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The Myth of Child Abuse

By Robert A. Lee

What About The Poor?

By L. K. Samuels

 **RAMPART
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THE MYTHS OF CHILD ABUSE

By Robert A. Lee

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MYTH #1: Child abuse is unnatural

Nothing is more natural than that the old, young, and weak are destroyed. Is this conclusion the work of a lunatic or a comedian? This conclusion comes from no less an authority than Charles Darwin. This is a basic tenet of his doctrine of "natural selection." Death and suffering are not accidental or incidental in nature, but fundamental. Only the fit survive, and by definition, children would rank about midway in the ranks of the unfit. The inevitable conclusion of persons agreeing with Darwin would be that child abuse would be covered in the natural law of suffering and death being meted out to the helpless.

If an authority such as Darwin is not enough, let us take the authority of the Holy Bible as a guide. The Bible is replete with examples of torture, abuse and mistreatment of children. Herod, the king, carried out systematic infanticide of Jewish children because of a prophecy announcing the coming of a messiah.² The pharaoh, under similar circumstances, killed the firstborn of the Jews because of a prophecy of a deliverer of the Jewish people, Moses. There are numerous examples of invasions in which the entire populace of the enemy is exterminated — men, women, and children. Abraham, the founder of the Jewish people is chronicled as almost "sacrificing" his own son because of "voices" he heard. Even God sponsored, promoted and carried

out infanticide, through Moses, by destroying the firstborn of Egypt as a means of persuading the Pharaoh to release the "children of Israel."³

MYTH #2: The "sacredness" of children

It is almost impossible for a parent of ten or more children to provide each one with high quality interaction. But this represents the pattern of child-parent interaction for most of the peoples of the world during most of human history. Even in the beginning of the twentieth century, almost half of the children born in the United States died before reaching maturity. Where is the special concern for children? Doubtlessly there have been religious groups, children's causes, special interest groups, etc., that have esteemed children, but the process is not widespread. Examples include the documentation in newspapers that in New York after the Civil War, because of overpopulation, newborn infants were commonly thrown on trash dumps and disposed of in garbage cans. Historically, even in Western Europe, children were considered animals, slaves, and even tools for the economic betterment of their parents. These same children were almost never considered "bundles of joy."

The change in the orientation toward children occurred in the eighteenth century basically when upper classes and middle class parents began to consider children as toys, baubles (much like their jewelry), and special creatures (probably related to their tendencies of having smaller families). But this concern for children being "special" referred only to *their* children and not to children in general. In England, in the U.S., in all of Northwestern Europe, the children of the working class were and still are considered street urchins, predelinquents, and eyesores.⁴

The inescapable conclusion must be that childhood as a sacred time is a very small minority position, adhered to by few people, in few places, and only for short periods of time. And then the process is applied to only certain children. The vast majority of the world's peoples, for the overwhelming majority of history have, when they have considered them at all, seen children as a nuisance or a burden, someone to be "seen but not heard". It needs not be more than noted in passing that a belief that the minority position be equated with some morally superior position to that which the majority thinks or practices is absurd. The few occasions in which children have been considered special must be seen for what it is, an anomaly.

MYTH #3: The “epidemic” or “gargantuan” proportions of child abuse.

How much child abuse is there? It all depends on how child abuse is defined. There are a number of types of child abuse. The type that produces the most acrimony is physical child abuse. One prominent researcher in the field defines physical child abuse as follows: “Non-accidental physical attack or physical injury, including minimal as well as fatal injury, inflicted upon children by persons caring for them.”⁵ This definition is important because it excludes such things as neglect — the withholding of food, clothes, shelter, protection and medical aid from a child, as well as other non-physical types of abuse such as verbal abuse. Also excluded is sexual abuse which has different types of motivations and sexual abuse by parents is not generally considered an “attack.” Keeping this in mind, and though there is wide discrepancy in the figures, most estimates of medically documented cases of physical child abuse occurring annually in the United States never amount to more than 300,000 cases.⁶ Now we must qualify the word “documented” above. The specification of medical doctors making the judgement of whether an injury is “non-accidental” or not excludes conclusions drawn by judges or policemen, social workers or teachers, technicians or neighbors. These people are incompetent to make medical judgements such as the cause of an injury to the physical body. Only the doctor can make the determination that an injury is the result of abuse as opposed to falling down stairs or running through a plate glass window. Also, documented, as opposed to estimated, means subject to verification, the scientific ability to repeat the procedures followed and come to the same conclusions.

Let us put this figure of 300,000 cases into perspective. For the purpose of round numbers let us accept that there are 200 million people in the U.S. Of these, half or 100 million are young adults. Half of these are children, 50 million. If we divide 300,000 by 50 million we get the percentage of 0.6%. In other words, 99.4% of the population of children in any given year, at least, are *not* the victims of this kind of child abuse. It would thus stand to reason that any epidemic of physical child abuse is unsubstantiated.

Wait a minute—comes a critic. What about the unreported, undiscovered cases that go on everyday? Science can make no statements about unobservables. Unreported, missing, or unseen variables cannot enter into objective science. What does “estimate” mean? It means a person comes up with a number,

usually without explaining how it was arrived at, and with all the convincing oratory and unswerving belief in its certainty (or at least rightness), proffered as fact. Well it isn't factual. There may be million's more cases of child abuse or there may be none. In the absence of a method of determining which is closer to fact, science admonishes that judgment be withheld. Our unswerving beliefs are worth nothing as far as facts are concerned.* *(Seeing things that are not there have medical definitions — they are called “hallucinations” or “delusions”.)

There is another common misstatement of facts concerning child abuse. Often one reads: “There are over a million cases of child abuse *and neglect in the United States each year.*” This is quite true. This is because there are about a million documented cases of *neglect*. Neglect is tied to physical child abuse as if they are very similar in method and in public reaction. This is untrue. It is one thing to be identified as a poor person who sometimes does not feed his or her children because of lack of money or because the parent is a teenager that has not mastered the art of child rearing, but it would be quite another thing to be a parent that beats his or her child about the head with a ball peen hammer. Neglect is a far less horrible crime to describe or to witness.

Let us use another comparison. A documented 2 to 3% of the population of the U.S. (and therefore of children) is seriously retarded. As such these people (children) can look forward to a very difficult life, uninterruptedly so, and in most cases irreversibly. There are many more retarded children than there are physically abused children! Why is there not a howl and cry about retardation? Could it be that retardation is fearful, loathsome, hopeless, i.e., it generates different emotions than abuse. To abuse and abusers we can direct hostility, righteous indignation, mount campaigns, save someone. We don't seem to be able to become heroes around retarded children. So we close our eyes to retardation. We pick and choose our moral stands?

This righteous indignation seems to have elements of self-righteousness as was mentioned already. There seems to be a preordained, prearranged, less than totally candid something involved. Maybe it has to do with hypocrisy.

MYTH #4: Child abuse being causally related to anti-social behavior.

We hear often such claims as “Most child abusers are the victims themselves of child abuse.” Or “The vast majority of

prisoners in penitentiaries were abused children." The response becomes "so what?" Having said that what else can be said? Statements such as the above have no meaning because they are simply statements of coincidences. Many convicts are among the ranks of the abused. Is that the only thing they have in common? The answer here is that we do not know because this is as far as the research has gone. It is as if researchers knew what to look for and as soon as they found what they wanted the search was ended. This once again does not constitute good science. Researchers should search for alternative alternatives which can either qualify or disqualify the particular hypothesis, not only complement it. How about the following qualification? Most child abusers being abused children is not the same thing as all children that are abused will grow up to be abusers themselves! What percentage of children that are abused grow up to abuse their own children (if they have children)? 90%? 50%? 10%? This is a crucial question for a more complete understanding of child abuse.⁷ If most children grow up to be abusers then the assertion of the literature on child abuse is substantiated. But their arguments are far less salient if only a small percentage of abused children become abusers themselves. There may be some research on this issue but the author is not aware of it! It should be no more difficult than contacting a sample of abusees in the 50s and 60s and see if their family of procreation is marked by child abuse. One gets the impression that this type of research is undesirable because any variation from unity would seem to qualify the iron belief that child abuse is horrible for all people, for all times, without exception, period!

What about the question as to whether physical child abuse is somehow correlated with adult criminality? There is some data here that is relevant. George C. Curtis wrote an article entitled "Violence Breeds Violence — Perhaps."⁸ It was a research study in which a group of violent adolescents were screened in order to trace the common threads of their lives. Five variables were found to be significant. Child abuse was one, but so was the intensification of a family rivalry situation (two children are in competition for the affection of the parents), foster home placement that is ineffective (the child's removal from a natural home is met in the child with feelings of betrayal, self-hate, loneliness, etc.), organic inferiority (being seen as different from other children due to genetic or medical reasons), and educational difficulties (the humiliation of being labeled

"stupid" and/or being taunted by peers and teachers.)

Thus there are other reasons why children may grow up to be violent instead of or in addition to being a victim of abuse. Unfortunately the link between childhood experiences and adult behaviors is very complex and such simplistic assumptions made by the philosophers of child abuse are unwarranted and unproven. Which antisocial behaviors are associated with child abuse? Homicide, rape, burglary, suicide, divorce, counterfeiting, all of these? Why?

Looking closely at the list of five variables, something else stands out. Why do we not emphasize the other four reasons for adult malfeasance? Could it be that if we emphasized family rivalry as a cause we might have to hold that parents (non-abusing parents) can initiate in their children a life of crime? With foster homes not working, we could blame a host of decent people — social workers, judges, policemen, foster parents! Within the educational difficulties perspective we could blame teachers, administrators, other children, our best friends. This gets too close to home. Abusive parents are supposed to be "out there" somewhere. They are not supposed to look like you or me!

MYTH #5: Inalienable children's rights

A woman is having severe complications during labor. The doctors make a decision. The woman's life is in danger therefore the unborn child is sacrificed so that the mother may live. The child does not even have an automatic right to be born! What inalienable rights does an unborn child, an infant or a toddler have? None. Historically the parents (specifically the father) was empowered with total rights over all the family members, even life and death decisions. Much the same rights are also found in the Bible.⁹ Children only have the rights that their parents give to them. Children are considered unable to understand the abstractness of laws and justice so their rights are ordinarily held in trust by parents until they have reached a certain age.

Doesn't a child have an absolute right not to be abused? Again the answer has to be in the negative. Who is going to guarantee that the child will be protected? The courts? They cannot. Let it be remembered that child abuse is only one aspect of the child's life. When the child is not being abused, he or she is being fed, clothed, schooled, coddled, given a wide range of expressions of freedom, in other words, the abusing parents are not *only* abusers, sometimes they are simply parents! The state would not be able, or willing for that matter, to provide as many rights or

privileges that even the abusive parents can provide.

Rights are not arbitrarily given to this group or that. Rights are negotiations between parties and one of the preeminent prerequisites for a right is that the party desiring the right can muster enough force to maintain and extend his rights. This is because one man's right is another man's penalty. Let us take an example. A person is walking down the street when he sees an adult beating a child with an ironing cord, the child appears to be tied to the bedpost. Does this person have an absolute right to enter the house and intervene on behalf of the child? Absolutely not! This person could quite reasonably be charged with breaking and entering, assault, and if he or she takes the child out of the house, kidnapping. This person can, of course, call the police. Can the police enter the home and intervene? Again the answer is no, according to the Constitution of the United States.¹⁰ The police would have to have a search warrant. The reason for this is simple. Totalitarian governments, using secret police, enter houses (or anywhere else for that matter) without announcement or request and may remove one or more family members without cause, often the family member never being heard of again. The Constitution was written to minimize this possibility. Armed persons, especially as agents of the state, are clearly limited in their powers because these rights conflict with the rights of civilians. Only when there is due process and when a preponderance of evidence is provided in a public forum which takes place in an adversarial exchange, will elected judges make a decision between the rights of the state over private citizens, over parents' rights vs childrens' rights, males' vs females' rights, the public interest vs those of special interests, etc. All of these very thorny legal questions have no simple answers available.¹¹

The observer of the child being abused also poses another problem. The observer would want the abuse terminated but would be unwilling to go so far as adopting that particular child to insure the child being protected. He wants "other" people — the courts, police, social workers, the health department, or anyone else that is or has responsibility, to assume this job. The reason is again very simple and straightforward. He would have to curtail some of his privileges and rights and preferences in order to shoulder this responsibility. He is unwilling to have his rights infringed upon in order to extend certain rights to others. Rights incur responsibilities. Rights are highly desirable but responsibilities are not!

MYTH #6: The omniscience of the state.

People have the mistaken notion that the state can do certain things more efficiently than the individual, i.e., the state is superindividual, bigger than life. There are so many examples to the contrary that the statement seems patently absurd on the surface. But here we are only interested in the state relative to child abuse. What does the state do about a family in which a child is a repeated victim of child abuse? It may take the child out of the home and make it a ward of the court. However the history of children being placed in "shelters" or formerly in "country homes" is (was) no better than leaving the child in the abusive homes.¹² The reason is not difficult to determine. The government may be a "private club" but it is *not* a family. Governmental employees are *employees*, not parental surrogates! They would be the equivalent of "babysitters" rather than parents. And no matter how much care and desire to help children, only so much love and attention can be crowded into the period from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Mondays thru Fridays, with occasional Saturdays thrown in. A child may not understand why a favorite adult leaves him or her and a different set of adults, with different temperaments and dispositions, show up. Even less can the government understand how these necessary, but impersonal shifts affect the child.

Foster homes fare little better, but for different reasons.¹³ Studies have shown that regardless of how enriched, pleasant, and loving a foster home might be, many children are no better off or in some cases are worse off for the experience. The reason is because "foster parents" are not the same as "natural parents". Children, beyond a certain age, certainly by two years of age, cannot be forceably removed from natural parents, for any reason, without the high probability of extreme psychological problems because they are "bonded" to their natural parents.¹⁴ This means that their strongest, deepest and most enduring feelings are endowed by nature upon "mother" and "father". There is no method of removing or transferring these primal feelings. They are the essence of humans as a species, the connection between men and other humans. It does not matter whether mother or father is insane, corrupt, abusive, retarded or extremely succorant. They are still mother and father, the most important people in the child's life, forever!

In the 1940s and 1950s when judges and social workers and other interested parties began to place abused children in "foster" homes, being ignorant, contemptuous, or disinterested

in the problem of bonding, they did not have long to wait to see the consequences. Children in the foster homes became morose, hostile, introverted, and especially delinquent. In fact one study shows that children taken out of abusing homes (after a certain age, about three) and placed in foster homes, had a higher rate of juvenile delinquency by the time they were eighteen years of age, than a control group of children who were left in the abusive homes. The same judges who placed children in foster homes began to see these children come before them as the accused in criminal cases.

It is now clear that these children developed a sense of rejection, unlove, self-loathing (what did I do to drive my parents away?), white hot anger (they didn't love me — otherwise why would they have abandoned me?), confusion, a sense of betrayal, and a distrust that manifested itself in a cynical view of the world. This was not compensated by ice cream and cake served by some stranger, some "foster mother". The child only felt more out of touch from reality, farther away from home in this strange, foreign environment.

Let us take another example, from the person who saw a child being beaten through the window. Suppose, for a moment, the observer entered the house, freed the child and began arguing with the abusing adult. What would the child, in all likelihood, do? The answer would be to find something heavy and try to "brain" the intruder. Why? Because the observer is perceived to be a threat — not to the child but to the child's parent — a worse threat than the beating. At least father is familiar, accepted, a part of the child's natural world. The stranger is a new, foreign, unexplained element.

To summarize then, what a child experiences being abused, what the parent experiences as an abuser, what the person on the street experiences as an observer, and what specialists experience as experts or agents, represent *four* different, sometimes conflicting, viewpoints, certainly not the same view and not even two points of view — the good and the bad. Failing to recognize all of the subtle differences is tantamount to failure to be able to resolve all the difficulties, and worse, pronouncing dreadful sanctions on the child in the future.

It is indeed a difficult dilemma — either to leave a child in the home of an abusing parent knowing that there is a probability of the child becoming a homicide statistic on the one hand, and removing the child from abusing homes, placing the child in a foster home, realizing that there is a probability the child will become a sociopath or a psychopath, on the other hand!

MYTH #7: The effects of child abuse are forever.

In this final myth the attempt will be to show that the extremes of child abuse are just that, exceptions to the rule and not the norm. The effects of child abuse are not uniformly foreboding — that children are not marked for life. On the other hand, abusers are not the incarnation of evil either. Let us attempt to put things into perspective. In addition, I would like to counter the predictable and understandable reaction of certain readers that there are some people so high in their ivy towers, so far removed from the real world, and so obsessed with the "scientific" (translated pseudo-scientific) method, that they can dismiss real feelings toward their fellow human beings. May I take this opportunity to express some personal things. I abhor child abuse. I have a daughter three years old and she has never been abused by her mother or myself (and neither of us was abused as a child either, whatever this suggests). I do feel terribly depressed when I hear about or see pictures of abused children. I also feel very helpless at not being able to do much to prevent it.

Although there is a good deal of research on the characteristics of children that are abused and parents that abuse, much of the research is contradictory, suffers from numerous methodological problems, is incomplete or faulty (or even manufactured) data, makes unwarranted generalizations, involves duplications of statistics and much of it is non-comparable.¹⁵

The first thing noteworthy is that all of the "psychological" variables such as motivations or personality, stress management, hostility, etc. have serious problems because of the subjective nature of these phenomena. Secondly, "structural variables", race, class, intelligence, religion, ethnicity, geography, income, etc., show the most contradictory answers. For this reason, as suggested earlier, these types of variables will be ignored. What are we left with? The answer is a number of generally agreed upon relationships that seem to stand alone, discrete units of information which do not seem to fit any pattern or model. Let us list some of these:

1. Children involved in incidents of abuse tend to be very young.¹⁶
2. Mothers (females) tend to be more likely abusers and to employ more lethal means than fathers (males).

3. Most abuse occurs among family members, not between strangers.
4. Most child abusers are younger parents—in their twenties.
5. Child abusers are “isolated” or have fewer social contacts. They are “loners”.¹⁷
6. Child abusers have “limited mobility”. They are more sedentary than the average person. They go fewer places, stay for shorter periods of time, go fewer times, etc.¹⁸
7. One study found that child abusers have an unusually high rate of unlisted telephone numbers, fully 86%.
8. Only children, oldest children and youngest children tend more likely to be abused.
9. Child abusers tend to be more non-verbal in their communication with other family members. Child abusers are not very talkative people.
10. Single parents (mothers) have a higher incidence of child abuse than two-parent families.
11. Smaller family size is more related to child abuse than larger family size.

Certain patterns do seem to appear. Women are more likely to be abusers because they spend more time around the children. The husband goes to work and gets a break from childrearing. Note also that the fathers are more mobile, less restricted than the mother. But the female/male variations tend to form a pecking order. Fathers may abuse less and be less harmful than females because they have another outlet not available to females, namely spouse abuse. The husband beats the wife, the wife beats the children, the kids kick the dog, the dog bites the mailman, and the mailman tears up father's government check! The youngest child or the young child is abused because it is the most vulnerable, the most helpless. Thus the oldest child, once the youngest and only child, would fit into that category. Middle children being least abused would be explained as never being the only child and spending the least time as the youngest or most vulnerable child.

Single parents that do not work would be expected to have a higher incidence of child abuse because they have to do all of the work of childrearing by themselves, and with less of an income as compensation. Working mothers get a relief by being more mobile (and perhaps have a higher standard of living) but this is

offset by the additional work required once she gets home.

Another interesting finding can be explained — why larger family size seems less likely to signal child abuse. A larger family has too many prying eyes. Child abuse is one of those crimes in which secrecy is at a premium. So the more people that witness the crime, the less the secret can be kept. In small families (especially with non-communicative members) the secret is most likely to be kept. On the other hand, if there are several children, not only is there an increased likelihood of “spies” and “loose talk”, there is also the possibility of physical intervention. When momma has “that look in her eyes” some of the siblings can head her off, others can go to the crib and spirit off the baby, others can run and call the neighbors.

Let me outline a scenario which I feel can explain much of the existent physical child abuse as well as outline a plan to locate these children at relatively little cost and inconvenience. This approach can also offer some suggestions for how to substantially reduce the incidence of child abuse. The key came from the recurrence of certain terms. Child abusers are isolated, secretive, cloistered, non-communicative, restricted, loners, immobile, perochial, anonymous.

If we look at all of these at once, certain highly valued American institutions come to mind. Strung together they are:

**MONOGAMY — NEOLOCALITY — RUGGED
INDIVIDUALISM — CREDIT (DEBT) FINANCING**

Child abuse is a direct result of Americans valuing an exclusive love/marriage arrangement that maximizes privacy, independence, exclusiveness and isolation. It is called monogamy with neo-local residence.¹⁹ Neolocality is preferable to living in an extended family. It is better to live too far from relatives than to live too close to them! The belief that a person should do things for themselves and not depend on others, rugged individualism, adds to this isolation. The tendency to “hold things in”, not to complain to anyone that will listen, is another element of this rugged individualism. Add to this the easy world of plastic money, installment purchasing, perhaps with overextension, and you have a volatile mixture. Throw in a recession, months of unemployment, and several small children, a young couple may feel much stress and little relief. Child abuse is a reasonable expectation.

This theory would suggest that child abusers are not monsters, simply people who are the victims of their own value

system, victims of their own egos (the world is for the taking), victims of a downturn economy.

Where would we expect to find child abuse? This theory would hold that child abuse would have a higher probability of being found where the above characteristics are found. The family in the neighborhood that never seems to be around; the husband that doesn't say "good morning"; the house that is inhabited but never seems to betray any sign of life; the house that is always dark, even in the evenings when one would think that the television or radio would be on; where no one ever seems to be invited over for a visit, or when someone does come to the door they are met by an eyeball peering through a crack in the door; where children never seem to be found playing in either the front or the rear of the house; where the people never seem to be seen at church, at parties, at the movies, or anywhere else! They don't have listed telephone numbers, don't have pasts, don't seem to be interested in anything at all. The most extreme of these types would be candidates for abusive homes. This is not to say that all people with the above characteristics are necessarily child abusers, i.e., not all sequestered, secretive, segregated couples are child abusers. The assertion here is that there would be a greater probability of finding abusing homes among this population than in a random sampling of all homes.

Finally, what can be done to combat physical child abuse? In two words — *promote openness!*²⁰ An extended family is one in which privacy is necessarily sacrificed. It has advantages, however, in that it offers variety and support. It also provides eyes that can see trouble in the offing. Anything that makes people more public, including nosey neighbors, someone always knocking on the doors, someone trying hard to establish a friendship relation, promotes openness. In other words, rethinking such basic American values as rugged individualism, monogamy, neolocality and the acquisition of wealth by debit financing.

The problem of child abuse is not mysterious or foreboding. It only requires that an objective, open-minded, unprejudiced look be employed.

FOOTNOTES

1. Origin of Species and Descent of Man, Modern Library Edition, p. 52-53.
- 2, 3. Mathews 2: 16 King James' Version.
4. There is a movie entitled "The Invention of an Adolescent" put out by the National Film Board of Canada, 1968, which chronicles much of the above material. See also the commentary to the Kempe, et al article in the same issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association, 181, #1, 1962, p. 42.
5. David G. Gil in Ray E. Helfer and C. Henry Kempe, The Battered Child, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968, p. 20.
6. R.J. Light, "Abused and Neglected Children in America," Harvard Educational Review, Vol. 43 #4, November, 1973, p. 556-598.
7. This question has been asked before. See George C. Curtis in Jerome E. Leavitt, Ed., The Battered Child: Selected Readings, General Learning Corporation, 1974, p. 74-75.
8. George C. Curtis, op cited, p. 74-75.
9. Exodus 20:12; Romans 1:30-32; Colossians 3:18-22; 1 Timothy 3:4-5; Luke 18: 15-17; Proverbs 13:24; 1 Samuel 2:25.
10. Amendment IV, United States Constitution.
11. See "A Lawyer's View of Child Abuse" by Samuel Felder, in Leavitt, op cited, p. 82-89.
12. See the appendix in Robert L. Geiser, The Illusion of Caring, Boston: Beacon Press, 1973.
13. Geiser, op cited, p. 168; Victor George, Foster Care, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970, Ch. 7; Jessica S. Pers, Government as Parent, Berkeley: Institute of Government Studies, 1976, Ch. 7.
14. While there is a great deal of controversy about bonding, such as persons who hold that bonding is extremely important, such as M.H. Klaus and J.H. Kennell, Maternal-Infant Bonding, St. Louis: C.V. Mosby, 1975; others such as S. Chess, "Developmental Theory Revisited", Canadian Journal of Psychiatry, 24, 1979, p. 101-112 hold that bonding can be overcome or compensated for in later life; still others feel bonding is temporary and easily substituted, such as G. Vaillant, Adaptation to life, Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1977. From the standpoint of historical tradition and lack of strong consensus to the contrary, bonding will be treated as very important herein.
15. Stephan A. Cohen and Alan Sussman, "The Incidence of Child Abuse in the U.S.," Child Welfare, 1975, Vol. 54 #6, p. 423-433, especially p. 433.
16. Gil in Helfer and Kempe, op cited.
17. See Child Abuse: Intervention and Treatment, ed. by Nancy B. Eberling and Deborah A. Hill, Acton, Mass.: Public Sciences Group, Inc., 1975, p. 80.

Mr. Lee was born (1942), raised and educated in the Los Angeles area (obtaining college degrees from L.A. State in 1964 and 1967). He has had an extensive and varied employment history including work in computers, biochemistry, social welfare, engineering and teaching. Mr. Lee is Professor of Sociology at El Camino College where he has taught since 1969. His serious hobbies are theoretical physics, **mathematics and cosmology** and has numerous publications on many subjects including a **theory of motivation** entitled "Socialization Anxiety", Publ. 1974. He is divorced and has a daughter, Joanna, age 3.

WHAT ABOUT THE POOR?

By Lawrence K. Samuels

I do not know of a single example of a predominantly collectivist or centrally planned society in which the ordinary citizen has achieved a major and substantial improvement in the condition of his everyday life or a real hope for the future of himself or his children.

Professor Milton Friedman

Nobel Prize Laureate in economics, 1976

It is said that people, especially the poor, cannot provide for their own well-being, and therefore anti-poverty programs operated by government agencies must be created. But does government really help the poor, or does government create economic and psychological poverty?

A few examples are in order.

A special government program operated by the Small Business Administration, "handed out millions of dollars to help 3,400 minority small businesses over the past ten years—and only about thirty are still in business today." (*National Enquirer*, Feb. 27, 1979). Despite generous loans and loose contracts, government's effort to increase wealth and jobs did not succeed.

Another example: A woman in Watts, California was told by the State of California that her home had been sold for \$173 under an old law. Mrs. Moore, a 53-year-old hospital clerk, received an eviction notice from the new owner. Under the Improvement Act of

1911, which was intended to give California cities an easy way to improve neighborhood streets, property owners have thirty days to pay an assessment. If they do not, the city treasurer's office sells the unpaid bill to anyone interested. The city put streetlights on Mrs. Moore's street in 1971 and assessed the residents.

When she asked a local city councilman about the length of time required for payment, he told her that she had ten years in which to pay. The new owners now want \$6,000 for the duplex home.

This is not an isolated case. Some 143 persons lost their homes to this law in one year alone in Los Angeles. It is not the rich who are victimized by these types of laws. (Associated Press, June 15, 1977).

Take the plight of Mrs. Flora Thorpe, a 59-year-old-widow in Cleveland. She had to pawn her wedding ring to pay for a new roof on her house to comply with city housing codes, but was jailed anyway. City inspectors arrested Mrs. Thorpe after she said she could not afford to have her house painted, too.

She explained to city officials that if it wasn't for her small dog breeding business conducted in her home, she would starve. The city officials cited her for that, too. Mrs. Thorpe needed help; instead, she got government. (United Press International, May 1, 1973).

WHAT ABOUT THE POOR?

The first question that inevitably pops into one's mind when first confronted with libertarian alternatives is, *What about the poor?* For some reason it appears to many people that libertarians have no feeling for the poor; otherwise, why would they oppose welfare, medicare and so forth? Those of the more altruistic persuasion shriek with horror when told that government is not the answer to minimizing poverty. Altruists would rather think of libertarians as heartless people who would take bread from hungry children or steal white walking canes from the blind. "Why," they scream, "without welfare and the taxes to support it, everyone would be impoverished."

In the first place, government does not produce the bread we eat or manufacture white walking canes for the blind. Poverty can only be reduced by increased production of food, housing and other products. Government, however, by its very nature, does not produce anything. The government only regulates and controls the marketplace. If the State tries to produce a product

or service, citizens are given a product with all the quality of the U.S. Postal Service and Keystone Cops rolled up in one. Government is a strain on the economy, slowing it down with regulations, which results in fewer jobs, higher prices and less productivity.

Poverty is not only economic in nature. When roads to personal achievement and acquisition of wealth are blocked, frustration and a feeling of helplessness sets in, which creates a sense of failure in an individual. Welfare, too, can promote a sense of failure—a poverty of the spirit and willingness to move forward in business ventures and self-improvement. In such an environment, the individual becomes trapped by his subconscious fears and insecurity. After all, he is accepting handouts, which to many people proves that he can do nothing but fail.

For this reason, education in self-improvement has become a major tool in undermining poverty. As an old American Indian saying goes: "Give a man a fish and he eats for a day; teach a man to fish and he eats forever."

PHONEY LAWS

But what about governmental laws designed to assist the poor? They usually accomplish the exact opposite. As Professor Murray Rothbard, in an interview in *Penthouse* (October, 1975) pointed out, "The laws to help the poor are phoney. The poor don't really benefit from the welfare state."

In the article, Rothbard cited a study of a ghetto district in Washington, D.C. "After estimating the taxes those people paid to the federal government and balancing that figure against the money the federal government gives back to them, it turned out that they are getting less from the government than they are giving. They're paying for the welfare state just as much as everybody else! The money is simply siphoned off into the military-industrial complex, into bureaucratic salaries, and so forth."

The 1968 report from the Tax Foundation showed that national, state and local taxes take 34 percent of the income of individuals who earn less than \$3,000 a year. (*U.S. News & World Report*, Dec. 9, 1968). Current studies from the Tax Foundation show that the poor continue to pay a good portion of their salaries into the tax collector's coffer. Perhaps if the impoverished and middle class did not pay so much in taxation, they could afford less expensive services from the private sector instead of those ser-

vices now provided by government.

Another law which hurts the poor is the Minimum Wage Law. A report by the National Federation of Independent Businesses in April, 1972 stated that a "loss of 680,000 jobs for marginal and submarginal workers. . . not to mention job opportunities that did not develop" . . . followed that year's minimum wage increase. Everybody wants higher wages, but, as Professor Henry Hazlitt once wrote, "We cannot make a man worth a given amount by making it illegal for anyone to offer him less."

If minimum wage laws, taxes and regulations do not empty the pocketbook and make workers eligible for the bread line, then inflation surely will. As government inflates the money supply, the dollar decreases in value. Worse yet, as the worker's income increases, his purchasing power declines.

This is only half of the story. The progressive Federal Income Tax works the same way. As a worker's income increases, so does his percentage of taxable income. The worker is making more money on paper, but is unable to buy more products at the supermarket; and he is paying at a higher, ever increasing rate of taxation. The Department of Labor reported in 1975, that "an average worker in private industry, supporting a family of four, now pays 23.4 percent more to the federal government for income tax and Social Security than he did a year ago." (AP, October 4, 1976). In other words, in 1975, taxes increased more than gasoline and food prices combined. This is amazing considering that many people look upon the oil and food industries as being run by rip-off artists. Probably 50 percent of the price increase in these industries was primarily due to higher taxes levied on those businesses. It is government which is the real rip-off artist. Not only do workers pay double the price for government and the problems it creates, but they don't even get a loaf of bread or a tank of gasoline.

ALTRUISTIC SCROOGE

If the government were prohibited from engaging in charity, who would care for the poor? This question implies the assumption that only government will provide for those who are poor; which, of course, is not true. People take care of people, because as social creatures, it is our nature to help others in time of need. Besides the psychological urge to help others, people feel an instinctive compassion towards the needy—and Americans do in a big way. In 1973 alone, private charities in the United States

received a total of \$24.5 billion in voluntary contributions, an increase of nine percent over the previous year. Moreover, the ordinary individual accounted for three-fourths of the 1973 total. (*U.S. New & World Report*, April 8, 1974). Five years later, in 1978, Americans donated \$39.6 billion to charity. (*Newsweek*, May 7, 1979).

Altruists would have us believe that everyone is heartless and unwilling to help those in difficulties. However, if the average citizen were asked to help a needy person, most would, indeed, help. What makes the altruist so certain that nobody would? Perhaps the altruist is an Ebenezer Scrooge in disguise. Perhaps he has a bad conscience or a guilt complex. He does not want to assist the needy himself, and so feels regret. Instead of working with the poor, helping them better themselves with deeds and action, the altruist attends congressional cocktail parties to lobby for legislation that will force someone else to be charitable for him.

Sy Leon, author of *None of the Above*, once observed, "There are three ways to help people: (1) you can help other people yourself; (2) you can persuade people to help other people; (3) you can force people to help other people." The first two are completely within the bounds of a free society; but the third is based on the authority of police, soldiers and guns.

The point is, people cannot be forced to be charitable. Sure, the tax money is collected at the point of a gun, but the giver is resentful of the receiver. This is not true charity—it is *Forced Charity*. It is theft from those who pay, and demeaning to those who have, for generations, had little choice but to accept government handouts.

The socialist solution to poverty, even though it fails to work, is to redistribute wealth in equal proportions. At first, socialists and equalitarians were satisfied with voluntary means to achieve this equalization of wealth distribution. However, they became impatient when equalization did not just happen automatically. This led them to advocate confiscation of wealth from individuals—using government as the mandatory collecting agency.

The problem with using government to correct the inequalities in wealth is twofold. First, to use the state in such a manner is to play into the hands of ambitious political movements. Any law or punishment imposed to achieve such a noble sounding goal may be justified on the premise that the *means justify the end*. This encourages legislation which would violate human and individual rights as the state centralizes to make equalization of

wealth more practical. The results are: the state centralizes, political leaders get to play Caesar, and special interest groups obtain their dose of power. By this time the needy are lost in the political shuffle.

Secondly, it is futile to strive for equalization of wealth. Equality of any sort is not only elusive, it is impossible to achieve or maintain for any length of time. It goes against the nature of reality. Nature does not provide any strong example of equality in human beings or in the animal world. Each species in the animal world has a means for self protection, concealment and gathering food which is unique. Each species has different, unequal abilities and body functions to survive. Some animals developed hard shells to ward off predators. Others developed wings to escape larger animals on the ground. Still others have great running strength to out-run enemies. Equality is strikingly absent in nature. It is far more in accordance with nature to strive for self-improvement rather than enforce an artificial equality.

GOVERNMENT DICTATIONS

The next result is predictable. In a democratic nation, as productivity declines and government programs fall behind schedule, the planners of equality soon realize that they are in danger of losing credibility. As the poverty-stricken people demand action, government plans must resort to primitive, naked force. The state nationalizes industry and workers as if everything the state touches is a *national resource*. Rebellious workers will be transferred to menial jobs or fired. And with government being the sole employer of workers, a dissatisfied worker could find it difficult to feed his or her family.

Forced equality eventually leads to centralization of authority; underproduction; less food, housing and jobs which, in effect, institutionalizes poverty and subservience.

INEQUALITY OF THE COIN FLIPS

But suppose someone created the perfect society in which every individual shared or received an equal amount of wealth. Also suppose that two individuals met and decided to flip a coin in a dollar bet. Once the coin is flipped and the winner takes his prize, equality disappears—somebody has more wealth than another. To prevent this, the planners of equality would have to prohibit anyone from engaging in betting or trading activity. Wealth comes from trade. Without trade, everyone would starve

in the naked cold. Even in the most socialistic nations, trade is the basic fabric of society. Equalitarian theories are just that—theories.

There is more. Enforced equality assumes that *value* is *objective*, that an object or action has one value. Value is *subjective*, not *objective*.

A good wage to one person is a low wage to another. A high price to one customer is a low price to another. People place different values on everything. Equality of wealth cannot be achieved because nobody can agree on what is equal beyond a small number of people. Usually, some equality is achieved when two people agree to make a trade. When the trade is made, each trader sees an opportunity to trade a lesser subjective value for a higher one. A client buys a bag of potatoes for a dollar because ten potatoes represent a higher value compared with the dollar, a lower value. Otherwise, it is doubtful an exchange would have been made. But this value is set by the two traders and not government planners.

It is no wonder that chaos and confusion surround enforced distribution of the wealth. It is hard to enforce something that is unclear and subjective. Enforced equality fails on the human level; an equalitarian paradise cannot occur because few can agree on what it is, or how to achieve it.

Wealth is increased in society by increasing trade. Wealth is not increased when government demands more money from taxpayers. Government may redistribute wealth produced by others, but little of the wealth reaches the poor. As the saying goes: *Those who control the state usually enrich their friends.*

POLITICS AND POVERTY

The libertarian alternative to poverty is the most rational. Rod Manis noted in a small pamphlet, *Poverty: A Libertarian View*, "When power is radically decentralized, people will be free to run their own schools, their own welfare programs, their own lives. . . . The system that obtains the greatest individual freedom would be the most successful and would provide the greatest opportunities for the poor."

Freedom does not guarantee wealth or success; it only guarantees the individual's right to acquire it fairly. Despite political promises of personal security from hunger and poverty, government cannot lessen the plight of the poor. Rather, the welfare state prolongs poverty and nurtures people's dependence on handouts. This is no accident. There is no better

way to control members of society than to make them insecure and eager to accept any type of legislation in exchange for a so-called free lunch.

Poverty is nothing to look forward to. Yet it is not the countries of the world with a high level of personal and economic liberties that suffer from mass poverty. The greatest resource of any nation is not iron ore, oil or gold. It is the recognition, by members of that nation, of the individual's right to acquire personal wealth in liberty. The question should not be, "What about the poor?" It should be, "What about the liberty not to be poor?"

NOTICE

New Rampart Discontinued

New Rampart has been discontinued as of Jan 1, 1986. Edited by L.K. Samuels for almost 5 years, *New Rampart* will be combined with *Rampart Individualist*. Subscribers to *New Rampart* will receive copies of *Rampart Individualist* in exchange.

The Editor

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