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Science and Necessity

Despite their surface appearances, theory and practice are closely related terms. In any extensive coverage of the subject it would be impractical to exclude the one while dealing with the other. As to which comes first in the order of time, this is a matter for dilettantes to cavil about after they have determined the seniority of the hen and the egg. For the social student, intent upon making a scientific explanation, they start together, work together, and end together. This reciprocal interaction prevents us from treating the two factors or phases of activity as if they were things apart.

What we have attained in scientific research is due largely to the pressing need for assistance in making a living under existing conditions. These are in modern society, as they have been in every system based on a property relationship, class conditions. The progress in science reflects such a status and so is intimately connected with the interests of the class that rules.

In mathematics we start with simple arithmetic. A study that goes back to a time when people did their counting on finger and toes. Addition, subtraction, and multiplication served the purpose of tallying the new batch of babies, deducting the fossils that croaked, and making allowances for the ones who took their places. The number of clubs or arrows used, the animals captured, the supplies of pemmican or roots to tide them over critical periods all had to be reckoned.

Simple arithmetic developed to the stage of geometry when an established mode of life among tillers of the soil made imperative the measuring of plots and distances so that the needs of the group might be appeased.

Later come the age of the engineers and the necessity for solving algebraic equations and the uses of differential and integral calculus. Crystallography, the theory of quanta, and on into the mysterious circle of relativity the simple figures of elementary arithmetic weave their magic way.

Dabbling in physics was a popular outdoor recreation among primitive peoples. The earth they lived on had to be understood so that living would become more bearable. The waters that surrounded them, as well as what fell in the form of rain, had to be watched and studied so that they might be able to predict and control what was going on in the world around them. The temperature and humidity of the weather, the pressure, movement, and composition of air were things that had to be known if health and crops were to be regulated and improved.

Those early smatterers in the realm of science could never imagine what their dabbling would develop into. They could never anticipate the technique of alternating currents, the principles of thermodynamics, or the possibility of contacting in less than a tenth of a second any part of the earth by means of radiotelegraphy, radiotelephony, or television. Radar, cyclotrons, electromagnetism, radiotechnology, nuclear physics, and wave motion mechanics would be terms devoid of meaning to our curious ancestors delving into the mysteries of earth, water, air, and fire. Yet these highly technical studies are just as essential to our existence as the simple examination of seasons and climates were to the bipeds inhabiting this planet in the ages past.

When we leave the natural sciences, so susceptible to marvelous and modern development, and enter the realm that envelops peoples with their problems and attempted solutions, we soon observe a marked and baroque difference. There seems to be no nuclear sociology, or radar economics to assist the student in solving the social incongruities that are so plain and numerous.

Why the difference? Sociology hits the class element in a sore spot. It interferes with the mechanism of owning and ruling. The study of any subject that tends to lessen the grip of the propertied section on the national economy must be curtailed in the interest of the "public welfare."

In its early phases sociology had the same function to perform that it has today. It had to treat of human beings living in group formation and determined upon making their existence as pleasant and painless as possible. At first there was no reason to evade the subject, to play it down, or direct it into a murky alley with a blind end. The people concerned could afford to be honest and fearless in their treatment of the issues involved.

But the institution of property and class control changed the program. It was considered more profitable to continue to own and exploit than to enter into any discussion as to its effect on society. The meat of the subject became taboo, and the bones were thrown to the masses by charlatans trained for the purpose.

Even some of the writers on the left fall into the error of regarding sociology as a particularly complicated subject, and one not readily sensitive to experimental examination. It is no more complicated or confusing than the interested section of society want to make it. They have no desire to simplify it, and ample reasons for distorting and detouring it.

As for experimental material, there is always a copious supply if those in control had any inclination to use it. What better basis could be desired for studying the defects of production, exchange, and distribution than a good, healthy depression? Capitalism has provided us with a wealth of these in the past 50 years. If there was any incentive to use this material the cause of industrial crises, and the obvious solution, should now be as plain as freckles on a moppet's nose.

In getting the lowdown on the causes of crime, so that we can wipe its detestable countenance off the social blackboard, what better field could we work in than slums and broken homes? And here, too, we notice that capitalism has been disgustingly helpful in extending slum areas and multiplying the number of homes that poverty has shattered.

Wars are an excellent experimental laboratory for studying the sources of vicious propaganda, the effects of shell shock on the sympathetic nervous system, as well as the peculiar behavior of the grey matter within the medulla oblongata. For ferreting out the answers to these questions, wars stand out like a chinchilla stole on a ghetto maiden.

And who could deny the fact that capitalism has really been over generous in fomenting and materializing wars? In the present century it has supplied two beauties, as well as a dozen small size economy packages for the benefit of those unable to utilize the larger article.

Yes, a knowlege of science is needed by the working class in its global effort to expose and abolish capitalism. We must understand the soil we till in the natural and social fields so that we may be efficiently equipped with the means to shorten the struggle and expedite the introduction of a socialist society.

J. A. MACDONALD

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