PSAC: Last Hurrah from Panel on Youth

Every society must somehow solve the problem of transforming children into adults; for its very survival depends on that solution. In every society there is established some kind of institutional setting within which the process of transition is to occur, in directions predicated by societal goals and values. In our view, the institutional framework for maturation in the United States is now in need of serious examination.

Considering the range and volume of the literature of the social pathology of the 1960's, there is nothing very surprising about the passage above except the source—a report of a panel of the President's Science Advisory Committee (PSAC). PSAC panels commented regularly on things like environmental and energy problems and, more controversially, on the ABM and SST, but seldom on ideas for social innovation. PSAC, of course, officially disappeared in the reorganization of the White House science advisory apparatus last spring, so the report *Youth: Transition to Adulthood* appears as a posthumous paper and a rather unlikely last hurrah for PSAC. (The report is to be published not only by the Government Printing Office but by the University of Chicago and Harvard University presses.)

Youth, to get its official bloodlines straight, is not a report of PSAC, but rather of one of its panels. As the announcement by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare that accompanies the report put it, "Although the report does not constitute a statement of federal policy, it is being published in the hope that it will stimulate further discussion, research and experimentation in this vital field." This it is virtually certain to do, since the panel that produced the report was chaired by sociologist James S. Coleman (see box), now at the University of Chicago and principal author of a report titled *Equality of Educational Opportunity,* released in 1966. The so-called "Coleman report" spurred a reassessment of policies and programs which had been developed to further equality of education in the public schools. And the new report, which focuses on the institutions that deal with young people, contains ideas which seem likely to form a new wave in educational R & D and may well give educational reformers a new demonology.*

When Coleman was appointed to PSAC in 1970 he appeared to be the logical choice to head the PSAC panel on education, but what happened reveals something about both Coleman and PSAC. Coleman says he did not want to become chairman of the education panel because the panel's primary inputs were through the Office of Management and Budget and other federal agencies. Coleman was convinced that the federal government really makes few telling policy decisions in education. "If a panel of PSAC was going to have an impact on education," said Coleman in an interview, "that impact would have to be on groups outside the federal government—on local and state authorities, on interest groups —and only secondarily on federal agencies."

His experience with the pivotal *Equality of Educational Opportunity* had been that the report's impact was greatest on the courts and school districts where it had been invoked in desegregation suits and policy debates.

Coleman also felt that if he were going to contribute anything to PSAC it would not be through the monthly plenary sessions of the full committee. He says he believes that "insofar as PSAC has had an impact, it has been through its panels" (and these he thinks have been useful). Coleman says that President Nixon was not making use of PSAC at the time, so it was a question of marking time or finding a useful way to proceed. Accordingly, Coleman says he asked himself "what problems were fundamental and how would it be possible to use the auspices of PSAC to have an impact on public policy?" He put forward the idea of a study on youth to Lee A. DuBridge, who was then science adviser, and PSAC approved the project.

The study was not to be on the problems of youth, says Coleman, but "on the institutions that handle young people in our society, the institutions through which our young people reach adulthood. The object was to raise the question of the appropriateness of the institutional experience young people have in becoming adults. . . ."

"The main idea," says Coleman, "is that we have moved rapidly from a period when young people went to work fairly quickly after they became physically able to work. Now they are held out of [productive work] in special institutions. These special institutions are schools, and young people have the special role of students. We do not think this special role prepares them for being adults."

The "youth" of the report are those in the 14 to 24 age bracket. Broadly, the argument is that schools have been animated principally to give "cognitive training" to increase the opportunities of their students when they ultimately enter the job market. The report calls for an expanded set of objectives for schools. Not only should schools continue to provide students with cognitive skills, but they should also help young people to be capable of managing their own affairs, to "develop capabilities as a consumer not only of goods, but more significantly, of the cultural riches of civilization," and, finally, to develop "capabilities for engaging in intense concentrated involvement in an activity."

Changes in the objectives of schools are necessary because of changes in society, the report argues. Of these, fission in the nuclear family and the growth of a youth culture are probably the most familiar, but the report is at

* Coleman says that he is concerned about equality for the members of the panel on youth. He feels that identification of the 1966 report with his name was unfair to the other people who participated in the study, and he says he doesn't want the new study to be known as another "Coleman report." He points to the varied expertise and experience of the other panel members and says each made major contributions to the report. Most of the report was a joint product, but seven of the eight members assumed primary responsibility for specialized sections. These were as follows: History of Age Grouping in America, Joseph F. Kett, University of Virginia; Rights of Children and Youth, Robert H. Bremner, Ohio State; The Demography of Youth, Norman B. Ryder, Office of Population Research, Princeton; Economic Problems of Youth, Zvi Grilliches, Harvard; Current Educational Institutions, Burton R. Clark, Yale; Biology, Psychology and Sociology, Dorothy Eichorn, Child Study Center, Berkeley; Coleman did a section on Youth Culture, and the panel's only current nonacademic, Minneapolis superintendent of schools John B. Davis, was invaluable to the panel, says Coleman, because he was able to "bring in direct contact with the schools. This was important since most members of the panel hadn't had experience in the schools in some time."

its most thorough and probably most convincing in identifying major areas of change.

Of fundamental importance is the growth of "youth institutions"—principally the school—in which young people spend much of their lives. In earlier times, young people moved back and forth much more freely between school and work and were much less segregated from regular contact both with older people and children.

There has also been a decided shift from the day when parents exercised full authority over young persons while they were still dependent. Authority is now shared between parents and the state, with young people exercising an increasing share themselves. In part, this is because of the evolution in the law, which originally stressed the protection of youth and is now increasing the emphasis on the rights of youth.

An important, but perhaps temporary, factor has been demographic. The postwar baby boom drastically increased the number of youth in proportion to other age groups in the population. This caused heavy strains on the institutions that serve youth and accelerated the trends toward the isolation of youth as a group.

Coleman's own views appear to accord closely with the analysis and recommendations of the report. Much of the work on which his professional reputation is based has dealt with adolescents, and, says Coleman, "it was clear to me that there was a growing development of a set of youth subcultures with their own norms and values caused by institutional isolation of young people from the rest of society. This led me to look around at other kinds of social arrangements in other countries." In the Israeli kibbutz and in the work activities incorporated into Chinese education Coleman says he found examples of working alternatives.

Coleman says he saw that it was "not just a matter of an unrecoverable past, that we have a social organization of the present different from the past. It was clear that there were alternative institutions even in industrial society."

He says he has shared a slow growth of concern that society was developing a new institutional pattern leaving only a "single legitimate path for a young person to take—that he would have to stay in school as long as he could stand it. If he can't stand it he drops out." A student now is "successful in terms of the institution only if he goes all the way through," says Coleman. "What's involved in coming into adulthood is more and more defined by educators. They would have students emulate themselves."

Coleman thinks that an intensified focus on scientific and academic training in the schools began with Sputnik and has continued despite the demand for equal opportunity in education reflected in Great Society programs of the middle 1960's. The growth of the "suburban elite schools" meant that "you could concentrate on advanced courses, and so forth, in these elite schools," says Coleman. "I don't think there was ever a diminution in emphasis on academic excellence. If you look at the kids going to elite colleges, their level of preparation is higher than ever."

This has generated a counterattack. In addition to the dropouts who provide silent testimony to the effects of the pressure, the 1960's saw the appearance of the "alternative schools," which were attempts at providing more flexible forms of education. Coleman thinks that these schools accommodated mostly middle-class people who already had cognitive skills. In general, says Coleman, there has been no real move to change the definition of what constitutes education so that it will not exclude or discourage so many.

Coleman a Blue-Chip Adviser

In the 1960's, social scientists were cast in a greatly expanded role as creators and critics of federally funded educational and social programs. One sociologist whose stock has risen steadily in recent years has been James S. Coleman, who headed the survey group which in 1966 produced the notable study, *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, which was, in fact, an analysis of the lack of equality in the public schools.

The study, required by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, was regarded as undoable by a number of responsible people in the field both because of the difficulty of developing a methodology and also because of the potential for controversy. And a major finding of the Coleman report —that the socioeconomic level of a school had greater effect on the performance of its students than any factor except the student's home background—did provide fuel for controversy. This was mainly because it was interpreted to mean that compensatory programs in schools with large numbers of minority-group students had a limited effect. The Coleman study was itself subsequently studied intensively, but its major conclusions appear to have stood up.

Coleman moved this summer to the University of Chicago from Johns Hopkins. He had gone to Hopkins to establish a department of social relations in 1959. Before that he had spent 4 years on the Chicago faculty after taking his doctorate at Columbia.

Observers attribute Coleman's success especially to his quantitative skills and his ability to focus on timely problems. At Hopkins he was not regarded as being preoccupied with teaching nor was he noted as a spellbinding lecturer. He is far from a prima donna, however, and his reputation for hard work and a straightforward manner appear to enable Coleman to get along with his colleagues and deal comfortably with officialdom.

Coleman has not been tagged as politically partisan or ideologically doctrinaire, and this seems to have helped make him persona grata with both Democratic and Republican administrations. He sits on the top research advisory bodies of both the National Institute of Education and the National Institute of Mental Health, and White House staff members ask him around to chat.

A comparison with another sociologist, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, suggests itself, except that, unlike Moynihan, Coleman has never relinquished theory for practice in a government post. Such offers have been made to Coleman and no doubt will be again, but for the present he seems rooted in academe. It seems certain, however, that he will remain in demand as a superconsultant and that one effect of the move to Chicago will be a longer commute.—J.W.

The report's recommendations for "alternative directions of change" propose a mixture of mild reforms and fairly radical remedies. All the recommendations, however, are labeled with the caution that they should be thoroughly tested before being put into wide use. As the report puts it, "These proposals do not take the form of recommendations for major policy changes, but of recommendations for pilot programs that can be expanded into full-scale policy changes contingent on assessment of their effects."

In general, the recommendations are that young people have the opportunity for more nonacademic experience, for more contact with other age groups, and for more scope to make decisions for themselves and take responsibility for others. The panel would like to see the development of more specialized schools where students would follow particular interests, and of smaller schools to mitigate the impersonality of the prevalent big, comprehensive high schools. The panel would also like to see young people take roles other than as students, for example, as tutors of younger children.

The panel sees schools acting as agents for young people not only in arranging work experience in conventional jobs but also, for example, in cultural institutions such as museums. Variations in the pattern of education, with stress on work-study programs, is regarded as particularly important.

The report urges serious reexamination of laws which now protect workers under 18. It appears that some of these laws reduce opportunity for youth. It is suggested, for example, that there might be a dual minimum wage, with young people receiving a lower wage than adults, since a high minimum wage is regarded as a disincentive to hiring young people.

Bigger changes in attitudes and institutional arrangements are recommended for programs to locate significant portions of education in the workplace. Young people would become part of an organization primarily devoted to work, but in which persons of all ages would have both working and learning roles. The difficulty of incorporating young people would vary, but the panel suggests that it would be possible for them to work in organizations in the performing arts, hospitals, manufacturing and retail businesses, and many government offices.

A greater leap would be required in setting up what the panel calls "youth communities" and "youth organizations," which they say should be tried on the possibility that age segregation may not be reversible. Youth communities would be, as the name implies, communities made up of young people. Here they would learn the attributes necessary for adulthood from the experience of solving problems themselves. Self-government is envisioned for such communities, but young people would share authority with adults.

The models for the "youth organizations" contemplated by the panel would be the present, adult-sponsored recreational and sports organizations, such as the Scouts, boys' clubs, 4-H, and the Y's, which mainly seek to develop noncognitive skills.

Educational Vouchers

A recommendation that seems very much a trial balloon is the suggestion for a system of educational vouchers for those over 16. The vouchers would have the value of the average cost of a college education. Such vouchers would put the decision on education into the hands of those who would experience the consequences, the panelists say. The vouchers would be valid in institutions which met standards similar to those developed for the GI Bill. A voucher system might open up new educational pathways and would act to equalize the subsidy of public and private support that benefits those who now go to college, but in the present circumstances it is probably the most utopian of the recommendations.

Some readers of the report are sure to find it odd that Coleman, who is identified with a study of equality of opportunity in education, would chair a panel that decided to exclude a special analysis of the problems of minority groups—blacks and women, for example—in the new report. Coleman comments that "it was the feeling on the part of the panel that the fundamental faults in institutions affect all young people in the monolithic structure that has emerged. If these faults were repaired," says Coleman, "it would be more beneficial than fixing education to solve the problems of blacks or women."

Coleman says the panel was united on most things, although there was disagreement on the relative importance of some points. Dissenting views were added to the report by panel members Bremner and Davis on both the minimum wage proposal and the voucher proposal, and Coleman added a comment on work organizations which made clear that he is more interested in "age-balanced" organizations (which would combine people of all ages in productive units) than is the panel at large.

The report will doubtless invite fire from critics ranging from traditionalists, who will see in it an antiacademic bias, to advocates of "deschooling," who will reject the report for not going far enough. Actually the recommendations are so diverse and undetailed that they amount to an agenda for discussion rather than a manifesto for change.

An essential point to be noted is the report's stress on the use of pilot programs. One lesson from the Great Society's era of improvisation in education- and community-action programs is that social inventions need a careful development phase. Coleman acknowledges that the panel's stress on pilot programs is "certainly, in part a reaction against programs adopted on a widespread basis before there is evidence on how effective they are, where a couple of years' experience would have led to a much more sophisticated design."

Plenty of questions of practicability and principle, as well as of cost, can be raised about the panel's recommendations. Sure to be suggested is that the report reflects an antiacademic bias. Coleman insists that the report is not intended to be antiacademic. "If we don't discuss academic things," he says, "it is because the major deficiencies in our society in bringing young people into it are nonacademic." There are serious problems relating to academic training, says Coleman, but these are "distributional." Academic training has been of an extremely high quality for some young people, but not for all.

More fundamental would be the question of whether what the report recommends wouldn't tend to supplant rather than support the family. Coleman says, "Although we don't write off the family, we regard the family as an extremely weak institution in modern society." This weakness has been exacerbated by the movement of women into the labor force, a movement accelerated by the women's liberation movement. "Women desire to be out of the home," says Coleman. "They want to be where the action is; that is in the workplace basically. And this leaves young people isolated."

How practical are the institutional changes the panel recommends? If young people have changed, so have

adults. Are there really enough older people around with the good will and energy required to help other people's children to grow up? What seems to be asked for is a whole new stratum of teacher-counselor-community worker. Professionalization, bureaucratization, and unionization of the public schools in recent years suggest that providing alternative community forms, which is what the recommendations of the report amount to, will not be easy.

Coleman concedes that "It is possible to argue that young people are happier when they don't have older people around," and that older people feel the same way about the young. He finds opposing evidence, however, in work-study programs, for example, where young people show up at work even when they avoid school.

"It's a very open question," nevertheless, Coleman says, "and it could be answered in an age-segregating way. Let's assume that young people don't want to be with adults and vice versa. We should ask ourselves collectively as a society if we can afford that kind of an arrangement. If you look at animal societies, you never see a case of extremely strict segregation of youth and adults. We may end up with an age-segregated society, but we should go into it with our eyes open and having tried the alternatives."

—JOHN WALSH

Sweden: Naderism Blooms in the North Country

Americans don't usually think of Sweden as a nation of smoggy skies, mutagenic food additives, and proliferating nuclear power plants. On the contrary, Sweden's image is that of an environmentally attuned nation where the government has shown vigilance in such matters as control of pesticides. But if one can believe Björn Gillberg, a microbiologist-turned-geneticist who in recent years has earned the title of the Ralph Nader of Sweden, Sweden's image as a clean country is a "sham," and its government, usually painted as operating a benign social welfare state, is unconcerned about the people's health and safety.

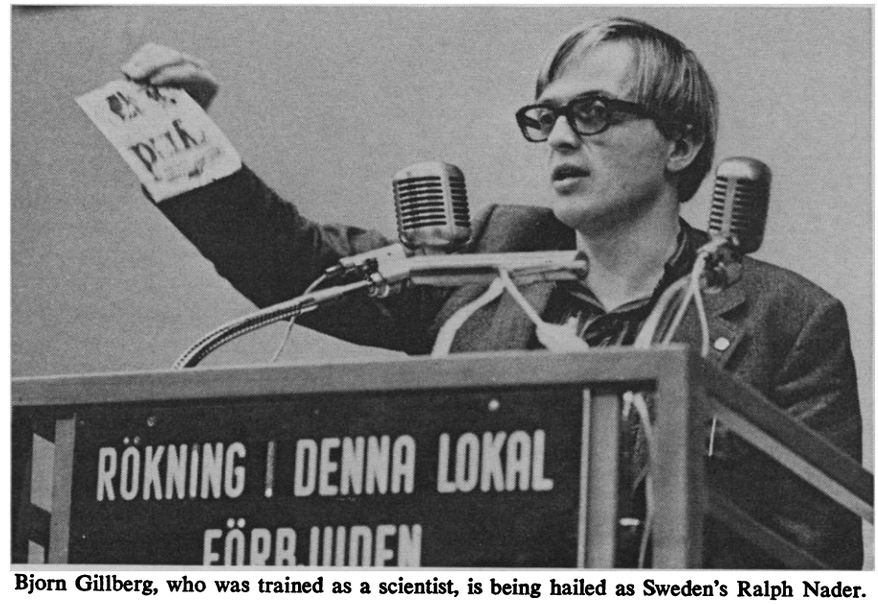
Gillberg is an intense and talkative man of 30, with an apparently infinite capacity for outrage about environmental and consumer problems. Interviewed on a recent visit to this country, he discussed his movement (which even his critics admit is substantial), the obstacles it faces in Sweden, and its successes since Gillberg became widely known with the publication of a controversial book in 1969.

Among Americans and Swedes familiar with his activities, there seems to be agreement that Gillberg, although controversial, is successfully so. Alan McGowan, president of Scientists' Institute for Public Information, says, "I think he has the esteem of a large number of people, including Swedish scientists who can't challenge his scientific veracity. He's a good researcher and he has his facts straight when he talks." One Swede, asked about Gillberg recently, replied by shaking his head: "He's outside the establishment you know." He added, "But Gillberg has been effective."

Parallels with Nader are not hard to find. While completing his dissertation in genetics at the University of Uppsala, Gillberg wrote a book about genetics which included sections on possible poisons in the environment. *Threatened Generations*,* as it is called, was published in 1969. A Swedish magazine later said it "created a storm in Swedish society." It also thrust Gillberg into the public spotlight, lecturing and writing on the theme of government mishandling of environmental and consumer problems.

Threatened Generations may or may not have been the Swedish equivalent of *Unsafe at Any Speed*—Nader's first major book—but according to Gillberg, just as General Motors tried to harass and discredit Nader, the Swedish government sought to undercut him. In 1971, STU, a government technical advisory board, refused to renew funds for Gillberg's research on nitrogen-fixing bacteria and their use in fertilizing soil. The official explanation was that Gillberg's work, which would be largely applicable to farmers in developing countries, did not conform to the STU's general goals. Moreover, "The interest shown earlier by the Swedish industry was no longer at

* Not available in English.



Bjorn Gillberg, who was trained as a scientist, is being hailed as Sweden's Ralph Nader.