

The Bertha Capen Reynolds Society

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Newsletter

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70185

Report on the Founding Meeting 11/8/85

The founding meeting of the Bertha C. Reynolds Society was held on November 8, 1985 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Chicago during the National Association of Social Workers' Symposium. For those of you who could not attend, this report is especially for you.

First of all, we did it! After months of getting out the Call and organizing for the event, our efforts were well rewarded. Many thanks to all who helped us get off the ground! Over fifty people attended the meeting. This was a good turnout considering that the meeting occurred at 5:30 PM on a Friday and in competition with other sessions that would have attracted progressive social workers, e.g. a session on the Nairobi conference. Over a thousand flyers were distributed in the preceding few days to announce the formation of the society to conference attendees. Many people expressed interest in joining the society, even though they could not attend the founding meeting. Their membership forms are still coming in.

Bobbie Rabinowitz, who works for the Social Services Employees Union in New York City and who is a member of Social Workers for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament, chaired the meeting with firm skill and gentle

humor. She introduced the speakers and chaired our group discussions.

Marti Bombyk, who teaches at Fordham University's Graduate School of Social Service and is a member of the editorial collective of Catalyst: A Socialist Journal of the Social Services, gave the introductory speech. The full text is included at the end of this report, at the insistence of Michael A. Dover, her co-convenor of the Bertha C. Reynolds Society, formerly the regional coordinator of personal services at the National Maritime Union in New Orleans and now working for a union in NYC.

Many people sent in written comments to the Call to Establish the society when they joined. Several of these responses were read aloud by Bobbie Rabinowitz while copies of the full list of written responses from the membership were distributed. The reading of a few people's enthusiastic comments wove a web of connection between those who could not attend and those present. Following the reading, several members of the audience introduced themselves and spoke about why they came to the meeting and what they hoped the society could become.

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Next, Allan Powell spoke on the kinds of activities BCRS members could undertake in their local communities. Allan is chairperson of the New Orleans chapter of the NASW and a member of the National Association of Black Social Workers. He was a founder of Social Workers for Social Change, the predecessor group of the growing Bertha Reynolds Society in New Orleans. Ideas generated by this group include study groups, educational forums which could be co-sponsored with other groups, forming social service contingents in local demonstrations, speaking out in a variety of forums (e.g. letters to the Editor) on issues regarding human services in our communities, and educating other social workers about the life and work of Bertha Reynolds through materials made available by the Society. (For example, an in-production videotape of "Somewhere a Door Blew Shut", a docudrama written by David Drucker and performed as a one woman play by Margaret Draper at the Smith BCR conference last June.) Allan also suggested that school-community committees be formed at the local level. Initially, we can come together to have potlucks and discussions about our work, our progressive visions, and what we want to do on a local basis, including using the local group for a support network.

Allan was followed by Joan Dworkin, a member of the BCR Organizing Committee who works for the Illinois State NASW. Joan gave suggestions about the kinds of activities the Bertha Reynolds Society could undertake at the national level. These include holding national or at least regional meetings for our members that would be forums for presenting our ideas about our work and progressive analyses of social service issues. Such meetings could also be "retreats" for re-charging our energies. We could also distribute position papers through national policy channels on contemporary social policy issues such as tax reform and redistribution of income, and provide a source of progressive leadership to the human service community.

Next, Fred Newdom, Executive Director of New York State's NASW, chaired a

discussion of the revision of the Call to Establish the Bertha Reynolds Society which will soon become the Call to Join the BCRS. The following amendments were approved: (Please consult your original Call)

#2. To further communication, cooperative support, and collaboration between and among social work practitioners, social service workers, scholars, and clients, thereby reducing the gap between theory and practice.

#7. To further coalition work between the human service community, the peace and labor movements, and all social movements whose objectives are integral to the achievement of a caring, humanistic society.

#9. To promote the mission and methods of progressive social work by facilitating the presentation, publication, and distribution of papers, books, and monographs and by stimulating research and contributions to professional and progressive publications, including those of feminist, Marxist, and anti-racist perspectives.

Recognizing that these amended principles have now become wordy, Mary Ann Mahaffey proposed that we authorize editorial polishing by the Organizing Committee so that we would not waste further time debating semantics. The polished amendments will be approved by those signing the original Call to Establish before being distributed as a new Call to Join. The new Call is enclosed in this newsletter. If you do not consent to the new amendments and wish to withdraw your name, please notify Marti Bombyk,

Along with this discussion, Arthur Katz proposed that a preamble for the organization's statement of purpose and principles (which hopefully will be prepared by and acted upon at our first national meeting) include definitions of the concepts "progressive" and "Marxist" and that these be derived from the work of Bertha Reynolds. His suggestion was unanimously supported.

Finally Marti concluded the meeting with a report of the current status of organizing efforts and recruitment of volunteers. She presented a long-range plan to develop the membership base of the society over the next year so that we can sustain a steady momentum without burning out. We hope the Society will be ready to democratically develop formal by-laws and an organizational structure in roughly a year.

Those present approved of Michael Dover becoming the Membership Secretary and of Fred Newdom becoming the Treasurer. Marti will coordinate the Organizing Committee, which in addition to former "Interim" members (Arline Prigoff/West Coast, Beth Lewis/New England, Joan Dworkin/Midwest, and Michael Dover/South) has now been expanded to include Rebecca Hegar/LA and TX, Wylie Rogers/MI and IL, Leslie Leigninger/MI and Judith Transue/W.VA. and KY. Ann Withorn of Boston will convene a group to plan and organize our first national meeting. In the meantime, Marti will facilitate the development of the East Coast region, expand and support the group of regional organizers, distribute organizing materials, and develop our newsletter.

Fundraiser Winners

The Interim Organizing Committee held a fundraising party the night before the founding meeting. We are most grateful to Joan Dworkin for taking care of arrangements and to Ann Schmidt for helping with the food and drinks. Our fundraiser was a raffle, and winning tickets were drawn by Mary Ann Mahaffey. Judith Transue won a complete paperback collection of Bertha Reynolds' books. Eleanor Steir won an original hardback edition of Bertha Reynolds' autobiography Unchartered Journey. Michael Phillips won an original edition of the same book, containing an inscription "Cordially yours," and signed by Bertha Reynolds. Many thanks to Jack Kamaiko for presenting it to the Interim Organizing Committee and to Morris Siegel for donating it.

Members and Money

As a result of our fundraising party and our membership drive, our treasury is in good shape. We have approximately \$1,000 to cover printing and mailing expenses in the next year. We hope to be able to create a separate reserve fund from the lifetime memberships to ensure the longevity of our society. At this point, we have about 250 members nationwide. Over the year we will continue to circulate the new Call to Join the BCRS nationally while solidifying current local organizing efforts.

Verne Weed 1907-1985

Verne Weed died on November 14 in New York City. A "living archive" will be dedicated in her name at Hunter College School of Social Work, on Monday March 3 6-9 pm. The collection will be housed at Hunter and will contain progressive social work literature and original archival materials. To contribute to this fund, please make your checks payable to:

(Write small to get it all in)

The Verne Weed Living Archive/HCSSW

Checks should be sent to:

Verne Weed Archive
c/o Mimi Abramovitz/Terry Mizrahi
Hunter College School of Social Work
129 E. 79th St.
New York, NY 10021

Arline Prigoff is writing a memorium about Verne to appear in a publication of the Bertha Reynolds Centennial Committee Proceedings. We are also considering printing your brief recollections of Verne in an upcoming newsletter. Please send them to Arline, who has volunteered to edit them for the newsletter. (See Organizing Committee Info on back [page 8] for her address).

INTRODUCTORY SPEECH AT THE FOUNDING OF THE BERTHA CAPEN REYNOLDS SOCIETY

November 8, 1985 in Chicago, Illinois

By Marti Bombyk

Hello everyone. We're very pleased to have such a good turnout for this historical event. My job is to provide some background information on how we got here tonight, why we need an organization of progressive social workers, and why we are naming it the Bertha Reynolds Society.

As many of you have read from the Call to Establish the Bertha Reynolds Society, our efforts grew out of the Bertha Reynolds Centennial Committee's work to celebrate the life and work of Bertha Capen Reynolds and to reaffirm her rightful place in the rich legacy of the social work profession. The Centennial Committee's work included a panel session at the Orthopsychiatry Conference held in New York City last April and a related reception held at Fordham University. In June there was a three day conference at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts that was attended by over 250 social workers from around the country. On the last day of the conference, an informal meeting was spontaneously organized to try to channel the energy generated by the conference into constructive action on behalf and by progressive social workers who identify with the tradition of which Bertha Reynolds was a part. At that meeting, over 50 people unanimously voted to issue a Call to Establish the Bertha Reynolds Society at the NASW Symposium in Chicago. Michael Dover and I volunteered, somewhat naively, to organize this effort.

Now that the Bertha Reynolds Centennial Committee is coming to an end, its work successfully accomplished, we are bringing into life a new Bertha Reynolds Society. For those of us who have been conceptualizing the relationship of the Bertha Reynolds Centennial Committee to the Bertha Reynolds Society, we are using the metaphor that from the decaying fruit comes a seed, and one day we hope it will stand like a mighty oak.

Why do we need an organization for progressive social workers? Because, as we are too painfully aware, our nation has drifted into conservative and reactionary politics. We endure not just social service cutbacks, the privatization of human services, and attacks on social service recipients, but also increasing and alarming gaps in wealth, escalation of militarization and international aggression, and the undermining of civil rights and liberties.

Our profession has been swept into this current, unable to resist the market forces that endanger our commitment to serving the most vulnerable and oppressed populations. Under such historical conditions, we progressives are in danger of being seduced away from our Left politics, ideals, and activism. We, too, are susceptible to the political climate and historical conditions under which we live. We need jobs to support ourselves and our families. Many of us have felt increasing pressure to separate our political views from our work. And in the absence of an articulate, clear analysis of what is happening to our profession, ourselves, our clients, and our country, we can become confused and deceived by the more mainstream responses. Our own views could be come diluted and demoralized.

Moreover, we have yet to enjoy the opportunity to fully discuss, debate, and develop an agenda of what we progressive social workers want. Our own skills of analysis and of making connections with each other in our workplaces, our communities, and nationwide are underdeveloped. Many of us feel isolated and fragmented. Many of us are suffering from individual and collective alienation.

The Bertha Reynolds Society will provide a "Left anchor" to the activities of our profession. It will give us a new counterpoint to swim towards, away from the currents that are sweeping our profession to the Right. Social work needs us to catalyze ideas and thoughts for releasing the conservative grip on our country's political sentiments and commitments, so that once again --or should I say that for once-- peace, social justice, and the meeting of human needs will be national priorities.

Our society will provide a forum for progressive expression and activism. And equally important, it will give us a home base. We need and want that feeling of homecoming, to be able to come home. By gathering together our kindred spirits --we who have been touched, shaped, and nurtured by the inspiration of Bertha Capen Reynolds' life and work-- we can give each other the support, reassurance, and encouragement that we need to keep our politics honorable, steadfast, and integrated with our working and personal lives.

Finally, this society, as is clearly demonstrated by the endorsers of the Call, can bring together the older progressives of the thirties, the middle aged progressive of the sixties, and the young progressives of the eighties. It will make sure that the torch is passed, to shed light on our history, our successes, and our lessons, and to illuminate the path ahead.

Now, why should we call ourselves the Bertha Reynolds Society? Because she was among the very first to earnestly develop a political analysis of society and the role of social work in bettering the conditions of human life on this planet. Her writings, as many of us know and as many more of us will come to learn, are inspirational to those who identify with the progressive tradition.

Another reason is that Bertha Reynolds' life, sad to say, is an example of what can happen when an individual, during a conservative historical period, speaks the truth to a profession that has turned deaf to voices that plead for social change. Bertha Reynolds was red-baited, ostracized, and shunned by her profession. Only a few stood by her in solidarity to protect her and help her survive, and to protect and advance the integrity of her world views, her ideas, and her practice methods. Her life teaches us that we must organize ourselves and stand together. We know there is strength in numbers. By coming together and forming this society, we are saying, "Never again."

And there is one more good reason to organize this progressive society in her name. As a member of the Bertha Reynolds Centennial Committee, I was privileged to meet and work with many of her former students, her friends, and her comrades. Often times as we were developing our plans and making decisions about various activities for the centennial project I would hear someone say, "Bertha would have liked this." Nearly always, this remark would be followed with nods of approval, and we always felt good when we knew Bertha would have liked what we were doing. And on rare occasions when there were disagreements as to what we should do, people who were sure Bertha Reynolds would be on their side were quite surprised to learn that

those who disagreed with them were equally certain of having Bertha Reynolds' support! So as you can imagine, members of the Centennial Committee exercised a great deal of caution in making proclamations of what Bertha Reynolds' would have wanted, for we deeply respect her memory. So having said this by way of introduction, let me read this statement that came in response to the Call. "I applaud your objectives and principles outlined herein. Having worked very closely with Bertha, I am sure she would be proud to have the Society, with these purposes, named after her." As a final, overarching reason for naming this society the Bertha Capen Reynolds Society, I submit: Bertha would have liked this.

It is with great happiness and a small dose of trepidation that we now form the Bertha Reynolds Society. And so let me conclude with a few remarks about ground rules because, in our coming dialogues and debates, some of which are bound to be challenging, if not irritating, we might need to be reminded of a few important points. I hope the ground rules will be something along these lines:

To have a kind disposition toward each other's political sensibilities and yearnings; to have a developmental and environmental analysis of the many paths to individual politicization; to understand and recognize the contexts which support politicization so that we may cultivate and harness them; to consistently give credit where and when it is due; to disagree with an honest explanation that does not attack another's fundamental character and to demand the same from those who disagree with us; to take heart in the fact that we're not alone, to recognize we are only human; to acknowledge that the high stakes frighten us and that we must give and take courage; to be open about our own limited understandings and unashamed to admit them or ask questions; to be able to freely admit it when we are wrong; and to persevere when we are convinced we are right (Bombyk, 1985).

Through these debates and dialogues, we can serve ourselves well as we work to serve the people, remembering the advice Bertha Reynolds gave to Ann Withorn in 1975 to relay to us:

You must always remember that good social work must be political, not because we try to indoctrinate anybody, but because if we help people help themselves better and understand the world they are in better, they they will be more able to help everyone else make the better world we all need. We can only do this well if we view the world from a social perspective. To be a good social worker, you have to be a progressive thinker." (Withorn, p. xii, 1984 in Bombyk, p. 130, 1985).

Welcome, everyone, to the Bertha Reynolds Society!

References

- Bombyk, M. On being a good social worker: A book review essay of Serving the People: Social Services and Social Change by Ann Withorn. Catalyst, No. 17/18, 1985, 121-130.
- Withorn, A. Serving the People: Social Services and Social Change, New York: Columbia University Press, 1984.

CALL TO JOIN THE BERTHA CAPEN REYNOLDS SOCIETY

Over the past ten years, social workers have begun to acknowledge and reaffirm the rich heritage left to us in the work of Bertha Capen Reynolds. 1985 was the centennial celebration of her life, 1885-1978. The Bertha Reynolds Centennial Committee, convened by Jack Kamaiko, honored her through events held by the American Orthopsychiatric Association and the Smith College School of Social Work. Since her death in 1978, she has also been honored by the Council on Social Work Education, and N.A.S.W. has re-issued three of her books in its Classics Series.

Through these activities, which involved hundreds of elder, midlife and young social workers, Bertha Capen Reynolds's work has been restored to its rightful place as a twentieth century social work achievement.

Bertha Reynolds' abiding commitment to humanistic practice methods, fundamental social change, and the scientific study of society today serve as an inspiration to social workers who wish to revive, foster and continue the progressive tradition in social work.

As the political and fiscal crisis in the national human service community continues virtually unabated, those of us who share in Bertha Reynolds' vision of a caring society are compelled to call upon our colleagues to find a way to deepen our political understanding and practice of social work in order to redirect national priorities toward the meeting of human needs.

Toward this end, an informal gathering of fifty social workers attending the Bertha Reynolds Centennial Conference in Northampton, Massachusetts on June 30, 1985 explored a new effort toward clarifying our political analysis of society and our profession and developing alternative visions and strategies for the future. In the resulting Call to Establish the Bertha Reynolds Society, over 150 social workers, young and old, national prominent and locally active, endorsed the formation of such a Society. A founding meeting was held in Chicago, Illinois on November 8, 1985, in conjunction with the N.A.S.W. Symposium.

Ten evolving principles and objectives for the Society were presented in the Call and amended in Chicago, where the 75 social workers present voted unanimously to reissue this Call to Join the Bertha Capen Reynolds Society.

1. To promote the study and practice of the progressive tradition in social welfare and social work.
2. To further communication, cooperative support, and collaboration between and among social work practitioners, social service workers, scholars, and clients, thereby reducing the gap between theory and practice.
3. To further the scientific study of society and social work by developing a critique of the nature of social welfare, social services, social work and social problems.
4. To develop and work on agendas for alternative social policies aimed at incremental and fundamental social change.
5. To clarify the requirements and methods of humanistic direct practice aimed at facilitating both individual and social change through advocacy, transformation, and empowerment.
6. To stimulate exchanges among employed, retired, and student social workers of diverse backgrounds to generate activism around social service and social policy issues.
7. To further coalition work between the human service community, the peace and labor movements, and all social movements whose objectives are integral to the achievement of a caring, humanistic society.
8. To expose and oppose the nature and effects of racism, sexism, ageism, heterosexism, and discrimination against the disabled and the psychologically distressed.
9. To promote the mission and methods of progressive social work by facilitating the presentation, publication, and distribution of papers, books, and monographs and by stimulating research and contributions to professional and progressive publications, including those of feminist, Marxist, and anti-racist perspectives.
10. To educate members of the human service community about the life and work of Bertha Capen Reynolds.

The Bertha Capen Reynolds Society will enable social workers to heighten our understanding of our roles and to become more effective and active in our agencies, unions, schools, communities, and in N.A.S.W. and other professional organizations.

We, the undersigned, call upon our colleagues to join us in building a lasting organization, which can further the historical and urgently needed progressive tradition in social work.

Marti Bombyk and Michael A. Dover, Co-Conveners

Mimi Abramovitz	Alfred H. Katz	Marcia B. Cohen	Joy Smith
Amy Lewis Reisch	Hope Murrow	Ken Grossinger	George Harrison
Hubert Jones	Jane Hammatt-Kavaloski	Steve Burghardt	Beth Silverman
Jeffrey Galper	Muriel Gladstein	Mike Fabricant	Tomannie T. Walker
Rebecca L. Hegar	Fannie B. Reich	Terry Mizrahi	Ruth W. Messinger
Gail Booth	Fred Newdom	Peg Brennan	Lois G. Sussman
Bertram Allan Weinert	Vicki L. Ellis	Helen Gualtieri	Myra Rosenberg
Richard Cloward	Joan L. Goldstein	Sharon Freedberg	Robert Schachter
Jennie Berman	Herta Mayer	Marilyn Montenegro	Ruth M. Bonvillain
Mary Bricker-Jenkins	Esther M. Lentschner	Bernice Augenbraun	Louis Berkman
Harold Lewis	Maryann Mahaffey	Alejandro Duhalde	Beth Lewis
Allen Powell	Robert Glass	Verne Weed	Joan Dworkin
Andrea Savage	Gary Smith	Susan Kinoy	Victoria Olds
Leah Shiffman	Millie M. Charles	Chauncey Alexander	Rebecca Schilit
Gloria Donadello	Florence Vigilante	Camille T. Claymon	Ruth H. Wilson
Andrea Johnson	Todd D. Kovich	Leslie Leighninger	Lynelle Rhodes
M. Mickey Lebowitz	Terry H. Copeland	Frederick Ahearn	Karen Rosenberg
David G. Gil	Nadine Henneman	Mary A. Hulbert	Frances Fox Piven
Arline Prigoff	Celia Wolsky	Michael S. Cronin	George Getzel
Mary Russak	Barbara R. Joseph	Elaine Peress	David Wagner
Michael Reisch	James Dunn	Molly Klopot	Ann Withorn
Sol Gorelick	Ruth V. Friedman	Manuel Diaz Jr.	Anne K. Stenzel
Aaron H. Beckerman	Vivian Pataki	Sally Saulvester	Herman Dooha
Daniel S. Sanders	Ralphhyne MacDonald	Henry Hicks	Alan Lefkowitz
Joan E. Ohlson	Carola B. Mayer	Barbara B. Solomon	Beverly Lefkowitz
Ruth R. Middleman	Imogene S. Young	Fiona D. Lamb	Jan L. Hagen
Marilyn B. Gore	Arthur Katz	Bernadette M. Cronin-Geller	
William Whitaker	Catherine Riessman	David Drucker	
Anne Knight	Jack Kamaiko	Shura Saul	
Nancy A. Humphreys			

RESPONSE TO THE CALL TO ESTABLISH THE BERTHA CAPEN REYNOLDS SOCIETY

Please check one or more of the following:

- Please send me more information about the Bertha Capen Reynolds Society.
- Enclosed are my dues for membership in the category of:
- \$ 5 Student, unemployed, low income charter member
 - \$ 10 Charter member
 - \$ 25 Sustaining charter member
 - \$ 50 Sponsoring charter member
 - \$100 Lifetime charter member

Name (Please print or type): _____

Address: _____
Street City State Zip Code

Telephone: (Home) _____ (Work) _____

PLEASE MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO BERTHA REYNOLDS SOCIETY AND RETURN THEM WITH THIS FORM TO:

**BERTHA CAPEN REYNOLDS SOCIETY
P. O. BOX 850169
NEW ORLEANS, LA 70185**

My signature below authorizes you to affix my name as a signatory to the Call to Join the Bertha Capen Reynolds Society:

(signature of endorsers)