both to *provide above-poverty minimum benefits under all social insurance programs and to establish a soundly designed program providing an adequate guaranteed minimum income for all.* We hope the Commission on Income Maintenance Programs recently appointed by the President will recommend bold and swift action in both areas.

HOW MUCH PROGRESS?

Given the Nation's failures to mount effective attacks on the three fronts where the war on poverty must be won, it is not surprising that we are making only slow progress when measured by the Council's absolute and frozen standard for defining poverty and no progress at all when measured by a more rational and more humane relative standard.

Even by the most commonly used standard, which the Council has adopted as its own, we are making progress at a rate which will not result in the elimination of poverty before about 1980 or 1985. The Council of Economic Advisers describes this standard as follows:

> For statistical purposes, households are defined as poor if their income falls below the cost of a certain minimum consumption standard—$2,185 in current prices for a nonfarm couple under 65 years of age, $3,335 for a nonfarm family of four, and so on.

In other words, although the standard varies by size of family, age, and location, and the dollar amounts are adjusted for changes in living costs, the actual buying power below which a family in a given category is considered poor does not change. The present standard was adopted on the basis of 1962 living standards, and it represents the same standard today as it did in that year.

By this standard, the Council reports considerable progress. It states:

> Between 1959 and 1966, the number of poor declined sharply from 38.9 to 29.7 million, or from 22.1 to 15.4 percent of the population.

But, is this an acceptable way to fix a standard for measuring poverty? Its implication is that the standard of living below which we consider families to be poor is not to be permitted to rise with the improvement in living standards of the rest of society. It would mean that once those now considered poor have seen their incomes raised to a level fixed 6 years ago, the rest of us will be free, in all good conscience, to turn our attention elsewhere. We would be relieved of all obligation to assure them even a minimum share in the fruits of society's growing productivity—since 1962 and forever into the future. Yet, as the standards of the whole Nation rise and they are left behind, they will still be considered poor both by their neighbors and in their own eyes.

The lack of realism in such a frozen standard is easily appreciated if the same process is traced backward in time. Tables attached to the Council's report give us data on living costs and earnings as far back as 1929. In that year the Consumer Price Index, at 59.7, was just about one-half of today's level. To be precise—$3,335 per year, which marks the poverty line for a family of four at average 1967 prices, is the equivalent of an income of $1,711 a year at 1929 prices, or just under $33 per week.