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AMITAI ETZIONI

After a long eclipse of the conservative position in social science, neoconservative social scientists have recently begun to take a major part in the public dialogue about the present state of American society. In brief, the sociological essence of the neoconservative thesis being advanced in the pages of *The Public Interest*, *Commentary*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *Fortune* is that American society is showing the strains of a structural overload. The consequent dysfunction is caused by an explosion of rising expectations, by a tidal wave of feeling among the people that the government *owes* them services and resources,¹ and by "the manufacture of *incompatible* policy demands that impose burdens on government which no government can meet."²

As neoconservatives see it, American society in the 1970s is suffering from strains caused in the 1960s. That decade, popularly known as the "New Frontier-Great Society era," was characterized by utopian expectations as to what the "voluntaristic" or "organized" elements of society, government in particular, could accomplish. As an antidote, the neoconservative prescription is to curtail the scope of missions pursued by the society as a whole, partially dismantle the government as the main societal tool, adopt more moderate expectations, and advance only carefully pretested programs.³

¹ Daniel Bell, "The Revolution of Rising Entitlements," *Fortune*, April 1975, pp. 98-103, 182, 185.

² Aaron Wildavsky, "Government and the People," *Commentary*, August, 1973, pp. 25-32.

³ See for example, "Special Issue on 'The Great Society': Lessons for the Future," *The Public Interest* 34 (Winter 1974). An issue devoted to a postmortem of the Great Society programs.

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Before analyzing these arguments, two general observations seem called for: it seems to me improper to dismiss neoconservative arguments (or those of any other group) on the grounds that they have political aims and implications ("defense of the status quo") and are therefore manifestly false. A thesis has a truth-value of its own regardless of the identity or intent of those who articulate it; it must be validated or rejected on the basis of empirical, logical, or normative arguments—not because of the psychological or sociological make-up of its authors.

Nor is it accurate to characterize the neoconservative argument as a mere defense of the existing (or crumbling) social structure. One of its basic premises is that a large number of societal attributes widely favored are being undermined by overload. These include civil rights, individual initiative and independence, economic vitality as well as "quality" in leadership, culture, intellectual life and science.⁴ As a result, sociologists of other theoretical and political persuasions cannot evade the questions neoconservatives raise: is there in fact an overload of demands in relation to capacities? Are widely shared values being undermined? If so, is the overload a main cause? And if so, is a partial sacrifice of some values worthwhile in order to advance others, say equality, or might the values now undermined be safeguarded (in their old or new form) *without* slowing societal reform? I am unable, within the confines of one article, to deal with all these questions. I will attempt here to clarify the concept of societal overload, point to its components, and indicate the main alternative approaches in dealing with it.

THE CONCEPT OF SOCIETAL OVERLOAD

Unlike concepts created specifically to carry a sociological message (such as Parsons's "pattern-variables"), the term *overload* carries with its connotations from common parlance. It calls to mind the image of a vehicle trying to transport a weight heavier than it was designed to carry. The suggestion that the corrective lies in removing some of the load is introduced by the prefix, *over*. *Overload* thus contrasts with *shortage of resources* which implies the opposite: that there is a given task or set of tasks that must be carried out, but for which resources are lacking. Just as the second term tends to distract attention from the fact that shortages can be made to disappear, not by finding more resources but by limiting our purposes (for example, we need not depend on foreign oil if we can cut our use of energy), so the term *overload* tends to ignore the possibility that a different structural vehicle, or a redesigned one, might not find current demands excessive.

Overload also has a technical meaning in connection with cybernetics, the science of steering, where it refers to cases in which units that gather and process information, render decisions, issue guiding signals, supervise performance,

⁴ Robert Nisbet, *Twilight of Authority* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975).

are receiving more inputs than they can deal with and hence either strain or break down.⁵ From characterization of telephone circuits, computers, and information networks, the concept has been applied, usually metaphorically rather than with detailed precision, to political and societal systems.⁶

To explicate the concept further, it seems helpful to note that aside from the generalized signs of overload—a system failing to accomplish its purposes, failing to respond to some or all of the demands put on it—specific elements of a system may be especially strained. This in turn allows one to assess both the nature of the overload (is it characterized by one or few bottlenecks, or is it more diffuse and encompassing?) as well as the scope of the restructuring needed if one seeks a society that is able to carry the heavy load rather than one that seeks to reduce it.

These elements will be found in the mixture of communal and organizational factors implicit in the societal picture of the concept of overload. On the one hand there are elements of a community system: organized groups (such as the family and other collectivities), stratification layers, institutional structures, and so on. On the other hand there is a polity at the core of which is a government, with the features of an organization, including a formal division of labor, lines of authority, channels of communication, processes for defining goals and deciding upon policies, implementation mechanisms and so on. (The twin concepts are related but not parallel to the *gemeinschaft/gesellschaft*, or communal/associational twin, because a *gesellschaft* or associational society is not necessarily a highly organized one, although it is more predisposed to such a structure.)⁷

A society can be characterized as relatively more communal than organizational. Traditional Japan was said to have been more effectively mobilized and governed as an entity than traditional China, and so it has been said about pre-industrial England compared with France.⁸ Over time, of course, a society may become more organized, as did Russia during the transition from the late Tsarist to the Soviet regime. A higher level of organizational intensity does not necessarily entail an undemocratic political system. Israel is more organized than, say, Panama or Paraguay, but it is not considered less democratic. A relatively high level of organizational effectiveness *and* responsiveness on the part of government to the governed its achieved when the polity contains not only effective administrative structures, but also effective organization through which citizens can express their preferences and make the government respond.

⁵ For review article see Karl E. Weick, "The Twiggling of Overload," in Harold B. Pepinsky, ed., *People and Information* (1970), Pergamon General Psychology Series.

⁶ For a political science treatment see David Easton, *A Systematic Analysis of Political Life* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1965).

⁷ For additional discussion see Amitai Etzioni, *The Active Society* (New York: The Free Press, 1968).

⁸ See Marion J. Levy Jr., "Contrasting Factors in the Modernization of China and Japan," *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 2 (1953-54), pp. 161-197.

Political parties, voluntary associations, public and private interest groups, social movements, are elements of such a participatory polity. The level of community and of organization and the balance of the two determine, as we shall see, the *load* a society can carry without undue strain.

THE "GUIDANCE" THESIS

As I see it, neoconservatives have correctly diagnosed serious strains in the societal system, and the strain is evident not merely at one or two points, but is generic and evident *throughout all the system's main components*.

As for correctives, the main neoconservative prescription appears much less valid than their diagnosis of the problem. While at first it seems quite plausible that if somehow the members of society could be persuaded to curtail their demands on the system the overload would subside, it might equally well be argued that the disaffection arising from unsatisfied needs would lead to mass rebellion or mass withdrawal, which in turn could cause even larger overloads. Still less convincing is the argument that greater reliance on the marketplace rather than on the government is a valid way to reduce the overload.⁹ The marketplace is inevitably more responsive to those with more resources and power, and the inegalitarian distribution of resources and power is at the root of much disaffection and of other social problems as well; hence, greater reliance on the market would more likely heighten rather than alleviate the demands on the system.

The main alternative to the neoconservative position is the suggestion that the system be reformed or transformed so that it will be able to carry "heavier" loads, to be what I would call a more active society. This approach, I should like to be the first to point out, suggests *adding* the missions of societal and institutional change to a system already heavily taxed, and would as the efforts toward post-Watergate reform attest, magnify at least initially the sense of burden, conflict, and instability. Yet once meaningful changes were to occur, the renewed hope and commitment that would replace much of the present alienation and cynicism might well reduce at least one main source of overload. This is the loss of political legitimacy on the personal level (Daniel Bell refers to this as the loss of *civitas*¹⁰), which makes it necessary to cajole or coerce many millions of unenthusiastic, apathetic, withdrawn or rebellious citizens into compliance with laws, regulations, and missions they no longer experience as "theirs."

Our discussion will proceed by examining four major components of an active, or "guided," society, the nature of the overload burdening each component, and the structural modifications that could be made to increase its capacity. The theoretical reasons for choosing these four elements have been spelled out else-

⁹ Bell, "Rising Entitlements."

¹⁰ Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1976).

where,¹¹ the evidence about the scope of specific overloads has been cited before, and many of the suggestions for specific reforms are not novel. This essay charts the main components of the overload and contrasts an active way of coping with the neoconservative approach.

CONSENSUS

All other things equal, the more people agree with each other and their leaders on the purposes collective societal action seeks to accomplish, the less strain on the system. A number of observers have pointed out that in recent decades the American citizenry has become increasingly demanding in the number and scope of issues and problems it expects government to deal with. The demands stem from a variety of societal groupings, which are not in agreement with existing national policies and procedures, nor with each other on the change they seek. The fervent anticommunism of the cold war, which for a time provided a fairly widespread and unifying source of consensus, weakened during the 1960s. The war in Vietnam was the most divisive the nation has been engaged in since the Civil War. On domestic issues not only is the nation divided between those who seek more social reforms (for example, minorities, the women's movement) and those who would reverse many of the reforms already enacted (for example, those that concern desegregation, abortion), but in addition, the various camps are divided among themselves (white vs. black civil rights activists) and disagree sharply over the methods through which shared goals should be advanced (for example, those who favor integration differ in their attitudes toward busing).

More broadly, Americans have difficulty reaching a consensus in part because millions are philosophically conservative yet programmatically liberal. Thus, a survey of American political beliefs in 1967 found 79 percent of respondents in a random national sample agreed with the statement, "we should rely more on individual initiative and not so much on governmental welfare programs," while only 12 percent disagreed (9 percent expressed no opinion). Similarly, 49 percent agreed (38 percent disagreed and 13 percent "didn't know") that "social problems here in this country could be solved more effectively if the government would only keep its hands off and let people in local communities handle their own problems in their own ways."¹² Yet despite the large numbers who favored a cut in government social activism on philosophical grounds, 65 percent wanted to retain a whole range of specific governmental programs directed at social problems (Medicare, federal aid to education, low

¹¹ Amitai Etzioni, "Toward a Theory of Societal Guidance," *American Journal of Sociology* 73, no. 2 (September 1967): 173-187; *The Active Society* (New York: The Free Press, 1968); *Social Problems* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1976).

¹² Hadley Cantril and Lloyd A. Free, *The Political Beliefs of Americans* (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1967), pp. 24-30.

rent housing subsidies, urban renewal, federal unemployment and antipoverty programs); 21 percent held neutral opinions of these programs, while only 14 percent were opposed to them. In August 1971, 87 percent of a national sample favored federal spending to help the elderly, 80 percent to reduce pollution, 74 percent for Medicaid, and so on.¹³ (More recent data gathered during the 1976 election campaign suggest indirectly that people may have grown more conservative philosophically, and less supportive of specific programs; however, the basic discrepancy remains.)

In addition to the sheer number of individuals who favor or oppose particular policies or programs, it is important to take into account the intensity with which particular positions are espoused and the willingness of persons to become politically active in behalf of them. Thus gun control, though favored by 67 percent of Americans,¹⁴ is opposed by a minority for which the issue is much more salient—a major reason gun control legislation has repeatedly been blocked. Similar differences in activism in behalf of one's beliefs seem to distinguish the large numbers who favor decriminalization of marijuana and other victimless crimes from the minorities who oppose such changes in policy.

Moreover the increase in alienation, the increased politicization of issues,¹⁵ and the decrease in respect for authority seem to have encouraged self-interested attitudes and actions, while rendering appeals to common values, the public interest, or the general good less compelling. (A Harris poll commissioned by the Senate Committee on Governmental Operations found that between 1966 and 1973, overall scores on the alienation index rose from 29 to 55 percent. By 1976, general disaffection reached 61 percent, according to a Harris poll of March 1976.)

Students of effective polities have pointed out that confrontations about one major issue at a time allow polities to adapt, without serious dysfunction, but when several issues rise in close sequence, they tend to overload the system. Thus it is likely that Britain was able to democratize with little political instability (compared with other nations) in large measure because of what T. H. Marshall described as its three-stage evolution of citizenship—*citizenship* being a concept that refers to the equal rights and duties associated with full membership in the political community. According to Marshall, the three components of contemporary citizenship developed and gained acceptance one by one over a period of three centuries. The eighteenth century was characterized by the adoption of equal civil rights (for example, equal justice under the law regardless of social position); the nineteenth century was characterized by the acceptance of equal political rights (for example, universal suffrage); and finally,

¹³ William Watts and Lloyd A. Free, *State of the Nation* (New York: Universe Books, 1973).

¹⁴ Gallup Poll, March, 1975.

¹⁵ Daniel Bell and Virginia Held, "The Community Revolution," in *The View from Below: Urban Politics and Social Policy*, Norman Fainstein and Susan Fainstein, eds. (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1972), pp. 309–313.

the twentieth century has been witnessing a movement toward increased social and economic equality (for example, the rights associated with the welfare state).¹⁶

In contemporary America, before any one issue, whether major or minor, is "processed" and consensus is reached, several other issues arise. Thus the race, youth, and poverty issues of the late 1950s and early 1960s are still with us, albeit in a less active form, while the women's movement, gay liberation, and the environment movement raise a whole slew of others. Even matters such as the proper form of health insurance, aid to older persons, or the use of the metric system are continuously churning. The resulting whirlpools of disagreement are both a consequence of overloaded channels of consensus building and an aggravating factor.

Neoconservative sociologists maintain that as a consequence of more and more conflicting demands made on government, the normative and structural integration of American society, its basic "unity," has been undermined, while the institutions designated for nonviolent resolution of the competing claims of different societal groups are no longer able to perform effectively. According to Daniel Bell, the process of turning to government to secure one's rights has recently "been unfolding in a peculiarly destructive way in the United States. Just about *all* grievances now get dumped in the lap of government while the voluntary associations that once furthered the claims of different groups are withering."¹⁷

Moreover, Bell asserts,

the ultimate problem presented by the revolution of rising entitlements is not that it will cost a lot of money—though it will certainly do that. What is potentially more dangerous is the threat that the revolution presents to our political system. It threatens to overload the system, to confront it with far more grievances than legislators and judges know how to cope with. What makes this threat especially devastating is the absence, thus far, of any agreed upon rules for settling the differences between all the contending interest groups.¹⁸

Given these conditions, widespread collective violence and general political instability are said to menace the nation. The eruptions in the ghettos and in the South as well as on the campuses during the 1960s are seen as signs to this effect.

While the argument that the society's mechanisms for building consensus are overloaded seems to me quite persuasive, I see the nature and meaning of collective violence in the 1960s as misdiagnosed. The crux of the problem is not merely that this neoconservative concern for national unity ascribes to it a higher value than to satisfying the claims of the rebellious disadvantaged

¹⁶ See T. H. Marshall, "Citizenship and Social Class," *Class, Citizenship and Social Development* (Westport, Ct.: Greenwood Press, 1973), pp. 65–122.

¹⁷ Bell, "Rising Entitlements," p. 76.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

groups, a value judgment which cannot be treated as logically or empirically supported, but that the neoconservative argument also assumes that acts of collective violence on the part of such disaffected groups have been a major threat to American democracy and wholly negative.

As I see it, collective violence (unlike personal violence, especially crime) was rather limited in frequency and scope in the 1960s. A number of other observers have pointed out, and have buttressed their claims with historical research, that collective violence during the 1960s' was sizable only in comparison with the immediate two preceding decades in American history.¹⁹ Relative to the American experience of the past hundred years (particularly during the period of emerging labor unions) as well as the recent history of other industrial democratic nations, the incidence and seriousness of collective violence in the United States during the 1960s does not stand out as particularly high.

Moreover, violence, as distinct from vocal protest, appears to have been perpetrated and provoked frequently by the authorities rather than by the dissidents.²⁰ But most important, the collective violence of disadvantaged or disaffected groups during the 1960s was basically a form of signalling dissatisfaction and desire for change,²¹ not an attempt to coerce a major sociopolitical revolution resisted by the majority. Indeed, sporadic violence of the 1960s succeeded in alerting both the elites and publics to unattended problems and for the most part it rather rapidly subsided once remedial action in the desired direction was taken—even when that action was *much* less, or proceeded at a much slower pace, than what the dissidents desired (for example, equality for blacks and withdrawal from Vietnam). To characterize black leaders as "angry" and as the source of "unrealistic expectations" that make the system "ungovernable" seems basically mistaken.²²

Though neither mass violence nor sustained disruption of the established order, let alone political revolution, has occurred as a result of turmoil during the 1960s, there is insufficient consensus to support effective public policies in many areas. Indeed, while disagreement takes a less spectacularly visible form in the 1970s, a case might be made that lack of agreement on the proper course to follow is in fact more pervasive than it was in the 1960s, as far as domestic matters are concerned. From busing for purposes of racial integration to forming a national health policy, from stressing the fight against inflation instead of

¹⁹ Sheldon G. Levy, "A 150 Year Study of Political Violence in the United States," in *Violence in America*, Hugh David Graham and Ted Robert Gurr, eds. (New York: Bantam Books, 1969), pp. 84-100.

²⁰ Gary T. Marx, paper presented at a meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, D.C., September 5, 1968; see also Gary T. Marx, *Protest and Prejudice* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967).

²¹ Albert O. Hirschman, *Journeys Toward Progress: Studies of Economic Policy-Making in Latin America* (Garden City, N. Y.: Anchor Books, 1965); William A. Gamson, *The Strategy of Social Protest* (New York: Dorsey Press, 1975); cf. Seymour Martin Lipset, "The Paradox of American Politics," *The Public Interest* 41 (Fall 1975): 142-165.

²² Bell and Held, "Community Revolution," p. 310.

against unemployment, from the Equal Rights Amendment for women to gun control, there is a sharp disagreement among members of the public, their leaders, and their representatives. This has been illustrated recently by the fact that two years after the energy crisis was declared an urgent problem, no national energy policy had yet taken shape because of unresolved disagreements.²³

The chief neoconservative suggestion for dealing with the disunity stemming from the dual revolution of rising aspiration and rising asperity over government's failure to meet expectations is for people to downscale their desires. This, it is argued, could be achieved if people were able to realize that they are asking, if not for the impossible, then for "too much." According to Wildavsky, "we are all, in fact, doing better and feeling worse."²⁴ Another source of the problem is said to lie in the intellectual *rhetoric* about alienation which, for example, underscores the monotonous, fragmented life of the assembly line, while ignoring that fewer than 2 percent of American workers are on the assembly line. Wattenberg adds

... perhaps the major danger today is only that we will be catch-phrased and crisis-managed to death before all is done. It is time for a reassessment. . . . It is time to investigate the capital-lettered applications that seem to issue from every typewriter through the land, spreading apparent doom on an otherwise healthy society.²⁵

The main alternative approach, especially if one views many of the demands being made on the polity as arising out of real unmet needs, is to increase the productive capacity of the society, the justness of its distribution, and its capacity to form consensus as to what is and can be done and for whom. (We focus first on the latter variable; distributions reflect in part consensus and in part power and are discussed subsequently; productive capacity is a matter for separate discussion.)

To increase capacities for consensus formation, the prerequisites need first to be developed. At present, Americans often share a greater commitment to collective symbols (for example, to the flag and to the Constitution as a sacred document rather than to its actual content) than to ultimate values.²⁶ One reason is that unlike the educational system of, say, France, the United Kingdom or Israel, the American schools do not instill in students a basic set of agreed-upon national values. A minimum shared national "core" curriculum would need to be developed before the educational system could serve as a means whereby most Americans could come to agree deeply on such values as civil liberties, individ-

²³ For a masterful account see Elizabeth Drew, "The Energy Bazaar," *The New Yorker*, July 27, 1975, pp. 35-72.

²⁴ Wildavsky, "Government and the People."

²⁵ Ben J. Wattenberg and Richard M. Scammon, *This U.S.A.* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1965), p. 305.

²⁶ For data see Amitai Etzioni, "Americans Reject their Constitution: What is to be Done?" *The Educational Forum* XXXVI, no. 4 (May 1972): 461-463.

ual rights, and equality. Such shared values could then serve as a foundation on which to build support for specific public policies.

In some democratic nations, one or more years of required national service provides successive generations of mixed class and ethnic backgrounds with a national experience and hence a shared sense of unity over and above diversity.²⁷ A transition from a volunteer professional army to a year of national service for all young Americans, in an organization like the Peace Corps or VISTA or in the armed forces, would help American society to move in this direction.

Television is one of America's greatest common denominators. It seems to promote a nationwide preoccupation with consumer products. Recent attempts to reduce the role of national networks and increase the role of local programming (favored by neoconservatives) weaken the role television can play in forming national consensual bonds. If reversed, greater reliance on network programming, especially an increased role for the public educational network, could promote greater national consensus.

Pluralism of subcultures and preferences can be maintained in these three spheres without undermining their ability to prepare the ground for national consensus. Thus, while all young American may serve a year, they may be free to choose the mode of service (military, civilian; domestic; overseas; conservation or antipoverty and so on). The educational common denominator of core values would still leave most choices concerning curriculum content and educational methods to local settings. And television broadcasts projected nationally could be produced in a variety of regional and other pluralistically based cultural centers.

While a national curriculum, a year of service, and public network television could enhance the overall predisposition to consensus formation, consensus on specific policy issues will still need to be processed in large measure through political parties, primary and general elections and other representative political structures. Various suggestions have been made to make these more "effective." Some suggestions are limited in scope: if, for instance, members of the House of Representatives were to serve four years instead of two, less of their time might be spent on campaigning and more on their congressional work. If their salaries were to be substantially increased in return for an agreement that they would not accept any other fees, members of Congress and state legislatures would not only be less beholden to private interests, they could also be required to work full time at representing their constituents in the legislatures, as opposed to devoting significant time to representing wealthy clients in court or before the bureaucracy as is often currently the case at the state level.

Other suggestions run deeper. Both James MacGregor Burns²⁸ and Clifford

²⁷ S. N. Eisenstadt, "Analysis of Patterns of Immigration and Absorption of Immigrants," *Population Studies* 7 (1953): 167-180.

²⁸ James MacGregor Burns, *The Deadlock of Democracy* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., Prentice-Hall, 1963).

Hardin²⁹ argue that political consensus will continue to be difficult to achieve, or fail to be solid enough to act upon, as long as the electoral system permits one party to dominate the executive while another dominates the legislative branch.³⁰ By guaranteeing to a single unified party control of both branches—while at the same time creating a secure institutionalized mechanism through which the minority party could function as a vigorous opposition—advocates of such reform claim that consensus within both the public and government could be made secure enough to provide a mandate for dealing with complex problems requiring comprehensive solutions. And in addition, parties would have a greater incentive to present responsible, alternative policy positions to the voters at election time. It has also been suggested that a multiple party system, or two “clear cut” ideological parties, one liberal and one conservative, would be more effective in translating differences of positions within the community into political positions, so those could effectively deal with each other.

The possibility of some initial increase in strain produced by a policy designed ultimately to reduce it is illustrated by the changed rules governing the selection of delegates to the Democratic nominating convention. Parties are, of course, a significant part of the consensus-building structure because they pull together diverse groups, such as labor unions, the poor, ethnic minorities, and the liberal middle class into a consensual camp that shares positions on public policy. They reduce many positions into a much smaller number of more widely acceptable ones, then submit them to a national election, which gives priority to one position. While some of the *subparty* positions maintain autonomy even after national consensus has been negotiated, and representatives in Congress often cross party lines in their votes, nonetheless, the party’s function remains that of advancing the consensus-building process through *reduction* in the range of positions.

During the 1960s a large variety of previously inactive or disenfranchised social groups heightened their political awareness, activization, and demands. If they began by taking their grievances into the streets rather than into the corridors of government and councils of power it was in part because they were excluded wholly or partially from the more normal forms of political participation. Slowly, minorities, women and youth increased their institutionalized political participation. Accordingly, poll taxes, literacy tests and other barriers to voter registration and office holding by blacks and other minorities began to fall; youths 18 to 21 gained the right to vote. However, until 1972 participation by these new groups in the presidential nominating process did not increase by much. In preparation for its 1972 convention, however, the Democratic party, which for ideological and historical reasons was best prepared to incorporate

²⁹ Clifford Hardin, *Presidential Power and Accountability: Toward a New Constitution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971); see also Sen. Walter F. Mondale, *The Accountability of Power: Toward a Responsible Presidency* (New York: McKay, 1976).

³⁰ Nelson W. Polsby and Aaron B. Wildavsky, *Presidential Elections* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1971); see also *Presidential Elections Fourth Edition*, 1976.

these new groups, revised its rules for selecting delegates so as to increase the representation of minorities, women and youth.

As sociologists would have expected, this first caused increased conflict and disagreement as the old groups (for example, Mayor Daley of Chicago, AFL-CIO President George Meany and their forces) had to adapt to the new situation. The increase in the variety of groups whose views had to be taken into account in building consensus, as well as the new internal party power balance that had to be negotiated, created a temporary 'overload. Eventually the rules were modified, with the new groups having to relinquish some of their initial gains. Reduction of the overload did therefore entail some decrease in demands and willingness to compromise on the part of the new groups. Significantly, however, and of at least equal importance was the willingness of the older groups to relinquish some of their power in favor of a wider coalition of groups, broadening public appeal and greater consensus-building capacities this would give to the Democratic party. Thus, a temporary overload was overcome by increased participation and accommodation of the internal party structure to permit greater consensus-building capacities.

The significance of this development is a double one. First, it illustrates that a policy may adapt to strains by doing more (despite some backtracking since 1972, the current Democratic party's consensus building is now much more encompassing than it was before). Second, that attempts to deal with the overload of new demands in a polity through institutional reforms may well cause new strains initially, but in the longer run they may reduce strains.

Samuel P. Huntington, a neoconservative political scientist, writes:

Al Smith once remarked, "The only cure for the evils of democracy is more democracy." Our analysis suggests that applying that cure at the present time could well be adding fuel to the fire. Instead, some of the problems of governance in the United States today stem from an "excess of democracy," in much the same sense in which David Donald used the term to refer to those consequences of the Jacksonian Revolution which helped to precipitate the Civil War. What is needed, instead, is a greater degree of moderation in democracy.³¹

For reasons indicated in our preceding analysis, we cast our ballot with Al Smith.

POWER

Societies have two axes of power: a "horizontal" dimension characterizing relations among the various organized groups within the society (for example, corporations vs. labor unions) and a "vertical" dimension characterizing relations between government and the populace. The two are closely related in that the government is more attentive to those groups that have more power; however,

³¹ Samuel P. Huntington, "The Democratic Distemper," *The Public Interest* 41 (Fall 1975): 9-38.

they are not mirror images because to maintain its legitimacy, the government tends to be somewhat less *inegalitarian* in its policies than the societal power profile *per se* would suggest.³²

A key feature of recent American power relations has been the mobilization of more and more societal groupings into organized groups that are actively political. As a result of myriad factors, the spread of college education, the rise of social movements, the development of new communications and production technologies, and the social effects of World War II and the war in Vietnam, minorities, farmworkers, welfare clients, women, and youths, among others, became more self-aware and active.

These mobilizations, as neoconservatives correctly point out, tend to heighten politicization of issues and widen the areas of conflict, if only because mobilization often sparks counter mobilization. Thus, the formation of the United Farm Workers led to formation of political associations among growers, just as the formation of national trade unions among workers hurried on the formation of national trade associations among manufacturers.

Second, organized groups tend to politicize conflict by involving the government. Thus, to stay with the farmworker example, a law was recently passed in California that grants farmworkers the right to unionize and specifies that the question of whether to have a union, as well as which union to have, be decided by democratic balloting, under the supervision of state officials to ensure honesty. Other examples: conflict between the women's liberation movement and its opponents dealing with such matters as government-imposed equal employment opportunities, other antidiscrimination laws, and an equal rights constitutional amendment; conflicts between the right-to-life groups and proabortion groups, with the role of government in regulating abortion.

As neoconservatives see it, organized conflict, especially when it involves the government, results in the politicization of social life, leads to threats to national unity and to even greater reliance on the government, which weakens the societal fabric. This in turn, following de Tocqueville, is said to erode the barriers to tyranny.

As I see it, while the mobilization of heretofore underrepresented or excluded groups does result in intensification of conflicts and an expansion of the government's role, such developments may be the transitional pains of adjustment of the power structure to a less *inegalitarian* system, rather than lasting strains. The history of the entrance of the working classes into political life illustrates this point. The passage of the National Labor Relations Act recognized the right of workers to organize and be represented by a union, and largely eliminated violent confrontation between corporations and workers. The NLRA established a distinction between legitimate and illegitimate modes of conflict and conflict resolution, and channeled business-labor conflict into the routinized legitimate

³² Amitai Etzioni, *Social Problems* (Engelwood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1976); cf. Joseph A. Pechman and Benjamin A. Okner, *Who Bears the Tax Burden?* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1974).

modes. After this, large scale and widespread industrial violence largely subsided.

It has been argued that recent demands differ from those of labor, in that the latter have been chiefly economic whereas the new ones include demands for esteem, approval, status symbols, and other such "resources" which are difficult if not dangerous for the government to allot. As I see it, labor's demands had such dimensions, too, and the difference between labor and the newly active groups is of degree. Second, once economic inequities are removed (for example, equal pay for equal work for women and minorities), political representation is provided, and the legal sources of indignities (such as the right to dispose of property and obtain credit) are removed, social manners tend to adjust themselves and require little official intervention.

The main alternatives, hence, are whether to call on newly active groups, which do not receive a proportional share of societal allotment and government attention, to moderate if not cancel their claims, in the name of national unity and societal stability and, to escape the alleged threat of tyranny, leave the existing power structure and its corollary inequities intact—or, call on the privileged power groups to accept greater equality of allocation and access to the government as the best way to cope with the overload.

Some neoconservatives argue that equality of assets, income, and power is not desirable because it harms a variety of other values, including reward for entrepreneurship (said to be essential to economic vitality) cultural excellence, freedom, and quality of political leadership (equality is seen as going hand in hand with a mass society).³³ They present a set of sociological hypotheses which can be tested. For example, how important is private enterprise to the economy? Were most recent *economic* innovations initiated and funded by the government? Does more equality reduce freedom? Or is it a *prerequisite* for it? These are also proper subjects for value judgment. If, for instance, mass participation in culture does undermine some qualities, does one prefer equality of access to highbrow tastes?³⁴ But this line of study and judgment is rather different from using the concept of overload to argue, in effect, against more egalitarian distribution of societal power (even if it entails temporary or longer run intensification of government intervention), because as the labor movement experience suggests, we can adapt to the strains involved by accelerating power reallocation rather than by stopping it.

Turning now to the second axis, neoconservatives have indicated its size and scope.³⁵ The government is involved more and more in areas that were once uniquely the province of the private sector or the private individual. Govern-

³³ Karl Mannheim, *Man and Society* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1940); Charles Frankel, "Comments," *The Elite and the Electorate: Is Government by the People Possible?* (Santa Barbara, Ca.: Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, 1963): 8–10.

³⁴ Herbert Gans, *Popular Culture and High Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1975).

³⁵ See James Q. Wilson, "The Rise of the Bureaucratic State," *The Public Interest*, 41 (Fall 1975): 77–103.

ment is now involved directly or indirectly in decisions about such personal matters as smoking, drinking, and drug taking, such family matters as birth control, abortion, and divorce, and such market matters as economic growth and stability, consumer protection, product safety, and the protection of the environment.

Neoconservatives favor reducing the load through a return to much more "limited government" and greater reliance on private initiative and the market place. According to Bell, "we have a lot to learn about the possibilities of the market mechanism to achieve social ends . . . The market [unlike the government] provides for self-adjustment and self-regulation within a framework of rules."³⁶ If by the market he means an emphasis on for-profit business corporations, it should be noted that they are limited in the kinds of missions they can take on by their very nature as for-profit enterprises. Willingness to support or engage in activities that are not profit-making out of a sense of corporate social responsibility is not wholly absent, but such "public service" missions are of limited size and scope. Health care, one of the few human services in America that has traditionally been the province of the private sector, illustrates the limits of what private enterprise—and even private philanthropy—can do in dispensing a social service. Private insurance, including both commercial insurers and the not-for-profit "blues," have been unable to meet the health care needs not only of the poor; there has been a growing feeling for a number of years that they do not even provide adequate health care for the middle class. And to favor allocation by the market is to favor a system in which people vote according to the number of dollars they can spend, a highly inequalitarian system. Nor has the market shown much concern for consumer protection, worker safety, and environmental protection. In short, cutting the load in this particular manner (occasionally referred to as deregulation) is to favor status, privilege and economic criteria over social justice and social values. But more than a normative judgment is involved; the implied assumption that most people could be prevented from acting on or out their alienation if subjected to pure or nearly pure reliance on market systems—thereby avoiding a vast overload on the system—is questionable.

This is *not* to say that the only alternative is for government to take over and directly run more and more services, such as health care, the way it runs public schools. Government intervention may take the form of subsidizing and seeking to guide the behavior of private and not-for-profit institutions in desired directions through use of financial and administrative incentives and penalties. That is, government intervention may be achieved through market style mechanisms, or by relying on the third (not-for-profit) sector³⁷ which would lead toward a mixed economy rather than an exclusively private one.³⁸

³⁶ Bell, *Rising Entitlements*, p. 182.

³⁷ Amitai Etzioni, "The Third Sector and Domestic Missions," *Public Administration Review*, 33 (1973): 314-323.

³⁸ Eli Ginzberg, Dale L. Hiestad, and Beatrice G. Reubens, *The Pluralistic Economy* (New

The main issue, though, is not which government mechanisms one relies upon, but whether one strives to attend to its missions, seeking the best procedures—or whether one prefers to dismantle the government as much as possible.

Those neoconservatives who recognize that even if some human services can be dropped and others handled by the private sector, there would still be much that would be defined as the governmental sphere. They tend to favor not just making government smaller, more modest and more manageable, but also a decentralization of government and a shift of decision-making power from Washington to the state and local governments. Revenue sharing, which over the past five years has disbursed \$30 billion in federal tax monies to state and local government, is a policy close to neoconservative hearts.

One's outlook on revenue sharing and other schemes for decentralization of government depends upon whether one prefers to discourage demands for change—in which case greater reliance on governmental structures with lesser capacity for comprehensive action is warranted—or to endeavor to satisfy rising demands by improving the capacities of governmental structures suited to taking action.

Several different but related issues are involved. The first is the extent to which one believes government ought properly to engage in deliberate efforts to change or reform the societal status quo, and if so, which level of government, national, state, or local, is better equipped to carry forward reform. Evidence suggests that local government is much less suited to pursuing reformist goals than the federal government for a number of reasons. First, state and local government has generally been found to be less accountable to the electorate as a whole, more subject to the influence of lobbies, the personal influence of cronyism and outright corruption.³⁹ Second, the reform-minded electorate tends to be concentrated in the relatively few large urban centers and a few states. Though numerically large nationally it is of less than proportionate influence in most state and local elections.⁴⁰ Thus, for instance, conservative, rural and small-town New York State residents wield disproportionately more political power within the state than the more numerous, more liberal citizens of New York City. The same holds for the nation as a whole.⁴¹ Third, on the national level, the very multiplicity of powerful interest groups tends to ensure that they will exert countervailing pressures. This prevents domination by a single

York: McGraw-Hill, 1965); Francis H. Schott, "The New-Priority Problem," *Technology Review* (December 1972): 39-43.

³⁹ Citizen's Conference on State Legislatures, 1973; Harmon Ziegler, "Interest Groups in the States," in *Politics in the American States*, Herbert Jacob and Kenneth Vines, eds. (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1965), pp. 103-104.

⁴⁰ Thomas Dye, *Politics in States and Communities* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973); Richard Cole and David Caputo, *Urban Politics and Decentralization: The Case of Revenue Sharing* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1974), pp. 10-11.

⁴¹ Robert A. Dahl, *A Preface to Democratic Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), pp. 114-116.

interest and leaves more room for the influence of the public at large.⁴² In contrast, on the local level in quite a few towns and even cities one racial group, one corporation, or a few ethnic groups may be politically dominant simply because there are no other groups of sufficient size or well enough mobilized to provide political competition.⁴³

Often . . . corporate interests find it more compatible with their goals to advocate the expansion of state jurisdictions at the expense of the national government. Some large corporations have financial resources greater than many state governments. With respect to the regulation of business, many states lack the necessary administrative machinery to provide thorough supervision . . .⁴⁴

In addition, state and local governments compete with one another to better their economies by providing a "favorable climate for business." Business firms, particularly large firms, can take advantage of this competition by playing one locality off against another to obtain more attractive tax rates, less stringent antipollution or environmental safety regulation, and other preferential treatment.⁴⁵

Wilbur Cohen, former Secretary of HEW, in voicing his opposition to revenue sharing, cited the overwhelming political dominance of the "haves" over the "have nots" at the level of local city government.⁴⁶ This view is supported by the way revenue sharing funds are used. The funds were provided to state and local governments as of 1972, at the rate of \$5 to \$6 billion a year, after \$16.9 billion were cut out of federal social programs, especially OEO, Model Cities, and other programs for minorities and the poor.⁴⁷

Evidence that most local and state governments are not effective instruments for bringing about social reform is likely to leave neoconservatives unpersuaded, indeed, it may well strengthen their support for decentralization, since they do not believe that much in the way of reform is needed. Neoconservative social scientists in particular do not look upon promotion of greater economic or social equality as a value deserving of increased emphasis, or one which can be pursued actively without unduly undermining others.⁴⁸

But even if one sees little need for reform, one still would favor federal government over state and local governments on two grounds to which neoconservatives do hold: effective and efficient administration and financial ac-

⁴² Lester Milbraith, *The Washington Lobbyists* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1963), pp. 345-347.

⁴³ Frank Trippett, *The States: United They Fell* (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1967).

⁴⁴ Harmon Zeigler, *Interest Groups in American Society* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964), p. 44.

⁴⁵ Dye, *Politics in States*, pp. 62-63; Demetrios Caraley, *City Government and Urban Problems* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., Prentice-Hall, 1977), pp. 21-22, 406-422.

⁴⁶ See Otto Stolz, *Revenue Sharing: Legal and Policy Analysis* (New York: Praeger, 1974).

⁴⁷ Robert C. Wood, in testimony before a Senate Committee.

⁴⁸ Robert Nisbet, "The Pursuit of Equality," *The Public Interest* 31 (Spring 1974): 103-120.

countability and integrity. While this cannot be demonstrated here, we suggest that a comparison of Medicare (federally run) and Medicaid (administered jointly by local, state and federal governments); the IRS and local tax collectors; Social Security Administration (federal) and welfare administrations (mainly local); federal and state and local courts; and other such comparisons of services in the same general area (albeit significantly different in detail) will show that federal agencies, while far from free of deficiencies, are more cost-effective, more professional, less corrupt, less open to partisanship and nepotism. While it has been argued that local administration may be reformed, and some progress has been made in this direction, the difficulties in improving the federal agencies suggest that it will take decades before most of the myriad state and local governments are raised to the level federal agencies currently maintain.

Thus, not only must social reforms be advanced if alienation, a main source of overload, is to be overcome, but in order to find the most effective and accountable administrative tools, greater reliance on the federal government, not on state and local government, is called for. Or to put it differently, a reduction of the "load" is compatible with greater reliance on the more incompetent, that is, on local levels of government; a heavier load with less reliance on them.

Moreover, a higher level of national management is not incompatible with the preservation of individual rights and freedoms, as neoconservatives frequently hold. First, despite their distrust of centralized power the framers of the Constitution themselves believed that a vigilant citizenry with a deep and abiding sense of the importance of safeguarding individual rights and liberties was far more vital as a bulwark against governmental tyranny than any number of formal Constitutional checks and balances, doctrines of the separation of powers, and the preservation of states' rights.

Similarly, de Tocqueville called for the preservation of "intermediary bodies" to cushion and protect the individual citizen against encroachments and oppression by the powerful modern nation-state, and stressed the activism of a citizenry organized in voluntary associations rather more than the fragmentation of governmental power. What de Tocqueville found attractive about American local community government seems to have been not so much its localism *per se* as its participatory character. In other words, in contrast to France where government consisted preponderantly of downward-controlling structures, American government emphasized upward, consensus-building channels. Thus, pluralism based on commonalities other than sheer residence within geographical boundaries—specifically, cross-cutting pluralism based on differences and commonalities of occupation, social class, ethnicity, age, etc.—is much better suited than localism to building a more solid and responsive national consensus and protecting individual rights and liberties.

In short, intensification of conflicts within the community may be handled by depoliticizing the issues, or reallocating resources unequally distributed, including power itself. Intensification of the government's role may be handled by reducing its missions, dismantling it in part, and decentralizing much of the

rest—or, by making the national government more indirect and more responsive, without cutting out most of its missions.

ADMINISTRATION

Social scientists of many persuasions are, typically, more concerned with consensus on values and power questions than with matters of administration as largely reflecting other "underlying" factors. There is a widely held notion that where there is a national commitment (that is, a broad consensus among the public on values backed by the support of the strongest power groups) a way will be found to implement a program. The counter thesis, the concept of administrative overload, suggests that while these "underlying" factors may be important, there are genuinely serious administrative impediments to effective social action. To illustrate: citizen participation in Office of Economic Opportunities programs and Affirmative Action ran into difficulties because of disagreements and the opposition of local power groups. It is also true, however, that questions of consensus and power aside, there is nonetheless a genuine tension between the democratic decision making promoted by the administrative mechanism of elected citizen boards running social programs, hospitals, clinics, and schools and the value placed on expertise, which implies professional authority.⁴⁹ Similarly, Affirmative Action runs into difficulties not just with opponents, but also with proponents who differ over modes of implementation. For example, what is the proper basis for quotas (or "goals") for hiring and promotion—the ethnic, racial and sex distribution in a particular profession, institution, town, or state, or in the nation as a whole? Are courts or federal agencies, grievance procedures or class action suits the most effective tools? Should Affirmative Action rely chiefly on persuasion, or on fines and jail terms for those not in compliance?

For each social program, an administrative pattern may be worked out, but the multiplicity of decisions that must be made, from the need to develop drug rehabilitation centers to open prisons, from "normalization" placement of retarded children in "normal" classrooms to shift of treatment of alcoholics from police departments to social workers, has generated an administrative overload on top of consensus and power difficulties.⁵⁰

The neoconservatives' answer, again, is to take on many fewer missions and thereby resolve the administrative logjam. The alternative answer is that given

⁴⁹ Citizen's Board of Inquiry into Health Services for Americans, *Heal Yourself* (Washington, D.C.: American Public Health Association, 1972), chs. 3, 4. RAND, *Citizen Organizations: Increasing Client Control over Services R-1196* (April), Prepared by Robert Yin, et al. (Washington, D.C.: Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1973).

⁵⁰ Charles L. Schultze, Edward R. Fried, Alice M. Rivlin and Nancy H. Teeters, *Setting National Priorities: The 1973 Budget* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1972), p. 1 ff.; Fainstein, *The View from Below*; Eli Ginzberg and Robert M. Solow, "An Introduction to this Special Issue," *The Public Interest* 34 (Winter 1974): 4-13.

sufficient consensus and power, new tools for public administration may be developed. Peter Drucker's point seems well taken; he suggests that government ought to *do less* (that is, act less often as the performing agent) but *guide more*.⁵¹ For instance, by allotting credit at different interest rates in line with social purposes (lower rates for railroads, higher for cars; lower for hospitals, higher for supermarkets) a central bank can reorient aspects of society without necessarily creating massive new regulatory bureaucracies and social programs.

Scores of laws and thousands of regulations now on the books but rarely enforced may well be cancelled, so that those that remain can be more strictly enforced through more frequent inspections and higher penalties for violations. Allowing violation of the environmental protection, occupational safety, and consumer protection laws to go unpunished invites more violations, and creates a situation that is then perceived as regulatory "overload." Tougher enforcement, as in the case of enforcement of the tax laws by the IRS, reduces violations to a manageable number, if the basic laws are legitimate. Hence the need is to prune the law, not simply because of sheer overload, but so as to give attention and resources to laws that are more clearly necessary for social purposes (such as laws for curbing pollution) by weeding out those that are less so (for example, laws for policing victimless crimes).

Finally, the "old-fashioned" mode of developing new programs, which is wasteful and alienating, limits the work that can be done. A program used to be launched, often on the hundred million if not the billion dollar level, on the basis of its political attractiveness and verbal and written arguments that it would work. Such a pattern was clearly evident in the Model Cities program. Once a program was introduced in the field, often in hundreds if not thousands of locations (150 cities participated in the Model Cities program instead of the six originally proposed) major difficulties would arise (problems of coordination and control were particularly acute in the Model Cities) and attempts would be made to modify the program "in place."⁵² This is somewhat like mass producing a new automobile model and letting the public discover its defects by driving it and having accidents, then recalling it for major modifications.

The more economical sequence, which results in less overload, is to try out a few small-scale prototypes, develop those and make the necessary adjustments and mass produce only relatively "processed" programs. For this procedure to prove workable the legislature must be willing to allow administrative research and development to take place in a few localities instead of insisting that once a program or policy seems to have potential it be immediately seeded in numerous Congressional districts.

Moreover, social program research and development has to be located where

⁵¹ Peter Drucker, *The Age of Discontinuity* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969).

⁵² Lance Liebman, "Social Intervention in a Democracy," *The Public Interest* 34 (Winter, 1974): 14-29; Bernard J. Frieden and Marshall Kaplan, *The Politics of Neglect* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1975).

the highest capacities are, not where Congressional pull is greatest; nor can it be distributed in small amounts over hundreds of institutions to answer traditional pork-barrel pressures. In short, administrative research and development must be more insulated from politics, especially from localism.

Our purpose here is not to offer a program for administrative reforms, let alone a full list of those needed, but to advance suggestions that will help administration grow to meet future needs (and grow it will have to, even if the list of government missions is curtailed) rather than cut the list to present or expected administrative capacities.

KNOWLEDGE

If consensus, power, and administrative tools were held constant, still another factor—knowledge relevant to policy—would bear on the potential effectiveness of various policies. Unlike many social scientists of other theoretical persuasions, neoconservatives ascribe an important role to knowledge in the success or failure of social policy. According to Daniel Bell, the knowledge-power of advanced science and technology, rather than the sheer muscle-power of industrial machinery, is a major feature of the postindustrial era.⁵³ However, in considering our collective efforts to overcome social problems, neoconservatives emphasize not our increasing knowledge but our comparative lack of knowledge which leads to overload.

Robert Nisbet lays much of the blame for the failures of the Great Society on the doorsteps of social scientists who "oversold" their data, their theories, and their overall capacity to come up with valid programs. Social science, as Nisbet sees it, is still too undeveloped to be of much practical use; social scientists should retire to the Ivory Tower for a good deal more basic research before they again venture to formulate policy.⁵⁴

The main alternative view is to see the availability of policy-relevant knowledge as a continuum from greater to lesser deficiencies, and rank social policy areas by the degree to which lack of knowledge constitutes a principle barrier to effective action. To illustrate: the means by which violent crime, and especially the incidence of death or serious injury caused by violent crime, can be significantly reduced are basically known. Research strongly suggests that domestic disarmament (not merely gun control), freeing of police and courts through decriminalization of victimless crimes, and increased employment for youth (most violent offenders are youthful) would reduce the incidence of serious crime by 40 percent.⁵⁵ What is chiefly lacking is not knowledge of how to

⁵³ Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

⁵⁴ Robert Nisbet, "Knowledge Dethroned," *The New York Times Magazine*, September 28, 1975, pp. 34-36, 39, 41, 43, 46.

⁵⁵ For additional documentation see Amitai Etzioni, "Public Policy and Curbing Violence," *International Journal of Group Tensions* 3 (September 1973): 76-95.

go about reducing violent crime, but favorable readings on the other variables—consensus, power, and administration.

In contrast, little is known about how to provide effective mass treatment for alcoholics. It is impossible to keep alcohol out of the hands of alcoholics without taking it away from everyone, and experience suggests that prohibition will not work. Alcoholics Anonymous seems to be effective, but it requires a high, spontaneous level of individual initiative, sustained motivation, and small group integration, which is extremely difficult to mass produce. Here a research breakthrough—perhaps in the biochemistry of addiction—might lead to safe blocking drugs.⁵⁶

Instead of pretending that our ignorance is total, we should recognize that our varying degrees of knowledge can guide our action or inaction. Where good or sufficient knowledge is available, we can proceed with greater assurance. Where it is lacking, there is no reason why, in principle, we cannot evolve it, if we invest in the effort, rather than shy away from policy-relevant research on social issues in favor of space, defense or consumer objects.

It should be noted that the knowledge overload explored here results from the increasing *demand* for more knowledge, not, as is often suggested, from an excessive supply. The unmanageable supply, to which reference is made, for instance, in the often cited OECD report which predicts that “in 1985–87, six or seven times the present volume of new information will be produced”⁵⁷ consists primarily of information “bits” rather than of synthesized “knowledge.” Masses of research findings, like the millions of pictures of cloud formations provided by weather satellites, are collected and stored but neither processed nor analyzed and hence not usable for policy-making purposes. Moreover, most of the findings are in basic research rather than applied or policy research. Growth in knowledge which policy makers can utilize results *indirectly* from developments in basic social research. Just as ream upon ream of basic research studies in chemistry and physiology do not provide medical treatments, so Parsonian sociology and econometrics by themselves do not offer solutions to social problems. Hence, the experience of a knowledge glut among basic knowledge makers and a dearth among policy makers is valid for both and not a contradiction in terms.

To link knowledge production more closely to the needs of societal guidance so as to increase the society’s capacities, a number of steps might be undertaken, aside from increasing the investment in the production of relevant knowledge. These include:

—make a somewhat greater investment in applied, policy research than in basic research;

⁵⁶ Amitai Etzioni and Richard Remp, *Technological Shortcuts to Social Change* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1973).

⁵⁷ Georges Anderla, *Information in 1985* (Paris: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 1973).

- increase efforts to develop cross-disciplinary, “synthesized,” policy-oriented (as opposed to abstract analytic) knowledge;
- revise the ratio of data collection to data processing in favor of greater attention to processing (that is, the aggregation, analysis and interpretation of data);
- evaluate knowledge makers who seek to serve as advisors to policy makers or to influence the policy making process not according to their academic credentials, or their reputation in the media, but according to their records as advisers;
- augment mechanisms that assure knowledge pluralism so that no one expert or coterie of knowledge makers monopolizes access to policy makers;
- use “data courts” in which controversial issues could be argued out.

In addition, the size and quality of staff attached to policy-making bodies affect their ability to absorb knowledge. This is particularly true in Congress, where committees not infrequently have three or four staff members at most assigned to oversee the activities of huge bureaucracies.

Similarly, there is a need to promote knowledge-making units either within or without the universities, that are predominantly policy-oriented. The linkages between these units and policy-making bodies should assure knowledge makers sufficient independence to examine policy assumptions critically while providing a relationship close enough to foster regular communication and sensitivity to policy makers’ constraints and priorities.

Andrew Shonfield points out that one of the great difficulties in planning during the first half of the twentieth century was that many of the tools, especially computers, computer models, and relevant data were lacking. The irony is that people now despair of planning as these tools become available.⁵⁸ Similarly, it would be ironic if we were to despair of social reforms for lack of the knowledge needed, just as the point when recent developments are beginning to make it available in at least some fields.

MONO- AND MULTIVARIABLE REFORMS

Macrosociologists are keenly aware that society functions as a system, that changes in any element affect the nature and action of the others. Societal guidance incorporates the possibility, though rather limited, of voluntaristic change: a deliberate reconstruction of the system. Recognizing that some linkages within the system are powerful, societal guidance theory nevertheless assumes that the elements are not “locked in” tightly; that there is a measure of play or maneuverability that allows one unit or variable to be modified within the constraints set by the others, even if the others remain basically unchanged;

⁵⁸ Andrew Shonfield, *Modern Capitalism: The Changing Balance of Public and Private Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965).

and that the entire system may be modified by altering simultaneously several, if not all, of its components.

Concretely, this means a double answer to those who argue that power and consensus are so intimately linked that it is impossible to introduce either a minimum national curriculum or to expand public television because power groups favor localism. Some reforms *can* be introduced one by one. Kennedy and Johnson, through the backing they gave the Voting Rights Act, helped launch an effective voter registration drive which in turn increased the political power of blacks and enabled them to mobilize more effectively. So long as each reform is part of a set tied to an overarching concept of transformation rather than an isolated element, taken together they might serve to restructure the societal system. For example, Congress's new budgetary machinery represents one step toward a general increase in its knowledge-processing capacities, which will bring nearer the overall goal of increasing Congressional capacity to shape national policy.

Transformation, or fundamental changes in the system, can be advanced not only through sequential reforms, each one increasing the likelihood that subsequent reforms will be more successful, but also through a multivariable approach. The Civil Rights movement was able to effect a significant change in race relations because its efforts focused not on one of the levers of change but encompassed several. In addition to mobilizing blacks, the movement heightened its political power during its most successful phase by attracting the support of white groups such as, labor unions; through charismatic leaders such as King, through the churches, media coverage, and folksongs. It also launched a campaign to change the national consensus and thereby overcome race prejudice. It sought legal reform, equality of pay, access to desirable jobs, housing, corporate power, all at the same time.

If these points are applied to the issue at hand, deliberate efforts to deal with the total overload could take one of two forms: either we grossly reduce that which we seek to do in general, collectively or through the polity in particular. Or we take action to create greater capacities for consensus building, for conflict resolution, for efficient and effective administration, and for development and assimilation of policy-relevant knowledge—so that the society is better able to accomplish more of the needs it is seeking to serve, though not necessarily all of them. Our choice between the two strategies for coping with the overload, will be influenced by our societal self-image.⁵⁹ Since it is one of the principle functions of intellectuals and social scientists to help shape the society's view of itself, the current flowering of neoconservative political and social thought is one factor that will determine which of the two options will be pursued.

The societal self-image neoconservatives offer emphasizes the folly of bound-

⁵⁹ Wendell Bell and James A. Mau, "Images of the Future: Theory and Research Strategies," in *The Sociology of the Future*, Wendell Bell and James A. Mau, eds. (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1971), pp. 6-44.

less optimism about government intervention as the agency of deliberate social change. Many of the problems we ask government to solve are, as neoconservatives see it, fundamentally insoluble; at least they will remain so in the foreseeable future. We have overestimated the availability of material resources; we became overconfident of our ability to reshape society and the future through knowledge, planning and organization; and we allowed our desires and wants for "more" to run out of control. The solution is "less of everything"; government should do less, knowledge makers should advise less, interest groups should demand less, and the public as a whole should expect less.

If American society adopts such a societal self-image, the overload will be dealt with chiefly by retrenchment, while whatever opportunities there are for increasing national capacities for collective business will be bypassed, and perhaps not ever perceived. For many already the "can do" climate of the 1960s seems worlds away and to many who disregard how rapidly a societal self-view can change, it appears almost unimaginable that social activism might regain a substantial following in the near future. However, the urge to reform and transform society has been a deep and abiding one in American society; hence, as I see it, the current neoconservative mood is likely to remain with us only long enough to serve as a much needed antidote to the naive—and at the same time arrogant—overconfidence of the 1960s. Out of a synthesis of the optimism of the previous decade and the pessimism of the present one may emerge a more moderate, more realistic approach to deliberate social change that will proceed not by overreaching but by consciously seeking to create societal capacities adequate to the rescaled purposes we can advance.