

APPENDIX 18

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A Way To End the Means Test

THE KENNEDY-JOHNSON war on poverty is avowedly aimed at the abolition of poverty. The grand strategy as revealed thus far is *prevention* through increased provision of gainful employment.

The social work profession has long been committed to the objectives of this war and to the strategy of prevention. Social workers strongly support measures for increasing the demand for employment and for preparing young persons and displaced workers better to meet the demands of the labor market through improved educational, health, and other community services. Yet at any given time not all persons and families will—or necessarily should—be related to a payroll. To insure victory the attack on unemployment must be supported by a system of defense that will assure the maintenance of income for all families. The treatment of poverty, like the treatment of other ills, through alleviation, reduction, and control, is in itself a necessary form of prevention against the spread and perpetuation of the problem. This may seem obvious to social

workers, but it is also obvious that this fact has to be repeated frequently.

The current chief defense against poverty is, of course, the social security system; the last line of this defense is public assistance. A most notable aspect of the public assistance programs in the United States today is the dissatisfaction expressed toward them by all parties concerned—the applicants for and the recipients of assistance, the rank-and-file of public assistance staff, legislators, and the public at large—and it is hardly possible to exaggerate the extent and depth of this dissatisfaction. The *treatment* aspect of the war on poverty will require a more effective operation than can be provided through our battered, tired public assistance programs. The public assistance programs will not be good enough even though they be pasted together with surplus-food stamps, glossed over with pseudo-service amendments, or even braced up with Kerr-Mills old age medical payments.

Like many other groups in the population, social workers have become increasingly critical of the public assistance programs, but for their own reasons. They have shown their skepticism of the possibilities of

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