

The Cut-Backs

The unemployment rate in San Francisco is scheduled to jump sharply on June 30. In the months following, there will be a sharp rise in the number of San Franciscans who are in poverty, on welfare, engaged in crime and involved in drug abuse.

That is not an astrological reading. It is based on the current plans to drastically cut federal social programs. On June 30, unless the plans are changed, almost a thousand people who have been working at minimal wages under the Emergency Employment Act will lose their jobs, as will many hundreds employed in the poverty programs, such as food supplement, health care and drug control projects. Over a thousand low-cost housing units will not be built, with consequent loss of employment. Several thousand summer jobs for youth will be gone. And so forth.



Raab

Most of the people fired will not be able to find jobs. Most of them will be members of San Francisco's racial minorities, which will swell their group despair to proportions we haven't seen since the 1960s. San Francisco blacks living below the poverty level is even now about 20 percent, compared to about eight percent of whites. That gap has been diminishing somewhat; if it starts growing again, should we expect the hungry to strew our paths with rose blossoms?

The proponents of cut-back say that taxes are too high. Too high for what? We have lower taxes than most of the industrialized countries of the world. Much lower, for example, than Britain or Israel. Of course, Israel has a high tax because its national purpose and security require it. But maybe our national security and purpose require a higher tax rate, too. Actually, a tax cut was just instituted in 1971, designed to result over a 10 year period in tax savings of 17 billion dollars for individuals—and tax savings of 83 billion dollars for industry. Wiping out just part of that tax cut would enable us to maintain the current level of our social programs—while holding down inflation.

The proponents of the cut-back say that many of the social programs to be eliminated are wasteful and not productive. They are undoubtedly right. The programs need to be reevaluated. But so do our expectations of these programs.

On the one hand, there was substantial progress made during the past couple of decades. In 1960, for example, non-Southern husband-and-wife black families under age 35 had an income only 62 percent as high as that of similar white families. By 1970, the average income of such black families was 91 percent of such white families.

It is true that most of these black workers were "making it," because of the drastic opening-up of new job opportunities for them in *regular* job channels. Most of them were not making it directly as a result of special social programs.

However, another sector of the black population was not making it at all—the older, the female-headed families. While some families were escaping the economic ghetto, the ones that remained behind became more desperate than ever. The progress being made on one front was not directly evident to the many young men and women still caught in the apparently unyielding vise of poverty. They needed signals that there was hope for them too—by way of some attention, some flow of money, even for community jobs, even for summer jobs; improved health services; food supplement; rent. *In toto*, these programs, at the least and however inefficiently, created an atmosphere of hope among many of those furthest removed from that sector of the black population which was making real progress. It helped hold the society together while that progress was being made; and it also indirectly prepared more and more of the young people for the real progress that they would be able to make.

Indeed, these programs need evaluation—and some of them would be better eliminated. But it would seem the better part of discretion, not to mention compassion—for those programs which actually deliver food, health services, and money directly to the hands of the poor—to reevaluate and prepare substitute programs *before*, not *after* wiping out the current programs.

This is the issue which will perhaps most affect the quality of life for everyone in San Francisco during the coming year. It is the major issue which our Congressmen will be facing in the coming weeks—and about which they would want to hear from us, whatever our opinions.