

SOCIOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE UTILIZATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES¹

OTIS DURANT DUNCAN, Oklahoma A. and M. College, Stillwater

ABSTRACT

The utilization of natural resources depends upon the population situation. People define, collect, process, and use natural resources, and this, in turn, is a function of the socioeconomic pattern of society. With a rapid growth in the beginning, Oklahoma's population has begun to decline, more especially since the entry of the United States into World War II. The fact that the limits of population growth had been exceeded under the existing economic organization was noticed first when a heavy exodus of unemployed workers was found to be taking place after the middle of the decade from 1930 to 1940. This movement was a symptom of deeply rooted economic breakdowns which had been a long time in reaching their culmination. More recently, the induction of persons into the armed forces and the shifts of workers to war munitions factories in other states accelerated the loss of civilian population.

Oklahoma has lagged in the development of manufacturing industries to absorb labor released from farms by the mechanization of agricultural production, by restrictive agricultural policies, and by changes in the organization of farming enterprises. To regain its lost population, Oklahoma is faced with the necessity of finding new economic opportunities for its people. Being unfavorably situated in respect to major markets and transportation facilities and especially discriminatory freight rates, Oklahoma has not been able to attract large-scale heavy industries. The state must find some method of obviating this obstruction to its development. The essence of the problem of checking the emigration of population is the recovering of economic opportunities for workers seeking employment.

Agriculture, once the source of employment of 70.0 per cent of the gainful workers in Oklahoma, now employs probably less than 20 per cent. Manufacturing, extractive industries, domestic and personal services, and professional employment have failed to take up the relative losses sustained by agriculture and to keep abreast with the gains in employment made by trade and transportation. Apparently this is the weakest link in Oklahoma's economic organization, and it is calculated to have a significant bearing upon the utilization of natural resources.

With an increasingly homogeneous population, rising levels of education, general advancement in scientific knowledge in the liberal and fine arts, and with growing intellectual independence, Oklahoma needs but to coordinate and rightly direct its talents in order to provide ample economic opportunities for any population it may expect to have within the visible future.

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