

Discussion

Marvin Friedman, AFL-CIO

I have not had the opportunity to review Jim Stern's paper. However, from listening to his presentation, I think it is obvious that he is engaged in some imaginative research and that his conclusions might have some very interesting policy implications. In fact, his presentation has prompted me to discard a couple of paragraphs of my notes. Following Stern's presentation, they would have been somewhat out of place because they were perhaps overly-critical of our manpower research. While I am toning down my comments, I think it will still be obvious that I am not happy with our research activity in this area.

Dr. Aller's paper bears out a suspicion I have had for some time, and that is that we not only are in the dark as to where we are heading in manpower research, but we do not even know how we got where we are. I found his brief description of the background of Title I of the Manpower Development and Training Act exceedingly illuminating. Furthermore, I think it is important to underscore his emphasis on the need for a greater policy orientation in our research activities.

I am, after all, a heavy user of the results of the research work being carried on, and not a researcher myself in the true sense of the word. I read the research reports with an eye toward what Dr. Aller has described as "useful guides to policy" or "ways for improving the operations of our institutions." Consequently, I find myself quite concerned over the present tendency of our manpower research activities to move in the direction of a battery of individual research projects, gathering facts and data but without any reference to policy implications; or where there are policy implications, they may be so buried that they are observable only by the closest scrutiny and clearly evident only to the individual who performed the research.

I do not wish to be drowned in an ocean of statistics. Moreover, I look askance at researchers and administrators -- whether in or out of the Department of Labor, or other government agencies -- who constantly advise that we really know very little about automation and technological change or their manpower implications. Such statements can contribute to a paralysis in the policy-making arena -- that is, the adoption of sound legislation -- when logic, even without statistics, tells us action and programs are needed. Properly, Dr. Aller touched on this when he suggested that groups of manpower planners might begin to select "some key areas where current research permits a sharp focus on policy possibilities" -- something which is sorely needed but has not been done in any systematic fashion.

I do not want the foregoing remarks to be interpreted as evidence of any opposition to additional money for manpower research, because such is not the case. I think we need more, and I suspect my present state of unhappiness may be tied to the relatively small amount of money being spent in this field. I would, however, like to underscore Dr. Aller's comment that the real need is for truly creative ideas for research undertakings and in this connection I believe we all have a responsibility to do some serious thinking.

Fred Suffa's paper describes what the manpower administration is doing by way of collecting data on the trainees. It is not a criticism of Mr. Suffa, but rather of the Department of Labor, when I suggest that there are serious shortcomings in the data being collected. I think, however, much of my criticism here is related to a difference of opinion over the general shape and direction of our manpower training programs. I am not sure this is the proper forum in which to explore these differences in any detail. Let me simply mention as an example one item in Mr. Suffa's paper: for the Department's analyses of its training activities, a permanent job is one which lasts for more than 30 days. This is a pretty poor standard.

To evaluate properly the results of MDTA training, I think we have to be concerned equally with the trainee-dropout as well as with the trainee who completes his course, and even with those who never enter a training program. Otherwise, we have no way of measuring the true results of our training efforts and, as a result, may be led too readily to conclude that whatever good fortune befalls the trainee is a result of the training program. The fact that the job success of the trainees may be due to an economic upturn -- which may also provide jobs for non-trainees, and for training dropouts as well -- may be overlooked. What I am suggesting is that a sufficient economic upswing can absorb large numbers of unemployed -- including youths, school dropouts and the unskilled -- and I do not want our training statistics to hide that fact when it occurs. Yet, it seems to me that the evidence is there in Mr. Suffa's paper that this is likely to occur.

From Mr. Suffa's paper one gets the very definite impression that the data being collected, and the analysis being performed on attitudes of trainees, deal exclusively with those whose skills are being upgraded. The question must be asked concerning the problems of those who are being downgraded -- not only in skills but in dollars and cents. In other words, to what extent are we providing training which will lead unemployed workers into jobs which require less skill, and

pay lower wages, than the jobs which they were performing before they became unemployed. It seems to me that a question of this kind has some very interesting policy implications, for example, in the area of income supports. Might it not lead us to a conclusion that, under some circumstances -- depending perhaps on age, family responsibility, length of time in the workforce, etc. -- we ought to consider income supplements to workers who are victimized by changing technology?

No doubt, one of the sources of our difficulties -- both in the development of our man-

power research program and the administrative statistics program -- is the relative newness of the MDTA. It's been with us only a couple of years. We have not, heretofore, been called upon to maintain a total program of research tied, as this one is, to increasing interest in a total manpower program. And the more we move toward an active manpower policy, assuming this is the direction in which we are now heading, the greater will be the need for related research. We can only hope that it will -- in Dr. Aller's words -- be accompanied by some "truly creative ideas."