

# CONSORTIUM OF SOCIAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATIONS

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TO: COSSA Members, Affiliates, Contributors, and Friends

FROM: Roberta Balstad Miller, Executive Director

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COSSA LEGISLATIVE REPORT

June 11, 1982

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This Week ...

British SSRC Endorsed in Rothschild Report  
NSF Director Resigns  
National Archives Budget Augmented  
NIMH Reauthorization  
New Members for Education Council  
NSF Testimony

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## British SSRC Endorsed in Rothschild Report

Last fall, Sir Keith Joseph, Secretary of State for Education & Science, seemed intent on abolishing the British Social Science Research Council. Toward this end, he asked Lord Rothschild to review the SSRC and alternative means of funding social science research in Great Britain. Lord Rothschild's report, released May 19, 1982, recommended not only that the SSRC should not be "dismembered or liquidated," but also that its budget should be guaranteed regardless of the imposition of budget cuts in the other research councils. Dismemberment of the SSRC would, in Lord Rothschild's judgement, be an act of "intellectual vandalism."

The SSRC is part of the British system of research councils (others include the Science Research Council and the Medical Research Council) established by the government to fund basic research. In purpose and scope, the research councils are similar to the National Science Foundation in the United States.

British SSRC Endorsed (continued)

Lord Rothschild's mandate was to determine what, if any, areas of the SSRC's work could be privately funded and what should continue to be funded by the government. The report says that basic social science research must be supported by an independent body like the SSRC and should not be dependent upon the special interests of the market place. Curtailing support for the SSRC would cause a burden to potential consumers of social science research that could not be sustained. Moreover, some research, in such areas as human geography, social psychology, and social anthropology, would probably not be supported.

According to the report, social science research should be independent of political pressure within the government. Lord Rothschild writes, "The need for independence from Government departments is particularly important because so much social science research is the stuff of political debate. All such research might prove subversive because it attempts to submit such policies to empirical trial, with the risk the judgement may be adverse. It would be too much to expect ministers to show enthusiasm for research designed to show that their policies were misconceived. But it seems obvious that in many cases the public interest will be served by such research being undertaken." He also stressed the need for social science research as a check on the credibility of "entrenched common sense."

He added that the SSRC's 5% share of the science budget is "disturbingly low" given the benefits of social science research to society. However small, he cautioned, social science research funds (which total 20.9 million pounds or \$37.2 million this fiscal year) should be "efficiently, extra-politically, and successfully administered."

At this point, Sir Keith Joseph is studying the report and has set aside two months for public discussion and comment on it before presenting the government's reponse. A summary of the main points of the Rothschild report is enclosed as attachment 1 and a comment from the London Times on the SSRC controversy is also enclosed (attachment 2).

NSF Director Resigns

John Slaughter, Director of the National Science Foundation, announced his resignation effective January 1, 1983. Dr. Slaughter leaves NSF to assume the post of Chancellor at the University of Maryland's main campus in College Park, Maryland.

### National Archives Budget Augmented

On June 9, the conference committee met to recommend an emergency supplemental appropriation for the National Archives and Records Service (NARS) and to recommend a \$6.5 million addition to the FY 1982 continuing resolution, currently set at \$76 million. Of the \$6.5 million, \$1.5 million is being earmarked for the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC). Since this emergency supplemental appropriation bill also includes a provision for a sizeable amount for the stimulation of the housing industry, it is likely that if it passes in Congress, it may then face a Presidential veto. Under the FY 1982 continuing resolution, the NARS budget staffing and programs have been severely reduced. The NHPRC grants program still requires reauthorization legislation, and the administration has again recommended that no appropriation be made for this program in FY 1983. The Office of Management and Budget is now proposing legislation that would eliminate the commission altogether.

### NIMH Reauthorization

After negotiations among members of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, H.R. 5919, the Waxman reauthorization bill for the Public Health Service has been split into new pieces of legislation. H.R. 6458 reauthorizes the Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Mental Health Administration through September 30, 1985, and H.R. 6457 reauthorizes the National Institutes of Health and other national research institutes under the Public Health Service for the same period.

The full Energy and Commerce Committee approved H.R. 6458 last week and is expected to act on H.R. 6457 during the coming week. Staff for both Representative Henry Waxman (D-CA, Chairman, Subcommittee on Health and the Environment) and Representative Edward Madigan (R-IL, ranking minority member, Subcommittee on Health and the Environment) have indicated a willingness to include language in the Committee report accompanying H.R. 6458 which would direct the National Institute of Mental Health to end its special relevance requirements for proposals in the social and behavioral sciences. At present, social and behavioral scientists must demonstrate that their proposals are of direct or explicit relevance to the agency's mission. Proposals by scientists in other disciplines must only demonstrate relevance.

NIMH Reauthorization (continued)

H.R. 6457 will require the Secretary of Health and Human Services to appoint a 12 member advisory board for the National Institutes of Health. At least four members of this board would have to be experts in public health or the social and behavioral sciences, and at least five members would have to be leaders in the fields of public policy, law, health policy, economics, or management.

New Members for Education Council

The National Council on Education Research (NCER), the policy making body for the National Institute of Education, now has a new chairman. President Reagan recently removed Chairman Harold Howe II before his term was over and named George C. Roche III of Hillsdale College in Hillsdale, Michigan, as the new chairman. Hillsdale College attracted attention in the 1970's when it refused to accept federal aid. At the present, the college is involved in a legal dispute with the federal government over whether affirmative action regulations can be enforced at an institution that does not accept federal funds.

NSF Testimony

Among the testimony presented to both House and Senate Appropriations Committees on the National Science Foundation budget was a comparison of the numbers of doctoral level social scientists and the proportion of NSF funds devoted to social science research. The testimony, by F. Thomas Juster of the Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, also addressed the question of the impacts of budget cuts on current research, the uses of longitudinal data, and suggested where additional research could improve national policy. Copies of the testimony can be obtained from the COSSA office (202/234-5703).

May 21, 1982

# Report condemns proposal as 'intellectual vandalism'

by Paul Flather

To dismember or liquidate the Social Science Research Council would be an act of "intellectual vandalism" and would have damaging consequences for the whole country from which it would take a long time to recover, Lord Rothschild says in a report published this week.

Lord Rothschild recommends the SSRC should be retained and freed from further inquiries, apart from those required by Parliament, for a minimum of three years from next month.

He also recommends that the Government should not reduce the SSRC's budget in real terms below the 1982-83 level for at least three years "irrespective of what happens, through sheer necessity, to the other research councils".

Lord Rothschild began work on his review in February after Sir Keith Joseph, secretary of state for education, asked him to report on the scale and nature of the council's work with regard to the principle that applied research and development should be done on a customer-contractor basis.

He says the customer-contractor principle has little application to the kind of research sponsored by the SSRC. It is therefore necessary to have an independent body to fund research for which no obvious customers exist.

After discussing in some detail the pros and cons of shifting the administration of postgraduate awards to the Department of Education and Science, Lord Rothschild recommends the SSRC should retain control.

The report goes on to pinpoint a number of administrative weaknesses with particular criticism of the SSRC's failure to communicate the

importance of social science research to the "man in the street and not only *The THES*."

In this respect the efforts of the council are "primitive and unprofessional", Lord Rothschild says. He criticizes the excessive use of jargon, and recommends the SSRC buy four copies of Sir Ernest Gowers' *Plain Words* at a cost of £6.50 and ensure that it is read by those at head office who write or dictate for internal as well as external consumption.

He says the results of this failure have been serious and contributed to the establishment of the inquiry. "These observations are not made in a spirit of idle pedantry. They are made to help the SSRC put across to the layman the importance of social science research."

Lord Rothschild's other main recommendations are:

- The number of SSRC panels to be drastically reduced.
- Payroll strength should be studied to see how many people are made surplus by computerising head office work.
- Relocating the head office at Swindon studied with urgency
- There should a full time executive. If it is the chairman the appointment should be for at least six years.
- The chief executive need not be a social scientist but he must be a first class administrator.
- Head office staff be eligible for civil service qualification certificates which will encourage staff mobility.
- The SSRC to publish annual reports on the PhD completion rates by university.
- The SSRC to encourage more American-style PhD programmes, with taught one-year courses, followed by two years' work on a

thesis.

● The SSRC to investigate the accusation that its industrial relations unit at Warwick University, and the panel for monitoring labour legislation, are unfairly biased in favour of unions.

● The SSRC should improve links with industry in private and public sectors.

● Referees should not be chosen exclusively by the SSRC head office staff, but in formal consultation with experts in the field.

● The SSRC must improve its communications, as regards style, content, and presentation.

● The SSRC is not to help establish new departments or sub-departments of sociology, nor finance those which specialists consider to be sub-standard.

The report has about 40 pages of extracts from 27 of the 320 written submissions sent as evidence to Lord Rothschild. This is seen as an integral part of the inquiry. Special emphasis is given to the small number of submissions critical of the SSRC, with the arguments carefully discussed.

The report contains sections on the meaning of certain words and phrases, including social science and sociology, on "Why social science?" and "Why a SSRC?", on social anthropology under the title "More evidence: about the disappearing world", and a final chapter on criticisms of sociology and the SSRC.

Lord Rothschild says that the SSRC's spending has been cut so much, 24 per cent in real terms in the last five years, that only the top echelons of social scientists can now be supported.

He says neither the British Academy nor the University Grants Committee have any money to take over social science postgraduate training nor would they accept the task even if they had the money. The same applies to the big charitable bodies and the four clearing banks.

"It is highly likely therefore that if the SSRC were not to receive its grant, research would not be done and yet more academics, about 600 according to the SSRC, would become unemployed," he concludes.

May 28, 1982

## Laurie Taylor



Mummy!

*Yes, darling.*

Mummy, mummy. Come quickly. Come quickly. Something's happened to daddy.

*What is it, darling?*

Look, mummy. Look!

*Where my little one? Where?*

Down there, mummy. At the bottom of the garden. There.

*But where my love? I can't see him.*

Up the tree. Up the tree. Daddy's climbing up the big tree.

*Oh my God, he is. STANLEY! STANLEY! What ARE you doing?*

Mummy, he's going right to the top. Right to the very top.

*STANLEY! Take care. Do you hear me? Take care.*

Gosh, mummy. He's at the toppest branch. Look.

*I daren't.*

Look, mummy. You must look. He's hanging on with one arm and leaning right out.

*Oh no.*

And he's lifting his other arm in the air. He's like a nempemor, mummy. A Roman nempemor.

*Oh God.*

Mummy! He's shouting. He's shouting something.

**CAN YOU HEAR ME OUT THERE?**

Who's he speaking to, mummy?  
*I've a nasty suspicion, darling, that it may be the world.*

IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME, HASN'T IT? A LONG TIME. FOR YEARS NOW YOU'VE DESPISED US. THOUGHT US SECOND-RATE. LAUGHED AT OUR BOOKS AND IDEAS.

Look, mummy. There are people standing in all the gardens.

*Shush, darling. Daddy's shouting.*

BUT NOW THE BOOT'S ON THE OTHER FOOT, ISN'T IT? WE'RE ON THE WAY BACK. OH YES, YOU'RE GOING TO HEAR A GREAT DEAL FROM US IN THE FUTURE. FOR NEVER FORGET, WE HOLD A MIRROR UP TO THE COMMUNITY.

Mummy. The branch is bending right over every time daddy waves his fist in the air.

AND DON'T COME TELLING US THAT YOU DON'T LIKE OUR RESEARCH. THAT WE ARE BIASED. POLITICALLY MOTIVATED. "HOME TRUTHS ARE UNPALATABLE." RIGHT?

Oooh, mummy, I'm frightened. He's holding out both arms. Like God does.

YES, ONCE AGAIN WE CAN ANNOUNCE OUR CALLING TO TAXI-DRIVERS AND SHOPKEEPERS, ONCE AGAIN MEET ANYONE'S GAZE IN THE SENIOR COMMON ROOM. WE ARE TRULY - BORN AGAIN.

Oh, mummy, will he be all right?  
*Yes, I think so darling. It's not a very tall tree. In fact it's the others I'm most worried about. What are THEY doing?*

What others, mummy?

*Well, darling, it's obvious. I mean, daddy can't possibly be the only sociologist to have just read Rothschild.*

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# Lord Rothschild's truce

The most spectacular, but in anything but the short term the least important, aspect of Lord Rothschild's inquiry into the Social Science Research Council is that it is a decisive setback to Sir Keith Joseph's determination to abolish the SSRC. Shortly before Christmas it had seemed to be his firm intention to abolish the council without further formal inquiry but he was dissuaded in a manoeuvre worthy of "Yes, Minister" at its best.

It was pointed out to him that Lord Rothschild's earlier review of the research councils, which had produced the famous customer-contractor principle, had not covered the SSRC on the grounds of its comparative youth. So Sir Keith was persuaded to invite Lord Rothschild to undertake a special review of the SSRC, although it was clear from an exchange of letters with Sir Geoffrey Howe which were leaked to the press and from his decision to cut the SSRC's budget disproportionately despite contrary advice from the ABRC that his hostility to the council had not waned.

So Lord Rothschild's report must be a great disappointment to Sir Keith. As Mr Michael Posner, the SSRC's chairman, nervously and constantly insists, the report is not a "whitewash" but it is much closer to that than, to borrow Professor A. H. Halsey's phrase, "the nasty hatchet job" for which Sir Keith must have been hoping. On the issue of whether the SSRC should continue in its present form Lord Rothschild is rock solid: to dismember or liquidate the council would be in his judgment an act of intellectual vandalism.

It is, of course, possible that Sir Keith will still go ahead and abolish the SSRC, as he has just done with the Schools Council. But he can only do so at peril to what is left of his reputation in higher education. Abolition of the SSRC would now be an act of ideological prejudice that would be beyond, or beneath, serious debate. The most likely outcome is that the Secretary of State will retreat behind a smokescreen carefully laid down by his officials (and possibly with a formal dissent from Lord Rothschild's recommendation that the SSRC's present budget should be guaranteed).

The second and more important aspect of Lord Rothschild's report is that it reaches the right conclusion, that if the SSRC were to be abolished it would either have to be reinvented in another and possibly less satisfactory form or else a lot of important social science research would not get done. Of course, in one sense this conclusion is banal - only Sir Keith Joseph, Lord Beloff and a few other critics of the council ever argued otherwise. So it could be said that £27,000 of public money has been spent to convince a few recalcitrant but influential critics of a truth which the overwhelming majority in both higher education and in government has never doubted.

But in another sense Lord Rothschild's conclusion is important. Social science had begun to develop a siege mentality the intellectual consequences of which might have been very serious. Lord Rothschild's report will help to lighten this oppressive atmosphere. If Sir Keith is generous enough to accept the advice to stop harassing social science through attacks on the SSRC and its budget, it is possible that social science may be able to use this truce to try to sort out some of the difficult choices which its constituent disciplines undoubtedly face.

Within the context of his general approval of the SSRC's work, Lord Rothschild raises three broad issues. First, he expresses some doubt about the effectiveness of the council's operation. He is particularly, and perhaps unfairly, critical of the SSRC's record in publicizing social science research. Of course, social scientists use jargon and the worse they are the more jargon they use. But how precisely do you persuade *The* ("Up Yours, Galtieri") *Sun* to take a serious and positive interest in social science research?

He is also critical of the excessive bureaucracy of the SSRC, suggests that the council should have either a full-time chairman or a secretary/ chief executive and non-executive chairman, and recommends that the council's refereeing policy should be liberalized and decentralized. All are important suggestions. But it would be wrong to conclude that the SSRC has a worse management record than the other research councils or any comparable public bureaucracy which

has to juggle with academic and political priorities. If the SSRC is deficient in this respect, a lot of the blame must be attached to the Governments which have harassed it. A truce, therefore, might make a substantial contribution to improving the management of the council.

The second issue raised by Lord Rothschild is the partiality of some social science research. In particular he insists that the allegations of trade union bias made against the council's

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unit for industrial relations at Warwick and panel of monitoring labour legislation must be investigated. The first allegation is based on the vaguest of criticisms made by Lord Beloff and the second does not appear to be based on any of the published evidence in Lord Rothschild's report.

Three observations can perhaps be made on these accusations. First, Lord Rothschild may have been in error in giving such weight to what appear to be general rather than specific criticisms made by Lord Beloff. The result is an apparent accusation of systematic bias against both the unit and the panel, which comes close to a suggestion of professional misconduct (and so brushes close to defamation?). Such an accusation is clearly very damaging. Even when it is satisfactorily disposed of, as it surely will be, the fact that it was ever taken seriously is bound to inhibit the academic freedom of those who work in the unit.

Secondly, Lord Rothschild in his own report argues that social science can never be value-free, although it can of course be conducted under conditions of proper academic integrity and to that extent can be "extra-political". If this commonsense judgment is followed, he has provided his own answer to the

accusation of bias at Warwick. Thirdly, the SSRC cannot be expected to see that all possible suggestions of bias are extirpated from the research it supports. To try to do so would be an intellectual nonsense. Its responsibility should be confined to ensuring that its portfolio of research is a pluralist one. There is nothing in Lord Rothschild's report which suggests that this is not the case.

The third issue raised by Lord Rothschild is the very broad question of the intellectual validity of sociology and more practically its actual quality within universities and polytechnics. Here Lord Rothschild seems to have caught a mild dose of Josephitis. He does not of course suggest that sociology is an unworthy discipline of knowledge. But he does suggest that too many sociology departments have mediocre standards, and recommends that the SSRC should do nothing to encourage the formation of new departments and should instead refuse to sustain in any way sub-standard ones.

It must be very doubtful if the report of an official inquiry is the right place to discuss whether sociology is or is not more coherent intellectually than economics, or history, or physics. It is also very doubtful if it is fair to pick on sociology. After all, during the very rapid expansion of higher education in the 1960s many departments in many disciplines acquired staff who before or since that period might have found it difficult to get appointed. To that extent there may have been a dilution of quality. It may even have happened in sociology and social science generally more than in the more traditional disciplines, because its intellectual contours were less clear and because the expansion was especially rapid. But it is doubtful if sociology is a significantly worse offender in this respect than many other disciplines.

In addition to these three issues raised by Lord Rothschild there are two extra-Rothschild issues that must be considered. The first is our chronic failure to achieve a sufficiently broad policy perspective on research across all disciplines. In recent months we have had two reports on research, Swinnerton-Dyer on post-graduate education and now Rothschild on the SSRC. We still await Merrison on the dual support system. It really makes little sense to have a series of single-issue reports like this. There is certainly evidence of a growing crisis in research but it cannot be tackled, or even understood, by a series of uncoordinated efforts.

The crisis consists as much of the ailing relationships between different parts of the research system as it does of the parts themselves failing.

The second issue is just as important. In his latest report Lord Rothschild is careful to suggest that his famous customer-contractor principle cannot safely be applied to the social sciences. Yet he hardly goes beyond this negative statement, except to conclude that an independent research council is the appropriate model for supporting social science research. Rather surprisingly he has little decisive to say on one side or the other about the controversy on how the SSRC should set about its job - by working forwards from academic disciplines or backwards from social problems. Not everyone is confident that the SSRC in its latest reorganized committee structure has got it right. A truce with the Government is certainly needed but not a freeze on this larger intellectual debate.

Two battles remain to be fought by the SSRC, both in an important sense more crucial to the council's future than Sir Keith's kamikaze attack or Lord Beloff's partisan gripes against the Warwick unit. The first is to put right the imbalance between academic inquiry and "customer demand" that has grown up under the intense political pressure which the SSRC has suffered in recent years. This creeping Rothchildization should be reversed. The second is to adopt a successful strategy to reverse the equally damaging decline in funding for social science research.