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**Public Service
Employment**
An Analysis of Its
History, Problems,
and Prospects

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**A FEMINIST SYSTEM
OF EDUCATION
FOR A NEW PUBLIC SERVICE**

Audrey C. Cohen

What is public service? It is investment in and development of people rather than objects. Every economic and ecological consideration, every consideration for the survival of humanity, tells us that we must allow people to be useful, to develop to their fullest capacity. Only through this process will persons realize that in the development of their own destiny lies the greatest satisfaction for life.

I know that I am proposing a change in our value system and in our priorities. But it is time. While we are all afraid that a pervasive government deciding what is in the public interest can invade our lives, I believe that, through individual integrity, we can and will guard against such an invasion. What I do fear is a society that spawns such violence and hostility as has ours in the last quarter-century. This cataclysm is symptomatic of deep-rooted problems. It is these problems we must confront and deal with in a realistic and practical way.

Paramount among the factors contributing to our current national unrest is a lack of needed public services, and this is an area in which government can effect a substantial long-term contribution. We cannot wait for the private sector to provide these services, because there are no dividends or monthly profits to highlight in encouraging such provision. It is true that in rare instances we see private enterprise providing public service. Large corporations such as Xerox and IBM are careful to provide beautiful plants, housing for workers, and contributions to the towns into which they move. But it is interesting to note that these have been wealthy communities into which they are moved, and that these wealthy communities would settle for nothing less. And even these instances have been few and far between.

If we agree, however, that through a system of public service we can provide the mechanisms to help evolve a society that encourages the development of human potential and that recognizes the development of individuals as the foremost goal of humanity, then our next question is: how do we do it? How do we get from here to there? How do we provide the means to enable people to care for themselves and also to care about others?

Our civil service is this government's one continuous venture into public service. It is totally inadequate to today's needs and certainly in terms of future needs. What we must have today are people who are trained to, and who demonstrate they are able to, solve problems—to teach our children, provide family guidance or assistance, stem the tide of our decaying urban centers, implement comprehensive health services, provide necessary legal assistance and guidance; in short, persons who by their performance demonstrate their sensitivity, their problem-solving capabilities, and their own effectiveness. Civil service does none of these. It is based on the antiquated system of equating test answers with practical competence. This is absurd. It is time to eliminate civil service and substitute a new policy and program of public service where, finally, performance becomes primary. Let us utilize the talents and skills of all our citizens, and let us give all people the opportunity to serve.

How can we do this? It is essential that public service become part of the educational and governmental process. To fill jobs in the public sector in order to provide needed services related to the general welfare means, to me, that the government should set up a long-range education/humanpower policy. We must define and implement a policy that enables every citizen to achieve status and rewards, as opposed to our current educational system, which is elitist and restrictive and which has continually discriminated against women and against minority groups. Experiential new humanpower schools and colleges should be established with federal funding to pull together the many components that determine an effective worker in a particular area. Both performed skills and theoretical knowledge will be constantly related to practical situations in a work-study orientation.

A long-range effective upgrading and employment policy must be developed and implemented by our government. This is not possible without the kind of educational innovation I have suggested above, for the new educational structure combines both vocational training and theoretical knowledge. It prepares a worker to be both skilful and humane. The latter quality has been ignored too long in public service. It is a crucial quality and must be prepared for in very specific ways.

In implementing a new federal educational policy designed to prepare persons to fill needed jobs in the public service skilfully, effectively, and humanely, it is essential to provide for continuing education. It is foolish to restrict professional preparation, for example, to a relatively short time-span in a person's life, and to effectively block such preparation at a later time. Professional education—any kind of education—should be available to anyone at any time within his or her working life. This would provide continuing opportunity for upgrading, and for changing careers or fields of interest, should that be indicated. Motivated adults succeed gloriously. The G.I. Bill has more than proved this. New education/public service employment programs and policies should reflect this experience.

Education and training must mesh for the development of the competence of our citizenry. Professionalism—and in essence a professional person is one who is thought capable of solving problems—as it exists today is not particularly effective. It is elitist. In many ways it is destructive. We require years and years of study, but students do not relate what is taught in the classroom to

situations they face in the real world. We have required more and more credentials, but nowhere do we ask the question: is the professional able to serve clients humanely? We say that education is the right of all, but have we provided the kind of higher education that is liberating, or have we instead channeled those who appeared to have limited vision into second-rate programs and second-rate lives? We must realize that a system based on more and more credits and degrees does not guarantee competence. Rewards, in such a system, are based on academic qualifications, not on effective performance.

The new worker developed by a new educational system must be a blending of male and female qualities, and this is important. For generations women have been excluded from the decision-making process. For generations professional education and our entire university system has been dominated by white males. Men have developed the value system and administered the credentialing procedures that govern the professions. Since our society is so male-dominated, it can reasonably be argued that it is white males who have been responsible for the destruction so prevalent today. Women, blacks, and Puerto Ricans could not possibly have done worse than what we have or have had in terms of war, poverty, and degradation.

On the one hand, women have always been identified with tenderness, concern, subjectivity, and sensuousness. On the other, these are precisely the qualities missing in our professionals today—qualities that are essential if we are really seeking to define the "humane," the ideal professional. It is the crucial synthesis of academic knowledge and these specific female behavioral qualities that will in fact determine the ideal professional—the person responsive to the needs of others, the person committed to social change and betterment, the person effective in raising the quality of the services available to our population.

When we begin to see the almost unlimited facets of the paragon I have just described, we realize that we must discover how to measure and evaluate these qualities; in short, we need a new evaluation and credentialing process. We need a whole new spectrum of behavioral and theoretically oriented tests. But these are not tests to be given once and then forgotten. That is what happens now in the schools or in the series of irrelevant civil service tests; that is what we must change.

Evaluation must be continuous throughout not only the period of professional preparation but the entire period of professional life. One effective way to do this might be for the individual worker to evaluate himself or herself on a daily basis, perhaps by keeping a log that offers a day-by-day assessment of his or her concrete performance. The focus must always be on a better society, humane behavior, social change. With such a perspective, people would work and look at themselves in a critical but constructive way. To view each day as an evaluation of effectiveness is much more demanding and challenging to a person than is a great comprehensive examination to be taken once and never again.

At the same time that we are building a new education/humanpower policy system, let us encourage diversity by those private groups engaged in public service, such as the Quakers, the communal groups, and others searching for new environmental solutions.

While contemplating and discussing public service employment in a totally new framework, Dr. Bell introduces yet another facet for us to consider. Under the present structure of society, with its attendant myths, it is difficult for some to accept Carolyn Shaw Bell's recommendation that the occupation of consumer maintenance be recognized—for society's assumption is that the woman's place is to minister to the needs of the family and that this is not a career. The increasing recognition of the necessity for limiting population growth in order for human society to continue to exist on the planet, however, has already begun to force new thinking about the role of the family and particularly the role of women.

If our population remains steady and does not increase—and I believe that since we are now faced with a question of environmental survival this is precisely what will happen—families will have fewer children, or none, and while more women will be available to enter the labor market, the stabilizing population will eventually diminish the total labor pool. What are the implications for a society with a diminishing labor supply? While indications are that the nuclear family will not necessarily disappear, it may very well remain as only one way of organizing society. This kind of social organization may prove counterproductive in a society where human resources become scarce. Will society be able to afford a situation where the skills and talents of a woman are to be used solely on a one-to-one relationship with her only child? Or will society require those who exhibit skills and talents needed elsewhere in the economy to use them elsewhere, and that those who are best at those "consumer maintenance" skills Dr. Bell outlines take over those tasks? What are the implications of males assuming child-rearing responsibilities? Could it lead to a new kind of society? A society of nonwarriors? Think of what that would do for the economy!

If we continue to assume, in line with the current myth of "only housewives," that the career of providing consumer maintenance should exist only if there is nothing better to do, then we are improving neither our values nor the existing situation. If, however, we expand this concept to the point where consumer maintenance is considered a vital element in community service—just as health care is—the establishment of a truly public service approach becomes possible.

There will be a period—and we are entering it now—in which women will begin to move quickly into positions of power and in which some men will see women attaining higher status than their own because the women can perform. What are the implications for a society in which women will hold higher positions than men? Because of their deep-seated survival instincts, men will be forced to accept and even encourage this, even though liberation initially will seem threatening.

When survival is at stake, however, the need to assume and hold positions of power becomes secondary. We must see to it that where there are demonstrated public needs for skills and talents, no matter what the power structure, that women be guaranteed the same access to these positions; that performance be a basic criterion for measuring competence to fill these positions, and that rewards reflect this performance.

If we can construct a society wherein public service truly means serving the public good, where the educational system is designed to make full use of each individual's potential at every age, and where the rewards are designed to reflect the individual's ability to perform in both a competent and humane fashion, we will, perhaps, have achieved the millennium. Let us begin with the educational process—it certainly is worth a try.