

## Welfare: Not Enough Money, Workers To Do Thorough Job

(Continued from Page 1) taken special action and replenished the fund to the extent of \$3,000 transferred from the county contingency fund. Presumably, the cases herein described will be reviewed in the light of this possibility for emergency aid.)

First time you met up with this fund—only you didn't—was in the case of the old Negro in the miserable cabin.

As he was almost entirely blind and had lost a leg, he was being helped by two funds, Aid For The Blind and APTD, but, the day before we came to see him, fate had come down on him hard in the shape of six young grandsons. His daughter, their mother, had been jailed for drunkenness and had "dumped the boys," as he expressed it, on him. There wasn't a bite of food in the house, he told us. On his two crutches, his eyes dim behind the black glasses, he stood to tell his tale, the center of a swarm of youngsters—you'd have said there were a dozen instead of six—and he was just about crazy.

Here was a dilemma. It would be impossible to raise his APTD allowance under three weeks, the minimum time it takes to communicate with the State Department of Public Welfare and, if the extra help is allowed, to get a check back. Here was a case for the Poor Fund, the county fund for use in emergencies; through which a food order may be given or an emergency call for medicine. But the Fund was living up to its name: It was so poor that it had vanished. There wasn't any more.

This is what happens regularly towards this time of the year, according to past experience. Why? The commissioners say: "She (meaning Mrs. W. B. Cole, superintendent of the county department) does it all out too fast." And SHE says: "There isn't enough. We HAVE to help in emergencies. That's what the fund is for." So what was to happen? It was arranged that the local store

would help but you wondered: should the store-keeper be penalized? And, how would he feel if he had to do this sort of thing often? Would he think: "We pay our county taxes and part of them go to run the Welfare. Why can't they take care of this kind of thing? That's what they're for."

### Another Family's Troubles

That was the reaction of another man we saw that day. This young man had been injured in an automobile accident four or five weeks before. His arm was still in a cast and it would be several weeks more, most likely, before he could go back to work. He had sent in an SOS.

Our case worker friend had not visited here before but, even before we got there, she said she doubted if this was in any sense a strictly "welfare" case.

"Temporary troubles, like this," she said, "aren't our job. But we'll see him and see how things are."

The house was small, in a bare yard, the young man was on the stoop. He was tall and gaunt, had a heavy cast on his right arm.

He opened the door to a sea of children. Or so it seemed in the small room. Light heads and dark, huge eyes looking out from under long bangs: three little boys and two little girls. A thin young wife stood, her tow hair hanging, like a shadow in the back doorway of a black inner room. She had a baby in her arms.

He caught our look. "And two more in school," he said.

You sit yourself on the sofa and pick up your pad and pencil. The children silently draw near. Soon a touselled little girl snuggles close, the others hang over your shoulder. Only the littlest boy stands solemn at the end of the sofa, his chin resting on his folded arms, great dark eyes gazing, like a Raphael cherub.

As background data in the case of this young textile worker, the employer had been consult-

ed, with the result that the welfare department knew the man was a good hand, steady and reliable, but a poor manager of his own affairs. "Never saved; used up his wages as soon as he got them." When the young man himself confessed to a recent sizeable debt he had to pay as "a loan from the bank for Christmas" you felt it was in the character given him by others.

But when the case worker suggested that he'd got big wages and when he went back to work again maybe he could manage them better and save something: "you've got seven children and perhaps..." he flared up:

"I Pay My Taxes So..."

"I can manage. You don't need to tell me. I've always worked and never asked help from no one. You don't need to help. I just thought I pay my taxes to the county and when I need help, like now, seems like I ought to be able to get it."

He was flushed and angry, on the defensive. The five little children stood around, huge eyes peering out from under tangled hair. The young wife maintained her shadowy silence. The place was cold.

It took a bit of talking to get things back on an even keel, and whether the worker's attempt at explanation of the way the department works: how you have to be in a certain kind of fix before you can get help, how his injury was just temporary and so on... whether this got over, it was hard to tell.

Later, you ask: "they surely did need help: no firewood and by the looks of it, little food—can't you do something in emergen-

Yes, you can, said the worker, under certain conditions. You can give a food order, for instance. But one of these conditions is the existence of the general relief fund. As for this young man, chances seemed to be that he'd be able to go back to work pretty soon. Yes, the family did look pretty miserable, but they'd probably make out. Again came the phrase "the neighbors will probably help."

As you drive on, you think: "Well, we spent half an hour there and made the father mad and I drew a dog and a cat and a pig with a curly tail for the children. And that was that." You think: "That wasn't good enough." And finally you say to your companion:

"You know, I think if I were that man, I'd be mad, too. You did a good job, all right, in calming things down, but it does seem as if it was in times of such emergencies that welfare help is needed, and quick. Now, that young man felt ashamed to be asking for help. He wouldn't have if he hadn't been really up against it," and you go on thinking out loud: "Of course, he ought to have saved. He oughtn't to have borrowed all that just for Christmas presents, there's no sense to it; but people will do it. And he oughtn't to have had so many children so fast to start with. That wife looked so thin and sick—but people will do that, too. If people had good sense always and kept their health—and didn't get in auto accidents and so on—if a lot of things—there wouldn't have to be any Welfare Department—"

"And I'd be out of a job," your driver laughs, "but there'll always be a need. Not only because of the bad luck some people get mixed up in but there are always people with poor judgment, of difficult temperaments who get into some kind of a mess. And there'll always be sickness, a sudden death and old age—and little children left alone."

And she goes on to say that it is a curious anomaly of social service work that prosperity, such as now, doesn't bring any marked decrease in welfare rolls. The families living on the lowest income have not benefited by prosperous times, especially around here where farming is the general occupation. At the same time, the cost of living has gone way up and, to people who must spend every penny they make just to keep on living, the going is pretty tough. The poor are always, it seems, relatively poorer in good times than in hard times.

You ride along and then you ask: "Even if this wasn't strictly a welfare case, wouldn't you have given a food order to that man if the Poor Fund hadn't been used up?"

She hesitated: "I don't decide these things. We talk them over in the department—"

"But if there is real need: all those children: starvation—"

"Nobody really starves. Somebody hears about it and helps."

"Yes, but what do the people think? They look to the welfare as to a friend in need. They know you help this one and that one. They don't understand why you can't help when they need it."

"It's true. They don't understand. We try to explain but it's complicated and they don't see why we can't just hand money out. They have an idea we have all this money rolling around—"

she laughs wryly, "and here we don't even have any emergency fund so's we can give them a little quick help."

"So you would have helped?" You are triumphant.

But still she hedges. "He made good wages. High wages. It's ridiculous that he couldn't have saved better."

"But the point is: he DIDN'T, and he's got seven little children. And that sick-looking wife. If she and the children land in the hospital for malnutrition, you'll have a lot more than food to pay for!"

And, as you drive along, you decide that a visit to Mrs. Cole and a look-see at the Poor Fund in her reports and those of the County Auditor Mrs. Wicker might help you to understand this business of the Disappearing Poor Fund.

"You'll do your best to keep in touch," you think, "but how is it humanly possible when there are so many people to see and so few people to do the seeing?—only two case workers, now, to cover Moore County. No wonder that one visit in six months is about all that can be managed, along with the emergency trips that, of course, have to be made in between."

You think of some figures you saw recently in which Moore County and other counties are compared, from a Welfare Department angle. You wonder why Anson County, for instance,

with population just 1,000 below Moore, and Public Assistance cases running 50 less, should have 10 workers in the Welfare Department while Moore has only six. Harnett County, with 390 more cases than Moore has 14 workers; Richmond with a population of 6,400 more than Moore has only 390 more welfare cases and 16 workers as compared to Moore's six. Dr. Ellen Winston, superintendent of State Welfare, in her talk here Tuesday, reviewed these figures.

Geographically, Moore is a large county. It is certainly a question worth studying, this matter of the Welfare work here. For one thing, and ignoring, for the moment, the humanitarian side of it: would it not be more economical in the long run, to increase the size of the department staff so that more frequent visits could be made? It would allow counselling, to try to prevent some of the troubles and the expense they bring on the county. Such counselling might help to keep families going, so that children wouldn't need to be in foster homes. More workers would enable the department to do more thoroughly the probationary and juvenile delinquent supervision, which is their responsibility; it might, again, cut down on the troubles and the expense. More frequent visits might even remove from the welfare rolls a certain number of cases now carried simply because no one has been able to get out to check up on the circumstances. It just might be Good Business, as well as Good Works, to spend more money on the Welfare Department.

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