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AUTHOR	Springer, Michael
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ABSTRACT

This report examines the origins and implications of social reporting and accounting and defines the problems related to finding measurable indicators of social change. The development of scholarly and governmental interest in these concepts and the interest in the conceptual differences among approaches on how to manage society are discussed. In general, social reporting and accounting functions consist of (1) assessment of the state and the performance of society, (2) anticipation of future crisis situations, (3) indication of control mechanisms, and (4) guidance of social knowledge. Discussed are some of the approaches -- the analysis of trends, national goal analysis, futurism, the new political economy, and systems theory -- that constitute a base of concepts, models, and methodologies for the development of social reports and accounts systems. An annotated bibliography of selected readings is included. (Author/MLF)

SOCIAL INDICATORS, SOCIAL REPORTS AND SOCIAL ACCOUNTS: TOWARD THE MANAGEMENT OF SOCIETY

by

Michael Springer
Wayne State University

for

OPERATION PEP: A State-wide Project to
Prepare Educational Planners for California

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PREFACE

As we move toward management of societal change, social reporting and social accounting become necessary. Once the goals and objectives of planned change have been defined, there must be ways of measuring the achievement of those desired ends. Many societal goals and reforms are so amorphic in nature, that they have for years defied measurement. Michael Springer explores the development of social reporting and social accounting in the United States and examines the problems related to finding measurable indicators of those end states deemed desirable by managers of social change.

Donald R. Miller

Burlingame, California
March 1970

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Michael Springer
Wayne State University

Introduction

"Social indicators," "social reports" and "social accounts" are terms that are being bandied about the academic world and government with increasing frequency. The prestigious Russell Sage Foundation has issued a volume titled Indicators of Social Change,[1] the American Academy of Political and Social Science has published two issues of The Annals on "Social Goals and Indicators for American Society;"[2] the London based Tavistock Institute has published a volume titled The State of the Nation: Social Systems Accounting[3] and a NASA sponsored research project resulted in the publication of a collection of articles, Social Indicators.[4] On the final day of the Johnson administration,

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*This paper is based on a more extensive study of social reporting and social accounting by the author, Social Reporting and Social Accounting: Toward a Managed Society. I would like to thank Carol Agocs, David O. Porter, John Musial and David Warner, colleagues at the Center for Urban Studies, for reading earlier drafts of this paper. Responsibility for any errors in logic or fact, however, is mine.

[1]Eleanor Bernert Sheldon and Wilbert E. Moore, editors, (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1968).

[2]Volumes 371 and 372, (May and September, 1967).

[3]Bertram M. Gross, (London: Tavistock Publications, 1966).

[4]Raymond A. Bauer, ed., (Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 1966).

a document titled Toward a Social Report was released to the public.[5] A bill called the "Full Opportunity and Social Accounting Act" has been introduced in two consecutive sessions of Congress. Recently, the Nixon administration has committed itself to the preparation of annual Presidential Social Reports.

These activities are loosely related to each other and represent a curious sort of political and intellectual movement. It is curious in that the movement presently has no base of popular support, but relies primarily on the influence of a small group of prestigious intellectuals and a few liberal congressmen. Further, the movement is non-ideological in the traditional sense. It does not focus on substantive areas of governmental action, but rather upon the character of the policy-making process.

Some notes on the origins and implications of this movement are presented in this paper. The initial framing of the proposal for social reporting and accounting is examined. Although this proposal was put forth rather vaguely at first, it received a variety of positive responses from government officials and scholars. They came to view the proposal as the next, and possibly ultimate step, in making the management of public activities more rational. This response was remarkable, because at that time there existed no draft Social Report nor fully developed system of social accounts. However, a variety of well-developed approaches that could serve as the basis for this instrument of social management did exist. The conceptual differences

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[5]U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1969).

among these approaches on how to manage society provide a focus for the discussions in the latter part of this paper.

An Idea in the Public Domain

The idea of an annual Social Report by the President and a national system of social accounts was initially framed by Bertram M. Gross in three provocative articles. The first of these broadsides, "Planning: Let's Not Leave It to the Economists," was published in a 1965 issue of Challenge,[6] a semi-popular journal of economic analysis and opinion. Gross argued that professional economists and economic analysts throughout the world had pre-empted other relevant expertise in the formation of national policy. Other kinds of relevant social science expertise were being excluded from consideration. Among a variety of suggested solutions to this problem, Gross proposed a system of social accounts. Toward the end of the article, he suggested--almost as an aside--the possibility of a Social Report of the President.

The second and possibly the most effective of these articles was the "Social State of the Union," which was published in Trans-Action, then a relatively new journal intended to communicate relevant and new social science research to the educated laymen.[7] Here, Gross developed two themes: First, a "new philistinism" was emerging in which narrow economic concepts and measures dominated the annual appraisal of our society. This philistinism was embodied in the

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[6](September, 1965), p. 30-33.

[7](November/December, 1965), p. 14-17.

"State of the Union" Message, Budget Message, and Economic Report. Second, to adequately assess the priorities and goals of the "Great Society," a system of social accounts, analogous to the existing system of economic accounts, was needed. This system of social accounts would serve as the basis for Presidential Social Reports, which, Gross argued, could be produced without specific enabling legislation by Congress.

Gross expanded the themes of the Trans-Action article in an article published in the May/June 1966 issue of Challenge. He advocated social reports for states and metropolitan areas.[8]

Nowhere, in these three articles, did Gross directly suggest the possibility of a Council of Social Advisors to the President, that would supplant or co-exist with the existing Council of Economic Advisors. He did hammer home the point that economists in general, and the present members of the Council of Economic Advisors in particular, were performing their advisory roles in a narrow and inadequate manner, and that there was little indication that they were about to broaden their scope. The implications of this argument were clear. The present character and role of the CEA had to be radically altered or some sort of new advisory institution had to be established.

In these articles and in his more scholarly discussions of social accounting and reporting, Gross never specifically proposed what sorts of statistical data should be included in a system of social accounts and what substantive areas should be covered in a Social Report. What Gross had accomplished was to put an idea, a provocative symbol if you

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[8](May/June, 1966), p. 27-29.

will, into the public domain.

Like a simple, melodic line, various politicians and intellectuals have attempted various orchestrations upon it. The strength of the idea, like a pleasing melody, was that it was intriguing enough to catch the interest of many, and general enough to allow a number of variations on the theme.

The idea sufficiently interested former President Lyndon B. Johnson that he set up a staff within the Department of Health, Education and Welfare which, advised by an interdepartmental committee and a panel of outside consultants, was to prepare a draft Social Report.[9] These activities resulted in the publication of Toward a Social Report. This report was released to the public on the morning of January 20, 1969.[10] The idea was seriously examined in Congress. Through the efforts of Senators Walter F. Mondale (D Minn.) and Fred B. Harris (D Okla.), "The Full Opportunity and Social Accounting Act" was introduced in two consecutive sessions in Congress.[11] The bill calls for the creation of a Council of Social Advisors, a Social Report of the President and a Joint Committee on the Social Report. On July 13, 1969, the Nixon administration committed itself to the issuance of annual Social Reports. Beyond this interest at the national level, several state

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[9]See Bertram M. Gross and Michael Springer, "Developing Social Intelligence," Social Intelligence for America's Future, ed. Bertram M. Gross, (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1969), p. 21-25.

[10]U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, op. cit.

[11]First introduced in the 90th Congress as S.843 by Senators Mondale and Harris who were joined by Senators Clark (Pa.), Hart (Mich.), Inouge (Hawaii), Kennedy (Mass.), McCarthy (Minn.), McGee (Wyo.), Muskie (Maine), Nelson (Wis.) and Proxmire (Wis.).

and local governments have explored the possibilility of social reporting.[12]

Although elected officials judged the idea of social accounting and social reporting worth serious consideration, the task of providing substance to these provocative notions rested with the intellectuals, particularly those intellectuals whose careers and interests are centered in both academic and governmental life.[13] For these men, the notions of social indicators and reports were "ideas whose time had come."

But they were and are ideas in the process of emergence. There exists no fully developed system of social indicators and accounts, only a variety of vague suggestions of what ground they should cover and what should be their conceptual underpinnings. These suggestions are the results of a number of intellectual approaches that move toward the macroscopic assessment of societal performance so provocatively suggested by Gross. A good deal of work has been done in the development of the necessary statistics and tentative suggestions have been made on the possible organization and substance of social reports, but no model Social Report exists.

In such a situation it might be useful to indicate what has been envisaged for social reporting and the sort of conceptual approaches that are being suggested to provide the framework for the substance of social indicators and accounts.

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[12]The States of New York, Michigan, Missouri and the offices of the Mayors of New York City, Boston and Detroit.

[13]The influence of scholar/activists is just beginning to be explored. See, Richard E. Neustadt "White House and Whitehall," The Public Interest, (Winter 1966), p. 55-69, and Noam Chomsky, American Power and the New Mandarins (New York: Pantheon, 1969).

Much of American social science has been developed to assist the governing elites of our political and economic institutions. Social scientists have addressed themselves to the problems of corporate managers, directors of social service agencies, high-level civil servants and elected officials suggesting ways to make their actions more "efficient" or "effective." Harold L. Wilensky has argued that:

> from Machiavelli and Adam Smith to modern social researchers, social scientists have been policy-oriented. In their 'applied' roles or moods they have addressed themselves to the ruler; intermittently they have turned their attention to the troubles of less privileged groups among the ruled.[14]

This assertion should neither surprise nor shock. For example, social psychology and organizational sociology has consistently addressed itself to the problems of organizational control, stable and responsive work forces and how corporate managers can secure these goals. They have not attempted to advise the machine-wrecker, the unresponsive worker or the wild-cat striker. Political scientists have consistently concerned themselves with making the formal governmental institutions more "efficient" or "democratic." The bulk of their advise is directed to Presidents, cabinet members, party leaders, agency heads and congressmen. Only rarely, do they attempt to advise lobbyists, participants in mass movements or unorganized citizens. In large measure, the significant variables of economics analysis can be manipulated only by a governing elite--be they the managers of G. M., the members of Federal Reserve Board, the President or Congress. There are no economic models

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[14] Organizational Intelligence, (New York: Basic Books, 1967), p. vii.

oriented toward the mass consumer.

Improving managerial rationality has been the focal concern of American social science. This concern is reflected in the choice of research topics and in the framing of questions studied, and in the "remedial" actions implicitly or explicity suggested. Although this writer has no fundamental objection to this orientation, a lesser emphasis on the improvement of managerial rationality and a greater relative share of social science effort addressed directly to problems, concerns and interests of the ruled would broaden the scope of the social sciences and provide a more "realistic" view of society.

Personal wishes aside, those conceptual approaches that are converging upon the idea of social accounting and social reporting stem primarily from the social science of managerial rationality. Developed and applied initially to the management of organizations, these approaches are being expanded to what can be considered the ultimate application of managerial rationality--the overall guidance of our social order.

The guidance of the social order may appear to be a rather far-fetched and utopian notion, but when one reflects upon both the range of demands that have been made upon our governmental institutions and the extent of rational control that has already been implemented at the federal level, such mechanisms as social reporting and accounting can be viewed as obvious and necessary innovations.

The Full Employment Act of 1946 explicitly committed the national government to the goals of maximum employment and economic stability and set up the Council of Economic Advisors. Since 1946, the range of goals, explicit and implicit in federal activities has greatly expanded.

There has not, however, been an expansion of our mechanisms for rational guidance to match this expanded range of governmental responsibilities. Incremental improvement in planning techniques have been achieved with the widespread application of cost-effectiveness analysis and the recent introduction of the Programming-Planning-Budgeting System.

These techniques are most effective in analyzing economic variables and are usually geared only to the activities and goals of one agency or department. They represent a series of unrelated and partial visions of the direction of governmental action. They are best employed when both goals and policies are defined and are of limited use in revealing alternative goals and policies.[15] These techniques can only assess governmental actions in terms of economic efficiency or effectiveness and thus exclude other choice criteria.

A number of large corporations have moved beyond these partial economic approaches and have developed operational, general system, overviews. These overviews provide detailed assessments of the internal structure and environments of their organizations. Often they are projected into the future for five, ten, twenty and even fifty years. These analyses provide the basis for strategic, corporate decision making.

To view social accounting and social reporting as a direct analogy to these corporate planning practices can be deceptive. Long-range corporate planning focuses primarily on a few "hard areas"--technology, markets and the level of economic activity--while any ultimate instrument of government planning must address itself to such elusive questions as

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[15] See, for example, the special issue of the Public Administration Review, Vol. XXVII, No. 1 (March 1967).

crime, social breakdown, public disorders and mental health. Also, the number of decision-making centers and the range of conflicting values are far greater within government than in corporations.

Such difficulties have not dissuaded a large number of intellectuals and government officials from interpreting a rather vague proposal for a system of social accounts and Presidential social reporting as a signal to begin the development of a comprehensive instrument for governmental planning. The specific functions and conceptual approaches for this instrument are presently being explored at the highest levels of the federal establishment and in a variety of university and private research institutions.

An Ultimate Instrument of Societal Management

Those scholars and government officials who have been providing substance to the notion of social accounting and reporting have indicated a rather ambitious set of functions that these instruments are eventually to perform. While some would emphasize one function over another, the following five functions reflect a rough consensus about what this new instrumentality of rational control is expected to do.[16]

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[16]This section is an attempt to synthesize a large number of public and private discussions of social accounting and social reporting. It is based on my observations of meetings of the Panel on Social Indicators of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare and series of meetings on the idea of social accounting held during 1967 by Bertram M. Gross. I was also enlightened by a number of discussions with a number of scholars and government officials and a variety of printed materials on social accounts. See particularly; U. S. Congress, Senate, Subcommittee on Government Research, Committee on Government Operations, Hearings, Full Opportunity and Social Accounting Act, 90th Congress, 1st Session, 1967; Raymond A. Bauer "Societal Feedback," Social Intelligence for America's Future, op. cit., p. 63-80; Daniel Bell, "The Idea of a Social Report," The Public Interest, No. 15 (Spring 1969) and Mancur Olson, Jr. "The Purpose and Plan of a Social Report," The Public Interest, No. 15 (Spring 1969).

Assessment of the State of the Society

Social accounts and reports are to provide a comprehensive--and in large part, quantitative--statement about the character of our society. Such statements are viewed as consisting of broad descriptive displays of information about the society. The scope and detail of a character statement on our societal system has as yet to be determined. There exist no "social" models that, like our present economic models, identify what parameters are "relevant" or "significant." There is, however, agreement that such a statement should include what is generally referred to as sociological, as well as economic information. Whether such a statement should include information on the natural and physical environment, the state of technology or the psychological condition of the population remains in question.

Assessment of the Performance of Society

Social reports are to somehow provide a normative assessment of this array of social accounts: how well is our society achieving a specific set of goals; whether a certain situation is desirable; or whether "progress" is being achieved. How such normative criteria are to be introduced is a thorny problem. It has been suggested that these performance standards be related to the goals of a particular administration or that a set of national goals be established by some "neutral" and "representative" body or that they should reflect a "consensus" of American values. Not surprisingly, these suggestions were countered with the arguments that the goals of a particular administration are too short-ranged to be able to provide measures of "social progress," that "neutral" or

"representative" bodies can only agree on goals at such a low level of specificity that they would also be of little utility, and that there "exists" no consensus of American values. Needless to say, social reporting must employ more sophisticated normative approaches that take into account the diversity of goals within our society and would permit assessment of performance on the basis of a selected set of values.

Futurist or Anticipatory Capacity

Linked to the assessment of system state and performance would be an orientation toward the future. The more visionary have suggested that a social report could project alternative social futures which could serve as a basis of political choice. Others view social accounting as an early warning device that could forewarn the nation of crisis situations (e.g., the uprisings in the cities or the public reactions to the Viet Nam involvement). More modest suggestions deal with the extrapolation of key social trends or the targeting of defined social goals. Any future orientation must rest on accurate and detailed assessments of the "present" state of society; these assessments have yet to be developed.

Indication of Control Mechanisms

Directly or indirectly, a Social Report should indicate the sorts of governmental and private actions that would ameliorate a condition, achieve a particular goal or secure a desired future. Given our present knowledge about society and of the impact of public policies, this function has been played down. A Social Report should indicate the general direction of public policy, rather than provide the details of remedial

action. For example, a discussion of the relationship between increased police activities and the rates of violent crimes may suggest that it is impossible for the police to suppress such acts and that crime rates are more responsive to changes in family structure, employment and income. Such a suggestion would have clear, but nevertheless, quite general policy implications.

Guidance of Social Knowledge

It has been eminently clear that our present base of social information and analysis severely limits the fulfillment of the above functions. Many have argued that the process of developing a system of social accounts and regular social reporting by the President is required to overcome these limitations. Through this process, some degree of central control (and perhaps more Congressional support) can be achieved in our federal statistical establishment. It has also been suggested that such a process could provide criteria for the allocation of federal social science support and spell out some key questions for academic researchers. Some have argued that this would be about the only function of social reporting in the short run. Others, more optimistic, believe the other functions can be, in part, achieved within a few years.

These five interrelated functions amount to what can be viewed as the ultimate application of managerial rationality. They imply that we can, in the foreseeable future, develop macroscopic assessments of our social order, predict our future and put social processes under control. The more cagey proponents of social accounting suggest that it will take some time to get the bugs out of the system and that there are some things--

usually unspecified--that cannot be measured, predicted or controlled.

Although there is a rough consensus on the possible functions of social accounting and reporting, there appears to be considerable disagreement on the conceptual approaches that would serve as their basis.

Some Approaches to Social Accounting

The idea of macroscopic assessments of our society did not originate with Gross' proposal for a Social Report and systems of social accounts. There are a number of well-developed approaches to such assessments and several documents which can be viewed as precursors to a Social Report. Much of the present debate about how to develop systems of social accounts and how to formulate Social Reports stems from the diversity of approaches. Although these approaches have unique origins, they are by no means mutually exclusive intellectual constructs. They have been used frequently in combination and individual scholars have contributed to two or more of these approaches. Within the limits of this paper, these approaches can only be crudely identified and a few of their implications for social reporting indicated.

Analysis of Social Trends and Change

The study of social trends and social change is one of the primary interests of American sociologists. A key figure in this tradition is William F. Ogburn who produced a vast amount of work on the measurement

of social change.[17] His particular concern was the development of statistical series that could be correlated and projected into the future. Ogburn viewed such statistical series as a necessary requirement for effective social planning.

Ogburn was the driving force behind the publication in 1933 of Recent Social Trends,[18] the most significant precursor to any contemporary Social Report. This volume was the product of the President's Research Committee on Social Trends, a committee established in 1929 to study "where social stresses are occurring and where major efforts should be undertaken to deal with them constructively." The committee was organized through the Social Science Research Council and the Encyclopedia of Social Sciences. Liberally financed by a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, it was chaired by Wesley C. Mitchell and Ogburn was the director of research.

The efforts of the committee were prodigious. It mobilized hundreds of government officials, statisticians and social scientists in producing a series of monographs and, most significantly, the two volume Recent Social Trends. Although the intellectual level of this document was quite high, it relied almost completely on time-series analysis. This emphasis reflected both the data manipulation capabilities of that period and the analytical predilections of Ogburn.

Ogburn's interests have been continued in contemporary sociological

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[17]An extensive bibliography of Ogburn's writing, William F. Ogburn on Culture and Social Change, ed. Otis Dudley Duncan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964).

[18]Presidents Research Committee on Social Trends (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1943).

research. Of particular interest is the Russell-Sage Foundation's Monitoring of Social Change project which is directed by Eleanor B. Sheldon and Wilbert E. Moore. The first publication of this project is Indicators of Social Change.[19] This collection of studies, edited by Sheldon and Moore, addresses itself to the critical elements of structural change that are taking place in American society. Projected studies of the project will focus on social-psychological change, theories of social change and statistics of change.

In regard to social accounting and social report, such projects collect and organize macroscopic arrays of social statistics which can be subsequently presented and analyzed in any number of ways. Such projects, however, emphasize scholarly rather than political concerns. As a result they tend to play down the policy implications of their findings.

The Analysis of National Goals

As part of the national introspection precipitated by Sputnik, in 1956, President Eisenhower appointed the Commission on National Goals as a "non-partisan" body supported by private funds and having no formal connection with government. The commission was to report on what our national goals should be and suggest appropriate policies to achieve them. Responsibility for the preparation of a report was given to the American Assembly of Columbia University and a number of foundations provided financial support. A report was prepared and published in 1960 under the title, Goals for Americans and given fairly wide circulation and publicity.[20]

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[19] Sheldon and Moore, op. cit.

[20] (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1960).

The report consisted of fifteen separately authored chapters which discussed eleven goal areas at home and four abroad. In general, it was a conservative and backward-looking document. The level of analysis was, at best, journalistic and, was suffused with the primitive patriotic slogans and anti-communism that dominated the political and intellectual climate of the 1950's. Curiously enough, the commission's staff director was William F. Bundy, then on leave from the Board of National Estimates of the CIA.

Under the auspices of the National Planning Association, the simple-minded approach of Goals for Americans was transformed into a series of rigorous and sophisticated analyses of the cost of securing a set of national goals. The key men behind this effort were the late Gerhard Colm, the chief economist of the NPA and Leonard A. Lecht, a NPA economist who directed a two-year study of the monetary cost of national goals. The findings of these studies are summarized in two publications by Lecht--Goals Priorities and Dollars and The Dollar Cost of National Goals.[21] These efforts combined the logic of benefit/cost analysis with macro-economic considerations to determine the costs and consequences of securing goals in sixteen substantive areas.

The Nixon administration made the analysis of national goals an integral part of its approach to social reporting. Whether this effort will result in another document like Goals for Americans, draw upon the work of the National Planning Association or use some other approach is as yet uncertain.

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[21](New York: Free Press, 1966) and (Washington, D.C.: National Planning Association, 1965).

Futurism

Recently, the shape of the future has become a primary concern of highly variegated groups of scholars. While a future orientation is clearly present in social trend and national goal research, the more speculative and intellectually venturesome approaches to the future are our point of reference. There are two key thrusts to these futurist activities that could have significant impact on social accounting and reporting--technological forecasting and the projection of alternative social futures.

Predicting the development and implementation of technological changes has become an integral part of the planning process in many large firms and governmental agencies (particularly the Department of Defense and NASA). The space, aircraft and electronics industries now plan upon the basis of projected technological "breakthroughs."[22] Such questions as the implications of new communications systems for urban development patterns are being seriously explored.

Needless to say, technological forecasting can be of great significance for social reporting. Many of the futurists are now moving into an area that may have even greater import--the projection of alternative social futures.[23] Projecting clusters of technological, social and

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[22]See, Ralph C. Lenz, Jr., Technological Forecasting (Air Force System Command, June, 1962) and James Brian Quinn, "Technological Forecasting," Harvard Business Review, April, 1967.

[23]Most significant of such activities are the work of Herman Kahn and his associates at the Hudson Institute, the Commission on the Year 2000 of the American Academy of Arts and Science; the efforts directed by Olaf Helmer at the Institute for the Future; and Bertrand de Jouvenel's Futuribles project in France. The monthly magazine, The Futurist contains extensive bibliographies of future forecasting efforts.

political changes, these forecasters suggest a set of alternative societal futures. Although the "state of the art" is poorly developed at present, it is hoped that such projections could eventually serve as one of the elements of social reporting.

The New Political Economy

"The New Political Economy," a term coined by the political scientists, William C. Mitchell, refers to a new multi-disciplinary field that focuses on the following four questions:

1. Which goods are produced, in what quantities? (Composition of the public budget.)
2. What is the overall size of the public budget?
3. How are budgetary choices made?
4. Who gets how much of the benefits produced and/or distributed by government?[24]

This "new field" is the study of political choice involving various scarce public goods. The allocation and distribution of these goods are assessed according to a variety of "decision rules" that posit the maximization of a particular good or of some "welfare function." Drawing heavily from price theory, welfare economics and a number of other sources, this new field can provide the basis for a new science of basic and applied policy analysis and the conceptual basis of social accounting.

Of course, this is not a new field at all. These positivistic notions have their origins at least as far back as Pigou and Parento. What is new, is the great contemporary interest in these approaches in

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[24]"The New Political Economy." Social Research, Vol. 35, No. 1, (Spring, 1968), p. 77.

both scholarly research and policy analysis. The new political economist views social accounting and social reporting as the logical extension of cost-benefit analysis and the measurement of social cost. From such perspectives, the National Commission of Technology, Automation, and Economic Progress called in 1966 for a system of social accounts. These accounts were to assess the utilization of human resources in four areas:

1. The measurement of social costs and net returns of innovation.
2. The measurement of social ills (for example, crime and family disruption).
3. The creation of performance budgets in areas of defined social needs (for example, housing, education and welfare).
4. Indicators of economic opportunity and social mobility.

Eventually this system of social accounts might provide a "balance sheet" which could be useful in clarifying policy choices. It would allow us to record not only the gains of economic and social change but the costs as well, and how these costs are distributed and borne.[25]

Such a "balance sheet" approach provided the conceptual underpinnings of Toward a Social Report, the Johnson administration's exploration of social reporting.[26] (This document will be discussed in some detail below.) There is every reason to believe that this intellectual approach will continue to be pursued vigorously in the academic world.

Systems Theory

Anatol Rapoport has written:

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[25]Technology and the American Economy (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1966), Vol. 1, p. 96-97.

[26]U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, op. cit.

> general systems theory is best described not as theory in the sense that this word is used in science but, rather as a program or a direction in the contemporary philosophy of science. . . . All the variants and interpretations have a common aim: the integration of diverse content areas by means of a unified methodology of conceptualization or of research.[27]

Operationally, system theory--be it drawn from systems engineering, sociology or biology--is an attempt to develop models or principles which help order a wide array of phenomena and take into account discernable regularities and interrelationships.

Social systems theory has been viewed as capable of providing a useful framework for social accounting and reporting in that it provides a comprehensive conceptual model capable of ordering the wide array of data that is expected to be included in a social report. Much work has already been done in broad applications of models of social systems in the study of comparative politics and anthropology. For the most part, however, such social systems applications have provided only rough descriptive statements about societies, and only very rarely do these analyses reach the level of specificity required to order large arrays of statistics.

In a more scholarly mood than when presenting his proposal for Presidential Social Reports, Bertram Gross outlined a general systems model to guide the development of social indicators and accounts.[28] This exercise is a clear demonstration that systems theory--whether

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[27]"General Systems Theory," International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, Vol. 15, p. 452.

[28]"Social Systems Accounting," Chapter 3, Social Indicators, op. cit.: A revised version was published as a book, The State of the Nation: Social Systems Accounting (London: Tavistock Publications, 1966).

Gross' brand or some other--can provide a sufficient framework for social reporting. By keeping his discussion at a more general level that did not come to grips with a range of statistical information, Gross also demonstrated the need for a fine grain application of his or some other systems approach to unequivocally demonstrate its applicability to social reporting.

Toward Some Social Reports

The above approaches--the analysis of trends, national goal analysis, futurism, the New Political Economy and systems theory--constitute a rich and diverse base of concepts, models and methodologies for the development of systems of social accounts and reports. This writer has no theoretical objections to the utility of any of these approaches. What is of interest, is how they are applied. It is impossible, however, to intensively critique any applications. There exists no draft Social Report, or even a partially developed system of social accounts. There are, however, two efforts that attempt to suggest how to begin the development of social reporting. These early documents merit some examination.

Framed solidly in the tradition of the new political economy, Toward a Social Report, is the most extensive governmental exploration of how to go about developing social indicators and accounts. While many people contributed to this document, its conceptual framework is largely the work of Mancur Olsen, Jr. Olson, a Deputy Assistant Secretary of HEW under Wilbur Cohen, was charged with the preparation of the document. The other effort was by Bertram M. Gross. Gross applied his variant

of systems theory to sketch out the conceptual model for the development of social accounts. In "Social Systems Accounting," Gross demonstrates how his systems approach could be of some use to the managers of society.[29]

The most significant difference between these efforts is the implicit model of managerial rationality--how should society's managers approach the task of making decisions. Before contrasting these two visions of societal management, perhaps it would be well to sketch out what is meant by managerial rationality.

There is considerable academic debate about the nature of rational decision making. Some theorists argue that the managers of organizations and political elites should try to maximize a particular good (e.g., net profits, reductions in crime rates). Others argue that maximization is impossible in the real world and that rational actions can only satisfy or make incremental progress toward desired future states or sub-optimal conditions. Those who view rational action as maximization argue that tests of efficiency or effectiveness should guide the rational decisionmaker; those who hold that real world decisionmakers can only satisfice, will argue that tests of rationality are at best instrumental.

James D. Thompson developed a more inclusive model of rational action that accounts for both maximizing and satisficing.[30] He indicates two factors that determine the appropriate rationality for a given situation: (1) standards of the desirability which can be clear-cut or ambigious and (2) the level of knowledge about cause/effect relationships

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[29]See The Managing of Organization, 2 vol. (New York: Free Press, 1964) and "What Are Your Organization's Objectives?" Human Relations (August, 1965), p. 195-216.

[30]Organizations in Action (New York: McGraw Hill, 1967), p. 83-98.

among the important variables. This knowledge can range from complete to incomplete. A maximizing situation is one in which goals are unambiguous and knowledge of cause/effect relationships is complete. Satisficing occurs when goals are fairly clear but there is only partial knowledge of cause/effect relationships.

Toward a Social Report, when pushed to its logical limits, implicitly argues that the management of society is rational only when there is a complete consensus on national goals, and when knowledge about how to achieve these goals is relatively complete. This notion is rooted in the conceptual scheme which guided the preparation of the document. Fundamental to this scheme is the definition of a social indicator.

> A social indicator, as the term is used here, may be defined to be a statistic of direct normative interest which facilitates concise, comprehensive and balanced judgements about the condition of major aspects of a society. It is in all cases a direct measure of welfare and is subject to the interpretation that, if it changes in the 'right' direction while other things remain equal, things have gotten better, or people are better off. Thus statistics on the number of doctors, policemen could not be social indicators, whereas figures on health or crime rates could be.[31]

Each substantive chapter focuses on a particular social indicator--health, public safety or social mobility. Questions posed in these discussions include: are Americans getting more or less of these goods, what is known about casual relationships, and where are our intelligence gaps? The appendix of the report sketches out an approach for the development of a more rigorous set of social indicators. It is argued that in many areas of direct normative concern aggregative indices would provide useful measures of social progress. A health index based

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[31]Department of Health, Education and Welfare, op. cit., p. 97.

on a measure of life expectancy less days of bed disability is given as an illustration. Such an index can take into account increases of life expectancy and discount them with increases in the number of days people are confined to bed at home and in hospitals. It is argued that an impressive set of social indicators based on such aggregative indices, could be developed at a modest cost in the near future.

The next step would be the development of a system of policy accounts for determining the most "efficient" way of increasing a social indicator. Social indicators would measure social outputs and policy accounts would measure the impact and costs public and private activities have upon a particular indicator. While this macroscopic causal model is a long way off, the report concludes it will be ultimately required for "rational" decision making.

Therefore, in the short run, Toward a Social Report judges that the management of society can, in the near future, be guided by clear-cut standards of desirabil ty, but will be constrained by limited knowledge of cause/effect relationships. It argues that in the long run complete knowledge of cause/effect relationships can be approached. What is behind these notions, of course, is the optimization model of welfare economics. Political processes will provide relative weights to a set of social indicators and the cost/constraint analysis and resource allocation can be determined by the product accounts.[32]

There are a variety of problems with such an approach. Optimization

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[32]This argument was developed fully by Olson in "The Relationship of Economics to the Other Social Sciences: the Province of a 'Social Report'," a paper prepared for delivery at the 1967 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, September 8, 1967.

models are static and of little use in either describing or analyzing social and technological changes. To use such a model one must also assume a very solid concensus about a set of unambiguous social values. Such a framework is appropriate only for a stable society characterized by a very high degree of political agreement. Our society, like most others, is far from stable and characterized by a high degree of conflict. If this assertion is correct and one wishes to remain committed to the new political economy, a social indicator--a measure of direct normative interest--would have to attempt to account for social change and indicate the dimensions of political conflict. Perhaps, a social indicator of health could describe the changing distribution of life expectancy less bed disability. With such an index, change is, in part, taken into account and setting the distribution according to income, may very well indicate the sources of conflict. Society's managers would then have to wait for a desired distribution to be determined by some political process--non-rational decision making.

In Toward a Social Report, Olson states, "a complete set of policy accounts is a utopian goal at present."[33] One can legitimately ask how long will it be before it is a "non-utopian" goal. Or, should we not, for the present, approach social reporting with a different model of rationality? Gross rejects for the present, the causal modeling implied by Olson's policy accounts. In describing his approach, he states:

> At first glance, the approach herein presented may seem breath-takingly--if not outrageously or even dangerously--ambitious. This is because of the inherent potentiality of any accounting system to be used as an instrument of prediction and control. A second glance, however, will

[33] U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, op. cit., p. 101.

> indicate that what I have thus far done is extremely - if not excessively - modest. My strategy has been to concentrate upon description and thereby prepare a foundation of explanation. This was meant studiously resisting the temptation to leap precipitately into premature use of the proposed accounting system for the purpose of prediction or control.[34]

Gross then goes on to present a general systems model which he originally developed and applied to the management of organizations. He argues that from this general framework one can generate specific operational models that can describe any social unit--a family, a firm, a tribe or even a nation.

The major elements of this general framework are seven structural variables linked to seven performance variables. His structural variables--people, non-human resources, subsystems, external relations, internal relations, values and guidance--could order a vast amount of descriptive data about the structure of any social unit. From his performance variables--satisfying interests, producing output, investing in systems, using inputs efficiently, acquiring resources, observing codes and behaving rationally--one could include an indefinite array of performance data and normative measures about the processes of a given social unit. The model explicitly takes into account a multiplicity of confusing and conflicting goals and can include a variety of partial models of cause/effect relationships. However, it only loosely indicates how this could be accomplished. On the other hand, how society is to be rationally managed is clearer. "Rationality" consists of society managers being able to work out compromises between conflicting goals and act on the basis of sketchy knowledge of cause/effect relationships. In effect Gross equates

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[34]"Social Systems Accounting" op. cit., p. 156.

"rationality" with "the political process." He is quite clear about this when he writes about "broad rationality."

> Any truly rational orientation toward the satisfaction of public interests--either at national or international levels--calls for a much broader kind of rationality than is customarily developed by scientists, technologists, or the administrators of organizations. The rationality may be described as the rationality of the guidance of social systems. Of necessity, it is a rough and ready kind of rationality that deals with a tremendous number of variables, indeed, all the basic interests and groupings in a society--and vast imponderables. Although valuing tight concepts and neat statistical specifics it is not led astray by sacrificing relevance on behalf of accuracy. This is the broad rationality found in the behavior of statesmen, politicians, and national planners. It is often best concretized in those overriding compromises that, from the viewpoint of a technocrat or an idealist, seem to be logically absurd. In its highest form the rationality of guidance often emanates not so much from preconceived policies and calculations as from the heat of social combat and conflict resolution. At this level of generality, the formulation of meaningful goals and the meaningful evaluation of social performance require a combination of brutal, pragmatic realism and humanistic ideology that places major emphasis on satisfying people's interests.[35]

In summary, Gross and Olson present two very different visions of what would be a rationally managed social order. Gross' managers would be men at the very center of the political process, perhaps in a vast situation room surrounded by a plethora of charts, graphs and intelligence reports. There, with "a combination of brutal, pragmatic realism and humanistic ideology" they work out the compromises and make the intuitive judgements required to chart the course of society. Olson's managers are well removed from social conflict--perhaps in a quiet, well-lit room with several computer consoles along the wall. There they wait for a consensus to be achieved so that they can secure the desired social goals

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[35] Ibid., p. 251.

in an orderly and expeditious fashion.

Concluding Remarks

The origins and implications of the idea of social accounting and social reporting have been briefly explored. The subject has by no means been exhausted. In bringing this short piece to a close, I would like to indicate that I am not entirely sanguine about these developments. My doubts are not about the possibility of a managed society. I am reasonably well convinced that social technology can be developed so that is would be possible to gain considerable control over many societal processes. My doubts rest on a variety of moral and political considerations.

One can view the proponents of social accounting and social reporting urged on by two motives--(1) a sincere desire to bring about the implementation of some long overdue social reform and (2) the hope that in the procesa of bringing about these reforms they will become a new political elite of technocratic managers. The issuance of Presidential Social Reports and the process of developing systems of social accounts will both focus interest and intellectual energy upon the achievement of a broad range of social goals. Such developments would also justify bringing the intellectual and scholar even closer to the centers of national policy formulation. The literature of social accounting can be thus viewed as an ideology which justifies the emergence of a new ruling class that will provide "objective," "scientific" and "non-ideological" advice to the "rulers" of society.

Furthermore, as I argued above, American social science has been, in large measure, geared to the needs of the ruling elites of our social

institutions. If social reporting is to become a major enterprise in our federal government, social scientists may very well become so linked to those elites that they will become indistinguishable from them. Such issues have been belabored ad infinitum. But if the notion of a "free-intellectual" has any contemporary appeal, then the development of social accounts and reports could pose serious threats to the survival of this social role.

If our polity can afford to maintain its slightly democratic and anarchic organization, I will be the first to yell down with the rascals and the hell with social accounts. But, from this writer's perspective, such a position may not be tenable. Our society is caught up in a juggernaut of social and technological change that, if not controlled and directed, may create increasingly unlivable cities, polluted land and an alienated population.

Therefore, social indicators and reports are ideas whose time has come, because they are needed. What is required now is that they be developed with models of democracy as well as rational management, and rooted in a social science that has been developed to serve the needs of the poor, despised and unorganized as well as the rich and powerful.

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