

SOCIETY

economists at SRI International, only three percent of 7.8 million AFDC children fell into this category. The parents of 85 percent of the children were divorced, separated, or not married.

In 1975, Congress established the Child Support Enforcement program, requiring each state to develop measures to establish paternity, locate missing fathers, and collect court-ordered support payments. The plan also required mothers to help locate missing fathers—or else lose benefits. In 1976, the program collected \$200 million, a sum equal to two percent of all AFDC benefits. By 1980, collections were up to \$600 million, five percent of benefits. Success varies from state to state. In New York, administrative costs exceeded collections in 1980, while Michigan rounded up \$3 for every \$1 spent. Nationwide, the program recouped \$1.34 for each \$1 of expenses.

One-third of all AFDC families with an absent parent should now be receiving child support, but only one in seven of those families does so. If collections could be improved and new awards won from other missing parents, the authors believe the program could recover 25 to 30 percent of all AFDC costs. Congress has already authorized withholding from federal tax refunds and unemployment benefits to increase collections. An even more effective (albeit radical) step, Robins and Dickinson argue, would be to have the Internal Revenue Service withhold child support much as it withholds taxes.

Improving child support enforcement might also yield one important fringe benefit. Some critics contend that AFDC encourages fathers to desert their families to enable them to collect welfare. If the charge is correct, an effective child-support program could reduce that incentive and keep more families together.

PRESS & TELEVISION

Rush to Judgment

"Lebanon Eyewitness" by Martin Peretz, in *The New Republic* (August 2, 1982), 1220 19th Street N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

Israel may have won impressive military victories in its June invasion of Lebanon, but it did not fare as well with American public opinion. Peretz, editor of the *New Republic*, blames distorted and superficial U.S. press coverage of the operation.

Early in the war, the media reported that the fighting had left 10,000 civilians dead, another 600,000 homeless. Government leaders such as Austrian Chancellor Bruno Kreisky, who cited the figures as he criticized Israel, believed that the source was the International Red Cross or UNICEF. Actually, says Peretz, the estimate came from the Palestinian Red Crescent, headed by the brother of Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) chairman Yasser Arafat. Body counts by Israeli and

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Pictures dramatized the recent fighting in Lebanon, but did they tell the whole story? Journalists were hard put to relate the history of seven years of bitter civil war and occupation by PLO and Syrian forces.

Red Cross officials later put the civilian toll in the towns of Sidon and Tyre, sites of the major early fighting, at some 300.

Reporters probably exaggerated the number of refugees as well, Peretz argues. Because Lebanon has had no census in over a generation, no reliable population estimates exist. Journalists' guesses for individual cities differed by as much as 300,000, and refugee counts varied widely as a result. The oft-cited estimate of 600,000 refugees, says Peretz, would include nearly everyone living in the war zone. And although the *Washington Post* reported on June 16 that the city of Jezzín "is said to have become a major refugee center" for 200,000 people, when Peretz visited the city a week later, he says, "they were not there."

The press has also "systematically ignored the fact that much of the destruction . . . it describes and portrays on television is a result of seven years of bitter fighting"—or of the PLO's tactic of choosing areas heavily populated by civilians for its strongholds. Many journalists who gave extensive coverage to the Israeli invasion paid little attention to Lebanon when it was occupied only by Syria and the PLO.

Peretz believes an anti-Israeli bias accounts for some of the media distortion. But constant deadline pressures for "new, vivid images of conflict, violent if possible," are also responsible. Unfortunately, he concludes, the public back home thinks it has gotten the whole story.