

Editor's Page

The Price Of Easy Money

The absurdities and contradictions of our society stand out in sharper contrast when one comes back from abroad, having been away from it all for awhile. Turning on the television set for the first time in many weeks, I heard, early in the morning, a special report. C.M.C.C., a health care facility in Highland Park, in the belly of Detroit, has a serious problem: it has no patients. The eager, young reporter interviewed physicians and nurses who proudly proclaimed that "free medical care is available to everyone up to the

age of twenty-one, they can just walk in." But, somehow, the patients do not show up. "We are here, ready to take care of them (sic!), and we hate to see it all go to waste." The camera focuses on several rooms holding new equipment and beautifully molded plastic chairs "where the kids will feel comfortable," all waiting, together with the highly paid personnel to fill the "urgent" health care needs of the community.



DR. BAR-LEVAV

WASTE IS ALSO MADE EASIER BY THE EXISTENCE OF THIRD-PARTY PAYMENTS WHICH SIMILARLY ENDANGER THE BRANCH THAT WE SIT ON COLLECTIVELY.

The special report on T.V. was beamed repeatedly, probably to induce patients to come. And the young reporter, earnestly and sheepishly looking into the camera as he

spoke, was probably satisfied that he performed an important and useful public function.

No one asked where the money for all this comes from, and no one wondered whether these facilities should be disbanded, since they seemed to fill no real need. Dogooders (physicians are not immune to this illness) relieve their personal guilt by going on the public payroll and by planning services and building facilities that are supposed to "improve" the lives of people whose health, education, housing and general level of existence deserve improving. A simple-minded connection exists in the minds of such self-righteous planners between poverty and self-neglect, and the thousands of studies that are replete with examples that prove the contrary are simply ignored. The needy are often emotionally sick, and their inability to manage independently is generally as much a result of this condition as it is a reflection of supposed economic waste of a Capitalistic system. But, public funds are sought and easily obtained for a variety of such projects, whether they are really needed or not.

Having just spent a few weeks in Switzerland where generally sanity still prevails in the value systems of individuals and in the public policies of governmental bodies, such intolerable waste seems utterly unbelievable. The resources and size of this country are so enormously greater, that all of Western Europe dwarfs by comparison, in spite of its rich cultural heritage, its variegated language and ethnic landscape and its illustrious history. But, even we, here, cannot afford to spend of these resources without paying a price which some time will be fatal to the continued existence of our society. Our enormous riches make a sub-culture of waste possible, serving the collective guilt among

the privileged and the irrational demands for always more among the underprivileged. Those who really deserve a better lot in life will never get it as long as society paternalistically caters to their pathology, overlooking the fact that self-respect is only attained through one's own efforts. Every individual needs a chance to obtain dignified work, but repeatedly excusing acts of personal irresponsibility without penalty only guarantees their perpetuation.

The price is beginning to show, although most people do not see the connection. The value of the dollar has been steadily deteriorating for the last few years, not only in relation to the German Mark, the Swiss Franc and the Japanese Yen, but even in relation to weaker currencies such as the Austrian Shilling. International capital is deserting the dollar, whose worth is considered to be watered-down. Disaster may be very, very far away, but it is unavoidable unless basic changes in our collective attitudes and value systems become widespread.

What is the point of writing editorials such as this? Planners are driven by personal needs that are camouflaged as humanistic concerns, and they will change neither by reason nor by editorials. But, in the health field at least, such planners cannot succeed without the active cooperation of physicians. This Editorial is intended mainly for them, for some physicians are not driven so much by unconscious needs as they opportunistically reach for easily available public funds in jobs of little responsibility. Waste is also made easier by the existence of third-party payments which similarly endanger the branch that we sit on collectively. Moral rectitude and admirable self-restraint are required to not reach for the kitty from which hospitals, schools and clinics nourish themselves steadily. But, the handwriting is on the wall, and it behooves us to heed its warning.

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