

However, the most devastating criticism of public welfare is never made. It is that the system is designed to insure that most people do not succeed in obtaining even the meager benefits to which they are legally entitled. Poor Americans, in other words, are literally cheated out of billions of dollars by government—and this at a time when affluent Americans are receiving transportation subsidies, agricultural subsidies, housing subsidies, urban renewal subsidies, and other governmental benefits of unparalleled magnitude.

To combat this lawlessness by government, welfare recipients have found it necessary to form a national protest movement. Under the inspired leadership of Dr. George A. Wiley, who is testifying here today, the National Welfare Rights Organization is now successfully forcing welfare departments in many localities to distribute benefits in compliance with the law.

One form of lawlessness arises from various policies and practices which keep eligible people from getting on the welfare rolls in the first place.

For example, welfare administrators deliberately engender ignorance of entitlements among potential applicants by refusing to release copies of welfare regulations to them. Hence many people do not realize they are eligible and do not apply. Or, if they do apply and are declared ineligible, they have no independent means of knowing whether they are being lied to—as they very often are.

Ladies and gentlemen, welfare manuals are unclassified public documents, and welfare applicants are American citizens. There can be no explanation for governmental secrecy about benefits except that the intent is to give as few people as possible as little as possible, whatever their legal eligibility.

But even if applicants know of their rights, they find it exceedingly difficult to assert them. The steps involved in proving one's eligibility constitute a veritable bureaucratic obstacle course, replete with invasions of privacy and the necessity of producing birth, marriage, employment, and a multitude of other personal documents which even the most compulsive middle-class family could not be expected to have ready at hand. One must conclude that the poor are supposed to cultivate the habits of the packrat. Nevertheless, lacking appropriate documents they are turned away.

And even if all documents are available, welfare functionaries—under public pressure to keep costs down—may then reject the application, telling the victim to seek help from relatives or friends.

Ladies and gentlemen, our investigations of poverty in northern cities have led us to the terrible conclusion that, for every person on the welfare rolls, there is another who is probably legally eligible but not receiving benefits.

Governmental lawlessness has indeed succeeded in reaching its objective. Little wonder, then, that the National Welfare Rights Organization is now planning to mount a nationwide advertising campaign to recruit the eligible poor onto the welfare rolls.

But one should not suppose that lawlessness ends where benefits begin. Many of those who do manage to get on the rolls are then cheated out of many allowances.

The calculation of budget allowances is extraordinarily detailed and complex—in New York, the few unemployed men who get on the rolls