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Address given by C. O. Ruggles, Professor of Public Utility Management, Graduate School of Business Administration, Harvard University, at the Annual Commencement Exercises, Suffolk University, Beacon Hill, Boston, June 16th at 8:00 P.M.

"THE SOCIAL SCIENCES IN AMERICAN EDUCATION"

Recent events throughout the world have brought forcibly to the fore the need for a better understanding of the social sciences. This lack of appreciation of the workings of economic laws applies not only to the leaders and the would-be leaders of many important countries, but to the people who endorse their programs. In other words, the whole world is in need of a better understanding of the social sciences if we are to make substantial progress in the improvement of economic and social conditions.

The failure of unsound government programs often sets a good cause back many years. And while a better understanding of the social sciences is important for the countries of the old world, it is especially important for a country as large as the United States. Moreover, what might be a sound policy for smaller countries might not be workable in a country the size of ours. Some one has said and apparently without exaggeration, that if Texas were a lake and France an island, France could be dropped into Texas and there would be room enough to sail out of sight of land on every side. Montana is almost as large as the German empire before Hitler annexed Austria.

Our forefathers broke away from Europe because they objected to the control over almost every aspect of their lives including their religious beliefs and American government and institutions represented an experiment on their part based upon the assumption that universal education would produce a high general level of intelligence that would, in turn, provide a sound basis for democracy. This philosophy is well expressed in the inscription upon the Boston Public Library which is to the effect that the Commonwealth requires the education of a people as the safeguard of order and liberty. The truth of this statement would be generally accepted but it is not so fully appreciated that the need for emphasis on various aspects of education changes from one generation to another.

It is probably not a reflection on educational institutions to say that they are always behind the times, at least in their general programs of instruction. In research and in extending the borders of knowledge, they are often far ahead of their time; but before an endowed institution can secure gifts or a state supported institution can secure appropriations for instruction in a given field, the need for such instruction must have been rather generally appreciated. By that time, the needed instruction may be at least one generation late.

In considering the need for more emphasis on the social sciences in American education, let us first trace certain aspects of education in this country; second, consider the extent to which changes in the economic and social conditions in the United States have, in turn, created new educational needs; and finally, the necessity for widening the opportunity for adult education in general, and especially in the study of the social sciences.

The second war with Great Britain created a great interest in technical education in the United States. After the battle of Waterloo, it was evident that markets for manufactured products would be sought in the United States both by England and by the continental countries. We at once passed our first protective tariff and focussed our attention on manufacturing industries. The first school to offer a substantial technical curriculum was Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute established in 1824. It was patterned after the French technical schools. While Harvard had been established as early as 1636, it was more than 200 years before that university organized its engineering school. Both Yale and Harvard organized engineering schools in 1847. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology was about to open when the Civil War broke out and hence its beginnings were postponed until 1865. During the Civil War Congress, through the Morrill Act, gave a great stimulus to technical education in the field of agriculture and engineering by providing subsidies for the so-called land grant colleges. These began to develop on a grand scale, especially in the Middle West, Michigan and Illinois being outstanding early examples. Indeed, the University of Illinois was known as the Illinois Industrial University until the year 1885.

This sketch of the development of technical education is presented not as a criticism of what our country was doing at that time, but rather to point out that it was a logical development. Young America had many bridges to build, many factories to erect, and numerous railway lines to be laid. Hence, it was natural that emphasis should have been placed on the physical sciences.

It is not an exaggeration to say that the success of all this period of technical education created some of the most difficult problems which we now face. With the abundant natural resources in this country, and an increase in technical proficiency, the country grew by leaps and bounds and its simple colonial life was soon being transformed into a complex industrial civilization. These changes were in part brought about by the fact that we adopted a constitution that prohibited any tariff among our states. This, in turn, meant that we were to see in America some of the largest business units the world had known. The markets for these huge industries were far flung. Free trade within the boundaries of America made it inevitable that the production unit should have been an enormous one.

America's early emphasis upon the physical sciences provided inventors with ample outlets for their talents and inventions multiplied at a rapid rate. The development and utilization of the resources of a country the size of the United States created many of our difficult economic and social problems, which, in turn, called for national legislation. The frontier West, for example, was suspicious of the industrial East and these feelings have been registered in much of our national legislation at different periods in our history. Indeed, the economic, business, and social problems that were the natural outgrowth of our technical achievements were upon us so suddenly that we had not had adequate opportunity to study and understand them. This is made clear if we glance at the character of educational institutions in this country during our early history and in more recent years. It is a fair assumption that the educational institutions of a country reflect what the people believe the rising generation should understand.

Departments of economics, for example, are not very old. There are still a few instances where older members of the faculty are still living who at one time taught all the economics, political science, and history that some of the important institutions offered. In fact, when economics was first introduced into the curriculum, it was often taught by the president of the university along with moral philosophy. If we check the development of such institutions as schools of business, we see this same lag in the study of the problems of the social sciences. Not until the 1880's was there a school of business organized in this country and indeed, up to about 1900, one could count all the business schools in the country on his fingers. It was almost three centuries after Harvard was established before its business school was organized.

It is not an accident that the social sciences and the schools of business lagged far behind the technical schools. One might say that the physical sciences and technical schools were represented by a sixteen-cylinder motor car traveling at such a high rate of speed that the social sciences, represented by a one-cylinder motorcycle, were sputtering along so far in the rear, that it was not possible for the social scientists to determine at which corner the physical sciences had turned.

Fortunately, there has been in recent years a recognition of the fact that the technical schools and the physical sciences have created problems to which the social sciences must now give serious consideration. This is a very vital matter because an intelligent understanding of the social sciences is the key to the so-called fuller life and a better social order.

To illustrate the extent to which legislators are often unprepared to meet urgent economic and social problems, let me refer to the comment of a Chicago editor made during the time I was in college. The Chicago editor in pointing out the lack of vision on the part of the Illinois legislators in framing child labor legislation said his first impulse was to criticize these legislators for their lack of understanding of such a vital problem; but on second thought, it occurred to the editor that the men in the Illinois legislature were the legitimate product of the American public school system. He pointed out that if he had gone to Springfield and selected a dozen men at random, and asked them how many of them had ever heard of Shaftsbury and what they knew of the strong and weak points of English child labor legislation, he would probably not have obtained much enlightenment; but that if he had gone down the same line of men making inquiries about the wives of Henry VIII, he would probably have secured quite a little information.

In other words, our educational system changes so slowly that it fails to meet our needs. It is natural and inevitable that teachers will teach what they know. Indeed, after college catalogues have described a new vision, it is not always true that the instruction is in line with the description in the catalogue. No stream can rise higher than its source and no teacher can be effective, for example, in the social sciences who does not know the social sciences. If that teacher has been educated in the old line subjects such as history, economic history, and government, the course is likely to be one dealing with those subjects.

But a better understanding of the social sciences must not be limited to legislators and leaders of public opinion. This statement leads me to the final point of my discussion, viz: the need for widening the opportunity for adult education. This must be done simply because able leadership is of little significance without intelligent followship. The fields of the social sciences are so dynamic that they change even from decade to decade and it is essential that we appreciate that our education, especially in these fields, is something that cannot be completed in a formal program of four years. In other words, even the people who have had the advantages of a formal education should have opportunities to keep abreast of the times and to obtain some understanding of rapidly changing economic issues. Moreover, there is another group of our people who are sometimes denied the opportunities of pursuing fulltime formal training. They must secure their education along with their daily duties in earning a livelihood.

It is heartening to see the extent to which many institutions have developed in metropolitan centers, thus giving an opportunity to people to learn while they earn. Indeed, in many ways, the combination of learning while earning is an excellent one. It is, in a sense, the laboratory method. At one time, we taught the physical sciences by means of textbooks and formulae. No institution is considered properly equipped today if it does not teach the physical sciences by the laboratory method. The medical student is not permitted to enter into the practice of medicine until he has had certain clinical experience.

It is probably not an exaggeration to say that much of our education in the social sciences has been, and still is, somewhat like teaching swimming by correspondence. We need to combine the process of education with the actual activities of

economic and social life. President Dykstra of the University of Wisconsin pointed out recently that even dictators have a way of rounding people up and running them through the voting booth, thus giving a rubber stamp approval to their programs. Unfortunately, the social sciences seem to the average individual as a field which needs no careful study and many men in our legislative halls are ready to concoct new laws on short notice that vitally affect the lives of the people. Half truths and half baked philosophies grow luxuriantly in the field of the social sciences. Not until we have a better understanding of the vital economic problems of our complex civilization can we hope to make real progress. Many simple panaceas being offered throughout the world today either wholly ignore or fail to understand fundamental principles of the social sciences. Until the situation is changed by a better understanding of these fields we cannot expect our government programs to be productive of worth while long-range results.