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Compte-rendu des discussions

Mr Hugues Lamarche

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CAN CHANGE BE UNDERSTOOD BY MEANS OF LOCAL STUDIES ?

In presenting the subject M. Mendras asserts that change can be understood only by means of interdepartemental studies and these require that the study be carried out on a local level, where varying points of view are available. Moreover only the local study can take into account the different aspects of social reality.

For M. Leynaud the local study is of interest

- if it enables one to know the immediate past of local societies
- if it presents clearly and precisely the relationship between the different groups and the dynamics of local societies
- if it is presented in our language (style, lay-out, presentation of data) M. Leynaud wonders if, in fact, the collaboration with a sociologist should not be direct and not by means of a report.

M. de Savigny first outlines the Civil Servant's reaction to the sociologist's studies :

- irritation at their reminding him that he makes mistakes and only mistakes
- he is intimidated by sociologists who offer to make such studies. He is overwhelmed by studies that he has not usually time to read because he is a man of action and that accumulate in cupboards. According to M. de Savigny, the Civil Servant has never tried to understand change ; he experiences it and causes it every day. He has not time to understand society. It would be interesting to know why the sociologist asks himself these questions.

In M. de Savigny's opinion, the local study is of no interest to the Civil Servant who has to take decisions on a national level. It would be of use only if he were interested in policy on a local level. With decentralisation it might be useful on a regional level.

The local study is particularly interesting in that it brings people to an awareness of their needs - but since this is the leaven of revolution, it is probable that local policy-makers will reject it.

A lively discussion ensues between the representative of the authorities and research-workers concerning the possibilities of collaboration. Briefly, some research-workers are indignant at the negative attitude of the Civil Servants. Basing their arguments on their own experience they demonstrate that positive collaboration can exist when definite problems are considered. But the authorities must state clearly what they want. However, other research-workers feel that no collaboration is possible, for the hypotheses and demands of the two parties are too different. The Civil Servant is afraid of the sociologist because he expresses local desires and demands - to some extent he is the spokesman of the masses. That is why the sociologist wants local studies and why the authorities reject them.

The research-workers wonder if the lack of interest shown by the authorities is not a hypocritical attitude. In fact the authorities are interested in the way change operates, so when they say that are not interested in understanding change are they not in reality hiding the fact that they do not want to know what is happening.

For the research-workers studies should not be carried out on the level of the policy-maker, for in France policy-making is carried out in Paris.

As far as language is concerned the research-workers feel it is up to the Civil Servants to make the effort to understand and use the texts prepared by the research-workers.

Civil Servants and research-workers seem to agree on one point. The role of the sociologist should not be limited to a precise local study. He should also see how decisions are made and analyse their consequences. With this definition of the sociologist's role collaboration should be possible.