

Is Social Science Relevant in the Philippines Today?

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To the varied motifs which have caught your attention during the three days of this convention and which you will bear away with you, I should like to add another, but briefly, because you are tired from three days of sessions. I would like to call attention to the need for a greater relevance than in the past to the vital social questions of today of Philippine social science and of Philippine social scientists. I refer particularly to sociologists, anthropologists, and psychologists.

Many of us have complained about the relative scarcity of graduate and undergraduate students who enroll in the sociology and anthropology curricula here in the Philippines. Should we not, perhaps, ask ourselves whether this is because we seem irrelevant in the eyes of the people, and especially of the youth, to the great issues of the day.

If I were asked what these vital questions are, I should reply that they certainly include what kind of action must

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be taken to involve the national political and the common man in a meaningful dialogue over goals, policies, and genuine commitments geared to the common good, in order to decrease the dangerous and rapidly growing distance between the national government and the common man. I would secondly emphasize the need to define what policy should be implemented by both government and religious groups to reduce the high level of the birth rate. I would next stress the need to discover how to gear our economy to much higher levels of agricultural and industrial production.

Fourthly, I would direct attention to the question of how our foreign policy can be made to serve the common welfare of all the people rather than the special good of particular interests. This would include such questions as our proper relation to the Vietnamese war, to Malaysia, Indonesia, Taiwan, and Japan, to China, to Soviet Russia and the other communist countries, and to the United States and the other countries of the West. It would also relate to what the proper point of distinction is between the genuine search

for cultural identity and a jingoistic and harmful version of nationalism.

We social scientists protest that we and our activities are relevant to life in terms of our research findings, hypotheses, and insights into Philippine culture and social organization. We might ask ourselves with profit, however, how often we attempt to get this knowledge into action projects to ameliorate existing social conditions. Are our insights and findings really relevant? The acid test is whether they prove truly helpful to better the social conditions of today.

There are those who eschew departure from the empyrean of basic research and the cool disengaged stance in order to participate for any significant length of time in both the planning and field execution of such developmental work; yet who but professionally trained sociologists and anthropologists have the background to build into developmental projects the insights into social organization and culture we have acquired and then to see that these projects are properly implemented from these viewpoints in field

operations? In short, if we sociologists and anthropologists do not accomplish our proper roles, adequate tailoring of projects to Philippine culture is likely to be done not at all, or at least not well.

I know the distinction usually offered in self-defense between the social scientist and the social actionist. I inquire however whether this distinction is any longer valid in our context of almost emergency developments. The scientist must care always that his values and biases do not lead him to misinterpret facts. Agreed. The social scientist as a social scientist must avoid judgments based upon values. Agreed. However, the social scientist is also a citizen and a human person. As such he has responsibilities as a citizen and a human person that only a person with social science training can adequately perform. I think we should examine the possibility that social scientists are making themselves irrelevant to the great issues of today because they are by and large avoiding involvement and commitment to the realistic solution of these issues.