

Book Review.

On the Theory of Social Change.

This is a bewildering book. Its very range tends to confuse the reader as he is suddenly confronted with changes of emphasis from economics to sociology to anthropology to psychology to history. Therefore review is extremely difficult. This review is written from the viewpoint of an economist; workers in other fields may have very different comments to make.

The author, a professor of economics, maintains in the preface that "my (the author's) formal training in economics could contribute little but a conception of the requirements for the analysis of theoretical models or systems and a sense of the inadequacy of economic theory to answer the question at hand". The "question at hand" is an explanation of how a traditional society moves to one where economic growth is underway.

Economic theories are thus discarded and to explain the transition to economic growth it is contended that personality changes are necessary before a society can alter. This occurs because a traditional society (in equilibrium) is disrupted by forces within or outside of it. Adaptation to the new situation causes profound changes in personality development and over many generations the personality type of the society is altered, as is the society, until one emerges which is prepared to accept the social, political and economic conditions necessary for economic growth.

In order to explain the development of these personalities, psychology is used. It is maintained that "the student of society or culture who does not have thorough professional competence in the psychology of personality is obsolescent". Within twenty lines this is followed by "it seems likely that the major flow of benefit will be from psychology to the other two disciplines"; that is sociology and anthropology. Although there is always the danger of taking quotations out of context, these seem to be overstatements of the actual situation.

The author calls for greater integration between the sciences which normally accept social change as their field and asks for more use of the methodology of the physical sciences, for example the employment of systems analysis. He suggests that "the understanding of casual relationships among the phenomena in the social sciences has reached a point at which there is no longer any excuse for not employing the power of systems analysis". Thus the reader is prepared to follow the construction of a dynamic model of social change. In the preface, the reader was also conditioned for a "general theory of social change". Unfortunately these claims are not fulfilled. Furthermore, those not conversant with the multitude of theories and techniques of explaining social change are given the impression that the use of personality to understand social change is a new field. Psychoethnics is a well used tool in the study of societies.

The theory is built up in the first three parts of the book and Part IV is used to test the thesis. The transition to economic growth in England and Japan is used for verification from an historical approach while case studies of Columbia and two towns in Indonesia are used for transition stage or the present.

Part V examines the effects of colonialism on social change. It is argued that colonialism has tended to retard the transition to economic growth. Case studies of Burma and the Sioux on reservations in the U.S.A. are used to bring out the argument.

The book covers such a broad canvas that summary is extremely difficult. However, it can be recommended to those who like contentious books. The author's argument that economics has little to offer to the explanation of social change is overstated. Economists who have worked in underdeveloped countries soon realize

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that the economics of the industrialized countries may not fit perfectly the situation in these countries, but the basic principle that economics is relevant where choice is concerned still remains. Choice of the type of economy to meet economic growth is an economic problem for the developing country.

The book is considerably weakened by the absence of any reference to the African countries. It can be maintained that to test his theory the author was forced to rely on countries with adequate written records but on this score the West African countries should not have been

excluded. The constant reference to elites in the traditional societies does not fit in with the situations in many African countries nor many of those in the Pacific.

Despite the author's claim, a general theory of social change has not been presented. He argues that "if this analysis is correct, it suggests a minimum lag of say thirty years between the time when independence is assured and the time when economic growth becomes vigorous, and a typical lag somewhat longer". What this means is uncertain but the thesis fails to permit such prediction.

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