



**WESTERN
MICHIGAN**
UNIVERSITY

The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

Volume 4
Issue 8 November

Article 26

March 1977

Social Work in Relief and Rehabilitation after Wars, at Home and Abroad

Walter A. Friedlander
University of California, Berkeley

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



Part of the Military and Veterans Studies Commons, Peace and Conflict Studies Commons, and the Social Work Commons

Recommended Citation

Friedlander, Walter A. (1977) "Social Work in Relief and Rehabilitation after Wars, at Home and Abroad," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 4 : Iss. 8 , Article 26.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol4/iss8/26>

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



SOCIAL WORK IN RELIEF AND REHABILITATION AFTER WARS, AT HOME AND ABROAD

Walter A. Friedlander, Professor Emeritus, University of California, Berkeley

In the United States after the wars of the 19th. century, particularly after the Civil War, no professional social workers existed who could have cared for the wounded soldiers and civilians or for the disabled veterans. But in Europe, during the war of France and Italy against Austria, in 1859, the foundation of some services for the wounded soldiers of the three involved nations were laid by a Swiss banker, Henry Dunant of Geneva who arrived by accident on the evening of the bloody battle in Solferino (Italy) and started to help bandaging some of the bleeding victims of this fight. When he recognized that he and his valet were not able to provide aid even to a small number of the many wounded, he went to the surrounding villages and persuaded a number of peasants to help him and his servant to bandaging other injured soldiers. He also continued his journey and asked the commanding general of the Italian and French armies to send soldiers and physicians to help the injured. As a consequence of this experience, Dunant published the story of this fact "Un Souvenir de Solferino" which was sent to several European monarchs, including the wife of Emperor Bonaparte in France and Queen Louise of Prussia and stirred public opinion in several countries to the recognition that aid for war-wounded persons was necessary. These actions led to the foundation of the "International Red Cross" in Geneva in 1864, which afterwards employed social workers, nurses and physicians who assisted injured persons in wars and natural catastrophes.

Although the International Committee of the Red Cross invited the United States to join the International Red Cross organization, Congress refused in 1864 to do so. Only in 1882, the foundress of the American National Red Cross, Mrs. Clara Barton, was able to persuade the Congress to join the International Red Cross. The international agency, in the meantime, had engaged social workers, nurses and physicians of the participating nations and had helped the victims of wars and natural disasters in Europe. However during the First World War (1914-18) American social workers and volunteers, in addition to British, French and Swiss workers were actively engaged in services to war-wounded persons and to prisoners of war, helping people of both warring nations. The most spectacular relief actions were conducted in France, Belgium, Italy and Greece, and institutions for the treatment of wounded and sick persons in Switzerland as a neutral country were widely used. Not only workers of the American Red Cross were helping in this period, but also American and British members of the Friend Service Committees (Quakers), of the American Relief Administration organized by the Government under the direction of the later President Herbert Hoover, the Near Eastern Foundation, the Save-the-Children Fund, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, the World Young Women's Christian Association and Young Men's Christian Association and other philanthropic and religious charities.

After the first world war, in 1921 the International Migration Service in Geneva (Switzerland) was founded especially to help refugees and families of prisoners-of-war

who did not return to their native homes to join their husbands and fathers. This agency, now renamed "International Social Service" with headquarters in Switzerland (Geneva) and New York and cooperating with local travelers-aid services employs trained professional social workers and helps also in adoption procedures for children of American citizens and foreign women, particularly after the war in Vietnam. The "Unitarian Service Committee" (Boston) gave medical aid and training of social workers in European and African countries who were badly needed after the numerous wars in Africa and in Europe after the second world war in 1945. Under the auspices of the League of Nations and more recently of the United Nations and their affiliated organization, UNICEF, World Health Organization, Food and Agricultural Organization and others, social workers have been assigned to various relief actions after wars and natural catastrophes. Numerous social workers have been helping in the rehabilitation and health services in East Asia after the end of the wars between Japan and China and the occupation of most Asian and Pacific countries by Japan. Finally in Japan itself, social workers have assisted in the repatriation of prisoners of war and wounded soldiers as well as in the development of modern social services and training of social workers.⁴

Among the social service programs directly related to wars, the War-Veterans Services are the most prominent. In earlier periods of history those services were extremely limited. For instance in England, France and Germany the resources were so meagre that veterans roved the countries as gangs, robbing and killing peasants who refused to give them alms. Consequently, the Elizabethian poor law of 1601 for the first time in England included veterans among those groups which should receive relief from the parish where they had resided before their disablement in war service unless their families were able to assist them. Similar provisions in other European nations were the rule until the later part of the 19th. century. In the United States, the Continental Congress maintained after the declaration of independence the measures for veterans of the preceeding colonial period, providing land grants for building a homestead, a small pension for disabled veterans, and institutional care for those seriously disabled that they felt unable to live in the community or with their families. Similar conditions continued until World War II. During this war the universal draft had for the first time in the United States transformed millions of civilians into veterans and the mass of them gave them sufficient political power to request new legislation which gave them new essential privileges compared to the civilian population.⁵

War Veterans are entitled to receive as monetary benefits "disability pensions" for all service-connected disabilities leading to permanent, total invalidity; and "disability compensation" caused by any service-connected disability; "retirement pay" after leaving military service; also temporary benefits for veterans discharged before able to find full employment, called "readjustment allowance" for unemployed and for formerly self-employed veterans; "death awards" for widows and minor orphans of veterans and special "death pension awards" under circumstances to survivors of veterans whose death was not service-connected. Educational benefits for veterans included "subsidies" for further education, studies and training, providing tuition, books, equipment and needed expenses, such as board, rent, lodging and travel. "Vocational training aids the veteran in finding employment and the disabled veteran

in addition to his disability allowance by a special "subsistence allowance". Veterans Benefits are administered by the Veterans Administration with its central office in Washington, D.C., and 13 regional branch offices.

Medical benefits to veterans are free hospitalization in veterans' and other public and private hospitals, medical and dental care, in emergencies immediate hospitalization, prosthetic and other needed appliances, and recreational facilities to help in rehabilitation. Blind veterans are entitled to seeing-eye dogs and electronic equipment; legless veterans to a special automobile; deaf veterans to vocational training in rehabilitation centers, veterans suffering from nervous illness to psychiatric therapy, and all disabled veterans to after-care after hospitalization in halfway-houses, foster homes and nursing homes, and in out-patient clinics. In most states additional medical and rehabilitation services for veterans are available which allow for treatment by private physicians and psychiatrists. Old veterans in financial need are entitled to unlimited hospitalization.

Social services by trained social workers and volunteers for veterans are counseling in personal, family, and economic questions, and advice for adjustment and on medical treatment ordered by the medical staff. The service includes rehabilitation and vocational training, information on preferences in civil service employment, tax and license fees, burial services for indigent veterans. Several states in USA also grant guarantees for the purchase of a business, a homestead and land, and educational supplements for children of veterans.

The Charter of the United Nations states in Article 1 that the purpose of this organization is the prevention and the removal of threat of war and to achieve international cooperation with respect for human rights and fundamental freedom for all human beings. Unfortunately they have not realized these purposes so far so that we have still to consider which social work functions are necessary after warfare and demilitarization. Within the framework of the international organizations discussed above the "High Commissioner for Refugees" is particularly concerned with aid for victims of war, displaced persons, widows and orphans of military personnel and civilians. These services were instituted after the special "International Refugee Organization" of the United Nations was liquidated in 1951.⁶ In addition to the High Commissioner's office in Geneva, the United Nations established after the 1947 Near East war still two additional agencies: "The Relief Fund for Palestinian Refugees" and the "United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees" (UNRWA). These organizations unfortunately have not been able to solve the problems of those refugees in settling them among the Arab nations nor to achieve their rehabilitation as far as the masses are concerned.

The other organizations of the United Nations are still trying to help war victims and orphans in many respects, by health care services, emigration counseling and assistance, children's aid, and social and economic community developments in the poorer nations. Social workers interested in international services are encouraged in most industrial nations such as Great Britain, France, Switzerland, Canada, and the United States by conferences and seminars under the auspices of the "International Council on Social Welfare", the "International Association of Schools of Social Work", the "International Federation of Social Workers" and the national professional

social work organizations of these countries, and of Australia and New Zealand. Regional conferences and seminars of those organizations are helping to increase the interest and the participation of social workers and volunteers in social services for victims of wars.

- *1 Martin Gumpert, Dunant, the Story of the Red Cross (New York, Oxford University Press, 1938); and John Maloney, Let There Be Mercy (New York: Doubleday, 1944).
- *2 Ernest P. Bicknell, With the Red Cross in Europe (Washington, D.C.: American National Red Cross, 1938); Walter Friedlander, International Social Welfare (Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall, 1945), p. 1-3.
- *3 Friedlander, op. cit., p. 3-5.
- *4 Dorothy Dessau, Social Work in Japan (Tokyo: Social Workers International Club of Japan, 2nd. ed. 19680).
- *5 Delwin M. Anderson, "Veterans Services", Encyclopedia of Social Work 1971, pp. 1513-18; Eveline Burns, The American Social Security System (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1949), pp. 265-292; Walter Friedlander & Robert Apte, Introduction to Social Welfare (Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall, 1974), pp. 99-100, 464-471; Social Security Bulletin 38 (April 1975), Jables M1, M2, M3, pp. 45-47.
- *6 Ralph Townley, The United Nations (New York: Scribners, 1968), p. 298; Walter Friedlander, International Social Welfare, pp. 41-43; Bertram Pickard, The Greater United Nations (New York: Carnegie Endowment for Peace, 1950).