

*African Political Systems*

PROFESSOR MEYER FORTES writes:

Your warm and appreciative obituary of Professor A. R. Radcliffe-Brown in the January 1956 issue of *Africa* (vol. xxvi, no. i, p. 1) expresses the sense of loss felt by all students of African cultures and societies on his death. There is, however, one error of fact in your article which, I am sure, Professor Radcliffe-Brown would have wished to see corrected. You say: 'He sponsored the preparation of *African Political Systems*, the first of the Institute's collective studies of a particular aspect of African social life. This volume, to which he contributed a valuable Preface, has become an established and widely used introduction to the subject.' In point of fact, Professor Radcliffe-Brown did not 'sponsor the preparation' of the book, nor, for that matter, did the International African Institute initiate its production. The facts are as follows.

In the spring of 1937 I was in Cape Town and there saw a good deal of Professor I. Schapera. He gave me the proofs of his forthcoming book, *A Handbook of Tswana Law and Custom*, to read and I was thus stimulated to describe to him the strikingly different political and legal institutions of the Tallensi, among whom I had just been working. Out of these talks was born the idea of bringing out a comparative survey of African political institutions. On returning to England in the autumn of 1937 I approached Dr. Evans-Pritchard and proposed that he and I should jointly edit a book on the lines of *African Political Systems*. Fortunately he agreed, or else the book would never have been undertaken. He and I then drew up a list of possible contributors. We aimed partly at a wide 'coverage' but what we considered more important was to enlist the co-operation of professional social anthropologists with recent field experience in Africa and a known interest in the kind of problems we had in mind. It was not till this stage that we took counsel with Professor Radcliffe-Brown and were fortunate enough to receive from him a promise to contribute a Preface. He did not, in fact, write the Preface until he had the opportunity to read all the contributions in proof.

As regards the International African Institute, Evans-Pritchard and I put the proposal for the book to Sir Hanns Vischer and Professor D. Westermann because we felt that, as several of the prospective contributors were former or current Fellows of the Institute, the Institute should have the first refusal on the publication. I recollect discussing the proposal for the book at length with Professor Westermann, when he was in London in 1937, and of receiving from him a promise that he would persuade the Executive of the Institute to sponsor publication. As far as I know there was, at that time, no scheme for a series of 'collective studies' of 'aspects of African social life' to be brought out by the Institute.

Though Professor Radcliffe-Brown did not 'sponsor the preparation' of *African Political Systems* his Preface added immensely to the book's significance, and his willingness to contribute this Preface was an example of his unflinching helpfulness to younger scholars.

*Local Government in the Colonies*<sup>1</sup>

A CONFERENCE on the development of local government in the colonies was held at Queens' College, Cambridge, from 22 August to 2 September 1955, under the chairmanship of Sir John Wrigley. It was arranged by the Royal Institute of Public Administration with the support and co-operation of the British Colonial Office, and was attended by some 120 members of whom nearly 70 came from 23 colonial territories. Among those taking part were Ministers or senior officials responsible for local government in most of the larger territories,

<sup>1</sup> *Development of Local Government in the Colonies: Report of a Conference, Queens' College, Cambridge, 22 August-2 September 1955.* Royal Institute of Public Administration, Haldane House, 76A New Cavendish Street, London, W. 1.