Quantitative History Seminar, Lent Term 2020

Supported by the Centre for History and Economics and the Trevelyan Fund

Seminars will take place at 13.15 in Room 6, Faculty of History
Sandwiches and fruit will be available
Convenor: Leigh Shaw-Taylor - lmws2@cam.ac.uk

15 January: Dácil Juif (Universidad Carlos III de Madrid)

The Impact of Copper Mining Activities on Schooling in Zambia from a Long-Term Perspective (1920 to 2000)

The “resource curse” literature links dependence on minerals to worsening socio-economic outcomes, including education. Copper mining has been the backbone of the Zambian economy for almost a century. This study assesses the impact of large-scale mining activities on schooling in Zambia at the local level since the 1920s. In regression analyses I control for a set of geographic variables as well as early mission location. Contrary to what previous African economic history literature has claimed, early mission location has no effect on the comparative development of education. On the other hand, mine areas overtake non-mine areas in education levels soon after mine openings. The mechanisms explored include income and wealth, urbanization, relatively skill-intensive job opportunities, and supply of schooling by state and mine companies in mine-proximate areas.

29 January: Yuzuru Kumon (Bocconi University)

How Equality Created Poverty: Japanese Wealth Distribution and Living Standards 1600-1870

Despite its sophistication, Early Modern Japan, 1600-1868 had among the lowest real wage levels ever recorded, 40% of those in pre-industrial England. This paper shows that this puzzle can be partly resolved if we take into account the greater equality of land-holdings in pre-industrial Japan than in Europe. In England by 1700, 70% of the rural population were landless but in Japan only 13%. Paradoxically, as I show theoretically, in the Malthusian demographic regime of the pre-industrial world greater equality should generate lower living standards. I show empirically that landless families in Japan were unable to reproduce demographically. Had most households been landless, as in Europe, the population would have been unsustainable without higher wages. If, as many historians believe, high wages and living standards in western Europe explain the onset of the Industrial Revolution, then Japan’s failure to industrialize could have been shaped by its unusual pre-industrial equality.

11 March: Timothy W. Guinnane (Yale University)

Bismarck to No Effect: Fertility Decline and the Introduction of Social Insurance in Prussia

Economists have long argued that introducing social insurance will reduce fertility. The hypothesis relies on standard models: if children are desirable in part because they provide security in case of disability or old age, then state programs that provide insurance against these events should induc couples to substitute away from children in the allocation of wealth. We test this claim using the introduction of social insurance in Germany in the 1880s and 1890s. Bismarck’s social-insurance system provided health insurance, workplace-accident insurance, and old age pensions to a majority of the working population. The German case appeals because the social insurance program started on a large scale and was compulsory for covered classes of workers, and because fertility in Germany in this period was still relatively high. Focusing on the state of Prussia, we estimate differences-in-differences models that ask whether marriage and marital fertility reacted to the introduction or extension of the main social insurance programs. For Prussia as a whole we find little impact.