Vringer op het buitenland

Engeland

Sociological research in the second half of the twentieth century is marked by two major tendencies. On the one hand, it is becoming less a matter of individual scholarship and much more a matter of team collaboration; and on the other hand, it is losing its appearance of national "schools" of sociology in favour of a much more international outlook. The recent establishment of the International Committee for Social Research in Industry is thus to be seen as a further development in a process which the International Sociological Association has been active in promoting since its inception. This Committee, which has grown out of informal discussions between the representatives of the Universities of Brussels, Chicago, Helsinki, Leiden, Liverpool and Münster, aims at encouraging social research to proceed along more comparative lines than has been the case so far; and it is likely that in this field at least, future projects will be of more than merely national interest.

In England, the pioneer work is already under way at the Liverpool School of Social Sciences and Administration. During the past year or so, a research team has been devoting its attention to the relation between technological change and social organization in the steel industry and has just completed a largescale enquiry into the social implications of technical re-organization in a north-Wales steel firm. The primary approach to research in this case has been sociological and for that reason manifests a welcome departure from the usual English studies of the human factor in industry which owe their inspiration to the work of Elton Mayo and to a pre-occupation with personality adjustments at the face-to-face level. At Liverpool the limitations of this kind of work are admittedly recognized 1), and in the present study the emphasis has been laid on the institutional features in industrial action, on both the formal and the informal aspects of management, trade-union, and labour personnel structures, and on the social and educational backgrounds of the participants in industrial activity.

What is not yet clear in this project is the theoretical bases on which it rests. So far nothing has been published and there is indeed some possibility that publication will be delayed until such time as a further study of another steel firm elsewhere in the country has also been completed. It is therefore perhaps premature to raise questions on the issue. Nevertheless the total project is reported to be concerned with (a) the factors which tend to facilitate or impede change, (b) the methods by which change can be absorbed with the minimum of interference to human relationships.
and welfare, and (c) the kinds of relationship which tend to promote the absorption of change. These would suggest a possible major advance in the empirical treatment of one of the branches of sociology where speculation has had, and continues to have, most sway 2); and it is a pity that no one at Liverpool has yet found opportunity to publish a discussion on the relevance of the steel firm enquiry for the analysis of social change generally. There is one feature of the organization at Liverpool, however, which is of special interest to the academic sociologist. The Liverpool School of Social Sciences is almost unique in England for combining research with teaching. The senior members of the research staff, in addition to directing the steel works study and running seminars as the research progresses, have also been engaged in lecturing to students taking the newly established Diploma in Industrial Sociology and in supervising their research projects and practical work. The main of this Diploma is to act as a qualification for personnel management in industry but internally the courses for it are also regarded as preparation for postgraduate industrial research which will eventually have international significance. This is an experiment in combining both research and teaching should prove of value not only to the students who thus come into direct contact with research in progress, but also to the research workers who regularly meet the freshness of the undergraduate and post graduate point of view.

At the same time there is a danger that research in these circumstances will become centred around problems which face the personnel officer in industry rather than which are of value to the development of industrial sociology as a scientific discipline. According to Professor Simey, the tradition of the Liverpool School of Social Sciences is that it has been „problem conscious“ in its teaching for at least forty years mainly because it has been predominantly concerned with training social workers and administrators. It was „only natural, therefore, for the research work which has been developed during the years which have succeeded the war to be based on modern methods of 'action research' which are designed not only to add to basic knowledge of social behaviour and social structure, but also to help those placed in positions of responsibility to take more effective action to deal with the problems which they are concerned. Close collaboration between teacher, researcher and administrator is a characteristic feature of the Department's work.“ 3) It is, of course, excellent if both aims can be achieved in the same piece of research, but there is the risk that worthwhile long-term results may be sacrificed in order to obtain quick returns.

Dr Scott, one of the research team at Liverpool, has however made out a very good case for „problem centred“ research in industrial sociology based on the nature of the material itself. As he puts it, „the traditional philosophy of laissez-faire competition has meant that many firms have sought to keep their affairs secret, and has led them to resent intrusion“ mainly through fear that „latent problems will be brought to the surface“. The organized workers, nevertheless, are often only too well aware that these problems exist, especially where they involve management-worker relationships, and for this reason they are inclined to regard research as „management inspired“ and contrary to their interests. In such a situation the researcher must strive to become accented by all parties while avoiding being identified with any of them. In this way only will he obtain willing co-operation on all sides; but he is not likely to do this if his research project is...
inspired by the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. People at all levels in industry are interested in "getting things done ...... and research which seems likely to make a contribution to action in the not-too-distant future is therefore more acceptable to them. If it be a contribution to be solution of their own problems, so much the better.” 4)

There is much to be said for this point of view. Clearly a well-thought out piece of research which achieves both long-term and short-term results is to be preferred, either to a sterile project of no practical value however excellent its intentions for the ultimate understanding of social phenomena, or to a problem-oriented project of immediate practical use but ephemeral as a contribution to sociological theory. Achieving both results in one and the same piece of work, however implies that the short-term project should be carefully designed to contribute to a general hypothesis about the working of social forces. Looked at in this light, the steel works study seems to offer many excellent opportunities. In the study of social change today, two main fields stand in need of clarification, (1) the relationship between technical advance and social structure, and (2) the relationship between large-scale social organization and individual role behaviour. If therefore we can find in a large-scale steel plant technical reorganization in progress, we shall have in miniature a model of what is happening to industrial society as a whole, which at the same time will give us scope for dealing with the problems of readjustment facing this firm as a single unit. It is to be hoped that the International Committee for Social Research in Industry will bear these things in mind when formulating its projects for comparative research.

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4) W. H. Scott: Anthropology and Industrial Research; an address given to the Anthropological Section of the British Association at its Annual Meeting in Liverpool, September 1-8 th, 1953. This address has not yet been published and I am indebted to Dr. Scott for letting me see a manuscript copy.

Nederlandse Sociologie
van maand tot maand


Deze heldere en belangwekkende rede is voor sociologen van groot belang, niet alleen omdat de inhoud geheel en al onderwerpen betreft, die de bedrijfssocioloog rechtstreeks aangaan, maar ook en vooral, omdat de poging tot bepaling van de verhouding tot de organisatieleer voor de bedrijfssociologie niet minder een probleem vormt dan voor de bedrijfspyschologie.

De schrijver, die na een kort historisch overzicht, met behulp van het probleem der formele en informele organisatie een toelichting verstrekt op zijn mening, dat de wederzijdse invloed tot studie van beide aspecten dwingt, tracht in het laatste deel van zijn rede dit inzicht te verwerken in een schets van de mogelijke en wenselijke verhouding tussen bedrijfsorganisatie en -psychologie. Hij verwerpt de naar zijn mening eenzijdige benaderingswijzen van overwegend bedrijfsorganisatorisch of overwegend sociatrisch standpunt, zo goed als de bijspikermethode, uitgedrukt in: „de moeilijkheden, die door de organisato-