

The idea of constructing a computer model of the ancient Sumerian civilization which could be used for teaching basic economics drew its inspiration from many sources: Rousseau's *Emile*; Dewey's emphasis on the problematic situation; a paper entitled "Teaching through Participation in Micro-simulations of Social Organizations" by Richard L. Meier delivered at the AAAS meeting in 1961; the first chapter of Harrison Brown's *The Challenge of the Future*, in which he discusses the origin of civilization in the Near East river valleys; a luncheon conversation with sociologist James Coleman of The Johns Hopkins University; and finally a PTA meeting at which the fourth-grade social studies curriculum was discussed.

The immediate reason for the choice of the Sumerians was to protest against the growing tendency in school curricula to ignore the pre-Greek civilizations, in spite of the growing weight of scholarly evidence as to the important role which this pre-history and early history should play in our understanding of the processes by which our society has come to be what it is. Childe and others have identified the development of settled farming—the domestication of food plants and animals—as a necessary forerunner of urban, civilized, social organization. This transformation first occurred in lasting form, in the river valleys of Mesopotamia, Egypt and India. It is ironic that as scholarship was discovering the importance of understanding this technological, economic and social revolution, school authorities were dropping the topic from the social studies curriculum.

As usual, the objectives of the project were developed as we went along. Two concerns arose in con-

get. The major problem facing the investigators was to refrain from importing market structures and price mechanisms into the model of the Sumerian economy. It seems likely that prices or rates of exchange were set by the holders of religious and political power, and maintained by custom. This has been described as a prescriptive economy, rather than a market economy.

The second content problem was that of portraying the processes of economic and social development, and to avoid the easier but unsatisfactory antiquarian approach. It takes more than a set of maps, king-names, customs and potsherds to build a socio-economic model of a civilization. It would, of course, be a falsification not to present the model to the student in terms of Sumerian artifacts, but material about the artifacts just is not enough. There must also be a model which includes the function relationships between the major economic and social variables.