

EDITORIAL COMMENT

Time to compromise

The Council on Student Life faces an uphill battle in its attempt to negotiate with the Board of Regents on the coed visitation proposals killed by the Regents in July. The reason for the pessimism is simple: in recent years the Regents have unanimously voted down coed visitation five different times.

Despite the poor odds CSL owes it to University students to try to arrive at a compromise proposal or find another approach to the question of coed visitation. The current program is inadequate in that it is infrequent and allows visitation for a maximum of only six hours.

There is a great deal of support for changes in the present rules concerning coed visitation in campus living units.

Last May a *Daily Nebraskan* poll showed that 77 per cent of the student respondents favored a more liberalized coed visitation policy. A survey of parental opinion showed that 56 per cent of the respondents favored the student guest rights proposal that the Regents ultimately defeated in July. However, the parent survey had an extremely low percentage of returns, which indicated the issue is of little importance to most of the parents.

But the student and parent support must be vocalized to be effective. The Regents aren't going to compromise out of altruism.

A good way to put the political heat on the Regents is for students, acting as potential voters, to flood the Board with letters supporting a more liberalized coed visitation policy. If your parents favor increasing the student guest rights, then ask them to write to their Regent.

Even if the Regents again ignore the rights of students to entertain guest in their rooms, the question of coed visitation will still haunt the Board. Subversion of the present rules is common and probably will increase. The University will be hard pressed to crackdown on violators since enforcement is difficult in both residence halls and greek houses and any compliance depends heavily on the students themselves.

Meantime, the University continues to try to enforce the unenforceable and confuses the issue by linking coed visitation with promiscuity. The best way out for the Regents appears to be a compromise with CSL.

Gary Seacrest

Social work: 'You get no thanks from anyone'

by Peter Benchley
Newsweek Feature Service

"Social work is supposed to be such a noble profession, right?" says the young man armed with a master's degree in social psychology. "You work long hours for low wages, but at least you're making a contribution."

"Well, if this is nobility, you can have it. The people you work for have set up a bureaucracy so incredible that nothing ever gets done—or when it is done, it's done wrong. And as for the people you're supposed to be helping—about half my clients just naturally distrust me because I am what I am, another quarter hate me because I represent the establishment that they think has enslaved them and the rest spend all our time together trying to con me."

The young man is a welfare caseworker, one of about 85,000 nationwide who are faced with the impossible task of administering to the needs of the millions of poor and desperate Americans who subsist on the public dole.

Everyday the country's welfare rolls swell further and every day—in cities as desperate as Dallas and Boston, New York and Los Angeles—the controversy grows hotter about who should qualify for welfare, who should be forced to work, who should take care of an indigent mother's children.

Bearing the brunt of both the growth and the controversy are the caseworkers, who are forced to wonder whether they are actually doing any good or are in fact merely presiding over the demise of a rotting system.

"There's a fantastic amount of anger among caseworkers," says an official of the Union of Social Service Employees in Chicago. "They feel they're pawns in the system, and they are."

Foremost among caseworkers' complaints is that they are overburdened with more cases than they can conceivably handle. According to union vice president Max Liberles, Chicago's 1,750 public caseworkers each average 150 separate cases at a time, and some individuals are responsible for as many as 220 cases at one.

To protest their staggering

caseloads, Chicago's social workers have staged three strikes in the past five years and the city has the highest employe turnover (55 per cent) of any welfare system in the country.

"We've done a survey of why caseworkers leave the job," says Liberles, "and it's not the salary (ranging from \$665 to \$915 per month), it's frustration."

In many communities, job-training programs are the pride of welfare officials, who cite them as proof that they are concentrating their efforts on putting welfare cases back to work. But the bureaucratic muddle through which a caseworker must slog before actually placing a man in a job-training program often undermines the whole concept.

Los Angeles County caseworker Mrs. Elisabeth Baynton-Cox, for instance, supposedly has access to a program called WIN (for Work Incentive), which pays for two years of job training for unemployed men. But when she first referred a client to WIN, she found that the program carefully avoided ex-convicts, ex-drug addicts and alcoholics—the very "problem cases" who need rehabilitation most of all.

Female caseworkers have an additional problem to contend with. Mostly white, relatively young and—compared to their clients—well-off, they find themselves occasional targets for violent resentment, hatred and contempt that welfare beneficiaries feel for the system.

Several of Mrs. Baynton-Cox's clients live in Los Angeles' Pacoima ghetto, which is heavily black and chicano. The pretty 26-year-old makes a point of visiting Pacoima early in the morning because, as she says, "I figure, whoever's into troublemaking is going to be sleeping."

Though the \$20,000 she and her salesman husband earn every year probably puts Mrs. Baynton-Cox above the financial norm of caseworkers, in many ways she is typical. Most of her training has been on-the-job. In college, she majored in French and took only one sociology course. The Los Angeles County Public Social Services Department put her to work full-time after a three-week "orientation"

course.

And like the majority of caseworkers, she finds herself in a painfully ambivalent position: sympathetic with her clients, symbolizing aid and comfort, but at the same time unable to fulfill promises made by herself and others. "It gets pretty embarrassing," she says, "to keep telling your client, 'I know you haven't got your check for six months but the computer broke down so wait a little longer.'"

Compounding the caseworkers' frustrations is the fact that while their clients blame them for every broken promise and bureaucratic foulup, they themselves have no villain on whom to vent their wrath. The villain is the amorphous, uncontrollable "system."

Paul Quirk, president of caseworkers union local 509 in Boston, sees the problem as a "corruption of the process by which the welfare system works. Through the mythification of the system, we have effectively begun to blame the victims for our inability to administer the system." The "elite and the haves," he says, "really like to pick on the have-nots. They like to tell the poor how to live. It's atrocious, really."

Whatever the source of the problem, caseworkers have found that their only recourse is drastic job actions—strikes or, as has happened in Atlanta, a curious alliance between caseworkers and clients. Scores of Atlanta caseworkers have joined the militant National Welfare Rights Organization. The bond may not accomplish much, says one, but at least "recipients will quit hating all the caseworkers."

According to most experts, the caseworkers' lot is bound to get worse and there is little evidence that it will ever get better unless the current welfare system is somehow dramatically overhauled. Caseloads will continue to grow and welfare workers will continue to quit.

"You feel so far from reality," says Barbara Babb, a 25-year-old Dallas caseworker who earned \$571 a month last year for dealing with 200 families. "You get no thanks from anyone, no raises at the office, and criticism from clients and the community."



"Anytime you're ready, David!"

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