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United Appeal Campaign

Who buys the band aids?

This is written by the Citizens for Social Action, a group of social workers who have sought to change the United Appeal Community Fund for two years.

Worried about the poor, the sick, the needy? Wondering what to do about it?

How about combining all your charitable donations into one easy payment. . .

The United Community Fund launched its annual bandaid collection again. The United Appeal kicked off this year with the old torch passing ceremony in front of City Hall. But when Miss United Appeal passed the torch to pretty little Roxanne, she wouldn't take it. She said she didn't want it.

Is the Fund having problems?

Certainly housewives, working people and even social workers in United Appeal agencies are asking questions about what the Fund actually does and how it operates. Questions like, where does our money go, what does it do, who controls the Fund?

Our money goes to the United Community Fund, which then allocates it in committee meetings to 78 agencies. These agencies serve people whose needs are not otherwise met by the present social and economic system, or people whose needs are being created by the inequity of the present system. This work is often referred to as bandaid solutions, even by officials themselves.

Bandaid solutions are temporary measures taken to treat someone's immediate problem. Not to deal with its cause. For example, chronic unemployment, poor education, inadequate housing, all contribute heavily to family breakdown. UA agencies counsel these families. They don't believe in helping people to organize themselves to deal with the causes of their suffering. What's worse, you and I, thinking that help is already being given, are blinded to the need for new kinds of social action such as citizen group organizing.

And then, a lot of counselling is aimed towards helping people to adjust to being poor, handicapped or otherwise deprived. These people are taught to accept the fact that if they are not as well off as some others, it is because they are lazy, immature or maladjusted. In other words, they are taught that the problem is inside them, not in a social system which doesn't provide the jobs, which doesn't provide the housing, which needs people at the bottom of the heap.

So the UA agencies do serve an important function. They prop up the bleeding so they don't fall in the streets to grate on your conscience and mine.

Who controls the money?

Simply put, the United Community Fund Board of Trustees is elected by the voting membership at its annual meeting. Anyone who holds a receipt of donation may vote, but most donors are not made aware of this fact. The 60 board members then select officers for the Executive Committee and eleven other committees.

The Board of Trustees enact United Community Fund policy. Last year, 43 trustees out of a total of 60, or 71.7

percent of the board were men from the business community. Sixteen out of 17, or 94.1 percent of the executive committee, and eight out of eight or 100 percent of the officers of the UCF were drawn from business last year. Every year, workers give 30 to 35 percent of the total collected by the United Appeal. Last year there were only four labor representatives or 7 percent representation on the board.

Who controls the money? In a word — business.

The Fund exercises a great deal of control over its member agencies. More than once an agency which has challenged Fund policies has been notified of an upcoming "review" of its eligibility for money from the Fund. For example, there has been growing pressure for staff representation on boards of member agencies. Then last year the annual meeting of the UCF passed a policy statement that workers in member agencies could not sit on their own boards. One agency elected a staff member to its board but then beat a hasty retreat, asking the staff member to resign for fear of losing its yearly allocation.

Traditionally, the role of the voluntary agencies as opposed to government agencies has been to press for innovative services which meet new needs. More and more people in this city are realizing that not only do we need innovative services, but we need — and we need desperately, groups which will organize to attack the root causes of their problems. These citizens' groups clearly challenge the status quo in a political way because they see that their problems stem from political and social conditions. Not from personal failure or maladjustment.

J.C. Thackeray, this year's UA chairman, claims that "among the highest priority services for United Appeal support are neighbourhood and self-help programs for what we consider 'high-risk' groups and areas of the city. . ." Such projects are paid for out of a so-called Innovative Fund. This Fund got \$50,000 out of a projected \$12,850,000 or one twenty-fourth of the budget. Priority is hardly the word for this fund.

Actually, the whole \$12,850,000 is almost nothing compared to the \$10 billion the government spends on health and welfare each year. This raises some more questions. . .

Why is the voluntary charity dollar, which is supposed to be used for innovative and non-government supported services, going to agencies which receive about two-thirds of their support from the government?

Why private taxation? Such a private taxation system has advantages for corporations. They have direct control over the spending of these dollars. They don't have direct control over the spending of public dollars. What's more, the largest proportion of donations comes from workers, workers who are only allowed to claim 10 percent of their income as charitable gifts. But every dollar contributed by a corporation to the United Appeal reduces its taxable income.

These are some of the questions people are asking about the charity dollar in Toronto. There are lots more.

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