

and translation by Susan Holten-Dall.

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Archaeologists For Peace

Amongst the variety of archaeological groups, societies, and clubs, a new one has recently been founded: "Archaeologists For Peace" (AFP). This group differs from most other archaeological associations insofar that Archaeology is not the focus and combining theme for the group, but rather archaeologists as a group within society. Thus moving the focus from our shared interest in the past to our shared responsibility for the future.

The group describes itself as a pressure group of archaeologists working for nuclear disarmament. In the statement produced by the group at its initial meeting it is further stated:

"Archaeologists cannot separate themselves from the political and social system they live in, and

major political issues affect our lives and work. As students of human society, archaeologists have a viewpoint on nuclear weapons. They could feel pessimistic, since human societies have destroyed themselves and each other throughout the past. They could feel that from the archaeological time perspective, political actions are insignificant. They could feel that campaigning on the issue would bring them into disrepute or conflict with their employers. AFP would acknowledge these views, seek to answer them, but would not be deterred from its aims."

"Archaeologists are trained in studying political and social organisations in the past: they also ought to look at the future of our society and take responsibility for that future."

AFP hopes to be established in time to be represented at the CND rally in October 1984, and further information can be obtained from The Treasurer: Hilary Major, 57A South Street, Braintree, Essex, CM7 6QD.

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The Restitution of the Parthenon Marbles

Another aspect of potential archaeological involvement in the present is, of course, the issue of restitution of cultural properties. Within this context the discussion and policy-making concerning the Parthenon Marbles is extremely interesting. Following on our

previous coverage of this debate, we call attention to the decision in April this year of the British Government to reject the request from the Greek Government for the return of the Marbles to Greece. The rejection was mainly explained by references to legislation which, according to the Government, prevents the British Museum from disposing of its objects. The

political and moral aspects of the problem were thus not referred to the official reply.

In the written answer to the Commons Mr Ray Whitney, the foreign Office minister, emphasised that:

"The trustees are prohibited by statute from disposing of the sculptures, and new legislation would have to be passed by Parliament for this position to be altered."

In a press release Mr Norman Buchan, M.P., Shadow Spokesman on the Arts, replied to this by saying:

"This is a shameful and in many ways a mean minded statement from the Government. ... The implication is given that because the Law says that they have been gifted to the Trustees of the Museum in perpetuity, then somehow we are inhibited from acting.

This is of course a nonsense, and indeed we have a precedent. In 1972, in order to enable museum charges to be imposed the Government brought in a Bill, "The Museums and Galleries Admission Charges". The problem the Government faced was that many bequests, and in particular the Erskine of Torrie bequests, had been on the basis that the collections should be exhibited free to the public. Accordingly, the National Gallery of Scotland, the National Museum of Antiquities

of Scotland and the Royal Scottish Museum could not charge admission unless the Bill was passed. The Government promptly passed the Bill."

In their reply to the press, The British Committee for the Restitution of the Parthenon Marbles, also emphasises the weakness of any argument based on reference to legislation. They say:

"The legislation referred to by the Government in its reply, ... , was passed by Parliament and can be set aside by Parliament. Museums in many countries, bound by equally strict regulations, have found means of returning objects of central cultural importance to their claimant countries."

and they further stress that:

"But our case does not rest on this point. We believe the request for the return of the Marbles to be just for two reasons: they occupy a central position in the cultural heritage of Greece and are potent symbols of the Greek people's link with its own past; and they were forcibly removed from one of the most splendid monuments of mankind, of which they had formed an integral part for more than two thousand years". The debate surrounding the Parthenon Marbles has obviously not been resolved by the Governmental reply, and future discussions surely will have to focus on other aspects than mere legislation.

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The New Commission

From April this year the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission takes over most of the responsibilities for the nation's heritage that were previously the charge of the Department of the

Environment's Directorate of Ancient Monuments and Historic Buildings. At first sight that may seem purely an administrative matter, but it is likely to prove of vital importance for British Archaeology.