ANTHROPOLOGY

Planned Cultural Transition

Computers could help determine how people can be helped into civilizations of the future, Dr. Margaret Mead told the Geneva Conference.

➤ THE PLANNED CHANGE of cultural patterns among large groups of people can become an exact science if modern technological tools such as computers are used, Dr. Margaret Mead, ethnologist of the American Museum of Natural History, New York, reported to the U.N. science conference at Geneva.

New analytical devices in producing purposive, controlled cultural change can be analyzed in a large number of variables. These analyses would include both worldwide experience in respect to each recurrent variable, such as urbanization or literacy, and the unique historical features of each specific situation.

Dr. Mead suggested that with a better understanding of change in industrialized countries, it would be possible to plan for quite a different future world. Instead of making the future static, as we do when we plan ways for the industrializing countries to enter the present world, it would become possible to deal with their problems in terms of a changing scene.

This methodology would be in contrast to the present thinking behind the engineering of change. This has two major premises:

1. A group of people sharing a common territory has the right to seek self-determination.

2. Any such unit may rightfully demand help in attaining the benefits of the modern world.

These premises, which have been developed only during the past 20 years, are based on a number of assumptions that must be scrutinized, Dr. Mead asserts. Such assumptions include those that size, past history, and racial composition are irrelevant to the ability of a group to attain full nationhood; that the state of world affluence is such as to make the help extended by the more industrialized nations to those less industrialized feasible and ultimately profitable for both; that the economies of the world are moving toward a world market; that all peoples desire to share in a contemporary version of industrial society; that the future of industrialized societies and industrializing societies alike is seen as similar to the present pattern; and that governmental agencies, national and international, are both the major units and instruments of change.

Dr. Mead listed a number of specific problems with which anthropologists, using new analytical methods and tools, might deal. Among these is the order in which groups or clusters of change should occur in relation to each other. It is no longer possible to assume that there is any single optimum sequence of change in such events as migration, the importation of new agricultural machinery, the new use of a written language, and so on, Dr. Mead stated.

Therefore, the planners must now plot out in advance the best order in which the clusters of change should take place, in the light of the specific situation. Another area is the over-all planning for transformational sequences in such broad areas as the change from dependence on an oral tradition to literacy. The planner must recognize that the sequences of transformation may move in the direction of either greater or less complexity, and that if several groups are involved the changes necessary for success may be multi-directional. With full codification, it is possible to work out a long transformation sequence.

A third problem to be dealt with is the changing scale of participation, in which the best use must be made of scarce manpower at the various levels of participation. The new tools must be used to bring a certain proportion of the members of every industrializing country to a level of political sophistication and social skill which will insure full participation in political and economic interchange.

Making the best use of past experience with change is still another problem listed by Dr. Mead. Analysis must be made of the earlier effects of change, especially in cases in which hope was followed by failure, which may constitute a formidable obstacle to effective change and compromise expectations about successful change in new situations.

It would be important, in assaying potential resistance, to identify the history of a people's contacts with new cultural forms and the ways in which these have led to advances or retreats and have widened or narrowed their perspective.

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TECHNOLOGY

GSA Opens New Communications System

➤ A FAST, new communications network to serve civilian agencies of the Federal Government throughout the country was unveiled by the General Services Administration.

The first phase of the Federal Telecommuncations System (FTS) went into operation Feb. 15, interconnecting Federal civilian activities in 43 cities on a 17,000-mile network, Bernard L. Boutin, administrator of General Services, said.

"Initially," said Mr. Boutin, "FTS will serve 250,000 telephones at civilian agency locations in the 43 cities. When expanded to full scale in 1965, it will interconnect some 355 cities and handle nearly all civilian agency telephone requirements throughout the country."

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