

**Text of a letter by Phillip W. Weiss, LCSW, that was published in November/December 2000 edition of the NASW Currents.**

In an article in the June/July 2000 edition of Currents (“NASW’s Confrontation with Reality: Crafting an Agenda for Change,” page 1), social workers are criticized for remaining separate from the ranks of organized labor. A professor of labor history is quoted as saying: “As white-collar workers, social workers have embraced a middle-class identity. Yet most social workers are dependent wage laborers and can be hired and fired at will.” The president of a labor union is quoted as saying: “Many social workers tend to separate themselves from blue-collar workers. They don’t understand why they need a union.”

Although I concur with the premise that social workers should become active in organized labor, I believed that criticizing social workers for being “middle-class” and for tending “to separate themselves from blue-collar workers” is not the best way to form a bond between social workers and organized labor [especially] without offering any solution for bridging the gap.

To attract social workers into the ranks of organized labor, social workers must be treated as professionals, and should be praised, not criticized for wanting to preserve their professional identity. As clinical professionals vested with the responsibility for providing care and treatment for the less fortunate in our society, the professional identity of social workers is well-grounded. Demanding that social workers relinquish their professional identity will only widen the chasm the presently separates social workers from the very persons who wish to represent them.