

[B-30-1966]

THE SOCIAL SCIENCES IN AN AGE OF SOCIAL REVOLUTION

II
XIV

During Detlev Bronk's tenure as Chairman of the National Science Board, he asked me to chair a committee of the Board to resolve what was then a troublesome question: whether or not the National Science Foundation should support the Social Sciences. Most of the Board members took a dim view of this, as they were mostly physical or natural scientists who did not want to see the then fairly meager educational and research funds diverted from their fields.

Det gave me a committee that was so evenly split that I had to decide the outcome with my vote. The committee report, advising support for the Social Sciences, came to the Board during a late Summer meeting when I had to be in Africa. It also came at the end of a long and difficult day when the Board was feeling testy. They simply rejected the report, and that would have been that, except that Det Bronk said, "You can't reject a report when the Chairman isn't here to defend it, so we'll vote again in October." When I returned, Det called and warned me of almost certain defeat for the report in the next meeting.

I came expecting the worst, made a strong presentation of the committee's report, stressing the growing importance of the Social Sciences to the nation. To my surprise, they approved the report, including the establishment of a Social Science Office which would soon become a Division of the Foundation, now allocating about twenty million dollars a year to Social Science.

I mention all of this because it may appear that I am unusually difficult with the social scientists in the essay that follows. I wrote as a friend, and friends should be honest with each other. President Hatcher of the University of Michigan asked if I would speak on the occasion of the dedication of their fine new Institute for Social Research about ten years ago. I remarked that they might not like what I thought I should say. "Don't worry about that," he remarked. "You know that universities are made up of people who think otherwise so why shouldn't you be free to challenge them?" So I did. As the last essay tried to find the value dimension for physical and natural scientists and engineers, here I try to do the same for social scientists.

Incidentally, to demonstrate how times change and the wheel turns, the new Director of the National Science Foundation is, for the first time, a social scientist, Dr. Richard C. Atkinson.