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problem for the profession. The problem was heralded by charges of 'irrelevancy' and 'inadequacy' in dealing with the concerns of clients of minority races. Yet, only the dilemma for social workers of minority races and not the problem for the profession was analyzed. In order to gain a fuller understanding of the phenomenon, a scrutiny of the profession's response would have to be made. Some of the questions that might be posed are--What were the past and immediate historical factors influencing the profession's solutions to the problem? Can the profession's attempts to solve the problem be placed into categories that would approximate the frameworks into which efforts of Black social workers to lessen the dilemma have been placed?

Whether the above questions or others are used, the analysis of the profession's response still awaits consideration.

**ETHNICITY, POLITICAL COALITION AND THE DEVELOPMENT  
OF A MEGAPOLICY PERSPECTIVE IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION\***

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**INTRODUCTION**

Social Work Education should have two major tasks with regard to teaching about ethnicity, particularly working-class ethnics. The fostering of sensitivity to diverse cultures, and the members of such cultural groups is clearly one thrust; the architectural task of participating in the building of a society which fulfills the needs and builds the security of its people should be the second function.<sup>1</sup> In the past, social work education has taught about ethnicity and often about politics with a narrow perspective limited "to single dimensions of policy".<sup>2</sup> A broader gauge "megapolicy perspective" would enable practitioners to refrain from dividing ethnic

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<sup>1</sup>The arguments which are being made in regard to social work education and social work professionals can be made too in reference to many other educational programs.

<sup>2</sup>Yehezkel Dror, *Ventures in Policy Sciences* (New York: American Elsevier, Inc., 1971), p. 18.

group members into "good guys" (those whom we support) and "bad guys" (those whom we oppose). It also would lead to the development of a policy-oriented perspective which could help social work professionals to influence significant social reforms.<sup>3</sup>

### DEFINITIONS

Before proceeding with this analysis, it is necessary to define several key terms which will be used in this study. Ethnicity, implies the sense of social inter-relatedness among a particular group of people. Such groups are "...linked by complementary habits and facilities of communication."<sup>4</sup> The term working-class ethnics reflects popular usage that highlights as "ethnics", wage and clerical workers of Eastern and Southern European or of Irish background. Also such ethnics tend to be of Roman Catholic or Greek Orthodox background. In addition to the Irish, major ethnic groupings include those of Italian, Polish, Greek, and Slavic background. Another term which will be utilized is political coalition. Political coalition, refers to active cooperation among diverse interest groups in order to achieve certain commonly desired goals.

The contention to be supported in this paper is that coalition behavior within the American political system would be enhanced if future decision-makers and other political influentials developed a megapolicy perspective. A megapolicy perspective is characterized by Yehezkel Dror as viewing "...discrete policy issues within a broader context of basic goals, postures, and directives."<sup>5</sup> In other words, a megapolicy perspective takes into account goals and values, social-political realities, and the realities of governmental structure and functions. In social work education, this perspective is germane to the education of clinical students as well as community organization students. Clinical social workers are in an active segment of the civic policy in the United States. They are influentials who

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<sup>3</sup>For an interesting discussion of the relationship of social work professionals to the task of political action, see Daniel Thursz, "Professional Education for Expected Political Action by Social Workers", Journal of Education for Social Work, 9 (Fall, 1973), 87-93.

<sup>4</sup>Karl W. Deutsch, Nationalism and Social Communication (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1953), p.70.

effect public policy decision-makers, either as decision-makers themselves, or as respected professional colleagues to whom decision-makers come for information. Insofar as this is clearly the reality of their influence-range, the theoretical framework they receive in school can be important in affecting the focus of social welfare decision-making. Similarly, it is as particularly useful as a theoretical perspective for students of social policy, social planning and community development.

The purpose of utilizing such a perspective in the professional education of social workers would be to foster their participation in the fulfillment of social development goals. Social development goals are being defined herein as: "...the formulation of a publicly supported infrastructure of services and income policies to insure that basic human (social and physical) needs of the citizenry are met."<sup>6</sup>

#### CURRENT APPROACHES TO THE TEACHING OF ETHNICITY

Currently, many courses dealing with ethnic groups, be they American Indians, Blacks, Jews or "white ethnics", view the ethnic experience in terms of specific wrongs and grievances which must be redressed by "society".<sup>7</sup> Such analyses often do not concern themselves with the nature of the social institutions which must do the "redressing". Often little attention is focused on the question of whom in society, or what groupings in society, should share in the reallocation of resources necessary to redress past grievances. Such an approach often results in a redress of some grievances, at the same time grievances are created elsewhere. If expansion of job opportunities or school opportunities for particular groups -- on

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<sup>5</sup>Dror, op. cit., p.18.

<sup>6</sup>Howard A. Palley, "The White Working Class and a Strategy of Coalition for Social Development", Social Service Review, 47 (June, 1973) 242.

<sup>7</sup>For a well-stated article elaborating on this position see, Hylan Lewis, "Race, Polity and the professions", Journal of Education for Social Work, 5 (Fall, 1969), 19-30.

the basis of group membership--result in a lessening of opportunities for members of other groups, a pattern of new grievance and political "coalition-splitting" is established.<sup>8</sup>

The alternative to this political divisiveness might be provided by a megapolicy perspective to the resolution of ethnic grievances. This approach would have to take into account the inter-relationship and inter-reliance between a variety of groups in our society. Furthermore, political reform regarding social development goals must result in issue choice which allows the inclusion of a variety of racial, ethnic and class groupings. Such a perspective takes into account Robert M. MacIver's observation "...We have to remember that a modern society is a multi-group society. It is composed of many inter-related groups. It is not homogeneous. All the conditions of modern life make that impossible."<sup>9</sup>

Providing this view in a social work curriculum leads to a problem which should not be overlooked in any serious discussion of curriculum and political-social perspective. The problem which arises relates to any demand or request for new courses or new approaches in developing educational alternatives. The flexibility of the course offerings is limited by sequence requirements tied to needs for professional excellence. Clearly policy perspectives can aid in the fostering of such excellence and courses which emphasize policy questions must be provided social work students. Given these needs for a complete training of professionals in social welfare decision-making -- it would seem that two complementary courses of action are open to curriculum builders. On the one hand a megapolicy perspective regarding ethnic involvement in a meaningful social coalition can be provided in basic courses in social policy and in social policy electives. Also, courses can be developed which deal specifically with ethnicity and the role of the working class, in short courses given at many institutions between the Fall and Spring semester. This later approach has

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<sup>8</sup>For a discussion of such "grievance" voting by white ethnics of Italian, Greek, Polish and Bohemian background in Baltimore City's East Baltimore wards, see Howard A. Palley's analysis of the strong vote by these groups for Richard M. Nixon in the 1972 Presidential election: "The White Working Class and the Politics of Social Development in the 1970's", paper presented to the National Conference on Social Welfare Annual Forum, Atlantic City, New Jersey, May 31, 1973, pp. 3-7.

the advantage of providing students with the specific types of materials not provided ordinarily in regular semester policy sequence courses.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, it enables teachers and students to ask questions and to seek answers which they often do not have the time to explore during the normal semester -- especially given the time constraints imposed by field placement obligations. This later condition of restraint on intellectual development and the development of a broad policy perspective poses a problem which could be explored elsewhere. Certainly a broader perspective with an understanding of potential political support via the traditional skills of the policy -- which include coalition building -- could foster the role of social workers in their goal of developing a better society for all Americans.

#### A MEGAPOLICY MODEL

A "megapolicy model" would, as do other approaches, study the needs, grievances and problems of the wide range of groups which interact within the American social-policy system. As well as looking at such groupings, a megapolicy approach would provide the framework necessary to study the inter-relatedness between groups, and the interconnections between such groups and the political system. Andrew Greeley observed this need for a broader perspective when he noted: "A considerable number of both the social scientists and the social policy makers are currently announcing that black is beautiful (whether they really believe it or not is another matter) but if black is beautiful (and it is) then so is Irish, Polish, Italian, Slovenian, Greek, Armenian, Lebanese and Luxembourger. All these represent valid and valuable cultural heritages. They all represent sources of identification and meaning in a vast and diverse society. They all have a positive contribution to a richer and more exciting community."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Robert M. MacIver, "Group Images and Group Realities", in Group Relations and Group Antagonism, ed. by Robert MacIver (New York: Peter Smith, 1951), p. 6.

<sup>10</sup>For an interesting discussion of the use of mini-courses in social work education, see Thursz, op. cit., 87-93.

<sup>11</sup>Andrew M. Greeley, Why Can't They Be Like Us? (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1971), p. 191.

A megapolicy perspective could help focus on those issues which have an appeal transcending ethnic and social class lines. Such an approach recently has been urged by Roy Wilkins, Executive Director of the NAACP. Speaking to the American Jewish Committee in New York City, Mr. Wilkins observed that Blacks, Jews and other ethnic groups had a joint interest in developing issues that are "coalition building". Such program areas might include free public transportation, improving the quality of neighborhood life and developing services for the elderly and the poor.<sup>12</sup> He expressed the belief that Blacks and Jews in New York City had spent too much time and energy divided on coalition splitting issues, such as control of school boards, school zoning and busing.<sup>13</sup> His suggestion also addresses itself to the possibility of building a political coalition comprising different income groups with a shared concern with improving the quality of life and the sense of well-being in urban communities.

A megapolicy perspective as an educational framework would provide greater insight for social work professionals on the importance of "lifestyle" issues to many working class ethnics.<sup>14</sup> For example, the building of a national coalition for greater social development which includes working class ethnics must respect their cultural conservatism on issues such as abortion reform and marijuana smoking. A megapolicy approach must be concerned with those social development issues which would include working class ethnics in a broad coalition which includes substantial segments of the poorer and the more affluent members of society.

A narrow, particularistic approach to the study of ethnic groups by potential influentials in the national policy may lead to a condition where confrontation strategy, which plays into the hands of those political forces opposed to greater social development in the United States, emerges. Kevin P. Phillips, a political strategist for President Nixon, has perceived,

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<sup>12</sup>New York Times, December 10, 1973, p. 13.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>See Herbert J. Gans, The Urban Villagers (New York: Free Press, 1962), pp. 27-28; also see Jeane Kirkpatrick, "The Revolt of the Masses", Commentary, 55 (February, 1973), 62.

in what he termed "Black Power" and "White Power" confrontations in New York State and New Jersey, a turning of the Urban, working class Catholics (particularly, the Irish and the Italians) in the Northeast to conservative Republican candidates.<sup>15</sup> To some extent, the 1972 Presidential election confirmed Phillips analysis. (Despite the Nixon landslide, there is currently considerable working class discontent with current national economic policies) Contrary-wise, a megapolicy approach to the study of ethnic problems might lead to the development of strategies based on the broadening of a potential coalition for social development. Such an approach would take into account the need to broaden political party structures to include more Blacks, Latinos and women, without excluding working class leaders. Such an approach could relate to a variety of ethnic and social class needs for improved social development: fairer tax laws, social policies related to progressive rather than regressive taxation patterns, greater universalism in social benefit policies, better health care services, decent housing, and adequate educational policies. Such social development issues are issues which have a common appeal to many among the poor, and the middle class, as well as to working class ethnics and other members of the working class.

### CONCLUSION

Social work education needs to mesh the teaching of ethnic problems and culture with the relationship of such knowledge to effective political action: a unity of theory and practice. A megapolicy framework for the study of ethnic groups and their perceptions of the social order could relate the educational process to the issue of social development within American society, as well as to the recognition of cultural complexity and the richness of ethnic and class groupings within American society. A utilization of this approach would enable social work professionals to develop the necessary cultural and political knowledge, and thus a more realistic perspective to foster interaction with diverse groups and to build political support for social development policies. It also is hoped that such an intellectual frame of reference will influence social work practitioners to show a greater concern for meeting the needs of working class ethnics, and to develop the political insight that this large group of Americans is a necessary component in any effective coalition for meaningful social development.

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<sup>15</sup>Kevin P. Phillips, The Emerging Republican Majority (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1969), pp. 174-175