

profile of poverty and welfare

Despite continued economic prosperity and relatively full employment, almost 8-million Americans are presently receiving public assistance. This number is increasing each year (In March, 1967, when invitations to the Arden House Conference were mailed, the number on public assistance was 7½ million. By October, seven months later, it had increased by almost 500,000).

Another 22-million people are now living on submarginal incomes below the \$3,300 poverty level established by the Federal Government for a family of four*. This number is decreasing slightly. (In March, 1967, 22½ million were in this category.)

Many of the 22-million who are not covered by present programs are in families which have a low wage earner or a wage earner whose family size is so large that his income is too small to meet a minimum standard.

In all, about 30-million Americans are currently classified as "poor" by official Government standards. Stated another way, about 15 per cent of the population are living below what is admittedly a minimum standard.

In addition, it is estimated that about 15-million others are "near poor" in that they hover just above the so-called poverty mark. The Arden House Conference was aware of this group, but its main responsibilities were directed toward the 30-million living below the poverty line.

Of all persons classified as "poor," slightly over one-fourth receive any public assistance. The remainder receive no public aid at all. A few may receive some financial support from private or voluntary charity.

The current combined costs of Federal, State and local public assistance programs is approaching \$8-billion. This sum, a record high, represents slightly less than 1 per cent of the nation's present personal income. Although the dollar amount continues to rise, the proportion has remained fairly constant for the past decade.

*The "poverty line" is fixed by the U.S. Government and is based largely on providing a total expenditure of 75c a day for all food, per person (in an average 4-person family), with twice this amount in addition for all family living items other than food. Except to allow for price increases, the poverty index has not been changed since 1959.