

DISCUSSION

By: Katherine Pollak Ellickson, AFL-CIO

Mr. Cabello's paper opens up stimulating vistas of what might be accomplished in this country if we followed the pattern of social programming that he outlines. But his approach is not one that has often been put into effect in the United States on a national scale. Instances do exist, especially at the local level, as for example when communities plan for new school buildings to meet expanding population. But in the equally important field of housing, local authorities are not proving too successful in attempting to meet housing needs for all the people. And very little of what Mr. Cabello calls social programming is now put into practice at the national level. Decisions are made to enlarge or cut federal appropriations by a series of political steps that would be difficult to explain even in many hours to our friends in other countries who follow a different approach.

Numerous factors contribute to the absence of such social programming at the national level. Among them are the size and diversity of our country, the division of responsibility between federal, state and local governments, the dominant faith in private enterprise, and the objections of important groups to government action, particularly if it may compete with their own operations or limit their freedom.

Perhaps long-range planning will come into better repute here as a result of the challenge presented by other countries. In the meantime, the statistics published in Health and Welfare Trends and the Indicators reflect the U. S. pattern of recording what has happened and what is happening rather than what remains to be done if basic human needs are to be met.

Both these HEW publications contain much useful material, especially on the Department's programs. It is gratifying that their value is to be recognized by making them generally available. Ready accessibility of this type of information will make it possible to include up-to-date facts in many discussions of public policy, thus hopefully resulting in sounder substance. Even though many types of social data are theoretically available to busy persons, it is too easy to neglect exerting the effort to locate them when a speech is to be made or a report drafted.

Much valuable material is prepared by government agencies, or is available in their files, which does not readily come to public attention. One reason has been the reluctance of the Congress to appropriate sufficient funds for more effective informational work by the government.

Vast business expenditures in the field of public relations are accepted as essential for successful private enterprise. Since such expenditures are tax deductible, surely the American people should be furnished in attractive and usable form the important social statistics which have been gathered by public agencies.

In addition to letting us all have these two new publications, the Department of Health, Education and Welfare should also improve the format and expand the contents of its other publications. The Social Security Bulletin, for example, deals with programs affecting every man, woman and child, but it is strictly limited in size and uses small type that discourages rather than attracts many readers.

Rather than spending more time praising the new publications -- which really speak for themselves --, I shall suggest certain additions or modifications which will assist to "highlight current and emerging problems," which is one of the purposes avowed by Mr. Stringham. It is of course one with which I am in sympathy. Civic organizations, like cabinet officers and lawmakers, need to know about current and emerging problems as well as about operating statistics and past accomplishments.

In more instances the data should be shown in relation to changes in the value of the dollar or on a per capita basis. Since population is growing rapidly and the dollar depreciates over the years, failure to adjust for such changes is apt to lead to a false optimism. An upward curve may turn downward when properly adjusted.

Through such changes and the addition of new material the contents might make a greater contribution to the formulation and evaluation of social programs.

Mr. Cabello very properly emphasizes the importance of comparing social needs with resources. In the United States, contrary to the situation in most countries, resources exist or can be created through rapid economic growth to meet the most pressing social needs within the foreseeable future. The great difficulty in this fortunate country is to focus attention on the unmet needs which too often are glossed over because they are involved with existing social, economic and political patterns which some people do not want to see changed.

Some of the social needs affect even the relatively well-to-do members of the population, including many statisticians. All of us are endangered by continuing shortages of medical personnel and facilities. We may welcome the data on hospital construction on page 33 of Trends, and be comforted by the fact that the chart now shows an upward movement especially as compared with the period from 1933-47. But it would be socially constructive to include also official Public Health Service estimates as to the backlog of hospital beds as compared to needs. The apparent progress has been offset by the growth of the population and obsolescence, so that the shortage today is still over 800,000 beds.

The shortage of nursing home facilities of good quality is even more acute but is not

mentioned. According to U. S. Public Health Service standards, more than 400,000 nursing home beds are required in the United States. Only 270,000 exist, and of these 116,000 are not acceptable on the basis of fire and health hazards.

The statistics presented on the numbers of doctors show a stable supply but do not highlight the decline in relation to population.

In the field of education, the data might well be arranged in a manner that would further illustrate need for social programming. Basic data are presented on separate pages on the number of children of school age and the number of teachers. But the reader interested in the relationship between these two sets of data would have to go through his own calculations to see how serious the situation has become for all of us.

The special social needs of the low-income groups likewise are of general interest. After all, the health and welfare of human beings directly influence the size of our national output and the stability of our society.

Objective measures of the health and well-being of the various segments of the population are not easy to obtain. Certainly the editors of statistical compilations are not personally responsible for the absence of more basic research measures of this kind. But there is a basic challenge to appropriate agencies to develop essential information and to make it available with appropriate analysis.

By way of additional illustration, I will use the experience of the Advisory Council on Public Assistance charged by the Social Security Amendments of 1958 with examining the national program and reporting to Congress. We could get dollar figures on outlays and individual payments such as are carried in Trends, but it was much more difficult to obtain sufficient information on how well the program is fulfilling its function of maintaining the health and welfare of the people who turn to public assistance as a last

resort. The lack of up-to-date information on actual budgetary needs of families of various types was one of the handicaps. At our request the staff developed some estimates of unmet needs which are to be published for the first time in the forthcoming report of the Advisory Council. Our recommendations include specific proposals that should lead to more basic information, including the development of national budget guides to help the states prepare their own family budgets.

When we examined present deficiencies in medical care, we were aware of tremendous gaps in the program and much poor quality service. In that area too we are urging the collection and publication of more information.

Even though the press should not note these points until the official release date, which may be January 4, I hope Dr. Bowman is lending a friendly ear.

In my statement to the Joint Economic Committee to which Mr. Stringham refers in his paper, I suggested certain measures of human well-being to provide objective data on progress made and problems still requiring attention. Some are in the Trends but others are not. I still think an effort should be made to include measures of housing adequacy and slum conditions, the number of families at various income levels by significant family types, the percent of children under 18 in broken homes, and the number of children attending school on part-time shifts.

The objective should be to reveal areas of social strain and personal maladjustment as a continuing challenge to develop more effective social programming.

While Mr. Cabello does not deal with this point, it would also be helpful in social programming to consider the cost of not meeting current needs in terms of unnecessary deaths, burdens on mental institutions and jails, continuing dependency, and the loss of valuable manpower.