the process, pointed to what macro approaches mean today:

The SWF project is in its early days, but so far we have faced numerous barriers. In working alongside migrants and asylum seekers we are up against a dominant political narrative that dehumanises and blames. It is not possible to talk about empowerment without addressing the socio-political onslaught that refugees are facing from the British and French states, which knowingly demonise and marginalise them.

To acknowledge this, we are trying to tackle the crisis on both the political and the social fronts by providing a social work presence in the camp to assess, support and safeguard vulnerable people, while campaigning for Britain and France to uphold the human rights of the camp's inhabitants....This is an opportunity to use the unique skills and wisdom of the social work profession to defend the rights of some of the most marginalised people in the world today, right here on our doorstep. This is our chance to reclaim the profession from state administration and practise international social work (Social Work First, 2016).

Social workers in Hungary have campaigned against the brutal homelessness policies of their government; social workers in the US have been actively involved in the Black Lives Matter campaign; and the Palestine -UK Social Work Network has continued to highlight the plight of Palestinian child prisoners in Israeli jails (Shennan, 2015).

### **Conclusions: whither macro approaches in social work?**

The above examples show that growing numbers of social workers are attempting to raise their eyes above the immediacy of their day-to-day practice and to challenge oppressive policies and ideologies that are causing so much misery and hardship to their fellow human beings both at home and abroad. Not surprisingly, given the hegemonic grip of neoliberal ideology and policies in recent decades, they are still far from being the norm. However, the spread of these groups to almost every part of the globe and the evident desire among much larger numbers for a social work rooted in social justice (see also Chapter 11), show the possibilities for the development of new macro approaches capable of addressing the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This is reflected, for example, in well-attended conferences on critical and radical social work from Britain to Hong Kong.

In conclusion, two questions face those who wish to develop such approaches. Firstly, how can they incorporate macro approaches into their day-to-day practice, as opposed to their being activities in which they are involved outside the working day, as is often the case at present? Secondly, how can such groups, whether they take the form of action groups or professional organisations engage in policy change and development without being incorporated and neutralized by much more powerful players? These are serious issues with no easy solutions. What is important and positive, however, is that, for the first time in many years, recognition of the need for macro approaches, often linked to a desire for a more radical social work, is back on the social work agenda. Given the global challenges that we face, that can only be a good thing.

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