

An Attack On The Aged Poor

There are at least a thousand elderly Jews in San Francisco who are very poverty-stricken, and their source of support is now being endangered.

The difference between a person who is poverty-stricken and one who is VERY poverty-stricken? The latter's income is low enough to qualify for a welfare grant. That's pretty low. So are the welfare grants, as a matter of fact. In San Francisco the maximum grant is \$200 for elderly people with no special needs. These are the people who have just the normal needs to eat, live someplace and occasionally replenish some clothing — all of which is not easy to do in San Francisco on \$200 a month.

But, at the present moment, this amount is scheduled to be REDUCED. Congress has passed a law which welfare liberals have long been calling for: it makes Old Age Assistance, as well as Aid to the Blind and Aid to the Totally disabled, a wholly federal program. Formerly, the states and the federal government split the costs for these programs, and there was a monstrous mish-mash of both state and federal regulations. As of January 1, 1974 the federal government is going to do it all.



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The problem? The federal program sets a single national welfare standard for the first time. That standard will serve to raise the level of welfare grants in some states. It will also serve to lower welfare grants in other states, unless those states provide additional welfare supplements, which the federal legislators fully expected to happen. After all, it doesn't make sense for there to be the same welfare grant in San Francisco as there is in Magnolia Falls, Mississippi.

But at the moment, there is scheduled no welfare supplement in the state of California — and there is heavy opposition to such a supplement. Unless something is done, those elderly poor who have been getting \$200 a month will — as of January — be getting \$130 instead! Try living in San Francisco on that. But, even worse, those elderly poor with special needs, including need for attendant care, who have been getting \$223 monthly, will get only \$130 monthly. Those who have been living in a board and care facility, getting \$241 monthly, will get only \$130 monthly. These new levels will disastrously affect the aged poor, and will drastically affect Jewish institutions set up to help them.

There are two bills proposing a state welfare supplement: Assemblyman Burton's A.B. 18 and George Moscone's S.B. 110. Both would prevent aid from dropping below present levels, and both are before the State Senate. Governor Reagan has indicated that he opposes these bills, and will do what he can to kill them. They both need a two-thirds vote.

Further, Assemblyman Bagley of Marin has indicated that even if the bills pass, the \$277 million needed to implement them will not be available if Governor Reagan's "Tax Initiative" is passed in November. This is the proposed Constitutional Amendment which will freeze the legislature's ability to raise taxes. If the voters pass this initiative in November, there will probably be no way for the State to provide welfare supplements for the aged poor.

There is a little shaft of light on another front: The National Nutritional Program for the Aged has received appropriations. This would provide low-income older citizens with low-cost, nutritionally sound meals in strategically located centers. There is a special provision to take care of Jewish dietary laws.

The organized Jewish community in the San Francisco area is now deeply involved in these problems related to the aged poor. The Jewish Welfare Federation is taking the lead in exploring the special application of the National Nutritional Program to the problems of the Jewish aged here. The Federation is also involved with its various agencies in trying to figure out how the Jewish old and poor can be helped if state welfare supplements are not passed by January.

But the prior concern, of course, is to see that these welfare supplements are passed by way of A.B. 18 and S.B. 110 — and that necessary appropriations are available, which means, according to Assemblyman Bagley and others that the Governor's tax initiative must be defeated in November. The Jewish Public Affairs Committee of California, comprising seven organized Jewish communities in the state, is working on these public matters. And right now many citizens are writing their Assemblymen, State Senators, and to the Governor on A.B. 18 and S.B. 110. As one legislator puts it: "Never underestimate the power of an avalanche of mail on a politician's desk."