

# HOW NOT TO APPLY ANTHROPOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE: THE RAI AND ITS 'FRIENDS'

## Introduction

At the end of the Second World War, the Labour Party's election victory under Clement Attlee led to hopes of an economic renaissance. Key manifesto promises included the nationalisation of the coal and steel industries, and the application of scientific planning and management. Policymakers began to consider the role that the social sciences might play in understanding human behaviour within industrial settings. In this chapter, I describe social anthropologists' reluctance to 'apply' their disciplinary knowledge to such utilitarian ends during this period. The story reveals the distance that the discipline had travelled since Malinowski successfully marketed 'practical anthropology' to Rockefeller in the 1920s. Now that social anthropology had a secure institutional foothold within Britain's universities, its leaders could enforce a hierarchy that placed theoretical and 'pure' anthropology firmly above application. Evans-Pritchard evoked this new determination when he wrote, just after the war, that 'I doubt whether anyone can investigate fundamental and practical problems at the same time' (1946, 93).

Historically, British anthropology's attitude towards its application can be characterised as one of serial ambivalence. Anthropology both depends on and denies its utility. Early proselytisers like Bronislaw Malinowski made the case for anthropology's relevance and

applicability to garner funding from the major philanthropic foundations (e.g. Malinowski 1929, 1930). Once anthropology's institutional position was more secure, academic anthropologists could distance their practice from that of colonial administrators, gentlemanly amateurs and curious travellers, creating a disciplinary 'comfort zone' around their work. At this point, 'application' developed a different meaning and resonance. It became dependent on, and derivative of, academic and theoretical work. Pels and Salemink, writing about the colonial contexts in which anthropology was formed, suggest that the discipline is in the habit of back-projecting 'the self-image of twentieth century academic anthropology onto all ethnographic activities that played a role in the formation of the discipline' (1999b, 2). They suggest that many of its practitioners saw the 'real' history of anthropology commencing only when theoretical and research expertise were fused in the person of the professional fieldworker. It was a narrow view of the discipline's recent history – after all, Radcliffe-Brown's collaboration with two Australian scholars, the psychologist Elton Mayo and the sociologist Lloyd Warner, led them to influentially apply Radcliffe-Brown's ideas to understand American factory life (Mayo 1933, Warner 1952), and also to strongly influence the sociologist George Homans (Homans 1951). Nonetheless it strengthened the resolve of British social anthropologists to challenge the use of their discipline to solve industrial 'problems' in post-war Britain.

### **The RAI and its 'friends' 1947–55**

The attempt by captains of British industry to court anthropology in this period is one of the more glamorous chapters in the history of a discipline already marked by its aspirations to join the British establishment (Leach 1984). Black-tie soirées at Claridges offered a convivial new milieu in which to woo social anthropologists. The key figure in this development was Israel Sieff, co-founder of Marks and Spencer. He was determined to show how anthropological methods could be used to study labour relations within large corporations. Sieff spent a great deal of time during the early 1950s convincing academics and his business colleagues that anthropology could solve industrial 'problems'. Misapprehensions about what the discipline could offer abounded, amongst both industrialists and anthropologists.

The new field of social anthropology had already proved itself adept at gaining funding from independent foundations (such as Rockefeller and Carnegie) and the British Colonial Office. However, commercially sponsored research was of a different order. In seeking to woo the

Royal Anthropological Institute (RAI), Sieff threatened the autonomy that academic anthropologists, through the creation of the rival Association of Social Anthropologists in 1946, had established around the discipline.

Israel Sieff, born in 1880, grew up in the same street as Simon Marks, the son of the founder of the retailer Marks and Spencers. After making a loan to Simon and joining him on the company's board in 1915, they worked closely for the next fifty years to build the company from its Manchester roots to its place as one of the UK's most powerful retailers. Renowned for his personal energy, Sieff used his position as a public figure to great effect. Soon after its founding in 1931, he became involved in Political and Economic Planning (PEP), an independent think tank to promote the science of 'national planning' as a solution to the economic and political crises of the time. It brought together an informal network of politicians, economists and journalists in working groups to develop practical strategies for tackling economic decline and mounting unemployment, and Sieff co-authored an influential report on industry in 1932. As he later modestly recalled, his influence ensured that the reports kept 'on a practical level ... theoretical and abstract approaches have always been above me' (Sieff 1970, 172). After the war, its activities greatly expanded. At the request of Sieff, a new PEP study group was launched to study human relations in industry. Given his experience at building a coalition of opinion, and his amateur interest in anthropology (he was already a member of the RAI), he decided to involve the RAI in this new initiative. Over more than five years, Sieff spent a great deal of time seeking to build links between anthropology and industry. It was here that the black-tie dinners came into their own, as he sought to bring together academics and his business colleagues.

The romance had actually been initiated by William Fagg, RAI Secretary between 1939 and 1956, and an important scholar of African art. In 1947 Fagg approached the industrial reformer Sir Robert Hyde, and asked him to come to speak to the RAI about the potential for 'cooperation' with industry. Hyde, born in 1878, had begun his working life as an ordained priest and warden of a Hoxton boys' hostel, and his experiences led him to set up the national Boys Welfare Association in 1918. Campaigning for better working relationships between managers and employers, and in particular for the provision of basic workplace amenities like lavatories, canteens and changing rooms, Hyde's hands-on style was highly influential. The organisation grew into what subsequently became known as the Industrial Society (which continues to this day under its new title 'The Work Foundation'). By the late 1940s Hyde had had a considerable impact on British industry and commerce, and his style of visiting and

spending time on factory shop-floors made him sympathetic to an anthropological approach. After speaking enthusiastically about anthropology's potential, he was made a member of the RAI council, he subsequently became a Vice-President of the RAI for a number of years, authoring a number of reviews and chairing the British Ethnography Committee in the 1950s (Hyde 1955, 1957).

Whilst nothing came of Fagg's efforts, an approach several years later by Lord Raglan, then RAI President, to Hyde's friend Israel Sieff had a more tangible outcome. Lord Raglan, the great-grandson of the famous Crimean War general, was a linguist and independent scholar with an interest in anthropology, and boasted an impeccable aristocratic pedigree and set of establishment connections. Sieff could hardly refuse, and invited the RAI officers to talk over lunch about the needs of the institute. Sieff was obviously impressed by what he had heard, and decided to host an informal dinner to bring together the RAI officers and committee members, including Meyer Fortes (then editor of *Man*), and Sieff's friends and business contacts.

Held in November 1951, little is recorded of that evening's conversation, but it was clearly a successful occasion, for soon afterwards Israel Sieff's secretary sent a number cheques from Sainsbury's Ltd, Thomas de la Rue, Unilever and Lotus to the RAI. Of particular note was a £1,000 cheque Sieff forwarded from George Harris, Chair of Rowntrees, who had noted 'how impressed he was by what he had heard at dinner', and in particular 'by the long and interesting discussion he had with Meyer Fortes'. According to Sieff, Harris had felt 'it would be an excellent idea if Fortes visit York and tell his colleagues there something about the work of the Institute is doing'. Sieff immediately wrote to Fortes to suggest this, noting that his colleagues 'were much impressed with the great potential value of this work in relation to the major problems we are facing'.<sup>1</sup>

Buoyed by this response Sieff discussed with Lord Raglan the potential for formalising the link, and proposed the creation of a body entitled the 'Friends of the RAI'. Soon after, Lord Raglan sent out a formal invitation to members of the RAI Council to meet Sir Robert Hyde over dinner at Sieff's flat, and to 'discuss a number of interesting aspects of the industrial problems today in this country, in which he feels that we may be of valuable assistance to Industry in general, both in this country and in their activities overseas'. Again, the response was positive, and the 'Friends of the RAI' were formally recognised at the next Council meeting. In the Summer of 1952 Council also agreed the formation of a liaison committee to expand this network of 'Friends', made up of twelve members, including Hyde, Sieff and Webster Plass as representatives of industry. As well as the RAI officers and President, Evans-Pritchard, Fortes, Forde and Leach were all

invited to join, as serving members of the RAI's executive committee. The report in *Man* of the RAI Council for 1952 presented the initiative to its membership in glowing terms – 'a group of industrialists who recognise the great potential importance of the results of fundamental anthropological research in the future of this country both at home and abroad'. Whilst acknowledging that the research would 'in no way be at the expense of existing methods and fields of research', the RAI Council was of the view that the Institute's role was to ensure that 'fundamental research should keep pace with developments in the application of research in social affairs'. This was to be a new and provocative twist to the relationship between anthropological theory and practice.

The liaison committee drew up a document for discussions with potential new Friends. Its rosy presentation of the RAI's past achievements and Panglossian potential for solving the problems of modernity deserves quoting at length:<sup>2</sup>

We firmly believe that the RAI, now hampered severely in its great work by a rise in operating costs out of all proportion to its income, deserves our immediate and effective assistance. The institute has gained a high international reputation and sponsored anthropological research from all over the world. Its forthright defence of the need to integrate human studies has played a vitally important part in the cross-fertilisation of ideas between specialisms, which to the detriment of our understanding of human behaviour, are growing steadily apart.

We live in a changing world, and new conditions require new methods of approach as problems of human relationship increase in magnitude and complexity, the political advancement of colonial territories, the economic development of backward areas, the increasing integration of world trade ... the growth of nationalised industries and vast industrial combines, new forms of labour organisation, a managerial class, all these are creating a new situation in human affairs about which we know very little and on which, relatively speaking, research expenditure is negligible. Many believe that the broad approach of the Institute, rooted as it is in empirical research, is becoming increasingly important to an understanding of the world, and especially industrial personnel problems.

### **'A strictly scientific attitude'**

Determined to keep the momentum, Sieff planned a major dinner for the Friends of the RAI in the Summer of 1952. Again the guest list was illustrious, including the chairmen of ICI, GEC, Unilever and Metal Box. Whilst only five out of the twenty or so of such magnates attended, amongst these were Thomas Padmore, Under Secretary in the Treasury. Again, a number of anthropologists attended, including

Edmund Leach, who was later to become RAI President. Leach, however, was 'dismayed' at some of the extravagant promises that were made by some of the RAI representatives over dinner, and, in a characteristically long and colourful letter to Sieff, told him so. It was 'very natural', Leach agreed, that some of the financiers should ask, 'Of what practical use is this anthropology to us?' and it was inevitable in the circumstances that 'anthropologists should put forward claims for the practicality of their subject and the comprehensiveness of the RAI as an institution'. 'Nevertheless', he went on,

I feel this is a very bad basis on which to make claims for support. All the serious anthropologists I know have a strictly scientific attitude to their subject; they are interested in the structural relations of human society in much the same detached kind of way as physicists are interested in the structural relations of the atomic nucleus. The fact is that the anthropologist really does not know whether or not his subject has any important practical applications, but when anyone holds out a financial carrot he tends to invent them. This is not fair either to the anthropologist or to the financier.

This was a rather disingenuous account of a discipline that only a few years earlier had argued for the potential relevance of anthropology for understanding colonial 'problems', and received a significant amount of funding for doing so. Leach went on to dismiss as 'nonsense' the idea that anthropologists might act, as it were, as social planners, or that they could provide the data that would 'solve the industrialists' problems'. As far as he was concerned, 'Anthropologists are people who have made a specialisation of techniques for describing the behaviour and organisation of small groups especially those of "primitive societies", but it is *anthropological* information, and it is most misleading to suggest that it can be readily utilised or made available to anyone who is not an anthropologist.' Finally, Leach pointed out that until very recently, 'research work relating to "modern society" has been felt to be outside the Institute's province' such that 'the Institute is not now equipped to provide the background data for sociological studies'. Instead, he proposed, that these resources could be developed, and that the Institute should 'aim at being a focal point for all the fields of sociological study, not only the anthropologists but the sociologists and social psychologists as well'. The prime need was for the 'institute to occupy its own building and pay its staff without pinching and scraping', such that the 'immediate need therefore is for money for general purposes and not for money for specific research into this or that detailed problem for which the anthropologist may be ill equipped to deal'.<sup>3</sup>

Leach copied his letter to Fagg, who privately expressed the view that it showed Leach 'and the LSE generally are trying to wreck the whole thing'. To his credit, Leach did nominate Kenneth Little to the RAI Council, suggesting that the 'work going on under the sponsorship of Social Anthropology in Edinburgh is just the sort of thing that Mr Sieff and his friends might be interested in'.<sup>4</sup> With Leach's encouragement, Little also wrote to Fagg, expressing his regret at having not been told about the committee earlier, given his interest 'in extending anthropological research amongst advanced societies', and noting that much research activity of his Edinburgh department 'is being carried on in this field'. In turn Little nominated Noel Stevenson to the liaison committee, given his experience as a colonial administrator. As a result, Fagg invited Stevenson to act as a point of liaison between the committee and the Friends to pre-empt an early souring of a relationship that Fagg felt was only beginning to develop. Unfortunately, Leach had already had a run-in with Stevenson, who had been involved in what Leach later called 'crazy cloak and dagger' intelligence work in Burma (Leach 1986, 377).

Stevenson threw himself into the role, and, with the help of the RAI, prepared a memo to the Friends detailing the RAI's financial outgoings, as part of another circular Sieff planned to tell 'his friends about the RAI and the way in which it – and anthropologists – might help industry'. The RAI Treasurer proposed a figure of £6000 to 'accomplish its functions', which he suggested, was only a matter of 'ten of our wealthy industrial friends' agreeing to covenant £400 each for seven years (the sum that Marks and Spencer had already committed), 'which they would not really miss in these days of high profit'.

As the momentum for the campaign developed, Sieff and the liaison committee prepared a new and more explicit appeal for research funds, emphasising the urgency of addressing social change. In a letter to Peter Rowntree, Sieff noted that:

Many of the causes of unrest, misunderstanding and unhappiness in industry are to be found in the past, and have their roots, not in present events, but in customs, traditions and group loyalties which no longer hold. The growth of business concerns, the disappearance of old personal relationships, the emergence of a managerial class, the breaking down of operations, are creating new situations in human affairs. We believe that this rapidly changing social pattern demands fresh methods of study and approach if adjustments in relationships, stability and integration are to be realised.

A draft fund-raising document proposed a 'research fund' for research into human relations in industry, strengthening the resources of the

Institute so that it could (1) establish an information service; (2) complete the reorganisation of its unique library; (3) undertake investigations into specific industrial problems; and (4) enlarge its publications on industrial research. Finally, the document proposed the establishment of a 'Museum of English Life and Industry', providing material evidence of the traditional way of life in England. This last proposal was included mainly at the behest of Hyde, who was also a close friend of Sieff. He felt that 'if we can bring in those who gathered around Sieff's table on some practicable issue such as this, it might lead to the development we all desire'.

Social anthropologists on the liaison committee were still not happy with the shape the fund-raising proposal was taking. Raymond Firth, new to the committee in 1952, decided to prepare an alternative draft. Ever sensitive to the need for disciplinary autonomy and new studentships, his proposal was to seek general financial support for the RAI and to establish a 'Research Fellowship' scheme. His proposal spent some time seeking to define the discipline itself:

The great importance of anthropology is in giving general clues to the understanding of human behaviour ... but it may also give some help in the solution of practical questions, provided that adequate study has been made of the problems ... this necessitates a great deal of basic research which, like such research in the natural sciences, is not by any means always linked to the solving of some practical problems.

This time it was the industrialists' turn to express their frustration. Robert Hyde, perhaps aggrieved that no mention had been made of his museum idea, felt that Firth's letter was 'too vague, and focuses primarily on problems', and 'fails to relate the work of the anthropologist to actual conditions prevailing in rapidly changing circumstances or to the wider influences that affect that relationship'. 'In my time,' he added, 'I must have read hundreds of documents addressed to employers and have found that when direct argument falters the writers fall back upon "problem" or "factor" as an easy way out.' For Hyde the solution was 'a more direct approach ... to the ordinary business man', ideally with a few extracts 'taken from that American journal of applied anthropology showing in what direct and practical ways anthropology could be of service to industry'. Drawing on his reading of this journal, *Human Organisation*, where US scholars were developing Lloyd Warner's seminal studies of factory-based networks, Hyde even proposed that the case for applied anthropology should be set out in a clear six point structure: '1 Study of basic human relationships and loyalties. 2. Interpret traditional anthropological method to modern industrial practice. 3. Fields of application in



industry. 4. Examples of successful applications. 5. Results to be expected. 6. Cost and return to industry.'

The following year Peter Rowntree, one of the Friends of the RAI, expressed similar misgivings about a memo prepared by Professor Forde. Writing to Sieff, he explained that having 'read this with interest several times, some parts of it I must confess I am unable to understand. Basically I think there is a difficulty of communication. It would seem that there is considerable difference between the nomenclature in general use in anthropological circles and in the business world.' For Rowntree, the solution was to try and 'translate what the anthropologist has got to say into language which the businessmen will be able to understand'.

As further appeals and fund-raising dinners were planned, and the network of sympathetic 'prominent industrialists' reached almost 100, the Friends increasingly sought to define the relationship in their own way. Yet another promotional document by Robert Hyde provided practical examples of the use of applied anthropology. He cited a 'pioneer study under the direction of Elton Mayo in a Western Electrical plant near Chicago' that 'demonstrated most forcibly that practical measures for improvements with regard to such matters as output, absenteeism, the understanding and acceptance of new instructions, depended in large measure on their adjustment to social necessities, both within the working unit and in the wider community from which managers and workers are drawn'. In his lecture to the RAI on the 'Application of Anthropological Knowledge to Our Industrial Society', Hyde pointed to the potential for anthropology to 'detect weaknesses in the industrial system which encourage discord rather than promoting harmony' (Hyde 1955). He went on to argue that awareness of the discipline's utility was currently limited to America. Citing with approval the foundation of the US Society for Applied Anthropology in 1941, he lay down a challenge to anthropological practice in the UK.

Rowntree also repeated his concern to 'bridge the gap' between the academic and industrialist view in a further letter to Sieff in April 1954, after another 'very excellent dinner and representative list of guests'. This time, he was not just concerned with anthropologists' use of language, but also about the need for a 'really practicable proposition as opposed to generalities'. He also felt that it needed to be shown 'why the contribution of the anthropologist can be useful and in what way his training and experience differs from that of the psychologist'. Ominously he went further still, suggesting that 'the biggest stumbling block to getting ready acceptance of the ideas which are so important is the use of the word "anthropology"', feeling that it was 'a word which immediately conjures up into the mind a detailed

study of foreign and primitive races, with particular reference to the study of physical attributes and trivial habits'. 'I believe', he ended, 'that when the time comes to collect money and to give publicity to the activities it will not be found that this can be done successfully for "Anthropology" or "anthropologists".'

Peter Rowntree and Robert Hyde were not the only Friends who felt that the onus increasingly lay on anthropologists to demonstrate their interest in this potential new research field. Minutes of a Friends meeting in June 1954 record one Sir Frank Shires pointing out 'that it was not only the industrialists who must be convinced of the value of Anthropology, but also the anthropologists who must be shown that one of the most fruitful fields of study lay in industrial organisations. A research project, supported by the fund, might achieve both these aims.' The Friends suggested lobbying the new Department for Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR) to include anthropological studies. Speaking at a liaison meeting about the prospects for DSIR support, its representative felt that 'there were already a certain number of studies that might be considered as anthropological in nature.'

The DSIR representative may have been referring to the work that Max Gluckman had initiated at Manchester. In the early 1950s, the Harvard sociologist George Homans – having just published his influential *The Human Group* (1951) – spent a year as a Visiting Professor at Manchester. Influenced by his work on the social norms created within a group of workers, Gluckman's students studied shop-floor relations in a number of different factories over a period of four years (e.g. Lupton 1963; Cunnison 1966.). The work became known as the Manchester 'shop-floor ethnographies' (Emmett and Morgan 1982, Cunnison 1982). Thomas Lupton went on to shape the emerging field of organisational behaviour. His work had minimal influence within anthropology, possibly because it drew more on social psychology than on sociology.

Why were these new ethnographies not discussed within the RAI at the time? One reason may have been Max Gluckman's increasing estrangement from Leach and Evans-Pritchard. Another was that this work, like the other community studies initiated by Gluckman's students – such as *Coal is Our Life* (Dennis et al. 1956) and *The Village on the Border* (Frankenberg 1957) – had not yet been published. As a result there were few monographs on industrial issues, and the first report of the joint DSIR/Medical Research Council committee on human relations in industry is silent on anthropological contributions. There was another angle too. When the Friends criticised the lack of anthropological involvement in this joint committee, given the obvious shortage of trained investigators, Firth bluntly pointed out that the

DSIR projects specifically stated that the work must increase productivity. Firth was adamant that anthropology was not in a position to agree to such demands.

### **With Friends like these ...**

Dissent within the liaison committee grew during 1954. Despite Sieff's success at gaining donations from Friends, there was no consensus about how the funds should be used, particularly in relation to 'commissioning research into industrial problems'. Once again, anthropology was put on the defensive. At a meeting in July, Sieff felt that there was still need for practical evidence of anthropology's potential contribution, whilst others asked why funds raised for sending anthropologists overseas were never used to send them into industry, and what anthropology offered that psychology had not already offered. Fortes sought to defend the discipline as a 'young science', asking for a five-year experimental period to develop 'a new side to the old tradition of devoted work with a high purpose', whilst Firth felt that the anthropological method of 'going to a society as a member and living like its people might be difficult to put into practice in industry ... by going into an organisation within his own community a man would most likely be "taped" in accordance with the class from which he comes, and so cut off from his fellow workers'. For Firth, anthropology needed a chance to 'experiment' in industry, and not to be judged on a narrow burden of proof.

Gradually Sieff realised the limitations of the task he had set himself, in the face of a ponderous and slow-moving RAI, and the striking distance between the utilitarian concerns of his fellow business leaders and the scientific values espoused by the anthropologists. Raymond Firth sought to mollify Sieff's growing frustration at how little was being achieved, noting after one meeting that 'it was rather a wearing occasion, but I think it was worth it ... You sounded a little disappointed at the end. It seemed to me however that this was perhaps as much as we could have hoped for in realistic terms. ... Wilson, our treasurer, told me that one of the Scottish distillers has promised £500 under covenant.' Firth went on to note that another industrialist had 'started our conversation by being entirely sceptical, but in the end admitted that the anthropological case did make some sense ... he might be willing to put our case to the English Electricity Board'<sup>15</sup> This was not the progress Sieff had hoped for.

By 1955 the liaison committee was replaced by yet another new RAI 'Committee on Anthropology in Industry' that aimed to plan a programme of research. Yet the last thing that business

representatives wanted was to be dominated by academic research concerns or a lumbering RAI bureaucracy. Barnes wrote to Raymond Firth in May 1955 to record his 'slight progress' with the Friends, after he had drawn up a new draft letter of appeal. As he recalls, 'Castle liked the draft, Rowntree thought it was hopeless and should be completely rewritten. I heard nothing from Sieff. Then about ten days ago, Sieff apparently called a meeting to discuss a draft which Miss Bradney [an independent researcher who later carried out an ethnography of Selfridges] had drawn up ... It is not the sort of document that I would have written, but there is nothing outrageous in it.'<sup>6</sup>

One of the Friends' last initiatives was to propose a semi-autonomous 'Industrial Relations Research Group' in order 'to avoid involvement in the internal business of the Institute' and to 'make a greater appeal to industry'. Their letter of appeal to employers used the blunt language of self-interest:

As a modern employer of labour, you will know that full employment, high wages and the provision of first-class amenities and working conditions have not been the complete answer to restlessness, dissatisfaction, high labour turnover or poor standard of work. Within your own factory you may have had these difficulties to face, and the incidence of unofficial strikes is sufficient indication that these are deep-seated problems. Our purpose in writing to you is to enlist your support for a method of scientific investigation and enquiry which, in our view, can help employers to find out root causes for labour stresses and strains within their organisation, not explicable by the ordinary criteria of wage levels and conditions of work which have been principal yardsticks hitherto.

The letter went on to extol the resources of the RAI, 'which is the recognised and long-established society for promoting the study of man himself in tribes, social groups and modern industry'. Such a straightforward promise of anthropology's benefits was not received well within the RAI, and there was strong disapproval of this latest proposal. At one committee meeting the President himself felt obliged to reiterate 'that all anthropologists depend upon the Institute, and that the main purpose of the appeal must continue to be the strengthening of the general purposes of the Institute'. This was unanimously agreed, but left Sieff, Rowntree, Castle and the others more isolated.

Caught in the middle, the RAI found itself unable to manage the growing rift between sceptical academics and impatient business folk. When Fagg circulated a draft Annual General Report of the RAI declaring that the creation of the committee on Anthropology in Industry was 'an earnest indicator of your Council's intention to

encourage by all means in its power the anthropological study of British industrial communities', many senior anthropologists reacted with disquiet. Meyer Fortes was of the view that 'some reference to the traditional interests of the Institute should go into every report', whilst Forde felt that it 'may give the wrong impression' and 'hamper the collaboration in prospect'. John Barnes felt it important to tone down such a statement to one simply 'encouraging anthropologists to take an interest in the study of contemporary industrial society' lest it 'raise false hopes'. He added wryly that 'it is not lack of funds that has prevented sufficient attention being paid to this in the past, it is merely that most people, quite rightly, think that the Bongo Bongo are more attractive than Mancunians'. The mood hardened. When Barnes wrote to Raglan at the end of 1955 asking if the committee on Anthropology in Industry was likely to play an active role in future, the response was frank: 'as long as we have any hope of money from Marks and Spencer or any other industrial concern we must keep the Committee for Anthropology in Industry, otherwise they cannot legally give us any money. Whether we can still hope for such money is quite another matter.'<sup>7</sup> The romance had ended.

At this point Sieff lost patience, and turned his energies to other projects. There were to be no further soirées at his Kensington flat or dinners at Claridges. Writing to Lord Raglan in January 1956 he apologised for having not been able to continue with his work of strengthening the Friends, and noted instead that 'the situation with regard to the economic problems of the State of Israel has compelled me to devote practically the whole of my leisure time to the work of the various Zionist organisations and funds for the Jewish Agency and world Jewish congress here and abroad'. He had become Chaim Weizmann's personal secretary after Weizmann stepped down as the first president of Israel. Sieff was spending a great deal of time in Israel, and was also still actively involved with PEP.

Sieff attended one final RAI reception in June 1956 with eighteen other industrialists and Firth and Forde to celebrate the completion of an ethnographic study of Selfridges. The occasion was used by Firth to reiterate the singularity of the anthropological approach. Unlike industrial psychology, he insisted, it was not based on the interviewing of people, 'but preferred to be among them as they worked, seeing how they behaved, and from that, building up its patterns'. For Firth, it was an 'observational science' that 'functioned on a long-range planning basis; it did not promise quick solutions of industrial problems but sought rather an understanding of what led to the existence of such problems'. Welcoming the report, Sieff was frank in his assessment. He agreed that it 'would have been quite impossible for a sociologist or an industrial psychologist to have made a similar study', and that 'social

anthropology could go further afield in this country'. However, Sieff made clear that social anthropology 'should be used by industry, not in place of, but in addition to, industrial psychology as both skills had their different contributions to make'. Sieff was a better judge of this than Firth, as he had continued to be highly active in PEP, publishing influential policy reports on industrial relations, the press, and the film industry. Deeply frustrated by his dealings with the RAI, Sieff resigned from his role as Vice-President of the RAI in 1957, ending a thirty-year association with the Institute.

Without Sieff's energetic leadership, the Committee on Anthropology and Industry fell apart. Marion Wesley Smith, an accomplished American anthropologist who moved to London in the 1950s, was appointed RAI Secretary in 1955, and tried hard to reinvigorate the committee. As well as writing to Sieff to persuade him to reconsider his resignation, she used her contacts to invite Dr Margaret Mead to come and talk to a meeting of the Friends. Mead was advertised in the circular letters as being 'in close touch with recent developments in anthropology in America which have proved useful to business men both in management and in their overseas contacts', and she talked on the importance of cross-cultural awareness within business. Whilst the Report of the RAI Council in 1956 again emphasised the number of lectures and publications now focusing on the anthropology of Britain, demonstrating the 'ever enlarging scope and significance of anthropology', the moment for collaboration had passed. Marion Smith attempted to follow up links with DSIR. Meyer sent her a letter with a note about two BP directors who might be interested in a closer relationship with the RAI – though noting that Sieff had 'had a crack' at ICI, with little success. Further attempts to organise events came to nothing. After Smith's untimely death in 1961, her successor Anthony Christie put his energies elsewhere.

If little came of the original ambitions of the Friends, a good deal of money was raised for the RAI. An annual covenant of £1,000 from Marks and Spencer for seven years helped the Institute through a difficult financial period. Through his contacts and support, Sieff also secured the extensive library of the explorer and Orientalist Sir Richard Burton for the Institute. Only one company is ever recorded as having approached the RAI for advice over industrial welfare issues. Booker Bros McConnell and Co. Ltd approached Firth to see if research could be carried out into the 'lack of communication between management and workers and other difficulties, despite liberal loan provision for workers to buy their houses' and 'the general problem of skilled labour'. Firth characteristically replied that such research 'would be of a fundamental kind without necessarily yielding any results which could be analysed by industry', and suggested a five-year

time span for such research. They also discussed a potential anthropological study of the labour situation in Ankole, Uganda, where a large sugar estate was planned. One Mr Caine from the company attended a couple of RAI seminars, and Firth lent him Oscar Lewis's book *Group Dynamics in a North Indian village*, which he returned, with a polite note saying that it had provided 'another insight into the methods and purposes of anthropological research'. No further communication is recorded.

The story of the Friends is marked by the repeated misrepresentations of anthropologists and their willingness to study contemporary industrial issues, by both the RAI and industrialists. Given the discipline's history, fields of expertise, and sense of moral purpose, this should not be surprising. Little ultimately came of Sieff's efforts, something of which he was perhaps aware. In his own memoirs, Sieff devotes twelve pages to his involvement with PEP, noting that it was one of the things in his life he was most proud of (Sieff 1970). He makes no mention of anthropology or the RAI.

## Conclusion

This was the first time that social anthropologists had turned down financial patronage, a mark of their newly won autonomy. In the 1940s anthropology had depended on the funding and prestige that Colonial Office patronage offered. By the 1950s there were a growing number of academic posts and research fellowships available. The discipline had no need to sell itself to the highest bidder. Despite internal differences, and some persuasive arm-twisting by industrialists, influential figures within the RAI remained sceptical. This was partly because Sieff's initiative threatened the independence also nurtured within the Association of Social Anthropologists. The association's members had only just been able to distance themselves from the RAI, and social anthropologists had no wish to see the RAI represent or dictate the shape of academic research. Yet the creation of a second scholarly association made it hard for the discipline to speak with a single voice. The cases demonstrate the misunderstandings and different styles of organisational working that exist not only between scholars and practitioners, but even within a single discipline.

This is not quite the end of the story. In the USA, the field of applied anthropology grew and prospered. Back in Britain, some of Max Gluckman's students, who had conducted ethnographies in a variety of different industrial settings in the 1950s, completed their doctorates and left anthropology. Tom Lupton went on from studying social relations in a steelworks to an influential career within management

studies (e.g. Lupton 1963). He and others, like the sociologist Tom Burns, wrote ethnographically-informed studies of business practice and innovation (Burns and Stalker 1971). Sociologists ruled where anthropologists feared to roam.

This situation finally changed in the 1980s, as the wheel of disciplinary evolution turned full circle. A growing number of anthropologists, unable to find academic posts, came together in a group inspired by Paul Stirling, entitled the Group for Anthropology in Policy and Practice. Holding regular meetings, they sought to shape the policies of the ASA and to promote the discipline's contributions to different fields of social policy (e.g. Stirling 1983). In the 1990s, an influx of career professionals seeking to study master's degrees in development anthropology and medical anthropology continued this process. The application of anthropology has once again become a recognised disciplinary field, and a subject of intellectual debate in its own right. With the disciplinary field no longer in thrall to a narrow theoretical agenda, these departures served both to revitalise older debates and to launch new sub-disciplinary fields (Grillo 1994, Pink 2006, Wright 2006).

### Notes

1. This and all subsequent references draw on A57 'Friends of the RAI', RAI's House Archives, unless otherwise noted. Grateful acknowledgement is made to Sarah Walpole, RAI archivist, for her help with this work.
2. A57.
3. A57.
4. RAI Archives A95/31/11.
5. Raymond Firth's personal correspondence, in Firth A9, LSE archives.
6. Ibid.
7. A95/39/13.