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PROBLEMS OF ADVOCACY*

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ABSTRACT

The recent past has seen the erosion, and among some, the rejection, of social science neutrality and professional detachment. Among the typical expressions of a new professionalism is the underdog advocate, who wishes to lend his or her skills to the cause of less-than-equal groups in the society. The paper analyzes the problems confronting such advocates. The first is the discrepancy between career routes and success behavior on one hand, and the needs of poor people on the other. The second is the difficulty encountered by middle strata professionals in cross-class and cross-cultural communication, including their own ignorance of the structure and dynamics of minority and poor peoples' communities. The third problem faced by the advocates is that the mere addition of their expert skills to the struggles of the deprived is not necessarily or usually adequate in terms of power resources. If advocates have, however, a modest definition of their possible accomplishment, and if they view underprivileged groups as the main actors in their own behalf, their roles may be defined more realistically.

Introduction

The last fifteen years have witnessed an erosion in the two related models of social science neutrality and professional detachment and self-regulation. In the case of social science neutrality the erosion has been dual: first, the possibility of "value-free" cultural work

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has been challenged, and among many, rejected (Gouldner, 1962; Stein, 1968; Hoult, 1968; also see Lynd, 1939); second, the desirability of allegedly "uncommitted" work has been questioned and charged with being covert or unconscious commitment to status quo values and arrangements (e.g. Gouldner, 1970; Mills, 1967).

The breakdown of the social science consensus on detachment and "value-free" work is not surprising. The advanced capitalist societies of the West, especially in North America, have had, and are still experiencing, a period of intense social conflict over race, poverty, war, liberty, and morals. Since detachment and objectivity must rest on consensus among scholars as to what is "given" and what is problematic, and on a sense of common membership in a scientific community (Bendix, 1970), Weber's classic statement (Weber, 1919, 1946) seems, today, beside the point.

Conflict and division in society has produced parallel division among members of (antagonistic) scientific subcommunities. Weber lectured against propaganda from the podium. His latter day critics, taking their cue from Mannheim (1949), argue that selecting the "facts" is the first step toward inevitable, even if unrecognized commitment.

Parallel to the erosion of the model of value-free social science has been new analyses of professionalism in all of the human service fields. (cf. Haug and Sussman, 1970) Here too the attack has been, basically dual. First, the idea of the professional, self-regulating community (Goode, 1957) as one which would necessarily serve clients best has been brought under attack by those who observe that self-regulation, as in medicine, quite frequently serves self-interest and in turn is sometimes or even frequently in opposition to client interest. (e.g. Alford, 1974; Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich, 1971) The second aspect of the attack on conventional professionalism has focussed on the professional's alleged ability to know the interests of the client more adequately than the client does him or herself.

Criticism of professionalism, like criticism of social science neutrality, is not surprising when newly organized interests, represented by combative and suspicious entrants to policy disputes, challenge a system of authority. As Hughes pointed out (1958, 1960), professionalism entails a mandate from society and from clients; this mandate grants to the self-regulating profession a monopoly of authority over matters concerning its area of competence. "Perhaps it is well to recall," writes Hughes,

that the opposite of service is disservice and, that the line between them is thin, obscure and shifting. In many of the things which people do for one another, the for can be changed to to by a slight over-doing or by a shift of mood. (Hughes, 1958: 69)

From the mid-sixties, black communities began to generate spokespersons who resisted the imposition of white elites' views about community development. It was inevitable that city planners, and other social service professionals would come under fire as persons without knowledge of or sympathy with the needs of the Black poor--that is, without a legitimated mandate.

The response made to these criticisms by many professionals has been a new ethic of professionalism. (Dumont, 1970) In part, the new professionalism has interpreted its responsibility as speaking out for and joining the underdog.

One city planner in Chicago, for example, working for the Department of Urban Renewal, publicly wrote an attack on design features and the lack of low-income housing in a Southside clearance project. He was fired; he obtained financial support from a liberal Chicago organization of rabbis and went to work for a community organization in the black residential area he had discussed. Another planner, interviewed in my study of advocate planners (Ross, 1975, 1976) opposed the location of a highway in a Chicano community near San Diego. Fired by the city agency for his opposition, he was hired by the Model Cities area board as their consultant on planning issues.

In the context of the late Sixties, an underdog advocacy like this frequently called for conflict with the established city-wide agencies. In such a conflict the planner, in much the same sense as the lawyer, was an advocate for his clients' interest. In this sense, the advocate planner, or the doctor who attacked a city's slowness in performing lead paint inspections, represents a redefinition of the service ethic of professionalism. When the tumult of the last decades broke up the consensus view of the "comon good," many activist professionals, especially those affected by public policy, looked to an identifiable client for their mandate.

The definition of who the client is when one works "for the community" as many claimed to, is not, to be sure, an easy task. A voluntary organization claiming to represent "the community" may or may not express views endorsed by most residents. And it will be ones' implicit or explicit political outlook which dictates one's estimate of whether

an organization's substantive position stands for the "interests" of the community as a whole, or any segment it claims to represent. But even with its difficulties, defining the client as a community group or specific neighborhood is a step toward commitment to previously neglected interests. The political commitment frequently embodied in this definition made the "new professionals" appear to some of their colleagues, as "unprofessional." The rhetoric of conflict in the inner city of the latter Sixties was not particularly polite, and indeed, demonstrations and other actions frequently had as much symbolic contention as coherent programs. Nevertheless, for many of the advocates in planning and other professions, this thrust to direct responsibility to an underprivileged or mistreated client had many overtones of a renewal of the service ethic which historically defines professionalism. The context of egalitarianism and populist ideas constrained this new version of the service ethic in ways shaped by a perception of the alleged distortions of orthodox professionalism.

For the new professionals in policy related fields, service to a suspect version of the "common good" was superceded by service to those heretofore excluded from potent roles in policy-making. For those in the free professions, service to the poor or working class was valued over that to the rich or affluent.

The norms of objectivity and detachment which were supposed to protect clients from hasty or personally distorted judgment were rejected. They implied, for these activists, a status inequality, a haughty removal from the peoples' struggles. In the place of the protection of detachment, however, there appeared the concomitant willingness to be criticized, to listen to the client, to be humble in the exercise of judgment. (Ultimately, of course, responsibility for technical judgment could not be evaded, and the more life threatening a potential error was, the less such views penetrated the profession in question.) In place of the "hard" results which planners, architects, doctors had come to expect - projects completed, buildings designed, patients cured - new goals arose: leadership developed which could carry on without constant technical support; buildings and projects designed perhaps more slowly, but with the approval of its users; communities not free of disease perhaps, but a bit less in awe of and less reluctant to use modern medicine. These are some of the ways the climate created by the protests of the recent past impacted on the human service professions.

So, in both social science and social service a new sense of commitment has suffused the work of many practitioners. But despite the renewal of a service ethic, it is not clear how, in the context of research for example a partisan social science (or scientist) can remain open to

disconfirming or uncomfortable facts; nor are many radical or committed social scientists content with a resolution of the problem of objectivity which concludes that reality is necessarily or wholly dependent on the position or preference of a given observer. Similarly, there are obscure and technical aspects of many professional fields of which lay persons remain mystified, and cannot judge; and there are, one can imagine, instances in which a professional may indeed know what is in a client's interest more clearly than the client. Therefore, although this paper focusses on problems involved in adopting the newer modes of social science and professionalism, it is not written without recognition of the complexities which precede them. It is clear, however, that many recent entrants to these fields have made value commitments in their professionalism or their science. While their work is not value-free, neither is it problem-free. So we address here some of those problems. Specifically, after examining the analysis held in common by many professionals recently, this paper focusses on problems of career routes and respectability for advocates; on their attempts at cross-class and cross-cultural communication; and on the fact that they are faced with power located far from their grasp.

Advocacy

As we have seen, for some scientists and professionals the socially determined focus of suffering, inequality, and injustice leads them to define, or want to define, their work in such a manner so as to advance the interests of these oppressed groups. Summarized most briefly, their analysis is that the privileged classes in modern society are well-served by the ordinary functioning of scholarship and social and health service; indeed, the analysis claims that such intellectual and professional work usually, and certainly in the long run, functions so as to more deeply entrench what is judged to be unjustified privilege and unconscionable oppression. This charge implies that scientific and professional workers, that is, intellectuals, have a large role in the maintenance of a given social order. As one leftist planner put it, planners are the "soft-cops" of the city. (Goodman, 1971:13)

As new entrants to the professions and to social science were developing this practical critique of their own fields, at the same time there appeared renewed interest in the concept of "hegemony" as suggested by the Italian Communist, Antonio Gramsci. For Gramsci, "the intellectual and moral leadership" exercised by a ruling group, and "the general direction imposed upon social life by the dominant fundamental group" is constituted in part by hegemony in intellectual life. This, in turn, produces consent to a given order's principles of organization, (i.e.

appropriation); this consent relieves a ruling class of the dangerous necessity of imposing its will by force. (Gramsci, 1971: 12) Thus, the critique developed by the new activists is a political, or politicized perspective, one which implicitly accepts a view of the society as stratified and conflict-laden around that stratification. Therefore an adversary process of social action and decision-making is appropriate; and so, the idea of advocacy--in social science and service--has become current. The advocate, at the minimum, declares a commitment to serve the interests of his or her client; he or she may further submit to the direction of the client; and the advocate may also serve at the discretion of the client.

The commitment among these new professionals to the redress of inequity and the subordination of these professionals to the unequal occurs in relation to specific social and historical trends. Increases in disposable income, among other things, breeds among some a sense of the irrationality, the lack of material necessity for suffering. Consequently, it breeds guilt among the comfortable, who, since they see suffering which is not objectively or materially necessary, tell themselves, in the words of Phil Ochs's song, "There but for fortune go you and I." Discussion of youth movements of the Sixties have emphasized this latter aspect of social movement participation as guilt. (e.g. Keniston, 1968) But, though this may be true--indeed we think it is--the critical aspect of advocacy is its proponents' focus--explicitly or implicitly--on the irrationality of the social arrangements which create or maintain suffering. This focus leads naturally enough to the notion that the exercise of expertise and rationality in the interests of the unequal will be a major element in the melioration of their condition.

One planner interviewed in my study of advocates in city planning, for example, had worked with troubled blacks and their parents, helping them redesign a condemned school building. This planner's view of advocacy was:

The facilitation of the achievement of community goals by an expert, especially the goals of community groups who lack the knowledgeability or power to achieve those goals. (Interview #28; unpublished data from Ross, 1975)

Armed with what is after all a certain optimism, then, advocates in social science and the professions attempt to use their expertise in the interests of the oppressed.

In 1968 I observed the beginning of an advocacy planning project in Chicago's West Side ghetto; earlier I had been involved in something called the Center for Radical Research in Chicago; and then I did

research on advocacy in city planning. From these experiences as observer-researcher, and as a participant I want to comment on three problems faced by advocates: there are the problems of career and profession, the problem of cross-cultural and cross-class communication, and the problem of power.

Career and Profession

For those in the so-called helping professions the primary problem involved in advocacy is, I would imagine, the structure of one's institutional employer, and the distribution of the services it produces. But for social scientists and planners--the groups with whom I have had contact--a rather different order of problem arises. Central here is the fundamental fact that these professionals are now part of more or less clearly defined career ladders, and these ladders are more or less sharply distinct from advocacy concerns. For the social scientist--either as graduate student or young untenured member of a faculty--relatively heavy expectations exist for professional output and achieved competency. Taking on the professional identity brings these expectations. The management of career goals generally requires a great deal of one's finite time and energy. This becomes a problem for advocates because meeting the needs of underprivileged groups is not necessarily or even usually the kind of activity which can easily be used to meet other career commitments. In short, you get few points for service.

I can illustrate this with some examples from my Chicago experience. The Center for Radical Research was formed on the model of a summer project, in 1966, in which about fifty students would do research helpful to black and poor white community organizations involved in resistance to urban renewal and other projects in the city. The communication link between the organizations and the students involved delicate political tasks as this was the period of the rise of a nationalist tone in black community life. Supposedly, the community groups would define research needs, and groups of students led by graduate students or teachers would try to help serve them. The task of leading these groups was a tremendous potential time burden. In my own case, that summer was to have been one of work on a Master's paper. What I discovered was that the kind of work required by graduate training was not going to be fulfilled through work on these community needs. For example, in one area a nascent tenants' group needed information as to who the large slumlords were. This information was useful to them, but not part of the kind of work which I could easily or immediately convert to academic or professional credit. Another group wanted to know about Mafia involvement in their neighborhood. Given the time and resources

available extensive use of clipping files was the best we could do: but people in the community knew at least as much as we could find that way. In sum, the Center was a good experience for a group of students who were exposed to the city, an awesome drain on the energies of the so-called group leaders, and of very limited value to the communities.

In my own dissertation research a similar problem occurred. I was involved in a survey of advocate planners. Because my institute was quantitatively oriented; because the pressure on dissertations are for scientific rigor; because such studies are easier to fund than others this mode was used. Yet as we interviewed advocates, their need emerged as one for detailed contextual case studies: how to do it, how others have done it. At a general level I hope our work was helpful, but it is clear that many specific advocate's needs were not met by our conventionally defined work.

The point, then, is clear. For a number of potential advocates--especially in research oriented fields--the orthodox professional careers make demands which cannot be met with this work. To break with orthodoxy, to accept insecurity and disapproval, are key elements in one's ability to do successful work. And indeed, this is what we discover: the most effective advocate researchers are those guerrilla researchers not now involved with academia. The North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA), the Africa Research Group (ARG), the Radical Education Project (REP--an arm of the now defunct Students for a Democratic Society) and the Brains Mistrust (BMT--a local group at the University of Michigan in 1970-72) are examples of this route.

One should point out, however, before leaving this topic, that as a certain number of sympathetic professionals begin to appear in a given field, critical mass can be reached: enough people to provide support, guidance, and employment can create sufficient social space to allow people to take this route. I believe this has begun to occur in economics and sociology and psychology, but it is only a beginning.

Cross-cultural Communication:

The second broad area of problems an advocate faces is that of cross-class and cross-cultural communication. In our study of community planning about half the advocate planners indicated that class, race or cultural gaps between themselves and their clients create serious problems of trust and communication. This problem is not, of course, unique to activist advocates. Gans' famous (1965) analysis of urban renewal in an Italian community in Boston, for example, showed the rather large discrepancy between the cultural and aesthetic standards of the upper middle class sub-culture of the planners and the working class residents of the

West End. The planners saw poor and overcrowded housing; the residents experienced minor inconvenience (e.g. cold water), but enjoyed low rent and a genuine sense of communal belonging. The planners saw crime statistics, but these were generated in just one part of the area, the old Scollay Square, and this area was excluded, by residents, from their social perception of the community boundaries. The planners, with speculators in support, razed the area, causing grief (Fried, 1963) which would have been surprising if the area really had been so bad. Among the advocates, those who do not see this relationship as creating problems are much more likely to be members of minority groups themselves--that is, Chicano or Black.

Advocate planners indicate that they use different strategies to attempt to overcome class or cultural barriers to communication. One white planner, part of a firm, hired a black project director; another non-Spanish speaking planner who worked with a Chicano community said he carefully cultivated personal relationships with the community organization's leadership. The general theme of advocates' coping strategies though, is dual: on the one hand, many emphasize listening carefully and patiently to community members' grievances, criticism, etc.; on the other hand, a number of planners emphasize the requirement of steady commitment and accomplishment. They point out that people trust you when they see you working for them through long periods of adversity.

As one goes over these interviews, though, the gap between the role of the educated professional and the lay community resident is of a kind not so easily solved. Good will and hard work, our respondents seem to be saying, will carry the outsider through these difficulties. My observational experience in Chicago, however, argues for the need for a different approach in addition.

In the Chicago community I observed, initial open community meetings were called by the middle class educated leadership of the community. Acting as a steering committee of a newly formed federation, they had selected a planning firm to help propose alternatives to the official proposals which would have entailed large scale dislocation. They held community meetings for the planners to explain their work and listen to the community. Throughout the first four or five of these sessions one could notice an interesting dynamic. The questions and arguments from the floor, directed to the planners who were sharing a stage-front table with the steering committee, frequently appeared to assume that the planners' tentative proposals were already the city's policies. Thus, the residents attacked or defended as if the planners' ideas were the law. The notion that the planners had been hired by the community to serve it had not taken root among the residents. Moreover, the

discussion revealed that the residents did not distinguish between a proposal which might or might not get implemented, and an actual operating program. Briefly put, though nominally members of an organization which had hired advocate planners, the residents did not know what the planning process involved. Furthermore, they responded to the advocates with much the same attitude as they would have to the city's own employees. A clear need in this situation was an introductory session or series which walked people through the nature of the policy-making process on which they were embarked. As things turned out, the broadness of participation was not maintained, and the organization's functions gradually devolved upon its leadership.

Besides concluding that participation requires that people be given effective tools of participation--in this case, some knowledge of what a planner's job might be--there are other things to learn from that community's experience.

White and black professionals are both apt to forget that minority ethnic communities, though disproportionately low income, are also diverse. Involuntary segregation, and a dual housing market, separate for blacks and whites (Molotch, 1972) produces, especially in many older black communities in inner city areas, significant class and educational diversity among residents. Thus, an understanding reached with a community's leadership, which is apt to represent the most stable and professionally sophisticated stratum of the community, will not necessarily reach down to the poorer or less educated strata of the community. In the Chicago case this fact almost led to a strategic disaster.

At one point in the proceeding the planners mentioned the need for code enforcement in the largely apartment-house community. Now the economics of ghetto real estate are such that the owner of a small building without other significant holdings can rarely afford the investment required for preventive maintenance or rehabilitation (Beckman, 1972); and financing is hard to get. Large real estate firms with good cash positions can generally afford this. At the meeting that night there was an owner of a single slum apartment dwelling--a black resident--who began to attack the idea of code enforcement. As a small owner his plight was understandable; his rhetoric, however, was not about the economic squeeze, but about the evils of invasion by white inspectors. It was passionately nationalist in tone. For a while it appeared that opposition to code enforcement would be mobilized by this nationalist spirit. Eventually, however, the vast majority's interest--as tenants who wanted decent facilities--prevailed. This was a modest-sized class-conflict, and the existence of such differences within minority communities cannot be ignored.

Power

An overarching problem advocates face is that of developing sufficient power to make a difference. For research professionals this may be less pressing, for usually they are in a more auxiliary service role, not on the cutting edge of action. The symptom of the problem, for advocate researchers, is a tendency to be utopian, or to compensate by a naive kind of muck-raking. In this mode, the researcher expresses indignation when he or she discovers, for example, an entrepreneur profited by his or her schemes. For the planners, though, the problem is significant--even, one might add, when they are not explicitly conscious of it. It seems fair to say that most advocates hope that the addition of their skills to a community's development process will help it in its struggle for constructive change. But the fact of the matter is that the mobilization of an urban community or neighborhood is but one step in a long chain of changes, actions, and strategies which might substantially alter the conditions of life of poor and minority peoples. To give just the flavor of this issue, consider the position taken by Leon Keyserling who has argued that if a full employment strategy had been followed in the Sixties, regardless of, or even instead of, the War on Poverty, poverty and associated problems of urban life would have been more significantly alleviated (Keyserling, 1969) than it was.

One of the earliest of the advocate planners, Robert Goodman has put it this way:

...within the present economic structure of our society, simply giving the poor more access to planning expertise doesn't basically change their chances of getting the same goods and services as wealthier citizens.

...Pluralist opportunities are therefore a necessary, but hardly sufficient, condition for real society equality. For such equality to occur, pluralism must be tied to a political ideology which deals directly with the means of equally distributing economic power. (Goodman, 1971:175)

These views have two implications for advocates, and are fitting places to close. First, to be maximally effective, local advocacy must look to national levels of resource allocation. The reason is simply that the resources available for physical reconstruction of a poor neighborhood, or for significantly increasing employment opportunities or needed services will not be generated in that neighborhood; and given the present structure of state and local vs. federal taxation (Pettengell and Uppal, 1974; O'Connor, 1973), they probably cannot be generated from

municipal budgets. So neighborhood organization aimed solely at redress of grievances at the city wide level is apt to be most effective in defensive struggles. The planners I studied in the early Seventies were clear about this: they reported that they were more effective when stopping "bad" things--e.g., a highway which would raze an area--than in their attempts to gain constructive long-range improvements.

This implies, in conventional jargon, the need for aggregation, across many neighborhoods and cities, of the demands of community level advocates, including practitioners and researchers and their resident co-workers. In the late Sixties, for example, the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO) was able to combine militant local action for changes and increases in Welfare allowances with a national presence calling for federally guaranteed minimum incomes. Its activity, imperfect perhaps, finally succumbed to the same dynamic which scattered the protests of the late Sixties. But the example remains a provocative one.

The links between local grievances and national demands for resources implies, at least, a para-political party-like process of organization. In such an effort, citizens are mobilized for action in their own interest at all levels of government. Their action is, itself, the strategic centerpiece of the effort.

So, the second implication is that the professional advocate performs an auxiliary service for the effort of community and national mobilization. Though an honorable task, worth doing, it is probably an overstatement to conceive of such service as essential to attaining progress for the less than equal. If the advocate role is seen in these relatively modest terms, relieved of the burden of seeing itself as the only or best hope for the poor, more realistic community strategies can be generated, and more realistic personal coping strategies may be adopted by the advocates themselves.

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