



**WESTERN  
MICHIGAN**  
UNIVERSITY

The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

---

Volume 4  
Issue 2 November

Article 8

---

November 1976

## Radicalism in Casework

Philip Lichtenberg  
*Bryn Mawr College*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>



Part of the Social Work Commons

---

### Recommended Citation

Lichtenberg, Philip (1976) "Radicalism in Casework," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 4 :  
Iss. 2 , Article 8.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol4/iss2/8>

This Article is brought to you by the Western Michigan  
University School of Social Work. For more information,  
please contact [wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu](mailto:wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu).



## RADICALISM IN CASEWORK<sup>1</sup>

Philip Lichtenberg, Ph.D.

Graduate School of Social Work and Social Research  
Bryn Mawr College

Social casework seems always in tension between some inherent tendency to be radical in a social and political way and a comparable drive to hold on to the established modes of life that are conventional and conservative. The profession has never pretended to be value-free, and within the values held forth resides this tension to which I refer. Similarly, social casework has long been a socially activist field -- as simple comparison with any other accepted profession readily demonstrates -- and in its assertive endeavors this same combination of radical and conservative tendencies can be identified. To a radical, such as I consider myself to be, social casework has long been a field with insistent promises that never seem quite to reach the level of attainment that it would be reasonable to expect.

Two signs point to the radical tendency within social casework. First, the profession attracts people who are also part of the radical movement. Over the years a relevant proportion of persons in the radical movement have been drawn to the field of social casework. Young people who seek to combine their political affinities with the economic need to earn a living come into the field, not without guilt in many cases, since they are aware of the conservative side of casework, but also not without genuine hope and expectation. Older persons, too, often those who have been active in radical efforts over a long period of time, turn to social casework as a professional outlet. Second is the insight that many of the pushes and demands of the radical political movement find eager acceptance and incorporation into casework ideology and practice. I think here, for example, of the readiness to align casework with ideas about participatory democracy, equalitarianism and the perceived need for a new society. Therapeutic

community, public health and other related popular movements supported by caseworkers are based on these ideas stemming from a radical analysis of society.

There are also signs of the conservative forces in the profession. It seems indisputable that the institutions in which casework is practiced are organized along conventional lines. Boards of directors, hierarchical patterns, modes of accountability, bases of financial support, definitions of appropriate patterns of interaction, conceptions of goals and means to goals are typical of those found in the social system at large. Institutions that house or express casework are not basically divergent from most other institutions in which work and careers are lived out. Secondly, the ideology that casework picks up from the radical movement is usually transformed by processes within the profession. Thus it happens that radical ideas customarily end up in their liberal form, and I would include liberalism as a category of conservatism in this respect.<sup>2</sup> Thirdly, the goals of casework that are carried out in the daily practice of the profession tend to be conventional. In fact, casework rarely poses significant challenge to the basic structure of society.

The radical and conservative tendencies seem to have different origins. The radical thrust or potential in casework appears to stem from the very nature of the tasks to which the field addresses itself. In endeavors with the problems that clients bring into focus, caseworkers consistently discover that in large measure the presenting difficulties are symptoms whose proper handling necessitates fundamental changes not only in the circumstances immediately surrounding the clients but also in the society at large. Caseworkers are in frequent contact with people who are hurting, who are pressed down by real problems of a profound nature. These problems, on the causative side, reflect larger, deeper social conflicts and struggles. On the curative side, adequate contending with the problems depends upon social change of a major kind. In its tasks and ambitions social casework is inherently drawn or pushed

unwillingly toward radicalism. As long as social caseworkers attend to true and basic pains and sufferings, they will be on the track of the radical tendencies.

The conservative trend in casework originates in the elementary need to survive and have access to resources while striving to handle the problems of clients. Caseworkers must always be practical and realistic in some degree. They must accommodate to the existing society if they are not to be isolated from clients and from means to struggle around the difficulties experienced by clients. In order that benefits be realized in a practical way, social caseworkers are forced to connect their efforts to the conventions and norms of the society. Clients, social agencies, social institutions, even caseworkers themselves, are all bearers of the norms and expectations of this society and association with these facts always represents a conservative influence. Thus, like the inevitable tendency toward radicalism in social casework that derives from the nature of the problems confronted, there exists also the tendency toward conservatism that rises from the need to act in the present world.

Serious casework cannot avoid either the radical or the conservative forces within it. Omitting the radical thrust would mean that the problems rarely would be pursued to a deep and important degree. Goals would be diminished (in the interests of being "practical"), time of caseworker-client contact abbreviated, number of persons accepted as clients or presumed to be assisted by the casework activity would be fewer in number, and so forth. Omitting the conservative inclination would mean that casework would flirt with the failure to survive or would exist bereft of access to the means and resources required to confront client's problems and to stand over against the basic demands of the existing social order.

Bringing forth and developing the radical direction within the practice of social casework will demand that in our daily efforts, large and small, we account

to the ambivalence of being both radical and conservative in ourselves and our co-workers. Our approach cannot be so alien to others that we force an immediate polarization and rejection of our views. We cannot artificially lay a radical politics upon casework practice, insist it unreasonably, deny our doubts, condemn too thoroughly our colleagues without slipping into the intolerance for contradiction and ambiguity that is itself non-radical. We will need to resist covering over our own conservatism with a too-forceful radicalism, because the underlying conflict in us becomes vaguely alive to others and they distrust our sincerity or the commitment we hold. If we genuinely know the value of radicalism for the realistic accomplishment of our goals, we do not need to hide that we too take care to survive.

The need, then, is for a new open-mindedness and tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity as we look at some possible directions that implement radicalism in casework activity. The aim of this receptivity would be to allow into play forces that would shift the radical-conservative balance of tendencies in the favor of more radicalism. Social casework that is more informed by radicalism, that draws upon a thorough-going democratic and equalitarian spirit, is likely to be more sound in its operation than any alternative form of endeavor. Such casework is more able to unite intention and outcome, policy and practice, and thus to realize the hopes of persons who enter the field with the highest ideals.

The social caseworker who incorporates a radical commitment within his or her practice has a double focus always in mind: the individual or small group as client(s) and the social institutions in which caseworker and clients live. The goal of casework is to transcend the caseworker-client relationship by bringing about significant changes in both the client's character and the principles of organization that regulate surrounding social institutions. No problem that is appropriate to the caseworker context can be located simply within the client's character or simply in the external oppressive features of social institutions. All problems relevant

to casework involve distortions, biases, deviations, errors or faulty dispositions in the character of both the client and the social institutions. Radicalism reveals to the caseworker that it is not possible to resolve adequately any individual's character distortions without the world being turned upside down. Each new gain into more healthy living changes the biases and distortions of a competitive society (biases in the family, work system, school system, government, etc.) with the result that pressures against change are steadily aroused. The dream of helping individuals to mature or even to survive peacefully within a sick society leads to disillusionment when these inevitable restrictions upon that dream become apparent. A casework that speaks solely to self-actualization, self-determination, private personal maturity unavoidably leads clients into liberal individualism, which is at bottom, a conservative life.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the fact that the radical caseworker sees the practical inefficacy of trying to change character without altering culture and of pushing to alleviate social pressures without modifying internal processes, he or she does not construe either of these taken separately as valuable goals on political grounds. Radicalism insists that the peculiar problems of everyday life and the root problems of the major social systems are deeply inter-related and that each actor must account to the common welfare as well as to his or her individual needs. The goal of casework becomes that of engaging client and social institutions in new modes of reciprocal influence such that the client's character and private problems are not divorced from his or her social context and the common welfare is not left free for others to manipulate. If the caseworker causes the client to become tied up in himself in the resolution of his problems, he demobilizes the client in a political sense. If the caseworker causes social institutions to meet some of the needs of the client without concurrent structural change in these institutions or significant movement toward such change, he demobilizes himself and keeps the client passive politically and socially.

Difficult questions come to mind when this goal is entertained seriously. If we cannot change schools and families through our own professional and political lives, how can we expect an alliance of caseworkers and clients to accomplish this arduous task? If clients are hard put to manage their anxieties and obsessions, their fears and jealousies, how can they be effective social change agents? Are not troubled people poor activists? Examination of these questions suggests that there are productive answers to them.

We cannot dramatically modify schools, industry and families as professionals because we have no political base. We are often called in as consultants, advisers or experts, but the recommendations we make are of a politically threatening nature and standing alone leaves us helpless. When we see the need for patient and family participation in medical diagnosis and treatment,<sup>4</sup> when we recommend student decision-making powers, when we speak to worker creativity, responsibility and spontaneity, we are bearing news from the political front. Yet we are out of touch with patients, students and workers (and doctors, teachers and managers too as political supports) when we represent their needs. We are, in short, isolated from a comprehensive political movement. Our social demands rely upon broad support which we can directly encourage by the casework activity itself only when our demands are connected with a larger movement.

Clients who have debilitating symptoms need not first be rid of those symptoms and subsequently available for social struggle. No one is fully incapacitated, and building upon the strengths of the client in respect to his or her social engagements is fully as possible as using these strengths in self-examination alone. We demonstrate our own unwillingness to lean upon clients in our common efforts when we suggest that they are not prepared for or capable of directing their efforts toward social institutions.

We do not expect to resolve fully either the inner conflicts of the individual or the social structural principles of the main institutions of society. Both sides of that equation -- private well-being and

social well-being -- depend upon a complete social revolution. To wish or anticipate such accomplishment is to be alone, ambitious and helpless. What is intended by casework is not complete realization of private and social well-being; rather, the aim is to engage persons in dealing with the realities of their own lives and of the collective life in new and more elevating ways. As clients and caseworkers tie their lives more closely to social struggle with personal sharing made important, they construct the conditions for on-going effort -- they transcend the lonely caseworker-client relationship and produce variety and diversity of personally and socially involved encounters.

This revision of the goals of casework from individualistic well-being to social and personal involvement contains a particular view of mental health or effective social functioning. We no longer can accept relief from symptoms, self-realization, capacity to adapt to a painful reality or peace of mind as definitions of mental health. These analyses leave the social order aside in their formulation, thereby assuming that the concrete functioning of the individual can be seen separately from that system.

Radicalism in casework will substitute a new set of ideas that define mental health and optimal social functioning. These new concepts will speak to such matters as equalitarian functioning (e.g., having an equalitarian rather than authoritarian personality style), revolutionary awareness and commitment and aspirations for unity of self and collective functioning. They will contain points of reference such that we can estimate progress along the dimension of skill in enabling groups to heighten individuation for all members and collective accomplishment at one and the same time. The new ideas about mental health will attend to realism of personal perceptions and judgments, a realism that incorporates deep understanding of personal problems, of social and historical forces, of the possibilities for good living. The definitions of mental health

will not only be value-laden, they will also be political in their substance.

In much the same way that radicalism can influence the definitions of the goals of casework, it points toward new thoughts on the choice of clients, toward a conception of selecting clients according to political as well as the usual considerations. Most of the time in casework practice we are not aware of choosing clients at all, we are even less aware that a political component is involved in such choice. We work in social institutions or alongside other members of the community in such a fashion that the clientele toward whom our efforts are directed seems merely to happen to us. The geographical location in which we labor helps to determine who comes to us and the clients we take on. The policies of the agency and its traditions also contribute to this choice. People who seek our services are another source of the selective, winnowing process by which we narrow the whole population (which could beneficially use our services) to a group of manageable size. Then, too, our preferences for kinds of problems and kinds of persons play a role in this determination. Yet it seems fair to conclude that we are not completely open and aware, articulate and politically sophisticated in the matter of allocating our energies and resources.

Three different proposals suggest themselves as useful expressions of radicalism in the selection process. First, maybe we should concentrate our work on people who are already in the radical movement. There are several advantages to this possibility. Persons in the movement, like all of us in this disturbed society, have the customary run of personal problems which handicap them as individuals and as activists. In addition, as a consequence of their engagements with the repressive forces of this authoritarian society, activists are faced with many crises and unusual personal threats. Risks of jail, of death, of loss of job, of loss of bearings through experimentation with new forms of social living arrangements increase susceptibility to stress and to neurotic reactions. Providing assistance to movement people would bring

social casework into radical activity immediately as a supportive part of a larger social struggle.

An alternative approach would be to center attention upon those persons who are ready for radical social action in the sense that they have come to some understanding of the influence of the whole social system upon their lives but have not been brought into positive social striving of a radical sort. As in psychoanalytic therapy the analyst offers an interpretation when the patient has most of the material to be understood in his preconscious, on the edge of open awareness, so casework might look to those persons who are on the border of radical understanding and action. Such choice would make of casework practice a mobilizer of persons for the radical movement. The worker would not coerce radicalism; he would nurture that which is burgeoning.

Yet a third alternative, akin to the second one, would call for a policy of giving priority in the offering of services to those individuals most likely to be radicalized by the casework activity. These persons may be ready for social action, in which case this third alternative is no different from the second one. But it may also be the case that there exist in the population of potential clients a set of individuals who have no sense of the relation between their personal problems and the bias of the whole social system and yet are open to that insight. If part of the casework activity is the joining of the struggle to solve personal problems through one's participation in social change activities, such individuals might be transformed into powerful radical activists in the obverse of the way that conservative social casework pacifies potential radicals by causing them to attend to personal problems separately from social action. Part of a diagnostic appraisal would attend to the probability that any individual would be radicalized by the sharing of casework activities and selection of clients would utilize these assessments.

Again, the social caseworker would serve as a

mobilizer for the radical movement, although he or she would be careful to keep the welfare of the client equally to the forefront of his or her concern and interest. That is, the proposal stated here is that of selecting for probable radicals and applying appropriate shared goals and activities with the hope of increasing the number of participants in the movement. Having selected for this probability does not mean that the caseworker forces radicalism on a client, dominates him or her. It means only that in its policy choices casework includes an explicit and radical perspective (because it is a sound point of view) rather than an implicit and conservative perspective (because it is easily imposed and permits the worker to live without immediate threat). I speak here only of the process by which clients are selected, not the transaction that follow. These will be taken up later.

What about those people who need help desperately and would never qualify under these criteria? Why forsake the universalism underlying casework, the readiness to help all who need assistance? Does one not become callous? Is one not laying on a radicalism despite all protestations to the contrary? How does one justify this political selectivity?

Two answers come in reply. First, all concrete action involves preference, attention to some things and persons rather than others, based on values. Casework does not now and cannot by its current practices contribute to all persons in the society who could benefit from it. We already choose a tiny fraction of the population, and changing the ground rules that determine which persons are included in that fraction does not alter the fact that most persons in need do not obtain casework services. Conscious choice is not necessarily inferior to the laissez-faire pattern that now exists. Second, and more importantly I believe, this form of selection provides possible service to a greater proportion of the whole population; it is more inclusive in its productivity because it attends to persons who try to change institutional structures for interaction. By helping people who are modifying the social structure, we become part of the movement to

eliminate the oppressiveness that is a significant element causing personal problems. We multiply our efforts instead of consuming our lives by helping a few and leaving the systematic bias unattended.

Would adoption of one of these alternatives mean that casework would emphasize the poor or the working class as is commonly assumed in radical discussions? I am not inclined to use these categories as substitutes for those defining the three alternatives. Working class individuals may or may not be readier for radical action than middle class or upper class individuals. That matter ought not be prejudged by reliance upon traditional radical theory. Perhaps the middle class is disappearing as Marx predicted<sup>5</sup> so that more and more of the population is proletarian. If so, concentration upon conventional designations of the working class or the lumpenproletariat could mean a loss of recruits to the radical movement and might induce us to serve persons who will not gain most by actively changing their world.

The goals of a casework process may be redefined by radicalism; the selection of clients may be informed by radicalism; similarly, the subject matter within the casework process may be modified by appropriate attention to a sound political base as a component of professional work. Because clients bring their living struggles to the casework relation, their particular interests and biases impinge upon the process and significantly determine its content and direction. If one addresses professional effort toward radical activists, some social issues and questions are more likely to be raised than if one attends to those nearly radical, those who might become radical or those for whom radicalism is a distant and irrelevant matter. Insofar as clients co-determine the relationship and its purposes, neither dominating it by only allowing their own definitions of its purpose to rule nor being victimized by an exploitative caseworker, the content will reflect the current experiences and perplexities of these clients. Thus, for instance, for women who seek feminist-oriented casework the matter of women's roles and oppressions is

more likely to be central to the process than in less explicitly directed casework practice.

By the same reasoning, if the caseworker has a definition of mental health that ties together individual functioning and social system performance, then the content to which the worker will be most alert will be that in which these levels of activity are interpenetrating. The goals of casework help determine the subject matter brought into play in the process of casework. To the old and sound dictum that the caseworker must start where the client is can be added the idea that the caseworker's responsibility is also to incorporate his or her own intentions, his or her goals and aspirations, in the relationship in a democratic and equalitarian way. The caseworker is not entirely passive in the selection of topics upon which concentrated effort is expended. In the simplest sense he or she may quietly, even unconsciously, respond more vividly to some subjects than to others. In different instances, for example during diagnostic activities, the caseworker may directly pinpoint areas of life to be examined. Radical perspective is among the dimensions to be considered in such decisions if the goals of casework are to be approximately attained.

Two guiding principles suggest themselves in respect to subject matter in the casework process, although there are countless other ways to approach this area. The first principle refers to a way of pursuing any element of everyday life that is brought by the client. Each item that occupies the center of attention may be considered to be incompletely rendered until its social history and institutional determinants are accounted to as well as its personal, characterological bases. A second principle requires that the caseworker be especially attuned to those problems in which the unity of personal struggle and institutional change is prominent. Whereas the first principle implies that a radical perspective is relevant to every detail of daily life, the second principle suggests that some problems in living are more aligned with the radical perspective than are others. Both principles are applicable to choices and emphases in casework practice.

The first principle stems from the fact that any part of a client's life, any action, is a function jointly of the client's character and his embeddedness in social institutions. An exploration of the contributions from both sides of that equation is necessary to the understanding of any issue and it is vital to the goals of casework. The more seriously and deeply any moment of human behavior is taken, the more ties to personal and social history there are to be found. Taking daily life seriously, seeing the historical importance of individual choices, placing the tiny action and broad social movements in their proper intertwined connections is itself affirmation of individual and social change. If a child is a "behavior problem" in school, he is also in the presence of a school that has difficulty meeting the needs of its constituent members. If a person has a phobia about elevators, that person also lives in a world where fears are private and social forces impersonal. If a marriage is in trouble, day care centers are also lacking. The associations are ever-present, not to be imposed by the caseworker's political convictions and prior study, but rather inevitably found or come upon by the persistent pursuit to a profound level of the conditions that cause a given problematic action. Rebellion against a father always has roots in the unconscious and can thus always be traced back to characterological foundations; just as insistently, however, rebellion against a father connects with social forms of authority, those functions within organizations that establish and express authority. Understanding one facet of rebellion against the father without explicit, detailed comprehension of the other facet is not truly possible. Any action or symptom, therefore, can serve as subject matter in the casework process while bearing the radical imprint so long as that action or symptom is studied deeply and in a balanced fashion.

The second principle guiding attention in the casework process rests upon the assumption that while indeed every action or belief is analyzable within the radical framework, some actions or beliefs are more available for achieving the goals of casework than are others. The theme in this selectivity would be that the

caseworker is particularly alert to actions or beliefs which readily or most obviously convey the interconnection of personal struggles and social forces. Life at one's workplace, whether this be the client's or the caseworker's work setting, may more openly expose this double focus than encounters at a party which conventionally seem personal or dealings in a department store or supermarket that are impersonal in appearance and apparently a function of social forces beyond our private influence. We have probably ignored too long the personal component in politically alive events, strikes, sit-ins, mass demonstrations, grass-roots organizing, intra-party debates. These may be apt topics for casework that we currently neglect or slight.

The subject matter of casework, in summary, is not merely that which somehow happens to take hold in the transaction between client and caseworker. Surely the client's preoccupations are primary and his momentary hopes and fears are central determinants of what is heard and what is explored. But the caseworker too is a participant in the transaction and he or she brings elaboration to some topics, judgment to other topics, decision to still others. In his or her contributions, the caseworker who integrates a radical perspective shapes the depth of the work and the direction to the goals of casework as influenced by radicalism.

Beyond choices in subject matter lies the general relationship between caseworker and client. For instance, it is often said that the caseworker acts as a role model for certain kinds of clients. His or her intention is to have the client identify with socially correct or, in our case, radical orientations as these are modeled by the caseworker. The client can observe the worker, see the behaviors demonstrated and adopt these modes of action for himself. Questions about this intention arise as soon as a radical perspective is adopted. Should a caseworker ever desire that a client take on ways of an authority through imitation; is not that a low level of learning and growth, based on a degree of unacceptable authoritarianism? If some modeling were desirable (say for anti-social, self-destructive individuals), as a

temporary way station on the road to healthy functioning, what standards and patterns should be presented for adoption? Does the caseworker wish the client to become adapted to social pressures or rather able to oppose conventions in less self-destructive actions? How can a caseworker rely on a client as political ally if the client has assumed a radical posture from imitative identification rather than from discovery and choice? Is the caseworker sufficiently confident of his or her role as revolutionary to put himself or herself forth as a role model?

Obviously, a host of problems in the relationship of caseworker and client are aroused by a radical perspective. I cannot here speak to any proportion of these problems. Instead, I plan to attend only to some guiding themes in the following paragraphs, emphasizing the interplay between the caseworker's technical expertise and political position as these affect the relationship with the client.

The caseworker enters into relations with a client in possession of certain concrete attributes. He or she is an "other" in the relation and can be said to serve purposes merely by the fact. When a client makes social a private concern by sharing that concern with another person, he or she transforms the very nature of the problem. But more than being simply another human being, the caseworker has some basic general attributes. He or she has some special competence or ability, some guides which regulate his or her willingness to use those capacities (such as professional ethics), he or she has access to some resources by being a member of an agency or institution or by having familiarity with resources useful to problems that clients often experience, and he or she has some social influence based upon credentials, prior accomplishments and reputation. In short, the caseworker is an expert and his or her technical talents enter into the relationship with the client. Without professional, technical substance, the person is not a caseworker at all.

Additionally, the caseworker is necessarily a political figure, in our case a radical. Every caseworker

serves political functions whether he or she wills it or performs these functions with unexamined biases and commitments.

In the radical tradition the caseworker is a political ally of the client insofar as the client is radical and a political mobilizer to the degree that the client is not yet radical. The liberal and conservative traditions tend to disengage clients politically by offering a surface neutrality of politics in the relationship.

Given the conservative-radical mix in both radical caseworker and client, the caseworker's activities as political ally and technical expert possess a dialectic, a continuing process of opposition and unity such that at times the political and technical are over against each other and at other times integrated with each other. If the caseworker places his or her politics above spontaneous concern for the client, if he or she sees the client as a social type, solely a potential ally, but not as a unique individual with special needs, then the caseworker has brought into opposition the political and technical and violates both aspects of the work. Imposing politics arbitrarily in the relationship means that the caseworker manifests a conservative trend behind the veil of radicalism. If politics is all or too much of what is considered the technical side of casework, if casework is nothing but a special political forum, the separate and special technical quality of casework is lost. The caseworker will inevitably oppress the client in the interests of other allegiances.

Conversely, if the technical aspects of casework are used as if they have no political component, as if they are value-free, the caseworker acts to demobilize a potentially politically alive client; he or she dominates differently. An opposition between political and technical factors in the caseworker's authority can take either form: the political over the technical or the technical over the political. Both reflect the conservative side of casework and need to be recognized, accepted as what they are, and submerged in the movement toward increased radicalism which involves the unity of the political and technical in casework practice.

With respect to this unity of the political and the technical, it is clear that part of the technical competence and performance of the caseworker is political: a productive worker mobilizes clients in democratic fashion towards what can only properly be seen as political goals, participation in social life such that effective reorganization of structural principles of institutions is promoted. The social caseworker neither dominates the client nor supports the exploitative tendencies of the client; he or she practices, teaches, nourishes and fosters the equalitarian modes that characterize a politically humane society. Because authority is needed to join individuals to their own development in the midst of collective accomplishment, the caseworker does not pretend to act apart from authority.<sup>6</sup> He or she is not laissez-faire in his or her attitude toward collectives and is thus prepared to be authoritative. Because arbitrary authority diminishes all individuals involved and limits the possible attainments of the collective efforts, the caseworker is similarly careful to be appropriate in the use of authority. He or she is not authoritarian in his or her commitments to individuals and groups while he or she does not shirk from being authoritative. In short, the casework-client relationship is itself a political act and proceeds most advantageously to client and caseworker alike within a democratic, equalitarian framework.

Similarly, the unity of political and technical components of casework is expressed through the influence of casework practice upon the world external to it. From productive experiences in the casework context come suggestions about how organizations, families, government, etc., can be organized most humanly. The technical side of casework raises up political implications for other institutions. We discover that disturbed persons function in a healthy way when they are exposed to direct communication, feedback, equality, trust, concern; and we propose that these conditions prevail in schools, families and industry. From our professional achievements arise political recommendations.

Finally, any study of radicalism in casework would be insensitive if it failed to acknowledge sincere resistance to the development of conscious decisions of a

political sort in the on-going practice of professional activity. Our professional training has taught us to be objective, openminded, morally neutral and value-free in our work. We have been led to assume that politics concerns only the electoral process and largely involves persons who are self-seeking, exploitative, insincere, hungering for power and privilege. By attempting to keep politics out of professional practice, we have wanted to be fair and helpful in our dealings with clients.

But there is not any true alternative to the union of politics and profession since there is indeed political orientation in all that we do. If we do not choose the politics of radicalism, we are condemned to the political positions of conservatives and liberals which have proven false to our goals. It seems clear to me that our development as professionals and as citizens is handicapped by our resistances to a conscious appraisal and deliberate use of political perspective in casework practice. Our development as citizens and as professionals is restricted by our belief that political effort is only electoral and almost always corrupt. Our work is political and failure to be conscious of that fact is irresponsible. I believe, further, that when we do accept a radical politics as inherent in our profession, we will bring into the field of social casework a revival of vitality and resourcefulness that will be truly exciting.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. For critical reviews and commentary that materially affect this paper, I am indebted to Ellen W. Freeman, Charles Frye, Jeffrey Galper, Barbara Hemmendinger and Alice M. Kohn. In addition, Alice Kohn demanded many appropriate editorial revisions which have enhanced the paper significantly. Motivation and support came from students, alumni and faculty of the Bryn Mawr College School of Social Work and Social Research, some young people at a regional conference of the National Federation of Student Social Workers and most dearly from Harvey Finkle, Jeffrey Galper and Jack Sternbach, fellow members of a once thriving personal-political-professional social work collective.
2. Robert Paul Wolff, The Poverty of Liberalism. (Boston: Beacon, 1968); and Philip Lichtenberg, Psychoanalysis: Radical and Conservative (New York: Springer, 1969.)
3. Ellen Meiksins Wood, Mind and Politics (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1972).
4. Joshua Horn, Away With All Pests (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969).
5. Louis Boudin, The Theoretical System of Karl Marx, (Chicago: Kerr, 1907).
6. Ellen Wood Freeman, The Use of Authority. Unpublished master's paper, Bryn Mawr College School of Social Work and Social Research, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, 1973.