



TASA The Australian
Sociological Association

Contact Email for December 2014

Greetings All,

The 2014 TASA Conference in Adelaide proved to be one of the best I have been to. I heard some very interesting papers and met up with a host of people, old friends and new. Sixteen papers were presented in the Applied Sociology sessions, however, only one person (apart from me) turn up for the Applied Sociology Thematic Group meeting. So no discussion was had this year. However, one other person arrived half an hour or so after we had gone. She came and asked the person standing next to me where Alan Scott and the Applied Sociology group were meeting. So I was able to introduce myself and we went and had a worthwhile discussion about sociology in the work place just between the two of us. However, there was discussion about Applied Sociology at the Annual Meeting, led by Eileen Clark. The executive, predominately made up of university based people, again decided that applied sociology did not warrant a permanent position on the executive, and if there was an issue anyone elected to the executive could be detailed to look after Applied Sociology.

At the final session we heard three papers on the concerns of those in academia about the attacks on sociology. At question time I again I pointed out that sociology did not belong solely to the Universities. That sociology was the day to day work of nearly 100 members of TASA and the universities need to recognise their responsibility to train people in sociology to work outside Universities. What I didn't do, and could have kicked myself for it afterwards, was to raise again the need for a Bachelor of Sociology, that would give those outside academia some academic and professional standing as sociologists. If psychologists can do it, so can sociologists. Opportunity lost.

Sandra Polaski, the ILO's deputy director for policy, quoted by Tom Miles, in an article in the Melbourne 'Age', argues that it is not cheap labour competition that is causing wages to stagnate in more advanced economies: "If productivity levels are increasing you can accommodate the competition, because the productivity of your firm will allow you to continue to pay good wages and still be able to compete. Profits have recovered since the global financial crisis but that income was not being reinvested at the rate seen previously, It's [companies] sitting on this retained profitability that's not producing good results for the global economy. Those on lower incomes in these advanced economies are reducing household demand which is decreasing overall aggregate demand." Is this just an economic issue or does sociology have a component to which we should respond? Much of the political approach to social issues is seen through economic eyes. The article suggests that it is the economic approach by industry is the cause of the lack of services provided to the community. Henry Mayhew, in "London Labour and the London Poor", a masterpiece of social observation and analysis, published in 1862, had this to say to a critic:

The national income, which is estimated at £300,000,000 sterling per annum, may be said to consist of three equal parts: £100,000,000 going to replace capital; £100,000,000 being the gross amount of profits accruing to the capitalists; and £100,000,000 the gross amount of wages received by the labourers. The latter, or wage fund, constitutes the great purchasing fund of the country, for the whole of this is (with the most trifling exceptions) consumed; whereas the profit fund mainly (perhaps more than half) is saved with a view of increasing the capital of the capitalists. Hence, to decrease the wage fund is consequently to decrease the purchasing fund of the community.

I wish you all a happy Christmas and a safe and productive new year. Who knows, we might get the importance of sociology widely recognised in the coming year.

Alan Scott, Continuing Education Officer