A just profession or just a profession? Social work and social justice

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Introduction

In most definitions of social work there are common themes around the role of the social worker in intervening in the lives of others and the way that that intervention and the lives of clients and communities is shaped, fashioned and in some instances effectively determined by the social and economic environment. Fundamental to effective practice is analysis of the lives, circumstances and situations of those with whom the social worker is engaged. That analysis and the practice associated with it is informed by a range of elements and dimensions, one of the most significant of which is some understanding and sense of social justice, however that may be defined. Social justice is a fundamental part of social work practice and a fundamental part of professional life and behaviour. It lies at the historical roots and core of social work – without social justice there can be no social work. Just as social justice is integral to social work practice, it is also integral to professional behaviour and identity. Given that it is integral to practice it must be equally integral to our professional lives and the work of our professional bodies.

To foreshadow the argument that lies ahead, I want to advance four basic propositions:

1) social justice lies at the heart of social work
2) a range of vital considerations have pushed social justice to the margins of social work
3) historically social justice has been critical to the Association's work but a range of forces including the particular form of professionalisation has resulted in the loss of that focus
4) unless we reassert the importance of social justice in our practice and profession we will fail to meet our legal requirements and our social and professional mandate.

Because it is central to the focus of this paper, I begin with a brief discussion about two key dimensions, namely social justice and social work and the relationship between these. This is but a brief foray into an extensive literature interested readers should explore. From there we proceed to an outline sketch reflecting the ways in which social work practice in New Zealand has changed over the 40 years since ANZASW was formed in 1964. The declining importance given to issues of social justice in social work practice and in the work of the Association is attributed to a range of factors which come together in the particular circumstances of social work in this country over the last decade. The paper concludes by arguing for the reinsertion of social justice as the central element of practice with some reflections on how we might begin to reassert that centrality.

Social justice, social work and the linkages

Social work literature and social work practice often utilise the term 'social justice' rather loosely. Despite this looseness, there are a number of common themes which dominate the use of the term 'social justice', particularly around ideas of structural disadvantage, inequality in the structural and the personal sense, equal treatment for all and commitment to those

who are the most disadvantaged and have the least by way of resources, using 'resources' in the widest sense of the word. These usages of social justice are similar to the approach to justice adopted by the United Kingdom Commission on Social Justice (Borrie Commission, 1994). In the discussion of social justice that informed the work of that Commission, Borrie identified a belief in the individual value of all citizens, meeting the basic needs of all and the opportunity to develop potential and the reduction and, where possible elimination, of unjust inequalities as core components of social justice (Borrie Commission, 1994).

Two other interesting components of social justice are taken up by Barusch (2002), namely group membership and voice. The former is critical in that it establishes the rules by which a group allocates resources and achieves 'fairness'. 'Membership' obviously identifies who is included and who is excluded, while voice refers to the ability to influence decisions. These summary elements beg the question of what constitutes 'fairness', but her identification of the five key questions surrounding the means by which we analyse social structures provides important indications of the critical elements of fairness and provides a useful basis for thinking about social justice. These questions are:

- How are the costs and benefits distributed?
- What is the relationship between costs and benefits?
- To what extent are people labeled as 'other'?
- Do those affected have an equal voice?
- What are the rules governing who pays and who receives?

Barusch notes that different political ideologies approach the question of social justice quite differently, but the elements she identifies here provide a good basis for evaluating each of those different ideologies. We might argue about the detail of her dimensions, but they will suffice more than adequately for our current purposes. Interestingly, for the purposes of this paper, it is worth noting that she clearly sees the primary role of social work as being a focus on those who have the least and are the most disadvantaged. In the American context, she notes that development of social work in the last 20 years has made this focus difficult to sustain. I will return to this issue later in the paper.

As with social justice, there is a vast literature which attempts to capture meanings and definitions in relation to social work. An emphasis on social justice is central to many of these definitions, including those which are fundamental to key professional entities. The international and national codes of ethics provide a very important ethical and value base because they are so central to our practice and indeed to our accountability. Social justice is clearly at the centre of those codes. On the international front, the commentary surrounding the IFSW definition notes:

> human rights and social justice serve as the motivation and justification for social work action. In solidarity with those who are disadvantaged, the profession strives to alleviate poverty and to liberate vulnerable and oppressed people in order to promote social inclusion (Quoted in Social Work Notice Board, July 2001).

In the discussion on practice, the commentary goes on to say: 'social work addresses the barriers, inequities and injustices that exist in society'.

At the local level, the ANZASW Constitution notes as one of the objects of the Association:

> ...to advocate for social justice in Aotearoa New Zealand and address oppression on the grounds of race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, economic status and age [Clause 2 [c]].

Principle 2.2 of the code of ethics says:

> social workers are therefore expected to reveal unequal, socially unjust and repressive political/social structures and systems and to work for and advocate amendment and where necessary the abolition of these (pages 6 –7).

The handbook for competent social work practice includes a statement that social work is about: 'the just, effective and human operation of (social systems)' (page 19).

Finally, the policy paper from the Social Work Registration Board identifies social justice as part of what is required in establishing a definition of competency. In the list of core competencies, it includes the following: 'Promote the principles of human rights and social justice' (Social Work Registration Board, 2004: 6).

In all of these documents, it is clear that social justice is an integral part of the way in which we see our own professional work and of the view of social work expressed by the legally constituted bodies responsible for both professional standing and local legitimation. Martin (2003) argues that it is the focus on social justice which is the common element unifying social work, an element which is very consistent with these brief quotations.

Why, then, this emphasis on social justice in social work? The literature is clear that from its early origins social workers saw an important dimension of their work as being about the ways in which social structures and the social environment influenced the lives of those they worked with. The tensions between the emphasis on the impact of social structures and the emphasis on the individual or family with whom social work was engaged have been central aspects of practice ever since the early days.

Historically, poverty, unemployment and inadequate housing were major foci for social workers concerned about the impact of the social structures on their clients. These foci were matched by emphasis on such diverse issues as the needs of children, of those with a mental illness and of those struggling with alcohol and drug issues. In all of these areas, and indeed in a number of others, social workers struggled with the needs of individuals, families and communities and with the social structures and frameworks which shaped the lives of those individuals, families and communities. A fundamental part of that concern and of the practice that surrounded it was an emphasis on the position of the disadvantaged and on reducing inequalities. This emphasis, although often contested and challenged, and interpreted in diverse ways remained central to social work as it developed through the 20th century.

Poverty, in its multiple dimensions, was a central aspect of the social justice dimensions of social work, a focus which was extended (and appropriately so) to what have been called issues of identity and recognition, particularly in areas such as ethnicity and gender. In the New Zealand context, of course, that was especially clearly reflected in the efforts and requirements to work through the implications of the Treaty of Waitangi and what the Treaty meant to practice in a way which reflected the bicultural roots of New Zealand society. This emphasis on identity and recognition brings us face to face with key tensions about the relationship between the origins of social work and its contemporary practice in a postmodern context. Inter alia, the growing focus in New Zealand on the Treaty of Waitangi and bicultural social work over the last two decades is reflective of what Powell (2001) identifies as an extension in social work from a focus on economic injustice and inequality to a focus on cultural injustice. (Interestingly, he goes on to identify justice as one of the 10 core principles of social work).

Before going any further let me hasten to add that I am not arguing that a focus on cultural injustice is invalid. It is in fact fundamental and needs to be placed alongside the emphasis on poverty and social inequality. My argument is much simpler – in focusing on cultural injustice and on identity and recognition, we have lost the concern with economic injustice, particularly the concern with the issues of poverty. To simplify the argument somewhat, we have lost our attention to the structural dimensions in these areas. We have displaced, or perhaps replaced, the interest in economic justice with an emphasis on identity and recognition. A central feature of the shifting emphasis is the way in which we have

lost/abandoned/given up our concern about poverty and the central importance of poverty in the lives of so many of the individuals, families and communities we work with. In that sense, we have abandoned/deserted the historical roots of social work.

I want to use the Association as a form of case study to illustrate the declining attention to social justice and to social structures and the effects of economic circumstances. Having said that, I want to quickly add an important rider. My argument is not about the individuals in the Association, much less about key Association personnel. To focus on individuals would be to steer the argument in exactly the opposite direction to the one in which I want to proceed. It would steer us away from looking at structures to gazing at the individual. It is entirely inappropriate to explain the neglect of social justice on the basis of the actions/inactions of individuals who have from time to time held office in the Association. Rather we need to understand (develop our own analysis of the position we are in) through an examination of a much more diffuse range of forces and circumstances. Focusing on individual levels of explanation actually carries with it the same inadequacies and assumptions that such an approach has at the practice level. It places responsibility on individuals and fails to attend to the broader structural forces which shape that behaviour. Of course, this does not mean that we can do nothing – I will return to that issue at the end of the paper. The relegation of social justice is a professional issue, not a personal issue. In sporting parlance, social justice comes off the bench (sometimes) rather than being a core part of the run-on team. It has become an add on rather than an integral part of professional activity.

A professional association

Implicit and explicit in the definitions of social work earlier in this paper is the role of social work and social workers as advocates. As I noted, integral to that role is the professional activity and responsibility of social workers in taking up and acting on issues and concerns which shape (and sometimes effectively determine) the lives of the individuals, families and communities with which social workers deal. As I note below when we review the Association conference, this professional responsibility has often been channelled through the Association in various forms, as the Association pursues its ethical mandate and its obligations in relation to social justice. A brief foray into each of the four decades of the Association provides useful raw material to explore the argument.

While not explicitly referring to social justice in his keynote address in the Inaugural Social Work Conference in 1964, John McCreary noted that with the development of a New Zealand Association:

> ...there is an opportunity to funnel information back from the field to government, from the field to the policy making body, from the field to the school of social science and other bodies concerned with social work, and to attempt to establish some wedding between social legislation and social casework practice.

Interestingly, the initial set of objects for the Association in 1964 did not include any reference to social justice. It focused on developing a forum for social workers, establishment of professional standards, promotion of training, development of common policy on issues of social work and social work practice, representation of social workers on a range of policy issues, publication of a journal and international affiliation. The code of ethics adopted by that Conference referred to social workers 'holding a firm belief in the worth and dignity of every individual regardless of colour, religion, race or circumstances'. It went on to say that: 'The social worker has a duty to arouse the social conscience to keep the community aware and informed of social needs'. In both of these quotations, the idea of social justice is implicit even if not formally expressed in that language.

The 1974 Biennial Conference in Dunedin included remits which focused on costs of home ownership, homosexual law reform, immigration, mothers' benefit and the status of children with special needs. The report of the Public Questions Committee in 1974 referred to work undertaken for the Royal Commission on Social Security, the Royal Commission on Hospital and Related Services, local police stations, emotionally disturbed children in post primary schools and submissions on a range of legislation in areas such as the Police Offences Act, and the Social Security, the Superannuation and the Children and Young Persons Bills. A 1974 Council meeting focused on a range of issues, including parental leave, children's wards in hospitals, the differentiation in sickness benefit between patients in general and psychiatric hospitals, benefit rights and care of children in institutions. The 1982 Conference had as its theme 'Social Justice. A Social Work Concern for the 80s'.

The annual meting of the Association in 1984 heard remits around the position of older people in rest homes, racism, availability of housing for single parents, child abuse and nuclear weapons. A 1990 submission to Parliament on the social security reforms argued clearly about the harmful effects of those reforms and argued strongly for adequate benefit levels and adequate income levels. Interestingly in the introduction to that submission, the statement is made: 'social justice is basic to social work practice. The Association's commitment to social justice leads, inevitably, therefore, to a concern with benefits and income levels'. The 1994 annual meeting carried no remits around public questions issues. Nor did the Annual meeting or the National Council meeting in 2004.

Thus, Association meetings and conferences have often seen substantial periods of time debating and urging action on issues as diverse as poverty, the position of beneficiaries and the financial circumstances facing older people, the importance of housing and development of housing policy, the impact of unemployment on clients and families and communities, the effects of racism on individuals, families, whanau and iwi, mental health services, homosexual law reform, abortion, etcetera. Any examination of Association minutes will note the work of the Association and the concerns of members as social workers actively engaged with trying to build social justice with and on behalf of clients and communities.

Recent years, however, have seen little Association attention (and indeed little professional attention) to these issues. The Association's voice and activity has been very muted around such fundamental issues as the forces creating and sustaining child abuse, the attacks on beneficiaries, child poverty, the quality of mental health services, the number of complaints about historical abuse in mental hospitals and children's homes, the growth of the gambling industry with its disastrous effects on families and communities, and the equally disastrous effects on families of the current housing pressures. Where was the Association's voice and the professional social work voice in the recent plan of action on human rights and in the debates on the Charities Commission?

Rather than focusing on social justice and advocacy with and on behalf of clients and communities we have been consumed by the demands of achieving professional legitimacy and the issues surrounding recognition and registration as a profession. Thus, if we examine the agendas of our National Conference and annual meeting and Council meetings over recent years, they have been dominated by concerns about registration and competency. The approach that the Association has used in establishing competency (rather than qualification) as the basis of social work practice and its evaluation is a necessary part of being professional. Indeed, it might be argued that it is a dimension of social justice – there is no justice in providing incompetent services to vulnerable and disadvantaged communities and families. However, to use a classical social science distinction, it is a necessary part of being professional and of just practice, but it is not sufficient. It is but one leg of an incom-

plete ladder. Why has this developed and what does it mean for the Association and for social work?

Reflections on why this has happened

A comprehensive argument about the reasons for the change is beyond the scope of this paper. Rather, I want to highlight here briefly some of the key components underlying the comparative neglect of social justice by the profession. First, there is the general retreat from what are called in the social science literature 'meta narrative explanations' and a focus on much more contingent explanations and, more specifically, as I noted above, on recognition and identity. In this movement from modernity to postmodernity, the emphasis shifts from looking for general or universal patterns and explanations towards explanations which give emphasis to the multifaceted and differentiated dimensions of exploring and explaining human lives and circumstances. It is the point well made by Powell (2001) in the arguments noted above where he talks about the role of social workers in relation to issues of cultural identity, using 'cultural' in a wide rather than narrow sense. For the interested reader, there is a considerable (and indeed fascinating) literature on the implications of postmodernism and the emphasis on identity for social work (Parton and Marshall, 1998; Ife, 1999; Pease and Fook, 1999; Parton and O'Byrne 2000; Allan et al., 2003). It is not possible here to traverse that literature. Rather, I want to focus on what that emphasis means for our practice as social workers and in particular for the social justice mandate.

The challenge to social workers from many quarters, has been to work with and within a framework of multiple identities in which a range of knowledges have significance, validity and meaning. If, then, there are multiple meanings in terms of our understandings of the world and of social relationships, what then of social justice which is based on ideas of a more universal kind in which there are generally agreed expectations and criteria of right and wrong, of what constitutes 'the good society'? The ideas and view of the world arising from what has now come to be called postmodernism can be (and sometimes are) seen as rejecting the idea of social justice and replacing it with an acknowledgement that there are multiple realities and multiple meanings to the notion of 'the good society'. In the world of multiple meanings and realities, it is sometimes argued, the universalist idea of social justice has no place. We are all individuals with different identities. Alternatively, if we are not separate individuals, we are at least members of multiple groups with multiple identities without common reference point/s. (I will argue later, however, that the idea of 'critical practice' provides a very good way to link the concerns with both identity and social justice.)

The focus on the individual as the unit of analysis and understanding is, of course, not limited to postmodernism. Indeed, it is not intrinsic to postmodernism, even though often incorrectly attributed to postmodernism and to postmodern analysis. Rather, individualism finds its most potent expression in neoliberalism, the hegemonic notion of the late 20th century, with its core assumptions based around the freely choosing individual. While social workers generally reject the philosophical and political assumptions associated with and arising from neoliberalism, its hegemonic assumptions have found their way into the culture and language, often, as is usually the case with hegemonic ideas, without serious questioning. To paraphrase one of the central dimensions of hegemony, it (individualism) is taken for granted. The idea of 'the freely choosing individual' is one of the central features of neoliberalism. To use the oft quoted assertion from Margaret Thatcher, 'there is no such thing as society'.

A second core dimension of neoliberalism is the notion of the minimal, residualist state. As with the notion of the freely choosing individual, the minimal state has, hegemonically,

come to be taken for granted. In operationalising that assumption, the state social services have increasingly come to be reduced to a series of output classes in which services and activities are limited to what the state purchases, and those purchases have been of a specific and limited nature. As part of the associated managerialist revolution, outputs mean that we are measured and measure ourselves on what we do rather than on what the effects are. At the risk of over-simplification, as long as we do what we are funded for, then the outcomes of those activities matters little. (For an interesting discussion of the impact of both managerialism and neoliberalism on social work, see Powell, 2001.)

While the current focus on outcomes (rather that outputs) and on a social development model for welfare do suggest something of a shift in focus, the meaning of that is still not clear and the limited and reduced state, with limited attention to social justice, persists. The managerialist emphasis which dominated the 1990s shifts from professionalism and the establishment and support of professional values to an emphasis on activities and outcomes which are set and monitored by the agency. In this context, it is the requirements and needs of the agency, not of the profession, which become dominant. As a number of authors have noted, the emphasis on difference and diversity is an emphasis on organisationally created and managed difference, not user driven difference in which services and programmes are developed and delivered with users (Williams, 1996; Wilson 1998). The organisation develops the service and the user takes at best a minor role. It is certainly not a new form of professionalism. Indeed, it is the complete antithesis of professionalism.

In the core challenges arising from postmodernism and neoliberalism, the notion of what it means to be a professional and to act professionally has also undergone substantial challenge. Seen in its most stark form in the early part of the 1990s, it meant that all legitimacy and knowledge lay with the consumer and the client. Postmodernism drew the attention of professionals to differentiated and diverse experiences, to different realities. This logically leads to an expectation that those experiences and realities are inherent in being professional. The client/service user has a vital role in shaping both the nature of services and the identification of needs. While neoliberalism and managerialism also emphasised the user, this emphasis was to define the 'user' as a 'freely choosing' consumer, an emphasis which is quite different from that of postmodernism. However, the influence of postmodernism, neoliberalism and managerialism raises the question: what does it mean to be professional and to act professionally?

Professions and professionalisation

Traditional, modernist definitions of professions highlight a range of characteristics or traits as being the hallmark of what constitutes a profession. These traits include such dimensions as a body of knowledge, a process of managing and responding to the behaviour of those who describe themselves as fitting within the particular occupational group and, equally importantly a particular approach to users of services. (For a useful discussion, see Dominelli, 1997.) The exclusive and self-serving critique of traditional approaches to professionalism is generally well known and makes many of us wary about the use of the term (Powell, 2001). It is an approach to defining a profession which is particularly limited in that it fails to attend to the more fundamental processes of the legitimation of knowledge and power and the processes by which that occurs. Furthermore, it is an approach to being professional which is inappropriate in our context, both historically and culturally.

The question of what it means to be 'professional' in the contemporary context remains particularly vexed everywhere, both within the social work literature and in social work practice. In a contemporary context, professionalism or 'being professional' can only have

legitimacy if it reflects accurately the social and cultural context in which we are located. It must also reflect our historical roots. Our own work within the Association has contributed to rethinking about what we mean by 'professional' as we work through issues of competency, biculturalism (and more recently multiculturalism), the privileging of knowledges, and wider questions about the nature of relationships between expert knowledge and user knowledge generated from experience.

Contemporary social work literature pursues the question of being professional in a number of interesting ways (Powell, 2001). Central to much of this discussion is an emphasis on the changing nature of the relationship between 'the professional' and 'the user'. The widely criticised, hierarchical, top down model is replaced by an emphasis on partnerships. While the nature of these partnerships is unclear (which is entirely appropriate), they do represent a very different way of thinking about what it means to be a professional social worker. Powell (2001) sketches out some interesting and important elements of partnerships between professionals and users, elements which contribute to a reshaping of 'being professional'. As Camilleri (1999) notes, this does not mean that there is no place for the professional. Consumers still require good quality professional services and professionalism needs to be exercised in ways that are creative and liberating.

It is within this somewhat broad framework that the links between identity and social justice that I noted earlier are well illustrated. Critical practice provides a very good structure within which to ensure that the traditional concerns with social justice are placed alongside contemporary interests around inclusion, participation and involvement of users. Ife captures these linkages succinctly when he notes that: 'practice...can, and indeed must, proceed in a way that takes account of universal values, moral and ethical principles, even if the way in which these are defined and operationalised will vary over time and across cultural settings' (Ife, 1999).

What is to be done?

The answer to this often asked question lies at two levels, at least for our current purposes, namely the individual practitioner acting individually and collectively and second, the professional association. Reflecting the arguments summarised above, one of the key considerations in the development of social work and the social services over the last two decades has been the increasing emphasis on three interconnected factors – identity, diversity and user participation and involvement. Integral to these challenges in the Aotearoa New Zealand context has been the imperative to engage meaningfully with the imperatives arising from the Treaty of Waitangi. These emphases are necessary but not sufficient for socially just professional practice in this country.

There is a powerful and persistent theme within social work literature and practice in which, to use Mills (1959) terms, attention to private troubles and public issues are both equally important. Interestingly enough, some of the more critical social work literature, critical in the sense of criticizing current directions, argues that it is vital to work with those immediate issues and concerns facing individuals, families, groups and communities while at the same time working with the structural forces shaping and limiting their lives. So, the argument is not that we should abandon, our concern with the day-to-day lives of people. Similarly, it is not an argument which says that we should abandon our efforts to develop competent, responsive and skilled practitioners. Rather, the argument is that only by attending to and actively working with the broader structural dimensions in our work with individuals, families, groups and communities can we actually claim to be professional and to be meeting the ethical requirements to promote social justice.

In pursuing the changing nature of professionalism, Powell argues that there needs to be a clearer connection between professionals and service users. 'This development puts the role of the public service professional, notably the social worker, in a new light as supporter and advisor as much as provider' (Powell, 2001: 133). He pursues this argument further by focusing on the relationship between social workers and clients and between social work and the state, concluding his discussion as follows:

> This (greater user participation) does not necessarily mean displacing professionalism. Most citizens value professional support and advice, but they wish it to be accountable to the public it serves. There are few professions (if any) so connected to and dependent upon its users for legitimation as social work. It has defined itself as both a profession and a movement with the social and moral purpose of helping the poor and the oppressed. The future of social work depends on rethinking its agenda in the context of participative practice (Powell, 2001: 141).

This same theme about the relationship between professionals and users is taken up by Camilleri (1999) in his discussion about the changing nature of social work where he notes that:

> There is a complementarity about the relationship between the expert contribution of the professional and the contribution of service users. Alternative strategies, in which both the skills and expertise of professionals and the paramount needs of consumers as the focus of service delivery are recognised, need to be implemented within a new partnership model (page 34).

It is worth noting too his comment that the current emphasis on the user as consumer actually disqualifies the contribution which the professional brings and implicitly suggests that that contribution does not exist or is invalid. It is this identification of the user as simply a consumer that is inherent in the neoliberal approach referred to above.

The implications of the emphasis on multiple voices and on participatory relationships between social workers and service users is that as a profession, and therefore as a professional association, social work still has a critical advocacy role. In exercising that role and in utilising the knowledge and expertise that goes with the profession, social work and its professional body need to find new ways of forming effective partnerships of advocacy in which the contributions of both social work and social work users are linked actively together. One of the implications of this is that the profession, as a professional body, needs to build working relationships with a range of user groups and their advocates in which there are active and democratic forms of participation and in which the voice of the profession stands alongside the voice of the user.

This does not mean that we completely abandon advocacy *for* those groups with which social workers regularly work, but it means that this form of advocacy has to be complemented and largely supplemented by advocacy in which social work advocates *with* users rather than in the modernist framework where social work advocated for and on behalf of users. My critique of social work development and indeed in the profession more generally in the last decade is that our advocacy has been limited on both fronts. This limitation, as I have argued, arises from both our own development as a professional body and the priorities which we have created in that process and from the changes within the economic and organisational context within which social work practice occurs. Here, to reiterate the points made earlier, the impacts of neo-liberalism and managerialism have been and continue to be profound. Alongside these must be placed the difficulties that social work has had in trying to work out the nature of its task and of its relationship to users as the emphasis of difference and diversity and on multiple voices has strengthened over the last 15 years. Now is both the time and opportunity to rebuild the significance of the role of advocacy within social work and within the work of the professional association. In doing so, there are both exciting possibilities for the development of the profession and for professional develop-

ment, opportunities which are entirely congruent with the historical and fundamental role of social justice in social work and social work practice. One of the advantages of the new professionalism is that it enables the social worker to speak with authority and it also gives legitimacy to action oriented activities. The link with service users enhances this dimension of social work professionalism.

Building competent practice requires that our individual practice be undertaken in a context in which the development of competency is located within, reinforces and is reinforced by an equally strong focus on and commitment to social justice in all that we do. We cannot simply leave this to the Association, but the Association has a critical role. As Lundy notes:

> ...now is the time to revitalize and transform social work professional associations so that social workers have both a national and local voice in response to the current political and economic changes that are creating the crisis in social welfare and violating the human rights of so many (Lundy, 2004: 198).

We also need to act individually and preferably collectively to ensure that the emphasis on social justice permeates all that we do. Our own individual practice needs to be undertaken from a social justice base. Speaking in the Canadian context, Lundy argues that: 'this is the time for social work to renew its vision and visibility and to become active proponents of social justice' (Lundy, 2004). This applies to relationships with clients and colleagues and to our work in the Association. Given the descriptions and definitions at the beginning of this paper, if we fail to apply that focus how else can we call ourselves professional social workers?

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