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MEMO NO. 21-67
October 27, 1967

TO: Participating Organizations
FROM: Arnold Aronson, Secretary

A SOCIAL SECURITY BILL THAT PUNISHES THE POOR

What began as an attempt by Congress to modernize the Social Security Act has, in the bill the House approved, resulted in several proposals that seem both backward and punitive.

Some of the House proposals come close to taking the long discredited view that the proper way to handle welfare is to insult the people who need it and try to push or scare them off the rolls.

When Newburgh, New York, in 1962, proposed to cut off assistance to recipients who refuse to take any jobs offered to them, it was excoriated throughout the nation for its medieval attitude. Yet the House-passed bill (H. R. 12080) has a provision that would authorize much that sort of treatment to dependent mothers and their children.

When Louisiana sought to cut off aid to mothers who gave birth to illegitimate children after going on relief, the Department of Health, Education and Welfare ruled the plan invalid. Yet the House, by placing a ceiling on aid to needy children seems to be trying, indirectly, to put its own limits on births.

The social security amendments are now before the Senate and it is here that we must concentrate our efforts for improvements in the 32-year-old statute that will make it responsive to the present needs of American society.

A Loophole for Hospitals

In one of our recent MEMOs (No. 19-67, October 9), we sounded the alarm in regard to an amendment that was not in the House-passed measure but was to be proposed as an addition to the bill during current consideration of it by the Senate

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AMALGAMATED CLOTHING WORKERS OF AMERICA
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AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION
AMERICAN ETHICAL UNION
AMERICAN FEDERATION OF LABOR — CONGRESS OF INDUSTRIAL ORGANIZATIONS
AMERICAN FEDERATION OF STATE COUNTY & MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES
AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS
AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE
AMERICAN JEWISH CONGRESS
AMERICAN NEWSPAPER GUILD
AMERICAN VETERANS COMMITTEE
AMERICANS FOR DEMOCRATIC ACTION
ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE OF B'NAI B'RITH
A. PHILIP RANDOLPH INSTITUTE
BISHOP'S COMMITTEE FOR THE SPANISH SPEAKING
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CHRISTIAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH
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CHURCH WOMEN UNITED
CITIZENS LOBBY FOR FREEDOM & FAIR PLAY
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DELTA SIGMA THETA SORORITY
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HADASSAH
HOTEL AND RESTAURANT EMPLOYEES AND BARTENDERS INTERNATIONAL UNION
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NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES—DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL JUSTICE
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PIONEER WOMEN, AMERICAN AFFAIRS
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UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH — OFFICE OF CHURCH & SOCIETY
UNITED RUBBER WORKERS
UNITED STATES NATIONAL STUDENT ASSOCIATION
UNITED STATES YOUTH COUNCIL
UNITED STEELWORKERS OF AMERICA
UNITED SYNAGOGUE OF AMERICA
UNITED TRANSPORT SERVICE EMPLOYEES
UNIVERSITY CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT
WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR PEACE & FREEDOM
WORKERS DEFENSE LEAGUE
WORKMEN'S CIRCLE
YOUNG WOMEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION OF THE USA
ZETA PHI BETA SORORITY

Finance Committee. This was the amendment offered by Senator Herman Talmadge (D-Ga.) that would enable patients to receive Federal medical benefits in hospitals that are not in compliance with the Civil Rights Act of 1964. We pointed out, then, the obvious danger this poses to adequate enforcement of Title VI of the Act, the section that enables the Federal government to cut off funds to any Federally-assisted program that discriminates.

A Compromise Effected

As this MEMO is written, a compromise appears to have been worked out between HEW and Senator Talmadge. Patients in non-complying hospitals would still be reimbursed, although the percentage of reimbursement no longer appears to be fixed. But instead of allowing such reimbursements for a period running from the start of Medicare in 1966 to December 31, 1968, the compromise would move the cutoff date for such treatment to December 31, 1967.

While this is an improvement, the amendment still opens a loophole in Title VI enforcement and should still be opposed.

New Burdens on the Poor

While the Talmadge amendment is the one that deals most specifically with a matter of civil rights, other proposals in the House bill would fall so heavily upon the urban poor and their large minority groups, that it seems incumbent upon the Leadership Conference to oppose them.

At the last meeting of the Washington representatives there was unanimous agreement that in addition to opposing the Talmadge amendment, the Conference should express its opposition to three others:

1. Compulsory Work and Training Programs

States would be required to set up work and training programs and adults and children over 16, who are not in school, would be required to participate or face the loss of assistance. To mothers getting help under the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program, this provision would come as a blow. They would be forced to take jobs or training even though, in many cases, there was no adequate day-care for their children and even though it was more important for them to stay home and care for their youngsters.

What's more, there are no assurances that the training would be thorough or lead to anything. It could very well force them, in the end, to work in dead-end jobs for low wages. And certainly forcing people to either work or lose the help they need for themselves and their children returns welfare to about the level of the mid-Victorian poorhouses.

2. Limits on Aid to Children

The House bill would limit assistance under the AFDC program to only the percentage of children in broken homes, as related to all children under 21 in each state, that was receiving help in January 1967. For instance, if three percent of the

minor children in a state were in broken homes and on AFDC in January, the state could not get Federal funds for more than three percent in subsequent years, no matter how large an increase there might be in the number of poor, fatherless youngsters living in it.

Hardest hit by this proposal would, again, be the people least able to bear the burdens it would impose -- the migrants coming from the rural South to the cities. For those states in which such migrants usually settle, the choice would be bleak: either to assume the increased costs of caring for the destitute or to simply ignore them and invite further chaos.

3. Benefits

The House bill would increase social security benefits by only 12 1/2 percent and raises the minimum benefit from the present \$44 to only \$50. This is clearly insufficient to meet the needs of individuals and families whose incomes are already being eroded by inflation. The Administration proposal calls for a 15 percent across-the-board increase and a 59 percent increase in the minimum to \$70.

While many groups within the Leadership Conference feel even this increase is insufficient, they are willing to endorse it as the minimum amount. The Conference consensus covers the amendments outlined thus far.

There are other amendments in the bill that individual groups in the Leadership Conference oppose. One particularly, is the drastic restriction the House bill imposes on the new Medicaid (Title XIX) program of medical care for the needy. Income limits would be established at one-third over the AFDC payments level which would actually cut off from Medicaid eligibility welfare recipients in some states. The bill also permits states to cutback on the range of medical care services provided, including the possibility of providing neither hospital nor physician services if other less essential services are provided instead.

What Needs To Be Done

We urge all our participating organizations to join in opposing at least: the Talmadge amendment on hospitals; the mandatory work-training provisions and the freeze on the percentage of dependent children who can be helped. We should strongly urge substantially larger increases in social security benefits, both across the board and in the minimum payments.

Please write to members of the Senate Finance Committee (list attached) and urge them to vote against these and any other amendments that would lead us backward, plunge millions of poor people into despair and play into the hands of cynics who say Congress is unable to meet the pressing needs of our communities.

But please act now! To a growing and alarming extent, the War on Poverty appears to be shifting into a War on the Poor.

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