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COVER

The sea as a builder constructed these limestone ridges in the Great Bahama Bank. Over countless years the precipitation of chemicals in the water and the drifting down of the shells and skeletons of minute lime-bearing marine organisms created deposits which solidified into sedimentary rock. The ridges, shown here at high tide, are covered with sand and mud and creased with ripple marks formed by currents. The channels across the banks are 10 to 15 feet deep. See page 560. [Fritz Goro—Life ©, Time Inc.]
Government Support for Social Science

A number of congressmen have become interested in developing better policies to govern relations of the Federal Government to the social sciences. A White House conference has been proposed, as has an Office of Social Sciences parallel to the Office of Science and Technology. A National Social Science Foundation, similar in organization and purpose to the National Science Foundation, has been recommended and was one of the topics discussed at recent hearings held by the Senate Subcommittee on Government Research (Science, 8 July 1966). Another bill before Congress proposes to assign to the National Science Foundation greater responsibility for increasing research competency in the social sciences.

The current interest arose in part from the Camelot affair and the resulting criticism of the Defense Department as an inappropriate agency to support social science research, particularly research carried out abroad. Some of the critics seem to forget that the military services have filled a gap that other agencies should have filled but did not. How lopsided the situation has become is shown by 1966 expenditures. Of $25 million spent by the U.S. Government on social science research abroad, the Department of Defense provided $12.5 million, while the Department of State provided only $200,000.

Policies concerning support and administration must be based on an understanding of why the Federal Government spends public funds on research in the social sciences. The reasons are exactly the same as those for supporting research in other areas: because it is good public policy to increase national research competency; and because the results are expected to help solve problems of broad public concern.

As for the first reason—fostering increased research competence—the National Science Foundation seems likely to be more effective than a separate agency, for the trend in science is toward a narrowing rather than a widening of the gaps separating different fields.

As for the second reason—usefulness—the historian Henry Steele Commager has drawn a parallel between the problems that troubled society during the industrial revolution and those that trouble society today. Considering the use and abuse of technology during the industrial revolution, it was humanistic values, he said, "and the practical efficiency of the social sciences which combined to provide partial solutions of these problems," and then, turning to the problems that now beset the world and the current uses and abuses of science and technology, added: "... the social sciences are called upon to perform once again, on a world scale, and for ultimate stakes, the tasks which they performed so well in the [19th century]."

The responsibility of the several agencies concerned with these problems is analogous to that of other agencies that find research useful in accomplishing their missions. The Department of Housing and Urban Affairs, the Agency for International Development, the Department of State, and other agencies that deal with major social problems should be marching up Capitol Hill asking for larger funds for research to enable them to do their jobs more effectively in the future.

Support and active involvement of the National Science Foundation and the relevant mission-oriented agencies will serve better than would a separate agency to keep the social sciences in close touch with other sciences and with the practical problems they can help solve. compartmentalization in a separate agency is neither the best means of strengthening the social sciences nor of serving the Federal Government.

—DAEL WOLFLE