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 marketplace. 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 response. 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).
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 customer 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 be 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.
Mummy!

Yes, darling.


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 didn'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 emperor, mummy. A Roman emperor.

Oh God.

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

CAN YOU HEAR ME OUT THERE?
Report condemns proposal as 'intellectual vandalism'

by Paul Flather

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Laurie Taylor

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.
The most spectacular, but in any-thing 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 smoke-screen 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 important custodians of a truth which the overwhelming majority in both higher education and government has never doubted.

But in another sense Lord Rothschild's conclusions are 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, Gallant') 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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ac-56-cussion of bias at Warwick. Third-
ly, 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 responsi-
bility should be confined to ensuring
that its portfolio of research is a
pluralist one. There is nothing in
Lord Rothschild’s report which sug-
gests that this is not the case.

The third issue raised by Lord
Rothschild is the very broad ques-
tion of the intellectual validity of sociol-
ogy 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 de-
partments 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 sociol-
yogy is or is not more coherent intel-
lectually 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 disci-
plines acquired staff who before or
since that period might have found it
difficult to get appointed. To that
extent there may have been a dilu-
tion of quality. It may even have
happened in sociology and social sci-
ence 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 chro-
nic 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 Roths-
child 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 can-
ot 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 im-
portant. In his latest report Lord Roth-
schild 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 re-
search 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 struc-
ture 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 “cus-
tomer demand” that has grown up
under the intense political pressure
which the SSRC has suffered in re-
cent years. This creeping Roths-
childization should be reversed. The
second is to adopt a successful
strategy to reverse the equally
damaging decline in funding for so-
cial science research.