

# Families Shirk Legal Duty To Take Care of Their Own

## Welfare Law Widely Disregarded By Relatives Able to Pay; Checkups Inadequate

This series of articles on public welfare follows six months of research and study by the staff of The News, including service by a reporter as a caseworker for the Erie County Department of Social Welfare.

The welfare problem, not confined to Erie County, is growing more costly each year. This series, spotlighting the system, is intended as an aid to the many dedicated persons who are struggling to confine welfare to the needy and thus benefit the taxpayer.

By ED MAY

**"WE PAY** our taxes. Let the Government take care of them."

That statement is costing you thousands of extra welfare dollars every year.

In Erie County today and in other New York counties, there are thousands of men and women who weekly deduct part of their take home pay and give it to a needy parent, an elderly aunt or children whose early marriage is being threatened by financial shoals.

You may be one of them and you do it "because it's only right."

But there are others whose charity never began at home or anywhere else.

### THE LAW SAYS THIS:

"The husband, wife, father, mother, grandparent or child of a recipient of public assistance . . . shall, if of sufficient ability, be responsible for the support of such person."

But like a number of laws governing welfare, there occasionally is a wide gulf between what it says and what it does.

"If we enforced the laws we had, we wouldn't need a residency law," is the way an Erie County Department of Social Welfare official put it when he spoke to our caseworker training class.

Because caseworkers are so pressed for time, the majority of these "responsible relative" contacts are made by the mailman.

**HE DELIVERS** a form letter and a four-page questionnaire which requests a detailed picture of the person's financial situation.

## Peculiar Diet

Special to The Buffalo News & North American Newspaper Alliance

WASHINGTON, June 11—

There are organisms that live on super gas. They prefer jet airplane fuel. They are a considerable problem for jet aviation, a Navy report says.

The organisms are minute plants, microscopic bacteria and fungi. It isn't the considerable amount of fuel they "drink up." The trouble is the bacteria are "highly effective in clogging various filters and strainers of the aircraft as well as transport facilities through which this fuel passes."

The organisms also require a little water in their diet.

"In principle," the report says, "the solution is simple—rigorous exclusion of water. But this is probably beyond practical realization."

Among schemes proposed is that of getting the bacteria and fungi to fight each other for their strange food supply, thus killing each other off.

Sometimes this "detailed picture" is summarized with a verbal snapshot like this:

"Can't help. Have enough trouble paying my own bills."

In many cases this capsule comment is true. But whether it is or isn't is not checked often enough.

"I've barely got enough time to drop in on the client without visiting half-a-dozen of his relatives," a caseworker said recently.

Because relatives are checked via the correspondence route, some of them have ignored form letters as blithely as they throw away third class mail.

**IN ONE OF THESE CASES** a client's father received five such questionnaires over a two-year period from three different caseworkers. A single one has yet to be answered.

However, the case record contains some sidelights on this subject.

In March 1959 Mr. S., the client, was picked up for being drunk. When the police arrested him they found there was a welfare fraud warrant demanding his arrest. The fraud, more than a year old, occurred during an earlier time when Mr. S. was receiving the public's charity.

He was held in \$1000 bail. His father promptly put up the bail money and hired a lawyer to defend his son.

**A FEW MONTHS** ago when I made a home call on Mr. S. I asked him about the modern furniture and expensive television set in the house.

"Oh, my father has helped me pay for that," was the answer.

But the Welfare Department has yet to find out the father's ability to pay the money the taxpayers now are handing out.

Or take the case of Mr. W., a 23-year-old father of two children who came to the Welfare Department in May 1958 after his unemployment insurance checks were exhausted.

He has been "on the welfare" continuously except from July to November 1958 when he received extended unemployment benefits.

**WHEN HE RE-APPLIED** for welfare help on Nov. 5, he lived in a house owned by his in-laws.

Fifteen days later he moved. The case record cites his previous living with in-laws and makes this observation:

"However, rent was not paid to legally responsible relatives and caseworker feels that it is for this reason that Mr. and Mrs. W. Moved."

Mr. Hagerty said Mrs. Eisen-On Dec. 2 the case worker interviewed the in-laws who

said they couldn't contribute to their children's need. They refused to permit Mr. W. to move into the upstairs empty flat "since this (Welfare) Department will not pay rent to legally responsible relatives."

"Mrs. G. stated that her daughter and son-in-law were entitled to public assistance, as she and her husband pay property taxes."

**THIS INVESTIGATION** also brought to light that on May 20, 1958, Mr. W. had taken out \$10,000 worth of life insurance on himself and his family.

This was 11 days after he first was accepted for welfare aid. He said the \$11.24 monthly premiums were paid by his mother-in-law.

Because of the questionable factors surrounding this case, a conference was held with higher welfare officials. It produced this:

**"DECISION WAS** that case was to be opened for a short term only and that client was to be specifically informed that this department expected him to find employment within three months. Mr. W. when informed of this became extremely belligerent and hung up on case worker."

The case was re-opened Dec. 1, 1958.

One year and five months later Mr. W. still was receiving \$32.45 every two weeks from your tax money.

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MONDAY—Dependent children.