

*Re-revised  
Cliff John*

Congressman John E. Fogarty  
Meeting of Rhode Island  
Chapter of the National  
Association of Social Workers  
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It gives me great pleasure to be with you today because as members of the National Association of Social Workers you are vitally concerned with the conservation of our greatest national resource--our fellow citizens. Dedicated individuals like yourselves help make it possible for Americans to live independent, useful lives, particularly through your efforts directed against the twin scourges of poverty and dependency.

Public welfare is the ultimate instrument of social conscience in the modern world, yet it is increasingly under attack. Two major reasons for this attack are steadily rising costs of public assistance programs, and the fact that many of the measures intended to help the needy contain loopholes through which abuses can creep.

When I became chairman of the Labor-HEW Subcommittee in 1949 the appropriation for Federal grants to the States for public assistance was \$948 million. At that time most people expected that the cost of this welfare program would gradually decrease as the Old-Age and Survivors' Insurance Program expanded.

But in spite of the fact that the OASI and disability insurance programs have increased twentyfold, public welfare costs have increased from \$948 million in 1948 to approximately \$2.5 billion projected for 1962.

Last September I wrote to Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare Ribicoff voicing my concern about rising welfare costs, and recommending that immediate steps be taken to determine what elements of our public welfare program need revision and what corrective actions need to be taken.

I wrote to the Secretary because I believe that if we disregard recent signs of public uprising, we may find ourselves unable to resist those who advocate harsh measures that deny care to those most deserving of it, who advocate a return to the "good old days" of Poor Laws and woodshed, and who contend that the solution to social welfare problems lies with the repressive approach of the investigator rather than with the more enlightened approach of the public welfare worker trained to prevent social ills as well as to rehabilitate those who have been afflicted by them.

In mid-December the Secretary announced a number of changes in the public welfare program which can be made through administrative action, and which are an auspicious beginning toward solving our many public welfare problems.

The Secretary's "ten steps" are in line with many of the proposals I have made regarding public welfare. They include provisions for more effective action against deserting parents, administrative actions to reduce and control fraud in public welfare programs, provisions for more efficient administration of State public assistance programs

and for stepped-up training of public welfare personnel, plans for developing services to families, and provisions whereby children will receive adequate protection, support and a maximum opportunity to become responsible citizens.

This program of administrative action is a significant move in the right direction: it aims at eliminating abuses which have crept into our public assistance programs and aims at getting people off the public payroll and back to work as useful, productive members of society. The Secretary's program is a first, and a very important, step toward reducing the tremendous financial burden of public welfare programs.

There are many reasons for these high costs: population growth, increases in the cost of living, urbanization, and many other more subtle factors almost unavoidably affect welfare programs. Part of the cost rise stems from extensions of the program into new areas such as aid to the disabled; part of it has been caused by increases in the Federal share of the average monthly payment per recipient. These are some of the reasons but they do not satisfactorily answer the questions that are increasingly being voiced by our citizens.

The American people want to know whether we are organizing our public welfare programs to their most efficient use, whether we are getting the maximum return on our public welfare dollars, and whether public welfare programs are really accomplishing their basic objective of reducing dependency or whether they are merely spawning more dependency.

These questions cannot be answered easily, but they must be answered if we are to make the public welfare program of the 1930's into one of the 1960's and 1970's. And as a legislator who has for more than 20 years watched--and taken part in--the great progress made in the health and welfare fields, I am convinced that public welfare programs must remain progressive and dynamic not only to alleviate present misfortune, but also to prevent that which can be foreseen in the future.

They must keep pace because the conditions causing social dislocation will become worse instead of better. Some of us see only good times ahead. We see a steady rise in standards of living. We see great advances in science and a conquering of many of the diseases which have traditionally plagued mankind. Others, however, wonder whether the next decades will bring us any closer to an understanding of the eternal enigma of human behavior. Our problems will not be simplified by the inevitable steady rise in population, increasing urbanization, and industrialization, with their unwelcome offspring of mounting poverty, unemployment, migration, juvenile delinquency, poor housing, inadequate educational facilities, and broken homes.

These problems are part of the price we must pay for progress. We must further pay for progress by providing services to people caught shorthanded in the impersonal web of progress, because, if we do not, we are denying the essential dignity of the human being. We must pay because if we do not we will drown in a fruitless effort to swim against the tide of history.

The modern chapter in this country's effort to take care of its own began some thirty years ago; and the States joined wholeheartedly in the movement to develop welfare programs. Certainly, I am not speaking entirely out of personal pride when I say that our own State of Rhode Island has figured prominently in that chapter. The forward-looking legislation signed into law last June providing for a Rhode Island Board of Registration for social workers is a fine example of the kind of progressive action which is making "America's first vacationland" "America's first vocationland" as well. A board of five outstanding social workers is already screening applicants for State certification, and moving forward in a way that is commendably in keeping with the new nationwide certification program of the National Association of Social Workers. Your efforts have made Rhode Island the second state in the Union in which the title "registered social worker" is backed by professional certification based on training, education, and experience.

This kind of activity shows that you are not standing still. It shows that you, the people closest to the problems of social dislocation, are willing to bear the heavy load placed upon your shoulders. It shows that you are willing to work toward taking the "dole" out of public assistance and getting at the basic causes of many of the problems public welfare activities are designed to alleviate. For we cannot hope to break the vicious circle of dependency unless we base our public assistance programs on sturdy foundations.

There are a number of principles which I have long believed should be the basic building blocks of public welfare programs.

First of all, public welfare should provide adequate assistance to any individual or family whose insufficient income and resources create a genuine need for assistance.

Secondly, public welfare is basically a State responsibility and should function under strong State leadership.

Thirdly, State plans should emphasize the prevention of social ills, and rehabilitation of those for whom these ills could not be prevented. Rather than relying on financial measures, the plans should stress rehabilitation and training projects to put the needy back on the job.

Fourth, restrictions of eligibility based solely on length of residence in a State should not be permitted under a Federally-aided program.

Fifth, more research in the broad field of human resources and social welfare should be conducted with special emphasis on such questions as the best distribution of financial responsibility between Federal, State and local governments, eligibility standards for welfare recipients, proper payment rates, confidentiality of welfare records, the efficiency of various administrative procedures, and other factors affecting the adequacy and economy of welfare programs.

And finally, because programs cannot be improved to the exclusion of those who staff them and who are ultimately responsible for their success, public welfare personnel should be assisted in becoming

better prepared to discharge their heavy responsibilities through the appropriation of more Federal funds for their education and training.

Gone are the days when a social worker could merely be a human link in the financial chain between the government and the needy. Today he must function as far more than a financial manager who decides who shall receive payments and how much they will receive. In order to give new emphasis to prevention and rehabilitation in public welfare programs, today's public assistance worker must in fact be able to provide preventive and rehabilitative services. He must understand the basic nature of what he is dealing with and know what to do about it. This calls for a trained, experienced and fully skilled person, one who has a full understanding of the social and psychological forces contributing to dependency.

In 1961, the National Social Welfare Assembly reported that only 3 percent of 35,175 social welfare workers in public assistance programs held masters degrees in Social Work. The need may be stated another

way. In 1960, less than 500 students out of more than 5,000 full-time graduate students in social work were taking field instruction in the public assistance area.

The backbone of our public welfare programs is the professionally trained caseworker. At present, only one caseworker with full professional training is available for every 23,000 recipients of public assistance. The full potential of our public assistance programs cannot possibly be realized if we do not have the qualified personnel to carry them out. Without the kind of personnel we need, we may find ourselves polishing the railings while the ship sinks.

What I am saying is that, as society grows more complex, the social services it needs are becoming correspondingly more complex. The issue is this: will social welfare services be organized and carried out to their greatest potential? Will they be directed toward a central goal, or will they go off in different directions because there is nobody to assemble them into a meaningful pattern?

Our welfare programs call for more than individuals with highly developed social work skills, although this kind of person will always represent a most basic need. Modern welfare needs call for a greater reservoir of manpower skilled in administration. They call for individuals well-versed in program planning, community organization and social policy. They cry out for individuals who can conduct the urgently needed research on numerous problems that persistently plague us. Our programs require exceptional persons educated not only to specifics

but to broad principles <sup>--</sup> who can see issues in context and not merely in terms of their immediate and obvious manifestations. <sup>They</sup> ~~He~~ must, of course, have the basic skills, but <sup>they</sup> ~~he~~ must also know how to use them to the best benefit of the common weal as well as of the individual.

I do not mean that all public welfare personnel must become administrators or researchers. I simply mean that an increasing number of effective administrators and researchers will be needed in the public assistance field, as in many other fields that provide services to large numbers of our population.

Suppose the goal is the reduction of juvenile delinquency in an overcrowded section of a large city. It is not unusual to find many agencies working with the same family <sup>--</sup> with a resulting lack of coordination. You may listen to the school social worker as he tells you how he sees early symptoms in a youngster, and how he checks them before they grow into serious problems. Farther along the line, the family caseworker tells you how he helps families adjust so that they will be less likely to breed juvenile delinquency. The probation officer tells you how he prevents delinquency by treating the youngster in his home before official action has to be taken. The parole worker tells you how he prevents further delinquency by helping that same youngster upon his release from an institution. This fragmented approach obscures responsibility and puts off the painful process of actually gearing the program toward preventing juvenile delinquency. Everybody in my story was doing something to prevent juvenile delinquency, and on their own levels, they were doing it effectively. But

juvenile delinquency, like so many of the other problems with which the social worker must cope, is a tremendously complicated issue, calling for highly coordinated administration and research if it is to be combated effectively. This is one of many giants that cannot be felled by a single boy with a slingshot. It must be defeated by an entire army marching together and in the same direction.

Who will lead this army? From your ranks must come a certain number of individuals educated to take care of the forest as well as the trees. They must function as advisors to those who make public welfare policy; for this policy must to large extent be shaped by those who are responsible for carrying it out. They must advance their professional status in the welfare program to the extent that they are consulted by our nation's leaders on public social welfare issues. They must help pin point goals for welfare in the future, weeding out the trivial and impossible and identifying the desirable and attainable.

While I do not advocate that all of you become generalists, neither do I advocate that all of you become specialists, losing touch with the broad issues that affect you. Somehow you must achieve the proper balance, so that you can be an effective influence on changing social welfare legislation.

I am spelling out this problem not because I think you are unaware of it, but because I want you to know that I am aware of it. And it is a truism, although a necessary one, to say that awareness of a problem is the first and most important step toward solving it.

While there are some steps which can be taken by the Federal government, there are many others which can be taken by the social work profession itself, and I would like to suggest four courses of action which you, as professional public welfare personnel, can follow.

First, you can conduct more research on the nature of caseloads themselves, so that you can more clearly define the types of cases that exist, those that need help first, and those for which help would be extremely difficult. You are in direct contact with the day to day evidence supporting the need for social change.

Closely allied to this is my proposal that you should take immediate steps to determine exactly what kinds of personnel you need. The amount of training needed to handle cases in the most deprived areas of the community obviously calls for a far better trained individual than is now available. Along this line, you can plan for the more effective use of the non-professional worker. Realizing that few health professions will ever attain the full number of personnel they need in the light of our growing population, the Joint Commission on Mental Illness and Health has recommended such economical use of personnel resources.

Third, in line with what I have said earlier, much can be done to improve the structure of welfare services, so that our present ideas, policies, programs and organization actually meet our social needs. And much can be done to influence those who make social policy by making better use of the knowledge you gain through research and through daily contact with social work practice.

And last, though certainly not least, much can be done by persons like yourselves to promote better public understanding of the purpose of public welfare programs. They must be supported not only in a defensive manner, but also in a positive manner if the average citizen is to understand the purpose and workings of public assistance programs and their relationship to America's own needs and values.

In conclusion I would like to repeat that positive measures such as an increase in research in public welfare problem areas, expanded educational opportunities to enable those who staff our public welfare programs to better discharge their responsibilities, plus constructive efforts by the social work profession itself, are the necessary first steps toward reversing what has seemed thus far to be an almost irreversible trend of skyrocketing welfare costs. These measures, moreover, can do much to answer critics who focus on the assumption that high welfare costs arise from some wilful choice of the individual rather than from circumstances over which he seldom has control.

With age comes responsibility--the responsibility to do what is necessary as individuals, as members of a profession which reflects man's concern for his fellow man, and as members of a great nation which has never shirked its responsibility of providing for its own. I am confident that history will not reverse itself, nor will it slow down, because your profession will remain--as it always has in the past--a potent force in making our public assistance programs work.