

## **Norma Parker Address**

Delivered by Grace Vaughan in 1979 at the 16<sup>th</sup> National AASW Conference in Brisbane

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The prospect is gloomy for the relatively resourceless, underprivileged and disadvantaged in the 1980s given the demographic and other predictions available. However, the very gloominess of the future may jolt social workers severely enough to see their responsibility in social policy, planning and administration as being more than aiding and abetting economists, politicians and government administrators. They may take the lead, show where immediate needs are, foretell in the hope of forestalling future needs and enter the halls of power, as influential visitors or as residents, to be seen as designers, spokesmen and advocates for a positive approach to social welfare rather than as apologists for it.

By virtue of our reaching tertiary level education and entering a profession we are resourceful, privileged and advantaged individuals. Therefore, we are prone to defend the system that has benefited us although less likely, perhaps, than those in other professions because of our special training in understanding human behaviour. It will take a purposeful and determined effort therefore to challenge the establishment and fly in the face of widespread opinion to avert the trend we have been warned of by Paul Gross, i.e. if we don't offer alternatives that promise more effective and efficient ways of coping with the need for income security and welfare services in the society then we will have to cope with reduced funding based on past largely ineffectual allocations.

Economic depressions have always hit the least resourceful both inside and outside the economic order—the elderly and children find government and family unable or unwilling to maintain resource allocation in their direction; the handicapped are knocked back both for funding and in their quest for equality of access to employment and other opportunities; and those who are untrained, unskilled, lacking in drive and without contacts are the first unable to remain employed. In this depression the young unemployed are suffering worst. Ironically, partly as a result of lessons learned by the trade union movement during the 30s depression when employers gave jobs to the young, usually firing them when they reached the age at which adult rates applied. The young were also more likely to accept and less

likely to tell about the condition frequently attached to jobs that less was paid than was signed for in the pay book. Now junior rates, when they do apply which is rarely, are little different to the adult rate; so the young, seen as less stable and with fewer responsibilities to discipline them, are passed over for the married woman who accepts readily jobs that are well beneath her capacity and training but which are less likely to affect her home and maternal duties.

We see therefore—loss of confidence and faith in the future; alienation from the rest of society; anomie engendered by the broken promises of a socialisation process which lauds the work ethic and conditions the individual to believe that unemployed status is no status at all, and that in this affluent society employment and affluence are dependent only on the individual's willingness to work.

Economic measures which include unemployment as a strategy to reduce inflation must fall into Sugata Dasgupta's definition of structural violence and if we cannot allow that the unemployed are the victims not the perpetrators of this depression then we cannot expect that there will not be 'protest', if not 'direct', violence as a result of their rejection by a society which is acting in a punitive, repressive and cruel way. Partly this circumstance can be blamed on our profession. In a democratic society that is to be judged on how competently it manages the welfare of its less resourceful members, those who are resourceful and knowledgeable have a responsibility, a duty and an obligation to place before the public and the policy makers a case for the redemption of those who have in the minds of the 'middle-range' of relatively advantaged people become pariahs.

Bound up also with the work ethic to which the middle-range remain faithful, but which has misled the unemployed, is the enormously frightening and uncontrolled spectre of technological change. Compared with the drastic and far reaching social disasters that took place in the industrial revolution, the advent of the micro-processor age will have far greater and more immediate effects on employment and privacy. The white-collar worker is about to get 'his'.

In our largely unplanned economic system minimum income and hours of work are controlled by industrial laws but automation and unemployment are uncontrolled. Automation, because of its initial cost, is mainly occurring in areas of high profit-making monopolies and oligopolies, usually transnational companies, so technological advance benefits the 'haves', does not create the 'kingdom of freedom' which Marx saw as a result

of the reduction of labour intensity. The arbitration system is tied to a relatively even advance in reduction in working hours and in the minimum wage. Only employees in industries obscured from general surveillance, e.g. seamen, miners; and those traditionally in upper strata occupationally, such as administrators, work less than 40 hours per week. So technological advance, in the absence of willingness to slaughter the sacred cow of the work ethic, or to introduce a guaranteed minimum income, cannot bring benefit to the great majority of employees who make up 85% of income earners in Australia. That is an area for a drastic change in policy.

The unemployed because of automation must be assured of income until re-organisation of industry or the subsidisation of labour intensive industries to allow general reduction of hours is effected. While agreeing with previous speakers that work should be and often is essential to a meaningful sense of purpose, the work ethic is an anachronism introduced by another age for a purpose which is now passé. Youth unemployment may, ironically, sound the death knell of this anachronism which is adding insult to injury on an already suffering section of the society. Gradually as fewer find jobs when they leave school, less shame will be associated with being unemployed. Alternative and simpler life styles will be adopted and, horrific thought for the consumer-oriented society, there will be less materialism. The positive aspects need to be investigated and not just accepted as a symptom of a 'drop-out' mentality or ratbaggery.

Why do we have a prevailing, general intolerance and indifference to the deprived, the suffering and those with less chance of access to equal opportunity? Our last conference was devoted to an examination of life chances and life styles. It would seem that attitudes have hardened since then and there is even greater likelihood of the less resourceful being seen as social deviants. Windschuttle in a recently published work *Unemployment* shows how entrenched are opinions founded on casual information from an inaccurate mass media. He says it is little wonder that in this context repressive and punitive measures by decision makers in the social welfare field are accepted readily and without guilt by so many. He quotes a statement that 30% of recipients of unemployment are cheating—this in a leading city newspaper! Another paper displayed a photograph of six girls sitting around a swimming pool with the caption imputing that they were all unemployed and having a great time—investigation showed that three were in employment and two were living elsewhere. Windschuttle pointed out that in 1976–77 with 350,000 unemployed there were merely 183 successful prosecutions for illegally receiving unemployment benefits, but in that year there were 32,000 convictions for tax evasion. Odd values—yet there is no doubt tax

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evasion, like avoiding radar speed traps, is seen as being clever, not deviant—there is widespread sympathy for the doctor who profits out of Medibank frauds, being seen as 'unlucky' to be caught—while the invalid pensioner who doesn't return what looks like manna from heaven in the way of extra cheques is imprisoned without noticeable protest or sympathy.

The mass media and politicians certainly create a climate in which people can harden their attitudes and accept repressive and punitive government methods and legislation. You may recall Mr Lynch's recent statement expressing his 'personal' views about the unemployed. A statement he felt constrained to make even in the face of quite clear statistical evidence about the state of the employment market; numbers of unemployed for each vacancy being 25–30 generally and 100 for the unskilled.

One of the most important factors contributing to poor communication between socio-economic strata, between the 'haves and the have-nots' is the increasing tendency for people of similar socio-economic status to group themselves in residential areas of similar prestige. So that divisions in our society are created that are not only social but physical. The way in which we are housed, particularly in the fast-growing cities, creates collections of 'little boxes'—streets full of them carefully segregated from other collections by ability to pay for land or type of residence. Given an address you can in the newer suburbs, without being clairvoyant, come very close to telling income, occupation, ethnic origin, educational level, and at what age the children of the household will leave school. People from similar residential prestige areas, work in similar settings, have similar family backgrounds, similar house types, spend leisure time in similar ways often with one another, their children go to school together, parents and children mix at sporting fixtures, they meet at community organisations, go to church or pub or club together, and so on. So that there is little socialisation to acquaint them with the problems or characteristics of those in different socio-economic groups.

Though many Australians have to 'battle' to balance the budget by doing overtime or relying on more than one bread winner in the family, most Australians live in relative affluence, most are working, most are not elderly or handicapped, most are heterosexual, most are married more or less happily, most have not had a tertiary education, most have not been hospitalised for more than minor illnesses, most have never been imprisoned or been in a Court, most pay their taxes, most have substantial savings, most are not rearing

children as solo parents, most have their attitudes formed by one-way communication from the mass media rather than by personal contact with opinion leaders, most have a mounting resentment to academics and professionals, most acknowledge the dominance in Australia of the economic institutional area, and most have little contact with those who deviate from these values.

Deviations from these proclivities therefore are viewed with distaste in the absence of any close contiguity with persons who do not conform with them. The tendency to physical distance between socio-economic strata precludes the possibility of modifying intolerance towards deviance. It is hardly to be expected that Mr and Mrs Average with their white skins, approximately quarter acre block, non-delinquent selves and children, regular jobs, short of matriculation educational levels, reasonable health, colour television, interest in spectator sports, reasonable bank balance, substantial hire purchase debts, at least one car, living in a residential area in which persons of similar socio-economic circumstances predominate are going to be particularly tolerant of persons who are outside the economic order, living on welfare benefits, or receiving social services, delinquent, feckless, unmotivated to 'succeed' and unwilling to work hard for little reward in the hope of future gratification of wants.

Given the inevitable results of physical as well as social separation of persons from different life chances and life styles we may still have the sneaking feeling that there are other reasons for turning people who are for the most part humane, rational, fair and caring into apparently cruel, callous and uncaring creatures. We can possibly blame the systems they and their predecessors make, which can be inhumane, irrational, unfair, punitive and repressively cruel. Building the confidence that we and our successors can change our social environment in the same way that we are continually changing and challenging our physical environment is an urgent task. Weakness and selfishness and greed are not inherent in human beings but exploitation and its handmaidens, envy and competition, are inherent in our present economic system. You may feel that this has been said before, and you are right, but now we are at the crossroads. This is a critical stage in the lives of the young. They are rejected at the time in their lives when they are most creative and have a right to expect to take a lead in shaping tomorrow's society. They are being excluded not just from decision making but from society itself. The prospect of that creative force becoming a destructive one is very real.

The dominance of the economic institutional area in societal survival issues needs to be challenged. It has led to unplanned development with the goal emphasis on growth. All else is sacrificed to this so that we have an unjust, inefficient social system, no real attention given to conserving our natural environment and little proper use of human resources unless that use happens to coincide with economic growth. All human resources are channelled into the path that leads to the twin goals of profit and growth. We have been bombarded with propaganda that declares that the development of all other institutional areas depends on the way in which we determine the 'production, distribution and exchange of goods'. Societies at different times and in different places have given extra emphasis to one or more of the other institutional areas governing societal necessities: reproduction the means by which the society is able to perpetuate its kind and care for its helpless young; legal-political, by which social contracts are undertaken between individuals who surrender some of their freedom for their own and the group's protection and efficiency, and by which rules are made and some structure of authority set up; socialisation, the means by which the individual is made aware of the culture of the society and given the skills necessary for the requirements of other institutional areas so that the society may function satisfactorily and the individual gain personal achievement; and the maintenance of a sense of purpose, by which man may demonstrate his unique gifts of creativeness and contemplation, hope and trust for the future of society using such vehicles as art, sport, religion and community service.

We have seen in history dominance of the reproductive or family in the patriarchal systems; Solon's Grecian democracy was based on the law; education dominated the Chinese literati period which lasted more than 2,000 years; and theocracies maintained a sense of purpose in societies such as the Ancient Egyptians and in the Spanish societies of the 15th and 16th centuries. Economic dominated societies have probably never been as evident in all history as they are in the present century. Political leaders of all flavours in capitalist and socialist countries see their countries as only surviving if they win trade contests and develop to the 'nth' degree, irrespective of environmental considerations, every resource primary and other in their countries.

The production, distribution and exchange of goods is not arranged so as to simply meet the survival needs of our population or to see to its comfort, it is geared to maximise profit irrespective of need and to maximise growth irrespective of capacity. Wes Michaelson of the US *Sojourners* magazine, a Christian publication concerned with conservation and social reform says 'In the Middle Ages the Church identified seven deadly sins; greed,

avarice, envy, gluttony, luxury, pride and sloth. The values of the American economy have succeeded in turning six of these sins into virtues; sloth is the only exception' and that to ensure the survival of the work ethic.

Further, 'blind allegiance to the god of Growth is preached—it is the primary cultural idol of our time', 'To base the future of the American economy on endless growth—is not only a moral catastrophe but is becoming an economic impossibility.'

An aspect of the relegation of the relatively resourceless, underprivileged and disadvantaged to the 'outer', excluded from contributing to the society, is the misuse and non use of human resources. Planning can overcome both the causes and effects of waste—planning that will give individuals a sense of achievement and societal involvement as well as raising standards in all fields of enterprise, thus improving the welfare and efficiency of our society. For instance if we examine the phenomenon of ageing—apart from obvious and increasing problems of caring for more aged by fewer relatives and the need to find ways of substituting community and neighbourhood networks for the largely defunct extended family—the loss of the wisdom and expertise of the aged from the whole society when they quit the economic order is detrimental to the society and damaging to many aged persons. The widespread practice in China of consciously using the retired for social education, caring for the young and handicapped, and as instructors in arts and crafts, needs to be seen by social planners not as sop or charity or therapy, but as an integral part of our social fabric, weaving richness into society and offering alternatives or adjuncts to autumn centres and virginal white sporting activities. Passivity need not be equated with old age. Domiciliary services for the aged, totally inadequate and swallowing resources without commensurate return could be the first area in which this largely untapped manpower source could be used.

The waste of the experience and wisdom of the elderly, although detrimental to the society, pales into insignificance compared with the future deprivation of society due to present lack of input by the young in their most critical phase of involvement, that is when their expectations of inclusion as tomorrow's decision-makers are being crushed with a brutality that is as horrifying to the aware as it is nonchalantly accepted by the uncaring.

This waste of human resources whether through unemployment, denial of equal access to opportunity, handicap or old age, is widely held to be a result of 'human nature'—an opinion which shows no acceptance of an immoral lack of caring and concern with underlying selfishness and greed—a direct result of an economic system based on envy and competition and exacerbated by factors already outlined. This acceptance of inevitable



weakness as explanation for such attitudes to their fellows is worse than the excuse offered of 'Something's wrong with society's values' as outlined by Bob Connell. Wrong values have a hope of being righted—an acceptance of the inevitability of human weakness has the connotation of a brick wall.

At a time when broad and innovative approaches to social policy and planning are needed to help solve this social and political impasse, we find fragmentation and compartmentalisation running rife in professional practice, education and research. While social workers, educators and social scientists in related fields are aware of the crisis and recognise the responsibility towards those who need their expertise, instead of tackling the task urgently many seem to be expending their energies on trivialities and trimmings. Given the luxury of endless time and their own untrammelled choice their focus of activity might be worthwhile, but seen in relation to the scene as sketched by some of our speakers and filled in with almost brutal reality by others, it can be likened to a chook running around with its head cut off. This unfocused use of resources is a result of not getting it altogether so that this conference and its spin-offs in practice, education and research 'new-looks' must put this to rights and it is up to every person attending to do just that—this needs a type of evangelical crusade and if anyone has failed to grasp the loud and clear message of our speakers then it is suggested that the proceedings be studied. In the field we find too many able practitioners undertaking projects which in their itty-bittyness demonstrate lack of confidence in tackling the wider tasks. Like a mother surrounded by chaos and urgent jobs, washing piled up, kids screaming, no dinner prepared, who turns her back on it all and energetically digs in the garden.

Confidence to learn skills about influencing social planning will come more slowly to some and there are formidable forces with which to cope. Most social workers are employed by large bureaucratic organisations, mostly government. Such organisations need to retain control over the criteria for which personnel are recruited. A conflict of goals between social workers and the organisation usually means its environment is a mechanism to keep the organisation's goals ahead of professional and personal goals of social workers who find that much of their energy must be devoted simply to the preservation of the organisation's structure.

In social work education we find many institutions more concerned with professional standing and conformity to the existing social order than with acquiring knowledge of the wider system, seeking cooperation with other professions and academic disciplines, and

applying the skills to the task. The vitally important link between the field and the institution is largely inadequate—either there is a block in the feedback system or a blocked ivory tower ear. The profession, certainly in the holistic approach area, is suffering because of poor communication between practice, education and research and we should not waste time laying blame or being defensive—the important thing is to find the communication faults and remedy them before it is too late. This Association, more than any of those likely to be culpable because of its supposed co-ordinating role, needs to organise for a serious assault on the idea that social planning and policy making lies outside the ambit of the profession's responsibility.

Turning to research, evaluation and accountability, it needs to be said that if we are to account for the expenditure of resources on research, policy interpretation and implementation then we must spell out what values underlie our evaluation processes. Accountability is fundamentally related to differing values and attitudes—skill in explaining and promoting professional motives may be as important as understanding programs, plans of action, or policy in evaluation processes by peers or in accountability to community and governments.

Empirical research is available in plenty to the profession but the mystique that has built up often consciously encouraged by 'methodology snobs' has smothered the sharing and exchange of information to the detriment of social science generally. Perhaps we should devise a team method for research projects, with those who know what they are about encouraging and supervising practitioners and educators and students to tackle the relatively unskilled tasks of data gathering—it may be clumsy and need more thought but it would leave the name of research unsullied and would garner the valuable knowledge that is locked in the minds of those in the profession who through lack of confidence and because they hold it so much in awe will not have a go at any form of research—perhaps we could help by devising another name for this way of adding to the body of knowledge, which as pointed out by one speaker, is extremely scanty.

Certainly we need to look at the Australian community with its special needs particularly in rural areas. Different circumstances in the many regions of our vast continent defy general consideration; an immediate and much needed research project could be to examine ways of ensuring that at least some information is filtering back from remote areas where often social workers are battling for professional support and interaction and an understanding of the special problems of isolation.

Along with most of the Australian population, people in our profession are experiencing a sense of powerlessness for themselves and their clients. Whatever social workers do about social policy and planning—retreat with dignity by non-involvement, denial of responsibility, or recognition of their unsuitability to do otherwise; defend the status quo, warts and all, by a rational acceptance or an accepting rationalisation; or assail the worsening situation by finding means of being involved—they need to have knowledge of the power structure in the social system. Definitions of power used are first Dahl's—he sees power as an explanatory concept rather than a legal or formal one, 'Power is the capacity to do, make or destroy, physically or socially' and, secondly, that of Hobbes, who saw life as a ceaseless and incessant search for power after power until death, 'Power is a relation, not a thing, quality or possession. Power is the present means to secure some future apparent good. Whether retreating, defending or assailing, the dimensions of power need to be known because some degree of power is necessary for each of the three options presented. There is no absolute power, it is only relative to particular areas and interests and is contained within the zone of acceptance determined by the person or persons influenced. So we need to study organisation both theoretically and in practice to see the play of politics at every level of the society, whether in formal or informal relationships in the family, the work place, the community; in the conduct of business in private or public sectors, voluntary or government agencies; in the three tiers of government (local, state and federal) and in the three arms of government, the legislature, executive and judicature. The definition of politics chosen is that of David Easton "The study of authoritative allocation of values as it is influenced by the distribution and use of power".

Whether we accept it as rule or tendency it is worth while in our study of power and the political system to look at Robert Michels' 'iron law of oligarchy': 'It is organization which gives birth to the dominion of the elected over the electors, of the mandatories over the mandators, of the delegates over the delegators, who says organization says oligarchy'. Leaders are seen by him to be the sole source of significant political action. Only leadership or executive functions need be understood to understand politics, he asserts. An important criticism of this it would seem is that leaders are guided in their decisions by what they see as the demands and aspirations of the led—an opportunity exists therefore to use with discretion the 'testicular approach', and that not only at election time.

Michels' assertion that leaders are the sole source of significant political action, however, has increasing relevance in the dominance of the Cabinet in the Australian Westminster-style parliamentary systems at State and National levels. This dominance is diminishing

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their confidence to influence decisions by parliamentary representatives and the represented alike. Once a majority is obtained and ministers chosen, the rest of the parliamentary representatives have little effective part to play in the legislature. For the most part the energies of the majority of parliamentarians are directed towards matters in the constituency and most of these are matters of social wellbeing. Not only in studying means of exerting power or influence, but also as an effective social work practice, a working relationship between parliamentary representatives and social workers should be sought. This relationship may also debunk the myth entertained by the politically unaware, and that means most of the population, that the most appropriate people are chosen to do the governing. If the observer is honest it will be seen that the generally poor standard of representation is what the society deserves because of its members' abdication of responsibility, at all levels, from ensuring that the pool is stocked with enough aspirants from a wide range of types to increase the probability of the most appropriate being selected as decision makers.

Policy planning and administration in social welfare is going on in enclaves but few professionals are getting into the halls of power. A few hints may help: firstly a study of the political structure doesn't necessarily show the system, an example is the exclusion of 'do it yourself' in the legal system—when an organised attack was made on established ways of getting an undefended divorce by Divorce Reform Groups, lawyers were shocked to find that clerks of court when stimulated were extremely helpful and surprised at the new relationship they had with clients of the court. Secondly, looking at who makes decision at different levels:

- (a) National Government Policy—Cabinet and advisers, modified by Party Policy and lobbying,
- (b) State Government Policy—National Government's three arms and funding—State Cabinet and advisers, Party Policy, lobbyists,
- (c) Local Government Policy—National and State Government decisions, Individual councillors or alderman, lobbying,
- (d) Interest Area Policy—National, State and often Local Government decisions, A.C.O.S.S.—constituent delegates,
- (e) Community Organisation Policy—members—(Turned upside down this structure shows where entry into the political system is easiest and brings power or influence

within reach).

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, remember that the decision makers are paper tigers!

Finally, while a third of the National Budget is being spent on welfare services, yet welfare is not seen in its own right as a societal necessity, but allocated grudgingly hoping the problems will go away. Therefore we see no planning for its development, rationalisation and integration with other development. It is essential that the welfare perspective comes from the welfare area. There must be a primary welfare emphasis. Too much comes from the health and education areas, which have their own territorial imperatives.

The message is loud and clear from Paul Gross. If we don't make the input he and his colleagues must look elsewhere or use what is. Donnison's message should be treated as urgent, that is the need to encourage creativity and irreverence so that the ineffectual use of conventional wisdom to evolve policy, develop plans and administer their implementation may be exposed.

Innovation, then, must spring from what is observed as a collision between traditional assumptions and changing realities—not an attempt to accommodate one to the other, which is a prevailing widespread practice. Anticipation in changing social and economic trends needs to be the watchword; not accommodation. Given the seriousness of the situation we need confrontation, not compromise.