

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

My task this evening is not to deliver a learned lecture, but simply to open this Fifth World Congress of the International Sociological Association. You may feel that in fact the Congress opened this afternoon with the Joint Session with the American Sociological Association, and in a sense you are right. The papers presented at that Session appear in the Transactions of the Congress. But we decided, in consultation with our American colleagues, to treat the Joint Session as a unique event and a thing in itself and to hold the formal opening of the Congress proper this evening.

We are meeting here in Washington on the invitation of the American Sociological Association and with the help of grants obtained through their good offices from a number of American sources. I wish, on behalf of the ISA, to thank these organizations most warmly for their generous help, and also the American Committee — or I should rather say the several American Committees — for all they have done to prepare for the Congress and for our entertainment while we are here. Among the many who have been concerned I will mention only three — Bob Angell, our former President, and Chairman of the American Organizing Committee, and Conrad Taeuber and Paul Myers of the Washington Committee, who, I know, have had the heaviest job to contend with. On the other hand, on behalf of all the participants of this Congress and also of the Executive Committee, I thank Pierre de Bie, General Secretary of the ISA, for his efficient work and the perfect organization of our scientific meetings. Thank you all very much.

Our presence here has, I think, a special significance. When the Association began its work in a small and modest way in 1949, there was a danger that it might be a predominantly European organization. It is true that its first President was an American, and several distinguished non-European sociologists took part in its affairs from the start. But its first four Congresses, from 1950 to

1959, were all held in Europe, where it was easy for Europeans to attend, but harder and more expensive for others. And it was also convenient that its office should be in Europe, in close touch with the headquarters of UNESCO, to whose inspired initiative it owed its existence and on whose financial support it depended, and still depends. But if it had remained European, or even predominantly so, it would have failed to fulfil the purpose for which it was founded.

A crucial point was to secure the full collaboration of sociologists in the United States, whose output exceeded in volume and variety that of any other region of comparable size. Not unnaturally there was, I think, a feeling among many American sociologists that their home market was so vast and rich that they had little need to engage in international trade, unless the commodities offered were of quite exceptional value. At the same time there were some European sociologists who adopted the fashion of speaking as if their kind of sociology and the American kind were in sharp antithesis to one another. This nonsense was nourished by a good deal of ignorance and misunderstanding on both sides of the Atlantic, and what was needed to dispel it was closer contacts, more exchange of ideas, and more co-operation in joint enterprises. I will not claim for the ISA the sole credit for breaking down the barriers because many individuals were working vigorously to the same end, but it has played its part. The contingent of American sociologists attending its Congresses has steadily grown, and now, with this meeting here, and the Joint Session that preceded it, the fusion is complete.

Meanwhile the Association was busy extending its coverage in other directions, and coping with very different problems. In Asia, Africa and the Middle East, instead of there being too many sociologists to be easily absorbed in an international organization, there were too few to carry the weight which the importance of their work and of the subjects to be studied in their countries merited. Whereas for crossing the Atlantic the need was to strip away the superficial differences of style and method in order to uncover the fundamental unity of the science as practised in two basically similar cultures, in order to build a bridge between Occident and Orient the reverse process was required. In this case it was necessary to penetrate through the superficial similarities, caused by a considerable importation of Western concepts, methods and literature, in order to identify and take stock of vital cultural differences. The sociologists of Occident and Orient could then, in collaboration with

each other, make the mutual adjustments needed to enable all to work together for the development of a truly universal science of society. And at this point I must remind you of the grave loss this cause of mutual understanding has suffered by the death of our Indian Vice-President Professor D. P. Mukerji. Although for some time past ill health had prevented him from taking an active part in our affairs, we were very conscious of his presence as one of our most distinguished and respected members, and it is sad to think that he is no longer with us.

There was a third bridge to be built, or barrier to be surmounted, in order to achieve full international status, and that is the one between the first nucleus of sociologists who met together at the 1950 Congress and their colleagues in the countries of Eastern Europe which in English we habitually refer to, inaccurately, perhaps, but unambiguously, as Communist. In this case the obstacles to full and free collaboration have at times seemed to be more serious, because they appeared to involve the very nature of our science. But, speaking frankly, I hope we shall not allow our proceedings to be too much dominated by the confrontation of Marxist and non-Marxist sociology. The bridges have been built and there is continuous traffic over them. When the subject under discussion is in fact sociology, it does not prove difficult to find the common ground on which a fruitful exchange of ideas and experience, and valuable co-operation in comparative research, can take place. But if we start by over-dramatising the situation, we shall end by talking, not sociology, but politics, and that will get us nowhere.

I have dwelt on this point in order to impress on you that the achievement of true international status is not merely a question of geographical representation. It is, of course, a fact of importance that the ISA now has members in 54 countries, and that more than 1000 sociologists attend its Congress. But more important still is the combination of hard work and good will that has made of these members a true cosmopolis. Judged by these standards the ISA can undoubtedly claim to be the only fully international organization of professional sociologists.

Turning now to the present state of sociology itself, I find rather less to be happy about. Its reputation in the world at large is not as high as it should be, and we all know it. And yet never before was there such lively interest in the problems that sociologists study, nor such urgent demand for answers to the questions that sociology poses. But sociologists cannot, or do not, produce enough of the

answers fast enough. It is not altogether their fault, for many of the questions are unanswerable without more knowledge and better tools than we as yet possess, and the questioners are impatient. And what they throw to us is often the intractable residue left after the economist, the political scientist and the psychologist have taken all the plums, that is to say the relatively easy questions. We are then asked to fill in the «social factors» and explain the «why» of it all after the others have dealt with the «how». And if we fail to satisfy them, they naturally turn to those writers who stand somewhere between cheap sociology and expensive journalism and who have no inhibitions about offering often highly sophisticated impressions as a substitute for the findings of scientific research. From them they can at least get what has been neatly described as the «low-down on the high spots».

It was because of the pressing need to communicate to the public, and to the politicians, an understanding of what sociologists have done, are doing, can do, and cannot do, that we and our American Member Association chose the theme which was debated in the Joint Session. I will not attempt to summarize the discussion, since most of you heard it. My concern is rather to consider how this Association can help sociologists to do more of what they ought to be doing and to do it on an international, or cross-cultural, footing. One answer, I am sure, is through its Research Sub-Committees. The point about these committees is that they are all devoted to the promotion of research on outstandingly important aspects of contemporary life — the kind of research that is most likely to provide the answers to the questions posed by the public and the politicians. In view of the importance of their work and the difficulty they have in meeting to discuss their affairs, it was decided to put one whole day of the Congress at their disposal during which they could organize group discussions on a theme or themes of their choice, while in addition time would be found for them to hold business meetings about their future activities. The response has been excellent, and we hope that the outcome will be programmes of future research some of which may attract the attention and win the support of Organizations or Foundations which have funds at their disposal for assisting enterprises of this kind. So I appeal to representatives of such bodies here present to take a look at these Research Committees; they will show you what they have done already and what they propose to do next, and you can judge them on the merits of their performance and their promise.

The main theme of the Congress, to which two Plenary Sessions

will be devoted, is «The Sociology of Development». This was an almost inevitable choice in view of the enormous interest in the subject shown by all the social sciences to-day. But we were also so bold as to choose as the third major subject the present state of sociological theory. I wonder whether perhaps we were rash to submit our science to so critical a scrutiny at this time. Professor König, in his general introduction, speaks of «the convergent features» visible in the four papers; and he is quite right. But the question I put to myself as I read them was — how far are they representative of the thinking, and the practice, of working sociologists to-day? I am sure there is a growing concentration of the minds of methodologists and philosophers on the problems which they have come to regard as crucial. But is there a central body of sociological theory in which sociologists in general find inspiration, guidance, and the instruments of scientific analysis to the same extent that economists find these things in economic theory? I think not. And I mention this point only as a warning against false complacency, and in order to add the hope that in the discussions and the papers for the groups (which I have not seen) there will be plenty of divergence of views, as well as convergence, and some lively disputation.

I noticed a similar homogeneity in the papers on the Sociology of Development. This, I think, is due to the nature of the subject and not to any restriction in the choice of authors. But it is noticeable that all the studies are of the historical and institutional kind, and that there are no examples of that type of sociological research (which for the general public is sociology) that is quantitative in character, employs sample surveys to collect its data, and delights in putting punched cards through machines. Here again I believe that it is a feature of present trends in sociology that there is a growing body of practitioners converging on the historical and institutional study of social structure and social change, treating this not as an exercise of the enlightened imagination but as a form of genuine empirical research. And I am glad of this. But once more I must express the hope that the discussions and the group papers will bring into the picture all the schools of thought which are relevant to the subject and take account of all the methods that they use.

For sociology is a vast discipline, and sociologists are a motley crowd. Of course we want our efforts to be, as Professor König says, «more directed towards systematic integration than towards controversy». But, if we are in too much of a hurry to iron out our differ-

ences, we may lose something that is precious. Let me illustrate this point by looking at two rather different situations, and our reactions to them. First, let us take the case of Professor X and Dr. Y. who are pursuing lines of research whose methods differ critically, but whose subject-matter is broadly speaking in the same field. They are suspicious of one another, because neither quite understands what the other is up to. But, in their more charitable moments, they see that they are colleagues, because they are both operating on the same kind of stuff and they both have the same kind of curiosity about it. So, although they are not close enough to team up and start a joint project — and nobody should try to make them — they will, if they are wise, keep in touch and exchange information for the benefit of both. Some day and somehow, perhaps, their work will become fused in a common result. This, I think, is the kind of situation George Homans had in mind when he compared the industrial sociologist with the social psychologist. In that article he enunciated a principle to which I heartily subscribe, that «the idea that there is only one way of going to work will be the ruin of our science». Hear ! hear ! This, then, is the case of two people, or sub-disciplines, moving along parallel lines. Of course parallel lines, if they behave as they should, will not meet in a point. But in sociological research they can both hit the same target. For the target is large; it is broader than the distance between the two lines. Life would be dull if everybody aimed all the time at the bull's eye. In the present state of our science we shall do well to scatter our fire a bit; we are more likely to hit something.

My second situation is one in which the interests of sociologists, and their methods, are so different that they seem to have little in common. They are not moving on parallel lines, but along different radii from the central core of sociology out to the periphery, perhaps in order to join hands with scholars in neighbouring disciplines having affinities with sociology — with the psychologists, the historians, the mathematicians, the lawyers or the biologists. And that is a very laudable aim. Where the divergence is as great as this, the most we can hope for is peaceful co-existence. I am not fond of this concept, because it is so unconstructive, but it may be a necessary station on the road to fruitful co-operation. There is no use in bringing two people together if they are acutely allergic to one another. It is better that they keep their distance and preserve the peace. Not that I disapprove of academic warfare. It can be most stimulating and enjoyable, provided it takes place between near neighbours and not between strangers or distant acquaintances.

In this respect the moral code of academic behaviour differs from that of ordinary social life. For when the antagonists are near neighbours, scientifically speaking, they understand what they are fighting about and both may emerge from the conflict wiser than they were before. Or at any rate their juniors may learn a lot from watching the battle of the champions. But if, shall we say, an earnest student of Durkheim's theory of the origin and nature of religion gets involved in a battle with somebody who is drawing careful maps of the catchment areas of all the churches in a great city, and each says that what the other is doing is futile, the conflict is bound to produce more heat than light and may, if one side wins, result in the impoverishment of our science. It is only when you are very sure of your faith that you can afford to denounce heretics, and it is only when you belong to a truly homogeneous community that you can think of issuing deportation orders against dubious-looking characters. Sociology has not got that far yet.

So, if we have a rough house on Wednesday morning, with the sociological holists and the methodological individualists flying at each other's throats, don't let's start chucking anybody out. It may be the duty of a scientific association to expose and denounce charlatans, but it should welcome honest disagreement, and the fruitful arguments it provokes, and be tolerant even of wide divergences of interest. For unity without diversity is tyranny; diversity without unity is chaos. And for sociologists the fundamental unity that solves this dilemma by preserving us from chaos without subjecting us to tyranny is the unity of our subject matter, the unity of mankind. If we ceased to believe in that, our science would dissolve into thin air.