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THE SOCIAL SCIENCES AND NATIONAL PLANNING¹

By Professor WESLEY C. MITCHELL

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AN impression prevails in many minds that social science has made out a case against national planning, at least in economic matters. This impression is the vestigial remnant of what used to be a vigorous belief. English political economy arose as a destructive critique of the national planning done by mercantilist statesmen and as a constructive argument for a policy of *laissez-faire*. But since Adam Smith published "The Wealth of Nations" in 1776, economic practise and economic theory have been evolving rapidly, each acting continuously upon the other. Present opinions upon national planning are the outcome up to date of these historical developments in the field of practise and of theory, which I shall sketch as briefly as I can.

I

The aim of mercantilist planning was to mobilize economic forces for national aggrandizement. The

country should have a numerous population; the common people should be trained in husbandry and the crafts, inured to labor and kept from the consumption of luxuries that are merely pleasant, such as sugar and tea. The necessities of life should be produced at home as a precaution against foreign attack; the mercantile marine should be fostered as an auxiliary of the navy; an abundant supply of the precious metals is desirable both for home trade and as the sinews of war. To guarantee this supply countries that have no mines of gold and silver must see that the balance of trade is "favorable." To that end, exports should be encouraged, and imports discouraged, except in the case of commodities destined for resale abroad or of raw materials for domestic manu-

¹ Address as retiring chairman and retiring vice-president of the Section for Social and Economic Sciences, American Association for the Advancement of Science, Pittsburgh, January 1, 1935.