



Co-ordinating the Great Society

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PROBABLY no series of legislative enactments in U.S. history has created more complex administrative problems than those recently passed under Lyndon Johnson's leadership. They have three things in common: their implementation cuts across existing departmental and agency lines within the Federal government; they demand almost heroic responses from state and local governments in order to succeed; they require a combination of technical and administrative skills that are critically scarce in the society at large. Despite the demands of the war in Vietnam, the critical shortage is not money but people to carry out the programs and effective administrative machinery. Neither Medicare nor aid to education nor the poverty program has either of these at the moment.

The poverty program alone, based on the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, is being handled by a multiplicity of agencies. Some of its projects are directly administered by the Office of Economic Opportunity, headed by Sargent Shriver and based in the Executive Office of the President; others are not. While the Job Corps is run by OEO, the Neighborhood Youth Corps is administered by the Department of Labor; the Work Experience Program by the Welfare Administration of Health,

Education and Welfare; the Rural Family Loan Program by the Farmers Home Administration of the Department of Agriculture; the Economic Opportunity loans by the Small Business Administration. And this catalogue does not begin to touch efforts related to the poverty program but not formally a part of it: for example, the Rural Community Development Service in the Department of Agriculture; the Economic Development program in Commerce; and the Appalachian Regional Commission, an autonomous organizational entity composed of state governors and a single Federal representative.

Such various sources of attack provide an undeniable impetus to the campaign against poverty, but they do not make for administrative tidiness. The difficulties in Sargent Shriver's position are patent: vested with over-all responsibility for the poverty program, he must negotiate, co-ordinate, even command and veto activities of departments whose Secretaries outrank him in status-oriented Washington. It is perhaps symptomatic of his situation that the Economic Opportunity Council, headed by Shriver and composed of the Cabinet Secretaries and agency directors with responsibilities in the drive against poverty, met only four

times in the first year of the program.

There have been some attempts to unsnarl the administrative lines. Agriculture and OEO, for example, have established a task force to co-ordinate Federal efforts to eliminate rural poverty. But the search is still on for a way of providing general direction for the total war on poverty. The miracle is that in spite of the administrative confusion, Shriver can point to the award of 1,800 Community Action grants, half a million Head Start youngsters, eighty-seven Job Corps centers in operation, and 1,800 trained VISTA volunteers—all accomplished in eighteen months of frenetic activity. But the administrative problems remain, and they will get worse before they get better.

The Proliferation Barrier

The problem of administering programs whose boundaries are amorphous is a general characteristic of the Great Society. A recent *New York Times* report on education found that, despite the formal responsibilities of HEW's Office of Education, important new education programs are found in most of the eleven Office of Economic Opportunity programs, as well as in five programs in Cabinet departments. Civil-rights responsibilities are similarly assigned, and have recently been reassigned, to each individual governmental agency. In spite of heroic work by Vice President Humphrey, no central bureau effectively co-ordinates the various efforts and policies in the field of human rights.

At present more than forty different Federal programs provide aid for urban development, yet the most careful of studies—that of the Advisory Commission on Inter-Governmental Relations—fails to reveal "any evidence of a unified urban development policy." In the field as in Washington, interagency contacts are predominantly informal. Where formal arrangements have been made, they are usually bilateral rather than multilateral. The new Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) will make inroads in this confusion, but it will not end it. Bureaus of at least four other Cabinet departments, as well as a half dozen or so independent agencies, administer grant programs to urban areas. As a result, separate

Federally assisted programs tackling different aspects of community development—physical, economic, and social—are often quite separate. In the area of assistance for local waste-disposal facilities alone, four different Federal agencies handle similar grant or loan programs in dissimilar ways.

If barriers to effective administration seem nearly insurmountable in Washington, they grow even more so away from Washington. Between the nation's capital and the ninety per cent of Federal employees who work in other parts of the country, among Federal field agencies, within state governments, within and between local jurisdictions, and among Federal, state, local, and private agencies working at similar purposes, a lack of co-operation and the absence of effective co-ordination threaten the very base of the President's programs.

Room at the Top and Elsewhere

There is often imperfect understanding between Federal field agencies and their headquarters in Washington. Federal regional and district offices representing scores of departments, agencies, and bureaus are sprawled haphazardly across the landscape. State and local officials find real difficulty in getting answers to their questions at local Federal offices. Problems must be referred upward through the hierarchy, laterally across agency jurisdictions, and screened at many stages along the way. The urgently needed decentralization of decision making can be achieved only after a thorough reorganization of the Federal field structure.

But implementation of the President's program is equally dependent for its success upon state and local governments. Here too the hazards are severe: metropolitan areas, each composed of dozens and even hundreds of anarchic local government units that are largely unconcerned with the needs of the whole interdependent area; state legislatures whose malapportionment has made them unconcerned with the plight of their urban areas for generations; and state bureaucracies inadequately staffed to fulfill the needed functions of program co-ordination and information gathering for rational com-

munity and regional development.

Affecting all levels of government from the operating level to high policymaking positions is the dire shortage of trained and talented people to plan and manage the thousands of projects and programs of the Great Society. I can perhaps best illustrate this dearth of manpower with an example from the field of education. The searching examination of our school system that was stimulated by the launching of the first Sputnik in 1957 revealed serious deficiencies in the training and competence of a dismaying proportion of our classroom teachers. And the problem reaches upward into the top levels of state educational systems. "Few states can command competent personnel," Roald Campbell, one of the most talented educational administrators, now dean of the Graduate School of Education at the University of Chicago, commented recently. "Possibly only the New York State department is prepared to be an equal partner with the U.S. Office of Education."

And what of the situation in the Office of Education itself? With an operating budget that has multiplied fourfold in the last two years, it is undergoing a determined effort to reorganize itself to meet its responsibilities. One step below its excellent chief administrators, in the crucial top fifty or so civil-service posts, nearly forty-five per cent of the positions were "vacant" as of last summer. Many others are still filled by holdovers from the more relaxed atmosphere of the Office's years of fiscal and programmatic neglect.

ANOTHER characteristic of the Great Society programs is the degree to which they become of necessity involved in the competition and conflict of local political machines and social institutions across the country. The OEO, for example, has authorized a third of a billion dollars in Community Action grants, each of them based on projects designed by community leaders, local officials, and neighborhood councils in more than a thousand different localities. Thus, along with the benefits of broad citizen participation, these Great Society programs inherit

the headaches of local political struggles.

A case in point is the battle joined by Mayor William F. Walsh in Syracuse, New York, and an independent Community Development Association. To the Republican mayor, this Federally subsidized campaign to organize, as a part of its program, a "democratic" voter-registration drive in the city's poor wards looked suspiciously like an effort to build "Democratic" organizations. The conflict over the \$425,000 program has been fought almost daily in the news media of Syracuse since last spring, and at various stages has taken either the mayor or program participants to Albany, Washington, and the LBJ Ranch. In a similar vein, the Conference of Mayors has complained that city-sponsored Community Action agencies are sometimes bypassed; and governors have testified before Congressional committees on the erosion of state sovereignty implicit in direct OEO links to local communities.

In many cities the poverty program has indeed brought about a revolutionary assault on the established social structure. The now famous requirement set forth in Title II of the Economic Opportunity Act for "maximum feasible participation of residents of the areas and members of the groups served" calls upon the administrator to bring into his organizing effort the very people he is trying to help, the traditionally alienated and effectively disfranchised. How widely the representatives of the poor will be effective partners in the design and implementation of the poverty program remains to be seen. In San Francisco a persistent and well-organized campaign brought them a series of victories that now leave them in numerical control of both the San Francisco Economic Opportunity Council and the Council's executive board. More commonly, as in Syracuse, neighborhood representatives find themselves outnumbered and outmaneuvered. But expectations have been aroused and will doubtless continue to complicate administrative operations of the Community Action programs.

At the same time, the Great Society is increasingly dependent upon the co-operation and initiative

of commerce and industry. Appalachia's \$840 million in new roads will not rehabilitate the region unless new trucks are rolling on them. Regional development plans, no matter how well formulated, will not bring progress to other economically backward areas unless businesses and factories take imaginative advantage of the \$3.25-billion Public Works and Economic Development Act of 1965. Streams and rivers and air will not be effectively cleansed without the active co-operation of the managers of the private economy (or for that matter the public communities).

This kind of Federal partnership with private enterprise in achieving the Great Society is already at work in the Job Corps, where a number of contracts to run residential training centers have been let to corporations whose usual activities are far afield from education. While Shriver has praised the record of corporation-run camps for their efficiency and their job-oriented programs, a highly publicized report on one of them, Camp Kilmer, by a panel of Rutgers professors criticized the camp's authoritarian atmosphere and its administrators' lack of understanding of young people raised in poverty. Yet training centers run by educational or community organizations have had their problems, too—brawling, prostitution, marijuana, sloppy bookkeeping. As Job Corps Director Dr. Otis A. Singletary has pointed out, "We don't recruit angels into the Job Corps." A certain degree of mayhem is built in.

Assigning the Challenge

It is easy—and politically popular—to overstate the administrative difficulties created by the Great Society programs. But administrative tidiness is not the be-all and end-all of government, and competition is often as desirable among government agencies as it is elsewhere. Nonetheless, the dangers are real and the need for new administrative machinery and methods correspondingly urgent. Federal programs must be more effectively related to each other and must complement state and local programs without the sacrifice of initiative, experimentation, and momentum.

What should the President's role

be in such a broad and ambitious enterprise? Certainly not that of personally supervising the operation of the national government, but rather of setting the necessary forces to work. For one thing, he can strengthen the capacity of his own Executive Office to recommend and enforce organizational change. In the West Wing of the White House and in the office building across the driveway are the President's supporting staff—those most capable of breaking the inertia and self-interest that protect existing jurisdictional patterns in the Federal establishment. The Bureau of the Budget, especially, needs additional staff to perform management surveys and to recommend administrative reforms. The entire field structure of the Federal government, as I said earlier, requires drastic overhauling and a decentralization of decision making. And with increasing authority assigned to Federal field offices, new interagency information sharing, planning, and program co-ordination must be made possible at the regional as well as at the Washington level. The President should also

insist that "overhead" money be given to state and local governments to assist their administrators in setting to rights their present haphazard participation in the scores of Federal aid programs.

The President has already led the way by raising the standard for top Federal administrators. He must now set higher standards for recruitment at all levels. By establishing suitable incentives or sanctions he will also encourage greater effectiveness at the state and local levels.

Indeed, the President in his 1966 Budget Message and in subsequent special rural and urban development messages has already indicated his awareness of what is required. Ultimately, however, the real burden of administering the Great Society is not on the President. The Great Society should be seen rather as a Presidential challenge to the American people. Looked at in this way, it represents a return to local responsibility. Its success depends not upon the administrative genius of the President but rather upon the co-operative energies of officials and citizens throughout the nation.

The Delta: Rich Land And Poor People

FOSTER DAVIS

GREENVILLE, MISSISSIPPI

ON JANUARY 31, a cold, cloudy Monday, several cars carrying about forty Negroes and whites charged past a startled guard at the gate of the phased-out Air Force base near here. They stopped at a vacant one-story wooden building, broke the door open, and set up camp inside. A few hours later a second wave arrived, bringing stoves, mattresses, and food with them.

The demonstration, staged to dramatize the plea of Mississippi Delta Negroes for food, housing, and land, caught the small Air Force detachment completely off guard. After repeated appeals to leave had failed, 150 Air Police were flown from bases as far away as Colorado. The next day, in a scene vividly recorded by

network television cameramen, the APs forcibly hauled out the resisting demonstrators.

Some of the evicted squatters spent the night at "Tent City," a small complex of tents and a community center used to house plantation Negroes who had gone on strike last May for an hourly wage of \$1.25. Under the guidance of the Reverend Laurice Walker of the Delta Ministry, one of the militant civil-rights organizations backing the strike, its leaders had ranged the Delta, urging workers to drop their hoes. Planters who still needed hand labor to get the cotton in had a bad scare. But with a continually declining demand for hand labor and a growing supply of people eager for work, the strike of tenant farmers