

SWU - Being actively involved



I am delighted that SWU continues to be involved in the working conditions awareness and the second phase of the campaign as we continue to gain the support of MPs.

There will be new areas of work over the next coming months and we look forward to sharing this with members once confirmed.

SWU membership continues to rise and we look forward to welcoming new members each week. I am delighted that our membership has grown to over 12,500 members. This is indeed a great achievement for all involved with SWU. The challenge ahead for SWU is building on that membership base, working on retention and for SWU to be actively involved with more campaigns and engaging with members. This continues to be a challenging task with only a small but active team; therefore, if you have an interest in being involved with the union then please do let us know. I am particularly pleased that we have managed to fill one of the two remaining vacancies on the Executive Board. If you have an interest in the work of Executive and stay in Scotland please do get in touch with me directly to talk about this further.

Highlighting poor practice to employers continues, the Social Workers Union have been writing to several Local Authorities to arrange meetings to suggest how working conditions can be improved.

This has

been effective this far and encourages a positive model of working together.

This coming month we have two terrific events happening in Manchester. The first one is the SWU Fringe Event featuring an evening of music, debate, food and fun on **Thursday Sept 26th**. **Friday Sept 27th** is the important date for SWU AGM and Conference. It is your union and a chance for you to share a view on the future and direction of the union. Please do come along and say hello. If not, I can always be contacted via email and look forward to regular correspondence from members.

I was asked recently at an event about SWU's commitment to International work and I am happy to provide a summary below for all members as our commitment to GFTU is often lost amongst all the other bits we do as a union. I continue to be active with the General Federation of Trade Unions and welcome the international solidarity work and remain active with this on the GFTU National Executive, recognising that smaller unions like SWU generally cannot sustain international departments. The GFTU led the way on solidarity with the Kurdish people and highlighting the savagery of the Turkish regime against the Kurds and its own progressive people and trade unions. The GFTU organised a major Kurdish cultural festival. The GFTU addressed an international conference on these matters and sent a delegation to Turkey to study things more closely. At a time of great difficulty for Venezuela the GFTU elected two younger members from our youth festival to go on a study visit there. The GFTU maintained close connections with the Vietnamese unions

and Chinese unions and I had the pleasure last year of an international study visit to Poland.

I am also looking forward to visiting Palestine in October with several SWU members and sharing my experiences. Visiting Palestine and the refugee camps in the Middle East is an important act of solidarity and insight into the situation that I will be able to report on. I want to see for myself the situation on the ground and talking to others, formally and informally, about what I have seen and experienced.

Finally, and importantly, I would like to give particular thanks once more to the hard-working Advice & Representation (A&R) Team and

Executive Board. The A&R Team continue to provide a quality service to member despite the increase in referrals and staffing challenges. The team are exceptionally dedicated and without them we would not have a union. They all work relentlessly behind the scenes and have a huge impact on creating change for the members who seek their knowledge and assistance. Likewise, the Executive Board and SWU Team continue to be a huge support for me.

John McGowan
General Secretary
j.mcgowan@swu-union.org.uk



Some of the GFTU Executive - Justice for the windrush generation

SWU AGM and Conference

Friday 27th September 2019

The importance of improved Working Conditions for Social Workers

The 2019 Conference and Annual General Meeting
The Mechanics Centre, 103 Princess Street, Manchester M1 6DD

Conference registration and refreshments from 9.30am • Lunch and refreshments provided FREE to BASW/SWU Members • Non members £10 • Students, unemployed, retired £5

Please note the SWU AGM is members only

SWU AGM will take place after conference and lunch at 2pm - 4pm (Members only)

Confirmed Speakers:

Emma Lewell Buck MP

As a Labour politician and former social worker, Emma is committed to building a society that works for the many, not the few. This belief fuels her work, particularly around food insecurity, something she believes is a sad indictment on the Conservative Government.

Colum Conway - Chief Executive, Social Work England

Colum became Chief Executive of Social Work England in September 2018. He is a registered social worker and previously led the professional regulator for social work and social care in Northern Ireland. Colum has worked in statutory family and child care services, early years policy and family systems support services.

Dr Neil Thompson

Dr Neil Thompson is an author and independent online tutor whose work is highly acclaimed across the people professions. He has held full or honorary professorships at four UK universities. Neil will be facilitating a conference discussion in his role as a SWU Ambassador.

Prof Keith Gidart

Keith is Professor of Labour and Social History at the University of Wolverhampton. He has appeared on television documentaries for the BBC. Specialising in working-class history, politics and culture from the late-Victorian period through to the 1980s - Keith will be giving an overview of trade union history and the importance of unions.



Banner Theatre Company - Live Theatre Show 'Free for All'

A new hard-hitting, entertaining and inspirational musical show from Banner Theatre - exposing the privatisers making big profits from our NHS. This show is a must-see for all health workers, trade unionists, social workers, health campaigners, students.

Register for Conference and AGM via
<https://www.basw.co.uk/events/swu-conference-and-agm-2019>



SWU Trade Union Advice and Representation Officer Julie Long shares her advice on wrongful and unfair dismissal

Wrongful and Unfair Dismissal

What is the difference between wrongful and unfair dismissal?

A wrongful dismissal is a dismissal in breach of contract and the only relevant considerations are the contractual ones of the employer. There is no length of service requirement for a breach of contract claim, which can be brought in the County or High Court. Most wrongful dismissal occurs where an employee is dismissed without appropriate or sufficient contractual notice. Damages awarded usually equate to the value of the employee's pay and benefits during the period of notice that the employee would have been given, had the contract been terminated lawfully.

The right not to be unfairly dismissed, is a statutory rather than a contractual matter. To determine whether a dismissal is fair or unfair it is firstly necessary to determine the reason for the dismissal (and whether it is one of the potentially fair reasons listed in the 98 Employment Rights Act). Whether or not the employer acted reasonably in treating this reason as sufficient to justify dismissing the employee and whether or not the employer followed a fair procedure. If either the employee or employer fail to follow established work-place procedures the Employment

Tribunal can increase or decrease awards by 25% as applicable.

Except in defined circumstances an employee must have a minimum of two years continuous service for the right to bring an unfair dismissal claim. Compensation is made up of a basic award usually the same as a statutory redundancy payment and a compensatory award. This can take into account future loss of earnings.

There are situations when an employee can choose between bringing either a wrongful dismissal and an unfair dismissal. There may have been a situation, for example, where the employee has been unfairly dismissed for an act that they didn't commit and an employer dismisses an employee with immediate effect. This is without allowing the employee to work their notice period. This would be both a breach of contract (wrongful dismissal) and an unfair dismissal (because you did not commit the act you were dismissed for).

The decision about which claim to bring depends on notice periods. Some senior managers, for example, who have lengthy notice periods may find it more beneficial than damages for a breach of contract claim.

Julie Long
SWU Advice and Representation Officer

Social Media

If you have not done so then please follow us on Facebook and Twitter - we are planning to post and tweet regular updates about the work and developments of the Social Workers Union.

SWU Updates: <http://swu-updates.org.uk/>

Monthly ebulletins

Monthly ebulletins are emailed to all SWU members. If you are not receiving this then please check what email address we have.

The ebulletins are also published on the web site.

SWU can be found on the following:

Twitter: SWU_UK

Facebook: www.facebook.com/socialworkersunionuk/

Internet: www.swu-union.org.uk



Learn with Neil Thompson!

An innovative approach to continuous professional development

Take charge of your own learning!

Be tutored online by highly respected author and mentor, Dr Neil Thompson, as part of this innovative online learning community based on principles of self-directed learning and geared towards developing critically reflective practice.

Members of the Programme have access to a secure website which includes:

Discussion forums - this is a form of online group coaching | A full-day equivalent e-learning module on Learning to Learn | An e-book to stimulate self-directed learning and a further e-book to be used to review learning every three to six to months | A continually growing library of learning resources based mainly, but not exclusively, on Neil's work: articles, videos, podcasts, multimedia presentations and so on. | An e-portfolio where evidence of learning can be stored (for professional registration purposes, for example) | An online reflective journal | Facilities for online socialising and mutual support (both important elements of learning).

This is not a course as such, but rather an online lifelong learning programme, a community of practice led and supported by a highly respected author and learning facilitator, with the learning tailored to each member's specific needs.

A full year's subscription is normally £99 plus VAT, but, for a limited period, Neil is offering SWU members a year's membership FOR FREE!

To find out more about this important learning programme and watch a short video about it, go to: www.apdp.org.uk. If you have any queries or you want to sign up please do get in touch with Neil directly at: neil@avenueconsulting.co.uk. We'll be happy to help!

Take this opportunity now to be part of this innovative learning programme!

SWU fees might be going up by £5 a year but for a short time we are giving you free access to Dr Neil Thompson's quality online training

A full year's subscription is normally £99 plus VAT, but, for a limited period, Neil is offering SWU members a year's membership FOR FREE!

Union Contact Scheme

Carol Reid, National Organiser & Union Contact Scheme Manager provides an update on recent events and some dates for your diary

Our most recent Union Contact Induction Day took place in Manchester on **Saturday 27th July** and was again a successful and invigorating day resulting in a new batch of workplace and university-based Union Contacts for our growing SWU Team.

The interest in becoming a SWU Union Contact and the popularity of Induction Days means we are already preparing for the next one, which will take place on **Saturday 23rd November at the Mechanics Institute in Manchester.**

Induction Days are a great opportunity for SWU members to find out more about becoming active and helping to develop and strengthen your trade union. Our Union Contacts are vital in getting SWU seen and heard in workplaces and we value their time and energy. We cover the cost of travel and accommodation for Induction Days so if you'd like to come along in November, or have any questions, drop me a line at the email address below it could be your first step to becoming a Union Activist!

Durham Miners' Gala

I was very pleased to be able to organise SWU's first trip to the wonderful Durham Miners Gala in July which was a great experience for the Union Contacts who attended. I believe it's essential that we develop a presence at such events which in turn strengthens our presence in the wider trade union world.

I'm already thinking of similar options for 2020, so watch this space and drop me a line if you'd like to make a suggestion for next year's trip.

BASW Branches

Branch meetings are a great place to discuss and plan



activism, enjoy social activities with like-minded people, listen to guest speakers, or be more involved as part of the branch committee if you wish. All branch activities are advertised on the BASW website under the "Events" section, and if you'd like to know more about branch meetings or be involved in setting up a new branch in your local area, please let me know and I'll forward your details to the relevant BASW Officers.

SWU AGM & Fringe Event: 26th & 27th September

The SWU AGM is fast approaching and will include a Fringe Meeting on the evening of Thursday 26th September at the wonderful Mechanics Institute in Manchester. This will include an entertaining and thought-provoking "round table" discussion with special guest speakers, music, and free food and drink. Many of our Union Contacts have already confirmed their attendance at both the Fringe and AGM (inducted Union Contacts receive free travel and accommodation). So don't miss out and let me know if you'd like to attend .. at the time of writing there are still a few places available.

Request for articles for Newsletter

Please try to contribute to this Newsletter whenever you can. The Newsletter is produced for SWU Members and we really value your input. If you have anything you'd like to share, whether it be snippets, articles, quotes, or anything of interest that you would like to add to your Newsletter - you can submit a short paragraph or two, or a lengthier piece of around 500 words, the choice is yours, and you can remain anonymous if you prefer. The important thing is to contribute to your SWU Newsletter.

*How did you find your Union Contact Induction Day?
What or who inspired you to become more involved in your Union?
Are you involved in any political or community groups that will interest SWU members?
Are your families/children inspired by your Activism?
What angers/frustrates you about social work in times of austerity?
What surprises/inspires you about your service users?*

If you have a spare few minutes drop me a line with your thoughts on any of the above and see your words in our next SWU Newsletter.

Thank you for your continued commitment to SWU -
together we are strong.

Carol Reid
National Organiser & Union Contact Scheme Manager
carol.reid@swu-union.org.uk

Call to Activism

*“Let them call me a rebel and welcome.
I feel no concern from it, but I should
Suffer the misery of devils, were I to
Make a whore of my soul....” Thomas Paine.*

I recently attended my first meeting of the Liverpool Friends of Palestine group at Jack Jones House in Liverpool city centre. This is a Pro-Palestinian group who oppose the Israeli occupation and maltreatment of the Palestinian people and their land - a humanitarian cause which I think is worthy of getting involved in as a social worker.

As we know, a commitment to anti-oppressive practice is a key aspect of social work. It is after all the essence of what we do in our everyday practice. However, for me, this also extends outside of the workplace and into the worldwide community.

Oppression comes in many different forms; it can vary from the very subtle and deceiving to the blatantly obvious. I therefore believe that, as social workers, it is essential that we don't forget our activism roots. These roots engender our profession and help empower the lives of people in the communities we work within, and I believe we should continue to challenge all forms of oppression wherever it may rise and in whatever form it takes.



Rodney Faizi
Social Worker and SWU Union Contact

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- ▶ **10%** discount for family and matrimonial law services
- ▶ **10%** discount for criminal/motoring offences and court litigation services

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or call **033 3344 9600**

Angi Naylor (with many hats) highlights some activity -

Out and About

From Tolpuddle to Durham via the dark satanic mills of Bradford, helping at a soup kitchen and of course being part of the welcome for the new Prime Minister SWU members have been out and about proudly wearing their SWU and Boot Out Austerity T-shirt.

Carol Reid led a SWU our contingent to Durham Miners Gala.

Pete Unwin did an acoustic set at Tolpuddle which included *How Can A Poor Man Stand Such Times*.

Jon Dudley with colleagues from BASW Worcester did their bit helping out at their local soup kitchen.

Meanwhile Angi Naylor stood opposite the Downing Street railings to remind the incoming Prime Minister that we will be calling him to task). Angi also took part in *We Shall Overcome* fundraising concert which she talks about in this article.

More way to Boot Out Austerity

The *Boot Out Austerity* Campaign has (and will continue) to be more than just a protest walk. Our campaigning is well known for its songs and poetry, and for standing shoulder to shoulder with services users and other like minded groups calling the government out on its savage austerity policies.



Boot Out Austerity have many friends and supporters around the country who come from all walks of life. One such person is Bradford based **Daz in the Hat** a promotor of live music, with a background in both social care and welfare benefits, and whose weekly podcast *Hat Tracks* regularly features our and other politically minded musicians songs. His show takes the Woody Guthrie motto that I subscribe to one stage further

“It’s a folk singers job is to comfort disturbed people and to disturb comfortable people.”

On the 28th August 2019 under the *We Shall Overcome* umbrella movement Daz invited over a dozen bands and musicians to come together and perform at *Hat Tracks Live* at the Salt Cellar pub in Saltaire, and where over £400 and a car load of food was donated to the Bradford Metropolitan Food bank. Yours truly was given the privilege of starting the evening off and of course I was proudly wearing the *Boot Out Austerity* T-shirt. (See further on for links to the songs I performed.)

It was Daz who brought *We Shall Overcome* to my attention; he (of course) thought I was the austerity expert and knew about every other grass roots project in the country. I (of course), had no idea that the name of a very powerful 1960’s Pete Seeger protest song had now become a watchword for an amazing grass roots movement

We Shall Overcome is the brainchild of **Jo Solo** who describes himself as a “musician, writer, activist, poet and broadcaster from Scarborough.” Way before *Boot out Austerity* was formed, he called on musicians, artists, activists and community organisers who were angry about the human cost of austerity policies and who wanted to do something practical to help those affected. Daz’s

Hat Track Live was just one of a dozen or so events



taking part over this summer.

Each event is used directly to help the community in which it is based. Some events ask for donations of provisions for their local food bank, others charge a moderate fee and take cash donations in a bucket.

In Joe’s words “To become a part of *We Shall Overcome* all you need is the desire to see an end to Austerity, and the guts to do something about it .”

To that end the next event is *We Shall Overcome Weekend* 5th, 6th, 7th **October 2019**
www.weshallovercomeweekend.com/

Check out whats going on in your area and get involved.

Links

Hat Tracks Daz’s weekly pod cast can be found at:
[www.mixcloud.com/Daz In The Hat/hat-tracks-followed by the date, ie 09-08-19](http://www.mixcloud.com/Daz%20In%20The%20Hat/hat-tracks-followed%20by%20the%20date,%20ie%2009-08-19)

Pete Unwin’s *Boot Out Austerity Blues* is a regular feature on the show.

Angi’s Song for Hat Tracks Live, *Doorway*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8JtM5MnN5qE>

A Soulin
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=568TrfTwqnA>

And finally if you’ve considering taking up Joe’s challenge to run a *We Can Overcome* event *The Boot Out Austerity Campaign Action Pack Leave No Stone Unturned* gives you all the tips you need to make it happen. Contact SWU for a copy

In Solidarity,

Angi Naylor
SWU Executive Member



Friday 13
September 2019
9:30am – 6pm
Bath Spa University
Michael Tippett Centre
Newton Park

Health and Social Care Conference

Creating (and sustaining) a healthy workforce

The health and wellbeing of Health and Social Care staff is an important consideration for employers and employees alike. This one-day conference will equip attendees with evidence-based resources and interventions which can be implemented into their organisations.

Hear talks from leading academics, professional organisations, and employers who have implemented successful wellbeing initiatives across the Health (NHS) and Social Care sectors.

- Dr Jermaine Ravalier, Reader in Psychology, Bath Spa University
- Prof Andrew McVicar, Professor in Physiology in Health, Anglia Ruskin University
- Dr Ruth Allen, Chief Executive of British Association of Social Work
- John McGowan, General Secretary of the Social Workers Union
- Prof Roger Smith, Professor of Social Work, Durham University
- Prof Neil Thompson, Social Work Consultant and Professional
- Geoff Ravalier, Wellbeing Lead (South London & Maudsley NHS Trust)
- TBC: Prof Jill Maben
- TBC: NHS England

Children are welcome but must be supervised at all times.
A nursing and quiet room is available on request.



Cost: £30 (or £40 including parking) and FREE for PhD/MSc students. £70 travel bursaries available to ten PhD students displaying a poster on their wellbeing/health related research.

For more bursary information contact J.Ravalier@bathspa.ac.uk by 13 July.

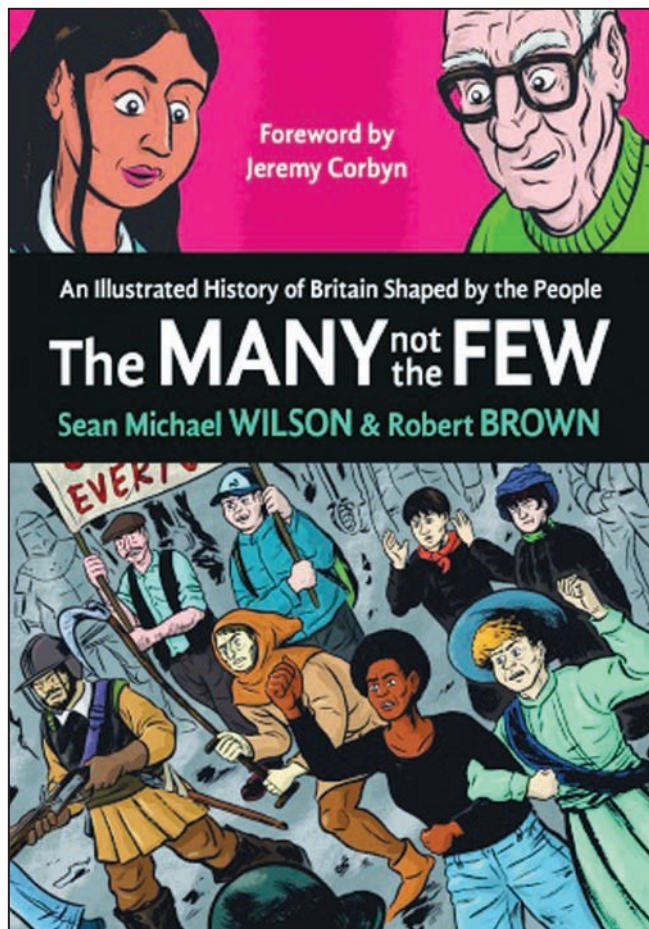
To book: www.bathspalive.com



Workable is the joint book publishing initiative of the General Federation of Trade Unions and independent publisher New Internationalist. The GFTU believe that the stories, ideas, creativity, organizing and educational experiences of trade unionists need to be more widely shared, and so are committed to providing a publishing platform for organized workers to express themselves.

All revenues raised from this venture will be reinvested into trade union education and publishing. The latest publication from the Generation Federation of Trade Unions is not to be missed.

The Many Not the Few by Sean Michael Wilson and Robert Brown



THE launch of this timely graphic “history of Britain shaped by the people” in the parliamentary annexe Portcullis House, Jeremy Corbyn made the point - and he should know - that change has never originated from within the walls of the Palace of Westminster.

It has always come, he said, as a result of struggles by ordinary people outside Parliament across the length and breadth of the country and, in his foreword to the book, Corbyn says he believes it will stimulate debate and

learning from the struggles it depicts which, in turn, will empower as much as they’ll inform.

He’s put his money where his mouth is - under his arm were four copies he had just bought for “the instruction of the younger members” of his own family.

Sean Michael Wilson and Robert Brown’s 10 historical episodes have been narrated and drawn under the observant eye of the GFTU’s general secretary Doug Nicholls and the union federation deserves much credit for getting the project off the ground.

The Many Not the Few consists of separate, compact - and occasionally light-hearted - conversations between veteran trade unionist Joe and his granddaughter Arushi as they discuss the most significant instances of popular rebellion in British history from the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381 on.

The New Model Army, the Levellers and the Chartists all come under scrutiny, along with post-WWII Britain, the golden years of trade unionism in the 1960s, Thatcherism, the 1984-85 miners’ strike, the slow decline of unions in the following decade and their renaissance in the last few years, particularly since Corbyn’s election as Labour Party leader. Even the McDonald’s strikers get a thumbs-up from Joe.

The book begins with a visionary quote from peasants’ leader John Ball - uttered nearly five centuries before Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels published the Communist Manifesto - that is particularly apposite now: “Things cannot go well in England, nor ever will, until all goods are held in common and until there will be neither serfs nor gentlemen and we shall be equal.”

The ensuing hugely eloquent narratives are embellished by Brown's animated drawing style, which supports the storytelling through the dynamic composition of frames and brilliant characterisations.

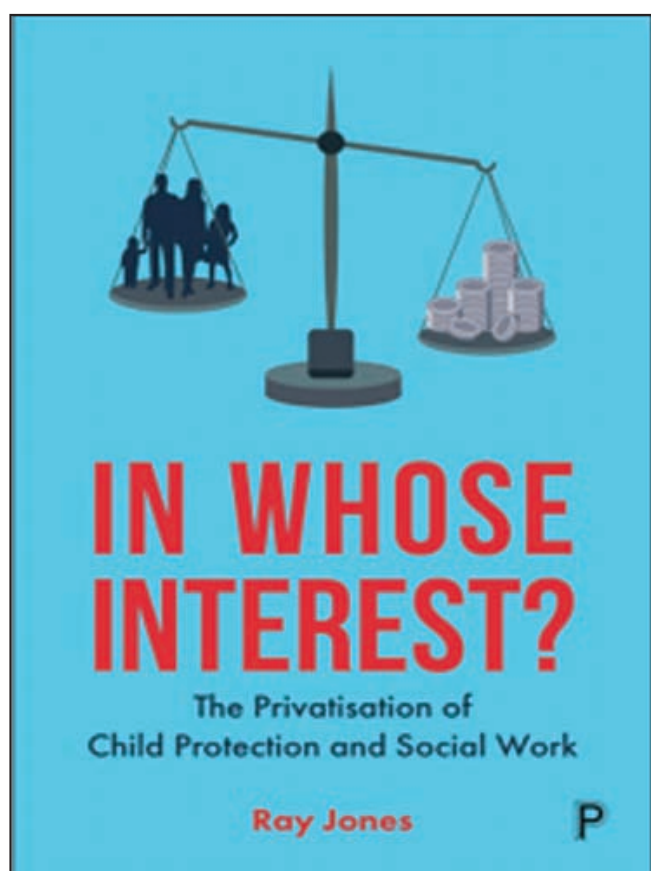
Protagonists include figures such as Oliver Cromwell, John Bunyan, Chartist Feargus O'Connor, Marx, Lenin, Engels, "Red" Ellen Wilkinson and Michael Foot and they're well served by Wilson's succinct and elegant text.

"Without a knowledge of the past, there is no future," the truism has it and that certainly sums up the significance of this excellent volume.

Review by Michal Boncza, Morning Star

Available to order from bookstores worldwide. Ebook editions are available from all major retailers. Also available from: New Internationalist's Ethical Shop in the UK: ethicalshop.org

In Whose Interest? by Ray Jones



In whose Interests? A phrase used on a daily basis by social workers to check that our work is ethically sound and indeed in the 'service users' best interest.

In his latest book Ray Jones uses that phrases to explain how society has been turned against the idea of state-run social services.

Giving numerous examples
he explains how

successive government have so engineered the welfare system that it is virtually impossible for a local authority to set up new in-house services though they can commission 'others' to do so and those 'others' have access to public funds as contracts or grants etc!

Giving a presentation at the Social Work History Network meeting in June 2019, Ray charted a forty years history of changes not only in policy leading away from direct services but in societies poor view of and attitude towards social workers, and the demonising of those in need of services.

This book joins up the dots, and it is not a nice picture to look at. However by presenting the whole story in one book and sharing his knowledge, Ray is empowering 'us' to do something about it, whether that be as an individual or as part of a group. SWU's continued work with Bath Spa on working conditions for social workers and Boot Out Austerity are two such way of challenging the government.

Ray's presentation can be found at www.kcl.ac.uk/scwru/swhn/meetings

Ray is also a regular Guardian contributor www.theguardian.com/society/2019/aug/07/outsourcing-childrens-services-wrong-waste-money

Review by Angi Naylor, SWU Executive Member

Financial peace of mind. Make it happen.



You work hard for your money but is your money working hard for you? Maybe you know you should be doing something about your finances but don't know who to turn to for advice you can trust. Yet the sooner you take action, the more likely you are to achieve your financial goals.

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We are the SWU's preferred provider of financial advice and we specialise in helping people working in the public sector achieve their financial goals.

See over for details.



One call or one email. Take the first step.

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- build up a nest-egg tax-efficiently, for yourself or for your children or grandchildren
- boost your pension provision, so you can enjoy a comfortable retirement
- take your pension and get the best possible income
- pay for long-term care
- pass on your wealth to your loved ones in a tax-efficient way.

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The value of your investments can go down as well as up, so you could get back less than you invested. A pension is a long-term investment. The fund value may fluctuate and can go down. Your eventual income may depend upon the size of the fund at retirement, future interest rates and tax legislation. Your home may be repossessed if you do not keep up repayments on a mortgage or other loans secured on it.

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SWU Social
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Roma Support Group - helping Roma people to get Settled or Pre-Settled Status in the UK - sharing information with the Social Workers Union

Who are the Roma people? The word Roma doesn't stand for somebody who is coming from Romania or Rome (Italy). Roma actually is one of the largest ethnic minorities, hence the most vulnerable groups of people across Europe and of course in Great Britain.

The Roma Support Group is a London based charity organisation, aiming to help the Roma community at large and fight against open racism that affects their everyday life. As it is known Brexit is happening and has a big influence on people regardless of their origin. However, people from the Roma community are facing racially motivated discrimination on a day to day basis therefore, getting a job or build a better life it is even more challenging for them.

The Roma Support Group's EUSS project (EU Settlement Scheme) mission is to help these people to get Settled or Pre-Settled status so they can stay and continue their life on the right path. In the UK they have a bigger chance to live free having the same rights as others. The only task we have is to raise awareness of the EU Settlement scheme among Roma and make sure they consider it as an opportunity rather than an extra hassle. This is their only chance to stay and live in UK rightfully after Brexit so there is a lot on our plate.

On behalf of the Roma Support Group we, the EUSS team, ask for your help to forward our contact details to anyone who might be concerned in this matter: can be your colleagues or even your clients. In case of language difficulties we can provide some help in Romanian, Hungarian, Russian, Polish and Romanes. We are opened for phone call information and appointments registration Monday to Friday from 11am to 4pm at the phone numbers: 07440743866 or 07459319706



WORLD SOCIAL WORK DAY ASSIGNMENT

SWU are proud to feature the winners of the Competition

Competition marked by
Dr Jermaine Ravalier, Bath Spa University; Shahid Naqvi, PSW Editor;
and Malcolm Jordan, SWU Executive Member



The criteria: a 750 - 1000 word assignment with the following title:

“How do working conditions need to change to create the most conducive environment for social workers to provide the best support for service users?”

Who could take part: Social Work Students undertaking an Undergraduate or Post Graduate Social Work Degree

The prize: four grants of £500



How do working conditions need to change to create the most conducive environment for social workers to provide the best support for service users?

Syeda Amira Haque - University of Birmingham



**UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM**

The budget cuts to social care mean social workers are under-resourced to do their jobs effectively (Grootegood and Smith, 2018; Jordan and Drakeford, 2012). Social workers feel that they cannot help service users as much as they would like to (Ravioli, 2017). Furthermore, social workers have high caseloads (Department for Education, 2019 pp.7), which could be a reason why social workers are reporting that they are overworking by up to 11 hours a week, often unpaid (Ravioli, 2017). Social workers report being unable to support service users effectively due to the high caseloads and administration tasks (Brindle, 2018). Despite this, social workers report that they do the job because they enjoy being able to support service users (BASW and SWU, 2012). NIASW (2012) advises that social workers would like more face-to-face time with their service users to build relationships and provide the support that service users need. This essay will explore how social workers' working conditions can be improved to enable them to provide effective support to service users.

Social workers often require support in managing high workloads (Hughes, 2010; Hafford-Letchfield and Engelbrecht, 2018). To address this, the HCPC (2017) advocates recognising the value of supervision. Supervision can include support with time management, case management and debriefing (Morrison and Hathway, 2001). Wu, Hu and Yang (2013) argue that the workload may be too high to manage effectively, even with supervision in place. Kessler, Bach and Heron (2006) suggest resolving this by employing more social work assistants who can complete administrative tasks. Social work assistants, however, do not have the expertise to undertake social worker roles but they could undertake administration and documentation roles, rather than intervention and supervision roles which require social workers' skills and knowledge. Thus, the recruitment of social work assistants could alleviate the administrative workload, allowing social workers more time for direct work. Furthermore, this allows time for supervision to be an opportunity for developing strategies to support service users, rather than the supervision being about time management.

HCPC (2017, section 3.5) requires social workers to look after their own emotional resilience. One method of looking after one's emotional resilience is to take breaks (Jackson, Firtco and Edenborough, 2007). However, social workers report not taking lunch breaks and working over weekends, leading to

burnout and time taken off sick (Community Care and Unison, 2017; Fritz et al, 2013). The consequences of this are that service users lose trust in social workers and deem them unreliable, damaging the important relationship for effective social work practice (Selwyn and Briheim-Crookall, 2017). Additionally, the tiredness caused by burnout decreases compassion towards service users (Cocker and Joss, 2016), inevitably preventing social workers from building effective relationships with service users (Simon et al, 2006). Therefore, a culture of taking breaks should be implemented in the workplace to support social workers in maintaining their emotional resilience in order to improve relationship-based practice.

Perhaps one of the most important relationships for social workers is the one they have with their managers. Social workers report having a poor relationship with their manager being a key reason for leaving a job (Kim and Stoner, 2008; Houston and Knox, 2004). Social workers often do not feel respected by their superiors (Lambley, 2012). Therefore, a transformation of supervision culture is required to facilitate social workers feelings are supported and respected, so as to enable good quality supervision (Godden, 2011). This could increase staff retention, addressing the problem of staff shortages and high caseloads (McKitterick, 2012). One method of transforming supervision culture is the use of team building exercises, which could promote better relationships between social workers and their superiors, although this would need further exploration. Overall, supportive and respectable relationships between social workers and their managers are essential for staff retention and, in turn, for providing good quality support to service users (Josefa Vázquez-Fernández and Barrera-Algarín, 2017).

Another method to improve workplace relationships is to avoid hot desking. 55% of social workers report that hot desking has a detrimental effect on their work (Community Care and Unison, 2017). Jeyasingman (2014) suggests that hot desking robs social workers of support and places them at a higher risk of burnout. This can cause social workers to adopt some unhelpful coping strategies, for example, by de-personalising families (McGregor, 2012). On the other hand, Munro (2019) suggests that adaptations can be made to hot desking to make it suitable for social workers, for example, using allocated times for office working sessions that allow colleagues to

access peer-supervision and to discuss cases. This could lead to better support for service users since more ideas and solutions could be explored (Chenot, Benton and Kim, 2009). Fundamentally, an effective shared workspace may be achieved by working smartly around hot desking. This would enable social workers to access peer-supervision more readily, reducing burnout and resulting in better solutions for service users, which may not be found through independent reflection.

In conclusion, there is convincing evidence of how social workers' working conditions are sub-optimal, which has negative consequences for both the service users and the social workers. There is little research, however, focused on the solutions to these challenges. One urgent aspect of research required is that of why and how tensions arise between social workers and their managers. Observations of team building and managerial relationships in other professions could help identify successful methods of team development in those respective fields which could be evaluated for use in social work. Finally, an independent study examining the cost-effectiveness of hiring social work assistants could encourage social work agencies and local authorities to allocate appropriate recruitment funding to such support roles. This would create an environment conducive to helping social workers become more effective in their frontline duties, ultimately leading to better quality social care for service users.

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How do working conditions need to change to create the most conducive environment for social workers to provide the best support for service users?



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In 1964 social work pioneer, Florence Hollis, wrote: 'Basic to all casework treatment is the relationship between worker and client' (Hollis, 1972, p.228). Those immortal words are as relevant (possibly more so) now as they were then. The working conditions experienced by social workers today range from significant levels of stress and overwhelming caseloads to a systemic annihilation of resources, budgets and funds all in the name of austerity. This potent mix results in a recipe for burnout amongst workers, and because of burnout, service users do not receive the necessary support they need.

A shift towards relationship based social work as a working condition would provide the best type of support for those who use social work services. Meaningful work and positive change can only take place within the social work/service user relationship when the service user feels that their social worker cares about them, is interested in them, is honest with them and is trying to see the world from their point of view. Only when this is felt can a purposeful relationship be formed, (Howe, 2008). Any type of relationship-based work will require the social worker to recognise the uniqueness of the service user and understand their strengths and how to play to them, as well as knowing their faults for effective social work to be carried out. It should also be noted that professional practices which fail to establish this with service users only risk their work becoming ineffective and redundant. Interventions, preventions, practice techniques, pieces of legislation and policies all require a human touch if they are to be effective for service users.

Human relationships are at the heart of social work and the notion of relationship-based work sounds ideal on paper, but in an increasingly neo-liberal society where a performance driven climate dictates the resources allocated to services, the emphasis shifts to value for money, what can be achieved and are targets being met. How can social workers then achieve relationship-based work or have a conducive working environment when it is only lip service being

paid to what is necessary for this to happen? The reality of what is happening to our profession is that compassion and empathy are easily crushed under the weight of heavy caseloads and performance anxious managers, (Howe, 2008). New research conducted by Social Workers Union and the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) found that an 'increasing number of social workers are looking to leave their jobs as working conditions remain chronically poor,' (Community Care, 2018). Those who took part in the survey cited 'rising stress levels' and a 'high work load with insufficient support' as two of the biggest contributing factors for wanting to leave the profession. The study found that the high work load and lack of resources for service users resulted in increasing stress levels. It was also reported that on average, social workers spend an extra 11 hours a week working more than what they are contracted to do so. 3,421 had taken part in the survey and mentioned 1,890 times within the survey that the workload was too high, (Community Care, 2018).

In reading what the data is telling us and listening to those on the front line of social work services it is becoming increasingly clear that what is being accepted at present must be challenged to achieve effective working conditions. Doel (2012) states that regular supervision, frequent team discussion of the team's work and a collaborative allocation system of new work is much more likely to raise awareness of workloads across the team and ignite a discussion about what is a fair and reasonable caseload. This could then reduce the levels of stress being felt amongst social workers.

Working conditions must change for social workers to provide the best services to those they support. For this to happen numerous steps must be taken, some of which have already been discussed. It could be argued that for real effective change to take place, then a form of radical social work must prevail. The very history of this profession is littered with radicals who spotted injustices and fought for change. Social work can be defined as 'the empowerment and liberation of people',

(IFSW,2014). As social workers we would not stand idly by and watch these conditions be imposed on our service users. We would challenge these conditions on their behalf while empowering them in the process. So why are we allowing this to happen to ourselves? Radical social work can cause a tectonic shift in the structure and organisation of our profession for the better. In the past it has led to better lives for those who feel disadvantaged, disempowered, deprived and vulnerable. It is time it happened for us. By empowering ourselves in our profession it could increase morale amongst workers and remind us of what professional pride and identity looks and feels like. If we empowered ourselves to take a stand against the working conditions being experienced, it could liberate social workers of those negative feelings and viewpoints that are withering the profession.

In striving for better working conditions for social workers to deliver the best form of support to their services users, we should lead from the heart, as well as the head in doing so. After all, this always has been, and always will be, what the essence of social work is.

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How do working conditions need to change to create the most conducive environment for social workers to provide the best support for service users?



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“Social work needs able and well-trained practitioners, but the ability to think clearly and humanely in difficult situations is not simply a product of individual character and education; it requires good working conditions and organisational support.” (Dickens 2011 p. 37) This quote reflects the aim of this essay which seeks to identify the barriers to effective social work and to establish that the good working conditions needed for social workers to thrive need to be on a deeply personal level. Indeed, findings suggest that social workers early unresolved issues as they grew up affects their career choice and the way they practice. (Kwan 2019)

Compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma, and burnout are all common experiences for people in the ‘helping’ professions. Mathieu (2012) explains that compassion fatigue can, ironically, lead the individual to work harder and longer which can result in significant physical and/or mental health problems. Some organisation’s attempts to manage this are tokenistic or problematic, for example ‘wellness workshops’ brings up concerns from participants about the safety of discussing such issues with work colleagues/management.

As Dalphon (2019) states, the issue of ‘burnout’ is a concern to social workers and contributes to staff leaving the profession. Dalphon advocates self-care and argues that it is required from an ethical perspective as social workers who fail to perform self-care can not deliver the highest standards of support to service users. However, realities often do not promote self-care, a culture of working late/coming in early are readily apparent. High caseloads, pressure from managers to take on more cases, cover for colleagues off sick and increasing amounts of relentless and repetitive paperwork are commonplace.

Ravalier’s (2019) study highlights the overarching stressor for social workers is work demand, namely high and complex caseloads. Other common themes were lack of control, poor managerial support and understanding of role and blame culture. It is well documented that individuals under stress perform poorly compared to those who are not. The issue of high work demand is unlikely to change dramatically given the governments agenda of austerity and the ever-increasing demand for social work input.

However, what can change is the support given to social workers by their organisations. If the workload and complexity is not changeable then the damage and personal cost to employee's emotional, and in turn physical, health needs to be openly acknowledged. Local authorities need to step up and provide a range of supportive, individualised measures to address this. The study by Ravalier et al (2016) showed strong evidence for short-term improvements of mindfulness on wellbeing of employees and moderate evidence for the longer-term benefit of meditation techniques. The study by Macias et al (2019) tested the effectiveness of functional-analytic psychotherapy and acceptance and commitment therapy for public employees and this showed statistically significant changes in reduction of emotional exhaustion and increase in professional efficacy, both of which are considered key components of burnout syndrome. Such studies show there are various therapies and interventions that can assist social workers to maintain their role. As Dalphon (2019) points out, self-care will look different to each person, so it is crucial an individualised approach is implemented. It is because of this unique nature of what constitutes self-care/effective support that I propose that employers offer a therapy budget and time off within work hours to attend to all its social workers. This therapy would differ from the often short-term and/or online counselling services that are sometimes offered as this tends to be one style of counselling provided by occupational health departments. Instead, the employee could explore with occupational health what type of support may be most beneficial but ultimately the employee can decide what type of therapy or complementary support would suit them and source it themselves. For example, this could be psychodynamic therapy, or could be more self-care orientated such as massage or yoga classes. This makes the support truly independent from the organisation thus remaining safe and confidential. It can be short or longer term, rather than an arbitrary amount of sessions offered, and a support style suited to the individual. It gives the employee the control over who they see and can change this if not suitable. As Lewis & King (2019) discuss, social workers are exposed to intensely emotional and often traumatic experiences, and as such the provision of support or therapy is vital to manage these difficult feelings. It is acknowledged that effective, reflective supervision is paramount but what is also true is the reality of receiving this is hit and miss at best, with high staff turnover and lack of time being barriers. At times the supervisor may be equally stressed and more focussed on caseloads and practical issues. In McGregor's (2013) report it was found a third of UK social workers were not receiving supervision and over half of those who were said it was not reflective. 73% of people said it was focussed on monitoring performance targets and timescales.

Therapy is not only beneficial for addressing problems but could also be argued important for continuing professional development. Liechty (2016) found the use of self to be a crucial aspect of the service user/social worker relationship. She describes how the personal self will impact on the ability to develop use of self, such as a willingness to share uncertainty, authenticity, curiosity and courage. This use of self is a common theme in social work education, yet to be able to utilise self effectively, a great deal of self-awareness is required, and therapy is well placed to explore and develop this. Without self-awareness personal beliefs and values can influence the day to day judgements made that will prevent building effective professional relationships with service users. Invest in the workforce in a substantial and meaningful manner as it is the workforce themselves that will have the most profound impact on the people we serve.

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How do working conditions need to change to create the most conducive environment for social workers to provide the best support for service users?



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The UK Social Workers: Working Conditions and Wellbeing survey with 3421 social work practitioners found that 61% intend to leave their job in the next 16 months because working conditions has remained 'chronically poor' (Ravalier and Boichat, 2018). They identified staff shortage, unmanageable caseload, overly bureaucratic administrative process, service users' negative behaviour, lack of support, lack of resources to help service users and low job dissatisfaction as stressors contributing to poor condition at work.

This paper examines how working conditions need to change to create the most conducive environment for social workers to provide the best support for service users in reference to older people's social care.

The current social care system is struggling to meet the needs of older people (King's fund, 2016, p.3) and the first thing that needs to happen is for the Government to end austerity in adult social care provision. There is a critical gap in demand and supply of social care for older people. England has an ageing population; in 2017 18.2% of people were aged 65 and over; this is projected to increase to 20.7% by 2027 (ONC, 2016). People aged 85+ grew by almost a third over the last decade and is expected to grow more than double over the next two decades (Age UK, 2017, p.4). There is an increasing number of older people with multiple health conditions and more acute levels of need suggests that more older people need social care (King's Fund, 2016, p.41). However, councils have experienced a cut of almost 50% in central government funding since 2010 despite 1.6% increase in demand for adult social care services since 2015-16, which means 10,670 fewer people receiving long-term support (NHS Digital, 2018). The overall staff vacancy rate across adult social care in 2016-17 was 6.6% (Skills for Care, 2018).

Ending austerity would generate more resources for older people's services overall, which means deployment of more social workers, elimination of staff shortage, reduction in individual caseload - all these would result in improvement of social workers' working condition and their morale. It would also means individual social worker having more time to build relationship with service users to provide a person-centred care, and thereby, social workers would meet the requirement of the Care Act 2014.

Ending austerity means more older people getting personal budgets, having more control over their care and 'achieving independent living based on social model of disability' (Waters, 2016); supporting older people with personal budget is an important area of social workers' work. Beresford (2016) identified lack of funding is key to less people getting personal budgets.

Austerity and council's budget cut meant closure of adult care providers in 64 councils (ADASS, 2017) and severe staff shortages in home care services; in 2017 more than 33.33% providers relinquished local authority home care contracts (The King's Fund, 2018). This, as Human Rights Watch reports, put vulnerable older people at risk of being denied their human rights and dignity because of the way the government allocates care resources (Booth, 2019). An end of austerity would mean councils having more resources to reverse this trend, which means social workers' being able to locate appropriate care and support for older people.

An end to neo-liberalism that has been dominant since 1980s (Howe, 2009, p.84) is required to ensure social workers recapture the spirit of social work that is about 'care of the poor, and concern for the weak' and helping 'people with problems and people who are problems' (Howe, 2009, p.12). This is especially crucial for social workers working with older people because it meets the profession's requirement of securing social justice for these vulnerable people (BASW, 2014).

It has been argued neo-liberalism has de-professionalised social workers and transformed their role from relationship-building to bureaucratic concerns of rationing of resources and assessment and management of risk (Rogowski, 2018). The current emphasis on the manager's right to manage and a focus on managerial power has been part of a broader process of de-professionalisation (that reduced) professional standing of social workers and their autonomy (Thompson, 2005: 176). This needs to end with social workers given more autonomy; their conditions of work should provide a learning environment where manager act as mentors 'providing reflective supervision' (Morrison, 2005) where social workers are free to voice their concerns and admit mistakes.

Successive governments, using neo-liberalism, effected a 'mixed economy of care' using language of choice and empowerment where it actually provided greater opportunities to private business (Ferguson and Woodward, 2009) at the cost of public provision. The privatisation of residential care for adults in the 1980s was driven by the idea of service users as consumers in a mixed economy of care. However, Johns (2017: 174) argues this idea failed to recognise the relative powerlessness of (older people) who cannot voice their concerns and who lack effective advocates. Complaints and enquiries about adult social care rose by 169% since 2010-11 (Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, 2018) with the most common types of complaint concerned councils arranging social care. This makes it imperative to end neo-liberalism in social work and reintroduce relationship-based social care because the functions of the social workers is to consider people and their needs in its entirety taking account of their views (The Barclay Report, 1982: 35). To this end social workers should place more focus on service users' needs and less focus on bureaucratic administrative process because such focus has created a climate of practice which (is considered) 'arid and unfulfilling by practitioners, bearing relatively little relation to the genuine needs or desires of older people' (Lymbery (2005: 2).

Finally, an integrated-joined-up-equitable approach between health, social care and voluntary sector is essential with services based in the community to ensure easier accessibility by all, eg, having one-stop centres housing GP practices, social services and voluntary organisations, to provide the best care for older people.

To conclude, end of austerity and availability of more resources and removal of neo-liberalism will create the most conducive environment for social workers to provide the best support for service users.

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SWU pre-AGM Fringe Event

Theme: *Austerity and Its Impact Upon Health & Social Care*

Interesting Q+A discussion with panel of guest speakers

Lively and informal evening

Free food & drinks

All taking place at the wonderful Mechanics Institute, birthplace of the Trades Union Congress

Explore the historic building and browse its interesting museum full of Trade Union memorabilia



The Mechanics Centre
103 Princess Street,
Manchester, M1 6DD

Thursday 26th Sept 2019
6.30pm - 10.00pm

Free Event but limited tickets so book now

For tickets available:
www.swu-union.org.uk

