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IntroductionRadical and critical social work is an approach that stems largely from Marxist perspectives, focusing on the structural causes and solutions to social problems. In this essay, I will be briefly outlining some of the historical developments that led to the beginning of modern state welfare and social work. Following this, I will discuss radical and critical social work from the perspective of Wacquant and other theories surrounding the link between social inequality and crime and punishment. Then I will draw some comparisons between the radical and critical approaches and the strengths-based approach to social work. I will then apply the radical and critical approach to human rights developments and the role and function of social work, assessing how social work has developed in response to previous human rights abuses, while also tackling human rights violations today.History of social workIndustrialisation saw a serious increase in social problems such as poor living and working conditions and diseases. Simultaneously, there was also a rise in social campaigns and charity organisations that tackled various matters. Some of these were: Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Prison Discipline Society, Anti-Slavery Society, and the Vice Society. The New Poor Law of 1834 was introduced by the government as a means of dealing with poverty, by both providing the poor with housing and work, while also functioning as a deterrent for people from seeking poverty aid. This was done by making the seeking of relief far less favourable than the lowest-earning work. A stigma was created surrounding 'pauperism', a new social class that was shamed for seeking aid. The type of financial aid available involved people entering workhouses which were communal living quarters that included manual labour by day.The Charity Organisation Society (COS), is often viewed as being developed from the work of Thomas Chalmers, an economist and charismatic speaker who was critical of the concept of pauperism and had ideas about a more harmonious working-class community. Chalmers helped the Glasgow town council to create a volunteer-based scheme that would oversee and advise families on their welfare in each district. They did regular home visits and upon finding a family in poverty, they would assist with employment seeking and personal finances. The aim of this was to create an altruistic community and reject the oppressive concept 'pauperism'. This family visiting scheme began to develop into social casework, consisting of organised home visits, interviews, investigations, and decisions by a case committee. The term 'social work' became prominent by the COS to describe this process. The COS was criticised by local newspapers as 'penny-pinching' and criticised by such as the Labour Party after it was founded in 1906, and the Fabian Society (1911) for being too intrusive in family life and too "inquisitorial and too slow and cumbersome in reaching decisions through its district committees" (Jones, 2011, p29). Post-1900, there was a progressive political climate where there was further state involvement in addressing social problems such as poverty, 'the new liberalism' stemming from the Liberal government at the time, introducing welfare systems such as old-age pensions, national insurance, and free school meals (Pierson, 2011). As well as the desire to fix the issues relating to poverty, the role of social work was also impacted by the late 1800s when the social construction of childhood began. Before this, children were considered economic assets and not considered any different from adults in the context of nurturing and protection. In 1878, The Factory Act prohibited children under the age of 10 from working in all trades and the 1880 Education Act introduced compulsory schooling for children up to the age of 10. This was the beginning of the government reforms put in place for the protection and development of children, and subsequently, the social worker's role of protecting and promoting the welfare of children (Hendrick, 1997). The 'Golden Age' of state welfare was during the post-war era. The end of the Second World War in 1945 saw a need for economic recovery and welfare reforms. The Beveridge Report by William Beveridge laid out the grounds for welfare reform, identifying the social problems of 'want', 'ignorance', 'squalor', 'idleness', and 'disease' and the way to solve this by creating a universal and comprehensive welfare system. This saw the introduction of the National Health Service, the government-funded comprehensive health service that treats everyone based on need and not the means to pay (Harris, 2004). Radical social work became prominent in the 1970s, due to an increase in poverty, and the realisation that individualistic theories such as psychosocial development were not able to be applied. It was not useful to blame individuals for their situation which was being caused by structural rifts (Jones, 2011).Radical and critical social work approachIn contrast with Durkheim — who expressed the view that crime and its punishment acts as a positive function to reinforce the collective morality in society — there are the views of Foucault, Garland, and Wacquant, which are more critical of the ways states implement punishment and deal with crime. According to Foucault (1979), prison is a point of analysis for the dynamics of power and bureaucracy in modern society. It is a method of power that is muchly hidden and creates "docile bodies" (Driver, 1984, pp427) by manipulating the time, space and bodies of criminals in prisons. Foucault emphasises the relationship created between power and bodies in the penal system (Driver, 1984). Garland (2001) argues that the labeling of criminals is a method of 'othering', as those convicted of a crime are often marginalised members of society such as the urban poor and ethnic minorities. Not only are offenders given an image of others, but their crime has sacrificed their liberty. Wacquant's (2009) view is similar and is that penal action towards dealing with crime has replaced welfare as a method of controlling and regulating the poor and therefore is not a reaction to crime rates but is instead a reaction to financial and racial inequality. The rise of neoliberalism sought to create "hyper-individualism" (Wilson, 2018, p7) in which community aid and obligation to others would end. Two models of neoliberalism were identified by Wacquant (2012): The economic model which applied the marketisation to all areas of public and private life. This materialised as state assets being privatised. During Thatcher's government, this model was applied to housing, public utilities such as education, welfare, and parts of the NHS, amongst other things. The other model was the decentralisation of power, the value placed on self-governing, and a drastic change in the relationship between individuals and the state. This also led to growth in the penal system, seen by Wacquant (2012) as a means of cutting welfare spending. This expansion of crime provisions continued into the Blair government in 1997. Stigmas became attached to marginalised areas such as 'ghettos', meaning communities within urban areas that are dominated by economically deprived ethnic minorities, which is seen as a form of racial segregation. The stigma that became attached to the 'underclass' also contributed to this othering and un-deservingness of deprived communities and corroding social ties. This has had an impact on social work as it is focused mostly on these areas. Wacquant (2012) emphasises that this shift is not only about cultural attitudes but serves to establish dominance of the principles and agents of neoliberalism. Jones (2010) argues that Wacquant relies too heavily on bureaucracy as an analytical device. Wacquant is commonly criticised for the application of the US system to other democratic states. However, it can be seen in both the US and UK that the increase of neoliberalism has seen an expansion of the penal system and equally, an increase in both poverty and crime. Wacquant's work can be criticised for ignoring the areas of resistance and gender — the principle of the argument being that gender politics is pushed aside in the analysis, focusing solely on the experience of men, which is vastly different from that of women in this context. This can be evidenced by looking at the statistics that prisons hold more men than women, however, women can be argued to suffer more under the lack of social welfare, due to factors such as being more likely to be responsible for childcare (Measor, 2013., Cummins, 2016). Linking these ideas to the role of social work, the impact that the penal system has is that it maintains poverty rates due to convicts finding it more difficult to find jobs when released from prison. There is also likely to be a role for social workers needed for the rehabilitation of convicts. An additional conclusion to this is that these coercive practices by the state need to be recognised by social workers and not taken at face value. Radical social work requires social workers to think critically about the way the state acts and recognise the background and struggles faced by marginalised groups of people (Cummins, 2016, 2020).To compare radical and critical social work with other approaches, I will be drawing in the strengths-based social work approach. The strengths-based approach aims at utilising people's strengths, such as their abilities, resources, social networks, knowledge, and skills, to improve their wellbeing and opportunities. The most obvious difference between this approach and radical social work is that the strengths-based approach has its focus on the individual, instead of the larger social structures. It is a more common and classical approach to social work, as it has roots in classical theory such as Maslow's theory of self-actualisation (1943) and Roger's theory of fully functioning person (1961). One of the aims of the strengths-based approach is empowerment, which holds the most similarity to the radical and critical approach, as the latter approach looks at how the structure dis-empowers people through oppression, one of the root causes of the social problems. The strengths-based approach is an important and effective approach to social work, however, it cannot be used on its own it does not solve the issue that the social structure is designed in a way that it thrives off of inequality (Coady and Lehmann, 2016).Human rights and the social work roleThe precariat is the term used for individuals in positions relating to the reduction of employment rights, such as flexible working, living wages, and hour contracts is linked with the changes in public service provisions during the neoliberal government. This development of the precariat has impacted the role of social work due to social workers having to respond to the agenda of risk management, in the areas of child protection, mental health, and adult social work. Social workers have a constant battle to act in the interest of morality and this can mean they are acting in contrast with the government provisions that are contributing to the structural issues, and they feel their professional autonomy is restricted by bureaucracy. The theories of radical social work that outline the links between welfare and inequality with crime and punishment, are extremely important to help social workers understand this link, rather than considering them to be isolated issues (Cummins, 2016). It is important that social workers are aware of the structural causes of poverty and are not simply responding to people's needs as they appear on the surface. In the UK, as well as neoliberalism being prominent in the 1980s onwards, there have also been government developments in the enforcement of human rights and anti-oppressive practice, and it has become within the role of social workers to uphold and enforce anti-oppressive practice. Throughout the 20th century, certain rights have appeared to come in waves, the first being civil and political rights, such as freedom of speech and freedom from torture. The second was socio-economic rights such as education and healthcare. The third set is rights regarding human relations, the natural world, and solidarity. These will have had an impact on the role of social workers as social work as a progressive role both influences and follows positive social change. This also shows how what is considered an issue of importance changes over time. For example, race politics may not have been a widely discussed issue and important within social work in 1900 as it has been in the last 50 years (The Race Relations Act of 1965), and environmental politics and the lgbtq+ politics were not as importantly discussed 20 years ago as they are today — for example, homosexuality was regarded as a mental illness until 1994 and lgbtq+ empowerment is largely implemented in social work today (Miles, 2011). There are constant and drastic changes in the collective perception of morality. Examples of this within the social work profession can be seen. As recent as the 1970s, doctors and social workers were complicit in the coerced separation of children from unwed mothers in Australia, according to a memoir by Noble (2020). There is an area of critical social work devoted to looking at the past misconduct within the profession, through the lens of remorse. An extremely important part of the profession is to be able to recognise and learn from the mistakes of the past, to improve (Healy, 2012).Human rights activism has been globally prominent in social work and movements throughout the 20th century, such as during the civil rights movement, anti-apartheid in South Africa, and campaigns for indigenous people's rights. Western social work has a particular emphasis on legalism-based human rights, understanding of human rights is based on civil and political rights, as outlined in the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR), and the Equality and Human Rights Commission of the United Kingdom (EHRC), which defines human rights as "not just abstract concepts — they are defined and protected by law" (Martinez Herrero and Nicholls, 2017, p77). The contrast between legalistic human rights and radical and critical social work is that radical and critical social work of course implements human rights legislation, but also looks at human rights with a critical view on the state and system, and how human rights abuses are covered up by the veil of racial prejudice, economic inequality, and criminality. A considerably basic example of how criminality is used to cover up human rights violations is that prisoners serving sentences of over 12 months are not entitled to voting rights. Pairing this with the radical theories of crime and social inequality, that those serving prison sentences are largely from ethnic minorities and economically deprived backgrounds, the law surrounding prisoner voting rights can be seen as a way to silence the political voice of marginalised groups and to strip them of a fundamental human right (Williams et al, 2012). This is important for the role of social work, as it is important for social workers to be critical of how the state and law cover up human rights violations.Social work is argued to have developed the way it has, partially as a result of the past human rights atrocities both inside and outside the profession. Provisions and legislation have been put in place over time, such as the BASW, the professional capabilities framework, the Human Rights Act 1998, and the Equality Act 2010 to name a few. These have been written to ensure social workers, along with other care professions, are following a certain standard to promote fairness and prevent discrimination (Harms-Smith et al, 2019). Radical and critical social work is not only a framework for enforcing human rights and fairness, it is a response to past misconduct and encourages the positive development for the present and future. However, there is a debate on whether it is necessary to refer to radical social work as 'radical'. The term 'radical' has connotations that consider it to be 'extremist' or an extreme contrast from the norm. If radical social work is designed to enforce basic rights and fairness, it is not radical, but simply just social work. There have been various names radical social work has been referred to as: namely 'structural' social work, and 'critical' social work. The linking of social work and the word 'radical' comes from its Marxist approaches which to many of the general population still are considered radical (Gray and Webb, 2013).ConclusionThe overall takeaway from this evaluation is that historical evidence such as the early developments of the welfare state in the UK, and in crime and punishment in the UK and US and other democratic states, there is a large amount of structural influence on inequality. As well as this, there are constant developments in the standards of human rights, as seen by previous ways in which human rights have been violated. 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Punishing the poor: The neoliberal government of social insecurity. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.Wacquant, L. (2010). Urban desolation and symbolic denigration in the hyperghetto. Social Psychology Quarterly, 20(2) (Summer 2010), 1–5.Wacquant, L. (2012). Probing the meta-prison. In Preface to J. I. Ross (Ed.), The globalization of supermax prisons. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.Wilson, J A. (2018) Neoliberalism. New York: RoutledgeWilliams, K., Papadopoulou, V., Booth, N. (2012) Prisoners' childhood and family backgrounds Results from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) longitudinal cohort study of prisoners. Ministry of Justice Analytical Services. Ministry of Justice Research Series 4/12 What is Radical Social Work?Radical social work is a theoretical framework and practice approach that seeks to challenge the status quo and work toward social justice. It is based on the belief that social problems are caused by structural inequalities, such as poverty, racism, and sexism. Radical social workers believe that these inequalities can only be addressed through collective action and social change.Radical social work is not a single, unified approach. There are many different strands of radical social work, each with its own unique perspective. However, there are some common themes that run through all of them. These include: A focus on structural causes of social problems. Radical social workers believe that social problems are not caused by individual failings, but by the way society is structured. They focus on identifying and challenging the root causes of these problems, such as poverty, inequality, and discrimination. A commitment to social justice. Radical social workers believe that everyone has the right to live a life of dignity and freedom. They are committed to working towards a more just and equitable society. A focus on empowerment. Radical social workers believe that people have the power to change their own lives and the world around them. They work to empower individuals and communities to take control of their own lives and to fight for social change. Radical social work is a challenging and often controversial approach. However, it is also a powerful tool for social change. Radical social workers have played a significant role in many important social movements, such as the civil rights movement, the women's movement, and the anti-war movement.Some examples of radical social work practice: Advocating for policy change. Radical social workers may work to change laws and policies that they believe are unjust or harmful. For example, they may advocate for increased funding for social programs, or for changes to the criminal justice system. Organizing communities. Radical social workers may work to organize communities to fight for their rights. They may help to create community groups, or to plan and carry out protests and other forms of direct action. Providing direct services. Radical social workers may also provide direct services to individuals and families. However, they will do so in a way that challenges the status quo and empowers people to take control of their own lives. The future of radical social work:Radical social work is a growing field, and there is a renewed interest in this approach among social workers today. This is due in part to the growing inequality and injustice in the world. Radical social workers are playing an important role in challenging the status quo and working towards a more just and equitable society.If you are interested in learning more about radical social work, there are many resources available online and in libraries. You can also find radical social workers working in a variety of settings, such as community organizations, social service agencies, and universities. Bookmark Copy this link, or click below to email it to a friend Email or copy the link directly: Sign in Article Navigation Show Summary Details Page of Printed from Encyclopedia of Social Work. Under the terms of the licence agreement, an individual user may print out a single article for personal use (for details see Privacy Policy and Legal Notice). date: 28 May 2025 You do not currently have access to this article Please login to access the full content. Access to the full content requires a subscription This volume has been put together to mark – and indeed celebrate – the 35th anniversary of the publication of Bailey and Brake's (1975) Radical social work. Bailey and Brake's work has become one of the few great, seminal texts of social work in Britain. Today, even those hostile to the general direction of the argument presented in the book, are willing to concede that the book had a significant impact on debates over social work theory and practice in the 1970s and 1980s.Reading the text today there is no doubt that some of the chapters are shaped by the language and concerns of the 1970s Left. But in its emphasis on the iniquities of the social structure of capitalist society, the challenge it posed to state directed bureaucratic welfare, and its emphasis on the public and social causes of private pain, it was contesting and reshaping many of the dominant assumptions of social work theory. In doing so, it was in contrast to previously dominant perspectives that saw social problems in terms of individual failing and moral ineptitude on the part of 'problem communities'.As Roy Bailey points out in his foreword, the book was the first of a number of texts that offered a radical interpretation of social work theory, practice and intervention in the mid-1970s. Its publication reflected three significant and interconnected developments.First, in the aftermath of the Kilbrandon (SHHD/SED, 1964) and Seebhom (1968) Reports, integrated social service/social work departments developed and created significant job opportunities for qualified workers. In response, higher education institutions expanded their social work course provision. Increasing numbers of social work students, however, then found themselves on courses where the traditional literature and theory base was found wanting. Psychological and medical accounts of clients and their problems were increasingly questioned and ridiculed by the new student cohorts (Jones, this volume). Instead students looked to new ideas that were emerging in the social sciences – ideas steeped in Marxist, feminist, countercultural and social constructionist perspectives that flourished in the early 1970s. Bailey and Brake put the book together to counter the traditional approaches to social work, to bring leading perspectives from the social sciences to social work and, by so doing, give students on courses the ammunition they needed to challenge the dominant theory base espoused on their courses. Radical social work is a branch of social work practice that challenges conventional approaches to problem-solving by focusing on the systemic, structural, and political dimensions of social issues. This perspective is grounded in a commitment to transforming societal power relations and advocating for marginalized populations. While conventional social work models often prioritize short-term remedies or individual-level interventions, radical social work emphasizes collective action, grassroots organizing, and social change. This approach holds that social problems cannot be fully understood—or effectively addressed—without considering how macro-level factors such as economics, political policies, and cultural beliefs shape the everyday experiences of individuals and communities.Radical social work is not merely an offshoot of progressive thought in the social services; it is a deliberate rejection of the status quo. Practitioners and advocates within this movement argue that traditional social work can inadvertently reinforce existing power structures by focusing predominantly on adaptation and coping strategies. Radical social work aims instead to tackle the root causes of social injustice—poverty, discrimination, and systemic oppression. It underscores the urgency of social transformation through collective empowerment and demands that social workers align themselves with social movements that seek to reshape the societal landscape.Radical social work as a term began to gain currency in the late 1960s and early 1970s amid a period of global social and political upheaval. Civil rights movements, feminist movements, anti-war protests, and labor struggles were transforming social consciousness. Within this climate, social workers and community organizers increasingly questioned the traditional methods that emphasized clinical interventions and individual therapy. They began formulating new approaches that acknowledged the significance of structural factors—particularly class, race, and gender—in contributing to social problems.The theoretical underpinnings of radical social work draw from a multitude of critical perspectives, including Marxism, feminism, and anti-racist thought. Thinkers from these schools of thought pointed out the ways in which capitalism, patriarchy, and racial hierarchies served as the foundational forces shaping both personal hardships and societal crises. Early radical social workers borrowed heavily from these critiques, advocating for social work to move beyond bureaucratic processes and engage directly with social activism. In these formative years, radical social work practitioners became closely tied to grassroots movements, forging alliances with labor unions, community organizations, and civil rights coalitions. These connections enabled them to gain a more robust understanding of how oppression and inequality manifested in the daily lives of community members.One of the most defining features of radical social work is its unwavering focus on dismantling structural inequality. Social workers in this tradition argue that problems such as poverty, inadequate housing, or lack of access to healthcare cannot be fully understood in isolation; they must be connected to broader economic and social systems that perpetuate deprivation. Rather than attributing individual failures to lack of effort or moral deficiencies, radical social work situates these challenges within the context of systemic injustices.By shifting the lens from individual pathology to collective circumstances, radical social workers highlight how limited educational opportunities, systemic racism, wage stagnation, and austerity measures converge to create enduring forms of inequality. Practitioners aim to correct these imbalances by collaborating with communities to promote political participation, foster grassroots leadership, and advocate for policy changes that go beyond marginal reforms.Empowerment is a central principle in the radical social work approach. This principle posits that individuals and communities have the inherent capacity to understand and address their own circumstances. Instead of viewing service recipients as passive clients in need of professional expertise, radical social work challenges social workers to become facilitators who help communities identify resources, build networks, and engage in collective action.Empowerment goes hand in hand with participation. Radical social workers seek to mobilize and galvanize collective energy. They encourage individuals to join in communal decision-making processes, thereby cultivating autonomy, solidarity, and collective efficacy. When communities unite to advocate for their rights—whether housing rights, labor protections, or educational reforms—this collective effort is seen as both a practical tool for immediate improvements and a transformative force for long-term social change.A key difference between radical social work and more conventional approaches is the explicit political consciousness. Radical social workers argue that many social issues stem from power imbalances rooted in political decisions. Therefore, addressing these issues effectively requires recognizing their political dimensions. For example, challenges such as housing shortages, environmental degradation, and health inequities often tie back to political agendas, budgetary allocations, and corporate power.Radical social workers not only acknowledge these power dynamics but also actively engage in political advocacy. This can include lobbying for policy reforms, supporting social movements, or even participating in civil disobedience. The goal is to forge systemic changes that dismantle entrenched hierarchies of power, thereby promoting a more equitable distribution of resources.While conventional social work often focuses on case-by-case interventions, radical social work embraces community-centered practice. This means that rather than isolating problems within individual clients, social workers are encouraged to identify communities that share common problems and experiences of oppression. By joining forces with local groups, activists, and other stakeholders, radical social workers can engage in collective solutions that have a broader impact.In practical terms, this might involve organizing community forums, establishing mutual support networks, or creating neighborhood-based initiatives that respond to specific issues such as food insecurity or child welfare. Community-centered practice affirms that people are experts in their own lives. The role of the social worker is to bring diverse stakeholders together, facilitate joint decision-making, and leverage communal resources to promote sustainable transformation.Radical social work places great value on grassroots engagement, seeing it as the lifeblood of meaningful social change. Instead of imposing top-down interventions, practitioners immerse themselves within communities to collaboratively identify priorities and design approaches. This hands-on, participatory ethos stands in contrast to models that rely on bureaucratic or technocratic solutions, which can sometimes disregard local insights.Collective action is seen as crucial for challenging entrenched systems of oppression. Many radical social work initiatives entail working with labor unions to demand fair wages, collaborating with advocacy groups to fight discriminatory housing practices, or partnering with environmental activists to address the disproportionate impact of climate change on vulnerable communities. Such collective efforts underscore the principle that systemic problems require systemic solutions.Radical social workers frequently emphasize reflexivity, acknowledging the importance of self-examination in mitigating biases and power differentials. Practitioners are encouraged to interrogate their own positions of privilege and question how their professional role might inadvertently uphold the status quo. Through ongoing reflection, social workers can ensure their practice remains anchored in ethical principles of equality, justice, and solidarity.Radical social work does not exist in isolation. It thrives on intersectionality and the synergy created when multiple movements—such as feminist groups, anti-racist coalitions, LGBTQ+ advocacy, and disability rights organizations—come together to challenge overlapping oppressions. Radical social workers frequently partner with these movements to push for policy changes that reflect the diverse needs and perspectives of marginalized groups.In many urban areas, skyrocketing rent prices and gentrification have made stable housing increasingly inaccessible. Radical social workers, in partnership with tenant organizations, often organize rent strikes, provide legal assistance, and demand policy reforms that protect tenants from exploitative practices. By collaborating with these community-led efforts, social workers can help shape legislation that prioritizes the right to safe, affordable housing. By using Spitzer's (1975) analysis of 'social junk' and 'social dynamite', I will identify the issues arising in today's context for service users who are perceived to fall into these two groups. It is important to note that there are a multitude of complexities exposed to individuals that can be argued to occupy many different service user groups, however for the purpose of this essay I aim to particularly focus on disabled adults and adults with drug and alcohol dependency. By providing examples of the ways in which issues such as: benefit and resource cuts, privatisation and the pathologising and criminalisation of behaviour has on these service user groups I will be able to appropriately apply solutions from the perspective of radical social work both in theory and practice form. I will then summarise the points made throughout this article and collate the reasons as to why and how a radical social work can support social workers and service users in today's context. The 1960s and 70s saw a rise in interest in the social consequences of capitalism (Howe, 2009). Radical social work was developed in an attempt to alleviate the consequences imposed onto individuals in a dominant capitalist society (Leonard, 1975). Spitzer (1975) provides a Marxist analysis of capitalism, identifying that it defines two service user groups: social junk, those that are classified as dependent and a drain on society's resources, thus needing care, and social dynamite, those that are dangerous and needing to be controlled. With the development of capitalism dependent on the exploitation of labour workers (Poynton, 2011), an economic system has been created, which in crisis, creates and recreates hardship for individuals whilst concurrently reducing the welfare resources introduced to relieve that very hardship (Brake and Bailey, 1980). The latter is a contradiction demonstrating the overwhelming power held by capitalists in society – the ability to create a hierarchical structure in which an 'underclass' categorises those that Spitzer (1975) refers to as social 'junk' and 'dynamite'.

As a result of capitalism, the societal involvement in social problems was hidden and not addressed; consequently social work became a 'partner in crime' in the silence culture of social justice (Steyaert, 2013). Pearson (1973) argues that to proclaim the humanistic nature of social work is fraudulent in that it produces an aims culture, aims of which are impossible to achieve in a capitalist society. Social work intervention, according to radical social workers, is ineffective if the client is unaware of the social context intrinsic to their social problems (Bailey and Brake, 1980). Radical social work involves understanding oppression in the context of social and economic structures rather than affixing the problems to the individuals who are oppressed (Brake and Bailey, 1975). A radical social worker's role involves positive assistance, the sustaining of mutual respect and the location of a service user's problems in a wider social and political context (Brake and Bailey, 1980). Leonard (1975) outlines four aims for radical practice: education, linking people with systems, building counter-systems and individual and structural responses. Radical social work is deemed to be the foundation in the development of theories such as anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice and critical social work theory. It is said to have transformed the social work value base to include anti-oppressive values (Ferguson and Woodward, 2009). The 1970's saw a tremendous rise in trade unionism amongst social workers, allowing for a collective identity to be created (Ferguson and Woodward, 2009) and thus contributing to radical social work practice. Along with this came 'Case Con', a social work magazine complementing the development of radical social work in the early 70's. A theme of homelessness was developed throughout, with squatters supported and families sheltered in social work offices (Social Work Action Network, n.d. a). Radical social work declined in the 1980's with the election of Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative Party into Government. Ferguson and Woodward (2009) describe the deprofessionalisation of social workers as a result of them being 'soft' on the groups that this particular Government and the media branded as 'scroungers' and the 'underclass'. The role of the welfare state in this era, and in the current context it can be argued, has been significantly reduced with access to support such as benefits and housing becoming more conditional and less abundant. Almost thirty years since the Thatcher Government, welfare state responsibilities continue to be mitigated and the poorest and most vulnerable individuals and communities become marginalised further, with people now more excluded than they have ever been (Ferguson and Woodward, 2009). This can be illustrated with the example of food banks. In 2008/09 25,899 people accessed food banks in comparison to a substantial increase to 913,138 people in 2013/14 (Trussel Trust, 2014). The above points can also be substantiated by use of legislation enacted to reinforce capitalist ideology. The NHS and Community Care Act (1990) introduced the concept of care management, replacing direct work with adult service users with the bureaucratic managing and 'rationing' of resources (McNicoll, 2013). In section 79 of the Care Act (2014), a local authority is required to delegate its functions – thus conforming to the neoliberal notion of marketisation. Policy is developed in an attempt to further reduce reliance on the state. The Care Act factsheets (2014) state that local authorities should be working with communities to identify services that are already available to them, in other words utilising that of the third sector to promote independence. The revisiting of community based work is central to radical social work theory and practice. Community development projects were intrinsic in the 70's to a radical social work as they moved away from the pathologising and individualistic model of deprivation towards an understanding of class structure and economic and social contexts (Hatton, 2008). Social workers today are becoming progressively disheartened with the increasing bureaucracy resulting in less direct work with people – reopening the case for community social work (Holman, 2013). In today's statutory context, social work has become more about fulfilling organisational functions than practicing the values on which it was developed (Asquith et al, 2005). Teater and Baldwin (2012) provide examples as to implementing community based work today: students conducting community profiles whilst on placement, utilising resources to conduct research projects concerning unmet need and information sharing amongst other authorities to gain a variety of perspectives. The values of a community approach reflect notions of collectivism rather than individualism (Jordan, 2007), thus allowing for acknowledgement of social problems in their social context. The privatisation of public services contributes to the capitalist dominance in society and the increased emphasis on health and social care organisations running for profit can have disastrous consequences for service users. Whitfield (2012) criticises the notion of 'payment by results' whereby providers are rewarded once targets and performance outcomes have been met. This is argued by Leys and Player (2011) as dangerous, as the quality of treatment is not accounted for in these outcomes. The epitome of this is Winterbourne View where service users with learning difficulties and mental health problems were abused at the hands of their carers. The serious case review conducted by Flynn (2012) identified that the average weekly fee for patients at Winterbourne was £3,500, with this providing no reflection of the service quality or patient safety and unlike most long-stay institutions, their annual turnover equated to £3.7 million. In situations such as this, and in an era where integration between health and social care organisations is becoming more prevalent, advocacy in the context of radical practice is crucial. Boylan and Ing (2005) argue that providers need to promote awareness of advocacy as the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) (2010) state that there is limited information available on advocacy to those with a protected characteristic under the Equality Act (2010). This was particularly pertinent in the case of Winterbourne View; if the patients had been provided with access to advocates it is fair to suggest that the abuse may have been recognised sooner and in a more sensitive manner. SCIE (2009) state that a clear role within advocacy is to work alongside people to ensure that there is a move away from a service-led culture; an opportunity to empower individuals rather than just allowing them to argue their case.

The experience of a 'mixed economy of care' among stroke patients was explored in a research study undertaken by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (1994). It was identified that the service users felt unprepared in becoming 'consumers' in relation to the purchasing of care and were reluctant in asking for support for fear of having an irritable response or their services withdrawn. The notion of the 'mixed economy of care' can not only lead to confusion and fear amongst vulnerable adults, but also expose them to abuse. Taking Spitzer's (1975) analysis of 'social junk' as represented by the Government and media, the service users perceived to fit into this category are older people and people with physical and learning disabilities. Looking at how the personalisation agenda specifically in relation to direct payments affects the two service user groups, it is difficult to argue that this does not render service users more susceptible to abuse. Whitfield (2012) states that direct payments are 'dressed up in the language of choice' (pg. 7) and this is artificial as the state are transferring the risk and accountability to the service user. Samuel (2012) identifies a danger to this in that service users may employ unregulated workers, or friends and relatives that leave them at a heightened risk of poor quality care and abuse than that of people using general services. As well as this, he argues that they may be less likely to report poor care and abuse, especially if those that are employed are relatives or friends. Teater and Baldwin (2012) argue that the personalisation agenda facilitates anything but a collective approach and 'cements' and individualises service users within the care market.

As well as the above, in a climate of austerity and severe cuts to benefits and services, disabled people continue to be the hardest hit (The Hardest Hit, n.d.). Disabled people are twice as likely to live in poverty than non-disabled people (Office for Disability Issues, 2011) and with plans to reduce benefit eligibility by up to 500,000, more than 25,000 people with a disability will be forced out of work (Disability Rights UK, 2012). Austerity measures limit the availability of resources and services and thus the amount of people that can access them. In other words, as resources and services are diminished, the service users deemed to be eligible for those that remain become increasingly reduced. Vulnerable adults needing to be maintained in the community within their support networks are denied access to services as a direct result of the ever-tightening eligibility criteria (Teater and Baldwin, 2012).

A radical social work would stress the need for collective action between both professionals and service users. Langan (2002) states that people are united today with the conviction that society is disintegrating. A dominating feature of radical social work aims for values of equality, justice and involvement in society by means of collective action (Howe, 2009). Policies need to be developed from the bottom-up, with service users with first-hand experience of the impact of governmental policy perceived and treated as experts. People need to develop a 'collective approach to autonomy' (Teater and Baldwin, 2012: 36) to be able to critically appreciate their circumstances (Doyal and Gough, 1991). This directly linking to Bailey and Brake's (1980) argument mentioned above around the ineffectiveness of social work if an individual is not aware of the social context to their problems. The Mental Health User movement along with the Disability Rights movement are the epitome of when collective action has successfully challenged policy and societal perspectives. One way in which we can help promote further collective action between service users is to develop forms of participation that are less tokenistic, moving to the view that service users are allies. Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation illustrates three areas of participation that provide service users with a degree of power: partnership, delegated power and citizen control. If methods are developed that reflect these three areas Warren (2007) argues that service users will: influence service provision, increase their confidence and self-esteem, become empowered through collective involvement and develop peer-led initiatives. Baldwin and Sadd (2006) argue that current participation can be viewed as tokenistic, however we must stress the importance of eliminating this, forming alliances and moving towards the top end of the ladder in which Arnstein (1969) describes. An example of ways in which this can be done reflects practices at the University of Bath, in which service users are involved with interviewing, lecturing and assessment of students and their readiness to practice. As well as the above, service providers will also benefit in the sense that service users and carers hold first-hand experience and knowledge that can challenge stereotypes and educate professionals (Young et al, 1998). Professionals also need to act collectively in order to actively advocate for social justice. This can be achieved alongside a trade union such as UNISON or by joining a radical campaigning group such as the Social Work Action Network (SWAN) (Baldwin, 2011). SWAN's (n.d. b) ethos echoes that of radical social work – promoting models of practice 'rooted in social justice' and to advocate alongside service users and carers. This stresses the importance of forming alliances as mentioned in the example above.

It is apt to suggest that adults with a drug and/or alcohol dependency are classified within what Spitzer (1975) would label the 'social dynamites' of society. The stigma associated with people that have drug misuse problems is substantial in that they are stereotyped as dangerous and dirty; this having a direct impact on the ways in which policy is implemented to support them (UK Drug Policy Commission, 2010). People experiencing stigma are less able to participate in seemingly generic life experiences – a career, intimate relationships and a place to call home (Goffman, 1963). A research study undertaken by Corrigan et al (2009) identified that people labelled as drug addicts are less likely to be offered and given help than those with a mental illness or disability. The control element required for these 'social dynamites' is substantiated by the criminalisation of drug possession, with up to seven years in prison punishable to those caught with Class A drugs (Gov UK, 2014). By criminalising the use of drugs it pathologises and individualises the issue and attributes it to that of the person, rather than considering the societal factors that may cause a person to take drugs. This is the basic premise radical social work wishes to eradicate.

The UK Drug Policy Commission (2010) states that professionals should be adequately trained to appropriately respond to people with substance misuse problems. In a radical context, this could involve revisiting our professional value base, particularly in relation to anti-oppressive values. In an article written by a social worker for Community Care (2014) it was argued that we as social workers have a duty to identify and fight discrimination and oppression at every level. If we are not actively identifying and challenging discrimination toward our service users then in effect we are not practicing social work according to the definition provided by the International Federation of Social Workers; 'principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities' (IFSW, 2014).

Another radical offering to address issues such as the above is to expose the political nature of social work to students within social work education. Many students advocate a commitment to social justice, however they are disillusioned in their belief that this can be achieved through individual practice (Baldwin, 2011). A political standpoint can help social workers become sensitised to the client and their perception of their situation – this is particularly important for those who have succumbed to self-blame (Bailey and Brake, 1980). This is directly applicable to individuals with substance misuse problems as there is a tendency to internalise the societal stigma and blame themselves for the issue rather than recognise it in a social context. A social work assessment reflects an individual's need and eligibility to access resources. An assessment in this sense is a highly political social work activity, with social workers used by organisations as resource managers rather than 'enablers of choice and control' (Baldwin, 2011: 198). By not having this political nature of social work exposed, we may risk further perpetuating inequality and oppressive practices (Thompson and Thompson, 2008). Along with this comes the importance of developing critically reflective practitioners within social work education. Having this skill allows social workers to recognise the influence of power inequalities which contribute to the creation of problems for service users (Howe, 2009). Baldwin (2011)