

## Failures of Money, Confusions of Mouth

BY MICHAEL HARRINGTON

**THE POLITICS OF A GUARANTEED INCOME:** The Nixon Administration and the Family Assistance Plan. By Daniel P. Moynihan. 579 pages. Random House. \$15.

Daniel Patrick Moynihan's *The Politics of a Guaranteed Income* is an important new work, indispensable to anyone who claims to speak on social policy in the United States. I say this, even though I disagree with its central political thesis and not a few of its other analyses and judgments. But whatever its flaws, it is necessary reading for all those concerned with the urgent problems of this nation.

Moynihan was for two years Richard Nixon's domestic Kissinger. In a gray, unimaginative administration he was an Irish romantic, a graduate of the regular wing of the New York Democratic party, an intellectual, and a sub-Cabinet veteran of both the Kennedy and the Johnson years. In his new book he has written a sometimes partisan, sometimes scholarly, and sometimes wrong study of one of the most surprising departures of Richard Nixon's first four years, the Family Assistance Plan (FAP). Few trained social scientists have had Moynihan's opportunity to examine the interrelationship between academic research and political policy making, and it is this that gives *The Politics of a Guaranteed Income* its unique vantage point and its most profound limitation.

I cannot even begin to summarize the multiplicity of issues Moynihan poses. I propose simply to comment on those that strike me as most relevant to present discussion and future choices. First of all, it is to Moynihan's credit that he corrects an impression being widely spread by President Nixon himself. In that most revealing interview with Garnet Horner of the *Washington Star* just before his landslide re-election Nixon said that the government had failed in the Sixties because it "threw money at problems." That theme has also been picked up by influential intellectuals—some of them Moynihan's associates on the editorial board of the political quarterly *The Public Interest*

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Daniel Patrick Moynihan

—who are preaching the virtues of timidity and caution in matters of social policy. The difficulty with this thesis is that the crucial event upon which it rests—that prodigious expenditure of federal money on the Great Society and the War on Poverty—never took place. On this point Moynihan is excellent—even though he sometimes coquettes with the neo-conservative ideas that his less informed colleagues derive from the data he proves to be erroneous.

"The social reforms of the mid-decade," Moynihan writes, "had been oversold and, with the coming of the war, underfinanced to the degree that seeming failure could be ascribed almost to intent [emphasis mine]." So it was, for example, that the "New Towns In-Town" program to build housing on surplus federal land was announced with great fanfare by Lyndon Johnson in 1967 and produced, as of mid-1971, fewer than 300 units. Many citizens, Richard Nixon foremost among them, listened to all those futuristic declarations of what the government was going to do for the poor, the blacks, the Chicanos, etc., and assumed that the nation was putting its money where its mouth was. It wasn't, as Moynihan shows in some detail.

However, by 1969, when Nixon took office and Moynihan joined him as his domestic specialist, there was the pos-

sibility of a basic new tack. There is a considerable body of academic theory that holds that change in a society such as ours comes only in increments. In the case of FAP, Moynihan rightly argues, a quantum leap was involved: a Republican President proposed a guaranteed annual income. He did so, to be sure, shamefacedly, *i.e.*, denying that his program was the guaranteed annual income it was. But the fact is that Richard Nixon had urged the most radical new social principle since the New Deal.

What went wrong with that remarkable venture in public policy? Moynihan's answer is composed of many strands, but the most important are these: conservatives, particularly southern conservatives, fought the measure because they were rightly fearful of the fact that it was a guaranteed income; some liberals and most radicals joined in a *de facto* alliance with their opposite numbers on the Right, because they could not tolerate the notion of Nixon's doing something good, and/or because they could not be one-upped by a Republican President. And on all sides, Moynihan adds, there was confusion and ignorance about what FAP was, in part because the scheme was deceptively complicated. Therefore, he concludes, the nation lost a great opportunity for a pioneering law that at least had the possibility of some modest success—which is more, Moynihan holds, than can be said for most of our recent social legislation.

I think that almost everything Moynihan says is true enough but that what he omits is at least as important as what he says. It is for this reason that I cannot accept the basic dramatic line of his narrative in which Richard Nixon is the hero and the liberals are the villains. (I should add that I wrote and spoke in critical—and sometimes quite critical—support of FAP and urged congressmen to vote for it even with its inadequacies.)

The conservative opposition to FAP is not too hard to understand. In the state of Mississippi that program would have raised welfare payments under Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) by about 500 per cent and supplemented the incomes of the working poor as well. In one Delta town, the experts figured, this would have *trebled* the income of black families. The economic and social underpinnings of southern racism could not tolerate such subversion, so the Dixiecrats fought a measure that, ironically,

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would have done more for the white poor than the black poor.

Moynihan's indictment of the liberals and radicals is not based on an attack against such obvious self-interests. The Left, particularly in the Senate, was, in Moynihan's view, caught playing that old game of More Militant Than Thou. It had to outbid Nixon and deny the validity of his plan. And many liberals simply did not understand the bill.

The main feature of FAP was not aid to welfare recipients: in the poor states, primarily in the South, such people would gain, but in the more affluent states of the Northeast they would simply hold their own. Moreover, the various figures for the minimum federal contribution did not, as many thought, define the total income that all Americans receiving relief would get, but only the federal portion of it. The real innovation in the scheme—and the conservatives understood it—was that working poor people not currently covered by any program would receive some aid. This would have added millions to the rolls.

The problem, as I understand Moynihan's presentation of it, was that, if the federal payments for the dependent (welfare) poor were raised up to the poverty line, or above it, as some proposed, that would vastly increase the number of working people who would then qualify for supplementary benefits.

If you encouraged people to work by allowing them to keep a portion—albeit a diminishing portion—of what they earned over and above the federal minimum (which the Left rightly favored), then to provide \$6,500 for a dependent family of four meant that some payments would have to be provided for every family earning \$13,000 or less—that is, to a substantial majority of the American people. I do not shy away from that idea on principle, as Moynihan does; but no one could argue that its time had come in 1969.

These facts were not as widely understood as they might have been, particularly on the Left, where it made such obvious emotional and political sense to argue that Nixon was holding the federal contribution down out of his well-known, and ingrained, reactionary temperament.

I freely confess to having made some errors in this matter; so did many other people. And there was an aspect of the More Militant Than Thou psychology at work in the case of some of the critics of the plan. But what bothers me about Moynihan's analysis—what vitiates at least part of it—is what he

omits.

FAP, as Moynihan understands, almost counterposed the needs of the welfare poor and the working poor. Its "trade off" was to leave the lot of the former (the extreme, Mississippi-like cases were exceptions) about as it was in order to improve the position of the latter. But what, precisely, was it that had permitted our economy to tolerate the outrage of so many family heads working so many long, hard hours and staying poor? Why is there even a category of "the working poor"? From the enactment of the Employment Act of 1946 to the present the answer is relatively simple: this nation has never pursued a really full-employment policy that would so tighten up the labor market that all working people would receive an income well above the poverty line.

Moynihan knows these things, of course. As assistant secretary of labor for policy planning and research under Kennedy and Johnson, he was tireless and eloquent in pointing them out. But he does not linger over them in *The Politics of a Guaranteed Income*. Indeed, in his attack on liberals in the Sixties for concentrating on social services, he forgets the Freedom Budget, prepared for A. Philip Randolph by Leon Keyserling and other economists (and endorsed by an impressive list of union presidents and liberals), which would have dealt with the problem, not through social work, but through jobs. Why this omission? In part I think it is because Moynihan was, and still is, focused too exclusively upon FAP, which was his own personal crusade. However, it is also true that candor on this point would have made his romantic portrait of Nixon as the lonely, thoughtful Tory reformer, in this book, impossible.

While FAP was being argued, Nixon was following conscious and deliberate policies that increased unemployment by two million and the official number of the poor by more than one million. He was, in other words, undoing at least part of one of the most undeniable accomplishments of the Kennedy-Johnson years, and he was doing it because he gave higher priority to Republican demands for price stability than to the welfare of the working poor (and of working people in general). In fact, as the President effectively acknowledged in his dramatic reversal of policy—the establishment of wage and price controls—in August 1971 his famous "game plan" had produced a simultaneous recession-inflation. If he had followed a real full-employment policy—including the federal funding of public service employment urged by both the Automation Commission of 1966 and the Riot Commission of 1968—the con-

traditions of FAP could have been dealt with.

I would generalize. A decent welfare program is possible only within the context of a full-employment society. If one accepts chronic high rates of unemployment and underemployment as a given, as Moynihan does in this book, then there will be inevitable conflicts between the interests of the dependent and the working poor.

In short, Nixon, the bungling economic manager, was the greatest single enemy of Nixon, the proponent of a guaranteed annual income. When Moynihan told the President that the wage structure was the most important single cause of the welfare crisis, did he add that the President's economic policies were making this crisis worse?

There was also a problem of deception. Nixon pretended that his guaranteed income was not a guaranteed income. Moynihan argues that this was a permissible strategy. It is all right "to make a radical proposal seem conservative," as William Safire of the White House staff put it. Indeed, the President himself is quoted as saying, "I don't care a damn about the work requirement. This is the price of getting the \$1,600 [the proposed federal minimum at that point]." But then must not the President be assigned some blame for the fact that some liberals believed him when he filled the public record with statement after statement on the Protestant ethic and "workfare"? If it was wrong for people to think that Nixon was proposing a reactionary and coercive work requirement, why did Nixon pretend so insistently and persuasively that this was indeed the case?

Pat Moynihan's basic reading of the FAP failure is much too easy on Richard Nixon, and it consequently places too much of the blame on liberals and radicals. It is of some moment that the President of the United States pursued disastrous economic policies that worsened the plight of the working poor at the same time as he delivered those homilies on the glories of menial labor. That is the context missing from *The Politics of a Guaranteed Income*.

Once one is aware of these omissions, then there is so much to be learned from Pat Moynihan's new book, so much that is intriguing and informing, that it should be read carefully and profitably even by those who disagree with some of its major themes. His treatment of such long-range issues as incrementalism and the relationship of social science to public policy reveal him as a more interesting theorist than many of his fellow travelers and associates; for all its flaws, *The Politics of a Guaranteed Income* is a major accomplishment. □



## In the Crunch

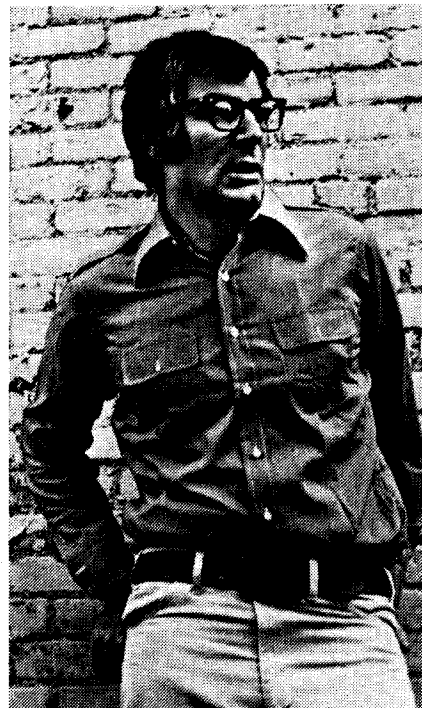
**THE BEST AND THE BRIGHTEST.** By David Halberstam. 668 pages. Random House. \$10.

BY ELIOT FREMONT-SMITH

Excepting possibly Daniel Ellsberg's *Papers on the War*, David Halberstam's *The Best and the Brightest* is the most important book on public policy to be published in the last year. Certainly it is the most successful: well over 100,000 copies are in print, and it has been at the top of the best-seller lists for several weeks. Is anybody really reading it? All 668 tiny-type, closely packed pages? That's another matter. One suspects, perhaps too ruefully, that it is being bought (and not really read) by people who already agree with its underlying theme that our involvement in the Vietnam War has been a terrible, tragic, and possibly criminal blunder. What about government? Is President Nixon reading it, or Henry Kissinger? Again—and without sure knowledge—one suspects not. They are too busy—and, anyway, Kissinger has a lot of books about himself to read first. And, supposedly, just like their predecessors, they know it all.

If that sounds bitter, it's intended. There are those of us, totally unconnected with government, who knew the war was wrong and also hopeless *more than ten years ago*. The cautiously rational part of one says "knew" advisedly: as I write, deadlines being what they are, the extraordinarily brutal and costly B-52 raids over Hanoi have been halted, at least for the moment, and Henry Kissinger is about to resume the Paris negotiations. Well and good, and here's hoping. But the other, less cautious, fully rational part of one does indeed know, and has known for a very long time, that the war was wrong in every possible way, and not least because it has made some of us sound shrill and has (as Marya Mannes pointed out last year in the *New York Times*) somehow brought up the question of patriotism vis-à-vis the most true and stalwart and committed patriots. To dissent on the war has been thought, and proclaimed by two administrations, to be subversive. Well, it *has* been subversive, not to what America is supposed to be and stand for, but to Presidents and appointed officials and functionaries, and to a policy that has not only been no-win, as the military correctly say, but itself subversive—characterized by a war that has been repeatedly and with calculation presented as something else, and that has cost hundreds of thousands of lives, billions of dollars, and not a small part of our collective soul.

How could it have happened? How could those extraordinarily able, intelligent, proud, modern, supremely rational men of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations—Robert McNamara, Dean Rusk, Maxwell Taylor, McGeorge Bundy and William Bundy, Walt Rostow, and a host of others, "best and brightest" all—have blundered so? In part, Halberstam suggests, they were doomed by history, by having come to political maturity during the Cold War years, by the legacy of McCarthyism that had driven the best and brightest experts on Asian affairs out of government and had put a premium on toughness, sureness, invulnerability. The Cold War was for most still a given in the early 1960s (so much so that to this day the Cuban missile crisis is thought of as Khrushchev's irrationality, not our own); we saw (and still see) our role



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as that of moral and military guardian of the non-Communist world—which led so easily to faulty analogies (Korea with Vietnam) and erroneous assumptions (for example, that South Vietnam was intrinsically a viable, independent political entity). And the Democrats, back in power, had chafed long enough under the notion that they had "lost" China; there were pressures aplenty not to repeat *that* mistake. Dienbienphu? Well, poor old France; such a calamity was unthinkable to happen to us.

Doomed by history—or, rather, by too close a view of very recent history, the kind of view that tends to obscure more than it reveals, the kind that is used primarily to justify continuing action in the same direction. That is one strand in Halberstam's explanatory

## SR RECOMMENDS

*A rotating selection by the book review editors of ten particularly notable new and current books of general interest, arranged alphabetically by title*

**THE BEST AND THE BRIGHTEST.** By David Halberstam (Random House, \$10)—A thoroughgoing and provocative analysis of the uses and abuses of power by the extraordinarily able policy-makers of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, who went to Washington to build a Camelot and left behind a country trapped in unwanted war and divided against itself.

**THE FRED ASTAIRE & GINGER ROGERS BOOK.** By Arlene Croce (Outerbridge & Lazard, \$9.95)—An intelligent text and nostalgic photographs combine in an act of homage to the team whose grace and style have become film landmarks.

**FIRE IN THE LAKE:** The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam. By Frances FitzGerald (Atlantic-Little, Brown, \$12.50)—With its intelligence, ability, and fine sense of Vietnamese culture and history, Miss FitzGerald's book becomes one of the best yet written about our involvement in Vietnam.

**THE GREAT BRIDGE.** By David McCullough (Simon & Schuster, \$10.95)—The fascinating story of the construction of the Brooklyn Bridge, whose dramatic engineering was matched only by the melodrama of political chicanery that attended it.

**HARRY S. TRUMAN.** By Margaret Truman (Morrow, \$10.95)—A frank and openly affectionate biography of the former President by his daughter.

**THE MAKING OF A PSYCHIATRIST.** By David S. Viscott (Arbor House, \$8.95)—An exceptionally candid, warm, and compellingly readable account of a young doctor's training and early practice in psychiatry.

**THE POLITICS OF A GUARANTEED INCOME: The Nixon Administration and the Family Assistance Plan.** By Daniel Patrick Moynihan (Random House, \$15)—This well-written, detailed account of the fate of the most far-reaching social legislation proposed since the New Deal provides a rare inside view of the workings of government and the pressures of politics.

**THE SUNLIGHT DIALOGUES.** By John Gardner (Knopf, \$8.95)—The author of *Grendel* takes on the complex texture of an American small town, the motif of medieval romance, and the weighty themes of freedom and entropy in his most important novel to date.

**TRANSPARENT THINGS.** By Vladimir Nabokov (McGraw-Hill, \$5.95)—A new brief novel, whose underlying theme is the juxtaposition of art and death, by the master of literary mirrors.

**VIRGINIA WOOLF.** By Quentin Bell (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, \$12.50)—A revealing biography of Virginia Woolf by her nephew, offering the fullest account yet of the Bloomsbury novelist, her circle, and her troubled life.