ATTITUDES TOWARD SOCIAL WELFARE: A SOCIAL WORK HURDLE

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THE accent in modern social work practice is on the welfare of the persons served, and not as in some periods in social welfare history, on the protection, glory, salvation or serenity of the donor and benefactor. Moreover, social welfare has been extended in modern social work practice to operate at several levels concurrently.

"Expressed simply, we may do one of three things. We may help people in trouble (relief). Or we may help people out of trouble (cure, rehabilitation). Or we may help people to avoid trouble (prevention). If the last level is broadened to include removal of the causes of trouble, the general search for knowledge, and helping people to realize their own full capacities for creative work, play, and growth, physical, mental, and spiritual, then the opportunities of philanthropy are well covered."

These levels of social welfare concentration are, in brief, the substance of social work interpretation when specific social services are justified, when social legislation is supported, when efforts are made, and contributions are solicited, on behalf of social agencies.

Except for the cynicism or doubt reflected in a few investigations and political debates, there has been little recent indication of opposition to, or difference with, this concept of social welfare. However, it has not been too long since

a few incidents in social welfare practice in different parts of the country set off a spate of misinterpretation which caused social workers no little concern. It is no accident that so many of otherwise understanding and sympathetic people are swayed by so few cantankerous diatribes against the "coddling" and the "spoiling" of the needy. There is almost a predisposition, born out of history if not biology, towards a critical view of the servers as well as the served, especially when the server is a "middleman" social agency or social worker.

Some of the popular reaction to social welfare is quite confused, but understandably so if we remember the origins of social welfare and the intermingling of attitudes and motivations towards it both in whole societies and in individual minds. A selective review makes this increasingly clear.

There has been justification of Freud's and others' suspicion that emotion is present at least at birth, if not before, but that emotion does not guarantee the compassion which fabricates philanthropy out of ordinary flesh. We do not doubt the occasional existence of this pure spirit of compassion, but to prove or understand it, our source is evidently not simply biology or heredity, but something more.²

¹ F. Emerson Andrews, Attitudes Toward Giving, New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1953, pp. 40-41.

^{2&#}x27;'Some psychologists insist that all giving has basically selfish motivation, and it is certain that some modern giving springs from a desire to have names prominent on a contributors'

The multitudinous external influences which act upon the original complex of flesh, blood, mind, and emotion interact with the psychological, physical and emotional developments which take place within the human being, thus making attitudes less susceptible to change through exclusively intellectually-geared interpretation.

"Lay people quite generally reflect in their own attitudes the scientific and theological and philosophical theories which best fit in with their own prejudices and fears, even when favored theories are basically contradictory." 3

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It is interesting to observe how many antique notions about social welfare persist today in spite of the philosophic implications of such far-reaching modern social welfare programs as Social Security, Vocational Rehabilitation and Unemployment Insurance. Some have recurred from time to time and others have led directly to very progressive social welfare measures. At any rate, some of the modern views, entertained by a substantial number of people, have either their source or their counterparts in civilizations now thousands of years old.

Ancient welfare assistance was chiefly the tangible expression of a sense of responsibility that the social unit—family, tribe, clan—felt for all of its members and a peculiar and developing code of ethics extended this concern to strangers. Basically, it was an individual act of mercy geared toward group self-preservation. Observation of primitive peoples gives a clue to the kind of welfare assistance which was practiced among ancient peoples.

"Giving in our present understanding of the term—donating an object or rendering a service without expectation of any personal return—seems scarcely to have existed among some primitive peoples. . .

"Alms-giving was not common among primitive peoples because there was little need for it. There were no 'poor' in the modern sense; needs were the elemental ones for food, clothing and shelter, and these were supplied through the family or the clan—unless all went hungry or shelterless."

The ancient Greeks also restricted their perspective of social welfare. Their objective was the unity of the state which demanded the strengthening of its economically weakest members. The "members" were a numerically limited group for they included only citizens and not slaves or foreigners who comprised the larger proportion of the population. To help citizens who were indigent, taxes might be remitted, debts annulled, lands redistributed, and doles of cash and food given. Citizens might also be encouraged to leave the state as a device to meet their needs or at least to avoid starvation without jeopardy to the political conscience.

These gestures did not reflect a compassionate view of fellow beings, for the purpose of the assistance devices was limited. Only certain people benefited from the munificence of others, and only for rather special reasons which had little to do with the psychological or financial straits of the needy themselves, and more to do with the comfort of the narrowly controlled social structure.

Citizenship was also the basis for the right to relief in Rome, and there, too, there was no benign motive behind the kindnesses rendered. They were rather a safety measure to forestall agitation among the dispossessed and dependent citizens who felt the effects of wars. The state handed out corn, and wealthy pa-

tricians made their private contributions to clients of their own choice, but state or private, the intent was similar.⁵

Judaism added a social touch to welfare assistance. In addition to its being projected as an individual religious duty, it was emphasized as a socially righteous act. Zedakah, the Hebrew word for charity, has been translated as "righteousness." Charity was a human obligation. The helpless (i.e., the stranger, the fatherless, the widow) had a right to claim the help of his more fortunate brother.

This was an anachronistic concept. Perhaps it was not intended to mean all that social workers would like it to have meant, but something of social work philosophy is included in it. The doctrine focused on the beneficiary to a great extent and not merely on the benefactor. The twentieth century social worker would be interested in the enunciated principle that charity should provide each person with what he needs and what he lacks, even to the extent of taking into account his former social position. This guide is used in determining alimony in the United States but there is not an echo of it in our assistance programs. We do well today to gain acceptance of the need to meet the beneficiary's minimum subsistence level. In view of recent debate on the subject, it is also interesting to note that Jewish texts support the need for secrecy in order not to offend or shame the recipient of assistance.

Christianity stressed personal immortality as a reason for being charitable. The cure of the souls of the sick and the

unfortunate became more important than the relief of their physical and social disabilities. However, Christianity required a higher regard for the dignity and worth of the individual than was customary in the early Christian era. Each human being was deemed, in the Christian view, to be a creature of God and, therefore, worthy of salvation as well as the commendation of all men. The human possessor of goods was merely a distributor and steward for the Supreme Owner who is God. Gifts were to be from the heart and assistance based on the love one owes his neighbors. Thus emphasis was placed on direct personal and private aid. Considerable equalization of recipient and donor should have resulted, for the gift of the philanthropist was considered to be balanced by the love and prayers of the beneficiary. St. Francis felt so strongly that charity should be personal, that he denounced even the charity of the large wealthy monas-

Church leaders have disputed the contention that the medieval church gave prestige to begging as a result of its attitude toward assistance. However, the early English poor laws were designed essentially to counteract the apparently permissive climate made possible or encouraged by Christian charity.⁶

The feudal system made a place for everyone within the feudal structure. The lord of the manor was bound to care for and protect the lowliest serf in time of famine and need, in return for which the peasant vowed his labor and loyalty. The serf would not insist on his rightful portion. Rather, he was grateful for any demonstration of generosity. The power structure of the day dictated the obli-

list or in the hope of personal gain, here or hereafter." F. Emerson Andrews, *Philanthropic Giving*, New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1950, p. 19.

³ Karl Menninger and Jeannette Lyle Menninger, Love Against Hate, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1942, p. 7.

⁴ F. Emerson Andrews, Philanthropic Giving, op. cit., pp. 27-29.

⁵ Cf. C. Clark Thompson's comment which is quoted in F. Emerson Andrews, Corporation Giving, New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1952, p. 17. "Business men have also found that it pays to be charitable... Often the benefits take the form of better public acceptance of the company's products and a higher regard for it and its managers as citizens of the community."

⁶ During ancient Greek festivals a declared "open season" made it incumbent on more fortunate citizens to treat beggars especially well. The charge against Christianity was that the "open season" lasted all year long.

gation for good works towards the needy, but it was a primitive form of assistance, with a dash of totalitarian control which exchanged a pitifully low level of security for freedom of action. The church plied its influence, but the church conformed more to the feudal system than the system adjusted and responded to the influence of the church.

The trade and craft guilds which formed in medieval and post-medieval towns, organized for the mutual protection of those engaged in newly appearing activities and thus assistance was again a form of self-preservation or mutual concern of those engaged in similar endeavor. In different degrees throughout Europe, and especially in England, assistance became a protective device. That is, without organization and centralization, assistance was costly and undisciplined,7 and "unworthy" poor might be profiting as well as "worthy" poor. Moreover, feeding gratis an able-bodied worker might be keeping a prospective employee out of the labor market. With a growing industrial economy and a diminishing labor supply, thanks to recurrent plagues and wars, this could not be tolerated and the government pitched in, first with oppressive measures and later with some positive gestures to care for the needy and to raise money to finance these ventures. It was a somewhat calculating, unsympathetic, attitude which, however, led to some of the more kindly acts of mercy to the poor and disabled.

On the continent, at the same time, more rapid progress was made toward more positive social welfare techniques, and more scientific ones, from an administrative point of view. For example, Juan Luis Vives' plan for relief was somewhat similar to the Works Progress Administration program of our time, providing to some extent an opportunity at self-sufficiency through provision of work for the able, instead of mere dole. In a different spirit was the suggestion of Sir Josiah Child, chairman of the East India Company in the seventeenth century, urging the employment of children, not to profit from their labor, but to discipline them to labor and to help them to become useful. His idea was what Sir Matthew Hale had in mind when the Lord Chief Justice proposed that the poor be enabled to support themselves, out of concern not for the victim of social disorganization but for the prosperity of England and its successful competition against foreign countries.

Socially alert individuals like Reverend Thomas Chalmers in the eighteenth century became aware of the need to do more than dispense assistance and a great deal of the extra effort he and others expended was based on a fundamental respect for the needy. A kind of supervised counseling was added to the process which also involved investigation.

Generally, the industrial revolution produced or re-enforced less humane, certainly less constructive from a social work point of view, attitudes toward welfare assistance. The capitalist was especially concerned with the maintenance of an inexhaustible supply of cheap labor. He was interested in economy in the expenditure of public and private funds for the poor. He wanted freedom from governmental interference. The economic philosophy of individualism overwhelmed any hint of the paternalistic or protective or, worse, liberal in attitudes toward the economically needy. Adam Smith, Joseph

Townsend, Malthus, and others who articulated these new concepts, gave welfare assistance no succor for, on one hand, everyone was supposed to have the right to manage his own affairs, even if he starved doing it, and, on the other, only the fittest were to be permitted to survive, by the dictum of natural law. If a few of the less fit managed to remain alive, they had a function to perform, what with all the menial tasks on earth to keep the titans and the upper classes comfortable and happy. It was necessary, however, for a reasonable

number to expire as a result of war.

famine and pestilence, since the re-

sources of the world demanded the con-

venient restraint of population to per-

mit the limited materials of the world to

go around.

Late in the nineteenth century the beneficiary of welfare assistance attracted increasing interest as a person in his own right. Howard, Dickens, and Dorothy Dix were among those who challenged the right of society to seek its own ends at the expense of its individual members, even its poor and needy ones. The labor movement, the settlement movement and the charity organization movement were forces which stimulated discriminating analysis and treatment of causes of poverty and indigence rather than casual treatment of symptoms.

Hollis and Taylor, in observing certain implications in the passage of the Social Security Act of 1935, limn into the history of social welfare an expression of its ultimate goal:

"The purpose of the Act was to cover some of the major risks of modern life that are beyond individual control and provision, and to strengthen community organization and services in maternal and child health and in child welfare, particularly in rural areas and areas of special need. It presaged also the final break with the old poor law philosophy of "less eligibility" that had long emphasized deprivation, insecurity, and humiliation

as the incentives to productivity and independence. The philosophy of the Social Security Act replaced this outworn idea with the concept of right to economic security when earnings are interrupted, by means of insurance benefits and public assistance payments. It was based upon the general welfare clause of the Constitution and incorporated the principles of equal protection and opportunity with the dignity and worth of the human personality....

"... The central principle of social casework, self-determination, came into general practice. . . . '' 8

. . .

The social welfare thread does not run a smooth and continuous line through history, from the primitive to the more advanced approach to which social workers and social agencies try very hard to adhere. Case loads are sometimes too great to permit the kind of intensive attention which social work philosophy might call for. Training is sometimes inadequate. Funds are often lacking. However, when there is a choice, the social worker does not limit himself to certifying eligibility or dispensation of funds. Nor does he limit himself to attending to those with problems, financial, psychological or social, for he frequently concentrates on the needs and interests of the "normal" or "average" person for which he provides through counseling or group work services, and for which he interests himself in preventive legislation.

Considering this the advanced stage of social welfare history for which the turning point came with the passage of

⁷ Compare the following statement: "At present, organized action has been stimulated primarily by the economic argument that it is cheaper to rehabilitate a worker than to continue to support him from public or private funds." Ernest V. Hollis and Alice L. Taylor, Social Work Education in the United States, New York: Columbia University Press, 1952, p. 130.

⁸ Ernest V. Hollis and Alice L. Taylor, Social Work Education in the United States, New York: Columbia University Press, 1952, pp. 26-27.

See also Grace Marcus, "Worker and Client Relationships," Proceedings of the National Conference of Social Work, New York: Columbia University Press, 1947, pp. 344 ff.; and Grace Abbot, From Relief to Social Security, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941. pp. 4-5.

preventive legislation, we can detect a slow, occasionally erratic and always uneven development of social welfare from a very primitive level. The imperfectly demarcated and constantly fluctuating trend includes several distinguishable stages of social welfare concern. Among these are the stages of self-preservation; self protection; disciplined assistance; realism; religious motivation; rugged individualism and the survival of the fittest; honest concern; economic determinism awareness; scientific investigation; democratically principled concern; prevention; expansion. These are crude labels which we need not pause to define since their only purpose is to find convenient terms to outline the progression from primitive social welfare to modern social welfare which is reflected in a historical survey. Theoretically our current stage is at the top level.9 However, despite much progress, we may be unduly optimistic for too many people are fixated at rather low levels of social welfare ideology. either in whole or in part.

F. Emerson Andrews and his associates, after interviewing ninety-one "givers" found less cause for optimism on several counts, although they knew the results of their study were not statistically reliable.

"Most of the past philanthropy was prompted by pity, or else by a desire to serve one's own interests or even salvation. Little of it proceeded from thoughtful efforts to prevent the ills from which men suffer, or to promote conditions of health and creative living. It was natural and perhaps necessary that past giving should have gone chiefly to people in need. While men starve in the streets and the cries of the suffering are sharp in our ears, few can spare time or thought for any but immediate needs.

"Now government is taking care of most elementary needs. Nevertheless, if our sample is at all representative, few people are able to look beyond the old pattern of helping the needy to the possibilities of 'placing ladders upon which the aspiring can rise' to use Andrew Carnegie's expressive phrases." 10

Also:

"Religion is the mother of philanthropy. About half of all giving goes to the church, for church support and for the numerous welfare and educational agencies which function under religious auspices. . .

"... It is clear that a very substantial portion of present giving to all causes springs from religious motivation." 11

Examples can be multiplied to indicate the need for an ongoing education program designed to change attitudes towards social welfare and to increase acceptance of constructive and expanded social work service by both clients and citizens at large. We will cite only a few.

General Eisenhower made a statement which must have fallen on receptive ears several years ago. He said in a speech in Galveston, at a time when both major parties were wooing him, "If all that Americans want is security, they can go to prison." 12 He had already criticized "the modern preachers of the paternalistic state" who "seek through government, assurance that they can forever count upon a full stomach and a warm cloak." 13

Herbert Hoover, who has not been without his influence, decried the sloganistic justification of such things as "security from the cradle to the grave," which "frustrate those basic human imJournal of Jewish Communal Service

pulses to production which make a dynamic nation." 14

Vannevar Bush seconded this sentiment: "A passion of security is an opiate which tends to destroy the virile characteristics which have made us great." 15

Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Taft Benson declared before taking office that "eternal truths" have been violated by the present "overemphasis on security" and the trend toward 'paternalistic government.''' He asserted also that "every young man requires the spurs of insecurity to force him to do his best." and that "the free enterprise system manifests a God-given eternal principle." 16

Sally Rand, the fan dancer, also made known her views about social welfare measures: She is almost violent when discussing unemployment insurance as she claims it works in California.

"I'm revolted, aren't you? she demanded. She feels it's badly administered, with too many people collecting it.

"The rest of us work our tails off, she said. . . . I'm against security from the cradle to the grave anyway. My ancestors worked like dogs for a piece of land to raise a potato on. . . . '' 17

A well-known clergyman expressed his attitudes with great feeling and conviction:

"To the younger generation which has never known anything except New Dealism and Fair Dealism the old folks seem unduly disturbed. Living in a world of deteriorating moral fiber, a world that places security above both spirituality and liberty, a world that's becoming more dollar conscious than less, they accept "do-goodism" and big government as normal in contemporary society. . . .

"The do-gooders would have us believe that during the first one hundred and seventyfive years of our history nothing was done for the underprivileged. Until recent years we were a heartless, unsympathetic neglected people.

"Now the truth of the matter is that Americans have never been indifferent to human needs. We have always been interested in welfare. Helping people is older than the New Deal and the Fair Deal, and far less political, federal and costly in every aspect of its program. . . . '' 18

Pastor Russell Clinchy decried all forms of public welfare as denying the charity of Christ, declaring that love of our fellow men and common efforts to prevent misery are mutually exclusive. All taxation to meet any form of human need, he said, is an evasion of personal responsibility.19

Rufus Jarman tore into some of the "abuses" in relief administration without limiting himself to "chiseling." He seemed critical of the fact that 22 per cent of relief recipients in Detroit had telephones listed in their own names. He insisted that many Detroit citizens were annoyed because their relief client neighbors managed to live better than they did. He considered the theories of caseworkers "mumbo jumbo." sneered at a caseworker's "dynamic passivity" intended to help a relief client to gain self-respect. He ridiculed a caseworker's concern for a client forced to answer unpleasant questions which might produce a traumatic experience. He considered utter nonsense a caseworker's belief that a relief client might not be "psychologically ready" to do a type of work she had never done before. He could not comprehend why social workers placed as much emphasis on social and psychological problems as on factors

⁹ For an interesting challenge to social workers and educational institutions, see Chapter III of the Hollis and Taylor report already cited. It indicates that we have no right to assume that social workers themselves are entirely equipped to meet the needs of an expanded role for social work.

¹⁰ Attitudes Toward Giving, p. 41.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 85, 95.

^{12 &}quot;Eisenhower's Stand," Time, LVIII, December 24, 1951, 15.

^{13 &}quot;The Age of the Individual," Vital Speeches, XV, June 15, 1949, 519.

^{14 &}quot;People Should Reject the Welfare State," Congressional Digest XXIX, August-September, 1950, 200-204.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 208.

¹⁶ Kenneth S. Davis, "A Bigger Role for Farm Co-ops," The New York Times Magazine, January 4, 1953, 17.

¹⁷ Earl Wilson, "Of Calendars 'n' Things," The New York Post, January 4, 1953, 5M.

¹⁸ Dr. Walter R. Courtenay, "The Church and Free Enterprise," Vital Speeches, XVI. September 1, 1950, 683-4.

¹⁹ Charity, Biblical and Political, a pamphlet cited in "The Bible and Public Welfare," The Survey LXXXVII, June, 1951, 291.

affecting the financial status of relief clients. 20

Even a domestic relations court judge of sympathetic bent expressed his alarm over the fact that relief was ruining families, basing his dictum on very few experiences—deviant ones at any rate, for he alluded to only one case, which involved alcoholics. He explained, "... I feel for the needy. I firmly believe the community must care for them. I have always fought for the underprivileged, sometimes at grave personal risk . . . because I believe so strongly in human dignity and self-respect, I am desperately worried about the 167,000 families now on relief in [New York] . . . city ...'' 21

Charles Stevenson, echoing the taunt of lesser eligibility wrote not uncritically, "Everyone on relief is entitled to better medical care than most taxpayers can afford." ²²

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The examples offered are no cross section of opinion, but they indicate a problem nevertheless. They are not exhaustive either. In the minds of politicians,

20 "Detroit Cracks Down on Relief Chiselers," The Saturday Evening Post, CCXXII, December 10, 1949, 17 ff.

These views appeared at a time when the press was quite critical of social welfare practices. There were quite a few eloquent rebuttals but the voice of the opposition was loud and strong and not entirely unwelcome in many quarters. For some of the rebuttals see Adlai Stevenson "Social Welfare in a Changing World," Social Welfare Forum, New York: Columbia University Press, 1952, p. 23; Edith Stern, "Broken Lives and Dollar Patches," Nations Business, XXXVIII, March, 1950, 46 and other articles listed in the bibliography.

²¹ Jacob Panken, (as told to Hal Burton), "I Say Relief Is Ruining Families," The Saturday Evening Post CCXXIII, September 30, 1950, 25 ff.

²² "When It Pays to Play Pauper," Nations Business, XXXV, September, 1950, 29 ff.

clergymen, entertainers, heroes and writers, these views become weapons to influence considerable resistance. As intimated, needs will continue to be met because people will contribute and people will be concerned. But how those needs will be met is something of greater concern to the dedicated social worker than to the rank and file contributor or the taxpayer.

The social worker wants "to transform the providing of assistance from a routine reducing the individual to a collection of eligibility characteristics and fractional items of need into a service sensitive to him in all his human values and dignity." 23 He wants to protect and arm all individuals against "the inevitable result of our industrial system." 24 The social worker's "interest is focussed on what is good for the individuals who compose society. Regardless of what programs we espouse or administer, the end result in our minds is always the person, supreme, divine." 25

These extension of service, however, collide with the viewpoints previously quoted. Some object that the social work viewpoint represents "coddling" and others object that it represents assistance which is too impersonal. A large middle group of our populace take a third position not unlike the industrial revolutionist who preferred non-intervention or like the medieval church-goer, prefers personal, direct giving.²⁶

The educational task indicated is large—but necessary if social work is to enlarge its scope and expand its horizons.

²³ Grace Marcus, loc. cit.

²⁴ Grace Abbott, loc. cit.

²⁵ Benjamin E. Youngdahl, "What We Believe," Social Welfare Forum, New York: Columbia University Press, 1952, p. 30.

²⁶ "Generous Giving Proceeds Usually from Personal Contact with the Problem," F. Emerson Andrews, Attitude Toward Giving, p. 118.