

of the products and materials purchased by the General Services Administration which would motivate manufacturers to develop and produce goods with a usable lifespan longer than that now considered normal or acceptable. As has often been the case in the past, GSA specifications tend to influence design specifications for whole segments of industry. It should be pointed out here that increased durability of such goods as electronic parts and equipment and packaging materials is not primarily a technical problem, since industry now has the capability to produce such materials having a much greater useful life than those now made generally available to the buying public. Electric light bulbs are a case in point.

The question of increased durability is, of course, closely tied to the national norm of high rates of consumption, and this, in turn, is a factor of great importance to the economic vitality of the Nation. However, two points are important here. The economic vitality based on high production and consumption rates is a short-term vitality, which fails to take into consideration the long-term economic factor of conservation of natural resources, particularly mineral resources. It would seem very important in the national interest for the Federal Government to increase substantially its research and development efforts relating to the economics of conservation. And into this picture must be fitted the question of social cost. Does it cost society more to enjoy the abundance and convenience of high consumption rates, while disregarding the long-term costs involved in depleting resources and in adding to the waste disposal burden?

A second important point on which relatively little research has been carried out is the question of the long-term effect on the labor force of a shift from a philosophy of planned obsolescence to one of reduced production of more durable and serviceable commodities. To what extent could high rates of employment be maintained in an economy geared more to the production and use of long-lasting products than to replacement of items whose obsolescence is a function of the marketplace?

In any event, more information clearly is needed to reveal the costs to society of a shift away from planned obsolescence. It seems reasonable to assume that if an automobile were made to last three times as long as it does today, in other words if it were not designed, engineered, and advertised into premature obsolescence, society would benefit, even if that automobile cost three times as much as today's car. Society would benefit by avoiding the costs and the hazards involved in disposing of a product three times as often as necessary. It would benefit by the conservation of natural resources. And it would benefit through the development of new employment fields to expand a labor market now threatened by automation.

Many Federal departments and agencies either now have or could have a direct interest in problems associated with planned obsolescence. The Departments of Health, Education, and Welfare, Commerce, the Treasury, Labor, Agriculture, the Interior, Defense, and agencies such as the Federal Trade Commission, the General Services Administration, and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration all could become more involved in research and development in this field. Although partly a technological problem, planned obsolescence involves social and economic factors that have not been thoroughly