SOCIÖLOGY AND DEPRESSION

WHAT HAS SOCIOLOGY TO CONTRIBUTE TO PLANS FOR RECOVERY FROM THE DEPRESSION?

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The Depression has brought to a head the problem of planning for relief, recovery, and reconstruction. There is a theoretical division of labor among the social sciences in research and planning for the "New Deal." Many statisticians, economists, and political scientists have been drawn into the various Recovery Administration divisions. In general, the statisticians would appear to be responsible for advising on methods of recording, collecting, and interpreting numerical descriptions of facts for use in planning changes in social institutions. The particular division of labor of economists and political scientists is somewhat different. It would appear that these specialists are responsible for advising plans to adapt old institutions to the new needs or to create new institutions. Now the chief characteristic of these plans as they are exemplified in R.F.C., N.R.A., A.A.A., C.W.A., P.W.A., F.E.R.A., C.C.C., and other enterprises, is that they all have a high degree of centralization and concentration of control. All of these enormous centralized overhead agencies of economic and political control operate through the use of the modern new machinery of communication—the telegraph, the telephone, and other rapid devices of spreading information. The qualities that are emphasized by these machine communications are accuracy, brevity, clarity, promptness, speed, and standardization. It is obvious that these qualities, essential to the proper operation of the enormous network of politico-economic structures, are essentially impersonal qualities.

When one considers such mass phenomena as hoarding, bank panics, speculation, overproduction, underconsumption, etc., it is evident that these are also impersonal forces, but they are impersonal forces because they are the result of countless independent individual economic decisions and actions. It is these unguided forces that the great centralized politico-economic structures aim to modify and control, and it is inevitable that in doing this, these new centralized structures should utilize impersonal qualities.

From the point of view of the sociologist, the new structures that have been set up are, in general, those which strengthen secondary and derivative groups with all of their impersonal and standardized procedures. This is done at some expense to primary groups and primary ideals. The rôle of sociology with its special understanding of primary contacts and forces is thus clearly shown to be a necessary part of planning and control of social change. Sociology has a responsibility for advising plans to adjust conflicts that arise between personalities and institutions. Sociology has a responsibility to advise on plans to minimize internal friction and tension within the social structure. The special rôle of sociology in the depression is thus to provide differential social planning to supplement politico-economic planning.

This is a necessary function because otherwise internal tension and external conflict would be likely to cause a collapse of the plans based on a partial view of social relations as those of economist and the political scientist inevitably are. The
sociologist is the only specialist who has the equipment to see the details of an approximate whole.

The reasons for the sociologist's special qualifications are, first, he is a specialist in the comparative study of institutions and the patterns of their structures and functions. Second, he is a specialist in the study of conflict situations and the tensions within personality and institutions. Third, he is thus a social psychologist who has studied the mass phenomena of crowds, crazes, and other mass experiences of public opinion and propaganda. Fourth, he is a specialist in the study of human ecology and culture patterns as these are exemplified in different standards of living, in different attitude patterns, and in the spatial distribution of social institutions.

At this stage in the process of relief, recovery, and reconstruction, the maintenance of a socially-going equilibrium is extremely important. But the maintenance of a socially-going equilibrium depends upon the cooperation of individuals whose whole personality is integrated into a reasonably consistent unit in contrast to the behavior of the economic or the political segments alone of these individual personalities. The sociologist knows that attitude patterns and habits integrate around such nucleated institutions as the family, the church, the school, and welfare institutions. Attitude patterns and habits integrate around the family in its home relationships, in the standard of living which develops such socially essential qualities as those of cheerfulness, courtesy, kindliness, loyalty, and thrift. Attitude patterns integrate around such an institution as the church where there is emphasis upon the socially important qualities of belief, faith, obedience, and reverence. Attitudes integrate into patterns around such an institution as the school where socially important qualities of honesty, trustworthiness, and understanding are emphasized. Finally, attitude patterns integrate around welfare institutions, social agencies, and hospitals since these institutions stress such qualities as courage, friendliness, and helpfulness.

The great need of the present crisis is to re-enforce our vast centralized overhead politico-economic structure at the base with qualities of personality organization that grow out of primary contacts and the discipline of local nucleated institutions. These qualities are those that pervade the whole personality and give coherence by virtue of inner unity rather than from conformity to outer pressure for the standardization of conduct.

Experience shows that there is a special strategy in making this necessary contribution to social planning. Here we encounter the ancient dilemma of every social scientist, how to contribute to the solution of the emergency without, at the same time, sacrificing one's essential scientific impartiality. How to be able to see the trees and yet not to lose track of the forest. There is a real reconciliation of this dilemma if we recognize the practical division of labor between the functions performed by the active leader and the functions performed by the research scientist. The active leader must be always a person who is partisan to his own plan. He is so partisan that his confidence carries conviction with his followers and he can press through to a solution. On the other hand, the research scientist is a person who remains impartial and by avoiding violent condemnation of one plan or another, succeeds in outlining the possible alternatives of action based on knowledge. The practical division of labor is, therefore, one in which the sociologist serves in an expert advisory capac-
ity and refuses to accept the responsibilities of executive decision. But if he is forced to accept responsibility for executive decision and the determination of policy, and so to identify himself with a particular program, then, let him become an active leader only temporarily. For if he remains an executive, he ceases to be a scientist. Let him, therefore, take leave of absence for a stated time from sociology, and let us hope he will return to his first love.

WHAT THE PRE-SOCIAL WORK STUDENT CAN GET FROM SOCIOLOGY: A SUMMARY

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In planning the program of the Section on Sociology and Social Work the co-chairmen have had at various times two somewhat different conceptions of the purpose and scope of this paper. Originally it was believed that it should deal with what is commonly called social pathology. Later it was decided to make it a summary and commentary on the three following papers. What has finally emerged is an effort to state in general terms the distinctive contributions that sociology may be expected to make to the equipment of social workers.

There are many misleading ideas of this relationship. It is often implied by social workers that sociology is of little value to their profession on the ground that it gives little time to social problems and social programs. The answer to this charge may easily be made in terms of an analogy. Do we condemn bacteriology because it teaches little about the practice of medicine? Or do premedics ignore bacteriology because it cannot give them all they need to know about pathological processes? Obviously not. Neither do intelligent persons criticize sociology because it has little to say about how social work should be practiced, or because they must turn to other disciplines for additional light on social problems.

However, one defense of sociologists against the charge of being theoretical, impractical, and useless has been to offer courses and write books on social problems. Now such courses and such books may be exceedingly valuable, depending on the breadth of the teacher's or author's information and the depth of his insight. But they are no more a part of sociology than they are of economics, or psychology, or any one of several other fields. In varying degrees this statement is applicable to the texts of Ford, Gillin, Queen and Mann, Bossard, Gillette and Reinhardt.

The point to these remarks should be quite obvious, but even a casual examination of current courses and texts shows that none of us has really given pre-social work students the best and the most that sociology has to offer, nor have we left to the economists, biologists, and others their distinctive contributions. There may well be a place for general orientation courses on social problems, but if so, they should be recognized as belonging jointly to several academic disciplines. It is my present thesis that the teacher of sociology will make his best contribution to social work by concentrating on sociological materials. These have primarily to do with groups, institutions, personalities, and the processes through which they change.