Filière MIC

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UE Cours Transversaux : EC Anglais

Chapter_1: Science in the Modern World

There was a time when the scientist in Europe was looked upon with fear and suspicion. He was the alchemist, the magician. He was supposed to deal in evil things with the help of evil forces. He was persecuted by the Church and the State. But gradually the situation changed, until today in the twentieth century. Science has become a highly regarded profession like Law or Teaching. Science has become the fundamental basis of medicine, engineering and technology; this has possibly given the modern scientist a sort of privileged status in society. He stands somewhat aloof from the rest of the society, dedicated to the pursuit of things beyond the under-standing of ordinary people. Science has become an exclusive profession which needs long years of training and apprenticeship.

And yet science is different from other professions. Unlike the others, the scientist can demand no immediate reward for his work; he has no ready market for the disposal of his discoveries. A lawyer argues a case and receives immediate payment. A doctor treats an illness and demands his remuneration. An engineer builds a house or designs a machine, and he has to be paid for it. But who will buy a scientific theory however basic it might be?

In bygone days, therefore, science used to be the hobby of well-to-do persons, or the spare-time engagement of people of other professions. Or, the scientist had to depend on the patronage of kings and nobles. Today men have understood the wider application of science in the production of goods. The scientist has become employable. He is the trusted adviser of the State. He is retained by the capitalist to help him with ideas that may earn him profits. The government also subsidies the universities to carry on researches that may have (a social utility 'The school-master was abroad' in the nineteenth century; in the twentieth century the scientist is very much so.

The dependence of the scientist upon a wealthy individual or corporation, or upon the State, may have an adverse effect on scientific research. For the patron will naturally wish him to follow lines of research indicated by him and regarded by him as useful or profitable. The scientist has to sell his researches to his patron, or he stands the danger of being out of employment. In other words, where profit is the impelling motive in a society, the scientist has to submit to the dictates of the profiteer for his livelihood. That is why really fundamental research has been and will always be carried out in the Universities.

There is another aspect. The inventions of the scientist are often regarded with distrust and fear by the common people. Because, instead of creating leisure, inventions of science may create un-employment. The invention of a mechanical labor-saving device may throw hundreds of workers out of employment. In the nineteenth century it led to riots which were cruelly suppressed. Today, served in the form of rationalization, it leads to strikes and lockouts. Again, instead of saving life, it deals out instruments of death. Lower-hungry politicians who would not spend a few thousands for welfare work, spend millions for the invention and perfection of nuclear weapons for mass destruction. The demands of profit supersede the demands of human welfare.

Source: *http://www.preservearticles.com/201103284767/science-in-the-modern-world.html*

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