

"MODELS OF WORK WITH CADRES WITHIN THE NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENT"

By SHERRY MCLEAN

Paper presented at ANC Seminar on Social Welfare,  
organised by the Department of Economics and Planning (DEP),  
Lusaka 27 - 30 July 1988.

Firstly, I would like to begin by congratulating the comrade who wrote the paper entitled *Role of social work within our National Liberation Movement* as many of the points raised are fundamental to setting up a social welfare department in the movement. As stated, historically social welfare within a capitalist society tends to create dependency, apathy and inequality by depowering the individual through the professional vs. client relationship, rather than empowering the individual towards self-help in a society.

The fundamental ethos of social welfare within the national liberation movement should therefore be according to the commitment for equality in a caring, accepting and healthy environment in line with the democratic South Africa we intend to build.

The models of social work which I propose are based on and strive towards working together to meet the needs of some of our comrades in a situation where social welfare is a concern shared amongst members of our communities, rather than being controlled by a small power base. In order for these models to be workable, a commitment at all levels is needed to address, discuss and look at ways in which we can meet social welfare needs. The national liberation movement has as its unchanging goal the liberation of South Africa and the building of a democratic, non-racial future for the people of South Africa. Within this framework the national liberation movement has to face a variety of challenges, many of them new, and this requires flexibility and an openness to new ideas and methods of working. Such a process of change and development for the better, which is fundamental to the nature of social welfare, can be conflictual at times because it may threaten the *status quo*, it may come across as critical, or (as I have been told) may be "ammunition for the enemy". I would like to stress that the problems we are encountering in exile are not extraordinary or abnormal, but unless we address them, rather than tending to suppress them, (or even to pretend that they do not exist), change will either be made more difficult to bring about or may never happen at all.

Rather than focus this paper on difficulties in our communities, of which we are already aware, I have chosen to suggest ways in which we can overcome problems. I have made various sub-headings according to different models of social work.

#### **COMMUNITY WORK.**

Community work is about developing the potential of a community through activation, education, support and advice towards self-help. Various models of social work can also be part of community work like group work and setting up of various services (e.g. child minding counselling, activities for children, social events.) We already have

plenty of potential amongst our comrades who have the skills and experience of working at grass roots / community level inside South Africa which could be realised and transferred to our exiled communities. The areas of work, whilst concentrating on different sectors of our communities are also inter-connected and would involve the community as a whole.

#### *Children.*

In order for us to develop our full potential as adults, we need a basis founded on love, guidance, support and time whilst we grow up. Most of us here will have had an extended family around us as children with parents, brothers and sisters, grandparents and aunts and uncles to care for, give attention and generally provide a sense of security. However, our situation in SOMAFCO obviously differs with so many parents working or studying away from East Africa.

When I left Mazimbu in November, 1987, there were 220 children living full time in the Primary School boarding section with four adults as boarding staff. Although most of the Primary teachers spent time organising activities for the children this adult/child ratio speaks for itself. In Ireland, for example, residential homes for children would have at least four child-care workers to ten children. The Nursery boarding section has a similarly low adult/child ratio with twelve children aged between 3 and 7 years to just one full-time adult. Some of the children are suffering emotional difficulties in the form of bed wetting, petty theft and real fear and mistrust of adults as well as learning difficulties. Those children who are withdrawn, lonely, homesick and unhappy can go for days without individual attention from an adult.

Whilst there is the clear need for many more trained child care staff, the responsibility also lies with members of our communities to work with our children. The Youth Section especially could be motivated and organised to be involved in recreational activities. Perhaps individuals could be a 'named' parental figure for a small group of children to whom the children could turn. This may mean relieving comrades on a part time basis from their ongoing work in other sectors, but would be of enormous benefit to the children. Recruitment could take place in the form of community education about the needs of our children.

The community education model could also be implemented both as regards families and comrades working with children, on child related issues such as physical and psychological development, emotional and behavioural problems, use of discipline, children's needs, sex education, etc. This may help to overcome the use of physical punishment and improve the quality of life for our children.

#### *Mental health.*

Although, under the circumstances, we do not have a disproportionate number of comrades with mental illness, there is very little knowledge or understanding of the whole area of mental health in the Movement. Therefore rehabilitation is made that much more difficult and many of

our comrades are isolated and rejected. Most of those who have undergone psychiatric treatment in East Africa live in a separate 'unit' in Dakawa away from the community. The conditions are appalling with poor sanitation and over-crowded living conditions. The staff are untrained and over worked and the comrades are isolated and generally unaccepted by the rest of the community.

There is an urgent need for an extensive community education programme to create awareness and a commitment to integration and acceptance. This would also mean involving manpower deployment, youth and women's sections, housing and planning sections, sports clubs, culture and recreation. Our comrades who are undergoing rehabilitation need to be living amongst other comrades, either sharing homes or in a 'half way house' situated in the community with support from a rehabilitation worker.

Carefully planned programmes; whereby there are different activities during the day, badly need to be drawn up and implemented by the Health Team in conjunction with the aforementioned sectors. I believe it is essential to involve other sectors because rehabilitation is not possible if left to the Health Team alone.

#### *Women.*

As another speaker is going to cover the social welfare problems of women in the National Liberation Movement, I will make my contribution brief. The potential for more development amongst our women comrades has not yet been realised given the strength, skill and experience that is there. The community work model, using group work and discussion could focus on development, including issues such as self-development, the equality of women, child care and child development, education, health, etc. The mothers and expectant mothers in the Kate Molale Centre could also benefit from such an approach, working and learning together with other women, as they are presently an isolated group in Mazimbu.

The Adult Education division in Mazimbu clearly has a role to play in implementing such programmes.

Training in group work and carrying out such programmes would take a relatively short time.

#### **GROUPWORK.**

Groupwork is a model which "provides a context in which individuals help each other and it can enable individuals and groups to influence and change personal, group, organisational and community problems." (Alan BROWN. *Groupwork*. Heinemann, 1982.)

Whilst it is a specific model of working, it can also be integrated into the community work model, for example, for training volunteers, support groups for people with shared experiences, women's development, psychiatric rehabilitation, and as an alternative to one-to-one counselling. It is not alien to the Movement as collective discussion at unit meetings, for example, is already being used. However,

groupwork in a social work context is more than collective discussion. It means working towards specific aims in a structured manner which ensures the participation of the whole group.

Groupwork is an effective, exciting and dynamic way of working, largely because the group members team together and support one another. Attitudes feeling and behaviour may be changed. It can be democratic and people come to identify their own problems, thus giving more power to the individual.

Some training in group work is necessary to facilitate a group. Such training can be gained in two ways. Firstly by working with an experienced and trained groupworker or secondly by setting up a training programme with potential groupworkers who could then go ahead and set up groups with various sectors of our communities.

Groupwork could be used, for example, as part of psychiatric rehabilitation, for orientation into life in exile, and as a developmental educational and supportive method with women, youth and secondary school students.

#### COUNSELLING.

The bulk of my work in Mazimbu was to do with counselling comrades who had self-referred from the Secondary School and comrades working in the community. The need for support was for a variety of reasons, but the main were loneliness, depression, anxiety, isolation, homesickness and relationship difficulties.

Many of the Secondary School students felt that they had no-one they could turn to for help and support or to confide in. Many also felt that their feelings were not shared by others, and had a real fear of psychiatric illness. As a result they were having concentration and learning difficulties as well as being socially isolated.

I found counselling to be very effective because

It helps people to share feelings of anxiety, guilt, frustration, and loneliness.

It gives reassurance and support that people are not alone in their feelings.

After two or three sessions there is a marked improvement in morale and well-being.

Although it was felt inappropriate for me to work in the Ruth First Orientation Centre in Dakawa, I was aware that many of our comrades suffer extreme anxiety, feelings of guilt at leaving their families so suddenly in South Africa, homesickness, displacement and insecurity on initially coming into exile. Counselling on a one-to-one basis to offer emotional support and reassurance at this crucial initial stage would be of enormous benefit and could prevent difficulties in the future.



Counselling can also be of great value in assisting with the problems of marital break down.

Training in counselling skills can be carried out in a relatively short period of time. (approximately 10 sessions of 1½ hours each). Perhaps a core group of comrades from our communities could be trained to carry out counselling work. Ideally such comrades should work under the supervision of a trained and experienced social worker.

#### **CONFIDENTIALITY.**

Confidentiality is basic to establishing a trusting relationship. Clients will not feel free to speak openly unless they are certain that what is said is confidential between them and the welfare worker. Yet there are times when it might be necessary to discuss particular problems with another person. In such cases the welfare worker should first obtain the agreement of the client for such outside discussion.

This area of confidentiality is a tricky one because of the real security threats facing the Movement at the moment. However, it would be exceptionally difficult for social workers to function efficiently and professionally if they were expected to pass all confidential information on to administrative authority. Perhaps the new Department of Social Welfare should establish clear guidelines on this question.

#### **TRAINING**

These then are the three models which I have identified as appropriate and practical for our situation, but there is one further point on training needs.

While the long term aim is to have a far greater number of trained personnel in the area of social welfare - i.e. social and community workers, community health workers, child psychologists and child care workers - our social welfare needs are immediate. As mentioned we already have resources in our trained teachers, comrades who have worked at grass roots community level, veterans and others who could participate in short-term training and carry out counselling, group work or community work.

I would like to stress that, even when we have professionally trained social welfare workers within the ANC, we cannot expect these comrades to work efficiently unless they are guided by an experienced professional during the first few years immediately after qualifying.

#### **SUMMARY.**

I propose that the following proposals be planned and implemented.

*A community education programme which aims to create a greater awareness of our social welfare need through talks and discussion.*

*Recruitment and activation among our comrades to work in a 'helping' capacity.*

*Models of work with cadres in the NLM.*

*A series of training workshops in counselling and groupwork.*

*Career guidance at SOMAFÇO towards training comrades in areas of social welfare, for example, community health, child guidance, child care psychology and social work.*

These measures whilst addressing our immediate needs, could also be part of long term planning in building a social welfare programme.

#### **CONCLUSION.**

Open discussion regarding a commitment to meet our social welfare needs should be held at unit and departmental level and with administrative organs. Such discussion may also encourage a greater sense of responsibility, acceptance and concern, so that social welfare becomes an integral part of people's lives rather than being the problem or concern of others, or our pretending that problems do not exist. Unless the new Department of Social Welfare is able to convince the leadership and regional administrations of the value of social welfare programmes, and obtain support and encouragement from them, a social welfare initiative is unlikely to be wholly successful.

Creating a caring atmosphere for our cadres is especially important in the National Liberation Movement where our task is to strive towards a better, more equal and democratic society.

May I finally finish by adding that my experience of working, living and learning alongside comrades in the ANC has taught me that not only is this ideal a possibility but most certainly a reality.