The War on Poverty: between Economics and Politics

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ABSTRACT
A wealth of solutions to poverty have been proposed, with little understanding of the forces required to turn a sound idea into an "implementable" program. A system approach is suggested to overcome this deficiency. This implies analyzing the effects of antipoverty measures on other elements of a society and a polity and the "feedback" effects of changes in these other elements on the new programs which are being introduced. Such an approach is seen overcoming the limitations of fragmented views of the issue—such as the purely economic one—as well as the lack of systematic analysis of a program's costs, benefits, sources of funds, and nonfinancial resources. Consequently, a challenge is also offered to those who formulate programs without taking into account dominant values (e.g., questions of consensus) and other political considerations (e.g., which groups would benefit or suffer from the program). This is seen as leading to undemocratic action or, most frequently, to inaction due to resistance. The article concludes with a brief review of the recent Nixon-Moynihan proposal in terms of the "societal-system approach" here advocated, and adds a cautionary note on the limits of planning.

More Policy Production than Poverty Reduction
The War on Poverty has been won several times over—on paper. A review of the growing volume of research aimed at serving policymakers in this area and at mobilizing the support of critical publics shows that many scores of programs have been advanced, any two or three of which should solve the problem but somehow do not. Clearly, we are not short of ideas; it is rather that the ideas are themselves "short." Often they seem to have been proposed with little understanding of the forces required to turn a good idea into an "implementable" program.

One of the most popular of the current ideas among poverty warriors is that what the poor need most is money; therefore, we should have either more of the same old programs (e.g., a higher minimum wage, greater social security benefits, or higher AFDC [Aid to Families with Dependent Children] allowances) or new programs that

* In revising this article, I benefited from comments by Daniel Bell, Carolyn O. Atkinson, and Sarajane Heidt.

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Dispense funds across-the-board to all needy persons (e.g., a negative income tax or a family allowance). But many of these schemes, as we shall see, are far from complete (is poverty only a matter of the absence of money?) and much more concerned with dealing with economic variables than with political constants.

A typical example of an antipoverty proposal founded on an economic analysis and "uncontaminated" by political and social considerations is the suggestion that poverty can be eliminated by increasing the "general demand" or "the pace of economic activities." (This suggestion, as well as others cited below, are found—unless otherwise indicated—in an excellent volume edited by Margaret Gordon, Poverty in America¹). Acceleration of economic activities may be achieved, we are told, by such mechanisms as a tax reduction or an increase in government spending, mechanisms known to anyone who has taken a course in introductory economics or who has read his Samuelson. A rough (usually very rough) estimate of the amount of stimulation necessary to reduce poverty by such-and-such a percentage is customarily made; this is computed by projecting into the future figures derived from measuring the decline of poverty in earlier years of prosperity (sophisticated calculators take into account that poverty declined in many nonprosperity years as well).

Yet some major questions are not even raised. Would government stimulation of the economy beyond a certain point generate a high rate of inflation? Would certain kinds of inflation inflict more hardships on the poor than on the nonpoor and eliminate most, if not all, of the gains offered by the program? What are the costs of the program as compared to its results? (It almost certainly would be more expensive to reduce taxes and increase government spending so that the subsequent stimulation of the economy would yield a 10% decline in poverty than to give 10% of the poor direct payments to raise their income above the poverty line.) What are the political constraints which have heretofore prevented the implementation of this idea? Can they be overcome, or do they render the whole idea quite Utopian?

Much of the discussion of stimulating the economy to raise it to levels at which poverty would disappear (and many other antipoverty proposals as well) reads as though the writer thought that his idea had not previously occurred to anyone else, and that there is an all-powerful ruler who is firmly committed to the eradication of poverty and is only waiting for advice about how best to go about it. The reasons which explain why earlier proposals of this sort were not implemented are rarely discussed, nor are the forces which may have arisen or been mobilized to increase the program's political feasibility usually considered.

**Without a Price Tag**

Budgets are one major site at which economic and political processes and considerations meet, especially if they are governmental budgets. There, the relative value attached to various programs becomes evident, as does the extent to which support for them has been marshaled. When a new item is, hence, suggested as worthy of being

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¹ Margaret Gordon (ed.), Poverty in America (San Francisco, Calif.; Chandler, 1965).

added to the list of programs entitled to an appropriation—but no price tag of any kind is attached to it—this is a fair indication of deficient political commitment.

The report of the Kerner Commission, for example, has several virtues, especially its arousing rhetoric, but the reforms suggested in its pages lost some of their persuasive power when the costs of implementing them were estimated as at least $100 billion a year. The report was issued early in 1968, a time of a tight budget squeeze. The Kerner Report itself provides no estimates, however rough, either of the costs of its general program or of specific programs within it, thus eliminating one basis on which particular programs could be selected if they could not be all implemented at once. Nor is there any discussion of the ways in which such an effort (or efforts) could be financed. Most of the seventy-odd plans for the eradication of poverty outlined by the various participants in an antipoverty conference at the University of California have a similar “don’t bother me with costs” attitude.

Besides the issue of costs, the question of the benefits—i.e., the expected or actual payoffs—of the programs must be raised. One of the issues involved is the extent to which the program will aid its major beneficiaries—the poor—as opposed to some of its resources being used for the benefit of other groupings in the population. Many proposals simply do not indicate the proportion of the funds that will be delivered “on target” to the poor, as against the proportion which will be absorbed by the program’s administrative machinery. For instance, we do not know how much of the $7 or $8 billion spent on welfare is devoted to financing the social welfare agencies themselves. A family allowance (without a tax-back feature) might deliver as much as 70% of its resources “off target,” to nonpoor. An increase in social security benefits that is designed to help the aged poor, may well go largely to nonpoor.

It is not that each plan has to provide a full and detailed analysis of its costs; this is often an intricate and complicated procedure. However, if rough estimates of a program’s costs, benefits, and sources of funds were required, this would tend to encourage the development of a more carefully thought-out plan, since such estimates require the proponents to deal with a wider set of considerations than they might otherwise.

**Need for Other Resources**

Everything that has just been said about financial resources also applies to other resources, especially skilled manpower and executive talent. Programs differ widely in the extent to which they require such “nonfinancial” resources. Both negative income tax and family allowance, for instance, require very few of them; computers will handle most the checkwriting chores. Urban renewal and psychotherapy require many more. Robert A. Levine has pointed out additional differences the most important of which seems to me to be the extent to which a program needs detailed and close supervision as against its being relatively difficult to tamper with and, hence, open to direction from a distance with a light hand. This is not only to say that those plans which have fewer requirements are to be preferred to those which have more stringent ones, but also that some programs need resources which, even
though they are not particularly expensive, have a long "lead time," i.e., they must be ordered years ahead of the time they are expected to be used. The unavailability of particular resources may in itself nearly disqualify a program, as, for instance, anyone seeking to use a thousand city planners in 1972 will soon discover.

Similarly, there are many good reasons to propose that programs for the poor be partially or wholly managed by the poor themselves; obviously, however, experienced executives are in short supply in this particular social stratum, and therefore the extra cost of using less experienced directors or subprofessionals must be taken into account. It cannot be ignored that so long as funds are insufficient, the paying of these costs means keeping some people poor longer. A moralist tends to be annoyed by such a presentation; he is typically unwilling to face the fact that maximizing one value will often hinder the advancement of others. On the other hand, the political decisionmaker must ask for the substitution curve: roughly, how much of one value must be sacrificed to advance the other(s)? In a world of scarcity, with, let us say, only $2.5 billion a year to fight poverty, if a self-help plan costs twenty times as much per capita as an antipoverty plan without a self-help component, should we not "buy" the latter? Can we afford to say that all nonself-help, for instance, guaranteed minimum income, is "self-defeating?"

Looking at prices, budgets, and nonfinancial resources is a way of broadening the economists' analysis, of covering more of the relevant features of the economic societal system. In addition there are, of course, potent noneconomic features, foremost, values and political factors.

**Relationship to Existing Values**

Charles I. Schottland\(^2\) opens his discussion of the antipoverty programs he favors with the statement: "In the first place, we need to change the value system of Americans which equates work with well-being. . . ." Several advocates of the negative income tax stress that unlike existing public assistance programs which are degrading, this "tax" treats the recipient of "transfer payments" as having a right to them, a notion which runs counter to the views of most Americans. Negative income tax was favored by 28 % of a national sample of Americans (Harris 8/7/67), while guaranteed work—guaranteed to bring families out of poverty—was favored by 78 % (Gallup 6/16/68). In a later poll (January 1969) the support for a negative income tax has risen somewhat to 32 %, but that of guaranteed work remains a much higher 78 %. The advocates of the right of freedom from want must hence recognize that the new normative orientation favored is one they endorse but which is not endorsed by most, or even a majority, of their fellow citizens.

Rarely do the advocates of a plan spell out their underlying position: are they to be viewed as social scientists or as participants in a political movement? In the first view, their advocacy of new values is quite presumptuous. Are they to set the values to which the society should subscribe? And are they not aware that it is almost impossible


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to change the core values of a society on order, as distinct from having these values evolve naturally? An American government might be able to launch programs that will eliminate, in 2 years, poverty as a problem of income deficiency, but it could not make most of its citizens view “transfer payments” to the poor as a right in 10 or 20 years. If there is any rule a policymaker must heed, it is the opposite of what Schottland maintains: challenge people’s values only if you cannot find any other ground on which to base the changes you favor.

If we are to view those who advocate changing American values as part of a social and political movement—a not unreasonable view given the support of much of the New and Old Left for negative income tax, while liberals are more inclined to support a family allowance program—it must be taken into account that the value orientations on which antipoverty programs and other massive domestic programs are based must ultimately reflect the majority’s values. It is quite difficult to launch and very difficult to sustain significant domestic programs without a fairly wide consensus. The difficulties encountered by the bussing of children to integrate schools are a recent case in point. (While various other measures favorable to Negroes or to integration were favored by 25% to 40% of a national sample of white Americans, bussing won the approval of only 2% according to a 1969 Gallup poll.) What the American people hold on the subject at hand is fairly clear: negative income tax is compatible with the values of less than one-third, while the right to work is compatible with the values of more than two-thirds. That is, an antipoverty program based on the right to an income without working is favored by a minority; a program based on the necessity to work if one is able has majority support.

Social critics do not have to limit either their views or the innovations they favor to that which is supported by the majority of Americans at any given point. The views of the majority may change and the critic may be “right,” though alone. But policy analysis, which is aimed at implementing a program, must take an explicit stand on the matter. Either a program is in accord with the views held by the majority of the voters, politicians, and civil servants, or the analysis must point to the ways in which a program can be implemented against their wishes. That these wishes will change, on short order, or can be changed to order, cannot be realistically assumed.

Relating to Politics

The polity is the ultimate framework of society, its organization, the main grit which allows a society to express itself and to act as an entity. Most writings on antipoverty programs are openly and completely apolitical. They assume a strong commitment to the antipoverty effort and ask, “now that a war on poverty has been declared, how may it be waged effectively?” Actually, even generals in “real” wars must take into account in their planning the reaction back home, not only to the war in general but also to specific features of specific modes of warfare and specific campaigns. For example, most generals of the armies of a democracy are reluctant to run up casualties sharply for a short period even if this might reduce the total number and rate of casualties in the war. Surely, the strategists of a domestic drive especially one which

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initially did not have very wide support, must take into account that its implementa-
tion must be related to a continual mobilization of support for the basic program, for
its specific features (e.g., the maximum possible participation of the poor), and for
specific campaigns (e.g., a literacy drive).

The policy designer must consider the reasons why it is usually more difficult to
mobilize consensus for domestic than for foreign projects. Foreign projects often
(although not inevitably, foreign aid being a notable exception) can be advanced in
such a way that they provide a material or psychic "income" to almost all citizens.
Material payoffs were important in earlier times (for instance, when colonial exploita-
tion allowed imperial countries to keep taxes low at home). More recently, in this
country, especially since the Truman Doctrine in 1947, psychic incomes have risen in
importance. The nation provides the prime source of political identification for most
American and other modern states' citizens. The "loss" of China to communism, the
"return" of Indonesia to the West, the "loss" of Cuba, the "defection" of Yugoslavia
from the Soviet-led camp all constitute significant psychic rewards and penalties for
the average United States citizen, ones that are sufficiently powerful that it seems
"unpolitical" for any administration to "lose" a few countries in succession. From
1947 up to the Vietnam War, the overwhelming majority of the citizens had
been on one side, united in adhering, on most issues, to the Cold War frame of
reference.

The political constraints are much tighter for domestic policymakers, and the need
to be "creative" politically, to find ways to broaden the appeal of a program, is much
greater. Here, one must determine which programs have fairly wide appeal and ask
whether or not the features which account for their appeal can be "copied" without
damaging the antipoverty program's major goals. Since most domestic projects are
"allocative", it is often impossible to please a majority of the citizens. Because the
population is not homogeneous, providing a program to aid one segment of the
population entails disregarding many of the others. For instance, in 1964, 49% of the
Americans identified themselves as liberals, and 46% as conservatives (the remaining
percentage did not identify themselves). True, reactions to specific programs vary
over time, and answers to public opinion polls differ according to the way the question
is phrased. Yet it is possible to piece together a tentative picture based on responses to
various Great Society programs over the last 4 years. These responses tend to show that
reforms which have payoffs for the middle classes as well as the under class are accepted
by about twice as many people as those which aim to service the under class exclusively.
For instance, in 1967, further expansion of federal aid to education was favored by
45% of Americans asked and increased aid to mental health clinics was favored by
47%, while only 23% would expand the war on poverty and a mere 16% favored
relief payments. This would suggest that a reformer may have to provide some "payoffs"
to those who will have to pay most of the cost of the reforms. It may be argued that
relief and the War on Poverty are unpopular because the programs involved have
come under fire, their weaknesses have been exposed, and, thus, they are rejected on
intrinsic grounds. While this may add to their unpopularity, only 23% favor the ex-
pansion of Head Start—the educational program for underprivileged children which
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was viewed as successful at the time—while 45% favor federal aid to education which goes to all classes and races but relatively little of it to the poor.

The need to provide multiple payoffs to a multiplicity of groups raises objections among key strategists of the war against poverty. Some hold that any “political” considerations are impure and a distortion of rationality. Particular exception is taken to the notion of “payoffs” for groups for whom the program is not intended—e.g., social workers, labor unions, and, more generally, the nonpoor. The conclusion which follows logically from these objections, although it is hardly explicitly stated by those who advance them, is that programs should be imposed against the will of the majority rather than taking the “irrelevant” interests of the majority into account (which, is in effect, to democratize these programs). Aside from the ethical questions such coercive measures raise, coercion often proves impractical; and, as happens only too often, programs which require such backing are unacceptable to policymakers or are enacted to remain on the books, not to be implemented. Thus, the “immorality” of taking into account political considerations must be balanced against that of undemocratic action or of further delay in the response to urgent needs.

It does not follow from this discussion that the best program is the one which provides payoffs to all comers. First, such a program would be very expensive indeed, which is itself not “political.” Second, there are payoffs other than money. Actually, political leadership can be examined in terms of the extent to which it is “creative” in finding ways to gain broad support for a program while deflecting as few resources as possible to nonintended beneficiaries. The value of “creativity” here will be more easily recognized once we take into account the fact that politics is not a zero-sum game, and that, in the political give-and-take frequently a “third” alternative may be identified which is relatively more acceptable to all sides involved than the positions with which they arrived. A bill authorizing federal aid to education, for example, was passed by Congress after a way was found to allow church schools to benefit from the bill (e.g., by the use of federally financed books) without unduly offending the forces which were vocally committed to separation of church and state. (Other factors which were operative—e.g., the fatiguing of the sides—need not concern us here).

The argument between the supporters of negative income tax and those who support a family allowance and increases in social security benefits as antipoverty devices focuses in part on this issue. The first group, which has considerable support in OEO (Office of Economic Opportunity) and on the staff of the President’s Commission on Income Maintenance, argues that the other systems deliver more off than on target: more of the benefits would go to the nonpoor than to the poor. And, they indicate, “universalistic” programs (“universalistic” because they benefit all the members of a demographic category, whatever their income) are very expensive, which is not very politically propitious in itself. The defenders of the other programs, concentrated in HEW (Department of Health, Education and Welfare), hold that negative income tax seems unacceptable to the majority of the voters and members of Congress.

As I see it, both sides are right, and the question becomes one of finding a program

3 A detailed account of this and related developments is provided in a fine book by Frank J. Munger and Richard F. Fenno, Jr. National Politics and Federal Aid to Education.

which would deliver more on target than would, let us say, a family allowance but which would also be more acceptable to the public and the legislature than negative income tax. Among the programs which have both such features is guaranteed employment (favored by 78% of adult Americans according to a recent public opinion poll), with the government as the employer of last resort, and an antipoverty insurance to pay those who are waiting for a job or unable to work.

This is not to suggest that a recalcitrant interest group must always be bought off, or that a program must be tailored to please it. For example, the gun lobby’s orientation is so contrary to the country’s well-being and its position is so rigid that it is better confronted than placated. For many issues, perhaps as much as a quarter of the voters—the Wallace-Goldwater ultraconservatives—must be regarded as “hopeless” in that it is not possible both to satisfy them and to fashion a viable antipoverty program. Another quarter are rather liberally oriented and will support almost any reform measure. The “remaining” half is the critical one; it is occasionally mobilized in support of reforms, but it tends to align itself with the die-hard conservatives if its normative commitments or vital interests are overlooked. (These figures are based on a public opinion study to be reported in detail later. The distribution in Congress seems to be somewhat more conservative than that of the country, and the country seems to have been growing more conservative since 1964. This conservatism manifests itself chiefly in reference to programs aimed primarily or exclusively at helping the blacks and much less so in reference to general domestic reforms.)

A very different set of antipoverty policies can be proposed, policies which do not aim at solving the problems of the existing system within its confines but, rather, seek to undermine and transform the system itself. A fairly low keyed example is Richard Cloward’s idea of encouraging the poor on relief to file for the full amount of the benefits to which they are entitled under the law. Cloward argued, quite cogently, that about half of the persons entitled to relief do not get it, and that many others obtain less than that to which they are entitled. Using more system analysis than most activists, Cloward pointed out that if all of these people were to demand their full shares, the existing welfare system could neither process nor meet these demands; it would therefore collapse, to be replaced by a system that is less bureaucratic and is nationally financed. This process is already at work to some extent, especially in New York City where Cloward’s mobilization effort had some success. The welfare system is in crisis, and various reforms were introduced (flat grants, allowing people on relief to retain some income from work, the elimination of “midnight raids,” etc.). It should be noted, however, that these reforms in New York were instituted by the city’s welfare commissioner, Mitchell Ginsberg; he was oriented towards such changes from the outset and might well have favored these reforms even without Cloward’s drive.

Other, more radical proposals seek to piggy-back a utopia—revolutionary, anarchist, or otherwise—onto specific social programs; in the process, rather than helping to lay the foundations of reform, they tend to play into the hands of conservative forces.

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S. M. Miller has argued repeatedly that to refer to the issue before us as one of poverty is a misnomer; inequality, he maintains, is the problem we really face, and what we should seek is income redistribution to generate equality. I am not at all sure that this redefinition accurately expresses the issue, but I am quite certain that it makes both antipoverty and pro-equality reforms much more difficult to achieve. Millions of Americans are moved by the theme of “poverty amidst affluence” and are willing to support progress aimed at eradicating poverty. And the repeated raisings of the poverty line might even eventually approximate the equality for which Miller argues. But those who base their attempts to redistribute income on those Americans who favor equality (not of opportunity but of income!) skate on very thin ice indeed.

A radical may, of course, hold that no significant change will be effected in the society until its citizens come to accept the radical characterization of its structure, its problems, and their cures. The validity of this counterargument rests upon what is conceived to be “significant.” If a significant change is defined only as a radical transformation, the statement becomes a safe tautology. If, on the other hand, the solving of at least one-third and preferably one-half of a problem within a few years is seen as “significant,” the statement is open to challenge.

Suggestions that the poverty line should be pegged at $7,800, or should be the mean American income, are not much less provocative at this stage than tying socialist titles to progress aimed at income redistribution would be. Aside from the question of whether or not a family of four which earns $7,800 a year is entitled to public assistance one must note that if such a plan were endorsed, it would push the cost of new anti-poverty campaigns to a level which would practically assure that they would be unacceptable to most political leaders and voters. The introduction of Social Security took the opposite tack; it started in 1935 with a low-cost program which has been broadened and extended about seven times in the intervening 30-odd years during which the public has had a “positive experience” with the program.

Using a moving poverty line such as the mean income has one additional disadvantage over an absolute line—even one as high as $7,800: it would make it rather difficult to foster a sense of accomplishment and success, an important aspect of politics. By this definition, the elimination of poverty would continuously elude us until complete equality is approximated.

Last, but not least, interest groups which oppose domestic reforms may have to be challenged and confronted, but to irritate the opposition without weakening it is not a policy conducive to change—reform or revolutionary. A typical case in point is the act of the mysterious individual who at the last moment wrote into the poverty bill a clause requiring the “maximum feasible participation of the poor,” and the government officials who used it to try to get around city hall, state capitals, and other local centers of power in an attempt to create “counter institutions” (e.g., a second school system) and to use federal funds to mobilize the poor against the establishment (e.g., rent strikes, Mobilization for Youth). While the poor surely should be mobilized to participate in managing antipoverty programs, how were the existing centers of

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power expected to react? Were they to "melt away?" Could they be expected to allow funds to flow directly from the federal government to the citizens without getting their clearance and guidance if not their "cut?" Would they let a federal agency provide the basis for forming coalitions against them? It is small wonder that the "participation" clause was fought tooth and nail until it was substantially dropped in 1967. It is paradoxical that those who detect the reigns of the power elite everywhere are so inclined to disregard the power of such elites when it comes to fashioning policy. As we see it, local power centers are less powerful and surely less tightly organized and coordinated than the "military-industrial (welfare) complex" proposition has it. They are, though, significant enough so that domestic policy must either win their support or overwhelm them; there is little to be gained from trifling with them.

The Nixon-Moynihan Proposal

This article was written before the features of the present administration's antipoverty proposals were known; it concerns itself with "how to think about poverty in societal system terms." Now that a new concrete proposal is in front of us, it might be reviewed in terms of the model of useful simplifications outlined in the preceding discussion.

The proposal deserves the wide acclaim it gained from experts in the field, as one of the most "liberal" and imaginative proposals of the Nixon administration. The public liked it better than negative income tax but less than guaranteed work. According to an 13 October 1969 Harris poll, 47% were scored as favorable.

The suggested program recognizes a strong American tradition of expecting those on relief to make themselves available for work and not live off the dole, by providing a strong incentive to work: People on relief can keep 50% of income from work up to a given level and may keep 17% more if the states so vote. At the same time, the Nixon proposal does take into account that many of the poor cannot work (many of the disabled, aged, and children); that it might well not be in the public interest for others to work (mothers of young children), and that the majority of the able-bodied are already at work but receive wages which do not suffice to bring them out of poverty. For all this, the new plan offers an income supplementation (the term "negative income tax" is wisely avoided) to bring their income up to $1,600 for a family of four.

This level of income is completely insufficient, to put it mildly. A family which will have to subsist on this income will have, in 1971 (the earliest time the program may be in effect), and income of about $30.00 a week. One cannot but assume that the reason this level was chosen is that even this limited program is expected to increase welfare costs by $1.4 billion to $1.9 billion. There can be little doubt that the ink will not dry on this piece of legislation—if the program is enacted without changes in the level of benefits—before the steps to raise the level of payment will be initiated. (To bring the program to $3,200 would entail much more than doubling the cost, because there are many more people whose income is in the $1,600 to $3,200 range than in the $1,000 to $1,600 range. Costs are estimated to run to at least $11 billion to cover the full range for all those now poor.)
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The plan is eclectic, drawing on the experience of previous welfare programs, which is a virtue of programs which come not from the pens of intellectuals but are the result of prolonged task forces. Taking into account societal system features, specifically the tension caused in the cities by the crowding, the overloading of facilities, and the increased lower-class sector, the plan favors the setting of national standards for welfare payments, hoping to discourage migration to the cities from the country, especially from the South. Second, taking into account another major system linkage, ignored until recently, it removes from the welfare plan the incentives to families to break up or not to formalize a liaison, by removing the gains which hereto befell a man or woman who are married or who live together, if they act as separate families.

The program, as now envisioned, will pay out only to the poor, which is—especially in the present political climate—a courageous step but not a feature which assures rapid or unadulterated acceptance by Congress. The plan’s costs might rise considerably if, as the federal welfare budget is introduced, the state, city, and voluntary agencies cut their welfare budgets more than the federal government picks up, in an attempt to pick up still more. However, the low $1,600 ceiling sets a limit on how high the initial costs may run. What will happen when the plan is actually introduced? Will significantly fewer people migrate? Will unskilled labor become more expensive? Will mothers work? Will people with higher income still experience most of the effects of poverty (from poor diet to slum housing)? The effects of the plan remain to be seen.

The Limits of Crystal-Balling

The policymaker initiating a new antipoverty plan, or expanding an existing one will certainly never have all the answers. On the contrary, he ought to proceed on the assumption that there is much that cannot be foreseen, and that the most carefully thoughtout policy may well need to be revised as it is being implemented. A reserve of funds, staff, time, and tolerance is essential. One reason for our numerous defeats is that programs which have never been tried are oversold, and their success is expected in a very short time. It took 8 years from May 1961 to accomplish Kennedy’s goal of putting two Americans on the moon and to bring them back alive. We should not expect to wipe out poverty on shorter order. Poor people could get an above-the-poverty-line income within weeks—for instance, if negative income tax of the appropriate level of payments was put into effect. However, despite the recent vogue among experts to stress the financial aspects of the problem, many of the deeper causes of poverty are sociological and psychological and their treatment will take more research, more effort, and more time. To argue otherwise is invalid in terms of the best of the available knowledge and fails to responsibly prepare a base for the longer-run effort that is required.