

Reorganization of the Social Welfare Network in Israel— Proposed Conceptual Frameworks

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Any attempt to redesign the network of social services in Israel, or in any country, must be prefaced with the understanding that these are political rather than professional decisions. Political considerations include such issues as responsibility for determining allocation of public funds, awarding civil service positions, and maintaining a positive profile in the public's eye and in coalition government. For these realistic reasons, many of the best suggestions of welfare consultants and social policy specialists have not, and cannot be implemented without endangering political balance of power. The classic example of this situation on the Israeli scene is the moratorium operating since 1972 concerning the implementation of the most significant recommendations of the prestigious Prime Minister's Commission on Disadvantaged youth (or as some call it, "The Katz Report" of 1972).

The Commission recommended to the Government that all income-maintenance functions be housed under "one roof," the establishment of uniform criterion for program eligibility, one administrative staff, and national, rather than local implementation. As a member of the Commission I would not be wrong in saying that the large majority of Commission members viewed the National Insurance Institute of the Ministry of Labor as the most appropriate roof for the income maintenance function, rather than the Ministry of Social Welfare. The political reality, however, would not allow transferring public welfare payments from the Ministry of Welfare, run by the National Religious Party, a crucial coalition partner in the government, to the Ministry of Labor, run by the alignment party, the largest partner to the government coalition.

So, political, not professional or even economic considerations, have shaped the present network of social service. What has been neglected throughout the years of political accommodation in Israeli welfare has been any serious attempt to reconceptualize the welfare network. Without a set, or opposing sets, of conceptual views our welfare programs will continue to develop on an ad-hoc, improvised basis, with intermittent inter- and intra-ministerial struggles for new territory and control over old turf. This alternative is costly for a small country with meager resources, and the cost in terms of human as well as financial waste can carry over several generations.

Antecedents to Present Public Welfare Services

There is little doubt that the present organization of public welfare services reflects the residual rather than the universal approach to social problems. That is, the social services are mobilized and called into operation only when problems occur, when a hole appears in the dike, when the major, "normal" social institutions do not succeed in handling certain individuals and groups. At that point social welfare services were created to care for the residual cases. The result of this conceptualization in Israel has been the creation, over 40 years ago, during the British Mandate, of the Welfare Department of the Vaad Haleumi, as a general wastebasket social agency for Jews who could not function without help from the rest of the Yishuv. Over the years the Ministry of Social Welfare, as successor and inheritor to the Welfare Department of the Vaad Haleumi, was traditionally apportioned to smaller, usually religious or left-of-center coalition parties with a presumed inherent

affinity for the unfortunate and disadvantaged. The larger political parties never viewed "welfare" as a significant economic portfolio and fully embraced the residual concept of social service. Also, welfare recipients never congealed into a significant voting block or pressure groups, and for the most part citizens were embarrassed to have to receive "charity." In the Jewish Israeli culture it is a blessing to give to the needy, but a curse to have to receive public assistance.

In recent years, primarily since the appearance of the Israeli Black Panthers in March, 1971, the whole issue of welfare and the disadvantaged has been linked to the fabric of the State, to the gap between the Sephardi (Middle-Eastern) and Ashkenazi (Western) Jews, and to a battle for reallocation of resources and power to influence social policy. There is a strong current in favor of bolstering the larger social institutions serving the disadvantaged and to widen their services, in order to make them more universally available, rather than strengthen and create even more ad-hoc, selective welfare services. Some have even recommended the abolishment of the Ministry of Welfare, *per se*, and its absorption by other Ministries.

It is appropriate, therefore, to look at some of the alternative models for restructuring the public welfare network, keeping in mind that without the proper political supports, little basic change will be possible.

Structural Alternatives

In my view, it is essential to move towards the universal concept of social service provision. In other words, functions related to provision of housing for the poor (rentals, mortgages, moving costs, etc.) should *not* be lodged in the public welfare offices. The same is true for basic health services to the poor and aged; these should be provided by the Health Ministry. Basic educational needs such as tuition subsidies, school books, uniforms, and even school social work should be provided by the Ministry of Education. Rehabilitation services to the poor and the handicapped

should be provided directly by the Ministry of Labor. And finally, the basic income maintenance function should be housed in the National Insurance Institute, or with the Income Tax Section of the Finance Ministry as part of a negative income tax program.

Perhaps, of all the changes proposed here, that related to income maintenance is the most discussed and controversial. For one thing, transferring public welfare grants from the Ministry of Welfare would mean "losing" nearly a third of the Ministry's budget. But it also would mean an end to the nearly sacred bond between financial assistance and treatment. Several generations of social workers in Israel have been schooled in their formative years of professional education on the manipulation of clients toward treatment and behavioral change by the awarding or withholding of financial assistance, or at best, by the sophisticated use of supplementary support. These concepts have since been attacked by clients' rights groups, social work educators, and civil rights movements in the major Western countries, and, in fact, assistance payments have been separated from social service for several years in parts of Israel and the U.S., and for even longer in Great Britain.

But in Israel, the myth still widely persists that everyone needing money also needs "treatment." The concept is hard to eliminate. It is accepted particularly with regard to supplementary assistance ("special assistance" in Israeli terminology) where the social worker can utilize "professional judgment" to provide or purchase concrete services over and beyond that included in the basic welfare grant. However, it is entirely possible to define clear *criteria* for supplementary assistance and to provide these grants via the National Insurance Institute. The irony is that since social worker judgment is now used as the primary method for determining a client's need for special assistance (mainly to stretch inadequate budgets among equally needy clients), the removal of supplementary assistance from public welfare offices threatens to eliminate a major area of professional judgment. Perhaps

a compromise is needed where the National Insurance Institute would establish a team of social workers in each of its district offices to review requests for Supplementary Benefits. But, whichever agency or procedure, there is no escaping the imperative for defining clearly the eligibility criteria for Supplementary Benefits.

Above all, the organizational changes suggested here are necessary to undo the consistent removal of the low-income, disadvantaged populations from the major institutions of our society. Without malice beforehand, for over 40 years we have allowed various Ministries to shunt the most needy among us into a Welfare Ministry that has never been able to compete with the facilities of other ministries, despite all of the great effort, frustration, and dedication of Welfare Ministry employees. The original conceptualization of service delivery was wrong. Instead of linking the disadvantaged into the larger, specialized Ministries we deliberately excluded them and transferred them to a residual, relatively ill-equipped welfare system, and out of the mainstream of Israeli society. And unless we correct this situation soon, we will be paying the price for generations to come by perpetuating their "separate" status.

Several concrete steps must be taken to implement the above transfers. For one thing, we will have to spell out the boundaries and obligations of each of the Ministries regarding the poor and disadvantaged. And this will mean anchoring these criteria in law, rather than in present administrative regulations. The inextricable link between legislating eligibility for service and the funding of those services, must not be a deterrent to legislation. Benefits, while uniform and universal, can be realistically in line with resources, and "claw-back" and other progressive features can be implemented to tie benefits to income levels.

We must also accept the reality that social work and social workers have, during the past 10 years, ceased being the exclusive domain of the Ministry of Social Welfare. Social workers are now employed in large numbers by Indus-

try, the Army, and the Ministries of Health, Housing, and Education. There is every possibility of helping these organizations to operate even larger social work programs, such as school social work, street corner programs, and other services. There is no good evidence showing why institutions for juvenile delinquents could not be operated by the Ministry of Education in conjunction with the Ministry of Labor, with a strong contingent of social work staff employed by these two Ministries.

What is Left?

Whenever I present my ideas on structural reorganization of Israel's social service network, the question always arises as to the "fate" of the Ministry of Social Welfare: what would be left if things are parcelled out? Several possibilities can occur.

The political struggle of the National Religious Party (NRP) to preserve the Ministry of Social Welfare could be diverted to efforts over control of another Ministry such as Health, Education, or perhaps Agriculture, or even Labor, although the latter course seems politically unrealistic. In this event, indeed, the present Ministry of Welfare might be abolished or merged with another Ministry.

Another, perhaps more feasible alternative, would involve retention of the Ministry of Welfare as a universal, highly professional, family counseling, treatment-oriented, and brokerage agency, operating in each city, and providing highly individualized, face-to-face help to all families and individuals in difficulty. The social workers employed by this "Ministry of Family and Community Services" would not be providing concrete (financial) aid, but would be offering counselling, advice, and linking people to a wide variety of appropriate services in the country. It would also work with neighborhoods and communities to develop citizen action and participation, including the funding of pilot projects for potential adoption by other Ministries and agencies.

Most important of all, particularly as an arm of the counseling and treatment func-

tions, the new, reorganized "Ministry of Family and Community Services" could provide basic child welfare services to the entire population such as adoptions, foster care, day care programs, rest homes for non-working mothers of large families, group-homes for adolescents, and other arrangements in-home and for out-of-the-home care of children and young adults, as well as licensing and services to neglected and abused children. I would also include here probation services, services to unmarried parents and their children, homemaker services, and especially the coordination of voluntary organizations now providing social welfare services to families and children in distress.

The new Ministry might possibly embark on provision of legal aid and advice to the disadvantaged, as well as advocacy, although past experience in lodging these functions in government agencies has been discouraging, to say the least.

In other words, the type of Ministry proposed here would involve a highly prestigious, professional network of personalized services to all citizens, *not only the poor*, but to anyone who might need to use them.

This Ministry might also be the central government agency for welfare and human resources data collection, research, and program evaluation, although this function would almost certainly be contested by other government units, such as the Central Bureau of Statistics and various Ministries.

Funding and Administration

Concerning the relationship of the reorgan-

ized Ministry described above to the local municipalities, I would urge that welfare funding be located with the national government entirely. This has been the basic trend over the years, with national funding presently at 75 to 90 percent in some localities. Municipalities have been unable to carry the burden of welfare expenditure, have often used welfare programs for political purposes, and have difficulty conceptualizing the importance of professional, personal and family counselling.

It might be possible to obtain flat-rate contribution (per capita?) by municipalities to the central government, but inevitably this would be nominal and token. My clear impression is that the social needs of the various towns and cities are totally beyond their economic capacity at this time, and will be so for a long time to come. I also believe that the cities will be more motivated to bring their residents into nationally funded social service programs, in contrast to their present subtle practice of deterring participation and use of services for fear of overloading municipal resources.

Of the two basic patterns for administrative responsibility, i.e., municipal responsibility for administration of programs and State supervision, or total State responsibility and administration and supervision via State district offices, I would suggest the latter pattern. Total State responsibility would be in tune with the national funding arrangement suggested above, and above all, it would eliminate the relatively ineffectual entrepreneur role which municipal leaders now exercise between the citizen and the State regarding welfare services.