

## THE SOCIOLOGIST IN A TIME OF CRISIS

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My feelings in undertaking a discussion of this topic are, to say the least, highly mixed. On the one hand I feel like the traditional fool venturing to rush in where angels fear to tread. On the other hand I feel like the pedestrian starting on a supposed voyage of discovery along a dusty highway, beaten down by centuries of earlier travelers. However, as good soldiers and good members of our craft, I am glad to join with my fellow social scientists in this discussion.

In the first place let us state that we are not unaware that other social scientists are studying this same problem. Only a week ago on this campus representatives of the National Social Science Research Council and of local councils from Massachusetts to California spent two whole days threshing out this very question. You will all remember Professor MacIver's presidential address to the American Sociological Society last December. The whole tenor of his talk was on this very subject of what the sociologist should do at such a critical period in our history. He referred to a committee of the American Sociological Society which was studying the problems of the nation in process of arming itself against crisis. You will recall also the report of the Sub-committee of the Executive Committee on Participation of Sociologists in the National Emergency Program, dated December 29, 1940. As a result of that report apparently a policy was adopted by the Executive Committee establishing a regular standing committee of the Society to work with the United States Civil Service Commission. Also, undoubtedly as a result of these same considerations, a committee drafted a very intensive questionnaire which was sent to all members of the Sociological Society asking them to list their qualifications and specific technical abilities which might be available to government in this particular emergency. Many of us filled out those questionnaires and returned them. The

American Economic Association followed suit with somewhat similar questionnaires.

Partly as a measure of self defense the universities and colleges have become interested almost to the point of alarm over this attempt to mobilize actively sociological and other scientific talent for governmental service. And with good reason, because while, of course, it is understood that many sociologists have administrative and other abilities which could serve governmental purposes extremely well, nevertheless there are certain other functions of the sociologist which must be maintained on the college and university level if we are not to be caught in the swirl of emotional disturbance and forget the duty right at hand in the thrill of a contingent heroism on a distant horizon.

That brings me specifically to the point that I think the first duty of the sociologist. That is to maintain, right where he is, the spirit of sociological science above the clamant pressure of propaganda and prejudiced testimony. He must sustain the claims of disciplined intelligence in the field of social problems as against emotionalism. He must continue to nurture and to teach the necessity and power of convictions based on evidence.

It is essential that the teaching function be maintained during this period of crisis as an insurance against heat without light and the destructive passions which would engulf education and the nation itself unless properly safeguarded. Youth at our colleges and universities is a very tangible reality and demand, not a contingent but a very present realistic claim for public service. It is essential that students be taught now more than ever before the basic ideas of how to live with their fellow men. Remember Professor MacIver's challenge in his address last December—

"Men seem to learn every other lesson more quickly than how to deal intelligently, on the larger political scale, with

their fellowmen. I am not dreaming of any utopia in which conflict will cease. I am merely suggesting that much of the actual conflict is misguided and ruinous, because of a lack of foresight, a lack of understanding, such as men do not display in the conduct of their other affairs. And the understanding that is most lacking is the understanding that sociology should and can provide. For it is the understanding of social relationships, of the social values men cherish, of their tribal gods and idols, of their responses to controls, of their long-run reactions to indoctrinations, of the tides of opinion, of the constancy and fickleness of mass emotions, of the consequences to the ingroup of treating the outgroup thus and thus."

As a part of our academic responsibility and our citizen's duty it is essential that sociologists work for the maintenance of freedom of the mind, freedom of speech, academic freedom, and all other civic and constitutional rights. But in this struggle for maintaining these rights we must be intelligent, tolerant, discreet, and not provocative. We must be realistic as sociologists in recognizing the presence of the mores, of mental sets and traditional attitudes. We must avoid gratuitous offense and opinionated self righteousness if we are going to serve these rights and exemplify the spirit of tolerance. We have to remember both in our teaching and in our practice that rights are not absolutes, but relative privileges sanctified by experience. I have known intolerant defenders of tolerance just as I have known extremely militant pacifists. There is a big difference between the sincere and effective defender of constitutional rights and liberties and the mere fuss-budget.

Most departments of sociology are being urged to emphasize the training of students in practical administration, whether directly themselves or through cooperation with departments of political science and economics. These courses may be coordinated even in the absence of a definite social service or social work division. Short courses also may be organized particularly in recreation. During the first World War I operated two successive summers what we called Social Service Plattsburgs which included a series of two week intensive units of work in certain fields of social welfare

effort. I also conducted special courses in Red Cross home service administration. To a certain extent the multiplication of social workers and the professionalization of social work in the last twenty years has perhaps rendered obsolete some of this type of educational work; but undoubtedly if the war crisis is actually precipitated and continues for several years as some observers predict, the strain on our various professional services will be greater than the present ranks of professional workers can sustain. It will be necessary to give intensive training of a sort to people who do not expect to be professionals, but who would, with the return of normal times, return to their voluntary status capacity.

From the standpoint of research, sociologists should be in a position to derive much worthwhile data to carry forward the practical significance of their science. For instance it should be possible to study more effectively than ever the ties that bind, the factors that make for social solidarity on the one hand, and on the other, to grade and rate more accurately the forces that produce tension and breakdown; to study the sources and workings of conflict as projected into army and navy, defense production, and the thought processes in local communities. There has been an occasional study of the effects of war upon the family, but not to the same degree that we have observed in the case of the depression. This is only one simple example of a field of research which, so to speak, is hot and will continue hot for the duration of this emergency. But I should also urge continuation of what might be called normal or non-emergency-inspired research, on condition of course that it is really significant and knows where it is going. This is no time for academic "busy work."

It goes without saying that sociologists, like other scientists and good citizens, stand ready to put their talents at the service of their communities as they have done in preceding emergencies. In order to offset the centrifugal tendencies of the national questionnaire to which I have already referred, local community authorities and the local colleges and universities need not only to mobilize the technical abilities of their faculties, but also see to it that defense and preventive projects right in their own areas are de-

veloped and made available for the sociologists of their faculties. There is much to be done in the field of recreation, in visitation of the families of draftees, in supplying the places of technical experts called away, in combating juvenile delinquency, in vocational guidance, in public health work, in the campaign against venereal diseases.

Finally, this is the time of all times when sociologists ought to be considering realistically the terms and conditions of a rational peace adjustment and the repairing of breaches in the social texture caused by war. Last week one night after going to bed I was suddenly stricken almost with panic over what I should do if by some chance called upon to work out a new pattern of living together in Europe and Africa or Asia. And I suspect that many of my sociological brethren would be in no less of a cold sweat than I was at the possible prospect. Yet they should prepare to

figure at the council tables along with historians, politicians, economists, and military leaders. Their understanding of population problems, ethnic issues, social psychology and techniques of social control, the objective measurements and conditions for social progress, and the whole historical cycle of efforts at social improvement should entitle them to a hearing not only during the progress of hostilities but after overt hostilities are ended.

In short, the sociologists have the opportunity and the obligation to continue on an improved scale their teaching, their research, their participation in community betterment, and to make their science an effective element in what I may venture to hope will be a somewhat more rational arrangement of the world's contours and organization after this nightmare of world chaos and depression has become a thing of the past.

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