

PART II

Democratic Policymakers

The trends described in the previous section, namely erosion of the principle of enumerated powers and the weakening of party leadership by reform, contributed to a proliferation of new federal grant-in-aid programs. In this section the fragmented political system is seen trying to cope with further fragmentation.

In the mid-1950s, when there were about 130 federal grant-in-aid programs, President Eisenhower made a serious effort, which was almost wholly unsuccessful, to reduce the number by turning back to the states activities that were properly theirs. Ten years later, when the Model Cities Program got underway, the number of grant-in-aid programs had increased to about 400. After another five years, when the Nixon administration put forward its revenue sharing plan, it had reached about 500. Whether the system would allow itself to be coordinated was obviously a question.¹

As the reader will see, coordination of its many urban-aid programs, although always one of the principal purposes of the Model Cities Program, was by no means its only purpose. In its rather brief life, Model Cities played many parts, two or three before its birth and others, some simultaneously and others seriatim, later. More than anything else, confusion of purpose destroyed the agency. In the account given here, the

¹“The number of federal categorical grant-in-aid programs available to state and local governments stood at 392 as of January 1, 1984, according to a tally made by the ACIR staff. This represents a decrease of 142, or about 27%, from the 534 counted three years earlier.” *A Catalog of Federal Grant-in-Aid Programs to State and Local Governments: Grants Funded FY 1984* (Washington, D.C.: Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, December 1984), 1.

confusion is seen to result not from some aberration of government but rather from the normal working of a political system in which power is very widely distributed.

Of the several political impossibilities that were demonstrated by the Model Cities Program one of the most evident is that of inducing, or compelling, federal agencies to work together toward some well-defined common purpose. There are of course strict statutory limits to the changes that agencies may make in their programs. But political imperatives are at least as important: every agency is under the necessity of fighting to preserve, and when possible to increase, its "turf," for if it fails to do so its support among interest groups and in Congress will evaporate. If a president had nothing else to do he could reduce the chaos somewhat by "knocking heads together." But a president, alas, has many other and more important things to do.

The second item in this section is a transcript of a rather informal lecture given in November 1972 to the Institute for Urban Studies of the University of Maryland. Here the author, who was chairman of the President's Task Force on Model Cities, tells how that body went about making a quick evaluation of the program. (The Task Force's report was published by the Government Printing Office in August 1970 under the title Model Cities: A Step Towards the New Federalism). The reader who has taken an elementary course in policy analysis may well be amused at the crudity of the procedures described. He should ask himself, however, whether a political leader is not likely to want and demand recommendations "at once" and whether the questions that he wants answered are not likely to be unanswerable except on a largely subjective basis. How often will a policymaker have use for a proper study, the results of which, probably inconclusive, will not be available for two or three years, very likely after the policymaker's problem—and perhaps the policymaker himself—has passed from the scene?

The last several paragraphs of the lecture to the Institute for Urban Studies represent a digression. They recall the response that the writer made when the White House asked for comments on the task force as an advice-giving device.

There is reason to believe that when the Nixon administration took office no one in the White House knew of, let alone had read, the memoranda left by the Johnson administration's administrators of Model Cities for their successors. (See the section of Chapter 4, "Making a New Federal

Program,” entitled, “Two Voices of Experience.”) As it turned out, however, the new administration acted very much as if it were following the advice left by its Democratic predecessors. It made no effort to establish a “superagency” to coordinate the others. It moved instead toward the consolidation of “categorical” (special purpose) grant-in-aid programs into “block” (general purpose) ones. And it pressed successfully for “revenue sharing”: the distribution of federal funds to states and cities with no strings attached.

In theory, revenue sharing, as proposed by President Nixon, was to be “a New American Revolution . . . a peaceful revolution . . . in which government at all levels will be refreshed, renewed, and made truly responsive.” In practice it turned out to be a minor disturbance at most. The same powerful political forces that had brought so many grant-in-aid programs into existence not only prevented their going out of existence but even added somewhat to their number. Some categorical programs were consolidated into block grants, but an unmanageable number remained. Revenue sharing became a reality, but on not much more than a token scale and with much uncertainty about its future. In the future, the essay concludes, the federal government will have a larger role in the spending as well as in the raising of state and local revenues. The import of the essay, and indeed of the whole section, is that it is now impossible to restrict the scope of the national government or even to bring its complexities under presidential management. If there is a New American Revolution, it will not be of the sort anticipated by President Nixon when he proposed revenue sharing.²

²For an up-to-date account of policy choices made with respect to the design and use of federal grants-in-aid to state and local governments by presidential administrations, the reader is referred to Lawrence P. Brown, James W. Fossett, and Kenneth T. Palmer, *The Changing Politics of Federal Grants* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1984).