

FROM THE ARCHIVES

UNIVERSITY OF LONDON
INSTITUTE OF COMMONWEALTH STUDIES

POSTGRADUATE SEMINAR ON
'BRITISH TROPICAL DEPENDENCIES
DURING THE PAST HUNDRED YEARS'
SEVENTH MEETING: 7 DECEMBER 1955

**THE ORGANIZATION OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC
RESEARCH IN THE BRITISH COLONIAL TERRITORIES**

E. M. CHILVER

PERHAPS I should explain first of all to those of you I do not know, who I am and what I do. I am a member of the Colonial Office Research Department whose title belies its real functions. The Research Department of the Colonial Office does no research but provides the secretariat for a number of advisory scientific bodies and is the department in the Colonial Office responsible for the day to day administration of that bit of C.D. & W. funds earmarked for research under the Colonial Development and Welfare Acts. Most of its time, I should explain, is spent pouring a quart of research into the pint pot of Treasury regulations.

Scientists, assisted by civil servants, are and always have been, in charge of the day-to-day central administration of the funds devoted to medical and agricultural research. But characteristically enough, the Secretary of the Colonial Social Science Research Council and the Colonial Economic Research Committee is now neither a sociologist nor an economist. I say 'characteristically enough' because the situation reflects the virtual absence of government social research organizations in the field. There are colonial agricultural and medical services, but no sociological service. There is a colonial research service, but it does not include any social scientists. There are only a handful of government ethnologists and sociolo-

gists, all recruited on different terms, and working quite independently of one another.

It would be impossible to discuss the work of the two advisory committees of which I am secretary—the Colonial Social Science Research Council and the Colonial Economic Research Committee—without making some mention of attempts to organize social science research in the Colonies before they were set up. My treatment will be very cursory and leave out of account the remoter influences leading to the setting up of the Council: for example, the precedents established in Australia and its Dependencies and in British India, nor indeed the local and short-lived experiments in government-sponsored research in Nigeria and the Gold Coast.

I think I can do no better than start with the foundation of the International African Institute in 1926, which is traced by Professor Forde back to the work of the Advisory Committee on Native Education in Tropical Africa which was appointed by the Colonial Secretary in 1923. Major Hanns Vischer was secretary of the Committee, which came to realize that ‘an organization was needed to promote research and serve as a clearing house for information on the social institutions and languages of Africa’. [The project took final shape at the International Missionary Conference at which the leading proponents of the idea of an International Institute were Major Vischer, Dr J. H. Oldham, the Revd. Edwin P. Smith and Professor Westermann.] The Institute was inaugurated in June 1926, under Lord Lugard’s chairmanship.

From the very start the influence of the Department of Anthropology at the London School of Economics under Professor Malinowski was important. In an earlier issue of *Africa* Professor Malinowski set out his views on how scientific anthropology could serve the needs of administration. This article provoked a debate with Philip Mitchell, then a Provincial Commissioner in Tanganyika, which in some ways set the tone of the debate between academic anthropologists and practical administrators ever since. In 1930 the Institute started a programme of research: then, as now, its primary purpose was to act as a clearing-house for information and to provide scientific information which could be used for a number of different purposes. At this time the Institute debated whether to appoint specialists to carry out individual inquiries, the results of which would be published in a series of monographs or to seek the collaboration of administrators and others and (I quote) ‘bring its inquiries into living and fruitful relation with the problems with which they were concerned’.

Although the second choice was decided on, it proved in the event that the first was the one carried out. It was during this period, and largely with the help of the Rockefeller Foundation, that material was collected for its monographs, which are now required reading for Africanists. Perhaps it is not true to say that the second and ostensible purpose of the Institute’s research was entirely neglected. It happened from time to time that African governments would ask the Institute’s

Fellows to make special inquiries. The most comprehensive of these were those undertaken by Professor Schapera for the Bechuanaland Government. He was the most successful of the Institute Fellows in getting governmental assistance after the period of his Fellowship. A candid evaluation of the results of the Institute's Fellowship Programme was published by Dr Audrey Richards in 1944, who wrote, 'at the outbreak of the war only the Governments of Australia, the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, the Gold Coast and the Union of South Africa were employing Government Anthropologists. There were none in the other territories, nor were any employed as advisers or appointed to the staff of centres of higher education. Once their research grants came to an end it was in fact impossible for any but a small number to make a living, and University Departments regularly discouraged students without private means from taking up the subject as a post-graduate course so that the number of trained investigators is now dangerously small.'

I should make mention, however, of an experiment in applied anthropology conducted with Sir Philip Mitchell's support by the anthropologist, Dr Gordon Brown, and the administrator, Mr Bruce Hutt, because it is so frequently referred to as a model. The purpose of this experiment was, according to Sir Philip Mitchell's letter to his District Officer, to examine in relation to a particular tribe the implementation of the Tanganyikan Government's new policy of 'local government in terms of its acceptability and its fluidity for future development.' As Sir Philip Mitchell said: 'it would be for the administrator to ask questions and for the anthropologist to answer them'. In the course of the project it was found necessary to define the duties and functions of the administrator together with the knowledge he should possess to perform his duties efficiently. As it happened, the anthropologist tended to want the inclusion of more knowledge than the administrator thought necessary, but they worked together very well and produced a joint book.

A few years later, in 1947, the first of the colonial field stations was set up; this was the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, which was not a government department but an independent body governed by a board of trustees. Its officers were, as its first director, Mr Godfrey Wilson put it, 'in no way directly responsible to any government or for any government policy, and their intellectual freedom is thus safeguarded. On the other hand, the presence of public men on the board ensures that the officers will not waste their time splitting academic hairs but will tackle instead problems of public importance.' Wilson had pointed out that the social research worker should not attempt to answer questions such as, 'What ought we to do about beer drinking in town?', but he could properly answer questions in the form of, 'Why is it so difficult to enforce the prohibition of private beer brewing?' He stressed the need for what he calls 'bare information'.

The next important event which led to the establishment of the Colonial Social Science Research Council was Lord Hailey's *African Survey*, which focused the attention of public men on the absence of information on native affairs. Hailey

himself seems to have favoured research on the lines of the Gordon Brown–Hutt experiments and further suggested that different disciplines should combine to attack specially pressing problems such as malnutrition. In 1940 the financial part of Lord Hailey's recommendations in his *African Survey* were put into effect by the passing of the first Colonial Development and Welfare Act, and a Colonial Research Council was set up under his chairmanship to advise the Secretary of State on the expenditure of funds for research. Nothing more could be done during the war years except to survey the information needs which a flood of development schemes appeared to require.

In 1944 the Colonial Research Council recommended the formation of the Colonial Social Science Research Council. Its terms of reference were to advise the Secretary of State on social research, but its early reports make it clear that such research was to be related to the requirements of colonial governments for information both general and specific, necessary for planning development schemes. At that time the Council proposed to start its operations with individual workers and to develop a system of research institutes modelled on the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute. Finding—perhaps understandably, since there existed no mediating technical branch of the Colonial Service—that its objects were not fully appreciated by colonial governments, the Council decided to send a number of specialists overseas to generate a better appreciation of the value of social science research. To this end Professor Forde visited the Gambia and Professor Firth went to the West African colonies. In 1947 Professor Schapera surveyed the several research needs of Kenya, Professor Firth those of Malaya, and Dr Leach those of Sarawak. Dr Stanner made a survey of Uganda and Tanganyika during 1947 and 1948 to correspond with Professor Schapera's Kenya survey. These East African surveys were intended to provide the basis of a programme for a new institute to be set up in East Africa along the lines of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute.

At this point I should refer to two parallel developments: the emergence of colonial university colleges in a special relationship to the University of London in British Africa and the West Indies, and to the findings of the Scarbrough Commission.

To take the latter first, it was set up in 1944 to examine the facilities offered by universities for the study of oriental, Slavonic, East European and African languages and culture and to make recommendations for their improvement. The Commission recommended that public funds should be spent on building up appropriate university departments, and on providing opportunities for study abroad. The financial provisions were recommended in terms of five and ten years after initiation on the grounds that the new studies would be self-perpetuating after that.

The various commissions which examined proposals for the setting up of university colleges in the colonies were not primarily concerned with research but both the West Indian and West African commissions drew attention to the value of associated institutes of social and economic research in the new colleges.

The effect of these two developments, the Scarbrough Recommendations and the establishment of colonial university colleges, was to alter the original policy of the Colonial Social Science Research Council. It now set itself three objectives: the provision of a body of scientific information of general use, the provision of basic data of more specific value to particular colonial governments, and the provision of teaching materials for use by the new colonial colleges. The first effect of its new concerns was to alter very substantially its attitude to the proposed East African Institute, which was now to be closely associated with the new college at Makerere in contrast to the autonomous Rhodes-Livingstone Institute.

I do not think that the seminar will want from me a blow-by-blow account of the Council's work from 1945 onwards, but rather an attempt to describe how the Council set about carrying out its wide terms of reference which, as you will see, had moved considerably from the Colonial Research Council's first emphasis on fact-finding investigations and applied studies. One of its first concerns was to follow up the suggestion made by Dr Richards in 1944 that a cadre of social scientists should be trained, and some twenty studentships, involving a period of study in the United Kingdom followed by fieldwork overseas, were instituted. This was a sort of baby brother to the Scarbrough studentship scheme. It proved difficult in practice to gear these studentships to known demands of colonial governments, and for the most part they were directed to studies which would remedy gaps in general information rather than supply specific data required for colonial development policies. However, some students, having established themselves in the good graces of colonial governments, found themselves called upon in informal fashion to do just this.

A special scheme had been instituted for work in Kenya as a result of Professor Schapera's visit. The ostensible purpose of this was to provide the Kenya Government with basic information required for projected developments in native agriculture, and as an experiment in applied anthropology. The scheme must be accounted a failure. I am not quite clear whether it would be wise to make generalizations on the basis of such a limited scheme, since accidents, illness, and personal quarrels all played their part in its failure, but I will venture to say this: although its needs for social research were great, Kenya was an unfavourable terrain for the experiment: at the head of things was a governor with very decided views about how the research should be conducted and who wanted quick results. Below him were provincial commissioners and district staff, well below strength and too overworked to give the kind of support to the anthropologists given in Tanganyika in 1934 by Bruce Hutt. Three of the research workers appointed were not British and relatively unacquainted with the underlying assumptions of colonial administration. Finally, having no working model to go on—Professor Schapera's advice not having trickled down to the operational level—the researchers were treated to start with as if they were members of the Colonial Service and subject to colonial regulations. As often happens in small communities, when silly

mistakes are made these are rectified in an over-dramatic way: the anthropologists, unwilling to play the role of advisers or intelligence officers, were temporarily relegated to that of visiting eggheads. One or two of them managed to retrieve the position in the long run, and one in particular, Philip Mayer, ended by establishing a useful relationship with the Nyanza Provincial Administration. From the point of view of the Colonial Office, however, some conclusions could be drawn from the official correspondence about the scheme. It seemed, for example, that the independence of the social research worker could best be preserved if his role as an academic anthropologist were stressed and if the end-product of his work were represented as a publication which would add to general scientific knowledge. The phrasing of his role in these terms would enable him to be accorded the usual courtesies as a respectably sponsored scientific visitor. After he had established himself as part of the landscape, he could if he wished, and if the circumstances were favourable, develop an informal advisory role or better still the role of go-between betwixt administration and native people. The Colonial Office did not seek to formalize its views by indoctrinating either research workers or colonial governments, but it was left with the strong impression that what Mr James Spillius has called an operational research role was only possible from the outset in particularly favourable situations—where, for example, the demand of governments for information was strong, but not too strong, where the general political situation was not too disturbed, and where some appreciation of the methods of scientific social investigation already existed.

Once the essentially academic character of the research worker had been established, the Colonial Office was able to arrive at an informal code about publications, though not without some ups and downs. In recent years the social scientist's report on commissioned work has often taken two forms: a brief outline report of some forty-odd pages for the colonial government's files followed by a scholarly monograph. This has the advantage of maintaining the interest of colonial governments without sacrifice of academic standards.

Before I finish with Kenya I will bring the story of social research there up to date. The last two social-science research workers posted there were comparatively young men, one of whom had had previous field experience in Tanyanyika where he had settled easily into the operational research role because of unusually favourable circumstances which included the presence of government sociologists who took a keen interest in his work. He worked in Nyanza Province where a favourable attitude towards social research had been generated by the work of Wagner and Mayer. The other was posted to the Northern Frontier Province and he had the good luck to have as his provincial commissioner a man who fully understood the modern social anthropological approach. The first man has now been appointed by the Kenya Government as provincial anthropologist, the first appointment of its kind in Kenya. In the case of the second, when the epitome of his D. Phil. thesis reached the provincial commissioner's office it was digested at once

and the full original text was called for practically by return of post. Copies of the epitome were made compulsory reading for the district staff.

Before I resume the theme of the institutes, which I have already touched upon, I think you might find it helpful if I give you at this juncture a picture of how the Colonial Social Science Research Council and its parallel, the Colonial Economic Research Committee, work, in theory at least. The CERC was started up in 1947 when it became clear that the CSSRC could not hope to give to this field the amount of attention it deserved. Both are advisory bodies, the CSSRC almost entirely and the CERC entirely academic in composition. Projects requiring Colonial Development and Welfare support may be presented to them either by colonial governments, the Colonial Office, or individual scholars. These projects do not, of course, come out of the blue. Those suggested by government are the result of circular inquiries or departmental initiative, those from scholars often arise out of informal discussions with Council and Committee members or as a result of circulars sent to UK and Commonwealth universities. Projects reaching the Council and Committee are always of three kinds: supervised projects for field work by Ph.D. candidates, proposals by established scholars, and team or institutional projects. These are examined first by Standing Committees in the case of the CSSRC. If they are considered worthwhile, and stand up scientifically, they are further examined by the Council in relation to the disposition of its funds. The function of the Secretary, as a temporary member of the Colonial Office staff, is to report colonial needs to the two advisory bodies, enlist their suggestions for getting them met—they often have to be formulated into researchable proportions—play back suggestions for research to colonial governments and get their goodwill, and cope generally with the administrative business involved in setting up a research project, from getting Treasury sanction for expenditure to ordering air tickets. The Council may appoint supervisors for a particular project and its specialist members sit on boards selecting younger candidates for fieldwork grants. Since there is no scientific secretary to cope with minor technical matters, the Secretary often has to poster particular members for advice. All their work is unremunerated and can often be a very heavy load on very busy people. The Council is also concerned with financial recommendations affecting the Institutes, although these are autonomous in every other respect. Their directors are solely responsible for the work carried out, their staff is recruited by the parent college, with the help of the IUC, and they publish their results how and where they like.

At the present time there is a flourishing academic research institute at Makerere College, one which has now got into its stride in Jamaica, and one which has been less successful in Ibadan. The Colonial Economic Research Committee has agreed to support an academic research unit at the UCGC, its only independent venture so far into institutional research. A social research unit was set up at the University of Malaya, but it has not struck root. The Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, established without C.D. & W. support, is now receiving it.

In so far as these institutes are concerned, there has been a curious echo of the Kenya problems I discussed at some length earlier, but in their case the vested interests, as it were, were not the colonial administrations but the academic ones of the university colleges. It has proved quite unexpectedly difficult to combine the interests of teaching and research. University colleges seem to be just as regulation-minded as colonial administrations and as impatient with the slow process of social investigation. To pursue the parallel, where teaching departments of social studies or economics existed even in embryo, the comprehension of the requirements of research in terms of day-to-day administration, study leave, and generally flexible management has been all the clearer. At Ibadan the absence of such a department has led in the long run to the decision that the institute is not viable as a field institution. By 1956 or early 1957 it will have ceased to exist and will be replaced, I hope, by a teaching department which will be generously enough staffed to allow its members fairly frequent field research leave. In Malaya, a social research unit was established under a committee, but, as experience shows, everybody's baby is nobody's baby. The Institute established in the West Indies in 1948 now has an embryo department of economics alongside it, and there is good hope that by the time its grant ceases it will have put down roots. In East Africa the Makerere Institute, which came into effective operation when Dr Richards went there in 1950, is a recognized part of the College, which had established a teaching department of social studies at an early stage. This institute, and to some extent the West Indian one, are the only two to have carried out successfully the original aims of the CSSRC which, as you already know, were the supply of general scientific information, of basic data for colonial development needs and for teaching material. Both of them have established themselves as recognized agencies with which colonial governments have concluded research contracts. The East African Institute specializes in the sociological and the West Indian Institute in the economic field. In spite of the poverty of the West Indies, the danger facing the West Indian Institute is not the absence of support from West Indian governments but the difficulty it faces in integrating the variety of demands for economic and social research it gets into a coherent programme. Now, an agency business can only be carried on by a going concern, and so far no colonial governments have been able to face the proposition of allocating sufficient funds to the parent university colleges by addition to block grants to enable the institutes to have a secure income. Nevertheless, what I have called the agency business of the Institutes creates goodwill, which I hope will stand them in good stead after the 31st March 1960, when the present C.D. & W. Act comes to an end.

Before speculating about what may happen after 1960, I should mention some new directions recently taken by the CSSRC and the CERC. The new direction taken by the CSSRC is the promotion of historical research—rather neglected over the past ten years because of the original bias of the Council towards applied and contemporary studies. The absence of reliable historical teaching material in the

new university colleges has been remarked on, for example, by the African History Conference, which took place under the auspices of the School of Oriental and African Studies. While it has been rather difficult to persuade the Treasury that historical studies can be fitted into the rubrics of the C.D. & W. Acts, the Colonial Office itself needs no conversion. The appearance of historical mythology has given scientific history an administrative *raison d'être*. The CSSRC has recently been discussing two projects involving the co-operation of historians and social anthropologists: the first is a cultural history of Benin based at the University College at Ibadan, where Dr Dike is the Head of the History Department, and the second is a proposal for the compilation of comprehensive regional histories of East and Central Africa. The organizational problems involved in this type of project are, of course, fairly novel and, no doubt, there will be muddles and mistakes to learn from.

Before describing the new look in the CERC, I should perhaps describe the old look. This Committee took the view from the very start that its first task should be to interest established academic economists in colonial economic problems, in theoretical and methodological ones, that is, rather than practical ones. Consequently, it made it its business to do what it could to persuade well-known economists to embark on colonial projects. The results have been Peter Bauer's 'West African Trade', for example, Ida Greaves 'Colonial Monetary Conditions', and Prest's and Stewart's 'National Income of Nigeria'. The *new* look, like most new looks, has two aspects, as you might say, a new waist and skirt length.

Encouragement has been given to descriptive studies based on overseas colonial universities either by their own staff or in association with them: for example, the Makerere Institute is working on the labour problems of local manufacturers, the UCGC in the incomes of cocoa farmers, and the West Indian Institute in a field study of the economic behaviour of small farmers. At the University of Hong Kong a descriptive study of money and banking in Southeast Asia has been supported, and a Durham scholar attached to Fourah Bay College is writing a history of economic development in Sierra Leone. A start has also been made in what one might call applied studies, which owe a great deal to Professor Austin Robinson's ideas. The base for these studies is an Economic Department of Government, such as the Statistics Department. These CERC projects are designed to help these Departments by means of what Austin Robinson calls bench-mark exercises. Governments now require regular economic and statistical information to guide policy makings and the setting up of a flow of information on economic conditions. Its analysis needs the views of those economists in this country who have worked on similar types of projects. Sometimes these combined advisory and operational tasks have been performed in vacations: for example, Mr Moser of the LSE has recently returned from Jamaica, where he has been studying amongst the files of government departments what the most feasible indicators of levels of living are in the island. Two other economists, Alan Peacock of the LSE and Douglas Dosser of

Sheffield, are just about to start out for Tanganyika to set in motion a national income exercise which, apart from its intrinsic interest, will set up a regular flow of statistics and train the administrators involved.

After 1960, as I said before, the future is obscure. I would guess myself that there will be a little money from C.D. & W. sources for social and economic research but that it will be considerably less than the half million-odd allocated during the present quinquennium. Such as there is would, I think, be for the most part devoted to any 'bedded-out' institutional research which showed signs of being self-perpetuating. The Colonial Office is, of course, not *officially* cognizant of the fact that C.D. & W. funds expended on social research has contributed to a small expansion in university studies in the United Kingdom. It is not officially cognizant either of such problems as lack of academic careers in certain fields of Colonial Office interest. The standing paradox of studies promoted by the CO is that their continuation depends to a great extent on the policies of UK universities, which are outside its range of influence and which will remain so. Only the universities can make them respectable.

In the course of time, the Colonial Office function as a patron of social and economic research will have to be taken over by others—by those colonial governments who can afford it and those of the new self-governing nations, by foundations, and perhaps by business. The CSSRC and CERC might be regarded in some respects as government-organized lobbies. It is perhaps not too soon to think about organizing other lobbies against the time when no more issues from the C.D. & W. Fund will be made.

The following were the principal points made in discussion at this seminar:

1. The Central Organization

The general strategy of research was controlled by the Colonial Research Committee, composed of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, representatives of DISR and the Royal Society and the chairmen of the several research committees. The Colonial Social Service Research Council, with its committees, and the Colonial Economic Research Committee were subordinate to the CRC.

2. The West African Institute

Its failure had been due to the absence of a director for a long period, the inability to find an economist for pure research, and the lack of a long-term programme. It was

now hoped that funds would be found for a teaching department which would also do research, as at Achimota.

3. Relations between the Institutes and Colleges

It was suggested that the existence of the institutes might have removed the stimulus to research by members of the teaching staffs. The policy was now to integrate the two more closely, by rotating the personnel or in other ways. This was in fact the only chance of continuing existence for the institutes after 1960.

4. Relations between Colonial Governments and Social Researchers

The official attitude had been so much more favourable in Tanganyika than in Kenya because in the former there had already been a government Sociology Department, which had been able to interpret the needs and objects of anthropologists to the administration.

The outlook in Kenya now appeared to be more encouraging than in the past.

5. Pressure Groups

Anthropology suffered from not having a pressure group like most other disciplines, since it fell between the stools of the Royal Society and the British Academy. When the Acts ran out it would be left without an official 'lobby'. Anthropology was not 'built in' to the Colonial Office structure, as were for example agriculture and medicine. It might, however, be built in to the colonial governments: the Kenya Government was about to appoint its own sociologist.

6. The Prospects for Research

The institute plan, Mrs Chilver thought, had been the right one in spite of some mistakes. Experiments in applied research, in the narrow sense, had proved a failure. The future of the institutes was not in question, but the problem was how to secure continuity of the type of independent academic research work which they had fostered. Possible answers included:

(i) The development of local graduate schools. It was absurd that candidates for doctorates should have to come to the UK where the necessary material was often not to be found. The conferment of higher degrees by the colonial university colleges was an end in view, and they were already conferred in Malaya—though this had not prevented doctorates being sought at British universities.

(ii) Expansion of the relevant studies at UK universities. There was, however, a danger of a time lag, which might leave experienced research workers stranded, between the sudden reduction in C.D. & W. money after 1960 and the hoped-for university developments.

(iii) American support. There were established organizations for African studies at North-Western and Boston Universities, and there might soon be others. There was also the Ford Foundation's programme of African graduate fellowships, and there had been some informal attachments to the research institutes. A conference organised at Princeton by the Carnegie Corporation had attempted to secure co-ordination of African studies, but no continuing organization had been set up. It did not seem that Ford, etc. would really take the place of C.D. & W.

(iv) Unesco already financed research, but only on a hand-to-mouth basis.

(v) Financial support from the local governments. Even the West Indies, which was a special case, could pay for more research than it was at present, though it could not support the institute on its existing scale.

It was pointed out that in economics at least the problem was the lack of men rather than the lack of money.

7. Retrenchment and the School of Oriental and African Studies

The expansion of the School had been based to a large extent upon the Scarbrough scholarships, and would be halted if they came to an end, since the field for the recruitment of staff would become much smaller.

8. Historical Research

(i) Organization. The CSSRC's move towards the promotion of historical studies was quite separate from the creation of a new advisory committee on archives and archaeology, which was the product of a different lobby and had a different source of funds. The CSSRC's scheme was still on paper; it would be canvassed in UK universities.

(ii) Access to material. The plan for regional histories would raise the question of access to material after 1902. The Colonial Office had to keep in step with other Departments in this matter. The Secretary of State had indeed the right to allow access at his discretion, but this entailed censorship, and recent cases suggested that it was preferable not to have access on those terms. (This had wrecked an earlier plan for standard political histories of the colonies.) The Grigg Committee, however, had recently recommended automatic opening after fifty years. Moreover, in practice it was usually possible to get access to colonial archives, at least to unclassified dispatches and to purely local material, provided that this was done quietly and that the general issue was not publicly raised.