

The Poor And The State

The government makes direct payments of over 20 billion dollars a year to the needy of this country. Beyond that, there are government food programs providing additional foods for the needy, costing over three billion dollars a year.

Those programs alone cast some perspective on the "People in Need" food program being conducted in San Francisco, in response to the demands of the Symbionese Liberation Army.



Raab

Every hour of every day, the American society gives more direct assistance to the needy than this SLA-inspired program will give *in toto*. This is not to demean the efforts of those involved in the program; their efforts have been nobly bent towards the release of Patricia Hearst. But the program is of little comparative help to the poor. It doesn't even point in the right direction.

America is already a welfare-oriented society. We have increased our expenditure for direct assistance by ten-fold since 1950 and by five-fold since 1960. Over half of all government expenditures are for social welfare programs of one kind or another, and that proportion has continually risen.

That's not too lavish, in terms of what finally reaches the poor. Over 75 percent of those receiving direct assistance are too old, too young, or too physically disabled to be able to work. If you add the mothers taking care of those children, then about 95 percent of welfare recipients are unemployable. And with rare exception, they are all receiving grants which fall below the poverty line.

Government intervention against poverty will inevitably change away from traditional welfare grant patterns, never poverty-breaking. In the long range, that intervention will provide more of the decent jobs and accompanying social insurance which will prevent dependency in old age or adversity.

At the least, there will inevitably be some kind of income maintenance plan to replace the current welfare system. But, one way or another, the American government is in the social welfare business to stay, and on a scale which could not be matched by extracting all their holdings from all of America's millionaires.

All of which has some relationship to the Jewish poor. Given the welfare-oriented state, it is already apparent that the fate of the Jewish poor depends heavily on general welfare laws.

Assemblyman Leo McCarthy, for example, has just introduced a bill, AB 113 which provides some tax relief for senior citizen *renters*. State law now provides a rebate to older home-owning citizens who have paid a property tax. The size of the rebate is related not only to the property tax they paid, but also to their income. Now, McCarthy proposes in this bill to similarly give a rebate to older *renters*—based on the property taxes they presumed to pay through their rent, and their household income.

Thus, if the total household income of a California renter 62 years or older is not more than, say, \$3,400, then he or she will receive a rebate of 80 percent of what the property tax equivalent is presumed to be.

The larger proportion of the Jewish poor, in this area at least, are the aged. The larger proportion of the Jewish aged poor are renters. The most disproportionate—and certainly the most inflexible—item in their budget is that of rent.

The passage of this bill will give these aged poor more cash relief in one sweep than can be provided under present circumstances by the Jewish welfare institutions. Indeed, many citizens are now writing their Assemblymen and State Senators to support this bill. And this issue of *The Jewish Bulletin* is running the names and addresses of local legislators, as the beginning of a regular service. (See Page Five)

Because of the growing welfare role of the government, local institutions of the Jewish Welfare Federation—such as the Jewish Home for the Aged, the Jewish Community Centers, The Jewish Family Service Agency, Homewood Terrace, and Mt. Zion Hospital—are coming together through the mechanism of the JCRC to evaluate the effect of *public policy*, such as AB 113 on the Jewish poor. These evaluations will be transmitted to the Jewish Public Affairs Committee of California, to provide some coordination among the Jewish communities of California.