SCIENCE

Applied Anthropological Research

THE future historian of cultural anthropology may well consider the most significant development during the current decade to be the maturing of applied research. This trend emerged after World War I and changed anthropology from one of the least "practical" of the disciplines to one that may become of fundamental importance.

In the U. S. the first major impetus toward applied anthropological research came from the Indian Service in much the same way that in France, England, and Holland it came from colonial offices. The founding of the Society for Applied Anthropology in the 1930s saw extension of interest into industrial and organizational problems of our own society. The utility of anthropologically trained personnel also became obvious during World War II.

Following the war, interest in improving the technical and economic positions of underdeveloped countries crystallized in the Point IV program. Thinking administrators soon realized that neither institutions nor technologies can be exported successfully without adaptation to national and regional cultures. Local work habits, prejudices, and institutions present obvious obstacles, but even more resistances lie in differing goals and value systems. New agricultural techniques require ingenious adaptations in areas where traditional methods have religious or social sanctions. Public health measures may fail miserably in the face of stubbornly held disease concepts that do not recognize microorganisms.

Still greater difficulties are posed by the integrated character of cultural and social systems. Even where resistance is least to a basic technological change in such a field as agriculture, the introduction of new techniques inevitably leads to social conflicts. Some segment of the society affected feels endangered by change and will become hostile. It is important to recognize that any of our technical and economic aid programs will provoke the enmity of some group within the country affected, and we must evaluate which elements we are willing to antagonize. Fortunately much constructive thinking is going on regarding this problem. Ambassador Capus Waynick, first (acting) administrator of the TEC, saw clearly that the major problem is not the transmittal of technical and economic aid, but how to do the job without making people angrier with us than they were before.

The two most important developments directed toward this problem are perhaps the pioneer program initiated at Cornell and the Coordinated Investigations in Micronesian Anthropology. The first involves modifying technical instruction to aid foreign students to interpret their new knowledge in terms applicable to their own cultures. In addition, it is investigating the repercussions in cultures affected by the introduction of technical innovations. The second program, sponsored by the Navy, showed ways in which research with basic and applied significance could be done under government sponsorship. As an aftermath, anthropologists are now attached to administrative staffs in Micronesia.

With the announcement of the Point IV program, the American Anthropological Association endorsed and supported the policy. Basic research must continue, for it forms the necessary prerequisite to successful application. Applied situations afford excellent proving grounds for the theoretical and conceptual structures deriving from basic investigation. In a field where the comparative method long offered the only substitute for laboratory testing of theory, new opportunities in applied research will help expand basic knowledge.

The dichotomy between applied and basic research will no doubt continue, but courses with applied interests are multiplying rapidly in universities, and research projects relating to the impact of industrialism on unmechanized cultures exist or are being formulated in practically every research center.

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