

PERSPECTIVES FOR A HUMAN RESOURCE POLICY

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It is a cause of constant astonishment to me to find, among such disparate groups as my students, business acquaintances, and officers of the armed services, an attitude toward the Government which can best be described as schizophrenic. In their view, the Government is viewed as something hostile and alien, with objectives and methods that are reprehensible, if not worse. The acerbity of their comments about the Government might lead one to believe that their remarks were directed toward the government of George III, not toward their own freely elected representatives in Washington.

Although it is difficult to sympathize with, it is easy to understand such a negativistic approach. The conviction runs deep in American experience that men should be the rulers of their own lives; that the individual should be free to decide where he lives, at what he works, and how he spends his money. Such freedom is possible only in a society in which the citizen is strong and government weak, for, if the balance shifts, freedom will be circumscribed, perhaps lost.

But a reading of American history reveals another significant strand. Whenever the public becomes aware of a sizable gap between the promise and reality of the American dream, it will use government in an effort to realize more completely its expectations. The concern of the Joint Economic Committee with developing criteria for assessing programs aimed at advancing the general welfare is readily understandable in light of the underlying negativistic attitude toward the growth of the Federal Government. As a modest contribution to the committee's effort, the following analysis will seek to:

1. Explain why the Federal Government played a relatively modest role in the past in the development of the Nation's human resources.
2. Call attention to new developments, both domestic and international, which require a reevaluation of this historic role.
3. Delineate the major criteria to guide governmental action in the future.

THE PAST ROLE OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

The major requirement for the rapid expansion of the American economy prior to the Civil War was people—able-bodied men and women who could hew down the forests, settle the land, and plant crops. Large numbers were attracted to our shores, and the United States made a gain not only in bodies but in skills and competences. Europe presented us with valuable human-resource capital without cost and without our having to pay even a carrying charge.

This helps to explain why the Federal Government was not pressed too greatly to support education. For all the years that free immigration prevailed, the country did not have to pay its own way in education and training. The point is also worth making that there was a sufficiently close bond between religion and education to lead many denominations voluntarily to support education, particularly at the college level. One need only recall the origins of Harvard College or the much later establishment of the University of Chicago.

In an agricultural economy, especially one in which there was a surplus of good land, an able-bodied man could provide for himself and his family. Those too sick or too old to work could be cared for without much trouble by relatives. The well-being of a family depended largely on the physical strength and competence of the male head of the household and on the vitality of his wife.

But, before one jumps to the conclusion that the Federal Government was substantially inactive during the first century of our national existence in pursuing a human-resources policy, it is well to note the following: The Northwest Ordinance and the Morrill Act both underscored the National Government's interest in furthering public education. The establishment of West Point provided not only trained officers for the Army but engineers for the country at large. Although the Civil War was fought to preserve the Union, it would be a mistake to write down the determination of many northerners to put an end to the shameful institution of slavery. The many wars against the Indian demonstrated the Federal Government's determination to add to the security of the frontiersman. Without further ado, it must be recognized that while relatively few demands were made on the Federal Government to contribute directly to developing the human resources of the Nation, it was by no means totally inactive.

NEW CONDITIONS—DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL

We are more vulnerable today than at any time since our first years as a nation. Whatever questions may arise about the responsibilities of the Federal Government, it is clearly charged under the Constitution to provide for the national defense. The President has stated unequivocally on several occasions that no country can possibly win the next war. The only victory lies in preventing it. And there is general agreement that the best chance of preventing a major war is for this Nation to maintain a strong defense position. What has not been so clearly perceived is the extent to which the level of competence of the population largely determines our defense capabilities. Congress and the public have become aware of the country's need for standby plants and the stockpiling of strategic materials but they have only begun to appreciate how much the military power of this Nation resides in the quality and skills of its people.

The first glimmer of recognition has come out of a concern that the Russians may be getting the jump on us by educating and training a larger number of scientists and engineers, from which the deduction has been made that they may gain a significant lead in military technology, with all that that implies. Irrespective of the Russians, something of major significance is taking place in the area of research and development as it impinges not only on the Armed Forces but on the civilian economy. It is only yesterday that many students of the

American economy believed that chronic unemployment was here to stay. The frontier had disappeared and the slowing down in the rate of growth of the population and our basic industries made it impossible to employ effectively all our available resources. The stagnationists made many errors, but none more serious than their failure to perceive that our economy was entering a new stage of development, one with an internal frontier based on the systematic application of intelligence and money to the discovery of new and the improvement of old products and processes. This was a limitless frontier. It did not preclude the possibility of periodic recessions or depressions, but it did rule out the probability of stagnation.

During the many generations that the labor force was being rapidly expanded by immigrants from abroad, only passing note was taken of the consequences growing out of the fact that certain regions within the United States were unwilling or unable to invest adequately in the education and training of youth. But, with the cessation of immigration at the time of World War I, we became greatly dependent on internal migration as a means of expanding the industrial labor force. New York, Illinois, California could no longer be indifferent to the quality of preparation that young people received in Mississippi and South Carolina, for many of them, upon reaching adulthood, would seek employment in the North and West.

The national import of regional differences was also highlighted by the experiences of the Armed Forces in World War II, when more than 700,000 young men were rejected for military service because they were educationally deficient and almost twice that number were reluctantly accepted because their low level of literacy presented the Army and the Navy with major problems in training and assignment. The increasing need of our society for trained intelligence has begun to undermine the old doctrine that education is, and should remain, solely a local and State responsibility. For, if some regions are unable to provide an adequate education for all, the Nation is the loser.

Advances in research are likewise largely responsible for the new and expanded role of the Federal Government in providing health and medical services. Until the turn of the century, and even later, an individual who was sick did his best to avoid admission to a hospital since his chances of recovery would be diminished thereby. Surgery was in its infancy, and even the best physician could do little to help the seriously ill patient. Small wonder that the demands on the Federal Government were slight. But the intervening decades have witnessed spectacular advances in preventive, therapeutic, and rehabilitative medicine. The Federal Government's first substantial involvement grew out of pressure to provide adequate medical care for the veteran. He was entitled to benefit from the advances of modern medicine. More recently, the Federal Government has become increasingly involved in subsidizing hospital construction and in furthering medical research.

Until the major depression of 1929-33, our experience supported the widespread belief that a man who was willing to work could provide for himself and his family without having to seek assistance from government. If he put aside part of his earnings when he was employed, he could tide himself over periods of unemployment or sick-

ness. No sane man held this view after 1933. As an aftermath of the depression, Congress passed new legislation which placed on the community, rather than the individual, many of the costs of industrial failure and personal misfortune.

The depression experience made us more aware of and responsive to a wider order of social need, not solely to the difficulties growing out of unemployment. And World War II threw a spotlight on other unfilled social needs. As a result, the last two decades have witnessed new and intensified efforts on the part of the Federal Government to assist disadvantaged farm groups, to give the Negro a better chance to participate fully in the American economy, to help veterans secure additional education and training, to provide more adequately for dependent children, and to contribute directly and indirectly in many other ways to raising the level of welfare of the population.

Although our foreign-aid program is predicated on developing and strengthening alliances with nations that oppose communism, it also reflects our response to the need of many underdeveloped people for technical assistance so that they may eventually secure more of the better things of life.

Many additional illustrations could be offered of the broadened framework within which the Federal Government has been fashioning a national human-resources policy. The major factors responsible for this vastly expanded approach are these:

1. The new place of science and technology in our economic development which has resulted in a vastly expanded requirement for trained personnel.

2. The new position of the United States in world affairs. Faced with the ever-present threat of nuclear warfare, this Nation must provide effective leadership for the free world. To do so, we must make full use of all our human resources.

3. The meaning of American democracy was never to be found solely in our economic well-being, important as that has been for our national development. From the start, we have sought to fashion a society sensitive to human and social values. Although committed to the principle of a clear separation of powers between government and the individual and between levels of government, we have been willing to experiment in the hope of advancing the general welfare. With nations, old and new, avidly engaged in a search for the better life, the United States is under constant surveillance to see whether it is living up to its commitments or hiding behind tradition.

GUIDELINES FOR THE FUTURE

The burden of the foregoing is clear: For most of our history, the Federal Government was not called upon to play a significant role in the development of the Nation's human resources. In the past few decades, economic, political, and military events have led to a vast expansion of effort on the part of the Federal Government. But the criteria that should govern the Federal Government's role remain obscure. Hence, in this concluding section, an effort will be made to note briefly the more important considerations that should guide future action:

1. With an economy that is truly national and that in turn depends on the continued large-scale migration of people, our human resources must be viewed as a national resource. Since the strength of our economy is a major deterrent to aggression, the quality of our human resources is a major factor in the defense of the free world.

2. Although the Federal Government must carry expanding responsibility for developing the Nation's human resources, it must assiduously avoid trying to do all, or even most, of the job itself. The essence of a democracy is the right of the family to decide as to the amount and type of education which its children should receive, and the right of the individual to determine at what and where he works. The Federal Government should take all necessary actions to provide maximum opportunities for individuals to prepare themselves as thoroughly as possible for work and life, but it should do so in a manner that encourages other agencies, governmental and voluntary, to continue to contribute as much as possible to this same end, for, if all responsibility were to devolve on the Federal Government, it would jeopardize the future of our democracy.

3. There is need for the Congress and the public to appraise critically the growing impact of the Federal Government on the development and utilization of the Nation's human resources growing out of such diverse developments as large-scale Federal expenditures for research and development, the tremendous training effort that takes place within the Armed Forces, the consequences of Federal social-security and agricultural policies. There is reason to believe that such a review would reveal, in varying degrees contradictory, overlapping, and ineffective results emerging from the expanded efforts of the Federal Government and point the way to more constructive policies.

4. Because of the long lead time required to educate and train people, there is great need for planning studies that are focused not on today's but tomorrow's problems. There is no institution in our society better fitted to undertake some of the basic statistical and related studies in the field of human-resource development than the Federal Government. Although it has expanded its work in this area during the past decade, broader and deeper investigations are required. While the Federal Government should take leadership, it should avoid trying to do the whole job itself. It needs, and must have, the active cooperation of business, trade unions, foundations, universities, and other interested groups.

5. In assessing future programs, the Federal Government, both at the legislative and administrative level, has need to appreciate that the investment principle applies even more to people than to capital. Hence, dollars well spent to raise the education, skill, and health of the American public will pay for themselves and yield a sizable profit to this and to future generations.