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Social work, precarity and the need for radical action: A European perspective

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What we will cover...

- Precarity, the precariat and social work
- What is social work and where has it come from?
 - Contemporary contexts
- Radical social work and radical social action
 - Piacularism in social work



PRECARITY, THE PRECARIAT AND SOCIAL WORK



- Labour market flexibility
- *Precariato*
- a political and social situation in which people are forged through neoliberal economics. People who might be described as living precariously have distinctive structures of social income that imparts vulnerability

- aspects of precarious living mentioned above have wide connections with the world of social work that seeks to promote human rights and social justice as central to its role
- Welfare benefit reform/reduction, austerity
- Universal Credit
- Precarity as a ‘process’ – doing precarity

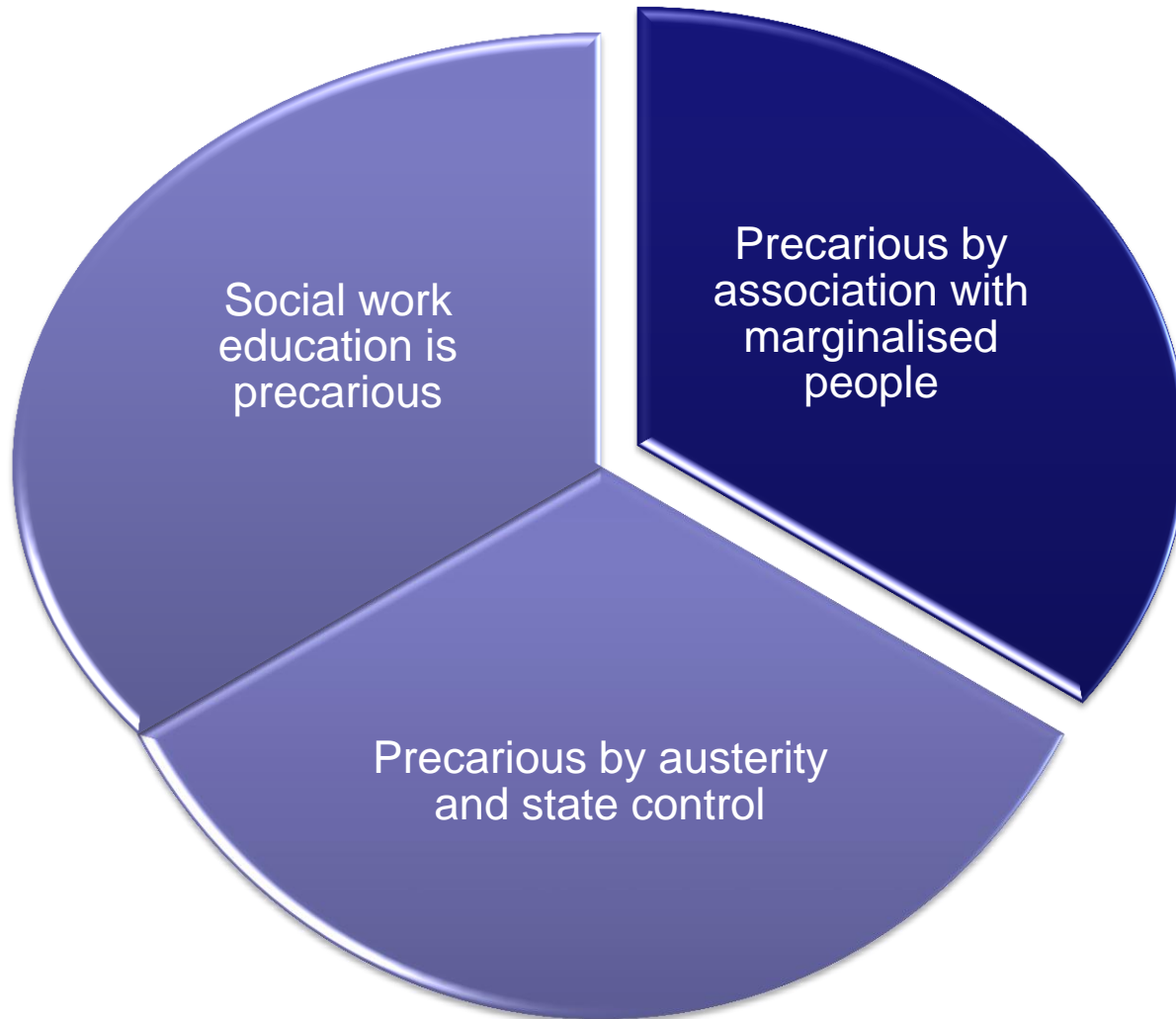
1. The precariousness of social work because of association with the marginalised
2. The precariousness of social work as a practice in times of austerity and association with state apparatus
3. The precariousness of social work education through isomorphic convergence

WHAT IS SOCIAL WORK AND WHERE HAS IT COME FROM?

- Politically ambivalent beginnings
- Religious/charitable; moral and political



- Social workers operate in these socially, politically and economically impoverished circumstances. Where social work forms part of a state system resources are severely constrained and tighter and more rigorous eligibility are applied. When working for third sector or civil society organisations, grants supporting services have been restricted and funding reduced making the provision of social work support less available.



RADICAL SOCIAL WORK AND RADICAL SOCIAL ACTION

- Social work is often controlled by seemingly benign states who use the technologies of care to exert control and to diminish the appetite for social action.

Transformatory sacrifice

Social worker as piaculum:

- Salves the conscience of the state
- Transforms power relations

Baby Peter

- revenge and punishment enacted by sackings, disciplinary hearings and public humiliation. (social workers) acted as a piaculum carrying the guilt of reductions in public services, lack of political commitment to social work employees and as a sacrifice to ensure continued public support

Radical approach to social work...

- ...would see the collective response to people's need and/or oppression as necessary to effecting change. The mourned for entity is the regaining of lost voice and security of status that is now longed for but feared. It requires a transformatory rite to expiate the wrongdoing of the state

- ritual and sacrifice represent dynamic techniques of resisting the damaging precarity of social work and those who use social work services that is experienced under neoliberal policies

