Welfare and dependency in Switzerland

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SWITZERLAND is not often thought of when we discuss the welfare state. In many respects it is not a welfare state. There is, for example, no national health service and most of the population is covered by voluntary health insurance. There is also no central program to provide a minimum guaranteed income for all of the population (other than for the aged and infirm) as found in England, Norway, and Sweden. Unlike the major European welfare states, the Swiss federal government defers in much greater measure to local autonomy. But in one critical respect it has achieved what the United States and European nations traditionally defined as welfare states have not: It has all but eliminated "welfare dependency," or intergenerational poverty, and it has done this in a strikingly different manner than other developed societies.

Whether Switzerland has lessons to offer the troubled welfare states of Europe or the United States is another question. But first, let us describe how Switzerland deals with the poor, and how it shapes policies to encourage self-sufficiency and to prevent the development of dependent people in its population.

The Swiss begin with a view of combatting poverty which is very different from that of the other developed countries. The Swiss
approach to the problem is framed as two complementary questions: What needs to be done to change the situation so that the problems will be alleviated rather than suppressed? What can be done to resolve the poverty problem, in a way that does not itself bring about unintended and counterproductive results?

And so the Swiss have arrived at an arrangement for the care of the poor which, first of all, has to meet the requirement of aiding them in such a manner that they are temporarily helped—yet not encouraged to become dependent on government aid. Second, aid has to be tied to a policy of encouraging the poor to help themselves as much as possible, and to move them out of poverty as rapidly as possible, if not in that generation, then at least in the next.

The Swiss have established a far-ranging and expanding program of compulsory social insurance that imposes on each worker and his employer a compulsory shared-risk program to provide for both the expected and unexpected financial needs of most other workers. This primarily self-sustained (with a minor government contribution) insurance program provides the worker with old-age retirement, disability and sickness insurance, survivors’ insurance, accident insurance, and unemployment compensation. Unlike the social insurance policies of many other industrialized nations, however, these programs are designed so that the beneficiary cannot control the outcome. Unemployment compensation is given only if the person is validly out of work and readily available for employment as it opens up. Disability is strictly defined in such a way that it has not, as it has in many other nations, become an alternative to work. Social insurance in Switzerland is operated as a true insurance program; the only difference between the Swiss program and the commercial form of insurance is that the Swiss program covers almost everyone. The lesson which Swiss social insurance administrators have learned from the insurance business generally is that client behavior usually changes in response to administrative actions—and that benefit levels should be structured to account for these changes.

All this has been done primarily through administrative policy. People are kept working and contributing to the fund until a bona-fide crisis occurs. Even then, Swiss social insurance requires that efforts be made to rehabilitate the infirm (during the benefit period) to return them to self-sufficiency if it is possible and feasible. Otherwise, the client can suffer a decreased benefit.

The emphasis on the “prevention” aspects of social insurance is matched with a heavy emphasis on prevention of dependency through employment preparation. In Switzerland it is hard to avoid
effective schooling and occupational training and experience. If a child should begin to falter in such preparation for adult self-sufficiency, it is the concern of the whole community—not just school personnel. Truancy and dropping out of school before completion are rare in Switzerland, and children not in class during the school day become the concern of local youth programs, the local police, the neighbors, the clergy, and anyone else who might be around. As for the educational-occupational offerings, they are varied and broad. There are offerings at every level and they extend into the adult years. In Zurich, male students have an educational apprenticeship completion rate of 97 percent while female students have a 91 percent rate. Even the resident Italian children of former Gastarbeiter (guest workers) have completion rates of 87 percent for males and 78 percent for females: The lower completion rates for Italian girls is due primarily to family pressure for early marriage. Thus, the old idea that Switzerland has few resources other than its people is matched with a national policy which ensures that its people are educationally and technologically prepared to take their places in the productive economy.

Linking immigration to poverty

Prevention of native poverty is also ensured by strict control of immigration, a policy which is similar in its stringent limitations to those of many welfare states, including Norway and Sweden. The Swiss take the view that they cannot provide for everyone in the world, or even for everyone who seeks to come to Switzerland, so they have carefully delineated a limited scope of responsibility. These limits, whatever the rest of the world may think of them, begin with a strong concern for “their own.”1 Thus, the Swiss policy on immigration operates almost as if it were controlled by a calibrated spigot which is opened only when labor shortages exist and is quickly shut when Swiss natives begin to draw excessively on unemployment compensation.

Social insurance benefits are generally much larger than public aid, but seldom at a level equal to full-time employment. The benefits are such that, in American terms, they would be adequate for relatively comfortable survival. In addition to these “First Pillar” payments, 80 percent of the working population is now also covered

1 Currently, the non-native element comprises 15 percent of the total population—a rate higher than that of most European nations. Foreign workers are eligible for the same social insurance benefits as are native Swiss, and community welfare agencies serve both foreign and native residents in need.
with "Second Pillar" occupational insurance funded by both employer and employee. The Second Pillar payments are often much larger than the basic program, which is compulsory for all workers.\(^2\)

Thus, the policy and administration of social insurance in Switzerland is similar in many ways to the policies and administration of social insurance in other countries to the degree that the latter have not been integrated with their public assistance programs. In most respects, the Swiss social insurance system provides greater and more adequate security for the population than that found in most other nations. One exception to the strict separation of the Swiss social insurance program from public assistance exists in the case of the aged or invalids with an income of less than 12,000 Swiss francs (about $5,500) after deductions of medical costs, excessive rental costs and other special needs. This program (the Ergänzungseistungen), which is similar to the Supplementary Security Income program in the United States, is federally administered and requires no prepayments. A limited but flexible means test is required, as it is in all Swiss public assistance programs. In essence, the federal government provides a guaranteed income, on application, for the aged and for invalids who are without resources. Administrative discretion, usually prohibited in other nations, is exercised in the Swiss program in order to prevent inappropriate use of disability provisions, such as has recently occurred in Holland.

The availability of adequate primary (First Pillar) and secondary (Second Pillar) social insurance, in addition to a broadly-available supplementary program, and additional cantonal social insurance, prevents the occurrence of poverty among the aged, sick, and handicapped so frequently found in other developed countries. Cantonal supplementary insurance has grown from 72 million francs (about $35 million) in 1950 to almost 1.5 billion francs (about $730 million) in 1980.

Despite all this preventive effort, some Swiss occasionally find themselves in poverty. Such persons are served not by the federal social insurance program but by the local communities and the cantons. The differences between Swiss social insurance and public assistance are carefully maintained because these differences serve a necessary function. The social insurance programs are administered by the central (federal) government, but public assistance is operated by local communities and cantons. In 1980 cantons and local

\(^2\) The "Third Pillar" of the Swiss social security system is the individual's own savings and insurance protection. The Swiss rate of personal savings is one of the highest in the world, despite the fairly low interest rates paid by Swiss banks.
communities spent 1,607 million francs on public assistance to families (amounting to about $803 million). This is in addition to 261 million francs (about $130 million) spent on housing for limited income families in 1980, and 85 million francs (about $42 million spent) on miscellaneous welfare projects. Most of these funds came from local and cantonal sources. No more than 30,000 people of all ages received this form of aid (aside from the Ergänzungsleistung recipients served at the federal level). In addition to these welfare expenditures, the federal and cantonal programs provide family allowances for larger families.

Swiss aid to the needy holds up well in comparison to that of other industrialized nations. Anton Kausel's comparison of welfare indicators shows Switzerland third after the United States and Sweden for 1970—well above the norm for other Western nations.3

Welfare in the cantons

Public assistance in Switzerland, unlike social insurance, is not a concern or responsibility of the federal government. In fact, federal data is not even collected on public assistance. The control of public assistance by the local community and the cantons has been jealously guarded since the origins of the confederation. Although all individuals have freedom of movement within the country, the individual's home community or canton carries the responsibility of providing for his care, either directly, if the individual is residing there, or on a reimbursement basis for the first five years he resides in another community.

Because public assistance is funded from local and cantonal sources, it becomes a matter of concern for each local community to prevent dependency, if possible, and to work with those who are dependent so that they can become self-sufficient as soon as possible. If a family is so beset with problems as to be unable to become self-sufficient in a short space of time, then the community authorities make special efforts to see to it that the children in that family are reared in a manner which will make them self-sufficient as they reach adulthood.

The public welfare programs of the local communities vary from community to community, but there is general similarity in how the welfare workers view their assignments and how they carry them out.

3 Kausel calculates comparative welfare indicators in terms of real GNP per capita, converted into an index number based on Austria 1970 = 100. Anton Kausel, Das Wirtschaftswachstum der Nationen von 1860 bis 1970 (Vienna: Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Lebensniveauvergleiche, n.d.).
Significantly, all public welfare aid is temporary, and continues only as long as the cause of impoverishment lasts. Only in the case of the elderly and some of the physically or mentally handicapped does this help continue indefinitely. But for the Swiss, any aid plan, once developed with the recipient, is quickly followed by consideration of how long the aid is to be given, and how soon the recipient will again be able to become self-supporting. This kind of a discussion involves questions of education and training, past employment and work skills, further education and training required, and plans for finding employment again. If full-time employment is not immediately possible because of child care arrangements, school and day-care resources are provided in order to make part-time work possible. Even part-time employment is usually viewed as temporary, in that the assistance recipient is expected eventually to become fully self-sufficient. There is essentially a “contract” between the recipient and the agency which covers the responsibilities for the amount and manner of service to be given by the agency for the recipient’s movement toward independence.

In most local community welfare ordinances this aid is described as “advice, counseling, information, and other social services, including, if necessary, financial and material aid.” There is usually no uniform schedule of grants, merely a set of guidelines which are considered along with the recipient’s goal and plan. Considerations in calculating the amount of “temporary” aid include not only the general and special needs of the recipient, but also the amount of money he can eventually earn, and whether a welfare grant larger than a beginning salary might discourage efforts toward training and employment.

In the United States and in other Western countries welfare is generally given on a basis of equality for each category of recipient. The delivery of the welfare grant is seen as the primary purpose of the agency, rehabilitation and social services are elective if available, and the welfare grant remains the same for as long as there are no changes in the recipient’s situation. In Switzerland the amount of the grant varies regularly according to the client’s progress.

Another difference between the Swiss and other welfare systems has to do with the responsibility of relatives and family. In some locations responsibility of relatives extends even to affluent brothers and sisters, who are called upon by the government to provide aid to needy siblings. Parents and grandparents are usually required to provide for grown children in need if they have the resources. Adult children are also usually required to aid their parents and grandparents if necessary. In cases of divorce and separation men are required
to supply adequate spousal and child support. Where child payments are not forthcoming on a regular basis, the public welfare agency in most cantons is required by law to deliver the court-specified sums to the mother and then press for repayment. And unlike court-ordered child-support payments in the U.S., Swiss payments are usually effectively recovered—a result of Switzerland’s unique tax system, and of its compulsory military service laws.

Public aid in Switzerland can be recovered by the authorities from an adult recipient or his direct relatives if he later becomes affluent. Thus some recipients tend to ask for less aid than they would otherwise when they know that they may have to pay it back. Similarly, public aid funds which are secured under false pretenses can be recovered with interest by the local community, a practice which keeps incidence of fraud to a minimum.

The enforcement of the “means test” for public welfare in Switzerland is easily carried out, due in part to the tax collection system. Each year every person files an income and wealth tax report. Local assessments are first levied on this basis, then cantonal assessments, and, finally, the federal assessments. For the sum of 5 francs (exempted in the case of the welfare authorities), in most communities a copy of any individual’s tax reports can be secured by anyone and without having to state a reason. If a report contains inaccuracies, these can be challenged by any other taxpayer. Thus, the tax record is an unusually authentic source for information on a person’s resources and economic ability to support himself or his family.

Nevertheless, public welfare is conducted on a confidential basis in Switzerland. It is illegal under most community ordinances for a public welfare worker to release information without client permission, even if such information is requested by the local public welfare board members. A public welfare worker may not interfere with the constitutional or personal rights of any client. The client, however, is required to cooperate with the welfare worker, not only in regard to determination of needs and resources, but also in relation to improving his own situation and that of his family. A client who does not cooperate in working toward self-sufficiency may find that the nature and extent of his welfare grant have been changed, or that his welfare grant is to be dispersed in small increments by an appointed guardian, or even that his welfare grant is now to be in the form of materials and vouchers. His only recourse is to appeal beyond the worker or supervisor to the public welfare commission or town council. Under such circumstances, the issue of confidentiality becomes moot.
Similarly, the welfare worker is authorized, without permission of the client, to release information to youth and community authorities when the client has not been acting responsibly and where guardianship is to be considered. In the United States, the interaction between welfare worker and aid recipient is routinized and focused primarily on regulations of eligibility for aid, and the authorized levels of grants. In Switzerland almost any aspect of the client's life, and that of his family, may be raised for discussion by the welfare worker. The worker has generally unlimited controls in requiring interviews with the client, or conducting collateral visits with the relatives, employers, teachers of the client's children, and others who may, in any way, affect the client's progress toward becoming independent. Thus, the welfare worker, both formally and indirectly as well, can shape the way in which public aid and public social services are used by the client and his family. If a client seeks to go beyond the case worker's constraints, or beyond the agency's constraints, he then comes face-to-face with community authorities who are almost always in agreement with the goal of self-reliance. And public officials are even more aware of the need to avoid welfare dependency than are the welfare workers themselves.

Obviously, Swiss public welfare administrators have a rather different view about poverty and welfare than that of officials in other Western countries. They realize that poverty is often caused by a variety of factors, including structural unemployment, and individual problems and conditions which prevent adequately remunerative employment, as well as dependency, which may be interactive with the availability of public aid. But they tend to individualize interpretations of why a particular client is in need and view the world as a place where individuals have a choice. If some are needy, then it is because they have made a wrong choice, or because they have been unfortunate in their circumstances, or because of a combination of these factors. Swiss administrators view welfare recipients as people who can change their lives once they have been helped to determine what has to be done. It is an attitude quite at odds with that of administrators in other countries, who tend to emphasize the goals of efficiency in the "delivery of benefits," equalitarian handling of clients in a massive system, and improved management of their assignment fulfilling diverse regulations.

Many Swiss welfare workers view welfare itself as an iatrogenic disease; that is, a disease caused by professional treatment. One Swiss welfare official drew a parallel between "welfarization" and
excessive bed-rest after surgery. "If the client gets used to inaction he will lose the ability to fend for himself."

Controls: informal yet effective

Admittedly, this system only works because of powerful informal controls. Probably the most effective of these is the Swiss family structure. From an early age, Swiss family socialization at almost all levels of society operates to shape children into functional citizens and workers. Community attitudes reinforce the authority of the family over children, and children soon learn that their behavior must conform to a standard of consideration for others. Each child is impressed with the assignment of picking up after himself, of doing the work assigned to him and of preparing for self-sufficiency. Children soon learn that as members of a family they must care for their siblings and be responsible for their well-being.

This family pattern is reinforced by community patterns. Aside from Zurich, which has approximately 354,000 inhabitants, there are few large cities in Switzerland. Most of the population live in small villages and towns easily reached by an effective network of suburban trains, trams, and buses. Residents may work elsewhere, but they participate actively in communal decision making. Many communities function on a town-hall basis, and most decisions regarding expenditures—on schools, housing, and welfare policies, for example—must be ratified either by a popular vote or a meeting of all electors. The social distance in these communities is minimal and news about individuals travels fast. People hear about jobs, informal community help is given to the aged and sick, and there is a high level of informal mutual aid. Neighborly aid is frequent, as is the operation of numerous voluntary social service programs.

Yet another reinforcement is the Jugendamt, a publicly-supported recreation, social service, supervision, and career program which serves a large proportion of the youth in each town. In no other country are such extensive and intensive efforts made to aid and direct a nation’s youth into positive social activities and away from those which are self-destructive and wasteful. The degree and amount of services given to young people and the attempt to tie recreation to character and career development among youth is both effective and unusual. There is a close working relationship between public welfare services and the Jugendamt which ensures that families given financial aid are also given advice, and more. The ease with which Beistand (supervision by locally-appointed guardians) is established and the frequent local emphasis that such services shall
include Rat und Tat (advice and action) is matched in few other nations.

Still another informal control can be found in the Swiss family relations courts. While poverty has become “feminized” in many Western nations as a consequence of divorce and unmarried motherhood, this is not so in Switzerland, in part because of Swiss divorce and family relations courts. In each of the welfare agencies I visited, I found that in contrast to the United States there were no complaints about divorce courts and considerable respect for the helpfulness of the divorce courts in preventing dependency. Husbands who are divorced from their wives must provide sizable amounts for child and spousal support, and those men who do not have their wages garnished. Funds are advanced automatically in many cantons to divorced wives with children by the welfare agency, which then secures reimbursement from the fathers by legal mechanisms. The fact that most fathers do pay what has been specified by the courts in Switzerland makes it more probable that they will also visit their children, and thus, serve as a parental influence on them. The only exceptions apparently are where the father is a foreigner, and thus, enforcement of court actions is ineffective. The Swiss rate of paternal determination and paternal support (outside marriage) is also much higher than in most other nations. We should note that the Swiss rate of children born out-of-wedlock is low: 5 percent in 1982, 3.8 percent in 1970. Over one-third of such births are quickly followed by marriages. In the United States, the 1980 figure is 18.4 percent and the 1982 estimate is closer to 23 percent; similar levels are found in many other industrialized nations.

Consider one example of the discretion of these courts: In a conversation with a Swiss banker, I learned that he had recently provided a bond to guarantee child support. This was occasioned when a divorced man from a small town in Switzerland was summoned to meet with the divorce judge. The judge was concerned that the man’s publicly-announced betrothal and eventual marriage to a second wife might result in his nonpayment of the scheduled child and spousal supports. The judge indicated that, although he was not legally concerned as a judge, he was concerned as a citizen of the community. He did not want to see the community having to support the man’s first family. He indicated that, because of his concern, he planned to appear at the impending marriage to protest that this new marriage was fundamentally immoral in that the man intended to develop a new family at the community’s expense. The judge was dissuaded from his plan to publicly protest the marriage
only after the man had posted a bond, participated in by his brothers, sisters, and parents, which guaranteed continued child and spousal support until the children of his first marriage were grown.

Most Swiss judges probably do not involve themselves to this extent in the enforcement of their decrees, but the fact that this does occasionally occur provides us with an indication of the informal community controls which serve to limit or prevent dependency.

The job of the district courts relating to domestic relations is assisted in many ways by the formal controls and structure of Swiss society. Each male votes (elections and referenda are frequent), pays taxes, and registers for military duty up to age fifty (and to age fifty-five for officers). If he wishes to move to another commune, he must de-register at the offices of the commune where he lives and then register at the offices of the commune he is joining. Not keeping one's registry up to date is a violation of tax regulations, compulsory military duty, voting regulations, and police regulations. No errant father can be lost in the system unless he leaves Switzerland.

Similarly, the operation of the court system is such that collection of child and spousal support can be enforced by the withholding of wages, by the establishment of liens on property, and by a variety of informal and social constraints. It must also be noted that in Switzerland divorce is not always granted by judges. There is no "no-fault" divorce in Switzerland, and, hence, people try to make their marriages work.

One will not be surprised to find education well-integrated into this society of high controls. Failure in school becomes a matter of concern, not only for the school personnel, but also for the child's family, relatives, diverse agencies, and interested people in the community. Because of the concern for the family's Ruf (family reputation in the community), and because in Switzerland completion of basic education is the path to economic success and self-sufficiency, parents and children alike are extraordinarily serious about education. Observers of Swiss education have referred to the heavy emphasis placed on scholarship and discipline in the Swiss schools, the high status of teachers and the well-established conventions governing student-teacher contacts. Each child is taught to assume responsibility for his actions, whether they occur in groups or alone. Instilled in each child is the importance of doing his work and doing it as well as possible. A Swiss political scientist wrote me that from early to late age, "the true Swiss is ready and willing to work, rising early and working late" as if for the joy of it. During interviews with school officials, a familiar theme was repeated: Switzerland has no real resources, except for its people.
Military service complements the schools in this goal. Every male young adult who is able-bodied is required to spend four months in basic training, followed by annual service. Employers are required to fund the wages of employees while on military duty, and many companies are glad to do so because military contacts are often helpful and "good for business."

If the norms and values of Swiss society are not fully absorbed by young Swiss males, military service with a local unit will usually complete the process. Each soldier in the Swiss Army is required to operate with a group and is also called upon to do his share within the group and on individual assignments. A man who goes off at the expense of his unit has to cope with criticism, not only during the annual encampment, but also from the other men who know him. Thus military service reinforces Swiss attitudes toward welfare. To request welfare without adequate reason, or not to support his wife (or ex-wife) and children, would similarly serve to stigmatize a man in his community.

Guarding against dependency

To constrain welfare too much by formal and informal methods may be hard on people who have no alternative but to seek it; but to make it too freely available and with too few controls will lead to its spread in the population and, over time, in the employment market, with unhappy effects. Have the Swiss been too harsh or too permissive in administering welfare? An examination of the estimated dependency caseload may help to answer the question.

I sought evidence of dependent welfare in the public agencies of four cities and one smaller industrial town. In each of these a major part of the welfare load is made up of what would be described in the United States as "medically needy." These are people who have insufficient income, either from current earnings or from assets (such as earned social insurance benefits) to be able to meet their basic needs. They include many aged, handicapped, and infirm people.

Conservative estimates of those adequately covered for medical care ranges from 78 to 90 percent. The remainder are provided with medical coverage and reimbursed medical care as needed by their local public welfare agencies. This makes up a sizable amount of the work of the Swiss public welfare agencies, ranging from 20 to 30 percent of the caseload.

Because there is no central agency to collect information and data on welfare statistics, I was forced to supplement whatever data were available with estimates from social workers and public welfare
officials. These agencies also have a temporary case load, made up primarily of people who had used up their unemployment compensation or whose unemployment compensation was less than sufficient to meet immediate survival needs. This group also contained a sizable proportion who were employed on a part-time basis. In almost all of these cases, the families were intact and were seriously searching for additional employment. Most of the unemployed or partially employed were in areas of industrial recession and were considering retraining programs or moving their families to areas where appropriate employment was becoming available. Many of these families were on the rolls only for continuation of payment of their interim medical insurance and were otherwise self-sufficient.

In all of the agencies visited there was a small part of their case load (aside from the temporary clients, the aged, the handicapped, and the medically needy) amounting to about 5 to 10 percent who represented dependent cases of long duration. These were described as multi-problem families. In each instance, there were such factors as inadequate employment conditioning and/or training, psychiatric disturbance, a disorganized family life, disorganized handling of family funds, anti-social or incompetent role models for the children, divorced parents, parental neglect of children, distancing of the individuals from their extended families, alcohol abuse, or excessive gambling. Their number was few in proportion to the total welfare load and measures were being taken by the public welfare agency either to resolve the dependency in the present generation or to prevent it in the next one. Great care was taken to insure that children in such multi-problem families were carefully observed and protected from the destructive patterns of their parents. In some instances, aid for such families was being maintained only as long as the parents accepted supervision and guidance of their child-rearing patterns. In other instances, Beistand actions were taken in cooperation with the Jugendamt to ensure that parental responsibilities were fulfilled. In still other instances, children were placed in special homes and institutions where reportedly more than a majority succeed in maturing into responsible and productive citizens.

In a population of approximately 6.4 million, a residual dependency figure of even 4,000 such families represents perhaps one-quarter of 1 percent. In the United States the figure of approximately 6 million in a population of 220 million represents about 3 percent. Thus, the Swiss level of chronic dependency would appear to be less than one-tenth of the American level. Comparisons with other Western nations show a similar dissimilarity. Of course, Switzerland has its social problems: There is alcoholism and increasing
drug use. But one does not sense any forthcoming change in the Swiss social patterns.

The citizens’ responsibility

Is there anything to be learned from Switzerland? The country is as large as, or larger than, many other European nations, including many welfare states such as Holland, Belgium, and Norway, where dependency and its related social ills have become a serious problem. Are the Swiss so imbued with the Protestant ethic as to repress welfare dependency? If so, one could point to other countries with similar or even stronger Calvinist influences which have failed the dependency test, among them the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden.

One explanation for Switzerland’s apparent exceptionalism might be found in its historical development. This argument would hold that Switzerland has not yet caught up with the “ills” of the rest of the industrial world and that, in time, the Swiss can be counted on to drop their pride in self-reliance and their inhibitions against dependency. Yet there is little serious evidence of social disorganization in the society. Another explanation of the Swiss welfare state points to Swiss homogeneity. But with four different languages, two major religions and many schisms appearing within them, a multiplicity of political parties and opinions matching those in many other nations, Switzerland is hardly a homogeneous nation.

How, then, do we explain Switzerland’s unusual set of welfare policies? It seems that the combination of an effective pattern of schooling, employment, local government, and an involved and concerned population has resulted in the successful prevention and management of welfare dependency and its associated ills.

In the United States in the 1960s, welfare became a right available without restrictions on the client beyond cooperation in proof of eligibility. In the 1970s, social services were separated from eligibility and made voluntary. Other nations in the Western world shaped their programs along similar lines. Many of these same nations have made related changes in their schools, their universities, and their other institutions, all in the direction of reducing individual responsibility.

Switzerland avoided many of these changes. We have focused on welfare, but it is apparent that this is only one of a number of problems which Switzerland has also apparently avoided.

It is interesting to note that Switzerland’s first constitution was modeled after the first American constitution. Switzerland is a confederation of states, just as was the first American model. But the
course of Swiss development has been very different. In the United States, federal power has grown enormously. The American picture is one of huge social, fiscal, and governmental problems which cannot be resolved by participation of its local citizens, and these problems become unmanageable even with the involvement of the best minds and leaders.

The Swiss scene is far different. The recognition of problems is first made at the local level. If the problem cannot be resolved at a strictly local level, then representatives of other nearby localities who may be affected by the same problems are consulted. Many area problems are resolved by intercommunal compacts.

In Switzerland the best-informed and least-corrupt people are elected on local issues since so much is concentrated on local concerns. One finds involvement and pride in local affairs. The pathway to national leadership is through local leadership. In an interview with Professor Hans Peter Tschudi, former president of Switzerland, I learned that he had gotten his start in Swiss politics by working as a commissioner in the Basle Town community on their Buildings and Works Program. In over twenty years of service on this commission, not one instance of fraud was reported.

At the local level it is possible for everyone to know each other. It is also possible at this level to ask questions and to receive clear answers, to understand the issues and the people affected. At the local level, the citizen either gets involved or he suffers the results of someone else’s activity.

It would probably be impossible for the other Western nations to decentralize to the degree the Swiss have. But probably the first lesson from the Swiss experience would be to relegate as many problems and tax bases as possible to smaller local units of government where the citizenry can get involved. The apathetic or dormant local American community would soon awaken when it finds that it holds both the responsibility and assets related to the issues.

A second lesson would be to act with care in maintaining the ethic of responsibility. Every piece of legislation in Switzerland seems to ask: Does this law grant rights without responsibility?

Recently, the problem of “concubinage” (persons living together without marriage) was seriously considered by all levels of government because it poses a possible threat to family life and adequate child socialization. But, after much discussion, it was left to the cantons to act, and in seven cantons the practice is still illegal.

It is hard to imagine Swiss law operating to weaken the prevalent ethic in the way some laws have in the United States. Thus, up
through the 1950s, grown children in the United States were generally responsible for their aged parents and most did accept this responsibility. But some persons were not provided for by their grown children and government efforts to get such support often proved futile. In order to save the "pride" of the elderly people who were too embarrassed to ask for help from their children, or those who had no children to ask, the law was relaxed and grown children were no longer required to aid their parents. What has resulted from this law is that today grown children provide very little aid to their parents, even in instances where the children are relatively affluent. Today parents receive primarily government aid.

Along with this breaking of the parent-child economic relationship has come a parallel increase in the social distance between parents and grown children and a revision of the family ethic of "caring for one's own." The Swiss policy has avoided such unanticipated effects. Parents are aided by their children, and the frequency of visitations is estimated to be relatively high. Only when the children cannot aid their parents is local aid available. And, where the children can but do not aid their parents, local government action and informal social controls suffice in this regard.

Thus, the lessons of Switzerland for other Western nations in regard to welfarization and other related social ills are clear. Welfare problems cannot be solved with a stroke of a pen in a nation's capital. They require acceptance of the assignment by individual citizens in each community.