

A STATEMENT ON POVERTY AND THE CANADA ASSISTANCE PLAN

Adopted by the Third Biennial Convention of the Lutheran Church in America--Canada Section
Ottawa, Ontario, June 20-21, 1967

RESOLUTIONS:

Resolved, That Lutheran Church in America--Canada Section commend the Federal Government for the enactment of the Canada Assistance Plan.

and,

That Lutheran Church in America--Canada Section commend the provinces for initiating implementation of the Canada Assistance Plan and urge them and their municipalities to move with all possible progress towards fulfilling the intent of the Canada Assistance Plan.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The social statement on poverty adopted by the Third Biennial convention of the Lutheran Church in America, June 21-29, 1966, has this conclusion:

The Lutheran Church in America commits itself to the struggle against poverty in full continuity with the biblical testimony about concern for the poor. While it recognizes that the forms of this struggle are subject to human judgment and are open to differences of opinion among fully committed Christian persons, it does not believe that commitment to the struggle is an open question for Christians.

Two of the judgments in the statement refer to the application of public policy in the war on poverty. They are:

We approve of declarations of public policy . . . which seek to eliminate the paradox of poverty in the midst of plenty and further seek to open to everyone opportunities for education and training, for work, and for living in decency and dignity.

We believe that in nations where conditions of abundance exist, it should be the goal of the national economy to provide every able-bodied adult with the opportunity for meaningful employment sufficiently remunerative to secure, at the very least, the minimal decency and dignity. Further, where a full employment economy is not possible or not desirable, or where individual inadequacies exist, we believe our countries have the responsibility to move as readily as possible to assure income adequate to secure the minimal standard of living.

To make these two judgments relevant at this time in the development of Canada's social welfare program it is appropriate that the church apply them to a major piece of social legislation--The Canada Assistance Plan. (A summary is appended.) This piece of legislation, enacted in July 1966 by the Parliament of Canada, brings an integrated approach to social assistance. It represents a major step towards the development of a modern social security system for Canada. Lutheran Church in America--Canada Section, in keeping with the church's position on poverty welcomes this progressive step.

COMMENT

To view rationally the need to which the Canada Assistance Plan is addressed requires that we do so on the basis of reason and knowledge rather than on the basis of emotion and myth. R. A. Jenness, in an article in the November-December 1966 issue of *Canada Welfare* said, "The question is not whether we can eliminate poverty. It is rather whether we wish to do so."

In an affluent society the attitude that "nobody starves" is contrary to social justice. Any social assistance programme operating at this level is self-defeating. Urban man has non-material needs in addition to the basic requirements of food, clothing and shelter. Leon Kumove, Consultant on Housing and Aging in the Social Planning Council of Metropolitan Toronto, in an article in *Canadian Welfare*, September-October 1966, writes:

If twentieth century social science has taught us anything, it is that these non-material needs are as basic to human survival as is the supply of food, clothing and shelter. When faced with choices, almost every human being will try to satisfy both groups of needs regardless of their material circumstances.

He goes on to say:

What reduces life to a long vestibule to death cannot be calculated by daily intakes of protein and calories. Nobody starves, perhaps, but every fourth citizen is excluded from the social existence we accept as our common heritage.

We are living in a society where, as Prof. Richard Titmuss said to the Canadian Welfare Council in 1964, advantages are multiplied for those who already have them and become less available for those who do not. The Canadian Welfare Council in its policy statement on the Canada Assistance Plan said, "There are and will continue to be poor people in Canada whose social and economic needs will not be met or their situation improved by increasing economic development and affluence of the population generally."

Who are the poor? One definition of poverty is given by D. E. Woodsworth, until recently Director of Research and Special Projects, the Canadian Welfare Council. In an article in *The Social Worker*, Vol. 33 No. 3, July 1965, he writes:

If we are to understand poverty, we should look at poor people as those whose roles in the social systems related to income, welfare, health, and education result in continuing or increasing inequality in the distribution of these resources.

Another way of looking at poverty is contained in the comments by Dr. Leonard Schneiderman, School of Social Work, Ohio State University, in an address to the Manitoba Association of Social Workers, May 15, 1965. He said,

It seems important to note that 34 million impoverished persons in the United States are roughly divisible into two equal parts. About half that number are related to the nation's economy through an employable family head. The other half are outside the economy. Half have family heads who are employable. Half are either too old, too young, or too disabled to work . . . Half of the people who live in poverty in the U.S.A. enjoy that status by virtue of the involuntary unemployment, the underemployment, and/or low wages of a family head.

Leon Kumove, in his article mentioned previously, present three concepts of poverty--poverty of income, poverty of social utilities, and poverty of cases. Poverty of income is self-evident but we should note it also means lack of credit, on which most of us live, or lack of eligibility for a mortgaged house in which many of us dwell. Social utilities, sometimes referred to as social services, across Canada are spotty and uneven, especially in smaller municipalities. The poverty of cases include those who have various handicaps, such as social attitudes, poor health, mental illness, physical disabilities, poor education, large families. In addition there are the so-called insular poor.

These include a substantial portion of the Indians on and off the reservation, of the Metis, and of the inhabitants of hamlets in the remote or isolated areas of our country.

It should be noted, too, that there are casualties of economic progress. The pressures of change in labour markets create mobility of labour. Rapid industrialization and urbanization draws people from town and country, especially from the economically depressed areas. As people move, they bring with them "the accumulated handicaps imposed by prior economic deprivation."¹ Often they lack the basic education requisite to acquiring the skills of urban living.

A massive attack on poverty includes, of course, more than a well-administered social assistance program. There are disparities in pay scales for the same work, inefficient industries, poor utilization of training programs, inadequate minimum wage legislation, and lack of opportunity in economically depressed areas. Then there is the added threat of permanent exclusion from the economy by the advance of technology. It is said that stability of employment can no longer be counted upon. There will be periods of "non-work" while finding other jobs or training for other jobs and bringing problems of mobility between places and between jobs. In this connection it should be noted that we are too inclined to stereotype people who are not working. Prof. Jenness, in the article mentioned previously, writes:

The importance of full employment policies in combatting poverty cannot be over-stressed. Almost all first-hand studies of the poor confirm the need and desire for steady work. In a recent investigation in Vancouver, for instance, the most dispirited persons interviewed were those who for reasons of age, personal disability or family responsibility (in the case of abandoned mothers), depended on welfare and saw no chance of getting employment. In overwhelming numbers, they did not want sympathy, handouts, advice, or the inquiring eye of middle-class do-gooders or researchers. They wanted jobs, and the satisfaction and anonymity that went with them.

THE CANADA ASSISTANCE PLAN

The Canada Assistance Plan is one of the necessary weapons to begin the attack on poverty. Canadians have assigned to government the task of providing an ultimate guarantee against poverty. Through the Canada Assistance Plan, Canadians as a whole have decided that social assistance shall be given on the basis of need. They have decided on a program which incorporates prevention and rehabilitation. They have decided that the administration of social assistance programs be improved and services added as required. This means the development of staff in quantity and quality. Legislation is only as good as the personnel who administer it. The mountainous caseloads for welfare workers preclude attempts at rehabilitation of clients. Studies of poverty indicate that the poor are desperately in need of more professional services. The Family Service Association of America points out that many families are not using services because they do not know their existence, because they are afraid to seek them out, or because they do not have the physical or emotional strength to locate them. As the trend to urban living continues, more people, even those above the poverty level of income, will be in trouble without professional social services.

The future of the Canada Assistance Plan lies in the hands of the provinces. What the Canadian people as a whole have sanctioned can be short-circuited by provinces or municipalities. Our ambivalence about federal-provincial rights can endanger human rights. So can municipalities. There are in some municipalities, especially small and rural municipalities, widespread inconsistencies, even arbitrary exclusion of persons who have a right to social assistance. We have been too inclined to view poverty in terms of deficiencies of people rather than in terms of deficiencies of political institutions and social arrangements.

It is stated in a study by a commission convened by the Board of Social Ministry, Lutheran Church in America, that:

¹The Advisory Council on Public Welfare, U.S. Department of Health Education and Welfare, "Having the Power. We Have the Duty." Summary of Recommendations to the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare. Washington, D.C., June 29, 1966.

With special reference to the role of Christians and of the church, it must be affirmed that a new concern about the quantity and quality of public social service is imperative.

It is not enough to know that certain services are being rendered by the government; citizens with a conscience need to have an informed concern about the standards of administration and the respect for personality . . .²

According to the British North America Act municipalities are creatures of the provinces and the latter have it within their power to raise standards of administration and levels of assistance. Some provinces have chosen to provide social assistance directly. When this is the practice, and it is felt that social assistance is inadequate, the church and its members may need to address themselves to provincial authorities. Some provinces have chosen not to exercise power granted under the British North America Act and have left the administration of social assistance to local municipalities. This suggests that a province may need to give municipalities the financial means to develop trained staff, good administration, and to provide adequate social assistance. Where standards have been set by the province and where means are provided by legislation, it may be necessary for local parishes alone or in collaboration with other voluntary groups to encourage municipalities to take advantage of available provisions according to legislation. Informed concern about the administration of social assistance at all levels of government is needed to achieve the quality and quantity of assistance intended in the Canada Assistance Plan.

SUMMARY OF THE CANADA ASSISTANCE PLAN

(Public Welfare, Bulletin of the Canadian Public Welfare Association, a division of the Canadian Welfare Council, 55 Parkdale, Ottawa 3, Canada, Vol. XIII, No. 1, October 1966, pp. 5-7)

PURPOSE

The purpose of the Canadian Assistance Plan is set forth in its preamble as follows: ". . . the Parliament of Canada, recognizing that the provision of adequate assistance to and in respect of persons in need and the prevention and removal of the causes of poverty and dependence on public assistance are the concern of all Canadians, is desirous of encouraging the future development and extension of assistance and welfare services programs throughout Canada by sharing more fully with the provinces in the cost thereof." The Plan, which received Royal Assent on 15 July, 1966, has effect, retroactively, to 1 April, 1966.

COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

The Plan differs from existing federal-provincial shared-cost assistance programs in several important respects. It is designed to assist the provinces in the development of an integrated, comprehensive general assistance program. There are now four federal-provincial assistance programs--for the aged, the blind, the disabled, and the unemployed. The CAP will enable the provinces, at their option, to combine these all into a single program and administrative framework. Recipients may be transferred to the new program only if they receive comparable or improved benefits.

The definition of assistance includes food, shelter, clothing, fuel, utilities, household supplies and personal requirements, items incidental to carrying on a trade or other employment, care in a home for special care, travel and transportation, funerals and burials, health care services, and welfare services purchased by or at the request of a provincially approved agency

²Board of Social Ministry, Lutheran Church in America, *The Church and Social Welfare*, 1964, p.29.

ASSISTANCE ON THE BASIS OF NEED

Under the Plan, assistance is to be determined by an assessment of a person's requirements as well as income, rather than, as in the present "categorical" programs, on the basis of income only. In contrast to existing means-test programs which set arbitrary ceilings on income and assistance payments, the Plan enables the Federal government to share with the provinces the cost of meeting need, whatever it may be. It provides for federal sharing in the costs of payments supplementary to benefits paid under programs such as Old Age Security and the Canada Pension Plan, as well as to persons receiving assistance under the "categorical" programs. There is no bar in the Plan to supplementation of income from employment.

A person in need is defined as one who because of inability to obtain employment, loss of the principal family provider, illness, disability, age or "other cause of any kind acceptable to the provincial authority" is found to be unable (on the basis of a test of need) "to provide adequately for himself, or himself and his dependents, or any of them." The definition also includes individuals under age 21 in the care of or custody or under the control or supervision of a child welfare authority (designated by the province) or a foster child as defined by regulation.

MOTHER'S ALLOWANCE

For the first time the Federal Government will share the cost of aid to needy mothers and their dependent children under provincial mother's allowance programs. It is estimated that this will extend federal aid to some 200,000 mothers and children.

HEALTH SERVICES

Another innovation is provision for federal sharing in the costs of health services to persons in need. To the extent that these are provided by provinces, sharing will cover "medical, surgical, obstetrical, optical, dental and nursing services, and includes drugs, dressings, prosthetic appliances, and any other items or health services necessary to or commonly associated with the provision of any such specified services." Hospital care is excluded because provision is made for it under federal-provincial hospital insurance program.

ADMINISTRATION AND WELFARE SERVICES

The Plan also authorizes federal assistance with the costs of improving the administration of public assistance programs and extending associated welfare services. Welfare services are broadly defined as "services having as their object the lessening, removal or prevention of the causes and effects of poverty, child neglect or dependence on public assistance." The definition makes specific reference to rehabilitation services, case work, counselling, assessment and referral services, adoption services, homemaker, day care and similar services, community development services, consulting, research and evaluation services with respect to welfare programs, and administrative, secretarial and clerical services, including staff training related to any of the foregoing services or to the provision of assistance. However, services relating wholly or mainly to education or correction are excluded. Federal sharing is not restricted to services provided directly by provinces or municipalities, but includes those of private non-profit agencies designated by the province for the purpose of providing services.

The federal contribution will be made towards the costs of salary and travel for new staff employed subsequent to 1 April, 1966.

WORK ACTIVITY PROJECTS

Provision is made for special programs to help improve the motivation and work capacity of persons in need who have not been able to take full advantage of training opportunities or who have unusual difficulty in securing or retaining employment.

INDIAN WELFARE

Federal-provincial agreements are also authorized under the Plan to provide for the extension of provincial welfare programs to Indians living on reserves or an unorganized territory in the provinces. Agreements of this nature apply to an Indian Band only with the consent of the Band Council.

IMPLEMENTATION

Federal officials are now engaged in discussions with their provincial counterparts leading toward the development of regulations to the statute.