

Cities Need Social Plan

by Patricia McBroom

THE NEW Demonstration Cities program is dipping deep into the structure of American urban life; it is likely to have as profound an impact on the structure of city organization.

Cities are blighted and blight, as anyone can see, is a problem of ramshackle houses, baked ugly earth and garbage overflowing in alleys.

But there is a new realization in Washington that the crisis of the cities stems from problems more complex than can be solved with a bulldozer.

Cities don't know how much money they've got, and they're not set up to find out because the work of the city is spread through a plethora of agencies—local, state, federal and private—each with its own separate mission, said Dr. Leonard J. Duhl, special assistant to the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and a theoretician behind the new approach.

The result is mismatched, half-baked services—a neighborhood without a school, a public housing project far away from shopping centers, a hospital with inadequate transportation lines, an employment agency with little or no contact to the job system, and nobody doing the kind of planning that is needed.

For the average urbanite, city ineptness is a nuisance at worst. For the poor, it can and has been crippling.

Los Angeles' Negro ghetto of Watts, which erupted into one of the worst riots in U.S. history last year, is 12 miles from the nearest hospital, 20 miles from the fat job market and no usable transportation service joins the area to either one.

Not surprisingly, the people of Watts complained bitterly about isolation.

People in low income areas lack mobility, said HUD official, George Williams, special assistant on the Demonstration Cities program. "We found that services provided city-wide just were not accessible to the poor."

As Dr. Duhl described it, the model cities program aims at no less than integration of disparate city functions—welfare, public housing, recreation, employment, education, health and transportation—in a total attack on social as well as physical blight, but focused in single depressed city areas.

Even if the new Congress should allow the infant program to survive, HUD cannot do much with the \$900 million allowed so far. But it's a foot in the door, said psychiatrist Duhl. He sees the demonstration program as geared to the shift from a rural to an urban society.

Actually, demonstration funds represent four to five times their face value.

Areas too poor to put up the matching funds for traditional federal grants-

in-aid from the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW), Labor, Commerce, and others—can use demonstration money for their quarter share.

That is provided the city has developed a coordinated plan for its selected demonstration area.

Highest priority, however, will be given to completely new plans and services, not funded by an existing federal grant, a transportation link for example, or a garbage collection system, or new approaches to low-cost residential renovation.

Since money is so short, there will be a premium on imagination, said Mr. Williams. If the space program can find a way of reducing an astronaut's waste to powder, cities ought to be able to come up with a better method of waste disposal than dumping it in the river, he pointed out.

In housing, demonstration money will be channeled primarily into renovating neighborhoods, rather than demolishing whole blocks and building high rise housing in their stead. This means increasing relocation of the poor into new low-cost housing in other parts of the city, with attendant political implications.

Even a single new transportation link affects the whole city, explained Dr. Duhl, especially if it reduces ghetto isolation.

Equally important politically is the impact Demonstration Cities will have on old established jurisdictions. States also have money in city education, welfare and other social programs and while they will have to be invited to the party, the new program provides a rather direct route between Washington and City Hall.

The model cities program squeaked by the last Congress, cut badly, but retaining its essential revolutionary character.

For the first time, the government is jumping with both feet in the jungle of urban administration, calling upon city services to realign themselves and create a smoother urban environment. If it works, a small amount of money focused on this purpose in one blighted neighborhood should eventually lead city governments to extend the coordination to whole metropolitan areas.

The impact this would have on traditional local, state and federal jurisdictions must have been at the root of Congressional opposition, even in such a liberal Congress as the 89th.

In the more conservative 90th, Demonstration Cities could encounter an immovable block and be scuttled before it starts. City reform may be too much for a society that apparently already feels glutted by reform.

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