

the term "non-aligned indifference" was used to describe the community's attitude to children's services, but I believe the term could equally be applied to social work practice itself in this field. I believe social work has not done a sufficiently good job of "selling" itself as having something to offer to children and families, and that part of that failure rests with our seeming inability or unwillingness to be open and honest about our assessments and their rationales, to be willing to advocate for quality services or to align ourselves with one viewpoint or the other when competing opinions are juxtaposed.

Like perhaps some of you, I am an avid watcher of "Yes Minister". A recent episode included a segment where Bernard was advising the Minister on the efficiency of a particular locality citing the lowest number of social workers per head of population as an example. When asked if that was good, Bernard referred to "Park-

inson's Law of Social Work" — the number of social problems always expands to fill the time of the social workers available. Whilst not subscribing to that law, it says something of the task which social work has if it is to remain effective and meaningful. Social workers and those involved in family and children's services have tended to become excellent fence-sitters, preferring to retain an "overview" of both sides rather than declare our support for either too readily. In family and children's services, if social work is to play a continuing part (as I believe it should), I believe we have to learn to decide where we want to be and climb off the fence, even if we have to face the odd bull or two in the process. Unless we can, social work practice will grow weaker and less relevant to most families and children.

There remain challenges and issues, both philosophically and from a practice point of view, for children's and families as this decade draws to a close. We have come

some of the way toward really establishing a network of caring, accessible, local services, designed by and for the families who will use them, but we still have a long way to go. In going on, let's make sure we recognise that we all have something to contribute and an enormous investment — in terms of our family and community life — in getting it as right as we can.

References:

1. Dickey B. *No Charity There*. Nelson, Melbourne, 1980, p.107.
2. Swain S.L. Selina Sutherland: Child Rescuer. In Lake & Kelly (Eds.) *Double Time*. Penguin, Australia, 1985, p.112-113.
3. Housden I. *The Prevention of Cruelty to Children*. Jonathon Cape, London, 1959, p.251.
4. Child Welfare Legislation & Practice Review, Victoria, 1985, p.11-13.

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