

THE COST: IF WE DO OR DON'T

Every day that we delay doing what we should be doing to stop or slow down the spread of poverty, the financial and social costs accelerate.

There is no way of escaping what some day we must finally do: provide the training, educational, and health services millions of adults and children need to fit them to earn their own way in the most competitive, most complex way of life in all history.

The cost: We are now spending some \$70 billions annually for welfare, education, and health programs that cannot do what needs to be done in the United States in 1968 and the years ahead—prepare millions of people to fill millions of job vacancies. Recast welfare, education, and health services, a reasonable health insurance program that will have us put aside the money we should to pay for our medical care, and a massive job-training program by industry, business, and labor, could raise the consumption levels of tens of millions of Americans and increase purchasing power billions of dollars annually. (In 1960, if Negro expenditures for consumption had equaled those of the white population, the added direct purchases by Negroes would have been nearly \$7.5 billion, according to Mr. L. W. Moore, president of the American Oil Company. Mr. Moore added: "Because of multiplier effects . . . the total impact on the economy would have been much greater than that. And, because of population growth, the figure would also be larger today.")

Hopefully, most of us still believe that every human being, even the most bereft among us, should have the opportunity to try to live a meaningful existence. After all, that's what life is all about.

II. THE STATE BOARD IN ACTION

Nineteen sixty-seven was the 100th anniversary of the New York State Board of Social Welfare, the group of 15 citizens who set policies and standards for the State's social welfare system, one of the most extensive and highly developed in the nation.

That system—involving public, voluntary, and proprietary facilities—includes institutions and services for children; homes for the aged; programs for the blind and other handicapped; casework counseling for individuals and families; hospitals, dispensaries, infirmaries, and nursing homes; anti-poverty programs; and the federal-state-local public welfare system, which provided for a monthly average of 1.3 million men, women, and children, at a cost of \$1.8 billion in 1967.

A lot of needy people and a lot of public funds. This problem of steadily increasing welfare population and costs has been an urgent concern of the Board, as it has been of many other citizens. And the Board, like other citizens, recognized that public dependency was becoming not only a major problem in the nation but a crisis, and required the attention and action of the private sector, not only the public. If millions of Americans were to be given an opportunity to earn their own living in today's economy and tomorrow's, those who set the work requirements and those best able to bring these millions into the mainstream of American living—the leaders and builders of our economy—must help to resolve or alleviate the great domestic problem of widespread poverty.

It was decided to observe the centennial of the Board, not in some conventional, ritualistic way, but through an action program that would seek realistic answers to the shake-up dimensions to which poverty and welfare had spread in the nation. It proposed to do this by presenting this tremendous economic and social problem to those who are primarily responsible for building and guiding our economy.

Commissioner George K. Wyman suggested that this be done through a unique meeting at which leaders from business, industry, labor, the mass news media, private charitable foundations, and government would assess the problem and make recommendations for its solution.

Chairman Hugh R. Jones and the other members of the Board approved the idea. Through a committee headed by George F. Berlinger, Vice Chairman of the Board, David Bernstein, Theodore C. Jackson, and Mrs. Donald E. McConville, plans were made for the meeting, for the production of two films, for publication of position papers, and for obtaining private philanthropic funds to pay the costs of the event.