

BY ALVIN L. SCHORR

Alternatives in Income Maintenance

The author presents six distinctive approaches to income maintenance, identifying their basic assumptions and controlling issues, and rejects or locates each approach within the system that will take shape over time. His primary concern is with suggestion of a pluralistic approach in order to assure income for all Americans.

SOCIAL WORKERS HAVE a tendency to proceed on issues of domestic policy in terms of sweeping simplicities. Certainly, the public has been presented in grossly simplified terms with such matters as the services issue in public assistance and the notion of an all-inclusive, noncategorical public assistance system. Although we may have thought these issues through more deeply than our presentation reflects, we have paid a penalty for each oversimplification, a penalty it would be useful to avoid in thinking through income maintenance for the 1970's.

It is to be hoped that the profession will not treat the search for a workable system as if it were shopping for a new automobile—trying to pick the single income maintenance program with the shiniest look and the best ride to replace the vehicles that now serve us. For the likelihood is that nothing will be traded in when we adopt our newest program. We shall have a somewhat more diverse array of programs, providing much better support for people's incomes—if we choose well—and much more nuisance to the orderly minded among scholars and administrators. This is both

a prediction of what is likely to happen and the writer's personal view of what would be best.

The half dozen distinctive approaches to income maintenance are readily defined and their advantages and disadvantages not hard to state. Unfortunately, this kind of presentation pits one program against another, as if to force a choice among them. Moreover, even a carefully defined program is shaped in each person's mind by what he thinks a number of other programs will be doing. With assumptions about surrounding programs not fixed, contending arguments fail to meet.

In order to avoid this, the writer has chosen to name each type of approach to income maintenance, identify the assumptions and issues that seem controlling, and either reject that type of program or locate it within the system that will take shape in perhaps the next ten years. Six distinct types of programs will be defined and discussed: public assistance, in-kind, social security, negative income tax, guaranteed income or universal demogrant, and the partial demogrant.¹

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¹ In addition to citations elsewhere in this article, the following articles will provide a broad background on the basic issues in income maintenance: Edith Abbott, "Public Assistance—Whither Bound?" *Proceedings of the National Conference of Social Work*, 1937 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,