

Welfare Records Stained With the Blot of Cheating

Concealed Car Ownership, Unreported Income Among the Violations Of Long-Termers

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 officials who are struggling to confine welfare to the needy and thus benefit the taxpayer. All names of clients and places are fictitious to comply with New York State law.

By ED MAY

The small room is neat—the lonely orderliness of a man who has an hour or two to see that the towel hanging from the white medicine cabinet is folded just right.

A large alarm clock ticks so loud that it becomes almost an overpowering sound. On the yellow walls are a picture and a calendar, and on the dresser are an open can of peaches and a framed wedding picture.

"What do you do all day?" you ask the man sitting on the bed?

"Read and just sit around, I guess."

"Do any of your relatives come and visit you?"

"No . . . nobody comes . . . just the caseworkers."

Works Sometimes

For a moment you want to feel sorry until you remember the man's case record in the files of the Welfare Department.

It's a document of cheating and lying that dates back to 1927.

Although Charles S. has worked for periods, he has known 38 different case workers in his lifetime. Just a few agencies listed under his name in the Social Service Exchange could serve as chapter headings to his story:

1914—Charity Organization Society.

1927—Department of Social Welfare.

1929—Catholic Charities Family Department.

1932—Children's Court.

1934—Legal Aid Bureau.

They chronicle private charity dollars and public tax dollars, the arrests of his children and the help he needed to get them out of trouble.

Asks "Personal Favor"

Interspersed are various attempts to use political cudgels to get more welfare money. Several letters in his file from a Cheektowaga supervisor end like this:

"I will consider it a personal favor if you can arrange to help this family in this matter as I feel that this is really a very deserving case."

When Charles S.'s wife felt the Welfare Department wasn't generous enough, she tried to work through the State Department of Education. It discouraged her with this reply:

"There are some things in your letter suggesting that you are attempting to use school attendance as a club to compel

welfare assistance. This you may not do . . . it is my advice that you send your children to school at once.

Wife Made Complaints

"They cannot all suddenly be so utterly destitute as to make this quite impossible. I also advise that you take up the situation again with your welfare representative. You will get on much more successfully by working with this man than in any other way."

Several notations in the record show that Mrs. S. made various complaints that she did not have enough clothing to send her children to school. The caseworker's report during this time includes this statement:

"Family had made a great many demands on Mr. Smith (the caseworker) requesting clothing and at one time Mr. Smith searched their house and found the attic to be well-equipped with clothing, as they had a great supply up there.

"Mr. S. was furious that visitor went through his house and said he was going to have him arrested."

Cases Not Peculiar

Today the man in the yellow-walled room is alone. His wife and children left him years ago. He receives \$31.10 from the Welfare Department every month to supplement \$61 Social Security.

If each of his eight children mentioned in the case record would give him 87 cents a week, Charles S. wouldn't be on welfare.

Cases like these are not peculiar to Erie County. Reports from other welfare districts in New York State indicate similar welfare longevity records.

They record generations of welfare recipients in one family tree. The story of Tony P. of Buffalo, is one of those. It represents four generations.

During the depression Tony

P.'s father was briefly on relief.

Used Subterfuge on Car

Tony has received public assistance almost all of his adult life. His son was on welfare in Erie, Pa. A daughter, living at home now, gets monthly Aid to Dependent Children checks for herself and Tony's grandson.

Here are excerpts from this relief history:

1932—Visitor found man had a car licensed in his grandmother's name. Visitor knows that the man drives car and is out nights with it. Man doing window washing but denies it.

1938—Mr. P. had a call for a WPA assignment but stated he did not get the card. The visitor checked with the work relief clerk and found this to be untrue.

1940—He shows complete dependence on the department although it is rather obvious that he is well able to help himself. It also appears that throughout his contacts with the department his parents have been able to assist him but have not been requested to do so.

1948—Anonymous telephone call from a person who said Tony P. had moved from Y St. to X St. . . . sold the property on Y St. . . . had purchased property on X St., but had placed it in his father's name. Mr. P. had bragged that were it not for the financial aid he had received from this department from time to time he would not have been able to purchase the property.

1954—Worker received A-2 (resource report) stating that Tony P. sold his 1947 car for about \$25, about two months ago. Mr. P. had informed worker that he was given \$12.50 for this.

The pages go on and on in this case-history. Occasionally Mr. P.'s checks were shut off when his various swindles came to light. At no time does the record show he was prosecuted for them.

Today your tax dollars still go to Tony P., his wife, two daughters and a grandson.

Collects, Also Works

Early this year another anonymous tip was added to the story. This one was sent to the special investigators. It said, in part:

"This is a letter to inform you about one of your cases. Their name is Mr. and Mrs. Tony P. He collects checks off of the welfare and he also works. The house he lives in belongs to him but he gets around it by having it in a lawyer's name.

"I hope you don't take this letter as a crank letter. This is the first I have ever written. It makes me mad to have him drunk and fighting, bragging to everyone at the bar about how he is making a chump out of the welfare.

"To think of all the people that really need it."

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NEXT—Another phase of the problem.