Professional Associations in Social Work 1900 - 1990

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In Memoriam

Arthur Collis
1916-2012
Honorary Archivist, BASW.
The Origins of Today’s Talk.

- PhD completed at Manchester University 1990.
- Based on material in the BASW archive, from predecessor organisations, collected in the 1980s from the archive – then at Kent Street, Birmingham (now at Warwick University). Supplemented from other archives.
- Issue 1 – selectivity of archive preservation.
- Issue 2 – own involvement with BASW in the 1970s, at local and national level.
Limitations of today’s talk,

- It is digitised, and I can e-mail you digital copies if you leave me your e-mail. (but it’s quite large – 308 pages.)
- There are 15 “working papers” on specific professional associations and historical periods which provide a wealth of detail. These are listed as an appendix to the paper I have prepared for today; and again are available on request.
- I have been specialising in other aspects of higher education since 1990.
What will this talk focus on:

1. The context within which professional associations of social workers developed.
2. Broad histories of professional association development.
3. The activities of professional associations.
4. Internal issues facing professional associations.
5. Some general conclusions.
1. The Context.

3. Conceptions of social work – vocational calling, supporting and therapeutic, and/or social control.
4. Ideas and models of professional work – traditional, the exploitation of power.
2. Broad histories – (a) 1900-1920

- Almoners’ Committee (1904); Hospital Almoners Association (1920); Institute of Almoners (1945); Institute of medical Social Workers (1964)
- Women Sanitary Inspectors/ Health Visitors (1896/1904)
- Relieving Officers (1911)
- Probation Officers (1912)
- Industrial Welfare Workers (1913)
- Women Housing Managers (1916)
- Federation of Professional Social Workers (1917)
2. Broad histories – (b) 1920 - 1940

- Association of Mental Welfare Workers (1924); Association of Mental Health Workers (1931); Society of Mental Welfare Officers (1954).
- Association of Psychiatric Social Workers (1929).
- Association of Moral Welfare Workers (1940)
- Association of Family Case Workers (1940)
- British Federation of Social Workers (1934/5)
2. Broad histories – (c) 1940 - 1970

• Association of Child Care Officers (1949)
• Association of Social Workers (1951) – incorporated the Association of Part-Time Social Workers (1960-67).
• Standing Conference on Registration (1955); Joint Training Council (1959); Standing Conference of Organisations of Social workers (1963).
• British Association of Social Workers (1970)
3. Activities – (a) Defining social work as an activity.

Make claims for social work and/or defend the boundaries of social work.

Strategies include:

• Idealistic discussions.

• Presenting the case to “others” – employers, government, the public etc.

• Protection of “title”.

3. Activities – (b) Influencing recruitment and training.

Strategies include:

• Influencing the selection of workers
• Arguing the case for training and attempting to influence those parties involved in decisions about education and training.
• Provision of education and training by the professional associations themselves.
3. Activities – (c) Affecting standards of practice.

Strategies:

• Aimed at influencing individual workers – professional consultation, supervision, accreditation, registration.

• Aimed at employers – local consultation, liaison with employer’s organisations, indirect influence via central government.

• Aimed at social work practice as a whole – code of ethics, practice forums, publications.
3. Activities – (d) Salaries and conditions of service.

- “Protective” functions.
- Salary negotiations/ salary representations.
- Evidence to committees of inquiry.
- Trade Union?
- Industrial action.
3. Activities – (e) Influencing Social Policy

- Should professional associations be involved with this?
- What to influence? – technical issues or broader social policy.
- How to influence? – patronage, pressure group politics, publicity, social action.
4. Internal Issues Facing Professional Associations. (1)

Three main areas:

• Membership. Closed – based on qualifications; Open – based on post held; recruitment; retention.

• Internal Government (organisation-maintenance) Members and leaders (involvement and participation); Committee Structure (role and function of committees); national, regional and branch autonomy; finance – raising and spending funds; paid officials and their impact.
4. Internal Issues Facing Professional Associations. (2)

- Conflict and consensus. Actual and potential sources of tension – characteristics of members, e.g. age, “generation”, race, gender, sexuality, training, pattern of employment, geographical location, personal ideology of “social work”. Proliferation of other sectional groupings and associations.
5. Some General Conclusions. (a)

- The relationship between the professional association and the occupation of social work is a dynamic one.
- The associations are also shaped by their members. “Coalitions of differing interests coming together, with different views struggling for supremacy within one particular association”.
- The associations’ influence on different aspects of social work waxed and waned over the 90 year period.
5. Some General Conclusions. (b)

Periodisation:

- 1900 - late 1940s. Pioneer Phase. Modelled on traditional professional organisations.
- 1970s – decade of doubts and challenges to traditional models of professionalism.
- Mid 1980s – period of consolidation and accommodation.
5. Some General Conclusions. (c)

The thesis demonstrated that an account of the development of social work as an occupation without any consideration of the role and influence of the professional associations would be a very partial and incomplete story.
Thank you for listening.

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