

Paul A. Samuelson, 1915-

Kort biografi

Amerikansk økonom. Professor ved MIT 1940-85. Paul A. Samuelson var rådgiver for præsident John F. Kennedy. Han har ydet bidrag inden for forbrugsteori, velfærdsteori, vækst- og kapitalteori, og handelsteori m.v. Samuelson modtog nobelprisen i økonomi i 1970. Samuelson støttede ligesom Milton Friedman og James Tobin de udbredte tanker om en negativ indkomstskat i slutningen af 1960'erne.



Dokumentation

Economics, 8th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1970, pp. 77-74

“Among informed professionals in the area of welfare and social psychology, there is a similar feeling of disquiet with the present apparatus of welfare assistance. It is indeed costly. And often inefficient. It puts a heavy psychological tax upon the recipients, and in some cases helps to create a caste of poor who must be taken care of in the same way that their parents were taken care of. A higher standard of sexual and other conduct is often demanded of those on relief than the critics themselves can, with all their advantages live up to. Thus, in some states the father of a family on relief may find that the noblest thing he can do to enhance the well-being of his loved ones is to leave home and disappear. Only then can his wife and children continue to get the aid they desperately need. (And lest he should return at night, the social-service caseworker is often supposed to initiate surprise bed checks – a practice that strikes sensitive observers as despicable).

.... If a relief father were to be offered a job that paid him several hundred dollars, taking that job might in many states cost him several thousand dollars in the form of lost relief payments. Even a

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steady job at a minimum wage of \$ 1.60 per hour might represent a net loss to him in terms of what is left over after deductions from his relief allotments.

Economically, the traditional system of welfare payments geared to need and earnings involves massive hidden costs in terms of disincentive effects. Literally billions of dollars of lost gross national product result from the disincentive structure of existing relief systems.

Contemplating the great economic inefficiency of existing welfare programs to mitigate poverty and inequality, economists of quite varied political persuasions have come to agreement on the need for a basic reform in the modern state. A New Frontiersman like James Tobin of Yale and a Goldwater and Nixon adviser like Milton Friedman agree that it will be both cheaper and more humane to replace or supplement the mess that we call welfare assistance by a federal program that utilizes the efficient apparatus of the tax structure to attune incomes with needs.

Here is an idea whose time has come. Most economists have for some time favoured it. Even President Nixon, in one of his early 1969 decisions was persuaded to recommend to Congress a family-allowance program which embodied much of the philosophy and mechanisms of the negative income tax. Indeed, almost everything is good about the negative income tax except its name – which sounds so negative. So call it, if you like the “incentive-guaranteed-income” plan.

....the basic notion is simple. When I make \$ 10,000 a year, I pay positive income taxes... When I earn an extra thousand dollars, I do pay extra taxes, but only in fractional amounts so that I am strongly motivated to earn more in order to have more.

Now consider a family below some defined poverty level – say, \$ 4,000, in a typical year in the early 1970s, for a couple with two children. Below that level they are deemed to have no capacity to pay any taxes; and indeed under current philosophies of equity and ability to pay, our democracy feels that they should receive government's aids. In short, these aids constitute a tax in reverse – a negative income tax.

But here is where incentives come in. It is a common mistake to think that only the unemployed are poor, or that only fatherless families are poor. Statistics show that much of poverty is among the

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working poor – people who simply cannot earn in the marketplace what is today considered a minimum- needed income. They and their children are deemed to merit government help.

Yet how can these aids be given them so as not to deter their efforts and incentives? Here is where the negative income tax provides a great improvement over those welfare programs which deprive people of all assistance the moment they get even a poor job. (And, of course, those on assistance know this very well and are thus deterred from trying to improve their position.) Just as the positive income tax is geared between \$ 10,000 and \$11,000 to leave people with an incentive to better themselves, the formula for the negative income tax is gauged to leave the poor with more income after they have used their own efforts to raise their private earnings by a thousand dollars, or even by a dollar. Even when their total tax is negative, their marginal tax rate is always a positive fraction less than unity. “