Review
Reviewed Work(s): The Sociological Imagination by C. Wright Mills
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REVIEWS

handled: increased leisure by technical efficiency, social lag of institutions behind material changes, increased need for co-operative action, and for long-distance planning, increased dependence on social control, and remoteness of social change, need for specialization, differentiation in providing for individuals, weakness of traditional controls over human conduct, increased strains and tensions, task of world leadership, and the challenge of atomic energy and automation. The economic alternatives available for the national future are boldly faced. So are the changes that have overtaken the family (though the remedies set out are pathetic). Nothing could be more objective than the description (in chapter 11) of the conflicting points of view on the Negro question and in interdenominational problems.

In profounder matters of values and ultimates, the treatment shows more pragmatic description than philosophical analysis. The authors make clear that their own position amid the welter of theories (admirably tabulated on pages 446–7) is more that of the pragmatic experimentalists of the Dewey–Bode–Childs–Counts–Kilpatrick persuasion than of any others. But having faced American educators with so many cogently demonstrated sociological problems they are at great pains to show how the schools can effectively hope to counter them, from family and delinquency to national outlook. This is of course where so many books on contemporary education become simpliste, and so many of their critics nettled at naive short-circuitings of the time it will all take. But The School in American Society is refreshingly free from the ‘if only’ evasion.

A. C. F. BEALES


Professor C. Wright Mills is the sociologist of the New Left; he is preoccupied less with the classical Marxist problems of property and exploitation, social class and social change, than with the neo-Marxist problems of the estrangement of man from an oppressive society, and with the search for a new humanism based on a sophisticated reformulation of the idea of community. This theme of alienation, buried in Marx’s earlier writings and all but stifled under the weight of his later analysis of its origins in the nature of capitalist exploitation, is enjoying a dramatic new vogue among post-Stalinist left-wing intellectuals everywhere.1 But it had already figured prominently in German sociology in its so-called ‘tragic vein’—in the writings of Simmel, Weber, Mannheim—and it is from this source that Professor Mills takes it up. Giving it a fresh formulation in characteristically vivid turns of phrase, he uses it in this book as leitmotif of a critique of contemporary American sociology, and as lodestone of a declaration of professional and political faith. Thus he defines ‘democratic society’ as one ‘in which genuine publics rather than masses prevail’ (shades of Mr. Raymond Williams), and elaborates the point (p. 187) ‘whether or not they are aware of them, men in a mass society are gripped by personal troubles which they are not able to turn into social issues. They do not understand the interplay of these personal troubles of their milieux with problems of social structure. The knowledgeable man in a genuine public, on the other hand, is able to do just that. . . . Men in masses have troubles, but they are not usually aware of their true meaning and source; men in publics confront issues, and they usually come to be aware of their public terms. It is the political task of the social scientist—as of any liberal educator—continually to translate personal troubles into public issues, and public issues into the terms of their human meaning for a variety of individuals. It is his task to

1 See the interesting discussion by Professor Daniel Bell in Societ Survey, April–June 1960.
display in his work—and as an educator, in his life as well—this kind of sociological imagination.'

Of course, a programmatic statement like this has a limited value outside the charmed circle of professional colleagues. Readers must turn to Professor Mills' *White Collar* (1951) for an example of 'alienation' treated concretely, and to *Character and Social Structure* (1954) for a (somewhat laboured) theoretical treatment of the methodology of a liberating sociology.

Most people are likely to read *The Sociological Imagination* for its two-fronted attack on the 'abstracted empiricism' and 'grand theory' of twentieth-century American sociology. Here Professor Mills has to some extent been forestalled—by Professor Sorokin's *Fads and Foibles*,1 and by Ernest Gellner's exceedingly witty review in *Inquiry*.2 But he develops his own analysis of the two prevailing types of 'practicality' in the social sciences—what he terms 'the liberal practicality of the moral scatter', and the 'illiberal practicality of the bureaucratic ethos'. He is referring, on the one hand, to the 'social science movement' by which, in its early years, sociology in America was directly linked with reform movements and 'betterment activities'; and, on the other, to the rise in recent decades of a tendency to serve the social administration of the welfare state. He shows that both types of 'practicality' result in a scientifically disastrous tendency to treat fragmentary problems in opportunist fashion; but he is at his most effective in analysing their different consequences for the personal and professional ethics and the characteristic careers of academic social scientists in America. In the context of this analysis, Professor Mills manages to make astute observations on methodological issues in the social sciences—and even to give a refreshing gloss to that old chestnut 'the uses of history'.

There is a curious appendix, presumably for students ('But, you may ask, how do ideas come?'), on his personal methods of work. It contains the disarming and heartwarming statement: 'Now I do not like to do empirical work if I can possibly avoid it. If one has no staff it is a great deal of trouble; if one employs a staff, then the staff is often even more trouble.'

JEAN FLOUD


This is a lively, interesting book, an *apologia* based on the evidence of its first four years for the earliest co-educational comprehensive school erected by the L.C.C. The record of achievement is impressive by any standards, with its source in the apostolic zeal of the headmistress and the members of the staff which expresses itself in many ways. One is the willingness to give up time without stint or measure. Careers conventions are held for third formers and 'The evening ends late, never as yet before midnight.' Even then it is difficult to see how 280 children and their parents can have had an opportunity of speaking to the experts on careers assembled in the Hall. In addition to the meetings of clubs and societies at 4.15 there is a recreational evening for each house each week from 5.30–7.30. To make all this possible the loyalty of the staff must be of a high order. Another outstanding quality of the school is the thoroughness of the organization, not only in the keeping of record cards and the compiling of questionnaires but in the series of interviews with members of staff and the issue of precise and simple instructions about dress and behaviour when parties leave the school for any
