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LET'S STOP HELPING THE POOR

Donald Feldstein
Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York

The time has come in America to stop trying to help the poor. These efforts have resulted in poor services, inadequate levels of aid, stigma to the recipients, creation of a permanent welfare class, cheating, and the exacerbation of divisiveness in America between classes and ethnic groups. In large part, these negative effects are due to the attempt to target or pinpoint aid for the poor alone; but the poor can only be helped in the context of programs for all Americans.

The selective forms of servicing the poor, so predominant in the United States, are reminiscent of a newspaper story, read as a child. It happened in one of those towns in which fire department services were on a subscription basis. As one non-subscribed house began to burn, the firemen gathered around, hoses poised at neighboring buildings whose owners were subscribers, ready to swing into action if these buildings caught fire, but allowing the non-subscribed building to burn down.

By and large, this kind of arrangement no longer exists. We seem to have accepted the proposition that fire protection is a basic social utility, necessary to the orderly functioning of society, and necessarily available to all.

But if this tradition were not so strong, one could conceive of a local legislator pointing out that perhaps 70% of the cost of running the fire department goes to 20% of the community, because in one area factory owners have not built adequately safe plants. Perhaps factory owners should pay for fire service. Or this mythical legislator might argue in the name of equity and social justice that the rich should pay a fairer share for their fire services; while the firemen might come on call to put out any fire, perhaps the owners of various properties should be billed based on their ability to pay. Or legislation could be introduced building in certain incentives, so that houses or factories which had anti-fire features would be charged less, and those without safety features would be charged an extra premium if they had a fire. Were we not used to the concept of fire services being a basic utility available to all, without specific or means tested cost, these suggestions could be seen as forward looking ideas to promote equity and safety.

But, of course, there would be flaws in such "reforms". There would be arguments and counter-arguments about who is really to blame for high fire rates in the ghetto. A bureaucracy would have to be created to develop the financial test under which people would pay differential fees for fire service. Inspectors would have to certify the level of fire safety in each dwelling. Another group of inspectors would have to police the system to see

that bribery and corruption were checked. The thrust of fire prevention would be on who belonged in what category, rather than on making all of society less fireprone. Fundamental cleavages would begin to arise between those who were below the paying line, getting a free service, and those who were above the line, paying for fire service. Those who paid, particularly those who were just a little bit above the level of the nonpayers, would inevitably feel resentful and put upon, and point up to any number of cases of cheating; by some other standard, they would be more eligible for the free service than a number of people who were now getting the free service.

Happily, no such move seems to be under way in the area of fire services. Society seems to be committed to the idea of fire service as a fundamental utility available to all, for a number of reasons:

1. Particularly in the crowded cities, there is almost no such thing as a fire which affects only the owner of a given property, and the recognition of interdependence forces us to generalize the service.
2. Most people are aware of the fact that there is a tax system which, however well or poorly, does attempt to provide the equity in financing, so that the rich pay more and the poor less for municipal services, including fire.
3. There is an unspoken decision by society that in the area of fire, as in other disaster situations, we are fundamentally one society, each dedicated to helping the other and responsible for one another, and that the traditional considerations of the marketplace do not apply.

But these same principles apply in other areas of human services as well. Not too long ago it appeared that the expansion of such universal social utilities as fire services, available to all, was an inevitable trend. From free high school we would go to free public education, at least through two years of community college; from Social Security we would go to Medicare, to health care for all. Even in that most troublesome area of income maintenance, we might move toward universal family allowances, as exist in other developed societies.

This trend seems to have been reversed, first with the War on Poverty, and most significantly since 1969. There was a clear Nixon philosophy continued by the Ford administration. It has become a part of domestic social planning to such an extent that even liberal thinkers in social policy have been carried in its wake. The Nixon social programs were consistently and fundamentally selective in their approach. They were based on a concept of American society which sees the market ideally taking care of everybody, but provides for certain kinds of special charitable programs for the casualties of the market society. This approach is

the very opposite of the creation of broad, universal social utilities, replacing the market in key areas of human need.

A selective social welfare program is a means tested program, any program in which the eligibility for the program, or the cost of participation in the program, is based on a determination of a given individual's ability to pay. Public welfare is, of course, the prime example, but it is true of food stamps, housing subsidies, Medicaid, sliding scale child welfare and day care programs, and fees set by a voluntary counseling service. A universal service is a service available to everyone, or to a certain class or category of people without individual testing of financial means. Thus the Social Security program's benefits are available only to people who have reached a certain age and have retired, but no individual has to prove his financial eligibility. Other examples of universal programs are Medicare, Unemployment Insurance, fire services, public parks, some veteran's benefits, police services and the public school system.

One can understand why a Nixon or a Ford would not support such programs. Committed to the market society, they still believe that the market is the mechanism and the vehicle for all good things, and social welfare's only function is to pick up the casualties of the market. This is true in the area of health care where Nixon proposed a dual system, one for the employed and one for the unemployed. It was the Nixon approach in the proposed Family Assistance Plan, which was a means tested program. It is how Nixon approached child care, espousing welfare day care, but vetoing a more general child care program in the Mondale Bill.

But this article seeks to explore why even liberal policy makers and planners have been carried along by the selective wave. Daniel Moynihan once fought for children's allowances (universal) as a sounder answer to poverty in America than a negative income tax. The former would provide a monthly check to every child in America; the latter would give money to the poor. But in a more recent book, Moynihan refers to the Nixon Family Assistance Plan (which was a kind of negative income tax) almost interchangeably with the term family allowances. Other planners espouse special programs for the poor and disadvantaged as obviously the most humane approach.

Nixon's was a consistent and defensible philosophy, but why have liberal and leftist social policy people begun to support selective programs? Why have they gone along with the Nixon culture? The reasons are several:

1. There is a realization that money is short, and choices do need to be made. Universal programs cost more money. To the extent that they are available to all, they are being used by people who could pay their own way. People with large bank accounts may

be eligible for Social Security or Unemployment Insurance. Benefits are being "wasted" on them. Thus, the natural answer to the problem of limited resources would seem to be to pinpoint or limit the service to the eligible poor, or to offer the service to everyone, but to make those who are able pay for the service on a sliding scale.

2. From a certain perspective, a selective approach seems fairer, no matter how large the pie, so long as it is not infinite. Rawls' A Theory of Justice and other writings have given credence to a sense of equity which is based on a reparations approach. If we take a simplistic view of the "spaceship earth" concept, rather than assume an ever-expanding universe, redistribution means taking from the rich and giving to the poor. If we assume continued economic growth, we can give the poor more of that growth while the rich expand more slowly. But we seem to be operating on the belief in a static pool of wealth. This lends itself to selective social welfare programs to redress wrongs. Give the benefits to the poor!

3. The "we"/"they" separation of society which was once seen as stigmatizing the poor is seized upon by some thinkers now as a positive. They seek to develop a special pride and identity for the poor.

The Welfare Rights Organization, so vocal in the late 60's, was an example of this trend. Membership was open only to the poor. It claimed to seek to swamp the welfare system by organizing the poor to demand their full rights. When the welfare system became so weighted down with demands, fair hearings, etc., it would be simpler for the establishment to institute a guaranteed minimum income. An example was the spurt in demands for special grants for winter clothing and other items (to which the poor were previously unaware they were entitled) in New York City. When the establishment did indeed crack, and offered a flat grant automatically to all welfare recipients, the Welfare Rights Organization objected. It objected, not only because the flat grants were too low, a legitimate objection, but by now W.R.O. liked the idea of having clients get benefits through their own efforts. W.R.O. objected to guaranteed grants for all as a tactic to break up the W.R.O.! Thus do means and ends get reversed. A number of previously powerless people now have an investment in specialized and selective programs for the poor, community elections in which only the poor may vote, etc. It has become their power base. Other sincere social thinkers see selectivity as the only way to make maximum feasible participation a reality, to give the poor clout.

4. Given the factors mentioned above, given the concern for

the poor and disadvantaged, liberals are now won over to selective programs by technology. If it is now possible to have a computerized family assistance plan, if people can have their eligibility checked in a non-stigmatizing and non-degrading way, then this takes a major objection out of selective programs, and society can afford to go ahead with them.

For instance, Nixon proposed a dual health plan, one for the employed and one for the unemployed and poor. But if all use the same services, and simply insert a card in a machine on their way in or out, and this card instructs the machine whom to bill for how much, then what harm is there in a means tested program? Certainly it would be cheaper than free health care for all, and it would not penalize the poor. Similarly, a negative income tax is not stigmatizing. Everyone fills out a tax form. Some would then give and some would get. Social planners have become enamored with the apparent simplicity and cleanliness of such schemes. Some even refer to a negative income tax as a universal program, which it is not.

Thus, we have a strange coalition: Rightists who believe in the market, with social welfare only as a residual arm of society, and leftists who believe in "Poor Power", or in getting the most dollars most quickly to the poor. Together, they have developed a strong thrust for selective social services and against the creation of new universal social services.

Let us examine the reasons for supporting selectivity in order:

1. Money is short.

There is no denying that universal programs do cost a lot more than selective programs, but not quite as much as would appear at first blush. Selective programs inevitably waste large percentages of the money expended in administration, investigations, and bureaucracy. As soon as benefits depend on each individual's means, operational costs multiply. (And cheating has to be expected in spite of this multiplication.) Consider the administrative costs in operating the public welfare programs around the United States, as opposed to those in the Social Security system. The former is weighted down by eligibility rules, investigations, and changes in status; the latter is run by a single computer system and local offices to answer questions.

There are also ways to cut the cost of universal programs. Counting the income received from universal programs, such as the present Social Security payments, or proposed family allowance payments, as part of taxable income would result in recovering part of the expenditures which are "wasted" on the rich. It may sound foolish to give everyone money, and then to take some of it

back from the rich. But the evidence is that this would be simpler, administratively more efficient, and fairer than deciding in advance how much to give whom.

Money could also be saved if a universal program, such as a children's allowance, replaced current regressive allowances. Under a children's allowance, families would receive a monthly check, say \$75 for each child in the family. If this were part of taxable income, the poor would keep it all, and others would pay back varying amounts, more as they were more wealthy. The current \$750 deduction for dependents in the income tax system works in reverse. The poor (who pay no tax) get no benefit. The family in a 20% tax bracket actually gets \$150. The family in a 70% tax bracket actually gets over \$500.* Ending these regressive deductions which cost the treasury billions of dollars each year would help to offset the higher costs of replacing them with universal programs.

Economists have also become more aware of social costs. The cost of manufacturing a product needs to include not only the cost to the manufacturer, but the cost to society of cleaning a polluted stream, building a road to a factory, even the cost of cleaning curtains in homes near a smoky factory. Similarly, it's hard to calculate the real cost of selective vs. universal programs. If universal programs cut down the division in society, alienation, the "we"/"they" feelings, perhaps even crime, how does one compare?

Universal programs do cost more, but not as much more as some would claim, nor more than any developed country can afford. Almost all developed countries have a variety of such services, in health, vocational retraining, income maintenance, day care. Only the United States seems unable to offer them.

2. Equity.

There is no way to discuss equity for the poor and disadvantaged in a political arrangement where the poor can't win. If they don't have the clout to develop, expand and improve programs, the kind of clout that is possible by universalizing programs so everyone has a stake in them, then there is no equity. It is only the universal programs that have the legislative and political support to be maintained, improved and expanded, even while selective programs are cut with impunity against the will of the poor. We need only examine the improvement in benefits in Social Security over the past years. In spite of the fact that it is financed by a heavy and regressive tax, there has been no great public outcry against tax increases, because everybody feels he will benefit. On the other hand, whenever times get hard and money gets tight, the programs for the poor suffer, just as public welfare has suffered in the years since 1969. Thus, in the long run, it is doubtful

* A small non-regressive deduction has now been added to the tax system.

that the poor get more by pinpointing money in programs at them.

Noble sentiments, such as "plans for universal day care should proceed only when high quality care has been attained for those who lack the resources to make other arrangements", are really neither sound nor noble. We will attain high quality day care for those who lack resources only when plans for universal day care proceed.

This whole concept of equity seems to be based on a vulgar environmentalist-neo-Malthusian interpretation of the reality that the goods of society are ultimately limited. Thus, the only issue becomes how the pie is divided. Instead, the pie can and must grow, albeit in different and less polluting ways. It is precisely in times of economic growth that the poor improve their status disproportionately, and begin to bridge the gap between themselves and the well-to-do. When times get hard, when there is no economic growth, the poor tend to suffer more, in spite of all schemes for providing more equity.

"It is criminal to expect the Third World to remain impoverished, foolish to expect the rich to share significantly with the poor, and silly to believe the poor will become strong enough to grasp from the prosperous by force. But given continued economic growth, the next century will see the world-wide abolition of historical poverty..." As with the Third World, so with the United States. In the expanding society of the 60's while all grew wealthier, the poor and Blacks increased their share of the wealth proportionately more. Not so in the 70's.

Universal programs give the middle class something. Under those conditions, it will tend not to object if they give the poor more. But take away from the middle class what it has, make it pay for a program for which it is ineligible, as selective programs try to, and it will fight the program, limit it, or make it ugly.

Equity is also unreal in programs which do not cover the target population. We often read about ineligibles on welfare, but a vast number of those eligible never get public assistance nor benefit from any selective program. Selective programs tend to play it close to the vest -- one does not see signs in the subway inviting a visit to your friendly welfare center to see if you are eligible. Money allocated for these programs assumes less than full participation. In spite of "alerts", "outreach", and Welfare Rights, a significant percentage of eligibles either don't know about programs, are too ashamed to apply, can't negotiate the bureaucratic maze, or are unfairly found ineligible and don't appeal. There's no equity in programs which inevitably reach only the aggressive poor.

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1. Sidney Levenstein, "Day Care: Gold Coin or Brass Check?", Social Work, Vol. 17, #5, 9/72.
 2. B. Bruce-Briggs, "Against the Neo-Malthusians", Commentary, July 1974, p. 26.

3. "We" versus "They"

The idea that developing "poor consciousness", like "Black consciousness", is the road to helping the poor, is particularly patronizing. The late Richard Titmuss pointed out that the dismally poor turnout in poverty board elections under OED was not a question of poor organization or communication so much as it was a rejection by the vast majority of the poor of a system in which they had to declare themselves to be poor to be eligible to vote. The very idea that it is no longer stigmatizing to be seen as poor is romantic nonsense. Anyone familiar with the poor knows that most of the poor believe poor is bad. Ask those who turn in food stamp vouchers at the supermarket and find the checkout clerks evaluating their choices of purchases. Organization of the poor is a no-win situation, because the best leadership often loses eligibility in the club, by earning money. "Poor pride" is the other side of F. Scott Fitzgerald's mistaken notion that the very rich are different from you and me; it is like the "culture of poverty" writers who romanticize and blame the poor for their poverty all in one chapter. Singling out the poor as the recipient of programs, or as the single focus of organization, is self-defeating. Poor people should be part of organizations and recipients of services in coalition with others to achieve their needs.

4. Technology

Finally, we come to the most persuasive argument of all. People who do not want the poor to be stigmatized, do not want them to have second class service, believe that the new kind of selective programs are not selective in the old sense. Everyone will fill out the same income tax form; under the Family Assistance Plan, or other negative income tax plans, the poor would have a net gain from the government while others would pay in.

Everyone could take advantage of precisely the same health services, argued some British policymakers in the 60's in a similar dispute. It's just that on the way out each person would have his credit card punched at the desk. Those who were able to pay, based on what the card indicated, would then receive a bill; the others would not. No difference in service, no stigma to the client, no problem in this modern age of making our welfare dollar go further by selecting out those who really need it. In a classic piece in the New Statesman, Titmuss explained how selective programs retain the quality of selective programs no matter how they are structured. Take the example of the health "credit card" to save money, in a system which had previously offered free universal health care for all citizens. Would the person who had to pay for health care because of his income still have to pay if the medical care was based on an accident caused by someone else? Suppose he were a veteran dealing with an injury received in war-time? Who would pay for an illness which was picked up in a

3. "Universal & Selective Social Services", New Statesman, 9/15/67.

hospital, of which there are more than a few? Such questions could go on and on, and force a reintroduction of a whole variety of health care systems, examining boards, screening devices, standards for what constitutes liability, service connected injuries, workmen's compensation cases, injuries inflicted by others.

There appears to be no way in which a selective system can avoid having bureaucrats make all sorts of moral judgments and evaluations of people's day-to-day lives, no matter how much of the mechanism is handled by a computer. Further, there is the problem of how eligibility and scales are to be determined for this credit card. There are inherent problems in any selective system, computerized or no. Let us assume that "A" and "B" each earned \$10,000 each year for ten years. "A" spent all his income, while "B" managed to save \$2,000 a year. Now both lose their jobs and start collecting under the Family Assistance Plan, or receive a health card. Is it fair that "B" should receive the same benefit as "A", since she has \$20,000 in the bank? Would it be fair if "B" did not receive the same benefit as "A", and was penalized for her thrift? But suppose "B" had \$100,000 in the bank, or an inheritance, or a piece of property? Should she still get welfare? All of these value questions are ones that have to be dealt with in the organization of any selective program, computerized or not.

Now one may argue that these same questions arise in the development of an income tax system, and are therefore no more onerous in figuring eligibility for a welfare program. But there is a difference. When a program is specifically set up to benefit the poor, rather than for all society, it invites constant evaluation of who is really deserving and who is not, and who is cheating the taxpayer of his hard-earned money. To the extent that we can separate the input, or financing, end of a program from the output, or program end, we can get a clearer and calmer look at financing and a cleaner program. In fact, the various gimmicks of selectivity-eligibility, sliding scales, negative income tax, may have even deflected America from one of the main social issues which needs to be handled, reform of the tax structure. The confusion between the input or financing equity and output or service equity diffuses our efforts. We would be better served by working to make the tax structure more progressive and more equitable, rather than trying to create financial equity by making only some people eligible for programs.

The technocrats who foresee a stigma-free selectivity consistently ignore nitty-gritty questions of administration. They write about a neat and simple FAP, just like making out one's income tax form. Volumes have been written on negative income tax; there is still no explanation of how it could be simply administered. In fact, an FAP type program would have to be welfare by another

name. The poor can't operate on a single once-a-year check based on their earnings of the previous year. When their earnings go up, it is not likely that they will have money to refund; when their earnings go down, they cannot wait for assistance. There will be a constant parade of people with eligibility claims and changes, and judgments will have to be made on them in a traditional welfare atmosphere of resentment and fears of cheating, because this is seen as a charitable type of program. In other words, negative income tax is really only a nationalized public assistance program. There will be cheating, and there will be scandals about the cheating, and stereotypes about the poor will be maintained and enhanced. When the middle class is squeezed, the program will be curtailed, because programs for the poor inevitably become poor programs.

There are other problems with selective welfare programs. Among the worst features of selective programs is the creation of a welfare class, a continuing group for whom welfare is a way of life, a group which is unique, at least in size, to America, because America does not have the other institutional and universal programs which other developed societies have to minimize welfare -- children's allowances, full employment programs, universal free health care, etc. For this group, leaving welfare presents problems of loss of benefits, loss of eligibility for a variety of selective programs.

This is the "notch" problem. At one point, Nixon's FAP was almost passed, but had to be sent back for revision, due to the notches. As people earn or are given more money, they hit notches, or points of ineligibility for any one of the plethora of selective programs -- low cost housing, food stamps, Medicaid, etc. So that by getting more, people may be worse off, and certainly this is a disincentive to work. Economists can design convoluted programs around the notches, but good sense cries out for a simpler, cleaner way out of the welfare mess.

Maintaining incentives to work constantly frustrates humane approaches to welfare in selective programs. So long as we maintain a selective approach, the onerous principle of less eligibility is inevitable. That is, the most somebody should make on welfare ought to be less or very close to the least anyone could make working. This sounds cruel, but in a market economy where work incentive is based on money, there's no way out of the dilemma. The only hope is to do as other countries have done, to take some universal system of payment such as family allowances, and/or services, and to separate it from the market, which cannot relate to family size or need. As Eveline Burns has written:

"This effort to build incentives into the payment system greatly complicates administration, especially when it is recalled

that for many of the poverty group income is highly fluctuating and highly unpredictable. Finally, we still do not know much about the incentive effect of different rates of taxation on the desire to work...

"It is for these reasons that I question in principle the desirability of trying to build incentive devices into our income security programs, sad though this would be for economists who are having such fun today playing with models and formulae. Why do we not separate the system for making antipoverty payments from the system which determines how much of total received income people should return to their government in the form of taxes?....

"...Why not pay everyone a demogrant, or national dividend, and let each individual earn as much or as little as he wishes and at the end of the year provide for a reckoning with government through the income tax system? This would enable us to make much more effective use of our tax system as the instrument for determining, in the light of all considerations and taking all incomes into account, how much of their income people should devote to the support of all our public services (including defense). In such a tax system, all income, including publicly provided income, would in principle be liable to tax, although it would probably be decided that, as now, incomes below a certain level would be immune from taxation...."

This is not the place to argue in detail the complex issue of the relative merits of family allowances versus negative income taxes. But the point is that it is the selective programs which have the strong disincentives to work in them, a condition universal demogrant, children's allowances, or universally available programs would tend to correct.

There are more problems with selectivity. Selective services must either assume a second-rate quality or be unfair to the non-poor. A detached street worker program for middle and upper class delinquents was set up in one community in the 1950's. Some officials objected because the parents of these children could afford psychiatric services -- why should the community support a street worker? Well, if psychiatric sessions are the treatment of choice, the poor should get them, too. But if street work is particularly effective with delinquent youth, why should the rich be deprived of this service? And this is one of the most important reasons to stop helping the poor -- the need to build one society in America.

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4. Eveline Burns, "The American System of Social Security: Agenda for the 1970's", Social Economics for the 1970's, ed. by George F. Rohlich, Dunellen, 1970, pp. 75-76.

Beyond the needs of ethnic pride and pluralism, the United States is splintered badly at this time. There is a lack of a central ideological core with which we all identify as Americans -- the mutual consent which provides the glue for a society. Liberals recognize this when others make law and order speeches about crime. Of course we need better police services, but ultimately no society can exist if it depends on constant policing to prevent law breaking. Society can exist only by common consent around certain norms of behavior with police available to deal with the deviant from those norms. While we accept this idea on crime, we may have been affected by the law and order approach in other social policy areas. The Nadar and consumerist approach to bad institutions tends to be to call for better policing of them. But it would be more effective to create social institutions in which we all can feel part, in which we all can feel pride. We need to undivide America from the war between the hardhats and the poor. One way of doing that is through the institution of more universal social services. Perhaps the most troublesome feature of any selective program is its inherent divisiveness. Day care, medical care, income payments, whatever, no matter how generous the level, creates an inevitable war between those above and those below the eligibility line. It is this aspect which has compounded the social cost of selectivity to America. The war between Blacks and White ethnics, between low middle income hardhats and the poor, is in part due to the selective approach to social welfare programs. The bitter street wisdom that to get good medical care, or housing, or whatever, you need to be very rich or very poor, is not all wrong. This compounds the reluctance to serve the poor even while it denies the needs of the people in between.

It need not be so. The development of new universal programs is possible, but social policy planners have to reawaken to the importance of this as an issue. Can we afford the high cost involved? Poorer countries than the United States manage more universal programs. Certainly it must be possible for the United States to devote some piece of its growth to such institutions. The remarkable thing is that the population will pay for such programs in spite of their great costs, because everyone benefits. The example cited about Social Security improvements should be borne in mind. The basic principle is that, as the pie expands for everyone, people are more generous; as it contracts, they are more miserly.

Universal services are not a panacea. They can become selective, de facto. In some cases, the rich "cream" or monopolize the service. They are more sophisticated about access, and can effectively deny the service to the poor.⁵ Or service can be left to the poor. We need only look at what is happening to the public

5. For a fuller discussion of this, see Alfred J. Kahn, Social Policy & Social Services, pp. 78-83.

schools in the cities. We see that a formally universal program becomes selective, if poor and Black children are the only ones in the public schools, and all others go to private schools. This has to be guarded against. What has happened in some community colleges shows that it can be. Where the community college is seen as a dumping ground for the inept and poor, morale is low, the graduates do not think well of themselves, and the community college as a social utility is less meaningful. In the parts of the country where the free community college is supported, where excellent faculty are hired to run first-rate programs, rich and poor mix with a sense of pride, and this has been a factor in what has been called the "blueing of America". Obviously, structure and form are crucial to whether a social utility functions as such. Cash programs, for instance, are less easily "creamed" than sophisticated service programs. While there are no guarantees, it is only with universal services that we have a chance for building the institutions of a united America.

There is one final argument that the liberals who support selectivity raise. They know that ultimately, universal programs would be better but, they claim, we have to take what we can get. When there is the possibility of an FAP, or a means tested health care plan, or an SSI (Supplemental Security Income), we had better take it as better than nothing. This approach ignores the way policy develops in America. In the United States we tend toward incremental changes. That is, programs are continued and built on the superstructure that is originally founded. We had better give more attention to basic forms and less to specific benefits.

Some people now think that, for all its benefits, it may have been a mistake to support Medicaid with its third-party vendor payments, built-in corruption, and escalation of health costs. Even if it meant waiting for another year or two for a better plan, it might have been worth the effort, because all improvements in Medicaid are still based on a basic poor organizing principle. One is reluctant to claim that such arguments outweigh the benefits of Medicaid, but the idea is worth considering. It is sometimes better in the long run to compromise on benefits for the sake of a better system.

For instance, in 1972 George McGovern called for universal demogrants of \$4,000 per family of four. He was frightened off this proposal by the astronomical cost estimates. But he was wedded to the \$4,000 figure, so he shifted ground to support of a \$4,000 FAP instead of Nixon's \$2,400 FAP. Finally, we got neither. If we had gotten a \$4,000 FAP, it might have been cut to \$2,400 by now because of a tax revolt. But if McGovern, and liberals generally, had stuck to the demogrant principle, even if the figure were cut to \$2,000, or set up to cover only children,

and such a plan had passed Congress, it could only improve, as Social Security does, because of the nature of the broad constituency served.

Our position is that universal concepts and programs are not only superior to selective social services -- we believe they may be at least as marketable. The time has come for social planners to make the effort, to make universalism a live issue again, to lay the groundwork for the kinds of programs in America which can truly bring us together.

Universal programs are not so wild a dream. We have houses on fire in the United States today. Any one may cause our house to burn down. We need a fire department committed to fighting all fires, wherever they arise, supported by all of us, to the extent we can. Helping the poor alone helps neither the poor nor the nation.

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Special consideration will be given to political and philosophical analyses. Papers may refer to undergraduate and/or graduate social work education. Please submit by 1/1/77 to Leslie Leighninger, Editor (1976-77 address: 1020 Ninth St., #47, Albany, CA 94710) and Associate Editor Michael Austin, University of Washington, School of Social Work, 1417 N.E. 42nd St., Seattle, WA 98195.