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Research Ripples

Government Farms Out More Studies; Some Reports Draw Criticism

Outside Work Can Be Better, Cheaper, Officials Claim; Social Sciences Accented

\$95,000 for the Self-Evident

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WASHINGTON — The Labor Department soon will hand out a \$45,000 contract, probably to a university, for a "thorough study of public knowledge and attitudes toward unemployment insurance." An underlying purpose, quite frankly stated, is to develop ammunition to help rebut criticism of the program, including articles published in the Reader's Digest.

At Pentagon request, the private Bureau of Social Science Research here is embarked on a study project to determine how social science research (such as that done by the bureau) is being used in making Pentagon and foreign-policy decisions.

In the first instance, it will be a year before results come in, and even then follow-up research may be proposed. But in the second case, the research into research, tentative conclusions are being reached: The reports themselves often make little direct impression on defense and foreign policy-makers, sometimes being dismissed as "garbage." The researchers console themselves with the knowledge that the ideas broached do "percolate around" in official minds, with the help of news stories, and may pop up in all sorts of situations.

"More Time to Think"

These are ripples in a current Washington tide: "A trend toward farming out more of the Government's research study work to outsiders—notably to universities and nonprofit research outfits." Uncle Sam's multi-billion-dollar research needs have grown so great, it's said, that Federal personnel just can't handle so much of the load; moreover, an objective outside analysis may often be needed for evaluation of Government programs and determination of national needs. Farmed-out research, officials say, can be faster, cheaper and better. Adds Labor Secretary Wirtz: "We are trying to get the ideas of those who have more time to think than we have."

A companion trend is also accelerating: An accent on research in the social and related sciences, from economics and sociology to psychology and anthropology, although the physical sciences still take most of the Government's research dollars. This new emphasis on social science research grows largely out of the proliferation of Great Society programs — civil rights or antipoverity or job retraining or education aid — that rely on research to lay their foundations or check on progress. "Demand for social research has grown out of programs designed to meet social needs," notes Herbert Striner, director of the W. E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research.

This demand is naturally leading the Government into far foggier research fields than the physical sciences. The social science projects undertaken may be more open to challenge, the results much less tangible. So far, officials do credit Government-sponsored private studies with having helped in formulating the program to get dropouts back in school and the U.S. drive for international monetary reform. But end-results of even these efforts are still uncertain.

Missiles to Window Glass

Outside research in some other fields has borne fruit of undoubted usefulness. A sampling: Highly accurate guidance for intercontinental missiles; more realistic Army rifle training, featuring firing at pop-up targets; a simple device for determining the thickness, and thus the wind resistance, of window glass in a high-rise apartment.

For better or worse, the Government's total commitment of funds for research of all kinds has been mounting fast. Since five years ago, it has roughly doubled, to an expected \$5.6 billion for the fiscal year begun last July. But in the same time the portion allotted to social and psychological sciences has more than tripled, to an expected \$298 million this year.

And of this year's \$5.6 billion research total, over 70% is being done "out-house," as Government slang puts it. As recently as two years ago, when the total was \$4.5 billion, the outside share was little more than 60%.

More or less in step with the rise in outside social science research, questions are arising about the need for some of the studies, the usefulness of the findings, and the adequacy of Government control and coordination.

One barb was hurled after the Commerce Department hired the accounting firm of Ernst and Ernst for \$95,000 to study why shipping rates are lower on goods imported to the U.S. than on exports. Among the explanations produced: It's "more expensive to load and stow cargo than to unload it." In response to this disclosure at a House appropriations hearing, irascible Congressman John Rooney of Brooklyn snapped: "And did you have to spend \$95,000 to find that out? Any hatch boss on the Brooklyn waterfront

could have given you the answer to that one without cost."

Quite unsurprising, also, was a key conclusion of a recent research report, "Management Decisions to Automate," produced for the Labor Department by Stanford Research Institute. The major motive for automation it was found, appears to be cost reduction particularly reduction that results from increased productivity.

There may be dangers, too, that some research results won't come in till after their potential usefulness has evaporated. Just now California's San José State College is studying unemployment and re-employment experiences of scientists and engineers laid off by aerospace and electrical companies in the San Francisco Bay area during 1964. But completion of the study is not expected till the fall of 1966 and so may come too late to provide lessons helpful for other laid-off scientists and engineers. Already increased defense and space work has given almost all of them jobs again, and further increases are in sight. An earlier study of unemployment in Erie, Pa., met such a fate: the problem had largely vanished before a report was made.

Some outside chores the Government itself might seem better fitted to undertake. The poverty-fighting Office of Economic Opportunity has paid Stanford Research Institute \$87,000 to compile an index of over 170 Federal programs which help the poor; the project took four months. Not long ago, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration gave Michigan State University a \$40,000 contract to prepare recommendations for NASA-sponsored research at colleges and universities, including Michigan State.

Just because of their close ties with the Government, some of the researchers heavily dependent on Uncle Sam may be less than completely objective. A Federal Aviation Agency official who supervises part of the FAA's research questions the value of studies done by "captive" nonprofit outfits like the RAND Corp. and the Institute for Defense Analyses, which work mostly or entirely for Uncle Sam. "When we use a captive, I don't know who is the captive—the company or the Government," he says. Moreover, "the type of work normally asked of nonprofit companies requires the companies to know as much about the Government as the Government itself. This implies a wasteful and costly duplication of effort."

Ill-Fated Project Camelot

Lack of intra-Government coordination was damagingly demonstrated last summer with the sudden exposure of the Army-backed Project Camelot. This was an ambitious \$8 million study of political motivations abroad and their relation to popular unrest that leads to guerrilla-style insurgency. Chile was to be an interesting example of a place where the problem did not exist. But news of the project leaked out there, arousing Chilean wrath and U.S. embarrassment: Ambassador Ralph Dun-

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