
Association Affairs

Work for Section K

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Section K (The Social and Economic Sciences) of the American Association for the Advancement of Science today holds a special opportunity and responsibility in our social, economic, and political life to aid in interpreting the problems of society to the physical and biological scientists and to help acquaint the social scientists with the problems invention and discovery are creating. All scientists (social, physical, and biological) have demonstrated their ability during World War II to utilize the techniques and accumulated bodies of knowledge of their own disciplines to meet a crisis. None were found wanting when a common danger faced the country. The spectacular accomplishment of the physicists, the production of the atomic bomb, has forced on both scientists and the public the realization that the cultural lag, discussed many years ago by Dr. W. F. Ogburn, is not just a phenomenon for academic discussion but a poignant reality that must be recognized if peace between capital and labor and peace between nations are to be maintained.

The engineers may invent most efficient heating and cooling systems, and the chemists, synthetic materials, all of which could be used to build clean, efficient, health-conditioning homes, but families continue to live in slums. This is a cultural lag around which cluster major social problems. The most baffling cultural lag is the lack of an adequate international government for the control of atomic energy, especially the bomb. Technology was bringing the nations closer together in 1920 and, as is well known, the speed in eliminating space has been greatly accentuated since that time. Consequently the lag in time is at least twenty-five years; a workable international organization should have been established by 1920. So today nations are trying to adapt their formal relations to a technology heretofore unknown.

Affiliated with Section K are the American Sociological Society, the American Statistical Association, the American Library Association, and the American Econometric Association. The section has also worked closely for many years with Pi Gamma Mu, the Social Science Honorary Society. Frequently the programs at the annual meetings of the AAAS have consisted of special programs given by these different organizations. Sometimes one central theme was followed

for all sessions for which the affiliated organizations were responsible, and sometimes not.

The programs of Section K have varied widely over the years; they have been determined by the places of the meetings, the time, and the interests of those in charge. The titles of some of the papers given in 1920 were: Preliminaries of Peace,¹ Effective Means for Readjusting Prices, Magnitude of America's Past in Feeding Europe, Americanization, Public Health, Precious Stones, Engineering Education for Tomorrow's Tasks, The Crime Wave, and Economic Conditions in Peru. Jumping to 1925, the general subject was Research and Progress. Topics covered included: Research in Forestry, Research in the Meat Industry, Future Agricultural Research, Scientific Research as Applied to Concrete Construction, and Administration of Industrial Research. Then, at the 1926 meeting, the general subject was Law Enforcement. This subject would indicate that the Association was interested in the crime wave. A general survey of the field of crime was made, though the causes of crime as they may have rested in our social and economic organization were not examined. Part of the programs since 1926 have emphasized mathematical methodology, while some attention has been paid to planning. More papers have been devoted to population problems than any other field.

Scientists are concerned today as never before about the consequences of the application of their findings. Today men do not engage in scientific research out of curiosity, as it was once said they did. Science, whether called pure or applied, receives its appropriations for practical ends, but just what those ends may do to society is troubling all thinking men. The historical background of Section K makes it especially appropriate that in its programs the social and economic questions which scientific findings are creating should be discussed.

The program of Section K for the St. Louis meeting (27-30 March) is built around the general theme, "The Impact of Technology on Society." This program is designed to portray vividly some of the problematical aspects of modern society occasioned by the advancement of the physical sciences and the lack of adaptation of man to the new conditions created or call it,

¹ By David Payne Hill, formerly an Assistant Secretary of State.

if you will, the cultural lag. The program will not be a symposium on scientific method or on any subject belonging to any one field, since techniques of any one discipline may be adequately handled in meetings of its own. Moreover, it is hoped that the St. Louis meeting will be the first of a series dealing with the place and responsibility of science and its handmaid, technology, in human affairs. This general plan is built on the belief that the method of science can be applied to all the problems of mankind and that the open-minded investigation of the most prejudiced and "ticklish" questions should be undertaken if they involve individual and social welfare.

During the past fifty years mankind, by sheer reason, has furthered his material achievements more than during the preceding two hundred years. He rides on the wind, has learned to utilize the waves of the ether, has explored to the minutest details the nature of matter, and anticipates that within a very short time he will be able to increase his power infinitely through conquering the atom. Man has accumulated much knowledge and developed techniques in economics, sociology, psychology, etc. Man can control nature: he makes the lightning, the wind, and the water his servants. But has he gained sufficient wisdom to control himself or to live with his fellow men without destroying them?

Man has all the facilities to live in comfort and security, yet never was a feeling of insecurity or distrust in Western civilization greater. World War II indicated that man is more rapacious than when the goods of life were not available, more cruel than when cruelty was that of the savage beast, and more bent on power and prestige than when titles regulated classes. The world is critical of democracy—perhaps more so than when it was only an experiment and

when Negro slavery contradicted its existence. Researches have given man millions of mechanical slaves with tireless power to do his bidding, yet Germany, which had this power to lift the standard of life for the world, was unsatisfied without the enslavement of others.

With all these indictments certain common values of humanity are still accepted by scientists and statesmen. Some of these are security, physical and mental health, and certain minimum standards of living. How far are we attaining these for our own people? How close can we come to their general realization? Social problems exist when these goals lie outside the grasp of a large mass of the population. Therefore, it falls within the scope of its activities for Section K to promote research that will bear on the formation of public policy that relates to such problems and to help secure the cooperation of the best thinkers in all sciences as problems in such fields press for solution.

Peace demands more vision, devotion, and cooperation of scientists who will use their techniques, methods, and disciplined minds to maintain it than did war. In war all scientists gave their best efforts to the Government. We know how to win wars; we do not have adequate knowledge of how to solve the problems of peace or those problems that lead to war. The physical scientists are just as anxious to preserve and improve our democratic way of life and keep peace with the rest of the world as are the social scientists. No one group of scientists has all the answers, but by all working together, solutions for the "cultural lag" and other maladjustments of society which are created or augmented by scientific discoveries and inventions can be found. This is the hope of scientists. Section K can provide a forum for just such cooperation.

Scanning Science—

An amendment to the Agricultural appropriation bill has just been sent to Congress providing for a "Director-in-Chief of scientific bureaus and investigations, to serve during good behavior, to have authority to act as Assistant Secretary, and to perform such other duties as the Secretary may direct." This amendment is the outgrowth of an effort to secure a permanent non-political organization and administration of the various bureaus and divisions engaged in the scientific work of the Government, and at the same time bring about a more intelligent and more effective cooperation than has been heretofore possible.