

# The Profession

## Special Commission Report On Use of The Social Sciences

Greatly increased use of the strengths of the social sciences is urged on Government and society in a report released recently by the National Science Foundation.

*Knowledge into Action: Improving the Nation's Use of the Social Sciences* is the report of the Special Commission on the Social Sciences, established by the National Science Board in 1968. The Commission was charged with making recommendations "for increasing the useful application of the social sciences in the solution of contemporary social problems." Chairman of the Commission was Dr. Orville G. Brim, Jr., President of the Russell Sage Foundation.

Running throughout the report is the theme that many decisions made today on the basis of financial data, engineering considerations, and the expertise of other disciplines should also have available the expertise of social scientists. For example, new transportation facilities, the report notes, should take into consideration not only the economic costs and returns but also other social costs and returns.

"Social scientists manifestly must be consulted in the collection of relevant information, and in evaluating social policies already in existence; their knowledge and informed intelligence should also be sought out before new social programs are instituted," the report states.

The report is available from the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, at 75¢ per copy.

### **Social Sciences in the Federal Government**

"At those levels in the federal government where major policy is made, social science should be deeply involved," the report says. While recognizing the current interest expressed by some in a Council of Social Advisers for the President, however, the Commission is not prepared to recommend it. The report notes that the Commission is convinced that full and effective transmission of social science data can be most efficiently achieved by including social scientists "in such key advisory groups as the President's Science Advisory Committee and the Office of Science and Technology, and through action by the Council of Economic Advisers."

Recommendations of the Commission with respect to the social sciences in the Federal Government are as follows:

- 1 Social science membership on the President's Science Advisory Committee should be increased;
- 2 Professional social scientists should become an important part of the Office of Science and Technology staff;
- 3 The Council of Economic Advisors should include among its staff and consultants both persons drawn from social sciences other than economics, and persons drawn from the physical sciences and engineering.
- 4 The Commission also recommends increased Federal employment of social scientists, and refresher training for social scientists in Government, to enable them to stay up-to-date with the rapid developments in their disciplines.

### **Social Science and the Public**

The report calls for improved dissemination of social science knowledge to the public, pointing out that the knowledge and insights of the social sciences may be important to each individual in his own life in such areas as career planning and child rearing. In addition, the report notes that better understanding of the social sciences by the general public "will raise the public's expectations as to the value of social sciences in dealing with public problems."

Among the Commission's recommendations to achieve this end are the following:

- 1 The National Science Foundation should increase its support of social science curricular development, and should encourage participation by professional social science associations;
- 2 Social science curriculum planners should particularly note studies of how children develop an understanding of social science concepts;
- 3 Consideration should be given to launching new Federal efforts to increase the proportion of social sciences included in continuing education programs.
- 4 The report also details a number of specific recommendations to increase and improve mass media reporting of social science knowledge. The report notes particularly that "television programming presents a major and unrealized opportunity for social science education."

### **Social Problem Research Institutes**

A major outgrowth of the Commission's meetings was the development of a new concept of social problem research institutes to conduct applied social science research on problems of public significance. Says the report, "The Commission proposes the formation of special social problem research institutes where social problems will be analyzed by teams of specialists from the social sciences and other sciences and professions. Engineers and other professionals must join with social scientists in these efforts. Their technical knowledge is indispensable to any analysis of causes of and solutions to various social problems."

The Commission recommended that \$10 million be appropriated in fiscal year 1970 to the National Science Foundation for the establishment of social problem research institutes.

(A closely-related program to support Interdisciplinary Research Relevant to Problems of our Society is included in the Foundation's fiscal year 1970 budget, at a level of \$10 million. Although this problem does not contemplate establishment of institutes, it will provide funds for multi-disciplinary groups at universities, who have banded together to seek increased understanding of major societal problems. Such groups may serve as nuclei for the institutes contemplated by the report.)

### **Other Recommendations**

Other sections of the social sciences report deal with the interrelationships of social sciences with the professions, with business and labor, and with community organizations. Relevant recommendations of the Commission in these areas include the following:

- 1 Professional schools should include more social science knowledge in their curricula;
- 2 Officials in both business and labor should strengthen their existing associations with the social sciences;
- 3 Evaluation studies of the effectiveness of community organizations should be greatly expanded.

With respect to social sciences in the community, the Commission states that "A primary need is a comprehensive inventory, on a national basis, of the social science work going on in community organizations." The evaluation studies must,

however, precede such a comprehensive inventory.

### **Background**

The Special Commission on the Social Sciences was established in 1968 by the National Science Board during a period of considerably increased interest in these disciplines on the part of both the legislative and executive branches of the Federal Government. The National Science Foundation, which has gradually but steadily increased its support of the social sciences throughout the years, was viewed as an appropriate place for a significant advisory effort to be housed, under the terms of the NSF Act providing for the establishment of special commissions. This is the third such commission to have been established by the National Science Board since 1951.

The Commission was asked by the Board to address itself to the following:

"1 A statement and analysis of the mechanisms and institutions, societal and governmental, that are needed so that the understanding and knowledge gained by the social sciences may be drawn upon and used effectively when they are relevant to understanding and dealing with significant problems in our society.

"2 An analysis of what forms of collaboration may be necessary among the social and natural sciences, and engineering, and among their practitioners in addressing these problems; and recommendations concerning how such collaboration might be brought about.

"3 A statement of what measures and programs, to be administered by federal agencies including the National Science Foundation, are required so that the social sciences may be more effective both in generating new knowledge and in its utilization, and so that our society can gain maximum benefit from the growing knowledge derived from fundamental research in social sciences."

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The members of the Commission on Social Sciences are as follows:

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