

YOU MAY QUOTE 300 WORDS

## A Reader's Digest

REPRINT

# Children Without Fathers

BY CHARLES STEVENSON



THE READER'S DIGEST • PLEASANTVILLE, NEW YORK



# Children Without Fathers

## *The Shocking Truth About the Aid to Dependent Children Welfare Program*

BY CHARLES STEVENSON



THE FEDERAL government's well-intended Aid to Dependent Children program has become a tragic moral and economic problem of the first magnitude.

I have traveled from coast to coast in the past year, interviewing local welfare workers and following four state-government investigations of the program. On the basis of this accumulation of evidence it can only be concluded that the federally subsidized ADC relief rolls are contributing to debauchery and fostering a demoralizing dependency on government handouts. Even Health, Education and Welfare Secretary Abraham Ribicoff acknowledges that "second- or third-generation people are on welfare," and says it is "a discredit to our society that we have not provided a system which helps succeeding generations to become self-supporting." It is indeed,

No one would argue with the hu-

manitarian aims of the Aid to Dependent Children program. First set up 26 years ago, it was designed to help mothers who, widowed, or deserted or divorced by missing husbands, could not support their young children. It was an effort to keep children in the care of deserving mothers, rather than place them in foster homes. In a large number of cases ADC still performs this necessary service to worthy but needy families. But over the years—with overt support from the Washington officials in charge—the program has actually functioned in such a way as to encourage illegitimacy and fraud, and it has stifled individual initiative toward moral or financial self-improvement.

### One Third Illegitimate

CALIFORNIA's troubles with ADC typify our present federal-state welfare apparatus everywhere. Within recent months a blue-ribbon com-

mittee of the state senate has discovered that 300,000 children and adults in the state are on ADC; that one out of every 26 children is on ADC; and that almost one third of these are illegitimate! One out of every four ADC families in California has been on the rolls five or more years, and the losses through chiseling are estimated as high as 15 percent of the ADC budget.

### Moral and Economic Irresponsibility

AFTER hearing testimony by local welfare directors, district attorneys, caseworkers and judges, the committee finds that the ADC program is "almost completely lacking in maintaining the community's moral standards, including every adult's responsibility to support himself and his family." The senators reported that ADC has been "significantly changed from its original intent, providing not only for those children whose parents *cannot* support them, but also assuming the responsibility of parents who *will not* support their children." Their grave warning: "Society is running the immediate danger of being responsible for rearing a whole new generation of children in an atmosphere of moral and economic irresponsibility."

The professional welfare worker who runs California's ADC program, one of the nation's largest, is equally concerned. "There is far too little effective attention given to the conditions under which children are

being raised and maintained with the help of ADC funds, and to the welfare of the children themselves," declares State Social Welfare Director John M. Wedemeyer. He adds that in 10,000 to 20,000 (a third of the total) ADC families in California, children "are being exposed to immoral living conditions."

Indictments such as these are possible because the federal government insists that every community adhere to Washington-approved statewide "uniform" regulations or face a cut-off of federal "matching funds"! This insistence weakens the authority of local welfare officials and prevents them from dealing with each recipient according to his individual problems.

Most of the adults on ADC are under-educated and unskilled, genuinely unfortunate. They need personalized assistance and rehabilitation. But the ADC program as administered from Washington encourages nothing more than a cash handout. The record shows that many recipients are being pushed into degradation by Washington's reluctance to permit local officials to help them solve their problems.

### Countless Abuses

In San Diego a jeweler phoned the authorities to protest that a woman had come into his shop and bought three watches with ADC checks which obviously were "not going for the relief of the destitute situation of her children." Countless



such abuses turn up. The state senate committee found that ADC checks given mothers "to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of dependent children" are too often squandered for personal purposes or shared with an "unrelated male in the home."

"We have cases in which the family was receiving its grant regularly and yet neighbor families were actually feeding and clothing the children, and the mother was using the money entirely for her own benefit," testified Leslie Pryde, chairman of Butte County's board of supervisors.

One obvious remedy is to control the spending of such people, giving them vouchers or paying all their bills to ensure that ADC funds given in the name of children are used for their benefit. However, the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare won't permit this.

### Penalized for Working

"ASSISTANCE comes to needy persons as a right," insists HEW's Bureau of Public Assistance handbook, used by all state welfare organizations as their bible. "The right carries with it the individual's freedom to manage his affairs; to decide what use of his assistance check will best serve his interests. . . . *Federal participation will be denied if there is any requirement that the recipient submit receipts showing how he has spent any part of his assistance payment.*"

California's legislators asked that Congress require HEW to permit controlled payments where they are essential to the proper care of children. Nothing happened.

Consider how another HEW doctrine further stifles initiative and fosters dole dependency. Today 35 percent of the women working in America are mothers. Despite this statistic, HEW's handbook encourages the ADC mother *not* to work because "the resulting nerve strain may affect her contribution to industry as well as to the well-being of her family."

Says the California committee: "The best interests of the children demand that there be an effort on both the mother's and the welfare agency's part to have her achieve partial if not complete self-support." Washington can't see it this way. If the mother earns any money, the amount is deducted from her ADC budget.

But what about the teen-agers in an ADC family? Shouldn't they, at least, be encouraged to earn in ways that wouldn't interfere with school? The senators asked this question of State Welfare Director Wedemeyer.

"Under the federal rules a boy can't save his money for the future," he replied. "There is no incentive for him to earn, even on a summer job. If he does save, all it does is cut down the family relief budget."

"If he were to have a paper route or something of that kind," one astounded senator cut in, "even

up until he was 21, that amount would—"

"—still be deducted," said Wedemeyer.

It is obvious that in such circumstances mothers don't encourage their children to work. So the committee members formally asked that Congress compel HEW to permit children to keep at least part of their earnings. Again Washington failed to heed.

### The Golden West

BECAUSE California's ADC payments rank among the most generous in the land, migrants come in from the less well-endowed states and draw on ADC. In an effort to discourage this practice, waiting periods have been prescribed for newcomers before they can qualify for ADC. However, HEW's handbook recommends that all states "eliminate from their plans all eligibility requirements that relate to length of residence." So the California restrictions are not strong enough to prevent the would-be beneficiaries from discovering loopholes.

Thus the Los Angeles *Times* reports that a woman from Alabama arrived at the Los Angeles County General Hospital just in time to give birth to her child. "The infant, being a native of California if only by hours, was entitled to state support. Then, shortly after leaving the hospital, the woman sent to Alabama for her half-dozen other children. They too got on the program."

With such relief abuses and pampering condoned, urged and even decreed by Washington, is it any wonder that the program breeds its own brand of government-sponsored degeneracy?

"A third of the ADC families are chronically dependent," reports Newton R. Holcomb, director of the notably progressive social-welfare department of the San Francisco Bay area's Santa Clara County. "Some are second-generation cases in which the children of former welfare recipients in turn are dependent upon public aid. Most have lost their self-esteem and motivation. Many are known to the juvenile court, adult probation, the jails."

The investigating committee adds: "Evidence shows there are a number of mothers who have never known any means of support other than the receipt of ADC funds. These mothers represent a second generation of recipients, their children the third. A few cases of the fourth generation of recipients were presented to the committee staff, and one case of a 14-year-old girl whose baby, when born, would be the fifth generation."

### It Pays to Separate

THE administration of ADC actually encourages divorce, desertion and chiseling. "I attribute the increasing load to a moral degeneration of the classes involved," states District Attorney Willis Haines of Shasta County. "An average janitor employed by Shasta County will take



home approximately \$232 a month. If he had seven children and was separated from his wife, she could receive \$343 a month plus medical attention from ADC. This fact tends to break up the home. When they have a little strife in the family, the mother says, 'Well, I'm leaving. I'll go on ADC and make more money than you ever brought home!'"

According to the testimony of Judge Roger A. Pfaff, of the Los Angeles domestic relations court, one wife divorced her husband because ADC pays her \$380 a month tax-free, whereas he earned but \$230. When a mother with five children and an ADC allowance of \$304 a month wanted Judge Pfaff to hurry up her divorce so she could catch a train for Phoenix, he asked who was paying for her transportation. "Oh, I'm using that state-aid money," she replied. Judge Pfaff asked, "Los Angeles County is a wonderful place to live, isn't it?" She grinned. "It sure is, Judge."

When money is handed out in this fashion, chisellers are quick to get their share by faking desertion. Investigators checking the registration of automobiles parked near a Los Angeles housing project flushed scores of car owners whose "desertion" was qualifying tenant families for ADC! All over the United States, cities find it necessary to hunt down chisellers in this manner.

### Daisy Chain

THE lax ADC system breeds generations of dependency. Consider

one case, which turned up recently in the San Francisco Bay area county of Contra Costa. The case, described by the district attorney to a U.S. congressional committee, is an ADC daisy chain so extensive that no one has been able to add up all its costs and ramifications. It began in 1951 when the husband of a family on relief left his wife, who started drawing \$203 a month in the name of her four children. Two years later she began living with another man and proceeded to add three illegitimates to her brood; they are now good for \$246 a month.

Meanwhile, the oldest son in her first batch of children, whom we will identify as A, grew up, married a 17-year-old girl, B, and left her on ADC with three children while he went to live with another girl, C, who produced an illegitimate and at last checkup was pregnant again. Then he left her. So now both B and C are on ADC for a total of \$398 a month, with B on the way to adding to her ADC bounty because she has since taken up with another man, D, and is pregnant by him.

Also, B's sister E is receiving ADC for two children, one fathered by a man, F, who is the absent parent in two other ADC cases involving five assorted legitimate and illegitimate children. Meanwhile, C's parents have been on ADC for ten years with five children, the oldest of whom, G, at age 20 has just had an illegitimate child who nets her an additional person-

al ADC payment of \$167 a month.

The second child, H, of the original mother was married at age 15 and went on ADC after her husband left her with two children, her grant later being increased because of an added illegitimate child by another man, I. (Incidentally, I is the absent father in three other ADC cases, in each of which he had one illegitimate child by different women.) Furthermore, H has produced a fourth and fifth child, both illegitimate, by a third man, so that she now nets \$291 a month for herself and her children under ADC.

"Our dilemma," sums up John A. Nejedly, the Contra Costa district attorney, "is that after nine years of ADC our original four children have grown to include 17 with the prospect that they might eventually produce 40 children in the next generation and an even larger number in the fourth generation."

### What to Do About It?

IN THE same county the district attorney reported that a woman with four children has been receiving relief and has since produced two illegitimates by different men. Disqualified from receiving assistance for the latest child because she refused to help the authorities determine which accused man was the father, she went to Texas for a vacation and put in a bill to ADC for a baby-sitter for the time she was away; meanwhile, the state's social welfare board, carrying out a Washington policy, ordered the county to

reinstate the withheld payments. If Contra Costa loses the case, now in the courts for two years, it will owe this woman an extra \$2500!

Can't *something* be done to force parents to spend their ADC grants in behalf of the children in whose name the funds are handed out? A number of California counties prevailed upon the courts to take on some of these children as court wards, then remand them to their parents with instructions to live up to court orders for decency and child protection or be thrown in jail for contempt. All this helped for a while. But as soon as HEW in Washington discovered what was happening, it ordered the state social welfare department to compel every county to abandon these legal procedures and return all funds to the parents to spend as they saw fit. The parents were to live their own lives, however depraved, regardless of the effect on the children.

Is it any wonder that approximately 26,000 of the 70,000 illegitimate children on ADC in California were conceived while their mothers were already collecting ADC in behalf of previous children, that the paternity of close to 40 percent of these illegitimates has never been established, and that in nearly three quarters of the cases the mother never lived with the father at all?

Everyone sympathizes with mothers who are victims of circumstances, but as Sen. Herman E. Talmadge, of Georgia, said: "One illegitimate child might be evidence of an honest



## Poll Indicates That Fathers Should Pay for Unwed Mothers' Relief

A RECENT Gallup poll asked this question:

*"Sometimes unwed mothers on relief continue to have illegitimate children, and get relief money for each new child born. What do you think should be done in the case of these women?"*

The reply of one person interviewed was typical of many.

"They should be allowed one mistake. But, then, by golly, there should be no more relief after that." Only about one person in ten would be in favor of increasing the relief aid for each new child.

But while most persons interviewed would "get tough" with the mothers, the concern is virtually universal that "something" be done to care for the children. What that "something" should be varies greatly. A number of persons feel that the children should be put in state- or community-run homes. Others believe that the solution is to put such children up for adoption.

One specific solution—which has been proposed by some authorities—is

mistake; two or more seem to indicate a habit that should not be encouraged at public expense."

### A Nation-Wide Problem

THE situation in California is just one example of what is taking place throughout the nation.

Between 1945 and 1961 ADC enrollment jumped from 701,000 to well over 3,333,000—more than a fourfold increase in dependency during a period of unprecedented prosperity in which the population of the United States increased by only 30 percent. One out of every 25 children in the United States is on ADC. And precisely in line with California's experience, a survey by HEW shows that a third of all these ADC children are illegitimate, and that one out of every four of these illegitimates is born while the mother is already on ADC

and being paid for a previous child.

In New Jersey a legislative inquiry got under way two years ago. Now the long, intensive digging has revealed appalling conditions. In Newark a woman hit the \$61,500 relief jackpot by producing 14 illegitimate children. That's what taxpayers were forced to ladle out for her brood, including three grandchildren. (Her daughters, raised on ADC, have already produced three illegitimate "dependent" children.)

Another New Jersey woman with 15 illegitimates has been legally drawing thousands a year; scores of others receive from \$500 to \$700 a month—all tax-free. "This program is putting a premium on immorality," says State Senator Anthony J. Grossi, the investigating committee chairman. "The more illegitimate children a woman has, the more money she gets, not to mention

that there be a court order requiring the unwed mother to name the father, who then must pay the extra relief costs for the child. Such a plan would meet with great favor from the public.

The 1681 adults interviewed were asked:

*"Do you think it is a good idea or a poor idea to get a court order to require the mother of an illegitimate child to name the father and then to require him to pay the extra relief costs for the child?"*

The results nation-wide: . . .

Good idea . . . . . 73%

Poor idea . . . . . 16%

No opinion . . . . . 11%

Judging by reactions, the American public is of a mind to take a new look at current public-welfare programs. The public is highly in favor, for example, of giving more control of relief programs to local communities. (This was a basic point in the fight between Newburgh, N. Y., officials and New York State authorities.)

— New York Herald Tribune

often being supplied with free food and clothing."

In Portland, Ore., Judge Virgil Langtry became so concerned at the ADC child-welfare cases piling up in his court that he wrote an open letter to the newspapers. One day he heard 24 cases involving 24 mothers with 124 children, 95 of them illegitimate, representing 77 different fathers. All of the children over 14 years old were already known to be delinquent, and 15 of the young girls had already given birth to illegitimate children.

### Cash Without Strings

IN Chicago, seven out of every ten ADC families are being paid for illegitimates. And Chicago's largest single class of beneficiaries results from men who have moved on after a less-than-three-month relationship with the women who

later bear their children. (A woman, age 26, at the county hospital just after the birth of her sixth son, had difficulty remembering who the five fathers were.)

Despite these deplorable findings, attempts to evolve reforms result in obstruction or discouragement by HEW. Eight Wisconsin counties and the Wisconsin state legislature adopted resolutions calling on Congress to allow the counties to demand an accounting of funds. "In many cases cash disbursed to mothers to feed, clothe and house their children has been squandered in taverns and uncalled-for purchases of luxury items, thereby depriving the children of the necessities of life," one typical resolution reads. But they plead in vain.

In Washington, D.C., a mother of seven made a practice of sending her children out begging while she



spent the ADC checks to feed steaks to her paramour. Federal policy prevented welfare workers from compelling her to spend the money properly.

Why this obstructionism by HEW? Why this incessant campaign to keep people on the welfare rolls without emphasis on rehabilitation? I have put these questions to relief administrators all over the country. The common answer is that back in the 1930's the schools of social work taught that all persons who lacked the world's goods were entitled to receive theirs in cash from the government. Given this money without strings attached, they would somehow solve their own problems and emerge as good mothers and fathers.

This philosophy has long since been disproved by experience. But once entrenched, the federal bureaucracy has not changed its viewpoint—although many local welfare workers are deeply worried.

*"Continued dependence upon relief induces a spiritual and moral disintegration fundamentally destructive to the national fiber; to dole out relief in this way is to administer a narcotic, a subtle destroyer of the human spirit,"* said President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the man who started it all, in a message to Congress January 4, 1935.

We should act on this quarter-century-old warning before it is too late. We must curtail this burgeoning dependency, instead of creating more. We must stop coddling par-

ents at the expense of the children, insist that money given in the name of children be spent for them. We must send chiseling parents to jail, even if it means finding new homes for the children who, God knows, need a decent, moral climate in which to grow up healthfully.

The California legislature report calls for parents to be "compelled" to accept responsibility for their children. All concerned should heed the following words from the report. They provide the sensible guidance we need if we are to return this program to its rightful role:

"Welfare personnel tend to act as if society alone is responsible for the plight of the individuals within their charge. They speak incessantly of the needs of their wards but rarely of their responsibilities. . . . Child support is, after all, primarily an obligation of parents and not of government. Our society places no limit by law on parents begetting as many children as they please. But society does quite properly impose upon these parents the fundamental duty of supporting the children they do beget."

Only if this philosophy is put into practice can we begin to do what else is necessary to bring common sense to our vast and ever-expanding relief program.

---

In a forthcoming article, Charles Stevenson will report on the various efforts being undertaken by cities, states and counties to administer help constructively.