

Once there was no "welfare."

There were orphan asylums where half-starved children, who were either "illegitimate" or had neither father nor mother, were hidden away from the world; there were debtors' prisons for those who couldn't pay their bills; there were workhouses in Europe and America, which were often open bull pens where men picked hemp or broke rock and chopped wood and were paid in food and shoddy clothing instead of money. And, of course, there was the poorhouse, where only the most desperate sought refuge. Both men and women dreaded entering that dismal lodging as much as they feared the plague.

The welfare system as we know it, woefully inadequate as it is, strangling in red tape and reeking with racism and bureaucratic snobbery, does give some minimal help to families facing starvation. It aids about half the more than 30 million people who are officially classified as "poor."

In 1979 the poverty level for a family of four was proclaimed by the government to be \$7,230 (up from \$5,859 two years earlier). None of the millions who are on welfare, however, have been brought up to the poverty level.

The form of help known as Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), the part of the public program most people have in mind when they speak of "welfare," varies widely from state to state. In Hawaii in 1979 it gave \$6,550 a year to a family of four who qual-