

INADEQUACIES OF OUR PRESENT SYSTEM

This religious and ethical concern for economic justice and dignity for all members of our society compel our organization's commitment to the principle of income maintenance. This conviction is reinforced by the recognition that present methods of dealing with the problem of poverty in America are not working. Today, 11 million households, almost 30 million people, fall below the poverty line—that minimum level of annual income which the Social Security Administration has found tolerable from the standpoint of nutritious diet, adequate shelter and the other aspects of living necessary for a minimum healthful existence. That this is but a minimum standard is emphasized by the fact that it allows only 75¢ per day for total food expenses and adds only twice this amount to cover all family living expenses other than food. Of the 30 million people living below the poverty line, one-half are children. Among those children one-half again are in families of more than five children.

Nonwhites, the aged, and members of households headed by women are among those groups whose incidence in the poverty population is greater than their representation in the general population. Yet, no section of this country is exempt from this scourge of poverty. Almost two out of three poor Americans are white. There is extreme poverty in the Appalachian region as well as on Indian reservations.

We already have, of course, a variety of public income maintenance systems. Social security, veterans' benefits, unemployment insurance, workmen's compensation, aid to the aged, the blind and the handicapped, the AFDC for female heads of families and for unemployed fathers, and the general relief of states and municipalities, all seek to provide an income floor for various categories of needy persons. However, it has been estimated that only about one-fourth of the current poverty group are in fact receiving public assistance. The fact that three-fourths of this group do not receive such assistance shows how restrictive the eligibility requirements are; while the further fact that one-fourth of those below the poverty line receive public assistance and still fail to meet minimum subsistence standards graphically demonstrates the inadequacy of some of our present assistance programs. In Mississippi, the average payment for an AFDC recipient is \$9.25 per month. As of December 1966, South Carolina paid an average of \$62.10 a month for an entire AFDC family. Not only do these programs leave out far too many poor, with inadequate payments to those whom do cover, but the manner in which they identify and treat the poor breeds continued dependency and sows the seeds of character deterioration, crime and riots. As Daniel Moynihan, student of this subject, so aptly put it ". . . the present welfare system is serving to maintain the poorest groups in society in a position of impotent fury. Impotent because the system destroys the potential of individuals and families to improve themselves. Fury because it claims to do otherwise" (Moynihan, "The Crisis in Welfare," *Position Papers, etc. for the Governor's Conference on Public Welfare*, November 2-3, 1967, P. 73).

In his condemnation of the present system, Moynihan is joined by other students of the subject representing views from almost every point along the political spectrum. President Johnson himself, in appointing a National Commission to recommend needed revisions in our present welfare and income maintenance, termed the present system "outmoded and in need of change." The American Jewish Congress commends this Joint Committee for initiating its own inquiry into this vital area of concern and for the completeness and depth of its investigation. The results of this hearing should no doubt contribute much to the available information on this vital subject as well as to the formation of informed conclusions and the framing of appropriate legislation.

INCOME MAINTENANCE JUST A PART OF A MULTIPRONGED ATTACK ON POVERTY

Pending the report of the National Commission and of this Joint Committee as well as the presentation of detailed legislation embodying various income guarantee plans with analysis of their costs and benefits and effects on the recipients and the economy, the American Jewish Congress has not committed itself to any particular program or method of income guarantee. In broad outline, however, and at this point of time, it sees the income maintenance program as part of a multipronged attack on poverty. We recognize, for example, that guaranteed income is not a substitute for programs of full employment and human resources development. We have urged in testimony before the House Committee on Education and Labor that the Government should, through its own programs and by stimulating private industry, create enough jobs to give