



Review and Reflection

BY
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PRESIDENT NIXON'S National Goals Research Staff, established with Leonard Germent as Director and Daniel P. Moynihan as Counsellor issued a report some months ago entitled *Toward Balanced Growth: Quantity with Quality*.

There are chapters on population, environment, education, science, technology and consumerism, as well as on the main theme of the report. Since violent controversies are raging in all these areas, it might be expected that this semi-official report would take something of a middle ground—and so it does. Yet there is implicit in this 225-page study a recognition that America's growth has gone out of kilter, what with congestion, pollution, conflicts, etc. "Concern has bred alarm, and some have urgently demanded that we call a halt to growth altogether. Yet our need is not to stop growth, but to redirect it."

In its chapter on population, note is taken of the "population explosion" scare, and Prof. Ansley Coale is quoted: "Even if our population should rise to a billion, the average density would not be very high by European standards." Of more concern is the distribution of population, says the report, what with the decline of rural areas and the continued swelling of large urban areas. The suggestion is made that steps should be taken to encourage a shift of population away from the "megapolis" areas and to build up middle-sized towns that would serve the rural area.

But note should be taken of why this shift away from rural areas has taken place. One large area that is declining is the plains states east of the Rocky Mountains. This was the last—and least promising—area settled by pioneers. After several generations of struggling and hanging on, many people are abandoning the marginal farms and small towns, victims of giantism and syndicated agriculture. The Staff might have considered what kind of land is available to whom and on what terms.

A crisis in education is acknowledged in the chapter on this subject. In the past twenty years there have been gigantic increases particularly in secondary and university education. "In the past, the public has equated going to school with education." But with this huge growth there has been little assessment on what school accomplishes. As between the view that higher education is for the

select few or for everybody, the report takes a middle ground and wants a "mixed" system. It concludes that much more study of the educational system is needed.

In any new study of education, it would be well to take note of a premise that is rarely questioned—that education (schooling) is the magic key to success. It is this that has led to the headlong rush to schools and universities—and to the present crisis. In a healthier economic system there need not be such a panic to get more and more schooling.

In chapters on science and technology the report is concerned with the growing feeling that we have gone too far. A "Luddite" reaction has set in and a growing minority feel that all progress should be stopped. (Recent successful opposition to the Supersonic Transport plane highlights this attitude.) The report urges encouragement of "benign" technology and discouragement of "harmful" technology. But even the "benign" kind can get out of hand if monopoly reaps all its benefits.

Consumerism has come into the news lately, dramatized by the doings of Ralph Nader and his associates. The report hopes this concern is more than a fad and that full consumer information will become part of our economic system.

In discussing the general problem of balanced growth, the report wants quality as well as quantity. Discrepancies in distribution are noted: "Even a large and rapidly growing GNP can mask the existence of widespread poverty. America has shown increasing concern for its poor, the 'other America' . . . Poverty is costly to all America, and the circumstances that create it are not easy to reverse. The search for balanced growth must include a study of the ways poverty can be further reduced and the ways the process that perpetuate it can be stopped."

Poverty can certainly be costly and it can so intrude into society as a whole as to threaten all progress and civilization as is becoming more and more evident.

Since the authors of this report recognize the problem of the association of poverty with progress, it would be apropos to call to their attention the work *Progress and Poverty* by Henry George, which tackled the problem directly and foresaw many of the consequences we are witnessing today.

BONUS FOR BLIGHT

THE Federal Government harnesses the profit motive to obsolescence and urban decay by letting owners of ageing buildings depreciate the same building over and over again for tax purposes. This give surban decay an enormous subsidy—a subsidy that is almost certainly bigger and costlier than all the Federal subsidies for housing and urban renewal. There are thousands and thousands of old buildings pre-empting valuable land that would be worth less than nothing without this redepreciation subsidy.

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