RESEARCH REPORTS

Reviews of new research by public agencies and private institutions

"Retooling the American Work Force: Toward a National Training Strategy."

Northeast-Midwest Institute, Box 37209, Washington, D.C. 20013. 50 pp. $5.00.
Author: Pat Choate

Low capital investment, poor management, and a fading technological lead are often blamed for poor U.S. economic performance. Often overlooked is an obvious factor: the education and skills of American workers.

Choate, a senior analyst at TRW, Inc., notes that such neglect is not new. Improved labor quality accounts for only 10 to 14 percent of U.S. labor productivity gains since World War II.

Today's work force is ill prepared to adapt to technological changes. Despite massive outlays for public schools, 20 percent of adult Americans are functionally illiterate. Engineers and computer specialists are already in critically short supply. The average age of U.S. machinists is 58, but industry is training only one-quarter of the new machinists needed to take over as their elders retire. Industrial robots and other innovations will eliminate 10 to 15 million jobs throughout industry by the year 2000. New jobs will require more technical skills.

Business is partly to blame for the poor state of the U.S. work force. In 1981, U.S. firms spent $3,000 per worker on new equipment, but only $300 for on-the-job training.

Washington's efforts, meanwhile, are poorly conceived and coordinated. In 1979, 12 federal job-training programs reached 11 percent of the work force, chiefly the poor. Little effort is made to retrain other workers or to upgrade skills. Existing programs are fragmented. In Virginia's Tidewater region, for example, 84 private and governmental organizations managed $22.4 million in federal manpower funds in 1979.

Choate calls for a comprehensive national job-training policy. To encourage workers to upgrade their skills, he argues, Washington should provide low-interest loans for adult vocational education and tax credits to businesses for their own training programs. A 25 percent credit could cost Washington $2.5 billion but boost business outlays by $10 billion. Local vocational education programs could be "customized" to meet the needs of area businesses, following the example of South Carolina and Oklahoma.

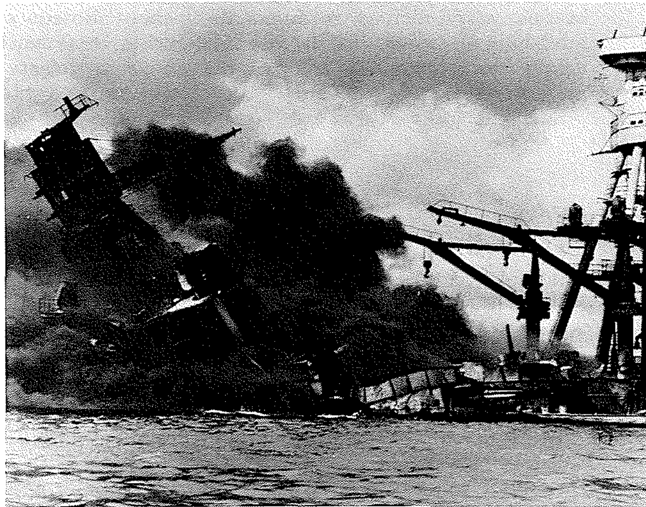
The time is ripe to adopt such policies, Choate observes: All 12 existing federal programs will come up for renewal by 1984. If the opportunity is missed, he warns, the United States will pay in higher unemployment and slower productivity growth.

"Surprise Attack: Lessons for Defense Planning."

Brookings Institution, 1775 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036. 318 pp. $24.95 cloth, $9.95 paper.
Author: Richard K. Betts

Most of the world's major 20th-century conflicts have begun with surprise attacks. Yet national leaders keep getting caught off guard.

After studying nine surprise attacks since 1940, Betts, a Brookings Institu-



The USS Arizona *sinks at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. The disaster spurred a top-to-bottom overhaul of U.S. intelligence services, yet Washington still failed to anticipate attacks by others on its friends and allies in later years.*

National Archives.

tion Senior Fellow, argues that such campaigns succeed not because of shortcomings in the victim's intelligence services, but because leaders do not believe the evidence.

"Bolts from the blue" are rare. Yet warning signs are often ambiguous. U.S. specialists had numerous signals of the impending Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, for example, but could not pick them out from the "noise" of conflicting information, Betts says.

Even unambiguous signs are difficult to interpret. In 1941, for example, Stalin "knew" so well that Hitler would negotiate their differences that he refused to believe that his erstwhile ally would launch an invasion—even after Soviet cities were bombed. The Israeli high command's low opinion of the Egyptian military blinded it to Anwar Sadat's preparations for the 1973 Yom Kippur War.

Even a series of aggressive moves can lull a defender into a false sense of security. Before invading the South in June 1950, North Korea staged border raids so frequently that repeated alarms of something bigger were dismissed as cries of "Wolf!"

The difficulties of defending against a surprise attack are compounded in the case of NATO. A consensus among all the Allied political leaders that the Soviets were preparing to attack would be required before defenses could be mobilized—and the Allies might move too slowly, reluctant to provoke Moscow.

Ironically, the very reliability of the U.S. nuclear deterrent poses a problem for NATO. "If the Soviet Union ever does decide to strike," Betts observes, "Western leaders will find it very difficult to believe." Indeed, when the Soviets mobilized for their invasion of Czechoslovakia during the "Prague Spring" of 1968, NATO's top three commanders were away from their posts, convinced that a surprise attack was out of the question.

"Chipping away at vulnerability to surprise attack" is the best one can hope to do, Betts believes. Giving NATO military commanders greater authority to mobilize their forces and matching every Warsaw Pact practice

maneuver with a comparable NATO exercise would increase readiness. Establishing a Maginot-like defense line would free other NATO troops for a more effective mobile defense.

Such changes would at least reduce the West's need to guess correctly about Moscow's intentions during a crisis, Betts concludes. But ultimately, a strong defense hinges upon leaders' ability to avoid making faulty assumptions or dismissing evidence.

"The Politics of Welfare: The New York City Experience."

Abt Books, 55 Wheeler St., Cambridge, Mass. 02138. 220 pp. $22.00.
Author: Blanche Bernstein

During the long debate over welfare reform, specialists have argued over welfare policy without much worrying about its implementation.

In fact, says Bernstein, commissioner of New York City's Human Resources Administration (HRA) from 1978 to 1979, and a state welfare official from 1975 to 1978, the intentions of Congress and state legislatures "have frequently been substantially modified, if not perverted, through regulation, management, and judicial decisions."

Administrators, the courts, ethnic, community, and religious groups, and the social-work community—all influence how welfare policy is translated into practice.

Such groups have blocked simple reforms and helped cast welfare into "disrepute," Bernstein contends. While public opinion polls consistently show that 70 to 90 percent of Americans support welfare, just as many of them are dissatisfied with existing programs.

Welfare "cheats" are a key cause of public discontent, says Bernstein. A 1968–69 study by the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare concluded that up to 30 percent of recipients were ineligible or receiving overpayments. Yet until the early 1970s, New York City's welfare administrators insisted that the number of "ineligibles" was below three percent. Mitchell Ginsberg, HRA commissioner from 1966–70, told caseworkers that there were too many people eligible for welfare and *not* receiving it. He led efforts to halt investigations to confirm the eligibility of recipients.

Bernstein also faults welfare administrators for applying a double standard to their clients: The New York social-welfare community resisted efforts begun under a 1975 federal program to make absent fathers of welfare families pay child support, though such payments are expected as a matter of course from other fathers. Local judges also opposed the programs: A 1977 study showed the New York City courts ordered payroll deductions from fathers' paychecks in only three of 398 cases where fathers were in arrears.

Critics' predictions that the program was "doomed to failure" proved to be self-fulfilling. New York State, alone among nine top industrial states, spends more on its child support enforcement program than it collects.

Assuring "program integrity" and reducing welfare dependency should be the first goals of welfare reformers, Bernstein says. She also advocates expanding welfare for intact families, now provided by only 26 states, to counteract incentives for families to break up.

"The greatest income maintenance program which has ever been devised is the intact family," says Bernstein.

She argues that prevention of family breakup is "the most effective way" to end welfare dependency.

But further cuts in federal social spending and continued intransigence by social-welfare interest groups, she adds, only make meaningful welfare reform more difficult.

WILSON CENTER PAPERS

Summaries of key reports given at recent Wilson Center meetings

"The State and America's Higher Civil Service."

Paper by Hugh Heclo, presented at a Wilson Center conference sponsored by the Wilson Center's American Society and Politics Program, October 23–24, 1982. Michael J. Lacey, moderator

In Western Europe and Japan, powerful senior civil servants are a permanent feature of government. The United States, however, has no comparable "higher civil service."

Washington does have its French-style elite technocrats—in the U.S. Forest Service, the Justice Department's antitrust division. Parallels to the British administrative class can be found in the Foreign Service and the Office of Management and Budget.

Overseas, the higher civil service is rooted in a tradition of service dating back to the founding of the state, observes Heclo, a Harvard political scientist. The U.S. Constitution, by contrast, established no clear role for the nation's bureaucracy. The U.S. higher civil service is a conglomerate molded by external forces—personalities, politics, Congress.

President Carter's 1978 civil service reforms authorized creation of an 8,000-man Senior Executive Service. Unlike their European counterparts, relatively few of these Americans come from families devoted to public service (only nine percent had fathers in government service) or out of top-drawer families. And, unlike the Europeans, the U.S. *career* bureaucrats usually stay in one agency and one program and serve as administrators, not as policy or political advisers.

But the United States is developing a distinct class of politically appointed "public careerists" who shuttle from high posts as aides and assistant secretaries in the federal government to universities, "public policy" think tanks, law firms, and back to Washington again. Half of President Reagan's top political appointees in 1981 had more than five years of previous Washington experience.

Public careerists perform the dual political-administrative functions that elite bureaucrats do in other lands, but without enjoying an institutional identity. The system as a whole, Heclo says, lacks central control: While this makes it more representative of the population, it also opens the door to opportunism and outside political influence.

Neither Congress nor the Presidents want to rely on a European-style, nonpartisan, merit-based senior bureaucracy. What we have instead in Washington are the "strengths and dangers of a democratic technocracy."