

SAUER, C. O.
This must never be shown
to anyone or go to the general file. I have
answered by phone.
JHW

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

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DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY
BERKELEY 4, CALIFORNIA

Dear Joe:

Your inquiry and enclosure makes me sadly aware again that I'm a survivor of another age. The case is ably presented, but to me it seems more of the Great American Delusion, a frenzy for change that I do not understand nor share. Were I really a social philosopher I'd try to plumb this compulsion in our civilization to innovation, to recast other ways in our own image. What is it that makes us unhappy if other people think and live differently? Are we unsure of our own values and find a way of quieting our consciences by remaking others? The thing has some hidden roots in religion, I suspect, that makes us have this constant urge to proselyte. It confuses me wholly and I don't think that it follows that what we do is simply the result of the fact that we have become the leaders of the industrial revolution. The organization of knowledge and inquiry toward 'practical' and 'meliorative' ends is sweeping all before it in this country and in Russia. I have said before regretfully that my life has been spent in a time of crusades and those who aren't crusaders are looking for a hole where they may stand a chance of not being overrun. We survive by keeping quiet and uncommunicative while the hosts with banners pass by. We are the Albigenists of our time and know and fear the penalties awaiting the great heresy.

I'm sorry to see that the RF is taking some more steps down the road of action programs. To do something about India seems to be first in the minds of the foundations and of Washington (read attached clipping, please). Mexico a sort of practise ground where the campaign against the enemy may be tried out? You know most of my objections to this sort of thing: The individual does what foundation or govt. wants him to do, not what he wants to do. The fdtns are planners and organizers of inquiry and hence arbiters not only of who works but what shall be worked at. The tendency is for them to become suppressors of free scholarship and of scholars. They go for integration, organization, directives. They select the persons who will do what is expected of them and get the results wished for. As in govt. the person who dissents from objectives or procedures is 'non-cooperative' and not usable.

This particular program started off with the relatively innocent objective of breeding better food plants. Next comes the step of redesigning the agricultural economy, and that involves putting the New Agriculture into operation and that means joining up with officials in making and executing official policy. This is no longer innocent; this is intervention of an alien group in the government of a country. I don't see much difference between this sort of thing and the matter that got the Jesuits thrown out of country after country in the 18th century.

I still have hope of the strength of resistance of the Mexicans. They're a tough lot to organize and keep lined up. Every force of governmental pressure was used for twenty years to put over the collectivist land reform and mostly the little fellows after they got their land went their own accustomed ways. The ejido really stuck only where they could be made dependent on commercial crops requiring loans, and there the ejidal banks took over the role of managers, a quasigovernmental patrón in place of a personal one. Individualistic and republican (an old Spanish term for the autonomous community) traits are deep in Indian and Spanish backgrounds; centralization has always run into rough going. Moreover Mexico does not have the fat natural resources that lend themselves to successful organization and dominant urbanization. It may remain a land of small subsistence communities in large part, only partly touched by commercialization.

I think I can speak to the matter in hand: I have known perhaps more of rural Mexico for a longer time than any American. For thirty years I have wandered through the villages of all but two Mexican states, mainly interested in their agricultural ways. I know their plants, their kitchens, their community ways. I have long been a farm operator in this country, a commercial producer of corn, wheat, soy beans, cotton, and live stock in Missouri, Illinois, and Oklahoma. For twenty odd years we have been housed in the agricultural compound of the university in daily contact with research and extension personnel. I have helped send a number of our agricultural scientists into Mexico and other parts of Latin America to study genetic, entomologic, and soil problems. These men, and some of them are among the best of the country, have gone down there to learn, not to indoctrinate, and of that I am proud.

American know-how has less to offer to the Mexicans than the planners think. Where they need it, they can come up here and get what they want, as has been well shown by the national Banco de Mexico and its training fellowships. There is a good leaven of Europeans (note the biochemistry of cortisone etc. by the study of native pharmaceuticals). The Mexicans and their permanent foreign residents are making headway about as rapidly as is safe and to me it is important that they make their own way. Urban and industrial growth is perhaps overaccelerated at the moment, and therewith commercial agriculture.

I have lived too long with village people to look down on them. What they grow and how they grow it makes good sense. They aren't lost in ignorance and superstition. Except where too many of them have lived too long on too little land and erosion is taking the ground out from under them, they come close to living in ecologic balance. Their life is not deflected toward feeding city populations, nor should it be. The peasant tries not to use up his natural capital; the commercial operations do. Mechanized large fields, reduction in diversity of things grown, pumps that lower the water table, dependence on commercial fertilizers, increased requirements of nitrates and phosphorus by heavy planting of hybrid corn and soy beans, ecologic upsets by weed killers and insecticides applied on a large scale, it is out of such operations that agricultural crises are being built up. Climate and population densities and low purchasing power make illusory any American style animal husbandry. The wisdom of the peasants is greater than ours. Nor is their life drab because they are conservative. The casual visitor may miss the social life of the field work, the exchange of ideas that goes on in the villages, the capacity to provide their own entertainment, the helping of one another. Why should any one want to change them and harness them to a machine of accelerating 'production' which is bound to destroy their ecologic balance and their ways. I'm back to this original question: Why have we this mania to remake other folks? Why this assumption of superior wisdom, this horrible hope that science and social science will organize all humankind into a crawling anthill? The goal seems to me indecent. Fortunately I believe it to be unattainable, because what we call increased production is increased extraction, the fertility potential is limited, we shall continue to depend on the higher plants, and over the long run we've got to return to the soils most of what we take out of them. The wisdom of the peasants is greater than that of the scientific Daedaluses.

I leave next week for a summer in the Caribbean with a group of good youngsters under a grant from the ONR to study whatever we want to study. Curious that the Navy for the moment has become the sponsor of free inquiry.

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