

INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR

SOCIAL SCIENCE AS AN INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

Session II

Social Science Developments in Latin America

Silvert, as chairman, opened the session by urging that two bases of disagreement that emerged in the opening session last evening be perceived as differences in degree:

First: social science is never completely autonomous, nor is it ever completely "hooked in," or integrated with other institutions. Rather, it is a matter of degree.

Second: social science is never completely national or international, but is somewhere along a continuum between the two.

In his presentation, Lagos referred to the three periods of Latin American social science mentioned in his preliminary memorandum: traditional, scientific, and "unsatisfaction." In the scientific period Latin American social science was a reflection of social science in North America and Europe, with a "good social scientist" defined as one who could contribute in the context of foreign disciplines. Social science departments in Latin American universities became identified with specific departments in foreign universities. But there was no Latin American social science and social scientists trained abroad often had difficulty in knowing what to teach when they returned home. For example, Keynes provides a specific theory for a limited set of countries. Or, it could be said that he provides a general theory for a specific kind of case. But Keynes (and also the ECLA model) does not work in Latin America.

In the present period of "unsatisfaction" Latin American social scientists are concerned with their social usefulness and consider it their role, as social scientists, to work for change in their societies. Concerning the independence of social science, social scientists are a product of their environment and all theory begins in ideology, even though individual social scientists may not be conscious of it.

In the present context, dialogue between social scientists in Chile is exceedingly difficult because social scientists find it impossible to take a neutral position in a society undergoing fundamental change. As social scientists become involved in giving "ammunition" to contending factions, it is difficult for them to analyze their society in scholarly terms.

In concluding his presentation, Lagos emphasized five points:

1. Social science in Latin America today has a strong ideological commitment.
2. European and North American influence on social science in Latin America has declined.
3. Social science in Latin America is struggling to explain what is going on in Latin America (a task in which North American and European social science failed) but the effort at this point is not very "scientific."
4. The institutional situation of social science in Latin America is very unstable, making continuous production very difficult.
5. Dialogue across contending groups of social scientists in Latin America is very difficult, making it easier sometimes to have dialogue with North Americans because they understand and accept each other's differences. (Later Germani expressed a similar sentiment, declaring that the "crisis of social science" in Latin America is that different schools and sects refuse to understand each other because of the ideological climate. These conflicting schools extend beyond national boundaries.)

Stavenhagen agreed 99% with Lagos, asserting that this is evidence for the existence of "social science as an international system" throughout Latin America. He expressed concern that in the present period of dissatisfaction with social science imported from abroad the "baby may be thrown out with the bath." It is important that social scientists discover ways to rescue the baby from the bath water. (Later Germani expressed similar sentiments when he observed that present uncritical acceptance of Marxism and Maoism is similar to the earlier uncritical acceptance of U.S. and European social science. He sees academic quality as an important problem. More important than ideology that guides research is the quality of work within different ideological contexts.)

Stavenhagen perceived a new kind of dependency at work in Latin America--the new Marxism, partly Mao and partly French (not from the USSR). You find little theory that is truly national. Is dependency theory itself truly Latin American or borrowed from Europe?

Stavenhagen underlined the requirement that a Latin American social scientist in the present context has a "commitment." The model of the social scientist as a "technocrat" is rejected and a social scientist must be an "intellectual" in the "old tradition." "We are first citizens and then social scientists. We need our social science in order to be effective citizens." He agreed

with Lagos that there is a "regional community of scholars" in Latin America that is functioning. (Later Germani also reinforced the growing regional consciousness of Latin American social scientists, saying that "only social scientists speak about Latin America with a feeling of belonging--not the politicians.")

Stavenhagen wondered whether upheaval and crisis do not provide the best environment for good theoretical work and suggested that a quiet environment stimulates little theoretical work of quality.

Silvert observed that the generalizations made about Latin American social science by Lagos and Stavenhagen seemed more applicable to economics, sociology and certain aspects of political science than to other disciplines such as history and geographically derived disciplines.

Brucan observed that the dependency of social science in Latin America on Europe and the United States mirrored similar dependency in other parts of the world. Before a true international social science can emerge, social science must be decolonized so that "small nations" are given a chance to produce theories and models that arise out of their own specific conditions. Otherwise, international social science would be dominated by the US and the USSR. (Later Stavenhagen agreed that social science must pass through a stage of nationalism before it can reach internationalism. Perhaps in Latin America there will first be a "regional nationalism.")

Because of the tendency for Latin American social scientists to feel inferior and assume that nobody pays attention to them, Germani felt it important to point out that the intellectual influence of Latin American social scientists on the rest of the world has recently been "very important." He specifically pointed to influence on Italy, with somewhat less influence on France.

Lengyel disputed the way in which Lagos interpreted limitations in the application of Keynes to Latin America. As long as the modern sector of Latin American countries were perceived as a functional extension of the British center, Keynes was as relevant in Latin America as it was in understanding a British economic system that included the English center and its extension in Wales. But, the reality changed. Keynes model was strictly intended to apply in the management of a capitalist central economy and nothing else!

Ghai disagreed, asserting that "imported systems" were not relevant from the beginning and that the Keynesian system didn't explain the situation in less developed countries, even in colonial days.

David asked that three questions be put on the agenda for later discussion:

1. What is a national discipline?
2. What is the difference between an independent social science and the independence of individual social scientists?
3. What is meant by dialogue? Is it useful? Are monologues with equal time the same thing as dialogue?

David wondered whether there is a difference between the basic intellectual approaches of social scientists and social science practice. We should be able to exclude from our consideration a lot that social scientists do because it is not "social scientific."

Tanaka wondered whether his Latin American colleagues were interested in newly emerging disciplines such as policy science and management science, since he believes that there is knowledge in these new disciplines that is helpful to less-developed countries.

Lagos pointed out the difference between the social scientist who defines his role as one of explaining a society as it is and the social scientist who is committed to the development of a new society. Many Latin American social scientists are committed to the development of a new society. Therefore, theories for explaining the development of the developed nations are rejected because they tend to assume that Latin America must develop in the same way as the present developed countries. From this point of view there is a "national discipline" in Latin American countries.