

lawyer-politician by profession and an economist by avocation, perhaps I can contribute a different and, I hope, useful point of view to the discussion.

Before examining the concept of the guaranteed income, I think it would be helpful if I stated the basic assumptions upon which I am proceeding.

First, one of the major objectives of our society should be the rapid reduction of comparative-poverty with the ultimate goal of its virtual elimination within a reasonably short time, so that standards of living are truly free choices of living, differences, not superiorities or inferiorities, and what measures less in dollars may well measure more in terms of human happiness.

Second, our economic and social system has produced unprecedented successes in eliminating subsistence-poverty and in reducing comparative-poverty over the years. In the postwar period alone, the number of persons in comparative-poverty has been reduced by an average of 700,000 a year. This is hardly a record of failure that justifies basic and far-reaching changes in our social and economic system. In fact, such changes might destroy the sources of our success and impede further progress.

Third, in spite of our successes, substantial numbers of Americans continue to live in comparative-poverty. As yet we have found no answer to the problem of the passing of poverty from generation to generation, nor have we found the proper approach to attacking the intractable islands of comparative-poverty and stagnation that exist in our otherwise prosperous and advancing society.

Fourth, as presently being developed, our welfare system is incapable of eliminating poverty and actually helps to perpetuate it. It not only falls short of providing adequate relief to those while they are in need, but it fails to provide the opportunities to make self-supporting citizens of welfare recipients.

If we can agree on these basic assumptions, then we are faced with deciding what is the best way to eliminate chronic hard-core comparative-poverty. Basically, I think we have only two choices. We can guarantee income to the impoverished, or we can guarantee them opportunity.

For my part, I choose opportunity. Guaranteeing opportunity is better for the country, and it is better for the individual. There possibly will always be some people for whom subsidization is the only way out. The chronically sick or disabled and certain mental defectives are cases in point. But for the vast majority of the poor, habilitation (largely education) and rehabilitation are attainable goals. What are the advantages of this approach over the guaranteed annual income?

Guaranteeing opportunity promotes individual dignity; guaranteeing income weakens it.

Guaranteeing opportunity recognizes that a man grows with responsibility; guaranteeing income denies his capacity for growth and self-sufficiency.

Guaranteeing opportunity is the humane approach to defeating poverty; guaranteeing income in effect says to millions of the poor: "We can't use you, we don't want you, but we won't let you starve."

Guaranteeing opportunity helps to eliminate poverty; guaranteeing income simply helps to alleviate it.

The idea of a guaranteed annual income for all citizens as a matter of right is not new. The expression itself has a daring, modern ring, but the concept was discussed by utopian thinkers as far back as Edward Bellamy in the late nineteenth century. Thirty years ago, Francis Townsend proposed a guaranteed income of \$200 a month for aged. His plan was not adopted, but it influenced the passage of social security and was a major factor in making the aged a powerful political force in American life.

What is new is that the idea for a guaranteed annual income is now receiving powerful support from eminent scholars and social thinkers as a solution to the problem of poverty in the midst of plenty. Advocates include liberals of both the modern and classical schools. Any plan having the support of such a disparate and growing body of intellectuals demands the attention of those of us who operate in the area of public policy.

How has the idea gained such momentum? You will recall that it was only a few years ago that the notion that America was an "affluent society" entered the conventional wisdom. We admitted to our affluence almost with a sense of shame or guilt, rather than with justifiable pride in the achievements of our system. The public sector, it was said, was starving, while most individuals were glutted with goods.

The picture was undoubtedly overdrawn but it left its impact. Professors, pundits, and publicists began to dramatize—and sometimes overdramatize—the