

## COMMENTARY

Representing (Dis)unity:  
Southampton, Cambridge And Beyond

The World Archaeological Congress, as we all know, stirred up an enormous controversy when it banned South Africans and Namibians from its proceedings. The steering committee set up for the 1986 congress has recently decided to break completely with the IUPPS, which has refused all the changes they proposed, and seek for itself a permanent role.

This decision is only to be welcomed -- for those who believe in the ban, following as it did the UNESCO boycott of all cultural exchange with the South African regime, it would have been a betrayal of our ideals had the IUPPS had its way over the mandate of the Plenary Session and Southampton been only a 'one-off'. However, allowing this issue to be confined to a Congress occurring only once every four years would seem to cast doubts on our motives. WAC is not the only international conference in archaeology, although it may be the largest. The issue of South African participation must not be forgotten, and the debate should be extended to cover all such congregations. Otherwise we may face the charge of gesturing, and inconsistent gesturing at that.

But what has happened in the aftermath of WAC? ARC 6:1 carried a report by Anthony Sinclair on the conference "The Origins and Dispersal of Modern Man", organised by Paul Mellars and Chris Stringer and held in Cambridge in March 1987. This symposium was originally to have been part of WAC, but was withdrawn after the banning of South Africans. It is, therefore, remarkable (however interesting Sinclair's account of the contents of the papers) that no comment was made by him of the participation of

South Africans, the controversy this generated, or its implications for post-WAC archaeology.

In similar vein, Gowlett's account in *Antiquity* (61: 232) describes the conference only coincidentally, and uses the occasion for a critique of recent approaches to the Palaeolithic. In neither of these papers is there any attempt to situate the event in its political context, except when it is construed as purely academic -- precisely the insularity that the policies adopted at WAC questioned. Referring to the content of the papers, Gowlett heads one section 'All Quiet on the Western Front'. Yet all was certainly not quiet -- the conference was opposed by the Cambridge Anti-Apartheid movement, the Cambridge University Students Union, and by many of our contemporaries who, for reasons unknown, have not given voice to their feelings.

All was, therefore, far from quiet, though to read Sinclair's and Gowlett's accounts you could be forgiven for thinking so. Is it, therefore, simply that archaeologists have short memories? This seems an unlikely explanation. Anyone who reads Christopher Chippindale's editorials in recent issues of *Antiquity* will be confronted by lessons in the art of glossing over the issues. For Chippindale, what is at stake is not something like morality or conscience, nor even that old stalwart 'academic freedom', but an even less tangible ideal, the 'unity' of archaeology. This unity, which 'we' once possessed but was compromised by WAC and Ucko's recent account of it, can be re-established:

Archaeology is in strong need of two organisations. It needs a broad based world

conference, with a strong third-world representation. And it needs a European regional conference, a sister to the North American, Pan-African or Indo-Pacific conferences, to deal with European parochial concerns... In the World Archaeological Conference (WAC) and in the IUPPS we have complementary organisations which are close to fulfilling these roles. If that is, the South African issue can now be defused, and if the personality clashes and the bitterness can be reduced (Chippindale 1987, 167, emphasis added).

How vast and incredible is his misunderstanding of the issues and questions raised by the policy adopted at Southampton and more recently formalised! Everything, in Chippindale's view, can be salvaged by forgetting what it was that we were arguing over in the first place. Only in this way can the reasons for the division be seen as 'complementary'.

Even more remarkable is the comment in the succeeding editorial (61:233) which implies that even if 'ordinary' archaeologists do not feel able to elevate themselves above these questions, the lofty status conferred upon the editor of *Antiquity* allows him to stand outside the issues in the original neutral ground, and have the best of both worlds. He is correct when he writes that the policy adopted at WAC must lead us to widen the question, even to the publication of articles from archaeologists working in South Africa and the receipt of South African journals: he is mistaken if he thinks that we could or should eschew discussion of such issues<sup>1</sup>.

Chippindale's comments on the formal split between the WAC steering committee, led by Ucko,

and the IUPPS, can only be awaited with interest -- there is no doubt that *Antiquity* is an important and influential journal, both in this country and abroad. The ban on South Africans at WAC is to be continued and the steering committee is organising an independent world congress series, the first to be held in Venezuela in 1990. It is ironic that in order to follow UNESCO policy, it was necessary to break with the very body affiliated to it. Archaeology is split, inevitably after WAC and the IUPPS reaction and (until better times in South Africa) irrevocably.

Yet the promise that these developments held for free, open and frank discussion from the undergraduate level upwards has not been realised. The Cambridge conference generated no such debate and no formal consultation with the student body was undertaken. The IUPPS tried to marginalise the Southampton congress and its policies by staging a rival congress at Mainz in September, and, by all reports, failed dismally. The issues cannot be forgotten, ignored or dismissed in the name of unity: papering over the cracks using the pages of *Antiquity*, *ARC*, etc., is a myopic and unhelpful policy. It certainly does not help archaeology to deal with its current crisis.

The issues do not end comfortably at Southampton and Mainz: smaller events have escaped attention, for no other reason than that they are 'specialised' rather than 'world' occasions. Engaging in wider debates has now become inevitable. In pursuing an ongoing discussion of these issues, conventional assumptions and values, 'unity', even the institution itself, may have to be shaken, but this only in realisation that archaeology after Southampton is not the same at all as it was before.

How much, and how long is it going to take, before we come to recognise this fact?

Ian Bapty and Tim Yates

#### Editor's Note

1. It is hoped that the issue of whether South African publica-

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#### What Shall We Dig And Who Will Pay?

It is a cliché to say that the entire British landscape is an artefact fashioned by generations of farmers, foresters and industrialists. It is nonetheless true and arguably the most far-reaching conclusion drawn from archaeological research. The changes to the landscape wrought by human activity are a continuing process and modern development will alter what had previously been established. However, the pace and scale of change is accelerating so that the land that was deforested in the Neolithic and subsequently farmed and built upon, is now being quarried away by modern machines. Current archaeology seeks to preserve the previous evidence of land use and change either in the ground or by record.

Before a selection of sites for any purpose can be made, we must know of their existence. Britain is fortunate in that the history of prospecting, survey and record goes back even beyond the well known antiquaries Camden (1551-1623) and Stukeley (1687-1765). Survey is an academic aim in its own right, some surveys focusing on important monuments (eg. Danebury, Stonehenge environs), others on problematic areas where archaeological sites are obscured (eg. the Kennet Valley, Hullbridge Basin, the Fens). Almost anyone can participate in this essential data collection process. Excellent work has been done by individuals

tions should come under the rubric of the ban, touched on here, will be expanded in a subsequent edition of ARC. The Commentary Editor is writing to various individuals concerned requesting comment, and unsolicited contributions to this theme will be very welcome.

(Charlton, Witton), museum enquiry services, the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments and university teams inter alia. But the information is only useful if it is accessible and communicated. The data must be assembled in centralised archives and should be publicly available. Libraries have been quarries of information for many years, but we now have the technology for rapid selection and extraction through computerisation.

It must be counted as one of the major successes of English archaeology in the last decade that county Sites and Monuments Records (SMRs) have been established. These must be maintained, improved and preferably made compatible (as the National Archaeological Record seeks to do) as they should be the starting point of much original research pointing the student to relevant literature, museum collections, aerial photos, to the precise field, and indeed the exact spot, of discovery. It is encouraging to see that concerted efforts are being made in Scotland and Ireland to establish such records. However, it must always be borne in mind that SMRs are only an interim statement of the communicated results of recording. Nor are they interpretative in their own right and it is for the researcher to judge the value of the evidence. Some recorded observations will be objective (eg. there are six barrows in Hillsburgh...), others subjective (...with nicely rounded profiles). There is a call for