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Any attempt to consider the problem of feeble-mindedness as a whole must take into serious consideration the following aspects:

First, the fragmentary and unrelated nature of the services now available for the care of the feeble-minded.

Second, the absence of consideration and the necessary detailed planning against this problem as a whole.

Third, the absence of any defined program of social control as it relates to the growth of this group in the social and economic order.

Fourth, the development of specialized skills in modern industry operating unfavorably in the matter of accommodation of the feeble-minded in the processes of earning a living.

It is true, more especially in urban center, that there are rather narrowly specialized social services for the care of the feeble-minded in cases of dependency or where the individual is in trouble. Otherwise, the group is left to shift for itself as best it can.

It must be noted, however, that these agencies do not operate within a well-defined total framework of care for the feeble-minded but exist as independent and more or less unrelated units serving individual cases without reference to the problem of feeble-mindedness as a whole. These independent agencies have largely been created to serve in relatively small areas. Although in Minnesota there is at least a nucleus for state-wide framework obviously susceptible of further development.

In the average city the feeble-minded family and individual will be found scattered through the relief agencies along with all other types of dependents. These families or individuals may or may not be formally identified as feeble-minded, they may or may not be committed, and they may or may not be sterilized. With the present high case loads the chances are good that they will not be formally identified, committed or sterilized. Or, at least, the number where any of those measures are undertaken are so small so as to be unimportant in the whole in providing any measure of social control.

It is ironic that the feeble-minded girl who bears one or two illegitimate children is likely to be either committed or sterilized by one social agency, while the girl of the same mental level who marries and produces several feeble-minded children is equally likely to secure both support and medical care through still other social agencies.

And in both types of agencies the problem is merely one of several other types of dependency served by these social agencies. Social agencies themselves, while operating under a theory of individual diagnosis, have developed no great skill at anything approaching social diagnosis and even less at sharing such skills as they have with the public. Thus the problem of the feeble-minded is constantly obscured within the social agency itself. It is more than likely at the present time that the social agencies with too limited programs are doing more to make possible the continued perpetuation of the unfit than they are to lessen the dangers of the increase of this type in the population.

Health agencies and recreational agencies operate almost entirely without reference to this problem.

Courts still tend to treat the feeble-minded delinquent in terms of their offense, rather than in terms of feeble-mindedness, and minor delinquents are temporarily committed as delinquents rather than as feeble-minded, and later released again to follow their own resources.

Schools, if they formally identify and segregate the feeble-minded for specialized training, also operate as independent units during the child's earlier years with no automatic passing on of records to any other agency for consideration of this group. In the light of the economic disadvantage of the group, any training in terms of vocational significance tends to be unrealistic and economically impractical and must be given its significance on a purely individual basis.

Thus, we are forced to admit that while some portion of the feeble-minded do have various fragments of services available, those services do not tend to diminish either the occurrence or the social and economic disadvantage of this group to any perceptible degree. Further, there has not evolved from such organizations as do exist any very specific objectives for dealing with this problem as a problem or to provide a well-defined base of attack upon the problem as a whole.

The lack of widespread social planning here serves to illustrate that many unrelated parts do not necessarily add up into an intelligible whole. It seems to be characteristic of our social work philosophy, however, that there is more concern over the one who is served than the ninety and nine who receive no concern and no service. The depression has made so clear that he who runs may read that our hit-and-miss fashion of comprehending our social problems through the limitations of social agencies rather than in terms of the problems themselves and ignoring the total outlines and rate of growth of problems such as unemployment, old age, the feeble-minded, etc., etc., has placed upon our social agencies geared to a local and a very limited service, an almost insupportable burden.

It seems reasonable therefore to select as a first objective the defining the scope and outlines of the problem itself. Defining the problem on less than a state-wide basis seems futile although the problem of the feeble-minded, as with most other social problems, must finally be a matter of national policy rather than state policy.

After defining the outlines of the problem and the development of such statistical and factual bases that the growth or decline of the occurrence of the feeble-minded may be known, - we are brought face to face with the question of developing social objectives relative to the entire group.

Possible specific objectives might be suggested as follows:

1. Setting up responsible guardianship of all feeble-minded children under the state, such guardianship functioning under a county welfare unit.

2. A program of segregation and sterilization applied on a state-wide basis.

3. Suitable and realistic training programs for the "trainable" portion of the feeble-minded accompanied by sterilization. This means, of course, continuous experiment and evaluation of these training programs and followed through and evaluated in terms of actual vocational significance.

This is, frankly, a program without reference to the need for both more intensive training and employment opportunities for normal people, which is also a valid need and not one being met in any very ideal fashion at present. The training and employment of the feeble-minded impinges upon the whole problem of a surplus of unskilled labor which embraces persons not feeble-minded.

An interesting trend in attempted social classification, is discernible at the present time. The term "unemployable" is being bandied about considerably. It is of course a dangerous word with no really consistent meaning. In its precise academic sense I presume it means those who because of extreme youth, old age, or physical or mental defect are unable to work for a living. But it tends to define itself also against a background of an increasing demand for technical skills. Many feeble-minded persons who were employable in a simpler social and industrial organization, are now unemployable - not because their mental defect is greater, but because the need for their particular capabilities is growing steadily less. The question may well be raised whether or not modern industry can ever accommodate the definitely feeble-minded, and if indeed it should do so, The question is important in terms of programs of training; the struggle to raise the wage scale for workers} and the development of our own social and economic philosophy. The whole question of the present attempt to deal with dependent families and individuals by the thousands in residence in industrial centers where they play no part in the processes by which men live is a troubling one. One sometimes wonders if much of the efforts of social agencies should not occur in a rural setting rather than in the urban one. I presume that there are literally thousands of individuals today that one might safely predict will have to be permanently subsidized in one setting or the other.

However, the thought of any program of continuous subsidy to the feeble-minded, preserving them to rear their children, providing them with various services without definite efforts at limiting this portion of the population seems nothing short of developing a program to preserve the unfit.

In the last analysis, social work represents a little more than the mechanism developed out of the prevailing social and economic philosophy of a given day and time. In fact, it is apt to represent the most conservative rather than the most progressive social and economic philosophy. It is almost inextricably intertwined with sentiment and sentimentality, with the philosophy that philanthropy offers an adequate approach to social problems. Social work represents a vested interest all its own. Therefore, at the core of developing realistic social objectives for the handling of the feeble-minded is the problem of prevailing social attitudes toward this group. The feeble-minded have been regarded primarily in a social and economic sense as an "exploitable" group in the interest of the more normal portions of society.

Any program other than the present one of obscuring the identity of the group in the general provisions for the care of the poor, the unfortunate, and the unsuccessful sets out also the immediate expense sharply against the problem. To be sure the lack of a defined program will no doubt be more expensive in the long run, but that point is hard to make to the individual tax payer eager to cut his individual taxes at anybody's expense. It is important also whether the public feels that the program is wholly one of concern with the feeble-minded, or also one of concern for the public.

But one thing is certain, - the public is unlikely to be interested in anything less than a specific program. Further, the subject itself is not one which immediately arouses widespread interest and enthusiasm. It is the subject for which the "special pleador" must be developed in every community. Intelligent efforts to develop these "special pleadors" have been almost nil. To agree that there should be specific educational efforts made - to heartily recommend such efforts is not the same thing as making thorn, although the feeling tone obtained may be much the same from these two processes.

This is one problem which the general social and economic philosophy is likely to ignore for a long time to come unless those who are particularly interested make considerable effort to develop a prevailing attitude in regard to interpretation and desirable procedures. It calls for leadership and planned, directed efforts. Our recent agreement to secure a continuative census relative to the feebleminded as they appear in the schools is a first step and obviously in the right direction, but is only a first step. After that comes the necessity of setting up practical objectives and related machinery. I presume that for some time to come these objectives will have to be in the nature of a compromise with prevailing public opinion and public apathy. But, again, a framework of effort is all-important rather than unrelated agency effort which is set up to serve the few rather than the many.