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Faulty Engineers or Neglected Experts?

Social scientists are being made scapegoats for the failure of dozens of domestic programs. The October 1972 issue of *Fortune* reports that "social engineers retreat under fire"—a main source of the shots fired being *Fortune* itself. Its staff writer Tom Alexander reports: "There's plenty of material for recrimination." He then recites the by now familiar catalog of failures of the domestic programs, failure to abolish welfare, poverty, school segregation, and so on—problems that have not been solved despite "record" investments.

The charges against social scientists are about as well founded as those brought in the early 1950's, equating social science with socialism. The discipline, as such, is no more at fault for the failure of many Great Society programs than the study of international relations is for the American involvement in Vietnam.

First, most programs did not receive the funds and manpower they needed. Alexander is, of course, technically correct: the investments in domestic programs reached "record" levels. But this does not make them high, and certainly not high enough.

Second, many solutions require tradition-bound citizens and legislatures to reexamine their views about the world, human nature, and human values. If they balk, and block progress, there is little a social scientist can—and maybe should—do. Thus, crime is usually ranked as the number one domestic problem. Recently the President, on the heels of the governor of New York, has sought to reinstate the death penalty because, it is alleged, all other efforts to turn back the rising wave of crime have failed. But the fundamental remedies that most social scientists favor have not even been tried. Many politicians prefer to grandstand against crime with "tough" speeches and suggest "tough" measures that they must know are either ineffectual or unconstitutional or both. Why point the finger at social scientists?

The social sciences could be more vigorous than they are—if the politicians would let them. The social sciences, as a group, have been the neglected branch of the sciences, receiving a mere 2 to 3 percent of the resource pie, and even that much only in recent years. No wonder there are fields in which little is known: how to help disadvantaged children catch up, for example, or how to respond to the growing dissolution of the family. But even in these areas social scientists can at least point to what will not work. The Coleman Report pointed out that the kind of efforts undertaken, at a cost of roughly \$1.2 billion a year, had no discernible results.

If America now seeks to attend to its long list of social problems, an increased investment in social science is the order of the day—not a chopping of their sources of support. Furthermore, social programs, in which the findings of social scientists are utilized, must be allowed to go through the same research and development sequence that missiles and lunar landing crafts go through. An initial mistake made by social scientists was agreeing to the use of their theories in attempts to plan societal changes. They should have insisted on design or table-top or wind-tunnel models in order to initiate, not to bypass, the research and development sequence. We must stop trying to jump directly from sociological blueprints into multibillion-dollar programs.

We can no longer delay facing our domestic needs, and we cannot deal with them without the help of the social sciences. But the social sciences themselves will require much nourishment and fortification before they will be able to fully measure up to this mission.—AMITAI ETZIONI, *Professor of Sociology, Columbia University, and Director, Center for Policy Research, 475 Riverside Drive, New York 10027*