

**The Colonial Office Advisory Committee on Education in the British Colonies
1923-1941**

Fewzi BORSALI, Université d'Adrar

Education, language and culture can be transmitted and conserved through natural and other social institutions such as the family, the church, schools and cultural centres. They are, however, submitted to change which occurs as a result of culture contact and balance of power. Colonial establishment and control expresses such change in a pattern of a dominating foreign minority culture over a subordinated native majority. Though such a colonial pattern logically requires official involvement through the establishment of institutions for its consolidation, the British remained indifferent to such involvement in their initial stages of colonial rule. It was not until 1923 that an official advisory committee for education in the colonies was set up in the Colonial Office. The paper attempts to examine first the underlying British philosophy before such involvement and the reasons for the change; secondly it focuses on the background of the creation of such a body, on its membership and organization until 1941, and finally on some of its achievements.

Though British colonial rule started in coastal areas following centuries of trade then extended to their respective hinterland areas by the second half of the 19th century, colonial officials did not think it necessary to introduce government schools or cultural centers for consolidating their supremacy in those colonies. This indifference can be related to British officials' belief in liberalism or laissez-faire and to the *raison d'être* of colonialism.

Educational or cultural matters had been under the monopoly of the Church in England, and it was not until 1833 that a first grant-in aid was made to educational institutions in England. This came as a result of the 1832 Reform Bill which extended popular franchise to the middle classes.

The people had to wait until 1870 to see their children granted some free elementary education by the State, and then successive Education Acts in 1902, 1918 and 1944 came to consolidate a national public educational system in Britain. As far as higher education is concerned, university institutions had been private corporations, and it was not until 1889 that the British government allowed its first annual grant to some universities and not until 1919 that it decided to set up a university grants committee. It was obvious that colonial enterprise would transfer with it such predominating official practice.

On the other hand, the lack of state involvement in colonial educational and cultural matters could also be related to the slow process of colonization; the British conception of colonial financial self-sufficiency and exploitation of African natural resources constituted the guiding principle for their enterprise therein. For example, missionary bodies had established schools for example in West Africa: the Christian Missionary Society (CMS) in Sierra Leone in 1806 and in Nigeria by 1847 whereas the Wesleyans or Methodists began their educational work in Sierra Leone by 1811, in the Gold Coast in 1835 and in Nigeria around 1847; the Basel Missionary Society had already started work in the Gold Coast in 1828.

The missionaries' scramble for conversion together with the need to produce cheap West African personnel for various services aimed at making the latter more receptive to colonial propaganda. Walter Rodney viewed the role of missionaries as 'being to preserve the social relations of colonialism, as an extension of the role they played in preserving the social relations of capitalist Europe' (1). Such a role was generative of colonial changes which were illustrated in the image of Sir Samuel Lewis, a Creole from Sierra Leone, whom J. Hargreaves regarded as 'an outstanding example of an African's successful response to the culture of Western Europe as received for the most part through the filter of colonial society' (2). But several factors came to affect this filter of colonial control which made Colonial Office officials review their indifference to the education of Africans and colonial people in the 1920s.

The factors included first the emergence of politically-conscious groups of western educated Africans asking for political reforms and for more education, namely nineteenth century educated Africans like J.A Horton and W. Blyden of West Africa as well as members of the Pan African movement and those of the National Congress of British West Africa (NCBWA) in the early 1920s. Second, the missionaries' meeting as early as 1910 in London urged the British government to take a more active part in colonial education since they were not able to finance the expansion of education in the colonies. Third, the impact of the First World War, and the introduction of Trusteeship or Dual Mandate principles, together with the recommendations of the American Phelps-Stokes commission on education in Africa led the Colonial Office to take a definite step for the formation of an advisory machinery education in the Tropical African Dependencies in 1923.

Functions and membership

The Colonial Office held a conference in 1923 under the chairmanship of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, W.G.A Ormsby-Gore (1922-1924) in response to the Education Committee of the Christian Missionary Society which suggested the establishment of a permanent education committee at the Colonial Office. The conference was attended by some officials of the Colonial Office, six colonial governors, three unofficial missionary representatives (3), together with Dr. Jesse Jones, chairman of the Phelps-Stokes Commission that visited Africa in 1920. The Secretary of State, L.C.M Amery (1924-1929), agreed to create such a body with the following terms of reference:

"to advise the Secretary of State on any matters of native education in the British colonies

and protectorates in Tropical Africa, which he may from time to time, refer to it, and to assist him in advancing the progress of education in those colonies and protectorates".

The carrying out of tasks depended on the expertise of the Committee members. The 1923 membership totalled nine including the following: two Colonial Office officials: the Parliamentary Undersecretary, WGA Ormsby-Gore and the Assistant Under-Secretary, Sir Herbert Read; two representatives of missionary bodies: Right Rev. Bishop Bidwell, nominated by the Cardinal of Westminster to represent the Roman Catholic Mission, and J.H Oldham to represent the Protestant Mission. Unofficial members included Sir James Currie, former officer of the Sudan Education Service and Head of Gordon College, Khartoum; Right Rev. A. David, Bishop, of Liverpool

and former Headmaster of Rugby School; Sir M. Sadler, Master of University College, Oxford, and Sir F. Lugard, former Governor of Nigeria and member of the governing body of the International Institute of African Languages and Culture. The Committee appointed a secretary, H. Vischer, former Director of Education in Northern Nigeria. In addition to this membership, officers of the education departments and colonial governors of the African Dependencies could be invited to attend.

The members were appointed for a period of three years and could be eligible for reappointment. In fact, changes in membership took place among both officials and unofficials. The Secretary of State appointed two women known for their contribution to female education: Miss Burstall, former Headmistress of Manchester Girls School and Miss A.W. Whitelaw, late Headmistress of Wycombe Abbey and a member of Oldham's mission to South and East Africa.

By 1927, at the Imperial Education Conference the colonial governors of other dependencies agreed to extend the terms of reference of the Committee on Education in the Tropical African Dependencies to their respective colonies (4). Subsequently, a second secretary, A. Mayhew, a former member of the Indian Service of Education, was appointed to act with H. Vischer in connection with the issue of an education bulletin.

The 1931 Colonial Education Committee comprised eighteen members consisting of two officials, three missionary representatives, ten members in their personal capacity, and three secretaries. The official side comprised: Sir R. Hamilton and Sir John Schuckburgh, Colonial Office Parliamentary Under-Secretary and Deputy Parliamentary Under-Secretary respectively. The representative side was composed of: Right Rev; Bishop Bidwell for the Roman Catholic Church Mission; J.H. Oldham for the Christian Missionary Society, and W. Spens for Cambridge University. The members in their personal capacity were: Miss S.A. Burstall serving since 1926; Major A.G. Church, MP, serving since 1925; Sir James Currie since 1924, Lord Lugard since 1924, Sir Michael Sadler since 1924, Miss A.W. Whitelaw since 1926; Prof. T.P. Nunn since 1927; Captain V.A. Cazalet, MP; Sir G. Maxell since 1929; H. Snell, MP. The Secretaries were: H. Vischer, A. Mayhew and P.H. Morris.

Such membership was subject to change due to the constant development of educational work in the colonies; the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Sir Philippe Cunliffe-Lister (Nov 1931-June 1935), introduced a system which would ensure the systematic appointment of new members for one year subject to renewal, and the retirement of a percentage of the members at the end of the year. By 1940, the joint secretaries, Vischer and Mayhew gave up work after they had been associated with the Colonial Education Committee for sixteen and ten years respectively. They were replaced by an educational adviser, C.M.M. Cox, aged 40, a scholar of Balliol, then Dean of New College, Director of Education in the Sudan since 1937. As far as those members serving in their personal capacity, it was felt that a system of rotation was required in order to release some members from the voluminous work of the Colonial Education Committee and to appoint new ones. The new system consisted in the retirement of members after three years of service. However, two members had already resigned (R. Firth and D. Mackinnon), and three were gone (R. Windstead, W. Spens and F. Sibly), whom it was thought to replace, bearing in mind the gradual importance of colonial higher education, the need to strengthen the female

membership of the Committee and the appointment of new members with non-African experience and knowledge (5)

The Committee membership of 1941 increased to twenty eight, ten more members than in 1931: five officials, six representatives and seventeen members in their personal capacity. The Colonial Office officials comprised: G. Hall (Parliamentary Under-Secretary (1940-42) as Chairman of the Committee; A.J. Dawe as Deputy-chairman, G.H. Creasy from the Social Service Department and J.L. Keith (former Acting Director of Education in Northern Rhodesia), and C.M.M. Cox. On the representative side, provision was made for the educational institutions and religious missions: Miss E. Burney and Ms E.C Mee for the Board of Education; Prof. F. Clarke representing London University Institute of Education; Rev. H.M. Grace, Secretary of the Christian Missionary Society and former Principal of Achimota College in the Gold Coast; Right Rev. Bishop E. Myers for the Roman Catholic Mission; and R.K Winter for the Sudanese Government.

Apart from Major Church, MP, all the others were new members serving in their personal capacity: Sir Donald Charles Cameron, former Governor of Tanganyika (1925-1931) and former Governor of Nigeria (1931-35); E.R.J Hussey, former Director of Education in Uganda (1925) and Nigeria (1929-1936), and member of the Governing Body of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University (1939); Mr. Herbert S. Scott, former Director of Education in Kenya (1928-1935); Sir R.C. Windstead, former Director of Education of the Straits Settlements, the Federated Malay States (1924-1931); G. Cator, a former member of the Colonial Administrative Service; *Sir Reginald Stubbs*, former Colonial Secretary in Ceylon (1933-1937); Sir G. Anderson, former Educational Commissioner with the Government of India; Prof. B. Mouat Jones, Vice-Chancellor of Leeds University, and member of de La Warr Commission on Higher Education in East Africa, 1937; Prof. W.M. Macmillan, member of the Trade Union Congress Colonial Committee, and former Prof of History in South African universities (1917-1934); Prof. Channon, at Liverpool University and a former member of the Commission of Higher Education in Malaya, 1939; Prof. Julian Huxley, Professor of Zoology at King's College, London University and former member of the General Committee for Lord Hailey's African Survey 1933-1938); Miss Perham, Reader in Colonial Administration, Oxford University (1939-1948); Sir P.W. Donner, Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Home Secretary, 1939; Arthur Creech-Jones, MP; Harold Stannard, and P. Vellacot (6)

Expertise

Since educational policy is fundamentally related to policy makers' expertise and ideology, it is quite interesting to find out the extent to which such expertise was relevant to the colonial context during which the British officials stressed the need for trusteeship principles as their guiding principle in their colonial policies. Examination of available biographies of the Committee members shows that those educated at Oxbridge institutions, excluding the officials, numbered six out of seven in 1923; seven out of ten in 1927, eleven out of fifteen in 1931, eleven out of twenty in 1939. Others were educated at other English university institutions (London, Birmingham, and Manchester) and a few received no higher education (five in 1923 reduced to two in 1931, and one in 1939).

Members with experience in colonial education numbered four in 1927 (excluding officials), and ten in 1939 whereas others with experience in non-colonial education totalled six in 1927 and 1939. The various Committee memberships were characterized by the prevalence of the Oxbridge elements and members with experience in colonial affairs. Some of them, mainly F. Lugard, JH Oldham, Mahyew, Macmillan, Perham, etc published books on either colonial education or other questions. For example, F Lugard, former Governor of Nigeria, wrote the fundamental work on colonial policy after the First World War, *The Dual Mandate in Tropical Africa*, 1922 and contributed with some articles on education and race relations in 1933. His valuable work on colonial education could be related to his association as Chairman of the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures established in 1926. Another important figure of the Committee, J.H. Oldham, was the editor of the *International Review of Missions* (1922-1927), and was involved in missionary education in the colonial empire. He wrote various books, namely *Christianity and Race Problems*, 1924; *The New Christian Adventure*, 1929, *The Educational Movement of Missionary Societies*, 1934, etc. Mahyew, former Director of Public Instruction in the Central Provinces of India is the author of *Education in India*, 1926; *Education in the Colonial Empire*, 1938, *Aims and Methods of Indigenous Education*, 1939, etc. No doubt one of the most critics of colonialism was Prof Macmillan whose works include: *The South African Aboriginal Problem*, 1919; *Cape Colour Question*, 1927; *Africa Emergent*, 1938; *Warning from the West Indies*, 1936. Miss Perham was the most notable researcher on colonial administration and for training colonial officials at Oxford. Her works include: *Native Administration in Nigeria*, 1937; *Africans and British Rule*, 1941 etc. The members of the Colonial Education Committee were not simply educationists, but they also held some responsibility whether political or administrative either in the colonies or in the UK. On the whole, members with colonial experience outnumbered the others.

Internal organization

Three years after its creation, the Committee appointed in December 1926 a sub-committee to deal with textbooks the aim of which was to establish a Bureau of Information and Advice concerning English textbooks which could be used in the African colonies. Its original membership included Major Church, Dr. Dunn, Miss Whitelaw, H. Vischer and H. Newbolt. It was enlarged to deal with colonial education as a whole when the main Committee was extended to other dependencies in 1928. By 1939 its members comprised E. Burney as chairman, Major Church, F. Clarke, J. Huxley and D. Mackinnon.

A second sub-committee was created in 1928 to deal with African Education reports. Ten years later, 1939, its membership included: D. Cameron as chairman, Major Church, JL. Keith, Miss Perham, Miss Oakden, Rev Dougall, Bishop Myers, H.S. Scott and J. Huxley. A third sub-committee created just after the second dealt with non-African educational problems. Its membership consisted in 1939 of the following: Windstead as chairman, Rev Dougall, Bishop Myers, E. Burney, R. Firth, A. Creech-Jones, D. Mackinnon, and Stannard.

1939 saw the creation of a fourth and fifth sub-committees. The first dealt with colonial questions with a view to advising the Colonial Department of London

Given the nature of its work, the Colonial Education Committee worked in collaboration with other bodies within and outside the Colonial Office. The Board of Education together with the Appointments Boards of Oxford, Cambridge and London universities were of valuable assistance for recommending and training candidates for the Colonial Education Service whereas the British Council, the Director of Colonial Scholars, the Victoria League, Aggrey House, etc. contributed in the welfare of colonial students.

The extension of the Education Committee on Colonial Education in 1928 implied more work and naturally more funds were needed to meet the expenses of the joint-secretaries, travelling expenses of the members, and the cost for printing and distributing the documents. 1924 expenses and those of the succeeding years were exclusively met from colonial sources between 1924 and 1933 when the Carnegie Corporation resolved to offer \$5,000 annually because of the impact of 1929 World crisis. The expenses of the Committee amounted to £2,342 in 1924, increasing to £3,441 in 1939 (7).

The arguments advanced by both officials and missionaries for their colonial enterprise can justify but their narrow-minded view of African capabilities on one hand and selfish interest on the other. University institutions came into existence after WWII, i.e. almost after a century and a half of colonial rule in Sierra Leone. In fact, the British attitude of colonial financial self-sufficiency eg the payment of British educational advisers in Britain from the colonial dependencies' treasury and foreign sources expresses the exploitation of colonial resources for the benefit of imperial domination.

Notes

1. W. Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Bougle l'Ouverture, London, 1972, p.278
2. J.D. Hargreaves, *A Life of Sir Samuel Lewis*, London, 1958, p 101
3. Sir H. Clifford, Governor of Nigeria (1919-25); Sir G Guggisberg, Governor of the Gold Coast (1919-27); Sir S. Slater, Governor of Sierra Leone (1922-27); Sir. R. Coryndon, Governor of Kenya (1922-25); Sir, G. Smity, Governor of Nyasaland and A.C. Hollis for Tanganyika Territory. The three unofficials included J.H. Oldham, Secretary of the International Missionary Council, Archbishop of Canterbury, and Rev. DR. Garfield Williams of the Christian Missionary Society.
4. At the Federal Education Conference of 1907 convened by the League of the Empire and attended by oversea Dominions, colonies and India, it was recommended to convene an Imperial Conference every four years.
5. CO 859/1/1201/8/ 1939 Letter from Creasy to Dawe 17.1.1940
6. Details about biographies can be found in "Who's Who" and files in CO 323 related to the Colonial Office Advisory Committee on Education
7. CO 323/ 1008/50786/1928 Vischer to Faddian 28.7.1928 and CO 859/1/1201/1D/1939 circular 30.12.1939.