THE WORLD ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONGRESS, SOUTHAMPTON, AND ITS AFTERMATH

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The 1986 World Archaeological Congress, held in Southampton from September 1-6, 1986, was to have been the 11th Congress of the Union Internationale des Sciences Préhistoriques et Protohistoriques (UISPP). UISPP is the official body of world archaeology in the eyes of UNESCO, with which it is affiliated (and by which it is modestly funded) through the Conseil International de la Philosophie et des Sciences Humaines (CIPSH). When the Union invited Britain to be the host country for its 11th Congress, it delegated responsibility for Congress organisation to a British national committee. Such delegation is normal policy for the Union and is limited only by the requirements of its statutes.

The Executive Committee of UISPP considered that one of those statutes was breached by actions of the British Organising Committee for the 11th Congress in late 1985, and in early 1986, on the basis of a postal ballot of members of its Permanent Council, it disowned the Southampton Congress and accepted an invitation from the West Germans to replace it by a Congress at Mainz, now scheduled for the beginning of September 1987.

The statute in respect of which the Union's Executive Committee disowned the Southampton Congress is No.3 of its constitution. This says that UISPP has as its objectives the promotion of prehistoric and protohistoric studies by the organisation of international congresses, by the patronage of scientific publications of an international character, by the organisation of excavations of prime international importance and, in general, by the collaboration of scholars of all countries in enterprises contributing to the advancement of the prehistoric and protohistoric sciences. The action of the British organisers that was ruled to be in breach of this statute was their decision to ban all South Africa- and Namibia-based scholars from participation in the Congress.

Many people will be aware of the events leading up to the British Organising Committee's ban and of the storm it summoned up.

Heightened awareness of the apartheid issue as a result of events in South Africa during the middle months of 1985 bought demands for such a ban from organisations on whose financial and/or logistic support the Congress depended heavily - the Southampton City Council and the Southampton branches of the (British) Association of University Teachers and National Union of Students. In addition, there was a real possibility of boycotts by African and other delegations, and promised demonstrations by the Anti-Apartheid League.

The British decision not to cancel the Congress in the face of these political pressures but to proceed on the basis of no participation from South Africa and Namibia led immediately to some resignations from the Organising Committee and to the withdrawal of intending participants, mainly North American and European, including organisers of and contributors to planned symposia. The decision of UISPP to refuse official recognition of the Congress led to further resignations and withdrawals, this time by scholars with official positions in or strong professional connections with the Union.

All these events took place on full stage. The popular as well as the scientific press took the utmost interest in what was going on. Prehistorians debated the issues in their columns. Open letters circulated round the profession in considerable numbers. Politics had not simply arrived at our door, but had battered it down.

II

One of the many ironies of the situation is that it had been a major objective of the Southampton Congress, announced well before its South African/Namibian ban and its disinheritance by UISPP, to promote recognition of the fact that the practice of archaeology is not, as orthodox opinion within the profession would have it, above or outside politics. A central week-long symposium at Southampton called Archaeological 'Objectivity' in Interpretation illustrated the reality of this proposition in a number of ways: from questions of conflicting views on 'ownership' and 'control' of sites and their contents, and on the 'right' of scholarly access to them, to more subtle issues of bias in archaeological aims and interpretations and of archaeologists' evaluations of alternative perceptions of the past. There are real problems here affecting the relationship of archaeologists and indigenous minorities, often focusing on the question of skeletal remains, which was a prominent matter for discussion in the symposium. There are problems for the profession, too, in respect of Third World countries, where the cultural domination of the colonial era has sometimes been exchanged only for cultural dependency in the era of political independence.

The Congress organisers made special efforts to bring to Southampton people from new nations and from minority groups to speak of the implications for them of the past and present practice of archaeology, and of what they saw as the way ahead. Thus there were speakers from Papua New Guinea and the Solomons, as well as from Africa and Latin America, by some of whom archaeology was seen as a potential tool in nation-building, and contributions from Aborigines and Maoris and American Indians, for whom our archaeological data are the material expressions of their ethnic identity. And lest it might be thought that problematic areas in our professional operations are confined to the world outside Europe, there was a fascinating session on the politics of Stonehenge, and discussions of gender and other

biases in the presentations of archaeology in schools, museums and the media in Europe itself.

As a result, the Congress was a meeting ground for a vast range of people, 1000 from 100 countries, where professional archaeologists from different forms of institution could talk with colleagues from all over the world and with a wide range of people from relevant constituencies not normally present at archaeological congresses - administrators, teachers, community workers, minority groups - as well as with their own students and junior colleagues, whom the Congress organisers had also made special efforts to attract.

All this made for an exciting brew. Not only were people discussing important issues usually off the conference agenda; the issues themselves were universal, in the sense that in one form or or another they surface in the practice of archaeology everywhere.

The same concern to make the meeting more than another international gathering but truly, as claimed, a congress of world archaeology was evident in the selection, for the more specifically academic symposia, of themes to which experience in any region could contribute: the Pleistocene, the development of complex societies, the social and economic contexts of technological change, cultural attitudes to animals, advances in the understanding of plant domestication and early agriculture. In these various meetings there was a stimulating mix of archaeologists with historians and ethnographers, zoologists and botanists, across regions as well as across specialisms.

III

The high level of enthusiasm generated amongst participants by the imaginative conception and organisation of the Congress resulted in over half of them - more than 500 - attending a Plenary Session to discuss business on the final afternoon. There is no doubt that feeling was heightened by the fact that the Congress had gone ahead and been held in the shadow of its rejection by its erstwhile parent organisation, of boycotts by scholars from some countries, including some of the profession's more famous names, of the withdrawal of appreciable financial support by some funding authorities and of a great deal of unfavourable and at times antagonistic publicity. The Plenary Session, however, passed beyond the matter of the South African ban to a consideration of how the innovations in the presentation of world archaeology introduced by the Southampton Congress could be built into its future organisation. I hope I have made it clear in this report that these innovations were basic in the planning of the Congress from the very beginning, well before the South African issue arose and irrespective of it when it did. By organising the sort of conference it did, the British Committee in essence invited its then-parent body to make itself more

representative of and responsive to the world outside Europe and North America. The measure of the Congress' success was that the Plenary Session took up that call for reform.

The overwhelming wish amongst those present was to prevent the split that threatened to develop in the organisation of world archaeology by entering into negotiations with UISPP, but in such a way that that body would be improved as a result. The following motion was adopted in virtual unanimity:

that a temporary Steering Committee be set up to be charged with:

1. discussing the views of the Plenary Session with the UISPP at its meeting in Mainz, through members of its Conseil Permanent and/or in direct meetings; and

2. considering the formation of a new world archaeological organisation in the event that joint discussions should prove unsuccessful.

IV

The Steering Committee set up at the Plenary Session was regionally constituted and given the power to coopt. It now consists of:

Professor Dharmapal P. Agrawal, Physical Research Laboratory, Ahmedabad, India

Professor An Zhimin, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing, People's Republic of China

Professor Bassey Andah, Department of Archaeology, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria (for anglophone Africa)

Mrs Charlotte Cane, Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit, Birmingham (for women in archaeology)

Professor Michael Day, Division of Anatomy, St Thomas' Hospital, UK (for Western Europe) (Chair)

Professor Dena F. Dincauze, Department of Anthropology, University of Massachussets, Amherst, Massachusetts, USA (for North America)

Dr Joseph-Marie Essomba, Department of History, University of Yaounde, Yaounde, Cameroon (for francophone Africa)

Professor Jack Golson, Department of Prehistory, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, Canberra, Australia (for the Pacific)

Ms Jan Hammil, Indianapolis, Indiana, USA (for indigenous minorities)

Professor Mario Sanoja, Central University of Venezuela, Caracas, Venezuela (for Latin America)

Dr Valentin P. Shilov, Institute of Archaeology, Academy of Sciences, Moscow, USSR

Mr Peter Stone, Department of Archaeology, University of Southampton, Southampton, UK (for students and young postgraduates)

Professor Peter Ucko, Department of Archaeology, University of Southampton, Southampton, UK (Congress Secretariat)

The Committee has met twice, in September last year immediately after the Congress and in late January, both times in London. It has distilled the essence of the lengthy proceedings of the Plenary Session and agreed on a number of heads of hoped-for discussion with UISPP. The following are the most important matters:

1. At present there are on the Permanent Council of UISPP up to four representatives per country, who are nominated - for the term of their professional life - by their predecessors. It is generally agreed that the rules need changing to achieve true representation in place of nomination, and for a limited term.

2. The business is more complicated than this, however. Four representatives from 100 countries theoretically means a Permanent Council (the 'governing body' of the present Union) of 400 - a totally unwieldy forum, which of course never meets in that number and is consequently dominated by the people who do attend, with Europeans always in the majority, since Europe is the place where its meetings - and those of the Executive Committee which it elects and of the Congresses on whose venue it decides - are almost invariably held. There are various possible solutions for this problem - abandoning <u>country</u> for <u>regional</u> representation, cutting down on the number of representatives, cutting down on the number of votes per country.

3. Then there is the matter of arranging for a voice at the highest organisational level for groups whose concerns regarding the practice of our discipline the Southampton Congress formally recognised for the first time and whose full participation in its deliberations was invited and achieved. This is probably the

most radical proposition of all, but it is one basic to the whole Southampton exercise and for which explicit provision is made in the composition of the Steering Committee.

4. As regards the participation of South African/Namibian scholars, the Steering Committee is of the opinion that this is a matter for a reformed world body to decide, but it points out the impropriety of official representation for South Africa on the governing body of an organisation affiliated to CIPSH and UNESCO, both of whom disallow it.

I may be able to report in an early issue of the Bulletin on how the process of negotiation with UISPP has gone. Meanwhile I have deposited with the President and Secretary of IPPA a copy of an edited version of the Plenary Session prepared by the World Archaeological Congress Secretariat. Copies will shortly be sent from Southampton to all people who attended the Plenary Session and, if funds allow, to everyone who registered for the Congress. There is a full unedited version available on cassette, which makes for compulsive listening. Also available, incidentally, are cassettes of any Congress session.

V

For the profession in general, and the world at large, the Congress Secretariat has prepared a bulletin recording the events at the centre of the storm which has stripped our discipline of its fancied innocence. Whatever the outcome, world archaeology will never be quite the same after Southampton as it was before.

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