Book Reviews

Man Takes Control: Cultural Development and American Aid. Charles J. Erasmus. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1961. viii + 365 pp. $6.50.

The United States has tried and continues to try to "do good" for underdeveloped areas of the world by providing technical aid and assistance. This effort began considerably before similar efforts began on the part of the Soviet bloc, and its impact in terms of dollars is still much larger. Yet, even before Soviet bloc competition was significant, the results of United States "technical aid" among the less modernized peoples were often disappointing or questionable. And now, in the current perspective of "cold" or "peaceful" warfare, such failures or equivocations take on the color of serious defeats.

Many social scientists of the type trained to get out among the common people in foreign areas rather than to rely merely on official statements and reports have observed and commented upon the deficiencies of some of the technical aid programs. But their opinions have been little heeded and less sought after in policy circles. For years Washington planners and administrators told us that such programs did not need "impractical dreamers" or "so-called" experts in "intangibles." If we are going to help an undeveloped country improve its agricultural production or sanitation, for example, so the line went, we should send hardheaded experts in such matters and not bother about difficult-to-understand affairs like the natives' value systems or social organizations. If the natives cannot see the obvious advantages of the new hybrid food plants we send them or if they cannot understand anything so simple as the necessity for boiling water to destroy intestinal parasites, there obviously is "something wrong with them" and they deserve the troubles which the United States is so generously trying to eliminate through the application of its technical knowledge and skill. Political opponents of the administrations in power have not, of course, been loath to advocate that the whole foreign aid program should be dropped because some failures have shown a considerable waste of the taxpayers' money.

Causes of Failure

Many behavioral scientists who have listened to such discussions in Washington and who have observed the programs abroad have felt differently. The trouble has been, they thought they knew, that many foreign aid programs fell somewhat short of total success because they employed only a part of the scientific knowledge and "technology" which was at the United States' disposal and which was necessary for success. We may send extremely competent engineers to help install a steel mill in Latin America, but after it is installed, Latin American people will have to work in it and the society in which it operates will have to adjust to it. Likewise with expertise in health, agriculture, transportation, housing, mining, fishing, and so on.

This book is mainly devoted to such matters, and I hope that it will be widely read by persons engaged in foreign aid programs, although it may prove hard going for some. For example, Erasmus writes: "While physical scientists seem to reach a consensus about the weaknesses or strengths of a paper fairly rapidly . . . . social scientists evince strong ego-involvements in their vocabulary and will argue their definitional differences into the ground. Novelty in the social sciences depends more on fresh analogies and jargon than on new frequency interpretations" (page 313). Erasmus occasionally proves himself to be, in this sense, a true social scientist, despite the fact that he writes many passages in clear, plain English. Incidentally, he borrowed the term *frequency interpretation* from philosopher Hans Reichenbach, and he uses it constantly. It means "how followers of a given culture see a given phenomenon." The author has also permitted himself a few hasty slips. For example, "Culture consists of *all* behavior acquired by men as members of social groups" (page 103, italics mine). I am sure he would agree that practically all normal members of social groups acquire idiosyncratic behaviors which are not shared and therefore are not a part of culture.

Planned Sociocultural Change

However, permit me, at the risk of oversimplification, to point to a few aspects of the book that may well prove rewarding to policy planners, foreign aid field men, and social scientists. About two-thirds of the volume is given over to a cultural theory related to planned sociocultural change in underdeveloped areas. The function of any given culture, the author says, is to offer some means of satisfying felt needs or wishes. Erasmus deals with only three types of such desires: hunger, sex, and prestige. And most of his argument has to do with prestige. He repeats what has long been an accepted part of general cultural theory —namely that such wishes or needs are uniquely defined in each culture, unless it has borrowed from elsewhere, and so are the means for satisfying them. And he stresses that the definitions of need, the means for satisfying it, and the goals sought may all be changed in time and by inside and outside influence. He roundly rejects "cultural determinism" of a type that allows no influence to individual or environmental (including social) factors. I am not aware that such a concept of "cultural determinism" has been seriously held by influential cultural theorists during the past 25 years, but Erasmus' emphasis is essential to his theoretical deductions.

Culture, he says, correctly I believe, includes not only means and modes of satisfying wants, but also patterns of cognition, "frequency interpretations," and notions of differences between the members or groups of a society which lead to "invidious emulation" and "invidious sanction." He then suggests, with many illustrations from the literature and his own observations, that with respect to the prestige motivation at least three sociocultural types may be

distinguished. In closed societies (for example, the Haida) conspicuous giving is the pattern for prestige; conspicuous ownership (for example, in Western capitalist societies until recently) confers distinction in the "opening society"; and finally, conspicuous production has become the prestige rule in modern societies. However, the latter are of two types: coercive (in Soviet Russia) and free (in the United States). The author has some quite intriguing things to say, against a background of cross-cultural survey, about the decline of conspicuous consumption and the turn toward production as a measure of a person's worth in our own society.

Facts of Revolution

The final third of the book consists of an analysis of a mutual aid program in Sonora, Mexico, financed in part on a supposedly self-liquidating basis by the United States and planned and carried out mainly by Mexican technical specialists with some aid from the United States and other outside sources. Erasmus points out that when the projects began, the Sonora area was a "dual society" consisting of lower-class elements (both Indian and mestizo) and a sort of upper class, with very insignificant middle elements. (I am again oversimplifying.) However, two results must be considered (not necessarily accepted, without further study, as universally occurring) by North American "do-gooders." First, the land reform program resulted in the carving up of several large parcels and in its redistribution in small lots to peasants. But within a few years many of the small lots were regrouped into larger holdings, mainly in the hands of the "new rich" upper or upper middle class, who had been able to help out their poor brethren with unrepayable loans. Second, graft (*mordida*) undermined many of the government's and social planners' fine plans. Erasmus thinks that, given the Mexican situation for what it was and perhaps still is, this is not such a bad thing after all. The grafters reinvested their graft to the over-all economic and social good of the community. He suggests that as the middle class grows and becomes more socially conscious graft will recede. I am afraid social planners in the United States must take some of these mundane facts of life into consideration. Graft and power-seeking are going to take various forms in different parts of the world. This year we have had reports of something similar that occurred in the Soviet Union with respect to socialized agriculture and of Khrushchev's reactions thereto. What will happen to land reform in Cuba? And as for "conspicuous production," what is the meaning of the recent revelations regarding price fixing in our own electrical industry?

Erasmus has been out among the common people, in Mexico, Haiti, Ecuador, Colombia, Peru, Chile, and other places. In this respect there are many others like him in the United States. But their experience and knowledge are not used by the national government. We hear a good deal about social science professors from Harvard and Massachusetts Institute of Technology who have been called to Washington. They are needed, but few have made a career of working among ordinary, common, lower-class people in underdeveloped areas, the kind of people that are going to support social revolutions if they themselves do not lead them. Perhaps some of the sort of scientific talent of which I speak is needed in the present cold war. Its lack surely seems to have been indicated in the recent Cuban fiasco.

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The Affair. C. P. Snow. Scribner, New York, 1960. x + 374 pp. $4.50.

The Affair is the eighth in C. P. Snow's series of novels entitled "Strangers and Brothers," after the first novel of the series. It is closely related in substance to *The Masters*, which it is supposed to follow after the passage of 16 years. The story is told in the first person by Lewis Eliot, lawyer and government administrator, and revolves about a problem of justice arising in one of the colleges of Cambridge University. One of the younger scientists of the college, Donald Howard, a man generally disliked for his leftist views and his lack of good manners, or perhaps disliked simply because he did not belong to the usual social class of university people, has been dismissed because of a verdict of scientific forgery. In his major scientific work, published jointly with his old master, Palairet, and constituting the principal basis of his appointment as a fellow of the college, a photograph has been found to be an obvious fakery.

"The affair" arises when a number of members of the college become convinced that Howard is actually innocent, and that the forgery was committed, for undisclosed reasons, by the eminent old scientist Palairet, since deceased. The campaign to reopen the case is strongly opposed by those who feel that Howard is not quite up to the college's standards anyway, that the scandal would do the college great injury, and that the best policy is to let the whole thing rest. The motives of the participants in the wrangle are considerably beclouded by the imminent election of a new Master of the College, a post to which several of the persons involved have aspirations. The denouement hinges on the development of evidence, quite convincing but never admitted, that the bursar of the college has suppressed the critical evidence that would have implicated Palairet and have vindicated Howard.

The slowly developing plot brings out to the fullest the psychological twists and turnings of each of the major characters, as viewed through the anatomical vision of Lewis Eliot. Moving deliberately, as befits a college atmosphere, the tale after some 200 pages really becomes absorbing; and the ultimate delineation of the courage and moral principle of Francis Getliffe, the eminent scientist who risks his chance to obtain the coveted post of Master of the College by defending Howard's innocence and by insisting on the need for the college to make retribution, is graphic and moving. The strength of the novel, as in *The Masters*, lies in Snow's ability to deal with human motives and psychological problems. Its weaknesses are those already marked in previous Snow novels: the shadowy character of his females and the exclusively intellectual level on which his protagonists seem to live. It is also peculiar to meet with a college which seems to have no students, so vaguely do they figure in the background.

Moreover, certain critical matters are left somewhat unsatisfactory. The motivation of Palairet to commit a fraud at the close of a scientific career of solid eminence rests unexplained; and the peculiar schizoid behavior of the bursar, who commits a fraud to prevent disgrace to his college from public knowledge that an acknowledged fraud had been found to be attributable to a