

Commentary

by GROMATICUS

Archaeology and apartheid: Southampton and the South African connection

IT NOW APPEARS that the organisers of next year's World Archaeological Congress, where, no doubt, many obscure aspects of the past will be examined, have been caught unprepared by one of the more obvious realities of the present.

The Congress Executive Committee's detailed arrangements have just appeared, informing us that all South African participants have been summarily dropped and, in a phrase which would have done Orwell proud, "their names omitted from the Final Announcement". (It should have said *almost* omitted, for the thick white lines in the said document only partially obscure the names of the South African and Namibian who seem to have made it through to that stage!).

Clearly, the Committee members believed that they had no choice if they wanted the Congress to go ahead. Evidently Southampton Council had threatened to remove its substantial support, the Students Union was going to withdraw the main conference accommodation and provide instead "non-violent demonstrations", and the Anti-Apartheid Movement had commenced persuading governments not to allow their nationals to participate. Faced with this the organisers decided that the "adverse consequences *for the finances* as well as the academic value of the Congress" (my italics) left them with no alternative to the banning.

The South African issue should have been

foreseen when the Congress was being planned. There has been considerable opposition within Britain to contacts with that country for a quarter of a century, though admittedly public awareness of the situation there has increased greatly in recent months due to the internal violence and the international debate about sanctions.

A case could have been made for excluding the South Africans because Britain, with its past constitutional and current economic links, could be seen as the one nation above all that could take an effective lead in opposing the regime. That is a view I would have reluctantly accepted, though an alternative one that favours participation is also feasible. This is, after all, a Congress of individuals not national or institutional representatives, and South African prehistorians have, I understand, a reputation for vociferous opposition to apartheid, which must take much courage to express.

That the South Africans were originally admitted is surprising, particularly as the Association of University Teachers, many of whose members will be taking part prominently, is opposed to all cultural contacts with them. Yet whatever decision was made should have been based on reasoned moral grounds and defended vigorously even if the meeting of the World Congress in Britain next year was put in jeopardy. To give way expediently to pressure from non-archaeological organisations who were clearly prepared to "breach the principle of free academic interchange" unless the Congress Committee did so for them is hardly satisfactory.

Excavation Round-up 1985

DIRECTORS, secretaries and other people concerned with excavations carried out in 1985 are asked to send a short report to the co-ordinator, Beth Richardson, D.U.A., Museum of London,

EC2Y 5HN, for inclusion in the Spring issue. It would be appreciated if they could be modelled on the ones in Vol. 5, no. 2, and if they could be sent in by 31 December.