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ON PROGRESS, PROVERTY AND PLANNERS

* The ideas for this paper evolved from a seminar that the author gave to the University of New Brunswick's Department of Economics in the fall of 1971, and from a brief review that the author did of Volume I of the Report of the New Brunswick Task Force on Social Development that appeared in *Canadian Public Administration*, Fall, 1972.

The New Brunswick Task Force on Social Development, sometimes known locally as the "Task Force on Poverty" (a misnomer, members of the Task Force would probably insist), was appointed by the New Brunswick government in July, 1970, to "initiate and promote public dialogue on problems in social development and social welfare" and to "recommend broad guidelines to the Government to assist in the future development of program priorities and legislation in the field of social development and social welfare". *Participation and Development*, Volume I of the Task Force's Report, appeared in September, 1971.

Upon a first reading, one might conclude that the thrust of this document is admirably expressed, and with great economy of words, by:

Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates and men decay.

But after more careful consideration, one might also conclude that Goldsmith's lines would more aptly convey the animus of the members of the Task Force if they were unpoetically distorted to read:

Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,
Where growthmen dream dreams destined for non-fulfilment,
Thanks to the fallacy of misplaced concreteness,
And men still decay.

The Report is not an anti-growth tract *per se*, in the manner of, say, E. J. Mishan's middle-class call for the comforts and certainties of middle-class life

in an unpolluted earthly paradise. This modest little document is a part of some of the other great stirrings of our times. For what we have here is another manifestation of humanism blended with the new Jeffersonianism.

The latter could be more aptly described as that more-or-less Jeffersonian individualism which seems nearly always to appear on the New Left, but sometimes, as in the present case, in more 'respectable' circles as well. In a variety of places, in the Report, this Jeffersonianism almost becomes a *cri-de-coeur*. Thus, at the very beginning we are reminded of "the absolute importance of the individual" and are told that "a recognition of human dignity must be our basic guiding principle". There is of course nothing new or exceptional in this. As a rule, in this kind of advocacy, the Jeffersonian twist usually surfaces when the advocate makes it plain that it is the 'little' man—the ordinary working man and woman, and that particularly Jeffersonian subset of humankind, the artisan, the farmer and the small businessman—who really matters. The authors of the Report, too, believe in the little man, and above all in the most diminutive of little men—those at the bottom of the heap. Now, one must admit that in New Brunswick the bottom rung of the ladder is exceedingly heavily populated. In January, 1971, approximately twenty-three per cent of the province's population (or about 143,000 persons) were dependent upon unemployment insurance, or welfare, or manpower allowances for various upgrading courses. (This last category is not of course exclusively the domain of those lowest down. Also, the twenty-three per cent should be pared down slightly to allow for some duplication in the reported statistics for these three groups of disadvantaged.)

The call for "human dignity" is more than a slogan for the Task Force; it also provided a vantage point for evaluating economic development schemes, or socio-economic development schemes, to give such schemes the Task Force's amending prefix. Although it is always difficult to be entirely clear about what "socio" means in this or any other context, the human-dignity standpoint for the scrutiny of these socio-economic development schemes usually comes out looking and meaning something like this: people matter, not things; or, to put it more blandly, the stress in economic development plans should be upon "social needs" (and for "social", read "personal and community"). Moreover, it is in this business of evaluating socio-economic development programmes that the Task Force's concern for the poor comes on most strongly, because to the Task Force the main criterion for evaluating any socio-economic development programme should simply be: what does it do for the poor?

If, *ex post*, it has done nothing, then the programme must be accounted a failure.

But there is not only "people" in the animus of the Task Force, there is also "participation". And the latter constitutes yet another point of contact that the Task Force has with some of our era's great stirrings. Participatory democracy and a reaching out to the people; in the realm of yearning, beliefs and dreams, these desiderata are practically ubiquitous, extending far beyond both the Task Force and the New Left. And in the realm of implementation, too, they show up in a variety of places. (One of the more prosaic of these places that economists have been exploring of late is in the "iterative duet" of indicative planning. This is both a dreamt-of place, as well as part of *terra firma*.) Let us be entirely clear about where the Task Force stands with respect to the *mélange* of beliefs and dreams. When the Task Force argues that people should not be excluded from key "decision making processes that directly affect them", they are of course referring to all of us. However, what really gives this sort of commitment its attractiveness in the eyes of the Task Force is the belief that the principal beneficiaries of participatory processes might well be the poor. Thus, cognizant of the lack of political power of the poor, the Task Force would devise structures for bringing the chronically disadvantaged into the business of decision making in the sphere of socio-economic planning—structures which are to be erected outside existing legislative bodies and existing political processes.

This animus, though, centering as it does upon people, especially poor people, and participation, resulted in something more than merely a critical glance at the development (and political) landscape; for it also seemed to impel the Task Force to take a vigorous, free-swinging line as both debater and would-be planner. More particularly, it led the Task Force into attempts to fault the analyses and panaceas offered by conventional growthmen (regional and other), and, secondly, it equipped the Task Force with a set of priorities for socio-economic action.

To attend first to the assault on the growthmen: the panaceas of the latter that drew most of the Task Force's fire were "growth points", and incentives to entrepreneurial decision makers. While the growthmen harbour a belief in the real growth potential of growth points and incentive schemes, the Task Force clings with equal tenacity to a belief in the inevitability of failure in this respect. But why, in the eyes of the Task Force, won't, or can't, these mooted panaceas do their job?

Growthpointism, the Task Force contends, rests upon a fallacious assumption insofar as the New Brunswick scene is concerned; an assumption that has to do with the type of mobility that can be effected in that province. The type of mobility that had been envisaged by the "growth-poles" men of ARDA and FRED, who preceded the growthpoint men of the present day—the growth poles, all in the northeastern part of the province, are smaller centres than the current growth points (Saint John and Moncton)—was of the intra-provincial, rural-urban variety. Now it so happened that that kind of mobility had not, in the past at least, accorded with the preferences of a sizeable fraction of the province's population. It is of course true that a great hoede of the rural folk of New Brunswick had, over the years, taken to the cities—but to the extra-provincial (and extra-regional) fleshpots rather than to the urban centres of the province. Whether the "multiplex" plans of today will confer on growth points like Saint John and Moncton any edge in the national sweepstakes for urban attractiveness remains to be seen. The Task Force maintains that although the incentives for movement to the growth poles of northeastern New Brunswick, for those who were within the ambit of the ARDA-FRED programmes for that area, may not have been adequate and such inadequacy may have contributed to the failure of the important mobility component of these programmes—less than fifty families moved to the designated growth poles over a four-year period—the fact is that these people simply did not want to move (at least to places like Bathurst). On the other hand, this ruralness of mind and body has in the past been constantly jolted, but, once again, the jolting has come not from massive migration to the urban centres of the province, but rather from the flight to extra-regional centres to the west. More to the point, if the mobility-minded rural youth of the province should continue to prefer Toronto to Saint John, then increasingly will that economically non-viable and non-mobility-minded rural residue constitute *the* reserve army for growth-point dominated industrialization schemes. And this is the group—it remains a statistically very significant group—that will of course be the hardest nut to crack for urban-centred employment creation schemes.

It is at this juncture that the Task Force's reading of the facts¹ is at one with its Jeffersonian longings. Let those with rural propensities stay where they are, and let the funds that might go into new urban infrastructure be redirected to the little places of the province for the rehabilitation, and rehousing, of some of Canada's most profoundly rural people. And who is to say to them—the "them" being both the rural residue and the Task Force

—nay? Certain of Ontario's well-beeled politician-accountants were once abused by Maritimers for hesitatingly, even apologetically, suggesting that if one could not eat well in the Maritimes then one should move on to greener pastures. Are Maritime politicians and social scientists now going to offer their own rural recalcitrants an intra-provincial version of the discredited 'Ontario' advice? Or was the earlier message from outraged Maritimers to advice-giving Upper Canadians that people should be encouraged to stay where they listeth—within limits, that is—intended only for the ears of the Ontario politician-accountants who offered the unwanted advice? Remember, too, that the Jeffersonian animus brings within its compass not only the totally dispossessed among the non-urban immovables, but also rural artisans, farmers and small businessmen. And this gives even more clout to the Task Force's attack on growth-centre concepts. At any rate, the Task Force does not let slip any opportunity to argue that economic development policies aimed at just a few centres will result in 'development' at the expense of the non-urban small entrepreneur (both farm and non-farm), to argue in short that planners must alter their priorities, and, in their thinking about appropriate nostrums for economic development, place far greater emphasis upon assistance to little men in little places.

Perhaps the rural-propensities or attractiveness-of-rural-life argument is really only a kind way of explaining the reluctance of a non-viable residue to move to town (and hopefully to employment). That is, to explore an intriguing possibility that was neglected by the Task Force, possibly what one is really up against here is a very large group of socio-economic *ineffectives* who might constitute a relatively unshatterable lump upon which a variety of economic development schemes, including those that feature a modest measure of growthpointism, will fall apart?

To look now at the Task Force's attitudes to various incentive schemes for entrepreneurial decision makers, we see the Task Force attempting to fault bigger and better incentive schemes by making forecasts that spring from what some might regard as rather raw empiricism and, also, by drawing inspiration once again from its Jeffersonian view of the good life. As to its empirical onslaught, the Task Force generated gloomy forecasts from a possibly selectively compiled record of past failures of incentive-aided projects and of non-fulfilment of expectations in the realm of employment creation. But what really sustains the Task Force in its attack upon incentivemanship is its ever-present Jeffersonianism. The newer incentive schemes, the Task Force charges, although not wholly neglectful of the needs of the little man,

are really tailored for the big fellows. Critics of the Task Force have already emerged on this one. If there is to be a shift in direction in aid programmes toward little men and little places, the end result of such reallocation, these critics insist, will be non-growth or even shrinkage in the province's aggregate tax base. Would *this* be palatable to the Task Force if at the same time its proposed social-development programmes are going to add mightily to the provincial government's outlays? Members of the Task Force would no doubt counter, as we shall presently see, that their programmes will do no such thing.

To get back to the brunt of the Task Force's attack on the material aspects of growthmanship, the Task Force, mustering all its debating points and its convictions, relies in the end upon its disbelief in the promises of the growthmen and upon its commitment to a particular value system. Economic growth schemes resting upon growth-point strategy and upon systems of incentives for entrepreneurial decision makers will fail to deliver the goods in the future as they have failed in the past. But it is not merely that the various industrial development schemes have failed to deliver, in more abundant fashion, material goods for those lowest down: far more importantly, and far more deleteriously, such schemes bring in their wake "a substantial distortion of social values". This comes from page one of the Report. In one form or another, it reappears on practically every other page.

To turn for the moment from this note of spiritual failure to that of earthly failure once again, the Task Force, having made its point that conventional and not-so-conventional growthmanship has failed to close the New Brunswick-Canada gap in living standards, goes much further and insists, in a yet more pessimistic vein, that probably no economic development can do this; so that New Brunswick will remain with its continuing condition of relative economic underdevelopment. Federal and other planners should therefore recognize this, should cease pulling out the stops on incentives-to-industry and like schemes, should cease dreaming that further investment in new industrial plant will *significantly* broaden New Brunswick's economic bases and should, instead—and here might come a surprise for those who would expect an imaginative leap in the dark at this juncture—devise schemes for 'more equal' equalization grants from the federal government and more favourable cost-sharing arrangements in the sphere of social-welfare programmes.

But to return now to the (partially) celestial: whatever one may think of all this and however unsophisticated one may hold the various debating points of the Task Force to be, one must also remind oneself that the Task

Force is very much *parti pris* on the underlying issues here, insisting as it invariably does that misguided 'development' efforts of the past have resulted in great social needs going unmet; so that to argue, as some critics of this aspect of the Task Force's Report have done, that new cost-sharing and similar deals with the federal government will only incur an added measure of rich-province backlash, does seem to be irrelevant. And, of course, equally beside the point would it be to say, as other critics have done, that the burden of the Task Force's brief is on the level of conviction.

Given, then, the Task Force's convictions and the position it takes in its colloquy with the economic growthmen, its list of objectives and priorities for action in the realm of "social development" should scarcely come as a surprise. Heading the list of these priorities is the business of looking after the basic need of those who are deprived; the basic needs, that is, that add up to a modicum (not defined with any quantitative precision) of employment security and income security, and a modicum of physical decency (also not defined with any quantitative precision) in one's dwelling. Thus, like the growthmen, the members of the Task Force, too, have their employment objectives, albeit, once again, but appropriately, not very precise ones. The objective here is simply compressed into an injunction (p 3): "the rights of the person include the right to work". (It might also be noted that the proposals of the Task Force for state involvement in improving the physical environment have an employment objective as well as an environmental objective.) Income security as an objective—proposal 139 calls for a guaranteed annual income—means, among other things, acceptance of welfare as a present *fact* of life (but not its acceptance, ideologically, as a *way* of life). Employable welfare recipients are to be given the option of working on socially useful, publicly-funded projects that should include, typically, such things as improvements in the physical environment, especially the housing component of this environment, roads, parks and similar public amenities. Moreover, welfare recipients who obtain such employment, or employment in the private sector for that matter, should have their welfare entitlement reduced by only 50 per cent of their earnings, up to some maximum total income, at which point welfare payments will of course cease. (This, in short, is the Task Force's version of the negative income tax.) As to the direction of labour to publicly-funded projects, there should be absolutely no coercion. Welfare recipients should be given the option of choosing to remain on welfare. This is, however, meant to be a constrained option because, first of all, the Task Force proposes that persons employed on public projects are to receive a higher rate of remunera-

tion than those on welfare, and, secondly, there is, or seems to be, in the Task Force's thoughts on the matter, an implicit though humanized version of the notorious "less-eligibility" principle of Nassau Senior's reformed English Poor Law. Now, although the need for welfare is recognized by the Task Force as one of the current facts of life, such recognition is not given in any spirit of resignation: for *the* objective of any welfare programme must be more than merely an income objective. Welfare must have within it the seeds of its own destruction (as a *way* of life): *the* desideratum of a welfare scheme must be the opportunity to escape the curse of conventional welfareism—that is, once again, welfareism as a life style or state of mind in the recipient. The focal point for innovative thinking in the welfare area must therefore be rehabilitation—specifically, a deep-seated psychological rehabilitation that will not only propel recipients to the better material things of life but will actually make them feel that they are on the inside, not the outside, of something called society. Unfortunately, here as elsewhere, the Task Force is long on objectives but short on analysis and operationalism, so that their "Each person has the right to expect that his innate gifts and abilities will be fully developed and channelled into their most meaningful use" (p. 3) must remain, for the time being at least, a slogan.

On physical environment, the Task Force says all the right things, but mercifully deals rather perfunctorily with the concerns of armchair environmentalists, and reserves its heaviest artillery, as regards physical environment, for a hard pounding on the housing front (often neglected by the armchair environmentalists); although here too the Task Force is sparing with analysis and detailed proposals. The hard hammering does, however, bring into our consciousness the fact that as of 1966 about 14 per cent of New Brunswick's population was living in dwellings either totally unfit for human habitation or if "fit" then characterized by excessive overcrowding, and to remind us, too, of the shameful inadequacies of CMHC programmes geared as they are, in actuality, to "non-low" income groups, and, finally, but surely most damning of all, of the contributory role that bad housing must play in the school dropout story.

To mention again briefly the kind of priority for action that emerged in the Task Force's treatment of welfare: this priority springs from an abhorrence of the bricks-and-mortar approach to the business of elevating mankind socially, economically and spiritually and we see it animating the Task Force in the great and persistent stress that the Task Force places upon structural change in existing organization, and attitudinal change, as instruments

of social amelioration. Health, education and welfare (in the narrow sense) provide enormous scope, the Task Force contends, for replacing the "thing complex" with a "people complex".

Finally, among the key objectives or priorities of the Task Force are those that add up to the already referred-to "participation". We might conveniently subsume the various proposals the Task Force has under this head under the rubric 'local involvement' through extra-legislative structures. (Actually, 'reducing the political powerlessness of the poor' might be a more apt label for this particular goal.) The objective here is not only increased participation in decision-making *per se*, in the policy sphere, but increased access to information—the *sine qua non* for the successful working of extra-legislative participatory devices. If the existing means for the purveyance of information are found wanting, the private means are scarcely any better. Thus, the Task Force remarks, somewhat laconically, that it was able to find "little interpretative comment [on its public hearings]" (p. 233) in the private media; but thereby hangs another tale, already told, in part, by the Davey Commission.

To the Task Force, escape from the bricks-and-mortar approach to social development, or from the "thing" complex in general, and emphasis instead upon structural and attitudinal change, also have their payoff in the narrowly financial sense; in the sense, that is, of a softened impact, compared to that of bricks and mortar, upon an already overburdened provincial government. In short, and no doubt anticipating a good deal of dollar-centred critical comment, the Task Force maintains that its proposals for action will not add horrendously to the provincial government's financial burden, will not, to be more specific, result in a greatly increased social-overhead-capital plus welfare load. Does this 'forecast' include the housing component of the Task Force's action package? But here, too, the Task Force fails to provide explanatory detail.

A rather strange addendum to all this—not so strange, perhaps, when one realizes that it is merely another example of the Task Force's reaction to some of the episodes in the (not always glorious) history of grant-aided schemes to the private sector—is provided by a clarion call for more reliance upon *private* enterprise, but, presumably, private enterprise of the really rugged variety, as "the primary motivating force for economic development in our province." (p. 167) Still, the state is not to wither away. Outright grants to the private sector do appear to be countenanced by the Task Force. But at the same time, the Task Force hastens to add—in a rather more explicit nod in the direction of non-withering—such grants should carry an equity

provision, and loans and loan guarantees should have tacked onto them a provision for government representation on boards of directors. However, to pose a rather unabashedly rhetorical question, can 'really rugged' private enterprise be found among 'incentive seekers'? And (perhaps equally rhetorical), what about the (planned?) size distribution of those who manage to reach the receiving line? One had thought all along that, ideally, this should be 'Jeffersonian' in character. Is aid to be directed—in what would be an unconscious ideological reversal—to the great as well as the not-so-great?

What are the administrative requirements and apparatuses that the Task Force envisages for getting operational with its goals, with its priorities for socio-economic action? A new department of socio-economic development is proposed for the implementation of all those programmes, and bits and pieces of programmes, that are currently the administrative responsibility of a variety of provincial departments and agencies in New Brunswick that have the adjective "economic" in their title. Similarly, in the welfare and social service field: a new and integrative department of community services is proposed that will assign a considerably expanded role to the counselling component of the total mix of its activities. Responsibility for employable welfare recipients will be transferred to the proposed department of socio-economic development. The non-employables will receive their emoluments from a cryptic-sounding agency merely described as "as appropriate central accounting section within the provincial government." (p. 175) And, the (then) existing Department of Welfare will be phased out.

Also of importance is the proposal for full regionalization of government services on the basis of a uniform set of regional boundaries for these services. Five such regions are proposed, and the region is to become *the* unit for the planning and administration of all social and economic programmes. Local democracy—participation and local involvement—will be catered to by the establishment of regional development councils, bodies expressly designed for bringing the local populace into the task of identifying socio-economic needs and of evaluating programmes. The aim here is not only local involvement but the integration of programmes.

There is admittedly a great deal of hot gosselling in the Report of the Task Force, but there is also an abundance of highly digestible food for second thought for the policy men of the country, especially those among them who—growthpointism aside—do not look beyond the more simplistic kind of Keynesian aggregative model. The New Left in the United States, in its critical attacks against various of the devices in the Establishment's (one winces

at the cliché, but one has to use it!) armoury of counter-cyclical and anti-poverty weapons, cries out that beneath those Keynesian aggregates there are people. To this, one is tempted to add the somewhat less shrill cry that beneath these same aggregates there are concatenations of interdependent economic and social relations that cannot really be planned or optimally rearranged by relying solely upon the more conventional of Keynesian tools. Those who have developed the growth-point concept have, in a way, responded to this "less shrill" cry. Certainly, they have gone far beyond (or, rather, beneath) the simpler sort of aggregative model and have identified and explored key relationships on lower levels of aggregation, and—in this they are hardly exceptional—they have 'taken a position' as to the wellsprings of economic development. The members of the Task Force, too, have probed beneath the aggregates. But, although they are much less sophisticated than any of Keynesians or the growth-point people, and are for the most part strangers to really rigorous analysis, they have questioned the conclusions and policy implications of growth-centre oriented analysis, and have, with admittedly scanty supporting empirical work, offered policy alternatives to growthpointism. One should not blind oneself to these alternatives as objects of potential study. Who knows—this for the growth-point men—the recommendations of the Task Force may eventually even emerge as supplements to, rather than alternatives to, growth-centre proposals? Or, to put it a trifle less dispassionately: does the New Brunswick Task Force on Social Development, with its echoing—occasionally to the point of excessive innocence—of Ruskin's defiant "There is no wealth but life!", help to illuminate the way for would-be disaggregators? With some misgivings, we would suggest that it does.

NOTES

1. One should add, however, that these particular facts, or rather the interpretation of them by the Task Force, has already been questioned by critics who insist that the failure of the growth-poles concept of ARDA and FRED for the northeastern part of the province should not be cited as a ground for negating the newer growth-points concept, because Saint John and Moncton will be considerably more attractive as places of residence than were Bathurst and the other locales of the earlier growth-poles strategy. But, once again, how will these larger centres in New Brunswick appear, *vis-à-vis* various extra-regional centres, in the preconceptions of the mobility-minded young?